Everyone knows who Victor Nikiforov is.

Even shepherds and beggars, even children of such.

So when Yuuri’s hunting trip takes him almost to the other side of the forest and he’s caught by men with the flaming sun insignia embossed in the gold of their breastplates, Yuuri knows who he is being dragged to meet. He just doesn’t know why.

Notes

this story started as a random idea that was inspired by alli's stunning drawing of eurovision
victuuri which my mind instantly took as weLL HELLO THERE MIDAS VICTOR WHO TURNS EVERYTHING HE TOUCHES INTO GOLD and so that's why we're here rip pls enjoy these small drabbles?
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Even shepherds and beggars, even children of such.

So when Yuuri’s hunting trip takes him almost to the other side of the forest and he’s caught by men with the flaming sun insignia embossed in the gold of their breastplates, Yuuri knows who he is being dragged to meet. He just doesn’t know why.

“I did nothing wrong, please let me go,” he begs, but even to his own ears he sounds petulant.

“Lord Nikiforov will be the one to decide that,” one of the guards tells him, and that’s that.

The camp is a busy place. There’s armed men everywhere and they all look at Yuuri with enough curiosity that Yuuri thinks it’d be better to just die then and there, without having to go through all of this. Maybe he could talk one of them, the guys sharpening their swords by the fire, to just chop his head off real quick and then he’d be gone.

Before he can follow through on that thought, he’s pulled towards a tent woven of – Yuuri will bet his left foot and a good chunk of left arm – real golden thread. The flap is drawn for them and he’s unceremoniously pushed inside. He stumbles on the golden carpet that stretches across the entire expanse of the tent and he catches himself on all fours, almost eye to eye with the tick threading of the blasted thing.

When he slowly lifts his head, everything he sees is gold. The chaise, the desk, the table with its golden plating, the water jug, the goblets, everything. It’s all too much. Too, too much. Yuuri has never seen more gold in his entire life and he’s willing to bet he never will again, either.

His nervousness was tittering towards panic before, but now it slides over the edge, smooth and golden, when his eyes fall on the majestic, throne-like chair that is also golden and currently occupied by Victor Nikiforov, who is wearing a golden tunic draped over one of his shoulders. It barely covers his private parts as it cascades down almost to the floor while his long legs are on full display slung over the arm of his throne, much like a king would sprawl in his own kingdom.

That, in itself, would’ve been a view… something Yuuri could’ve only dreamed of… but once he takes in the sight, he really can’t focus on anything other than Lord Nikiforov’s hair.

Because it’s silver.

It’s silver.

He’s bathed in gold and his hair is silver.

Yuuri snorts before he can help it and immediately scandalized slaps a hand over his mouth. Victor Nikiforov’s hair is silver, but his eyes are blue. So blue, in fact, that when they look into Yuuri’s, Yuuri feels like they have frozen him with as little trouble as it takes Lord Nikiforov to turn things into gold.
“I hear you’ve been sneaking around our camp,” Lord Nikiforov says. Yuuri shakes his head vehemently, hand still pressed against his mouth. “What were you doing there?”

“I was just hunting for supper,” Yuuri mumbles through his hand. “I’d no idea you were here.” And then, because he apparently has forgotten all manners, he adds quickly: “M’lord.”

Victor Nikiforov gives him a once over and fluidly stands up. Yuuri is eyelevel with his thick thighs for just a moment and watches, fascinated, as the muscles shift to hold up the added weight. He realizes what he’s doing the moment the golden fabric of the tunic slides into his view and Yuuri turns his gaze quickly. A mortified blush makes his cheeks sting.

Oh gods, he thinks while Lord Nikiforov walks up to him, this is how I die.

Bare feet come to a stop right before him, but Yuuri doesn’t dare look up. Lord Nikiforov does have some very shapely ankles, though. Yuuri takes note of it, desperately focused on everything but the fact that one touch from the man could turn him into a golden statue forever.

“Drop that hand from your mouth, I can’t hear a word you say,” Lord Nikiforov orders and Yuuri drops his hand like burned, clenching it tight into a fist in his lap. “Better. Now, tell me again, what were you doing in the forest?”

“Hunting,” Yuuri replies quickly.

“Hunting?” Victor Nikiforov replies in a voice that speaks clearly of how strange the concept must be to him. “What for?”

“For supper, m’lord,” Yuuri adds. “Rabbit, or wild geese, maybe. They’re in season.”

Lord Nikiforov gives a hum and Yuuri twitches, startled. It sounded… really nice.

He’s fairly sure the tips of his ears must be burning with how hard he’s blushing now, but it seems that it is of little bother to Lord Nikiforov. The man crouches down into Yuuri’s line of sight and Yuuri gets an eyeful between his thighs when they part before him. He quickly snaps his gaze up, burning, but it’s only to have his chin caught by Victor Nikiforov’s hand and guided up, up, until their eyes meet.

“I hear that we are having rabbit stew today,” Lord Nikiforov says slowly. “How about you sup with me, little hunter? Let’s build some trust between us.”

His eyes are blue, sparkling, and his lips are stretched in a smile that looks both hungry and delighted, yet Yuuri knows it’s definitely not at the prospect of food. It’s difficult to swallow, but Yuuri does so when his mouth waters. For what, he can’t tell.

“I don’t… um…”

“Come now,” Victor Nikiforov leans closer and his warm breath ghosts over Yuuri’s face just as his thumb moves to press against Yuuri’s bottom lip. “Will you join me for dinner… or will you become dinner? Which one will you pick, mm?”

The flap of the tent lifts then and Lord Nikiforov withdraws, but his gaze remains locked on Yuuri. Heat is crawling under Yuuri’s skin, in his very veins, and his heart skips around like a rabbit during a hard chase. Unlike a rabbit, though, Yuuri does not plan to be anyone’s prey.

He stands up while the servants place the supper on the table. They are left in the tent alone again shortly after and Yuuri spots a goblet filled with wine, which he takes in a slightly trembling hand.
He downs the drink and only then turns to Lord Nikiforov.

He licks his lips of the sweet plum aftertaste, aware of how blue eyes follow the move.

“Shall we?” he asks.

Chapter End Notes

so I promised I'll put this story on ao3 as well, so here it is! I'll upload the rest of the chapters soon, but if you want to stay updated on new things feel free to follow me on tumblr @katzuyas ^u^)b
Chapter 2

All through the supper there's something squeezing at Yuuri's throat. It makes it difficult to swallow, but it also makes him pace himself and portion the food, so at least he doesn't choke on anything. He would have peace of mind over that, at least he won't make too much of a fool out of himself, except the eccentric Lordship barely eats any of his own food and simply stares at Yuuri the entire time.

When Yuuri drinks Victor Nikiforov's gaze slides down the column of Yuuri's throat. When he takes some stew on a golden spoon and brings it to his lips, the heated gaze falls there and stays: intense and overbearing. When Yuuri rips away a bite of bread, Lord Nikiforov's eyes linger on his fingers and then follow Yuuri's hand up to his mouth, where they narrow as if pleased by what they're seeing.

One time Yuuri catches Lord Nikiforov lick his own lips when Yuuri puts the bread inside his mouth and, absently, Yuuri licks his own. It seems the wrong thing to do, because the blue gaze that refuses to leave him darkens with so much naked desire that Yuuri feels his cheeks flush despite himself.

"Try the apples, too," Lord Nikiforov croons, picking one up from the golden plate on the golden table.

The red skin turns to gold in his hand and Yuuri can't help his gasp of surprise. The display of his powers is effortless and Lord Nikiforov's face is lax with contentment at Yuuri's reaction while Yuuri hates that he's impressed. Or maybe he loves it, he isn't sure himself anymore.

"Come on, take it," Lord Nikiforov says in a soft murmur. He offers Yuuri the apple and this time Yuuri takes it in hand. "They're edible, don't worry."

Yuuri still doesn't think it's a good idea to eat gold, but he's too curious about the taste to refuse it again. He brings the fruit up to his lips, aware of the blue eyes following his every move, and he bites into the golden skin. It's as tender as a normal apple would be, which he hardly expected. The juices flow into his mouth and his reaction is involuntary at this point – he moans at the fresh, potent sweetness melting on his tongue.

It startles him when he hears an answering moan from Lord Nikiforov, though.

"Are you sure you're a hunter?" Lord Nikiforov asks, voice low and husky. "Because you look like a little nymph, or a dryad, maybe? A forest spirit that was sent to this place to tempt me into doing evil?"

Yuuri swallows the piece of apple he's been chewing on just in time to suck in a shuddering breath of surprise as Lord Nikiforov slides out of his seat and steps up to Yuuri. One of Lord Nikiforov's palms rests on the back of Yuuri's chair and he cages Yuuri in it with his body. He's so close that Yuuri can feel the heat of his skin, can see the dusting of gold flecks across his shoulders, and can smell his sweet with wine breath. It fans hot on the side of his face, which Yuuri turns away quickly to avoid looking into those blue, shameless eyes that drink him in as if he's something to be admired.

It's a futile struggle on his part, because all it does is make Lord Nikiforov lean in closer. Heavenly soft lips ghost over Yuuri's cheek up to his ear, where Victor Nikiforov speaks with enough passion to make Yuuri's core tremble:

"Oh, temptation, how sweet is your torture..."
Yuuri can't hide his shiver. His face is burning hot and he can't deny that his interests are stirring, but there is no possible way he can give into this. Lord Nikiforov is not someone a simple shepherd could have, nor dream of having. Much less lay his hands on.

"M'lord," Yuuri mumbles past his heavy tongue. "It's not proper--"

"What is propriety in the face of want hot like the coals of a burning fire?" the sultry voice whispers into Yuuri's ear and even when Yuuri pulls away to the very back of his chair, he can't escape it. "What is propriety in the face of desire?"

"I'm not--" Yuuri starts and has to bite his lip when Lord Nikiforov mouths at the edge of his jaw. He swallows hard and his fingers clench on the apple that he's still holding out of sheer reflex. "I didn't come here to, to do this."

"Why did you come then, little dryad?" Lord Nikiforov asks, but he doesn't move away. "Was it to see how far my patience can outstretch? How far Victor Nikiforov can be pushed before he succumbs to your charms?" A hot, open mouthed kiss is pressed to the fluttering pulse point on Yuuri's neck, before Lord Nikiforov continues. "Let me answer you then, my sweet."

Lord Nikiforov pulls back and, stupidly, Yuuri turns his face to look at him. He's caught with his breath in his throat when Victor Nikiforov leans into him so close that their noses touch.

"For every push, I will pull you back," he says just as his hands wrap around Yuuri's neck. "Didn't I promise you that already back then?"

Thumbs stroke along the length of Yuuri's throat, but even if it wasn't for that, he would still not be able to do more than croak out: "Back when?"

Blue eyes take Yuuri in, search his face for any sign of dishonestly, of playful tug of rope, but Yuuri's question is true. Lord Nikiforov's lips part in surprise and he pulls back from Yuuri faster than Yuuri can blink. The absence of his warmth is jarring and Yuuri feels like a fool for missing it, since it was never his to keep in the first place.

"You're serious," Lord Nikiforov says then, voice barely above whisper. "You mean, you don't... you don't remember?"

Sudden fear grips Yuuri by the heart. "Remember what?"

Lord Nikiforov looks at him with painful longing in his eyes and Yuuri feels guilty even though he has no reason to. Or no reason known to him. But he couldn't have--

"Oh, Yuuri..." Victor Nikiforov sighs.

And Yuuri knows that yes: yes, he could have. And he did. Apparently.
"So who is it this time, old friend? Who's caught your eye?"

Victor sheds his golden cloak as soon as he steps through the door of the Giacometti mansion. His white gloves stay on his hands even when the young lord, who came to greet him personally, takes him by the arm to lead him to the ballroom.

"I'm growing weary of your scheming," Victor tells him. "It really is not as secret as you seem to think and I don't need you trying to fill the sadness of my days with dishonest romance."

"Whoever said I wanted it to be a secret?"

The young lord of the Giacomettis laughs openly at him. The rubies swing from his ears as he walks, adorn his neck and fingers, and a sprouting of them shows in the hollow between his collarbones. They grow right out of his skin, sparkling in candlelight to the sound of his amusement.

"My, chéri, it is no unknown that I wish for your happiness and if I can have a hand in making it happen then why shouldn't I try for it?" Christophe squeezes his arm and Victor relents.

"I admire your enthusiasm, Chris," he smiles. "It never seems to bring fruit, no matter what you try, so one would think you'd give up already. Is this time different? Is that what has you so delighted? Have you finally found someone special for lonely old me?"

The grin that Christophe gives him is cheeky and, despite everything, Victor's hopes rise.

"You'll see, if the fates deem it so," Chris says and slips past the herald who announces him with little to no trouble.

"The fates, huh?" Victor sighs before going after him.

He doesn't need to say his name for the herald to know who he is. The man bellows "Lord Victor Nikiforov," right as Victor steps through the burgundy curtain in the ballroom archway. It is to hushed whispers and curious glances that Victor makes his way down the short flight of stairs to meet Christophe, on whose arm he can already spot his recent fancy.

"Phichit," Victor dips his head when the man bows to him in greeting. "You're looking as radiant as I remember."

"You flatter me, my lord," Phichit grins at him, undeniably pleased. "It's good to have you back with us."

He's draped in reds and golds, a crown of rubies on his temples that matches the possessive claim that Christophe's arm makes around his waist. He looks truly a sight, but Victor would never risk making a move on him, because of the glimmer of adoration in his old friend's eye. That is worth more to him than a passing tryst.

"Thank you," Victor says. "It's nice to see some friendly faces after so long in solitude."

"Hopefully more than just friendly faces, yes?" Phichit winks, lifting a goblet to his lips, but Victor can see it's only to hide a smile. "Did Chris already speak to you about tonight's surprise?"
"He mentioned something in passing." Victor throws his friend a glance, but it remains unanswered, because Christophe's eyes are trained on the beauty at his side. Victor can't really be upset about that, so he turns back to the only party that can explain it to him. "What did you two concoct this time? Am I going to regret coming?"

Phichit gives a small laugh. "No, no, nothing that bad, I promise! We only thought that turning this evening into a game would help to keep your interests more, ah, focused."

"A game?" Victor asks, intrigued. "What sort of game?"

"See that, over there?"

Phichit tips his goblet at the far table filled with food. Among different plates of goodness there is one that Victor thinks must be what Phichit is directing him to look at: it's an entire mountain built of what seems like small desserts made of two pieces of pastry held together with white cream.

"They are called creampuffs," Phichit explains. "A friend of mine has brought the recipe with him from one of his journeys to the south. They're quite delicious."

"And?" Victor lifts an eyebrow at him, because surely that can't be it. Did he travel all this way to have a taste of foreign dessert? He could find worse ways to spend his time, but it still did not mean he wants to be invited only for pastry parties.

A corner of Phichit's mouth lifts in a little smirk. "One of them is hiding a ruby."

Ah, Victor thinks. There it is.

"And the prize of finding it is...?"

"The ruby itself, of course. And..." Phichit rests a warm hand on Victor's arm, "...a dance with our very own Lord Nikiforov. If he accepts, that is."

Victor ponders on it for a moment. He already is there, so why shouldn't he indulge his friends? It's only a dance, after all.

"Very well." He nods his ascent. "But first, let me indulge in these creampuffs. I am rather curious about the taste."

Phichit laughs at him quietly, covering his mouth with an elegant hand, and dips in a quick bow. He excuses himself to bring him one and Victor watches him navigate between the people instead of listening to Christophe's mooning.

Maybe this evening won't such a waste in the end, Victor thinks. At the very least his palate will be content enough for both of them.
When Phichit veers into view again, Yuuri is drinking his seventh goblet of wine. It's delicious and heady, and he already feels his body melting into the looseness that he knows well from the times he overindulged on ale. Paired with the delicious pastry that Yuuri is stuffing himself full between the sips of wine, he'll go as far as to say he's in heaven, but Phichit deems it a far less appropriate occupation.

"Have you been standing here the whole time since I left?" he asks and Yuuri only shrugs. His mouth is full, so he wouldn't answer even if he knew what to say. Phichit sighs at him. "Are you at least having fun?" he asks again, and Yuuri shrugs. Again. "I'd offer to introduce you to some people, but that would require you actually speaking to them..."

"Sorry, can't," Yuuri mumbles and shoves the rest of the pastry in his mouth to prove his point. Phichit's snort is as inelegant as it is amused. Yuuri gives him a sloppy grin while he's still chewing. He licks his fingers off the remnants of thick cream and then licks his lips for good measure. The sweet taste is such a lovely contrast to the tartness of the wine that he sighs happily as he washes it down with whatever's left in his goblet. It's really, really good, he just can't help it – it isn't often that he gets to indulge like this.

"He's here, you know," Phichit tells him in a conspiratory whisper. He turns to the mountain of pastry and carefully puts a fat one that Yuuri has been eyeing onto a small plate imbedded with rubies. "Lord Nikiforov."

Yuuri's hand that was reaching for another pastry as well freezes for a second before he takes it. "That's nice," Yuuri says.

Phichit, to his credit, doesn't laugh at him. He only tilts his head and gives him a look, and it might have been the same thing, Yuuri realizes, because Phichit's eyes are swimming in amusement.

"What else do you want me to say?" Yuuri asks. "It's not like I can just go up to him and gawk like a fish fresh out of the water."

"I can introduce you," Phichit offers, but Yuuri is already shaking his head. "What would I even say to him? He's... He's Victor Nikiforov!"

"So?" Phichit is unmoved. "Lord Nikiforov is a friend of young Lord Giacometti, who you have no problem speaking to from what I remember."

"That's only because he's Chris. I've known him since we were teens. It's different," Yuuri defends himself, burying his nose in his goblet before he realizes that it's already empty.

He refills it with a tender flush. If a little blunder like this is enough to make him want to escape the mansion, he can't even imagine what it would feel like when he makes one in front of Victor
Nikiforov. Young Lord Giacometti is a different story: Yuuri's family home is rested on the very edge of the property line of the Giacomettis and, once upon a time, Yuuri has rescued the little lord from falling into a ditch when his horse bolted. He was only a year older than Yuuri himself so their unlikely friendship continued over the years. It afforded Yuuri many an opportunity, but he was rarely of a nature to accept the kindness that he felt was not warranted.

Even today Yuuri has been invited to the ball like he was one of the higher society, when in fact he was nothing but a humble son of a shepherd. From the moment he stepped into the ballroom he felt inadequate and constrained, but to think that he would be invited to meet Lord Nikiforov of whom Yuuri has only heard stories, and whom he admired through them with a passionate heart?

No, Yuuri could never face him.

"Chris will be there, if that's any consolation. I left him with Lord Nikiforov just now," Phichit offers again. "I can be your chaperone, if you will."

Yuuri smiles at that, he can't help it. "You'll leave me all on my own as soon as Chris bats his eyes at you."

"I can't really deny that," Phichit laughs. "But I really think you should come with me. Lord Nikiforov is perfectly polite and I doubt he would tease you awfully for admiring him. He does not seem the type."

"Truly?"

Phichit nods, face sincere. "I will be the first one to challenge him to a duel if he so much as breathes wrong in your way."

"Do you even know how to use a sword?" Yuuri asks.

"I don't," Phichit shrugs. The rubies on him glitter in the candlelight and Yuuri knows that he would never win in a duel that required him to do anything more physical than speaking. "But I can slash at him with my tongue. I hear I'm quite good at it."

That Yuuri can't dispute. Phichit might not have a physique that instils fear in others, but he can reduce even the bravest of men into nothing with his words alone. And if that doesn't help, the affection of young Lord Giacometti is an assurance that Phichit often indulges in without restraint.

Yuuri sighs to himself. He doesn't feel certain of the decision he's about to make, but he knows that if he doesn't take this chance, another opportunity to see the man who can turn things to gold with only a touch might not be afforded to him.

So refills his goblet, downs the wine in a few gulps, refills it again and grabs his pastry.

"Fine, you win," he tells Phichit, who gives him a triumphant grin. "I'll come."

Chapter End Notes

this is the last part that's currently on tumblr, but a new update will come in a couple of hours anyway so keep an eye out for it if you're enjoying the story and make sure to
follow me on tumblr @katzuyas ^u^)b
Chapter 5

Phichit returns not only with the pastry, but another quite delicious looking treat: a young man who has the looks of someone rugged by the sun and roughened by hard work. A commoner, perhaps, but Victor is not one to judge social status too harshly. The way the man's body fills his clothes catches Victor's eye instantly, but more than that, he's captured by the rosy cheeks and bright, glowing eyes that look like they are deeply in search of something. What, Victor has no clue, but he is curious.

He almost doesn't notice when Phichit hands him the pastry on a little saucer, he's too busy in his admiration. It doesn't escape neither Phichit, nor Christophe, and they exchange a meaningful glance, before Phichit motions with his hand towards their new companion.

"This, Lord Nikiforov, is a friend of ours. His name is Yuuri," he introduces, then turns to Yuuri with a playful grin. "And this, as you well know, is his Lordship, Victor Nikiforov."

"A pleasure," Yuuri says, bowing slightly. His voice is a low timbre that feels soothing even if he doesn't say much. Victor wouldn't mind listening to him speak more, if he's being truthful.

"The pleasure is all mine," Victor replies, charming smile on his lips.

Among the gossipmongers gathered at the event, Yuuri seems like a person who enjoys listening more than speaking – a quality that Victor has learned to cherish through the years. Yuuri's eyes stay astray, even though Victor would love to look into them again. The young man is a silent presence in the conversation that carries on without him, but Victor's attention flicks to him every now and then out of sheer curiosity, and he notices how Yuuri's blush deepens every time that attention is noticed, which only makes Victor's interest spark further.

Yuuri seems unbearably sweet, Victor thinks to himself. Almost as sweet as the pastry they are both indulging in.

"It's quite delightful, isn't it?" Victor says, watching Yuuri chew.

Yuuri's eyes lift to meet his and there is nothing shy in his gaze. It's open and intense, almost pulling Victor in more than he already is drawn to him.

"It is," Yuuri agrees. "It feels a bit like eating a cloud."

Victor grins. "Have you ever tried one? Is that what they taste like?"

Yuuri's ears dip red in embarrassment and Victor chuckles.

"Forgive me," he says. "I did not mean to tease."
"It's alright," Yuuri replies. "I know I'm easy to play games with."

"Is that so?" Victor murmurs when Yuuri tips his goblet and downs the contents in a few quick gulps.

Yuuri doesn't have the air of a person that is easy to beat at anything, despite what his words claim. Victor drops it, though, instead watching how Yuuri bites into the pastry once again. A little of the cream gets stuck to his upper lip and Victor's breath nearly falters when Yuuri looks directly in his eye and licks it off. It's a quick flash of tongue, but somehow the air around them thickens with some unspoken tension.

Yuuri finishes off his pastry while Victor is staring at him, enraptured. Yuuri licks off the remnants of powdered sugar from his fingers and gives a small sigh that sounds far to upset for Victor to stand.

"Here," Victor offers him his own barely touched pastry. "You can finish mine if you want."

It seems to be the best choice he's made thus far, because Yuuri's face lights up and his eyes sparkle in the candlelight almost like Christophe's rubies. Victor is absolutely enchanted.

"Are you sure?" Yuuri asks, voice wistful, and it's precious how reluctant he is to accept something that he obviously craves. "You should eat it yourself. You do like it, no?"

Victor nods with a small smile. "I can see you enjoy them quite a bit more, though. It will be just as much pleasure to me to watch you eat as it would be if I did it myself."

Yuuri's cheeks flush again, but he accepts the pastry with a softly mumbled "Thank you." Victor's eyes follow his hand when Yuuri brings the sweet to his lips. Yuuri's mouth opens wide and he bites, sugar gathering on his lips like white cloud dust.

Victor craves to have a taste of that cloud as well.

"You've got a little..." he speaks through his desires and motions to the corner of Yuuri's mouth, where sugar stubbornly sticks to his skin, despite Yuuri already licking his lips twice. "Can I?"

When Yuuri nods at him, hesitant, but open, Victor brings his hand up and rubs his thumb over the white powder. Yuuri's cheeks flush deeper, his eyes flutter half closed, and he looks so sweet in his uncertainty that Victor wishes to cup his face like that for the rest of the night. Maybe even far into the morning, if allowed.

His only regret is the glove that still wraps around his hand, but even through that he can feel the warmth of Yuuri's skin. And he wants.

The moment is broken all of a sudden when Yuuri's eyes widen and a rough cough escapes him. Victor's hand drops to his side and Yuuri steps back from him as he brings his own up to cover his mouth, it seems – but no. His hand clenches on his throat, fingers trembling, and the coughing doesn't stop. Just as Victor is beginning to worry, Phichit is there in a flash of ruby red to pat his friend hard on the back.

Three or so slaps later, Yuuri makes a gurgling sound and something comes spitting out of his mouth. It's red and hard, and clicks across the beautiful tiles of the ballroom floor, spinning round and round until it stops right at Victor's feet.

A ruby.

Victor lifts his shocked gaze up.
"Oh dear," Phichit says. "Now *that* I was not expecting."

Yuuri is still wheezing, almost choked by the damned thing.

"Well." Victor clears his throat, forcing a light smile onto his face. "It seems I owe you a dance, Yuuri."

Chapter End Notes

yeah, my friends, putting things in food is NOT as great an idea as it might seem...
"Shall we dance, then?" Victor asks, offering Yuuri a hand which remains completely ignored.

"I need a drink," Yuuri says instead and walks past Victor to one of the refreshment tables.

Victor allows his hand to drop back to his side. Disappointment sits in his belly like a lump of lead. He looks after Yuuri longingly, but before he can give into the urge to sigh and mourn his lost chance in peace, he's brought out of his sulking by Christophe.

"Go after him, you fool," he hisses at Victor. "Strike while the iron is still hot."

"I'm hardly a blacksmith," Victor replies, but turns on his heel and follows after Yuuri since he can hardly deny that he wants to.

Yuuri is standing with his back towards him, so Victor carefully walks around to approach him from the side so as not to spook him. In one of his hands Yuuri is holding a wine jug, a goblet in the other, and he pours wine into it, drinks it in a few quick gulps, and pours more, which he also drinks just as fast. It keeps happening even when Victor steps up to him and if Victor wasn't already so impressed by him, he would've been by now.

"I apologize. That was tactless of me," Victor speaks first, but Yuuri doesn't offer him as much as a glance.

"Not your fault," he says.

Yuuri fills another goblet and drinks from it. Victor won't attempt to lie and claim that the strength and angle of Yuuri's jaw when it clenches as he swallows isn't affecting him in intimate ways – it does. Yet, he pushes past his attraction, because it most definitely isn't the time for it. There's an upset line to Yuuri's forehead, a frown between his brows. And he drinks, and keeps on drinking, chugging the wine as if it was water.

"You shouldn't drink so much."

The glare Yuuri throws him is a first. "I almost died just now, so excuse me if my drinking ruins your sense of decorum, Lord Nik– Nikiforov."

The hiccup that breaks out of Yuuri on Victor's name ruins the angry image he's trying to project. Victor almost coos. Yuuri is still sending him a look that tells Victor that he is aware of what Victor must be thinking, so Victor gives him a sheepish smile in apology.

"Say, Yuuri," Victor speaks up to change the way of the conversation. "If you were to die soon, like it almost happened, what would be the last thing you would wish to do? Something you might not have had the courage to try, perhaps?"

"What about you?" Yuuri asks back, and Victor doesn't really expect it, so he blinks in surprise for a moment. "What regrets could someone like you have? Someone who has everything."
Victor's mouth dips in a slightly bitter smile.

"Everything? Hardly." He takes the goblet out of Yuuri's hand and takes a swig. "If I were to die soon, I'd probably ask this very handsome young man to share a bed with me." He winks at Yuuri, but the allusion must be completely lost in translation for there is no reaction from Yuuri at all. Victor sighs into the goblet. "Sadly, I don't think he's interested."

"Well, he must be a complete moron then," Yuuri says like it's the most obvious thing. "Who would ever dare deny you anything?"

"You, for one." Victor tips the goblet at him.

Yuuri opens his mouth to argue, but before he can recognition replaces the wrinkles of confusion on his face.

"Ah, the dance."

"Among other things," Victor agrees.

"Alright then," Yuuri says and takes Victor's hand.

Yuuri pulls him away from the table so fast that Victor barely has any time to leave the goblet there, and already he is being led to the centre of the floor. Yuuri wraps his arms around him, settles into him like he's been dancing his entire life, and flips Victor's world on its head just as easily as he spins Victor around and around and around.

"Wow," Victor breathes during a step that puts them chest to chest, hip to hip, face to face.

Yuuri is positively glowing and he smiles at Victor with the sort of happiness that Victor feels reflected on his own lips without even trying to do so.

"You asked what I would do if I were to die," Yuuri reminds him.

His grip on Victor is strong and sure, and it takes Victor a moment to bring himself out of his reverie to focus on Yuuri's words. When he does with a hum that means "Go on," Yuuri dips him down low, only supporting him with his arms. Victor feels weightless and powerless against the look in Yuuri's eyes that smoulders into him akin to the fire that starts in Victor's heart.

"I would do this," Yuuri says as he tips his head down and rests a kiss on Victor's panting lips.

Before Victor can comprehend what is happening, or enjoy it for that matter, Yuuri pulls back and Victor is lifted with him. Yuuri spins him again, and Victor – dizzy, dazzled, charmed – falls into his arms with the most silly of grins he ever remembers making.

"Do it again," he asks, unsure if he's asking for a kiss or to be spun until all the world fades away in a brilliant blur, but he wants.

The matching grin on Yuuri's face is enough to tell him that he isn't the only one.

Chapter End Notes
THEY KISSED??!!!!!
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

As soon as Lord Nikiforov walks away to join Yuuri at the refreshments table, Phichit turns into Chris and buries his face in Chris’ robes. He doesn’t weep, but his shoulders tremble all the same, so Chris wraps both his arms around him in silent comfort.

"I almost killed him," Phichit whispers in a voice that quakes with something deeper than fear. "He could've died, Chris... Because of me."

"But he didn't," Chris replies. He strokes one hand down Phichit's back in a comforting motion. "You couldn't have known that would happen, mon chou. It wasn't your fault."

"It was my idea, though," Phichit insists. "I thought of putting rubies into pastry. If it wasn't for that—"

"And I never disputed this idea," Chris interrupts him, harsher than he normally would since he knows rather well that Phichit tends to ignore his kindness at times if he isn't forceful with it. "If I thought it could bring harm to anyone, I would've said so. I would've stopped this. Please, sweetheart, don't blame yourself for it. It was no one's fault and I am certain Yuuri is aware of it as well."

Phichit draws back from him, lip worried between his teeth and vulnerable look in his eyes.

"You really think so?" he asks. "What if he won't forgive me? I... It is my indirect fault that he was made a fool in front of Victor."

"Mon coeur," Chris says in a voice that he mostly uses to chide his pet into behaving. It works surprisingly well on Phichit as well, which makes Chris rather smug. "That's Yuuri we are speaking of. You know him. He knows you. There is nothing to forgive, I'm sure."

It must be the right approach, because the tension slowly leaves Phichit's shoulders. He leans into Chris far more at ease now and over his head crowned with a tiara made of rubies and gold Chris catches a glimpse of Yuuri and Victor holding hands as they walk towards the dance floor.

Ah.

"Besides," Chris speaks into Phichit's ear. "I think our little scheme might have proven quite a success. Look."

Phichit turns his head to where Chris directs him just as Yuuri spins Victor around and around. They are a distance away, so it's impossible to hear what they speak of, if they do at all, but Victor's cheeks are rosy with a flush and he's smiling, and... Chris has not seen him like this in many, many years. Through the nostalgia he doesn't even notice when he begins to smile himself, happy at his friend's newfound joy.

"They look fetching together," Phichit says, content. "We did good, didn't we?"

"That we did, mon chou." Chris can't help his grin. "That we did."
A sweet kiss is pressed to his cheek and it draws Chris' attention from the dancing pair. He looks down into Phichit's face, his shining eyes and smiling lips, and the adoration he sees there is as touching as the words Phichit speaks.

"I love how happy you are for them," he says.

Chris dips his head to capture the mouth that talks of him so sweetly and Phichit arches into him, welcoming and warm. Their kiss is a chaste one, not entirely proper for polite company, but how can Chris ever resist his little doe?

"Ah," Phichit grins. "Seems like you have sprouted, my love."

He lifts a hand to pluck a ruby from under Chris' chin. The stone shines in his fingers, full of Chris' affection. Chris takes it from Phichit, then takes his hand and places the ruby on his palm before closing Phichit's hand around the ruby and bringing it to his lips. He kisses Phichit's knuckles, glancing up at him through his lashes.

"For you, always," Chris says with utter devotion on his tongue.

The tender blush that blossoms on Phichit's cheeks is as stunning as the smile he is rewarded with.

Chapter End Notes

did yall know I love phichimetti?? bc yes, yes I do //melts
That night Victor Nikiforov keeps on falling.

Yuuri dances him around the floor, spins him and twirls him, dips him low and sweeps him off his feet yet again, and Victor can't escape the thundering of his heart, nor the breathlessness of his lungs, nor the laughter that spills from his lips. It's delightful. Yuuri is, he's so–

"You're beautiful when you smile like that," Yuuri whispers into his ear when the music brings them close.

"Like what?" Victor asks, unable to hold back the joy from his voice.

"Like you're free," Yuuri explains.

Ah, Victor thinks, that's because I am. For the first time in forever.

He doesn't say it out loud though, not yet. Instead, he takes the control of the dance and guides Yuuri through the steps that Yuuri catches almost perfectly on the first try. Yuuri is bright and impressive, and Victor... Victor is finding himself more smitten by the second.

Was this what the fates have been withholding from him?

When the song ends and another begins, Victor pulls Yuuri away from the dancing pairs. He leads him by the hand out of the ballroom and into the quieter part of the mansion. Yuuri's fingers are sweaty in his grasp, but whenever they slip on the leather of Victor's gloves, Yuuri squeezes Victor's hand tighter as if he doesn't want to let go even for a second. It brings Victor's heart such pure pleasure that he shivers well before they make it outside into the beautiful garden Christophe's grandmother built from the grass up.

Yuuri's footsteps are so hushed that Victor needs to look back at him every now and then to remind himself that he is real. Or maybe that's simply his excuse to once again be able to gaze into Yuuri's eyes, to catch his smile, to feast his eyes on what surely must be a dream, because someone as stunning, as bright, as free can't be real.

"Where are we going?" Yuuri asks him and Victor turns just in time to open his arms when Yuuri stumbles right into him. They pause there, among the shadows and trees, lost in the depth of each other's eyes.

"Nowhere," Victor says over the thunder of his heartbeat. "Anywhere. Wherever you want to go."

Yuuri laughs at him, a soft huff of warm air against Victor's shoulder. Yuuri's arms drape around Victor's waist like the finest of silks. Against the night, Victor shivers in a sudden heavy-lidded want.
"I'm good right here," Yuuri says and Victor has never heard more beautiful words.

"Your dying wish," Victor prompts quietly. "The thing you'd do if you were to die soon, what was that again? I think I must have forgotten it."

"Is your memory that fleeting, Lord Nikiforov?" Yuuri asks, a cocky turn of lips.

"Victor," Victor breathes, enchanted with Yuuri's boldness. It makes him so radiant that Victor wants to bathe in his glow, even if the teasing is done at his expense. "Call me Victor, please."

Yuuri hums. "No, that doesn't feel right."

Before disappointment can settle in Victor's chest, he continues: "How about Vicchan?"

Victor can't discern what meaning that word has, how to spell it or what language it derives from, but to his ears it sounds so close to Vitya that his cheeks flush within seconds of hearing it fall off Yuuri's tongue. It's been too long since anyone spoke to him like that, with such familiarity and affection, and Victor melts against Yuuri without any shame.

"That's perfect," he tells him right before their lips meet.

The moonlight is their only audience and they make full use of it.

Yuuri's kisses are sweet. He presses his mouth to Victor's like he's holding something precious, worshiping him without words, and Victor feels unraveled even before the strong hands on his back begin to move. When Yuuri lays him down onto the soft, dewy grass, Victor is already a pliant bundle under his touch – welcoming anything and everything Yuuri has to offer.

Yuuri is gentle with him, too. His hands open Victor's robes, reverent, and his mouth follows in their wake, chasing away the cold night breeze with its searing whisper on Victor's skin. Yuuri's tongue feels like fire, but Victor finds it impossible to resist the desperate burn it awakens in his body. The weight of Yuuri that pins him down to the grass is a cage that Victor never wants to escape from, especially when Yuuri shifts across him, dragging their clothes together like two snakes shedding skin against each other.

Their legs are tangled and close, and Victor's own hands get lost in the fabric of Yuuri's robes. He pulls and pushes, and pulls again, but it's not enough to take them off – not with his gloves on. Yuuri seems to be thinking the same thing, because he takes one of Victor's hands by the wrist and with his teeth, he rips the glove off Victor's hand. Victor gasps at the naked desire that runs through his body then like a stroke of lightning. It's only multiplied when Yuuri rests a kiss in the middle of his bare palm, while half-lidded eyes gaze at him with enough passion to set Victor aflame.

He shivers at the strength of his want and he lurches up to catch those irresistible lips with his own. Yuuri opens up to him like it's the only thing he's been made for and shifts in Victor's lap to sit right over the bulging arousal that dents Victor's golden robes.

They shift together and the sounds Yuuri makes fill Victor's heart to the brim. He lays Yuuri on the grass like he was doing himself only moments before, and slides his robes apart with eager hands. A sound akin to a whine rips out of Victor's throat when he sees Yuuri's naked form for the first time.

Yuuri is beautiful. That's one word for describing him, but as Victor dives down to drag his lips over the trembling stomach and lower, to the heat between his legs, he can think of a dozen others.

Absolutely enchanting.

Victor sinks his face between Yuuri's thighs and follows the pathway to heaven with eager, reverent lips.

Chapter End Notes

find me a fool more smitten than our vitya and I'll pay you 100 bucks
His lips are sticky and salty once he's done, but the feeling of satisfaction that burns in his chest is so overpowering that Victor welcomes the contrast. Yuuri lies unravelled, spent, under him and he's an even more stunning sight than he was before, which Victor takes full pride in – it's him that has done it, and he would live through every second of it again.

Yuuri's lips are parted on greedy little breaths, his cheeks are flushed and his stomach still quivers from the strain. Victor runs his hand over the soft skin there and thumbs at the thin stripes that spread across the canvas of Yuuri's skin. They shine silver in the moonlight, ethereal. They... they almost seem like a sign from fate, really.

Victor, with his golden touch, and Yuuri with body striped in silver.

It feels like something, but what, Victor doesn't know. And he isn't allowed to think of it either, because Yuuri's hand pulls him down by the neck. Their mouths meet before Victor can protest at the taste that still lingers on his tongue. Yuuri, apparently, does not care for it anyway. Or Victor's feeble protests, for that matter. His tongue is eager in Victor's mouth and it doesn't take him much time to force all thoughts out of Victor's mind.

"We should've stolen Chris' bedchamber," Yuuri pants when they part for breath.

His face is hooded by the shadow of Victor's shoulder, but even so Victor can see the raw want in his gaze. It makes something in Victor's groin ache, so he shifts over Yuuri and straddles his hips in a way that makes him brush against him with every breath they take.

"I want you," Victor tells him, wild and longing, and Yuuri is kind enough to kiss him again before Victor loses all shame and begins to beg.

Yuuri moves his legs, lifts them slightly, and Victor slips more securely into place. Strong thighs support him and strong arms keep him still, but all Victor wants is to squirm. To rub himself on the silver of Yuuri's stomach until the marks turn golden under his touch. The thought scares a gasp out of him, he would never wish to turn a human being into a lifeless, golden statue, but he isn't allowed any reprieve to process his fears – Yuuri's hands pull his robe up and splay on Victor's bottocks like they belong there.

"Yes," Victor chants. "Yes, yes, please, ye~"

Yuuri's mouth keeps him busy, but he can't bring his focus upwards no matter how Yuuri's tongue twists. Yuuri's fingers play with the soft flesh and dig into his skin, pull him apart in ways that make the fire burning in Victor's loins spit sparks of desire all over his body. He twitches and keens loudly when Yuuri's cock, already sprung hard, slips between Victor's legs and rubs against his most
sensitive parts.

Most sensitive after his heart, of course, but that isn't fairing any better either.

Victor's fists tighten in Yuuri's hair.

"Do it," Victor pants. "Just do it, I can take a bit of pain."

"No," Yuuri denies him and just because Victor wants it so badly, he growls in frustration. "I'll give you something else, Vicchan."

The name builds up on Victor's skin like a shiver and then spills over him with a choked gasp when Yuuri throws him onto the grass and covers him with his body. They are pressed together so tight that Victor can feel the tremble of Yuuri's stomach as he breathes. Yuuri looks down at him, bathed in moonlight and darkness, and the air around him is of something out of this world: something much like Victor himself.

The familiarity aches, but the throbbing of his arousal is more than Victor can take, so he leaves the thought alone. For now.

Yuuri seems to be thinking the same, because he takes both of their cocks in one hand and strokes. His hand is rough, worked, but he holds them in a grip that is far from painful. Victor, on his back and with his legs thrown apart, grasps at Yuuri's shoulders and pulls him chest to chest even as his own head falls back and unfocused eyes see the stars. The heat of their bodies is trapped between them in an ungodly fever that burns so sweetly Victor can't help melting into it with each sound of pleasure that he makes.

Yuuri rests his forehead on Victor's shoulder and his quick breaths moisten the skin right above Victor's heart. A kiss there is the only thing Victor needs to come undone, and Yuuri gives it to him without asking for anything in return. His hand works Victor through the shivery ecstasy, using his spilled seed to move faster and it's less of a surprise and more of a deep, primal content of being claimed that turns Victor into a pliant, accepting mould. Yuuri slumps into his arms and Victor cradles him as they both burn hot against the night's chill.

"I want to see you again, Yuuri," Victor whispers once his breath returns to him. "Please, tell me you want it too."

Yuuri is Christophe's friend. He's Phichit's friend. Surely the both of them could arrange something if they both were amenable. If... if Yuuri wanted it.

"You should come to my house then," Yuuri tells him. He hides a little yawn in Victor's shoulder and then slips off him to lie at his side. The moonlight shines silver in the whites of his eyes, which is far more charming than should be. "We have an outdoor bath behind it. I think you'll enjoy that."

"It sounds delightful," Victor says. "I'd like that very much."

"Good," Yuuri smiles.
That smile is the last thing Yuuri gives him before he slips into the arms of sleep, but it's enough. Victor watches him, heart full and happy for the first time in a long while, and when his own eyelids slide shut, it's with a matching soft curl of lips that mirrors gentle affection on Yuuri's face.

The moon winks down at them from behind the clouds, the only witness of the love that begins to bloom in the darkness of the night.

Chapter End Notes

I'm kind of getting scared of this fic bc I have so much planned for it?? I swear it was only meant to be one drabble.... //sweats
"I woke up alone," Victor ends his story on a barely concealed sour note. "Imagine my utter disappointment and shame when I made it back to the mansion only to have Chris inform me that you had already departed home."

Yuuri's face is white as a sheet of paper now. It was delightfully red just moments ago, embarrassed at the detail with which Victor recalled their night of moon-lit lovemaking. Victor thought that speaking of it might help Yuuri recall the passion they shared, but all he can see on Yuuri's face after all is said and done is fear. And panic. And a heavy dose of disbelief.

It stings quite a bit.

"I'm so sorry," Yuuri mumbles. "I can't believe--"

"I am not," Victor interrupts him rather coldly. "It was a beautiful night to me, even if it meant far less to you. Please don't tarnish my memory with fruitless apologies."

Another hue of shame is called forth onto Yuuri's face by Victor's words. Yuuri's mouth clicks shut and it should be satisfying, but all Victor feels is a chasm of darkness opening in his chest once again. It threatens to swallow him back into the cold world of loneliness and estrangement, which he believed to have only just escaped...

Is he wrong to hope for something more than one night of bliss? Is it wrong of him to crave more than just a fleeting passion?

"When I drink," Yuuri starts, eyes firmly on the ground, "my memory gets woozy and, from what you said, I must have drunk a lot that night."

Yuuri cringes here, and something akin to hope wakes up in Victor's heart. Does he regret drinking? Does he want to remember? Does this little tick of the muscles in his face mean that Victor was wrong in assuming he was the only one who cared?

"I'm-- I'm sorry I don't remember it, but if... if I did those things, if you enjoyed my company, then--" Yuuri takes a deep breath and lifts his head. His eyes are wide, but determined, and Victor can't fight it when his heart flutter, "--I'm glad to have had that much wine. Otherwise, well, I probably wouldn't have had the courage to speak to you. You are Lord Victor Nikiforov, after all, m'lord."

"I am," Victor agrees, but before Yuuri's expression can fall, he adds: "And I was Lord Victor Nikiforov when you had me on my back in Giacomettis' garden. Why does it matter?"

Yuuri's cheeks blossom pink, but he doesn't look away. Not this time. And it thrills Victor beyond belief.

"Is... is that what you want from me, m'lord?" Yuuri asks. "To be a young buck that gives relief to your passions?"

The way Yuuri phrased it made a shiver of delight run down Victor's spine. Is this what he craves?
To have a young stallion, like Yuuri himself, ready and eager to mount him whenever Victor is struck by a passing fancy? No, it doesn't seem like it. While Victor would not have minded that, oh no, he can't help but be greedy – he wants more than just physical intimacy. He wants to possess the heart and the soul, not only the body, but... he also wants to be possessed. To be wanted for more than his charms, for more than his title.

"No," he decides when it becomes obvious that Yuuri is waiting for him to speak. "I want more than that, I always have. I want something... complete. Something lasting. Something honest. Do you think you can be that with me, Yuuri?"

Yuuri opens his mouth, closes it, and opens it again. His eyebrows are furrowed in confusion, but when he speaks, his voice is steady.

"I don't know what honesty means to you, or what complete and lasting includes, but I think that if you return those sentiments equally, we can be, um, close."

"Close," Victor repeats. "Tell me then, Yuuri, since we're speaking so familiarly with each other, what do you want me to be to you? A father figure? A brother? A friend? Or maybe... a lover?"

Yuuri's cheeks burn, as Victor predicted. Yuuri shakes his head so hard that his hair whips in the air like a dog's does when it shakes water out of its wet fur after a swim. It's an amusing thought and it brings a ghost of a smile to Victor's lips when Yuuri answers.

"I don't want any of that, m'lord. I just want you to be yourself."

Surprise grips Victor by the heart and his mouth goes slack. "Be myself?"

But who is that? Is it Lord Nikiforov? Is it the man who can turn things into gold? Is it the reclusive socialite who charms everyone he meets? Is it the man who dances and drinks the night through, and later takes the first pretty thing to his bed?

Who is this Victor Nikiforov that Yuuri wants him to be?

"Just yourself," Yuuri says as if he can hear Victor's inner turmoil, "how you are when no one can see you. Yourself that you'd never show anyone else."

"So you wish to know my secrets?" Victor asks. He can do that, can he? But–

"No!" Yuuri quickly denies and Victor frowns in confusion again. "That's not– I don't–" Yuuri takes a deep breath. "I want you to be able to confide in me, yes, but only if you wish to. See, that is what I mean. Be yourself. Be selfish. Be who you want to be. Honesty, you said, yes?"

Honesty, Victor remembers. It's what he asked of Yuuri as well. Slowly, understanding seems to make his vision clearer. He hums and puts a finger to his lips in thought as he takes in the slightly unnerved slope of Yuuri's shoulders.

"Are you sure?" Victor asks. "I am a very selfish person, Yuuri. Once I have you... I might not be willing to give you up."

Like before, Yuuri's response surprises him, but Victor can't deny the thrill that comes with it. There is no blush, no shyness, when Yuuri looks him in the eye and says:

"I'm a rather selfish person myself, m'lord."

"Then call me Victor, Yuuri," Victor replies, smiling. "Let's be selfish together."
I may or may not have written 3 more chapters today so I can honestly say that it will get pretty chill for a while before things get crazy again but I know where I'm going (for now at least lol) so pls stick around? ;3c
"I can't do that!"

Yuuri slaps a hand over his mouth when the vehement denial makes it past his lips before Victor is even finished talking. There is no excuse for his impoliteness, but what Lord Nikiforov suggests is simply ludicrous.

"Why not?" Victor asks as if there can't be a reason to turn down his proposal.

"I can't just leave with you, I have family! They'll worry about me, if I don't return," Yuuri explains. "And there's also the--" He stops, because there is no way he can just bring up his biggest inconvenience in life like it's nothing. He swallows and sighs, and finishes: "Nevermind that, I just can't go with you."

Victor gives a hum as he sits back in his chair. The finger that is drawing the soft curve of his lip is unbearably distracting, but with sheer force of will Yuuri forces his gaze up to meet Victor's eyes. It doesn't make him feel much better, since they take him in like he's some sort of a puzzle that Victor needs to solve, yet it's an improvement for sure.

"How about I go with you then?" Victor says so unexpectedly that Yuuri twitches in surprise.

"You... what?"

Victor's smile is more of quirk of lips than an actual smile, but his eyes twinkle with amusement.

"If you can't go with me, I can go with you," Victor elaborates. "I don't have anyone to worry about me, see? I can go where I want. And if I wish to go with you, the only thing that is standing in my way is obtaining your approval. Will you grant it?"

Yuuri sits there like a fool, staring at the man who wears robes worth more than Yuuri's entire house and has more riches that Yuuri can comprehend, and he thinks to himself: what have I gotten myself into?

"I– I can't," he finally manages to say. "There's, um, there's--"

_There's a full moon coming_, is what he can't say. Because then Victor would ask why that matters and Yuuri would have to lie, or worse – explain why he can't be far from home on the nights of the brightest moon, why he can't be away from the forest... and that he can't do.

He can't stand the thought of seeing fear or, worse, disgust in Victor's beautiful blue eyes.

"There really is no space in our house that could fit one more," Yuuri gives at last. It's a lie, but still a smaller one than the alternative which doesn't want to come past his lips. "And it really isn't a place fit for a noble."

"I don't mind," Victor says then as if his entire reason for being is to make Yuuri struggle. "I can sleep with you, or even on the floor if I must. Or, I could send for my bed? A tent, if it appears too
"No, no," Yuuri shakes his head, "that won't do. I– A few days. I need a few days, so I can talk to my parents and then I will come to see you."

Victor looks at him for a brief moment and Yuuri feels like he can see straight to his soul. Like he knows that Yuuri is hiding something. He can't know what, though, and that is the only reason for Yuuri's peace of mind. When at last Victor nods his head in agreement, Yuuri breathes a sigh of relief that rids him of the rest of his worries, if only for this moment.

"When should I expect you then?" Victor asks.

The full moon is three nights away and it always takes Yuuri at least two to regain his strength afterwards. It won't be easy, but he can't afford to make someone like Victor wait longer.

"In five days' time," Yuuri decides. "I need to finish some things, speak with my friends and family, and then I'll come find you."

"Your home is on the other side of the forest, isn't that right?" Victor asks, sitting up straighter. When Yuuri nods, he continues: "I'll wait for you here then. We'll camp for a few more days and once you rejoin me, we'll leave for my mansion."

"Alright," Yuuri agrees. He'll have to make sure to refrain from straying towards camp lights during the night, but it will be far less of a headache than explaining everything now would have been. "I can... leave then?"

The smile that makes it onto Victor's lips reminds Yuuri of the ones he was treated to when they first met. Or second met, as it'd happen, but Yuuri is certain that Victor smiled like that at him during their dancing at the ball and whatever had come next.

It's a smile full of scorching attraction, passion and desire, and all of it framed in the shape of lips that Yuuri already knew the touch of. His face turns red before he can help it, but that seems to only sharpen Victor's edges, because he slides out of his chair with a grace that Yuuri can't help but admire. Victor comes towards him, taking small steps that feel more like seduction than simply walking, and Yuuri is too weak to resist it when his lap fills with gold, warmth and Victor Nikiforov.

"We still have time before the sunrise," Victor murmurs in a voice that sends shivers down Yuuri's spine. The gold robe shimmers when Victor slides his knee between Yuuri's thighs and pushes him into the back of his chair as he hovers above him. "How about we keep being selfish for a moment longer?"

There are no arguments in his dazed mind that Yuuri can voice, so he lifts his slightly trembling hands and locks them on Victor's hips. He pulls him into himself and the blue eyes that have been looking at him with half-lidded pleasure widen in surprise that melts into delight so quickly it takes Yuuri's breath away. Happiness is a soft thing on Victor's face from this close and Yuuri finally sees that what he has been told wasn't a lie – Victor spoke nothing but the truth.

Without doubt, they made love under the moonlight on the night of the Giacometti ball.

"Can I really have this?" Yuuri asks, lips trembling on a shaky breath he lets out. "Can I really have... can I really have you?"

When Victor leans down to rest their foreheads together, Yuuri sees no hesitation, no trickery in Victor's blue eyes. It's easy to believe him, easy to trust him, and Yuuri finds himself doing so without being asked for it. With Victor, that trust seems to go both ways, though.
"You already do," Victor says softly. "Be selfish with me, Yuuri. I'm all yours, if you only want to take me."

Yuuri breathes an eager, disbelieved "Yes," because how could anyone not want Victor Nikiforov, but he isn't given time to dwell on all the reasons for it. His mouth is claimed in a kiss that is both sweet and heady, like the best of wines, and all his earlier insecurities fade away into simmering content that is naught but golden.

Chapter End Notes

hints hints hints mind the hints y'all they're important for PLOT reasons ;3c

(also thank you so much for all the comments guys you're all so kind ahhhh I haven't had the time these past two days to reply but I will get to it tomorrow I promise!!! love you <3)
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

They don't do much.

Lord Nikiforov is a hefty weight in his lap, and even after they move to the chaise – Yuuri protests the bed quite vocally and Victor relents, only to sprawl on the length of the chaise in a way that instantly makes Yuuri's throat dry with insuppressible want – Yuuri still can't help questioning every little move he makes. He's held other people before, but none of them were... were him.

Him, who slides his hands over Yuuri's thighs like he worships them. Him, who bites Yuuri's lip hard enough to set every part of Yuuri's body aflame. Him, finally, who speaks Yuuri's name in a breathy voice that sounds as needy as Yuuri feels.

Him, who beckons Yuuri forward, and who Yuuri follows without a thought.

"Kiss me again," Victor asks when Yuuri slides onto him. He's trying to keep a bit of distance between them, but Victor has no such barriers: he pulls Yuuri into himself, greedy and sure.

And so, they kiss.

Victor's mouth is as familiar to Yuuri, as it is not. It's hard to put it in words, but when Yuuri gives in to his instincts, he has a strange premonition of this already having happened before – and it had, at the Giacometti ball. His own body's response is just more proof of that, even if Yuuri's mind still struggles with the thought that he could've seduced someone as beautiful, as perfect, as... divine as Victor Nikiforov.

Seduced, and then scorned, he remembers.

"Were you," Yuuri speaks between the kisses," looking for me... all this time? Since the ball?"

Victor's hands pull on Yuuri's face and he lifts his head briefly. Holding onto him as if he's afraid that as soon as he lets go Yuuri will disappear, Victor admits:

"I would've looked for you for the rest of my life, if I had to."

It's a little hard to breathe when faced with such honesty, but it was what they promised to each other, so Yuuri forces his lungs to work.

"Thanks be to the gods that you don't have to then," Yuuri says and kisses Victor's lips again.

They are mellow and pliant under him, and open when he presses his tongue against them. It's like tasting the forbidden fruit, Yuuri thinks as he lets himself drown in the feeling. Victor is less than a noble like this, with the control of the moment willingly passed into Yuuri's hands. Oh, he's just as beautiful, what with the flush high on his cheekbones and his glossy, smooth lips and his skin softer than fine silks... but there is something more to it, something that makes him seem only a human.

That something makes Yuuri cradle the side of Victor's face gently, and slow down his kisses into little brushes of lips. Victor whines in the back of his throat, but Yuuri pulls his head away when
Victor arches upwards to claim his mouth on his own.


He slides his lips over Victor's. It isn't a kiss, not really. Just a tender touch that is as soft as it is fleeting. Victor trembles underneath Yuuri while his hands desperately clutch onto the back of Yuuri's robes. It's then that Yuuri fully realizes how much Victor wants him. Words are just words, they can be spoken in the heat of the moment, but honest actions of the body? No, those can't be faked.

When Yuuri looks into Victor's face – his flushed cheeks, shiny lips, half-lidded with pleasure eyes and the tiny crease in between his eyebrows that deepens when he arches off the chaise to follow Yuuri's mouth – he knows that this is what desire looks like on Victor. And it is beautiful.

"The absence makes the heart grow fonder," Yuuri whispers.

"I've suffered so long already," Victor whines. "Are you truly cruel enough to starve me further?"

"I was talking about myself, Victor," Yuuri admits, a flush crawling higher on his face. "If I have you now, I might never want to leave."

Victor groans at that and he pulls Yuuri down on him with strength that steals Yuuri's breath away. He can hear Victor's heart hammering in his chest, the way that he is pressed to it. His own matches it beat by quickened beat, a music just their own.

"Then don't leave" Victor asks. "And, please, call me Vitya when we're like this."

"Vitya?" Yuuri repeats, the name a sweet roll on his tongue. He smiles. "That sounds like my dog's name, Vicchan."

He hears the gasp first, and when he lifts his head it's the parted in surprise mouth he notices first as well. Only after does he take in the full blush that renders Victor is pink from cheeks to the collarbones.

"You called me that," Victor admits. "That night we met. It was... it was a dog's name?"

Oh, lord almighty–

Mortified, Yuuri scrambles up. "I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to, I swear! I don't know what came over me, but I can assure you I meant no offense! Vicchan is a very dear friend to me and he has been with me through every struggle and hardship, so I couldn't possib--"

Victor cuts him off with a little kiss that ends before it even began, but makes Yuuri's excuses halt expertly.

"I took no offense then, and I won't take any now," Victor reassures him. "On one condition."

"Whatever you want, please--"

"You need to bring Vicchan to meet me some day," Victor smiles, and it's a stunning, happy smile that reminds Yuuri of a heart that his mother draws on the beach sand every year for their father on the anniversary of their wedding. "I do love dogs."

Unable to say anything, Yuuri lets out the incredulous little laugh that makes Victor's eyes shine with something warm and lovely. Yuuri is left staring at him, one thought repeating in his mind just as he
tilts his head to accept another one of Victor's sweet kisses.

How is this his life now?

Chapter End Notes

//sighs happily bc victuuri kisses are the most blessed thing in the universe
They part when the first light of dawn creeps over the horizon. Victor is reluctant to let Yuuri leave and pulls on Yuuri's robes for just one more kiss, which becomes two, which becomes three, which becomes countless others until the sun is up and the camp begins to wake.

"I need to go," Yuuri reminds him while Victor clings to him, leeching on his lips. They'd feel dry if it wasn't for all the licking and kissing he's been doing all night. "I really need to--"

"I know," Victor whispers and it's hot against Yuuri's lips. "I know. But I still don't want to part."

"It's only for a few days," Yuuri soothes even as his own heart flutters in his chest. He runs his fingers through Victor's hair and smiles when Victor sighs in bliss at the feeling of Yuuri's nails scratching his scalp. "I'll be back before you notice."

Victor's mouth drops open to argue, but before he can Yuuri puts a finger to his lips.

"And I'll bring you a gift," Yuuri adds. "A proper courtship gift." At that Victor's blue eyes begin to sparkle with so much delight, Yuuri can't hold back a small chuckle. "It won't be anything extraordinary, but it will be a gift coming straight from the heart."

Victor takes Yuuri's hand from his lips and kisses his knuckles, a soft expression on his face.

"I'm certain I will adore anything you bring me," he says. "But I will still adore you the most."

Yuuri's cheeks burn with the strength of his blush, but it isn't an unwelcome feeling. Not anymore. After the whole night of touching Victor and familiarising himself with his touch in return, Yuuri's embarrassment about those gentle kisses that Victor so enjoyed pressing into his skin has somehow mellowed.

"Five days," Yuuri repeats.

"Five days," Victor nods and it's a promise.

Blue eyes follow him from the tent, as he walks past the guards eating breakfast, putting on clothes or armour, strapping their swords to their belts. He feels their gaze as he makes it past the campline. The weight of it disappears once he enters the forest, but the feeling of Victor remains with him well into the trek home.

Yuuri can't get him out of his head.

Victor lingers there like a vision, like divinity trapped into human form, and Yuuri is helpless in fighting the charms that work their magic even if they are apart like so. He remembers the press of Victor's body, the sound of his voice, the flush of his face... There is no denying that Victor is beautiful, but when Yuuri was allowed to look closer at him, he could see that he was so much more to him than just that beauty. So much more than just his power.

Victor is needy. Victor is selfish. Victor is childish.
But he didn't push past what Yuuri was willing to give. He didn't let his temper rule him. He didn't take what wasn't his to take.

He was considerate. Passionate. Open. Accommodating.

In just one night, Yuuri learned more about him than he has from Chris' many, many stories over the years and... the feeling is heady. It makes Yuuri's head swell as he walks through the forest towards the small cottage his family is living in. The taste of the food and wine he had still remains on his tongue, but when he licks his lips it's the memory of Victor's kisses that comes to him. The sun bears hot on his skin, almost like a ghost of Victor's breath, and Yuuri dives into the nearest shadow of a big oak for momentary relief.

He presses his back against the bark and looks up into the blue, blue sky that reminds him of Victor's eyes.

"How?" he asks no one in particular. How did this happen to him?

He can recall drinking at the ball, yes. The pastries Phichit proudly presented him with were delicious as well. There were dancing couples and food, and drink. And Chris whispering sweet nothings into Phichit's ears, which had both of them drunk on affection instead of the fine wine that Yuuri gulped the more the night went by. That was the reason Yuuri left them alone, he remembers. But after that... there's nothing.

Until Yuuri woke up in his bed, groggy and with legs aching as if after a long day spent working, or walking, or... Victor has told him that he awakened alone, and Yuuri realizes in an instant what he must have done: he ran away from him, like he always did after full moons.

It's a habit of his, a bad one. With his mind not fully comprehending yet, he pushes himself off the harsh ground and runs to rid his body of the uncomfortable ache that settles in the muscle over the few hours of sleep he gets between the dawn and midday. It's been like this since he can remember, so if the Yuuri who awakened from his drunken stupor mistook his inebriation as the after effects of the full moon, then–

"I really ran away from him," he mumbles with a groan. "I ran from Victor Nikiforov."

Clearly, Yuuri is ridiculous.

Ridiculous enough to run away after having the man he's been dreaming off right next to him, and then not even a month later doing very much the same – he's running now, too. This time, however, he's running with purpose.

Or that's what he tells himself as he pushes off the tree and continues on his way. It's a long walk home, but Yuuri's steps are sure, determined, because he knows what he needs to do.

First, he has to see a friend of a friend about what it means to be a good friend, because as much as Yuuri appreciates the opportunity afforded to him, he would've still liked a word of forewarning. Especially from those who call themselves his friends...

Chapter End Notes
there you have it, some explanation for how exactly our oblivious son woke up after sexing victor without knowing he sexed victor RIP VITYA
"Where were you?" Mari asks, eyebrows drawn.

As soon as Yuuri steps over the threshold of their tiny house, she appears from behind the kitchen door in a rush of hot air and steam like a spectre in the mist. Her face is usually set in stone, but the frown of worry that is set on it now makes guilt rise up Yuuri's throat.

"I'm sorry," he replies after he swallows. "I was in the forest and lost track of time."

Why he lies he doesn't know, but the words spill out of his mouth faster than he can hold them back. Mari accepts it for the truth, though, and only she sighs at him.

"You know how mom gets," she chides him. Yuuri hangs his head low, admitting the defeat.

"I know, I'm sorry. Where is she? I'll apologize properly."

Mari waves a hand towards the door she came from moments before, but before Yuuri can brush past her, she speaks again.

"Did something happen? You look... well, a little..." She waves a hand unable to describe what she's seeing. Yuuri can guess it's nothing good.

*I met Victor Nikiforov and learned that I shared his bed on the night of Chris' ball.*

...is what he doesn't say. His lips purse in a line as he swallows his thoughts.

"Let's, let's talk about this at dinner," he says. "It's quite a tale."

Mari lifts her eyebrow at him, clearly intrigued. He shakes his head then, and turns to the kitchen to greet their mother, who is too busy stirring pots and flipping pans to notice his arrival.

"Mom," Yuuri calls quietly. "I'm home."

She whirls around in a swoosh of skirts that makes her look far more graceful than just a shepherd's wife. Yuuri can't help a smile. An elated gasp makes it out of her mouth once she sees him, and she claps her hands once before she rushes to his side. He's ready for one of her hugs and gathers her small frame in his arms.

"Welcome back, Yuuri," she replies. Her voice is light and airy, and so sweet that any lasting tension leaves his body while she holds him. "Where you successful in your hunt?"

"Ah..." Yuuri cringes. "I got sidetracked, I'm sorry. And I'm sorry for worrying you. I never meant to stay the night."

She's an angel, his mother. She gives him a smile and a little pat on the cheek, and he's forgiven without any fuss.

"As long as you get back safe," she tells him. "Now take these dishes to the dining room, please."
They set the table while Mari fetches their father from the outside bath, and together they sit, and eat, and talk. The conversation is easy: about the harvests and sheep shedding, and preparations for winter. Yuuri gathers his courage while he nods at his father absently until he feels ready to speak.

"I met someone," Yuuri begins when Mari's gaze becomes too much of a burden against the side of his face. "The night of the ball."

"Oh, that's lovely, Yuuri!" His mother cheers. "Who was it?"

"I'd rather not say yet," he decides. It's better than lying, he thinks. "But he... he asked me to come with him. Live with him."

"Are you going to? Just for a man you've only met once?" Mari gives him an incredulous look that Yuuri can't help thinking is well deserved. He himself is still having trouble believing that he is making this decision, but... he is. And that's that.

"I met him twice. The night of the ball... and tonight," he explains. "And I know it's rushed, I know it's not, not proper..." he swallows thickly, looking from one face to another, "...but I think I might want to try it?"

"Sweetheart," his mother says as she takes his hand in both of hers. They're small and scarred from years of hard work, but their touch is even kinder for that. "Whatever path you choose, we will support you."

"I worry, though," his father interrupts. "Does this man know of your..."

He doesn't finish, but it isn't needed. They all know the reason for his asking.

Yuuri bites his lip and shakes his head. He knows that can be a problem. It will be, for sure. But as long as he can return home once a month, convince Victor that this is the specific time he needs to be there, it could possibly work.

"Don't be naive," Mari tells him after he explains his thoughts. "Things like this never go as planned."

"Do you trust this man?" his mother asks.

Does he? Yuuri doesn't know. As much as he learned about Victor, he still doesn't know enough. Definitely not enough to make a choice as big as this, but... he wants to give him a chance.

"Then you should," his father says. "If that is what your heart tells you, you need to follow it. Live with no regrets, like your mother and I have always wanted for you."

Yuuri looks at them both, at kind Hiroko and gentle Toshiya who smile at each other with no end and look like there is no other place they would rather be, and he knows that this is what he wants, too. It seems the decision is made for him, then. It's clear in the single gesture his father makes when he takes his mother's hand up to his lips and rests a tiny kiss against her worked knuckles... just like Victor had done not even a day ago.

Yuuri smiles.

Maybe he doesn't know him, maybe he has a lot to learn, still.

But he knows that he wants this, too.
"I'll leave after the full moon," he tells them. "But I will be back until I know I can trust him with this."

"And if you can't?" Mari asks, the only one lacking excitement at Yuuri's new predicament.

He looks at her for a while, but can't find anything in her face that isn't there out of simple worry and kindness, as much as she'd like to deny. He smiles again, a tad more at ease.

"Then you can give him a piece of your mind," he offers. "And if that doesn't help... there's an axe out back, isn't there?"

The sharp grin Mari gives him makes Yuuri feel more secure than any promise of acceptance ever could.

Chapter End Notes

it's so silly but I keep forgetting that yuuri's father is a shepherd when I write and then when I edit I need to somewhat put it in there bc it!! should!! be!!! there!!! what the hell am I even doing smh
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Phichit wakes to tender kisses down the line of his shoulder and it is almost a perfect way to greet the new day, except the stubble around the sweet mouth of his beloved feels like little stubborn needles that ruin the sensation completely. Instead of opening up his eyes, Phichit reaches blindly towards where he thinks Chris' neck must be and slips his fingers into the short hair on his nape, only to pull, and pull him away.

"Good morning, mon chou," Chris purrs as he comes to rest his lips against the plush of Phichit's cheek. "It's another beautiful day to spread love and happiness among the lonely hearts."

If Phichit was more awake, he would've snorted. But as is, he can't force himself to do so, and ends up only giving a soft grunt. It makes Chris chuckle, low and lovely. Phichit would not mind terribly if that sound lulled him back to sleep, but Chris' lips return their exploration of his shoulder along with the prickly sensation, and he can't stand it anymore.

He wraps his arms and legs around Chris and flips them over as gently as he can. His weight pins his beloved down, and with a cheek against the smooth, warm skin of Chris' chest, Phichit gives a blissful sigh.

"I take it you aren't particularly inclined to get up yet?" Chris asks to which Phichit only nuzzles into his chest. Chris' laughter jostles him around and Phichit makes an impatient sound that thankfully works to calm his pillow. "Very well, love, a little longer then."

A little must be a lot, because when Phichit awakens next the sun is visibly up and peeking into their widows with no shame. With no shame as well, the doors to their bedchamber bang open and their mutual friend, Yuuri, walks in with a servant hot on his heels.

"Mister Yuuri, please, I'll be in trouble if--"

The man's ranting stops as soon as he takes note of Phichit's clearly awakened form on top of his master, and he flushes crimson before hastily bowing to him.

"Master Phichit, I'm so sorry! I tried to stop him, but he just wouldn't list--"

"That's alright, Antoine. Yuuri is a friend, it is no trouble." The man looks visibly relieved, but the words seem to have a different effect on his friend who gives him an ugly frown. "Bring us some breakfast and tea, will you?"

"Right away, Master Phichit. Right away."

Phichit climbs off of Chris, who miraculously is still immersed in deep slumber, and makes it around the bed to the small sitting area. Yuuri has stopped there and kept still – far too still for it to be normal.

"What's wrong, Yuuri?" Phichit finally asks when it becomes obvious that Yuuri isn't going to speak. "Did something happen?"
"Why didn't you tell me?" Yuuri asks, voice bitter.

Phichit looks at him in surprise. "Tell you what?"

"About the ball."

It's then that Yuuri lifts his head and their eyes meet. Everything is right there, in the open, and Phichit suddenly understands. A little sheepish, he says:

"You never asked."

"How should I have known to ask? You know I was drinking, and you know how I get when I do!"

It's more than bitterness, Phichit takes note. Yuuri's eyes are wild and his hands are shaking, and before Phichit can offer to sit down and talk, Yuuri explodes.

"Why didn't you tell me I met Victor Nikforov? Why didn't you tell me how big of a fool I made myself in front of him? And why didn't you tell me I danced with him? Dear lord, Phichit, I slept with the man! How could you not have told me that?!"

Eyes wide, Phichit's mouth dropped open.

"Well, I wasn't aware of that small detail," he breathes. "What was it like?"

Yuuri throws his hands in the air. "That's just it: I don't know! I don't remember it!"

"Wait... How do you know it happened, then?"

The question seems to sap out all of Yuuri's energy and he collapses on the chaise, where he hides his face in his hands. He mumbles something, but it's gone before Phichit can make it to sit next to him.

"Again," Phichit says, and Yuuri takes a breath so deep Phichit can visibly see it.

"He found me again and we kissed intensely through the entire night."

The moment it takes for Phichit to unravel what Yuuri has said is a tense one, but it quickly passes when Phichit's breath leaves him in an excited whoosh.

"Oh lord," he says, and Yuuri nods. "What then? Did he tell you all about it?"

"I thought I'd die about five times during the story," Yuuri replies. Sympathetically, Phichit pats his shoulder. "But how could you not have told me?"

"I'm sorry, Yuuri," Phichit says, contrite. "It simply slipped my mind. You, um, you almost choked on one of the rubies and I was... well, I was a little distressed, so Chris and I retired early, and I didn't see you after you and Lord Nikiforov began to dance."

The sigh Yuuri gives is a resigned one.

"I'm sorry, too. It isn't your fault, I shouldn't have accused you. I shouldn't have drunk that much in the first place, I have no one to blame for that but myself."

Phichit says nothing to that, but he waits for the rest: for the gossip that is about to come, because he knows Yuuri. And as well as he knows him, he also knows that Yuuri can't keep the most exciting things to himself, so Phichit – the kind, loving friend that he is – will always be there to lend him a
willing ear. When Yuuri opens his mouth at last, Phichit is on the edge of his seat with curiosity.

"I... might have agreed to live with him?"

This time when Phichit shrieks, Chris bolts upright in the bed and looks around wildly, still partially asleep, but neither of them notice: they're too busy screaming into each other's shoulders, because that is the news worthy of the loudest appraisal. And Phichit can't wait to hear all about it.

Chapter End Notes

me @ phichit: babe if u don't want that stubbly man THEN I'LL GLADLY TAKE HIM OFF UR HANDS JUST SAY THE WORD
I'm sorry but I'm always thirsty for my swiss-assman
"So that's what happened," Chris says as he sips on his morning tea. "Well, I'm not certain it will make you feel better, but what he's done? That is rather tame for Victor."

"Tame?" Yuuri asks, looking pale and uncertain.

Victor would smack Chris upside the head if he knew he's doing it, but Chris is of the opinion that Yuuri deserves to know the truth. He wants to be a good friend to both of them, after all. And that means never taking sides, no matter how amused the prospect of Victor Nikiforov pining away is.

"The morning after the ball he asked me about you," he says to Yuuri's widened eyes. "I told him that you live by the edge of the forest between my property and the Nekolas', and his first instinct was to go see you, which I somehow managed to prevent. I know you wouldn't have appreciated him ambushing you like that." Yuuri nods, and the feeling of guilt Chris didn't even realize he was holding onto settles into relief. He smiles a little into his tea. "Instead, that doofus went and bought the land from Nekolas like it was the most obvious thing he could do. I'm actually proud of him for not offering it to you as a courtship gift."

He almost rolls his eyes at Victor's antics, but the fearful shock on Yuuri's face stops him.

"Would he?" Yuuri squeaks, and when Chris only cocks his head in agreement, he groans. "Oh lord, what did I get myself into..."

"The romance of the century, my friend!" Phichit tells him brightly.

He's all smiles and sparkling eyes, and Chris can't help the warmth of affection from shining through his gaze. Phichit catches it like he always does, and the smile he gives him is a different kind of beauty now: private and tender, so sweet that it rips a smitten sigh from Chris' lungs.

"But--" Yuuri starts. "But, Nekolas' land? That's a good ten acres of property, isn't it? Why would he even--?!"

He breaks off with a sound so conflicted that Chris takes mercy on him.

"Listen, old friend, Victor isn't like the rest of us. Gold and riches are nothing to him, you know? Say, if you could have as much gold as you wanted with only a thought and a touch, don't you think it would lose its shine all too soon?"

"That makes sense, yes," Yuuri agrees, "but it still doesn't explain why he would want to gift all of that to me. It's too much!"

"He wanted to impress you," Chris tells him simply.

"I wouldn't be impressed with that! I'd never accept it in the first place, what was he thinking?" Yuuri denies, incredulous.

"We know, Yuuri, we know," Phichit pats his friend on the arm.
"That's why I stopped him from carrying it out," Chris adds. "Told him to wait for you to reach out to him first... at which I can see he failed spectacularly. You say he is camped on the other side of the forest?"

Yuuri nods and Chris snorts. It's an inelegant sound and unfit for polite company, but he is among friends, so he lets it be what it is: derisive, amused, not at all surprised by his other friend's preposterousness.

"I couldn't have invented a scheme more creative than that, I must say," he gives, still smiling. "His desperate actions are a clear tell of his wants, though, no?"

Yuuri takes a shaky breath, wrangling his hands in his lap. "Do you really think he's interested in me? I... you know I'm not the same person when I've had a drink. It's– I don't want to lead him on with a false idea that I can be someone like that, because I can't. I'm not."

"Personally," Phichit injects before Chris can reply, "I think he'll love the sober you as much as the drunk you. If not more."

"And if he doesn't," Chris continues, "and mind, I have no doubts that he will, but if he doesn't for some bizarre, unconceivable reason, you can rest assured that neither me nor Phichit will allow any hurt to come to you. Victor is my friend, yes, but so are you, Yuuri. Please, keep it in mind."

The little smile Yuuri gives him isn't like his usual ones, but it is the first one that day. Chris counts it as a win. Especially since in addition to that he receives a thankful smile from Phichit as well.

What more could a man want to start his day well?

"So you think I should go through with this?" Yuuri asks. "Allow Lord Nikiforov to, to court me?"

"Yes," Phichit immediately says.

Chris turns an amused smile towards him. "Love."

He doesn't say much else, but Phichit seems to understand without words what it is Chris wants to tell him.

"If you want to," Phichit corrects himself, but the smile on his face isn't an apologetic one.

Yuuri seems as helpless against it as Chris feels, and he nods.

"Then I guess this is happening after all," Yuuri says, sounding both excited and disbeliefed.

"Good luck," Chris tells him. He recalls the smitten look on Victor's face, his smile and flush and shining eyes, and he grins into his teacup sharper than any time before. "Though, I think it's a safe bet to say that you don't exactly need it."

The little flush on Yuuri's cheeks proves him more than right and Chris chuckles to himself. Oh, things are going to get interesting soon.
I live for victor/chris friendship but you will have to tear yuuri/chris friendship out of my
cold dead hands

(also we're getting vitya back next chapter, prepare for golden eggs of surprise ;3c)
It's mid afternoon when Yuuri makes it back home from the Giacometti manor. He's tired and a little shaky after all the revelations of the recent days, but his heart feels awfully light. He isn't upset by any of what's happened and, in fact, he is quite honestly looking forward to getting to know Lord Victor Nikiforov. The intimacy is not something Yuuri could've envisioned ever being offered to him, but you don't look a gift horse in the teeth, so he takes it in like he takes everything else: with a grain of disbelief, still, but with an open and eager mind to boot.

"Go take a soak out back," his mother tells him when he returns. "Enjoy yourself before tomorrow, yes?"

There's a tiny smile on her lips that reminds him of all the smiles Mari gave him when they were still children and about to get in trouble. He doesn't dwell on it, though. His mind is already slipping from this small detail onto bigger, more pressing things.

Like the full moon.

Or Victor Nikiforov.

Stripping out of his clothes, Yuuri can't help but press his fingers against the silver marks that cover the expanse of his stomach, chest and thighs. There are some on his back, he knows, and a scattering across his shoulders as well – they are almost a part of him now, like freckles or scars are to so many others: his, but also not really; a brand that he never asked for, but got anyway.

A burden to bear for the rest of his life.

Yuuri pulls his hands away to wrap a towel around his waist. Despite the marks, despite who he is... he is still lucky. His family loves him. They accept him. The thought of how his life could've been if he was born to people less caring than his beloved mother and father makes him shiver with unspeakable fear. If the world came to know...

He quickly discards that idea. The world will never know. No one who knows his secret will betray him. Yuuri believes in them, trusts them. But does he trust his new... friend, too? Is Lord Nikiforov a man who would keep Yuuri's secret? Or is he one of those who would call for Yuuri's death the first chance he gets?

It's with unease churning in his chest that Yuuri steps through the doors leading to the outdoor ponds of the onsen. He's still deep in thought, warring with his own perception of Victor, and he doesn't notice the presence of another in the top most pond. Only when his name is called does he look up – and, once he does, the world around him shifts and the up is down and the down is up and Yuuri's backside hurts as it hits the harsh stones of the path leading up to the baths. All of it is nothing compared to the overjoyed smile Victor Nikiforov sends Yuuri from where he stands in his full naked glory next to the gigantic brass statue of a tanuki... which now isn't brass, but pure shimmering gold.

"Hello, Yuuri!" Victor chirps, completely unashamed of his nudity like he always is. "I couldn't wait five days without seeing you, so I decided to visit. I hope you aren't terribly upset with me?"
Yuuri blinks where he sits and slowly lies down on the stones. Did he hit his head? Is that it? This must be a vision, a phantom, a nightmare of sorts...

But the splash of water he hears is definitely there, and the soft padding of wet feet on the stones sounds too real to his ears. Yuuri purposefully does not turn his head when the Victor-hallucination kneels next to him, even though the warmth that comes from the pale skin feels less like a ghost and more like actual human being, but... that can't be true, can it?

"Yuuri?" Victor asks, voice carrying worry with as much grace as Yuuri expects from him. "Are you quite alright? Did you hurt yourself in your fall?"

Yuuri doesn't reply, because you can't talk to the spirits if you don't want to be cursed. So he presses his lips together and looks away, and prays for whatever this vision is to be gone.

"Yuuri?" A warm, deceitfully human hand touches the centre of his chest where his heart beats out of alignment and Yuuri startles. "You're worrying me, Yuuri. Please, answer me." He doesn't and the voice wavers. "Should I get your father? Maybe that would be for the best, so wait here and I'll–"

Yuuri snatches Victor's wrist before he can stand up. The feeling of wet skin is very lifelike, very human, and doubt begins to creep into Yuuri's heart. Could it be that this truly is...?

"Are you real?" he asks.

He doesn't chance a look at Victor's face in case this is all just a play of some trickster, but when Victor takes Yuuri's hand and lifts it to his lips, Yuuri can't help it when his eyes follow suit. The kiss Victor presses against his knuckles is light and warm, just like the rest of him. Even Victor's blue gaze is filled with gentle fondness that is paired with a hint of unconcealed worry that seems warmer than it should be.

"I am as real as I can be, my Yuuri," Victor says and smiles, a little sweet quirk of lips that frames his face perfectly. "I apologize for spooking you, it was not my intention. If you wish, I can leave and wait for you at the camp as we previously agreed."

"No, no, it's fine," Yuuri shakes his head. "You're already here. It would be unfair of me to make you go all the way back."

Victor smiles at him again, heart-shaped and overjoyed, and Yuuri is suddenly reminded about how little they are both wearing. To distract himself from the flush that burns on his cheeks, he sweeps his gaze away. It lands on the now golden statue and before Yuuri can hold the words back, the spill from his tongue:

"Did you really turn that old tanuki to gold?"

"It's the least I can do in return for your family allowing me to stay here, no?" Victor replies easily. "Rules of hospitality demand that a guest should bring a gift, and since I have prepared none, I hope this will make up for it."

It's such a silly thing to say, but after hearing from Chris that Victor had bought the entire estate neighbouring their little patch of land in an effort to impress him... this could be considered fairly mild. The very thought has Yuuri snorting. He brings his hand up to muffle it, but he really can't hold back his amusement.

"You're impossible," he tells Victor who only grins in reply.

"Nothing is impossible if you try hard enough," Victor says simply.
He's right, Yuuri thinks to himself. Even if he doesn't remember it, he must have tried pretty hard during that ball if he managed to capture Victor's attention and... he truly isn't upset about any of it. Quite the opposite, in fact.

"Shall we take a dip, if you are feeling well then?" Victor asks.

When he offers his hand to Yuuri, Yuuri takes it without thinking twice of it. He hoists himself up to join Victor in the pond that now is guarded by the same statue he knew his entire life, but new. And if it isn't a perfect metaphor for how Yuuri suddenly feels about himself, he'll be thrice damned to howl to the moon for the rest of his life.

Chapter End Notes

there we go, mr extra mcextrason making a grand entrance and his equally as extra chosen beloved pretending to faint like the damsel he is deep in his heart gosh I love these idiots
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

When Yuuri first sees him, Victor thinks he might have made a terrible mistake. Yuuri slips and falls, and for one breathless moment Victor believes he might have injured himself, but thankfully Yuuri was just in shock at seeing him there... which in hindsight Victor should've thought through a little bit better than what he had. Yet crying over spilled ink is not something Victor Nikiforov indulges in, so he moves past it fast. Yuuri seems to favour that approach as well, since he allows him to stay, and everything would be as if out of Victor's many dreams of their reunion, except...

Yuuri rejects every one of Victor's attempts at getting closer to him. When Victor offers to wash his back, he claims that he can do it himself. When Victor holds open the seat next to him at the dining table, Yuuri walks to the other side and sits there without a word. When Victor asks if he's in the mood to stretch his legs some before sleep, Yuuri says he is too tired – and when, at that, Victor invites him to sleep with in one bed, he gets the door of Yuuri's room wordlessly shut in his face.

Victor frowns where he rests under the spare blanket that Yuuri's mother gave to him with a humble apology. He's unable to sleep, and he tosses and turns, but it isn't the fault of the blanket or the scratchy bedding made of straw-filled linen. It's all Yuuri. Victor tries to figure out what went wrong, but no matter which side he rests on, which corner of the room he hangs his gaze at, he can't find a clue.

Yuuri appeared to be on edge the entire time. He was jumpy, unfocused, like Victor's presence made him insecure. Did it? Was Victor wrong to come here? Did he push too far and turned Yuuri away from him with his impulsiveness?

Victor decides to ask him right as he falls into light slumber, out of which he is shaken what only seems like minutes later. He blinks dazedly only to see Yuuri's mother leaning over him.

"It's morning," she tells him. "Yuuri will be leaving for the forest after breakfast. He can take you with him, if you want."

"I'd love to go with him, yes!" Victor sits up straight at the very prospect. Even the lack of sleep will not stand in the way of spending time with Yuuri.

She nods at him with a smile. "Then get ready. Breakfast is almost finished."

Preparing takes him longer if he's home, but here where no one cares what he wears or what he looks like, or that he is proper nobility, he washes his face and neck in a little basin filled with fresh stream water that is still slightly chilled, and he decides that it's enough.

"Good morning," he greets everyone once he steps into the dining room and two other voices murmur their greetings.

Yuuri isn't among them, not until Victor takes the same seat as the evening before. There are shadows under Yuuri's eyes as if he hasn't slept a wink and Victor's heart tightens at the sight. Is this his fault? Before he can allow his mind to go down the rabbit hole, Yuuri catches his gaze and gives him a little smile that chases away any and all dark thoughts. Victor returns it with his own while hope flutters in his chest like a butterfly.
It's lovely.

The meal is humble, but warm and filling, and Victor praises Yuuri's mother's cooking as much as is proper. She smiles and thanks him, and shovels more food onto his plate until he can't fit any more in his stomach. He notices the bigger portion of meat on Yuuri's plate, which looks slightly less well-cooked and more on the raw side, but he doesn't say anything about it. If that is what Yuuri enjoys, Victor will make sure to keep it in mind and instruct his cooks accordingly.

It's all too soon that the breakfast is done and Yuuri lifts from his place, giving Victor a hesitant smile.

"Mom said you want to come with me," he says to which Victor nods eagerly. "Are you sure? It'll be terribly boring, I'm just going to pick a few herbs."

"I've never done that before, so I'm sure it will be illuminating in some way or another," Victor replies with a bright smile, because finally they are moving in the right direction. Small steps, yes, but forward.

"If you're certain, then let's go," Yuuri agrees.

They leave the little house and walk through the fields of high grass that tickles Victor's thighs, past the stream running across a meadow of flowers and cherry trees, until they see the forest looming in the distance.

"This way," Yuuri says and takes Victor's hand to direct him.

To Victor's absolute delight, he doesn't let go, and Victor slides his fingers in between Yuuri's even if his own cheeks turn tender pink at the audacity of the gesture. It's tender, it's new. Victor loves it.

"Do you know what nightshade looks like?" Yuuri asks.

Victor frowns. He turns his head to Yuuri, who is watching him with so much rapt attention that Victor feels there is more to the question than it initially seems. Is it a test of sorts? Should he be concerned?

"If you're asking if I poisoned someone before, I haven't," Victor decides on saying.

Yuuri quickly shakes his head, though. "That isn't what I meant at all! I'm sorry! We need to pick some, so I just wondered if you'd like to do it. If you know how it looks, that is. Sorry, I shouldn't have—"

"I can do that," Victor interrupts him with a small squeeze of his hand. It's a relief as well to not have to be afraid of being accidentally on purpose poisoned for his inattention. "I know the description of it, at least. Violet flowers that look like stars, no?"

"Yes," Yuuri agrees. He doesn't say much more, but Victor gets curious. Maybe too curious.

"What do you need a poison for?" he asks.

Yuuri hums and looks away from him, but even when he answers Victor doesn't truly believe him. They promised each other honesty, yes, but they still are nothing other but strangers.

"The rats," Yuuri says in a voice that doesn't waver. "They've been a real menace on our storage."

And Victor nods, knowing well that he was just lied to.
Chapter End Notes

trouble in paradise? nah, not yet anyway ;3c
They part at the forest line. Yuuri points Victor in the direction the nightshade grows in patches of colour, and he himself follows the well trekked path to the pine trees they always collect resin from. He replaces the two jars that are almost full with new ones, puts a good dozen of fat pine cones into his bag along with them in case his mother wants to smoke some venison for the winter, and grabs what seems to be a fitting branch of needles for the heartwarming pine tea, and then he returns back to Victor.

"Did you find anything yet?" he asks, forcing his voice to sound strong and collected.

Which he, himself, most definitely is not.

Sending the man whom he barely knows to find a poisonous plant that Yuuri has to inject willingly in order to help him stay in control when his changes happen isn't among the brightest of his ideas. In hindsight, Yuuri should've gotten the flowers himself, but... what's done is done, he tells himself and plays along with the fabrication he's created.

"How much do you need?" Victor asks back. He shows Yuuri the four flowers with stems and roots still intact.

"Just one more will do, I think," Yuuri says and crouches next to him to carefully extract the flower himself.

He takes the ones from Victor's hand and puts them all in his bag. The guilt is there at the forefront of his mind as he catches Victor's eye, but he's trying to fight it. Victor has asked him for honesty, has trusted Yuuri enough to come to his home with no guards, has chosen to allow Yuuri to get to know him at his own pace... He has been nothing but kind and open, and Yuuri is repaying him with this boldfaced lie.

It settles like lead in his stomach, heavy, and sour like acid, but... can Yuuri tell Victor the truth?

He sneaks a glance at Victor from the side. He must be far less subtle than he wishes to be, because Victor turns his head towards him with a little smile and a soft hum of inquiry. It startles Yuuri into a blush and he quickly looks away, embarrassed at having been caught.

He could trust him, Yuuri knows. In the future, maybe.

But not now. Not yet.

Not when every gaze up into the sky reminds him of what is to follow during the night.

"You seem tense," Victor says abruptly and it brings Yuuri out of his musings. "Are you certain you're well?"

Another lie, Yuuri thinks as he forces on a smile.

"I think I'm just anxious," he gives. "I've never left home for longer than a day or so. It scares me a
little, but I'm also looking forward to it? It's a strange feeling to describe."

Victor nods and Yuuri takes note of how much more genuine his smile looks. It is honest, in truth. Unlike Yuuri's own. Guilt claws at him until he is forced to snatch his gaze away from Victor's face.

"I know what you mean to say," Victor agrees. "I'm so excited to get to know you, I can barely function a minute without thinking about you."

The admission is nothing perverse in nature, but Yuuri's face burns from the tips of his ears to the dip under his chin. He must make a soft noise of embarrassment at the back of his throat, because Victor hastens to follow:

"Ah, I apologize, I did not mean to push. You wanted to set the pace, so I'll gladly respect that. Worry not, my Yuuri, I can be a perfect gentleman when I try."

Yuuri bites his lip lightly. "Only when you try?"

"Well," Victor says, a flustered edge to his voice.

It sounds curious enough that Yuuri glances at him briefly and once he does, he can't look away from the tender pink on Victor's cheeks, the noble line of his jaw and the blue of the eyes that lock with Yuuri's as if they want to do nothing else.

"I know you were subjected to the contrary during the last few of our meetings, but I hope your opinion of me was not irreparably damaged. I can be," Victor smiles a sharp smile that makes his face light up, "quite chivalrous, I hear."

"Oh?" Yuuri asks, fighting a silly grin at Victor's feeble attempts at what he believes to be flirtation. "And who did you hear that from?"

"I'm certain Christophe would vouch for me, if you were to ask," Victor replies with surety that makes Yuuri snicker. "Though, you might want to take his exaggerations with a grain of salt."

Yuuri hums. "So it isn't true you've bought the Nekolas' land to impress me? Pity, that was pretty impressive."

The gasp Victor makes is entirely worth the charade. "Was it? I mean, well, yes, if that's the case I may have bought the deed for the property from old Lord Nekola. Chris spoke true."

"You're impossible," Yuuri pronounces with a sigh that is more to hide his amusement than an actual sound of annoyance it could've been.

The clouds are lazily crawling over the sky as they make their way back home. The sun is almost in full zenith, which means there's only so few hours left in the day that Yuuri will get to spend with Victor. He should use them as best as he can then, he decides.

"Vitya," he calls, and the name falls from his lips with surprising ease. Victor turns to him with breathless awe on his face and Yuuri gives in to a blush at the suddenness of it, before he forges on: "You don't have to impress me with money and gold. Not with precious stones or silks, or any of your riches."

He takes Victor's hands into his, gentle and careful, and brings one of them to his lips just like Victor had done so many times before. It's a little embarrassing, he must admit, but it is well worth it if only to see the surprise on Victor's face and the precious, potent flush on his cheeks.
"I want you," Yuuri says for all that it is making his heart tremble in his chest. "I simply want you."

Victor's breathless silence is broken by one whisper that sets Yuuri alight with want so powerful he almost gives into it.

"Yuuri..." Victor moans.

And when he jumps into Yuuri's arms and topples them into the high grass so that they see nothing but that and the blue sky – Yuuri can't possibly blame him, because he feels the same. They roll down the little hill and breathless, panting, they stop at the bottom of it with Victor straddling Yuuri in a way that should be uncomfortable, but isn't. The affection that has no reason or right to be there, but is, shines down at him from Victor's gaze and reflects in the uneven flutter of Yuuri's heartbeat. It melts away the anger and fear that Yuuri has been fighting alone for so long; it melts him into acceptance with every brush of Victor's lips against his, warm, freeing, unassuming.

As if he was saying "I simply want you, too," Victor kisses him softly, and Yuuri kisses back. Urgent, demanding, hot... because he knows that his time for all things simple is quickly running out.

Chapter End Notes

man what a day they're having I can't even there's so much going on I think yall will kill me for it ahahah //sweats
"Oh, that's right!"

Yuuri sits up so suddenly that Victor falls off his chest with a yelp. A contrite smile on Yuuri's lips and a tiny kiss to Victor's temple make up for it, though, which is perfect of itself.

"Sorry about that," Yuuri gives, a fond curl of mouth. "But I just remembered! You wanted to meet Vicchan, didn't you?"

Victor's eyes widen at the mention of the name of Yuuri's dog. The name inebriated Yuuri found suitable for Victor himself. His cheeks flush at the memory, but he nods at Yuuri who seems to be waiting for his reply.

"I'd love that," Victor agrees and watches with unhidden delight how Yuuri's face lights up with joy. It's so precious, Victor could stare at just that for hours on end. "Do you keep him in the house? I didn't see a dog there yesterday."

"He remains locked in my room at night," Yuuri explains. "And during the day he sometimes goes to herd the sheep with my father, but mostly he just naps in the kitchen with mother and Mari. He's a little lazy, you'll notice."

"He sounds charming," Victor says and means it.

"Come, then." Yuuri smiles at him as he climbs to his feet and offers Victor a hand. "Let's see what he's up to today."

Victor takes Yuuri's hand and is hoisted up with such ease that he loses his footing and falls right into Yuuri's arms. Yuuri chuckles against his cheek and doesn't protest when Victor kisses him gently once again. It's a rush no matter how often he does so, but there is also something soothing about having Yuuri like this: sun-warmed and smelling of grass and dirt.

Victor's heart swells in his chest when he lifts a hand to pluck a stray piece of dried grass from Yuuri's hair.

"Let's go meet Vicchan," he agrees.

The journey back is peaceful, even if they stop here and there for some sweet kisses that have Victor's blood thrumming in his ears. The wide, happy smile doesn't want to leave his face. It's been... it's been too long since Victor has felt this carefree.

There are no social rules to follow here, where the only people around are Yuuri's humble family. There are no others to impress, no royalty to honour. It's just Yuuri, with his soft gazes and sweet touch, and Yuuri's kind mother, his gentle father, and his sister, who makes fun of Victor and glares at him like he's already one of them.

It's wonderful and freeing, and... it feels a bit like home – a memory that is so faded in Victor's mind that he can't tell if what he's recalling is the true happenings of his childhood or just a fabrication of
his yearning heart.

"We're back!" Yuuri calls out once they step through the door.

"In the kitchen!"

Yuuri's mother's voice comes muffled through the kitchen door and when Yuuri opens it, she smiles at them over her shoulder. There's a smudge of flour on her cheek and Yuuri wipes it away when he comes forward to hug her. She gives back a hug, keeping her dirty with dough hands away, and once she's done with Yuuri, she turns to Victor and offers up her arms to him. Bewildered, but touched, *oh so touched*, Victor steps up to her and returns the embrace. Something warm and tender stings at his eyes, but Victor pushes it away and smiles: this is no time for tears after all, it is time for happiness.

"Did you find everything alright?" she asks. Yuuri is already unpacking the contents of his bag on the small table by the roaring oven. "Good, good. We might need a bit more resin for the winter, though. How about we set up another distillery next time?"

"I'll do it before I leave," Yuuri promises. "Do you need anything else?"

Yuuri's mother hums in thought. "Maybe some more wood for the fireplace, if you would."

"Of course." Yuuri gives his mother a smile. "I'll get to it right away, but first... do you know where Vicchan is? Victor wanted to meet him."

"Oh! I think he's out back in the garden. I gave him a little bone earlier and he ran there without looking back." She chuckles.

Victor can't hold back his smile at that. And he grins even wider when Yuuri takes his hand and pulls him out of the kitchen. They walk through the side door that leads outside and only make a few steps before Yuuri points something out with a finger.

"There, look," he says.

Victor looks and, indeed, behind a bush he can see a little tail wagging left and right, left and right. Yuuri sneaks up behind Vicchan and pinches his butt lightly. There's a yelp and Yuuri's laughter follows while the entire bush shivers as the tiny dog tries to turn around and see who it is that's disturbing him. The reaction when he sees Yuuri is even more precious, because he gives a tiny, sweet bark and jumps out of his hideout to frolic around Yuuri's ankles.

"He's delightful," Victor says when Yuuri bends down to pet his furry friend. "How does so much happiness and joy fit in such a tiny body?"

"I don't honestly know," Yuuri answers as he picks the wiggling puppy up and offers him to Victor. "Vicchan, this is Victor. He wished to make your acquaintance very much."

Victor grins and takes one of Vicchan's little paws for a proper handshake. "Enchanté, Vicchan."

A little wet tongue swipes at the tip of Victor's nose as if the dog is trying to say "It's a pleasure to meet you too," and Victor laughs, happy and free. Yuuri joins him, unrestrained, and the sound of their joy makes for the most beautiful music Victor has heard his entire life.

When Yuuri hands Victor the pup, he accepts him with open arms and a smile that Yuuri returns with one just as bright and just as lovely.
Ah, Victor thinks as he rubs his knuckles against Vicchan's soft fur, I knew this would be worth it.

Chapter End Notes

did you melt yet? bc I'm definitely on my way there rtyfcvgbu
Victor is too busy playing with little Vicchan to immediately notice what it is that Yuuri is doing, but when Yuuri sheds his tunic his attention is inevitably pulled away from the pup in his lap.

How could it not be?

Yuuri's chest is bared in the sunlight and the muscles of his back move as he rips the axe from the chopping block. Victor's mouth is parched, lips as dry as his eyes which refuse to blink for fear of missing even a moment of this beautiful spectacle. Breathless, Victor follows every shift of Yuuri's body when he rests a log of wood on the block, swings the axe and brings it down with a heavy thump that feels like Victor's own heart straining against his ribcage.

"Wow," Victor whispers.

Vicchan wiggles in his lap and Victor momentarily tears his gaze away from Yuuri to look at the dog. He's kneading Victor's thighs as he tries to find the most comfortable place to rest and it's precious, yes, but...

Victor looks up when another thump carries through the air. Yuuri turns around and puts another log on the block before his eyes catch Victor who is frozen where he sits.

"Would you like to try?" he asks.

Victor vehemently shakes his head. "No, no, I'm... no. Please, carry on."

And Yuuri does.

And it's pure suffering, Victor thinks.

The sun bears down on them hard, but Yuuri works through it as if he is used to that. He is, Victor realizes, but at the same time he must be feeling the heat on his skin twice as much as Victor does. The expanse of Yuuri's chest and shoulders, even his face, is covered with a sheen of sweat that makes him look like a statue of a god, gleaming with its polished to perfection surface.

Only the silver stripes across his body ruin the image, but Victor can't help being fascinated by them as well: they look different in the sun than they had that one moonlit night. He remembers how they almost shone in the dark with a light of their own, yet its nowhere to be seen now. Now, the silver is almost white like scar tissue, barely visible against the brightness of the sun.

Yuuri chops the wood in a steady rhythm that Victor's heart can't seem to keep. It runs headfirst into desire that overtakes Victor's body in a hot flash of want when Yuuri huffs a tired breath and pushes his hair back with an uncaring hand. He stands there, a gorgeous, sweaty god, tempting Victor with his every breath, but the worst... the worst is when he smiles.

It's a curious, happy thing that sets Victor's groin aflame and Victor moves before he realizes it.

Vicchan gives a little bark when he unceremoniously falls off of Victor's lap as Victor stands, but
Victor is too busy making his way towards Yuuri to notice or care. Yuuri pauses his work and smiles at him again, and it's almost too much. It takes all of Victor's self-control to stop himself from clinging to Yuuri's half naked body then and there.

"Are you torturing me like this on purpose?" Victor asks, voice low.

Yuuri's eyebrows draw in confusion. "I don't understand what you mean."

Propriety be damned, Victor thinks as he pushes Yuuri against the side of the house. He slots his body firmly against Yuuri's and he knows Yuuri can feel what Victor is feeling, because his brown, molten eyes widen when Victor cants his hips just so.

"You—" Yuuri breathes, but chokes on his own spit. "Just from... from that?"

Victor groans, bowing his head against Yuuri's shoulder. Which, in hindsight, is a mistake, because Yuuri's skin is warm and smells like sweat, sunlight and fresh wood, and Victor's arousal spikes hot at the thought of how it would taste on his tongue.

"You don't even know how divine you look, my Yuuri," he murmurs while he turns his head to press his nose against the pulse point on Yuuri's neck. "You're like a young god of temptation, sent down to the land of us mere mortals who can't possibly resist you."

Yuuri makes a conflicted sound. It gets distorted into a tiny moan halfway, because Victor loses his composure and presses a kiss against Yuuri's throat. His lips come away salty and dry, but warmth heavy like honey seeps into his body from just that.

"Yuuri," Victor moans. "What charm did you put me under, love? How can I resist you?"

Yuuri's fingers skim across Victor's back and Victor feels criminally overdressed. A shiver at that tender touch still makes it down his back, though. It always will at Yuuri's hand, he knows. Yuuri's aim must have been the short hair on Victor's nape, because soon those fingers lock there and pull Victor away from the warmth of his skin.

Yuuri's cheeks are flushed, but his eyes shine brighter than Victor has ever seen them.

"Then don't resist me," Yuuri tells him and it's as simple as that.

"Can I really just...?" he asks, but before he can finish the fingers of Yuuri's other hand clutch his jaw and close it for him. They're strong, relentless, and Victor feels claimed to the very last drop of his blood that now rings in his ears with the rush of passion that courses through his veins.

"You can," Yuuri says, a fierce fire in his eyes. "And you will, no?"

Victor nods his head as much as Yuuri's double hold allows. It seems to be enough, because Yuuri's mouth quirks in approval that Victor feels rushing straight to his groin.

"Now," Yuuri begins. "On your knees, my lord. I have a task for you."

Chapter End Notes
HELLO HOTNESS MY OLD FRIEND
Yuuri never imagined himself in a position like this, but there is undeniable power in ordering someone around, he thinks as he watches Lord Victor Nikiforov fall to his knees before him. It's heady, the rush of authority that it awards him. He doesn't know where the audacity to voice a command like that came from, or if he should regret it yet, but if Victor follows through then... it must be acceptable, it seems?

And it feels good. Yuuri can't deny that.

Victor sinks to his knees with grace that brings a flush to Yuuri's cheeks. Even like so, Victor is still a noble – still a beautiful picture of poised elegance and dignity, despite the glazed eyes and reddened face. He's incredible, Yuuri thinks, admiration hot on his breath.

"You look perfect like this," he tells Victor, caressing the side of his face.

Victor leans into it, open and submissive, and for a moment there Yuuri is scared at how much want wakes up inside him. He knows, though... he knows that this urge to dominate, to claim, to possess... it isn't entirely him. It isn't what he would normally do. It's a beast waking up from its monthly slumber and while Yuuri acknowledges that it is a part of him, he doesn't want that part to take Victor from him. To take Victor, in any way, at that.

He withdraws his hand before Victor can rest a kiss against the pulse beating in Yuuri's wrist.

"Stay here," Yuuri tells Victor, who obeys without a word of argument.

Yuuri walks around him, a spring in his step, and picks another log from a pile that still needs to be halved. His back is turned on Victor, because Yuuri doesn't think he can take looking at Victor's obedient form without wanting to fall to his knees right next to him. He knows he'd be capable of taking him right there, on the grass before the pile of logs for the fireplace in his childhood home. The desire to take, to ravish sizzles under his skin like moonlight on the night of the full moon, but the sun is still high up and Yuuri is less vulnerable to it than he will be at night.

So he resists, and he puts his newfound passion into chopping even more wood. His body thrums with strength and he gets five more logs done when Victor's voice breaks his concentration.

"Yuuri?" Victor asks. He sounds uncertain and–

Yuuri looks at him. "Yes?"

"Do you-- What--"

"You're going to kneel there," Yuuri tells him without breaking out of his work. "And you're going to think about me."

"What," Victor's back shivers so hard that Yuuri can see it from the corner of his eye, "what should I think about?"
"Think about the night of the banquet," Yuuri replies, putting another log on the block. "Think about what would happen if we took it further. Think about me, on top of you, and every time you hear this." He swings the axe and chops the wood in half with a heavy thump, "imagine that it's me splitting you in half."

The whimper Victor makes is agreement enough for Yuuri to get back to work. He allows his mind some peace while he moves his body at a familiar pace: pick up a log, rest it on the block, swing the axe, halve, kick the pieces off, and again. He doesn't bother checking up on Victor, because he hears his muffled gasps every time the blade strikes wood.

It's better this way, he thinks against the urge to drop everything and spread Victor there like a feast on a table, ripe for the taking. Until the full moon passes, it's better if he doesn't touch Victor like that. For both of them.

He's done with the big pile all too soon, though, and Victor still obediently kneels with his face directed to the side of the house. Yuuri walks up to him and runs the tips of his fingers over the bowed nape of silver hair. Victor's shiver feels like a buzz on his skin and Yuuri can't help it when he bends over him to whisper against his ear:

"Are you still resisting the temptation, my lord?"

Victor's moan is louder now, more desperate, starved, and Yuuri feels the breathless satisfaction churn inside his chest. He locks his fingers around Victor's neck in a gesture so possessive that he almost withdraws from him completely, but... Victor keens at it and his mouth parts on a needy "Please," that keeps Yuuri there against everything else.

"What do you want, Vitya?" he asks, lips against an ear that is delightfully tinted red. "What can I do for you?"

"Yuuri," Victor moans, "I need– I want– I'll beg if you wish it, but don't be cruel with me..."

"Very well," Yuuri relents easily.

He walks around to stand before Victor and then drops to his knees to even their height. It's the first chance he gets to see Victor's face since he left him there and it's a astounding difference to what it looked before – Victor's eyes are dark with lust, lips wet and panting, and his entire face is red from either embarrassment, arousal, or the strength it must take to hold it in.

Or all three, Yuuri thinks when he tilts Victor's face to meet him and Victor almost slumps into the kiss that Yuuri offers him. It's less of a kiss and more a press of open mouth against Yuuri's, because his other hand sneaks under Victor's robes to find the dampness that's already there from how badly Victor wants it. Yuuri's fingers tease at the straining length which pulses against the touch, but Yuuri pushes past it. The skin in Victor's most intimate place is coarse with hair, but the little patches of it that aren't are delightfully soft to the touch and Yuuri's fingertips glide on the sweat that gathered there until he finds what he's looking for.

The choked sob that rips out of Victor's mouth is a sweet sound to Yuuri's ear and, emboldened, he teases where Victor wants him most. He strains against his own clothes, but at the moment he is wrapped in Victor's pleasure so completely that he can put it off for later. And he does without a thought, because Victor's arms wrap around his shoulders in an effort to find purchase when his back arches to guide Yuuri's hand better.

Lips, wet and warm, kiss the side of Yuuri's neck right before Victor's teeth sink into his flesh. That's all it takes for Yuuri to growl, a low sound that builds in his chest until Victor tenses in his arms.
"Come for me," Yuuri orders, and Victor twitches as if that's all he was waiting for.

With a keen Victor spills over Yuuri's forearm and his thighs clench, trapping Yuuri's hand where it sits. Not that Yuuri wants it back. He's more than happy to allow Victor to slump against him like he's doing now, and slant his lips against the patch of skin on Victor's shoulder where the robes have slipped during all their ministrations.

Victor trembles in Yuuri's arms for a long while and it's quite a heady thought to Yuuri that he is the reason for it, but as soon as the trembling stops he remembers: this is Lord Victor Nikiforov. And Yuuri has just reduced him to a graceless mess in a place where anyone could stumble upon them.

He dreads the moment Victor straightens up and looks him in the eye, but there is not an upset wrinkle on Victor's face. Victor smiles at him instead: bright, happy, glowing.

"Let's take a bath," he says.

And with words as simple as that their roles are reversed yet again, and all control if pulled out of Yuuri's hands, but somehow Yuuri can't bring himself to be disappointed. Not when Victor gives him looks like he has just witnessed a god ascending and Yuuri was the one to make it happen.

Chapter End Notes

drunk yuuri is one thing, but pre-full moon horny werewolf yuuri? I'll take one of those with a dash of absolutely smitten vitya who lives for the pleasure of his beloved //prayer hands
From the very night they first met, Victor knew that Yuuri could reduce him to nothing but a bundle of unbidden desire and he was proven right the very moment Yuuri brought him to his knees. The way he commanded him, held him, teased him... Victor loved every second of it. It was pure suffering at first, yes, but once Yuuri finally touched him, all of Victor's senses lit up with pleasure so thick he couldn't have cut it with the sharpest of knives. And the release, oh, that made Victor enter a world beyond theirs: where delight meets the stars and where moonlight falls for the sun, and gemstones grow on trees made of clouds.

He's a little unsteady on his feet once it's all done and over, so Yuuri slides an arm around him as they walk to the onsen. Victor doesn't want to admit to it, but he does think to himself that when Yuuri takes him at last, he will need far more than a bath to recover – his body and mind, both.

"You're incredible, Yuuri," Victor says while Yuuri helps him clean most of the mess that became of his robes. "No one has ever done something like that to me." Yuuri's shoulders tense, but Victor quickly follows it with: "I must say that I enjoyed myself quite a bit, thank you for indulging me."

A shaken breath later, Yuuri's discomfort eases. Victor smiles at that, glad.

"It was my pleasure, my lord," Yuuri speaks as he finishes with Victor's clothes.

Victor doesn't need to look at his face to know that it's darkened with a flush – he can see it crawling onto the bare back of Yuuri's neck, charming and honest. Running his hand down Yuuri's spine as he walks by, Victor climbs into warm waters of the onsen. It's an immediate relief on his knees, which have never spent that long on the harsh, unforgiving ground. Victor rubs his fingers into the tender skin there while Yuuri sheds the rest of his clothes and joins him.

"Does it hurt badly?" Yuuri asks to which Victor sends him a smile.

"A price worth paying," Victor replies and once more is gifted with the sight of Yuuri's flaming face. Emboldened, he leans closer to Yuuri's ear. "Say, Yuuri, is that what you want from me? To have me on my knees for you, obedient, begging? Is that what you dream of when you're alone?"

He's expecting Yuuri to run from his advances like he has done many times before, but today seems to be yet another day full of surprises. Yuuri turns his face to Victor and looks him in the eye without an ounce of shame.

"No," he says, and his gaze is golden. Victor has believed that gold was such a mundane thing, an ugly colour he was more than fed up with, but all of it is changing now that it's trapped in Yuuri's eyes: so vibrant, so full, so... so divine.

"I don't want you on your knees, Vitya," Yuuri murmurs in a voice that sounds almost like a purr. A heat that has nothing to do with the warm bath crawls across Victor's skin. "I want you on your back, arched, and screaming my name for the world to hear and know who Lord Victor Nikiforov belongs to. Would that make you happy, I wonder?"

It takes all the strength of his will to bite down on his lip when Victor feels a moan build up at the
back of his throat. He can hardly help it, though. Words as passionate as that could move any man worth his salt, and especially if they were coming from someone like Yuuri.

"That would make me the happiest man alive," Victor admits, "but I fear I wouldn't stay alive for long if you had your wicked way with me. My poor heart is already struggling to keep up with you. Please, have mercy on me, my Yuuri."

The little laugh that Yuuri gives is the sole reason for gooseflesh on Victor's arms, but it is the kiss that Yuuri presses to his cheek – sweet, lovely, innocent – that makes Victor flush. Suddenly, he feels bashful like he hasn't felt in years, and he peers at Yuuri from the side. Bathed in the glow of the slowly setting sun, Yuuri looks like a brass statue with his wet, sun-kissed skin and hard muscle set into a body that is not devoid of its natural curves.

He's stunning, but...

It isn't his imagination, Victor thinks when he spots the tense line of Yuuri's neck. There is a strain in the lines of Yuuri's shoulders, the way his head is angled. Before he can think of it twice, he lifts a hand and runs his fingers down the side of Yuuri's neck. The tension is even worse under his touch and Victor frowns at it.

"Yuuri," he starts, unsure of how to word his worry. "Does my presence make you uncomfortable in any way?" Honesty, he reminds himself. Be honest, and honesty will be returned to you. "If I am crossing a line you wish for me not to cross, you'll tell me, yes?"

"Of course," Yuuri replies, as easy as breathing, and Victor knows it's a lie. He sees it in the slope of his neck and his tense shoulders, and oh...

He turns away.

In a matter of seconds the mood has shifted from the easy flirtation into something that Victor can't even begin to like. The ache that wraps itself around his heart is far worse than loneliness, he thinks, because now he knows what feeling is like, what truly living is like, so to return to solitude after partaking in the sweet nectar of life... more than ever before, it seems like a cruel punishment for sins that remain unknown to him.

And even the warmth of the baths can't keep away the chill that engulfs Victor's heart as hope leaves him once again at the mercy of the capricious fate itself.

Chapter End Notes

what you've all been waiting for starts tomorrow, hope yall are still alive bc maaaan will this be a ride to remember ;3c
"You should head to bed early today," Yuuri tells Victor after supper.

Mari and his mother are clearing the table while his father is braiding a rope from leftover dried straw that hangs from the wooden wall of the room on a big rusty nail. Vicchan is napping in Victor's lap peacefully and Victor's hand moves over his back with a continuous fondness. They makes a precious sight that Yuuri's can't help but smile at. The dog has taken to Victor instantly and it spoke well to his character that Victor was just as charmed by him in return.

It's all Yuuri has hoped for, truly.

"The moon is not even up yet," Victor replies, "we could play a game of cards before bed?"

"Apologies, but I'm a little tired after today," Yuuri lies.

It's coming easier and easier with each dishonesty that passes through his lips and he feels the disgust towards himself churn in a pit of his stomach.

"How about another night?" he offers to ease his guilt some.

Victor nods his head. He isn't happy about it, it's clear, and when Yuuri gives him a small smile in hopes of making up for his rejection, it remains unreciprocated. Victor looks away from him and only looks back when Yuuri stands up to retire for the night. With a heavy heart and skin crawling with the incoming full moon, Yuuri makes it as far as a few steps into the corridor leading to his room before Victor's voice stops him.

"What would you say to sharing a bed, Yuuri?" Victor asks, smiling at him this time.

It's a strained smile, not entirely honest, and Yuuri feels something intangible between them crumble. Honesty was what they have promised to each other, but it seems like Yuuri isn't the only one who couldn't keep his word. If it was any other night, Yuuri might have considered Victor's proposition... or at least he tries to convince himself of that as he refuses Victor yet again.

"I'm sorry," he says. "I need my rest tonight. I have a feeling with you around my night would be spent with far less sleep than should be."

It gets a little laugh out of Victor and Yuuri thinks he's succeeded. He misses the assessing gleam in Victor's eyes when they part for the night. Maybe if he chanced a glance over his shoulder like he so wanted to do, everything that happened next could've been avoided. But alas, Yuuri hasn't been blessed with a gift of foresight, so he leaves Victor there and retires to his room where he prepares a bag – spare clothes, food, ointment with honey and pine resin for possible injuries. He drinks the entire vial of the nightshade concoction his mother has left at his bedside and sits there in the dark, fighting the shivers and thoughts that grow dark, dark, and darker still.

The moonlight sneaks into his room through the small window, but Yuuri doesn't leave until it hangs high in the sky. The house is quiet with the night's hush and it isn't difficult to find his way out: Yuuri knows these corridors, these walls, these floors like he knows his own body and his feet are as
silent there as if he was walking barefoot across grass. He hears the groan of the wooden floor behind himself only once, but there is no one in sight, so he blames it on the wind and finally leaves the cottage to head east... towards the forest.

In the thick bushes a few steps into the line of trees, he hides his bag. The moon still isn't in the right position, and even though Yuuri feels the shivers already crawling across his skin, it still isn't time. Yuuri's feet take him towards the river that runs through the forest. He climbs the rocky riverside up to the small waterfall it sprouts from and, there, he strips out of his clothes.

The water is cold, but the shivers that wreck Yuuri's body now are hot and rapid, so the chill is a welcome distraction of what is to come. While he still can, Yuuri dives underwater. The bottom of the waterfall is lined with stones that are pale and polished by the water until perfection. They glow in the silver moonlight and remind Yuuri of Victor – of his hair and his pale, unmarred skin; so pretty, ethereal almost.

It is these that Yuuri thought of when he first saw Victor, and it is these that he intends to make into a small crown – a tiara? is that what they call it? – to rest on the temples of Victor's silver head. Gold is what Victor has dressed himself in, what he could provide himself. But these stones... they were a part of Yuuri. Every full moon they were here, every full moon they witnessed his pain and his relief, and took note of the longing in his howls.

These will be the gift he has promised Victor.

Yuuri grabs as many as he can carry in his arms and swims back to the shore. There would be enough, he thinks, and tomorrow he will have something to do while his body rests after the night's strain. And maybe... maybe Victor will forgive him for brushing him off so cordially if Yuuri presents him with something so honest and pure.

He smiles to himself, resting the stones on his tunic. An image of Victor's overjoyed face flashes behind the eyes that he squeezes shut at a wave of searing pain that suddenly runs through his bones. It passes soon, but while it lasts the feeling of burning from inside out is so agonizing that Yuuri lets out a keen and a sob without being conscious of it. He bows into himself and chokes on his breath until the pain lessens and the first wave is over.

There are others coming, he knows. Soon, he knows that too.

Yuuri rests at the riverside and looks up at the sky where the moon is big and round and pale silver, like Victor's hair, like Victor's skin, like Victor's–

When the pain hits him again, he screams.

Chapter End Notes

I'm gonna be howling to the moon today myself as well bc I was rejected from yet another zine so ayy it's a parteyyy (of the losers) "ugly sobs"
To follow Yuuri is not a decision Victor makes lightly, but it is a decision he makes in the split second that he hears the door of Yuuri's room open and quiet footsteps pass by Victor's sleeping place. Victor doesn't move, but in the dark he can make out Yuuri's form creeping towards the entrance. There is a lump over the side of him that Victor believes must be a bag of sorts, and when Yuuri opens the door and the light of the moon illuminates his silhouette Victor is proven right.

It's when the doors close quietly once again that Victor decides to go after him. The explanations Yuuri has given him before have sounded forced, untruthful, and Victor was hurt by them, yes. He resolved himself to respecting the boundaries that Yuuri has put between them, but it still stung whenever he thought about it.

Because they made a promise.

And Yuuri has chosen to disregard it.

As hurt as he was and still is, Victor can't deny his true nature – that of curiosity beyond any hurts. It's that fault of his that makes him throw off his blanket and quickly don a tunic over his bare chest and thighs, before he toes in his shoes and makes it out the door to track down Yuuri, whatever it is that he's doing in secret.

There is a fleeting thought in his mind that he might be breaking Yuuri's trust, that he shouldn't, but didn't Yuuri first break his trust when he lied? Doesn't that mean Victor has at least some right to satisfy his curiosity, even if it is in such a way?

He spots Yuuri in the distance as he walks through the grass fields and Victor follows a few paces behind so that Yuuri can't see him. The route they take is familiar and it doesn't take Victor long to realize where they're going even before he sees the dark shape of the forest looming before them like a thing of nightmares. Yuuri doesn't pause when he steps between the trees and Victor quickens his steps in order not to lose him in the dark.

He loses him anyway.

Maybe it's the trees, maybe it's the bushes, maybe it's Victor's overconfidence that gets him lost; he doesn't know. What he does know is that the trees all look the same, the bushes rustle like there's animals circling around him and waiting for a single sign of weakness to pounce on the unsuspecting noble that dared disturb their rest.

Victor feels like a fool.

And then he feels like a scared fool when a blood-curdling howl rips through the quiet of the night.

It sounds close, too close for comfort, and Victor thinks of finding Yuuri first, but the fear pushes him towards where he thinks the edge of the forest is.

Yuuri knows this place, Victor tries to reason in his head while twigs and branches snatch at his clothes like the forest itself is trying to hold him back.
Yuuri can get out on his own, Victor tries to convince himself again as another howl splits the night.

Yuuri must have heard that too, no matter where he was. He'll know where to go.

The sounds that previously drowned in the night are louder now: Victor's uneven breathing, his footsteps, the rustle of the leaves or the flapping of an owl's wings. A shiver runs down Victor's spine when he sees an open space between the trees – a clearing that he has passed on his trip earlier with Yuuri. It must mean that he's at the end of the forest and, with hope in his heart, Victor quickens his steps.

He doesn't make it out.

The rustling around him changes, deepens, and the moon draws the shadows longer and more terrifying. But among that, the thing that freezes Victor's blood is the loud panting that gets closer and closer and–

Victor runs.

He doesn't think his feet ever carried him that fast, but the fear pushes him past his limits. It helps, or so the deceiving hope that blooms in his heart when he almost crosses the clearing tells him. In truth, over the sound of his own yammering heartbeat, Victor hears the large paws pound the ground behind him and they're close, they're loud, they're here...

A sound like a sharp growl is all that Victor catches before his back is pushed and he falls face first into the grass at the very edge of the tree line. His breath is knocked out of his lungs and he can't see anything, but he can feel – oh, he can feel.

There's a big paw on his back, claws almost breaking skin where they bite into it through the thin tunic Victor is clad in. The paw keeps him down, but Victor is too still from fear to struggle. The weight of it is focused between his shoulder blades and crushes his lungs in the most painful of ways. With his nose buried in the grass on top of that, it's difficult to breathe, but if that is the price he has to pay for living to see another day Victor is willing to take it.

He doesn't know what to expect, yet the raspy growling from behind him is raising the hair on the back of his neck. Cold sweat beads on his skin, but he lies as immobile as he can in the hopes that it will be enough to dissuade the beast from eating him.

A sound of sniffing fills Victor's ears and he whimpers when it gets louder as the beast breathes him in.

Please, Victor prays to whatever gods there are, don't let me die like this.

Whatever gods there are must be all listening, because the beast gives a sharp huff – breath a gush of warmth and fear against Victor's neck – and it withdraws. The pressure on Victor's back lessens, but he stays still longer. There are the sounds of paws stepping around him, circling him as if the beast is waiting for his move. A move that Victor doesn't plan on making. A move that Victor must make without knowing, because a cold nose runs up his bare thigh and, against himself, Victor yelps – a move he has not planned on making, but made anyway.

Once he does, the pretence of being dead is broken, so he flips around and lifts his hands to protect himself, to turn the attacking beast into gold and live, but...

The wolf that stands before him, a huge example of its species, looks at him with no malice in its big eyes. It isn't growling, its ears aren't flat, but the logical part of Victor's mind has given way to fear, so without acknowledging any of that, he rasps out a shaky:
"Please... plea-se don't eat me!"

Chapter End Notes

I just wanted to say that I love all of you guys who read this fic and even more those of you who comment and, and, to those of you who have left their support yesterday when I was heartbroken about the rejection from the zine I just want to once again say THANK YOU bc you've kept me going and it's amazing how a little comment like that can make someone feel a 100 times better, so bless you all, I love you and thank you for reading this story and being upstanding human beings <3
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The wolf is big.

When it opens its terrifying jaws to pant, the fangs inside its mouth are roughly the size of Victor's fingers. It's eyes are as big as Victor's fists. It's entire body looks like it could carry Victor better than any steed of noble pedigree.

Victor's heart is a painful hammer in his throat when he swallows, but he does so, because if he doesn't, he won't be able to breathe, and breathing is crucial for living, so... so he takes the chance and swallows a greedy gulp of air at the same time as the wolf moves – and it all is for nothing when the air leaves Victor once again in a sharp scream of terror.

That scream dies in his throat as soon as the wolf yaps. The teeth snap, sharp and loud, and all the blood rushes from Victor's face, leaving him pale and breathless and so scared. His hands shake wildly, but he keeps them up as a barrier between them, because if there is anything that can still protect him it's his powers. If only he could touch the wolf, he could turn it into a golden statue and escape, but...

The wolf takes a step towards him first, and then another, and Victor struggles to withhold the shivers that make his entire body tremble. His hand almost touches the thick fur, but before it can, the wolf stops and lifts his head up to the sky. Its body is still, ready to pounce, listening, when another howl pierces the night.

Another follows.

And another.

And to Victor's terror, the wolf that stands only an arm's length away from him joins in on the cacophony of howling and releases a sound that terrifies Victor to the bone – it's domineering, threatening, harsh, but what it also is, is a reason for the wolf to leave, which it does without a second glance at Victor.

Slumping onto the ground in relief would've been something Victor would consider doing, if it wasn't for the fact that the forest seems to be full of danger and fear. So, instead, Victor stands up on shaky legs and runs home as fast as the weakness in his knees allows.

He looks over his shoulder at the lightest of noises and terror grips at his heart anew, but he doesn't stop, not even to fill his aching lungs with breath.

He makes it inside Yuuri's home with the howls still ringing in his ears and throws all the locks shut. The blanket he has discarded so thoughtlessly before, he drapes over his shoulders without a thought for his ruined clothes. The comfort it gives isn't enough to soothe him fully, but the longer he stays there, hidden, the longer he has to regain his peace.

So Victor sits there in the dark, shivering against the fear and the memories, and it isn't until the light of dawn breaks in through the windows that he remembers one thing: *Yuuri hasn't come home.*
A different sort of fear pushes Victor upwards and he takes his steps towards Yuuri's room. It's empty. Vicchan is curled on Yuuri's pillow, yes, but there is no sign of Yuuri in sight.

Something nasty and cruel raps at Victor's chest, a stutter against his heartbeat. Did he... did he leave Yuuri to die? Should he have searched for him? Is it... is it Victor's fault that Yuuri is—

"What are you doing in here?"

Victor turns to find Mari standing in the doorway of the small room. Her face betrays nothing, not even an ounce of worry for her brother, and Victor wonders.

"I was hoping I could wake Yuuri, but I see he must have already risen," Victor says in a voice he hopes resembles his usual light charm. "Do you have any ideas on where he might be at this hour?"

The gaze Mari measures him with tells him that he must have failed at his attempt at normalcy, but she doesn't voice any of it. Instead, she grunts and tilts her chin towards the corridor. They retreat from Yuuri's room, leaving Vicchan to dose in peace, and walk down the short way to the kitchen.

"Sometimes when he wants to escape for a while he sleeps in the forest," Mari says. "He'll be back before noon, though, don't worry. He always is."

They are greeted by Hiroko's sweet smile and soothing smell of baking bread. Yuuri's mother takes one look at Victor and her face morphs from joy to worry in a single blink of an eye.

"Vicchan, oh dear! What happened to you?"

She rushes to him and wipes the hastily untucked edge of her sleeve against Victor's cheek where some of the dirt must have dried through the night. Victor allows it, happy to find comfort in her concern.

"I'm well," he replies and smiles his first true smile of the day. "But I fear we must talk when Yuuri returns. I... I went to the forest tonight."

He doesn't expect the shock and fear on Hiroko's face, but he does expect the stone cold expression that settles on Mari's. They share a look that Victor can't decipher before Hiroko smiles at him again. This time, her smile is a little strained, but still patient and kind, and Victor can't help thinking there must be something else at works here than first meets the eye.

And, he makes up his mind as he takes a seat by the fireplace while mother and daughter begin the preparations for breakfast, he's going to figure out what.

Chapter End Notes

I bet this is NOT what yall have expected but things are going to get... heated ;3c
Chapter 27

Yuuri's head is aching and his bones creak when he twitches in his slumber. That is what wakes him, but it's a longer moment still before he cracks open his eyes. The sun is bearing down on his naked body slumped at the edge of the stream where he must have collapsed after transforming back into his human self. There is an echo of pain in each shift of his tired body, but Yuuri forces himself to stand.

His vision is blurry and everything seems to be covered as if with a soft veil while blood hums in his ears and muffles all other sounds.

The stones, his mind lazily reminds him. Victor.

So Yuuri walks upstream to the waterfall and gathers the precious stones that look almost translucent in the daylight. He puts them into a bundle made out of his shirt. The material is shredded like he raked his claws through it in the heat of the shift and Yuuri ties the loose ends into a knot to keep the stones safe. His pants fare no better, so, naked, he makes his way to the bushes where he's hidden his bag the night before. From inside it, he pulls the spare tunic he's packed and slides it on, groaning in pain when lifting his arms awakens a sharp ache in his back. He doesn't bother with pants or shoes, since he can't bend that low anyway, and slowly he begins the painful trek home.

His eyes close while he walks and he sways from side to side on uneven feet. Once, he trips on a root and doesn't fall only because of the conveniently growing bush that catches his fall and pokes him with broken twigs. It's a relief when he finally leaves the forest and tumbles his way downhill to where the cottage sits among the trees and soft, spidery grass.

Mari is waiting on the front step, a smoke between her teeth, but Yuuri is too tired to stop for a chat. He almost passes her by when she speaks.

"He followed you," she says. "You should talk to him."

Fear swells at the back of Yuuri's head like an afterthought. It's reduced to nothing but that the moment he yawns.

"Later," he replies and enters the house.

The smell of his mother's baking bread is the first thing that greets him, and then the scent of oiled rope that his father has left to dry overnight. Yuuri stumbles to his room and he almost makes it without coming face to face with another being, except he doesn't.

Victor catches him by the arm before Yuuri walks right into the wall.

"There you are," Victor breathes and the relief in his voice sounds honest, happy. "Yuuri, we should talk. I– I need to–"

"Not now," Yuuri interrupts him. "Sleep."

Victor doesn't reply, but he doesn't release Yuuri's arm either. So Yuuri pulls it away from his grasp.
and finds Victor's hand instead. He locks their fingers together and normally just that would have him flush at his own audacity, but... he's too tired. He pulls Victor into his room, pushes him onto his bed, and climbs on top of him.

Victor doesn't say a word against it.

"Yuuri," he only murmurs when Yuuri rests his cheek against his chest and begins to drift off to the sound of Victor's soothing heartbeat. "Where were you all night?"

"Forest," Yuuri mumbles back, stretching his legs with a sigh.

They're sore. All his muscles are. And he's dirty and smells like wet fur.

But Victor doesn't say a word about that, either.

Victor's arms wrap around Yuuri's back and stroke gently over the thin fabric of his tunic. One of Victor's legs moves and Yuuri makes a soft sound of protest. Victor huffs a breath that sounds like laughter, but Yuuri isn't sure. He wants to sleep. Just that.

"Shift a bit, love," Victor says. "Between my legs. It'll be more comfortable for both of us."

With a heavy groan Yuuri lifts himself up and allows Victor to spread his legs wider before he settles back in. He hums. Maybe Victor was right.

"What were you doing in the forest?" Victor asks while his hands rub Yuuri's back and card Yuuri's hair.

It's soothing. It's nice. Victor is always so nice... Yuuri wants to be nice to him, as well.

"Gift," Yuuri sighs. "For you."

"For me? What is it?"

He sounds excited, Yuuri thinks. He will be excited, Yuuri knows. When he sees what Yuuri can do with the stones, how they will match his skin, his hair...

Thinking of that Yuuri falls into slumber, held within the embrace of sunlight and gold, and he doesn't think twice of the slight tremble of Victor's arms that wrap around him like they never thought they'll be allowed to do it again.

Chapter End Notes

a slightly shorter chapter today bc I had class from 8am till 8pm and I'm a living zombie rn so I'm channeling my post-full moon yuuri hjbgjhnjm
When Yuuri awakens later that day, it seems like he wasn't the only one who desperately needed sleep. Victor is slumped underneath him, his head thrown to the side and hair falling in his face. Silver strands almost slip into Victor's open mouth when he breathes in, and dance on the air of his breath when he breathes out, so Yuuri brushes them away with a gentle hand. It's then that he sees the dark shadows under Victor's eyes: they're big enough to match Yuuri's.

Clearly, Yuuri isn't the only one who had a trying night.

He decides to let Victor sleep and carefully extracts himself from the bed. He puts his blanket over Victor to help him stay warm now that Yuuri's body won't be there to keep the heat trapped. He quietly leaves the room in search for food that his still aching limbs need to recover. His feet take him to the kitchen where he finds a plate of warm soup waiting for him near the fireplace and he smiles at the kind nature of his mother, who always thinks of everything and makes sure Yuuri eats even when he least wants to.

He sits by the fire to eat. It's warm, the soup and the stones of the fireplace, but it's a soothing kind of warmth that spreads through Yuuri's body like a healing balm. He's halfway through the bowl when the side door opens. Mari steps in with the bottom of her apron tucked to her chest in a makeshift basket that is filled with vegetables from the garden, which she then lets fall from the fabric on top of the little table.

"Did you talk to him?" she asks without greeting.

"Not yet," Yuuri replies. "He's asleep."

His throat itches as if his voice isn't his own, and a part of him – the part that still thinks like a wolf – knows it isn't. He shakes his head to rid himself of that, but the feeling lingers under his skin. It will take a few more days for him to return to being fully human, but this time Yuuri doesn't have the luxury to wait for it.

This time there is Victor.

"He went to the forest last night," Mari tells him. Yuuri recalls she has already told him that and nods, so that she can continue. "Didn't say what he saw there, but it must have frightened him, clearly. You should be careful, little brother."

It isn't fear that grips Yuuri by the heart and makes swallowing a spoonful of soup harder, no. It's a strange sort of excitement that he reminds Yuuri of his hunts – the night howling that gives his blood a rush, the run and chase, and the scent of prey.

He takes a deep breath to ground himself when the blood in his veins begins to run faster. He is home now, he thinks, where the air smells of wood and his mothers soup is warm and savoury, where there is no prey and no chase, only kindness and family. Slowly, his heightened senses return to normal and Yuuri can breathe with more ease.

It's confusing, the first day after a full moon always is.
"So that's why he looks so tired," Yuuri says. "He wanted to speak with me when I returned, but I could only think of sleep then, so I took him to bed with me and he is still snoring even now."

Mari gives a huff of amused laughter. "No wonder. You should've seen him in the morning. I caught him in your room and when he noticed me he looked like a spooked deer. Any idea what might have given him such a scare?"

Yuuri sighs as he finishes his meal. He sets the bowl and the spoon in his lap, and sits back to close his eyes. The memories are there, somewhere. But his mind still can't decide if it's human or wolf and he can't find the correct path that would lead him to them.

"I don't know," he finally says in defeat. "But I'll ask him. He might have seen something he shouldn't, so it'd be better to explain before he can get any ideas that we can't control."

Mari nods in agreement.

"And if that doesn't work, there's still the axe," she reminds, and Yuuri laughs even if it's brief.

It sends him into a coughing fit, because his chest expands and hurts, and his lungs feel like they're suddenly on fire, but even as his eyes water, he doesn't miss the amused look on Mari's face. He gives her a watery smile, which she returns with a sharp grin of her own before she takes his bowl for cleaning and shoos him out of the kitchen.

No better time than present, Yuuri thinks as he makes his way back to his room. Victor is still in deep slumber when Yuuri returns and for a single moment Yuuri thinks it might be better to leave him to his dreams, but it's then that Victor whimpers softly into Yuuri's pillow and the decision is made for him in the few steps it takes for Yuuri to round the bed. He sits on the straw-filled bedding and... suddenly shy, he doesn't know how to go about it.

Should he shake Victor awake? Should he kiss him? What is the proper procedure to wake up a person of noble birth after you promise your... what exactly? The longer Yuuri stares at the long, pale eyelashes that cast little shadows across his cheeks, the more he is confused about what he should do.

He settles on brushing Victor's cheek with his thumb and softly speaking his name until Victor's eyes flutter open. Blue and bleary, they remind Yuuri of gemstones dimmed with smoke, but they're still beautiful. And the more they gaze at each other, the clearer Yuuri can see the return of the usual sparkle as a smile makes it onto Victor's lips and lights up his entire visage.

"You came back," Victor whispers.

Yuuri doesn't know what that means, but he replies, "I did."

"Come lie with me."

Victor lifts a corner of the blanket up for him and Yuuri can't reject an invitation like that. He slides underneath the fabric, resting his head on the same pillow Victor is using. They are close enough to feel each other's breath when they exhale and it's comforting in a way, Yuuri thinks while his body unwinds from the tension of being upright.

"I dreamed of you," Victor tells him in a hushed voice. "You were lost in the forest and calling for me, but for the love of everything holy I couldn't find you. It was... it was maddening, I must admit."

Yuuri gives a soft hum. "I've been to that forest since I was a child. I never get lost."
"Maybe you don't, but I did. And I... saw... things."

Victor closes his eyes briefly. His face settles into something colder, harder. Yuuri has this seen before only once: that night at Victor's camp when Victor thought Yuuri was disrespecting their first meeting.

"Tell me, Yuuri," Victor says as his eyes open and stare Yuuri down even as they lie on the same pillow. "Why do you keep lying to me?"

Chapter End Notes

I'm still half dead so pls forgive me for not replying to comments, I'll get to it tomorrow //sends love to all yall bc you're making my day every day <3

ps. yes, I love teasing you as well ;3c
"I didn't mean to," Yuuri whispers.

He feels small, even if the wolf in him struggles against Yuuri's will to establish his dominance over Victor. *You shouldn't cover, don't bow your neck,* it hisses insidiously into his ear. Yuuri ignores it, ignores his aching heart, and opens himself up, raw.

"There are things about me that you aren't ready to know," Yuuri says. "Things that you may never be ready to know. I can't... I can't trust you with them before I know I can trust you with my life, Vitya."

Victor opens his mouth to argue, but before he follows through, he closes it again as if he sees the truth in Yuuri's words. They are just strangers, still. There is something intimate, something physical drawing them to each other, yes, but as human beings they know little about each other.

"Will you tell me once you know?" Victor asks instead.

And Yuuri smiles, because that is the best thing he could've said. "Of course."

"Very well, then," Victor gives. "I will allow you to keep your secrets until I prove to you that your trust will never be misplaced with me. But, please, don't lie to me again. If you can't tell me the truth, say so instead, but never lie. Can you do that for me?"

"Yes," Yuuri breathes, heart in his throat. "Yes."

He takes Victor's hand under the cover of the blanket and twines their fingers together. He gives them a little squeeze to mark his promise. It calls forth a smile to Victor's face, light as it is. Even with that Victor still looks tired, though, and Yuuri's earlier worry returns to him twofold.

"What happened in the forest tonight?" Yuuri asks, gentle voice and eyes.

He doesn't want to push, but he wants to know if he can help. If Victor has seen him, then maybe... maybe it could be as easy as offering comfort where it's clearly needed.

"I don't--" Victor starts and falls quiet as the breath rushes out of him in a gush. "I don't know for sure, but I saw a beast. A--a wolf, I believe. And it was easily as big as a horse. I barely escaped with my life, but Yuuri, the fear that I suffered... I've never been so terrified in my entire life."

Without speaking, Yuuri shifts closer to Victor and wraps his arms around him. He holds him dearly while Victor shivers at the memory of what Yuuri knows must have been him. It had to be. No other wolf in the forest can rival him in size and to hear that Victor fears him... it's just like Yuuri expected – he can't trust him with his secret.

"Are you hurt anywhere?" Yuuri asks, forcing himself to mend what little he can.

Concern makes him pull back when Victor remains silent inside his arms. Yuuri gazes deeply into Victor's face as he looks for any wounds or pains. He knows he is a violent creature inside, but he
doesn't hurt anyone on purpose, not even during the full moon when his humanity withdraws to give
way to his more animalistic urges. But if he did... if he did...

Yuuri's hand trembles when he rests it against Victor's cheek.

"Please, tell me. Did the wolf hurt you?"

Victor closes his eyes and murmurs a soft "No," into Yuuri's wrist. It's a relief, yes, but the shaking
of Victor's body speaks of a different hurt that was surely Yuuri's fault as well.

"I'm sorry," Yuuri tells him.

"Why? It wasn't your doing," Victor says back and Yuuri can't help the bitter smile, because it is. It's
his doing, his fault.

But he can't tell Victor that. If he does, Victor will look at him differently. He'll come to hate him.
Maybe even will call for Yuuri's head. And... Yuuri is selfish. It wasn't a lie when he told Victor that
those few days before – he's selfish and he wants Victor to stay even if it means hiding the truth from
him. Even if it means lying to him about this.

He's so selfish.

"Yuuri, I–" Victor starts, but pauses.

He bites his lip until it turns red and Yuuri's gut sinks with the realization of what is to come. His
breath stuck in his lungs, he waits for Victor to tell him what Yuuri knows he feels.

*I was wrong. I don't want you anymore. This was a mistake. Forget about me and I'll forget about
you. We will never meet again.*

"If there is one thing I have at my disposal, it's money," Victor says instead and Yuuri frowns, since
it isn't what he's anticipated. "I don't want to take you away from here and leave your parents at the
mercy of that... that *beast*. This isn't safe. You can't live in fear like this. I want to help, please."

"Help?" Yuuri repeats, voice hollow as understanding breeds new fear into his tired limbs. "How?"

"I'll hire hunters to kill it," Victor immediately says. He rises up on his elbow, eyes determined, alight
with madness of fear. "Or if that doesn't work, I will have men cut down all the trees and chase it
out. Whatever will work to keep you and your family safe. I, Yuuri, I was shown so much kindness
here that I can't just let this pass, so please, tell me what I can do to protect all of you."

*Kill.*

Victor wants to kill him.

Without being aware of it himself, Yuuri's eyes water. He takes a shaky breath, but it gets stuck in
his lungs on the way. He feels breathless and drowned by nothing and everything all at once. He
tries to put some distance between him and Victor, but when he moves out of bed his legs get
tangled with the blanket and he slips, falling hard to the wooden floors.

There, he lies, and stares at the ceiling while his heart yammers hard against his ribcage.

"Yuuri, dear, are you alright?" his mother's voice comes from the outside, but when he doesn't reply,
he can't find his voice anyway, she peeks her head into the room.

It's clear to her by the crazed look in his eyes that he must be spiraling into the abyss of his thoughts,
because she sets the basket of fresh linens by the door and quickly makes her way to him. She helps him sit, wraps him in her arms and rocks with him like she used to do as a child. In soft voice, she begins to hum a song that always put him and Mari right to sleep.

And yet, despite that, all Yuuri can hear is Victor's voice giving the order to take Yuuri's head.

Chapter End Notes

well... you said I could tease you some more, so ;3c
initiating screaming in
3...
2...
1...
GO!
There are many things Victor is far from comprehending about Yuuri, he realizes as he watches Yuuri's mother rock her son on the floor of Yuuri's room. Yuuri's body trembles like a leaf and his breathing is raspy, full of whimpers and dry sobs.

What caused this... Victor cannot tell.

It all happened too fast for him to grasp the nuances that must have meant more to Yuuri than Victor: one second Yuuri was concerned about Victor's wellbeing, and the next, just when Victor expected him to be eager about being rid of the monster lurking within the forest, Yuuri fell off the bed and proceeded to shake as if... in fear? Of what? Of... him?

Victor doesn't understand.

But Yuuri's mother does. She must, because she looks over Yuuri's trembling shoulder and smiles kindly at Victor as if his worry is obvious on his face, like it is obvious in his heart.

"Be a dear and tell Mari to put on a kettle of tea for all of us, please?" she asks. Victor hesitates and his gaze falls onto Yuuri again. "Vicchan." He looks at Hiroko to see her small smile and the deep lines of aging on her face. "He'll be alright."

At that Victor nods and leaves the room. He still isn't sure of what came to pass in the little moment between his proposal and Yuuri's reaction, but maybe Yuuri will explain once he calms down. Victor hopes for it, for the honesty to return to them.

With his head still submerged in dark thoughts, Victor steps into the kitchen. Mari's face isn't kind when she looks at him, not like Hiroko's was. But she doesn't outright tell him to get lost, so Victor forces on a smile that he trusts will bury the invisible hatchet between them, and says:

"Your mother asked for tea."

"And she sent you?" Mari asks, eyebrow drawn, but she obediently settles a kettle over the fire.

"She was, hm... occupied, you could say," Victor explains.

"Occupied," Mari repeats. Her eyes are narrowed and attentive, and Victor feels like he is being interrogated for a crime he doesn't know he committed. "What happened?"

"I'm not keen on the details myself," Victor mumbles. "I was talking to Yuuri and then he fell off the bed and began to shake, and when your mother came in she just scooped him up into her arms and sent me here. To get tea." He pauses, and then sighs. "I don't understand what happened. Did I do something, say something wrong?"

Mari remains silent for a moment so long that Victor feels the uncertainty crawl up his spine. Did he really do something wrong? Mari takes out a small brass case from within her apron and opens it up to pick a thinly pressed stick that smells like...
"Want one?"

Mari offers the case to Victor, but he shakes his head when the scent of tobacco hits him. She shrugs at his choice and lights up the one she picked. In a few moments, as she breathes in the smoke and lets it out through her nose, looking alike the dragons of legends, the room envelops in wisps of gray smoke that cloud vision and dim senses.

Victor secretly wishes it could dim his confusion as well.

"Yuuri's heart is made of glass," Mari finally speaks from behind a cloud of smoke. "He's delicate. But he isn't fragile. You won't break him, but he will break of his own."

"What does that even mean?" Victor finds himself asking, because truly, could Mari be any more cryptic than that? "I know he's shy at times, but--"

"That isn't it," Mari interrupts him. "He isn't shy, he's scared. He thinks too hard on certain things. What you said to him might not have meant much more to you than the very words you spoke, but he hears things there that sometimes aren't." She pauses and takes a smoke. "You don't need to be overtly careful with him, but do not let his mind get the best of you."

"I still don't understand," Victor admits.

Mari only sighs at that. The kettle on the fire begins to bubble, so instead of replying, she sets it on the table and brings out three cups and a tray. She sprinkles the leaves and herbs into the water before she hands it all to Victor with a measuring glance. Victor doesn't know what she sees when she looks at him, but it must be enough, because her face softens an ounce.

"You should talk to Yuuri," she gives. "He will explain what he wants you to know. Ask him then."

With nothing more to add, she returns to kneading the bread and Victor has no choice but to leave. He makes it back to Yuuri's room, small, uncertain steps one at a time.

The night of the Giacometti ball he believed he found salvation. He believed Yuuri and him have been fated to meet, fated to form a bond that would transcend life and love itself. Now, though, there is doubt shimmering under Victor's skin with every treacherous breath he takes.

Did he make a mistake?

He raps gently on the door and Yuuri's mother softly invites him in. Balancing the tray with tea on one hand, Victor enters to the watchful eyes of both mother and son. He stops there, uncertain of how to proceed and it's thanks to Hiroko that he doesn't make a spectacle of himself. The woman climbs to her feet, kisses Yuuri on the crown of his head, and murmurs a soft word or two to him. Yuuri nods his head and Hiroko smiles, then turns around to leave.

She pauses by Victor, though, and rests her hand on Victor's arm where she can reach.

"Be patient with him, Vicchan," she says, and then truly leaves.

The room feels colder for it, but it matters little when Victor is set aflame by only one gaze of Yuuri's red-rimmed eyes.

"Come sit with me?" Yuuri asks. "We need to talk."
COMMUNICATION HAPPENING SOON I HOPE Y'ALL ARE READY FOR THIS BC I DEFINITELY AM NOT
"The wolf," Yuuri starts, and Victor can see how he swallows his nerves. It takes all he has in him not to reach over and take one of the tightly clenched hands that Yuuri rests in his lap, "the wolf isn't a killer. It isn't a monster. It's- it's a deity? The guardian of the forest, if you will."

"Oh," Victor breathes. He feels silly for assuming what he has, but... he had every right to, didn't he? The wolf did attack him, after all. "Why did it come after me then?"

"Did it hurt you?" Yuuri asks the same question he's already asked, but adds: "Aside from scaring you?"

Victor shakes his head.

The only hurt he's come to is the little pin pricks of claws on his back and the bruised knees from the fall. Apart from that, the wolf did nothing. Now that Victor thinks of it... the animal might not have meant to harm him from the beginning, but he was running, so it chased after him. It is a fact well known that a predator will never leave prey to run alone. Yet fear is never rational, and a fearful being will always run from danger.

How could have Victor known better in a moment of such weakness?

"Mari and I have grown up playing in the forest," Yuuri explains further. "I know– I've seen the wolf before. She has as well. And our parents. It, the wolf, it means us no harm."

"I apologize," Victor says. "What I said about killing it and chasing it away... it must have sounded cruel to you." When Yuuri nods, Victor can't help the heavy feeling of guilt from bowing his neck. "I meant only to keep you and your family safe. Please, forgive me if I overstepped."

It's Yuuri's hand that lifts his chin up with a touch so light Victor would think he imagined it, except Yuuri's hand is still there, hovering below Victor's face like he is unsure if he's allowed to touch him. Without a second thought, Victor takes that hand and rests it against his cheek.

"You didn't do anything wrong," Yuuri tells him. "I apologize for how I reacted as well. Your offer was coming from the goodness of your heart, I know it. Yet, it still made me scared of how readily you thought of killing. I– Vitya, I–"

Yuuri's lip trembles when he pulls it between his teeth. Victor doesn't push him, not this time, because even as Yuuri worries his lip, his eyes glow with a light that is searching for something in Victor's face. What, Victor can't possibly divine, but he keeps his expression open and honest in hope that whatever it is Yuuri wishes to find, he finds it.

He must, since he follows soon with: "I'm scared that one day you will discard me as easily as ordering to kill the wolf came to you."

"I would never!" Victor's breath leaves him with a gasp. "Yuuri, how can you even accuse me of such a thing?"
"I'm sorry," Yuuri whimpers, closing his eyes. His hand trembles in Victor's. "I'm so sorry, but I-- I fear that more than anything. I know it is hardly your fault, but that is something that keeps me from fully enjoying your company and I feel like that only proves it more. I'm not the man you think me to be, Vitya."

"Did I," Victor starts and takes a pause to breathe, so he can calm his spinning thoughts, "did I do something that made you think I would leave? Did I give you an impression that I would discard you once I grow bored? If I did--"

"No," Yuuri says softly. "It's all me. It's in my head. I'm sorry."

"Then, please, Yuuri," Victor begs as he squeezes Yuuri's hand. "Please tell me what I can do to stop these insidious thoughts. Because, trust me, none of them are true. I know we've only met recently, but to me you mean much more than you can fathom. These past days have shown me that time and time again." Yuuri's face is full of disbelief and Victor's heart squeezes helplessly in his chest. "I have been struggling with being myself, with separating the Lord from the Victor and here, with you, I can finally be myself, even if I hardly know who that is anymore."

Victor gives a little smile that he doesn't intend as bitter as it turns to be, but it is, and yet it's somehow accepted. Yuuri's thumb rubs against his cheek lightly, leaving warmth in its wake and changing the nature of Victor's smile with effortless grace.

It's for this, more than anything, that Victor keeps speaking. Somehow what Mari has told him before, now begins to make a frightening amount of sense.

"With you, I feel like I can rediscover the person I am and once I do, I know that you will accept me for who I am, not who I was or who everyone thinks I ought to be. Because, Yuuri, you are a kind, understanding soul that bleeds for everyone but yourself, I think. So maybe this time, instead of bleeding out on your own, you could allow me to help you patch up your wounds?"

He ends his speech with hope shining through his eyes. If Yuuri truly doesn't want him, if Victor truly has missed the mark, then he will accept it without a fight. But there is still a flutter of want in his heart that has nothing to do with what they happened during the Giacometti ball.

It has everything to do with who Yuuri is, though.

And who he is, is the sweet, kind man who opens his heart to Victor despite his fears and smiles at him like he is going to cry: beautiful, honest, precious.

"I don't want to burden you with my difficulties," Yuuri says quietly.

"It's no burden when I offer freely," Victor injects.

Yuuri's hand trembles in Victor's hold, but he doesn't let go. Soon, the trembling stops as well and, despite all fear, Victor hopes.

"Are you certain?" Yuuri asks once more.

"Never been more certain of anything as I am of this," Victor says.

There are no more words that Yuuri speaks, yet the way he falls into Victor and wraps his arms around him as the fear and desperation cling to his skin; it says more than any "Please," ever could.
there we go, they talked and are happy now and victor is still blissfully unaware that his bf wolfs out every month on the clock ahahah
rip-vitya
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

my sweet people I am crying tears of happiness rn bc the lovely @enulib made this beautiful draw of yuuri and I haven't stopped looking at it since, so this chapter is dedicated to them bc I'm touched and so happy ahhh!!!!!! I LOVE YOU INU!!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

That afternoon they spend in the dining room, sitting by the fire. Yuuri fiddles with the stones while the metal structure for the tiara he plans to make is heating up in a mold above the crackling logs. Vicchan is sleeping at his side while Victor is pressed against the other, a comforting weight that Yuuri can rest against. He abuses the position as if he was trying to test the truth of Victor's words, but in the end the only thing Victor does is offer him is a smile and an arm wrapped around Yuuri's back to steady him.

It brings a flush to Yuuri's cheeks. Such a simple thing, some would say, and yet it isn't: it speaks of Victor's honesty, of his dedication, of the motives behind his actions... and those, like Victor, seem pure.

"What are those?" Victor asks when Yuuri spills the stones onto the floor before them.

"They aren't worth much," Yuuri starts as Victor takes one of the stones to look at closely, "yet I've always thought they look pretty. And then I met you, and– and you are even prettier, but I thought the shine they give at night would be fetching matched with your hair."

Yuuri glances to the side to gauge Victor's reaction. Far be it from Yuuri to gift something subpar to a person like Victor, who could have anything his heart desired, but... what else could he offer? He has not a thing of value to his name, so this is the most sublime token of admiration he can afford.

He needn't have worried, though. Victor's face is warm and tender, bathed in the light of the dancing flames, and there is a smile upon his lips. One that makes Yuuri's heart flutter inside his chest.

"I need no courtship gifts, my Yuuri," Victor says softly, turning his eyes on him. The smile mellows even further in affection, curled around Victor's mouth like a lover's embrace. "No riches, no precious stones, silks, what have you. The only thing I truly want is your company."

Yuuri knows his cheeks must have turned red at the clear fondness in Victor's demeanour, but he can't bring himself to care about it when Victor takes one of his hands and brings it to his lips. He presses a kiss against Yuuri's wrist, no doubt aware of the throb of Yuuri's pulse.

"Well, that, and your affection," Victor says, breath against Yuuri's skin.

It's frightening, Yuuri thinks while he snatches his hand back to bring the red-hot mold out of the fireplace. He sets it aside to let it cool a little, but his own heart can't get a moment to breathe like that. It quickens its mad race as his mind reverberates Victor's words inside his head. It's frightening, Yuuri thinks again, how badly he wants Victor's affection as well.
"Should I turn it to gold?" Victor asks.

"No. Not yet. I have to press the stones first."

Victor gives an invested hum that feels like a compliment on Yuuri's skin.

With hands that shake a little when he picks the first stone, Yuuri works methodically on placing the smaller ones at the bottom, then larger, then filling the space with the tiny ones – all within the mold of warmed red brass shape – until the stones are gone and the crown is formed. Victor's curious weight is pressed against Yuuri's side fully, yet he finds that he doesn't mind it now. The comfort he finds in what used to be something else is now a freeing feeling that eases all the tension from Yuuri's body, so that he can lean right back against Victor's chest.

"Now what?" Victor asks. Both of his arms are wrapped around Yuuri's waist in a lose hold that is secure and warm. Yuuri rests a hand against them, smiling a little at how peaceful it feels.

"Now we wait for the metal to set," he says.

Next to the fireplace, they sit wrapped in each other for long, long minutes. Maybe an hour has passed, maybe two, and maybe Yuuri has dosed off on Victor's shoulder at some point and Victor did the same, but when his mother calls them for supper, both of them startle out of their daydreaming. Victor's chin that was resting comfortably on Yuuri's shoulder slips and Victor smacks his nose against Yuuri's shoulder bone. With a muffled yelp that turns into a moan he sits back, but the dazed look that is still in his eyes is the sight that makes Yuuri stifle laughter.

Victor gasps when a few chuckles slip past Yuuri's lips. "Are you mocking me, good sir?"

"No," Yuuri replies as he struggles to remain serious and... he fails. Giving an open laugh, he plucks Victor's hand from his nose and assesses the damage – which is none. "I believe you'll live, my lord. Here," he adds and leans over to press a little kiss against the tip, "now it'll heal without complications."

It's quite a vision, watching Victor's face tint pink right before his eyes. Only when it does, and when Victor peeks at him through his eyelashes that are a startling silver against the flush on his face, does Yuuri realize what he's done. His own cheeks turn a shade of red while he struggles to find a place to rest his gaze.

"I– um– we should– supper? Yes," he finally finds it on the window behind which the sky has turned dark. "We should, um, go? And eat. Yes."

He stands up quickly and is about to turn away, but Victor's voice halts him in the spot.

"What about the tiara?"

"We can check on it after we eat," Yuuri replies, happy for the change of the topic. He offers Victor a hand up, which Victor takes with a smile. "You can wear it to bed, if you wish."

"Your bed?" Victor asks, voice sly, but there is something vulnerable in his eyes. Something that searches approval and acceptance, and before Yuuri knows it, he's saying: "Yes."

The smile that Victor gives him is bright and heart-shaped, and even if it isn't the most beautiful one he's seen, in that moment Yuuri is certain it is the most honest.
Chapter End Notes

I have melted in the floof and can't get up goodbye this is it the last chapter we can all go home now
Supper passes in comforting quiet that does not feel any different from how suppers usually do when it's only his family around. Yuuri smiles into the meat pie his mother made him. It's a tender crust wrapped around mostly raw meat, but it's what his wolf side demands right after the full moon, and Yuuri knows it's the quickest way to restore his strength. That, and the small vial of nightshade concoction that he keeps in his room to drink before bed.

"Do you like raw meat, Yuuri?" Victor asks once the food is gone and they slip away from the table to check on the tiara.

"Not exactly," Yuuri answers. "I usually don't have a stomach for it, but there are days when it's just... right. I don't know how to better explain it."

Of course you don't, he thinks to himself, because how do you explain that you are a beast that would rip apart its prey and feast on the carcass with utter glee?

He swallows thickly the unease that crawls up his throat, but it seems he has worried for nothing. Victor gives a soft sound of agreement, unsuspecting of anything.

"Ah, I know that sentiment," he says. "I have that particular relationship with peaches, you see? I mostly can't stand them, but every now and then I will eat nothing but peaches for days on end. It's strange how human bodies work, no?"

Yuuri agrees, because he can't afford not to even if he knows there is nothing human about the wolf that sleeps under his skin. Instead, he chooses to gently touch the stones imbedded into the mold, and when they don't as much as twitch at his prodding, he knows it's the time to break it open. He does so under Victor's eager gaze, which turns into a heated breath at the back of Yuuri's neck when curiosity bids Victor closer.

"Now we need to bend it to the right shape while it's still malleable," Yuuri tells Victor more to distract himself from his thoughts than to be informative. "It isn't hot anymore, but it's still warm, so be careful. And come here, we need your head for this."

Victor obediently sits on the chair Yuuri points at. The brass bends finely in Yuuri's hands as he folds the shape to Victor's head, mindful of the rough edges that still need polishing. It takes a while, but once he is happy with the form the crown has taken, he makes sure all the stones are still in place and sets the headwear on the windowsill to completely set through the night.

"That's it?" Victor asks. "Didn't you say I could take it to bed?"

"I did, but I didn't mean today," Yuuri replies. "If you remember correctly, my lord, I told you I will see you in five days, so five days is what I made preparations for."

Victor gives him a chided smile that is sure an apology for how he's ambushed Yuuri in his home before that deadline has passed. Yuuri smiles back to let him know that he isn't truly upset and it's like he has cast a charm: invisible tension leaves Victor's shoulders and he slumps forward a little into a posture that does not befit a noble, but fits Victor surprisingly well.
"Tomorrow, then?" Victor asks, hopeful.

Yuuri nods. "And tomorrow we will have to prepare to leave as well."

"Are you well enough to travel?" Victor's eyes are concerned as they gaze deep into Yuuri's eyes. "You still seem tired."

"I will be alright," Yuuri tells him. The concern is touching, but Yuuri isn't some damsel in distress and he needs no saving. He has promised five days and so five days it will be. "Besides, we only need to get to your camp and from there, there will be carts I can rest in if I feel too weak to stay atop a horse, yes?" At Victor's nod, Yuuri smiles. "Then I will be more than alright."

"If you're certain," Victor gives in. "But we should head to bed early anyway."

Yuuri gives a hum in agreement. "A bath first."

"Oh, yes!" Victor's face breaks into a smile. "We need to, one last time before the journey. I can't imagine how mundane bathing will feel afterwards, so we might as well indulge while we still can."

"We can return here anytime, if you want," Yuuri offers as his mind already reminds him of the next full moon. He will have to return home then, but maybe... maybe he could bring Victor with him. If he's careful enough. "It would be nice, no? I'm certain my parents won't mind."

"That would be delightful, my Yuuri. I'd love that."

They share a smile, amicable and at ease. It feels so simple, being around Victor now. Yuuri has to remind himself that they've only known each other for days, really, but so much has happened during these few days that it doesn't make much sense to create distance between them. Not that Yuuri wants to, no. He is quite happy with the lack of the usual rejection he feels inside at being touched by others. Victor's casual touches seem different, seem to be something else, something better, and Yuuri is more than overjoyed at how the little kisses that Victor rests against his skin at times leave him breathless and flattered.

They finish their bath fast, for neither of them can keep their eyes open much longer. It's with a press of lips to Yuuri's shoulder that Victor leaves the bath first, and when Yuuri follows him soon after, it's another kiss against his temple that sends his heart aflutter. It's silly, Yuuri thinks, to be so affected by a man he doesn't truly know yet, but it's even more silly not to be.

Because when they retire for the night and Victor's body curls beside him on his straw-filled bedding, it is a warm and full feeling that wraps around Yuuri like the comfort of his family home has always done, except now it isn't just that: it's Victor, too, and it is as confusing as it is exciting. Yuuri can hardly wait for the dawn to come.

Chapter End Notes

we are entering the drama-less part of the story my friends so pls expect a lot of feels and the boys being smitten with each other ;3c
Yuuri dreams of the hunt, oddly enough.

His hands and feet are paws, pounding the ground with each leap he takes, fast, fast, faster. His ears twitch at every sound, then rest flat against his head as the wind whistles around him. His teeth, sharp and long, itch for something sweet and supple to bite into and it isn't until he catches his prey that Yuuri gets to experience it – but he does and it's delightful.

He shivers with pleasure as he chomps on the neck of a buck he's pinned to the ground. The deer trembles against his hold, yet it is obvious that the will to fight is no longer there. It's a different kind of ecstasy that courses through Yuuri's veins when the deer gives into him with a final sigh. Yuuri sinks his teeth into its tender skin—

—only to wake up suddenly in his bed, wrapped in Lord Nikiforov's arms.

"Yuuri..."

It's only when the voice reaches his ears, raspy and brimming with need, that Yuuri realizes that he wasn't dreaming, or maybe not fully. His teeth have broken the delicate flesh of Victor's throat and the taste of blood spills over his tongue like an exquisite gravy. Even as Yuuri's mind registers that it isn't a dream, that he's crawled between Victor's legs and pressed him down into the bed to hold him down, Yuuri doesn't pull back – he doesn't want to.

Thoughts clouded with pleasure and that animalistic urge to act, Yuuri gives into it and laps at the small wound he's made. Victor arches his neck against the caress of Yuuri's tongue, a moan spilling from his lips. Greedily, Yuuri trails kisses up the pane of pale skin, up to Victor's jaw, and from there to his lips that are already bitten red by Victor's own making.

It's strange, Yuuri thinks while he drinks another moan right off Victor's lips. He's never spent the full moon with anyone, nor the days after. It's always his family around him and what he's doing now... it can't be done with the family.

Yuuri shifts his hips, aware of the hardness between their bodies. He doesn't know when in the dream he's rolled on top of Victor, but his blood is demanding release, so he twists a hand under the sheets.

"Wait, Yuuri, wa~"

Victor's voice is a pretty sound in Yuuri's ear: breathless and heated. Yuuri doesn't heed the words, though. He can't, not with the arousal building in his groin. His hips twitch forward.

"Yuuri, my~"

Victor lifts his knee and his bare thigh slides against Yuuri's. Skin on skin, hot, it makes Yuuri's blood rush faster. His breath comes short, panted against Victor's shoulder where his bowed head rests.
"Let me," Victor asks while his hands cup Yuuri's backside. "You must still be tired, let me do the work."

Yuuri's only answer is a growl that builds up low in his chest and, gritty, rises up his throat. He pushes himself more into Victor's pliant body and it makes both of them groan. It takes no hesitation on Yuuri's part to flip Victor around – he catches him by the hips and twists him with sheer strength of his arms. Victor's surprise comes in a yelp that soon slides into a lustful groan when Yuuri hikes up his tunic to reveal his bare back.

Yuuri straddles Victor's thighs and slots his cock between the mounds of Victor's backside. They're firm, yet soft, and pleasure and completion are the only things Yuuri thinks of as he fucks himself between them. Victor's hips rise and fall with Yuuri's rhythm, but he presses them down with his hands and quickens the pace.

Victor muffles his moans in Yuuri's pillow, but Yuuri's ears are sensitive to them. He catches each stutter of breath, each whine, each slip of the tongue. The smell of their sweat wraps around them like a blanket woven of their own flesh and Yuuri bows low over Victor's neck to take more of him in. Victor smells like... gold, Yuuri pants against his skin. There is a metallic undertone to his skin, yet it's warm, so warm it's almost scalding – a smell so distinct that Yuuri wants to taste it.

He licks at the crook of Victor's nape, taking primal delight in the shiver that wrecks Victor's body. He doesn't notice the hand that Victor sneaks behind him, but he feels it when Victor's hips lift higher and urgent fingers lock around his neck. Victor pulls him chest to back and bucks against Yuuri's hips in what can be nothing other than an invitation.

And one that Yuuri is tempted to take.

"Take me," Victor pants. "Yuuri, take me now..."

"I'll hurt you," Yuuri resists as best as he can. "You aren't ready."

Before Victor can voice his protests, Yuuri slots his cock between Victor's thighs instead. The base rubs against Victor's swollen groin with every thrust and it's the only thing that seals his further demands silent. Yuuri ruts into him hard enough to make the old wood of his bed groan alongside them.

When he spills, it's between Victor's legs. His final, erratic thrusts bring Victor to the edge as well and his pleasure spills over the bedding, mixing with Yuuri's. They collapse onto the bed, breathless but sated, and it is a long while before someone speaks.

"Move," Victor whines first, "you're heavy."

Yuuri rolls off of him, regretful. He doesn't lose the chance to wrap an arm around Victor and tuck him to his side, though. Nosing at the back of Victor's neck where silver hair meets the skin, soft like a child's, Yuuri rests his lips against the high bone of Victor's spine.

"You will never find me complaining about being manhandled like so, but I can't help but wonder what happened to make you so impatient," Victor murmurs as he cranes his neck to look at Yuuri. "Did you have fulfilling dreams?"

Victor's eyes have a dazed cloudiness to them, yet they are twinkling and happy at the same time. Yuuri's shoulders ease when he drapes himself over Victor, legs tangled despite the mess that must be growing uncomfortable on Victor's thighs by now.

"Sometimes I get like that," Yuuri says, which explains nothing, yet is the truest he can offer.
He thinks back to his dream of chasing the prey and holds Victor closer.

Victor isn't prey. Victor is human. Victor is a lord, a noble. And Yuuri has no right to expect that level of submission from him, much less extract it by force.

"Do you mind?" he asks, suddenly shy.

Victor's reply comes without hesitation. "Not at all. I enjoyed it quite thoroughly, if I do say so myself."

It eases some of Yuuri's worries and he breathes their joint smell deeply. For now, he thinks, that is good enough. For now.

Chapter End Notes

if you didn't know yet I'm a furry
Chapter 35

Victor is spent and it's only been an hour since he's awakened. He didn't think that the little kisses he tried to wake Yuuri up with would result in something so... primal, but he definitely isn't complaining now that the deed has been done. There is a pleasant sting between his thighs when he squeezes his legs together, a remnant of the rub from Yuuri's cock.

Victor finds it delightful. He slides his hand between his legs and smears the evidence of their pleasure over the sensitive skin there. It's thrilling, he thinks. The way Yuuri has held him, taken him, forced him to submit with sheer strength – even if Victor's submission was more than willing.

"We should clean ourselves and head to breakfast," Yuuri speaks from behind him and Victor quickly retracts his hand.

His cheeks flush at the thought of being caught, but Yuuri seems to have missed it. It isn't disappointment that fills Victor's heart, yet he decides to keep that little pleasure in mind for use in his own time.

Yuuri slides over his body on his way up. He freezes on the side of the bed while his eyes gaze over the picture Victor presents, resting there with his thighs painted with seed and tunic wrinkled and hanging off his body in a way that reveals more than it covers. The flush on Yuuri's face is a precious sight after everything they have just done and Victor feels giddy enough to chuckle.

"Are you feeling shy now?" he asks.

Yuuri bites his lip, but his blush travels to the tips of his ears. It's precious. Victor can't resist the pull, so he lifts himself up on one hand and rests a tender kiss against Yuuri's mouth.

"No need, my Yuuri," Victor whispers. "Remember our promise? It was honesty and selfishness, wasn't it? I quite enjoy it when you are selfish with me."

"If you're certain," Yuuri gives in, but he doesn't sound convinced.

"What shall I do to convince you?" Victor asks. "Say the word and it shall be done. Would you want me to grovel? Kneel at your feet the entire day? I will do it, if that is what you wish."

Before the words even leave his mouth, Yuuri is already shaking his head vehemently.

"No, no, never! I told you when we met, didn't I? I only want you to be yourself, Vitya," Yuuri says, face still aflame, but gaze intense and molten.

Victor melts like the gold he hates: easily and fast.

"Then trust me when I say it," he leans close to wrap his arm around Yuuri's shoulders, "there is no greater pleasure for me than when I see you take me with that much strength and conviction."

Yuuri remains quiet for a moment, but his arms wrap around Victor in return, so it's a comforting silence that falls between them.
"Does that mean, if we ever take this further, that you wish me to..." Yuuri doesn't finish, leaving it to Victor to divine the rest.

"I'm not opposed to it, however we do it," Victor speaks his mind. "But I would be lying if I said I don't enjoy it more when you manhandle me with as much passion as you just did. It was... Very pleasing is not accurate enough description to relay the strength and enjoyment of what it was to me, but for now I think it will suffice. At least until I find a better word."

The flush that has taken permanent residence on Yuuri's cheeks dips down lower. It crawls down his neck and Victor traces the side of it with a curious finger. He feels it, and sees it, when Yuuri shivers under his touch.

A sharp grin pulls at Victor's lips and he gives into it wholly.

"We should prepare for breakfast, as you said," Victor reminds. "I wouldn't mind eating something else beforehand, but I think we could both use some additional nutrients for the journey, no?"

It's a marvel, Yuuri's face is. His cheeks are a deep crimson, but with each thing Victor says he discovers a new dimension of red that takes over the previous one. Yuuri is a never ending chain of surprises and the arousal that has just been sated stirs in Victor's gut at that thought.

The sticky mess between his thighs is quickly becoming uncomfortable, though, so when Yuuri offers him a scrap fabric, wet with the water from the basin standing on the windowsill, Victor gladly accepts it. Just as his hand disappears between his legs, Yuuri jumps from his place and stutters a few words that sound like "breakfast", "check", and "robes", and leaves the room among Victor's unflattering chuckles.

It's sweet, Victor realizes. The change that happens in Yuuri in such a short time, from a confident young man who reduces Victor to a bundle of pleasure, to a shy, embarrassed man that is easily the sweetest person Victor has ever met. Maybe apart from Yuuri's own mother, because Victor has a true weakness for Hiroko's kind smiles.

He quickly finishes cleaning up and dons his tunic at the same moment Yuuri returns. Victor turns to see his flushed face as he tries not to ogle Victor's naked body, but his gaze feels more like a compliment, like a lover's caress, than any of the jealous, devouring gazes that Victor is used to.

He dresses properly for polite company and together with Yuuri they leave the room. It still smells of them, Victor knows, but there is something comforting about knowing that Yuuri purposefully left the windows closed as if to keep their scent in there for longer – as if he wished to hold onto it.

It's Victor who takes Yuuri's hand as they walk down to breakfast, but it's Yuuri who squeezes his fingers gently before he lets go when they take their seats at the table. Victor sits there among the family who should be strangers to him by all means, but isn't, and he knows that he will miss them all when they leave.

He takes the first bite of the food, expecting it to taste like his own bitterness at the thought, but it's delicious as always and Victor has to force back the unbidden tears that suddenly come to his eyes because in so little days this place has felt more like home than home ever did.

Chapter End Notes
guys it's been an ENTIRE MONTH (!!!!!!!) of updates here on ao3 and over a month on tumblr and I just wanted to say that I never expected this kind of reception and I'm so happy you're all enjoying this story ahhhh thank you so much for all your support, I love y'all big time!!! <3

(I'm also thinking of maybe doing some sort of chapter where you can give me a prompt for a scene bc I'm near writing chapter 50 and I want to celebrate it somehow so pls let me know in the comments if you're interested in that? ;3c)
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Yuuri crowns him when the sun is high up in the sky and the stones imbedded in the brass look like spider eggs: small and almost translucent. Yuuri has polished off the crass edges that could snag on Victor's skin by accident and the weight of the tiara itself isn't much, but it is isn't the best headwear Victor has worn in his life – far from it. It is the only one made by Yuuri's own hand and with as much care and dedication, though, so Victor deems it best just for that.

"How do I look?" he asks Mari, who is holding Vicchan back from jumping through the air straight into Yuuri's arms that are now free and crossed on his chest as he admires his handiwork.

"Like an actor who was born with a pretty face, but has no talent or money to afford good props," she says honestly.

Yuuri's offended "Mari!" gets drowned in the laughter that Victor can't hold back. It's just like Mari to say something like that, but he knows she means only to tease. Vicchan yaps in what seems to be agreement, which has Mari's lips quirk in undeniable amusement. She catches Victor's eye and quirks an eyebrow at him, to which he only replies with more laughter and turns to playfully wink at Yuuri, whose face is now reddened in shame, and grins.

"Thank you!" he sweeps into an dramatic bow. The crown wobbles on his temples, but it stays put, even if he has precariously lifted a hand to keep it from slipping off. "People always call me pretty, but if it's coming from you, my fair lady, I think I can finally believe the truth of it."

Mari snorts the theatrics, but her face isn't unkind. She leaves them to it without a word more and retreats back to the kitchen with Vicchan still in her arms. Alone, Victor can't help but repeat the question, this time directed at Yuuri.

"I'm sorry," Yuuri says, sighing. "I wish I could give you something better, something... something that would befit a person of noble birth, but we can't afford much and I--"

"Yuuri," Victor interrupts him before any more apologies spill from Yuuri's lips, "I don't care about the value of anything you gift to me. What I treasure most is the work you put into making this, which has Mari's lips quirk in undeniable amusement. She catches Victor's eye and quirks an eyebrow at him, to which he only replies with more laughter and turns to playfully wink at Yuuri, whose face is now reddened in shame, and grins.

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"Yuuri," Victor interrupts him before any more apologies spill from Yuuri's lips, "I don't care about the value of anything you gift to me. What I treasure most is the work you put into making this, because you made it for me, with me in mind, didn't you?" Yuuri gives him a hesitant nod that makes Victor smile. "Then it's special. One of a kind, Yuuri! There isn't another crown like this in the entire world! Isn't that a wonderful gift that no one else could ever give me? Why would I want something that anyone could have if they paid the right price when I can have a thing that is special and meaningful?"

Hesitation slowly drifts from Yuuri's face and a little flush takes its place, shy in its happiness like Yuuri himself.

"Are you certain?" Yuuri asks. "I won't take offence if you prefer something more--"

Pressing a finger to Yuuri's lips, Victor stops him.

"I prefer this," he says. "I prefer whatever you gift me, because I know it will be a gift more honest than any others I receive. And that is the end of it."
Satisfied, Yuuri nods. Victor retracts his hand, but changes his mind half-motion and pulls Yuuri's chin up while at the same time he closes the distance between their heads. The kiss he rests on Yuuri's lips is soft and chaste, a sign of gratitude and appreciation more than anything passionate.

"I adore it, Yuuri," he says, meaning the tiara. "Thank you for spoiling me like this."

"It's hardly spoiling," Yuuri denies. His eyelashes flutter against his cheeks and ah, Victor has to fight a blush of his own, because Yuuri is of undeniable beauty that shines from within with an overwhelming glow and Victor is standing right in the midst of it. "I would offer you the moon, if I could."

The words are touching, but–

"Why the moon?" Victor asks. Everyone has always likened him to the sun: impossible to look at, happy and warm, golden. And yet Yuuri is....

"Your hair is one thing, your skin another," Yuuri says, brushing Victor's fringe away first and then sliding his rough knuckles over the side of Victor's face, "but the moon is for your soul, because it doesn't shine on its own, I think. It reflects what others shine upon it, doesn't it? You have always been what others want you to be, but not who you truly are, no? Like the moon who reflects the shine of the sun."

It's silly, Victor thinks as he swallows hard through his tightened throat. It's silly how easy it is for Yuuri to see through him. They have only truly known each other for less than a week, but... is Victor that much of an open book? No, that isn't the case. It's because Yuuri can see inside his soul as easily as he can charm it.

"You, my Yuuri, are a marvel," Victor admits in a whisper that is more reverent than scared of his truth having been uncovered. "Lady luck has smiled upon me the day you crossed my path."

Yuuri's eyes half close in pleasure, molten and warm.

"It smiled on both of us," he says, and Victor's face softens into a smile.

Whether it be luck or destiny, he is glad that the gods decided to allow him to meet Yuuri. Just these few days he spent in his company have been filled with more life, more love than Victor has come to know in his entire life. The rest of his days seem brighter now that he looks into the future, and – as Victor gazes into Yuuri's tenderly smiling face, he knows – the future is finally worth looking into.

Chapter End Notes

okay so first things first: if you're reading this story and you follow me on tumblr (@katzuyas) and you see my random fic ideas that I sometimes post, please don't ask me to write it? I really really love yall and I'm super flattered by how many of you read this fic and that you enjoy my ideas so much, I really am, but I can't handle writing anything else when I have this fic to update daily, you know? I don't think I'm asking for something unreasonable, so please have patience with me until I finish this fic or until I write enough chapters beforehand so I can divide my attention between this and some other stories! I love you and thank you for all your support, it means a lot to me <3
second thing: the prompt thing for chapter 50 was met with an enthusiastic response from you, my lovely readers, so I will try to include you guys in the creating process for this special chapter by giving you a prompt that you will base your idea for this fic on. I won't tell you what I have planned or where in the story we will be then, but for this and the next update I will be looking for ideas in your comments, so make sure you put them there if you want me to write it! I will pick the best one that will make it into chapter 50 and 2 more that I will try to combine for chapter 51 ^u^)b

the prompt for this challenge is travel, so let your imagination go wild and let's create something awesome together!!
"What more do we need?" Victor asks once Yuuri is done wrapping the freshly picked apples, which he then puts into a pouch that is set aside on the kitchen table.

"I will bake you some bread for the way," Yuuri's mother says and Yuuri smiles at her in gratitude.

"I don't think we need much else," Yuuri replies. "It will be a far shorter journey on horseback than if we were to go on foot, so I think we'll make it even before twilight."

"And we can sup at camp, so we shouldn't pack too heavily," Victor adds. He turns a smile onto Yuuri's mother, unable to help himself. "Though I would never say no to Hiroko's lovely cooking."

A faint flush takes to the woman's cheeks and she trills a laugh.

"Thank you, Vicchan," she says. "Now I'll have to make sure to prepare something special for you. A final treat, since we don't know when you'll be back to taste my cooking."

"Mom--"

Yuuri's protests fall on deaf ears and soon they are both chased out of the kitchen while Hiroko begins preparations for the mysterious treat that Victor can't help but look forward to. With time now to spare, they take Vicchan and leave to walk the path through flowery meadows that leads to where Yuuri's father herds the sheep. It will be soon that they leave, but duties of everyday life wait for no one.

"It's so peaceful here," Victor says in the quiet hum of the wind and the buzz of the bees that are busy among the flowers.

"It is," Yuuri agrees. There's a faint smile on his lips, tender and light. "It's why we have never moved from this place, despite the many offers Giacomettis brought to us."

Victor's interest is piqued at that. "They wanted to buy your property? Why?"

"It's a small piece of land," Yuuri replies with a shrug. "We own these few fields and half of the forest. For Chris this is like a drop in an entire ocean, but I think it must be a sore spot for them, since my parents always refuse."

Vicchan barks somewhere in the distance and their attention is called to him. He seems to have found a nest on one of the trees and is now joyfully jumping around the old willow, yapping at the couple of sparrows that nervously flap their wings. Yuuri gives a sharp whistle that Vicchan immediately catches and with a final bark trots back to Yuuri, who kneels to give him a stern warning against scaring animals smaller than him. Vicchan looks positively ashamed of his careless actions and whines in apology until Yuuri's heart softens enough to indulge the dog with a little scratch behind his fluffy ears.

It's positively adorable and Victor's heart melts with love.
"You're the sweetest person I have ever met," Victor tells him as Yuuri stands up and it gratifies him so when Yuuri's cheeks dust with a precious pink.

"And you," Yuuri says once he's done biting his lip, "are a charmer. Saying all these things... what have you to gain, my lord?"

"Must I have something to gain for paying you compliments? Can't I simply be speaking the truth?"

Yuuri gives a hum like he isn't fully convinced of Victor's honesty.

"What shall I do to prove it to you, then?" Victor asks.

It is a similar thing to what he's asked Yuuri the day before in his room, but when he gazes at Yuuri from the side now, it is significantly different as well: Yuuri's eyes twinkle playfully in the sunlight and it's enough to make Victor realize that this is all just teasing. He hides his grin by turning away, but it's then that his eyes spot the yellow flowers along the path. He picks one up and without a moment of hesitation puts it behind Yuuri's ear.

"Do you know what dandelions represent, my Yuuri?" Victor asks and Yuuri blinks at him without a clue. Victor smiles as he explains: "Some say that they symbolize intelligence, others – the power of the rising sun. They look like it, no? But I like the interpretation of healing and long lasting happiness. They are strong flowers, able to thrive even in the inconsiderate conditions. It's admirable."

"Such a great burden put on such a small flower," Yuuri says, plucking the dandelion from behind his ear. He twirls the stem in his fingers and the bud spins, yellow and pretty. "Don't you think it must be difficult to meet all these expectations?"

"If it grew alone, I'm positive it would be. But look," Victor points at where the dandelions sprout in bunches, "they never grow alone. Some things might be too hard on one person, but if you have the support of others, don't you think it lessens the burden some?" With a smile, Victor turns to Yuuri. "I'd like to be your other dandelion, if you'll allow it."

Yuuri remains silent for a while as he looks down at the flower in his hand as if it holds all the answers.

"You're very knowledgeable," Yuuri finally decides on.

It's sudden and rips a little laugh from Victor, since it isn't what he expected.

"I spend my days reading. It would be a shame if I didn't remember at least some of what I come by," he says, but his heart warms at the compliment.

"In your books," Yuuri starts, licks his lips, and looks at Victor with a curious gaze, "do they speak of animals as well? Like... like wolves?"

Victor opens his mouth to say that "Yes, of course!" but he hesitates on the first syllable. The library at the Nikiforov estate is a big one, yet Victor has never been fond of reading while he spent his time there. His own collection is far smaller and there isn't much on the topic Yuuri is asking after. However...

"If that is something that interests you, I would be happy to search for it with you," he offers instead.

The smile that Yuuri gives him is small, but it is soft and sweet, and when Yuuri tucks the dandelion behind Victor's ear, it feels like the world has become a happier, warmer place in seconds.
"I would like that very much," Yuuri agrees.

Chapter End Notes

I received a few wonderful prompts from you guys but today is still game so if you have any ideas you want to see in this fic for the prompt TRAVEL then leave me a word below ^u^)b

(also I'm dying bc these dorks are too sweet rycdyhujbn hELP)
Chapter 38

Saying goodbye is never easy, Victor knows, but Yuuri doesn't look heartbroken when his mother squeezes him in her arms for the last time. There is a little smile playing on Yuuri's lips and his eyes shine in the morning light like they have done as soon as they woke up. Victor couldn't resist kissing Yuuri then, but he tries his best to resist it now since Mari looks his way as if she knows what is rushing through his head.

"You hurt him, Nikiforov, and that axe out back is going to cleave off that pretty head of yours," she tells him. And before he can respond to it, she adds: "Yuuri already agreed to let me do the honours, so remember that. I'll be watching you."

Victor opens his mouth, a happy "Of course! I wouldn't wish any harm to come to Yuuri," on his lips, but Mari interrupts him once again. She flicks off the ash of her smoke and looks towards where Yuuri is fending off their mother, who is clearly fussing about one thing or another like all mothers seem to be prone to do.

"Don't let him hurt you either," Mari says. "He isn't a bad person, he won't hurt you on purpose. But you know what they say..."

"The road to hell is paved with good intentions," Victor finishes the maxim for her.

She gives him a grim nod and, without a word more, leaves to say her own goodbye. It's strange, Victor thinks, that Yuuri's sister would offer him such advice. Yuuri does not strike him as a person who would hurt someone even for the better good, but surely his own sister should know better? Is this a warning that Victor hasn't been expecting, but somewhat felt coming? A warning against giving away his heart too freely?

Before Victor can argue further with himself, Yuuri's mother turns to him and offers him a hug as well. Surprised, but definitely welcoming, Victor gathers her in his arms and decides not to worry about things that may never even happen. The here and now is better than anything his mind could concoct anyway.

"Thank you so much for your hospitality," he tells Hiroko, who smiles at him and pats his cheek.

"You're very welcome, Vicchan," she replies. "Visit us anytime you want, dear."

"I'll make sure to do so," he promises. "I can't kidnap Yuuri forever after all, that would be a crime I wouldn't forgive even myself for."

She laughs at his words, silly as they are, and gives him one more hug. Once they part, Victor spots Yuuri on his knees, kissing goodbye the little Vicchan and his heart melts in his chest at the sight.

"Should we take him with us?" Victor asks when Yuuri finally joins him, but Yuuri shakes his head.

"My parents love him too much, it would be like losing another son," he explains.

And it does make sense, Victor feels. He gives Vicchan a scratch behind one floppy ear. The dog
jumps around until Mari picks him up and cradles him against her chest, so that he doesn't chase after
them when they leave.

This is it, Victor thinks at that.

"So... this is it," Yuuri says, an echo of Victor's thoughts. He turns to his parents one last time. "I
didn't have the time to make another distillery, but I'm sure Mari can handle it."

"You got it," Mari says. "Now get out of here before your lord changes his mind."

"There is no power in heaven or on earth that could make me do that," Victor replies, easily stepping
into the banter. Yuuri gives him a half smile, but his cheeks are tinted red, which sends Victor's heart
into joyous singing. "However, we ought to go. The forest will not be any easier to cross after dark."

"Yes, you're right," Yuuri nods. "Then we'll be off. Take care, everyone. Be well."

"Go, go. Before your mother begins wailing."

Yuuri's father smiles at them, a kind, but teasing smile that has Yuuri's mother chuckle.

"I will not!" she replies. "He is not leaving for war. He's just moving onto better things. And we will
see him soon, yes?"

With that question she turns to Victor and Yuuri, who look at each other briefly and then face
Yuuri's parents together.

"I will deliver him personally to your doorstep," Victor vows.

Yuuri's mother smiles, nods, and then shoos them away. "Go on then. No time to waste!"

It takes them a second to climb onto Victor's horse. Victor sits in the saddle and Yuuri slides behind
him, wrapping his arms around Victor's waist in order not to fall from the rump when the horse kicks
off. A final wave later, they move at a measured trot through the dusty path that leads deep into the
forest and then onto the other side, where Victor's camp is set.

"Are you as excited as I am?"

Yuuri's voice whispering right into Victor's ear is delightful, but what Victor finds even more so is
the squeeze of Yuuri's arms around him and the press of Yuuri's thighs against his. If he brings his
focus onto the wrong things, he can even feel the shift of Yuuri's groin against his backside as the
pace of the horse makes them jump along to the even rhythm.

Is Victor excited?

He releases a breath of pure agony at being unable to stop right there and beg Yuuri to take him, and
instead forces his mind to think of other things: of Yuuri sleeping in his bed, of Yuuri eating in his
dining room, of Yuuri bathed in gold that Victor will provide him with.

"I'm so excited I can barely breathe," he tells Yuuri honestly.

Yuuri's little laughter is a huff of warmth against Victor's neck. Shivers spill down his spine, and yes,
now Victor really can't breathe.

And he loves every second of it.
Chapter End Notes

THEY'RE FINALLY LEAVING GUYS HOLY SHEET!!! a new beginning for our boys starts soon, I'm so hype!!!!!!

thank you for all your ideas for chapter 50, my friends! I will compile them and pick the winner soon and in a bit over a week you'll see what kind of thing comes out of it ^u^)b I'm looking forward to that ahhh!!
The forest during daylight is a charming, quaint place.

And yet, every time Victor looks deeper between the shadows of the trees, he can feel his heartbeat quicken in his chest at the memory of the panting breath, growling, and the paws pounding the ground unlike the hooves of his horse.

It brings shivers to his skin, but that, he guesses, is somewhat alright, because Yuuri's arms tighten around him in an embrace that is protective and secure, and Victor allows his fears to be chased away by the even rhythm of Yuuri's heartbeat that he can feel at his back. Yuuri's presence is soothing as much as it is exciting and Victor can tell that even though he's returning into the effortless comfort of home, a completely new journey awaits him there – one that he can't divine the destination of.

"Where are we going next?" Yuuri asks. "From the camp, I mean. You have acquired the Nekolas' property, but surely you have one of your own, no? Are we travelling there?"

"Would you like to see it?" Victor asks back. "My family has been nobility for only two generations so we don't have much to our name. Or, that's how it used to be. With my powers, it seemed quite ungrateful to allow my parents to live in less than ostentatious luxury, but I myself have found that boredom is surer to find you when you have everything your heart desires at your beck and call. So I left my family home and decided to look for luck elsewhere."

"And that search brought you here, didn't it?" Yuuri ends for him.

Yuuri's voice sounds like he's smiling, but Victor can't be sure. He nods nonetheless, wishing he could see Yuuri's face to have a better understanding of what Yuuri might be feeling. He allows the horse to lead the way for a moment while he twists in his seat to send Yuuri a smile.

"Yes," Victor confirms. "It brought me right to you."

"Watch the road," Yuuri tells him, but there is a light flush on his cheeks and a smile on his lips, and Victor doesn't feel an ounce of shame when he steals a kiss from them before he turns back. "I think I'd like to see your family home... one day. For now, though, I think we will be better off getting to know each other. What do you say?"

"I think that's a splendid idea," Victor agrees. "I have promised to give the Nekolas time to leave the estate so that the renovations could be made – it was in poor state from what little I could see while I inspected the property before we finalised the transaction – but I believe that they should be completed by now. And if not, maybe we could mould it to our liking?"

"That sounds nice," Yuuri mumbles as his cheek rests on Victor's shoulder. His breath is warm against Victor's neck and it feels cosy. It feels nice. Victor sighs a quiet breath of delight. "Then we'll go there? And stay?"

"If that is what you wish."
"What I wish is for you to be selfish now." The words come as a surprise to Victor, but not an unpleasant one. It's softly spoken and barely heard over the noise of the hooves clicking on the ground, yet it sends Victor's heart straight into a gallop. "Be selfish, Vitya, and take me wherever you want to go."

Feeling playful wind tug at his hair and robes, Victor smiles to himself.

"If I could have my way, I would have you here, right now."

"Here?" Yuuri asks, laughter on his breath. "On the back of your horse?"

"You know very well that is not what I meant," Victor tells him, but his tone only makes Yuuri's shoulders shake with barely withheld amusement. "Is this what I get for baring my desires to you? Mockery and laughter?"

"If I didn't knew better, I would say you are sulking, my lord," Yuuri speaks into Victor's nape, his breath a caress against the soft hairs there. "Alas, I know better."

"My Yuuri is a cruel master," Victor sniffs. He turns his head the other way, nose up, and it calls another laugh from Yuuri's lips. "Didn't you allow me my turn at selfishness? Are you backing down on your word?"

"Not at all," Yuuri says calmly. "But that is only for after we get to camp. As it is now..."

Before Victor can grasp at what he is doing, Yuuri takes the reins out of Victor's hand and squeezes his thighs around the horse's sides while he leads it into a trot, then a canter, and finally a gallop down the winding forest path. Victor yelps at the unexpected change of pace and Yuuri's arms are the only thing that keeps him from sliding off the saddle.

There's a rush of blood in his ears and when Yuuri's laughter fills his heart, Victor can't help it either. He laughs, freedom and wind blowing in his face, and it's the most fun he remembers having during a ride in... what seems to be forever.

He bends over the horse's neck when they near a low hanging branch and he and Yuuri both duck under it while the horse carries them further into the forest. Yuuri uses that chance to rest a kiss on Victor's nape and it makes a tender flush bloom on Victor's cheeks. It's a happy one, too, and the grin that finds home on his face refuses to budge even when they reduce the pace to allow their four-legged companion some rest.

They must be a good half of the way there, but it still takes a few hours longer for them to emerge from within the tree line. Once they do, the camp is still a fair distance away, so they trade reins once more and Victor directs them towards the tents with the flaming sun insignia that gleam golden on the horizon.

"We should stay a day longer," Victor says as Yuuri wraps himself around him once more and presss his cheek to Victor's back. "You can rest and I will attend to all that's happened while I was gone."

"Whatever you wish," Yuuri tells him and it's a sweet promise that Victor takes to his heart. "I will be content by simply being there for you when you're done."

"You can't say things like that, my Yuuri," Victor whines. "I'd never want to leave you, if you do."

"Well," Yuuri says, lips a hot whisper against Victor's ear, "maybe that is what I want, my lord."

Shivers rushing down his spine, Victor doesn't even notice when they cross the camp border, but he
knows that as soon as they make it to his tent, they will not be leaving it till the morning.

Chapter End Notes

yuuri you sneak ;3c

also I’m sorry about unanswered comments today I need to run out for some errands but I will definitely answer tomorrow, I love you all <3
It feels like something out of a dream when Yuuri enters the camp for the second time in so many days. Unlike before, however, he isn't dragged by the scruff of his clothes to meet a noble lord who takes one look at him and promises to devour him alive. Now, Yuuri sits on the back of a horse behind that same noble lord, arms wrapped around him and face hidden in said lord's robes, while everyone that has stared at Yuuri with derision and pity struggles to swallow the bitter truth that makes Yuuri's chest hurt in possessiveness so delightful he shivers with it.

Victor is his.

And they all know it.

And they all envy him.

And Yuuri is thrilled by it.

His arms tighten around Victor's waist when they stop to speak to someone and the way Victor easily rests his palm above Yuuri's linked hands fills Yuuri with want. It must be some remnant of the wolf's instincts still raging from the full moon, he tries to convince himself while he fights the crude thing that tells him to forcefully grab a fistful of silver hair and turn Victor's attention back to where it belongs.

And where it belongs is with Yuuri.

Yuuri jumps off the horse as soon as they stop for good and before Victor has a chance to direct him, he steps into the tent he remembers so vividly. Nothing there has changed: the floors are carpeted with gold, walls threaded with it, furniture made of it; everything there is rich, shameless and golden. But it isn't Yuuri's aim to sightsee.

He waits, and true enough – Victor steps through the flap soon after him.

"What has you in such a rush, my–"

He isn't allowed to finish. Yuuri doesn't let him. He pulls him close and sets his lips against Victor's in a claiming kiss that Victor melts into despite the initial sound of surprise. It's a short fumble towards the chaise and they fall there in a heap of limbs and robes.

"Far be it for me to complain," Victor starts, short out of breath, "but what might have brought this on?"

Yuuri kisses him again, hard, before he replies. He's equally short of breath, but satisfaction shimmers under his skin at the sight of Victor's cheeks blossoming with pink.

"They were looking," Yuuri speaks against Victor's lips. He's unable to stop kissing them until they are red and swollen and a clear tell to anyone that Victor has been spoken for. "They were looking at us and they know."
"If it bothers you I can give an order to—"

Yuuri steals the rest of Victor's words straight off his tongue and swallows them along with the moan that rises up Victor's throat.

"Let them see," Yuuri asks. "Let them know. They will look at you, and they will look at me, and they will know that I'm the one who stole you away."

The little gasp Victor makes is a sweet sound against the possessiveness that brings Yuuri's lips against Victor's again. Yuuri kisses him hard, and then kisses him slow, and slower, softer, as the passion burns higher. He doesn't want to take Victor apart, nor does he want to lose all control. It's inherently hard, though, what with Victor calling his name between the kisses and sliding his hands all over Yuuri's body...

The sound of someone clearing their throat is what makes them part.

"I heard of your return, my lord," a man that stands near the entrance to the tent says, his gaze politely averted.

Yuuri quickly pushes himself off of Victor's lap, but Victor takes his time sitting up and rearranging his robes to hide the visible dent in his pants. It's Yuuri's cheeks that heat up at it, and they darken further when Victor gives him a smile and a wink.

"What has happened during my absence?" Victor asks.

The man stands straighter as he reports, "Everything is under control, my lord. No major incidents. We are running low on provisions, so if we are to stay longer we would have to send for more."

"No need," Victor says. "You may tell the men we will be departing within a day or two. Will the food last until then?"

"Yes, my lord, it should."

"Good," Victor nods. "Then for now you are dismissed, captain. I will find you later for a full report."

"Of course, my lord."

The man bows and turns on his heel. The flap of the tent waves in the gust he makes as he leaves, and only when they are left alone again Yuuri realizes the extent of the situation he has found himself in.

He is really doing this, he thinks, looking at Victor from the side.

It was easy to treat Victor as himself back in Yuuri's childhood home, since everyone was treated equally there, but here... here Victor is given the proper respect someone of noble blood deserves. Yuuri knows naught of the customs, procedures, he barely recalls the titles given to nobility. And now he is to spend his days at Lord Nikiforov's side, his ignorance and peasantry on full display?

Yuuri doesn't notice his hands shaking until Victor takes them both in his and brings them to his lips, which rest soft, tender kisses against Yuuri's worked knuckles. Warm light of gold shines in Victor's blue eyes, peaceful.

"I am so happy you're here with me, Yuuri," Victor says.
Despite his fears not having been amended in the least, Yuuri's trembling stops. Despite his worries that still churn at the back of his mind, his fingers aren't cold.

"I'm happy to be here with you as well," Yuuri says, and finds that he truly means it.

Chapter End Notes

40 chapters and 40k of this story holy sheet guys???? I'm so surprised by this you don't even understand
thank you for all your support, you rock <3
Yuuri excuses himself from a tour of the camp that Victor cheerfully offers in favour of resting. The full moon wasn't too long ago and while Yuuri is mostly recovered, there is a lingering ache in his body that makes itself known after so many hours spent on horseback. Victor doesn't say a word against Yuuri's choice, bless his heart. He only smiles and kisses Yuuri's hand before calling for supper.

He's sweet and he's kind, and Yuuri doesn't even fight a sigh at how deeply he appreciates Victor's comforting presence. It's a surprise to find it such, as much as it isn't. Somehow, being with Victor feels to Yuuri like being with a friend he has known for years. There is a connection there, a deep understanding between them that Yuuri can't truly put into words – so he doesn't. He allows it to be what it is, and accepts Victor's nature like Victor accepts his in return. For this moment, it's enough.

The sun is leaning down over the horizon when the servants scramble to fulfil Victor's wishes. The picture of power Victor presents as they all walk past him, bowing every time, is something Yuuri's gaze finds itself focused on until they are well and truly alone. Ordering people around comes effortless to Victor who was born into it, Yuuri takes note, but despite his title Victor is far from the image of a crude noble who strives only for riches and gain. Even a servant in Victor's camp is treated like a human being, with all the dignity and respect it entails, and Yuuri is happy to see that Victor is a man of a kind heart.

It's when the flap of the tent rests closed again that Victor takes his steps back to the chaise and gracefully drapes himself over Yuuri's side.

"We should eat," Yuuri reminds him.

The food is on the table before them. Various meats, fruit, bread, and wine. Yuuri isn't surprised to find peaches there as well, not after what Victor has told him about his unusual cravings. It all smells delightful and it takes only seconds for Yuuri's mouth to water simply from looking at it.

"Go ahead," Victor tells him almost like a ghost of their second first meeting. "Enjoy the food."

"You won't eat?" Yuuri asks.

He turns to gaze at Victor, who only shakes his head. The smile on his face is warm and encouraging.

"I'm not very hungry, I will have some later."

The only thing Victor has eaten all day was what Yuuri had himself – apples, bread and a few pieces of jerky. It was hardly filling, so Yuuri opens the pot that he knows must be filled with soup and pours some into a bowl. He tastes it for temperature before taking more onto the spoon and offering it to Victor. That seems to do the trick, because Victor's face goes slack in surprise, but lights up in a smile only a moment later. The change comes so fast that Yuuri doesn't have the time for the second thoughts to mull his head and make him doubt himself.

Victor opens his mouth and Yuuri carefully brings the spoon to his lips.
"You just keep surprising me, my Yuuri," Victor murmurs after he swallows. He licks his lips while Yuuri takes a piece of bread, soaks it in the soup and eats it.

"You always say that," Yuuri notes. "What is so surprising in me trying to care for you?"

Victor seems to be speechless for one precious moment, and then laughs quietly. He accepts another spoon of soup before he replies:

"That, in itself, is what is surprising."

When Yuuri only gives him a confused glance, Victor smiles a smile so sad, so lonely that Yuuri instantly regrets asking. He does not take his words back, though.

"No one has ever bothered before, you see. To care."

Yuuri takes a spoonful of soup himself to give Victor the space to talk if he wishes to without trying to prompt him into a confession he might not be ready for. If he isn't, Victor doesn't betray it, because he continues in a voice that holds no ill will to those he speaks of.

"My father never was a warm person, he only cared for my studies and accomplishments. My mother, on the other hand, only cared to clothe me in pretty things and parade me before others just so she could boast among the noble ladies."

Victor picks a peach from the tray and turns it around in his hand as if looking for invisible flaws, much like he must have been looked at by everyone before. Yuuri's heart aches for him. He knows that he would never be able to live under that kind of pressure, all those expectations... no.

"For some," Victor says, stroking a thumb over the delicate skin of the fruit, "that would be enough. For others, it is. But I... I always wanted to find that special kind of affection you read of in poetry, you see? It drew me in. Maybe it spoiled me, even. Made me wish for things that were never meant for me."

Victor smiles a strange smile that is more bitter than any Yuuri has seen on his face thus far. Yuuri can't stand looking at it, but he can't stand the thought of looking away from Victor in his time of utmost vulnerability, either.

"There is nothing wrong with wanting to be loved," Yuuri tells him gently.

"I know that," Victor nods. "In my head, I do know it. But in my heart... I can't help the doubts. All my life, I– Am I– Yuuri, please tell me truthfully, am I a person worthy of another's affection?"

Do I deserve this, Yuuri hears, and oh, he knows this question well. How many times has he asked it of himself? How many times has he thought it since Victor appeared in his life?

He smiles, a smile full of fondness and warmth, while he cups Victor's face.

"You deserve it," Yuuri says, force in his voice. "You do. All of it, and then some."

The look in Victor's eye is a doubtful one, and Yuuri squeezes his cheeks harder to make him focus. He brings their foreheads together, rests his nose against Victor's, and gazes in his blue eyes: deep, intimate, honest.

"You deserve it. And if you'll have me–"

The sharp breath Victor takes flutters across Yuuri's lips.
"Yes," Victor says before Yuuri is even done speaking. "Yes, yes, I will. Yuuri, yes!"

The soup grows cold in the forgotten bowl when they kiss and it isn't until they fall asleep in Victor's bed, surrounded by gold, warmth and soft pillows, that Yuuri remembers it, but by then it hardly matters anymore.

Chapter End Notes

I just want to wrap vitya in hugs ;u;

psa: I have a wedding (not mine) today so I might be late with the next chapter or it might be even a day late if the event runs later than I expect, sorry! feel free to read up on some of my other works in the meantime tho, if you're so inclined ^u^)b
Victor is gone when Yuuri awakens the next day. The place where his body was resting through the night is cold, so Yuuri ventures a guess that it has been quite some time since he left. For a precious moment, Yuuri indulges in the feeling of the soft bedding, the silky smooth rustle of sheets. It feels like... it feels like floating in the lake water: weightless. He almost gives into sleep once more, but his ears catch the unmistakable sound of shuffling, which is enough to chase any lingering comfort away from him and thrust him right into alertness.

He turns around and, indeed, there is someone walking around the tent. Someone that isn't Victor.

"Who are you?" Yuuri asks, sitting up and eyeing the stranger with caution.

The stranger jumps at his voice and turns around so fast they slip. Or maybe it's all part of a greeting that was premeditated all along, because once the young boy falls to his knees, he stays there and bows low in Yuuri's direction.

"Good morning, my lord," he says. "I was tasked with your comfort by Lord Nikiforov. He bids you a good day and apologizes that he was unable to be by your side in person, but urgent matters have called him away. He wishes for all your needs to be met, so if you have any, please command me as you will. My name is Ilia and it is a great honour to serve you, my lord."

Yuuri swallows the surprise and his nerves, and shifts closer to the edge of the bed. The sheets pull around his hips like a guard against the other and Yuuri can't help but feel grateful even for a comfort this small.

"I'm not, I'm not a lord," he says carefully. "You needn't bow to me, I'm just... I'm no one, really."

"That will not do, my lord," Ilia insists from where he remains prostrating. "Lord Nikiforov ordered to treat you with proper respect. All the servants have been warned."

The words serve to even further make Yuuri uncomfortable. He never wanted this. He never asked for this.

"At least, please, stand up," Yuuri pleads. "I have never, um, I've never had anyone bow to me and I have no title, no noble blood, so I would appreciate it if you didn't do that. We're equals."

"I cannot comply, my lord," Ilia repeats. He lifts from his bow, however. His face is young, younger than Yuuri's. He must be a boy, still, and Yuuri's discomfort spikes at the thought of someone barely out of boyhood already living in servitude. "Lord Nikiforov ordered to--"

"Where is he?" Yuuri interrupts him.

He looks around the tent as if he could spot Victor just by doing that, but everything is golden, golden, golden... and no silver in sight.

"I believe that Lord Nikiforov is at the stables," Ilia replies. "Or maybe still with the captain of the guard at the barracks, if the reporting ran overtime. Would you like me to send a message to him?"
Would he like to...

"No, no, that's, um, that is quite alright," Yuuri says. "Thank you."

Silence falls between them, heavy, oppressive. Yuuri can hear his own uneven heartbeat in the quiet of it all. Ilia is looking at him, but not directly, no. His gaze remains locked around Yuuri's collarbones, but never ventures higher than that and never, never into his own eyes.

It's unnerving.

"Would you like me to fetch food, my lord? Water, to freshen up?" Ilia offers after a moment of staring.

"That would be..." Yuuri's voice breaks, so he clears his throat and settles for the easier one: "Yes. Please."

"Right away, my lord."

Ilia bows down once more and gracefully gathers himself off the floor. It's only when the flap of the tent closes after him and Yuuri is truly left alone that Yuuri feels like he can breathe again. He slumps against the golden pillows, hides his face in his hands and rolls around the bed while a sound of unknown nature makes it out of his throat.

He was not born for riches, he was not born for servants. It's obvious to him, but to Victor who has always lived this way it must be a way to ease Yuuri's life, except... Yuuri would much rather wake up with Victor than a servant, would make his own food rather than have it prepared for him by servants, would choose to dress himself, press his clothes, wash them if need be, all by himself. It is what he is used to, it is what he has always done at home, yet–

Yuuri looks around at all the gold, all the shine and wealth, and he knows.

He isn't home.

He should let go of the habits of youth and grow into this: with all its splendour, all its dazzle, all its gold.

The flap of the tent opens and Yuuri twitches in surprise when Ilia and two others enter, bow low and set to work, because no matter what Yuuri tells himself, there is a feeling in his gut that speaks louder than his words can. What it says, in a voice that knows no compassion, is that growing into this will be harder than facing Victor after the full moon.

However, harder, does not mean impossible.

Yuuri latches onto that hope and stands from the bed, accepting a robe from Ilia. Harder simply means that he will have to put more effort into it and that, that Yuuri thinks he can do. Especially if Victor is there to help him through it.

As if the thought itself brought him back, Victor steps into the tent and the smile that blooms on his face at the sight of Yuuri is everything Yuuri could've wished for. He smiles back, and knows that things will be well.

Chapter End Notes
I'm barely awake and the wedding was a disaster, but here's a new chapter. I want to die.
Victor steps into the tent to find Yuuri already risen and being tended to. It brings a smile to his lips. A little one, because the discomfort is clear on Yuuri like the sky above their heads is cloudless, and for one breath Victor fears that he might have overstepped. It all eases at once, the discomfort, the fear, when Yuuri catches a glimpse of Victor and he smiles.

It's precious, oh so precious. Victor's heart flutters in his chest, young and merry.

He smiles back, more than appreciative of the gold Ilia chose to drape Yuuri in. It looks stunning against Yuuri's skin, plays perfectly with Yuuri's hair, and brings out the warmth from the very depths of Yuuri's eyes. He is truly a vision of unparalleled beauty and Victor wants to bathe him in all things golden for the rest of his life, or as long as Yuuri allows him.

"I apologize for returning so late," Victor says to Yuuri, taking his hand and resting a kiss against his knuckles in greeting.

A flush tints Yuuri's cheeks pink at the gesture. It always does, Victor remembers, and he can't hold back the admiration from his gaze. If possible, Yuuri's face turns even more pink and the sight of it is so stunning that Victor almost forgets his next words. He has to swallow the hopeless urge to rest his lips against the reddened skin, since they aren't alone and he doesn't wish to embarrass Yuuri further, but it comes with a heavy sigh of yearning.

"There were many things to attend to after my absence," Victor explains. He steps back to allow Yuuri to finish dressing, yet he can hardly take his eyes away from him – it seems like Yuuri has become even more beautiful during Victor's short absence. "I trust that Ilia met all your needs?"

"You know I don't need much," Yuuri tells him, but he is smiling, so Victor doesn't feel appropriately chided. "I would like to have you by my side when I awaken, but alas... You have duties that I cannot keep you away from."

Victor makes a conflicted sound. He would've more than loved that, too. It was with a bleeding heart that he left Yuuri alone that morning and he hoped to return before Yuuri has risen, but he has been away from camp for too long. Being a lord required more than simply carrying the title, yet Victor hasn't noticed before how much until he has been pulled away from the one place he wished to never leave.

"It won't make up for my absence, but I do have a gift for you," Victor says just when Ilia finishes draping the fabric of the golden outer robe around Yuuri's shoulders. The servant bows low to Yuuri, then Victor, and steps away.

"You may go," Victor tells him quickly.

He doesn't even look away from Yuuri: he can't. The short time he has not seen him seems to have made Yuuri more stunning than Victor remembered.

"Have you eaten yet?" Victor asks and when Yuuri nods, Victor's face splits into a smile. "Good. I can show you the gift now, come along!"
He leads Yuuri out, pressed to his side. They walk through the camp and Yuuri... he shines. Victor can see it in the turn of heads that follow after them, in the gazes that smart the back of his neck.

It's jealousy, he knows. It's curiosity, he feels. It's everything that makes his heart beat faster with the joy of the knowledge that Yuuri is admired and envied, because he should be: he's a god amongst mortals and now they all can see it.

Spring in his steps, Victor walks Yuuri down to the stables. He signals the stable boy with a hand and the flap of the tent is drawn for them to step through.

"What is this gift, Vitya?" Yuuri asks, voice low so only Victor can hear him. "I have already told you that I don't need any of your gold--"

"You will need this," Victor interrupts him. "And I think you'll like it. Please, let me? I want to spoil you, my Yuuri, as much as you have spoiled me with your kindness these past days."

Yuuri's eyelids lower and a faint pink takes to his cheeks. He squeezes Victor's arm once.

"Very well," he agrees. "But if I think it's too much, you will never gift me anything like that again."

"Whatever your wish, my Yuuri, I will gladly comply," Victor vows.

They enter the camp stables to the sound of horse snorting. The air inside smells of fresh straw and manure, but neither of them comments on it. Victor leads Yuuri to one of the pens in the far back, where his own horse is held – a great gelding of pure blood and melancholic temper, appropriately named Tristan. The horse gives a soft huff when Victor clicks his tongue at him in greeting. Victor pets Tristan's head with a little chuckle and before they can get distracted, Victor directs Yuuri to the pen opposite of Tristan.

It belongs to a stallion black in colour and fiery in temper, whom none of his men could tame. Victor knows it might not take to Yuuri either and thus be unfit as a gift, but if there is anything he's learned about Yuuri until now it's that he can charm anyone with his gentle smile.

"This is the gift I wish to offer you," Victor says. "Alas, only if you want him, and only if he accepts you. I would hate to see you get hurt."

"Oh..."

It's love at first glance, Victor thinks as he turns to gaze at Yuuri's face. Yuuri's eyes are trained on the horse's mane and they shine, they shine better than any gold Victor has seen. A flush makes a home on Yuuri's face, but it is one of excitement now, one of breathless expectation. Victor can't help feeling such when Yuuri looks at him and asks:

"Has he been tamed yet?"

"No," Victor replies. "No one was capable of it. Do you wish to--"

"Yes!" Yuuri's hand squeezes Victor's hard. The smile and eager brown eyes turn on him and Victor's heart swells in his chest at the sheer power of the sight before him. "Yes, yes, I do! Can I?"

"Of course," Victor agrees, because how can he deny Yuuri anything when everything he already owns, along with his body and soul, already belongs to him?
what better way to lift someone's mood than to offer them a gift? idk I'm cheap like that sorry
The stable boy struggles with guiding the horse out of the pen. The stallion is as Victor has seen him many times: unruly, stubborn, irate. The slick tail whips back and forth and the hooves pound the ground as he resists the pull on the reins. There is a moment when he rears back and kicks his front legs out, so aggressive and unwilling to go, that Victor wonders if this isn't a mistake in the making.

People gather around them. It is already the habit of everyone at camp to watch new challengers who dare brave the odds to break the stallion's steel will. Many have tried and many have failed, so much that Victor has promised to gift the steed to any who succeeds.

He has hopes for Yuuri, yes, high, high hopes that are based on Yuuri's perfect control of Tristan during their ride the previous day, but even those hopes pale in the face of the fear that overtakes him at the sight of the bucking animal before them. Far be it for him to be glad of delivering Yuuri right into the hands of danger.

"Are you certain you wish to try?" Victor asks, but Yuuri's eyes remain on the prize. He is positively charmed and Victor can do little else but watch him with a heart that steadily grows heavier.

"I do," Yuuri replies. "He seems like a spirited fellow. I quite like him."

Yuuri sends Victor a smile, yet something of his worry must show on Victor's face, for the smile slides off Yuuri's lips like it was never there in the first place. Yuuri steps closer to him, takes his hand and squeezes Victor's fingers in a comforting manner that does nothing to ease Victor's fears.

"If you don't wish me to try, then I won't," Yuuri offers. "Just say the word, Vitya."

It is a sweet gesture that Victor wishes he could accept. But Yuuri wants this, Victor knows, so he simply shakes his head and gives Yuuri a small smile, albeit a nervous one.

"No, no, please. Do go on, try your hand at it." He squeezes Yuuri's fingers in return as if he was trying to send him courage through it, but in truth he is the one who steals comfort right from Yuuri's warm touch. "Just promise me, you will be careful, my Yuuri. I would hate to see you hurt."

"I'll watch myself, you have my word," Yuuri vows.

With one last squeeze to Victor's hand, he lets go and walks up to the stable boy who is barely able to keep hold of the irate stallion. As if he sensed a new adversary, the horse stops his bucking. He stares Yuuri in the eye, even when Yuuri steps close, and Victor's heart rises into his throat with the anticipation of what is to come.

Yuuri hops onto the saddle like he was born for it. He takes the reins in hand and finds his balance while the stallion pads impatiently in place. It's going well, Victor sees, but before he can finish the hopeful thought that maybe Yuuri will do well–

The stallion bolts.

Victor can only watch as the black nightmare carries away, the gold threads of Yuuri's robe gleaming
in the sunlight. He gives a surprised gasp and takes a step to follow, an order to bring out Tristan on his lips. Shouts sound all around as Yuuri races through the camp. He looks like he is barely holding on in the saddle, but it isn't long before he isn't; he is sitting high and proud and his heels are ebbed into the smooth stomach of the stallion in a picture of power.

Steady hands pull on the reins and Yuuri veers around to make his return. The horse goes as directed and for a moment Victor thinks Yuuri has done it. It comes to a halt when the hooves rake into the ground and the stallion kicks his hind legs up to try to throw the rider off. Yuuri leans precariously close to the black neck, but he stays in the saddle to the whistles and cheers of the gathered men.

Victor's own hands clasp together in fear, excitement and awe, while his mouth hangs open in admiration. This is the man he chose, the man he has picked to be with, and the heart that has done the choosing is now fluttering in his chest like a dozen butterflies that have found the nectar of the gods in a lone flower among so many others.

The stallion kicks once more before he gives up and jumps into a canter back towards the stables. Yuuri pulls him to a stop, but the stop is another surprise: the animal rears its head and kicks off with his front legs this time.

Yuuri stays in the saddle through it all.

With batted breath, Victor thinks of the strength it must require, of the strain on Yuuri's thighs. To keep atop a steed so wild, so untamed... It isn't the sun that bears with a hot flash down on Victor's body, yet he can hardly complain, because Yuuri looks stunning the way he is.

His hair is blown with wind and his robes are askew, but his cheeks are glowing with a flush that matches the radiant smile he sends Victor when he brings the stallion to a stop.

"I did great, didn't I?" Yuuri asks.

Words are not enough to tell Yuuri what Victor wants to tell him, and what that is he doesn't even know himself. His chest feels full, his heart beats fast, and his breath is short, but the world is filled with so much clarity and colour, so much beauty and warmth that Victor doesn't hesitate for one second to open his arms and accept Yuuri when he slides into them right off the saddle.

He kisses him then, stealing a soft laugh off Yuuri's lips and keeping it to himself, while cheers sound all around them.

"You did it," Victor says as he gazes deep into Yuuri's molten eyes. "He's yours."

"Really?" Yuuri asks, soft awe on his face.

A smile matching it spreads on Victor's own. "If you want him."

"I do, thank you!" Yuuri says, honest and vibrant, and he leans in to kiss Victor's lips, which Victor accepts more than gladly. "I can't thank you enough. I'm so lucky you've picked me."

Victor laughs, breathless as he is, and kisses Yuuri again, because truly – he's the lucky one.
some of you guys mentioned the little fuckup I made yesterday (using mere for a male horse) and jfc you're so right and I'm ashamed of myself and I'm sorry and I'll fix it all asap fhchygjbhjn THANK YOU FOR POINTING IT OUT rip me

anyway, hope yall enjoyed vitya being thirsty as always <3
Yuuri spends the rest of the morning in the saddle, but Victor doesn't mind watching him. He smiles every time Yuuri turns his head his way and offers sweet kisses when Yuuri brings the stallion around for water. The sheen of sweat glistens on the steed's sides as well as on Yuuri's face, but in Victor's eyes it makes them both even more beautiful.

It's during one of those times that Victor asks: "Do you wish to ride him tomorrow when we leave?"

"Can I?" Yuuri asks back. He smiles softly when Victor nods his agreement. "That would be lovely."

"Quite a pair we will make," Victor continues, amused. "Me on Tristan, white and silver, and you and this one, black and mysterious."

"There's nothing mysterious about me, my lord," Yuuri replies humbly, even if his eyes twinkle joyfully. "You've seen all there is to me. I'm simply a son of a shepherd, nothing more."

What Victor knows by now, however, is the opposite of that. There is not a thing common in the slope of Yuuri's nose, in the cut of his cheekbones, or the line of his jaw. Not a thing common in his silky hair either, nor in the brown of his eyes that is scattered with a dusting of gold and red alike. In character, Yuuri seems shy at first, sweet at second, but once you know him truly, like Victor begins to – Yuuri is far from an innocent boy he thinks himself to be.

He did steal Victor's heart and has yet to return it, after all.

Not that Victor ever wants it back, no. Yuuri can keep it for as long as he wishes to, and even longer, still – Victor is glad to afford him that.

He voices none of his musings, though. Only a small smile on his lips betrays him, but when Yuuri catches it and his gaze flicks down to Victor's lips, the smile morphs into something truer, less crafty.

"Have you thought of the name for him yet?" Victor asks instead, nodding his chin at the black stallion.

"He doesn't have one?"

"The honour was to be awarded to the one who tamed him," Victor explains. "And since that person is you, it is your right to give him a name of your choosing."

Yuuri hums in thought as his eye returns to the steed. A minute passes, then another, before Yuuri finally takes a breath and speaks in a voice that brims with embarrassment:

"I don't know what I should name him." He looks to Victor, eyes pleading. "Could you maybe suggest a name that would fit him? Something with meaning and grace, and fiery spirit, perhaps?"

"Of course, my Yuuri," Victor smiles. "It's an honour to assist you, never think otherwise. Let us see then... I am fond of the names of old, much like Tristan himself was named after such a personage. In
that manner, Galehaut seems to befit the temper of your steed, but alas, the end he has suffered was
not a pleasant one, so it would not bode well. Lancelot was the object of Galehaut's affection, yet
what fits in the name might not fit in character, so I wouldn't pick that either." Yuuri nods along,
although his face remains blank in confusion. "There was also Gaheris, Percival and Bedivere, but
alas, none of them seem to be right."

Victor taps his lips in thought as he tries to recall more names. As suddenly as he does, his breath
hitches in a gasp.

"Oh! I remember! Lamorak!"

"Lamorak?" Yuuri repeats as if tasting the word on his tongue.

"He was known for his strength and his fiery disposition, and it is said that he has fought over thirty
men at once!" Victor explains. "While it may not be as many, your steed has had his own share of
winnings over many men thus far. I think he will wear the name with honour, if you choose it."

"Lamorak," Yuuri says again, running a hand through the horse's mane. The animal snorts and shifts
away from his hand as if to coldly turn him away. It works not, for Yuuri only grins at such
behaviour and nods: "I like it."

He turns to Victor only to smile at him in a much more mellow, much sweeter way.

"Thank you."

"Anything for you, my Yuuri," Victor smiles back.

His eye catches the captain of his guard standing a few steps away and he knows that his blissful
time is over. With a sigh, Victor takes Yuuri's hand, wraps it in his and presses his lips to the
knuckles that smell of leather and oil.

"I wish I could stay with you the entire day, but alas, I'm required to fulfil my duties." He gives a sad
smile that Yuuri touches with a thumb. "Have fun, my dear, and return to the tent for supper. I will
be there, if you need anything, so please, don't hesitate to seek me out."

Yuuri trills a laugh at the clear plea in Victor's voice. He leans close and rests a kiss against Victor's
smiling cheek – it's tender and soft, and Victor's face tints pink even if he is not sure as to why.

"I will never disturb you at work, my lord," Yuuri says. His eyes gleam in the afternoon sun like
gemstones. "You seem to enjoy it too much. I wouldn't dare break your focus, lest your wrath falls
upon me. What would a lowly shepherd's son like me do if he falls into disfavour?"

Gasping at the sheer joy of having Yuuri tease him, of all things, Victor touches a hand to his heart
that is now trembling in his chest as if it wants to fly straight into Yuuri's arms. And Victor knows he
would follow it in seconds.

"My Yuuri is a cruel master," Victor decides, pretend hurt in his voice, but neither can he help his
smile, nor can Yuuri keep his own from showing. "I shall leave you to your pleasures then, and
suffer my accursed fate in the loneliness of my own company."

He sweeps into a bow that elicits a lovely giggle from Yuuri's lips, and once they share a final glance
Victor is ready to leave. Yuuri seems to have other plans, however, for he sneaks one more kiss onto
Victor's lips, and then another, and one more that leaves Victor with batted breath, awaiting another
soft touch–
–which never comes.

He opens his eyes to see Yuuri jumping into Lamorak's saddle and then he rides away with Victor's heart, dignity and reason tucked into a sleeve of his golden robe. Dazed, but smiling, Victor turns on his heel.

He isn't sure which deity he has been blessed by, but as he lifts his face to the sky and the warm light shines upon him, he is more than grateful for what they have given him.

Chapter End Notes

did you know I love my sweet boys
and also teasing Yuuri bc that is A Good™

oh, oh, ohhhhh!!! I keep forgetting to mention it holy sheet but if yall love soft boys being all silly and adorable, you should go and support @softviktorzine in which I have a little piece that will melt your heart <3 the physical copies are all sold out already, but the pdf sale is still on until may 15th!! if you have $10 to spare, please consider supporting this project bc I swear it's worth it, the softness is overwhelming ahhh!!! <3 <3 <3
With the wind in his ears and the even rhythm Lamorak has taken, Yuuri almost feels like he does during the full moon: his senses awaken, the heart hastens its beating, and the instincts push him farther, faster, more. The only thing that differs is the lack of searing pain and the gentle touch of sunlight on the back of his head, almost like a caress that keeps him from slipping into the mindset of an animal.

Alas, Yuuri feels free.

He cares little for the eyes of others that follow him as he rides through the camp, around it, back to the stables, and again. Lamorak goes at a pace that makes the sweat on his dark body gleam in the sunlight and gather into foam at the juncture of his legs. It's impossible for Yuuri to see the faces of the people watching them, so quickly they pass. They're a blur, a mass of colour that slides past him too quickly to notice, but he prefers it that way – out of sight, out of mind, as his mother is used to saying.

The dusk is turning the world into a sea of flames with its final glow when Yuuri finally veers Lamorak back into the stables for good. The stallion listens to him without any of his initial resistance. It seems to have melted away under Yuuri's direction and now as Yuuri jumps off the saddle and pats the thick, proud neck in appreciation of Lamorak's spirit, he gets a faceful of a smelly breath in return for his trouble.

Chuckling, Yuuri leads Lamorak back into his pen.

"Are you finished, my lord?" The stable boy finds him as soon as Yuuri lifts the leather saddle from Lamorak's back. "Please, allow me to do this. You should not trouble yourself with tasks like this."

"I don't mind," Yuuri replies with a smile. He grabs some straw and, despite the protests of the boy, begins to clean the heaving sides of the stallion. "If you wish to make yourself useful, you could bring me some water to wash off afterwards. And some for Lamorak."

"Lamorak, my lord?" the boy asks, and Yuuri smiles.

"This one," he says as he pats Lamorak's neck again. "Apparently it's a name for someone of great strength and fiery temper. Lord Nikiforov believes it fits, what do you think?"

"I think it's perfect, my lord," the boys says, returning Yuuri's smile. "A fitting name, for certain. Lord Nikiforov made a great choice. As did you."

Yuuri gives a thoughtful noise. He isn't sure what he has done to deserve it, but he can see the respect in this young boy's eyes. The boy's hair is yellow, not much different from the straw that Yuuri is using to cleanse Lamorak of sweat, and is mussed as if he was sleeping in the straw more than in his own bed.

"Say, how many people have tried to tame him?" Yuuri asks out of sheer curiosity.

"Oh, probably everyone at camp! Us, stable boys, were first, since we always ride the horses when
they are freshly bought or untamed so that the lord or lady it belongs to doesn't get injured. But this one was a stubborn fellow. He even bit me!"

The boy laughs and proudly shows Yuuri a little scar on the side of his arm. It's pale now, but Yuuri has no trouble imagining the pain it must have brought while fresh.

"None of us could get him to behave, so the guards tried next. Lord Nikiforov promised to reward the person who succeeds, so there were many challengers, yet none of them were able to do it. No one until you, my lord."

Yuuri's mouth opens in surprise. Has he really done something that impressive?

"You were really incredible, too!" the boy exclaims, eyes alight. "Even when the horse was bucking, you didn't fall off! And that speed! You were as fast as the wind, I swear on my soul!"

"Really?" Yuuri asks.

His cheeks sting with a faint flush that he is certain must cover his entire face by now. The pure admiration in the young boy's expression is something Yuuri has never been on the receiving side of. It's new, and the level of attention that is brought to him because of it does not make Yuuri comfortable, but... he doesn't hate it as much as he has believed he would.

"I saw it all with my own eyes!" The boy leans over the wall of the pen, eager and honest. "Forgive me for being so forward, but... are you staying with us for long, my lord?"

"I believe so," Yuuri replies, glad of the change in subject. "At least for as long as Lord Nikiforov can stand my presence."

"His lordship is smitten with you, my lord, everyone could see that. I'm certain you have nothing to fear."

There is a level of surety in the boy's voice that makes Yuuri look at him longer than was probably proper. It must have unnerved him, too, for the boy flushes and squeaks, as if caught at something he was not supposed to be doing.

"I'm so sorry, my lord, I did not mean to gossip! People always tell me that my honesty will one day get me in trouble. I never meant any offence, I swear on my life! Please, do not punish me for my loose tongue!"

Before the boy can fall to his knees and grovel, Yuuri lifts a hand.

"It's alright, it's alright," he says hastily, swallowing his own nerves at the thought of punishing someone.

He would never, but none of the people here at camp knew that: they only saw him as their lord's companion, who could take their lives with one nod of his head.

"I took no offence, you needn't worry," Yuuri assures. "Besides, I'm no lord. I hold no power over you."

"But you do have Lord Nikiforov's ear, my lord," the boy injects. "That is more power than the rest of us will have in their entire lives."

Yuuri stares at the boy for a moment, because his words echo Yuuri's thoughts perfectly.
"What's your name?" Yuuri finally asks.

"Kenjirou, my lord," the boy quickly answers. "But everyone calls me Ken."

Yuuri smiles at the slight tremble in the boy's voice. He pauses in his task and walks up to the boy and ruffles the yellow head of hair with his clean hand. At the incredulous, awed gaze that Kenjirou lifts at him, Yuuri can't help but laugh a little.

"I was just like you not even a week ago," Yuuri tells him. "A simple shepherd's son, nothing more. Don't believe that your fate is set in stone, because it's your own fate and you decide where it leads you."

The boy stares at him, breathless and so full of that youthful wonder that Yuuri chuckles again.

"Now, what happened to that water you promised me?" he grins, and grins wider when Kenjirou scrambles around, almost tripping over his own feet, before he finds his bearings and runs out of the stables to fetch what Yuuri has asked for.

In light spirits, and even lighter outlook into the coming future, Yuuri returns to his work, because he may have Lord Nikiforov's ear, but in the end he is only himself – he is just Yuuri, a shepherd's son who still can't believe how lucky he is to be here.

Chapter End Notes

some of you wondered about the reactions of those watching yuuri, well... you can bet your asses they were as smitten as vitya ;3c

just a little psa or a warning to all bc wow some ppl are rude af: please stay nice in the comment section? I very much appreciate that you're enjoying this story but shitting on other writers while praising me isn't actually a compliment so um? be kinder to writers, I guess is what I want to say bc they don't owe you anything and they write in their free time and base their writing on the inspiration that comes and goes and if it goes don't be an entitled piece of shit and appreciate what your writers give you instead of demanding what you want -- if you want something written, WRITE IT YOURSELF GDI

to the rest of yall: I love you, you're awesome <3
Victor sits at the large table by the tent wall, surrounded by what must be the commanders of his guard, and he looks like a royal hard at work. His brow is furrowed and he holds a finger to his lips, deep in thought. Blue eyes travel through the writing he is inspecting faster than Yuuri has ever read, faster than he would ever be capable. Victor's hair, which he must have slid behind his ear at some point, slips its confines and spills forward into his face like strands of spider's web, delicate and light.

He's focused and beautiful, and when he lifts his head once Yuuri enters the tent, he smiles as bright as the sun that is setting behind Yuuri's back.

"Please, don't mind me," Yuuri lifts a hand when Victor moves to stand. "I'd hate to interrupt anything important."

"You never interrupt, my dear," Victor croons at him, but he returns to whatever it is he's working on.

Yuuri crosses the tent to the area hidden behind a golden curtain. He can still hear every word of the conversation, but he doesn't follow it. It is of no interest to him, so he chooses to rest before supper. He sheds his outer robe and rests it on the chest of clothes that sits at the foot of the bed. In only a tunic of white cotton, he slumps onto the bed. The cover, which is sewn with pearls of gold, glimmers in the light of the candles when Yuuri shifts and it's like a small scattering of stars in broad daylight that dances across the tent walls.

It's pretty.

Everything here is.

Yuuri sighs, rolls onto his stomach and rubs his cheek against the soft fabric. It's a life like he hasn't known before, but a life he wouldn't mind getting accustomed to as well. Horse riding, silky bedding, meat for breakfast, midday meal, supper without having to hunt for it... No, Yuuri does not hate it at all.

He almost falls asleep, lulled by Victor's voice speaking to his men, but before he notices that he is, there are feet shuffling over golden carpets and, soon, a warm hand rests on the small of his back.

"Yuuri," Victor's voice caresses Yuuri's ear. "Did you fall asleep?"

Yuuri gives a tiny tired moan. "No. But I could."

He lifts an arm, wraps it around Victor's waist and pulls him onto the golden sheets. Victor's hair splays over the fabric, silver and soft. There is a look in Victor's eyes, one that makes Yuuri's lips quirk in an undeniably affectionate smile.

"Did you finish what you had to finish?" Yuuri asks.

"I did," Victor confirms. "How is Lamorak?"
"Good. I think we'll get along quite well."

Victor smiles at that, a mirror of Yuuri's own smile that refuses to leave his face.

"I knew you had it in you."

"Did you, now?" Yuuri teases, sleepy as he is. "Because from what I recall, you were rather worried for my wellbeing and tried to dissuade me from it."

"That was only because I've seen so many fail," Victor injects. "I have full trust in your skill, my Yuuri. Would I have offered, if I thought any less of you? If I believed that you are any less than I think you to be?"

No, no he wouldn't have. Yuuri smiles at that, genuine. And before he can think twice, he leans closer and slants his lips against Victor's in a little kiss.

"Thank you," he says. "For believing in me."

It's always a miracle at work when Yuuri gets to observe the change in Victor's face: how the blue of his eyes lights up like freshly-fallen, sparkling snow, how the bridge of his nose and the high points of his cheeks dip into pink like the sky when the sun slopes over the horizon, or how his lips quirk in the shape of a heart, so lovely, so sweet, so--

Yuuri kisses them again, and Victor gives into it like it's all he's been put on this world to do.

"You were magnificent today, did I tell you?" Victor whispers with those lips of his right against Yuuri's. His hand settles on the side of Yuuri's neck, where his thumb strokes along the line of Yuuri's jaw. It's grounding, as much as it isn't. "Seemed to me like you were born to ride, born to have the wind blow in your hair and people worship you from afar."

"Hardly," Yuuri snorts a laugh, but Victor's face remains serious.

He leans over Yuuri and the gold of the tent reflects the light of the candles in a way that frames his head in a halo. Victor's face is shadowed by it, but his eyes are bright, focused, brilliant... and more than honest.

"You're beautiful, Yuuri," he says. "And people see it. I wish you could see it as well."

Swallowing hard against the rawness that suddenly scrapes at his throat, Yuuri can't deny being caught off guard.

"Help me see it?" he asks.

The tender smile Victor that shines down on him, and the soft kisses he presses to Yuuri's forehead, nose, and lips are enough of a reply, but Victor follows all of it with words, still, as if he knows that Yuuri will have trouble believing him otherwise.

"I will," Victor promises. "For the rest of my life, if need be."

The way Yuuri's heart stops and jumps back into erratic happiness only a second after plays second fiddle to the tearful smile that Victor kisses off his face.
you know what, I keep forgetting the fic timeline bc it's been almost 50 chapters but...
they've known each other for like 2 weeks tops ya know LOOK AT THEM
SPEWING LOVE CONFESSIONS LEFT AND RIGHT WHAT THE F I can't write slowburn lmao rip
"We shall leave at dawn," Victor says as they sup. "There is a good two days ride between us and the Nekola estate, what with the carts slowing us down measurably, so we need to utilize as much of the daylight as we can."

As he says, they do.

The world is still dark when they rise, and it is still dark when they leave the tent. Servants rush past them, loading everything onto the carts that stretch as far as Yuuri's eye can see. Among the hustle, they make their way to the stables where Tristan greets them with a soft nicker, but Lamorak ignores their presence until Yuuri steps into his pen and begins to saddle him. He acknowledges Yuuri only with one dark eye that glares at Yuuri as if searching for any weakness in character, but Yuuri doesn't hesitate in his work. That would only provoke another test of strength between them and it isn't the time for it, Yuuri knows.

"He seems to have taken to you," Victor says.

Yuuri thinks he means Lamorak and turns to smile at Victor, but once he does he notes that Victor's gaze is trained on Kenjirou instead. The boy has flushed upon their entering and bowed low to Yuuri even before he acknowledged Victor's presence at all.

Yuuri himself can feel a flush come onto his cheeks at the memory of it.

"I'm not certain why," he says. "But I don't mind his vigour. He's young and excitable, that much is true, but somehow it's refreshing to be around him."

Victor hums at that. "I can't blame the boy for his affections. He is right to admire, because there is a lot to find utterly irresistible about you, my Yuuri."

"Stop that," Yuuri tells him, heat on his cheeks. "He's only a boy. When I was his age I didn't even know what love was, much less be interested in finding it. Especially with men that much older than me."

"Oh?" Victor turns to Yuuri from where he was observing the saddling of Tristan. His blue eyes sparkle over the pen wall and Yuuri can tell that he will be teased before Victor even opens his mouth. "I would much enjoy hearing about your first affairs, if you wish to share. I can tell you about mine, as well. You see, the first time I--"

Yuuri makes a choked sound before words tumble from his lips in a stream of denial.

"No, no, no, I don't wish to know!" he says quickly. "Please. It's unnecessary, my lord. It is a matter of the past, so let us leave it to rest there."

Yuuri steps away from Lamorak and takes one of Victor's hands over the wall. He slots his fingers between Victor's. They align as if they were sculpted to fit, but Victor's are pale, light, unblemished, while Yuuri's are darker, worked, thicker as well. Yuuri squeezes Victor's hand and gives him a smile that finds its mirror on Victor's lips.
"Is it something that could change what we have?" Yuuri questions. "Because I don't believe it will. You are yourself, and I am myself. My Vitya, your Yuuri, no?"

Victor's face lights up like the sun itself. Yuuri remembers when he called him the moon, but there is more of the bright light of the sun, warm and healing, in Victor now – he's glowing with it when he pulls Yuuri closer to the pen wall by their joined hands.

"Your Vitya, I like the sound of that," he whispers as his forehead gently touches Yuuri's.

"I thought you might," Yuuri admits, just as softly.

They would probably share a kiss, maybe more than one, but a squeak somewhere to the side makes them break apart. It's Kenjirou, Yuuri notices by the flushing face of the boy, who has his hands thrown over his eyes, but still peeks between his fingers at the sight before him. He squeaks again when both Yuuri and Victor turn their attention to him.

"I– I apologize, my lords, I did not mean to interrupt," he rushes to say, bowing low once, twice, every other word. "Tristan is ready, and Lord Orlov has requested your presence, my lord. It's important, he said."

Victor gives a sigh as if Lord Orlov has done him a great disservice. He lifts Yuuri's hand and kisses the palm of it. Warmth spills over the spot and reaches all the way to Yuuri's heart in a wave so pleasant Yuuri almost sighs with it. He smiles and nods instead: there is no need to ask or give permission here, they both know.

"Will you keep an eye on Tristan until I return?" Victor asks.

"Of course," Yuuri smiles.

With a final squeeze to his fingers, Victor lets go and leaves from where they came. Watching as his back disappears, Yuuri can't help the thought that being a noble, being a lord, so someone that many other lives depend and count on to make sound and fair judgements, seems not to be as easy as the drunkards at the town's tavern make it out to be. It's hard work and moments of pleasure stolen away, interrupted, but all the more fulfilling for their fleeting nature.

Yuuri's eye catches the slack-jawed look on Kenjirou's face as he turns around to Lamorak. He smiles kindly, mainly to tell the boy that he did nothing wrong, but it has the opposite effect: Kenjirou only blushes harder in his flustered state.

"I'm sorry for the intrusion, my lord, please forgive me!"

And he runs away, fast enough to leave Yuuri blinking in surprise. The last thing Yuuri notes is the flush covering the back of the boy's neck and he chuckles to himself, because he might not have been interested in love at Kenjirou's age, but from that reaction he knows that it will be different for this stable boy.

Yuuri only hopes that his first love will be kinder than his own was to him.
ycyuhbn guys oh my god I'm sobbing bc I'm busy today and can't answer comments but WE'VE HIT 50K WORDS ON THIS STORY AINT THAT AMAZING???? AHHHH I'M SHOOKETH

I'm also doing some planning for the relationship/family tree side of the story and can I just tell yall that I hate how fucking aristocrats interbreed like the idiots they are bc EVERYONE is related to EVERYONE and I just want to eat a brick thanks
In his golden saddle, with golden reins in hand and golden robes draping over the back of his white horse, Victor looks like Helios himself – the god of the sun come to earth to awe and fill hearts with blind worship. Seated by his side, Yuuri is resolved to commit his body, heart, and soul to him, should he ask.

Not that Victor would ever, humble and kind as he is.

Yuuri smiles to himself at the thought just as Victor raises his voice to announce their departure. The sound of horns resonates in the air long and hard while Yuuri tries to hide the fondness in his gaze, because he is certain it will lead to questions for which Yuuri knows not the answers.

He is too clumsy at it, however. Victor turns his head to him at the most inopportune moment and captures the look that Yuuri is giving him. Softness overtakes Victor's expression like sunlight does to darkness and he guides Tristan into step with Lamorak.

"What are you thinking, my Yuuri?" Victor asks like Yuuri knew he would.

"You," Yuuri says honestly, unable to keep the smile off his face any longer.

The sound that Victor makes is close to a coo, but far more pitched. Yuuri laughs at it.

"Aren't nobles supposed to have rules of proper conduct?" he teases. "I fear there is nothing proper about you, my lord. What am I to do with you?"

Victor chuckles. They ride so close that his leg brushes against Yuuri's and it's a comforting touch that lifts Yuuri's spirit and reddens his cheeks with familiarity that settles between them.

"But how could I be proper around you, my Yuuri, when my heart yearns for you even when you're this close, and my mind thinks only of you when it sleeps, and my very soul trembles in my body at just the memory of you?" Victor chants, a wistful sigh on his lips. It makes Yuuri flush further, but it isn't entirely unwelcome. "It's impossible, my dear. I forgot what the word proper means the day I met you."

"The ball," Yuuri recalls with an ounce of shame. "Yes, that must have been a highly improper affair."

"Why, yes, yes it was," Victor agrees, but there's a smile on his face, which denies that he feels any shame at all. "And I did not regret discarding the rules of polite society in the least. It was more than worth it, you see? I found a gem that shines far brighter than anything nobles could offer."

Victor winks at him and despite of how well Yuuri knows him already, despite of how intimate they have been, he still feels his ears sting as the flush on his face reaches them. It's silly, and sweet – a special brand of torture that belongs uniquely to Victor and which Yuuri, quite contrary to his usual disposition, enjoys more than he probably should.

"You are an awful tease, my lord," Yuuri says simply.
"Should I not be?" Victor asks.

Something in his voice rings of hesitation. Yuuri looks at him and opens his mouth to say "You can be whatever you want to be," but he stops. Instead, he looks back at the column of carts, guards, and servants that follow them.

They are all here because their lord commanded them, because Victor commanded it.

After the few days he spent at Yuuri's childhood home, Victor stepped right back into his role like the most talented of actors. And he plays it with ease, Yuuri can see it at every turn. Almost as if it's a relief for him to be back. Yet, Yuuri knows it isn't – if it was, Victor would not hesitate like he does now. He would not falter, but he does.

The decision takes no longer than a breath to be made.

"Come with me," Yuuri says, and digs his heels into Lamorak's sides.

In a cloud of dust that the horse's hooves kick up, Yuuri speeds downhill of the road. He doesn't look back to see if Victor follows: he doesn't need to. He hears Victor's voice give directions to go on and the telling sound of Tristan giving chase. They ride together as if the devil itself is on their backs and the wind roars in their ears joyfully.

Laughter on his lips, Yuuri looks back. Bright-eyed, he catches Victor's eyes and a matching smile splits Victor's face – it's more of a smirk than a smile, but it's happy and daring, and has Yuuri push Lamorak faster and faster, and faster...

They speed through the small patch of trees, circle around it and come back to where a beautiful lake spreads through the land. The waters are clear and shimmer in the morning sunlight as if they were speckled with gems.

Yuuri leads Lamorak onto the sand and further, into the shallow waters of the shore. They slow their pace and Victor comes up at his side. Yuuri smiles at him, and Victor smiles back, slightly flushed from the ride. He looks beautiful and sweet, and Yuuri has one thought to pull on the reins and kiss him, but before he can they hit the water and Lamorak bucks.

The sudden movement catches Yuuri off guard, but by the time he reins the stallion in, it's too late. Lamorak kicks back and with a yelp Yuuri is propelled off his saddle. The splash when he falls into the lake is louder than it should be, since the water only reaches Yuuri's waist where he sits in it, dazed, but even that isn't enough to muffle the chortle that leaves Victor's lips.

Victor sounds like a goose choking on a piece of bread and Yuuri stares at him, wet, bruised, and unreasonably charmed, because this isn't His Lordship Victor Nikiforov, but simply Victor: the man to whom Yuuri has given his heart.

And he is perfect.

Chapter End Notes

you guys are so sweet for giving me so much leeway with answering comments so I'll abuse it a little more bc holy sheet I spent the whole day trying to finish up the family
trees of the charas in this fic and I'm just SO TIRED bc it's a never-ending loop of checking and adding and thinking up names, and let me tell y'all that they interbreed more than I care to explain yhxcyhujn

ps. vitya and yuuri are so sweet together, this chapter healed my aching neck in seconds <3
"Are you quite alright?" Victor asks once he's calmed down.

Yuuri, who sits in the water like the fool he is, stares at the man who has irrevocably changed his life. He's smitten, he realizes, far more than he ever was with anything before. Yuuri's heart trembles in his chest with affection so stifling that he thinks it'll flow out of his mouth when he opens it to breathe.

"That was improper of me, I apologize," Victor says, but the glint of amusement in his eye is a clear contradiction to his words.

"Didn't we already establish that you lack any and all propriety around me, my lord?"

Yuuri pushes his wet hand through his hair, frantic to regain control of his stuttering heartbeat. The strands stick to his scalp while droplets of water fall onto his flushed cheeks and roll down his skin almost like tears. Victor's gaze follows one of them until it dips behind the collar of Yuuri's robe and the interest on his face is hardly deniable. He must notice Yuuri watching him, because he gives a slightly sheepish smile and offers Yuuri a hand in standing up.

"Truly," Yuuri says, amused, even as he accepts the hand. He doesn't get up, but holds it lightly instead. "You don't need to pretend to be a noble with impeccable manners around me. Don't be a lord. Don't be a Nikiforov."

"Just your Vitya," Victor ends for him with a small, genuine smile, "right?"

"Just my Vitya," Yuuri confirms.

And then he pulls on Victor's hand hard enough to make him lose his balance.

With another splash, Victor lands in the water face first. To Yuuri's childish satisfaction he flails around the shallow waters as if he was drowning in a deep sea. It's Victor's sputtering – once he rises up on his hands, that is – that has Yuuri laugh, though. Victor's hair is damp and hangs at the sides of his face in strands that look like clumped together dust bunnies.

Yuuri can't help but think it's fetching.

"You tricked me!" Victor accuses him once he spits all the water that must have gotten into his
mouth during his unexpected swim.

"Did I?" Yuuri cocks his head to the side, smirk on his lips. "Yes, I believe I might have."

Victor's mouth opens at Yuuri's audacity, but then he laughs. And Yuuri joins him, because Victor's laughter calls to him in ways that he can't resist. He slumps into Victor's side and when Victor turns to wrap an arm around Yuuri, he uses that chance to press a kiss to Victor's grinning, wet lips.

"Since our clothes are already soaked, I think it calls for a swim," Victor says once they part.

His blue eyes shine like the water they are sitting in, drawing Yuuri further into his charm. How can he say no to that? To him? It seems impossible and Yuuri has no will to even try fighting it.

Golden outer robes they spread across the white sand and shuck the rest of their clothes with no shame. Yuuri purposefully does not look Victor's way until he's waist deep in the lake. They have seen each other naked, that much is true, but in broad daylight it still feels fresh. Tender. Yuuri can tell his face is tinted red from the shyness that overtakes him, but there is little he can do against this feeling.

He dives into the lake to cool his head.

"I have never done this before," Victor admits while they swim around.

There is a youthful gleam in his eye, something new and all the more precious for it. Yuuri wants to wrap it in his hands and protect it from the world that is bound to tarnish it, like he has done to Victor before.

"Never swam around naked? My lord, you have not lived then," Yuuri says, finding it in himself to give cheek, and Victor laughs. "Here, let me show you how it's truly done where I come from..."

Yuuri dives underwater and makes his way to an unsuspecting Victor. Once there, he lets his fingers ghost across Victor's calf, quickly snatching his hand away when Victor's leg jumps. He tries it again, on the thigh. And again on Victor's lower back. Above the surface of the water he can hear the surprised noises Victor makes and it makes Yuuri laugh silently. Finally, as he runs out of breath, Yuuri pulls on both of Victor's legs and tugs him underwater.

With a bubbling laugh, Yuuri breaks the surface and ends up laughing even harder at the flustered look on Victor's face as he resurfaces not long after him.

"And you dare claim I play a tease," Victor makes a face that gives him a look of a pouting child, which must be the silliest Yuuri has seen him, yet at the same time so fitting.

"I'm sorry," Yuuri replies, suddenly worried. His hands brush against Victor's while they're both trying to stay afloat and it's a little comfort that has him speak his thoughts: "If you wish me to cease, just say the word. I know I'm stepping out of line every time, so if you think something to be too much, don't hesitate to tell me."

Victor shakes his head. His wet hair slaps his cheeks, but his eyes are warm. As is his smile.

"Not many have dared to do it before," he says. "Yet, I find it irresistibly charming, my Yuuri. Please, never stop. I enjoy it awfully much if it's coming from you."

Yuuri stares at him for a moment too long and Victor's smile falters under his gaze. A flush takes over Victor's face, bright on his pale cheeks.
"I mean, only if you wish to," Victor corrects himself. "I wouldn't want to ask for something you are not willing to give."

Yuuri shakes his head, bewildered. "You are a strange noble, Victor Nikiforov."

"Is that... a bad thing?"

"No." Yuuri smiles. "It's a you thing. And I think it's charming."

The sweet smile that Victor presses against Yuuri's lips tastes like lake water and salt, but Yuuri enjoys it more than he probably should. Later, they trade soft kisses as they lie in the white sand of the lakeside, basking in the warmth of the sun and each other. It's only when their clothes fully dry that they decide to ride along their way.

There is a lingering caress of warmth in Yuuri's body as he gives one final look at the lake and it only strengthens at the tender, adoring gaze Victor sends him from atop Tristan. Yuuri jumps onto Lamorak's back, takes reins in hand and smiles.

"What do you say, my lord?" he asks. "Shall we see which one of us is a better rider?"

His challenge is answered with one of Victor's brilliant grins, before both of them leap into gallop.

Chapter End Notes

my sweet dudes and dudettes, you've all given me so much motivation and will to keep on going with this story that I can't even say thank you properly bc whatever I say will never be enough, but please know that I love and cherish and every one of you <3 and we will repeat this prompt thing for chapter 100, I think... what do you say? ;3c
They return to the caravan when the sun is high up in the sky. It's then that they pause for a meal, but it is a short halt that only lasts about an hour at the longest and then they're travelling again until the sun makes its way across the sky and turns pink where it sets behind the horizon.

"Usually the nobles have tents drawn for the night even when they cross small distances," Victor tells Yuuri as they sup by the campfire. "But I find myself more comfortable like this. It feels like I'm closer to my men, almost."

"It's very kind of you," Yuuri tells him. "I'm certain everyone appreciates it, since it's less work for them too. They can rest more, eat warm food, sleep longer."

The happy smile Victor gives him is stained with the gravy from the meat they were eating from a single platter. Yuuri lifts a hand and wipes the sauce away with his thumb. Victor's eyes shine in the low firelight, so warm and beautiful that Yuuri can't help admiring them. And him. All of him.

"You're a very kind man, Vitya," Yuuri repeats again.

He might have believed that Victor could harm him in his fear if he knew about the other side of Yuuri, but since then he has learned that Victor is a kinder man than Yuuri has given him the credit for being. Somehow, it makes the affection in his heart ache a little less, and Yuuri smiles back freely.

They sleep under the starry sky, under one blanket and the cover of the night. Victor's body is a warm press against Yuuri's back and his arm is a comfort where it rests slung across Yuuri's belly. Like that it isn't a challenge for Yuuri to slip into sleep, but when he does, his dreams aren't peaceful.

He dreams of running, of howls and screams. Of Victor, unconscious, slumped over his back as Yuuri in his wolf form runs away from something, but what, he can't tell. It seeps insidious fear into his heart, makes it tremble and squeeze, as his lungs squeeze when breath comes short and muscles tear with the effort of carrying them to safety.

Yet safety never comes: there's fire and swords, and knives and pain, so much pain and fear and--

"Yuuri," Victor's voice whispers. "Yuuri, wake up, love. You're dreaming."

It's hard enough to open his eyes, but when Yuuri succeeds the world feels like it's burning. He's hot
in his own skin as if the fires of his dream have reached him here as well. The effort it takes to turn his head to the side is rewarded when Yuuri rests his blurry gaze on Victor – on Victor, who is conscious, unharmed, bent over him with worry written over his handsome face.

"Yuuri," he whispers again. "Are you well? You were whimpering in you sleep."

"I'm..." Yururi starts and pauses as the words scratch at his throat. "It was only a dream."

"Do you want to tell me about it? I hear that helps–"

"No," Yuuri interrupts him. He turns to the side as his eyes already close, and selfishly demands: "Just hold me."

And Victor does, with no questions asked. He wraps his arms around Yuuri and keeps him close to his body while Yuuri falls into slumber once more.

As if Victor's touch kept the nightmares at bay, Yuuri sleeps peacefully. However, once he wakes as the dawn breaks over the horizon, he does not feel any better. The warmth of Victor's body that previously has given him comfort, now is stifling him inside his own skin, which feels as if it was roasted in the sun that has not yet peaked. His vision is hazy and when he tries to sit up, he sways as if all strength has left his body.

A cold hand touches his cheek and Yuuri knows what it is, even as Victor's worried voice announces:

"You're burning up."

Yuuri makes a soft sound of agreement. "We shouldn't have taken that dip in the lake yesterday."

"I'm so sorry, my Yuuri," Victor's arm rests around him, rubbing at the small of his back.

It's a weak attempt at comfort, but Yuuri finds that he couldn't bear with much else, so he tries for a smile. It must not do what he wants it to, because Victor looks even more worried – as blurry as he is.

"It isn't your fault," Yuuri mumbles. "I should've expected this. It's my own doing, after all."

"Are you well enough to travel?" Victor asks. "We should stay here, make camp. You need rest. A healer, as well, yes? I will send for one right away–"

"Vitya," Yuuri interrupts him gently. He strokes his knuckles against the side of Victor's face. "I will be alright. I might not have the strength to ride on my own today, but I will sit in one of the carts. I don't want to trouble everyone just because I feel unwell after doing something so silly. Please."

Victor's face shifts into something hard that Yuuri can't see all too clearly. He blinks and tries to focus on the slope of Victor's brow and the shape of his downturned lips, but it's useless. His head swims as if he still was in the lake water, but this water is hot and uncomfortable, and Yuuri wants to leave it as soon as he can.

Yet, he can't.

"You'll ride with me, then," Victor makes a decision for them both. "And if you get any worse, we will be stopping. Whether you like it or not."

There aren't any words Yuuri can find to protest, so he nods. The movement is a careless one and he
wincing when his vision dances before his eyes. He slumps in Victor's arms, but he isn't allowed to stay there for long. He's slowly laid down again, covered with a blanket, and kissed on the forehead.

"Rest now," Victor tells him. "I will collect you once it's time to depart."

Sleep takes Yuuri sooner than he'd like, but he doesn't resist it: it's his only hope of getting better. After all, the sooner he can stand on his own two feet, the sooner he can stop being a burden to the one person he never wanted to get tired of him.

Chapter End Notes

I bet this is not what y'all expected ;3c
and just saying but... winter is coming uwu
Yuuri's skin burns in all the places they touch, but even as Victor holds him close in a fruitless wish to provide comfort for Yuuri and himself, the feeling of helplessness that churns in his stomach does not recede. Tristan walks slowly next to a cart that Victor ordered to be prepared for Yuuri, if a need to use it arises, but he can't bring himself to let go of the man that leans into him so trustingly. Yuuri is heavy in his sleep, yet dropping him is not what Victor worries about – it's the fever that rages through Yuuri's body and makes even Victor's own skin heat up under the layers of golden robes.

Sweat pearls on Yuuri's forehead in beads that glisten in the sun which shines on them with no mercy. Yuuri's lips are dry, swollen from fever. Victor takes the waterskin from where it's tied to his saddle and drinks a few greedy gulps before he presses the mouthpiece against Yuuri's lips.

"Yuuri, love, you need to drink," he tells him as he tries to wake him up.

Yuuri groans and turns his head away, but Victor gently nudges it back.

"If you don't drink, you will never get better," he tries again. "And if you don't get better, how will you keep all the promises you made me? I did not take you for a liar, my Yuuri. Was I wrong?"

Yuuri groans once more, but Victor's words seem to strike a chord within him. He forces himself to take a few sips while Victor holds him with one arm and the waterskin with the other. Tristan walks on loose reins, as obedient as always, for which Victor is glad more than ever. Once Yuuri is done, he pulls back with a little cough.

"Thank you," he rasps.

His head limply slips to rest against Victor's shoulder, back where it has been before and when Victor looks at him again, Yuuri's eyes are closed.

"Do you want to rest in the cart?" Victor asks, brushing away Yuuri's damp fringe. "It would be more comfortable than on a bouncing horse."

"I'm rather comfortable here," Yuuri mumbles into Victor's neck where he nuzzles like a little cat. It would be precious if not for how hot his skin feels against Victor's. "I don't want to move."

Victor sighs. "Very well. But if the fever doesn't break overnight, you will rest in the cart tomorrow, yes?"

Yuuri gives a sound that is neither agreement, nor protest. Victor foregoes any other comments and cradles him closer as he wraps his cloak over Yuuri's head to somewhat protect him from the sun. The tiny breath of relief that Yuuri gives is enough to make him smile slightly, but the worried crease between his brows remains.

It's been hours since they left, and it will be hours still before they set camp once more. Yuuri's fever has not lessened any in all this time. In fact, it seems to be peaking – a thing that shortens Victor's temper and puts him in a bad mood from all the worry. The caravan moves too slow, the sun shines too hard, the shade is never there when needed and the water he gives Yuuri to drink isn't cold
enough. Everything should just–

"My lord!"

Ready to snap, Victor turns his head to the captain of his guard, who unbeknownst to his mood points towards the horizon. Victor's gaze follows the direction, cutting words at the edge of his tongue, but they all die down as he squints against the bright sun – there, on the line where the sky meets the green hills, a group of riders heads their way.

It's still too far to see the faces, but Victor can already tell who they are, for leading them is a young man with hair the colour of the sun itself. Victor can recognize it everywhere, since only one person he knows has this particular light shade running in the family.

Unconsciously, Victor cradles Yuuri closer.

It isn't fear that settles in his bones, but tiredness, dread, and... yes, maybe there is fear there as well, but it isn't fear of the people that head down to meet them, no. It's the fear of what they want, because that can only be one thing. And Victor is unwilling to give it.

As the riders come closer, the crest on their robes becomes clearer. A basilisk reared back and prepared for an attack, sown with green and blue which finds its reflection in the delicately angled face of the young lord of the Plisetskys' who glares at Victor with unhidden rage in the eyes that match the beast on his chest.

Victor secures his cloak tighter around Yuuri and it's the only thing he does before the hooves stamp the Royal Track. Horses snort when the riders stop. There is three of them, apart from the young lord. One of them seems vaguely familiar, as if Victor has seen him before, maybe even around the young Plisetsky, but his memory serves no name or title, so he chooses to focus on the only person he truly knows.

"Good day, Yura," he speaks before angry words can spill from the little lord's mouth. "Where might you be going in such a haste?"

The little lord, who is not so little anymore, Victor notes, snarls: "Don't play the fool, Victor. You know very well we've been looking for you."

"Why? I'm hardly lost."

"Moron," Yuri Plisetsky spits. His face is harsh for a moment, but after the initial heat it softens up into something akin to worry. It's that, which has Victor turn his head to him fully, rapt in attention. "I can understand that you want peace in your grieving, but buying land left and right is not the proper way to–"

"Grieving?" Victor interrupts him. "What are you speaking of, Yuri?"

An unease of unknown origin settles in Victor's heart, heavy on his chest. Heavier than the body pressed against him.

"What am I–" Yuri repeats, but it only takes him a single look at Victor's face to realize that Victor is not tricking him. "You don't know..."

"Don't know what?" Victor's hand tightens around the reins. "Tell me, Yuri, tell me right now. What's happened?"

Yuri doesn't play with words, he never does. He says what he thinks, be it the harsh truth or– well,
what Yuri says is always the harsh truth. Or a harsh lie. Yet this time, as a look of worry and discomfort once again crosses the young face, Victor has no reason to believe that Yuri’s next words are anything but the painful reality.

"Lord Nikiforov is dead," Yuri says. "Your mother has written to you, but none of her messages seemed to reach you, so she asked me to find you instead. She hoped you were just too stubborn to return to the estate."

He doesn’t say anything more, but Victor hears it in his voice anyway. "You need to come home,” green eyes say as they look at him and Victor's body goes cold even against the heat of the sun.

He needs to go.

Chapter End Notes

if yall don't hate me after this arc I will be surprised ahaha //sweats

also ayyyy it's your fav angry child, hello!!
"Who's that?" Yuri asks when Victor calls Illia forth to pass Yuuri onto him.

"Someone very dear to me," Victor replies.

It tells Yuri little, but that is what Victor prefers. He doesn't want to bother his Yuuri with needless conversation while he's still plagued by the fever. Besides, Victor prefers to introduce them to each other when both parties are of sound mind and temper... which is definitely not now, as little lord Plisetsky proves to him.

"So that's what made you go crazy and leave home." Yuri snorts. "Love. Pathetic."

"The reasons I left home are my own, Yura," Victor says in an even voice.

The words sting something deep in him, but he puts a mask of cold calm over it and plays the role he was reared up to play – that of a composed noble, who is hardly bothered by anything.

"Bring me something to write," he tells Ilia once Yuuri is safely deposited in the cart next to him. Once Ilia slips away to do his bidding, Victor turns to the captain of his guard: "Call three of your best men. We will let Lord Plisetsky's troop rest their horses for a little longer and when I finish what I need to, we shall leave for the Snowberry Estate."

"What about the caravan, my lord?" the man asks. "Should we still head to Evergreen Manor? Or follow after you?"

Victor's eyes are inevitably drawn back to Yuuri, who sleeps fretfully on the pillows that were spread over the harsh wood of the cart to keep him from gaining any more aches on his already bumpy journey. Victor's heart swells with yearning, but he knows that what he must do is inevitable. He swallows his own desires, his needs and his wants, and says:

"You will go as planned to the Trident Crossing, and there you will head north to Snowberry."

"Understood, my lord."

The man bows as much as the saddle allows, and kicks off to relay Victor's orders. Neither Victor nor Yuri speak a word once he's gone. Ilia brings a block of parchment, quill and ink, and it's only then that Victor's dismounts. He exchanges the reins for the items before he hops onto the cart, sits by Yuuri's side and stares at the blank parchment, uncertain what to write.

How do you tell a person you promised yourself fully that you need to break your word and leave them when they need you the most?

Not once, not twice, as Victor's hand trembles where it slides across the paper, he looks towards Yuuri. His lover's face is calm with sleep, but there is a sheen of sweat over his skin, a redness to his cheeks that is so different to what Victor knows Yuuri's sweet blushes to look like. His heart aches as he adds the final lines, and aches even more when he signs his name with a flourish under an honest "Always yours."
The ink dries fast under the sunlight, faster than Victor has hoped. He folds the parchment in a way that is already as familiar as writing itself, pours the hot wax that Ilia hands him over the middle of the letter and presses his seal to mark it. Nikiforovs' setting sun crest looks at him from the red liquid that sets even before Victor passes the letter to Ilia.

"You will give this to Yuuri when he wakes," he orders.

"Yes, my lord."

"Watch over him as well," Victor continues. "Check his fever every hour. If his condition worsens, send to the nearest village for a healer, understood? I put him in your care, Ilia, and if anything happens to him on this journey, you will answer with your head."

"He shall be cared for as if he was you, my lord," Ilia replies, and his words seem genuine enough that they should ease at least some of Victor's worry, but they do not.

With heavy heart, Victor turns to a sleeping Yuuri once more. He brushes the damp hair off his forehead and leans down to press his lips against the heated skin. He shouldn't be leaving now, but if he must, he will take this little comfort with him and keep it close to his heart until they can be reunited again. Yuuri stirs as if he has felt the tender caress, but the sleep and fever that cling to him are heavier and pull him back into nothingness.

Smiling, a bit heartbroken, a bit fond, Victor slides his knuckles down Yuuri's cheek one last time.

"I will see you soon, my Yuuri," he whispers.

And because he has never been fond of farewells, Victor leaves as he stands.

He jumps atop Tristan, nods at young lord Plisetsky, and with golden robes billowing behind him rides hard north – back home, where he vowed never to return.

The more distance they put between them and the caravan, though, the more one thing clears in Victor's mind: home is where the heart is, and where his found a place to rest is back in the pillow filled cart, cradled in the palm of Yuuri's hand.

Chapter End Notes

angst? did anyone say angst? ;3c

I'm really busy today, so I'm sorry but I'll answer the comments tomorrow! love ya <3
Chapter 54

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The fever breaks when the camp is already set and the world is veiled in darkness. Yuuri blinks his bleary eyes open, tired despite how much he's slept, and stares at the starry sky as his mind struggles to understand the position he's found himself in.

"My lord," a voice next to him catches his attention and he turns his head to spot Ilia kneeling by the fireplace. "You're awake, good. How are you feeling?"

"Better," Yuuri says.

His voice is a rasp, so he clears his throat, but it only sends him into a coughing fit that makes him breathless and dizzy. He curls on himself and coughs his due.

"Or I was, before this," he adds after the terrible feeling passes.

His throat is ticklish, so Yuuri swallows hard in hopes of saving himself from another fit. It truly helps very little. Ilia might be smiling when Yuuri looks to him again, or it might be the play of the shadows on his face, Yuuri can't tell.

Gently, Ilia helps him up until Yuuri can sit on his own. He's offered a drink then as well, something that warms his hand when he closes his fingers around the cup. It smells of honey and herbs, and Yuuri takes a deep inhale before he brings the liquid to his lips. It tastes as sweet as it smells. The warmth and smoothness of it are like a balm to Yuuri's scratchy throat and he sighs in relief after the first few sips.

"Thank you," he tells Ilia, truly grateful.

The young man bows his head with a light smile playing on his lips. He moves to fluff the pillows Yuuri has been resting on nearby a fat fire sizzling in a stone circle. The camp is still awake, most of it at least, so it can't be too late, Yuuri guesses. His eyes flit around in search of--

"His Lordship isn't here, my lord," Ilia says as if he senses who it is that Yuuri's hoping to see.

Yuuri's eyebrows draw together. "He isn't here?"

"He left early in the afternoon," Ilia confirms. "Young Lord Plisetsky arrived with his men and they rode north for the Nikiforov estate. We are to follow them, those are Lord Nikiforov's orders."

There are no words in Yuuri's mouth that he could speak to express the pure surprise he feels at this revelation. Victor has promised to stay with him, promised to be by his side, and now he... rode away? Confused, more than hurt, Yuuri blinks at the fire that licks high into the sky.

"How far is it to the estate?"

"About a week and a half at the pace we are going, my lord."

"That's far," Yuuri gives, voice quiet.
He rests the cup in his lap, but even the warmth of it is no longer any relief. The darkness that surrounds them seems to encroach more on the small space by the fire with each breath Yuuri takes and all of it because Victor has left.

He left, he promised he’d stay, but he left and Yuuri is now alone in a place that steals comfort from him faster than the moonlight steals his humanity on full moons. Yuuri swallows harshly, throat once again dry and aching. Can he really be here, if Victor isn’t? Can he really claim the place everyone knows he doesn’t deserve when the one person who wants him here is no longer present?

"His Lordship left you a letter, my lord," Ilia's voice disrupts Yuuri's thoughts like the spark that flies off the fire and disappears into the night.

A folded parchment with a seal of the setting sun is handed to Yuuri. He takes it with a hand that he only now notices is shaking with perceptible tremors. Forcing it down, Yuuri gives Ilia back the cup and breaks the seal on the letter.

Guilt settles around his heart like a heavy anchor, when his eyes fall on the first words written by Victor's hand. My darling Yuuri, it says. And Yuuri feels the affection, the fondness, the pain even, as if Victor was right there, speaking it right to Yuuri's face.

There must have been a reason for him to leave, Yuuri realizes. Wrapped in his own selfishness, in his own terrible, horrible feelings, he hasn't taken notice of it before, but truly... Victor would not have gone if he didn't have to.

Yuuri returns to the letter, reading the words slowly and with growing difficulty as the flames of the fire flicker and the spidery writing merges into something unintelligible. Or maybe that's just the tears that Yuuri can feel welling in his eyes.

My darling Yuuri,

Forgive me for leaving you in your time of need, but urgent matters at home have pulled me away. My lord father has passed away, it appears. I received the word only now, but it has been quite a time since it occurred, as my cousin assures me. They have been sending missives, it seems, and I am not one to inquire who is at fault for none of them reaching me, yet the facts are the facts: I do know now and I must act on it.

It is with a heavy heart, and an even heavier conscience that I write all of this. You're resting next to me and if I didn't know better I'd say you look peaceful. But I do know better, my dear. I hope that when you read this the fever has broken and your suffering has eased. It bears on my mind like a brand, your wellbeing that is. Please, trust me when I say that with all my soul I wish I could have stayed and watched over you like I promised. I dream of nothing more than the day I get to hold you in my arms once again, even as I sit next to you, still.

I believe you will be upset at my absence, and you have all reason to be. I broke my vow to you, that I did, and no amount of apologies will make up for it – I realize that. Yet I still hope, desperately, fervently, that you will find it in yourself to forgive this fool and allow him to make up for it once we meet again.

Get well, my love, that is all I pray for.

Always yours,
The signature that crawls across the parchment below the text of the letter is graceful, bold, and achingly beautiful – everything that Victor Nikiforov is. But the Victor Yuuri knows is much more than that. He's kind, he's generous, he's sweet and silly, too, and most of all he's caring, even when he's hurting himself in the process.

Yuuri's hand tightens around the letter, crumples it, the words, the paper, the seal.

"Have Kenjirou saddle my horse," Yuuri tells Ilia.

"But, my lord–"


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Chapter End Notes

thanks to ao3 being down for like an hour I don't really have the time to answer comments today (THANKS DUDE) bc I have classes in like 2h and gotta get ready to leave UGH but I promise I've read all of them and I really enjoy you guys screaming at me and I hope you scream some more after this chap ;3c
"No," Ilia says.

"No?"

"No."

Just when Yuuri opens his mouth to argue, Ilia shakes his head and continues: "You're in no condition to ride, my lord. Especially not at night and not alone, hence – no, I will not tell them to saddle your horse and I will not allow you to leave. Lord Nikiforov tasked me with your wellbeing and since I quite value my head where it is, so right here on my shoulders, I would appreciate your compliance on this matter."

Surprised by Ilia's hard tone, Yuuri falls silent. He stares, part in shock, part in awe, at the servant who all but sat him down like an unruly child.

"In a little more than a week we will arrive at the Snowberry Estate, my lord," Ilia adds as if trying to lift his spirits. "You will return to full health within that time and Lord Nikiforov will be more glad for that, than for you risking your life on this reckless stunt."

There is truth in his words, Yuuri can recognize that, but his heart yearns to be close to Victor. The news of a death in the family must have been hard to take, especially at a moment like this: when Yuuri battled a fever that could just as well take his life like it has taken so many others already.

Yuuri swallows hard and nods.

"Very well," he says. "I won't go."

Ilia smiles a small smile. He bows his head, more respect in the incline of his neck now than there was before as if the decision Yuuri has taken earned him more than just a growing ache of his heart.

"I shall bring you food, then," Ilia offers. "You need to eat if you are to regain your strength."

He disappears into the night, and Yuuri follows him with his gaze. Ilia is younger than him, a teen still, but his presence is something akin of a noble. He garners obedience with his words, commands without raising his voice, and Yuuri wonders if all those who serve at lords and ladies' pleasure are compelled to learn this kind of skill.

He asks about it once Ilia returns with a tray that carries a bowl of soup, bread, some fruit and a jug of mead, watered down with the same honeyed concoction Yuuri drank earlier.

"I am a page at Lord Nikiforov's service," Ilia explains. "I have been for years, since I was six or seven, it's hard to tell. His Lordship was kind to me and taught me many a thing, but the most I've learned is from observation."

"A page?" Yuuri repeats. "Are you aiming to become a squire then? A knight?"

"I would if I could. Alas, His Lordship is not a knight. He could not appoint me a squire, but that is
just as well. I have given up on that boyhood dream," Ilia says with a smile. "I am quite happy
serving His Lordship as I am and my position amongst the servants is quite high as well. There is
nothing to bemoan, my lord."

Yuuri nods with understanding. Should he have found himself in a situation such as Ilia's, he would
not have been ungrateful to the fates either. For them, simple people, it is an utmost luck to serve a
noble – especially a good, caring lord like Victor. Yuuri himself has been thrown into it with little to
no consideration for his own peasantry, but he did not try too hard to fight it: it was a fortuitous thing,
after all.

While such, however, it would not do for Yuuri to embarrass Victor with his lack of manners.

"You should teach me," Yuuri tells Ilia when he's finished with the food. His head feels sharper,
vision clearer, and only the slight ache of his limbs remains as a reminder of his fever.

"Teach you, my lord?" Ilia asks. "What is it that you wish to learn?"

Yuuri opens his mouth, pauses, and then breathes out what he desires:

"Everything." Ilia blinks at him, confused, so Yuuri goes on. "The court manners. About the
Nikiforovs. Their history, connections, family. I don't wish to embarrass Victor once we arrive at the
estate. His mother will be there, no?"

Ilia nods, and Yuuri gives a nervous smile.

"I'm just a shepherd's son, Ilia," he says. "I hardly know what is proper, what not, among those of
noble blood. And I would hate to bring Victor shame, especially at a time as important as this."

Ilia matches his smile, although his is more reassuring, warmer.

"Of course, my lord," he agrees, bowing his head. "I shall teach you as much as time allows then."

And as he promises, he does: the morning finds them in one of the carts, basting under the sun and
repeating the short yet convoluted history of the creation of the House of Nikiforov. Ilia teaches
Yuuri with patience and simple words, but his temper allows for no distractions and he does not shy
from a snide comment whenever Yuuri's attention slips away from him. Even then, he remains
respectful and collected, and as the time passes Yuuri's respect for him grows as much as the
friendship between them.

A day of lectures turns to two, those to three, four, five... Kenjirou sits with Yuuri by the fire as they
eat and listens to Ilia's teachings of manners and proper conduct with star-struck awe that Yuuri finds
both amusing and admirable, since the boy mimics every hold on the utensils, every gesture, every
bow and twitch of Ilia's body with razor-sharp focus that only speaks of the greatness he is meant for.

It's a week and three days into the journey that they finally reach their destination. A great building
rises up on the horizon, majestic and huge, and Yuuri has to squint against the reflection of the sun
that shines from the skies onto the roofs and slopes and columns – all of them golden and rich.

"Welcome to Snowberry Estate, my lord," Ilia says, but Yuuri does not even turn to him.

He's enraptured and afeared, yet most of all, he's aching: for this, here, is Vitya's home, and he's
missed the Lord Nikiforov more than words can ever convey.
guys... guys.

look at THIS GORGEOUS THING done by the incredible ayawanderlust who is such a sweetheart and drew that for this story AND I CAN'T EVEN WORD PROPERLY IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL????? HOLY SHEET PLS GO GIVE IT SOME LOVE? <3
He's dirty and panting, hair a mess and clothes ruffled by wind, when they finally enter through the golden front doors embossed with the sun in all its different shapes and forms. Victor feels like little lord Plisetsky is at the end of his tether with the way he stomps the ground harshly behind him, but before profanities begin to spew from the ever-ready mouth, a familiar figure runs down the grand stairs to greet them.

"Vitya, you're home! Finally!"

It's all he hears before his vision swims with red curls as cousin Mila hugs the living daylights out of him. For a girl, her hold is strong and Victor's ribs creak, even as he huffs a laugh. He returns the embrace and picks her off the ground some, much to her squeal of joy. Once their greeting is done, Mila moves to little Yuri, who hides behind Victor's back with a feral snarl.

Home sweet home, Victor thinks as the two begin to bicker.

"Young master, welcome home."

The butler, old Pavel, whom Victor remembered fondly over the years, bows low to him despite the creak in his worked back. Victor smiles, touched, and guides him up gently.

"It is good to see you, Pasha," he says. "I wish it could've been under better circumstances, though."

"Indeed," Pavel sighs, more weary than Victor has ever seen him. "It is good that you are back, young master. Since your father's unfortunate passing, the lady has secluded herself in her chambers and refuses to attend to any matters of importance. We all hoped your arrival would put some vigour into her, alas..."

"I'll speak to her," Victor promises.

He takes off his gloves and hands them to Pavel, who passes them on to another servant – an unfamiliar face this time. And that isn't the end of the surprises that Victor encounters once he takes a more careful look around. The entry hall has been redecorated, it seems. Gold still permeates the very soul of the estate, but the walls are covered with tapestry and big oil paintings in polished wooden frames, the floors have been coated with rich, red carpets and the stairs have been redone in marble that shines off the light of a dozen chandeliers.

It's dazzling and too much for Victor's taste. Not too much for his mother's, however.

"You will report to me of all the changes done to the estate in my absence," Victor commands. "I want to know how much was spent on renovations, how much is left, the costs of daily living – the such. I will speak to my mother first and then I will meet you in father's study."

"As you wish, young master."

Pavel bows again, but Victor's mind is already elsewhere. Mila catches his eye and only nods. She seems to understand his mood better than Victor does himself, because she takes little Yuri by the
arm and tugs him to the sitting room opposite the hall. Victor watches them go for a precious second, before he too, takes his steps deeper into the building.

He climbs the stairs, heads right. His feet carry him as if they know the way without him guiding them, and they do – how often did Victor run through these corridors when he was but a wee boy? A wistful smile takes on to his lips and refuses to disappear even as he nears his mother's chambers. They have always been opposite of his father's, a thing that never made much sense to him until he grew up and realized what their marriage was: a scam. A thing of convenience, a marriage of families, not souls.

With a steady hand, Victor knocks on the door.

"Mother, it's me," he announces. "Vitya."

There is a moment of silence, then rustling, then a drop of something hard onto the floors and finally–

The door swings open, harsh, sudden. The face that Victor remembers so well has not changed much over the years. The woman he calls his mother, but is no such in anything other than the name, is draped in gold from head to toe.

From underneath her golden dress peers a golden point of a golden shoe. Her hands are gloved with gold, neck adorned with that and rubies – ones that match the fiery red of her hair, which she has plated over her shoulder with golden treads, pearls and flowers. Atop her head sits a golden tiara, much like the one Yuuri has made for Victor, but less tasteful, less honest. Yet, it is a fitting one for her in all its dishonesty and opulence.

She does not look like a woman in mourning for her dearly beloved lord husband.

"Vitya," the woman breathes. "Is that really you? My darling son, you've returned?"

"I have," Victor answers. "Young lord Plisetsky intercepted me on my way to Evergreen and told me about father's passing."

"Ah, yes, that unfortunate thing."

A wrinkled nose, drawn eyebrow, a careless wave of hand: that's all a noble man of the Nikiforov name gets for providing a life of luxury to this woman. Victor swallows his tongue, lest the words he wants to speak find their way out.

"But you're finally here! Come, come, you must tell me all about your travels!"

Victor allows himself to be pulled into the room, but chooses to ignore the thinly veiled order and the offer for tea. He declines to sit as well. He won't stay there long and the closer he is to the door, the easier it will be to march out and never return... or so he tries to convince himself.

"I have heard you've refused to leave your rooms," he speaks over his mother's chattering. "Why? Father's death touched you little, we can both see that."

She hums, corners of her lips twitching as if she was repressing a smile. "It is expected of me, no? Mourning. Your father was my husband, after all."

Looking at her now, at her golden dress, neatly braided her, the touch of red on her lips that is far from natural, Victor knows – this is what he's escaped all those years ago. This deceit, these lies, the masks and fronts, hypocrisy, duplicity, dishonesty...
He closes his eyes and, briefly, prays that Yuuri never sees this side of him.

"It is expected of you, yes," he says once he opens them again, and it's a cold, hard gaze of his blue eyes that falls on the only mother figure he ever knew. "So you will mourn."

Chapter End Notes

I'm dead tired and I could barely do any editing to this so I'm sorry if there's any fuck ups orz I'll answer the comments tomorrow, lovelies <3 hope you'll enjoy the drama in the meanwhile ahaha //sweats
"I am not an actress, my dear," she tells him. "I cannot cry at will, sadly."

"We both know you're a better actress than you are a mother or a wife, so why don't you just try, hm?" Victor says, cold permeating his every word. He's as much a lord now, as his father used to be: demanding, unapproachable, harsh. It seems to be the only way to speak to his mother, though.

Yet she still doesn't seem to comprehend what Victor is doing. She smiles sweetly at him and it's sickening, as much as it was when Victor was still a young boy.

"Everyone mourns in their own way, Vitya," she replies. "You cannot expect me to shed tears that I do not feel in my heart."

"And what do you feel in that heart of yours? Do you feel anything at all?" he asks. "He was your husband for over twenty years. Have you no fondness for him in the least?"

She doesn't reply, but she doesn't need to. Victor can see it on her face: there is fondness there, yes, but it isn't meant for the late Yegor Nikiforov. It's meant for the life of luxury that came with him, and the same life that she hopes will stay since Victor is back to replace his father.

Swallowing his anger, Victor rings for a servant. It takes a moment for them to arrive, but once they do Victor's rage has cooled into something far more collected than a roaring fire it was before. It's a beast now, clawing in his chest for a way out, but he doesn't let it: he keeps it on a leash and guides it where he wants it like a familiar, tamed pet.

"Collect my mother's dresses, jewellery, shoes, and everything else that is inappropriate for mourning," he commands. "Put everything in storage and bring me the key once you're done."

"Vitya! You cannot do that!"

The first real emotions – shock, then anger – make their home on his mother's face. They are much more fitting than her fake smiles, and Victor gives her one such in a petty show of revenge.

"I assure you that I can, mother," he chirps sweetly. "I am the lord of this house now. I can do what pleases me, and what would please me now, is to see you mourn appropriately for your late husband. You will agree with me that the way you are dressed is hardly an attire widows should don, yes?"

When she declines to answer, seething in silence instead, Victor nods at the servants that hesitated at her outburst.

"Go on," he tells them.

And go on they do.

In less than ten minutes chests upon chests of valuables are carried out of the room, leaving it almost bare. Harsh. Like it should be for someone in mourning.

"Vitya, darling," His mother takes a different approach, her voice pleading, "there is no need to go to
such lengths. I will comply with your wishes, if you feel about this so strongly."

Victor only nods. "Good. Then once the mourning period is over, you will be returned your belongings."

He is ready to leave, turns on his heel almost, but her hand latches at his elbow. The hold is tight, desperate, and it is more on an impulse that a conscious decision when he looks her way again.

"You cannot do this to me," she hisses. "I'm not some child to be punished for wrongdoings. Think about what people will say! You know the servants gossip! We will be on the tongues of the entire county before you even know it!"

"And what would they say about you, if they knew how you truly felt?" Victor hisses back, temper lost. "After all the games and people you've played over the years? Did you think of that? Your own reputation would be ruined, along with my father's. I will not allow you to do this, not when his body has barely chilled yet." He rears himself back some, trying to regain his composure and once he succeeds, he adds: "If you think about it, I'm actually doing you a favour."

"What favour?!" She shakes him by the arm so hard that Victor rips it away from her grasp so as not to stumble at the pull. "You're forcing me to dress like a– like a– like some nun! I will not stand for it! It's insulting!"

Lips curled with annoyance, Victor snaps:

"A nun? Why, yes, indeed, that is a splendid idea! You could use some humility, mother dearest."

She opens her mouth, cheeks flushed with rage, but Victor speaks over whatever pretence she plans on using now.

"Do not test my patience, I warn you, or you will find yourself a true nun, not only dressed as such."

There is a gleam in her eyes, one that promises revenge and suffering, but Victor ignores it on his way out of her chambers. He lets the door shut behind him with a bang that echoes through the corridor. He only takes a few steps before the enraged scream follows it, and he thinks: Good, that's what it should be.

He walks down to his father's study. It's now his, by all rights, but even as Victor steps through the door, he can't call it anything but his father's – the man's presence fills every object there, every stone, every book, every curtain and chair. Victor hesitates as he rounds the large table that his father spent hours of every day bent over. The wood is worn, marked here and there, but it's still warm to the touch as it was when Victor was a child and sneaked into here to glimpse the big world that he wasn't yet allowed in.

He smiles to himself at how silly that wish was. He's older, smarter, more experienced, and now he knows that the big world isn't so big. And it isn't a world he should've wished to belong to.

Just like it isn't the world he should introduce Yuuri to, no. From that, and the evils of nobility, he must protect the one thing that made his big world bearable, because Victor knows that if he loses this, another chance at happiness may never come – his father's example a vivid image in his eyes.
did I mention the drama happening? well yes, this is the drama
...and it's only the beginning of it
Funeral preparations under way, three days later Victor has gathered his bearings. The estate has been running smoothly, not to his mother's credit. Pavel did his best, and continues to do so under Victor's direction, for which Victor has rewarded him handsomely with a position of steward and a raise in pension. The old man who served his father almost his entire life is more loyal to him in death than his wife ever was in life, how funny life plays its tricks, Victor thinks with a heavy dose of bitterness.

"We will need to prepare accommodation," Victor tells him one day. "My men will be arriving shortly, so I wish to have everyone situated in appropriate quarters."

"How many men?" Pavel asks.


"We can handle that number, young--" Pavel stops himself, and then corrects: "Forgive me, master. It will take some time for this old man to remember."

Victor shakes his head, smiling. "It's quite alright. It will take some time for me, as well."

"Should we hold off with the funeral until your men arrive, then, my lord?"

Before he answers, Victor thinks of Yuuri: of how lovely it'd be to hold his hands and curl into his warmth at night when thoughts and memories keep him up. It will only be a few days longer until they can see each other again, but Victor can't allow Yuuri's first time in his home to be for such a sad event. Especially since he knows not of the condition of Yuuri's health. He might have recovered from the fever, or he might have not – subjecting him to a long strain of a funeral could not bode well.

In the end, Victor shakes his head at Pavel.

"No," he says. "We'll hold it as planned, on the day after tomorrow."

Turns out, he was right to order so.

The day starts with a growl of thunder and the world itself seems to be in mourning. The unforgiving heavens rain down on their heads and the lightning rattles their bones. Victor holds his mother under the arm as her dress gets tugged by unruly winds. She looks frail in black, pale and unwell, like any proper widow should look at her husband's burial site. Yet her eyes gleam when she looks at him and Victor knows, oh, he knows this is all but another game to her.

He is not far from thinking so, as she proves him later, dabbing a beautifully crocheted handkerchief under her dry eyes when the mourners pass on their sincere, sometimes not, condolences. They speak no words to each other, but Victor knows that it's only a tentative peace, one like those that come before a storm. He waits for it, and waits, and waits, and the storm is coming, yes, but it doesn't come when he expects it to, nor from the place he expects it from.
It's not his mother that becomes the catalyst of it, but an uncle: family by blood, not only by title.

"Yegor was a shrewd man," uncle Yakov tells Victor, hand strong held within Victor's own. "Hell takes those first."

It is by far the truest thing anyone has said about Victor's father that day and he gives a short, choked laugh. Yakov, Duke Feltsman as he'd be, claps him on the shoulder at the same time as thunder splits the skies. It makes Victor twitch, but Yakov thankfully does not comment on it.

"If you need help, boy, send a word. I might not be a family man, but you are the last of our blood to keep an eye on. If there's anything I can do for you, don't hesitate."

"Thank you, uncle," Victor says, truly grateful. "I appreciate your presence, and the offer. I've noticed, however, that aunt Lilia isn't with you and curiosity bounds me to ask, did anything happen?"

Yakov gives a grunt, then a shrug, and then answers:

"Nothing much. Just your old people, leading different lives, wanting different things." He notes Victor's inquiring gaze, and adds: "She's a governess to the young princess Camellia. Write her yourself if you wish to know more. Lord knows, you'll have more luck at hearing back from her than I do."

"I will do that then," Victor nods.

"Be warned that she will try to find you a match too," Yakov says. "She's been talking of it ever since she took over as the princess' governess. You might find yourself with a royal wife sooner than you'd like, Vitya, so be sure to keep your head about you and refuse before she even offers to act as your intermediary."

"A wife?" Victor repeats, distaste clear in his voice. "I have never wanted for one, nor do I now. In fact, I have met someone during my travels and I would be very much upset to find that my life has been meddled in without my want or consent."

"You ought to speak with Lilia yourself then," Yakov tells him. "I do not partake to matters of heart, it is not my favoured pastime."

"And it is aunt Lilia's?" Victor asks, amused at the concept. Even Yakov's grim face brightens some with a smile, albeit a little one. "I will make certain to write her soon, in that case. Wouldn't want my lover to find out that instead of coming to a funeral, he'll be seeing me at my wedding."

"He'll be here?" Yakov asks, to which Victor nods and replies: "In a few days."

"I do not need to remind you to conduct yourself properly, yes?"

Yakov gives him a look, one that means to be intimidating, but to Victor it's only amusing.

"I am not the one you should be directing those words to," he says and turns his head to where his mother is all but weeping in her sister's arms. Lady Plisetskaya pats her on the back, but even she seems to know the true disposition of her sister, because when her eyes meet Victor's fleetingly, she bows his head to him with far more respect and compassion that her sister's whole body could ever hold.

"I always told Yegor, he should've picked the other one," Yakov grunts before he leaves.
Frankly, Victor can't agree more. But, alas, what's done is done, and he now has to live with the burden of his father's decisions. The least Victor hopes for, though, is that in the process he does not become a copy of that which he so desperately tried to escape all those years ago.

Chapter End Notes

arranged marriage anyone? uwu
jkjk I wouldn't do that to them... or would I? ;3c
If Victor has been gifted with the power of foresight instead of his silly gold touch that is more trouble than the gain it offers, he may have been able to predict what was coming. Alas, he has not, and in his blissful ignorance he missed the signs that were surely there when he wasn't looking.

It is a week and three days past his departure from Yuuri's side that a servant informs him of the large group making their way up hill to Snowberry Estate. At once, Victor orders Tristan to be saddled and leaves everything with no second thoughts, but before he can as much as put one foot in the stirrup, he's called away by the one he wishes to see the least of all: his mother.

"My lord!" a chamber maid shouts after him. She's gathered her skirts in both hands and runs towards him as fast as she can, clearly disturbed. "The lady! She's, my lord, she's throwing things! Screaming and shouting obscenities, like– like she's been possessed with grief! You need to come quickly, lest she hurts herself!"

Foul mood clear on his face, Victor stomps to her chambers. What awaits him, however, is not what he expects. His mother stands in the ruin that became of her room – there's glass, pieces of the broken tea set, drawers pulled out of their rightful places with their contents spilled over the floor, and even the curtains have been ripped from the windows.

The petite woman who's done it all screams sharply just as Victor enters and he only has a split second to duck before a vase whistles over his shoulder into the hall, where it splits into a thousand pieces on the marble stones.

"What on earth are you doing?!!" Victor demands once he whips his head around after the initial shock of the moment has passed. "Stop that!"

She does not stop in the slightest. Hair flying astray and a mad glint in her eye, she picks the first thing at hand – the bouquet of lilies that previously occupied the vase that's now crushed into smitherins behind Victor's back – and flings it at Victor's face. He's barely able to lift and arm to block some of it from hitting his head, but it's only the tip of the iceberg, it seems. Other things are hurled at him, one after another, and Victor curses vehemently as he bats them all away, trying to get closer.

He prevails when his mother runs out of the things to throw. She screams then, loud and piercing, but Victor takes the moment to close the distance between them and grab her by the arms, so that she can't pick up anything else.

"Calm down, woman!" he snaps at her when she struggles against his hold. "What's gotten into you? Have you gone mad?"

"You," she hisses at him. Twists around in his arms and almost breaks free, but Victor holds fast even as she slams her palm on his chest. "You are what's gotten into me! You've come home, finally! After all the shame you brought to me when you refused to marry that Crispino girl! Everyone looked at me like I was defective, like I couldn't raise you right! I hated it, you hear me?! I hated it and I hate you!"
She hits him again, and again, just to make sure her words reach him. And they do, still. Even after the years have passed, Victor still feels the burden of his refusal to marry the little Crispino girl weigh heavily on his conscience. Yet, he does not regret it.

"She was too young," he tells his mother, who snarls at him like a rabid dog. "You know that, I've told you that a million times before I left! If you hadn't pushed for it--"

"So what if she was young?! You could've waited to take her, we could've raised her to be ours," she spits. "But you threw a tantrum like an unruly child and left, leaving your father and I to suffer the disgrace of your actions for many long years. And now--" She heaves a breath so sharp, so sudden, that Victor flinches. "After everything we've done for you, after everything we've sacrificed for you--Now you've come back to bury your father and you've brought a whore with you?"

Anger, hot and white, shots through Victor like a flash of lightning does across a stormy sky. He cares little for the insults to himself; he's heard all of it, and more. But Yuuri, his sweet, caring Yuuri, doesn't deserve this treatment from anyone. Especially her.

Victor isn't even aware of moving, it all happens so fast. When he comes back to himself, his hand is lifted in the air and his mother holds her cheek in hand. Guilt stabs Victor in the heart, but it lessens significantly at the rage that contorts her face.

"You ungrateful child," she hisses. "I've raised you like my own, I've cared for you, I wanted all the best for you--"

"The only thing you wanted was for me to be your obedient little doll," Victor spats right back at her. "You never cared about me! You never even tried! The only thing you were ever good at was spending father's gold and gossiping, don't try to deny it!"

"How dare you?! I've raised you as if you were my own and now you give me cheek? I could've had children of my own, if I didn't sacrifice everything for you!"

"Raised me? You?" he repeats, incredulous.

It's almost enough to make him laugh, but Victor stifles the bitterness and only pushes her away, disgusted. She stumbles over the long hem of her dress, but twirls around in an angry mess of curls and skirts, utterly unfazed.

"Neither father, nor you, have ever done anything that could be called raising," Victor tells her, voice hard. "If it wasn't for the tutors and the servants, I would've been left all alone, because the two of you were too busy doing... what, dear mother? Care to tell me how you spent your days? Lounging around, having tea parties with your lady friends and spending father's gold, then my gold on dresses and jewellery, and presents for all those people you wished to impress?"

Victor's lip curls. He glances down at the face he's come to deeply hate over the many years of his boyhood and there is no compassion in him now for the woman the world calls his mother. She is hardly anything such, never was and never will be, but even with as much as she's done to make him despise her, he still can't bring himself to sever her rights to remain in residence. He would have the authority as the lord of the manor, but... he is not the kind of man who'd do that to a helpless woman.

"You may stay here," he tells her, disregarding her glares, "and live here like you have until now. After the mourning period has passed, your things will be returned to you. If you wish to leave, that is more than fine with me, but if you intend on staying here, then I'd suggest you begin to act like the lady you were raised to be. This estate is not a place for rabid animals like you've proven yourself to be just now."
"You would throw me out?" she asks, venom in her voice. "Your own mother?"

"You are no mother of mine. My mother died during childbirth, and you... you're just a woman with whom I never wish to be associated again, but have to for propriety's sake. Don't think too high of yourself, it's much too late for that," Victor says, and it's the last thing he speaks before he turns on his heel and leaves her chambers.

Chapter End Notes

you know, now that I've read this again I think vitya may have gone too far, but on the other hand I think it fits well with the situation hmmm idk?? I'm conflicted about this chapter for SO many reasons bc I don't think vitya would ever hit anyone but then I don't think he wouldn't in a situation such as this so I'm just gonna leave this to your judgement @Data
Chapter 60

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

From the moment Yuuri steps into the Snowberry Estate everything is big, and golden, and absolutely terrifying. The servant who greets them at the door – the butler, Pavel, as he introduces himself to Yuuri with a deep, respectful bow that makes Yuuri instantly fluster – bids a house maid forward and orders to take them to the guest chambers in the West wing. The woman curteseys and without a word begins to lead the way deep into the mansion: a corridor here, a hallway there, a door, a golden archway...

"This way, my lord," she says when Yuuri's steps falter at the new sights before him.

He's glad for Ilia's silent presence at his side. The page is far from Yuuri's confidant, but his face is familiar in this entirely unwelcoming place and it keeps Yuuri from going back on his promise to Victor.

Victor, who isn't here.

"Where is Vi– um, Lord Nikiforov, I mean?" Yuuri asks the maid.

"He was called to the lady's side, my lord," she answers. "She's had a trying time grieving, my lord."

"That's understandable," Yuuri murmurs, ashamed that he did not think of it himself.

He doesn't say anything against the continuous spill of 'my lord's that leave the servants' lips when they refer to him. As much as it makes him uncomfortable still, it would not do for him to insist otherwise now that the entire household is immersed in grief.

"Please, give Lady Nikiforov my deepest condolences."

The maid offers him a smile. "I will, my lord. I'm certain mistress will appreciate it."

She leaves them in a room bigger than Yuuri's entire childhood home and curteseys on her way out. Ilia asks if there is anything Yuuri needs and when Yuuri shakes his head no, he does the same. He's a servant, too, Yuuri realizes as the doors close behind him.

In this manor, there are only those who serve and those who are served: divided by their birth and raised into opportunity and riches, or the lack thereof. Yuuri himself would've never made it to a place such as this, if it wasn't for the opportunity that has been awarded to him by fate itself. If he didn't save Christophe Giacometti all those years back, if they didn't become friends... he would not be here on this day. He would not have caught Victor Nikiforov's eye, he would not have fallen in love. A chance meeting all those years back has changed Yuuri's life which otherwise might have been set in stone.

Is Yuuri glad for it?

As he sits alone in the richly decorated sitting room, Yuuri thinks that it's possible. Perhaps. He might not be happy at the moment, for the occasion is far from a joyous one, yet he knows he has found something in Victor that he wishes to hold onto. And that something will not be tarnished by his
discomfort at having been thrown into the lap of luxury.

Hours pass while Yuuri sits there, awaiting the moment that Victor comes to his side or calls for him. The minutes pass slowly, indecently so. On more than one occasion, Yuuri finds himself dozing off only to be awoken by a servant asking if he needs anything. His reply is always the same:

"No, thank you. I simply wish to wait for Lord Nikiforov."

They leave him in peace every time. And every time the big, golden door opens, Yuuri's hope rises, and then falls when he is once again disappointed that it is not Victor who steps into the room.

The sun sets outside as he waits, but Victor doesn't come. A different maid lights up the candles around the room, and another one brings him some food – on a golden tray, with golden utensils and platters. The sight of it is more comforting than Yuuri would've ever thought, but he discovers that he has no appetite and simply continues his aimless staring around the room that he now knows the decor of by heart.

It's only when Ilia appears in the door to help Yuuri get ready for bed, does Yuuri realize that the moon is hanging high in the sky. Ilia, the good boy he is, must notice the crestfallen look on Yuuri's face and takes pity on him, but his kind words miss their mark.

"His Lordship seems to be occupied today," Ilia tells him.

"Of course he is," Yuuri replies, shoulders tense. "His father just died."

The air in the room sours instantly.

Yuuri berates himself for speaking in such thoughtless manner, but even as he opens his mouth to apologize, the words don't come. He abhors this side of him, the one that can be crass and harsh simply because he wishes for others not to see his shortcomings. Ilia, however, only bows his head in acceptance, continuing to disrobe him in silence. It seems that Yuuri's behaviour is not as peculiar as he himself believes, yet he still forces the apology onto his lips.

"I'm sorry," he says while Ilia folds his tunic. "That was uncalled for. I'm just... I'm worried for him, that much I believe is obvious, but it's no excuse to treat you poorly."

"It's quite alright, my lord," Ilia says, small smile on his face. "I understand. If you wish, maybe I could give His Lordship a message from you?"

"You'd do that for me?" Yuuri asks, touched.

Ilia smiles brighter. "Of course, my lord. I'm certain His Lordship misses you just as much as you miss him. It would be a joy to all of us, I'm sure."

Yuuri's cheeks colour at the lack of shame in Ilia's confession. Are all servants aware of their masters' affairs this intimately? Yuuri cannot bear to think of what else do they whisper amongst themselves while their masters' ears can't reach them.

"Will you tell him that I'm here for him, whatever he needs?" he asks, embarrassed, but determined. If this is his only chance to speak to Victor he doesn't want to have any regrets. "And that I will stay for however long he wants me to stay. He's not alone, and he doesn't need to be. Taking comfort in others is not a shameful thing. And, and just, tell him to please take care of himself? I know it must be hard at a time like this, but it's especially important now."

Ilia nods when Yuuri takes a deep breath, having spoken straight from the heart.
"Anything else, my lord?"

Yuuri thinks about it for a moment and then shakes his head. No, all that he needed, he's spoken. Now he can only wait for Victor's reply and hope he'll come to Yuuri, if he so chooses to.

"And do you need anything else, my lord?" Ilia asks, which startles Yuuri a little.

He's forgotten about all his wants, thinking of Victor. But what more could he want except to be by the side of the man he's chosen in a time when he needs him most?

Yuuri shakes his head again. No. There is nothing more he needs.

And when the doors close after Ilia wishes him a good night, Yuuri's heart knows it is true.

Chapter End Notes

60 chapters guys??? 60 days of daily updates??? what the heckie are we all doing here omg
Yuuri is almost asleep when he hears it: the sound of the door being opened.

Before he even sits up in bed, fear is gripping at his throat and his heart speeds into an uneven canter inside his chest. A figure, dark and menacing, crosses the room straight to the bed. Yuuri's first instinct is to scramble away, but he halts in his flight once the moon peeks through the window and illuminates the face of the assailant, because he's not one at all – it's Victor.

"What--"

"I can't believe they put you in here," Victor speaks sharply, interrupting Yuuri's question.

It startles Yuuri again, and Victor must notice, for he sighs and his face softens into something much warmer, much more him.

"Come with me, darling," Victor says, offering Yuuri a hand. "You shouldn't have been here all this time, alone. I don't know who's responsible for placing you in this room, but you belong at my side and I will have no less than that."

Before he can think twice about it Yuuri takes Victor's hand. It's cold, terrifyingly so. Victor helps him up and wraps him in his arms, face buried into Yuuri's neck. His nose is as cold as his hands, and Yuuri can feel their touch through his thin sleeping tunic. It's as much for Yuuri's comfort as it must be for Victor's that he envelops Victor in an embrace.

"I missed you," Victor whispers. His lips press against the place on Yuuri's neck where his blood pulses strongly, and it's lovely enough after days of not having him close that Yuuri shivers.

"I missed you as well," he replies. "How are you feeling?"

Victor laughs softly, but there is a bitter, unhappy tinge to it. Yuuri's arms tighten around him, a reminder that he's here, that Victor is safe, and it's only Yuuri who will ever see him like this. And it seems to succeed, because Victor's shoulders slump and his laughter dies down into a weary sigh.

"Let's lie down," Yuuri offers.

"They'll be looking for me in the morning if I'm absent from my chambers," Victor opposes, but he goes willingly when Yuuri tugs on his hand.

"Then let them look," Yuuri simply says. "You deserve some peace and quiet, at least at night. Have you had any rest since you've arrived?"

Victor doesn't answer with words, but the expression that crosses his face is enough to tell Yuuri the truth. No, he didn't think so either.

He slips back under the duvet and makes space for Victor. It takes a second glance and Yuuri invitingly patting the sheets next to him for Victor to give in. Yuuri waits as Victor shrugs off his outer robe and pants, but as soon as he slips into bed, Yuuri's there to wrap himself around him like a
human furnace. The coldness of Victor's body seems to not be limited only to his hands and nose – Victor's feet and knees, even his thighs are freezing, as if death itself was taking possession of his body limb by limb.

Yuuri shivers, pushing himself impossibly close. He can feel the slight expansion of Victor's chest with every breath that he takes. It's a little comfort, but with a bigger gain – Yuuri's relief is warm and strong, and he holds Victor in his arms like he never wants to let go.

"How was your journey?" Victor asks after a moment of soaking in each other's presence. "I wish I could've shown you all the sights on the way..."

"Ilia did splendidly at that," Yuuri tells him, running a hand through Victor's hair. His fingers catch on the knots here and there, and he carefully unwinds them. "I wish you could've been with us, but the circumstances couldn't be helped. Thank you for the letter as well. I admit I was fairly upset when I was told of what happened, but I bear no grudge against you, Vitya. You did what you were supposed to. There's no fault in that."

It's as if the burden of leaving a feverish Yuuri weighted hard on him, some of the tension in Victor's body recedes. The rest, however, stays, but Yuuri has a good idea what might be the cause of that.

"But enough about me, how have the matters here been? Are you... how are you?"

Victor doesn't answer him. The silence stretches out for so long that Yuuri peers down into the dark to see whether Victor has fallen asleep, but the sight that meets him is something that nothing could prepare him for – Victor's eyes are bright and welled with tears, which slowly roll down flushed, blotchy cheeks right before Yuuri's eyes.

"Oh, Vitya," Yuuri whispers, heartbroken for the man who clearly has suffered more than he ever wished anyone to know. "Oh, sweetheart..."

He wipes the trails with his thumbs, cradles Victor's face, but no matter how many times he repeats the action, new tears replace the old. It's painful to watch, but even more pain is brought to him by the thought that there is nothing Yuuri can do to help Victor with what burdens him. In his powerlessness, the only way Yuuri can think of to comfort Victor is to hold him closer and allow the tears to flow freely until they dry on their own.

"Yuuri," Victor hiccups in his sniffles. "Why... why did I have to be born into a family like this?"

It's a question Yuuri has heard people ask in many different stages of their lives, in different roles, different kinds of existence. But as much as he wishes to know it, Yuuri has yet to find an answer. Even if it is so, it would not do to remain silent, so he speaks what he thinks, because he finds comfort in the certainty that no matter what, if it's coming from the heart, it will not fail.

"We don't choose where we're born, that much is true," Yuuri agrees. "But the circumstances of our birth do not define us, Vitya. You are not defined by your title, your gold, or your parents. You can be whoever you want to be. Just as a noble can fall into depravity or poverty, a shepherd can be uplifted and reach greatness. It's all in the choices we make and who we are as ourselves."

Yuuri rests a kiss against Victor's forehead and speaks the rest into the crown of his head.

"And who you are is a kind and loving man. I don't know if it's your nature, or you were raised to be this way, but I am thankful to your parents for one thing – they brought you into this world, and it's thanks to that that we've met. Isn't that reason enough to be happy for the families we both belong to?"
Victor doesn't reply, but his arms squeeze Yuuri tight enough to make breathing a challenge. Yet, Yuuri suffers through it willingly, holding him, soothing him, and when sleep takes Victor from sheer exhaustion, Yuuri watches over him until the dawn breaks and the world awakens from slumber.

Chapter End Notes

ok bc ao3 is having some issues I'm gonna quickly drop this and will answer comments tomorrow!!

also AAAYYYY GUESS WHO'S BACK TOGETHER -- OUR BOYS <3
I hope you had a fun time crying ;3c
Chapter 62

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The sun is high up when Yuuri awakens from the sleep he doesn't remember succumbing to. His arm is protectively curled around Victor's waist as the man slumbers by his side. Yuuri wonders what it is that has snatched him from the land of dreams, but he doesn't have to wonder for long: he hears the footsteps outside in the corridor, rushed, loud, even where he sits up in bed almost on the opposite end of the chamber that is located past the spacious sitting room.

Slowly, he rises, mindful not to wake Victor with his escape and leaves the chambers to investigate.

"What's happened?" Yuuri asks the first maid that he sees rushing past him.

"My lord," she says and curtsies on sight. "Lord Nikiforov is missing. His attendant came to wake him this morning and he was just gone! So now all of us have been tasked with searching the manor. You wouldn't have seen His Lordship by chance, would you, my lord?"

It takes Yuuri a glance around, at all the haste, all the ruckus, to decide on what he says next.

"No." He offers an apologetic smile that he hopes comes across as genuine. "I can't say I have. But if I do happen upon him, I will let you know."

She returns his smile and nods, but before she can run off to continue the search for the lord who is currently sleeping comfortably in Yuuri's bed, Yuuri asks:

"Could I trouble you for some breakfast before you leave? It doesn't have to be much. And some tea would be nice, if you'd be so kind."

"Of course, my lord, right away."

"Thank you."

Yuuri returns to the sitting room and then quietly enters the bedchamber. He dresses himself in the same clothes he's worn the day before, struggling a little with the tying of all the threads. Once he's done, he casts a glance at Victor, who has spread himself all over the bed in Yuuri's absence. It brings a smile to Yuuri's lips, so fond and loving that he cannot hold himself back from leaning over the bedside and resting a kiss on Victor's forehead, much akin to how he did during the night.

Victor doesn't stir at the gentle touch, exhausted as he is. Yuuri leaves him to rest and reenters the sitting room just as the doors leading outside open. It isn't a maid who steps through, but Ilia, bearing a tray filled with food that could feed not two, but three men over.

"Good morning, my lord," he greets Yuuri calmly.

"Not to all of us, it seems." Yuuri nods his chin at the door, where they can both hear some shouting. "Has there been any news yet?"

Ilia gives him an amused look that Yuuri can't help but blush at. Oh, he realizes, he must–

"We both know that His Lordship is not missing, my lord," Ilia says, eyes twinkling. "No need to
pretend."

Chastised, Yuuri asks: "You knew the whole time, didn't you?"

Ilia smiles at him in a way that clearly takes amusement at Yuuri's innocent way of thinking, but Yuuri can't truly find it in himself to be offended at being perceived a fool – because he is one. Ilia has told him before that he'd served Victor for many years, so why did Yuuri think Victor could disappear somewhere without his attendant knowing?

He shakes his head, disappointed by his own naivety.

"I didn't know for certain," Ilia admits as he spreads the breakfast on the table before Yuuri. The amount of food only now begins to make sense: Ilia must have brought enough for Victor as well. "But I suspected. His Lordship surely must have missed you after all this time, my lord. It was simply a matter of time until you both disappeared, I thought, so when it happened I wasn't really taken by surprise."

"But how did you know he's here?" Yuuri questions, while Ilia pours him the tea. "We could've left the mansion for all you knew."

"Yes, you could've," Ilia nodded. "But you were both tired, and I didn't have anything to base my belief on until you asked the maid for breakfast. After that, it was rather obvious."

Ilia smiles, and his smile is one of the most shrewd that Yuuri has seen on his young face. It breathes a little fear and apprehension into Yuuri's bones, but he convinces himself it's nothing to ponder on. Ilia is Victor's servant and, from what Yuuri has seen of him, his loyalty is honour bound to his lord. If anything, having an ally like Ilia makes a certain level of relief lighten Yuuri's breathing.

"Aside from that, you have just given me the answer yourself, my lord," Ilia adds.

Yuuri blinks at him. "I did? When?"

"When you flushed. And then when you asked if I knew. It was quite easy to read you, I must admit." Before Yuuri can respond to Ilia's teasing, the look on Ilia's face settles into something more serious. "You might want to be more careful about your facial expressions, my lord. There are people in the high society who would use them against you, if you're too free with them."

"I know well the sort of people you speak of," Yuuri allows. "But I will not turn myself into one of them simply to keep them from teasing me. It isn't who I am, or aspire to be."

"That is very admirable, my lord." Ilia bows his head. "Alas, I would hate to see you hurt, so please be cautious."

Yuuri offers him a smile, one that he hopes conveys all the gratitude he feels for Ilia's kind words. They have only known each other a few days, but the journey here has brought them close. Yuuri knows that even if Ilia is Victor's attendant, he can depend on him to be truthful and a confidant.

"I have dealt with nobles before, Ilia," Yuuri says. "I do not enjoy it one bit, but I can handle myself on par with them, if I must. But thank you for the sentiment."

Ilia nods. "Shall I tell them where to find His Lordship then?"

Yuuri hesitates for a moment, torn between being truthful and allowing Victor the much needed rest. The choice he makes is an obvious one, however.
"Not yet," he gives. "Let Victor sleep a little longer. He needs it."

When Ilia bows low this time, there is a smile on his face: a soft, warm little quirk of lips. Yuuri watches him leave the room, wondering if it was for him or for Victor that Ilia's happiness shone so beautifully, but once his stomach grumbles, he discards all thoughts and sets his eyes on the true feast before him. He might be taking the mantle of a dragon protecting his treasure, but no dragon, even a metaphorical one, can fight when it's starving.

Chapter End Notes

did I ever mentioned that I love dragons? no, well, I do ;3c is that a hint at something?
hmmmmmmmm

ALSO guys I just wanted to thank you all again bc this story has just hit 1k kudos and I'm so proud and touched that I just want to give yall a big hug <3 thank you for being amazing, for reading this story, for leaving comments and kudos, and for making this all happen bc trust me -- this was supposed to be just a little silly oneshot and now it's a whole thing that YOU LOT made me write, so truly, this is as much my own accomplishment, as it is yours! bless yall ❤️ ❤️ ❤️
Victor's eyes open to sunlight streaming through the big manor windows. It illuminates the room, reflects of all the gold that covers the furniture and the walls. Blinded, Victor groans and burrows deeper into the pillows. There is something gnawing at the back of his mind, but when he reaches for it, it slips just out of his grasp. Soon, however, his mulish head begins to spin thought like silk and he remembers.

These are not his chambers, and this is not his bed. Everything is distastefully golden, but Victor cares little for it as the events of the previous day rush to him in a wave that leaves him tired, as if he didn't sleep way past morning. Despite that, Victor throws off the bedcovers, dons his robes in haste, and makes his way to the sitting room.

He hears the voices before he even opens the door and he pauses there for a second, too curious for his own good.

"You hold it like this, my lord," Ilia says. "Then you lift that finger... Yes, good."

"This is ridiculous," Yuuri's voice comes through the wood, amused and light. "Do they really drink like this? Victor too?"

"It is a sign of good breeding," Ilia replies. "Do not ask me why. I don't have all the answers. And yes, His Lordship does this as well. In polite company at least."

Yuuri's laughter is a brilliant sound that heals Victor's heart like it heals his mind. The hand that Victor is resting on the doorknob twitches with an impulse to join them, but Victor holds back from it when the door leading out into the hallway opens. The unmistakable clack of armour makes Victor tense up, but even as his heart leaps out of his chest to join Yuuri, his feet remain rooted and his ear pressed against the gold-painted wood.

"My lord," a gruff voice of who Victor expects is a guard says, "I apologize for the intrusion, but we must search your chambers. Lord Nikiforov has not been found yet and we must ask all residents to vacate their rooms for the time being. Lady Nikiforova ordered so."

"I have told you before that Lord Nikiforov isn't here," Yuuri says. His voice loses all its light, but he sounds even. Sure. Victor can't help the surprise he feels as he stands on the other side of the door. "Instead of bothering honest people like this, you should be spending time on actually trying to find him. Have you checked the stables? Is his horse still there? What about the gardens?"

"We will search there after we see into your bedchamber, my lord," the guard replies. "Unless there is a reason for you to delegate us elsewhere? Anything you wish to hide?"

Before Yuuri can reply, Victor thinks enough is enough. It's touching that Yuuri stands in to protect him from the world he was born into, even for just a moment, but Victor cannot allow Yuuri's reputation to suffer for his selfishness. Not like this.

He opens the door and steps into the room. All eyes turn to him at once and the attention would be daunting, if Victor was anyone else than Victor Nikiforov.
"I would appreciate it if the men I employ did not harass my guests in my absence."

Victor sweeps a cold gaze over the man who towers over Yuuri as if he wanted to intimidate him into compliance. Yuuri stands tall and proud before him, fearless in his protectiveness, but Victor can't allow him to stand alone: he crosses the room to stand by him as fast as his feet can carry him.

"My lord!" the guard exclaims, surprised. "So you were here!"

"Where I was and what I was doing is of no concern to you," Victor replies, hard. "Or my mother. And most definitely does not give you permission to disturb everyone at residence." The guard looks appropriately chastised by the choice words and Victor's frown lessens. "You may leave now. And call off this ridiculous search, I am not lost."

The man rushes to comply, away from Victor's ire.

"I shall bring you some fresh tea," Ilia bows and excuses himself from the room just when Victor turns to Yuuri, like a sunflower drawn to the sun.

Because Yuuri is just that – his sun, his joy, his comfort. He smiles at Victor, sheepish and apologetic, even as he steps closer to where Victor holds his hand to him. Their palms slide together, warm and sure.

"I'm sorry," Yuuri says. "I wanted to let you rest longer, but it seems we've woken you by accident."

Victor shakes his head. "Do not apologize. It has been the best rest I've had in days."

Yuuri's smile is sad when it touches his lips.

"I wish it not to be true, but I know it must be," Yuuri says softly. He lifts his other hand and runs a loving thumb over the arch of Victor's cheek – over the dark circles that must have formed there, Victor thinks. "I realize you must have heard a lot of it over the past few days, but I truly am sorry for what you must be going through now."

"Thank you," Victor says before he even realizes what Yuuri has said.

And once he does, a small smile reaches his heart as well. Because Yuuri did not pay his respects to the loss Victor has suffered, no. He did not honour the late Lord Nikiforov. His condolences were for Victor, for the pain he's gone through, for the sleep and joy he's lost.

It's just like Yuuri to say the perfect thing when Victor needs him most, and Victor doesn't even think of his actions when he takes Yuuri's face in his hands and kisses him with all the love, passion and gratitude he bears for this young man who has flipped his world on its axis.

As Yuuri kisses him back, tender, but deep, Victor realizes that he's marginally wrong: Yuuri didn't flip his world – he keeps on spinning it, and weaving, and threading, and making it into something new and beautiful; a work that Victor can be and already is proud of.

Chapter End Notes

heads up yall, I'm starting the crucial stages of renovations so I might be late answering
comments or even late with chapters, but I promise to do my best and still update daily (at least for as long as I have chapters at hand), so please be patient with me? love ya <3
Chapter 64

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It seems impossible to forget a touch so electric, so addicting, but as Victor kisses Yuuri he comes to realize that he must have, because every brush of Yuuri's lips, every touch of his tongue and every stuttered breath he takes – it all makes Victor feel like he hasn't felt before. Far too soon, Yuuri pulls away and rests his forehead against Victor's to catch his breath. Eyes of molten brown look into Victor's with affection so warm that Victor melts into it and submits his will freely into Yuuri's hands.

"Come," Yuuri says after a moment of blissful silence, "you need to eat, my lord."

"I need you," Victor replies and his words are more true now than ever, even if he allows himself to be pulled towards the chaise. "So, how long have you been lying for me, my Yuuri? My, I must have corrupted you already and you've been here only a day!"

He says it all teasingly, with a small smile on his face, but Yuuri's gaze is serious when it falls on him. Victor feels a tiny bit silly for making light of a matter as serious as this. Even so, Yuuri does not hold it against him – he simply gives Victor's hand a squeeze, a silent "You need not pretend with me, Vitya," that makes the burden that Victor is carrying half its weight.

"How long has it been since you've last slept? Eaten?" Yuuri asks, kind. When Victor shakes his head, because he cannot recall, Yuuri goes on: "I will lie for you, Vitya, even if you don't ask for it, so whenever you feel like you're at the end of your patience, please know that with me you will always have the peace you need. I will protect that, no matter the cost."

There are no words to describe the emotion that overtakes Victor in that moment, but the tears that well in his eyes have one source. It's gratitude. It's peace. It's warmth. All of it, which has one common ground that flutters in Victor's heart like a bird ready to fly – love.

No love was there for Victor in this house when he still lived here, and none is there for him now when the last of his direct bloodline is gone. His mother has never loved another human being in her entire life, hence the only kind of love that developed in her warped heart was greed. Victor might have learned it from her, but his wantings are directed in a much different way than hers: what she desires in gold and attention, he craves in affection, and only now, with Yuuri, is he able to truly find it.

"Sometimes," Victor says, voice barely a breath louder than a whisper, "I think that I really have done nothing to deserve you, yet I'm so lucky you've chosen to stay by my side."

"Then there is two of us," Yuuri tells him, while a precious, fond smile touches his lips.

It's strange how easy it is for Victor to be open with Yuuri, a man whom he's only known for so many weeks. In all that strangeness, however, it doesn't feel rushed. Not by a second, not by a day. It feels right, as if time itself has stopped existing, allowing only their souls to resonate on the same plane of understanding.

"My Yuuri," Victor sighs, bringing up Yuuri's hand to kiss it with reverent adoration. "You are my miracle, my saviour, my divine protector, and I worship you."
Yuuri's cheeks darken with a flush that is both fetching and enticing, and Victor smiles at it. It is good to know that he can still bring forth this shyness in Yuuri's sweet nature. Emboldened by it, Victor leans closer to press his lips to one such cheek. It's delightfully warm, and the skin is smooth under his touch, flawless.

Alas, even if flawed, Victor would still think of it as perfect.

"You are incorrigible, my lord," Yuuri complains softly, but his eyes shine with unhiden delight.

Victor's laughter is carefree for the first time in days as it spills from his lips.

"Forgive me, my love. I have simply missed your presence dearly," Victor replies once his mirth dies down. It does not disappear, though, for which he is more than glad. "How was your journey here? Did you recover from the fever just fine? You don't seem to be ailed anymore, but if you need a doctor or a healer or--"

Before he can continue, Yuuri's finger on his mouth halts the words. Yuuri smiles, shakes his head, and says:

"I am as well as I was when we first met, my lord. Maybe even better, now that I'm with you."

And Victor's heart trembles, and it flutters, and it beats twice as it normally does, for Victor is a fool and it is a known truth that fools in love are fools in all matters of things. If it's for this, Victor thinks as Yuuri's cheeks colour once again at his own audacity, then he does not mind being a fool for the rest of his life.

"As am I," he gives warmly in reply. "Your presence alone is a source of great courage and comfort to me, my Yuuri. Thank you for coming."

"Thank you for inviting me, Vitya," Yuuri whispers and it's a beautiful, intimate thing that Victor cradles against his heart like a precious gemstone. "I hope you do know that no matter where you wish to go, I would follow you as long as you want me."

"I didn't know that, no, but..." Victor offers him a smile. "I do know now. And I promise you that I will never leave you alone again."

Yuuri's little smile is a blessing of its own, but he follows it with words that Victor doesn't know he wanted to hear until Yuuri speaks them right against Victor's lips.

"I will keep you to that promise, my lord."

They lose themselves in a tiny world of their own, and when Ilia returns with freshly brewed tea, it's to no one's surprise that both Victor and Yuuri wear matching smiles that widen every time their gazes meet – it is the privilege of newfound love, after all.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not saying the floof is here to lull yall into a false sense of clam but... ;3c
"The funeral was four days ago," Victor divulges when Yuuri asks. "There are still some of the family members lingering in the manor, so if you do not wish to meet them, you can hide here. I would've wanted you to stay in my chambers, but for the public eye maybe it is indeed better that Pavel put you in this wing."

"I don't mind where I stay, as long as I can be there for you when you need me," Yuuri says, earnest, and Victor offers him a smile in his gratitude. "Ilia did mention some names to me on our journey here, but I don't think I have grasped them all. You have quite a big family."

Victor laughs at that.

"Not entirely," he says. "Most of the people that are included under the name of 'family' are only distant relations. Like Uncle Yakov, for instance. He is my grandfather's brother. Or little Lord Plisetsky. I believe his great grandfather and my great grandfather were brothers, so my grandmother was a Plisetskaya by birth, which would make us... third cousins?"

"That sounds terrifying, if I'm to be honest."

The look on Yuuri's face is made of confusion and concentration all at once, and it's hilarious enough that Victor chuckles.

"Worry not, my Yuuri, I shall teach you all you need to know about the Nikiforovs, if you so wish," he offers. "For example, did you know that the same way I'm related to Lord Plisetsky, I am also related to our current royal family?"

Yuuri's eyes go wide at that and his mouth drops open, so Victor continues with a grin: "Elisa Plisetskaya, so the sister to mine and Lord Plisetsky's great grandfathers, married Ilyes Leroy. So you could say that King Noah is my second cousin once removed. From that end of the family tree, I am also related to our mutual friend Christophe – he would be a third cousin, like Lord Plisetsky. Isn't it curious how nobles are all related to one another?"

"Curious is one way of putting it," Yuuri admits.

"What about your family?" Victor asks, unable to hold his tongue. "Is it only your parents and sister?"

Yuuri hums and takes a sip of his tea, but it is clear that he does it to avoid answering for a moment longer, if he can. It brings up an uncomfortable feeling in Victor's chest, so he hastens to say:

"You do not have to answer if you don't wish to. I am too curious for my own good at times, so please, don't feel obliged to say anything simply because I've been babbling your ear off."

"No, no, that's not it," Yuuri answers, shaking his head. There's a smile on his lips, and Victor answers it with one, albeit still with a little hesitation. "I only wonder what to say, really... My family, you see, we're nothing like you."
Yuuri fiddles with the porcelain rim of the cup that has been painted gold.

"My grandparents are dead," he says. "My uncle, father’s brother, is dead as well. And my mom, she had three sisters. One of them is dead, another lives way across the country, so we never really meet. And the last one, well... mother doesn't really like talking about her, so I believe there might be some bad blood between them. I can’t say for certain, but Mari and I never really breach the subject when she's involved. We do not wish to reopen old wounds."

"I understand," Victor gives.

He takes Yuuri's hand and holds it, light, unassuming. Yuuri turns his palm over and their hands slide together like they belong; it's more comfort than anything Victor has ever found in this house, with his family.

"My own family has its fair share of bad blood as well," he confesses. "My grandfather was disowned not long before my parents' wedding, which could've ruined my mother's chances of finding a husband at all. My father didn't care about it, though – he still married her, title or no title. It was a marriage of love, you know?" They smile at each other. "But grandfather Feltsman never forgave it, so while he was alive it was forbidden to talk of grandfather or uncle Yakov, who inherited his title. It's so silly that people would put a worthless title over family, over another human being. Don't you think so?"

Victor turns his head to face Yuuri, but he does not expect the soft, loving fondness that meets him there.

"You are a kind, precious soul, Victor Nikiforov," Yuuri tells him. "And the world is a better place with you in it."

Caught off guard, Victor knows that his cheeks have turned bright red. Part from embarrassment, part from the weight of Yuuri's kindness, Victor ducks his head. He doesn't belong to the shy people, but here, now, where he's found himself under the tender gaze of someone who sees the good in him, Victor can't help feeling this way.

And it's a happy, warm feeling, too.

"Then it is twice, no, thrice as good with you in it, my sweet Yuuri," Victor says back.

Yet Yuuri only tuts at him, like one would at a disobedient dog.

"Do not make this about me, Vitya," he says. "I know why you do it, and I will not have it. You may be uncomfortable with people seeing your kindness, with being vulnerable in the face of public, but I want you to know that I see you. And I always will."

Yuuri shifts closer and presses his cheek against Victor's while his arm wraps around Victor's shoulders in an embrace that is both light, calming, and at the same time a hard promise.

"I will keep your heart safe as best as I can."

And as Victor returns the embrace, he willingly puts said heart in Yuuri's hands, for now and forever, because he knows that there will never be a safer place for it – not even in his own chest, no.
remember me complaining about how everyone's related to everyone? well there ya go... and that's only a small portion of it //sweats
I think I could actually post pics of the tree drawn out if you want? let me know in the comments if you want that!
"So who else stays in the manor now?" Yuuri asks as the breakfast is cleaned from the table.

It's well into the afternoon and the sun is slowly making its way over the partially cloudy sky. They rest on the chaise, wrapped up in each other, so close you could not tell one from the other. It's warm and it's intimate, but not in a way that could be mistaken for anything else than simply taking comfort in being together.

"Most everyone has already left, but a few remain. The closest family, if you will," Victor says, tucking a stubborn lock of hair behind Yuuri's ear. It sprouts back up and Victor pouts as he tries again, much to the same result. "My cousin, Mila, is staying. And so is my aunt Yulianna. She's my mother's sister. They are set to depart in two days, so after that there will only be us here. And my mother, that is."

Yuuri hums. "You want to stay here, don't you? To keep an eye on your mother."

"Not in ways that you think, but yes," Victor agrees. There is no easy way to explain the kind of person his mother is, so he simply says it. "I've already told you that my mother wasn't good to me when I was growing up, but now she holds no more power over me. I would've left her for my father to deal with, but seeing as he's gone... I have to settle matters with her once and for all."

"That sounds rather ominous... What do you plan to do?"

Yuuri peers at him with trust and openness painted over his face and Victor feels how the ugly claws of shame rake his own chest from the inside out. He sighs, squeezes his eyes, and hides his face in Yuuri's shoulder. If only there was a way to avoid it all...

"I don't know," he admits. "I don't know, but... I have to do something."

Yuuri's hand brushes through his hair, gentle and reassuring. "Let me rephrase that, then. What do you want to do, Vitya?"

The answer comes to him faster than he can take the breath to speak the word.

"This," he says. "I just want to be with you. Without fears, worry, without having to handle my greedy mother who wants for nothing more than to lay her hands on my father's gold."

"I'm afraid I can't help you with that. But I can help you with this," Yuuri says as his thumb strokes the back of Victor's neck. "I can be there with you, offer comfort when you need it. Will that help, Vitya? Just say the word."

"That would be lovely, my Yuuri... but I cannot accept it."

Victor pulls back an inch. He refuses to look Yuuri in the eye, but Yuuri has none of it and turns Victor's head his way, cradling it in his palms. Victor bites his lip, tries to turn away from the inquisitive gaze, yet no matter what he does, he knows this calls for that honesty they have promised each other all those weeks ago.
So, he takes a breath, closes his eyes, and admits in a voice as hushed as a whisper:

"I don't want you to see me like that. Ruthless, cold, uncaring... I don't, I don't want you to know that side of me."

"But I do," Yuuri says, just as quiet. "I do, Vitya. I do. All your sides, I wish to know them. And all those sides, I wish to," He swallows, licks his lips, and goes on with determination that lights up his eyes golden, "I wish to love them, too. All the sides that there are to you, because all those sides make up the man that is Victor Nikiforov. You wouldn't be the kind man you are, if you didn't have this ruthless side."

"But how... how can you want this?" Victor asks, incredulous. "Aren't I just a cruel noble if I behave like that? Wouldn't I be the thing you despise most, if I acted like so?"

Yuuri shakes his head as much as their position on the chaise allows. "You are nothing like the nobles I despise, Vitya. Believe me."

"But how can you..."

"Only those who are ruthless know mercy and compassion. Only those who are cold can recognize true warmth. Only those who don't care are able to appreciate selflessness and kindness," Yuuri tells him. "And you know them all. The good and the bad, I've seen it. So I believe that when you act the way you need to, you will be able to be just in your judgement."

Victor does not notice how short out of breath he is until he opens his mouth to speak. He sucks in a greedy breath, moved by Yuuri's trust so much that tears gather in his eyes anew.

"You, my Yuuri, are a gift I will never deserve," he says.

"And yet, here I am, so you must, no?"

Yuuri smiles, a cheeky little smile that has Victor laugh despite how heavy with affection his heart feels. He can't bring any coherent words onto his tongue, so he squeezes Yuuri in his arms, and hard enough to have Yuuri groan from the strain on his ribs.

And when he laughs, Victor laughs with him, because as long as he has this, as long as he has Yuuri by his side, he knows he can tackle all the obstacles, and then some. And he will.

Chapter End Notes

I feel like crap today so pls forgive me for any mistakes, this is barely edited orz the tree will be up tomorrow (if I can do it), along with the answers to comments!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

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Chapter End Notes

I didn't want to go overboard (hence why jj isn't here but he is arsene's grandkid!) bc honestly I could very well add phichit's fam here and all of the leroy's (which there's a lot of I kid u not, jj has like 5 siblings????), so this is an abridged version that I had to cut and remake from scratch almost bc the program I'm using is dumb af and can't do shit fcyhvjun

hope it's still clear who's related to whom tho, but if not, hit me up with all the questions in the comment section down below! ^u^)b

and remember: the focus is on vitya and his family now, yuuri will have his own family drama arc, I promise ;3c
Every word that Yuuri has spoken since they reunited in the middle of the night has been nothing but the truth. He predicted that Victor would be heartbroken, after all news of a death in the family is never a cause for joy, but he did not expect the shattered pieces to be so fragile and small. There is a lingering doubt, weariness to Victor that Yuuri hasn't seen before and it breaks his own heart how little he can do to hold them all together.

Words of comfort and physical closeness seem to be the only things that offer any sort of reprieve, so Yuuri makes sure he does his best in those limited ways he knows.

"What do you usually do during the day?" Yuuri asks, grappling for any sense of normalcy. "I can't believe you only laze around like this. Surely even nobles have their own pastimes, no?"

Victor hums into Yuuri's collarbone. His head rests against Yuuri's chest and his eyes are closed, one could say he was dozing, but Yuuri knows he isn't. Every now and then Victor will turn his head here and there and rest a little kiss on the thin fabric of Yuuri's tunic or the patches of skin that peer from underneath. It's a sweet sentiment, yet Yuuri knows that it's done more to Victor's own comfort than his.

Which is more than alright, really.

"The life of a noble isn't very exciting, I have to admit," Victor sighs. His breath is warm against Yuuri's chest, like sunlight itself. "We play cards, go riding or hunting when the weather allows, but mostly we spend the time reading or entertaining guests. It's fairly boring in a mansion like this."

"It's a good thing you're with me then, because with you I don't think any second could ever be boring," Yuuri says honestly, which makes Victor chuckle.

"You are far too sweet on me, my Yuuri," Victor replies and lifts up some to press a kiss to Yuuri's lips. "But, I think there is one thing that could lift both of our spirits. Would you fancy a walk, my dear?"

Yuuri grins. "Lead the way."

Victor takes Yuuri's offered hand and leads like he promised: through the gold laden hallways and doors, out to the part of the mansion that Yuuri hasn't seen yet. There are many things to see, many more to admire, and Yuuri has to try really hard to remember to keep his mouth closed. It seems an impossible task, though, when they pass a double winged door which looks majestic enough that Yuuri's steps falter in awe.

"That's the library," Victor tells him. "The one I spoke about before, do you recall? One of these days we might be able to look for that wolf deity in there."

"That would be a productive way to spend the time," Yuuri agrees, hoping that to Victor's ears he does not sound as reluctant as he does to his own.

Victor must notice his hesitation, however, for his face softens into something akin to shame.
"Ah, I apologize. I simply assumed, but of course it might not be the case... With your upbringing it wouldn't be unusual, after all..." Yuuri gives him a confounded glance that serves to break Victor's rambling apology. "Forgive me for asking, but... can you read, Yuuri?"

"That's what has you so worried?" Yuuri laughs a little, and laughs some more when Victor's cheeks pink with a precious flush. Yuuri kisses one such, since he's unable to hold back and the happy smile he receives in return is all the more precious.

"Yes, I can read," Yuuri says. "I'm far from fluent, but I think with practice I could get faster. There wasn't much to read at home, after all."

Victor nods, now more confident. "That's splendid! A good base is sometimes worth more than fluency itself. All the books in the library are at your disposal then, so, please, peruse them to your heart's content."

In thanks, Yuuri squeezes Victor's hand, which still rests in his even as they move from the library door. They venture deeper into the mansion, turn one corridor into another, until Victor pauses before another door – as gold and richly decorated as the rest of them. Victor opens them, a little nook at first and then wider, but even before it's fully opened, a ball of brown fur tumbles out, right between Victor's legs and forward: straight at Yuuri.

A squeak of surprise leaves Yuuri's mouth when he's assaulted by what he guesses to be a dog. His suspicions are confirmed when a long tongue begins to slobber all over his face. Laughing, Yuuri pets the furry back until Victor saves him from the oppression by pulling on the dog's golden collar.

"I'm so sorry, my Yuuri," Victor says. "I should've warned you that Makkachin is a very excitable boy. I tried to teach him better, but he is as stubborn as a mule..."

Still grinning, Yuuri wipes his face with his sleeve.

"That's quite alright," he says, and smiles at Makkachin who does his best to look guilty, even if his tail tells another tale. "He might not have been a perfect gentlemen, much like his owner when we first met, but I guess I do like boys like that."

It's only teasing, Yuuri knows, but the kind of light it puts in Victor's eyes is worth every word and every slobbering lick of Makkachin's tongue. Victor looks overjoyed and not at all insulted, and his little "Yuuri!" sounds like a breathless squeal rather than a call to stop.

So Yuuri doesn't.

He chuckles instead, and steps close to Victor to whisper: "Will you be a perfect gentlemen to me if I ask nicely, my lord?"

Victor's face turns a delightful shade of pink. He licks his lips, eyes aglow, but before he can answer in what Yuuri is certain will be a favourable way, the door behind Victor's back swings open and a young lady with hair red like the fire itself breaks their little moment.

"Vitya, have you finally come to relieve me of this guard duty? I swear, you spoil this dog more than you'll ever spoil your chi–" she pauses mid word once she spots Yuuri, and then rushes to say: "Oh, apologies, I did not know we had company."

She sends Victor a glare, but it's a playful one that he answers with a "Well, now you know."

"Allow me to introduce you," Victor says as he takes Yuuri's hand again and squeezes it in show of support. "This is Ludmila, my cousin that I mentioned to you before. She prefers to be addressed..."
"Mila," the girl interrupts, a wide, open smile on her face. "Please, do call me Mila. My parents have no sense for the names at all."

"And this," Victor lifts their joined hands and, gazing adoringly into Yuuri's eyes, kisses Yuuri's knuckles. It makes Yuuri flush, such a bold gesture in the company of Victor's cousin, but before he can even recover, Victor goes on to introduce him: "This is my sweet, darling Yuuri. Be kind to him, Mila."

"I don't know what you mean, Vitya, I'm always kind," Mila answers with a grin sharp enough to put doubt in her words into Yuuri's heart.

They step into the room, Makkachin in tow, and when the heavy golden doors close behind them, Yuuri isn't certain if he's being trapped or uplifted, but he knows he wouldn't want to be anywhere else – only by Victor's side.

Chapter End Notes

here's the actual update for today, hope you enjoyed it! and pls check out the family tree in the previous chapter if you have questions about victor's lineage ^u^)b

(also who is dying bc BEST BOY MAKKA IS HERE AND I'M LIVING!!!!!)
Mila is a nice girl, Yuuri decides an hour into slow conversation. She teases Victor, smiles, and treats Yuuri with as much kindness as a peasant like him can expect from a noble lady. The hefty weight of Makkachin slumped over Yuuri's lap is a comfort that might be an unfair influence on his decision, but Yuuri can actually stand the thought of being around Mila even without Victor's reassuring presence, if such a need arises, which is more than he can tell about anyone he meets for the first time.

Except his confidence comes down to nothing when Victor is called away on some urgent matter and they are truly left alone. Mila's eyes are eager as they take Yuuri in, and all the feeling of dread that Yuuri hasn't been feeling until now appears with double its strength to lay waste to the fragile peace of his mind.

"Tell me about yourself, Yuuri," Mila asks, pleasant and nice, but Yuuri can't help the shaking of his hands. He hides them in Makkachin's fur, hoping that Mila hasn't noticed. If she has, she doesn't mention it and goes on: "But most importantly, how did you two meet? I must admit that Vitya has never even mentioned you before, but he is quite forgetful, that one. I assume it must be a recent turn of events, yes?"

"That is a very long and, frankly, embarrassing story," Yuuri says as he ducks his head to hide the unbidden blush that overtakes his face. "At least on my part it is, so it might be better if you ask Lord Nikiforov about it."

"Lord Nikiforov? He has you referring to him by his title?"

A frown on her face is deep, maybe even angry, Yuuri thinks. It takes his breath away from the sudden fear that he's said something wrong.

"No, no, that isn't...!" he quickly rushes to say, but pauses when the words that are supposed to follow become gibberish in his head. He takes a deep breath and then forces them one by one. "We have an, um, agreement, you could say? I refer to him as Vitya, but it's a more, mm, private matter? Just for the two of us."

"Ah," Mila smiles. "I understand. Vitya has always been a rather private personage, despite his willingness to appease the public image his parents forced on him."

The vice that has been holding onto Yuuri's throat seems to lessen at that. He looks at her, hopeful, and she offers him a little wink, which takes Yuuri by surprise so badly he lets out all his breath in a loud whoosh. Mila's laughter pearls around the room.

"Come now, Yuuri," she says. "No need to be so anxious! We're all very happy to have you here. I swear, we've long been making plans on who to match with my foolish cousin, since he never showed any interest in people, so you've saved us considerable trouble by showing up here."

"Really?" Yuuri asks.

Until now, the thought of Victor marrying to carry on his line has not crossed his mind. The one of
Victor finding someone more worthy than him? Oh, yes, definitely. After all, he could have anyone his heart desires, pick the brightest, the prettiest, the richest... But the idea of Victor being forced into a marriage he does not want, with a person he does not know or maybe even does not like...

It sends shivers down Yuuri's spine.

"I do so swear," Mila promises. "Lady Nikiforova might still want to push for an arranged match. She's peculiar about the benefits, since her own marriage was agreed upon by her father and uncle Yegor, but I'm certain that if Vitya is really happy with you by his side, she will have no sway over the rest of the family should she try to bring the matter to their attention. After all, family should only wish for its members' happiness, don't you think?"

Unable to speak, Yuuri only nods. Before he can even begin a struggle with his tongue to hold the conversation as proper, the door to the sitting room opens. Hoping it might be Victor, Yuuri's eyes flit to it, but it is to his great disappointment that he doesn't find the one he's looking for.

Instead of Victor, a woman stands there. Dressed in clothes of navy so rich it almost seems black in the faint light that comes from the faraway window, and with a mesh shawl threaded in golden flowers draped around her shoulders, Yuuri thinks he knows who she must be. The height of her chin and the sweep of her eyelashes give truth to his predictions, which are further confirmed when Mila stands up and greets her.

"Aunt Alisa," Mila says, moving to kiss the woman's cheek. "It's lovely to see you."

"Milochka," the woman answers in kind, voice sweet.

She smiles at Mila, but even as she does there is something around her eyes that doesn't. Yuuri cannot blame her, however. She has just lost her husband, after all. Reasonable must be for her to not feel much joy in the world at this time.

It doesn't take long before the gaze of her eyes – which Yuuri cannot help but notice are not blue like Victor's – rests upon him. A curious eyebrow is drawn, and Yuuri hastens to lift Makkachin off his lap and stand to greet the lady of the house when she speaks:

"I have heard we are entertaining a guest. My son has never been one for introductions, so forgive me for greeting you so late, my good lord."

"No need for apologies, my lady. Truly," Yuuri replies after he swallows his nerves. "I feel like I should be the one begging your forgiveness for the time I have intruded upon you is rather unfortunate. I am certain you'd rather be with family than worry about my presence here."

"Nonsense," the lady says. "Any guest of my son's is welcome here, no matter the occasion."

She offers Yuuri a gloved hand, which he takes and kisses to uphold propriety. It is only thanks to Ilia's lessons and the many balls he has attended due to Christophe Giacometti's friendship that Yuuri knows the protocol that nobles follow. He lets go of the lady's hand fast, but not too fast, so as not to seem rude. She must be agreeable to his manners, because she nods and smiles at him lightly.

"Allow me to do proper introductions then, aunt," Mila says. "This is the Lady Alisa Nikiforova, wife to late Lord Nikiforov and mother to Victor. And this, aunt, is Victor's companion, Yuuri... Forgive me, Yuuri, I've never asked for your family name, did I?"

Yuuri forces on a smile and shakes his head. "It wouldn't be any familiar to you, my lady."

"Just Yuuri then, yes?" Lady Nikiforova asks, a smile spreading over her face. "Splendid! I think we
will get right along."

And when she takes Yuuri under arm and leads him to sit on the chaise, Yuuri can only hope for it to be true.

Chapter End Notes

and so, let the screaming begin bc I know yall want to ;3c
Lady Nikiforova does not seem to be a bad person, Yuuri quickly learns.

"–and then Vitya flipped that long braid of his over the shoulder and it smacked the little Chulanont right in the face," she finishes the story of Victor's coming-of-age ball.

It's a hilarious retelling and even Yuuri laughs at the image her words bring to his mind. Victor dressed in robes that are fitted more to be a dress than a tunic, with long hair down to his waist braided with flowers, and a crown of diamonds, sapphires and gold... It paints a pretty picture, but an even prettier one is said Victor with a pout on his face and a flush to his cheeks, childishly smacking someone with his flowery braid. Even a saint would giggle.

On a chair opposite of him, Mila is discreetly wiping away her tears of joy into a handkerchief.

"Which Chulanont was it?" Yuuri asks, curious. "Do you remember, my lady?"

Lady Nikiforova seems to think for a moment and then she hums to herself. "It wasn't the eldest. And definitely not the partner to good Count Giacometti's son, no, but I cannot recall the name of the one..."

"It must have been Daw, then. I heard he had quite a temper."

"Oh, yes," the lady nods. "He seemed terribly upset about the cold shoulder Vitya has given him. If I remember correctly, Daw is the one who died in a duel not even a year later, no? Such a shame for a boy so young to leave this world by the hand of violence."

Yuuri dips his head in agreement. He still remembers when the news had reached Phichit's ears. He was inconsolable, stricken with grief, and even Christophe could only do so little to stop him from wasting away as well. It took many weeks for Phichit to return to normal, and many more for him to even speak of his brother again.

"Death is never easy," Yuuri says. "Which is why, I would like to once again offer my condolences to you, my lady. If there's anything I can do to help in this trying time, please do not hesitate to ask."

"Thank you, my dear," the lady replies. She smiles at him and pats his hand lightly. "The sentiment is enough. You'd do me much more service if you keep an eye on Vitya instead."

"I will do that even without you asking," Yuuri vows, earning a nod.

"Good, good. He will need someone to be by his side. I know that boy, he will try to shoulder everything on his own and while he might succeed, he might also forget how to be human like the rest of us. It will be good for him to have you there to remind him of that."

That having been said, the lady smiles at Yuuri one final time and stands, and so do they.

"I have other matters to attend to as well, you can imagine how busy the house is now that my lord husband has gone, so I must leave you two to it," she announces. "It has been a pleasure to speak
with you, Yuuri. I hope we can do this again some other time."

"So do I, my lady," Yuuri replies kindly, and bows to her when she leaves.

As soon as the doors close behind Lady Nikiforova, Mila turns to him with a wide grin.

"Oh, she must like you! I don't remember aunt Alisa smiling so much at one of Vitya's suitors since... well, ever, I believe."

"You really think so?" Yuuri asks.

The pit of his stomach where his nerves have bundled into a solid cocoon of worry and doubt at first sight of Victor's mother, and slowly unravelled during the conversation, now ease completely. The woman has not struck him as anything but kind. It isn't hesitation to believe in Victor's perception of her that settles in his heart, but something else that Yuuri cannot name properly as of yet, hence he chooses to leave it be without further investigation. At least for now.

He slumps back onto his chair, exhausted, but in a good mood. Mila laughs at him, not unkindly, but definitely amused by his immense relief.

"One would think you were afraid of her," she teases him.

"I'm afraid of everyone," Yuuri mumbles, but once Mila shoots him a glance, he retracts his words: "I mean, meeting new people is always a challenge to me. Even with Victor I was always tense, waiting for something to go wrong."

"And did it?" Yuuri gives her a questioning glance, to which she specifies: "Did anything go wrong?"

"Oh yes, so many things," he answers with a little smile.

And it is true. Between the night they first met at the Giacometti ball and this night at the Snowberry Estate they have been through many ordeals: their first meeting afterwards, Victor's surprise visit in Yuuri's childhood home, the full moon, the fever, the separation... And yet, somehow--

"And yet, you're still here," Mila finishes for him as if she knows his thoughts. "Isn't that a sign that everything that the fates wish to be, will be? No matter the journey, the goal remains unchanged, wouldn't you say?"

"Do you believe in fate then?" Yuuri asks, turning his head to her.

Mila's blue eyes are alit with an inner fire when she meets his gaze head on. Like this, she reminds him much of Victor – of that stubborn side of his that shows when he speaks of his deepest convictions and wants. Indivertibly, Yuuri listens carefully to her next words.

"I'm not sure," she says. "But there is one thing I don't believe in."

"What's that?"

"Coincidence."

She doesn't explain her thoughts, but she doesn't need to. Somehow, Yuuri understands what she means to say. Because he knows the sentiment well.

How much of a coincidence can it be that he met Victor twice?
That question he can't answer for certain, but he knows the probability of it happening by accident is low. After all, if it wasn't for Victor's choice to camp outside of the forest, Yuuri would not have been brought to him. And if it wasn't for Yuuri's choice to attend the ball, they would not have met in the first place.

"I know what I believe in," he tells Mila then, and once she curiously asks him about it, he gives her a little smile, and says: "Choice."

And his is to stay by Victor's side, as long as he's allowed. Despite the odds.

Chapter End Notes

I had an eventful breakdown today so that was fun and now I have classes in like 2h so I'm sorry but comments will have to wait till tomorrow, but I hope you still enjoyed the chapter! the plot thickens?
Victor returns to them after the luncheon. Mila and Yuuri are engrossed in gossiping and giggling as they share their fond memories of Victor, even if it's mostly Mila that is doing the sharing, since she knows Victor longer. Still, Yuuri is starved for the stories in a way he has never ached to know about anyone before. It's quite terrifying, really, but also incredibly enchanting and the more he learns about Victor, the more he seems to fall for the man.

"What is this vixen putting in your head now, my Yuuri?" Victor asks as he draws near.

Both Mila and Yuuri can't help the chuckles that burst from them at that. Victor eyes them both, but when Yuuri holds out his hand to him, he takes it with a smile, kisses it, and perches on the chaise right next to Yuuri. Their thighs touch, a tiny comforting thing that soothes Yuuri's heart inexplicably.

"We were talking about you," Yuuri tells Victor.

"About your first meeting with Tristan, to be exact," Mila supplies.

Victor's only answer is a groan. It sends Mila and Yuuri both into another fit of giggles. Victor ignores them and hides his face in Yuuri's shoulder, resolved to stay there even as their laughter subsides.

"You're so mean to me, Milotchka," he says into Yuuri's neck. It comes out in a mumble, but Mila grins anyway as if the words Victor is speaking are naught but a compliment. "You're even pitting my Yuuri against me!"

"I'm doing no such thing!" Mila reiterates, but her laughter lies waste to her truthfulness.

Yuuri chuckles lightly into Victor's hair, which he pets with his free hand. Victor gives a pretend sniffle and kisses the side of his neck before he lifts his face. He looks a little tired, a bit worse for the wear than he has been when he left, but there is a smile playing on his lips now, so Yuuri does not question it further.

"You should go be a menace somewhere else and leave me and Yuuri to enjoy ourselves in private," Victor tells Mila, who huffs openly at that.

"Very well, very well," she agrees. She gathers her skirts and stands, and in a very unladylike fashion – she sticks her tongue out at them. "I shall go where my company is taken as a delight, not a punishment."

"Oh dear, I wonder where that might be," Victor teases, but Mila is already turning with a rustle of her skirts which muffles his words so only Yuuri can hear them.

Yuuri tries not to smile, but it's impossible when his mood is as good as this.

"It's nice seeing you so carefree with others," Yuuri says once the door closes behind Mila.
"And it's nice seeing you get along with my family," Victor returns.

He smiles at Yuuri in a dearly adoring way that makes Yuuri flush a little. The attention is sweet, however, and when Victor moves to rest his forehead against Yuuri's, Yuuri meets him halfway, comfortable and safe in his affection.

They stay like that for a moment, seconds, minutes, longer, and Yuuri realizes that with everything that happened from the moment Victor woke up that day, this is the first quiet moment they have been allowed to share. So he uses that moment in a way he thinks both of them can appreciate most: and closes the distance between their lips in a tender kiss.

"I adore it when you kiss me like that," Victor tells him over a sigh when they part again. "It makes me feel so full and happy."

"I will kiss you like that whenever you wish, then," Yuuri replies, content to give it to Victor freely. "Be selfish with me, Vitya, remember? That's what we promised."

Victor laughs a little, a somewhat sombre sound that makes Yuuri gaze at him with concern.

"If I were to be selfish, I would take you away from here and never return," Victor confesses. "But we both know we cannot do that."

Yuuri doesn't think for long. In one bout of courage, he stands up and pulls Victor along. Determined to have his way, he takes both of Victor's hands and squeezes them tight.

"Let's go," he says, voice sure. "We can't leave forever, but we most certainly can leave. For a day, for the afternoon, for a few hours if anything. So let us go, Vitya, let's leave."

Victor's mouth remains slack against Yuuri's encouragement, but when it closes, a new light enters Victor's blue eyes. It's bright and hopeful, happier than any Yuuri has seen since their reunion. He cradles it against his heart, precious and dear, in order to protect it and to bring it to its full shine. With a smile that holds all of his affection, Yuuri adds:

"Come, Vitya. Let me spoil you."

And he pulls on Victor's hands, but Victor stays rooted in place. All at once, though, he unfreezes and throws his arms around Yuuri. The hold is tight, which makes Yuuri's breath leave him with a little noise of surprise, but just as quick as Victor was in embracing him, he releases Yuuri as well.

It leaves Yuuri confounded, and he becomes even more so when Victor takes his face in his hands and gives him a sound kiss.

"You, my Yuuri, are a brilliant gem and I adore you with my whole heart," Victor tells him.

Flattered and flushed, Yuuri can't keep his smile away, so he smiles, and replies: "And I you, my Vitya."

Hand in hand they leave the sitting room. Makkachin trots by their side, eager to see where they're headed. They take their steps to the stables, and once there, saddle their horses on their own. Yuuri thinks he spots Kenjirou's head around the corner once, but Victor steals his attention with another kiss and all thoughts of anything but him get thrown carelessly out of Yuuri's mind.

With Makkachin running between Lamorak and Tristan, and barking at the sounds of their laughter, they ride out into the crisp afternoon: happy, in love, and for just a little while – free.
Chapter End Notes

omg ok but I completely forgot to write about it yesterday bc there was so much happening but??? as of right now this story is officially the longest piece of fiction I've ever written so um??? congrats to me I guess??? wow almost 75k words how on earth did we get here....
Sprawled on top of Victor's cloak and a bedding of leaves and grass, with Victor's arm wrapped around him and Victor's heart beating against the cheek that Yuuri rests on his chest while Victor's fingers twirl locks of Yuuri's hair absentmly, Yuuri knows what bliss is – and it's this.

And yet, he also knows it cannot last forever.

"We should go back before the sun sets," he says. Victor's belly contracts under Yuuri's hand when he whines and Yuuri rubs at it soothingly. "You know we have to. They will start another search, if you aren't at the manor by nightfall."

"I hate that," Victor mumbles. "That's exactly why I never wanted to return here. With you I feel so careless and cared for and free, but there it's only restrictions after restrictions. Can't do this, because it isn't proper, can't do that because everyone is watching! I can't do anything, because Victor Nikiforov apparently is not allowed to be anything other than pretty and charming!"

"Maybe to all of them you are," Yuuri hums, lifting his head to gaze into Victor's disturbed eyes. "But to me, you're just Vitya – my Vitya. And you'd be surprised at how many of your people care about your happiness as much as they do their own."

The frown that marred Victor's forehead until now evens out when Victor gives into a tiny smile. His free hand comes up to brush against Yuuri's cheek, tender and loving. Yuuri's heart flutters in his chest, much akin to a young, joyful butterfly.

"How do you always know the right things to say to me?" Victor asks, awed.

It's such a silly concept that Yuuri laughs.

"I don't," he says. "I never do. In fact, I always worry I might be overstepping, but... you'd tell me if I was, I trust you with that. And I trust you with a lot more." Yuuri smiles. "But above all, I trust my gut. And it's telling me that you are a good, kind man, so helping you through your doubts is the right thing to do, and I want to do it."

"You're incredible, you know?" Victor says then, as he leans down to rest a kiss between Yuuri's eyebrows. "Incredible and beautiful, and kind, and gentle, and loving..." He punctuates each word with a kiss to Yuuri's face: some on the cheeks, some on his eyelids, and last one right on Yuuri's lips. "And I think... Yuuri, I--"

A rustle of the bushes not far from where they are startles them both. The intimacy gone, they look for the source of the noise and only when a little rabbit skips into the clearing, do they release their breaths. Yuuri looks at Victor and Victor looks at him, and laughter spills from their lips freely.

"I guess the moment for deep confessions has passed," Victor jests once their joy subsides some.

"Do we really need those? Moments?" Yuuri asks. "Isn't every moment spent together a good moment to share?"
Victor's breath comes with a huff of incredulous laughter, that he presses right against Yuuri's lips. Yuuri doesn't fight it: he wraps his arms around Victor's neck and rolls onto his back, pulling Victor along. The weight atop of him is suddenly a lot, but it's a good lot. It feels warm and grounding, not like a trap or a cage that Yuuri always believed it to be, no. This, with Victor, it's comforting and—

"I adore you, my Yuuri," Victor whispers against Yuuri's lips. "Body and soul, and everything else that you are."

His words are heated, yet kind, but Yuuri's mind returns to some of his past worries. It's been almost two weeks since the full moon. Many things have happened along the way, so Yuuri could not blame Victor for forgetting the nightly endeavour that brought him so much freight. Much to his own shame, even Yuuri almost repressed the memory of it.

Alas, it is still there, and now it rises up to the front of his mind like a bad dream, but much more real.

"Everything?" Yuuri asks, pulling away from the kisses. "Are you certain? What if I'm a beast in human flesh? What if I'm a demon sent here to lead you astray? What if I were to lead you to your death?"

Yuuri allows his fingers to caress the side of Victor's face.

"Would you still think so kindly of me then?"

The blue of Victor's eyes is bright and, by all reason, should be cold. It isn't. It pulls Yuuri in, wraps him in warmth and love, just like Victor's hand wraps around Yuuri's. Gentle lips place a kiss on his palm, a meltingly tender gesture of affection that runs far deeper than just words.

"If that is the price I have to pay for the happiness you give me, my Yuuri, then I will gladly offer you my heart, my soul, my body, all that is mine to give," Victor says in a voice that breeds no doubts of his sincerity.

And Yuuri believes him. He wants to, so he does. That is his choice, and once he takes it, it is his own doing that shapes whatever becomes of his destiny, and of his affair with Victor.

More than content, Yuuri arches up to kiss Victor again, and whisper to him softly: "I will take you then, heart and soul and body, all that is yours to give, but only if you do the same in return. Will you take me as I am, Vitya? Heart, body, soul, all that I am and all that is mine?"


It's only one word, but the power it holds over Yuuri is much more than Victor could ever imagine. Because always is how long Yuuri has had to suffer because of his wolf form, and always is how long he still will have to bear. But when that same always falls from Victor's lips, in a way that is filled with passion and affection, desire so deep and pure that nothing can stand in its way, Yuuri begins to believe that maybe always was never meant to be lonely.

Maybe always was meant to be together.

Chapter End Notes
did they just get engaged? bc I swear to god they sure sound like it
"Make sure to move Yuuri's things into my chambers," Victor orders as soon as they return to the manor. "I will not have him staying in that room any longer. His place is right by my side and I shall accept no less."

As Pavel bows, Yuuri does not protest. He stands by Victor's side, cheeks flushed, and he has a look about him like he wishes to speak, but at the same time wishes to be somewhere, where no one could gaze at him with as much curiosity as the servants do now.

Victor feels both concerned and amused, so he indulges in his own selfishness and wraps an arm around Yuuri's shoulders when he leads them both away from the prying eyes.

"Should I not have done that?" Victor asks quietly, uncertain if he did not make Yuuri cross with him.

"No, no, I approve." Yuuri shakes his head lightly. He smiles at Victor, a tiny, tender smile that is more than enough to take Victor's breath away with its simplistic beauty, and adds: "I could not stand to be apart from you another night either."

Like honey over a wound, his words soothe Victor's heart. He sneaks a glance around and, during a moment when no one is looking their way, presses a quick kiss to the high point of Yuuri's cheekbone. It makes a delightful pink blossom from that spot over Yuuri's entire face, and Victor laughs at it, charmed beyond belief.

Yuuri seems to have words for him, but once he catches Victor's gaze, his face softens and he only gives a soft sigh and wraps his own arm around Victor's waist – another precious thing that has Victor's heart beat in his chest like it has never done before.

The walk to Victor's chambers seems to be over too soon, but Victor regrets nothing, for the best part will await him behind the closed doors. After all, he can kiss Yuuri freely then, he can hold him close, and whisper sweet things to him all night long...

From his reverie, he is pulled out forcefully by a servant who has brought them water to wash off before supper, and then another parade of four with said supper made of wild geese stew, freshly baked bread which is still crisp and warm under the touch, and an array of salads accompanied with red wine from the local winery owned by the Nikiforovs. It looks mouth-watering, and so, they sit down to eat without further dely.

"Oh, didn't you say you were hunting for geese back when we saw each other at the camp for the first time?" Victor recalls after the first few spoons of the rich stew.

Yuuri blinks at him in surprise. "I might have. They are in season, after all."

"Do you hunt often, then? With a bow? Or are you more of a tracker?" Eyes alit, Victor gasps: "We could hunt together sometime!"

"That would be lovely," Yuuri agrees with a smile. "I am fairly proficient with a bow, although a
knife is my favoured weapon. We could have a challenge and see which one of us is a better hunter, how about it? And the winner's catch would be the one prepared for supper that day. After all, the food you hunt yourself tastes much better than anything else, even winning."

His words have a fairly innocent meaning, or at least they must have, but Yuuri chooses that moment to lick his lips from the gravy stains that stick to them and all of Victor's innocent thoughts shift towards a more adventurous territory. Heavy-lidded, he continues eating, but now his attention is divided between the food on his plate, and the golden spoon that methodically disappears between Yuuri's plump lips.

Is it cruel, Victor wonders, that Yuuri does not know how badly Victor wants him? Is it cruel to wish to tell him that? Or maybe, the most cruel thing of all, is that Victor knows that he will not be able to last long, should Yuuri choose to tease him like so on purpose.

Akin to a hunter taking down the defences of his prey, Yuuri is slowly stripping Victor of any self control, and by the time they finish eating, Victor's lone wish is to take Yuuri's hand and drag him to bed. He must be more obvious in his desires than he suspects, because it is Yuuri who takes him into the bedchamber. It is also Yuuri who dismisses Pavel and the rest of the servants, and Victor can only nod when the old butler looks to him for confirmation.

"Don't think I didn't notice," Yuuri says when he starts to slowly undress Victor, piece by piece of the golden robes.

"Notice what?" Victor asks, throat dry.

He doesn't move, not for the fear of moving, but for the fear of stopping this wondrous thing that is currently happening. Yuuri's fingers unlace the threading on the sleeves of Victor's outer robe, which he then pushes off Victor's shoulders with warm, steady hands. Victor shivers against their touch, starved and eager to see whether this is going where his mind has already found a home.

"You've been looking like you want to devour me all evening," Yuuri admits. His cheeks are tenderly aflush as if the pinks of the setting sun have kissed them farewell before disappearing into the night. "Is that what you want, my lord?"

"I--" Victor swallows.

Yuuri's fingers deftly unravel the knots of his tunic and the silky fabric slips down Victor's skin, right onto the floor.

"I wouldn't mind if you did the devouring, but yes, oh yes," Victor breathes, his breath shallow and eager.

His hair stands on its ends from anticipation when Yuuri bends down to pick up his tunic and fold it over the chest by the foot of the bed. It's maddening, but so, so addictive. Victor is only left in his pants, the material of them skin tight and leaving little to the imagination, which leads him to believe that Yuuri is already well aware of the state he has put Victor in. He is aware, oh yes, and he must be enjoying it.

It shows when Yuuri's fingers gently slide over the tense muscles of Victor's abdomen and finally settle on his hips. Yuuri looks up at him through his eyelashes, beautiful, dark things that make his eyes shine darker than their usual molten brown, and Victor realizes what this look is: it's a perfect mirror of his own, the pure desire for another.

Slowly, Yuuri drops to his knees, and Victor's pants go with him, pooling at Victor's ankles, but that
is the last of Victor's coherent thoughts before pleasure engulfs him in its ever-encompassing embrace.

Chapter End Notes

I'm a little late today but I think the ending makes up for it ;3c
pls prepare for like, what is it, 5 chapters of smut?? coming up in the following days
^u^)b
It's all too soon when Yuuri lifts from his knees, but Victor hardly dares complain. He takes everything in with the kind of worship that Yuuri deserves and submits himself to the pleasure of being attended, teased, and worshipped until Yuuri folds the last piece of clothing and steps back.

"Now, you must decide," Yuuri says. "Do you want to be the hunter, or do you want to be the prey, my Vitya? I will not mind giving in, if it's you."

Victor's breath falters on his lips. "Give in? Do you mean you--?"

"If that is what you wish," Yuuri agrees. His dark eyes gaze at Victor inquiringly. "Is it?"

Unable to force a word through his dry, dry throat, Victor nods.

"Then have me, Vitya," is all that Yuuri tells him and Victor wastes no time in waiting: he steps up to him and kisses him with all the desire that hums sweetly in his blood.

Yuuri opens up to him, takes him in like their bodies were made to match. Victor sinks into it with a sigh so content that it sends shivers down his spine. The clothes Yuuri is wearing rub against Victor's bare skin, coarse and rough with their golden threads and pearls of gold sewn into the fabric, but it doesn't feel wrong – quite the opposite.

Victor pulls Yuuri close. It's enough to make him ache for more, so slowly, unwilling to part from Yuuri's divine lips, Victor slides Yuuri's outer robe off his shoulders. The fine threading around the wrists is tight, and when the sleeves get stuck there, Victor breaks the kiss and forcefully yanks the robe free.

Yuuri's surprised gasp fans over Victor's cheek, shocking like a crash of thunder. And like one such, it strikes Victor's body with untamed power. Where Yuuri was careful with Victor's clothes, Victor throws Yuuri's in a pile atop of his. He cannot mind it now, not when Yuuri's skin begs him for touch, the way it flushes under Victor's heated gaze. With hurried fingers, Victor works off Yuuri's tunic, and much like Yuuri before – he drops to his knees to retrieve it.

Yet unlike Yuuri, Victor stays there.

The stones are harsh and cold on his bones, but the heat that burns within him makes it feel like a pleasant tingle. Even more so, when Victor catches the gaze of Yuuri's eyes as they bear down onto him. There is as much attraction, as much sheer, naked want as there is in Victor's own. It is no big conundrum to Victor to rest his hands on Yuuri's thighs and slide them up until he can slip his fingers under the material of the pants.

They come off with a shiver, both his and Yuuri's, and while Victor's hands stop at Yuuri's calves, he does what he dreamed of when Yuuri was in this position only moments ago: he leans forward and presses a languid kiss to Yuuri's hip.

Yuuri gasps, a choked little sound that makes Victor grow bolder. He allows himself to nuzzle his nose into the coarse hair of Yuuri's groin and inhales deeply the sharp, musky scent of Yuuri and the
lingering smell of the leather that seems to be seeped into Yuuri's skin.

It makes Victor groan from helpless, broken need.

The heat of Yuuri's body is harsher between his legs, dizzying. Victor can feel it on his chin when he rubs against the sensitive low of Yuuri's abdomen, when he kisses the slightly salty skin there, and it is awakening an ache in him like he has not known yet.

"Vitya..."

Yuuri's voice is a whisper, a breath, no more, but it sets Victor's body aflame. The hands that Yuuri brings to Victor's shoulders for balance, tremble against Victor's flesh as if they are playing him like a piano, and maybe they are, for Victor cannot know which actions are his own and which are the fruit of the blunt desire that burns in his loins.

"Yuuri, Yuuri, my sweet, darling Yuuri," Victor mumbles into Yuuri's skin, lips wet with his hot breath. "Tell me, is this what you truly want?"

Yuuri takes a shuddering inhale.

"If it is what you want as well... then yes," he says, gazing down at Victor.

Yuuri's eyes are dark enough that they look black, but it's a fetching sight. It matches his hair and stands apart from the glow that his skin seems to possess naturally. He's beautiful, and young, and flawed with scars, but he is so very real: Victor's breathing falters when he realizes that this is not another of his dreams, that he is going to have this man be his.

Eagerly, he sprouts upwards, claims Yuuri's lips in a quick kiss, and pulls him to rest on the bed. Among the sheets of white, Yuuri looks even more stunning than he had against the moonlit sky that night of the Giacometti ball. He lies sprawled where Victor has rested him and gazes up at him with such trust that Victor hesitates in joining him.

"What is it?" Yuuri asks, since the wavering doubt on Victor's face must be obvious.

"Is this what you really want?" Victor asks once more. "You can tell me to stop at any point, and I will adhere to your wishes, I do so swear, but is--"

Yuuri lifts up on an elbow and shushes him with a finger against Victor's still speaking lips. He smiles, soft, and lovely, and says, "I have wanted this in my dreams since the day we've met, Vitya."

And it is the sweetest thing Yuuri could've said, Victor thinks, because his heart melts into the palm of Yuuri's gentle hand, which Victor then takes to rest an adoring kiss against. With no further words, since the affection and conviction in Yuuri's eyes speak boldly enough, Victor crawls onto the bed, over Yuuri, and when Yuuri arches his back in an invitation for a kiss, Victor seals his lips against Yuuri's and gives into the torrent of want that has wrecked his body for months – now, finally, to be fully released.

Chapter End Notes

it's my birthday today yall and we're having some body worship in this chapter here
(which I adore) and I already posted another story today which was pure floof so I feel like it's going great //sighs happily

pls check out 'what living feels like' if you're in the mood! or better yet, subscribe to me so you don't miss any other updates I post? I do write other things apart from this fic ya know ;3c
Until now Victor has only known the side of Yuuri that took him in his arms, cradled him and made him into a slave of love. All in a willing, subservient manner that Victor did not regret in the slightest. Here, however, with Yuuri trapped beneath the weight of Victor's body and searching fingers that caress his sides in an almost ticklish manner, Yuuri is a blushing delight that Victor cannot be anything but surprised by.

It's heady, the kind of power Yuuri affords him as he submits to Victor with no questions asked. Victor, on the other hand, finds himself unusually hesitant as if that trust that Yuuri places in him is more precious than any other, and he is afreared of tarnishing it, for once done, it cannot be undone.

"How should we...?" Victor asks between the kisses, between sweet gasps and tender moans.

"Like this," Yuuri replies, winded. "Like this, please, I want to see you..."

There is no particle of Victor's body that could ever deny a request like that, so, helpless as he is, he spreads Yuuri's knees with his hands and settles between them. It might be difficult on them both, but seeing the stunning way Yuuri throws back his head against the white sheets when their groins come together is most certainly a bounty worth the struggle.

It doesn't take long for Victor to lose himself in the stutter of his hips and the breathless calls of Yuuri's name that fall freely from his lips. What brings him back, however, are Yuuri's nails: sharp crescents of them digging into Victor's thighs. The little pinpricks of pain elevate the pleasure into another plane of experience, but Victor reels it in and forces himself to stop.

Hovering above Yuuri, he pants. Yuuri's eyes seem to glow in the dark with an inner fire of his want. The resistance is futile, Victor knows, so he dips down to kiss Yuuri's eager mouth.

"Vitya..." Yuuri breathes against Victor's lips, a sweet and loving sound that makes Victor shiver.

"Yes, my love?"

"Be gentle with me?" Yuuri asks.

His cheeks are flushed tenderly and his face is soft. He does not look like the same man who Victor so vividly remembers chopping wooden logs back at the small cottage on the other side of the big forest in the south. This Yuuri is... Victor can't find the right words to put in what he sees with his eyes. There is a shyness to Yuuri, an openness, something vulnerable but just as sweet, and it's difficult to name, but Victor wishes to embrace it like he has done with the other, more confident side.

It is his Yuuri, after all. And he worships all of him.

"I promise," Victor whispers, pressing his lips to Yuuri's temple. "You are safe with me, darling. Always."

The smile that Yuuri gives him is watery, but Victor kisses it still. While the previous heat is still
humming in his body, Victor can feel it subside – it's replaced by something softer, like a roaring fire that's coming down to a little warm glow. Their kisses slow, their passion thaws, and when Victor pulls back, it is to the sight of Yuuri's unfocused gaze and spit shining on his parted, kiss-swollen lips.

"I'll be with you in a moment," Victor says on an exhale that leaves his lungs without his permission.

He stands up and quickly retrieves a bottle of olive oil from one of the drawers. It is always placed there by a maid, replenished if needed, ever since Victor has turned fifteen and discovered the pleasures of manhood. Now, however, unlike how it was in the past, he will not be indulging in them alone.

Yuuri is spread and waiting when he returns. If there was any moon this night peering into the chamber through the glass windows it would illuminate his skin with that stunning silver that Victor remembers from all their previous nights together. Alas, the moon is gone, but Victor weeps no tears for it, because in its place Yuuri's cheeks are aflush and his eyes are aglow, and he is beautiful. Now, just as ever.

They kiss in greeting as if they didn't see each other for much longer than it took to make it back, and Victor sinks into the comforting warmth of Yuuri's arms around his shoulders with a tiny, happy moan. It doesn't take long for Yuuri to get impatient, though. He arches his back off the bedding and rubs against Victor, much alike a cat who wishes to be pampered.

The thought makes Victor bite back a smile as he sets down to do his own brand of pampering.

Popping the bottle open, Victor pours the oil over his fingers. It drips down his hand, rich and golden. Drops of it fall onto Yuuri's skin and it's a beautiful sight that has Victor entranced. Yuuri's cock, which is already swollen and pink, rests against his abdomen while the oil slides over the length and pools underneath in a golden puddle. Victor discards the bottle carelessly before he slides his hand over the smooth mess he's made, and the feeling it evokes is better than he could've imagined.

Yuuri moans when Victor takes him in hand. The strokes are slow at first, but the more Victor hears those stuttered gasps and needy groans, the quicker his wrist jerks. He needs to constantly remind himself that this is only the preamble and the real prize is still awaiting.

As soon as he massages the oil into Yuuri's beautiful cock, he gathers the rest onto his fingers and slides his hand between Yuuri's legs. They spread for him without asking, which makes something powerful thrum in Victor's veins. He circles his finger around the ring of muscle surrounding Yuuri's entrance and it twitches under his touch, eager and tense, and Victor coos:

"Breathe, my love, calm yourself and try to breathe."

Yuuri obeys. His hands are thrown over his eyes so that Victor cannot see them, but instead, he can see Yuuri's parted mouth with its red, glossy lips, and his flushed crimson cheeks, and it is just as delightful, as arousing, as perfect.

Victor pushes his finger into Yuuri's heat, and they both lose themselves in the pleasure of it.

Chapter End Notes
replies to comments will be up tomorrow bc my eyes are refusing cooperation and I barely even got the strength to edit this ycuyjhn sorry for any mistakes?
also booooooi it's so hard to write smut with this lingo holy sheet send help
It takes far longer to properly prepare for an intercourse than it does to actually have one, but Victor regrets not a second of it. He moves his fingers in and out of Yuuri at an even pace, observing with a growing ache in his own loins how Yuuri's cock bounces when Victor curls his fingers inside him. The very sight of him would have Victor come on the spot, but he rears himself in and holds.

It is not the time yet, he tells himself.

When the time does come, however, his own cock is painfully hard. Yuuri looks wrecked: his flush has spilled over his neck and chest, his eyes are glossy with tears of want, and his hair is sweaty and tangled, and even more a mess than it is after a night's sleep.

He's gorgeous.

And Victor aches for him like he has never ached for anyone.

"Are you ready, my sweet?" Victor asks. "Do you think you can take me?"

Yuuri groans, and moans soon after when Victor's fingers curve within him once more. "Yes, please, just... Vitya, just..."

"Yes, my love? What is it that you want?"

"You," Yuuri whines. "You know what I want! Stop teasing me, my lord."

In reply, Victor only slides his fingers deeper and spreads them as far as the soft, tight walls allow. Yuuri gives a loud groan that Victor hears himself echo. As much as he's teasing Yuuri, he is also teasing himself and now... now he's at the end of his rope with need.

"Spread your legs for me, my beauty," Victor tells Yuuri as he pulls his fingers out.

Yuuri does as asked, no shame in his movements, not after everything they've already done. He takes himself by the knees and offers Victor a view of his twitching, gaping hole that has Victor's breath falter and blood rush down to his cock so rapidly it makes him dizzy.

"Seven layers of Hell," Victor curses, "you are going to be the death of me, my Yuuri. And I am going to love every second of dying in your arms, I swear."

"Don't talk of dying at a time like this," Yuuri chides him, breath a huff. "And don't even think of doing it while you're with me. I promise that if you do, I will find a way to bring you back to life just so I can send you off with my own bare hands."

It has Victor laugh, the petulant vengeance in Yuuri's voice. But he must admit, it would make for a fairly disastrous memory to have, so he begs all the deities that are listening to keep his fragile heart beating while he takes this man to be his.

He puts more oil onto his throbbing length, rubs it into the skin with a few controlled strokes, and finally, finally, with aching slowness and care, he settles the tip against Yuuri's entrance. Yuuri sucks
in a breath, but says no more, so Victor chances a glance at his face to reassure himself that he is still allowed to do this.

"Are you still certain you want this?" Victor asks.

"Are you?" Yuuri asks back.

"I have never been surer of anything in my whole life, but..." Victor starts, but Yuuri interrupts him.

"So have I," he simply says.

The look in his eyes is heated, but Victor finds no dishonesty in it.

And so, after a breath to steel his madly jumping heart, he guides his hips forwards.

The breaching is slow, halting, and filled with Yuuri's gasps and groans. Victor's own join him as sweat pearls on his forehead from the sheer effort of controlling the pace and the urge to slam into the tight, welcoming heat that wraps around him like a silken glove. Once he's fully sheathed inside, they are both breathing too hard to form any words, so wordlessly Victor guides Yuuri's legs to wrap around him and shifts slightly to accommodate them better.

They both gasp when the movement pushes Victor's cock even deeper into Yuuri. Instead of waiting, Victor takes Yuuri's own cock in hand and strokes it gently until it's sprouting into full hardness again. It seems to be enough for Yuuri to distract himself from the brief pain, and once his mouth opens in a moan of pleasure, Victor slowly begins to move his hips as well.

It's heaven, he thinks when he thrusts back into the heat of Yuuri's body. It's what love feels closest to – the enveloping warmth and softness, all of it that wraps you securely and safely within a pleasure of the highest kind.

He loses himself in it, and Yuuri does so as well. The heels that press into Victor's spine urge him deeper, faster, harder, and he obeys as if they are his own wishes. They must be, too, because the abandon that overtakes him is hard to find in anything but this: the throbbing of his cock that sinks into the clenching tightness between Yuuri's legs.

"Yuuri," Victor whimpers when Yuuri's insides squeeze around him. "Yuuri, my Yuuri, gods, I love you..."

It might be Victor's words, or it might be the way his cock angles within him, but Yuuri arches his back off the sheets and comes undone with Victor's name on his lips. His come spills over his belly and chest, almost up to his chin, but Victor can't give the sight his proper admiration, for the walls of Yuuri's insides tighten around him and pulsate with his pleasure. They suck him deeper into Yuuri's wet heat... and Victor, too, unravels within seconds of Yuuri's scream.

He spouts his fill into Yuuri until his cock limps down. Among the trickle of his own cum, he pulls out: tired, but unable to look away as the seed leaks from Yuuri's hole and runs between his cheeks like ambrosia runs through the rivers between the mounds of the hill Olympus.

Before he thinks better of it and reasons himself out of his heart's wants, Victor grabs Yuuri and bodily flips him over. He ignores Yuuri's soft sound of surprise, eyes focused on his prize. With greedy hands, he pulls on Yuuri's hips until he has him where he wants him and sinks his fingers into the full mounds of Yuuri's rump to spread it apart.

"What--" Yuuri gasps, but the rest of his question is swallowed by an overdrawn moan, when Victor's tongue licks at the twitching, sensitive rim that is now coated with his own seed.
Delight spills in Victor's chest at the sounds that come from Yuuri's lips. He buries his face between the mounds of Yuuri's ass and tastes the drink of the gods straight from the sweetest of chalices – and he transcends to the fields of Elysium, blessed, content, and sated.

Chapter End Notes

bet you did not think that'd happen ;3c
As Victor forces him onto his stomach and lifts his hips upwards, Yuuri doesn't know what to expect. He's soft, warm, and content after the release he's just had, but the suddenness of Victor's advance leaves a tingling sort of excitement deep in his loins. It stirs when he feels a hot breath pant into the dip of his spine, but before Yuuri can voice his surprise, Victor is already pushing forward.

The first lick against his sensitive entrance is hot, it's maddening, it's–

Yuuri moans, helpless against the pleasure that thrums in his veins once more. It rises like the tide – slow, and then faster, higher, and then all at once as it spills over his body in a powerful wave that leaves Yuuri shuddering and begging for more. Shameless sounds roll off his tongue, but his mind feels as if it's made of clouds. Only the budding heat between his legs keeps him from floating into an unconscious state of ecstasy.

Victor's fingers, previously so thorough and gentle, now tease the length of Yuuri's cock without mercy. A delightful torture it is, and Yuuri submits all of himself to it, but even when Victor's hand fully closes around his girth, it's Victor's tongue that steals the last remnants of Yuuri's sanity straight from his grasp.

The feeling is nothing like that of Victor's fingers, nothing like his cock: it's stranger and softer, slippery and addicting all at once. Unconsciously, Yuuri bends his spine and pushes his hips back, offering himself to Victor's ministrations on a proverbial golden platter.

And he's rewarded for it handsomely.

Victor's sneaky tongue laps at his hole a few times more before it delves deeper, pushes past the rim and into Yuuri's tender insides – awakening heat and passion inside Yuuri with a few simple swipes.

"Ah–" Yuuri pants. "Vity– ah..."

He doesn't know what he must taste like, what with the oil and Victor's seed already spilling out of him, but judging from the way Victor greedily licks out as far as his tongue allows, Yuuri can tell that he enjoys it just as much. The very thought is absurdly arousing and Yuuri gasps at the way his body answers to it: clenching down on the tongue that Victor has pressed into him.

It's that, which has Yuuri beg.

"Vitya, please," he sobs. Tears stream down his cheeks, but they are only there from the effort it takes to breathe past the pleasure that burns within him, nothing else. "I need– Please, my lord, I want–"

"What, my sweet? What do you want? Tell me," Victor asks without pulling away. His breath is hot against the wet flesh of Yuuri's entrance and it makes Yuuri shiver as the last of his nerves spark with white hot desire.

"Again..."
Yuuri turns his head back as much as he can to gaze into Victor's eyes. They're dark, but somehow bright at the same time, glazed with want that mirrors Yuuri's own.

"Take me again, I beg of you," Yuuri asks. "I need you... my Vitya, please..."

The sharp breath Victor takes is not an answer, but the two fingers he slips into Yuuri most definitely are. They slide in easily, deeper than Victor's tongue ever could. There is still some of the seed left inside of Yuuri from Victor's earlier release and Victor scoops it and spreads it over Yuuri's rim with so much care it has Yuuri moan again.

"Please," he begs once more.

His pleas have been heard, though. The fingers disappear and something bigger replaces them, a familiar weight that Yuuri sucks a breath of anticipation for. This time, when Victor breaches him, it's faster and harder than the last – and it's exactly what Yuuri needs.

He screams into the bedding where he pushes his face as Victor takes him from behind, one powerful thrust after another. Yuuri's cock jumps from the force of it where it sits neglected between Yuuri's legs and with one desperate hand Yuuri grabs for it. He squeezes hard, unwilling to come just yet, and takes all of Victor time after time after ti–

Without a warning, Victor's hands clench around Yuuri's hips, tight and hard like double vices. Victor's thrusts lose their rhythm and it's to Yuuri's utmost surprise that he feels Victor's warm seed fill him up again, way before his own release.

Victor grunts as if even he has been caught off guard by it. He falls forward and the heavy weight of him changes the angle of his cock within Yuuri, makes it rub against Yuuri's most inner parts, which to his own surprise now sends him into the throes of release. Even the harsh grip he has on his cock doesn't impede it and with a shout Yuuri spills over his hand and the bedding underneath them.

Once done, all tension and strength leave him and he collapses into the mess with Victor's heavy body still atop of him. That, however, is more than acceptable: Yuuri is warm, he's soft, and his muscles ache with a delightful tingle; he feels claimed through and through, and the glory of it belongs to Victor and him only.

"Are you well, my love?" Victor asks, voice as breathless as Yuuri himself is. "Have I hurt you in any way?"

"No," Yuuri gives.

It sounds more like a moan and he flushes briefly before he realizes that Victor has yet to pull out of him. At that thought, which makes him doubly aware of all the points where their bodies touch, Yuuri's flush deepens. It's dark enough in the chamber that Victor must not notice, so Yuuri only burrows his face in the sheets before him and mumbles back:

"I'm, ah, I'm alright, I believe."

Victor shifts and lifts himself off of him. The absence of his warmth makes a chill pass through Yuuri's body. He shivers, but that is still nothing against the feeling of emptiness that encroaches onto him once Victor pulls his spent cock out.

Yuuri breathes in shakily, eyes shut closed. He has half the mind to ask Victor to hold him, but something stops him. He isn't sure if it's his own shyness, or his anxious disposition that is now beginning to react to all that they have done, yet Yuuri remains mute. The chill of the room that he previously did not feel now begins to chip away at his skin and Yuuri thinks that it is only right:
without Victor the world is, indeed, much colder.

But before he can even finish that thought, Victor's warmth wraps around him once more – a careful arm, a warm chest pressed to Yuuri's side, and even warmer lips that rest a tender kiss against Yuuri's shoulder blade. Slowly, Yuuri turns to the side and as if he was only waiting for it, Victor envelops him in an embrace that is tight, but not overtly so; warm, and comfortably safe.

"Sweet dreams, my Yuuri," Victor whispers into his ear and Yuuri smiles, because he is sure they will be.

The sky outside is dark and moonless, and when Yuuri falls asleep wrapped up in Victor so fully one could not tell them apart, he dreams of warmth in his belly, of soft fur and skin, and blue eyes that watch over him, protective and kind.

Chapter End Notes

I promised you like 5 chapters of smut, didn't I? which number is this, hm? by my count it's only 4 ;3c
Chapter 77

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

What rips Yuuri from peaceful slumber is not anything malicious. It's only Ilia, who rests a tray with fresh towels and a jug of water on a little table by the wall. The attendant smiles at Yuuri in an apologetic manner when Yuuri blinks at him, not yet fully awake.

"I apologize for waking you, my lord," Ilia says.

"What time is it?" Yuuri mumbles.

Victor's arm is draped around him and he feels safe and warm, but the sun has not yet peaked into the windows of the bedchamber, so it can't possibly be time to rise.

"Still before dawn," Ilia answers. "Is there anything you need?"

"No, no, thank you," Yuuri says and even before Ilia bows and leaves, he curls into Victor and closes his eyes again. Before dawn is definitely not a time anyone should be awake.

He falls asleep in seconds, and wakes much, much later to something soft and wet tickling at the side of his neck. He opens his eyes, but there is little he sees – Victor's neck and shoulder cover him completely from view as Victor continued to lavish Yuuri's skin with sweet kisses. Yuuri stirs slightly, yet when it becomes obvious that Victor will not stop in his ministrations, Yuuri nips at his neck in response.

That is what gets Victor's attention and he pulls back a bit to peer down at Yuuri with a lovely, dazzling smile.

"Good morning, precious," Victor greets.

"Good morning," Yuuri replies, unable to keep a smile from his lips.

Victor dips his head down to rest their foreheads together and they share a tender smile, accompanied by a just as tender look that is a perfect mirror in their gazes.

"How did you sleep?" Yuuri asks.

The shadows of exhaustion are still visible under Victor's eyes. Yuuri lifts one hand to touch Victor's cheek, gently slide his thumb over the cheekbone that is a stunning sign of his noble breeding, but to Yuuri is nothing more than a canvas for a soft blush that paints over Victor's face whenever faced with compliments and kindness.

"I haven't slept this well since I've left your side," Victor admits. His lips curl into something sweet, something darling that Yuuri cannot keep from kissing – so he does.

Their lips meet halfway in a tender caress. Nothing between them buzzes of the passion of last night. It's only good, pure adoration that bleeds into Yuuri's heart, seeps into his bones and warms up his body from within.

He sighs in bliss against Victor's lips.
"You're incredible," Yuuri says, slowly blinking his eyes open.

Victor's laughter is a gentle breath of warmth in Yuuri's face. "You're stealing the words right from my mouth, my Yuuri, because I wished to tell you the same thing."

"Oh, stop it! You keep saying that only to distract me. But truly, Vitya," Yuuri slips his hand to Victor's nape where soft silver strands tickle his palm, and he smiles, "you are the incredible one. You make me forget all my worries, all the burdens and the dark things. You make me feel so, so free and safe it's incredible. It's amazing."

Victor, with eyes warm and affectionate, says:

"And is it so hard to believe that you make me feel the same way, Yuuri? Because you do, good gods, you do."

It is a hard concept to comprehend, but as Yuuri looks into Victor's eyes, he realizes that every time Victor has said it, he truly meant it. That he means all that he tells him, that he is always open, always honest. Honest, like they have promised each other to be.

Honest, like Yuuri fails to be about his biggest, worst secret even now.

He swallows down the guilt and wraps Victor in a hug to distract himself from it. He will tell him, Yuuri knows. One of these days he will. After all, day by day Victor proves to him that he is more than worthy of trust, and that Yuuri wishes to give to him.

But not yet, not just yet, because Yuuri is selfish and while he trusts Victor and trusts in him, too, he also does not wish to lose what they have, should the worst come to pass.

"Yes," Yuuri speaks, muffled in Victor's shoulder. "It is hard to believe, but... I'll try. For you. For... for this, for us."

Victor gathers him into his arms, wraps him in and holds him: tight and close to his heart, which beats –much like Yuuri's own – in a song just for the two of them.

"That is all I ask for, my sweet Yuuri," Victor tells him.

They lie pressed into each other for a moment longer, while the morning sun streams into the room to make a stage for the golden dust to dance around. The moment is peaceful, unbroken, and Yuuri sighs deeply as he sheds all but this feeling of bliss. This is what he has always dreamed of, he thinks. The quiet, the comfort, the tender, unwavering love, much like what his parents have.

Yuuri lifts his head up to gaze at Victor and finds him already looking down, a fond curl to his lips.

Is this what love feels like, Yuuri wonders. It must, he thinks, for nothing could ever best this feeling that spreads over his heart like honey, rich and smooth and soothing.

He shifts forwards to kiss Victor once, and then again.

If this is love, Yuuri can't really find anything to hate, anything to ponder, anything to make him hesitate. Nor is he trying to. Nor will he ever, he knows.

If this is love, Yuuri is more than ready to open his heart to it, and to the one it yearns for – the one who smiles down at him and says his name with a smile in the shape of a heart, beautiful, dazzling, and more precious than life itself.
so, here's the thing: this week I'll be entering the 90s when it comes to chapters I'm currently writing and I was wondering if we should do the same prompt thingy deal for chapter 100 as we did for chapter 50? what do you guys think? ofc the prompt will be different this time, but the rules will be the same, so what, should we go for it? let me know in the comments!
"We should probably get out of bed," Yuuri says between the kisses that Victor keeps pressing to his very willing lips.

"Mm, just a moment longer." Victor kisses him again. "Isn't this terribly comfortable?"

He rolls onto his back and pulls Yuuri along, so that when they pause for breath Yuuri is sprawled over him instead. Victor grins, all roguish and handsome, and something warm settles in Yuuri's belly at the sight of it. It has little to do with Victor's smile and much more with the fact that there is nothing separating their bare bodies besides the sheets tangled around their hips.

"There," Victor says as he settles his hands on Yuuri's sides. He slides them lower to rest on Yuuri's hips before he kisses Yuuri again, and whispers into Yuuri's lips: "Now you are the one keeping us in bed."

Yuuri can't help it when laughter bubbles in his chest.

"Has this been the grand master plan all along, my lord? To get me in your bed so you can put all the blame on me and lounge in it all day? Shame on you."

Yuuri lifts himself up to sit and the sheets cascade down his back. They settle around his thighs, draped like the finest of silk gowns, baring all else to Victor's eyes. It's vibrant, the kind of look Victor gives him. The morning light gleams in his gaze, warm and joyful, but the darkness of his pupils paints the blue surrounding it as even more beautiful, more stunning than it normally is.

Yuuri drowns in it, just as he drowns in the soft caress of Victor's thumb rubbing circles into the flesh of his hip.

"You're gorgeous," Victor tells him.

Yuuri's cheeks heat up at that, but he does not turn his gaze away.

"So are you," he replies.

The smile that touches Victor's lips is tender. Yuuri leans down to trace its curve with his own lips and it's all sweetness and light. Victor's hands leave warmth across Yuuri's skin where they slide lower, cup his rump and squeeze. It's almost involuntary at this point, but Yuuri's breath hitches on a moan that he spills straight into Victor's open mouth. The echo of Victor's own tastes like heat on Yuuri's tongue.

"We shouldn't," Yuuri warns, but his words fall on deaf ears – as deaf as his own.

Victor's fingers slip between Yuuri's legs, adventurous and bold. They find the tender spot fast and rub against it. The sensation is so familiar, tickling and nice, but at the same time there is a little sting to it that only makes Yuuri arch his back for more. He gasps when Victor's thumb presses into him: not enough to breach, but enough to make the seed that still remains trapped inside of Yuuri after the night spill out of him in thick strings of white.
Victor curses at the same time as Yuuri makes a sound of embarrassment. It's both an arousing concept, to have Victor's release in him still, as much as it is mortifying – to allow Victor to see something so intimate... Yuuri wants to hide away and erase his memory of this completely.

Before he can do anything, however, Victor speaks in a voice so heavy with desire that Yuuri feels his own cock awaken with desire for more.

"Dear gods, I want to take you again right now," Victor says as he pushes one finger into Yuuri, into the mess inside of him.

There is a resounding squelch and Yuuri's cheeks hurt from the force of his shame, but he does nothing to stop Victor's hand, no. He arches into it, resting his own hands on Victor's chest and closes his eyes against the gaze of overwhelming hunger that Victor directs at him. Under the palm of his right hand he can feel the thunder of Victor's heartbeat, which beats just as wildly as Yuuri's own.

"Yuuri," Victor groans. "You are so beautiful, my love, so special..."

Yuuri makes a muffled sound from between the lips he keeps on biting. Victor's finger curves inside him, strains against his rim and circles, and teases him all the more, but Yuuri can't deny how good it makes him feel. It's maddening: the shame, the want, all combined into one.

"Can you take me like this?" Victor asks, impatient. "Can you ride me like a stallion, my Yuuri? Use me to bring yourself pleasure, to fulfil your needs?"

"No," Yuuri gasps. Victor's wrist snaps against his balls, a soft slap that makes Yuuri see the stars. "No?" Victor repeats. "What do you mean?"

"No, I... I want us both to--"

Yuuri grinds down, groin against Victor's. It elicits a delicious sound from Victor's pink lips, and Yuuri opens his eyes to that. He gazes intensely into Victor's own, and says:

"Together."

The hungry groan that Victor makes is enough of a confirmation for Yuuri to continue the slow movement of his hips while Victor's fingers work him open enough to be able to sit down on his cock and take pleasure from it. By the time it happens, Yuuri is impatient, but it heals him to find that Victor is straining just as much. The red head of Victor's cock that rests against his stomach is pearling with the proof of his desire and it settles the ache between Yuuri's legs into something more pleasant, more worthy.

Without thinking, Yuuri takes Victor's length in hand. It's thick and heavy, and hard with arousal. As he guides it to his entrance, he's mindful of the heated gaze that follows his every move, so when he sinks onto it centimetre after centimetre, Yuuri knows where to look. His eyes never stray from Victor's face and he watches it change: from the first signs of want fulfilled, through self control harder than even his cock, to pleasure so overwhelming once he's fully sheathed that Victor cannot breathe even through his parted mouth.

And as Yuuri watches him like this, hair in disarray, cheeks tender with a flush, eyes glazed and lips wet with desire, he finally realizes that this is what power feels like. And it feels good.
ok, so the prompt thing WILL be happening again soon! I will get back to you when I hash out the details ^u^)b  
that having been said, I was thinking of making a masterlist of chapters on tumblr (since there's so many of them there) and I thought that having a banner for this fic would be fun but since I know crap about editing I wondered if maybe we have any editors here in the house that would want to take this job? if you do it'd be awesome, so pls let me know? <3

ANYWAY, I hope you enjoyed the ride (innuendo very intended) ;3c
Yuuri succumbs to the force of gravity not long after. Victor's spent cock slips out of his hole and fresh seed trails down Yuuri's thighs, paints them white and sticky, but he is comfortable where he is: right there in Victor's arms. He lies on Victor's chest, which bears the fruit of Yuuri's own release, yet it bothers neither of them as they embrace in the bliss of the moment.

It's far too soon that the consciousness returns to Yuuri's previously clouded mind.

"We should not have done that," he mumbles.

"Why?" Victor asks. He runs his hand over Yuuri's back. If it makes Yuuri shudder pleasantly, he does not mention it out loud. "You were incredible, my love. I do not regret a thing."

"Neither do I," Yuuri admits. "Yet, still, we should not have done that. It is already bright out, Vitya. What if someone has heard us? What if someone interrupted us like this? I would possibly die of shame if that were to happen."

Victor's chuckle is a warm rumble against the ear that Yuuri keeps pressed against his chest.

"Darling, I hate to be the one to tell you this, but... I believe that everyone already knows. Wasn't it you, back at the camp, who told me to let everyone hear and know? They surely have gotten some idea then. Tent walls are much thinner than wood and stone."

Yuuri blushes at the truth in Victor's words, because he really did say that. Dear gods...

"So you think everyone already knows that we...?" he doesn't finish, but it is not needed for Victor to understand him.

"Oh yes, I do," Victor answers, words bathed in satisfaction. "Does it bother you?"

"I..."

Yuuri hesitates. He isn't certain that he wishes for everyone to know the nature of his relationship with Victor, despite what he's said in the heat of the moment. But even if he isn't certain, just one glance at the openness in Victor's face tells him that no matter what choice he makes, Victor will stand by him and support him – and that soothes all the worry in Yuuri's feeble heart.

He smiles.

"No," he says. "It doesn't bother me. Let them know I'm yours and you're mine."

Victor's lips are tender when they press to the crown of Yuuri's head. For a moment longer, they lounge comfortably in bed, but soon it becomes obvious that the more they linger the less comfortable the position they have chosen actually is. After a while, Victor carefully slides himself out from under Yuuri, kissing his shoulder briefly as he goes.

"Stay here, my love," Victor says, to which Yuuri does not object.
He's far too tired to move, so he burrows his face in a pillow and closes his eyes. Sleep does not come to him, however. It is to something slightly cold and wet that Yuuri snaps his head up, but it proves to be only Victor who takes to wiping the remnants of their passion from between Yuuri's legs.

Embarrassment chases all remaining lethargy from Yuuri's body, when he protests: "I can do that myself, Vitya!"

"Let me, my Yuuri," Victor answers with a soft smile. "Please? I wish to take care of you. It is, after all, my fault you have found yourself in a predicament like this. Allow me to take responsibility for what my actions have caused."

Still aflush, Yuuri cannot help but argue.

"I wanted this just as much, there is no responsibility to be had here by only one party, my lord," he speaks, but his words falter as the wet towel rubs against the sensitive flesh of his rump. "You are not doing this to atone, I can tell. You take pleasure in this, don't you?"

The smile on Victor's face morphs into something that Yuuri supposes must have been meant to be apologetic, but looks nothing such. Victor's eyes twinkle joyfully, a beautiful blue that is a perfect picture of the same hue the cloudless sky outside the window has. Yuuri would have to fight hard to keep a smile off his face, but he doesn't have neither the strength nor the will, so he smiles freely: a little exasperated and a tad more fond.

"Do as you will, then," he gives his blessing. "But no more goofing around. Promise me that, my Vitya."

He uses the name on purpose, and with good reason. Whatever Victor's intentions might have been at the start, his expression mellows down now. He complies with a little kiss to the arch of Yuuri's shoulder blade and an adoring, wide smile that makes Yuuri's heart flutter.

"You have my word, my Yuuri," Victor says.

He sets to work and cleans Yuuri properly on his back, then on his front. Once that is done, he asks Yuuri to sit in his lap so that the rest of his seed can flow out of him without additional strain. As embarrassing as it is, Yuuri submits himself to it and sits in Victor's lap, gazing down into the loving face that cannot hold back from smiling whenever their eyes meet.

"This is as good as we can do, I believe," Victor announces after some time. Yuuri isn't sure how long it's been – he's lost himself in the thoughts of how beautiful the man he's chosen is, and how lucky he is to be here. "We should dress and eat soon. Despite my wishes, it would not do for us to stay in bed all day."

Yuuri snorts, amused. "Didn't I try to tell you that before?"

"Yes, you did, my love. And you were absolutely right," Victor agrees, kissing the corner of Yuuri's mouth with a shameless smile. "Forgive me for being selfish?"

Just like that, Yuuri's heart melts and his teasing smile eases. He bumps his forehead against Victor's, light and tender.

"Always," he replies.

And it must be the right course of action, because Victor shines brighter than all the gold surrounding them when he grins wide. Yuuri locks the sight in his heart, happy and full, and resolved to strive for
this each and every day, since happiness and love look best on Victor and Yuuri simply wants him to enjoy his life as much as he himself is enjoying being at Victor’s side. After all, it is only fair for them to draw from life and love in equal manner.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not exactly happy with how this chapter has turned out but I LOVE SERVANT VITYA OKAY BYE
"I..." Yuuri starts as they are dressing, hands on the hem of the shirt he has yet to tuck into the waistband of his breeches.

The shirt is Victor's and a little too big in the shoulders, the sleeves are just a smidge longer and the feel of it is a tad more airy to how Yuuri wears himself, but it's Victor's and it smells like such. The drape of it is a comfort much akin to a hug from the man himself and Yuuri does not complain in the least when Victor offers it to him.

He does not say a word about how the additional fabric is a good thing to busy his hands with once a nervous spell strikes him, either.

"I've met your mother," Yuuri finally decides to say.

Victor turns to him so fast that he slips and hits his toes on the side of the chest of drawers he has been rummaging through in search for a belt to tie his outer robe with. He curses and hisses, but still jumps on one leg to where Yuuri stands. The hands that grab Yuuri by the shoulders, either to steady Victor or to hold Yuuri close, are clenched so tight that Yuuri winces.

"What?" Victor asks, pure shock and fear written over his face. "How? When? What did she say to you? Yuuri, I promise, whatever it is she said, you cannot listen to a word that comes out of her lying mouth."

"She was actually quite pleasant," Yuuri says slowly. "She didn't seem like a bad person to me. And, well, mostly she just spoke of you."

"Nothing bad, though!" he hastens to correct. "It was when you were called away and Mila and I were about to lunch. She joined us and spoke of you, and... Vitya, are you certain she means you no good? She... she seemed to genuinely care about your wellbeing."

"Oh, she might. But what she cares for is only the wellbeing that is crucial to my powers and my title. She doesn't care if I'm happy or lonely, she never did."

Victor's hands tremble where they rest on Yuuri's arms, just as his voice does from the anger of his words. Yuuri gently unlocks Victor's hold and takes both his hands in his. Victor grabs for them and squeezes, insistent and almost crazed with some emotion that Yuuri cannot call anything else than desperation.

"Yuuri, please, listen to me carefully," Victor begs. "My mother is not a good person. She is playing her tricks on you, like she plays them on everyone else. There is not a kind bone in her body. All that she wants is gold and riches, and a comfortable life for herself, and if that means she needs to become something that others want her to be, she will be the best actress in the theatre of life. Do not trust her, I beg of you."

Yuuri looks at him for a moment: at the worry in Victor's brow, the fear in his gaze, the consternation
in the downturned corners of his mouth. He cannot imagine a reason for Victor to be dishonest about a matter as important as this. What would he have to gain for discrediting his own mother? There is nothing that comes to Yuuri's mind, but alas: what would Lady Nikiforova have to gain from tricking Yuuri into trusting her?

"Yuuri, my love," Victor says then, pleading and afeared, and Yuuri realizes that oh, he knows what.

"I promise, Vitya," Yuuri replies. He brings both of Victor's hands up to his lips and rests two precious kisses atop of each. "She will never have a sway over me. I'm yours, and I am here to stand by your side and your side only."

The relief in Victor's eyes is heavy-lidded and glazed. Yuuri would dare say even tearful, but when Victor blinks, his eyes remain dry. He pulls Yuuri close to him, wraps him in his arms, and holds him in an embrace that is too tight to be of any comfort, but Yuuri allows it to last, because it is what Victor needs right now.

"Your mother must be a fine actress," Yuuri mumbles into Victor's shoulder, still thinking of any falseness he could've missed in her when they met and finding none. "She seemed to be so genuine in her care for you, so concerned about you... She told me to keep an eye on you and help you through this trying time, but I... I really was fooled, wasn't I?"

"It's what she does, darling," Victor says, a heavy sigh on his lips. "She fools people into believing the best of her and then she uses them for her own gains. That is exactly what she did to my father, and what she kept doing to me while I was still a young boy. But no more." Victor pulls away and looks down at Yuuri with a set to his lips that speaks of his anger for what's been done to him and his family. "She will no longer have a say in any matters of this estate, nor my own life. And I pray that you keep a level head about you in her presence as well. If not for your own sake, then for mine."

"I will," Yuuri nods. "I promise, my Vitya. I will not place my trust in her."

For the first time since the mention of his mother, Victor smiles. It's a small smile, but it's a trusting one. Victor leans into Yuuri and rests his head against his, eyes closed as if in prayer. There is still something terrified in the aura that clings to him, something that speaks more of the years of conniving and plotting that the woman who calls herself his mother had him suffer through. For a young mind to be warped into the games of the adults... it could not have left Victor scarless, and now Yuuri sees those scars for the first time.

As he kisses Victor's brow, he vows that he will protect those scars from reopening, even at the cost of his own flesh suffering for it.

Chapter End Notes

the drama thickens ;3c
Chapter 81

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Victor is reluctant to leave Yuuri's side after breakfast. The revelation that Yuuri has already met his mother the day before comes like a bolt of lightning from a cloudless sky. It strikes Victor with cold dread down to his core and sets his body aflame with fear, but fear not for himself or the estate, but for Yuuri – the sweet man with a kind soul who sees only the best in people, and will surely try to see good in the rotten woman Victor's mother is.

Instead of leaving Yuuri alone then, Victor chooses to take him with.

"Where are we going?" Yuuri asks, curious, as they walk through the manor.

"I usually take petitioners once a week," Victor replies. "People from the neighbouring villages and settlements, who struggle with all manners of things. They come here to hear their lord's judgement on disputes, or to beg for supplies once they run short, or sometimes even ask for favours. It is not only for the poor, either. I meet all kinds of people who come to ask for my golden touch in exchange for unusual items."

"Unusual items? Like what?" Yuuri asks. "What can be unusual to someone who has all the gold he can touch?"

Victor grins. "Oh, you'd be surprised."

And surprised Yuuri is when they settle in the Great Hall of the manor and the petitioners are ushered in.

There is a man with an ivory harp, who asks for the strings of his own instrument to be turned into gold as he wishes to play the sound as sweet as the trill of the birds and believes this is how he can achieve it. Victor cannot play a harp, but the make of it is so stunning that he inclines his head and fulfils the man's wish.

There is another man, this time with an array of spices from a distant land. He wishes to become a merchant and sell the product that makes Yuuri sneeze four times in a row after he sniffs at some vials, which has Victor giggle into his hand in a very unlordlike manner. Alas, for his dream to become reality, the man requires gold to purchase a dozen wagons. Victor grants him the wish with a promise of always saving a portion of his merchandise for the Snowberry Estate cooks.

A woman comes bearing a delicate silk tunic that shines silver under the sunlight that streams through the windows. It seems to be glowing, ethereal, and Victor agrees to the woman's plea without even hearing it, once he imagines Yuuri wearing the beautiful fabric. She asks for nothing outrageous: a gown to be turned golden for an upcoming ball she has been invited to. A touch of a hand is all it takes for her wish to be fulfilled and the tunic presented to Yuuri, who eyes it with embers of wonder in his gaze.

It gives little pleasure to Victor to receive the items, but his pleasure lies with Yuuri, for his face is awed and childlike at each new thing presented to them. Something selfish overtakes Victor's heart then. He wishes to gift it all to Yuuri, lay the world at his feet, since he knows it is well within his grasp, and Yuuri, sweet, darling Yuuri... he deserves it all. That, and more.
"I had no idea that people could make such fine things," Yuuri whispers after a man who has offered Victor a rare book of long lost knowledge leaves with a sack filled to the brim with gold. Yuuri's fingers caress the cover embossed with markings that even Victor has never seen before in all his years of collecting rarae aves. "And they give all of it to you just like that? All those valuable things, in return for a little gold?"

Victor offers him a little crooked smile. "It is amusing, isn't it? The way people covet my powers when in truth all it is that I have and they don't is the ability to put gold on anything. Even goldsmiths can weave harps of gold, or other lords offer funds for wagons. I'm nothing special, if you think closely about it."

"I wouldn't go that far," Yuuri says and his eyes twinkle in the sun that shines off all things golden in the Hall. "You're plenty special to me, my lord."

As if his words held some unnoticeable charm, a laugh is pulled from Victor's lips. It's carefree and smitten, the two things Victor always seems to be in Yuuri's delightful presence. Careless of the audience of another petitioner, Victor takes Yuuri's hand and rests a kiss on his knuckles. Much to his enjoyment, Yuuri's cheeks flush pleasantly. The already soft curl of his lips softens even more with a tender smile and, adoring as he is, Victor sighs at the sight.

"There is no one more special in this entire world than you, my love," Victor says.

Yuuri squeezes his hand, but he does not refute the words. In fact, he seems to soak them in, bask in them with the quiet happiness that simmers in Victor's own heart at that. It's the first time Victor sees him like so, but it instantly steals all his attention and only the sound of Pavel clearing his throat to announce the petitioner brings Victor back from his admiration.

He faces the man who claims himself to be a squire for the noble Lord Zdetsky, but his thoughts are fleeting and unfocused. After all, Yuuri's hand is still wrapped around his, warm and gentle even with its roughened by calluses touch, and his eyes peer at Victor with unhidden joy and affection so sweet that Victor's chest feels full from simply sitting near him.

"Let us hear you, good man," Victor finally motions his free hand towards the man. And in favourable spirits, he fulfils his wish, and all others that come afterwards, because he wishes all to know the happiness that he himself can taste the fruit of from his beloved's precious lips.

Chapter End Notes

my sweet dudes: the day hath come! the prompt thingie has been revived! we shall hold a contest at the end of which a sole winner will emerge to the honour of having their idea encrypted in writing for the generations to come!

in all seriousness now -- the rules are simple bc all you have to do is think of an idea for this story that will correspond with the prompt in some way. it can be a loose relation, it can be literal, it can be metaphorical, whatever your heart desires! once you get it, write it down in the comment section below so I can read them all and pick the one I like best, which will then be written into this story as the upcoming chapter 100 ^u^)b fun, yes? if you think so too, then let's do this!
the prompt for this round is library so knock yourselves out, guys! I'm looking forward to seeing what you come up with~
"That was the last one, my lords," Pavel announces after a man with a bouquet of golden lilies leaves to woo his beau. "Lady Yulianna has sent an invitation to lunch for you. She and Lady Mila expect you in the gardens at your earliest convenience."

Victor would much rather seclude himself with his Yuuri in the chambers and eat food straight from his sweet fingers while drinking in all of his beauty, but he shan't, because he is a proper adult who knows to tell apart the time for pleasure and the time for family. And, sadly, at this moment it is the latter.

"Do you wish to meet my aunt?" he asks Yuuri, still. "We can decline the offer, for it is just that – an offer. I'm certain she will take no offence if we prove to be absent for the time being."

Yuuri smiles at him, benevolent and kind, and says: "No need to be so cautious on my behalf, my lord. I already took a liking to Mila, so what harm could it be?"

Since Victor can find none, they accept and make their way to the gardens. Victor wraps Yuuri's arm around his own and rests the hand on his bicep as they take a stroll to where the gazebo sits among the trees and greenery.

The alleys of neatly trimmed flowers and bushes lead them deeper into the maze and Victor takes note that it is not much different from how he remembers it, and yet it is. The flowers much remind him of the meadows past Yuuri's parents' cottage, the bushes – those in the forest beyond the hills. The only thing that colours the contrast between the places is the memory of both, because while the cottage in-between the Giacometti and Nekola lands is a warm, tender glow in Victor's heart, the garden here is a pit of darkness and unhappiness that no sweet flowers or elaborate cut of the bushes can change.

"This is incredible," Yuuri says when they pass by a yew bush trimmed into a shape of a woman with bird-like wings. The goddess Nike, Victor knows.

"Or pretentious," he replies. "It depends on who you ask."

Yuuri turns a glance at him, inquiring, but not pushing. He never does, Victor realizes. He never pushes, simply accepts what Victor gives and waits for him to open up of his own volition. Should Victor choose not to, Yuuri accepts that as well, the caring man that he is.

Victor's heart swells with affection.

"This is the goddess Nike," he explains to Yuuri. "It is the surname my great grandfather chose when he was made a Lord. Nikiforov from Nike to mean those who are favoured by victory. If you add the name my parents have chosen for me, it all becomes quite much, don't you think?"

"Not at all." Yuuri hums. "Victor, favoured by victory with a touch of gold. I think it fits rather well."

"Ah, yes, I almost managed to forget that small detail," Victor says blithely. "Thank you for the
reminder, dear."

Yuuri's laughter is a sweet sound among the dark memories of this place and Victor cannot help a smile of his own. He leans in to press a kiss against one of Yuuri's laughing cheeks. They're warm from the sun, flushed, and touching them feels like touching a freshly baked bun: squishy and sinful. Victor puts down the urge to bite into it. Alas, he does so with great difficulty.

"Come, love, let us go," he says, guiding Yuuri down the cobblestone path. "My aunt is not a person you should fear, but it is better not to make her wait too long."

"Is she your mother's sister or your father's?" Yuuri asks. "She's Mila's mother, yes?"

"Yes, she is," Victor agrees. "Aunt Yulianna is my father's sister. She is more of a family to me than the woman who calls herself my mother ever was or will be."

Yuuri squeezes his arm briefly at the bitterness that edged itself into Victor's words, so Victor smiles at him in apology.

"Mila takes more after her father, Viscount Babichev, than she does her mother, but you'll find that Aunt Yulia is a kind, agreeable woman. I hope for you to get along, if possible."

"I'll do my best," Yuuri promises right as they round the corner and come into a clearing where the fat gazebo redone in the fashion of the current lady of the house sits majestically against the walls of privet that surround the garden.

The gazebo itself is truly a sight to behold: the columns are covered with luscious vines of ivy and the gold of them peeks from beneath the leaves, while the roof glints in the morning light as if it is the sun itself. The inside is painted white, oozing brightness on an already bright day, but that is not what immediately catches Victor's eye, no.

Mila's red hair glints copper in the sun and it's a beautiful picture – one to contrast vividly with the pale silver of her mother's. It is a similar shade to Victor's own, only slightly more golden, but just as unprecedented. If anyone had doubts that she was born a Nikiforov, they would ease with a single look at the long locks braided over her shoulder.

Both ladies lift their heads as they approach. There is a grin on Mila's face, but Lady Babicheva purses her lips and eyes them with a narrowed blue gaze.

"Good day, aunt Yulia," Victor greets with a true smile. "And to you, Milotchka."

"How nice of you to finally join us, Vitya," Lady Yulianna says in return, tone unhappy. "Must you always make us wait on you?"

"I was taking petitioners, aunt," Victor explains. "If you have a grievance, bring it up with them next time."

The lady huffs, but her expression is light. Victor knows she is not terribly upset with him, but plays a hard woman to please likely to intimidate the only person new to them. Without waiting for her to ask, Victor unwraps himself from Yuuri's side and presents him to his last living family:

"Aunt, allow me to introduce to you," he speaks, voice sneaking into fondness when his gaze rests on the side of Yuuri's face, "this is Yuuri, the companion my heart has chosen."

Yuuri bows respectfully towards her, but before he can as much as rise from it, Lady Yulia makes a doubtful sound.
"Hm," she says, eyes sharp, "we shall see about that. For now, why don't you both take a seat?"

Chapter End Notes

troubles on the horizon? more likely than you think! things will be getting spicy soon ;3c

and the prompt challenge is still running so if you have any nice ideas for this fic and the prompt library, pls drop them in the comments section below ^u^)b

(replies to comments will be up tomorrow bc I have class in less than an hour rip)
"Please don't scare him, auntie," Victor asks as they take the open seats.

He pulls up a chair for Yuuri like the gentleman he was raised to be and Yuuri flushes dearly at that. In the company they are Victor does not feel ashamed to smile with all the happiness he feels about the tender pink that dusts across Yuuri's cheeks and rest a loving kiss in the crown of Yuuri's head before he slips onto his own chair, grin wide and smitten.

"I am doing no such thing," Lady Babicheva answers, although her face softens a smidge. "Forgive me if I come across as such, Yuuri, but I simply wish to gauge the man Vitya has chosen with my own eyes. His previous romances were... let's just say, not entirely thought through, so this time I aim to save him some heartbreak before it gets too far."

Now, she might be just in her reasoning, Victor cannot refute that, but he cannot in good conscience allow his family to bully Yuuri into, what exactly? A challenge for his hand? A courtship to please his elders, but not Victor himself?

To decline a notion as preposterous as this one, Victor already opens his mouth when Yuuri speaks over him.

"I assure you, my lady, I do not take offence to that in the slightest," he says with a serious nod. "In fact, I'm glad that Victor has someone like you to guard the rights to his heart. He is a sweet and a kind man, who gives himself freely to everyone, so it is of utmost importance, in my mind, to protect what little we can. I would hate to see him hurt as well. In that, we seem to share sentiments."

Lady Babicheva nods to the truth that peers from Yuuri's words. They seem to be in an agreement, a common purpose bridging the gap between them. Seeing them like that awakens something warm in Victor's chest, even if the topic at hand is his own sound judgement.

"I am happy to hear that you are a reasonable man, Yuuri," aunt Yulianna says. "It brings me much relief to see that Victor has chosen better than his last few love endeavours. Alas, you will still have to prove yourself worthy of him."

"Of course. I expected no less when I agreed to come here." Yuuri bows his head respectfully.

"And might I not have a word to speak on this matter?" Victor asks in an unhappy voice, yet he is far from upset. It soothes his temper, the way that Yuuri takes all that is thrown at him with dignity and determination to earn the approval of those Victor is closest to. "I am no damsels who needs the family's protection, aunt."

"You," the aunt says as she gives him a pointed look, "are already smitten beyond saving. Tell me I'm wrong in thinking you'd sell your soul for this boy."

Victor opens his mouth, but no denial comes from it. Because the words aunt Yulianna speaks are true: he would sell his soul for Yuuri, should such a need arise. Victor hangs his head in defeat, but lifts it soon after when a warm callused hand closes around his. Yuuri's hand wraps around the one Victor rests on the tablecloth, a comfort and a promise, both.
"If it helps," Yuuri says, "I would sell my own twice for you."

"Yuuri," Victor breathes.

It is surprise and adoration, but also disbelief and happiness so profound that no other sound makes it out of Victor's throat. But it doesn't need to. Everything that Victor has wished to speak seems to be woven into the call of Yuuri's name and Yuuri's cheeks respond to it with the best answer he could offer: a precious, tender flush that brings warmth to Victor's own as well.

"See, mother? I told you," Mila says, smiling into her tea. Her blue eyes twinkle over the rim of the cup like the freshly fallen snow does in the sunlight. "They are too far gone for each other. I fear that if you try breaking them apart, you could ruin both and gain naught."

Lady Babicheva acquiesces with a hum. "Let us lunch for now. And after... well, we shall see."

As she says, they do. The food is delightful, as expected of the manor cooks. Only the best is served to those who eat off golden plates with golden forks and knives, but Victor still prefers the humble meals at Yuuri's parents' cottage, where he could taste the earthiness of the food as much as the love it was prepared with.

They are done with the light meal sooner than Victor would think and while he and Mila sip on their tea sweetened with honey-thickened raspberry kompot, Lady Babicheva stands gracefully from her chair. The fabric of her blue dress shimmers when the sun catches on silver threading as she offers a hand to Yuuri.

"Come, dear, let us take a walk through the gardens so we may speak honestly with one another."

Yuuri scrambles to his feet, ready to offer his arm to the lady, when Victor finds his voice.

"Aunt," he calls. "Do not scare him away, I beg of you. I would hate to come to see you as an enemy, especially now of all times."

Lady Yulianna of the House Nikiforov looks him straight in the eye like the free, fearless woman she was raised to be and for a single moment there her face reminds Victor much of his father's. There is a coldness there, a harsh steel of determination and drive for that which she deems to need her hand, her protection, her guidance – the look akin to those Victor remembers from his boyhood lessons with the tutors whenever his father was in attendance.

"Worry not, Vitya," Lady Babicheva says, taking Yuuri under arm. "If he is worthy, you have naught to fear. And if he isn't..."

She does not finish. They both know what happens to those who are not worthy of association with the Nikiforovs. Alas, Victor feels deep in his gut that it will not be his Yuuri.

His eyes meet aunt Yulianna's gaze, as hard as her own, because he is certain that whatever she has planned, Yuuri will prevail. He must.

"So mote it be," Victor agrees, and on they go.

Chapter End Notes
to those who thought yulianna babicheva is a nice woman -- think again ;3c
the prompt taking is still ongoing so if you have any idea you'd like to see for this fic that includes the prompt library pls drop it down below!!
"You must be very precious to Vitya if he's so protective over you," is the first thing Lady Babicheva says to Yuuri, who can only flush at what is hidden beneath her words.

"He is just as precious to me, please believe me," he answers according to the truth that lies within his heart.

"Is that so?"

They walk away from the gazebo, further into the gardens. The walls of privet rise up high above their heads here, but not high enough to stop the sun from shining down on them with its heavy gaze. When Lady Babicheva turns her head to him, her own gaze seems just as heavy, if not more.

"Tell me, Yuuri, where are you from? I must admit that I know nothing of you. Vitya has never been one to share too much of his personal life, but even as much as that is true, he has been completely mum about you thus far. Sate this old lady's curiosity, will you?"

"I'm afraid there is nothing curious about me," Yuuri replies with a smile.

He is hot under the collar of the thick outer robe, but he ignores it in favour of the conversation, because he has this strange, inexplicable feeling that is he missteps even once, Lady Babicheva will skin him to the bones with no mercy.

"Are you aware of the land lines of the Giacomettis, my lady?"

"In the south, no?" she answers with a question and at Yuuri's confirming nod, asks: "What do they have to do with this?"

"I'm friends with Christophe and his partner," Yuuri explains. "But, alas, that is not what I wished to speak about. The Giacometti lands are commonly believed to run all the way to the forest that divides the border between theirs and the Nekolas' property, but in truth they do not. There is a small patch, just enough for a cottage and a few meadows and fields, that belongs to my parents. It isn't much, but for us, it is more than enough."

He offers a small smile, but Victor's aunt does not return it. In fact, something shrewd twitches through her face when a passing cloud covers the sun for less than a blink.

"So, you were not born into riches," the lady summarises. Yuuri only inclines his head in agreement. "Is this why you're so keen on Vitya? For his gold?"

The shocked gasp Yuuri makes at the audacity of the statement is meant to be followed with a complete and utter denial of such accusations, but Lady Babicheva speaks over him without a care for his outrage.

"How much would it take for you to leave?" she asks. "A thousand gold pieces? Would that do? Oh, you know about Vitya's gift, don't you?" She clicks her tongue, almost impatient. "A thousand might be too little a price for you then. How about ten thousand? You could be settled for life with that."
"My lady," Yuuri says, voice quiet in his anger, "are you trying to insult me?"

"Ah, is that too little, still?" Lady Babicheva sighs. "Twenty thousand then."

She waves her hand as if spending so much gold is naught but a slight inconvenience to her.

Yuuri looks her in the eye.

It is hard to believe that Victor holds so much distrust towards his mother, who in all her kindness embraced Yuuri and accepted him as her son's suitor, but towards his aunt he bares trust, unknowing of the way she is trying to buy a way for Yuuri to break her nephew's heart.

Or does Victor know? Is this what he has been telling his aunt not to do, back at the table? Is this woman yet another person whom Yuuri should not trust?

Confused as he is, he doesn't know the answer to any of these questions, but what he does know, he says outright without an ounce of shame or hesitation.

"You could offer me all the gold you own, all the gold your family owns, and it would still not be enough for me to leave his side."

Lady Babicheva eyes him carefully. She must find something in the hard set of Yuuri's mouth or the furrow of his brow, because she hums and turns away. Her movement tugs Yuuri along, since she still clutches onto his arm, and Yuuri is forced to stumble into step with her.

"What do you want from him then?" the lady asks after a moment. "The title? The fame?"

"Is it really so hard to believe that I simply want him for himself?" Yuuri asks back.

A fleeting glance sent his way is sceptical at best. "There were others before you who claimed similar things. In the end, they all caved."

"I cannot say much of that since I knew none of them, but one thing is clear to me, my lady," Yuuri says stubbornly. "They weren't me."

"Be that as it may, I cannot in good conscience allow your relationship to proceed before I know for certain that you can be trusted, Yuuri," the lady says. "There will be challenges on your path, ones that require trust and compassion, and putting the other's safety and comfort before your own. Can you, in all honesty, say that you would do all of that for Vitya? Would you give your life for him, if need be?"

"If you were to ask me that only two weeks ago, my answer would be different from what it is now," Yuuri says. "But because of what I've learned about him, because of what I've seen him do, I can honestly say that yes, I would."

They stop on the pathway made of white cobblestones. The bushes of ivy are neatly trimmed into squares and flowers, white and blue – irises, Yuuri believes – which stand for the Nikiforov family colours, are kept in tasteful compositions along the sides.

It's a beautiful scenery, but it isn't what takes Yuuri's breath away. What does, is the fire in the icy, blue gaze of Lady Babicheva as she reaches within her sleeve to bring out a golden dagger embedded with sapphires and pearls.

"Prove it," Lady Babicheva calls on him. "Show me your devotion. Show me your truth, Yuuri."
She hands the blade to Yuuri in an offer that he cannot refuse if he wishes to earn her acceptance, so he takes it. And he proves his worth.

Chapter End Notes

hooooo boi things are getting heated in here yall next chapter will slay I swear to god
//fans self weakly

there's been so many good ideas for the prompt thing, which is awesome bc now I have a great pool to pick out from, and as such I bring the prompt gathering to a close! I'll be working on the next chapters this week so I'll see which one I like most then and we'll all see the fruits of our joint work in, what, 2 weeks? ahhh I'm excited!!!
thank you to all of you who participated, you guys rock <3
Yuuri holds the dagger in his hand without any knowledge of what is expected of him. It's weighty, but not heavy enough to be a ballast. Yet as it sits there, it's very aura is so menacing that cold sweat gathers between Yuuri's shoulder blades. The gold gleams in the sun as if the thing was on fire, and the longer it stays exposed to it, the more its touch on Yuuri's skin feels like a branding iron rather than the elegant craftsmanship it is.

Lady Babicheva remains mum about the purpose of the weapon. She simply watches Yuuri with intense focus and awaits his next move. And Yuuri, poor Yuuri, he knows not what is expected of him, but still – he knows he cannot fail.

So he lifts up his arm and cuts through the fine threading of the cuffs, after which he yanks the robe and the shirt sleeves up to expose his elbow. He rests the tip of the blade against the green vein that protrudes slightly from the bend of his arm. It's a daring thing, to keep something so sharp against his own body, but Yuuri does it even despite the rush of blood in his head.

Determined, he lifts his gaze to look Lady Babicheva in the eye.

She says nothing, still.

With a deep breath, Yuuri sinks the blade into his own flesh.

It stings, and rich, dark blood instantly oozes out of the wound, runs down the length of his forearm to the wrist, past the palm, down his fingers. Yuuri slides the dagger across the inside of his elbow and once that is done, he allows his arm to hang by his side when he offers back the bloodied weapon to its owner.

"I swear on my blood," he says, voice even, "that I will never seek to harm your nephew. I will protect him with all I have: my instincts, my words, even my life if need be. I am true and honest in this, that I promise on this blood that I spill for you at this moment."

The blood that trickles down his arm is red like Christophe's rubies. A small puddle of it gathers next to Yuuri's feet, where it drips from his fingers one precious drop after another. Lady Babicheva does not speak for a long moment, so Yuuri counts them as he can: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine...

"I did not expect you to do such a thing," the lady finally admits.

"What did you wish for me to do then?" Yuuri asks.

He is acutely aware of how wet his palm is, how much blood is flowing down from the gash in his arm. To think it was all for nothing... he cannot abide such a thing.

"I believed you will threaten me," Lady Babicheva says. Her eyes search Yuuri's face for the kind of malice one should need to do so, but finds none. "I believed you would rather take my life, than yours. I must admit that... I was wrong."
Yuuri inclines his head at the sheepish look that crosses Lady Babicheva's face. The little smile she gives him is much similar to the ones that grace Victor's face whenever he's caught in a lie, and Yuuri can't help it when his own lips quirk slightly at the realization.

"You're Vitya's family," Yuuri says. "I would never do such a thing."

"Hesitations like those might be what loses you, Yuuri," she warns. "I assume you've heard that Victor's mother, my late brother's wife, is not a person of outstanding morals, such as you seem to be. You need to remain wary of her, my dear. She will not think twice of the blood you shed, but will suck you dry of it like a leech, and afterwards leave the husk of your body to waste away. Much like she'd done to my brother..."

"Victor did warn me not to trust her, but if I'm to be honest, she struck me as a much more pleasant than you, my lady," Yuuri replies. "She never asked for my blood, or any proof that I care for Vitya. Why should I trust you, then, when to me you seem like the more shrewd one?"

He expects to see outrage on Lady Babicheva's face, maybe offence. After all, his words were crass and impolite. Yet what the lady does next surprises Yuuri thoroughly, for she laughs at him in sheer joy. It is not one of those deranged laughs, or panicked ones, not fake or pretend. It's honest and happy, as if Lady Yulianna is glad for Yuuri's suspicions.

"Good, Yuuri, very good!" she praises. She reaches within her sleeve once again to hide the blade and pulls out a periwinkle handkerchief instead. With her free hand she gestures to Yuuri's arm. "May I?"

Yuuri nods, thoroughly confused.

"You cannot trust anyone here, remember that," Lady Babicheva instructs as he dresses his wound. The handkerchief does little to halt the bleeding, but she rips further Yuuri's sleeve and wraps that around his elbow as well. "The only person you should trust is Vitya, and him alone. Do not trust the servants, for they are easily bought. Even those closest to you. Do not trust the family either. I know I am one of them, and for all that you know, you shouldn't trust me either, Yuuri. Alas, I am the only living family that truly cares for Vitya and his happiness, so please, do me this favour and keep him safe from his mother's clutches. I cannot ask for more, but I ask this: beware of her, Yuuri. She will not lose any sleep over hurting either of you."

Lady Babicheva seems honest enough in her warning. Added to what Victor has already told him, Yuuri nods his head. It seems there is more to Lady Nikiforova than he realized when he first met her. She seemed kind, she seemed welcoming... if it was all a ploy to get Yuuri to trust her, to put doubt in Vitya into his heart, then she may have succeeded.

She may have, but she didn't.

Yuuri's love for the Lord Nikiforov, his sweet Vitya, proves to be much stronger than his mistrust, so he acquiesces to Lady Yulianna's plea. If it is to save Victor, he will trust no one, believe no one. He will keep his own judgement on all matters.

There is, after all, nothing he wouldn't do for Victor – and his bloody arm proves it.
wow today was crap and I couldn't write anything good... I'm so glad I have a few chapters to fall back on bc otherwise yall would not have this today rip but anyway YUURI IS SUCH A BADASS AND I LOVE HIM AHHHHHHH!!!!!!!
"You must be wondering about what happened to make us all wary of Lady Alisa," Lady Babicheva says once she's done dressing Yuuri's wound.

His arm is still bloody, but the slow trickle of it has stopped. Instead, the liquid of life soaks into the fabric knotted around Yuuri's elbow and coats the gold threads burgundy. They lose their shine, like all things do when they lose their life and briefly Yuuri wonders if he hasn't cut too deeply. But even if he has, there is that certainty in him that it will only be a matter of time until the wound closes of its own and only a silver scar will be left in its place as a reminder of this day: one to match so many others already littered across his body.

"I have wondered about that, yes. It all seems very... conspicuous," Yuuri admits under Lady Babicheva's gaze. "But I'd prefer to hear it from Victor himself when he's ready to share that part of his life with me. I do not wish to trespass onto something I am not welcome in knowing."

"A very admirable attitude," Lady Yulianna agrees. "But vastly unpredictable. If you are not made aware of the situation, it will prove much easier for that woman to trick you. How will you know to look out for her if you don't know what to look out for? Vitya is doing you a disservice by not telling you of the hardships she's put him through."

"I will make sure to ask him about it then, but if you will, I would rather end this conversation for now. As I said, I trust Victor and I trust that what he shares with me is what he wishes me to know, so I would appreciate it if you could wait until that time with the rest of what you wish to speak to me about." He chances a glance at Lady Babicheva, and asks: "Or is there something else?"

Lady Babicheva hums. "Yes, there might be. But alas, that depends on how well you will be able to handle Lady Alisa, so I also think we should wait. Until you're ready."

"So be it." Yuuri inclines his head, and receives the same courtesy in return. "Should we return to Victor and Mila?"

"Not yet," Lady Yulianna says. "Come, this way. You need to wash off that blood or else they will both panic."

She leads him through the maze of the pathways till they reach a small pond with a great golden fountain. Unlike the goddess Nike cut from yew that Yuuri has seen before, this one is a man clearly, but with wings that span even wider than the bringer of victory. Yuuri stares at them in awe as they walk closer: they glint in the sun, shimmer and shine, so beautiful and dazzling.

"You have surely seen the Nike on your way here," Lady Babicheva says. "This is one of her brothers, Zelos. He is the patron of rivalry and contest, but also a god of jealousy. Quite fitting, if you think of who ordered him to be made." At Yuuri's questioning gaze, Lady Yulianna's lips quirk in a tiny snide smile: "Lady Alisa, of course."

The distaste in her voice is tangible. Yuuri asks no further questions to avoid annoying her and simply crouches at the edge of the pond to sink his hand into the clear waters. They're warm from the sun, so he quickly washes the blood off his skin. But even as he does so, the fact that his robe is
"It'd be hard to hide this from Vitya," Lady Babicheva says when Yuuri stands up. "You should return to the manor and change. Unless you want to tell him the truth?"

Yuuri debates it for a moment. He wishes to be honest with Victor in every way possible, yet he knows that if he shows his wound to him like this, it will bring Victor more worry than Yuuri ever wants to give him. It already happened once when Yuuri broke out in fever the day after their spontaneous stop at the little lake and at a time like this, with all manners of things to weigh on his mind, Yuuri does not want to trouble Victor further.

And so, he says: "Very well, I will go. Please tell Victor I will be back right away."

Lady Babicheva nods with a smile. It's more pleasant than any she's given him before, but somehow it does not give Yuuri any relief.

"You can take this path," She points behind his back, "and it will take you to one of the entrances to the manor. I shall make up some excuse for your lateness, so Vitya doesn't run after you."

Yuuri nods once and spins on his heel to leave.

"Yuuri," Lady Babicheva calls, but he only looks over his shoulder. "I am not your enemy, remember that, please."

"But you are not my ally either, are you, my lady?" Yuuri cannot help asking. The way she smiles at him in response, cheeky and dark, is answer enough. "I understand."

He leaves without a word more.

The ache in his lower back that he was acutely aware of ever since leaving the bed in the very morning is now a thought at the very back of his mind. The sting of the wound in his arm is one such as well. What occupies him more, brightly, vividly, without pause, is the heavy feeling of being trapped – locked in this family strife that Yuuri should have no part in, but does, because the man he has given his heart to brought him into this. Despite Victor's promises of protection, despite his assurances...

Yuuri suddenly feels alone and a sheep among the predators who not only want a taste of his blood, but to rip him apart, piece by lonely piece of flesh.

And Yuuri only has so much to give.

He runs a trembling hand through his hair and breathes the warm, flower-scented air into his lungs, but even that fails to clear his mind of the thoughts that encroach on him like a grave filling in with dirt to bury a body – and this time, the body is Yuuri's.

Chapter End Notes

poor yuuri ;u; and poor vitya too ;u; this place is so bad for them, they should just leave for their honeymoon and never come back I swear
Chapter 87

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

If asked, Yuuri wouldn't be able to explain how he made it to Victor's chambers through the maze of the garden and then the corridors of the manor. His mind remained submerged in the dark thoughts and if he's seen anyone on his way, he has no recollection of it. Even in the bedchamber itself he sits on the edge of the bed for a long while, trying to collect himself enough to face the adversity of the world once more, but it is a difficult feat when his breath is shallow and rushed, and his heart flutters in his chest as if it wishes to be anywhere but there.

Curling in on himself, Yuuri buries his face in his hands. His back is bent enough to hurt while he holds his head between his knees. Blood rings in his ears and pangs in his arm, a reminder that he is still alive. It's grounding, if only a smidge, and counting the throbs of the wound helps him to calm down.

It does not help his thoughts, though. Those – dark, twisted, full of doubt and hesitation – keep returning to him even after he collects himself enough to change his robes.

Whom should he trust? Lady Nikiforova? Lady Babicheva?

Did Mila know that her mother planned this? Did she know when she talked to Yuuri in such an amicable way? Or is she clueless in all of this? Or maybe, she is an ally to her aunt, Lady Alisa, whom she entertained with a smile?

And the servants, do they know? The guard that wished to search Yuuri's chambers that first day, the maid who brought him to his room, so far away from Victor's, maybe even Ilia...? Could he be...?

Yuuri's hands tremble when he unties the knotted fabric from the wound on his arm. There is no more blood seeping from it. The flesh around the gash is tender and pink, but after Yuuri washes it off in a basin, there is no more blood on it. His healing must have already started, but Yuuri doesn't truly register it until he dons another tunic and another robe from a chest that Victor has gifted him before.

A sudden knock on the door startles him so badly that he jumps in place like a thief caught red handed with the lord's pearls.

"My lord?" Ilia's voice sounds from the sitting room. "One of the maids saw you rushing inside and notified me. Do you need some assistance?"

With his heart in his throat and thoughts spinning madly, Yuuri considers fleeing. But that concept is as ludicrous as the panic that has overtaken him earlier. It is impossible to live in fear of everyone, impossible to live at all whilst seeing an enemy, a deceit at every corner.

Yuuri's hold on the soiled robes tightens, but at that moment and idea strikes him: a shrewd one that neither Lady Babicheva nor Lady Nikiforova would be remiss to appreciate, he's sure. Yuuri does not take comfort from implementing a trick like theirs, but if he is to survive this nest of snakes, he will need to learn to think like one.

So before what little courage he has leaves him, Yuuri decides to take arms against the doubt and
conflict in this house, and find someone to trust in. Even if he needs to resort to a ploy to find out those worthy of it.

"Come in," he tells Ilia. The page enters the chamber and bows to Yuuri before he even looks his way. "Ilia, be honest with me, can I truly trust you?"

The servant seems surprised by the question, but he quickly composes himself and nods. "Of course, my lord. I will never betray you."

"Then if I asked you to do something for me without telling Victor about it, would you?"

Yuuri sees the hesitation on Ilia's face, even if the boy wishes him not to. Not long passes between his question and the calm, collected look to overtake Ilia's features, but Yuuri catches the tiny shift in his eyes when he makes his choice.

"Lord Nikiforov has ordered me to serve you, my lord," Ilia says. "And so I shall, in whatever you need me for."

It is a gambit that may bring fruit of trust, but it is also one that may ruin everything, Yuuri realizes. Yet, despite the danger, he follows through with his plan and hands the bloodied robes to Ilia.

"Dispose of these for me, please," Yuuri asks. "Make sure no one sees the blood."

He can clearly see Ilia swallow at the sight of it, eyes wide. "Can I... My lord, can I ask whose blood...?"

"Mine," Yuuri answers. There is no use in lying about this. "It's mine."

"Are you injured, my lord?" Ilia’s gaze rakes over Yuuri's body as if he's searching for a wound, but it is invisible under Yuuri's new robe. "We should treat it properly. If it spilled so much blood then it must be quite serious. Lord Nikiforov would have my head if I allowed anything to happen to you."

"It is of no consequence now and, frankly, the blood is more of a scare than the wound itself," Yuuri pacifies Ilia's fears. "It has stopped bleeding already. But as you said, Victor would worry if he came across it, which is why I want you to dispose of these in secret. Please, do not tell him the truth."

The way Ilia's lips purse together in a tight line makes Yuuri's faith waver, but it only lasts a second, no more. Ilia nods his head with a grave frown.

"I will do as you ask, my lord," he gives. "I will dispose of the robes, but I will not lie to Lord Nikiforov if he asks me for the truth. If he doesn't, however, I will have no reason to say anything."

"Very well, that is acceptable," Yuuri agrees. It is something he could've expected. "But if anyone else asks..."

"...then I know nothing, have seen nothing, and will say nothing," Ilia finishes.

And when he leaves, closing the door behind him with a quiet click, Yuuri feels like he can breathe again, because there is at least one person here who will be his ally for as long as Yuuri has Victor's wellbeing at heart, and that seems to be for a long, long while.

Chapter End Notes
mmm can yuuri really trust ilia tho, I wonder ;3c
Chapter 88

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

On his way back to the gardens it is on complete accident that Yuuri stumbles into a whispered conversation between two guards. It would not pick his fancy on any other day, but his instincts are heightened with blood loss and the danger that lies dormant in the manor, so his ears pick the snippets of it against his better judgment.

"...again? We need to replace Kirill in the pantry, this is the third time," one of the man says. "He will get his throat slit in his sleep one of these days."

"It's been years since Lord Nikiforov has been in the estate and we've had peace, it's no wonder the man has grown lazy." The other man shrugs, his chainmail rattling. "But you're right. It wouldn't do for us to fail like all those years ago. Remember old Boris?"

"Lord have mercy on his soul. I would not want to bear the burn of the Lady's anger."

"Poor fellow, indeed," comes the answer. "But it was his fault for not keeping his men disciplined enough. If not for that, they would not have kidnapped the young lord, and Boris would still be alive. You reap what you sow, is what they say where I come from."

"Then we need to sow better," the other says. "Let the captain know that Kirill allowed someone into the manor. It's better to tell, than have us all flayed for his mistakes."

"Right, right... Sometimes, true loyalty lies not within loyalty itself, but--"

Yuuri listens no more. He hastens his steps away from the place where the guards stand and makes his way outside into the gardens. His mind, however, stays there in the corridor: thinking, debating, shocked.

Someone has sneaked into the manor without the guards knowing. A chill runs down Yuuri's spine despite the warmth of the sun bearing down on him. Someone has sneaked in... and it wasn't the first time, either. It's happened before. And Victor was taken.

Yuuri pauses by the yew Nike, staring up at her wings spread as if in flight. She looks majestic, just like Victor does every time Yuuri sees him. But despite how he looks, despite who he is, despite all that Yuuri has learned about him... there are still so many things Yuuri doesn't know. So many awful things in his past that he hasn't shared.

It should not be as surprising as it is, after all Yuuri has hardly shared his biggest secrets with Victor, so why should he expect something so revealing from the man? They have promised each other honesty, but never transparency, Yuuri realizes. Would Victor speak truly of his past if Yuuri asked? Would Yuuri, if it was Victor who did the asking?

The wind picks up and the little leaves that make up Nike's face rustle in a whisper that tells him, "There is no easy path to victory."

There isn't, Yuuri agrees. But when you bear the burden with someone, it is half as hard.
Nike says nothing to that. She seems to accept his answer and the path he takes when he passes by her on his way to the gazebo. His steps aren't sure, and he isn't certain of the decision he is making, but he does not falter. He might be walking to his fate, to fulfill what he's destined for, but it is only because of the choice he has just made: the choice to rejoin Victor at the table and face his family, suspicious, conniving, shrewd as they all might be.

"Yuuri!" Victor greets him with a smile that shines brighter than the sun. He stands up to meet him halfway and brushes a stray lock of hair out of Yuuri's face in a gesture as sweet as the look in his eyes. "Aunt Yulia told me you fell into the pond, are you alright?"

Briefly, Yuuri meets Lady Babicheva's eyes over Victor's shoulder. She gives him a small smile and lifts her cup to him in a silent toast. It takes all Yuuri has in him to look Victor in the face and lie.

"The grass was wet and my foot slipped." He gives a small laugh that sounds pretend to his ears, but Victor seemingly finds no fault in it. "I'm only glad I didn't pull your aunt with me. It would be a shame to ruin such a pretty dress."

The melodic laughter from Lady Yulianna gives credit to his story. Victor still lingers with his hand close to Yuuri's cheek. He peers down into Yuuri's face as if he is trying to find something in him that would explain the ill pallor of Yuuri's skin.

Because Yuuri knows he must look worse for wear. He still feels a little sickened after the fears have gripped him, and he has not yet fully processed what he overheard on his way back. It all sits in the pit of his stomach like raw meet does on any other day that does not fall around full moon.

And it's nauseating.

"Are you certain you're well, my sweet?" Victor asks once more.

Yuuri does not force himself to smile this time. He takes a deep sigh and wraps his fingers around Victor's hand. As he pulls it down, he rests a fleeting kiss against Victor's fingertips, and whispers honestly:

"I will be, now that I'm by your side."

Victor's face softens into an expression so kind, so fond that Yuuri's breath leaves him with a tremble. He has so many questions, still, yet he cannot bring himself to care about them when he gets lost in the warmth of Victor's adoration that shines in his eyes like stunning pearls of shimmering blue.

Leading him by the hand, Victor helps him to his seat and takes one just by him. He offers his hand palm up to Yuuri, where he lays it on Yuuri's thigh, and once Yuuri slides his own against it and locks their fingers together, he knows that whatever lurks in their future, whatever monsters they shall face, as long as they remain loyal to each other, they will prevail.

They must.

Chapter End Notes

...once you taste the evil fruit of lies it's hard to stop isn't it ;3c
Once they leave Lady Yulianna and Mila, and take their steps to the library, where Victor promises to show Yuuri the books which might be of help in his search for the wolf deity's origins, Yuuri speaks up.

"I overheard some guards on my way back."

Victor looks at him from the side, curiosity written over his face. "What were they saying?"

"They mentioned someone named Boris. He served as a guard here some years ago, from what I understood," Yuuri offers tentatively, gauging for Victor's reaction. There is none.

"There could've been someone like that, I can't honestly tell," Victor says with a shrug. "Too many people come and go through the manor's doors for me to know everyone's name or story."

"They said–" Yuuri pauses. He bites his lip, still uncertain if he should proceeded, but forces the words out anyway: "They said he was responsible for allowing your kidnapping."

The way Victor falls quiet is the only sign of his discomfort, but it's as bright to Yuuri as torchlight in the dark of the night.

"I understand if you do not wish to speak of it, I truly do," Yuuri quickly rushes to say. "I just thought I should let you know that I heard that, in the chance that you'd like to speak of it. But if not, if I was wrong, then please disregard it entirely. I do not wish to push you, Vitya."

Victor's shoulders are stiff, but he shakes his head at Yuuri's offer.

"That's quite alright, my Yuuri," he says and clears his throat. "It is true that I do not remember that time fondly, but it is no secret – yes, I was taken from my bed in the middle of the night when I was, what, fourteen or fifteen, I believe? It wasn't the only time, either. But that one was probably the worst. If pursuit was a moment late, I would've been put on a ship and lost forever."

Painfully, Yuuri's heart clenches in his chest at the dispassionate way Victor talks about the matter. As if... as if it is normal for him, as if it's something to get used to.

Yuuri's hands clench into fists where they hang by his sides, useless.

"I have told you before that people covet my powers," Victor continues. "Some think it best to take me away from my home and keep me as their goldmine, a pet who turns things to gold for his little trick. As you can see, it never truly worked. My parents guarded me well, but even with all the guards and precautions accidents still happen."

"That's awful," Yuuri whispers.

"That's my life," Victor says in a voice so calm, so careless that Yuuri cannot bring himself to stay silent.

He grabs Victor's elbow hard, and steps into him as if for a kiss, but instead, he says with all the
passion, all the love, all the protectiveness that simmers within him: "Not anymore."

Victor, clearly surprised, opens his mouth to reply. Yuuri does not allow him this.

"Not anymore," he repeats, hard. "You are no longer a child, no longer just a goldmine. You're my Vitya, and I will rather die than have anything like that happen to you again. Your life is so much more than your gifts, Vitya. Please, tell me you can see that."

Gently, Victor unlatches Yuuri's hand from his elbow and brings it to his lips. His eyes are closed when he presses a kiss to Yuuri's knuckles, so it's impossible to know what he must be thinking, but the deep sigh Victor releases afterwards is hint enough. Yuuri steps even closer, afeared for his wellbeing.

"I do see it, my love," Victor says. "I truly do. Isn't that what I've been telling you since the day we've met? You changed my life, Yuuri. You make me see the best in myself, things that I have never seen, never noticed, and even those that I have, and which I could not accept – you make those seem like things to cherish as well." Victor smiles at him, fond and sweet. "My life, darling, is all the better for it now that you're here with me, I do so swear."

Yuuri cannot stop the flush that brushes his cheeks, but he does not give it much thought either. All his attention is focused on Victor, who peers into his eyes as if the entire world is trapped in them.

Yuuri swallows through his suddenly tight throat. "I'm happy to hear that, I truly am..."

"But?" Victor asks, a quirk to his lips that tells Yuuri he knows something he won't like will be coming.

"But." Yuuri agrees. The words are heavy on his tongue, yet they must be spoken, "I do not want you to put so much weight to my presence in your life. Please, do not misunderstand – I love to be of help, and I myself am ridiculously happy when you can smile so freely." Yuuri gives him a smile of his own. "Alas, what I wish for from the bottom of my heart is that you find joy on your own, Vitya. Do not equate your happiness with my presence at your side."

The frown of confusion and hurt on Victor's face makes Yuuri hasten in his explanation.

"No, no, don't do that," he quickly adds, taking Victor's face in his hands. "I do not mean for you to stop being content with what you have. But I worry about..." He pauses, changes his mind and finishes the thought on another note: "I worry about what would happen if I were to disappear? If I was no longer here? Vitya, I still wish for you to be happy then. I wish for you to find goodness in your life in an event such as this. Please, promise me you will at least try."

"I–" Victor starts, swallows, and continues: "I don't understand. What do you mean disappear? Are you... Is there something you are not telling me, Yuuri?"

Yuuri shakes his head with a little, woeful smile.

He thinks of the things Lady Babicheva has told him. He thinks of Lady Nikiforova, with her smiles and kind words. He thinks of his wolf form, the secret he's been hiding for so long. He thinks of all these things and he knows, he knows deep down in the pit of his gut that he cannot tell Victor about any of that.

So he doesn't.

"No, there is nothing." The lies come easy as breathing. "I promise I will not leave your side willingly, but promise me what I asked in return, Vitya. You will try to find happiness, even if I am
not there with you."

Still confused, Victor nods his head.

"If it is so important to you, I will adhere to your wishes," he complies. "But if there is anything, anything at all, my Yuuri, I do hope you know that you can come to me, yes? Your secrets, all that you entrust me with, it is all safe with me. I hope you do know that."

"I do," Yuuri says.

And he believes in it. But, alas, belief is not always enough. Sometimes the worry and the fear make a mixture too powerful for belief to conquer – and Yuuri has a strange feeling that this might be one of those times.

Chapter End Notes

foreshadowing anyone? //winkwonkwinkwonk
Chapter 90

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The library is even grander inside than its golden doors indicate. They step into the spacious room with the highest ceiling Yuuri remembers ever seeing and the heavy aura that has been buzzing around them with something too harsh to settle ever since their earlier conversation now dissipates into nothingness as awe and admiration replace it.

Yuuri’s mouth drops open and his head turns here and there while his eyes try to take in all the splendour, the gold, and most importantly – the books, which are neatly stacked on shelves upon shelves until the height so impressive that a man standing atop another would not be able to reach the highest of them. The breath that passes through Yuuri's lips is reverent, as is the light in his gaze.

Victor's subtle chuckle is what snaps Yuuri out of his awe-stricken state. He turns to him, flushing briefly at having been caught in such childish admiration, but Victor's eyes are crinkled and warm when they meet his. The unease that has been there before seems to be gone and Yuuri breathes a little easier for it, stands a little taller, glad that the storm has passed.

"Is it really so amusing to see a peasant like me gawk at a sight as incredible as this?" Yuuri teases, and Victor only laughs further. "You are a cruel master, Lord Nikiforov. To poke fun at me for such a thing, that is cruelty in its finest. Shame on you."

"Ah, alas, I could never be as cruel as your beauty, my love" Victor replies, a shameless grin on his face. Before Yuuri can react, possibly flush deeper at the compliment, Victor takes him by the hand and says: "Come, precious, let us see if we can find anything of interest here. I do promise not to laugh again at your expressions, even if they are terribly amusing."

They walk among the shelves of deep mahogany cases embossed with golden symbols and twirls, and images of the flaming sun akin to the one in the Nikiforov crest. Yuuri cannot help but cast his eyes from side to side as he tries to take in the entire chamber, but it's impossible for him to wrap his mind around the richness so exquisite. Even the books on the shelves, or some of them, bear golden markings on their spines as if everything the Nikiforovs touch would be remiss of something if it bore no gold in its making.

"This section is dedicated to the religious books we have gathered," Victor finally says when they stop before a case that looks much like the others to Yuuri himself. "We do not have an astounding collection of them, I must admit, but I believe we may still find something of use here. Over there," Victor points to a table and three comfortable looking armchairs that stand bathed in the midday sun by the big windows, "we can sit and read once we find what we need."

"Let us start then," Yuuri says, and then smiles sheepishly, "is what I'd like to say, but I have no idea where to even start. There's so many books here!"

Victor laughs. "That is the only perk of being born a noble – the books our ancestors have gathered for generations. I hope we can find something in here that will explain what the wolf deity in that forest really is. Do you know what religion it might come from?"

Ah, Yuuri thinks as his mind goes blank, how will I survive this?
"I," he licks his lips, "I... don't really know for certain. Wolves appear in many cultures, no? In many religions? How can we tell which one this specific wolf is from?"

Victor hums in thought. "Maybe we can think of its characteristic features? For instance, what I can recall is that it is easily as big as an ox. I was too frightened to look at it closer, but maybe you remember some other details? You have met the wolf, no?"

Yuuri's mouth is dry like the ashes from yesterday's fireplace as he thinks of what to say to that. This, right now, would be the perfect opportunity to confess his secret to Victor, to tell the truth as it is, but... Victor has enough on his mind at this time. What, with Lady Nikiforova playing her games and Lady Babicheva spinning her own webs, the funeral and the arrangements to carry on the matters of the estate; with all of that on his shoulders, could Yuuri really bother Victor with something as heavy as his curse?

Aware of how sweaty his hand has become, Yuuri pulls it out of Victor's grasp and walks up to the case. His eyes cast upon the books and when one catches his gaze, he reaches his hand upwards to pull it out.

"I do not remember much," he finally says, looking at the cover of the leather-bound book. "Just the eyes. They were red, and gold, a... a colour in-between? Like autumn leaves. I don't know how to describe it better, forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive, my Yuuri," Victor says, sweet in his blissful ignorance of Yuuri's inner turmoil. "It already gives us more information than we previously had. And, that book you've picked will be the perfect thing to start with."

"What is it?" Yuuri asks, inspecting the letters embossed into the leather more carefully.

Before he can compose them into coherent words, though, Victor gives him an answer.

"It is called the Bestiarum Vocabulum, which is a compendium of beasts of both mortal and immortal realms. Luck might have it that you will find the wolf there. As for me, I'll look through these," Victor says as he quickly pulls three different tomes from the shelves and with an armful, gives Yuuri an encouraging smile. "This shall give us something to do until supper, I believe. Shall we?"

Clutching the book in both of his sweaty hands, Yuuri follows Victor to the table. He cannot tell if any of the tomes here contain information about the wolf, about himself, but if they do – for some miraculous, inexplicable reason if they do – then Yuuri no longer knows if he wishes to find it.

Or maybe, what he wishes to do is to bury the knowledge deeper in the library so that no one ever, much less Victor, could find it again.
IT'S HAPPENING YALL!!!!!
Chapter 91

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

The pictures inside the book Yuuri has chosen are grotesque and do not remind him of animals in the least. They are all beasts, for what Yuuri knows, even the deer or the goat he finds. Still, he carefully sifts through the pages one by one, so as not to miss anything that might be of importance.

"Hm," Victor gives after a long while of only the rustling of paper, "there is Fenrir, the son of Loki, who is believed to be the one to devour Odin during Ragnarok – the apocalypse, that is. It says here that his jaws are so big that the top would reach the heavens and the bottom would rest on the ground. His children, also wolves, are foretold to swallow the sun and the moon."

The skin on the back of Yuuri's neck chills at the thought, but no, that does not seem probable. He cannot be one of those.

"Do you believe the wolf was that big?" Yuuri asks. He turns a page in his book to distract himself. "For one meant to be capable of such terrifying deeds, it seems rather small to me."

"You are right," Victor nods. "It definitely is not of that size. But maybe it will grow the closer it gets to Ragnarok?"

"Maybe," Yuuri allows in words, but chases the thought away at the same time. "Still, let us keep up the search."

And so they do. Yuuri's book brings little results, but every now and then Victor brings some known wolf deity to his attention.

There is the she-wolf who became mother to the founders of Rome. There is the wolf with a sky-blue mane named Asena. A gray wolf. Another couple of them who were akin to horses for the gods of Norse belief.

In some of them, the wolf is a hated figure. In others, it is believed to be a symbol of protection, of fearlessness, but never good. Never kindness. Not in the way that Yuuri is, not in the way that he hopes others can see him.

As Yuuri sits there listening to it all, he begins to wonder if maybe he is truly an anomaly among his kind. Or, if there even is his kind at all. None of the wolves Victor speaks of are similar to him in physique or character, none of them change their shape to match the movement of the moon. Could it really be true that Yuuri is just a being cursed for unknown crimes? But who would curse him? Why?

There are so many questions swimming in his head that Yuuri does not notice the presence of another in the library until Pavel steps to Victor's side and bows.

"My lord," he says. "A woman has come to beg for an audience. She says her son is gravely ill and she cannot pay the healer to take him under his care. The boy will surely die if nothing is done. What shall I tell her?"

Yuuri feels the weight of Victor's gaze on him and he lifts his head up from the book. Victor's eyes
search his as if asking for permission to leave, permission that is hardly Yuuri's to give. He smiles, nonetheless. It's a sweet, touching thing that Victor does to confirm Yuuri's wishes and Yuuri cannot help but feel his anxious disposition ease at that proof of Victor's caring nature.

"Go," Yuuri tells him with a smile. "I will still be here when you're done. A break might serve us both well."

A grin splits Victor's face, bright and lovely. It's all the more precious when Victor takes Yuuri's hand and rests his lips on it in a sign of his unbound affection.

"You are a gift, my love," Victor says. Yuuri's cheeks flush at his tender words, but he only waves him away without saying anything back. Victor chuckles, and adds: "I shall be back as soon as possible."

"I will wait for you here then," Yuuri promises.

With that, Victor leaves. Yuuri sits alone in the quiet of the library, watching the closed golden doors for a long moment as he ponders on Victor's kindness.

For a stranger, whom he doesn't know and has never met, Victor will lend his ear and offer help as much as he can, and it's sweet. It's darling. It's the sort of thing that makes him the man to whom Yuuri has opened up his heart.

However, Yuuri cannot help but wonder whether that same kindness will be afforded to him, should he come forward with his secret. Will Victor still gaze upon him with such pure adoration? Will he still take Yuuri's hand so freely? Will he kiss his cheek and laugh like he does now, warm and sweet? Or will fear replace it all, frowns and anger, and calls to arms against the beast that has fooled him?

Yuuri shudders to think of it. He trusts Victor in all manners of things, but this... He wishes he could trust him with it as well, yet the dread that has seeped deeply into his bones over the years of hiding who he is, is now stronger than his love. Selfishly, Yuuri wants to keep what he has for longer, be at peace for longer. Just these past few weeks with Victor... it's not enough. His heart has finally learned what it means to love and now that it has, it refuses to give up on it just yet.

Tearing his gaze away from the golden doors, Yuuri peers down at the open book in his lap. He plans to close it and stretch his legs a little, traverse the entirety of the room, maybe, but before he can do that his eye catches on the drawing on one of the pages, for the creature presented on it cannot be anything else than a wolf.

Yuuri's heart jumps into his throat, as sudden as a crash of lightning.

"Luna corde lupus," he reads.

The inscription tells him nothing, but he reads further, and the more he reads, the more colour drains from his face, because it seems that he has found what he's been looking for. And it is hardly what he expected.
ao3 is doing crappy today so I'll reply to comments when they get their priorities straight, but hOLY SHEET WHAT'S THAT?? DID YUURI HIT THE JACKPOT???

...oh, he totally did ;3c
"My good sir, kind sir," the woman pleads, offering her cupped hands to him. In them lies a dozen pebbles she must have picked along the way. "Please, for my son. I ask for nothing more."

Victor, with a flower crown woven of blue roses sitting on his temples, smiles kindly as he rests his hands atop the stones. His fingers don't glow, there is no shine, nothing that would indicate that anything happened.

But it has.

Once he pulls his hands back the stones wink at him, fully golden. The woman's eyes gleam with tears as she peers at them, and Victor continues smiling even as she weeps in gratitude.

"There isn't much I can do to help," he finally says. "But I can at least do this for you, and I'm glad. Thank you for the crown, it is truly a delightful gift. I hope that with mine your son's health can improve."

"Thank you, my lord, thank you," the woman repeats time after time. "Bless you and yours! I'm sure that good Lord in heaven will reward you for your kindness."

Victor isn't, but he keeps smiling even then. The quirk of his lips eases some after the woman leaves, bowing on her way out, but Victor's happiness does not dissipate like it normally would have done by now. No, it clings to him, heavy and sweet like the scent of the roses that wraps him in a tender embrace.

He plucks the crown off his head. It's a simple thing, but beautiful – much like Yuuri himself. And much like the crown Yuuri has made for Victor. That thought brings him an image of Yuuri wearing this crown, a gift from Victor to return his favour. The contrast of the blue roses and Yuuri's black hair that Victor imagines makes his heart sing in want.

His feet carry him towards the library before he even thinks of moving and Victor grins from ear to ear as love, happiness and life buzz sweetly in his veins akin to a swarm of bees. If it wasn't for the occasional servant he passes by, Victor is fairly certain that he would skip along the hallway in his joy.

He finds Yuuri where he left him: at the small table, with feet slung across one arm of the chair and a book open and propped on his lap. Even from afar Victor can see the serious look on Yuuri's face, and that too is a precious sight to him. He wishes he could capture the beauty of the moment when the setting sun paints the room amber with its last, orange rays. Maybe Yuuri would even agree if Victor asked a painter to eternalize his image...

Before Victor makes up his mind about it, though, he brings himself closer. While he's still behind Yuuri who has yet to notice him, Victor grins mischievously. He holds the crown higher and as he comes to a stop behind Yuuri, he drops the crown onto Yuuri's head.

What he does not expect is the shriek that follows and the almost comical way that Yuuri flails when his balance is lost. Unable to do a thing, Victor watches him soundly flop off the chair. There, lying
on the floor with one leg still up on the armchair, the book laid across his stomach and the flower crown askew, Yuuri blinks up at him.

"Well, that was quite a greeting, my dear," Victor jests.

Yuuri's cheeks dust pink. "You surprised me."

"I can see that." Victor chuckles, but offers Yuuri a hand up. "Can you stand?"

"Yes, yes, I'm fine," Yuuri quickly says. "It wasn't that big a fall."

"Good. I would hate if you came to hurt yourself because of me."

Something in Yuuri's face shifts, but it is too fast a change for Victor to catch. Nonetheless, he narrows his focus on Yuuri's face and only then notices the pallor of his skin. The glow from the windows deceived him, Victor realizes, since now that Yuuri stands with his back towards it, his face looks tired, pale, and shadowed. Almost fearful. Definitely *not* fine.

"Are you alright, my Yuuri?" Victor asks.

His hands reach for Yuuri's cheeks, but Yuuri smiles and bats them away gently. That, in itself, tells Victor all he needs to know, but the curl of Yuuri's smile is another dead giveaway. Victor frowns before Yuuri even answers. The unhappiness and worry must be vibrant on him, because Yuuri's course of action changes. Victor can see the hesitation in his gaze, then withdrawal, and finally Yuuri speaks:

"I think I made myself ill with reading all the things wolves are believed to be. They are... not pleasant things."

"Maybe we should stop for today then," Victor says. He bends down to pick up the book that fell along with Yuuri, closes it and rests it on the table. "The library is not going anywhere. We'll have time to explore it another day."

Yuuri nods. "You're right. I shouldn't have rushed this. I guess my curiosity got the best of me."

The smile that Yuuri offers Victor now is more honest, more like himself. Relief touches Victor's heart, but he does not allow it to settle. Not until he reaches for Yuuri's hand and Yuuri willingly takes it, and gives it a small squeeze. Only then does the tension leave Victor's shoulders, but the worry does not. He carefully guides Yuuri through library, attentive to every shift of Yuuri's body.

"You needn't hover," Yuuri tells him, amused note in his voice. "I am not that sick."

"Forgive me for being concerned about your wellbeing," Victor follows suit, even if he is hardly about to laugh.

Yuuri's gaze softens. He leans more of his weight against Victor, who wraps an arm around his shoulders.

"There's nothing to forgive, I apologize," Yuuri says, contrite. "I simply do not like to seem weak in your eyes. In anyone's eyes, really."

"Yuuri," Victor says, serious. "You are anything but weak. Strong, beautiful, kind, incredible," Yuuri's cheeks regain some colour to them when he flushes at Victor's words and Victor's next breath comes a little bit easier for it," and stubborn – yes, you are, do not give me that look – but you are most definitely *not* weak."
"You really think so?" Yuuri asks softly.

He does not look at Victor, but rather at his own feet as they shuffle through the golden library door. He sounds small, too small for the big, loving heart that he has in his chest. And Victor hates it.

"I don't think so, my love," Victor tells him then, confident in his words. "I know so."

The door closes with a click and they move down the hallway, now in lifted spirits.

And behind the golden doors, towards the table where Victor and Yuuri left their books, forgotten in their worry, a silhouette creeps out from the shadows to rest a greedy, deviant hand on the Bestiarum Vocabulum.

A hand gilded with rings of gold and rubies.

Chapter End Notes

I feel like yall will scream at me even more today than after yesterday's cliffhanger so I'm bracing myself for it already ahahah let the screaming commence!
"Come, love," Victor pleads, "eat a little more. You've barely touched anything."

"I'm not terribly hungry," Yuuri replies as he pushes away his plate of meat.

"We can have the kitchens prepare you some soup then? Soup is good for when you don't want to eat, but have to," Victor tries again.

The colour of Yuuri's skin is still rather ill, but it has regained some of its glow natural since they've left the library. For that, Victor is glad. But the strange stillness that has trapped Yuuri in its hand lingers in the stretch of his neck and the slope of his shoulders, and Victor's heart fills with worry.

Yuuri, who must see through all of it, offers him a smile that is both precious and just as heartbreaking.

"I simply do not feel the need to eat, Vitya. Please. One day without food will not have me starving."

"If you say so..." Victor relents, but his lips remain pursed. He himself has suddenly lost his appetite.

The atmosphere between them is heavy. With what? That Victor cannot divine. It must be connected to the findings of Yuuri's search for the origins of the wolf deity, he believes, but, alas, he cannot tell for certain. Yuuri does not utter a word of what kind of gruesome things he's found and Victor cannot ask about it for fear of Yuuri's condition worsening even further.

It leaves little to do, except–

"I know what we need," Victor says, and once Yuuri looks at him, he smiles: "A bath."

Yuuri's eyes light up at the very mention. The smile that Victor is trying to keep up feels all the more real for it.

"We sadly do not have anything as amazing as the springs in the back of your parents' house, but we do have a golden tub big enough for two. Would you be interested in that?"

The way that Yuuri bites his lip as hesitation overtakes his joy, kills something inside Victor's chest. It aches and burns, and he doesn't know the source of it, but it pains him all the same. Yuuri does not outright reject his offer, but he just as well might have: Victor feels it like a rejection altogether.

"I--" Yuuri gives. "Would you, I mean, are you intending on bathing with me?"

The question should not be as hard to answer as it is, Victor thinks, but he cannot help the disappointment from colouring his gaze. He drops it down to the hands that Yuuri rests tightly wrought in his lap, and he swallows it all to reply.

"If you wish me not to, then I won't," Victor says. "Whatever you'll allow, my Yuuri. I could leave, if that is what you choose. Just say the word."

But Yuuri shakes his head and takes one of Victor's hands. His touch is cold, in much need of
warmth, yet Victor resists the instinct to bring Yuuri's fingers against his lips. He simply brings his other hand to hold Yuuri's in between his, soft, cradled, safe.

"No, stay, please," Yuuri asks. "I would like it very much if you did."

"Then I will," Victor promises, and this time he doesn't fight the impulse: he brings Yuuri's hand to his lips and rests a loving kiss against his knuckles.

While Pavel oversees the preparations, Victor and Yuuri remain seated. Yuuri rarely shows his affection around other people, but this time he surprises Victor when he rests his head on his shoulder and shifts so close that he practically tucks himself under Victor's arm, who needs not be told twice and wraps it around Yuuri's shoulders.

They speak little while maids rush back and forth with buckets of heated water and once the tub is filled, Victor dismisses the servants altogether. For what he plans, they will not be needed.

"You should go in first," Victor speaks.

Yuuri looks up at him from where he's dipped a hand into the steaming waters.

"And you?"

"I will, after I attend to you," Victor tells him

Yuuri's cheeks flush, much from his embarrassment as well as the heat that oozes from the bath. He hardly says a word against it, though. He sheds his clothes and climbs into the tub, hissing at the first touch of the hot water.

Victor strips of his clothes as well and takes a soft towel, which he soaks thoroughly and kneels at the side of the tub. Yuuri's eyes are closed, face relaxed and flushed. To Victor's immense relief, he looks far more at ease than any moment before. And when Victor brings the towel against his skin, Yuuri sighs – and with the air he lets go, all the remaining tension and worries seem to leave as well.

"This feels nice," Yuuri says while Victor gently scrubs his back and shoulders.

"I'm glad." Victor smiles a small smile to himself. "I'm very glad."

In silence, Victor cleans Yuuri's body as best as he can. His neck, his collarbones, his chest, sides, arms... The water that rolls down Yuuri's skin is tantalizing, but Victor does not pay it any attention. This moment, now, is not about carnal pleasures, no. It is about safety and care, and love: the things Victor wishes with all his heart to give to Yuuri.

He moves from one side to the other. Yuuri is slumped against the back of the tub, enjoying the bliss. Victor starts with Yuuri's hand, and kisses it once it's clean. Yuuri's lips quirk in a little smile that instantly lightens Victor's spirits. He rubs the towel higher, up Yuuri's forearm, then up his arm to the shoulder, but something catches his gaze and he drops it down once more.

"I don't remember this..." Victor murmurs.

A curious scar, a new one marks the inside of Yuuri's elbow. It's pale, almost glowing if Victor turns Yuuri's arm right, and it seems... it seems almost _fresh_. But that cannot be, he knows, because he's seen Yuuri's body many times before and until today he's never noticed a peculiar mark like this one.

Yuuri's eyes are open and sharp when Victor lifts his gaze to him. It startles Victor a little, this sudden intense focus, but he doesn't show it on his face. At least, he hopes so, when he opens his
mouth and asks:

"What is this, Yuuri?"

"It's only a scar, Vitya," Yuuri says and the timbre of his voice clearly tells Victor that it's anything but what Yuuri claims it to be.

Yuuri is lying to him, Victor realizes.

The next breath he takes is painful, so painful he almost gives it up, but he doesn't, because *Yuuri is lying to him*. And Victor will surely rather die than give up on finding why.

Chapter End Notes

are we finally gonna get some answers next time? maybe ;3c tensions are running high woohoo!
"Yuuri," Victor starts, and then pauses since no words come to him.

His mind is spinning with repercussions of what this means, of what it could mean for them. They promised each other honesty, and at honesty Yuuri has failed... or was that his plan all along?

"Do you take me for a fool, Yuuri?"

He tries to keep the hurt from his voice, but he must fail at that, too, for Yuuri gives him a little smile: one that is bitter and sad around its edges. Victor knows not if the smile is for him or if it's Yuuri's own guilt that makes it appear so, but it does look sincere.

"Not at all," Yuuri replies and his words also seem to be truthful. "In fact, I believe you are far smarter than people around here think."

"Then why are you trying to deceive me?" Victor asks.

His hand squeezes around Yuuri's wrists, which he still holds in his grasp. Yuuri does not pull away even when Victor's hold becomes too constricting. He simply looks at Victor for a long moment, eyes searching, pleading for something, but for what Victor does not know.

And what he doesn't know, he cannot give. As much as his heart wishes to.

"That is not the path I intended to choose," Yuuri says. "Trust me when I say that I meant to tell you about it, but simply haven't found the right time. Things are happening around the estate, many things all at once, and it's hard to speak of it when I know how much your family – or what's left of it – means to you."

"What are you speaking of?" Victor asks, surprised. "What does my family have to do with–"

No.

His eyes suddenly widen at the thought that crosses his mind. No, his mother couldn't have–

"Shh, shh." The water in the tub splashes over the edges when Yuuri moves to sit against the side. "Vitya, let me speak. Please."

One wet hand comes to rest on Victor's cheek and it brings his mind back into focus: the focus on Yuuri's eyes. They gaze at him with softness, so much of it that it looks akin to pity. And if it was coming from anyone else, Victor would've bristled at it, but since this is Yuuri – the sweet, kind Yuuri who cares for him more than anyone ever had – Victor stifles the rejection that builds up in him and listens.

"I would die for you," Yuuri says.

Victor's breath falters and his mouth opens, but before he can say anything, Yuuri's finger presses onto his lips.
"No, listen," Yuuri insists. "This is what your aunt wanted to speak with me about. I know that because of your powers your life is always endangered and, if need be, Vitya, I'm willing to give up mine for you. She wanted to make sure I speak the truth when I told her the same thing, so I gave her a vow on my blood."

"But--"

Victor's eyes flick down to the scar. The wound, whatever it may have been hours before, is closed now. No human can heal that fast, no matter the size of the injury. Unless Yuuri isn't... But...

"How?"

Confused, Victor lifts his gaze, but Yuuri's face remains soft... and suddenly Victor knows that it wasn't pity he's noticed there before, no. It was guilt. It was shame.

Victor's own heart squeezes at the thought of Yuuri being ashamed of himself for something so selfless. He rests his own hand against the one Yuuri still keeps on Victor's cheek.

"I," Yuuri says, then swallows thickly as if he's gathering the courage to speak honestly of a secret he's been bearing with him for a long while. "I haven't told you about this either, but I think you already know that I've been keeping a secret from you."

When Victor nods, Yuuri smiles in a way that clearly says he expected it all along.

"Just like you have powers, I have some as well. They are nothing like yours, not as impressive for certain, but that is what they help me with – healing."

"So you can heal your own wounds, yes?" Victor clarifies. "Any wounds?"

"No," Yuuri shakes his head. "I'm hardly immortal, Vitya. I just... I heal quicker than other people, that's all."

Before Victor can gather his thoughts to reply, Yuuri hangs his head low and goes on.

"I apologize for never speaking of it before," he says quietly. "That is not, not something I want many to know. I've been, you know, I've been called a freak before. A monster. I– I didn't want you to see me as one too."

Victor's throat tightens at the vulnerability that Yuuri presents.

"Oh, Yuuri..."

It doesn't take much thinking for Victor to know what to do. He wraps Yuuri in his arms and pulls him into an embrace so tight, that they can both feel the edge of the golden tub crunch against their ribs. But it hardly matters to either of them. Yuuri slides his wet arms around Victor and rests his forehead on Victor's shoulder, forcing his breathing to remain even. The position is not the most comfortable and after a while Victor's knees begin to hurt, but this kind of pain is nothing in comparison to Yuuri who has readily slashed his flesh open for Victor.

"You are a fool, my love," Victor says, finally, voice thick with emotion. "I would never require you to risk your life for me. In fact, I would rather die myself than see you hurt. No, please," he adds when Yuuri lifts his head as if to argue, "let me finish. I listened to what you said, so do me this favour and listen to what I have to say in return."

Only when Yuuri nods, does Victor continue. He rests his forehead against Yuuri's and, gazing right
into beautiful brown eyes, speaks what sits in his heart:

"Never – and I mean it, darling – *never* risk your life for me. I am not worth it. And I would not be able to live with myself, if you did, so please, I'm begging you, promise me you won't."

"You know I cannot do that, my lord," Yuuri replies, a ghost of a smile on his lips. "Do you truly believe I would be able to live with myself, if I did?"

And Victor knows he would not. He knows it as well as he knows that he would not be able to live without Yuuri either. It is only right that the same applies to Yuuri, but...

"Still. Promise me that you will not put yourself at risk needlessly. No more vows like this." Victor traces his thumb over the scar that glows silver on the inside of Yuuri's elbow. "No more proving to anyone how worthy of me you are – the only one who has any power to judge this is me, and I have deemed you worthy of my affection a long time ago. Please, promise me that, my Yuuri."

Yuuri's shoulders drop when he caves to Victor's wishes.

"I do," he says. "I do promise. But I will protect you with all my might, Vitya, should such a need arise. That I promise as well."

There is a fierce sort of determination in the slope of Yuuri's brow and Victor cannot help but smile at that: honestly, from the bottom of his heart.

"I am lucky to have a knight such as yourself to keep watch over me then," Victor says and smiles with even more delight when Yuuri's cheeks flush.

"If you tease me any more, I will not allow you to join me in the tub, my lord," Yuuri says, but when Victor gives a pretend gasp, he sees the smile on Yuuri's face before he turns away.

And all seems well once again.

Chapter End Notes

holy fuck this chapter brings this fic over 100k words??? what the fuckety fuck yall omg hOW
Chapter 95

Sitting behind Yuuri in the tub, with his arms wrapped around him and Yuuri's back pressed to Victor's chest, while their legs tangle together in the smooth waters, Victor feels like the luckiest fool in the world.

"Say, what else did aunt Yulianna talk to you about?" he asks. "You were gone quite a while. Oh, wait... Did you truly fall into the pond?"

Yuuri's sigh expands the circle of arms Victor has wrapped around him.

"No, I did not," Yuuri speaks truthfully. "Your aunt concocted that lie to hide the fact that I had to leave to change my robes. They were sullied with blood and we both thought it best, lest you worry about my wellbeing."

"It didn't really work in your favour, did it?" Victor hums, slightly amused.

"It did not," Yuuri agrees, a hint of it in his voice as well. "I apologize again. I lied to you when we've promised each other honesty... Even if the cause was just, I cannot begin to tell you how badly it made me feel to mislead you like so. Can you, do you think you can forgive me?"

Yuuri does not look over his shoulder to see Victor's expression, but if he had, he would have seen a soft smile and loving eyes directed right at him. Since he doesn't do so, Victor dips his head down to rest a little kiss on Yuuri's nape.

"You're already forgiven, my Yuuri," Victor says. "But, please, do not lie to me again. You may believe it is for the best, or that you are protecting me, but the truth is always a better thing to hear no matter how pretty the lie is. I would rather worry or be mad than remain in the dark."

"I– I never thought about it like that," Yuuri admits quietly. "But, yes, I promise. No more lies from now on."

"Good." Victor tightens his arms around him. "I will have a word with aunt Yulia about this as well. I cannot believe she asked you to do such a dangerous thing. If it wasn't for your healing powers, you could've bled to death!"

"It's alright, Vitya, please, do not get upset with her." Yuuri rests his hands atop of Victor's and strokes them soothingly with his thumbs. "She did what she thought was best to protect you. You shouldn't fault her for that."

"I should and I am," Victor insists. "You are far too important to me to be playing those silly games with the lot of them. I do not want to lose you over some aristocratic prejudice."

"You won't. I promise, you won't. I will be here for as long as you wish me to, my Vitya, I do vow that with all my heart." Yuuri's fingers slide between Victor's and squeeze to mark his words. "Only you have the power to make me leave, remember that."

Sweetness flutters in Victor's heart, warm like the water they're sitting in and tender like the presence...
of Yuuri in his arms. Victor smiles into Yuuri's dark, wet hair.

"Then I will never let you go," he says back.

They steam in the tub for a while longer, comfortable in the silence that falls with Victor's last words. When, for the third time, Victor catches himself almost dozing off, he forces his eyes open for good. He hides a yawn in Yuuri's shoulder and snorts an unflattering little laugh at the hand that Yuuri blindly reaches backwards to ruffle his damp hair.

"We should head to bed before we both drown in this tub," Victor decides. Yuuri hardly protests, if the small mumble he gives is anything to go by. "Come, love, let's get you dry."

Yuuri is a heavy weight to lift from the tub, but Victor does not complain in the least. Especially not when Yuuri wraps his arms around his neck trustingly. Victor's heart swells at that to the two, no, three times its size and he has to swallow the stream of ridiculous words of adoration that threatens to fall from his tongue at how precious Yuuri looks tucked into him.

As best as he can, Victor dries them both before he carries Yuuri to bed. It is with a great sigh that Yuuri rolls onto silken sheets and Victor has to muffle a giggle behind his hand. He slips under the golden covers behind him and wraps himself around Yuuri's curled up form, close enough to feel his warmth seep into his own skin. It brings a sigh to his lips as well, to which Victor succumbs shamelessly.

The day has been a long one, full of eventful times, some more happy than others, but at the end of it, Victor finds that he cannot truly call it a bad one. No day with Yuuri by his side could be bad.

He presses his lips to Yuuri's shoulder. The skin is warm and smooth there, lacking the silver scars that litter the rest of Yuuri's body. Yuuri hums at that, or that's what Victor believes it was supposed to be, for the sound that leaves his lips is more of a grunt – one that only a person halfway into the land of dreams could make. Warmly, Victor chuckles at that and rests another kiss in Yuuri's damp hair.

"Sleep, my love," he murmurs softly.

The clutches of Morpheus pull at him and his eyes grow heavy fast, so Victor gives into it as well. He rests his head on the pillow next to Yuuri's as his breathing evens out, and just as he slips into sleep himself, he hears Yuuri's mumbled reply.

"Sweet dreams, Vicchan..."

And Victor smiles a little smile, but it's a happy one: because unlike the first time it happened, being called by Yuuri's dog's name now can only be the most flattering of compliments, and he is more than happy to receive it and wear the name with pride.

Chapter End Notes

wow I'm having a weird day, everything's so cloudy and swollen wtf even, sorry if this is subpar to the usual quality
They say that dreams only highlight that which the mind feels most strongly about. They have that annoying quality of never being clear enough in the waking moments, but being terrifyingly realistic when you're submerged in them and until the pleasant shifts into ghastly you can never tell if it is a good dream or a bad one.

Yuuri knows it, or he thinks he does, but just as you cannot tell you're inside a dream when you're experiencing it, he cannot tell if what he's seeing is a nightmare concocted by his frightened mind or a memory so vivid it sends chills down his spine. Alas, what he does know with startling clarity is that it matters not whether what he's seeing is a dream or reality – it still fills him with dread down to his bones and lingers there like a monster who spares no innocents.

The night is dark despite the full face of the moon hanging above. The sky starless. Wherever he turns, all that meets him is pitch black nothingness that in itself would not be as alarming, but as Yuuri stands there, still and silent, the moon falls to earth in a blinding comet that bursts into light upon touching solid ground. It morphs into a woman with a face of stone and robes woven of silver moonlight. Her eyes are pure whites, seemingly unseeing, yet seeing perfectly at the same time.

She directs her gaze at Yuuri, who shivers where he cowers before her, because he knows this face, those eyes, this woman. He recognizes her. From where, he cannot tell. A memory, a dream so far away, so distant that he cannot help but wonder if it's real.

But he does know her. And he knows what she's come for.

"Now is the time, childe," the woman says. Her voice is as cold as her visage, her robes tugged by the winds that Yuuri cannot feel. "You made a vow. You need to keep your word."

The only source of light is the woman's chest, which glows silver with half a heart trapped behind the crevices of her ribs.

"I didn't know," Yuuri speaks. He pleads. "I didn't know, then. Please, I didn't know what I was doing!"

"That is of no concern to me," she tells him. Her hand stretches towards him, fingers pointed at his heart, which begins to flutter in Yuuri's chest as if controlled by her. "Now that you know love, you can finally fulfil your promise. I've waited long enough for this."

"But I can't," Yuuri tries again. "Please, don't take it away. I– I love him. I cannot give you what isn't mine to give any longer. It belongs to him now."

The stone-cold face contorts in an ugly grimace of anger and Yuuri stumbles back. His hands come up to cover his chest protectively, as if that alone could stop the woman from ripping out his heart.

"You would dare break your vow?" the woman hisses. Her hair lifts around her like snakes made of silver moonlight, reared and ready to strike. "You would dare turn your back on me?"
"Please..." Yuuri begs. "I never meant to... I just, I love him? How can I give you what's his now? If only I didn't fall in love, if I didn't meet him, I could still--"

"It would've been of no use to me then," the woman says. Her face has softened now, moved from anger into something akin to pity and Yuuri knows it's for him as much as it is for herself. "That is the way of life, my cub. Men take what's ours, claim it as theirs and then abandon us once they've had their fill."

Yuuri shakes his head. "No. No, no, he wouldn't--"

"But he would," she interrupts his denial again. "He will. And once he does, you will come to me willingly, little one. There will be no more running. No more moonless nights filled with vulnerability and darkness, yes? We will shine together."

Hand pressed to his chest in the place where his heart beats like a hammer against his palm, Yuuri falters.

"He wouldn't. He won't. He loves me."

"Then you have naught to fear, my cub, do you?" the woman replies, smiling.

But her smile is cold and her eyes gleam bright, as if she could peer into the future and see that which Yuuri could never know. She lifts her hand to him and he steps back, afearèd, but it is his mistake. The ground beneath his feet crumbles and falls, and he falls with it – deep into the darkness, until the glow of the woman's heart becomes as tiny as the speckle of the moon on the starless sky.

The scream of terror dies in Yuuri's throat when his eyes snap open to the calm, quiet night in Lord Victor Nikiforov's bedchamber. He is safe. Or he should be, away from the nightmare, yet he knows that this one he cannot fully escape. Not this time.

Because as much as he would favour believing it was only just a dream, he knows deep in his heart it wasn't.

His pulse flutters, rushes and jumps, and dances as if lead by inaudible music of a piper: one with half a heart shaped of moonlight.

"Yuuri?" Victor's voice is thick with sleep when he calls Yuuri's name. "What's happened?"

"Nothing," Yuuri quickly replies, out of breath from the screaming he'd done in his dream. "Nothing, I'm well. It was just a bad dream."

He shifts closer to Victor and wraps himself in him.

Luna corde lupus, said the book from the library. The moon's wolf heart.

Yuuri counts Victor's breaths to distract himself from the thoughts of the moon lady, whom he knows is the goddess of the moon. The one who rules over midnight, the one who is to blame for Yuuri's predicament.

"No, my cub," a cold voice whispers in his mind, omniscient and everpresent. "You are."

And when Yuuri's eyes close again, his dreams are filled with moonlight once more.
wow I'm still not feeling my best and I have 4 finals this weekend but WHO CARES LOOK AT THIS DRAMA OMG I'M EXCITE!!!!
Chapter 97

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It is unlike a memory, for in memories you experience the world as you remember it, but now Yuuri is not a part of that world – he's a spectator in a play that unravels right before his eyes, but it is a play that is written on the basis of that which once was. Of his own memory, his own life.

The room is one he does not fully remember, filled with luxurious pillows and covers, rich tapestries on the walls. It feels achingly familiar, nostalgic almost, but Yuuri's rational mind argues that it cannot be.

There are blue baldachins above the bed of navy sheets. The ceiling is painted dark and speckled with stars made of what seems to be diamonds and pearls. They glisten in the moonlight that falls from the big windows, ethereal and beautiful. Periwinkle curtains float in the night breeze that comes from the open glass doors which lead to the terrace where a small boy stands with his face upturned to the sky.

The night is starless, but the moon glows brightly when a woman, the boy's mother, steps up to the marble balustrade. And Yuuri's heart stops because even if she is far younger than he remembers her, he can without a doubt tell who she is.

"What are you doing out of bed, Yuu-kun?" his mother asks and Yuuri watches as his boyhood self turns his full, flushed face to her. The excitement that shines in his eyes is almost as bright as the moon.

"I wanted to see the moon," he says. "She's so pretty tonight!"

"That she is," his mother allows kindly, an indulgent smile on her face. "But she would not be happy to find good boys out of bed so late in the night."

Little Yuuri's face fills with a pout so round and mighty it becomes another moon in the sky. Hiroko laughs and presses her finger to one puffy cheek. The air releases from Yuuri's lips with a whoosh and they both laugh at the sound that splits the calm of the night.

"Have I ever told you the story of how Lady Moon made it to the sky?" Hiroko asks when silence befalls again. Yuuri's little head shakes left to right, no. "She was once a beautiful, young girl, you see. Everyone loved her. He beauty ensnared hearts of men, but she never allowed anyone into her heart, because of a prophecy that was given about her when she was naught but a babe."

"A pro-pecy?" little Yuuri repeats, word alien on his tongue.

"A prophecy," Hiroko repeats, enunciating clearly so her son could understand.

Older Yuuri, dreaming Yuuri, smiles at it. His mother has always been a kind soul, and it was from her that Yuuri got his mellow disposition.

"A prophecy is a foretelling of the future, Yuu-kun. Only those who were gifted with the Sight can make them."
Little Yuuri's mouth shapes a little o in his awe, round like the moon herself.

"Lady Moon was given one such foretelling," Hiroko continues her story. "She was told that when she finally decides to give her heart to a man, he will take half of it and in her despair she will become so cold that she will lift up to the sky, never to return. So Lady Moon strayed from men and never afforded them more than a fleeting glance, but one day she met a prince, who was handsome and valiant, and kind, and before she realized, her heart was already breaking into two."

Little Yuuri gasps, his small hands coming up to cover his mouth.

"What happened next, mother? What happened next?" he asks.

Hiroko smiles and presses his button nose with her finger.

"The prince took half of her heart, yes, but he did love her as well. He offered her a half of his own heart in return to keep her grounded by his side. She happily took it and they lived together for many, many years." The smile wanes of her face, replaced by a sad look as she lifts her head to gaze at the moon. "But prophecies, my sweet, have this strange power of always fulfilling themselves. This one did as well. You see, the land where they both lived was a peaceful one, but even the most peaceful of places have their own strifes."

Hiroko turns back to young Yuuri, serious.

"The younger brother of the prince felt that he was more worthy of the throne and killed his brother," she says. "He became king soon after and spared no regard for his dead brother's wife. Lady Moon, struck by despair of losing her love, wept and wept, and the half of the heart that her husband has given her all those years ago, she cried out along with her tears."

"Oh no, poor Lady Moon," little Yuuri mumbles as tears gather in his own eyes. Hiroko makes a soothing noise and wraps the boy in her arms. "She went to the sky, didn't she? The half that kept her grounded was gone, so she left, didn't she?"

"She did," Hiroko agrees. "She became cold and distant, and then she left. It is said that until someone offers her the same kindness as her late husband, she will remain in the sky, watching over those whose hearts remain broken."

"That's such a sad story," little Yuuri says. "Can she never be happy again, then? Oh, I know!" Yuuri's round face lights up with joy. "What if I give her half of my heart? I will not need to give it to anyone for many, many years, so she can have it! That would make her happy, don't you think, mother?"

"Yuuri, sweetheart," Hiroko starts, a kind smile on her lips. "You cannot--"

"He can," a voice sounds around them like a whisper of the cold wind that suddenly picks up. "If he wishes so, I shall accept it."

The eyes of the son and his mother widen when a woman veiled in moonlight appears to them. She hovers in the air, ethereal, inhuman, and the whites of her eyes focus on the small Yuuri for one lingering second before they lift to gaze deep into the soul of the Yuuri who is older now, who knows better. The Yuuri who must live with the promise he has made whilst a silly child.

"My cub," Lady Moon speaks. She turns her unseeing eyes back to young Yuuri, who trembles and hides in his mother's robes. "Once a month you will walk beside me and you will share my heart. Until you know love, I will bless you. And when you do, when you finally find it, I will come to retrieve the half of your loving heart that you've promised me."
Her smile is cold, but it is no colder than the chill that settles around older Yuuri's heart when Lady Moon reaches her hand out to him. Colder still, however, is the thought that seizes Yuuri's mind in a vice:

"That time has come."

Chapter End Notes

I'm still dead and finals part 2 is today so I'll be mia after I post this but if you didn't know yet I love thinking up lore and BOI DOES THIS CHAPTER HAVE ME EXCITED!!!! even more than the last one which is just !!!!!!!!!! ahhhhh can't wait to read all you guys' thoughts on this <3
Yuuri awakens with a start.

His body is racked with shivers, covered with cold sweats. The bedding has tangled around him like vines, ready to strangle him if he moves, and even the weight of Victor's arm wrapped around his middle feels too much as Yuuri struggles to keep his breathing even in the dark of the night.

He remains still for a long moment, eyes open as if to chase the nightmare away. But even then, he can almost see the pale glow of the Lady Moon casting shadows from where moonlight trickles into the chamber from the split between the curtains. There is no hiding from her, no escape. Yuuri is trapped in a fate so cruel, so heartless – but one of his own choosing.

And he cannot breathe.

Taking sharp, laboured breaths, he slips out of the bed and on trembling legs crosses the chamber to the sitting room. There, behind the closed doors where Victor cannot see him, cannot hear him, he slides to his knees as the weight of his own body becomes too much to uphold.

You did this to yourself, his mind whispers insidious things. You're the only one to blame.

You've cursed us to suffer, his heart adds. It bleeds, it cries. Almost enough to break in half, but not quite yet.

You're a fool, his mind says again. Compassionate, selfless fool who will pay with his happiness for his silly act of kindness.

As Yuuri shivers in the darkness of the night, alone and despaired, he knows they are right. He was a little boy, an innocent soul that knew no better. He wished to help. He wished for all to find their happiness in life, for all to be kind to one another. Silly dreams of a child... now, to be paid for with the ultimate price – that of his heart.

Yuuri doesn't realize that tears are flowing down his cheeks until a sob tears past his trembling lips, hitched on his uneven breath. It sounds loud in the stillness of the room, startling, and he immediately slaps a hand over his mouth to muffle it, lest he awakens Victor on accident. That helps little, for whilst Yuuri battles to keep it hushed, his heart overflows inside his chest with longing and regret.

Oh, sweet Vitya, Yuuri thinks. The kind man that he is, he would gather Yuuri in his arms, rock him back and forth and whisper delightful nonsense into his ear, if he saw Yuuri like so.

But he can't. Yuuri cannot let him know. He should... he should leave.

Stunned by the simplest of solutions, Yuuri lifts his head. He stares at the door to the chamber where Victor sleeps unawares.

"Should I...?" he whispers into the dark. No one answers but his very own heartbeat that tears itself apart at the very thought.
What of it, Yuuri thinks, if it tears apart anyway when the day that Lady Moon returns for her part will come. She will tear two hearts, not one, if Yuuri chooses to stay – since he is certain that Victor's heart will suffer as much as his own.

"What should I do," he asks of himself. "What should I–"

Should Yuuri have been asleep at this time, the tiny noise would've escaped his notice. But, alas, he was not. And as disturbed as he is in this moment, he hears the sound of footsteps outside the sitting room door quite clearly. At this time of night, it could only be a guard out on a patrol, he reasons, yet... there is no clinking of chainmail to hear. Not even that of a sword strapped to every guards' waist.

Like a flash of lightning, hot and electrifying, Yuuri remembers the conversation of two guards he overheard the day before. Someone has sneaked into the manor. What if... what if...

As the footsteps near, Yuuri climbs to his feet.

His heartbreak is a distant thought now that he is faced with danger of unknown form and shape, but danger of real consequence: not a lady in the sky, but a real human challenger, whom Yuuri cannot allow to come near the man he has sworn his heart to.

The blood boils in his veins with fear and excitement that teeters on the verge of insanity. Yet Yuuri welcomes it gladly, for it affords him an opportunity to act, to cease his cowering and take reins of his fate.

And so, he carefully crawls over to the door, making sure no noise is made on his way in order not to spook whoever lurks beyond.

The footsteps pause at the same time as he does and Yuuri holds his breath. His heart flutters, blood buzzes and fingers tremble when he reaches his hand to the door handle. He is about to pull on it, but there is a loud crash from the corridor, then another, and the footsteps rush away in a hurry.

Yuuri throws the door open and peers into the darkness of the hallway, but it seems he is too late: the place is empty and only a decorative golden armour that sat on the marble pedestal at the end of the corridor is a witness to it all as it lays on its side, upturned.

Ghosts do not crash into armour, Yuuri reasons with himself. Moon ladies do not do that either. It had to be someone real, someone human. Someone who did not want to be found there, but who planned to enter the chamber, Yuuri is almost certain of it. And maybe... maybe it was that same someone who has already been in the mansion before. The person whom the guard Kirill did not see come in.

If they came unseen once, and came unseen twice, who could say they will not return for the third time? And if they do, whatever it is they have come to try, maybe the third will be the charm that allows them to succeed?

Yuuri returns into the sitting room and closes the doors behind him. It clicks softly, safely, as it locks him and Victor away from malicious intentions of anyone who could mean them harm. As it does so, so does it lock Yuuri's confidence back in his heart. Because no matter what the future brings, no matter the pain that awaits them both, Yuuri cannot allow the present to hurt the man he loves.

And so, he shan't.
I passed all my finals and now I'm down to only 3 backup chapters so I gotta get my ass in shape and start writing again but HOOOO BOI ANOTHER HELLA EXCITING CHAPTER?? WHAT IS THIS?? AN ENDLESS SERIES OF MYSTERIES??

it might as well be ;3c
Once the sun rises over the horizon and bathes the world in its still slightly cold light, Yuuri knows he will not sleep a wink longer. The very moment he returned to bed, he curled up at Victor's side and kept on watching the man's sleeping face until the birds outside the window began to sing their morning dues. Sleep was the farthest thing on his mind then, so he is not surprised in the least when the sky brightens without him noticing or falling into slumber again.

His time is not wasted, however. No time spent gazing at Victor's handsome face is.

Victor's forehead is creased with little wrinkles of unease and his nose twitches every now and then as he dreams. Vivid dreams they must be, too, because the blue eyes that are hidden behind pale eyelids move restlessly the entire time. There is little Yuuri can do to project safety and comfort to someone who sleeps, but he still tries – he strokes a gentle hand through Victor's hair once, twice, and longer, until his elbow protests at the strain.

In his slumber, Victor breathes through his mouth which remains partially open. His little snores, so light and quiet, bring a smile to Yuuri's lips unwittingly. If he hasn't fallen in love, Lady Moon would not have a chance to collect his heart, Yuuri thinks as he rakes his gaze over Victor's beautiful visage. But if Yuuri hasn't fallen in love, he would not have known how freeing, how breathtakingly profound love feels. Because it feels like all is right in the world, like every little piece of the puzzle of life has aligned into one clear picture and everything, while imperfect, is just right.

A feeling like that cannot be to blame for anything, and Yuuri does not blame it. Neither does he blame his heart for choosing Victor – the sweet, tender man who loves him despite Yuuri having no title and no lands or riches to his name. Nor, when Victor finally opens his eyes and gazes back at him with sleep soft sweetness, can Yuuri blame his face for returning that gaze with a smitten smile of his own.

"Good morning, beautiful," Yuuri says, feeling tender in his heart. Victor's cheeks blossom under the caress of his words like the prettiest of peonies. "How did you sleep?"

"Who are you calling beautiful, beautiful?" Victor asks back, a silly smile on his lips. "And very well, thank you. What about you, my love? Did you get some rest?"

Yuuri hums. "Not much, but I do feel a lot... clearer today, if you will. Sharper."

"I'm glad to hear that," Victor says.

He reaches for one of Yuuri's hands and rests a sloppy kiss on it. He keeps a hold of it after, though, and closes his eyes while sleepily nuzzling into it. Yuuri bites back a smile.

"Are you going to sleep longer, my lord?" he asks.

"Might as well," Victor mumbles into his hand. It tickles where his lips caress the tender skin and this time Yuuri does not fight his smile. "Unless you have a better idea how we can spend this fine morning, my love?"
"I could think of a few, but, alas, you look far too comfortable to disturb, so I think I will keep them to myself."

One blue eye cracks open to peer at him. Yuuri gives his best teasing smile and he does not even have to try all that hard: it comes natural and laced with sweetness that Victor gasps at in pretend offence.

"You're a sneaky one, aren't you, my Yuuri," Victor teases back. His arms find their way under the covers to wrap around Yuuri and he pulls him close enough that their noses bump together. Victor's eyes twinkle in the morning light, bright and playful. "But I believe I know a way to convince you to share."

"Oh, really?" Yuuri plays along, even when one of Victor's thighs rubs against his as Victor hikes up his leg over Yuuri's hip. "What exactly do you--"

In one fluid motion, Victor pulls Yuuri down underneath himself as he rises swiftly above him. His grin is smooth and silly, but seductive to a point of making Yuuri's body brim with uncontained heat.

"--have in mind?"

The rest of his words leave Yuuri on a breath of surprise, but it is admiration and love that fill his lungs afterwards. It is also that that Victor breathes into him when he presses his lips against Yuuri's in a sweet, tender kiss.

"How about this?" Victor asks.

"I'm not entirely convinced," Yuuri gives, struggling to keep his features blank. "I will, however, allow you to try it again, if you wish."

"My, how generous of you," Victor croons.

He wastes no time in stealing another kiss from Yuuri, and then one more while the one hand he doesn't use to support himself teases up Yuuri's bare thigh. It tickles, and warmth spills in Yuuri's belly like sweet honey. He makes a noise into Victor's mouth, which has Victor pull away, but Yuuri doesn't let him – he drags him back to his lips and into another kiss, one that has them both panting when it ends.

"That is one way to greet the new day," Victor says between his rushed breaths.

Yuuri laughs soundlessly into his cheek. "Would you believe this is what I had in mind when I said I know a better thing to do than sleeping?"

"Oh dear, what a coincidence! I thought it might be, but it is good to have that confirmation straight from your lips." Victor grins when he kisses those same lips to mark his words. "Should we greet the world like this for a while longer?"

"Most certainly, my lord," Yuuri answers, his grin as wide as Victor's, and as happy as his, too. "It would only be proper."

"Very proper," Victor agrees. "Yes, indeed..."

Yet, truth be told, there is little propriety in where he puts his hands next, and far less when he follows them with his mouth no long after. Yuuri, however, cannot find it in himself to care while he rests his hand in soft silver locks and climbs floats on pleasure straight to the heavens.
gosh there is nothing better than sweet mornings with victuuri, is there //sighs happily
chapter 100 is tomorrow yall ahhh!!!! who's excited to see what came out of it?
Chapter 100

Chapter Notes

here we are, my friends! chapter 100!! wow this is just amazing and I'm txcuuyhbnjm bc this is all thanks to you, my lovely readers, for all your support and comments <3 that is also the reason why this chapter is special and made up of the many, many wonderful prompts you have given me ^u^)b many of you opted for a 'secret collection of romances' and 'hideouts' and for some floof and teasing, so here's a chapter made of many of the little things you wanted, enjoy!! ♥

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Can I be a little selfish today and ask you for something, my lord?" Yuuri questions once they're done with breakfast.

He's hesitant, but only at first, because as soon as the words fall off his tongue, Victor presents him with a smile that is both brilliant and adoring, as if he'd love nothing more than indulge Yuuri in his every wish. Yuuri cannot help it when mirroring excitement awakens inside him. It's Victor's charm that does it, makes him irresistible.

And as he shifts closer to Victor, presses their sides together, Yuuri feels incredibly lucky to be able to say what he does next.

"I don't want to share you with anyone," he confides in a soft whisper. "Just for the day. Please?"

Victor's smile mellows around the edges.

"Anything you ask for, my dear," he answers with no delay. "Simply say the word and it's yours."

"You spoil me, my Vitya." Yuuri's cheeks darken at the strange pleasure that settles in his chest when Victor turns his head slightly to rest a kiss high on his cheekbone. "Yet, somehow, I find it difficult to be upset with you over it."

"How fortunate I am to have a sweetheart as benevolent as you," Victor replies, eyes shining brightly. "What should we do today then? Go for a ride?"

"The weather seems nice, but I was thinking..."

"Yes? Go on," Victor encourages him when Yuuri pauses, caught by another uncertainty.

"You were brought up here in the manor, no?" Yuuri continues. And at Victor's nod, asks: "It's a huge place for a child, surely you had some hideouts. Do you remember any of them? Maybe some place where we could both fit and spend the day doing nothing?"

A pensive look overtakes Victor's features as he tries to remember and, once he does, his face lights up much akin to a child's. With such pure, innocent excitement as well, he takes Yuuri's hand and tugs him up to stand.
"Let's go," he says, and go they do.

Victor leads Yuuri around the house, pointing at all the nooks which Yuuri would've missed if he was all by himself.

There's the small space behind the windowsill in the hallway outside of the office, partially hidden by the heavy burgundy curtains. Victor tells Yuuri the story of how he used to hide there in wait for his tutor to pass at which he'd then jump out to scare the man. There's the pedestal atop the marble stairs on which a great golden armour stands. It is hollow inside and Victor explains how he crawled inside with Makkachin every time the both of them invoked his father's ire. There's also the pantry, which can be accessed through the tiny corridor that leads to both: that and the kitchens.

"I sneaked down there whenever mother punished me by refusing to feed Makkachin," Victor says, a smile to his lips that is neither sad nor heartbroken. Only nostalgic as if the memory itself is not entirely a bad one. "I always gave Makkachin my supper and then came here in the middle of the night to steal some food."

"Did your mother punish you often?" Yuuri asks, tentative to begin such a heavy conversation, but an answer to that question would explain Victor's dislike for the woman. "She seemed to tolerate Makkachin well when he's been with us in the room."

"She's never truly liked him," Victor answers. His hand curls around Yuuri's a little too tightly, but Yuuri says nothing to that – he only steps closer to Victor's side, silent in his comfort, so that Victor can speak freely. "She punished him for my mistakes in some scheme to gain more control over me. It was her way of making sure I behaved, since she could tell how much it hurt me to see him miserable."

"She's a heartless woman," Yuuri whispers. "Who does something so cruel to an innocent darling like Makkachin?"

"That she is," Victor nods gravely. "But thankfully, she no longer has any say over me or Makkachin. Or you, for that matter, my Yuuri."

The smile Yuuri offers him is sent back twofold when Victor's lips quirk in an adoring, dazzling grin. Happy to be pulled along, Yuuri allows Victor to lead him the familiar way to the library. The golden doors are opened for him and he steps inside, holding onto Victor's hand even as Victor pauses to close the doors behind them.

"What are we doing here?" Yuuri asks.

"Over here, love."

Victor directs them opposite of where they spent their time yesterday. They walk to the far end of the room where the walls come together. On the far side, hidden by a case of shelves, Yuuri can spot a great wooden chest. It is easily as big as the golden tub they have bathed in the day before and suddenly Yuuri knows what it must have been used for when Victor was but a wee boy.

"Go on." Victor grins, noting Yuuri's excitement. "Open it."

Carefully, Yuuri lifts the lid and, indeed, the chest is lined with fabric and pillows. Unable to hold back a grin, Yuuri turns to Victor and asks: "Shall we?"

It's him who crawls into the tight space first and, unlike the night before, it is Victor who settles between his legs. His back presses to Yuuri's chest while they both slide down lower, so that Yuuri can put the lid back on. In comfortable darkness, drawn away only by a smidge of light that comes
from the keyhole in the chest's side, they both sigh in great relief.

"I read here for hours on end," Victor mumbles to the arm he's nuzzled into when Yuuri wraps them around him. "Only when the daylight began to disappear, did I venture out at all. It was my favourite place, you see? So quiet, peaceful. No one could find me, the world couldn't touch me, and I was safe to explore all these amazing places through the books. This was my haven."

Yuuri's eyes adjust to the darkness bit by bit and, once they do, he wastes no time in leaning down to kiss the crown of Victor's head.

"What did you read?"

"Everything," Victor answers. "Whatever picked my fancy, really. If I remember correctly..."

Victor shifts, then shifts again and grunts. His elbow knocks into the wall of the chest, fingers scrape on Yuuri's calves. Before Yuuri can ask what exactly it is that Victor is doing, the man makes a triumphant noise and pulls something from between the haphazardly thrown fabric.

"Here it is," Victor says as he brings the object to light and when he does, Yuuri can see it's a book. "Oh, it's a perfect one, as well. A collection of poems."

"Read to me, then," Yuuri asks, wrapping his arms tighter around Victor.

"With pleasure, my love," Victor replies. He rests a kiss on Yuuri's wrist and holds the open book up to the little light that the keyhole gives. "It might be a bit difficult, but I will do my best."

Encouraging, Yuuri bestows another kiss to the soft silver head of hair that he props his cheek on next. He closes his eyes to the rustle of pages, until Victor's voice sounds through their cramped space: soothing, calm, lovely.

---

Your two great eyes will slay me suddenly;

Their beauty shakes me who was once serene;

Straight through my heart the wound is quick and keen. Only your word will heal the injury

To my hurt heart, while yet the wound is clean—

Your two great eyes will slay me suddenly;

Their beauty shakes me who was once serene. Upon my word, I tell you faithfully

Through life and after death you are my queen;

For with my death the whole truth shall be seen.

Your two great eyes will slay me suddenly;

Their beauty shakes me who was once serene;
A rustle of pages, a deep breath, and:

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

"That sounds complicated," Yuuri whispers while Victor changes pages once more.

Victor huffs a tender laugh before he answers.

"That's love, sweetheart."

"Are all of your poems about love?" Yuuri asks, teasing. "Did young Vitya lust for the romance of
"You tease now, my love, but weren't you the one who flushed so sweetly when I began to court you?" Victor teases right back and Yuuri struggles to hide his mirth.

"Court me?" he repeats, laughter on his breath. "If by courting you mean arriving at my parents' cottage and appearing to me fully unclothed, then yes, I believe you are right. Alas, I hardly think that was what you had in mind."

Victor's laughter shakes them both, warm and happy as it is. Yuuri cannot help his own grin from spreading over his face.

"Touché, my dear. I concede," Victor gives. "You've won this bout, but I shall not be defeated."

And he reads more:

*Love is a fire that burns unseen,*

*a wound that aches yet isn’t felt,*

*an always discontent contentment,*

*a pain that rages without hurting,*

*a longing for nothing but to long,*

*a loneliness in the midst of people,*

*a never feeling pleased when pleased,*

*a passion that gains when lost in thought.*

*It’s being enslaved of your own free will;*

*it’s counting your defeat a victory;*

*it’s staying loyal to your killer.*

*But if it’s so self-contradictory,*

*how can Love, when Love chooses,*

*bring human hearts into sympathy?*
"Oh, how little I understood of love and longing when I first read those," Victor says once he's done reading. "There is only so little the mind can imagine. So little the heart can pretend to understand when the real emotion is not yet known to it."

"Do you know it now?" Yuuri asks, his own heart aflutter in his chest.

He is certain that Victor can feel it, for he takes Yuuri's hand and presses his lips to it. A reverent, tender kiss is all the answer Yuuri needs.

"Let me answer you with this," Victor says, and then reads:

I loved you first: but afterwards your love

Outsoaring mine, sang such a loftier song

As drowned the friendly cooings of my dove.

Which owes the other most? my love was long,

And yours one moment seemed to wax more strong;

I loved and guessed at you, you construed me

And loved me for what might or might not be –

Nay, weights and measures do us both a wrong.

For verily love knows not 'mine' or 'thine;'

With separate 'I' and 'thou' free love has done,

For one is both and both are one in love:

Rich love knows nought of 'thine that is not mine;'

Both have the strength and both the length thereof,

Both of us, of the love which makes us one.

"Sounds familiar, darling?" Victor asks. "You said something much alike to me recently, do you remember?"
Yuuri does. Oh, he does remember that conversation they had as they lied sprawled on a bedding of grass when Yuuri told him--

He smiles, burying his love in Victor's soft locks.

"What did I say, exactly?" he asks, even though he knows the words by heart.

"If I remember correctly it was 'I will take you then, heart and soul and body, all that is yours to give, but only if you do the same in return,'" Victor recalls. "And then you asked me if I will. Lord be my witness, I would take you even if you did not measure us with equal make."

"But how could I not?" Yuuri tightens his arms. "Didn't your poem say so: there is no you, no me, no yours or mine -- we are us, equal across all and in every way that counts."

"And that is why I love you, my Yuuri," Victor says, voice brimming with adoration. "You do not see me as the noble lord everyone does. You see me, Victor, your Vitya, your equal. Someone you've come to cherish as much as I have come to cherish you, I hope."

"There is no need to hope when it's the truth," Yuuri answers him. "I do, my Vitya. I do cherish you. More than I can put into words."

"Let us find someone who can put it into words for us then."

Victor turns a few pages, a few more still, and then settles on one.

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in
my heart) i am never without it (anywhere
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done
by only me is your doing, my darling)

i fear

no fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) i want
no world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows

(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows
Victor's voice sounds through and the chest falls quiet once more. But to Yuuri, the words still ring long after Victor is finished speaking, for fear grips him and the loveliness of Victor in his arms is replaced by weight – deadweight; heavy, suffocating, sharp.

The message of the poem is sweet, or it is meant to be such, yet to Yuuri it feels like the manifestation of his nightmares. The heart, the moon, the deepest secret... Such plain words they are, but Yuuri cannot help the tremble that overtakes him. He's reminded of his dream with vivid clarity: he's reminded of Lady Moon, who will come to collect half his heart to, like the poem has said, 'carry it with her'.

And Yuuri will not be able to stop her once she does. Not this time.

"Darling, what's wrong?" Victor asks.

He sounds worried, concerned, and belatedly Yuuri realizes that he must feel the way Yuuri is shaking on his own body. It is hard to disguise this as anything other than what it is, so Yuuri doesn't try. He doesn't think he can, anyway. Instead, he bows his head to hide it in Victor's neck and whispers:

"I had a dream last night. A nightmare. That, that poem... It reminded me of it." He takes a shaky breath and quickly adds: "I apologize for ruining the moment. You were being so sweet and I--"

"Shh, shh, say no more, my love," Victor coos softly. "There is no need to feel sorry. You cannot help what you fear, and you cannot dismiss it either. I'm happy you told me, but why didn't you wake me when it happened? I could've helped."

"I didn't..." Yuuri swallows harshly. "I didn't want to be a bother."

"Oh, sweetheart," Victor's voice is soft, still, but now slightly exasperated. "Have I not told you before that you could never be a bother to me? Have I not shown you how much I care for your wellbeing?"

Yuuri can only clutch the fabric of Victor's robes in trembling fingers, because yes. Yes, he has. Guilt, as it sits in the pit of Yuuri's stomach, is a heavy, uncomfortable rock that weighs Yuuri down.

"My Yuuri, my love," Victor speaks again. "I know this place, this house breeds dishonesty. It teaches lies and half-truths. I know how difficult it must be for you to make heads or tails of whom to trust. But, please, believe me when I say it – you can always trust me. I will do everything that is in my power to prove it, if you so require, but it will never change, my dear. Never."

"Do you truly mean it?" Yuuri whispers.

"Then allow me to confess something to you," Yuuri says, mind made up.

The time to measure Victor's honesty has come.

Chapter End Notes

ok, so... //sweats I know this is a cliffhanger and yall will hate me for this but... I'm officially going on a break for a week. writing every day and posting every day gets exhausting after a while and I think I'm nearing yet another breaking point (running out of chapters to post, stressing to produce, dealing with renovations, bad sleeping/eating etc, it's all putting enormous strain on me) so to keep myself fresh I'm forced to do this but I AM NOT ABANDONING THIS STORY

don't worry about that pls, I have lots planned for this and a couple of chapters already written and more will follow, I just need to dial down on the stress a bit, lessen the pressure, ya feel? I'll be back after my one week hiatus with another (probably) 100 of daily updates, that you can count on ^u^)b and in the meanwhile, feel free to read my other works or follow me on tumblr @katzuyas?

thank you for all your support guys and see yall in a week!! <3

poems used in this chapter (in order of appearance):
  Rondel of Merciless Beauty by Geoffrey Chaucer
  Sonnet XLIII by Elizabeth Barrett Browning
  Love Is a Fire that Burns Unseen by Luís Vaz de Camões, translated by Richard Zenith
  Monna Innominata [I loved you first] by Christina Rossetti
  i carry your heart with me by E. E. Cummings

UPDATE: I'm alive, but barely and I did get some writing done before real life kicked my ass once more so I'll be taking the rest of the week off, still, and will be back during the weekend. I'm sorry, guys, but I just don't have the mental capacity to handle everything at once rn... (for more details on wtf is going on you can always check my tumblr) see yall in a few! I love you and thank you for your patience!!

UPDATE 2 [07/08]: I thought I will be able to get back into the groove of things right away but welp I WAS WRONG... in other words: writing is going awful for me rn and I need to flush out some of the bad stuff before I return, but I'm writing almost daily now which is good and it shouldn't take too long for me to get back on track but I still want to write a couple chapters in advance so I can return to daily posting NEXT WEEK (hopefully this is the last update of this kind and I will be able to get a chapter out for yall then orz) I'm so sorry for this, but I promise I'm working on it! thank you for your patience and in the meanwhile... go read my other works? ;3c
"At night, when I woke up from my bad dream," Yuuri starts, "I heard footsteps outside your chambers. Someone was inside the manor, Vitya. Someone who should not have been here."

"Maybe it was just a guard?" Victor tries, but falls silent when Yuuri squeezes him in his arms.

"Do not play a fool with me," Yuuri warns. "I know there is something brewing here that you do not wish me to know, but... I do have eyes and I do have ears, Vitya. The person from last night, they crashed into the armour in the corridor and fled, so I couldn't see who it was, but it was not a guard. Please, believe me."

"I do, my love, I do," Victor quickly says. He falls silent for a moment, considering, and then gives: "I will ask the captain to patrol the halls at night. Just to be safe."

"Good."

Yuuri breathes a little easier then. He is far from happy with the situation, scared of the unknown threat, but the promise of action from Victor's lips does allow him some relief.

"Vitya, I..." Yuuri forges on. "I did not want to ask you this, but I feel that I must. For both of our sakes."

"Ask whatever you wish, my love," Victor replies. "There are no secrets I would willingly wish to keep from you."

Yuuri swallows thickly at the honesty in Victor's voice. It is something so light, so free when Victor gives it. Why is it different when it's Yuuri's turn to return the favour?

He battles against his heart, against the conscience and the fear, and says: "Everyone considers your mother a threat here. You warned me against her and so did your aunt. I understand that she is not a good person, not someone to trust. I believe you. But that belief makes me question why haven't you simply forced her to return to her family home? Why hasn't your father?"

"Have you heard of the expression 'keep your friends close, but your enemies even closer', my Yuuri?" Victor asks back. "That is exactly what this is. I allow her to stay, because while she is under my roof I retain some sort of control over her actions. I know her every move, her every conversation: with whom she talks, about what, how long."

"How on earth...?" Yuuri asks, somewhat incredulous.
"Oh, I don't do it personally, none of that," Victor says. "It's the servants, my love. They know all that happens around the manor and they report to me whenever something out of the ordinary occurs."

As Victor speaks, Yuuri recalls the warnings of Lady Babicheva. She spoke to him of the servants, that she did. She cautioned him against trusting any of them, urged him not to speak truthfully, not to give them power.

Now, as Victor tells Yuuri of his little spies, Yuuri realizes how right Lady Yulianna was in her warnings.

"And you trust what they report?" Yuuri asks. "You fully believe their words? What if, what if your mother inspires more loyalty in them than the heir who has only just returned home after a years' long absence?"

"I wouldn't worry about that, my Yuuri," Victor answers, careless of the danger that Yuuri presents before him. "The only thing servants answer to is gold. And they know who holds the purse strings around the estate. It is not my mother, not anymore."

"I hope you are right," Yuuri replies, but he is hardly convinced.

He wishes to believe, wishes to trust those that surround them, trust Ilia and Pavel, and young Kenjirou, and the dark haired maid who always brings him supper. But Lady Babicheva's words sound true in his mind. She is right, as shrewd as her thinking seems to be – she is correct. If loyalty of the servants is so trivial it can be bought with gold, who can tell whose gold they will like better? Whom will they serve?

In the dark of the chest, cradling Victor against him, Yuuri knows what he must do. It is the exact thing that Lady Babicheva asked of him, and only now does Yuuri see the need for her actions.

Victor needs help.

He might not need Yuuri to fight his battles for him, no. That Victor can do splendidly on his own. But what he might need, and what Yuuri must be willing to offer him without hesitation, is his unyielding support. His trust. His protection, should it be required. His confidence, loyalty, love – ones that cannot be bought with no amount of gold.

Because Yuuri cannot be bought. He, and he alone, is the only true person that Victor can confide in, Yuuri realizes. He is the only one whom Victor can truly trust, who does not have ulterior motives and is only guided by his affection and equal trust in Victor.

And he keeps betraying that trust by lying to him.

The guilt and heartache at that thought take Yuuri's breath away.

"I'm sorry," he whispers suddenly, "Vitya, I'm so sorry that I've been hiding so much from you. I asked for your trust time and time again, and yet you've never even once betrayed mine. You've been nothing but supportive, nothing but kind and yet I've deceived you with half-truths and lies. I'm so sorry, Vitya, I'm so–"

"What are you speaking of, my Yuuri?" Victor asks, turning back in Yuuri's arms even if it's too dark to see anything.

"My dream, the one I woke up from," Yuuri says and swallows hard. "It wasn't just a dream. It was a memory. A... a memory of how I got my powers."
"Your healing?" Victor sounds confused. "Were you not born with it like the rest of us?"

Yuuri gives a little bitter laugh that sounds far too heartbroken in his own ears. He stifles it, chokes it in his throat with a sharp breath he takes through his nose to say: "No, I was not."

Blindly, Yuuri lifts his hand and in the darkness trails his fingers over Victor's cheek, his ear, to cup the side of his face and bring their foreheads together.

"Please, listen to my story, Vitya."

Chapter End Notes

bOI IS IT GOOD TO BE BACK
it's been over 2 weeks since I've last updated but I'm back now and I'll try not to take another such hiatus if I can bc it was not merciful to my writing abilities RIP but anyway, things are getting heated again ahhh excitement!!! my plan is to consistently post updates from now on, but sadly they will not be daily updates anymore -- at least for the time until I'm done with renovations which are still ongoing and suck the life out of me orz that having been said: the updates will be every second day now! it'll give me more wiggle room but will still not be that long that yall will forget what's happening and I hope you stick around with this story for a WHILE longer ^u^)b

thank you for the wait, my friends, and let's dive into the story once more!! ♥
The way Yuuri laughs in the darkness of the chest has the hair on Victor's nape stand with fear and dread so poignant he feels sickly sweat bead at his hairline. Victor's breath comes faster when Yuuri brings their foreheads together, but it stops altogether once Yuuri finally speaks.

"Please," Yuuri says in a voice that sounds broken enough to make Victor's heart ache, "listen to my story, Vitya."

There is nothing else that Victor can do, so he mumbles a quick "Yes, of course, my love. Speak freely," and falls quiet to allow Yuuri the freedom to choose his next words.

Yuuri does so carefully. Victor can hear his shaky breathing, feel his rapidly thumping heart, but after a moment Yuuri decides on what to say. The fear and hesitation are almost tangible in the little air that is trapped with them inside the chest and it smells of old blankets and unwashed pillowcases.

"When I was a child," Yuuri begins, "I adored staying up late to gaze at the moon. It's beautiful, no?"

He pauses as if waiting for Victor's reply and Victor nods before he remembers that it is too dark for Yuuri to see.

"It is, yes," he agrees.

"Do you know the story of Lady Moon?" Yuuri asks then. "My mother told me of it once and... only once. Because the day she has, Lady Moon herself appeared to us and cursed me for my own naiveté."

The words Yuuri speaks aim at his own weaknesses, but Victor feels them pierce into his very heart as well, for every strike against himself that Yuuri makes, every doubt, every bitter slip of tongue, it all deals a blow against Victor's love – and that he cannot abide by.

"I have heard of the myth, but I never would've thought it to be true," Victor says, fighting against his surprise. "What happened, my love? What did Lady Moon do to you?"

"According to the legend, she can return to earth if someone offers her half of their heart, like her husband once did." Yuuri's voice trembles as he whispers the words into the dark. "I was a child, I... I didn't know what I was doing, please believe me... If I knew, if I had any idea..."

It is not often that Victor's gut clenches with dread so primal he forgets all else, but in that moment, as Yuuri's despair becomes clear to him, Victor experiences that type of fear. And it makes him ill to
the pits of his stomach.

"Did she..." he pauses and has to swallow the bile that rises up his throat at the very thought. "Did you... Has she taken your...?"

"No," Yuuri says, but the way he does so sounds not much different as if he was saying yes. "She did not take my heart yet. But she will. I– The dream I had– She came to me, Vitya. She said it was time. Said that now that I knew love, my heart is ready to be split and, once it does, she will have it."

As if it is his own heart that is to be broken, Victor gases in pain. To think that Yuuri, the kind, precious soul that he is could be treated so unjustly by a goddess, an entity that neither of them could stand against... Victor cannot help it when his body shifts to stay closer to Yuuri. He wraps him in his arms as much as the cramped space allows and pushes his face against Yuuri's chest: right where his heart still beats as one whole.

"Then we will never allow your heart to be split," Victor decides. "If it is whole and loved, she cannot claim it."

"What if she'll try anyway?" Yuuri asks, sounding small.

He wraps his arms around Victor's back, but his hold is light, almost slipping, and Victor fears that Yuuri will slip through his fingers as well if he lets go. So he tightens the embrace, grabs fistfuls of Yuuri's robes, and holds on for dear life, because Yuuri is that and so much more.

"I– I told her that my heart already belongs to another," Yuuri speaks again, slow, careful words. "I told her that I cannot give her what is no longer mine to give."

It would be a lie if Victor claimed that his heart did not stutter at hearing such a confession from Yuuri's sweet lips. He lifts his head to gaze into Yuuri's eyes, but it is too dark to see much. Left alone in the dark and his wonderings, Victor's voice sounds as small and as vulnerable as Yuuri's:

"Do you mean... me?"


The world does not burst into colour at this confession, Victor notes. But it hardly matters, because Victor's heat does burst into a joyous dance that makes up for it plenty. Victor doesn't register moving until he is pushing the lid of the chest up and with it comes fresh air, warm but crisp at the same time, golden sunlight that is both too bright and not bright enough, and finally – the sight, for Victor can now see the worry in Yuuri's eyes, the furrow of his brow and the concern settled around his lips.

Above all, however, what Victor can see is the unhidden, honest truth in Yuuri's gaze, and that he answers to.

"If any man could possess that which is most precious to you, he should be the luckiest fool in the world," Victor says, and smiles. "Alas, if that man is me, I will not only be the luckiest fool in the world. I will be your luckiest fool, because my heart is as equally yours to command, and yours is mine."

Yuuri opens his mouth to speak, but Victor is not done yet. He presses a thumb against Yuuri's lips, leans close, and whispers:

"Should the moon fall to the earth, should the stars stop their shine, I vow to you, my love, I will protect you. I will keep you safe within here," Victor presses his free hand against his own chest,
"because this heart of mine has been beating for you ever since we've met and should I fail, so will its beating, since now that it knows love, it will not stand to be whilst you are gone."

"Vitya, no," Yuuri warns, eyes aglisten like ambers under the waters of the sea. "Please, do not–"

But Victor does not listen. He leans down and kisses the protests from Yuuri's lips, until none of them are left and Yuuri complies to the caress of love and affection that Victor bestows upon him.

Chapter End Notes
	hey are such smitten fools I'm melting in their love ahhhh
also, I just wanted to give a huge shoutout to Merlioske bc they left a comment on every single chapter of this fic and blew up my inbox with over 100 comments in like 3 days or so and I'm absolutely L I V I N G while I'm reading all these wild reactions ahaha
omg you're perfect babe thank you so much ♥
Victor does not sleep well that night, nor any that follow the revelation that Yuuri's confession brings. It is one thing to love someone who can heal his own wounds faster than anyone else, but it is a whole another to give his heart to a man who was destined to have his ripped apart at some goddess's convenience. Victor does not fear the wrath of Lady Moon, neither does he fear the consequences of his insolence, but what he does dread with his whole soul — and what he dreams off in the worst of his nightmares — is losing the one thing he loves, the only man he has ever loved.

Every night he wakes up within the darkness of his chambers and checks the bed at his side. Yuuri is there, he's always there, sleeping, sometimes dreaming, and other times watching over Victor while he dreams his share. He is a warm presence that wraps around Victor to comfort and to take comfort as well, because as much as Victor cannot control his fears, Yuuri can do little about his either.

The days are bright. Safe, almost. The night terrors release their clutches and for a few hours each day Victor feels free. Yuuri laughs, he smiles, he flushes at the compliments that spill from Victor's lips at every turn — and it is beautiful.

It's a cherished time, much needed respite against the worldly and otherworldly matters that both of them have earned through sheer perseverance.

"Go, be with your Yuuri," aunt Yulianna says with a crooked smile when Victor stops by her rooms to see if she needs company. "No need to entertain this old lady, I can find my own amusements in this estate, don't you worry."

"I will take Makkachin with me, carry on!" Mila waves goodbye whenever Victor sees her and she sneaks out of the room with the dog in tow to give them some privacy.

"My lord, there is a—" old Pavel pauses, yet when Victor turns to him with a flush and a smile still lingering on his face, he changes his mind: "That is of no big consequence, my lord, I will see to it myself. Forgive me for the disturbance."

Victor allows it, allows it all as he stares star-eyed at the person who his life and love now orbit around: his Yuuri. And Yuuri shines like the brightest of suns, now free of secrets, of burdens that weighed him down. He is hardly carefree, and a deep darkness awakens within him every now and then at the memory of what's to come, but he shines all the stronger for it as well.

"Here, try this," Victor says during one of the lunches.

He takes a little cake onto his golden fork, a delicious fluffy cream cheese made of fresh milk and dressed with blueberry kompot and powdered sugar, and brings it against Yuuri's lips. Yuuri sniffs at it first and then he makes a face: his little nose wrinkles and his lips twitch, and Victor chuckles at the distaste he presents.

"Not enjoying it much, I take it?" Victor asks.

Yuuri gives him a little smile before he replies: "I am craving something else at the moment. Something that is far less sweet than this."
"What's that? We can have the cooks prepare it in a jiffy."

Yuuri hesitates for a moment. There is uncertainty in his face, something that must run deeper than a simple wish to avoid being an inconvenience, but Victor does not press him for answers. He waits until Yuuri makes up his mind, and when he does, Victor offers him a comforting smile.

One that Yuuri returns, even if it is a shaky effort.

"Do you remember when you stayed with my family and I?" Yuuri asks. "We spoke of peculiar eating habits, like your love for peaches."

"Not entirely love, it is more complicated than that, but I do remember, yes," Victor allows. "Tell me, my Yuuri, what is it that you crave now?"


He licks his lips as if the very thought made his mouth water, but once he catches Victor's gaze, he flushes dearly as if ashamed of his want. There is not a bone in Victor's body that could ever deny his love anything, so he calls for a maid and orders what Yuuri wants. He does not see the odd look on the girl's face, because he does not spare a glance her way – his eyes are bound to Yuuri who smiles at him like a precious sunflower, full and lovely.

"Thank you, Vitya," Yuuri speaks once the door closes after the servant girl. "You are so kind to me I sometimes cannot believe my luck."

"I am only returning that which you have given me plenty of, my love," Victor replies, resting a kiss against Yuuri's knuckles.

Yuuri's flush is darling when it graces his soft cheeks, but Victor is not given the proper time to admire it. Yuuri's lips find his and, tender, adoring, unravel him in ways that Victor could not resist even if he wished to. With a pant on his breath, Victor peers into Yuuri's eyes, darkened by the smidge of lust that has sneaked into them during the kiss, and what he finds there is equally as hard to resist.

He finds love, an abundance of it. So much that Yuuri has never put into words, but which is so honest now as it stares into Victor's face, bared naked to his eye. And Victor finds that it mirrors what has been in his heart for long, for many, many days, but what he has not yet spoken out loud truly.

"I love you, my Yuuri," he speaks now. He does not say any more, because words like those are a powerful magic on their own, one that needs naught to follow.

Yuuri smiles, a sweet quirk of lips, and whispers, "And I love you, my Vitya."

When the maid returns with a slab of meat for Yuuri, uncooked, but plated on a golden platter, Yuuri devours the entire thing in a few minutes. With each bite, he glows, he hums, and he smacks his lips together, a certain show of his delight. It brings Victor as much joy to watch him, as Yuuri himself must be feeling, but the purity of that happiness is quickly tainted once Yuuri catches Victor's gaze.

The air thickens, the pleasure deepens, and the sound of Yuuri swallowing the last bite gets lost in the clink of the golden utensils he drops onto his finished plate.

Because now, now the hunger aches them both in a different way. And they can only sate it together.
I have no idea what this chapter is but there's one thing certain: vitya is a smitten fool and I love every bit of him
Yuuri's lips taste like blood when he throws Victor onto the bed that night and, lacking any and all shame, Victor finds himself growing aroused by that. There is something primal in the metallic taste on his tongue, crisp and sharp like the danger that peers down at him from Yuuri's beautiful, brown eyes. They are blown wide, almost all pupil and little else, with desire locked in a deep, unsettling void that gazes at Victor and which Victor gazes into, as it swallows them both.

As quickly as Victor has become addicted to Yuuri's kisses from the first one they shared, this unique sensation that seeps into his body at every tug on his hair and every scratch of Yuuri's careless nails, Victor believes that this, now, may yet surpass it in how fast he succumbs to the seduction of Yuuri's dominance.

And, undeniably, Victor is thrilled at the prospect.

"Down," Yuuri tells him, sharp, focused.

His hand pushes at Victor's chest, presses him to the bed, while Yuuri sits above him in such a domineering manner that Victor's very soul shivers inside him with expectation.

"Let me do the work tonight, my lord."

"It does not seem like you require my blessing, but you have it, my Yuuri," Victor replies. His breath feels hot on his lips, slick and hungry as they are. "You have all of me, whatever you need."

"You seem awfully eager today," Yuuri remarks and it takes everything that Victor has in him not to laugh at the truth of it.

"If you knew what picture you present right now, my love, you would know the reason for my eagerness."

He lifts a hand to Yuuri's face, rests his thumb against a swollen lip. Yuuri's mouth quirks at that, but what he does next, Victor does not expect. Yuuri's lips part, slowly, much akin to a treasure cove opening its gates to reveal the hidden valuables inside, and Yuuri's tongue slides out like a snake that protects them, licking at Victor's thumb to invoke a kiss of hot, spiking pleasure right into the midst of Victor's already aroused soul.

Breathing is far less on Victor's mind as Yuuri's mouth takes his thumb into its hot depths in search for the only treasure Victor can still keep interest in. And oh, how much of it he finds there...

Yuuri sucks on his finger while still keeping his gaze locked on Victor's face, so seductive, so irresistible.

"You are the devil," Victor tells him on a breath that he does not have.

"And you," Yuuri tells him once he releases Victor's thumb from his lips with one last lick, "are mine."
The warmth that spills over Victor's body at the claim stated with such ease is a thing some people would be ashamed of. But not Victor. Never him. The possessiveness in Yuuri's voice, the harsh demand for submission, for obedience... it brings a primal sense of belonging to Victor's heart, an eager desire to please and excel.

"Mark me," Victor begs then, overtaken by the feeling. "Mark me as yours, my Yuuri. Please."

The way Yuuri's eyes widen in surprise at the request is only a credit to his nature. Of his own will Yuuri rarely indulges in what he desires, Victor knows, but given explicit permission, given a plea like this? Yuuri has no more need to resist that which he truly wants and the change on his face is as freeing to watch as it must be to feel.

Victor takes a shuddering breath and asks once more: "Mark me, my love. So I bear you with me every second of today, of tomorrow, always."

"Do you truly know what you're asking?" Yuuri speaks, even when his eyes trail over the column of Victor's throat in search of a perfect spot to sink his teeth in.

"I do," Victor says quickly. "I do, and I want it. I want to be yours, my Yuuri. Don't you want me to be?"

It is a question Victor asks to stir Yuuri's possessiveness, but the way Yuuri's eyes brighten, the way his mouth forms a grin so sharp it could cut skin, the way Yuuri pulls on Victor's hair and tilts his head back to bare his throat; all of it is far beyond Victor's imagination. Expectation pools low in his belly, warm and thick like the desire that throbs between his legs.

"You are already mine," Yuuri says, a murmur that runs like a caress over Victor's skin. "Mark or no mark."

A kiss of hot lips is pressed under Victor's chin, soft, but heated all the same. Victor groans at the sensuous slide of tender flesh against the arch of his throat. He cannot swallow, the angle of his head is too harsh, and drool pools in his mouth while Yuuri continues his little torture downwards.

"But," Yuuri speaks, into the dip between Victor's collarbones. His breath is moist, voice almost a purr, and Victor trembles beneath it as want overtakes him wholly, "if you so desire, I will comply. Hardly be it for me to deny you something that I do want as well, my Vitya."

The inane pleasure that it brings Victor to hear Yuuri call him by that name is now doubled by the weight of Yuuri's body, pinning him down to the golden sheets of their bed, and it is doubled twice over by the caress of silky, slick lips which kiss a heated path to where Yuuri will place his mark – right under the collar of Victor's shirt, where it will lie hidden, but during a moment of recklessness: bare for all to see.

And when Yuuri's teeth sink into Victor's flesh, the pleasure lifts him up high off the mortal plane of experience and into what ecstasy must feel like to gods, drunk on ambrosia and power, for Victor feels like one himself. His mind opens, his eyes see, his body feels... and what it feels cannot be defined by words, only sounds, and one such leaves Victor's mouth: a moan both long and deep, right from within his aching groin.

Yuuri laps at the wound his teeth have opened, gentle and caring. It's a startling contrast against the pain, but enticing at the same time. Victor shivers and trembles, and whines against Yuuri's hold, but struggling is of no use. Yuuri holds him down, presses him, pushes him, and takes what he wants so boldly that Victor's desire climbs over the threshold of his susceptibility and spills itself right out of his parted lips.
"Now, this, my sweet Vitya, is what it means to be mine," Yuuri tells him as he lifts up to gaze Victor in the eye.

The hand that does not keep Victor's hair in a tight fist sneaks between the fabric of Victor's shirt, his pants, and rubs the proof of Victor's submission into his softening, wet cock. Each stroke of Yuuri's thumb, of his hand, rips little noises from Victor's mouth, but he does not protest. Oh no.

"I think you enjoy it quite a bit, don't you, my Vitya?" Yuuri asks, teasing and devious.

There is naught else that Victor can do, but moan his affirmation and give himself over once more to the pleasure that Yuuri gifts him with, and he does so with a flutter in his heart, a spark in his eye, and a smile on his lips, because he does enjoy it, yes.

More than that, however, he enjoys Yuuri – in any shape, any form, any way. After all, love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope.

And Victor... Victor loves Yuuri. And that is all that needs to be said.

Chapter End Notes

anyone ordered smut? here's some sub vitya bc we all know he loves it, and so do we ;3c
He awakens with the morning light, but it is not that which brings him back to consciousness – it's the soft feeling of lips trailing kisses over his neck and hair tickling his skin in their wake. Victor groans into the pillow that his cheek is resting on, but he does not otherwise move. He is far too comfortable for it, what with Yuuri's weight on the back of his thighs and the gentle ministrations of his lover on the bare skin of his shoulder.

It's a lovely thing to wake up to.

Especially lovely, Victor finds, is the tender way Yuuri laps at the wound he has made at the crook of Victor's neck the night before. With as much eagerness as Yuuri presents now, Victor has no doubt that there is now much more than just one mark claiming him as Yuuri's, yet... he does not find it in himself to be upset over it. Quite the contrary, in fact.

A pleasant shiver runs down his back when Yuuri sucks on his nape and Victor lets a little shuddering breath pass between his lips.

"This is a fine way to greet a new day, I must agree," he murmurs to let Yuuri know he's awake, but Yuuri does not reply immediately.

He takes his time, rests a few more kisses and testing bites on Victor's back, before he lifts up some. His hands rest on Victor's shoulder blades, hot pads of his palms burning Victor's skin like a brand of their own.

"If it is only fine, then I must not be doing a good work of it," Yuuri says, a concerned hum in his voice.

Victor only laughs at it. "My love, there could be no one better at this than you, I can tell. But far be it for me to deny you the opportunity to practice your craft, so if it pleases you, do carry on."

It takes a single moment for Yuuri's hands to turn Victor around to rest on his back. Yuuri still sits above him, but now Victor can look him in the eye, and hardly be it in him to complain at such a thing. He smiles invitingly, when Yuuri dips his head down to rest a kiss against Victor's lips. The taste of blood lingers on Yuuri's tongue, but overnight it has mellowed down. It softened. As did Yuuri's gaze, Victor notices when they look at each other again.

Yet, it must only be a trick of the light, for when Victor lifts his hand to touch the mark on his neck, Yuuri's eyes are hard once more. The deep brown seems almost black as Victor fingers the teeth indents on his skin – a black that is dusted with copper so vivid, it reminds Victor of the dying coals in a fireplace.

"It's beautiful," Yuuri says as if he's reading Victor's mind.

Yuuri's hand moves to join Victor's and his fingers press against the wound, also. Victor bites his lip to suppress a little hiss, but he cannot help the flush that crawls onto his cheeks at the gaze full of admiration and lust that Yuuri rests upon him.
"You're beautiful like this," Yuuri repeats. And with much more satisfaction, adds: "All mine."

"All yours," Victor confirms, although his breath is batted.

It did not take long for him to feel his body responding to Yuuri's presence, his touch, his gaze, but now that he lays underneath him, he knows Yuuri can feel the rise of his desire as well. Every shift of Yuuri's body rubs his groin against Victor's, joins them together in more than just the carnal pleasure, and when Yuuri dips down to kiss Victor's neck again, the slide of his hips rips a greedy moan out of Victor's throat.

"Mine," Yuuri repeats, heated, as he sucks on the mark of his own making.

Everything feels hot, burning, and Victor moans again as the heat spreads over his body. It thickens in his groin, sharpens there into something he craves more than anything and Victor turns his head to the side in a shameless plea for more.

"Yours," he pants. His hands grab onto Yuuri's hips and bring them down only to have more of that delicious friction spark pleasure into their bodies. "Only yours... my Yuuri... please..."

"Please, what, my lord?" Yuuri asks.

He's teasing, Victor knows, but somehow in the moment he cannot bring himself to appreciate it – the flush on his cheeks feels like his skin is boiling and the ache between his legs is far more persistent than any scruples Victor could have left. So instead of playing along, Victor hooks a leg over Yuuri's hip and rolls them over, so that he can grind against Yuuri and bring them both to completion.

His plan would've been perfect, if only Yuuri didn't roll them over once more. Rising on top of Victor again, he pins him down with a snarl that makes Victor's back arch and his neck tilt in a thrilling combination of lust and submission. And like that, manhandled and claimed, Victor for the first time thinks of his Yuuri – the lovely, gentle man he'd met – as a real beast.

But a beast that Victor is proud to belong to.

Yuuri's teeth sink into his neck again, almost on the same spot as the night before. Victor whimpers against the pain, but as Yuuri's hips move against his and their cocks rub together, the pain melts into sweetness so profound that Victor feels utterly ravished and unravelled. The faster Yuuri moves against him, the less coherent Victor's world seems to be, and then, finally, all at once it spills over the edges of his vision as his body tenses in release that comes with a sharp cry of Yuuri's name.

Left panting, Victor trembles on the height of pleasure. He's deeply aware of the erratic thrusting of Yuuri's hips against him and the slide of Yuuri's still hard, swollen cock through the mess of seed on Victor's stomach. Desperate grunts leave Yuuri's lips as he ruts against Victor like a dog. For all that Victor loves him like this, he cannot help but want to add to his pleasure even more, and so, he slides his hands to Yuuri's back and drags his nails down the bare skin.

It's not a moan that Yuuri makes at that, not even a whimper, but a whine so deeply intoxicated that Victor repeats his actions again before he notes it. This time, be it the scratching or Yuuri's own efforts, Yuuri shudders breathlessly before hot seed spills over Victor's stomach again, joining with the mess.

Victor only has the time to blink twice, because then Yuuri is collapsing onto him, utterly spent.

"Not that I don't enjoy having you in my arms, my love, but we will be all dirty later," Victor says gently, but Yuuri's lone reply is a grunt and naught more.
With a sigh, Victor tries to shift him some, but Yuuri's weight is spread over him much too evenly to move with just his hands.

"Come now, sweetheart," Victor begs again. "Let's clean up and then we can rest."

"Mm," Yuuri gives, and does not move an inch.

His eyes are closed when Victor peers down and his breathing is even, slow. Startled quite a little, Victor realizes that Yuuri has simply fallen asleep while still laying on top of him. It's quite an amusing thing, too, Victor cannot deny, and his own lips quirk in a tiny smile, but, well, this will not do.

Once again, Victor pushes at Yuuri's shoulders and tries to roll him over, but Yuuri seems to weigh twice as much asleep as he does awake and, after a moment's struggle, Victor slumps against the pillows, defeated. He stares at the golden ceiling with its fine crafting and shine, and sighs.

"Lord be my witness, I did try," he tells no one in particular before he wraps his arms around Yuuri and closes his eyes to give into tiredness like Yuuri has already done himself.

Chapter End Notes

oh vitya, don't even pretend you didn't enjoy that uwu
tomorrow we're starting the Good Things ;3c
The voices are hushed, but to Yuuri they sound as if the people are speaking right over his head and it is more than simply annoying. Groggy, he pulls himself up and cracks his eyes open to tell whoever is disturbing his peace to kindly go away, but it's then that he notes the emptiness of the chamber.

There is no one there.

Like nothing else that awakens all of Yuuri's senses in seconds and when he slips off the bed, he is aware that the voices are not in his head, but simply coming through the slightly left ajar doors to the sitting room. Against his better judgment, Yuuri sneaks closer to hear what is being said.

And at once, he recognizes Victor's voice.

"...propose we do with this?" Victor is asking. "We cannot station the guards all around the house, it'd make it impossible to live here. I already am watched enough as is, I will not agree to constrict my own freedom even further."

"Of course, my lord," a low voice rumbles. Yuuri has heard it only a few times before, but he does recognize it: it's the captain of Victor's guard. "May I suggest a guard outside your chambers at night then? You would not even notice he's there and your good sleep would be protected, as should be."

"That does seem like the best solution, yes," Victor agrees. "I would hate for my Yuuri to wake up again to strange people snooping around the manor." He pauses for a second... "Oh! And do replace Kirill in the pantry. I have heard that he is not doing the proper work and that I cannot abide. Give the post to someone trustworthy who will not test the limits of my patience."

"As you wish, my lord."

The man leaves the chambers at once to fulfil his master's bidding and Yuuri has this single moment to decide what to do with himself further: whether to pretend not to have heard a thing, or to confront Victor head on. Before Victor's footsteps even near the doors behind which Yuuri is hiding, Yuuri knows the answer, because there is only one that he can and should consider.

There has been enough lies and half truths between them – no more.

So when Victor steps into the bedchamber, Yuuri closes the doors behind him and wraps his arms around Victor's waist without hesitation. He means it as a hug, a loving embrace, but to his surprise Victor jumps away from him like a spooked cat. Yuuri lets him go instantly, startled just as badly at the severe reaction as Victor himself seems to be.

And as he looks into Victor's face and the naked, raw apprehension in Victor's beautiful blue eyes, Yuuri realizes why.

"I'm so sorry, Vitya," Yuuri rushes to say.

The guilt throbs in his chest like a thorn was impaled straight into his heart. After everything he's
learned, after everything he's heard... Yuuri is such a fool.

"I didn't think..." he tries to explain. "I'm so sorry, sweetheart. I didn't mean to scare you."

Slowly, Yuuri offers both hands to Victor so that he may take them if he wishes to, but Victor simply stands frozen a few steps away from him.

"It's only me," Yuuri says again, forcing himself to sound soothing instead of panicking like his heart tells him to do. "I will never hurt you, you know that, yes? You're safe with me, my Vitya. You're safe."

The look of fear eases off of Victor's face with every reassurance that passes Yuuri's lips. Gingerly, Victor takes a step towards Yuuri, and then another, and finally rests his hands in Yuuri's. They tremble slightly as if not all danger has passed yet and the sight of it twists the knife inside Yuuri's heart further. He brings Victor's hands upwards and kisses them both, once, twice, before he brings them to his cheeks.

"It's alright, my love," Yuuri tells Victor gently. "Everything is quite alright. You're safe here."

"I--" Victor starts, but he sounds out of breath and needs to pause to gather air to continue: "I apologize. I did not mean to react like this. To you, of all people."

"There is no need for you to apologize, the fault is all mine. I should not have done that. Especially at a time like this," Yuuri says. "Can I... Can I hold you?"

No hesitation shows on Victor's face this time when he nods and replies: "Yes, please."

So, carefully, Yuuri gathers him in his arms. He can feel the wrecked shudder that runs through Victor's body just as well as if it was his own and his heart weeps for the hurt that Victor has never given any sign of suffering.

But he must have, Yuuri knows. He must have been dealing with this all alone for many, many years, and the disinterest in his safety he has projected before must have been a learned response to no one ever caring enough to ask if he needs help.

Yuuri runs a soothing palm over Victor's trembling back.

"It's alright, my Vitya," he croons into Victor's hair. "You're safe with me, I promise. I will never allow anything to happen to you. Not while I live and breathe."

"Don't," Victor warns, voice small where his face is hidden in Yuuri's shoulder. "Don't make a promise you cannot keep."

"But I can, and I will," Yuuri insists. His arms tighten around Victor, pull him so close, press him, so that they can both feel each other's heartbeats. "I will protect you, Vitya. From the worldly and otherworldly, from human and inhuman, I promise you."

Or I will die trying, Yuuri thinks, but doesn't say so out loud because he knows what Victor would say to that. His words, however, can do nothing to change Yuuri's determination.

And Victor seems to realize that, for his resistance wanes and he slumps into Yuuri as if he has resigned himself to be in his care.

"Thank you," Victor gives, heartfelt and soft.
He says nothing more, but to Yuuri it sounds far more like a sweet and tender "I love you," and he replies with the same, whispered against Victor's temple. Because no matter what the danger that lurks in the dark may be, Yuuri will protect him, just like he vowed.

After all, Yuuri Katsuki does not break his word.

Chapter End Notes

*war drums slowly picking up pace*
"They are leaving today," Victor reminds Yuuri after Pavel informs them that Lady Babicheva and Mila wish to say their goodbyes.

"That's today?" Yuuri asks, caught off guard. "I... What day is it today?"

They have just finished breakfast and are dressing for the day, but – Yuuri realizes with a startling twinge of fear that runs deep into his bones and settles in the most hidden cracks of his vulnerable soul – he does not know what day it is. He has lost count. So many things have happened since he first arrived at the Snowberry Estate that he has never spared a thought for the time that has been unavoidably passing.

And that, in turn, means that he has spared no thought on how close the full moon is.

Victor laughs fondly at him, unaware of Yuuri's growing dread. He steps close and rests a kiss high on Yuuri's cheek and it is only Yuuri's familiarity with Victor's easy affection that makes him withhold a flinch.

"It's Thursday, my love," Victor says. "We have spoken about this a few days ago, don't you recall?"

Yuuri strains his mind to remember, but when noting sparks in his recollection of the most recent days, he shakes his head.

"I must have forgotten," he admits. "We were faced with quite a few revelations recently, so I was a little preoccupied."

He offers Victor a small smile, but the truth is that he does not believe he could do any better than that at this moment, because it's Thursday. And Thursday means there is only a week until the night where Yuuri's body will howl in pain at the full face of the moon.

He swallows harshly and forces himself to continue with the conversation, so as not to raise any suspicions. Victor has enough on his mind without adding Yuuri's problems onto it.

"I could not have kept track of it all either way, but... They're leaving?" Yuuri looks over his shoulder at where Victor throws open a chest to pull out a silver robe threaded with sparkling sapphires. "Where are they heading?"

"Back home, I presume," Victor replies as he dons the robe.

It sits on him regally. The colours match Victor as if they were drawn from him: the threads shine silver like they are the very extension of his hair and the sapphires seem like Victor's own eyes were plucked and multiplied to be then woven into the fabric. They twinkle merrily just as Victor's eyes do when he smiles at Yuuri, as he smiles now.

Sadly, Yuuri cannot bring himself to appreciate it the way it deserves.

"They have their own estate to run, my Yuuri. They cannot be spending all their time here, however
frivolous you believe us aristocracy to be," Victor teases.

Yuuri flushes before the denial makes it onto his tongue. "I never thought that."

Victor's smile, as it quirks at the corners in that special, amusingly indulgent way, says how little he believes in those words. Even further, he adds, light in his teasing:

"Of course you haven't, darling. You are far too kind for it."

If Yuuri was not blushing already, he would be now. Alas, the flush sits on his cheeks like fat apples do on their branches, red and ripe for the taking. Even if Victor does not know Yuuri's deepest thoughts, his very presence still manages to lift up Yuuri's spirits in ways that he cannot explain, but is incredibly grateful for.

"You imagine me to be far kinder than I am, my lord," Yuuri mumbles as he fastens his own robes around him. "I can assure you that I can be quite unpleasant at times. You should never judge a person's nature by their best, only by their worst."

"There is truth to that," Victor agrees with a smile, "but a kind person would not issue me a warning like that, don't you think?"

There is naught that Yuuri can speak to change Victor's mind once he has decided on something, and he does seem to be decided on Yuuri's apparent kindness, so Yuuri gives into it with a tiny smile. Little use is there in arguing semantics, he thinks.

Dazzling in his victory, Victor smiles and swoops in to rest a kiss against the tip of Yuuri's nose – a gesture that has Yuuri's blush deepening into a crimson akin to Christophe's rubies.

"Come now, my kind sir," Victor says, taking Yuuri's hand and sliding his fingers through Yuuri's. "We do not want to make aunt Yulia wait for us too long."

They walk through the mansion without dillydallying. Yuuri does not have the time to pay particular attention to all that happens as they do, but he takes note of the increased number of the guards patrolling the halls. Something not entirely ominous, but tense nonetheless, hangs in the air that smells sweetly of blooming rhododendrons that are spread across the manor in various compositions of purple, red and pink.

It's that last one that makes Yuuri stop to pluck one from its vase. He breaks the stem short and slips the flower into the little hole in the front of Victor's robe. The colour does not clash with the blue: in fact, it compliments it more and Victor's silky chuckle is proof of that.

"Why, thank you, my love," he says, and Yuuri can only smile at the adoring look Victor directs at him.

There are many things Victor is not yet aware of, many of which Yuuri is keeping from him to protect him, but as he lifts up to his toes to rests a kiss against Victor's cheek, Yuuri believes that maybe the future would not be as horrid as he imagines it to be if he told Victor the whole truth. And in return, maybe Victor would share his own fears with Yuuri freely...

The brilliant smile on Victor's face is returned to Yuuri twofold before they go the rest of the way and pass the front doors, which glint in the morning sun with a thousand of golden sparks dancing in the air around it. The carriage is already awaiting, loaded and prepared for the journey. As Yuuri takes it in – all the chests and goods tied securely on the back – he cannot help but wonder at the strangeness of it all.
When he agreed to live with Victor, he brought along a single bag that contained nothing more than a change of clothes, his hunting knife, the few coins he has managed to save from selling rabbit fur before winter, and a bottle of the nightshade concoction just to be safe. In comparison with his belongings, the ladies here have one each more to them on this single trip than Yuuri’s family owns put together, and the contrast is stark.

"Aunt Yulia," Victor greets as they descend the stairs. He comes to the woman and kisses her cheek one after another. "You could not have waited until midday to leave? Why must you always do this to me? You know the mornings are my least favourite time of day."

"And that is exactly why I picked it," Lady Babicheva replies. "The world will not cater to you, my dear, no matter how much gold you may have. You might just as well learn it now."

Victor does not pout like a child at her words, but Yuuri can see it in his eyes that he wishes to do so badly. Yuuri hides his grin by turning away, right under the gaze of Mila, who only grins in reply to his amusement.

"Make sure he doesn't sleep his life away for us, will you?" Mila asks, holding out her hands.

"It will be my pleasure," Yuuri replies as takes both and squeezes them to reassure her.

Because there is no lie in his words. Not this time. Not when Victor's wellbeing is at stake.

Chapter End Notes

the full moon is around the corner, lady moon is waiting, lady nikiforova is plotting, vitya is getting jumpy and the babichevas are leaving... I wonder, what else can go wrong, hmm? ;3c
"Be careful," Lady Babicheva says to Yuuri while Victor and Mila tease each other mercilessly instead of saying their goodbyes.

Yuuri turns his head to Lady Yulianna. She is watching him closely, much like she has done when they first met, but this time there is far less hostility in her blue eyes. It means little in the grand scheme of things, yet Yuuri cannot help but feel somewhat accomplished. After all, the air between them could have been worse after what's happened that day in the gardens.

"There is far more lurking in the shadows than you are aware of, my dear," she tells him. "You will be wise to remember that and keep a watchful eye out."

"I will," Yuuri agrees, for Lady Yulianna's warnings have come true before. He loses nothing in listening to her once more... or so he believes as he nods to her. "I will not allow any harm to come to him, I promise you that. He is safe with me."

"I trust you," Lady Babicheva says easily and it brings a smile to Yuuri's lips.

"We both know that isn't true, my lady," he replies, amused at her attempt.

The corners of her eyes crinkle when she smiles at him, pleased that he has not been fooled. It brings some satisfaction to Yuuri as well that he has once again proven to her that he will not be taken lightly.

"But I do appreciate the sentiment," he continues. "I will keep your words fresh in my mind, that I do promise."

Lady Yulianna nods, turning her eyes back to Victor and her daughter. "Good. He will need your help for what is to come."

Her words, ominous as they are, awaken the dread inside Yuuri's soul. He has been struggling to push away the thoughts of the upcoming full moon, but the worry lines on Lady Babicheva's face bring the fear back twofold.

"What is to come?" Yuuri repeats through a tightened throat.

Before she can answer, however, the golden doors above their heads open. A figure draped in a black dress, one with the hems dripping golden from the knee down, and a shawl of shimmering golden dust around her shoulders – Lady Nikiforova appears at the top of the stairs. Her luscious curls of copper hair shine in the sun as she descends the steps to stand among them and Yuuri realizes that this is the first time he sees Victor and his mother together, side by side.

And the sight triples his fear.

"That," Lady Babicheva whispers to him as she walks past to greet her sister in law, "is what's to come."
She puts on a smile on her face. "Alisa, dear, I thought you wouldn't make it!"

"How could I have not?"

Lady Nikiforova smiles back, and her smile looks as honest as the one that brightens Lady Babicheva's face. The two of them look like the best of friends, smiling and happy to see one another. If one did not know the truth, they could have easily been fooled by them. Among the fear that Yuuri feels deeply in his soul, admiration of the ladies' skill rises to the surface, because he knows – both of them are playing a game. A game of pretend and of falsehood, where one wrong move could cost them everything.

It is both a terrifying sight, as well as an impressive one.

"We so rarely see you in the manor, you should come visit more often," Lady Nikiforova says, touching her cheek to Lady Babicheva's. "It would be our pleasure to host you."

"Oh, I wouldn't want to impose," Lady Babicheva replies. She returns the gesture and draws back. "After all, it is Vitya's time to settle down here with Yuuri. They will need their privacy."

"Indeed, indeed," Lady Nikiforova agrees. "It brings me much happiness to know that my darling son has finally found a worthy match."

Her eyes flit briefly to Yuuri, who unlike during their first meeting now seems to be under even more scrutiny than he ever had from Lady Babicheva. There is something shrewd in Lady Nikiforova's gaze, something calculating and cold that was previously covered with a smile, and suddenly Yuuri feels as if all his secrets have been bared to this woman.

He shudders to think of the consequences of such a thing, and turns his eyes away. Thankfully, he is not the only one to notice the unwarranted attention.

"Yes," Victor says, voice tart. "Privacy would be wonderful. Alas, you can only have so much of it when you live with parents who know not how to properly behave."

"Now, my son, you mustn't blame it all on my poor head. I am certain that Yuuri has been living with his parents until now as well, no? It must have been just as trying on him, isn't that so?" Lady Nikiforova demands sweetly and Yuuri feels slightly sickened to take part in this strange, veiled conversation that he knows not the meaning or aim of.

"I have," Yuuri agrees. His catches Lady Babicheva's eye, the subtle twinkle of annoyance in it, and on a deep breath, he adds: "However, my family has accepted Victor without any unnecessary fuss and fully respected our privacy. I would like to see more families do that, but alas, it seems that practice is far more common for those households less favoured by fate than the nobility."

Mila openly laughs at his boldness and even the grin on Lady Yulianna's face cannot be taken as anything other than sharp amusement. She nods at Yuuri briefly in a gesture of admiration, while Victor stares at him with his eyes wide and mouth partially open, surprised and awed by Yuuri's bold statement. Yuuri's cheeks flush at his own audacity, but the reception keeps his confidence intact.

Only Lady Nikiforova seems to be unhappy with Yuuri's words. Her eye twitches lightly, but that is all that Yuuri catches of her displeasure before her true nature is once again hidden by a smile.

"What a lovely sentiment, Yuuri," she says. "Surely, we could stand to learn a lot from you. I must make some time to speak with you more often, then. You need to enlighten me more about the wise ways of the commons, my dear."
There is no denying that her aim was to offend, judging by the way Victor's face clouds severely at the insult, but Yuuri does not allow him to speak in his name. Not this time.

He gives a smile to Victor's mother and says: "Of course, my lady. It would be my pleasure to give you that lesson."

And when Victor takes his hand, cold and sweaty as it is, Yuuri squeezes it tightly, because he is fine. They are both fine. And they will continue to be, for as long as they stay together – united against all odds and those that mean them harm.

Chapter End Notes

I hear yall missed old mama nikiforova? weLL she's here and she brings The Trouble
As the Babichevas' carriage disappears beyond the estate gates, so does Lady Nikiforova. She climbs the stairs without a word of farewell, but Yuuri cannot be upset about it, for once she leaves, life seems to return to Victor's face again as if she was the intangible wind that has snuffed the candle of his joy and now that she retreated, it sparked anew.

"Should we take a walk through the gardens?" Yuuri asks, trying to distract Victor from the dark thoughts. "It's such a beautiful day and I don't think you have shown me all there is to see yet."

The smile Victor gives him is clearly forced, but Yuuri does not comment on it when Victor says: "Of course, my love. Anything you want."

In stilted silence they walk around the manor and take a path that Yuuri does not recognize until they arrive at the different entrance into the beautiful maze of privet. The air is clearer there, less tainted with the poison of the manor, and the deeper into the gardens they get – thus the further away from the great walls of the estate – the more Victor returns to himself.

Yet Yuuri would be lying if he claimed to like that.

"Vitya," he says softly. "You know you can be upset around me, yes? I will not look at you any differently if you give way to your true emotions instead of trying to do what you believe will please me."

"I am not doing that," Victor denies hastily, but when Yuuri says nothing, he turns his gaze to him. "Am I?"

It's a tender smile that Yuuri gives him, one full of his love. "You are. And I appreciate it, but I do want you to feel safe enough around me to be able to show that side of yourself as well."

Victor's sigh is long, but once it passes, he seems far more at ease than before.

"Forgive me, my Yuuri," he says. "I did not mean to do that. It's simply a hard thing to discern the right time to stop, because I do not wish to worry you needlessly."

"If I do worry about you, then it is never needless," Yuuri says, squeezing Victor's hand. "I do not enjoy it, no, but the reason for my worry is because I love you. And I hope you do know that."

Victor brings Yuuri's hand up to his lips and rests a kiss upon it, after which he gives a small smile.

"I do. And I am an incredibly lucky man for it."

Yuuri says nothing to that, but the flush on his cheeks, precious and pink, speaks enough for him.

The silence between them lessens considerably and they walk further in amiable spirits. Victor guides Yuuri by the hand, but once they near what he wishes to show him, he pulls Yuuri close and wraps his arm around his waist.

"Here," he says in Yuuri's ear.
Here is a privet wall that makes Yuuri blink in surprise and turn his confused eyes up at Victor, who only smiles sweetly. He reaches a hand into the bush, fiddles around with something and–

There's a click, loud and clear, and a scrape of hinges, and the privet wall begins to move.

"A hidden door?" Yuuri asks, delighted.

"There's many more secrets to the manor than you know, my love," Victor tells him, pride in his voice.

Yuuri cannot help his grin as the door opens fully and the inside of a tiny alcove appears to them on the other side. Without waiting, he steps inside. There is little room there, but enough to be fitting for the two of them. A bench stands on the far end, yet Yuuri disregards it as he shrugs off his robe and spreads it on the grass. He sits down and only then looks up at Victor.

"Come on," Yuuri calls. He opens his arms in invitation that does not need to be repeated. "This is just what we needed."

Victor takes off his own robe and rests it nearby before he sits next to Yuuri. The sun that peeks through the green leaves above their heads plays a wondrous game of colour on Victor's face, one that Yuuri cannot help but admire, because Victor is beautiful like this. A man with so much heart, so much joy, so much life to give to others; he looks like a figure carved of marble: strong and stunning.

Yet Yuuri knows that he is far from just that. He is so much more than meets the eye, and as Yuuri leans in to kiss Victor softly, he feels hot tears gather beneath his eyelids. The full moon closing in may be the cause for it, or it may simply be Yuuri's own nature or the strength of his affection for Victor. Whatever it may be, it fills him to the brim and overflows the moment his lips part on a breath.

"It's been only a month since we've met properly, my Vitya, but I swear to the gods that my heart has never known love like what I feel for you," he whispers against Victor's mouth. "I know it's silly to feel so strongly after so little time, but I– Vitya, I truly–"

He cannot complete the sentence, because the words seem to get stuck in his throat which tightens with emotion so great that Yuuri doubts there even are words to describe it. He swallows and hopes to somehow convey the magnitude of his adoration, but Victor speaks before he can.

"I know," Victor says, sweet and soft. The tender curl of his mouth feels like an admission of love as much as his words do. "I know, because I do feel it, too, my Yuuri. As if the fate itself has tied us and brought us to each other, but it is so much deeper than anyone or anything could have predicted. I love you with my whole heart, my Yuuri, and far more than that, too. And I think, I truly think that I will love you until my dying breath, for no love can ever be greater than what I feel for you."

"Don't say that," Yuuri chides in a voice wet with unshed tears of love so great it cannot be tamed. "Don't speak of dying in the same breath you speak of loving me. If you truly do," Yuuri sets his palm against Victor's cheek and brings his eyes to meet his own tear-filled gaze, "if you truly do love me that much, never think of dying unless we are both old and gray, and have lived our lives to the fullest at each other's side. Promise me that, my Vitya, I beg of you."

"Of course, my love, I do promise," Victor replies as easily as he always confesses his affection and Yuuri's heart swells within his chest in a mirror of that. "I will never wish to die if the prospect is living by your side."

The happiness, pure and radiant, spills onto Yuuri's cheeks along with the tears which he hides in
Victor's shoulder as he pulls him into an embrace.

They fall onto their bedding of Yuuri's robe and grass, woven tight together in a way that should be suffocating, but isn't. It's only heartwarming and fulfilling, and so right that when Yuuri whispers another "I love you," against Victor's lips, it's met with the same words falling from Victor's, because their hearts now beat as one and as one they will beat until the very last.

Yuuri is sure of it.

Chapter End Notes

the hints are getting as thicc as yuuri's thighs and I am enjoying myself immensely
That night Yuuri dreams of the moon again, but it isn't the Lady in the sky. It's the old moon, the one that's always watched over him during his nights in the forest. It has always guided him, kept him sane for as long as the curse lasts. It's warm, somehow, even if its light is a silver veil over all that it touches with its cold hand.

Yuuri dreams of that moon and of his paws hitting the ground harshly while he runs: runs faster than the wind and howls louder than it rings in his ears. His heart beats wildly in his chest, but it is only the excitement of the chase, the scent of blood and prey that makes it so, not fear, not despair, not sadness. Somewhere before him, Yuuri knows there is another runner – the chased, whom Yuuri is following after.

He awakens way past dawn without having caught them, but the nightly chase fills his own legs with an ache of satisfaction that he cannot be upset about. It feels fulfilling in a way that having caught his prey always feels like and, despite it not happening this time, Yuuri greets the new day at Victor's side in an amiable mood.

The threat of the full moon hangs on the horizon as it has before, not much has changed in those short hours. There are only days left until the moon becomes round once more, but unlike any other time the monthly dues are near, this day Yuuri does not find himself fearing for what's to come.

In fact, as Victor kisses him over breakfast, Yuuri cannot find a fault in anything: his world is beautiful and joyful, lacking in nothing, pining for naught more than he already has been given.

Yuuri sighs sweetly against Victor's lips, content beyond simple words.

"What is it that you wish to do today, my love?" Victor asks, tucking a strand of Yuuri's hair behind his ear. He is smiling tenderly, cheeks pink and eyes aglow with happiness, and Yuuri cannot honestly wish for anything other than to keep on gazing at Victor like this for the rest of his life.

"Can we just do this?" he asks back. His hand runs through Victor's hair, silver like the moonlight and just as beautiful. "I cannot help but feel like the more I look at you, the more things about you I find to love. Like this, here," he says as he ducks his head to press his lips against the little mole on the underside of Victor's jaw. "I never knew you had it, but it is irresistibly charming. I wonder what else I might discover if I dare look close enough?"

"I keep no secrets from you, darling, but if you wish to explore, hardly be it in me to deny you that right," Victor replies even as his face reddens further at the prospect.

He means to say more, but their moment is broken by Pavel who announces that the Lady wishes to speak to Victor. Yuuri's disappointment settles upon him in a cloud that brings about the end to his happiness and brings the corners of his mouth down, but they do not stay there for long, because as soon as he catches the sight of that, Victor kisses him once, twice, three times... until Yuuri cannot help but smile again and laugh against Victor's heart-shaped smile.

"Go, Vitya, see what she needs." Yuuri sends his beloved lord off with an adoring swipe of his thumb over Victor's neatly shaven jaw. "The sooner you do, the sooner you will get back to me."
"I will only be a moment, my love, I promise," Victor vows.

He leans close to steal one more kiss, this time from the high of Yuuri's cheekbone. It makes Yuuri flush, but brings a twinkle to Victor's eyes and a joyous spring to his steps, which make Yuuri giggle into his hand as he watches him go. Yuuri is left alone when the doors close behind Pavel, who dutifully follows after his master, but it is not so for long, since Ilia returns to clean up after their finished meal.

"You look cheerful today, my lord," the boy comments with a little smile. "Happy things acoming?"

"I'm not certain about that," Yuuri replies, gazing at the door that Victor has disappeared through with a lingering smile of his own, "but I feel... hopeful, you might say. Light. As if my burdens have become less overnight. Does that make any sense?"

"It certainly does. Love tends to make little sense and much of our lives lighter, if it is reciprocated."

It is only because of the colour still present on Yuuri's cheeks from when Victor put it there that Yuuri does not blush at Ilia's words. To hear what he has many a time heard from Victor's lips from someone else, someone who sees them together and alone alike, someone who has no reason to meddle with their affection for each other... Yuuri cannot help but feel Victor's love burn twice as boldly in his heart.

And it fills him with far more happiness that one man can handle.

"I'm going to the library," Yuuri announces as he climbs to his feet, unable to remain seated.

There is a wealth of power inside him that wishes to be unleashed and a brisk walk down the corridors might help to settle it.

"Should Lord Nikiforov ask for me, please tell him of my whereabouts," he asks, to which Ilia only gives a nod and replies, "Of course, my lord."

Yuuri leaves the chambers much akin to how Victor has done so before: his feet are light, his heart is full, and the smile on his face does not wane as he traverses the halls to the golden library doors. The room has not changed since the last two times he's been there, so Yuuri takes his steps to the little sitting area by the windows, where he'd left the most important book in Victor's collection – the Bestiarum Vocabulum.

As he nears the table, Yuuri sees the discarded books that have yet to be cleaned by the servants on Victor's order. He checks the titles and the covers, and then checks again, because surely he must be mistaken. When the second look does not bring about any change in what he sees, Yuuri pauses, breath stuck in his throat.

The happiness he's felt this entire time floats out of him as if it never was.

He stares at the empty spot where he'd left the book that contains all the secrets of his identity and wills himself not to give into the panic, because... because–

The book is gone. And whoever has it, has Yuuri's fate within the palm of their hand.
*war drums nearing*
"That boy of yours," his mother says as soon as Victor steps through the threshold of her dainty sitting room. "He's hiding something. You should be careful to keep your valuables about you, lest he snatches something straight from under your nose. He looks like one of those ruffians from the village, wide-eyed and sticky-fingered with a hunger for gold that isn't his."

The flames of rage lick at Victor's insides, violent and untameable at such a bold and untrue accusation of his beloved, but he does his best not to allow them to leave his mouth when he coldly asks, "Is that all you've asked me here for?"

Lady Nikiforova, who sits in her chair like the Queen herself has graced his presence, lifts the tiny cup of tea to her ruby red lips. She makes him wait, because she knows how short his temper is when something he cares for is insulted and she has done so on purpose to stir the impulsiveness in him as well. But, alas, as she knows that, Victor also knows that to speak against her now would be playing right into her hand and that he has long since learned not to do.

So he waits. Allows his anger to simmer in his chest, to gather, to boil quietly, while he waits for what other insults his mother may resort to – and oh, she does resort to those of the lowest kind.

"Say, Vitya, my dear," she speaks as she sets her cup on the saucer with a sweet click of porcelain, "what do you plan to do with this peasant? Because he is one, no? It's clear to see: he can't dance, he can't speak properly, even his face is so--" She waves a hand while her nose wrinkles in distaste, "--rustic. And that is putting it mildly. I am curious then as for what you plan for this boy? Is he your charity case? Are we to be a boarding house for uncouth farmers now, my son?"

Every word out of her mouth has Victor grit his teeth more. There has been little love in him for his mother for many years now, little less so ever since he returned home, but in this moment, Victor realizes how little there truly is left: because there is none. It's only cold, heartless fury that settles inside him as he looks at the woman whom he has always called his mother.

"You are insulting the man I love, I will have you know," Victor replies, voice as icy as his glare. "He is much more than you realize and you are blind, blinded by your own greed and apparent stature, if you dare speak of him in such a way."

He pauses for a breath and takes a step closer, as poised in his rage as he has been taught by his father, who had suffered a similar fate many times before and must have known that a day where Victor could use a skill like such will come. He was hardly wrong, even if his methods of ensuring Victor retained control over his emotions were not the most advisable for a child or a teen, but now the fruit of his teachings wraps around Victor in a cloud of tightly leashed anger which bares its teeth and snaps its jaws, yet remains heeled at Victor's feet.

"Don't you realize it, mother?"

Venom drips from Victor's words, cool and hissing.

"You no longer have any power here. Your word counts for nothing. And this hate you spit at Yuuri, mark my words, Alisa Renard," Victor says, using her maiden name as a threat, a threat that is
well within his power to carry out as the lord of the estate, and one that his mother realizes as well, judging by her narrowed eyes, "if you continue to speak ill of him, if you as much as glance at him wrong, I will not think twice of your fate. Do you hear me?"

"I do hear you, my dear," the voice that replies him is as cold and as poisonous as his own. "I do, however, also wonder at this sudden change of heart you seem to have gone through. It seems oddly... convenient for the boy that it happened now, no?"

Lady Nikiforova sets her teacup on the table, uncrosses her legs and in a rustle of skirts stands up. She is far from an intimidating height, but as she steps close to Victor, his heart trembles inside his chest with worry. He knows that she will not attack him with her fists, that fight he would win without breaking a sweat, but such is not the chosen field of this woman, no. Her favourite weapon is schemes, words that cut deep to the bone, ones that open old wounds and make new.

And that, Victor believes, is far more frightening than a bruise on his honour.

"Is he threatening you somehow?"

Lady Alisa rests a hand on Victor's arm, she stands so close. Her voice is hushed, a murmur only as if she believes there might be someone listening in on this secret she is speaking of.

"Has he put some sort of charm on you to do his bidding? Something that has ensnared your free will and bound you to him?" Her eyes search his face while Victor feels his own features slacken with incredulity of her claims. "If he is threatening you or has charmed you, you would not be able to tell me, that's a given, but give me a sign somehow, my son. I will find a way to break this curse, I promise you."

"You're insane," Victor finally finds his voice.

He rips his arm away from her clutches and steps back, much like one would from a walking corpse: with dread, disgust and denial.

"Have you truly gone mad, woman? He put no curse on me, no spell! For the first time in years I finally see clearly, I finally dare reach for my own happiness instead of constantly giving it up to please others, and I am grateful! Yes, I am grateful to him," he repeats when he spots the sceptic turn of Lady Nikiforova's mouth. "Yuuri is the only person who accepts me for me, for who I am and not who he wants me to be. But, alas, that is something you never understood and the time for you to learn has long passed."

Rearing his head and straightening his shoulders, his back, Victor looks down upon Lady Nikiforova and warns: "Stay away from him, mother, or I will not be responsible for the consequences. You've been told."

She does not reply to that in words, or with actions, and even her face remains impassive as Victor turns on his heel and leaves. It is exactly that lack of anger, lack of emotion but clearly calculative blankness that wraps around Victor's lungs and makes it hard to breathe – it feels like a noose around his neck, like shackles are wrapped around his chest, and Victor cannot for the life of him break out of their hold.

He stumbles through the library doors, impatient and crazed, only to see Yuuri's back: his bent shoulders, bowed neck, the shimmer of his gold-embossed robe. And it's then, as he takes his beloved silhouette in, that Victor feels the chains let loose.

He breaks free, breaks away from the doors, and walks straight towards that which keeps him
breathing. Towards Yuuri.

Because the only curse Victor is under is of this house's making, and Yuuri, his sweet, darling Yuuri, is not the one to place it on him, but the one to lift it as he has been lifting Victor's spirits since the day they met and there are no words, no actions that Victor would not venture to to ensure his safety.

Chapter End Notes

*war drums closing in*

NEXT CHAPTER GUYS. NEXT CHAPTER.

(also, I just wrote chapter 125 today and ryxcubgjhn I!!! AM!!! SO!!! HYPE!!!!! this story is turning into such a pain in the ass and I love it tyxc)
In a dire need of comfort, Victor wraps his arms around Yuuri's waist only to give a muffled sound of surprise when Yuuri jumps in fright, almost smashing his shoulder against Victor's nose. As soon as he realizes that it's Victor touching him and no one else, Yuuri sinks into the embrace with a breath of relief that Victor echoes when he rests his chin in the crook of Yuuri's neck.

"Forgive me for frightening you. That was not my intention," Victor apologizes softly, though his heart still beats unsteady inside his chest from his earlier conversation.

"No, no, that's," Yuuri swallows hard enough that Victor hears it clearly, "that's quite alright. I just wasn't expecting you so soon. How did it go with Lady Nikiforova?"

Victor makes a conflicted noise: something between a harrumph and a groan that is meant to symbolize his frustration with his mother. It must come off as he wishes to, because Yuuri does not press the subject when Victor changes it without commenting on what's been spoken between him and Lady Alisa.

"What has you so ready to jump out of your skin, though?" Victor asks instead, running his hand over Yuuri's side. He means it as a soothing gesture, but it hardly works since Yuuri remains as wound up as he has been before. "Did something happen while I was gone?"

Yuuri does not answer immediately, but he does answer soon: "The book. The Bestiarum Vocabulum. It's– I've looked for it, but it's gone."

"Is it?"

There is something in Yuuri's voice, some unspoken panic, unnamed alarm that makes Victor peer over his shoulder at the table where he remembers leaving all the books they perused those scant few days ago. The title Yuuri has mentioned is not there, just like he said.

"Maybe it was placed back on its shelf?" Victor offers. "Let me see."

He unwraps himself from Yuuri, mindful to leave a kiss on Yuuri's soft cheek before he goes. Yuuri walks with him, stands so close that Victor can feel the heat of his body. His presence is pressing, as if Yuuri cannot wait a second too long to find the book, which... Victor has never noticed him being so motivated to read. In fact, he vividly remembers the paleness of Yuuri's face after he has seen some of the contents of Bestiarum Vocabulum, so to see his eagerness to find it once more is both surprising and somewhat suspicious.

Victor cannot help himself when he asks: "Why do you want to read it so badly? Didn't it make you quite ill before?"

"It did," Yuuri agrees.

His voice is muffled slightly and when Victor peers at him from the side he notices that he's biting his lip. He looks quite worried, bothered even, and Victor doesn't think before he abandons the search and turns to take Yuuri's cheek in hand.
"My love, there is no need for you to make yourself sick again," he says gently. "I will read the book myself and see if there is anything inside it that can help us. Please, don't force yourself. I will rather suffer the sight of all those horrible things than see you like that again."

"No, that isn't—" Yuuri starts and shakes his head. "I am not worried about what's inside. I, I simply fear that in the wrong hands that book can cause far more damage than it does as it sits on its shelf."

"Then we shall find it and put it in a safe place," Victor promises with a smile that, hesitantly, Yuuri answers with one of his own. "Now, let us see."

Victor turns to the bookcase and skims the titles with his eyes.

"If it was filed correctly it should be right over..." He lifts his hand and taps on the spines of two, three books in a row, before his finger stops in an empty space. "...here."

And where here is, there is only a tilted book from the spot next over, while the rightful title that should stand there does not.

"Strange," Victor says, but at Yuuri's worried look, he smiles. "Fear not, my Yuuri, we shall find it. Search around the table once again, will you? Maybe it has fallen somewhere that we did not expect it to. I will look for it here in case it has been misplaced."

Yuuri nods at him, but the uncertainty and fear do not disappear from his eyes. Victor wonders if this odd mood that lingers around him may have any connection with Yuuri's powers and the moon goddess, but... until they find the book he will not know for certain.

So with doubled efforts they both return to their quest. Victor climbs onto a handy little stool, which purpose is to allow him to reach the higher shelves, and when that breeds no results, he ascends the ladder that brings him to the highest of them. But even that is for naught, because the Bestiarum Vocabulum is gone as if it never was to begin with.

It's while Victor is at the top of the ladder that a loud knock comes from the golden doors to the library. Confused, because the servants usually do not do such a thing, Victor looks that way. The knocking comes again, and this time, he answers.

"Come in!"

But, whoever might be on the other side, they only knock again. And once more, before Victor even takes one step down to see who it is and why exactly are they disturbing their peace.

"I'll open it," Yuuri says as he walks past the ladder.

From high above the floor, Victor watches him open one wing of the golden doors and, from high above, still, Victor watches how a gauntlet clenched around a thick hilt of a sword smashes against Yuuri's face with a harsh crack.

Victor's gasp of surprise is drowned in the cry of pain that tears from Yuuri's lips as he stumbles backwards. Blood spurs from his nose, seeps through the fingers of a hand that Yuuri puts against it and drops to the marbled floors like rubies: precious and thick. Before Victor can come to his aid, Yuuri is struck again on the side of his head and, helpless against it, Victor is left to watch the love of his life fall to the ground, where he lies lifeless and motionless. Victor's heart clenches so tight inside his chest that he can hardly breathe, but it is of little consequence, because his heart is down there – lying on the floor as if he's dead.

The very thought sends blind rage through Victor's body and the sound that leaves him as he sets his
eyes on the five hooded men who have dared to hurt his Yuuri is the most inhuman he's ever made.

He roars.

And, unarmed in the face of multiple opponents, he charges towards them.

Chapter End Notes

911? YES HELLO I WOULD LIKE TO REPORT A MURDER OF MY READERS
Despite having been born a noble, Victor has never truly trained fighting. He knows how to wield a sword – which he does not have now when he needs it most – and he knows how to string and arch a bow – which he could not use in close combat – and he also knows, least of all, how to defend himself in close proximity against someone armed with a knife or their bare hands.

What he does not know, however, is how to fight multiple people pointing swords at him, and only such knowledge could be of help in the predicament he has found himself facing. Fear flutters in his belly, but the rush of clarity that comes with danger keeps it at bay and allows Victor to think on his feet.

And think he must if he wishes to get out of this unharmed, because the hooded ruffians circle him like vultures: tighter and closer, and round and round, until one of them strikes.

"Give up, me lord," he says. "We dun wan' yer lil head to get hurt, now do we?"

"You should have thought of that before you actually hurt someone," Victor spits back, avoiding the hand that comes to grab him from the back.

He slaps it away and it's only when he does, that he invents a way for him to win against these scoundrels. For what he intends, though, he will need to touch skin and a high order it would have been – since the men are all wearing long cloaks that cover their bodies almost completely, thus ensuring that their identities and lives remain protected – except that Victor knows there is one place that he will be able to reach at any time, despite their cloaks.

It's their faces.

The hoods cover them, yes, but it only makes Victor more certain of his plan, because if they cover them with hoods and not masks, it must mean that their faces are bare underneath the shadow of the fabric.

The chance to apply his hypothesis comes sooner than Victor thinks. In numbers grows confidence and as the five step ever closer to Victor, blades at the ready, the one who seems to be the leader of the group comes forth to nab Victor from behind.

Nimble on his feet, Victor ducks under the arm that grabs for him. He twists around so fast that his back hurts at the suddenness of his move, but he doesn't allow that to hold him down. Before the man even knows what Victor is planning, Victor's hands reach for his face and slap against the bare skin, which under his cursed touch begins to turn into solid gold.

It spreads like a disease, centimetre after another. The man screams from a mouth that gets covered in gold within seconds and, just as soon, the scream dies in his throat. He stumble backwards while the gold makes its way down his body and the hood falls off his head, showing everyone exactly how dangerous Lord Victor Nikiforov is when he wishes to be as the man freezes solid – dead, greedy, golden.

A futile hope awakens in Victor's heart that maybe this will deter the others, but after the initial
surprise they only seem to be even more angered. It's all too soon that another man makes a grab for
Victor, yet this time Victor's trick doesn't work, because another one grabs his elbow and together
they force his hands behind his back where they tie them with a rope.

Victor struggles against it, arches his hands towards even a thread of it, but it's no use – he is at their
mercy now.

"Who ordered you to do this?" Victor asks, because he knows that these man are not doing their own
bidding. There must be someone paying them, someone who prizes Victor as a trophy and would not
wish him harm. "You will not succeed, let me warn you now, so you might just as well state your
price and I will double it if you let me go."

"Yer guards, m'lord?" one of the man asks and laughs. His voice is raspy as if he's just downed an
entire pitcher of liquor. "They got nuffin on us. Let us through, that they done. Right through the
main door, aye?"

"Aye, aye," the other one cheers. "And we'll have all yer gold soon, me lord. No need to 'urry. Yer
gonna work yer share, don't ye mind yer pretty head."

"And if yer really good to us, we be really good to ye, aye, m'lord?" the first one adds. Victor can tell
there is a sleazy smirk on his face even without being able to see it. "Maybe we even keep ye for
ourselves. The lady can wait her turn with ye until we've had our fill."

"Oy, hush ye now, ye cretin," the third man scolds. "He don't need yer whole life plan."

The fourth man has been silent thus far, but while the other three argue among themselves he steps
forward. In his hands he has a sack, much akin to those that farmers put grain in to sell at the market.
It must be one such, because as he steps close, Victor can smell the faint scent of straw.

"Don't struggle, my lord," he says in a voice that surprises Victor with how proper it sounds. "We
will not harm you as long as you remain obedient. There is nothing in it for us if you die, nor there is
anything in it for you, so do us all a favour, yes?"

"You," Victor tries to peer into the depths of his hood, but he sees nothing but the man's chin, which
gives him nothing, "you seem like someone who can be reasoned with. I have gold. I have more
gold than you could ever carry and I can give it all to you."

"Forgive me, my lord, but we are men of our word," the man says. He lifts the sack and Victor
knows what's to follow. "The deal was made, and the deal will come to an end. Afterwards, well,
afterwards you could try to bribe us. But for now..."

The sack is pulled over Victor's head and his vision becomes obscured completely. A tug on Victor's
tied arms has him stumbling, but the hand that guides him pulls him upwards almost effortlessly. He
is shaken in place, like a ragdoll, and Victor cannot bite back a sound of anger.

His rage doesn't last long, however. He does not see it, but he hears it when a gauntlet nears his head
and he feels it, oh, he feels it when a hilt of a sword knocks the consciousness out of him.

As Victor gives into darkness, his heart does not let him go peacefully. It reminds him of Yuuri and
his slumped form, his unmoving body, and Victor's soul weeps for his love until the world goes
black.

And then, there is no more weeping to be had.
what do you call double murder? bc I think I just did that and yall are gonna set me on fire ahaha //sweats
When Yuuri awakens, his face throbs and the back of his head pangs with an ache that brings a pulsing headache to his temples. With a groan he opens his eyes, but everything around him is golden and bright and he cannot stand the sight of it, so he closes them again. He's lying on something hard, something cold. It takes him only a couple of seconds to realize that it's a floor, and a couple more to remember that he's in the library of the Snowberry Estate.

"Victor," he rasps.

His mouth tastes like blood, foul and old, dried with his spit into a mixture that makes him gag. He rolls over and spits what's in his mouth, but it hardly helps any, because the taste lingers.

"Vitya," Yuuri tries again, but even if his voice sounds stronger this time, there is still no answer from Victor. In fact, it's the silence that breeds uneasiness into Yuuri's heart, forcing him to look.

And, when Yuuri opens his eyes again to see nothing but the empty library, with his own terrified reflection staring back at him from the golden statue of a man that wasn't there before, he remembers.

The men. The hoods. The swords.

Victor.

Yuuri pushes himself up on weak hands. They shake under his weight, but the strength of his will is more than the ails of his body. His nose pulses with a new ache as he tries to breathe through it, so with a little pained whine, Yuuri parts his mouth to suck a greedy breath into his lungs.

It's not exactly the taste that hits him first as he does that: it's the scent and the taste of fear and anger that hang in the air like a thick fog, which chokes Yuuri's breath inside his throat and makes him gag once more. He struggles to breathe past the naked rage, despair, regret, and something sweeter and confusing like relief, which are all meshed together in the atmosphere of the library.

It takes Yuuri a moment to gather his senses about him, yet once he does he realizes why the scent has sent his own heart into such panic.

It's Victor's fear that he feels.

It's Victor's despair that he smells.

It's Victor—

—Victor who is now gone.

To call the sudden burst of power that runs through Yuuri's body at the thought anything else than protectiveness would be a folly. The feeling sits in the pit of Yuuri's stomach and, from there, fills his limbs with purpose – and his purpose, his strength, his reason; it's all Victor.

Yuuri climbs to his feet, vision swaying, but he blinks through it. He cannot be deterred now. Not when his beloved's safety is at stake. Slowly, he takes the first few steps to the library door, then
faster, and once he leaves the golden chamber behind, he runs. Through the halls, through the corridors, past the people who do not seem to realize anything is wrong; Yuuri doesn't pause, not for a breath.

His nose leads him after the feint scent of Victor that he can more vividly taste on his tongue rather than smell in the air, but Yuuri follows the trail regardless of what sense leads him. He cannot afford not to, because every second lost is another second that Victor remains with the people who took him. It's every second that he is afeared and alone, and Yuuri's heart cleaves almost in half from the pain the very thought brings him.

"My lord–"

Yuuri does not see Ilia until they almost collide. He does not pause, however, and swerves to the side to run past him.

"My lord, what–"

The boy keeps his pace, yet as Yuuri turns his head towards him, Ilia falls quiet. His expression is a fine compliment to how awful Yuuri’s face must look. It matters little at the current state of affairs, so Yuuri brushes it off with a half bitten:

"Not now. Victor has been taken."

They make it together to the stables, Yuuri a good few steps before Ilia, and he wastes no time in saddling Lamorak – he jumps straight onto the horse's bare back, grabs onto the black mane, and nudges him outside.

"My lord, wait!" Ilia is at his side, panting and flushed, but following loyally. "At least let us sound the alarm. I know you are worried, but this is not the first time it's happened. Please, wait for the guards to gather. You cannot go after them alone, it's madness!"

"Then call me mad, but I can go after him alone and I will," Yuuri says. He gives Ilia a hard look that has the boy flinch. Yuuri does not have the time to feel for him, though. "Any second we waste is a second longer that Victor spends with these people. Any second can be the one that makes us lose him. And, hear me clear, Ilia, I will not lose him. Sound the alarm if you will, but I am giving pursuit now."

He waits for no reply, since nothing the boy could say would stay Yuuri's hand. He kicks his heels into Lamorak's sides and they run. They fly. Lamorak bolts down to the estate gates and then further, guided by Yuuri's tightly clenched hands and thighs, and the feint scent of Victor that Yuuri can pick apart from so many others that linger in the afternoon air.

He does not wonder at how he does it, he does not wonder why; it's not important now. The only thing that matters to the rapid heartbeat that flutters unhaltingly in his chest is Victor – Yuuri's darling Vitya, who smiles like he sees the world in Yuuri's eyes and who kisses Yuuri like he's the most precious thing he's ever held, and who speaks Yuuri's name with a softness that no one ever has used before and, Yuuri knows, that no one ever will.

Lamorak takes a sharp turn when Victor's scent thickens at the entry into the forest that looms to the east of the manor. Between the trees, where the sun does not bear down on their necks with its full shine, the shadows creep along with every one of his strides, but there are no shadows in Yuuri's mind: there is only purpose and unfaltering confidence that he will get Victor back.

He must.
Breath short, eyes focused, and mouth filled with blood and Victor's fear, Yuuri urges Lamorak faster. Faster, to save the man he loves.

Chapter End Notes

yes, you all guessed it right -- yuuri to the rescue!
also, every time I write about yuuri riding a horse I get such intense heart boner holy sheet he would be Such A Sight guys I swoon yhcvibunm
Yuuri feels the hard muscle of the horse move under his body as if it is his own. The strain it takes to keep holding on is almost as draining as running that fast, that hard, that long would've been if he were to do so himself. His thighs ache, his spine twinges with sharp jolts of pain, and his hands remain clutched as if they were to never uncurl again.

But it's insignificant, all of it: the pain, the hardship, the sparks of fear that course through him every time Victor's scent gets thinner. Nothing matters to Yuuri now. Nothing except finding Victor.

And they are getting close.

The clues are barely visible, but Yuuri's keen eyes, so used to hunting and tracking his prey through the forest, see the clear marks in the underwood. A few broken twigs here, a trace of multiple hooves there, and – most importantly – the scents that waft through the air, meshed with Victor's own.

There's the scent of horse and leather, the scent of sweat which lingers on Yuuri's tongue and guides Lamorak forward, and there are also the other three that Yuuri can pick apart from the fear, worry and anger that is a beacon of Victor's make. All three smell much the same: of greed, of joy, and of the eagerness that makes Yuuri's own rage rise as his throat clenches on a growl that builds up low in his chest and spills from his lips without much thought.

Lamorak snorts nervously, but he does not halt his run. In fact, he only gallops faster, urged by Yuuri's anger. He jumps over a bulky stump, careens past the treeline and there. On the small pathway with sparse treelife, Yuuri can see the riders as they take the bridge over the river at full speed. Four horses, four riders, and one of them holding a man with a sack on his head and a robe of glimmering gold fluttering in the wind.

Yuuri's vision goes dark for one terrifying second.

He feels as if his entire body suddenly coils so tight that all function of it stops: his breathing falters, his heartbeat wanes, his sight disappears and his conscious thought gets lost in the nothingness the frightening strength of his rage brings.

And as fast as it comes, the sensation dissipates, yet the rage remains faithful and true. It courses through Yuuri's body like poison, seeps into the every fibre of his being, and sets him aflame, but he does not push it away. Not this time. Instead, he bathes in it, embraces it, and takes it as his own to guide him and fill him with enough power to win over those who dared rip his beloved away from him.

Because Yuuri will not stand for it. And they will learn. They will pay.

Lamorak neighs loud enough for the men to look behind. The sight they make, a lone horse and rider, must not impress them because they do not take the threat to be of any significance. Why should they, when all that chases after them is one unarmed peasant on the back of an unsaddled horse?

Yuuri stifles the laughter that comes up with a growl of madness from the depths of his chest. It does
not sound sane, but whatever sanity is left in Yuuri, it disappears the moment he's close enough to taste Victor's fear once more.

It's that taste that sends Yuuri's senses into utter chaos, from which a monster is born.

He doesn't notice the exact moment one of the men breaks away from the group and veers back, prepared to attack. All Yuuri sees is a rider bolting towards him, and the next thing he knows, Lamorak crashes into the other horse.

Both steeds scream on impact, but Yuuri cannot see to Lamorak's injury, if he's sustained any, because the other rider lifts a sword above his head. He strikes, a bearing blow onto Yuuri's head, which doesn't land. Yuuri's elbow is faster, where it smashes right into the man's chest and thus steals his breath away. Given the opportunity, Yuuri kicks the man off his horse and slides off Lamorak as well.

This will make following the others difficult, but a weapon would be a great asset in facing the remaining three, who Yuuri knows will not give up without a fight.

So while the man gathers himself up, Yuuri steps around his horse. He plans to take the sword then, but he has clearly underestimated his opponent. The man wheezes, but stands up, and glares at Yuuri hotly.

"Yer gonna regret this, fella," he says, swinging his weapon in a clear threat.

"And so will you," Yuuri replies.

They circle each other once, then again. Yuuri has enough time to gauge the strength of the man and, truly, he knows they are ill matched. The man is easily twice as big as Yuuri himself, which must be half the source of his confidence. The other half is his sword, which glimmers in the sparse sunlight that shines through the tree leaves.

However, Yuuri's eyes are keen and he spots his opening straight away: it's at the man's waist. Strapped to it with a leather belt, there is a knife that will be Yuuri's one and only chance. And he does not plan on wasting it.

So when the man charges at him, a roar on his tongue, Yuuri dives under his arm and locks his fingers around the knife's hilt. Quick on his feet, he steps away and swirls around. He's behind the man's back in a blink of an eye and, before the other can swing the heavy sword around to do any serious harm, Yuuri pulls the man's head back by a fistful of hair and slits his throat like he's done time and time again to many a pray.

Blood, crimson and thick, spills over his hand and the blade, but Yuuri does not care for it. He drops the dying bastard to the dirty ground where he belongs, while he himself takes onto Lamorak's back in a single jump. The horse does not wait for Yuuri's direction; it chases after the others as soon as Yuuri grabs onto his mane.

And together, Lamorak with the sweat foaming on his skin and Yuuri with blood dripping off his hands and blade – they head towards battle.
scREAMS A LOT
Yuuri's vision swims in red.

It might be the fault of the sun setting behind the horizon in crimsons and oranges, but he knows that it isn't the only reason. There is the blood on his hands, fear and ecstasy in his heart – the powerful feeling of omnipotence that always comes with a kill. And his anger, vivid and sizzling, oh, his anger is yet another thing. It steals his breath, fills his throat with thirst for more than simply water and Yuuri knows that he is hardly himself anymore.

Now he is truly the beast he has always feared becoming.

Yet for Victor... for his Vitya... he does not regret embracing that side of him. For Vitya, he would do much worse. Become much worse. As long as Victor remained safe.

Lamorak flies through the forest road, so fast that it doesn't take more than two hundred paces for them to see the riders once more. And they see them, too. This time, however, unlike before, only one of them continues their escape, and it's the one that Yuuri wishes to catch the most. He only gets a glimpse of Victor's golden robes from afar and between the trees, before he needs to face two armed opponents who charge at him in a cross.

Yuuri has no time to stare after Victor, not when two swords are drawn at him. Lamorak rears his had back and snorts as if he's ready to accept the challenge. Yet, Yuuri has better plans.

"Here, boy, this way," he says and pulls on the dark mane to change the steed's direction. The horse goes as Yuuri wills it and they dive between the trees.

The two riders follow hot on their trail, but their horses are no match for Lamorak who veers between the barks of old trees as if he runs such courses daily. Yuuri would appreciate his horse's skill, but his mind is preoccupied with how to–

The branch that comes out of nowhere kicks Yuuri off Lamorak's back and takes his breath away. He ends up on the forest floor, groaning in pain, but that is nothing compared to the momentary fear that settles in his bones when they rattle as a horse's hooves stomp the ground nearby.

Yuuri rolls away from his spot, and it's only that quick thinking that saves him from the stab of the sword that comes from above. The rider that has caught up to him sneers, his face red with an array of still fresh scars.

"Dun ye wiggle, ye lil weasel," he says. "I stab ye real quick and ye wun even feel it, come on."

Yuuri does not deign to answer him.

He feels awful for hurting a harmless animal, one that has caused him no sorrow or upset, but he climbs to his feet and with a cry that rasps and breaks in his throat, runs straight at the horse's flank. His knife sinks into the maroon skin behind the horse's front leg up to the very hilt. Blood spills from the wound like juices do from cooked meat – it's slippery and wet, and so, when the steed neighs in pain, Yuuri jumps away from the danger that the rampaging, hurt animal always is.
He is right to do so, because the moment the sword swings through the place Yuuri has just stood in, the horse kicks and jerks, and throws his rider over his neck before he collapses on the ground to breathe its last. Yuuri doesn't watch it happen. As soon as the horse's knees hit the ground, he's by his rider, kicking the blade out of his hand.

It clatters across the ground, but Yuuri doesn't stop there, no.

He kicks at the man's head again.

And again. And again.

Until the body stops moving, until the hand that's reaching for the sword stills forever.

The sound of hooves at his back sets Yuuri's body aflame once more. He looks around wildly. There should be one more rider there, one more man to kill before Yuuri can follow after Victor. Blindly, Yuuri jumps after the sword that glints in the setting sun and he makes it there at the last moment, too – the horse comes out of nowhere, and a blade follows after it.

Yuuri pars the strike clumsily. He has never held a weapon so long in his hand and he must use both to lift it, it's overtly heavy. As he swings it again to block another upcoming strike, Yuuri realizes that this is not a way to victory. This, the sword, will only be his doom, like it so was for its master before him.

A plan forms in Yuuri's mind, quick and hasty, but it is the best he can do with his finite resources.

He rolls away, as far as he can with the bulky weapon, and he rises up on steady legs. The rider measures him with his gaze for one moment, but he does not speak. Unlike the others before him, he is smart enough to retain his silence and among it comes his charge. With no warning, no hint – but Yuuri is not taken by surprise.

He wastes no time once it starts: he swings the sword with all his might and imbeds the blade deep into the horse's chest. It's at the same time that he does so, that the rider strikes with his own sword and whilst in motion... Yuuri is too slow in avoiding it.

Pain, hot, blinding pain bursts into being on the top of his shoulder. It runs down his collarbone, down his arm, shoulder, back, and Yuuri howls to the sky from how much it hurts just as the blade retreats from the wound it made when the horse falls and takes his rider with him. Through the pulsing ache, Yuuri can see that the man's leg has been trapped by his own steed, who crashed onto it during its fall.

There is no pity in Yuuri's heart as he steps towards the man. There is no pity in Yuuri's heart as his shoulder bursts into even more pain when he lifts it to pick the same sword that stabbed him. There is no pity in Yuuri's heart as he looks down into a now terrified face of a man who took Victor from him.

"Please..." the man says. "D-don't--"

Yuuri sinks the sword in the man's throat before he is finished speaking. His anger boils crimson, the same as the blood that seeps from his shoulder, that wets his shoes, and he thrives on it.

With a crazed laugh, Yuuri drops the dirty sword and whistles for Lamorak, who comes as bid. The horse snorts when Yuuri touches him with a bloodied hand, and Yuuri laughs louder.

"Go, boy," he says once he's climbed into Lamorak's back. His eyes are firmly set on the horizon, red and cold. "Let's get Vitya back."
Chapter End Notes

I hate writing battle scenes I swear they make me sweat like crazy ""
but!!! ONLY ONE MORE TO GO YALL
Chapter 117

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

The consciousness does not return to Victor easily. He hears some noise, some sounds that do not make much sense to his mulish mind, but he does not feel inclined to decipher what they are. He is far too lethargic to try and it isn't until he hears a scream somewhere not far away that he snaps out of the fog that has overtaken him upon waking.

He blinks – and blinks again behind the sack that still firmly sits upon his head obscuring his vision – because the scream that he's heard had an eerily familiar timbre to it. Something in Victor's disposition shifts then and, all at once, everything that's happened returns to him: the library, Yuuri, the kidnappers, the pain, Yuuri.

And Victor realizes that the scream just now belonged to none other than Yuuri himself.

Relief fills him so strongly and so suddenly that he goes limp against the hold of his captor. If Yuuri is here, close enough to hear, then it must mean that he was not harmed too badly in the library. He is alive and well, and he's come all this way, perhaps... perhaps to save–

The high-pitched horse squeal stops the thought from forming. It sounds pained, desperate, almost as if the horse was dying and fear once more trails its cold hand down Victor's spine.

Yuuri is a brave heart, a sweet man, filled with courage, strength and determination. If Victor has learned something about him in all the time he's known and loved him, it's that Yuuri will never allow himself to take no action when someone he cares about is in danger. So when he hears Yuuri's voice again, not a delirium, but a true roar of rage and desperation, only one word makes it past Victor's trembling, cold lips.

"No..." he whispers as if a prayer.

Yuuri shouldn't have come. He shouldn't have...There are too many opponents for him to face alone, if he is alone, but Victor doesn't hear any sounds of scuffle, no more hooves following, no clink of armour that could indicate that his own guards have come as well.

It's just Yuuri, Victor feels it in his heart. And said heart weeps, because it's a fool's errand and for his sake, no less, his Yuuri will come to be harmed yet again.

Without much though, Victor buckles against the rope that he's been tied with, but it's no use.

"Don't struggle, my lord," the man with the proper accent says. "You don't want to fall off the horse."

"If you let me go, I won't have to," Victor replies. "Let me go now and I will allow you to leave with your head on your shoulders."

"I will take my chances, if you will, my lord," the man answers. The horse takes a sharp turn and Victor sways in his spot, slung over the neck of the animal. "It's not every day that I am offered what Her Ladyship has promised."
"Who?" Victor asks, but his question remains unanswered, so he demands again. "Who?! At least tell me that much! Was it my mother? Tell me!"

Before anything can become of his inquiry, Victor hears a sharp nicker from somewhere close. That, and the sound of hooves, but not just the ones of the horse they are riding on – someone is coming after them.

Hope bursts in Victor's heart and it spills over his limbs, warms him until he's hot under his golden robes with nerves and expectation. His captor gives a sharp curse and kicks his steed into a faster gallop. Even as he bounces on the horse in a somewhat painful way, Victor cannot help the joy that overtakes him when he recognizes the angry snort of the horse that is giving chase, because only one fiery steed can measure up to that temper.

Before Victor's happiness can make him shout Yuuri's name with as much triumph as he feels, the sound of hooves gets even with them and Victor's breath is pushed out of his lungs when something hard knocks him in the face and kicks him off the horse's back. The ground meets him hard and Victor groans at the impact, which deafens and blinds him for a few long seconds.

Later, as he struggles for a breath that has been stolen from his lungs, he hears the clutter of steal, the grunts and groans, a sharp yelp, and more than that – the sickly sound of a blade piercing flesh.

It all lasts no longer than a minute or two, but as Victor lies on his back with his hands uncomfortably bent underneath him, he feels the time stretch into unknown. He tries to unbind the rope around his wrists, but it's a feat he doesn't achieve no matter his efforts.

Fear for Yuuri, for his beloved sweet Yuuri, settles in him once more. He should be helping, Victor thinks, he should be the one protecting Yuuri, not having him lay his life for him.

To no avail, Victor tries throwing off the sack that stubbornly remains atop his head and it's during that struggle that he realizes that all around him has fallen into silence.

Until footsteps come near.

Breath stuck in his lungs, Victor waits. Hands grip the sack and in one full motion they pull it off of Victor's head. Momentarily, he's blinded by the light of the setting sun, but Victor blinks quickly through it so that he can see, because he must see what became of his–

"Yuuri–" he breathes, but the rest falls short on his tongue once he sees the Yuuri before him.

His clothes are in tatters, bloodied rags that drape on him like a hanged man does on his noose. Yuuri's face, hands, hair, all of him is covered in splatters of blood: some of it still fresh, some dried, some thick, almost black.

He looks as if he's been through hell, as if he's fought a dozen men, as if he–

And he has, Victor realizes with a strangled sob that rises in his throat despite the joy of seeing Yuuri again. He has – Yuuri has killed, he's been injured, he's been hurt, all because of Victor. For him.

"I'm sorry," Victor whispers as untameable tears roll down his cheeks. "I'm so sorry, my love, I'm so–"


Yuuri lifts a hand to Victor's face, but he hesitates. It must be the blood that's still fresh on his fingers, but Victor cares little for it when he leans forward to put his cheek in Yuuri's palm himself. That is all
it takes for Yuuri to gather him in his arms and squeeze him, hard, so hard that Victor's breath leaves him again, but it is a wonderful feeling nevertheless.

The harsh heartbeat that Victor feels on the rise of his shoulder where it presses against Yuuri's chest settles into something calmer while they remain embraced. It does not last long, because Yuuri soon pulls away and undoes the rope that has been keeping Victor prisoner. And once he does, he takes Victor in his arms again, but this time he picks him up like one would a fainted damsel.

"Let's go home," Yuuri says.

And flushed, breathless with wonder at the strong set of Yuuri's jaw and the fire in his eyes, Victor says not a word of protest – he allows his love to put him on Lamorak's back and leans into him once Yuuri takes his seat behind him.

Safe, bewildered, and smitten despite the gore around them, Victor allows himself to be taken home in the arms of the man who has made it so.

Chapter End Notes

Yes well vitya's reaction was totally predictable but hey, we have our beast boy carrying his beauty so I think you can forgive me? ;3c
"My lord! My lord!"

They are halfway back to Snowberry Estate when the guards meet them. There is a good dozen of them, maybe more, and they are all equipped in full armour, chainmail, shields and swords, and cloaks fluttering proudly their insignia in the wind. Somehow, as he takes them all in while they turn their horses to flank Lamorak for the rest of the ride, Victor cannot help but wonder what would've happened to him if Yuuri didn't come to save him. Maybe by the time his men arrived, glamorous in their golden armours with the setting sun embossed into their breastplates, Victor would be far, far away being sold off to the one who ordered him to be taken...

"My lord!"

The captain pulls his horse around to align himself with Lamorak's even walk.

"My lord, are you harmed? We heard the news from Ilia, the attendant, and we've come as fast as possible to rescue--"

"You were late."

Victor is so surprised at the coldness of the voice that comes from behind him, the coldness of Yuuri's usually soft, warm voice, that he startles. Yuuri's arms wrap around Victor more securely as if telling him without words that all will be well and Victor... Victor finds himself believing him. Unwaveringly.

"You were too late, captain," Yuuri repeats. "And I find myself enraged by the carelessness of you and your men."

The captain seems so surprised by the harsh tone that he remains speechless for a moment, much like Victor himself. The man's face clouds not long after, however, and he replies:

"With all due respect, my lord, I will not take critique from you. You are not the master I chose to serve."

"I am not, and I never shall be," Yuuri says to that, unbothered by the denial and confident in his words. "But do not mistake me, good sir, I will speak truth to you, for your actions could have caused your lord his life. And that, I would not have forgiven. If he were not sitting right here with us, it would be your head that I would go after next."

His arm slides to Victor's waist, pulls him closer as if protectively and on instinct, and lead by that as well Victor guides his hand to sit atop of Yuuri's to calm his anger. It's the first time he sees Yuuri so visibly angered, yet he is too tired, too drained to react to it more than simply to offer Yuuri what little comfort he can.

"You have failed to protect your lord and you have failed to retrieve him once he was taken right from under your nose, captain," Yuuri says, voice trembling with the force of his upset. "If it were me in your position, I would be quaking in my boots at the consequences of my actions."
"Then that be my lord's anger I shall bear, not yours." The captain lifts his head up, foolhardy. And then, as if to belittle Yuuri, he adds: "My lord."

That, more than anything, makes Victor's own anger rise. Before Yuuri can give the man a scathing reply like he is well entitled to, Victor sets his shoulders straight and looks down on his captain with all the aristocratic might that runs in his veins.

"Mind your tongue, captain," he chides the man coldly. "You are speaking to your betters, well remember it. I will strip you of your position and release you from my service, should my Yuuri only say the word. The only reason you are not suffering my anger right now is because he is doing a splendid work of scolding you on his own and I do share his thoughts on the matter, so you might as well pay heed."

Chided, the man flushes deep crimson. He obediently bows his head though, and when he speaks next his tone is much more humble.

"Forgive me, my lords," he says. "I meant no offence. But we have taken all the necessary precautions and preparations to face battle with unknown assailants, so to hear our efforts be demeaned is not a matter I take lightly."

"Understandable," Yuuri says then. "But if those precautions and preparations are what has caused your efforts to be demeaned, then I believe you must revise your practices for the future, captain. We do not want the history to repeat itself, do we?"

"Surely not, my lord," the man replies. He nods stiffly in acquiesce. "I shall do as you say."

Victor does not see whether Yuuri nods back at him or if he simply rides off without acknowledging him, but they cross the gates of the Snowberry Estate before everyone else. Yuuri guides Lamorak to the stables and jumps off first only to offer his arms to Victor afterwards. Unable to say no, Victor allows him to help, but the moment Yuuri bends down to take him into his arms again, Victor protests.

"I can walk, Yuuri, there is no need to--"

His flustered rambling is interrupted by Yuuri's sweet voice that says: "But I want to. Can I?"

And Victor is powerless once more against the strength of his love, so when Yuuri picks him up and begins to ascend the stairs that lead up to the grand doors of the manor, Victor only buries his face in Yuuri's shoulder. He rubs one flushed cheek against Yuuri's robe, content at the closeness. There is blood on Yuuri's robes, there is dirt, but it smells like Yuuri and that, despite of everything else, is soothing enough.

"I have you, my Vitya," Yuuri tells him then. "You're safe now."

"I know," Victor replies, his voice equally as soft as Yuuri's. "I'm with you."

Yuuri doesn't say anything else as he walks through the hallways of the manor at a brisk pace. He behaves as if Victor weighed nothing and the careless show of strength is more than impressive. Victor would've appreciated it far more if the circumstances were different, but as he is now, he simply allows himself to be carried and cared for.

Because that is what Yuuri does – he orders a bath, which Ilia sets up faster than Victor ever thought possible. As the preparations go on, Yuuri never once lets go of Victor until the tub and the water is ready. Then, he gently peels Victor's clothes off and smoothes his hands over every inch of Victor's skin to check for injuries. When he finds none, he sets Victor in the tub and with a towel washes the
blood and dust off of him.

In there, Victor looks at him for the first time properly.

Yuuri is pale. He is covered in dirt and blood so thoroughly that it's difficult to spot at first, but Victor is close enough to be able to do so. He sees the worried lines, the angry ones, all of Yuuri's precious heart painted into the frown on his face.

With a wet hand, Victor touches Yuuri's blood-smeared cheek.

"Step into the water, my love," he says then. "You need this, too."

Yuuri does not argue, not this time. He strips quickly and joins Victor in the lukewarm water. It's only when he sits back against the side of the tub that Victor moves. Water sloshes around them, but he is careless of it as he sits on Yuuri's thighs.

"Yuuri," he calls, because Yuuri's eyes are closed and his face is pinched as if something ailed him.

Brown eyes open, depthless and unfocused, and Victor leans down to press his next, trembling words right against Yuuri's lips.

"Thank you, my heart."

The way Yuuri's arms wrap around Victor then is naught but desperate, but Victor cannot be one to judge: he clings to Yuuri as well, because he is safe now, yes, but the fear lingers deep inside his bones and as he holds onto Yuuri, who trembles with his own fears almost as badly as Victor does, Victor finally finds the release for his.

Neither of them notice the tears that flow into the bathtub waters, and if they do, they don't speak of it, since like all else they understand the unspoken, for no words can ever be enough to give justice to the strength of their love and that, which was just saved.

Chapter End Notes

hooo boy finally home but is the drama over yet? hmmm I don't know ;3c
They recover slowly. Without any words traded between them, Victor pulls away from Yuuri's tight embrace first, but he doesn't go far. So as not to think of the terrible, horrible thoughts that keep on swirling in his head, he takes the wet cloth again and begins to wipe away the blood and dirt off Yuuri's face, his jaw, his neck, shoulders...

It's then that he spots the angry red mark that crosses downward from Yuuri's collarbone and he knows. Oh, he knows.

"You were hurt because of me," Victor whispers.

His lips tremble and fingers grow numb as he traces the tender skin around the wound. It's closed now, no longer bleeding, surely given Yuuri's extraordinary healing abilities, but the very fact that a blade once cut through the skin here, maybe even the bone, and blood gushed out of this exact spot has Victor paling from the guilt.

"I– Yuuri–"

Yuuri says nothing immediately. He takes Victor's hand first and, lovingly, kisses his fingers. Only then, does he give in a soft, creaking from exhaustion voice:

"Better me than you. I will heal."

It diminishes none of the guilt and shame that sit like logs in Victor's chest. He wishes to say more, to insist that Yuuri's life, body, pain are as important as his own – maybe even more, for Victor's loving heart cannot condone such suffering to come to his beloved, especially on his own behalf – but the words seem to be stuck in his throat. Instead of them, Victor feels hot tears sting under his eyelids once more and when he blinks, like precious pearls they fall down onto Yuuri's bare chest, leaving trails in the blood and dirt still smeared over Yuuri's skin.

"Vitya," Yuuri croons gently. His hands reach for Victor's face and hold it up so their eyes can meet: and in Yuuri's molten brown Victor sees nothing but love and immense relief, relief that Victor himself has come to no harm. "Please, don't cry, sweetheart. There is no need for your tears. I'm alright, my love, this is nothing I cannot recover from."

Yuuri's thumbs wipe away the wetness from Victor's eyes, but his tenderness only makes the tears come faster. Victor takes a small, hiccupping breath before he dares open his mouth again.

"But you were hurt because of me," he says in a terrified whisper. His hand tightens around the cloth as it continues to tremble. "The one thing I vowed to never allow to happen, happened. And it's all because of me."

"Hush now," Yuuri tells him when he presses his lips against Victor's. They taste a little like blood, but Victor does not have it in him to react to it like he has those few days ago. "Don't cry, my sweet Vitya. You were not the cause of this wound, I promise. It was just my carelessness, my own fault that made it happen. However darling your tears are to me, there is no need for them, please."
The gentle lips that speak so kindly to him kiss Victor's cheeks, his nose, his temples, eyes; they drink away all the tears that fall from beneath Victor's eyelids.

"Don't," Victor says on a weeping breath. "Don't try to console me, Yuuri. I know this is my fault. You've warned me about this and I should've listened to you, but I didn't and the consequences of that came to haunt me. And you, you just... You came after me and you saved me, and– And–"

The rest of his words get swallowed by a sob that Victor fights a losing battle against. Yuuri pulls him against his chest, arms wrapped around Victor's trembling back, secure and soothing. One of his hands lifts up to card through Victor's damp hair and even when the fingers catch on the knots, Yuuri doesn't stop and Victor says nothing of it, because there is comfort in the little pain it brings – as if it can be somehow equal to what Yuuri has suffered.

"I will always come after you and I will always save you, if it is within my power," Yuuri says. "I gave you my word, after all, remember?"

Victor doesn't have the strength to nod. He simply buries his face in Yuuri's shoulder, presses his lips to the red, raw skin of the wound and sheds more tears, because this is love. Love has pushed Yuuri to do this, love is hurting Victor now, and love is flowing out of his eyes – it's all love, and whoever said love is eternal happiness was a fool.

Love is pain, suffering, heartache... but the reason to fight through it is simple: in love you are never alone.

And Victor feels it when Yuuri's lips press against his ear, soft and loving, just as his whisper is.

"Tell me, Vitya, what should I do? How can I comfort you? How can I help you? I want to make you feel better, Vitya, please..."

At a plea so earnest, Victor melts into Yuuri's arms. The water they sit in is quickly becoming cold, but the warmth of Yuuri's body keeps Victor from shivering. It also keeps him safe, protected, and as he shifts to peer at Yuuri again and Yuuri's hands move to the small of his back to accommodate him, Victor realizes what it is that he needs now.

"Make love to me," he says, resting his splayed fingers on Yuuri's jaw. "I want to be wrapped in you, with you, just... just you, my Yuuri. Can I, can I ask for that?"

With his words, he offers Yuuri a way out. He offers him a chance to deny him, a chance to make an excuse and avoid closeness, but Victor underestimates Yuuri's devotion for him just as he previously underestimated his strength. Yuuri, it seems, lives to surprise him.

"Of course you can," Yuuri says then. "And if that is truly what you wish, then I will gladly give myself to you, however you want me. But is it, Vitya? Is it what you truly wish for? You were attacked, kidnapped, and I fear that you might not be thinking--"

"No," Victor interrupts him.

"No?"

Victor shakes his head and on his knees he lifts himself a little out of the water. The caress of the droplets rolling down his hips and back seems like teasing fingertips, but he ignores the sensation in favour of peering down into Yuuri's face.

"I do not wish to think of any of that now," Victor says as he rests his hands on the sides of Yuuri's face. "I simply want to be, and feel. Just you."
The little crease between Yuuri's brows smoothes out at that. His face softens, eyes melt, and he gives a tiny nod to Victor, while he takes Victor's hand and rests an adoring kiss to the centre of the palm.

"Your wish is my command," Yuuri whispers.

And once he lifts his head, their lips meet halfway – soft, tender, loving. It steals his breath, hushes his thoughts, hazes around his mind... but that is what Victor wants, and Yuuri, as always, delivers on his promise.

Chapter End Notes

I don't know what it is about comfort smut but I love it so much?? rydxcyghb /u/\
The kisses they share like little secrets are sweet, even when the passion churns deep within them. They are something out of a dream and Victor wills himself to never wake up as he pushes himself harder against Yuuri to suck on his tongue. His beloved blesses him with a groan of need and Victor thrives on it while greedy hands grip his hips, half in the water, half above. It's a delirious feeling, Victor must admit.

"Yuuri," he pants, "please..."

The weariness of the past events sits like a caged monster somewhere at the back of his mind, but when Yuuri slides his hand down Victor's spine, Victor throws away the key and gives himself over to simply being and experiencing the pleasure of Yuuri's fingers, which sink underwater to rub at the tender pink flesh of Victor's entrance.

"Do you want me to...?" Yuuri asks, voice and caresses questioning as if after all this time he still needed Victor's permission to claim what is rightfully his.

"Yes, Yuuri, yes!"

Victor keens with need, because that is just like Yuuri: sweetly considerate and caring, but bold enough to be astounded by his own prowess. And it's that prowess, and that consideration, and that--all of it, in fact, all of him is what Victor desperately needs.

The water sloshes around as Yuuri moves his hand and the sound of it adds to Victor's arousal. It stirs low in his belly, but it isn't fully awake yet. Not the way it would normally be and for a moment Victor struggles to keep his grasp on reality when Yuuri's hands turn into other hands, those that grip him hard and those that roped him down and slung him over the back of a horse...

Yuuri's lips, mouthing at the skin on Victor's neck close to the mark he himself has made, bring Victor back. With a soft gasp and a shudder, Victor wraps his arms around Yuuri's head. To ground himself, he pushes his hands into Yuuri's dark hair, which here and there is sticky with dried blood and dirt.

And somehow, suddenly, the thought of Yuuri fighting for him is much more appealing than it was just seconds before, because the hands that killed all those men who meant to harm Victor are now slid between Victor's thighs, intent on giving him as much pleasure as he desires and, oh – Victor gasps as one finger breaches him – this is what having true power must be like.

"Yuuri," Victor moans.

Yuuri hums against Victor's collarbone, nuzzling and kissing his way down his chest. Only once his bottom lip rests against the pink bud of Victor's breast, does he look up. There is nothing innocent in the picture he presents, for his finger works tirelessly in and out of Victor, but with a tender flush on his bloody cheeks and a little smile on his reddened lips, Yuuri looks truly stunning.

Victor's own face probably matches Yuuri's blush, but Victor has never been a shy person. So when his chest heaves under the greedy breaths he takes, he subtly twists to rub his nipple against Yuuri's
open mouth. Yuuri needs not be asked twice: his hot tongue wraps around the tender flesh and he sucks a moan straight out of Victor's throat.

"Ah, Yuuri...!"

Victor cannot help shifting closer, wanting more, begging for it.

Heat spreads from where Yuuri's lips kiss it into his skin and pools down low, between his legs, and back to where Yuuri's finger rubs his insides. Submerged in the water, it feels strange, and every sound of the slurping water sends new shivers down Victor's spine. He takes a shuddering breath, but that quickly turns into another moan, because the strangeness of the sensation is something he finds himself enjoying far more than he would've thought possible.

When Yuuri pushes the tip of a second finger in, however, the pleasure turns into more than just that.

"Does it hurt?" Yuuri asks as if he's noticed the sharpness of Victor's breathing. "Should we stop? I can get some oil to--"

"No," Victor quickly says, grabbing onto Yuuri's arms to keep him where he is. If Yuuri moves away now, if he leaves... Victor doesn't think he could bear it. "No, this feels good. Cleansing. I-- I want to continue like this, please."

"Are you certain?" Yuuri asks again as he prods at Victor's hole with yet another finger. He does not put it in, but the warning is clearly received. "Can you take all of it without anything? I-- Vitya, I don't wish to hurt you."

Victor bites his lip and slowly, dips his chin down to look Yuuri in the eye.

"Would you stop if I said that I want it to hurt?"

And before the surprise on Yuuri's face can turn into mortification, like Victor sees the signs of it already becoming so around the corners of his lips which draw thin and pale, Victor adds:

"I want to feel you, my love. During, and after, I want to carry this with me like you carry this scar on your shoulder."

Victor's wet fingers touch the red flesh of Yuuri's wound gingerly.

"Vitya, I--"

"Please," Victor begs. "I know it is a lot to ask, but I would not be asking this if I didn't want it, or understood what I'm asking you to do."

"You will hurt for hours, days even," Yuuri says again, slightly off put. "If this is only about my wound then you needn't go to such lengths--"

"It isn't just that," Victor assures and only once the words leave his mouth does he realize it's true. He wants this as well for himself. Like he'd want it any other time that wasn't marked by blood and fear. "I want to... I want to feel you. Just you. Think of you when I move, when it hurts. It will help in the days that are to come, I'm sure of it."

With those simple words, Victor sees Yuuri's face change. He sees the acceptance soften the fear, the resignation cover the refusal. Yuuri nods, finally, but he does so after a deep sigh that almost makes Victor retract his plea.
He doesn't. And it is granted, as Yuuri will grant Victor anything, and Victor will grant him anything back.

"Very well," Yuuri says, leaning forward to press his lips to Victor's collarbone. "But if you change your mind midway, please, speak up. I did not save you from harm from those men to now break you in half myself."

"I know, my love." Victor smiles and dips his head down to rest a kiss in Yuuri's hair. "I know. And I love you all the more for it."

He may have wished to say more, reassure Yuuri that he did not mean to test his limits, but Yuuri chooses that moment to curl two fingers inside Victor's hole and all the words flow out of Victor's mind along with a moan that speaks more than he ever could.

Chapter End Notes

do not do this at home kids
(unless you're into pain)
((but even then do this only after doing your research and talking it through with your partner thoroughly))
(((safe sex yall!!)))
The sound of slurping water that Victor's hole makes as it clenches around Yuuri's fingers, craving something thicker, something *more*, makes Victor's body hot with embarrassment. It is by far the most lewd thing he has heard in his entire life, but he could not be able to stop if given the opportunity – the stretch of Yuuri's three fingers is addictive and once they curl inside him... *oh.* Victor's toes curl with them, for the pleasure he feels then is more than just grounded to the parts between his legs. His whole body sizzles with it under Yuuri's tender touch as if it is a well tuned instrument in the hands of the most talented musician.

And Yuuri, for his part, has taken the matters into his hands so thoroughly that Victor feels both wound up and slack all at the same time. He feels hungry and full, open and easy, but at the same time clenching and drawing Yuuri further in.

It's mindmelting, the pleasure is.

"I think this is as far as I can open you," Yuuri says, twisting his fingers inside Victor.

Victor's cock twitches at that, heavy with a need to be touched. Yuuri has been neglecting it for so long that, as he gives a wanton moan, Victor doesn't know whether he should be glad for it or not. Glad, because he is certain he would have long since given into release if Yuuri as much as ran his fingers over it; and not, because the throbbing ache between his legs is so strong that even the little sting of the stretching did not impart on Victor's pleasure – in fact, it only heightened it.

The water gurgles as its sucked into the empty gaping hole that is left twitching once Yuuri withdraws his fingers. Victor's sharp gasp of surprise at the new sensation turns into another moan, because Yuuri does not waste much time on other things: he simply slots his cock against Victor. One of his fingers rubs at the spot where the rim of Victor's hole touches with the head of his cock, and Victor shudders at the difference in pleasure.

This, the water, the hot length touching him, the fleeting caress... it all feels too good.

"Are you sure you really–?" Yuuri starts, but Victor doesn't hear him, blinded by his want as he is.

He simply arches his back and reaches backwards to keep Yuuri's cock steady as he slowly sits down on it. It's thick, it's big, and Victor feels full even before the head breaches him – and once it does, it's pain and pleasure, a mixture of both that has Victor's mind numbing like his spine does at the sudden pressure.

Yuuri's breaths come sharp and fast against Victor's chest. Victor takes a moment, stops, to catch his own, and it's then that their eyes meet – black brown against black blue, dilated pupils of love and lust.

"I love you, Yuuri," Victor says, overtaken by feeling. "I love you so much, my Yuuri..."

Yuuri groans at that and his hips buckle upwards just a little of their own volition, but it's enough to push his cock deeper into Victor. Black spots dance across Victor's vision when the pain hits him first, but it soon melts into a little throb only, which pairs with the hot length of Yuuri's girth inside
him like cookies and milk do and Victor's thighs tremble as he keeps himself from slotting the full thing inside him all at once, hungry for more as he is.

"–love you, too," Victor barely hears the end of it. "I love you, Vitya, I love you with my whole heart..."

The tight hold he keeps on his wants slips slightly and Victor sinks himself lower, lower still, until the fullness inside him steals his breath. He pauses then with a gasp. The water sloshes around the tub with their each shift, but that is only background noise to the sound of Yuuri's wrecked breaths.

It's then that Victor realizes this is the first time for Yuuri, first time inside him.

"Do I feel good?" Victor asks, none too shyly. "Tell me, my Yuuri, does this feel nice?"

He grinds his hips, clenches on half the cock he has inside him. Yuuri's only answer is a whine so potent that even Victor feels its strength somewhere deep where Yuuri's cock has yet to reach.

It urges him down again, and he follows that urge, sitting down on Yuuri and tearing himself apart in the process.

"God, Vitya–!" Yuuri cries. His voice muffles Victor's whimpers, but only some. "Calm, my love, patience! Don't hurt yourself over this."

"Patience!" Victor pants as he fights against the pain that bursts behind his eyelids with every shift of Yuuri's cock. "Who has the time for that? Who has the patience to be patient? I need you, my love, not patience."

Before Yuuri can reply – and yes, Victor knows what he would have to say of this, the thing Yuuri has said many times over – Victor lifts himself up on shaky knees and, to the sound of splashing water, he sinks down on Yuuri's cock. They both groan in unison. Yuuri's hands find purchase on Victor's hips and even when Victor thinks he has ground all the way to the base of Yuuri's cock, Yuuri still finds room to thrust up into him weakly. Almost as if it is against him to stop.

"Yes, Yuuri, please," Victor chokes on a sobbing breath. "Take me..."

The water sloshes around them, fills the air with more than the usual noises, which sets fire to Victor's skin. It's all wet, unbelievably wet, and yet pain stings around Victor's hole and somewhere deep inside him – lights up with every slide of Yuuri's cock.

But it's good. It feels... cleansing. Wholesome. As if Victor's soul was being scraped raw, not just his body.

Yuuri's movements are restricted, both from the weight of Victor in his lap, but also from the resistance of the water, but when he thrusts up into Victor, there is nothing that could've prepared him for the stars that begin to dance across his vision. With a keen and a sob, Victor bounces in Yuuri's lap like he has always wanted to do: and he is thriving.

No thoughts bother him then – there is only the stretch of Yuuri's cock and the slide of its head, and the press of his own cock to Yuuri's stomach – and before pleasure swallows him fully and the darkness carries him off, Victor pants, groans, whimpers his love into Yuuri's sweaty forehead, and he is happy.

Happy, loved, and safe.

And it feels good.
hooo boy this is a wild time to be living
When Victor slumps against him, it takes Yuuri a moment to realize that he is not simply overtaken by exhaustion. The pleasure – and pain, Yuuri can tell – must have played a big part in weakening Victor's defences, but above all, Yuuri believes that the fear and uncertainty of the last hours have finally caught up with him.

Victor's spent cock is flaccid against Yuuri's lower belly and his own, still hard and aching, is sheathed deep inside Victor. Yuuri's sense of decency would never allow him to keep going, however. Not when Victor is unconscious and unable to consent. Yuuri closes his eyes then and pulls out of Victor's abused hole, shivering – the water is cold on his heated, sensitive skin.

As gently as he can, he shifts Victor into a more comfortable position, wraps his arm around his back so as not to let him slip, and then quickly finishes himself off. The touch of his own hand is familiar, practiced, and Yuuri has no problem bringing himself to completion. The scent of Victor's hair, wet as it is, comforts him and pushes him over the edge until Yuuri spills into the tub water and gasps into Victor's shoulder, but alas, Victor remains unawares.

It isn't shame that makes Yuuri's cheeks colour, but a kin of embarrassment. He washes his hand off the mess, washes his cock, too, and only then does he pull Victor away to wash their bellies as well.

Victor would not have minded, Yuuri thinks as he pours water over the soft cock to clean it off. He would be happy that Yuuri has been as fulfilled as he himself. After all, Victor is a sweet, caring man. And... he loves Yuuri maybe just as much as Yuuri loves him.

"You do, don't you?" Yuuri asks the unconscious man in his arms, but as expected – receives no reply.

He smiles to himself, though.

"Let's move you to bed, my lord," Yuuri tells him, resting a kiss against Victor's cheek.

There is no reply this time, either.

Yuuri turns Victor to the side and then picks him up into his arms. He stands carefully, so as not to slip, and in cascades of cold water steps out of the tub. He cannot dry Victor while simultaneously carrying him, so he sits Victor down on a nearby chair and gently pats him dry with a cloth. He does the same to himself afterwards, scraping and washing away the remnants of blood and dirt that in their endeavours they both missed.

Only once they're clean and dry, does Yuuri take Victor to bed, where he covers him with clean sheets. Victor wakes for none of it, but it is just as well. By the time he himself curls up on Victor's side, Yuuri's own eyes are threatening to close on him as exhaustion finally takes over him.

Arm wrapped securely around Victor – to keep him close and to keep him safe, but also to keep Yuuri's mind at peace – Yuuri studies the servants who buzz around the room to clean the bath. Through half-lidded eyes, Yuuri watches every one of them: what they do, who they speak to, whether they bow upon leaving.
He does not exactly suspect that one of them might have aided the men who took Victor that morning, but the feeling of uncertainty is nagging at the back of Yuuri's mind, because... someone must have.

There were four men that Yuuri has killed. One that Victor has turned into a statue. Five men in all.

It's impossible for a group like that to pass through the manor without anyone seeing or hearing them. And maybe they had, Yuuri thinks to himself, as the last of the servants quietly leave the room. Maybe they had seen them, but failed to report to anyone.

Or maybe it's the guards that were bought off. Maybe the captain who has failed to arrive in time to save Victor was taking his time, because he has been paid to do so.

Darkness steams around Yuuri's mind, heavy and thick. There are forces at work in this manor that he has not considered before, things he never calculated for.

But, alas, Lady Babicheva has warned him against this. She told him, back when they last spoke: "There is far more lurking in the shadows than you are aware of," she said then.

Did she know, Yuuri wonders. He rests his head next to Victor's once the doors to the bedchamber finally close. Did Lady Yulianna know that Victor's life would be at risk? The footsteps that Yuuri follows with his keen ears retreat from the sitting room and grow silent as the private chambers of the lord of the manor are emptied. Did Victor's aunt know and purposefully remained silent on such a thing?

She wouldn't have, Yuuri decides, nosing into the back of Victor's head. The damp silver locks tickle him, but their caress is a comfort and a distraction against the noise of Yuuri's own mind. If she knew, Yuuri thinks, she would've spoken of it. After all, Lady Babicheva cares for her nephew.

Just like Yuuri does.

"I love you, Vitya," Yuuri whispers against Victor's nape. "I love you so much. I think... I think if something were to happen to you, I– My heart would surely break."

In the silence of the room, where no other sound reaches them apart from their breathing, Yuuri hears Victor's calm, blessed heartbeat. And against it, he closes his eyes and allows himself to slip into slumber, but not before the last words roll off his tongue.

"I'm so glad I made it in time..."

Exhausted, but lucky and light with the weightlessness of the promise kept, Yuuri gives in to dreams, which for once do not torment him through the night.

Chapter End Notes

I'm debating a difficult thing bc my schedule for august and september got really really full and I'm not sure if I will be able to keep up with daily updates... so here's some solutions:

1) I could continue updating daily until I run out of the chapters to post, and then go on
indefinite hiatus (until I finish the other things I need to write)
2) I could post a weekly update - once every week, probably on saturday or sunday
   (maybe two chapters together to make the update longer?)
3) I could post updates bi-weekly, at their usual length
4) I could go on a weekly update schedule after we deal with the next big cliffhanger
   (more or less 5+ chapters)

so here's the thing bc I can't decide: please leave me your pick of the above in the comments section below? I'd really appreciate the input!
What Yuuri awakens to is heat.

It wraps around him, sizzles under his skin and chokes him in a way that is both sweet and harsh at once. Sweat beads into pearls on his forehead, but he is still dreaming. He must be, or so he believes – of fire maybe or summer, when the sun bears down onto the world with its unforgiving shine. Suffocating as that all is, Yuuri realizes he is wrong once he snaps his eyes open to gold: gold and warmth and a head of silver hair that rests before him.

And just like that, Yuuri knows what situation he has found himself in.

With a gasp that moulds into a moan, he sets his hands on Victor's moving hips and peers down between their bodies to where Victor has sheathed himself upon Yuuri's cock whilst Yuuri was asleep. The girth disappears from his sight deep into Victor with every shift, every grind, and the heat that Yuuri is so tightly wrapped in is slick, soft and divine – it's heaven.

But as incredible as it might seem, Yuuri feels obliged to ask: "Vitya, what are you–?"

"Yuuri..."

His question is broken by Victor's moan. It sounds desperate, broken almost, as if Victor has been doing this for quite some time and has yet to find release, but now that Yuuri is awake the impossible seems just within his grasp.

"Yuuri, please... You didn't finish last night, so do it now. I want you..."

"Are you sure?" Yuuri's own breath hitches on a groan that he quickly swallows. "Have you recovered enough to--"

"Yes, yes, I'm certain, please...! I'm ready, I made sure, I just need you, my Yuuri!"

Victor sounds broken, wrecked, but Yuuri would much rather him sound it than be it. Hence, he stills Victor's hips with strong hands before Victor can do any more damage to his, or Yuuri's composure. He ignores the disappointed groan that Victor makes and pulls out of him to, instead, slide three of his fingers at once into his red hole.

Victor whimpers at that, arching into Yuuri's hand. His spine is a delightful angle that Yuuri cannot resist admiring for just one second. He remembers himself soon, however, and rubs his fingertips as far as they go – true to his word, Victor takes him in until the last knuckles, swallows him up like his body cannot wait to have more.

Dazed by the heat of the pleasure and still unshaken sleep, Yuuri takes a breath to ground himself.

"You are such a naughty man, Vitya," he says as he bows himself over Victor's back. He takes his cock in hand and lines it against Victor, ready, but still. "You really want this so badly?"

"Please," Victor begs. "I need you, my Yuuri. Fill me, breed me, make me so utterly yours that no
one who looks at us will ever doubt that I belong to you."

Yuuri can't hold back his groan. He rubs the tip of his cock against Victor, and asks again: "Is that what you want? To belong to me like a pet? Like a... like a broodmere who only waits for me to slit my cock between your legs?"

He isn't sure where the words are coming from, but the idea of Victor waiting for him with his strong legs spread apart and a fetching flush on his cheeks thrills him beyond belief. It is the idea of breeding him, however, that makes Yuuri's mind turn into a mush of passion and lust.

"God, yes," Victor pants, "yes, Yuuri, yes! I want it! Please! Use me, fuck me, I will be your best bitch! Just– please--"

And like that, the feeling is gone.

Yuuri's senses return to him, cold, but sweet, somehow, when his heart pangs in his chest at Victor's words. He grips Victor strongly and flips him over, forcing his legs apart to accommodate their position and – most crucially – to look into Victor's flushed, need-stricken face. Blue eyes are unfocused even when Yuuri takes Victor's face in his hands. Yuuri leans over him and waits until Victor's gaze stops on him, but it never does, because Victor is too far gone with desire.

"No," Yuuri says softly and it's then that he gains Victor's full attention. "You can never be my bitch. You can never be my pet, or broodmere, or any of those things. Do you know why?"

Victor's disappointment is clear when he bites his lip and shakes his head, but Yuuri kisses that lip, and he kisses the tip of Victor's red nose, his red cheeks, his sweaty forehead. Against Victor's temple, he whispers:

"Because you are my most precious thing, my Vitya, and I will never treat you less than you deserve. And, love, you deserve the world."

Victor keens at that, a sound between a sob and a moan that Yuuri isn't sure how to interpret until Victor's mouth parts on a desperate breath. And after the breath come the words that Yuuri most wished to hear, even if he did not know so himself.

"Then love me, my Yuuri," Victor asks. "Love me like it's the last thing you'll ever do."

There is no power on heaven or earth that could ever stop Yuuri from doing so, and he proves it when he slides back into Victor slowly, gently, while at the same time speaking against Victor's lips.

"I love you, Vitya," he says. "I love you. I love you. I love--"

Every thrust of his hips he punctuates with a confession that sits sweet in his chest, but flows sweeter still from Victor's own mouth as moans take over his breathing. Victor wraps his legs around Yuuri's waist, wraps his arms around Yuuri's back, wraps himself in Yuuri's heart, which is freely and willingly given.

And when the pleasure becomes too much to form words, Yuuri leaves kisses – open-mouthed and breathless – over every patch of Victor's skin he can: from his lips, to his eyelids, chin and ears. Victor, in turn, grows tighter, slicker, more desperate in his moans and, soon, he comes with Yuuri's name on the lips which Yuuri kisses as he, too, follows him into the bliss of completion.

Victor's hands, so tightly wound up in Yuuri's hair it begins to hurt, uncurl from their place behind his head and drop to the bed as if all feeling has left them. Yuuri feels the pleasurable bonelesness himself, but he does not give into it. At least, not before he pulls out of Victor, who whines at the
first move Yuuri makes to do just that.

"No," he complains and tightens his legs around Yuuri to keep him in place. "Stay. I want to feel you more..."

"It will be uncomfortable for you later," Yuuri tells him, because he cares.

But Victor clearly does not, because he insists. "It won't. I want it, please, my Yuuri. Indulge me once more? It's the last time, I promise."

"Very well." Yuuri sighs, weak against his love as he is. "Hold on to me then, I will move us around."

Once Victor grips him well, Yuuri carefully picks him up and – while they are still connected – rolls over to lie on the bed himself with Victor now atop of him. It must content Victor greatly, because he hums and wastes no time in settling his cheek against Yuuri's shoulder. Eyes closed, he must drift off into slumber soon, but Yuuri cannot seem to do the same.

Because as much as he has enjoyed this waking moment, the fact of Victor's kidnapping remains not a dream, not a terrible nightmare, but reality – and Yuuri fears for what it will mean once Victor awakens again.

Chapter End Notes

the conclusion for the future updates is as follows: I will update daily until we break past the most recent crisis and then I will resort to weekly updates (on saturdays or sundays, that I will have to see yet). thank you all for chipping it, it was great to hear your thoughts <3

also, damn the smuts here are getting real but RIP VITYA'S ASS YOU SHALL BE REMEMBERED
Running his fingers through Victor's silver locks while the man slumbers sprawled over his chest helps Yuuri greatly to remain calm. His mind is occupied with concocting new – and newer still – scenarios of what may happen due to the recent terrible events in their lives and only some of them include Lady Nikiforova. Mostly they are connected to Victor's kidnapping, some others to the missing book, and more yet to the quickly approaching full moon.

Alas, Yuuri should have known to fear the sleeping dragon, for one can never be certain whether it's truly asleep or simply waiting for the most opportune moment of weakness to pounce.

And Lady Nikiforova did just that.

"Good morning, darlings! It is far too late in the day to be lounging in--"

The Lady bursts through the doors of the bedchamber without any warning. She halts in her tracks as soon as she spots them on the bed: bare as newborn babies for all the world to see. Her face crinkles with what Yuuri must know to be disgust and, this time, he can hardly blame her for it.

Yuuri's cock is filthy with his own dried seed and still halfway sunk into her own son, a spread she can clearly see from where she stands at the foot of the bed.

Cheeks aflame, Yuuri quickly grabs the bed sheets and throws them over their bare bodies. A cloud of golden dust lifts into the air along with it, but at least now he can look past the dancing lights to the mother of the man he loves... of the man who still keeps his cock warm. Yuuri intends to apologize for the view they present, even if there is little fault of theirs in her sudden appearance, but before he can as much as open his mouth, Lady Nikiforova barges on.

"I see my son is still dreaming soundly," she says and waves an impatient hand. "No matter then. You," She sends Yuuri a look as haughty as a noble lady of her stature could muster upon finding her offspring in such a compromising disposition, "untangle yourself, dress, and see me in the dining room. I wish to speak with you properly."

As boldly as she arrived, she leaves. The doors bang behind her with a force that Yuuri could never expect from someone so frail looking, but he has learned his lessons well: here, in this manor, nothing seems as it does at first sight.

He peers down his chest, wondering if he should awaken Victor, but he decides against it. Through it all, Victor remained blissfully aslumber, and far be it for Yuuri to deprive him of his much needed rest. After everything that's happened, Victor deserves at least that.

Be that as it may, detangling himself from the unconscious body is a challenge, yet after a struggle Yuuri succeeds. His cock is not as limp as Yuuri would have wanted, but he does not have the time to take care of it. He quickly cleans himself in a basin of cold overnight water and dresses in the first set of robes that he spots. Once he's ready, he rings for Ilia and waits until the boy arrives.

"Is there anything I can help you with, my lord?" Ilia asks, bowing low.
"Please keep a watch over Victor for me," Yuuri asks from where he's pulling the bed sheets around his beloved carefully. "I would not wish for him to wake up alone after what's happened yesterday."

He hates leaving anyway. If it was someone else who asked for his presence he would surely decline, but... it isn't.

Yuuri presses one last kiss against the sleeping Victor's temple.

"If he asks for me, tell him that I went to speak with his mother," he tells Ilia.

"Is that wise, my lord?" the boy asks, worried. "Lord Nikiforov has made certain the two of you spend as little time together as possible. To seek her out now..."

"I am not doing this on a passing fancy, Ilia," Yuuri explains. "She sought me out just now, but... I think it is time that we spoke with each other honestly. She is his mother, after all."

The press of Ilia's lips is a clear indication of his hesitation, but he says not a word more to keep Yuuri from leaving. Yuuri, grateful as he is of the consideration, squeezes the boy's shoulder with a small smile.

"I will be well, worry not," he says, even if he isn't entirely certain of the truth in his words. "Keep an eye on His Lordship."

Ilia bows his head, mumbling a heavy "My lord," as Yuuri walks past him and out of the chambers. He knows the direction to the dining room from when Victor has first shown him around, yet it still takes him quite some time to get there. The room is spacious and grand, as all that is in the manor, but it is situated in a wing opposite to where Victor's quarters are.

The walking does Yuuri good, however. It clears his mind of the fear and nighttime worries, sharpens it into a sword that is meant to fight an enemy that is no longer unseen, but present and there – sitting at the high table when Yuuri enters through the golden doors.

"Ah, at last," Lady Nikiforova greets him. "Come, my dear, sit. You must be hungry after all that excitement yesterday."

She says it with as much nonchalance as one would expect from a noble lady the day after a ball, not her son's kidnapping from under her own roof, but Yuuri realizes in that moment that, indeed, he is starving. With all that's happened, food was the least of his worries, which is hardly any fault of his. Yet now, faced with platters on platters of delicacies...

Yuuri takes a seat next to Lady Nikiforova.

"Bon appétit," the lady says, smiling, "is what they say to wish for your food to taste well, but alas, we are Nikiforovs – all our food is already delicious. Dig in, Yuuri, no need to be shy."

Briefly, Yuuri wonders if she'd spare so much effort to encourage him to ingest poison. He discards the thought just as quickly, though. If Lady Nikiforova wanted him dead, she would not be caught sitting with him. The remnants of an unfinished biscuit and gravy on her plate are proof enough to Yuuri to deal away with the suspicion once and for all.

He picks a scone from the mountain of them in the centre of the table and tears into a half in one bite, so as to sooner sate his hunger. After all, facing enemies is always better done on a full stomach.
and here's what we've all been waiting for: tomorrow, you'll learn of the real scheme
lady nikiforova is setting into motion
who's excited? ;3c
"Tell me, Yuuri," Lady Nikiforova says as Yuuri chews on the fourth scone in a row. "Is my son fairing well?"

"What do you mean?" Yuuri asks, uncertain to what she alludes.

"I have heard of what happened yesterday," she explains. "He was taken from the library. You were with him, no? What's happened there, Yuuri? Will you please tell me?"

There is a crease on her forehead, which Yuuri cannot interpret. Whether it's worry or confusion, it is an expression that Yuuri cannot recognize, for he's never seen anything like it on her face before. It's confusing, to say the least, but Yuuri decides that whatever it might be, Lady Nikiforova is still Victor's mother and, thus, deserves to know.

"We were looking for a book," Yuuri starts. "And suddenly there was knocking on the library door. When I opened it, I received a fistful to the face and then another hit to the back of my head. I don't exactly know how Victor was taken, but when I woke up there was no doubt in my mind. So I went after him."

"And how, pray tell, did you find him?" Lady Nikiforova leans closer, curious. "I heard that you left the manor before the guards were even alerted, surely you must have known where it was they were taking Vitya, no?"

The brief panic at how to explain his extraordinary sense of smell comes to a halt as Yuuri narrows his eyes at the woman across from him.

"Are you suggesting I had something to do with this?" he asks, coldly. "That I was an accomplice to this madness?"

"Of course not! How could I, when you're the one who fought so valiantly for my son's sake?"

Lady Nikiforova smiles, but unlike during their first meeting, Yuuri can now see the fakeness of her smile. It's in her eyes, which do not match her easy smile, but bear into Yuuri with intense focus. Yuuri doubts it is simply because of her concern for her son's wellbeing.

"Say, Yuuri, has Vitya said anything about the attackers? Have you noticed anything in particular?" the lady asks. "Or maybe they mentioned something? About their employer, perhaps?"

"Not that I know of," Yuuri says. "Do you, my lady? You seem to be awfully invested in that topic?"

The smile on the lady's face sharpens faster than Yuuri can blink. She gives a laugh, a short bark of it that sounds far more menacing than anything she has done until then and Yuuri... Yuuri feels the hair on the back of his neck rise in alarm.

"Ah, Yuuri," Lady Nikiforova says, sitting back in her chair and watching him with an indulgent look on her noble face. "Let us drop the pretences then, shall we? You have been warned against
"Is there anything to warn against, my lady?" Yuuri asks back.

It is her chance to be true with him, to confess her plans, her intentions, but Lady Nikiforova only chuckles.

"You know very well that no one in this manor can stand me," she says, a bitter curl to her lips. "I will not hide that there is reason for it – ha! years of it, in fact! – but you must believe me when I say this: I have no reason to wish for Vitya's demise."

Yuuri does not hide his scepticism at her words. "Then why would anyone think that? Surely, there must be a reason for it, too."

"I will not deny that I haven't been the most loving mother, Yuuri," she says. "I have made mistakes, like any parent does. And maybe mine were less forgivable than others', but I have never wanted anything less for Vitya than what I think he is capable of. He could rule this world, if he wished to, don't you think, Yuuri?" She sits up and leans over to whisper to Yuuri: "Don't you think he could be the greatest? The richest? A king?"

Yuuri's breath is loud when he sucks it into his lungs in shock.

"That's treason, my lady, you shouldn't speak of such things," he urgently whispers back.

The lady only laughs. "Of course, of course, you're right! Forgive me, my dear. I simply wished to know your opinion and I believe that now I do, no?"

Yuuri hesitates on what to say then. Truth be, he has always perceived Victor as someone who could very well be the wealthiest man in their realm. The most powerful, too, for even a fool knows that gold can get you everything and bring you everywhere. But a king... Yuuri could never think that.

"How could he ever become what you suggest?" he asks. Was there a secret still that has not been divulged to him? "Is... is Victor of the royal bloodline?"

Lady Nikiforova smiles whilst she shakes her head.

"Such innocent thinking," she says. "No, my dear. There is not a drop of royal blood in my son, I'm afraid." She pauses, and then adds: "Well, apart from that distant relation to the Plisetskys who are a cousin line to the Leroys, but alas, not the right way to the crown for our beloved Vitya."

"Then how...?" Yuuri begins, but oh. He realizes how. And it fills him with raw fear. "You cannot possibly mean--"

"No, not yet," Lady Nikiforova interrupts. "Not before I can gain enough support, make a plan. Not before we convince Vitya to agree."

"We?"

The fear that has been burning in his chest slides down to his stomach and turns into a brick of ice so cold that he feels like he will be sick. Never in his wildest imaginations did Yuuri envision this: a revolution, a coup, a plot to replace the current king with the man he loves for who he is and not what he has accomplished or what he might still accomplish.

"If you will help me, I believe we might succeed," Lady Nikiforova adds. "My son seems to lend you his ear more willingly than he does to all others, after all. You could... guide him towards the
right way of thinking, let's say."

Trapped and ill from his woes, Yuuri stands up on shaky legs. The chair legs scrape over the marbled floors and the very sound of it brings gooseflesh to Yuuri's arms.

"No," he says. And because no other words seem to be making sense to him at this moment, he repeats it: "No."

Without acknowledging anything else, he turns on his heel and runs – runs out of the dining room, up the stars and away, back to the bedchamber where the man he has promised his heart to sleeps unawares of the great plan brewing behind his back.

A plan to sit a man of gold on the royal throne.

Chapter End Notes

;3c

also, happy birthday CreativeSweets!! <3
Before Victor even opens his eyes, he feels the emptiness inside him. There is no Yuuri underneath him, no Yuuri beside him, and no Yuuri inside him when Victor wakes up. He doesn't dwell on it, however, because a trickle of Yuuri's seed dribbles out the moment Victor rolls to his side – he feels it as if a tickling of a feather on the mound of his ass and the sensation makes him shiver with part remnant pleasure and part disgust.

All would be well, all would be fine, if Yuuri was there to help him clean up. To hold him and kiss him... But he isn't.

"My lord," Victor hears instead and once he turns his head, he spots Ilia bowed by the bedside. "Good day, my lord. I hope you had a restful sleep."

"Mm," Victor mumbles, not fully aware yet. "Where's Yuuri?"

"The Lady asked to see him, my lord," the servant says. "He left half an hour ago."

That's all it takes for Victor to instantly sit up, alert and afeared. His backside pangs with hurt against the sudden movement and Victor hisses at the sting that is far worse than he imagined it to be the night before, but he ignores it all – Yuuri is more important now.

"What did you just say?" Victor asks.

And Ilia repeats himself: "He went to speak with the Lady, my lord."

Wrapping a sheet around his waist to preserve some of his dignity, Victor climbs to his feet. Albeit unsteady, he plans to walk all the way through the manor to save Yuuri, but, alas, it seems that his sacrifice shan't be required, for at that very thought the doors to the bedchamber are opened and Yuuri strolls inside, safe and sound.

Or he seems so at first glance, because the longer Victor looks at him, the more he recognizes the panic and fear on Yuuri's pale, stricken face.

"Yuuri," he calls, holding onto the bed frame for balance.

Yuuri jumps, spooked, and Victor's heart jumps with him: straight to his throat where it sits like a stone that he cannot swallow. Before Victor can take a step towards him like he so badly wishes to, Yuuri is at his side. The concern in his eyes is blown wide enough to be considered manic and Victor startles when Yuuri's hands grip him at the arms with just a little too much strength.

"Oh no, I hoped I'd be back before you woke up. I'm so sorry, Vitya, I should have been here to help you. Are you quite alright? Should you be walking around just yet? Come on, sit, let me help," Yuuri says, words tumbling out of his mouth so fast that Victor has trouble following them.

It does not give him the time, however, to worry about the needling pain that rushes up his spine with every shift of his hips. Between Yuuri's rushed words and the knowledge that he has just been with his mother, there are other, more important things that swirl around Victor's mind and all it takes is
one look at Yuuri to confirm Victor's belief that something is simply not right.

"What did she want?" Victor asks. Yuuri's nervousness seems to be seeping into Victor from where their skin touches and he feels himself growing as panicked as his beloved. "What did she want with you, Yuuri? Tell me, please. I will have her thrown out of here with barely a cloth over her back if she'd done anything to you, I swear--"

"No!" Yuuri shouts and, startled by his own loudness, repeats in a much more hushed voice: "No, no, don't do that. I-- I'm well. She's not done anything. We just, we just spoke. Nothing more."

To hear that does not quell Victor's worries. In fact, it only makes him feel weaker and he collapses onto the bed, which sends another bout of blind pain up his spine.

"What did she say?" he asks despite it. The need to know is more pressing than any pain could ever be. He clutches onto Yuuri's forearm, desperate and afeared. "What did she say, Yuuri?"

Yuuri does not answer him instantly. He sends Ilia away first, orders to bring warm water and a fresh set of clothes. It is once the doors close behind the boy that Yuuri takes a seat next to Victor and finally deigns to tell him:

"I do not wish to keep more secrets from you, Vitya, I do not. But this one, I don't-- I don't want you to know. You shouldn't. For your own safety and good health."

"For my--" Victor starts. "What about your safety? What about your good health? Yuuri, surely you cannot mean to bear all of this alone! I can see how bothered you are by whatever she's told you. Please, my dear heart," he tries, sliding his hand to Yuuri's and locking their fingers together in a show of support and unity, "let me bear this burden along your side."

But Yuuri does not give into Victor's plea. He bows his head and looks at their joined hands for a long time, before he answers.

"It is not your burden to bear," he says.

The words are simple, but the pain they invoke is more severe than any wound that could ever be inflicted upon Victor's body. He feels breathless with it, stricken, as if someone backhanded him across his very soul.

"Yuuri--"

"I'm sorry, Vitya," Yuuri interrupts him, only then lifting his eyes to look at him.

There is a plea in Yuuri's brown gaze, a fear and a determination, too -- all of it combined into something so compelling, Victor cannot say a word against it.

"Please," Yuuri says, "don't make me say it. Trust me and allow me to handle this matter alone."

Victor realizes that he could press Yuuri for answers and that, with enough effort behind it, Yuuri would crack open and spill his secrets, but Victor does not choose that. He would never. Yuuri's trust is worth more to him, and as Yuuri asks for it now, Victor elects to give it to him openly, even if worry and fear hold him in their grip as if they were never to let go.

However, Yuuri's hand holds him just as tight and far more preciously. And it's that hand that Victor rests his heart in once more.

"Very well," he agrees. "But at least tell me this: are you feeling well, my love? You look so
frightened, so pale."

The shaky breath is not reassuring at all and neither is Yuuri's weak smile.

"I am not," Yuuri says. "But I will be. I hope. I just– I think–"

Victor squeezes Yuuri's hand and lifts it up to press it, and that hope, against his lips in a kiss that he, too, hopes may help – at least some.

"I was wondering," Yuuri starts again, shifting closer. He looks expectant, hopeful, and Victor already knows that whatever it is he asks will be given to him at once, when Yuuri proposes: "Would you be terribly inconvenienced if we took a holiday at my parents' cottage? I, I believe it could serve us all well. Give us time to recuperate after..."

He does not finish, but he needs not to. Unexpected as the proposal is, predictable its result as Victor knew it'd be, he finds himself to be quite eager to accept, which he then does with smile and a nod, and a soft "That sounds lovely, let's do it," that earns him a true, albeit shaken still, smile from Yuuri.

And, faced with that, Victor can tell that Yuuri is right – they could all use the time away from the manor and its insidious occupants. Oh yes.

Chapter End Notes

say it with me: YUURI YOU DUMBASS WHAT TF ARE YOU DOING
but also: thank fuck they're finally leaving I've had enough of this house maybe they will just never return--

yeah right
"Tomorrow," Yuuri says right before Ilia returns with a fresh basin of warm water. "We'll leave tomorrow. For today you should rest and I will take care of all preparations, don't you worry a thing."

Victor doesn't know entirely what to say, but it seems to be unnecessary to say anything at all. Yuuri gives him a smile, squeezes his hand and lists all manners of things to Ilia who dutifully bounces away to carry the orders through.

It's actually amusing, and part impressive, to watch Yuuri exude such an aura of authority. Victor doesn't remember when the last time he's seen this was, but as he sits on the edge of the bed he feels like something wonderful is happening before his eyes. The only thing that mars this beautiful spectacle is the reason for it, and those are two: his own mother and the failed kidnapping.

That thought brings out cold hives onto Victor's bare skin. He shivers violently, sick to his stomach. All of a sudden the amusement is gone, replaced by the nasty memories of rough hands, pain and fear... so much fear that Victor gags with it.

He's been trying so hard not to think of what's happened, to distract himself any way he could – first with worrying for Yuuri, then with intimacy, then with worrying about Yuuri once more... The trip Yuuri has suggested seems like a most opportune blessing, but as Victor is now, he does not wish to be left alone at his mind's mercy, so he speaks up.

"Let me help at least with packing, my love," he says, moving to stand up. At once, however, Yuuri is at his side, sitting him down again. Victor goes, but he does so with a small huff of annoyance. "I feel like a helpless old man. Do not coddle me like this, I am not that hurt."

"You might not be," Yuuri agrees, "but I still want to give you time to recuperate, because I love you and I wish to spoil you today. Will you deny me, my Vitya?"

Oh, that smile. Victor can never resist it. Yuuri could manipulate him into the worst of offences and, given a single loving smile like the one that graces Yuuri's lips now, Victor would say yes to all.

"I cannot deny you anything, for all that I have and all that I wish is always yours, my sweet Yuuri," he says and sighs. "But I fear that my mind is bound to wander while you are busy with preparations and I am hesitant to allow it."

Yuuri lifts one of Victor's hands to his lips and rests a kiss against it.

"Then I shall stay by your side and keep you company through it all," he says. "We can give out orders from the bed, after all. Whatever you need today, Vitya, it is yours – you only need to ask. Except for walking around too much, that I will not oblige."

Victor does not need to be told twice. "Then join me in bed for a while, my love. Hold me some, so I can think only of your arms wrapped around me and nothing else."

"Of course, Vitya," Yuuri agrees. "Just one moment."
He stands up, but not before giving Victor a kiss to reassure him that he will be back. Victor watches him cross the room to where Yuuri's bag, the one he's brought with him from his parents' home, sits in a drawer. While Victor climbs into bed and rests against the pillows, fighting against the brief sting of his backside, Yuuri rummages through his belongings. Finally, he produces a little bottle and takes a quick swig from it.

"What is that?" Victor asks, too curious for his own good.

"A calming draught. For my nerves," Yuuri answers with a grimace. "It tastes awful, though. I hate it."

A shiver visibly wrecks through his body, but he does not complain further. He corks back the bottle and closes the drawer. On his way over he discards the outer robe, which he throws over the chest at the foot of the bed. It's only then that Victor notices it's his own robe and the thought of Yuuri dressing in his clothes to, maybe, possibly, feel safer wrapped in Victor's scent... it makes warmth pleasantly swirl in Victor's belly.

"So how is it truly that you feel?" Yuuri asks once he settles down next to Victor, who wastes no time in burrowing himself in his chest. "How is your back?"

Victor hums. "Not as terrible as you make it out to be. But, also, not as great as I believed I should be."

"I'm sorry," Yuuri whispers at that. A soft kiss is rested against Victor's head to mark the apology, even if none was ever needed. "It's my fault for not fighting you harder on this."

"Hardly. I wanted it badly and you simply indulged my desperate begging. There is no fault of yours here, my love," Victor tells him, but he knows that Yuuri has not been convinced.

It's simply who Yuuri is: a man who bears all burdens on his own shoulders while all his heart is given away to strangers and no room in it is spared to give forgiveness to his own mistakes. Unless he can repair those mistakes somehow...

"If you wish to make up for it, my Yuuri then... here." Victor takes Yuuri's hand and guides it to a low spot of his spine where the pain seems to burn the most. "Rub this spot for me. It might ease the pain some."

"I'd be happy to," Yuuri says and even before he is done speaking, his fingers begin to press into Victor's skin. It feels soothing, a little painful, but it is good pain, Victor thinks as he sighs into Yuuri's chest. "Any other spots that are aching?"

"No, but I am rather chill," Victor complains and, soon, a golden cover is tucked over him. He cannot help his smile at Yuuri's tenderness. "Thank you, my love."

Yuuri only kisses Victor's head again, but that is as good a reply as any Victor could've wished for. He breathes in deep and closes his eyes. The chamber is quiet, at least for now, and Victor can hear the heartbeat fluttering in Yuuri's chest, his breathing, and the soft rustle of the fabric where Yuuri's hand keeps moving as he rubs Victor's back.

If he were in a different mood, Victor could have said that maybe getting kidnapped was worth it, if it got him such royal treatment. But, alas, he is not is such a mood. In the one he is, he is simply glad to be safely back in Yuuri's arms, and yet something dark swirls around his heart and seeps to it like poison.

And no amount of sweet kisses and Yuuri's tender caresses can ever chase it away, Victor knows.
Not this time.

Chapter End Notes

ok so here is the stopping point from which we will start the weekly updates! next chapter will be up in a week, my friends! I hope you will stick around with this story and I promise that as soon as I get a grip on the other things I need to do in the next few weeks I will be back with daily updates <3
**Chapter 128**

Chapter Notes

wow is anyone else feeling super weird coming back here bc it's only been a week but it feels like AGES???? o.O

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Despite the soothing ministrations of Yuuri's hand, Victor does not give into slumber. He can't, whatever the reason for it might be, and once Ilia returns to inform them that the kitchens were instructed to prepare the food for the journey, the stables are tending to the horses and the maids are ironing out the robes, Victor gives up on trying and opens his eyes.

Everything is too bright all at once, so he hides his face in Yuuri's chest yet again. It is a good choice, for Yuuri drops a kiss into the crown of Victor's head. It's a warm, loving gesture that Victor smiles at, but his smile remains as hidden as his face – pressed right against Yuuri's precious heart.

"Should I have anything else prepared, my lords?" Ilia asks, but Victor does not reply. He leaves it all to Yuuri, who steps into the role he wasn't born for, yet masters without a struggle. It makes Victor quite proud to witness it with a swell of satisfaction that runs deeper than simple reassurance that Yuuri would be a wonderful life companion.

"A light meal," Yuuri asks. His hand does not stop stroking Victor's back and his voice is a soft rumble above his head, comforting. "Something easy on the palate, not too fatty. And warm wine."

"Right away, my lord," the servant bows and retreats.

"Hungry?" Victor asks, realizing that he is so himself. They have not eaten at all since... the morning before, Victor counts, startled.

"We will both need strength to ride tomorrow," Yuuri explains. He hesitates briefly and runs his fingers down Victor's spine. "Although... will you be able to ride? Maybe we should take a carriage, even if it will take far longer to travel."

"The bumping alone would make the pain doubly, if not triply worse," Victor winces at the very thought of long days spent in a carriage. "Not to mention how suffocating it is inside in the heat. I'd much rather take to the saddle. But worry not, my Yuuri, I will be well by tomorrow. I am in good hands, after all, aren't I?"

Smiling, Victor tips his head up. His wordless plea for a kiss is met with Yuuri's lips, but as Victor endeavours to deepen the kiss, Yuuri withdraws from him. Victor blinks in confusion for a second or two before he turns his eyes to Yuuri for answers. What he is met with is a sweetly apologetic smile and guilt-ridden warm, brown eyes.

"The brew I drank earlier," Yuuri explains, and indeed, Victor notes that his breath smells a tad peculiar. "It would be best if you did not come into direct contact with it."
He must see the befuddlement on Victor's face, for he hastily adds: "Some of the ingredients can be dangerous if you don't have healing powers like mine. I would not wish to put you in any more discomfort than I already have."

Whether Yuuri aimed to placate Victor or not, he failed at it spectacularly and Victor's worry must sound as clear to Yuuri's ears as it does to his own when he asks:

"What ingredients could there be in a calming draught that require healing powers?"

"I--" Yuuri starts, but he takes one look at Victor, one gaze into his eyes, and gives: "It's a nightshade concoction, Vitya. It's partially poison."

"And you drink it willingly?"

The worry that has been burning around Victor's heart reaches for his throat and turns his voice into a high pitched squeak. In the face of such admission, how could it not? Victor lifts himself onto an elbow, regardless of the discomfort of his lower body, and peers down at Yuuri, whose expression is pinched with his own uneasiness at the chosen topic.

"It does its intended purpose, Vitya," Yuuri says, however patient. "I do not drink it often, but only when I need to. And only as much as I need to, no more. I know the risk. Trust me, I do not take my healing abilities for granted. Much like you have lived with your golden touch your entire life, so did I, and I know where my limits lie."

There is reason in what Yuuri speaks, but the worry is still palpable in Victor's gaze. He cannot help it: to hear that the man you love poisons himself every now and then is as if to hear that you may lose him without knowing when – any day, any hour, unexpectedly.

It puts raw fear in Victor's heart.

"I," he starts, "I trust you, my Yuuri, of course I do. I just... It terrifies me to think that you are hurting yourself like this."

"Not hurting," Yuuri shakes his head. He offers Victor a small smile, which does as much to soothe Victor's heart as any of Yuuri's smiles could. "It doesn't hurt. It only numbs the senses a little so that the panic and pain, if there is such, can be easily ignored. It's a well practiced recipe, Vitya, I am in no danger, I promise."

And because Victor cannot abide the thought that he could be, he chooses to believe in those words instead. Unable to kiss Yuuri the way he wants to, Victor brings a hand up and guides their foreheads together. Their noses touch, breaths mingle, and the intimacy is conveyed, but even still, Victor follows it with more.

"I trust you, my love," he says. "I trust you with my whole life, my heart, my gold. And so, I will trust you to know what is best for yourself, too."

Yuuri's eyes widen at his admission, warm and perfect. It only lasts a moment before they mellow down and flutter shut, a tender caress of Yuuri's thick lashes against Victor's own.

"Thank you," Yuuri whispers. "You don't know how much it means to me to hear you say that."

Victor smiles softly, but because Yuuri cannot see it, he rubs their noses together. Brown eyes open to him once more as if called back by the gesture and it's in them that Victor sees Yuuri's smile, too.

"I trust you as well," Yuuri tells him then. "More than anyone. And, possibly, more than it's wise."
Victor cannot help the chuckle that rises up his throat at that, because Yuuri speaks true.

"Then we are both fools, my love," he replies, resting another kiss on Yuuri's lips which still smile at him as he does.

And it feels right.

Chapter End Notes

yuuri: so I poison myself recreationally--
victor: what the fuck yuuri are you okay
me: //smoking a cigarette
me: ANYWAY

see yall next week ;3c
They spend the day in bed: talking, lazy, in love with each other and the world.

Yuuri does not speak of what matters he and Lady Alisa touched upon when they spoke, and Victor does not ask. He can feel Yuuri tense up every now and then once he gets lost in thought, but all it takes is a caress of Victor's hand to bring him back — and he does come back, with a smile and a kiss pressed to Victor's forehead as if in protection or apology... For what, however, Victor does not know, yet he is certain that should he ask, Yuuri would not be willing to tell him.

So he doesn't.

It's a little bit suspicious, but Victor has learned to trust his gut over the years and what his gut is telling him now is to trust Yuuri and wait for him to open up. To meet him with love and acceptance once he does.

Instead, Victor asks what Yuuri wishes to do once they make it to the little cottage beyond the Belt Woods.

"Just rest," Yuuri says with a wistful curl to his lips. "A lot has happened since I left home and... it would be nice to simply sit back and think of nothing for once, don't you agree?"

"I do, yes," Victor replies then. "No watchful eyes, no spies, no one to pretend before. Added to that, your mother's fabulous cooking? What else could a man want?"

Yuuri's laughter is a soft thing in Victor's ear. "I'm sure she will be happy to see you again as well."

The servants come and go, asking this or that, but Yuuri handles it all while Victor simply lounges around on his chest like one of those harlots that the nobles are so fond of keeping. As he does so, Victor thinks he would not exactly mind being one. If, of course, Yuuri was his noble keeper, that is. After all, Victor is far from the type of man to easily submit his free will to others, but to his Yuuri? He would do so without having been asked.

"Thinking deep thoughts?" Yuuri asks just as the doors close after a maid who came to receive confirmation on supper. "Care to share with me, my Vitya?"

Warmth blossoms over Victor's heart at the name that now passes through Yuuri's lips easy as breathing. It's lovely, the sound of it, and Victor basks in it like he basks in Yuuri's attention.

"Just thinking about you, my love," he says back. "About how lucky I am to have met you."

Yuuri offers him a brilliant smile. "So am I, you ought to know that."

"I do," Victor admits, pleased by it beyond belief. "I surely do. You keep telling me that whenever I confess my admiration for you, after all."

Yuuri's laugh is a little sheepish as if he was caught red-handed at mischief. Victor allows a grin to stretch his cheeks, too.
"I keep stealing your moments, aren't I?" Yuuri asks. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Victor answers easily. "I love hearing you say it, too. And I love... well, I love everything about you, my darling Yuuri. You can steal whatever you want that is mine, because it all belongs to you anyway."

Yuuri remains silent for a second, before he snorts gently into Victor's hair, where he is hiding his face.

"Is it really stealing if it's mine already?" he asks, and Victor realizes the reason for his mirth. He chuckles as well, warm in the arms that Yuuri has wrapped around him.

"Well then," he says, "There is no need to be sorry in that case. What's mine is yours, my love."

Yuuri only kisses his head in a reply. He's been overtly indulgent the entire day and hardly be it in Victor to complain, oh no, but the fact remains – it is unusual. And Victor knows the reason for it. How could he not, when the back of his mind is wrapped in darkness that only Yuuri's presence keeps at bay?

He shudders to think of what the night could bring, but thankfully, it is still a few hours away. Yuuri's hand sliding down his back is a good enough distraction and Victor allows himself to enjoy the caress.

"How are you feeling?" Yuuri asks, gentle as always.

"Mostly healed, I believe," Victor says truthfully. He shifts his legs and the pain is only minimal, something that will surely go away overnight. "Could I stay in bed with you for all my ails, my love, I would never complain about it again."

"As long as you'll want me here, I will be," Yuuri tells him with a smile.

"Unless, of course, you get ill first. Then I will be by your side for whatever you need," Victor returns, but Yuuri shakes his head at him.

"You already were, remember? That day when we swam in the lake?"

"Oh, that!" With a smile Victor recalls the day and Yuuri's impressive dive off of Lamorak's back. "It seems like it was so long ago, but it couldn't have been more than a few weeks, could it?"

"Not even a month," Yuuri confirms, wonder in his voice. "But I feel the same way. It feels as if... as if we were always together."

He seems to catch himself before saying something else. A tender pink blossoms on his cheeks, maybe from shame, maybe embarrassment, and maybe something else. Victor takes it in with adoring eyes, regardless of what it is, because to him it's one thing and one thing only – beautiful.

"I apologize, that was a silly thing to say," Yuuri follows.

"No, my love, it wasn't. I feel much the same," Victor confesses softly, watching how Yuuri's face melts into warmth to match his own. "It's mysterious how it works, no? Love. We have only just met, it seems, but I feel like I have adored you for a lot longer."

"As if..." Yuuri licks his lips, a nervous tick that Victor fully adores. "As if we were meant to be?"

"Yes," Victor agrees.
There is something in Yuuri's eyes, soft, yet red, that shines from within his soul and Victor wonders if it is that, if it's Yuuri's soul calling out to his own – its other half.

"As if we were meant to be," he repeats. "Do you truly believe that, my Yuuri?"

"I can't help it," Yuuri admits. "I was drawn to you from the first moment, and maybe it was simply curiosity at first, maybe it was silly infatuation, but... I don't think so. You see, I was never interested in people this way. I never bothered. But you, you made me want to be bothered. I believe there must be more to it than simple attraction, but even if there isn't... I would choose you, still, Vitya. I would always choose you."

Clumsy as his words are, they take Victor's breath away.

"I love you," Victor simply says, because he cannot think of any other way to answer a confession like that. "I love you with my whole heart, my Yuuri."

Carefully, he presses his lips to Yuuri's and repeats the words once more against them. And Yuuri, his sweet, kind Yuuri, he smiles into the kiss and whispers it back, because he has made a choice that matches Victor's – a choice to stay, a choice to love.

Chapter End Notes

yes hello this is your neighbourhood soulmate au lover speaking and I have an announcement:

THINGS ARE NEVER WHAT THEY SEEM

also thank you all so much for your support guys, I'm so grateful to have you sticking around still <3 this odd schedule is so hard on all of us but I'm sure we can power through this and get back to the exciting things soon! love ya <3
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Yuuri feeds Victor off his plate, small bites passed in his fingers, which makes Victor feel spoiled: spoiled and so good, so warm that he feels full just from being indulged like so. The wine is brought to his lips in a goblet that Yuuri hands him carefully. It's aromatic and soothing, and Victor sips on it before releasing a happy sigh that is only partially caused by the delight of the food.

"I think I should get incapacitated like this more often," Victor says lightly once Yuuri sets the tray away. "I enjoy how much you spoil me."

"Don't even think about it," Yuuri tells him sternly. "Your health is far more important than this." Just when Victor is about to pout at the clear dismissal in Yuuri's voice, Yuuri gives him a little smile and adds: "But, if you like it so much, I wouldn't mind spoiling you more often. That is, without you being injured in away way, shape or form."

"Would you really?" Victor asks, unable to keep his grin a secret.

"Always," Yuuri answers. "You only need to ask, my Vitya."

"Then spoil me now, my love," Victor demands.

He throws his arms around Yuuri, pulling him closer. Yuuri goes where he wants him without a single word of complaint. He is still dressed, while Victor is naked, and the coarse material of his outer robe rubs against Victor's bare skin. It is not an awful feeling altogether, Victor must admit. But as he arches against Yuuri to feel more, Yuuri gently backs away.

"We should rest tonight," he says as if he knows Victor's intentions were more than pure. "There is a long road before us tomorrow. We wouldn't want to be too tired to be forced to take the carriage, would we?"

The very mention of the infernal thing makes Victor grimace.

"You sure know how to ruin the mood, sweetheart," Victor says to which Yuuri only laughs.

His laughter is followed by a kiss pressed to Victor's cheek and all bad humour disappears as soon as Yuuri's lips touch Victor's skin. It's magic, he knows, it's love.

Thinking of it, wrapped in Yuuri's arms, which seep safety and calm into Victor's tired limbs, Victor gives into slumber soon. He dreams, however – a thing that rarely occurs to him and which he finds weary and upsetting every time, because the content of his dreams is never pleasant.

Neither is it this time.

He doesn't see the faces, doesn't see the people, but he feels hands all over him. They touch, tug, pull on him, and like a ragdoll he is thrown here and there by the force of the crowd that is one with the darkness that surrounds him. He doesn't hear voices, only their breathing. It fills his ears, the darkness, and soon calls forth another music: his speeding heartbeat, as it rises into his throat when the nails begin to rake his skin.
The anger inside him that was borne of such treatment turns into fear. Victor hisses and trashes against the hold, but the hands are relentless. They grip him harshly, tear at him, rip apart his clothes.

He cannot run, cannot escape.

They will tear him apart, too, he knows. Limb by limb. Arm, shoulder, leg...

He doesn't feel the pain, but he knows when it happens: the dark world around him bursts into red all of a sudden as if the sun shone brilliant crimson and--

It's then that he wakes up.

The red lingers across his vision, bleeds like the blood he has seen so much of only the day before, but Victor blinks and blinks again until he realizes that the only red he sees is the soft hue of the flames in the fireplace and the reflection of them in Yuuri's concerned eyes.

"I'm alright," he says, partially to quell Yuuri's worry and partially to convince himself. "It was simply a bad dream, that's all."

Yuuri nods, as if he expected it all along, and opens his arms for Victor to nestle in. Victor accepts without a second thought and only once he's wrapped in Yuuri – safe, he's safe, he won't ever be safer – does he notice that his entire body is shaking. Yuuri is still, a rock that Victor presses himself against to regain composure, but it's a hard thing to do when Yuuri drops a tender kiss against his forehead.

"You're safe, my love," Yuuri reassures. "I will not allow anyone to hurt you ever again. I promise."

And Victor trusts him. He always will, he's sure.

Even so, he cannot seem to fall asleep once again. Just on the verge of slumber, his body recalls the sensation of hands, the scratch of the nails, the sound of dislocating joints, and he snaps his eyes back open, breathing uneven.

"You're safe," Yuuri whispers to him then, awake and watchful.

He seems not to have gotten a wink of sleep, choosing instead to guard over Victor. The thought makes guilt swell in Victor's heart, much like it has when he first saw Yuuri's wound. Yuuri should be as tired as Victor himself, if not more, but here he is: standing watch over him to ensure that Victor is safe, that he can sleep.

Tears sting at Victor's eyes at one time and he buries his face in Yuuri's chest so as not to let him see. Because Victor knows that if he does, Yuuri will be even more worried, more concerned and... Victor has already been trouble enough.

"I love you, my Vitya," Yuuri whispers. His hand gently cards through Victor's hair, soft, soothing. "I love you, my sweet. You're safe. You're safe, my love, I promise."

It's to those words that Victor falls asleep, or so he thinks, yet he doesn't remember falling into slumber. He must have, though, for when the new morn breaks, he opens his eyes only to realize that time has gone without his notice.

Yuuri is still awake when Victor glances at him. Dark shadows of exhaustion have found home under his beautiful eyes, but he offers Victor a smile once their eyes meet, nonetheless. It's not a particularly bright smile, nor is it happy. It's simply a smile: hopeful, comforting, a little hello that is not voiced with words.
Victor, however, cannot bring one to his own lips.

Yet, he doesn't need to. Yuuri lifts off his pillow and presses his smile to Victor's mouth. It's a tentative kiss, tender, and Victor gives back one alike it.

"You didn't change your mind about going?" Yuuri asks once they part and, mutely, Victor shakes his head. "Good. Let's go then."

And that they do. After a quick breakfast, they dress for riding, take the few necessities they will need on their way and leave – just two men, alone on a journey to nowhere, unaware of the eyes following them from the top window of the manor.

Chapter End Notes

I know I've been really shitty about answering comments recently and I'm so sorry for that guys, you don't even know how awful those unanswered comments make me feel bc I feel your enthusiasm and I want to reply, but god I'm so busy with this bang fic I'm writing that I don't have any time for other things at all orz (and the fic is only ever getting longer and longer, I've been writing for a month and it grew from 9 chapters to 15 in the span of like 3 days KILL ME NOW GVKBJIKM)

I'm so sorry guys ;u; I will have a hectic september bc real life will be making a dramatic appearance so I'm not sure when I'll be able to get back full-time but I can promise you that updates will definitely be a weekly things for a while still. I'm really sorry again and thank you so much for your continued support, I'm so lucky to have you all <3
The fire is softly crackling before them, but Yuuri has no eyes for it. His gaze is focused on Victor, who has curled himself on the ground to sleep. They talked little about the kidnapping and the men who took him, but Yuuri respected Victor's wish to keep up the normalcy of their days. He has resolved himself not to breach the subject until Victor was ready to speak to him of his own will, whenever that may come.

Truth be, though, Yuuri worries for him.

Victor might not wish to speak of it, but Yuuri can see the heaviness in the slope of his shoulders. He can feel the tremble in Victor's body when he embraces him, the breathless stillness when he rests a kiss against Victor's skin.

It's terrifying, to think that Victor reacts like this to him: to Yuuri, who only wishes to love and protect him. Yuuri would be lying if he claimed that Victor's unconscious reactions did not hurt. They do. There is no fault of Victor's in it, however, so Yuuri does not dwell on it. He forgives and forgets, and strives to regain Victor's trust.

"I feel them," Victor whispers on the third day of their journey.

The sky is dark, cloudy, and there is not even a star in sight. The only light is the fire before them and the way it lights up Victor's blue eyes is strange, wondrous, and also... fearful. Yuuri wishes to wrap his arms around him, but he hesitates to do so.

"Their hands," Victor continues as his own clench tightly together in his lap. "I can feel them tugging at me when I sleep. Ripping me apart."

"It won't happen again," Yuuri tells him then. "I will keep you safe, Vitya."

"I know," Victor breathes. Nods. "I know you will, my love. I just... I just wish you could save me from my dreams as well."

His lips quirk in a little bitter smile that Yuuri wishes to never see again, too. It pains him quite a bit to be unable to help him in this hard time, but there is nothing he can do except to be there, to listen. Somehow, that seems even harder than facing the four armed men has proven to be.

"One of them was educated," Victor says as they camp on the other side of the Belt Woods. "Or, at least he must have been among the nobility often enough, because his accent was proper."

Curious, Yuuri asks: "Can you place it? Maybe that could give us a clue as to who was behind it?"

"He mentioned a lady. A noblewoman."

Victor bites his lip then. He doesn't look at Yuuri, but stares intently into the fire as he tries to divine who that could be.

"My first thought, of course, is my mother, but why would they be taking me away from the manor"
then? It doesn't exactly make sense. She could've confined me inside under guard, if she truly wished to capture me."

Yuuri takes a gulp of nightshade, the last that's in the bottle, but it's more than alright because they will be home the next day. It makes him shudder, from the taste and the burning as it goes down. He throws the empty bottle into the fire and watches it melt as he thinks back to his last meeting with Lady Nikiforova.

Could the woman be so shrewd as to imprison the son she wanted crowned king? To what end? To control him? To ensure he'd do her bidding without complaint?

In all her scheming, Yuuri believes she knows her own son better than to believe he'd bow his neck to heartless oppression like that.

"No, I don't think it was your mother," Yuuri says and once Victor gives him a surprised look, he adds, flushing: "I spoke with her after we returned to the manor, remember? I-- I don't think she would do that."

"I will not press you to tell me what the two of you talked about, but tell me this, my love," Victor says, reaching for Yuuri's hand, "can you be sure?"

Yuuri shakes his head. "I can't say for certain, but I can find no motive for her to do so."

"Or maybe that is just what she wants us to be so confused about," Victor adds with a heavy sigh. "I abhor all these schemes. She thirsts for power so badly that she won't think twice about making me suffer, which could be motive enough. And she would have ample opportunity to pay off the guards to stand down and watch it all happen."

The logs in the fire crack loudly.

"The guards?" Yuuri repeats.

Victor's words stir something inside him. Of course! If the guards were paid off to allow entry to the kidnappers, if the servants were told to look the other way, then the lack of worry or care that Yuuri had seen in the people of the manor would be fully explained. But, alas, could Lady Nikiforova really have done it?

"And you believe your mother did it?" Yuuri asks again. "That she paid the guards to let the men inside, and... and maybe to be late to follow after you so that the kidnapping succeeds?"

"Who else could have enough gold and sway over them?" Victor asks back. "She has always wanted to chain me down in the manor and keep me as her reassurance of good fortune. It would not surprise me if she indeed swooped so low as to hire some ruffians to get what she wants, yet still keep her hands clean if need be."

"But the guards," Yuuri presses, "shouldn't they be loyal to you? You're their lord, their master!"

Victor gives Yuuri a saddened smile that does not reach his pained, blue eyes. "Sometimes, even that is not enough, my love."

Yuuri says nothing to that, because there is nothing that can be said. Loyalty, honour – those are the most admired qualities in people, but so rarely found. It seems that even nobles had their own troubles distinguishing between those who they can trust and those who only answer to the highest bidder.
"Then what," Yuuri swallows hard, "what should we do? Are... Will we return to the manor, after? If everyone there is under your mother's influence then is it safe at all to stay there?"

"It isn't," Victor simply says.

He turns his head to Yuuri and the light from the fireplace bathes one half of his face while the other, submerged in the shadow of the night, smiles at him grimly.

"Why do you think I left there?"

Even if Yuuri knows the reason, he cannot help but feel that they will return. Victor is the Lord of Snowberry Estate. He needs to be there, regardless of the danger and scheming that awaits him there, and he knows it, which is exactly why he has settled there after his father's death. And, as Yuuri takes Victor's hand and twines their fingers together, he decides to stand by him.

Because where Victor goes, he'll follow. For as long as Victor wants him at his side; forever.

Chapter End Notes

my poor babies ;u; they need a hug ;u;
I hope you all are doing better than vitya and yuuri and... there will be an announcement next week!
Before they regain a good footing as they descend from horseback, the doors to the cottage are thrown open and Yuuri's mother bumbles through them, her full face sweet and smiling.

"Yuuri!" she greets.

She hasn't changed much, Yuuri notes as he takes her in. Silly of him to think that a month could change anything visibly. Hiroko Katsuki is still full of life, still kind and open. It seems like nothing much has happened in the little cottage on the west side of the Belt Woods, but when Yuuri steps through the threshold into the house after greeting his mother, he realizes that it has.

The small dining room, which used to be filled with straw for his father's rope weaving and linens for his mother's sewing now looks much the same, and yet different. It looks harsher, poorer. Less comfortable than Yuuri remembers it, less warm and more harsh, cold, unwelcoming... Or maybe it's just Yuuri who is different. Maybe the life he's seen while he was away opened his eyes to more things than he ever believed he'd see as he sat in this chair by the crackling fire, weaving rope with his father.

"Come in, come in," Yuuri's mother ushers a smiling Victor through the door. "I was not expecting you back so soon, but I must say I am very happy to see you."

"We're delighted to be here," Victor answers in a voice just as sweet. "Are you certain we will be no trouble if we stay a few days? I'd hate to impose on you all, and so suddenly at that."

"Nonsense, my dear. We are delighted to have you anytime. There is no imposing among family, don't you worry a thing." She smiles and pats Victor on the arm as she cannot reach higher. She must catch the way Yuuri is looking around, for she smiles and adds: "Mari is picking vegetables in the garden, but you can check on her. I'm sure little Vicchan would love to see you both."

At the mention of the dog, Yuuri forgets all his previous wonderings. He doesn't think twice about leaving Victor behind and quickly makes his way through the kitchen to the little doorway that leads to their small patch of greenery at the side of the house.

Little Vicchan sees him before Mari does. It's a joy beyond words to watch the tiny animal wiggle around in greeting, barking, and then – once Yuuri crouches and pats his thigh in a beckoning gesture – to see the little legs carry him faster than Yuuri's ever seen as the dog makes it to his side. He jumps in place as is he wants to reach all the way up to Yuuri's face and Yuuri laughs as he picks his best friend and allows him to do just that.

The noise they make must catch Mari's attention as well, for she halts in her work and looks over.

"Oh lookit here," she gripes, "His Lordship decided to grace us with his presence."

Despite his laughter and a wiggly, fluffy Vicchan in his arms, Yuuri flushes at her words. "I can go if you don't want me here," he replies, but Mari snorts at it. They both know it's an empty threat.
"Why would I want you to go when I can have you dig out the potatoes for me?"

With one last kiss to Vicchan's snout, Yuuri chuckles. He lets the dog down and with him following his every step, walks over to the patch of potato plants. He's about to rake into the earth when Mari speaks again, her voice light and teasing.

"Careful not to ruin your grand new robes, my lord," she says.

And Yuuri picks a handful of dirt to promptly throw at her in petty revenge that has her cackle and him grin like a fool. Not much later she dusts her skirt and picks up the vegetable basket that she's been filling with fresh pickings. It's a scene like many others Yuuri has seen during his life, it's one like he has known for years day after day when he still lived here.

A calm sets in his heart, soft, trilling like morning birds.

Despite the dangers he's faced recently and those that remain out there – the upcoming full moon and such – as Yuuri takes a deep breath of the clear air of the woods and the meadows and his mother's cooking... he feels safer than ever.

"It's good to have you back, little brother," Mari says unexpectedly, but when Yuuri looks up, she's already making her way back to the house.

In the doorway she passes by Victor who stands there with his golden robes and silver hair, beautiful, ethereal, and Yuuri wonders – he wonders, for all reason would indicate that a man like Victor, a noble who could have anything he wished to, who could buy all he set his eyes upon, who could charm anyone he desired; a man like Victor should not find a place like this to be of comfort. But as Yuuri looks at him, Victor waves a cheerful hand and smiles, smiles so happily, so freely... that somehow Yuuri knows then.

He turns away and, with his bare hands and little to no care about the dirt getting behind his nails, he picks the potatoes from the ground and into a wicker basket Mari has left. Once he's done, he wastes no time in standing around. There are dirt marks on his knees and black all around his fingernails, but when he steps next to Victor, he receives a beautiful smile and he knows – they both do.

They're home.

Chapter End Notes

I didn't want to do it but sadly I have to... life is crazy rn (we're starting renovations again/I have teaching practice upcoming) and I need to finish a bang fic hopefully this month, so it really pains me to say that this story will be going on a small hiatus :u; I know it's horrible and I'm more sorry than I can tell you... I have a couple chapters written still (3, I think??) but this is a good stopping point for now, so I will keep those for later use and for right now I will beg you to be patient with me and if you enjoy my writes then look forward to the bang fic bc it's shaping up to be quite a monster (about 80k maybe?? //sweats)

in the meanwhile please follow me on tumblr @katzuyas bc I post random daily bits of headcanons and writes there too, so, you know? do the thing ^u^)b
thank you for always reading and giving me the strength to write more and more, and see yall soon!! (I hope) <3
commission I ordered from saniika, who is an absolutely incredible artist and a real sweetheart!
please consider supporting her if you can! and definitely show her love ❤

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter End Notes

ps. no, I haven't forgotten about this story guys, I promise ;3c
make sure to follow me on twitter @katzuyas bc there will be things in the works soon!

Works inspired by this one
Gathe me in silver by viceandvirtue

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