### Songs in a Minor Key

**by** Denrhea

**Summary**

Yuuri Katsuki trusted the wrong person and found himself bonded at a young age without his consent. Ten years after the alpha took possession of him, he's out and trying to pick up the pieces of his life.

Victor Nikiforov is a single dad of his young son Yura who has ran off every nanny they hired since his mother passed away.

Desperation and a little friendly interference will bring these two(three) together.

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**Notes**
This is my Harlequin Romance/Hallmark Movie YOI fic. I hope you love it. It starts off a bit dark but hold on because it picks up from there with lots of lovely fluffy goodness.

That being said, the background story is dark. TRIGGER WARNINGS: PAST ABUSE, PAST EMOTIONAL ABUSE, PAST NON-CON/RAPE, PAST MISCARRIAGES. Yuuri is a survivor, though, and he is determined to move forward, to reclaim his life. And Victor is a positive force in his life. He isn't Yuuri's rescuer. Yuuri got himself out. Victor offered him honest employment and things pick up from there.

This was originally titled "First Class" but that title didn't seem to fit it after I started writing.

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See the end of the work for more notes.
Yuuri stared at the piece of paper in his hand. His alpha’s words blurred out as he looked at the print. After more than a decade, he was free. And it didn’t involve him being the main character in an episode of *Deadly Omega*. (Not that he ever considered murder. Not seriously, anyway.) He could finally walk out of this house and into the world. Of course, he was walking out with practically nothing to his name. He wasn’t allowed to take anything he didn’t bring with him, which meant his suitcase was much lighter than it began. His alpha had been reluctant to replace clothing, and the tiny rolling case had a few pieces of athletic clothes. He was standing out in front of the large house, the door shut and locked firmly behind him. He didn’t know where to go, but the worn out cell phone that was his only connection to his previous life held the numbers of family and old friends.

*Tokyo. Who do I know in Tokyo?* He scrolled down the list and hoped he could get a connection. The number rang on the other end. He knew it was up to date. He was meticulous about keeping numbers up to date just in case this day would come. “Phichit?”

“Yuuri? Oh, my god! Is that really you?”

He sniffed and had to fight the sob rising up in his throat. “Y-yes. Will you come get me?”

“On my way. Are you someplace safe?” Phichit’s voice didn’t waver, as if he had spent a decade waiting to say those very words.

Yuuri looked around the darkened drive. “I’m outside his house. I don’t…know where to go.” Thankfully, Phichit kept tabs on where he was located. Once he learned Yuuri’s story, he latched onto the omega, promising to be there as needed. This new house, Yuuri hadn’t lived here long. It was spacious…and clearly not meant for him.
Yuuri had felt the slow freeze out with his last failure. Another pregnancy that ended in miscarriage. They moved and Yuuri was given a room far from his alpha. Yuuri didn’t complain. He waited, hoping soon he’d be free. After weeks, or possibly months of daily degradations informing him of how bad an omega he was, his alpha finally told him, “You’ve been replaced. I won’t continue to support a useless leach.”

The words were harsh but Yuuri didn’t even wince. In his hands, he held his freedom, a document that would allow him to move forward. It was a half freedom, really. There was a stigma for omegas set aside by their alpha; used, worn out, useless. But the annulment would allow him to have the connection to Shuji completely severed. He’d no longer be a bound omega. He...could go home.

He shuddered, his tears shaking through his body as he continued to walk down the drive, dragging his suitcase behind. The clothes within should be too small but Yuuri had been held to a strict diet by Shuji. It was clear to him he was undereating; he often felt dizzy, and his hands would shake. The cold would blow through him and he couldn’t get warm no matter how he tried. He took a sharp intake of breath as he realized what his freedom would mean. *I can eat. I can...dance. I...can skate.*

He stopped at that thought. *How long had it been?* Reaching the bottom of the hill, he stood on the corner and waited for his ride. *How long had it been since I even wore a pair of skates? I don’t care that I can’t compete, just to be able to glide across the ice and feel that freedom...*

A silver sedan drove up and the windows powered down. Yuuri almost cried, he was so glad to see his best friend. “Get inside,” Phichit directed. “We don’t want to give him a chance to change his mind.”

Yuuri laughed bitterly, wincing at the hollowness in the sound. “He won’t be coming after me. He has another omega to torment.”

Phichit’s eyes went up the hill. He hated to hear that another was about to face the years of horror that his friend endured, but...Yuuri was free. “Did they...at least have a choice?”

Yuuri cast a long glance over his shoulder before putting his suitcase in the back seat. “I don’t know. I didn’t meet them. He just came into the room and told me I was gone. I got an entire half hour to pack...it took me ten minutes.”
Yuuri was sixteen when he met Phichit, a thirteen year old junior chasing after him determined to be his best friend. Yuuri typically distanced himself from other skaters, but he found the boy’s enthusiasm and light infectious. After they retreated to their rooms, Phichit came to his room and they stayed up late playing *Call of Duty* and talking.

Through Phichit, Yuuri was able to forget his horrible future, the ticking clock that chased him relentlessly. For a few years, gathering blissful memories, Yuuri had the sweetest friend and an exciting skating career. It was later, when Yuuri announced his retirement, that his best friend found out Yuuri’s bitter story. “Why?” he demanded.

Yuuri sighed, hugging himself. “My alpha won’t let me compete anymore.”

Phichit stepped back, they were in the privacy of Yuuri’s room. “Your...alpha?” Phichit had trouble accepting that. Yuuri could see the dark eyes working quickly, putting the pieces together. “You’re only nineteen. Wh-why?”

Yuuri shrugged. “Some...don’t think omegas should stay in athletics.”

The dark eyes turned hard, brows knitting, “That’s bullshit! I’m omega and I have no plans to take an alpha until I’m good and ready!”

Yuuri turned, it was too much. “Some of us don’t get a choice, Phichit!” he forced out, his voice shaking.

The desperation in Yuuri’s voice shook Phichit up. The Thai man put a gentle hand on his friend’s shoulder, turning him back around. With a soft voice he began again, “What...do you mean?”

Yuuri hugged himself, his hand resting on his opposite elbow. “I’ve...been bonded since I was fourteen. I didn’t get a choice. And now...I’m pregnant. So it’s not like the ISU and JSF are going to let me skate now.”

Phichit’s eyes tracked down from Yuuri’s face to the slight swell of his stomach. “You could skate after the baby,” Phichit suggested weakly, his voice threaded with tears.

Yuuri shook his head. “I don’t think he’ll let me.”
Phichit then made Yuuri to promise, “You have to stay in touch with me.”

Yuuri couldn’t bring himself to look his friend in the face, “Why do you want to still be my friend?”

“Because us omegas have to stick together,” Phichit answered. Yuuri could tell the younger man was struggling to accept his fate. Yuuri struggled with it. This was not where he planned to be at this point in his life. He hadn’t planned any of this; all the planning had been done by Shuji, without consent.

He didn’t go through a matchmaker. He wasn’t courted. He was cornered in a hallway, at the end of a competition by the alpha. An ISU official who had decided Yuuri would be his omega had forced the newly presented skater into the bond then threatened to jerk his skating credentials if he told anyone. Yuuri was only fourteen and the world was already cruel to omegas. He assumed the law would side with this man. His parents didn’t find out until he was seventeen and by then, they couldn’t do anything. When Yuuri graduated high school, his alpha came to collect him, telling him to leave childish things behind. He was allowed to bring only his clothes. His mother managed to slip a blanket to him that held her scent. Yuuri, all of eighteen and afraid, followed the alpha to his car.

He reached behind him now and pulled that blanket out of his suitcase, snuggling into the worn threads. His mother’s scent all but gone, he still swore he could smell her.

“So, what’s your plan?” Phichit asked quietly as he negotiated traffic.

Yuuri blinked, *I get to make a plan.* “I’m...going to begin again.”

“I might be able to get you on at the app company I do freelance work for,” Phichit suggested.

Yuuri shook his head slowly. He knew without a college degree, he wouldn’t get far down that path. At twenty-seven, college seemed impossible. “I...want to go home. See my family. Maybe I can figure out where to go from there.”

“I want to help,” Phichit whispered, hitting the steering wheel in frustration.
Yuuri jumped and had to focus to keep from shrinking on himself. *I’m safe. I’m with Phichit. It’s okay. He won’t let anything happen to me.* Finally he drew a settling breath. “I know...you can help me by getting me to my parents’ home.”

Yuuri stepped off the train, the weather having turned windy and rainy. He could feel the cold seep through him. Phichit had given him food, bought him the tickets, and reluctantly let him go. Yuuri had held onto him for as long as he could, hugging him close. “Thank you. I don’t know what I would have done without you here.”

Phichit was openly sobbing at the departure of his friend, even if it was to send him to his family. “I’m always here for you, Yuuri. Stay in touch.”

“I will. I promise.” If Shuji couldn’t keep them apart, he knew that he could hold onto his friend now that he was free. “I have to find my feet again.”

“I know. I just want to keep you safe.”

Yuuri loved his friend, but he needed to leave Tokyo, it was too close. “Maybe...I’m safest far away from him.”

Now in Hasetsu, Yuuri walked down the road that would take him home. He ignored the rain and wind. He ignored the strange looks from other people probably wondering where they’d seen his face before. He kept walking, one foot in front of the other. Ten kilometers. Two hours. He stood before the entrance to Yuutopia, his parents’ business and home.

Opening the door to the residential entrance, a startled body came around the corner and stared at him with wide eyes. “Y-yuuri?” And then he was enveloped in his mother’s embrace, her warm tears combating the cold from the rainy walk, her cry drawing others into the room and soon he was being held by his father, his sister, his ballet coach Minako smelling faintly of liquor…

With a sob of his own, he murmured, “I’m home.”

Then in a whirlwind of action, he found himself being changed into a dry yukata, warm from the spa. The material and scent was heavenly in its familiarity. He was seated at the family table and
food placed before him. Yuuri stared at the steaming bowl, feeling overwhelmed from the knot of anxiety he’d held in his stomach for a decade. Fighting it, he slowly took a bite then another and he would have loved to have finished it but after half a dozen bites, he knew he couldn’t hold any more. He had been half-starved for so long his stomach shrunk, only allowing small bites here and there.

“Is it okay?” his mother worried.

Yuuri nodded, his smile soft, his expression exhausted. “I’m just tired, Mom.” How could he tell his mother how little he’d been able to eat?

“Don’t worry,” she reassured him, seeming to accept his explanation at face value. “Your sister and Minako are upstairs freshening your room.”

Yuuri looked around as he took in the space and a poodle came barking and sniffing at him. “Vicchan...you’re still here,” he whispered.

Both of his parents exchanged troubled glances. “Yuuri,” his father began softly.

Yuuri traced an unfamiliar mark in the poodle’s fur and lifted him, no her, up. “This isn’t Vicchan,” he murmured.

“He waited and watched for you for a long time,” his mother continued softly. “And he was already well past his years.”

Yuuri let the tears fall, “How long?”

They exchanged looks. “Six years ago,” his father answered quietly.

Yuuri thinned his lips, his hand going down to his abdomen. That was when he lost his second, a boy. Yuuri had carried him almost full term. When he opened his brown eyes slowly, Yuuri knew he was slipping away. The doctors and nurses worked to bring him back but he was gone in a blink. The loss of all his children had been horrible, that one was devastating. He had shut down, mourning for the short period he had been allowed before he was back under his alpha.
His mother’s eyes held understanding. She gathered him into his arms and he wept, giving into long held back tears, mourning four babies, fourteen years lost, a childhood tainted by the future ahead, and a dog that waited for him to come home. He was broken.

He didn’t remember coming to his room. He had fallen asleep in his mother’s arms. He suspected his father took him up the stairs. Although small, he was always uncannily strong. He could tell by the scent on the blankets, though, that his mother tucked him in.

The next days slid by in slowly dawning awareness of his situation. It started with Yuuri regaining his strength under his mother’s watchful eyes, gently prodding him to take one more bite. The foods she provided were mild so as not to tear at his stomach with their richness. Miso and rice were his standby foods. She always had a hot cup of tea ready, ginger for his stomach. He moved through the inn at first reacquainting himself with the space, studying and taking in the smallest changes. The new poodle, Ren, or lotus, meaning rebirth, took to following him, trying to get his attention. She wasn’t Vicchan but slowly, she found her way into his affection.

Yuuri reclaimed his freedom over the next weeks. He went to the clinic with the legal papers and they began the series of shots that would sever his connection to his mate. The clinicians were efficient in their care. Yuuri knew his bond with Shuji had died long ago, this was a necessary medical procedure to allow him to choose a new mate. He practically laughed when the doctor explained that to him, and he saw in her face how ridiculous the idea was. He felt the judgmental stares of the entire staff. They didn’t know what Yuuri had endured and how hard won his freedom was. They only saw an omega sent away by their mate. And he could hear them gossiping behind his back. *He’ll never find an alpha to take him. Better that the alpha had died then leave him abandoned. It says on the papers he couldn’t produce a child. That cinches it, no alpha will take him now.*

Over the following months, Yuuri tried to work, to reclaim and find purpose in life. He helped out at the inn working quietly with the other employees but he heard them whispering when they thought he was out of earshot. Minako asked him to help at the studio, and he enjoyed teaching beginner dance classes, however parents started taking their children away. If an alpha doesn’t want him, there must be something wrong with him. Minako would never ask him to leave, but Yuuri couldn’t let her business suffer for him. He left.

His parents loved him, unconditionally...and their hearts ached for their son. Mari fought for him, quieting the rumors when she caught wind of them. But they were fighting society, custom, tradition. And those were three warriors that seldom lost.

It was Yuuko who found him one day after he’d stopped going to the studio.

“I heard you were back in town,” her soft voice came up from behind him.
Yuuri turned, the Madonna of the Ice Castle, just as pretty as ever. “Yuuko,” he rose, they embraced. “It’s good to see you.”

She laughed, “You would have seen me a lot sooner if you’d stopped by the rink.”

Yuuri blinked, he started to shake his head. “I don’t know…”

“Well I do.” She took his hand, leading him out of the inn. “It’s after hours, we can give you the whole sheet, freshly zambonied. You can even meet my girls.”

“Girls?” Yuuri followed her into the fresh air of the street.

“Yeah, three, all at once. Where’d I get that luck?” She sucked in a breath, the minute the words left her mouth she wanted to pick them up and put them back in. “Oh Yuuri…I…”

He shook his head, “No, it’s okay. I really want to meet them. And see Takeshi.”

She smiled back. They were at the steps of the Ice Castle, it looked exactly the same as Yuuri’s memories. He remembered group lessons when he was four, his first one foot spin, splitting his lip from his first flip. It was home, or at least part of it.

They laced up, Yuuri was surprised to find that Yuuko had snagged his skates before even coming to get him. He stood at the barrier, looking out on the clean, uncut ice. Frozen.

“I don’t know.” He turned, looking at his friend standing behind him.

“Take your time.” She walked up to lean on the barrier. “Remember when you showed me your best snowplow stop?”

He furrowed his brow, then erupted into a broad smile. “Oh god!”
“Show me your best snowplow stop.” Her voice was warm, but firm.

He took that first step, toe pick down, free leg gliding out. The sound of the ice under him was mystical. He felt wobbly, afraid to do a three turn after a decade off ice, but he felt strong enough to do a set of forward powerpulls. The grind of his edge was like music. He turned, saw his friend, the tears gleaming in her eyes. He skated up to the barrier. One foot, inside edge, pushing out, coming to a perfect snowplow stop. He put his arms behind his head, “ta da!”

Yuuko couldn’t keep the tears back. She stepped out, pulling him into an embrace, holding him as he cried.

Takeshi had been watching from the warm up room, and came down. He waited, letting his wife work her magic on her...their friend. When he noticed they were slowing he came forward, “Well, it’s good to see you back. No quads, okay?”

Yuuri snorted, “I couldn’t do those when I could skate!”

“You can land one!” A gruff voice came from somewhere, Yuuri couldn’t see the owner.

“I bet you can land lots and lots!” A second voice joined it, and soon Yuuri was able to see two...no three little heads peeking out over the barrier.

“Yuuri,” Yuuko pulled him over to the three munchkins. “These are my girls, Axel, Lutz, and Loop.”

Yuuri watched the little girls fight over who could take pictures on ‘momma’s phone’ and he had to admit he loved them. He was delighted his friend had found such a happy family and was able to stay in Hasetsu, but he did feel a twinge of jealousy. I could have had this too...if… Yuuri shook himself, skating into a familiar school figure. No point thinking of what’s lost.

The Nishigoris let him use the ice as often as he wanted, and he found himself there almost daily...as soon as the rink closed to others, of course. He sat in the sound booth one day with both Yuuko and Takeshi warming up from the chill before heading on the ice once more when Yuuko brought up an old topic. “Do you still look up to Victor Nikiforov?”
Yuuri shrugged. He’d lacked means and was forbidden from collecting memorabilia commemorating the skater. “Shuji didn’t like me holding onto things from other alphas.”

“I didn’t ask about Shuji,” Yuuko clucked. “Anyway, he was widowed like two years ago. And he retired at the end of the last Worlds. He said he would be coaching at his old rink and focusing on raising his son.”

Yuuri frowned, “I’m sorry he’s widowed and retired. I would have liked to see him skate again, now that I can watch TV.”

Yuuko laughed, “Well, I was thinking that this might be something you were interested in.”

Her voice was leading and Yuuri shook his head, shrugging. “What’s that got to do with me?”

“Well...I found this!” She turned the laptop his direction. It was a personal ad. *Widowed father seeking companion omega as mother-figure for his son. Omega will have their own room and will be employed as a live-in nanny for son. Room outfitted for omega’s safety and privacy. Asking for one year contract as a trial period. This is a paid position unless and until we decide we wish to bond.*

Yuuri’s eyes flicked up to the picture and it certainly looked like a likeness of Victor but he couldn’t believe it. “I’m sure if it were him, he’d be looking for someone more suitable than me.”

“What do you mean? You are great with kids!”

Yuuri rolled his eyes, he knew he was terrific with children, it was adults who had problems. “Tell that to the parents that pulled their kids from ballet when I tried to teach.”

“Yeah, and all those asshats thought you were the best teacher their *darlings* had ever had until they learned about your...past. They are idiots who are more interested in gossip than truth.”

He looked at the ad again. “It’s probably someone putting his picture up to trap some omega into a bonded relationship. I’ve already been down that road.”
Yuuko shook her head, “This one goes through a placement agency. You could meet him before you decide to go. Set it up for a public place and take a friend.”

Yuuri’s fingers slid over the image but then shrugged it off. “What’s the point? When he finds out how I was set aside, how my bonding was...annulled...he’s not going to want me around his son. Let alone himself.”

Yuuko turned to her mate desperately. “Talk to him!”

Takeshi, who had cleverly used that time to start stacking skates, felt the need to make sure the zamboni was filled. Leaving the room quickly he said, “This is your thing, Yuuko. I told you he wouldn’t go for it.”

Yuuri was soon rescued when a trio of six-year-olds entered the building calling out to their mother and father. He decided he’d had enough of the ice that day and packed up to head home.

After his evening shift at the restaurant serving his mother’s food, he trudged upstairs and washed off the scent of the inn. He loved his mother’s cooking but lately he’d grown to hate the restaurant. The smells cloyed at him and reminded him how hard it was to eat.

In the privacy of his room, he checked his messages and smiled to see one from Phichit only to frown.

Peaches/ Did you see the ad VN put up?

He rolled his eyes. *The universe is conspiring against me.*

Yuu-chan/ I saw the ad SOMEONE put up with VN’s picture.

Peaches/ I thought that, too, but it’s genuine.
Yuuri stopped, holding the new phone. Mari had insisted he get an update, and he did like the sleek new model. He was interested in Victor, but he shook himself free of thoughts of the skater.

Yuu-chan/ Even if it’s legit, what does that have to do with me?

Peaches/ What if that is your second chance?

Yuu-chan/ I am too messed up for this.

Peaches/ You do have some healing to do. It’s easier to heal surrounded by love.

Yuu-chan/ Which is why I’m here.

Peaches/ How are you?

Phichit would break off and focus on the important, to check on him.

Yuu-chan/ My family loves me...everyone else seems to have branded me as a pariah.

Peaches/ People are always ready to believe the worst. Think about this, though. Clean slate.

Yuu-chan/ I’d have to go somewhere completely oblivious of my identity.

Peaches/ St. Petersburg might be that place.

Yuuri spent the morning cleaning rooms on checkout. He knew how to efficiently turn a room,
quickly nullifying scents and freshening the surfaces. New linens, and the space was good as new. One of the drawbacks was that sometimes the customers returned looking for things they forgot...and found it necessary to hit on the help. In this case, the owners’ omega son. He hated the entitled behavior of rich alphas thinking they can have an omega for the asking. As he brushed off the unwanted affections of yet another alpha, careful to get himself out of a corner, he spotted his sister down the hall keeping a careful eye (or ear) on things. As soon as she spotted him, she called out, “Mom was looking for you.” Yuuri took the easy out and ran down the hall towards the kitchen.

It had been the third offer that week, none of them attractive, all of them insulting. An omega in his position doesn’t have a lot of options, they would begin. They would then offer them their protection, offering to put him up in a house and to take care of him...as their mistress. Yuuri pushed those offers aside. He wanted to be able to take care of himself, not to be taken advantage of, to be used at will by an alpha. But no one was giving him a chance.

Sitting in the quiet of his room, his eyes fell upon his laptop. He remembered the ad he read earlier that week. *Would it be so bad; it’s not like I’m a mail order bride? A companion omega doesn’t have the implied sexual expectations. Maybe he’s still not over his wife. Maybe he really is just looking for someone to help with his son.*

He opened his computer and found the link Phichit sent him. Opening the ad, he did a quick search on the placement agency. Ren crawled into his lap and licked up at his chin. “It’s ridiculous to try. Why would he want me?” He read through the ad, the more detailed version. “Matchmakers put omegas like me in old alpha’s homes.”

But something in Yuuri had to try. He opened up the link and began the application process, entering his name and contact information and moving through the questionnaire.

*Have you been in a bonded relationship before?  Yes.*

*Do you have children?  Yuuri’s fingers stilled as he stared at the question before tapping out No.*

*Do you like children?  Yes.*

*Do you like pets?  Yes.  Yuuri wasn’t leaving without his dog this time.*

*Are you single, widowed, or divorced?*
Yuuri looked at his papers. Annulled. That’s like divorce. He started to select that when his fingers stilled, taking in a deep breath as he remembered how the customers treated him. I don’t want to be a mistress. If I’m a widow, at least I’m considered matable. But...it’s a lie. He moved past that question intending to go back. Working through the rest of the questions, he submitted it then stilled.

“Oh, shit! I meant to go back to that question!” He hugged himself, before trying to go back into the application. Submitted. Closing his eyes, he felt the sting of tears. I can’t even do this right. He curled up in bed wrapping himself in the worn blanket he carried with him to Shuji’s and back. Ren was up in his space, licking at his face until she circled her body and settled down in front of Yuuri.

Yuuri slept. He slept through dinner. He barely woke up when a soft knock landed on his door and felt his mother’s hand on his forehead, a soft touch of her scent down his back. “Hard day, dear?” Yuuri nodded but didn’t speak. She tucked him in and let him sleep some more.

The next morning, he left only as necessary. Bathroom. Shower. Picking at breakfast. By afternoon, however, he couldn’t mope any longer and left to go downstairs.

“Yuuri, feeling better?” his mother greeted warmly.

“A little,” he lied. She gave him a knowing look but didn’t push.

She knew that sometimes tasks were the best way to help her son. “Well, if you’re up to it, we could use someone to shovel the snow on the walk.”

Yuuri looked up, eyes searching for a view of the outside. “It snowed?”

“Last night and most of the morning,” she replied cheerily.

Yuuri worked through his demons with physical labor and found his laugh as Ren would leap and disappear into the drifts, setting the shovel down to fish her out. “Well, at least I’ve got you,” he murmured softly. Which was true because the poodle had taken to Yuuri to the point where his family referred to her as Yuuri’s. He gathered her up to bring her inside. Drying her off, he remembered similar incidents with Vicchan. Then his thoughts drifted to leaving her behind at eighteen. He didn’t want to but Shuji said there was no place for pets in the house.
Drawing in a shaky breath, he moved into the family space and pulled out his phone. He was surprised to see he had an email. “The client has requested to meet with you.”

Yuuri blinked and blinked again. He knew it was the matchmaker agency but it seemed unreal.

He cautiously tapped out a response. “A meeting could be arranged after we talk.”

That night, Yuuri sat before his computer, his hair washed and pushed back from his forehead, dressed in a blue pullover waiting on the skype call to go through. The screen lit up and before him was none other than the living legend himself. Yuuri’s breath caught.

“Hello, Yuuuuri?” the silver-haired man greeted.

Yuuri was dumbstruck before he finally found the words. “H-hi. I can’t believe...why me?” The worst words possible, he groaned as soon as they left his lips.

Victor chuckled in response. “Well, honestly, I had a friend screen these first. And Chris said it had to be this one. So...I don’t know?”

Yuuri felt a pang of disappointment but forced a smile. “What do you want to know?”

“Everything...but for now, you didn’t say your marital status.”

Yuuri hugged himself, his lip trembling. “I-it’s hard to say.”

Victor’s expression softened. “Aaah, I understand. It’s okay. Even after two years, it’s sometimes hard for me to accept she’s gone.”

Yuuri knew he should correct Victor’s possible misconception but he couldn’t say the words. He
just nodded. “You wanted to meet?”

Victor’s face lit up, “Yes! I do. You’re in Japan, right?”

“Yes. And you’re in Russia.”

“Ah, yes...I am. But I’m going to be in Japan soon. I have skaters in the NHK. Perhaps we could see each other then.”

“Tokyo?” Yuuri confirmed, chewing his lip. He worried at the prospect of being in the same city as Shuji.

“Yes...is that possible? I mean...I can pay your travel, your room.”

“N-no, I’m okay. I have a friend I can stay with.” Phichit will think of something, he always does.

“Then let me at least leave you with tickets. You can watch them skate,” he offered. “Then after, maybe we can have dinner.”

Yuuri’s mind was scrambling. I can’t go to the NHK. Shuji will be there. “Could we...meet the first time in a group? Maybe I bring my friend and you bring yours?”

Victor chuckled and nodded. “I think that’s a smart move. Yes, we can do that. I’ll bring Chris.”

“I’ll bring Phichit. Oh, he’s my best friend.”

“Sounds perfect. I’ll email my itinerary once it’s set and we can make a plan from there.” An impatient voice called from the other room. Victor answered back and then returned to Yuuri. “My son...I did mention I had a son.”

Yuuri nodded, his heart in his throat. “Y-yes.” That was the reason for this, wasn’t it?
“Tokyo...then we’ll decide if we will move forward. Thank you, Yuuri.”

“Thank you.” And then he was gone, the call disconnected. Yuuri glanced towards the hall that would lead to his parents. How would they take this? They just got him back. But even Yuuri could admit he was just existing. He needed to make a move forward. Maybe he could work as a nanny. He began searching Companion Omega contracts. They turned out to be varied in duties but often involved a grieving alpha. The one he’d probably be signed to was for child care since the alpha requested nanny services but it wasn’t the same as hiring a nanny. There were more boundaries in a straight nanny contract. In this one, he could court Yuuri but there was an out clause letting Yuuri leave if offered unwanted affections. *Who could look over this contract for me?* He didn’t want to go through his family attorney. He thought back through his small network of friends. Most of his contacts in Tokyo were through Shuji and untrusted.

Yuu-chan/ Do you know any attorneys?

Peaches/ I’m dating one. It’s long distance, though.

Yuu-chan/ I need someone to look over the Companion Omega contract should I decide to consider it. I don’t want to be roped into something unexpected.

Peaches/ You’re going to answer the ad?

Yuu-chan/ I did...and we had a skype call. We’re meeting in Tokyo. Could I stay with you? This is sort of your fault.

Peaches/ Of course you can stay with me! And I’ll contact my bf to see if he’d read over the contract. I’m sure he won’t mind. He hates it when omegas are unfairly taken advantage of.

Chapter End Notes

In this world:

Yuuri had to report Shuji before he turned sixteen which is the "age of consent"...which really means he can no longer claim he was underaged. The rest of it is Shuji's word against Yuuri's...and in this world, they would take Shuji's. Shuji intimidated Yuuri to keep him quiet, convincing him that he could keep him from skating and take away his other dreams. It wasn't until later that he learned he was
going to lose skating anyway.

Yuuri had no choice at eighteen. He had to go with his alpha and couldn't be free of him by choice. The alpha has to give them a writ of divorce or a writ of annulment for the omega to be free. They are very oppressed and as such, parents often employ matchmakers to protect their children. Yuuri presented early...and this made him vulnerable. He trusted an official...and should have been safe. However, Shuji is a predator.

I want to state clearly, Shuji did not have sex with Yuuri until he came of age and moved in with him at eighteen. He likes his lovers young but not children. Shuji is a sadist and younger targets are more easily manipulated for his tastes. And Yuuri knowing the fate that he faced only added to Shuji's enjoyment.

The bondmark doesn't require sex and can be hidden. It is on the shoulder in this world. Yuuri tends to be private and dressed out of sight of others.

I know you have other questions and I'll field them in the notes as I can.
Once bitten, twice shy

Chapter Summary

Now for some of Victor's POV. What does he think about this mail order business?

Chapter Notes

Hi, all! I planned to post this on Wednesday but I have no Truth chapters ready. You may get two of these this week. That's okay, though...because this story is BluSkates' favorite!

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Ch. 2: Once bitten, twice shy

Victor couldn’t believe what Chris had done. He was furious...almost. After watching his fifth nanny walk out, he was also desperate. “What am I going to do?”

“You’re going to go through these applications,” Chris prodded.

Victor huffed. “That was not the kind of ad I asked you to set up.”

“Sometimes we have to take a new approach. This one obviously isn’t working.”

As he watched his blond hellion pouting in the corner, Potya held in his small arms in an impossible position but purring happily so obviously not upset, he knew he was at his wit’s end. “I’m not ready for a new mate,” he breathed.

Chris let his friend sit for a moment before approaching him, “I know...but maybe you can find someone and...mourn together. Perhaps as you heal, you can find happiness.” He saw his friend’s face soften at the idea of being able to talk to another person about how he felt. “And this is a companion omega. There is nothing that says this has to go any further than being a friend and a nanny.”
Victor seemed to perk up at the thought, “So you suggest...another widow?”

Chris frowned not necessarily wanting to hem in opportunity. “Maybe a widow...but sometimes we have to help someone else to find our own relief.”

“I don’t want someone who can’t handle Yura,” Victor protested. The five-year-old was rambunctious and energetic and had somehow managed to run off every single nanny so far.

Chris chuckled as he studied the pouting boy. “I think that if you change the stakes, you might find more what you’re looking for. Remember, a companion omega can have greater authority than a nanny and they form a closer relationship with the children. They...can be affectionate.”

Remembering how cold the last nanny, a German named Helga... Helga!... had been, he had to nod in agreement. Yura hated her. But to be honest, he hated all of them. He missed his mother and none of these women were ever going to be her. And Victor missed her as well. Had it really been two years?

Three weeks later, Chris laid an application across his desk. “This is the one.”

Victor took the paper from his friend and he may have frowned in irritation. “It doesn’t say a whole lot,” he answered after the fact. He narrowed in on the unanswered question. “And he avoids marital status.”

“Makes you wonder why?” Chris suggested, waggling his eyebrows.

Blue eyes flicked up to his friend before asking, “Why are we friends?”

Chris grinned. “Because I know your deepest, darkest secrets.”

Victor groaned. He was right. He knew what led to his bonding to Yelena. He loved his mate and
mourned her loss...but he knew he wouldn’t have bonded her if it hadn’t been for Yura. Of course, it wasn’t the story everyone assumed.

He tried one more why. “Why this one?”

The hazel eyes sparkled with that secret smile that showed Chris was up to something. “I have danced with him before.”

That took Victor by surprise. “Really?”

Victor watched as Chris settled himself in a chair across the room. “I doubt he will remember it but I remember it clearly and...if Yelena hadn’t been in the picture, I would have found a way for you two to meet.”

Victor smiled at the thought. Then stopped, “Was he bonded at the time?”

Chris shrugged which meant technically yes. “He wasn’t happily bonded which led to a large amount of champagne and some bad decisions.” At Victor’s narrowing eyebrows, Chris waved him down. “Not that bad...he didn’t cheat. But we did spend the evening running and hiding from his alpha.”

“I hope he didn’t pay for your little game, Chris,” Victor stated clearly annoyed.

Chris frowned and Victor suspected that the omega may have been dealt with harshly. “He needed cheering up. He had his friend there, too. We watched over him.”

Victor looked at the file once more. “He’s in Japan.”

“He is...and you will be there soon...”

“The NHK.” Victor saw where Chris was taking this.

“Exactly.”
Victor frowned, he had dozens of reasons why this was a bad idea, why it would never work. He was old, he was sad, lonely, and broken. Two blue eyes rose up to see the hazel eyes of his friend shutting down any arguments. Defeated he shrugged, “Why not...I can at least meet with him.” I need a nanny. He’s too much for Nikolai and Olga.

Chris slapped his thigh, “That’s the spirit. He’s also sent in the necessary background checks and has requested those things from you as well. He wants...to talk to you.”

“Well, he will when we meet in Japan.”

“No, he wants to talk to you before he agrees to the meeting.” Chris saw the confused look on his friend’s face and filled in his understanding. “I think...he’s skeptical it's you.”

Victor sighed as he considered his options. He’d never had to jump through hoops for a nanny. But then again, they didn’t stay, and this wasn’t just a nanny. Even with all of the protections clauses in the contract, it still put Yuuri in a vulnerable position. “Authorize the background checks and forward his contact information. I’ll set up the call.”

“I suggest something where you both can see one another. Maybe Skype?”

Victor nodded in agreement. “That would put him more at ease. I guess one can’t be too careful.”

“I’ll see to my end. Do you want me to prepare the contracts?” Chris could have bitten his tongue for moving too quickly.

Victor frowned. Am I ready for that? Finally he nodded and said, “Make sure there are solid protections for both parties. If his alpha was an ass, he’s probably extra cautious.”

“You know I always protect the omega’s interest. I don’t work for alphas who do otherwise.” Chris left to do the legal work Victor needed and his friend watched the door as he considered this next move. Companion. That just meant friendship. He could accept a new friend. He wasn’t ready to let go of his wife, though. They came together under odd circumstances but he didn’t care for her any less for it. And their love for each other grew as they continued to protect and love Yura.
He looked down as he felt a wet nose press into his palm. “Hey, Makka. What do you think about a new person in this house? Maybe someone...more than a nanny?”

Makkachin barked with approval.  Well, if Makka approved...

Victor stared at the blank screen after the Skype call. The omega appeared to be shy but determined, but those eyes...they were open and tender. **Would you be able to form a bond with my son? He needs a mother...he misses his own so much.** He could tell there was something the omega was holding back but his background check showed no criminal history, little credit activity, and a past work history that ended abruptly at nineteen. Figure skating. No wonder Chris knew him. **How did we not meet?** Whoever his alpha had been, he had not registered the relationship...which was odd but Chris did hint at abuse. At least he’s out. No wonder he’s hesitant to trust an alpha.

He remembered Yelena coming to him desperate and pregnant. “He’s not a good alpha, Vitya...I need someone to protect me from him. Someone to keep my son from him. If he finds out I’m pregnant…” It had been awkward bonding with his friend. He loved Yelena, but as a friend. They had never been intimate. When she moved in, she occupied the room where Yuuri would stay...he stilled at that thought. He already had Yuuri moving in.

He pulled up the pictures provided by the omega. Thumbing through, he could see a happy childhood in those pictures, a boy playing with a dog, dancing, skating. But as time went on, he could see sadness creeping in. **When did you get involved with this alpha?** The recent pictures showed him a bit on the thin side. **Maybe you stop eating when stressed. Olga will get you healthy again.** Well, between her and Nikolai...

He thought back to the video call and reflected on those eyes. They were open but he could see the despair in their depths. **You need this, too. Someplace to find your feet.** He knew Chris had a good instinct when it came to people and if he’d met the omega in person, he’d already have a gauge on his personality. **Maybe...**

**Tokyo, Japan**
Victor was disappointed to find the tickets were unclaimed but he had the location for their meeting in his phone. Chris couldn’t come with him but Victor wasn’t worried. He just knew Yuuri was nervous about meeting him alone.

When he arrived at the restaurant, he was shown back to their table. Yuuri was there waiting, standing and bowing as he met Victor with awkward greetings in Japanese then English. “Sorry.” He waved at his companion. “This is my friend Phichit.”

Victor’s eyes blinked at the familiar face. “Chulanont? You took silver at Worlds last year and then announced your retirement.”

Phichit’s melodious laugh rang through the air. “It didn’t create as big a stir as your retirement announcement. I wasn’t sure anyone noticed.”

“I always pay attention to my competition...especially when we share the podium. I didn’t realize you were Yuuri’s friend.”

“I’ve known Yuuri since junior days. Too bad he didn’t continue skating. He may have knocked you off the podium.”

“Phichit!” Yuuri muttered warningly.

The retired Thai skater reached over to settle his friend. “Are you okay now if I leave?”

Yuuri hesitantly nodded. “I...I think I’ll be fine.”

“Call me if you need a ride home!” Then the spritely friend was gone.

They awkwardly took their seats. Victor watched Yuuri gracefully pour both of them tea as he worked out his words. It was clear that Yuuri was more skittish in person. “I hope your journey went well.” Victor watched the thin wrists working as the earthenware pot was moved over his own cup.

Yuuri forced a smile. “Traveling alone on the trains as an omega is always an adventure.”
Victor hated that, how alphas would reach out and become handsy with an unattached omega. “I wish I knew how to change that mindset,” he murmured.

“You too,” Yuuri whispered in reply.

As their food was delivered, sushi, he watched Yuuri deftly serve him and didn’t know what to say at first. “I’m not looking for someone to take care of me,” he protested.

Yuuri sat back his hands in his lap. “Habit. I had certain expectations from...him.”

Victor felt bad, he didn’t know what to say. He didn’t want Yuuri to think he had to serve him, but he didn’t know how to say that without sounding like he was rejecting the man. “It’s okay...I just didn’t want you to feel...obligated.”

Yuuri shrugged, his eyes downcast. “I don’t know how to act in this situation. It’s not a date…”

“Think of it as an...interview of sorts?”

Yuuri nodded, lifting his eyes slowly. “What...do you want to know?”

Victor considered the question as he popped the first piece of sushi into his mouth. “I suppose the most pressing thought is...why did you answer my ad?”

*My friends wouldn’t stop pester me about it...* Yuuri thinned his lips and swallowed. “I...was very young when I went to my alpha. Eighteen. I don’t have a lot of skills beyond taking care of house and home. I can teach dance but the town where I live is small so they don’t really need multiple dance teachers. And I’ve not studied beyond what could be found in a local studio. I could skate, but then again, not a lot of demand. I...help out at my parents’ inn but...well, I’m an older, unattached omega. There are certain...ideas...that our customers have. I guess, I want a position where I can stand on my own feet and not feel...sexualized.” A blush climbed up in his cheeks at that final word. “What about you...why did you put that ad up?”

*My friend posted it and wouldn’t stop pester me about it.* Victor considered telling him he that but wasn’t sure how Yuuri would receive it. “I...have had several nannies over the past two years
but my son, he’s spirited and those situations haven’t worked out. I need someone that can meet him where he’s at. He needs a maternal figure, someone that will give him the affection as well as the care he needs. Nannies are bound by a professional code. All business. Yura...he needs a companion, a friend.”

Yuuri considered those words for a moment before asking, “And you?”

“Me?”

Yuuri nodded. “I researched companion contracts. They involve both the children and the parent in these cases. What will my duties be towards you?”

Victor hadn’t really considered that end of it, but now that he was there with this man, looking in those rich chocolate eyes he had to admit he was starting be interested. “I...hadn’t really thought about me. I guess...it would be nice to have a friend, someone to talk to at the end of the day. Maybe a plus one at events, not an obligation but sometimes it’s nice not to attend these things alone.”

They ate in companionable silence for a few moments before Victor asked, “Do you have a dog?”

Yuuri blinked at that. *Do I?* “M-my dog passed away while I was gone.”

Victor seemed puzzled, “While you were gone?”

Yuuri nodded. It was a painful memory, one he didn’t want to relive and he answered with little detail. “I wasn’t allowed to take him when I moved in with my alpha.” Victor’s eyes widened, holding a bit of anger towards that. Something about that flicker of anger gave Yuuri the ability to continue. “I was gone for ten years before returning to my parents’ home. In that time, he passed away. I’ve been spending time with the family dog, a poodle named Ren. She’s become fairly attached to me in the short time I’ve been there.”

Victor hated to pry too deep but he couldn’t help but ask, “How long?”

Yuuri looked up as he gathered his thoughts. “I’ve been...on my own for around six months.”
“If you want to bring your dog, I want you to feel free to do so,” Victor rushed before adding, “that is, if we decide to go through with this.”

A soft smile settled on Yuuri’s lips. “Thank you.”

Victor began going through his mental list of topics. “You have no children.”

Yuuri slowly shook his head, his smile disappearing. “No...I can’t...they never survived the pregnancy.”

“I’m sorry,” Victor whispered. He watched Yuuri close off and noted this was a taboo topic. “Are you okay...with taking care of children?”

Yuuri looked up in surprise and nodded. “I am...I had hoped to teach when I retired from figure skating. Well...before him.”

“He didn’t let you go to university.”

Yuuri shook his head and Victor was getting a clear picture of the controlling environment the omega escaped...through death? Divorce? He couldn’t be sure.

“You’ll have quite a bit of free time during the day. Maybe once you settle in, you could take classes. You’d probably need to learn Russian first. Don’t worry. Olga, Nikolai and I all go back and forth between English and Russian...and sometimes French. Yura has picked up on quite a bit of English.” He paused before admitting, “I’m afraid none of us have picked up Japanese.”

Yuuri tilted his head, lips parted as he considered Victor’s words. “Are you...offering me the position?”

Am I? Did I? But Victor knew his instincts said yes. “If you agree to the terms of the contract, then I’ll arrange for passage.”

“Do you mind if I have an attorney look it over?”
Victor grinned. *Once bitten, twice shy.* “Always a wise move. I’ll have the contract sent to you and you can have it looked over. Shall I arrange for a ride home?”

Yuuri looked at the door and shifted uncomfortably. “Unattached omegas travel in pairs when in Tokyo,” he whispered. “I’ll call Phichit.”

Victor frowned. He hated that Yuuri wasn’t even safe in his own country. “I will wait with you...or if you feel comfortable, I’ll escort you back to your friend’s home.”

Yuuri regarded him thoughtfully and Victor could see a myriad of thoughts going through his head. “I suppose...if I’m considering entering in your home, I...could let you escort me home.”

An hour later, Victor walked Yuuri up to the door of Phichit’s apartment, a protective hand on his back but nothing more intimate. Yuuri appreciated it and felt it gave him further insight on what to expect living with him. As Phichit opened the door, Yuuri turned to thank him. “I will let you know my decision as quickly as possible.”

“Thank you. I feel confident Yura will do well in your care.” As Victor walked away, Yuuri slipped into Phichit’s apartment.

“Well?” Phichit asked excitedly.

“He’s offered me the job. The contract will be sent to me for review.”

Phichit broke into movement, hugging Yuuri then diving into his phone to send a series of texts, “I’ll alert my friend! I’m so happy for you, Yuuri!”

Yuuri hugged himself as he found his smile once more. “Me, too.”
Chapter 3: My piece of happiness...

Yuuri tugged nervously at his sleeves as he waited for his family to join him in the family dining room. They were at the end of the day and the family often left the staff to finish up the closing procedures. He watched his mother’s tired expression as she placed their meal on the table. His father and sister sat on either side of him. His mother took her place across from him.

As food was passed around, his father broke the silence. “So what is this news you have for us?”

Yuuri put the dish of rice back into the center of the table before answering. “I’ve...accepted a position as a nanny.” Sort of...close enough . The other title might make his family worry.

His mother blinked in surprise. His sister tilted her head suspiciously. His father waited for him to continue.

“When I went to Tokyo to visit Phichit, it was for a job interview. The father is a widower and he needs someone to help with his son. His job requires a lot of travel seasonally, so he wants someone he could leave his child with for extended periods.”

“Is this an alpha?” Mari asked, never one to beat around the bush.
Yuuri looked at his sister with wide eyes and nodded slowly. “We’ve both had background checks.”

“Yuuri,” his mother said softly, “If someone ran a background check on Shuji, would they have found anything?”

No, Yuuri knew they wouldn’t. “This is different. Phichit knows him...knows of him, at least. And I...I need to do this. He’s a good man. And...I can go to university while his son is in school.”

“Do you mind if I look over the contract?” Yuuri father prodded gently.

Yuuri reluctantly stood up and went upstairs to retrieve the contract. Of course they won’t trust my decisions. I kept Shuji’s actions from them until it was too late to do anything legally. But he knew in his heart they just wanted to protect him. He walked down the stairs slowly, thankful for Ren’s company. As he sat back down with his family, the poodle wriggled into his lap.

Toshiya took the contract and started looking it over as Yuuri continued, “I had it checked out by Phichit’s boyfriend. He’s an attorney that looks out for omega rights.”

“Still, for our peace of mind, let your father read through it,” his mother said gently.

His father’s eyes tracked through the document, with a few grunts and mmmhmms before he handed back the contract. “This is a companion contract. Do you know what that means?”

Yuuri nodded, his eyes resting on his hands. “It means that I’m more of a member of the family than an employee,” he said softly.

“It also means that this alpha can court you and you aren’t protected by employment laws.”

Yuuri was surprised that his father, a beta, would know this. “I kn-know. He wants someone to take care of his son. He didn’t make any move towards me during our meeting.”
“He wouldn’t, though, would he?” Mari pressed, but her voice had softened. “You were in public. It’s a different thing inside his home.”

Yuuri looked at each of his family members before he closed his eyes. Sometimes he felt so defeated by his secondary gender. “Stop treating me like an omega!” He watched his family fall silent, then he calmed. “I...know what happened to me...it wasn’t good. I never asked for it. But I was a kid when that happened. I...know my instincts, but I took Phichit with me as well. Both of us felt the sincerity of this alpha.” He knew he had to be just as sincere with his own family, “And I...don’t feel at ease working at the Inn.”

He watched the troubled glances between them. “We could move you to a different job,” his mother suggested. But Yuuri had worked in all of the jobs. He was still hit on and he didn’t like it. He felt vulnerable. But he didn’t feel that way with Victor.

“I need to stand on my own two feet,” Yuuri continued. “I need to do this...and there are protection clauses in the contract. I...want to do this, to at least try.” As he met their eyes, they could see the stubbornness set in. “It would mean a lot to have your support.”

“If this doesn’t work out…” his father began.

“Part of this contract guarantees passage home. That amount is set in trust should I decide to dissolve my end of the contract for any reason. I’ll come back.”

Mari reached over and squeezed his hand. “I can’t look out for you there.”

“Maybe...it’s time for me to learn how to look after myself,” Yuuri suggested.

“When...do you leave?” his mother finally asked.

“He’s arranging for my travel. I don’t have much. Just my clothes.”

The dog wriggled into his lap and then barked up at him causing them all to laugh. As they quietened, his mother’s eyes rested on the poodle. “Can you...will he let you take Ren?”
“No, I couldn’t,” Yuuri protested.

She looked up sharply. “He won’t let you?” Memories of Yuuri having to leave Vicchan behind settled between them.

“No...h-he said it would be okay if I brought a pet. He has a dog and his son has a cat. But...Ren is your dog.”

His father shook his head slowly. “Ren hasn’t taken to any of us the way she’s taken to you. She is your dog. Take her.”

Yuuri stared in surprise at his flight itinerary. First class! He’d never flown first class. Shuji kept him at home, and the few times he was dragged along, he was put in omega class while his alpha stretched out up front. He traced his fingers down the flight arrangements which included accommodations for Ren. I’m doing this. It’s really happening.

He felt like he’d finally made a decisive move in his life rather than reacting to the events around him. As he packed his one suitcase, he realized this was the first time he’d been excited in years to pack; excited to be going somewhere and doing something. Hell, excited at all! He had a crate for Ren and had seen to the poodle’s vet papers.

His sister and Minako both insisted on driving him to the airport in Fukuoka. He was relieved as he didn’t want his last memories of Japan for now to be getting grabbed on the train. “I can’t believe you will be working as a companion in the Nikiforov home,” Minako buzzed in excitement. “I remember how much of a crush you had on him as a child.”

“Maybe...but it didn’t matter,” Yuuri said quietly. They all knew what he meant. His choices were taken from him.

The dance teacher never lost her positivity, it (and the booze) kept her eternally young. “Still, you get to know him better and who knows?”

Yuuri leveled her a look and said firmly, “I’m not looking for romance or an alpha. This is a job,
and an amazing opportunity. I’m hoping this will get me the credentials I need to take on other nanny positions. I’m going to go to college and study child psychology. If I-I…” He stopped and took a deep breath before continuing. “If I can’t have my own children, maybe I can help someone with theirs.”

Both women were quiet for a time before Mari broke through the silence. “I hope you get all of that, little brother. You deserve your piece of happiness in this world.”

Yuuri had never traveled with such attention and care. First class was way out of his price range but to be able to fly without being hit on and not in the crowded omega class full of screaming children and harried omega mothers was a tremendous relief. As the darkness filled the cabin, Yuuri slid his sleep mask in place and drifted off.

Yuuri gathered his luggage and checked the messages on his phone. *Oh, Victor can't pick me up. He's sending his father-in-law.* Luggage and Ren’s carrier in hand, he walked out to look for his ride and spotted a gruff old man holding a sign up with his name. “I’m Nikolai,” he introduced. “Yura’s my grandson...he was his mama’s world.”

Yuuri was a little intimidated by the man’s introduction, but he could feel that the grandfather was looking out for a little boy who had managed to run off a litany of nannies. “I promise to take good care of him,” Yuuri stated solemnly.

“You’d better,” he responded gruffly. He loaded Yuuri up in an old pickup which was a far cry from what Yuuri was expecting. “Vitya has been delayed at work and Yura is at home with Olga. You come with me to the house.”

Yuuri rode along taking in his new home, his eyes studying the people they passed on the street. He’d never lived outside of Japan although he’d traveled with competitions. He had to get his work visa arranged by Victor’s attorney and he took the time for the visa to get a pet passport for Ren. It had required two more trips to Tokyo, all funded by Victor, to deliver and receive the required documents from the consulate. Now he was here.

His eyes widened as the truck pulled up to a single attached residence. Perhaps not as wealthy as
the one he left when he walked away from Shuji but certainly well appointed. But there was something more. *Warmth*. Yuuri didn’t feel fear beyond the normal nervousness of someplace new. He unfolded from the car as the old man drew up. An older woman stood in the door greeting him.

She sounded stern, but her voice held something welcoming. “I’m Olga, Victor Andreivich’s housekeeper.”

Yuuri wrinkled his nose. “I...thought his name was Nikiforov.”

She chuckled and answered, “Andreivich is a patronymic. It is how we address each other. What is your father’s given name?”

“Well, Toshiya,” Yuuri answered.

“So Yuuri Toshiyavich. There we go.” She guided him inside as she continued, “You’ll have to forgive us old folks. We hold onto our old ways.”

Releasing his toy poodle into the room, he watched as she began to explore the new space.

Yuuri hugged himself, feeling welcome in this warm home. “Where is...Yura?”

“Oh, he’s pouting.” She turned to survey Yuuri, summing him up under her wrinkled eyes. “You’ll have fun with that one. Don’t get discouraged. He doesn’t realize that he needs another mother.”

Yuuri sighed, looking upstairs where the housekeeper’s eyes trailed. “Maybe we can start with friends.”

He mounted the stairs and walked up to the landing, his ears listening for the sound of a child playing. A cat ran out of a room and he heard someone cry out “Potya, come back” only to come face to face with a blond child.

Yuuri’s heart crawled up his chest as he took in the child regarding him with distrustful eyes. “I
“Don’t need a Mama!” he declared and then took off after the cat. A chuckle behind him drew his attention back to Olga.

“Don’t worry. He will come around. All prickly on the outside but he’s soft and gentle on the inside.” She smiled as Yuuri regained his feet. “Why don’t I show you your room? You can get settled before Victor Andreivich comes home.”

Yuuri found himself ensconced across the hall from the boy. However, he did have a private bathroom and the closet was as big as his room back home. “This space...is generous.”

“Yes, Victor Andreivich wanted you to be comfortable. He’s a good man. You don’t have to worry about him.” She waved him to the controls by the door. “It has a standard lock but both Victor Andreivich and myself have the keys. However, because this is an omega room, it also is equipped with a scent lock. Should you need complete privacy, such as during your heats, you can activate the scent lock.” She took his arm and set his wrist into the receptacle. “There is a remote device by the bed and an outside device.”

Yuuri blinked at the extra precautions taken for his safety and...comfort. “He...thought of everything.”

She laughed warmly and Yuuri knew he would like her. “He did...four nannies ago. She was an omega and he wanted to make sure she felt secure. He went through the expense only for her to be gone within three months.”

Yuuri had to admit it was admirable Victor would do this for a stranger, and he felt a small pang of jealousy realizing it wasn’t done just for him. “Why...do they not stay?”

“Impatient lot. They don’t want to take the time to figure out how Yura ticks.” She considered the little fiery blonde across the hall, locked in his own world. “He’s a good child once someone takes the time. His teachers adore him...most of the time. Such an imagination! But he’s got a temper, a tough exterior. Yelena was such a sweet tempered lady, she didn’t believe in corporal punishment. Vitya agreed.”

Yuuri smiled softly at the heavy handed hit. But he was happy to know they had similar disciplinary beliefs. “Yelena...his...wife?”

“She was sweet, a dancer. However, her body was weak. She didn’t fully regain her health after
having the boy. She loved him dearly, though, and wouldn’t have given him up for anything.” Yuuri heard something in her voice that implied there was more to the mother’s background, something the housekeeper wasn’t sharing. But the moment was gone as she patted Yuuri’s back and glanced around the room. “I’ll leave you to unpack and get settled then we can talk about anything you need.”

Yuuri slowly unpacked, his belongings not coming anywhere near to filling the space. He could hear Yura racing around, chasing the cat then his cry of glee when the small poodle joined in. “This is like a baby Makkachin!” Yuuri smiled to himself. He’d seen pictures of Victor, Yura, and their two pets, Potya and Makkachin. Well, at least poodles are accepted in this home.

He then heard a boisterous greeting from the front door and feet scrambling downstairs. “Yura, your papa’s home!”

Yuuri took a deep breath to settle his nerves and went to the rail of the stair. Victor lifted blue eyes to meet his and his breath caught. Yuuri could almost imagine greeting him as his mate and that unsettled him inside. This isn’t what I came for...I just need to find my feet.

Victor seemed equally transfixed, his voice lost for a moment before the omega’s name leaves Victor’s lips. “Yuuuuri,” he murmured, “You’re finally here.”

The shy Japanese omega descended the stairs. Yura was annoyed that someone had his Papa’s attention other than him and fidgeted, hanging onto the alpha. Victor stepped towards the omega and Yuuri moved within reach, his eyes downcast, a shy “hi” on his lips.

Victor’s voice softened, “I apologize for not meeting you at the airport. One of my students was injured and I had to see to them.”

Yuuri looked up, curious, “You...teach?”

Victor ran through his words, “I guess...yes, I’m their coach. I still perform in ice shows but I’ve retired from competition. Yura is one of my students but the young ones only spend a few hours during the week on ice.”

“My coach is Georgi,” the blond argued, breaking in, jealous of not being the center of attention. “He coaches me and Mila.”
Yuuri smiled shyly, returning his gaze to the small boy. “I’ll have to acquaint myself with your schedule.”

The blond shrugged and ran off chasing Ren and Potya now joined by Makkachin. “He’s fun,” Victor murmured as he watched his son run off. Turning back to Yuuri, he blushed and shrugged. “You’re probably wondering what in the hell you’re doing here.”

Yuuri’s eyes rested on the door where Yura disappeared. “I have to admit I didn’t expect…” He waved his hands around the large, well appointed home. “…all this.”

Victor chuckled. “I’m not worried about finding someone to watch my son. I have Olga and Nikolai. But…he needs someone…he needs the nurturing of a mother.”

“I’ll…do my best,” Yuuri promised.

Victor sighed, his eyes resting on a picture across the room. “I loved my wife. Yelena was…beautiful and full of grace. She retired from the stage and would teach the dancers at the skate club. She enjoyed working with the young ones.” He came back to himself an abashed blush touching his cheeks and refocused on Yuuri. “How was your trip?”

Yuuri watched the wistful sorrow disappear, replaced by ardent interest. He found himself smiling at this man, “It was…more than I expected. I normally don’t have that nice of a travel experience.”

Victor frowned, “I just remembered what you said about traveling alone in Tokyo and wanted to ensure you didn’t have to worry about fending off unwanted suitors on the trip.”

Yuuri smiled, a blush tainting his cheeks. “Thank you. Most would have put me into omega class.”

Victor narrowed his eyes. “What is that?”

Yuuri blinked in surprise. “I guess it’s like coach…but focused on omegas. Lots of mothers and kids.”
Victor frowned and shook his head. “That sounds exhausting. I think First Class is more appropriate. Now, are you settled?”

“Yes, I’m unpacked and ready to work.”

Victor chuckled at his eagerness, his discerning eyes noting the tiredness in Yuuri’s eyes. “How about dinner? We eat as a family in this house. Olga, when she’s here, as well as Nikolai, Yura, and myself. Care to join us?”

Yuuri hesitantly agreed. They walked through the kitchen into a dining room set for a casual family dinner. Victor invited Yuuri to sit at his side and Yura clamored to the other side talking about his day in rapid Russian. Victor responded in Russian, laughing, warmth in his voice before turning to Yuuri. “He’s telling me about a new student at school. His name is Otabek.”

“Beka!” Yura broke in. “He’s so cool.”

“And three years older than you. He may be more interested in those his age once he settles in.”

Yura shrugged. “He has a sister my size.”

Victor winked towards Yuuri. “I think someone has a little crush.”

Yura’s eyes widened, his cheeks red. “Nononono. Gross, Papa!”

Yuuri hugged himself as he took a few bites of the food in front of him. Maybe...he was already falling in love with this little one.

Chapter End Notes

And who couldn't fall in love with that little ankle biter?
Chapter Summary

Yuuri faces his first difficulties as Yura's caregiver and learns how difficult it is to allow himself to be cared for.

Chapter Notes

What? Another chapter? I may love this story as much as BluSkates...it's the baby Yura. I can't resist his impishness.

This chapter is full of fluffy goodness but still hints at the abuses Yuuri suffered in the past. It's going to take a while for him to recover but I think you will all agree he's in the right place and in good hands...although whether that's Yura's care or Victor's care, I'll leave it to you to decide.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 4: At least out loud I won’t say I’m in love...

Yuuri walked Yura up the stairs after sleepy good nights. “So what now...bath and story?” Yuuri suggested.

The blond hellion wrinkled his nose. “I don’t need a bath.”

Yuuri laughed and shook his head. “I don’t think that’s how it works. Why don’t you pick out a book and some pajamas while I run your bath. Do you want bubbles?”

“Of course?” The look the little green eyes gave Yuuri let him know exactly what level of idiot he was for suggesting otherwise.

Smiling at the antics of his little charge, Yuuri went into the bathroom and acquainted himself with the oversized tub, then began filling it and finding the basket of toys nearby. Soon, Yura was back with Spiderman pj’s in hand. He stripped without care and marched his naked tokhis over to Yuuri.
The omega shook his head in amusement and lifted him over the edge and into the water.

As Yura began acquainting himself with the toys, he frowned when Yuuri settled down to help wash him. “So you’re going to stay?”

Yuuri felt a double meaning in that question, this little boy was used to being abandoned by caretakers who quit before even trying. He decided to focus on the task at hand, “Did your other nannies leave you unattended?” Yuuri asked in surprise.

The blond huffed before shaking his head. “No, but I’m a big kid.”

Handing over a washcloth, “Well, show me how a big kid washes up and maybe I’ll give you some space. But I won’t leave you alone.”

“Fiiiine!” He took the cloth and began a snapdash wash job and then looked up to see Yuuri’s arms crossed in disapproval. “What does it matter? I’m just going to get dirty again anyways.”

“Anyway, singular.” Yuuri corrected, taking back the cloth and rubbing it with soap then returning it to the boy. “And dirt carries germs which, over time, breaks the body down and make us sick.”

Yuuri watched as the little blonde thought about it before he began to work slowly to remove his dirt being a little more thorough about it. “Can you wash too much?”

Yuuri nodded. “Some do...but they also have to see special doctors called psychiatrists.”

Green eyes narrowed at the familiar word, knowing only the simplified stereotype associated with it. “So...they are crazy.” He dropped the washcloth into the tub. “Well, I’m not crazy.”

Yuuri laughed at the decisive action, “You’re also not clean,” Yuuri argued.

“ Wouldn’t want to get too clean .” Yura turned his back on Yuuri while he played with some animals made for the tub.
Yuuri narrowed his eyes and then pulled out the phone, texting Yuuko.

**Yuu-chan/ How do I get a five year old to wash up in the bath?**

**Yuuko-chan/ Yuuri! Is he five? Is he adorable?**

**Yuu-chan/ Yes. We’re in the bathroom. This conversation is awkward.**

**Yuuko-chan/ Oh, right. Rewards. What does he want? Phrase it like you wanted to do something with him, but you can’t because...**

Yuuri considered what he had to offer. Looking at his nails nonchalantly, he bargained, “I was going to read to you after your bath, but I guess if we can’t get you clean in time…”

The child turned towards him, sizing him up before shrugging and picking up the washcloth. He did a much more thorough job of washing and let Yuuri wash his back and hair. As he carefully rinsed the soap from Yura’s hair with care, the blond admitted quietly, “You’re better at that than Ghitta.”

Yuuri frowned in confusion, “Ghitta?”

“Nanny before Helga, Helga was two nannies before you. She’d get soap in my eyes and didn’t even care. She was an omega, too. But I don’t think she cared.”

“I’ll do my best not to get soap in your eyes,” Yuuri promised solemnly. “I grew up at an inn and a spa. Do you know what that is?”

Yura slowly shook his head.

Yuuri thought of the best way to explain something as complex to a child with no true cultural reference. “People came there to take baths that made them feel better.”
Yura thought for a moment, “So you know how to do this bath thing good?”

“Well, not good, and yes.” Yuuri corrected gently. He watched Yura play with the toys a bit longer then held up a towel. “Why don’t we dry off so we don’t get too pruney? Then we can read.”

Yura remained in the tub, green eyes narrowing. “Can I...have two books?”

Yuuri looked at him thoughtfully before answering, “This time. But next time you have to wash up without a fight for two books.”

“I can do that!” The little form was standing, reaching out for help out of the tub in an instant.

Yuuri chuckled at the enthusiasm. “Show me, don’t just tell me.” Drying him off thoroughly, he handed Yura the pajamas while he let out the water and spread the towel on the bar to dry. He turned to find Yura dressed. Sitting on the toilet, Yuuri guided him between his legs while he combed through his young charge’s hair. “Are you growing it long like Papa?”

Yura turned a little to look curiously at Yuuri, “Papa’s hair isn’t long.”

“It was when he was younger. Maybe he’ll show you pictures,” Yuuri suggested.

He watched shoulder’s squeeze together with barely suppressed excitement. “Can I go ask him now?”

“We’d have to give up a story,” Yuuri stated. “You have school tomorrow.”

Yura tapped his lip as he decided. Yuuri thought the learned gesture from the father looked even more adorable on the son. “I think...I want to see Papa with long hair.”

They walked down the stairs hand in hand and Yuuri spotted a lamp lit up in the family room. “Papa may be busy. We’ll have to see what he says,” Yuuri hedged, keeping his voice soft.

Victor heard them talking and turned, a heart shape smile erupting upon seeing them together.
“Yura, come to tell me good night?”

“Nope!” the little hellion declared. “I want pictures. Yuuri said you had long hair.”

Victor looked startled, his blue eyes going up to Yuuri with surprised, the Japanese omega blushing in response. “I...did.”

Yura had already cleared the distance and was standing before Victor, “Show me!”

Sighing, Victor stood up and walked across the room, pulling out a couple of photo albums and moving to the couch. He sat in the middle so that one could sit on one side and the other on the opposite but when he spotted Yuuri’s hesitance, he declared, “You opened this can of worms. You will join me in my struggle.”

Shifting nervously as he considered his place in the house, he slowly walked towards the pair and took the indicated seat as Victor opened the album. “You’re going to be a bad influence, I can see that now,” he muttered under his breath but Yuuri could see the sparkle in his blue eyes and relaxed into a grin in response. “I think I was about...nine when I started growing it out.”

Yura peered over the pages, “Did your Papa say it was okay?”

“He wasn’t sure at first but my Mama told him it was my hair, my decision.” He showed the early pictures of him in a dance recital followed by a skate show and they progressed through the album, stopping every so often to tell one story or another. The clock wound on until Yura was curled up into Victor’s side asleep. “It seems it’s bedtime.” He started to pick up the little sleeping bean when Yuuri interrupted.

“Let me,” he said softly, scooping up the little one.

Victor watched nervously, seeing Yuuri sway a little under his small son’s weight, his hand going out to steady him from behind. He really needed to fatten this boy up. “Let me go up with you. It’s been awhile since I’ve tucked him in.”

Victor followed Yuuri up the stairs, a protective hand staying on his back. They settled him into his bed and Yuuri unconsciously ran his wrist over Yura’s pillow next to his cheek. Victor tucked the blanket around him and then looked around until he found a tiger in a ballet dress. Tucking it
under the child’s elbow, he guided Yuuri out of the room.

“I owe him a story,” Yuuri said softly.

“Trust me, you’ll more than make it up,” Victor chuckled. “How are you settling?”

“Well, it’s just the first day...but I think...I’m going to like it here.” He could feel the blush rising into his cheeks at the close proximity with his employer.

Victor nodded, “Let me know if you need anything, for yourself as well as for Yura. And if I’m not available, talk to Olga. She shops for the household.”

“Okay. Thank you.” Nodding towards his door, he added, “It’s been a long day. I think I’ll turn in early as well.”

Victor took a step back and Yuuri thought he saw something sorry in his eyes. “Okay,” Victor said reluctantly. “Good night.”

In the privacy of his room, Yuuri’s mind was racing. *Fuckfuckfuckfuckfuck*. He pulled out his phone and thought about who to contact.

**Yuu-chan/ Phichit!**

**Peach/ Yuuuuuuriii!**

**Yuu-chan/ I’m here...and Yura is adorable...and I feel...more together than I have in a long time.**

**Peach/ That’s wonderful...and a certain handsome Russian?**

Yuuri frowned at the phone, as if the texts could carry his facial expression to his friend.
Yuu-chan/ This is a job.

Peach/ Sure. Tell yourself that.

Yuu-chan/ Peeeeeeeaach!!!!

He showered and dressed in an almost dreamlike state before settling in bed, pulling his blanket up to smell his mother’s scent. She made sure she scented the old blanket well. I’m not falling for my boss. He fell back into the mattress. Nope! Not at all. Turning over on his side, his eyes rested on the door and he thought about the sleeping form across the hall. But I may be a little in love with his son, though.

Yuuri woke up a little while later to a scratching at his door. At first he thought it was Ren but she was curled up asleep in his bed. Slipping from the covers, he went to investigate. It was dark and colder than he was used to. Peeking into the hallway he at first saw nothing until he heard a sniffle. Outside his door stood a sleep disheveled little boy clutching a blanket and stuffed tiger in one arm.

“Are you okay?” Yuuri asked, dropping down to his level.

Yura shook his head slowly. “Bad dream,” he whispered.

Yuuri scooped the little boy into his arms, surprised when he snuggled into his neck breathing in the scent. Yuuri held still for a moment, letting the boy find comfort and relax. Then he took a step towards Yura’s door but stopped when he heard a whimper. Yuuri turned to see the little face scrunch unhappily, “What would you like?”

The little voice was sincere, “To sleep with you and Papa.”

Yuuri sighed. Nope, that wasn’t a complicated request at all. “I don’t sleep with your Papa…” he began.
Yura seemed confused by that, which was odd since he knew what room to go to, “But...you’re our omega. Can’t we just go to his room?”

Yuuri nuzzled into the blond hair. *Yep, I’m gone. This one has my heart for sure.* “I tell you what, you pick who you want for the night.”

He was still, his small hand knotted into Yuuri’s sleep shirt. Yuuri could tell the boy was debating between sleeping with his father but giving up the omega’s scent. Snuggling back into Yuuri’s neck, he decided. “Maybe tonight I stay here.”

Leaving the door open, he carried the boy over to his bed. Not quite a nest yet as Yuuri wasn’t certain if he were allowed to make one. He settled Yura into the sheets, tucking the bedding around him before stretching out over the surface. Lying down next to the boy, Yuuri wrapped the blanket he brought from home around himself. The boy curled into him, his hand once more fisting into Yuuri’s shirt as he tucked under the omega’s chin. *For someone who doesn’t need a mama...*

Yuuri woke up to Olga singing in the hallway and sat up sleepily, looking at his phone. It was dark but Yura needed to get ready for school. Then he looked around realizing Yura was gone. He stepped into his slippers and walked through the open door towards the hallway. Yura was sitting in his room across the hall talking to Potya in Russian.

“Good morning, Yura,” the omega greeted warmly.

The blond child looked up, his cheeks pink, his eyes full of resolve. “I sleepwalk.”

“Oh...okay,” Yuuri answered, *have your fiction if it helps you.* “It’s fine, you know.”

Yura didn’t seem to agree but wanted out of the conversation quickly, “I need to go to school.”

“Let’s get you ready then.” Soon he had the uniform laid out and in order, something he was familiar with from growing up in Japan.
Yura fought some of the parts of his uniform, namely the tie. He pouted about the sweater but it was cold outside and Yuuri insisted on an extra layer. He tried to tell Yuuri he didn’t need socks. Yuuri said he’d hide a surprise in his sock but he couldn’t have it until he was on his way home from school. He slipped the stick of gum just inside the cuff. Then he marched Yura downstairs to have breakfast.

They both ate a bowl of oatmeal but Yura looked across the table critically at Yuuri’s. “You didn’t eat all of yours.”

“I’ll finish it later,” Yuuri promised. “We’re late and I need to get you to school,” he covered when he spotted the doubtful frown.

Then they were out the door. Olga had described the route and Yura swore he knew the way. With Ren on lead, they began to make their way down the street. “Where’s your coat?” Yura asked halfway down the block.

“Oh, I guess I forgot to pack it.” Yuuri covered quickly with a lie. He was hoping no one would notice he didn’t have a coat, nor boots, nor a great deal of clothing. Perhaps with his first paycheck he could replace some of the items he needed.

Yura stopped pulling on Yuuri’s hand and frowning with adult concern, “This is Russia. You have to have a coat.”

Yuuri laughed and tugged him back into motion, “Says the shortstop that refused to wear socks this morning.”

“I got a stick of gum out of the deal.” Yura skipped happily next to his omega. He never had a nanny give him gum, or hold his hand on their way to school...or talk to him. The Japanese omega even got down to his level and looked him in the eye.

“Such a shrewd bargainer,” Yuuri praised. They walked two blocks, took a right and walked four more before arriving at the front steps. Yuuri straightened his sweater before sending him inside. “I’ll be here when you get out, okay?”

The kindergartener nodded, his eyes going up the steps. “Oh, there’s Beka! Bye, Yuuri!” and then he was gone.
Yuuri watched for awhile, and he didn’t know why he felt a little moisture at the corner of his eyes. Turning to head back slowly, he thought about his day unsure what he was supposed to do once he left Yura at school. Victor was long gone, his day starting much earlier.

Yuuri had planned to enroll for classes but he wasn’t sure how to do that without a computer, or a credit card, or a school in mind. Freedom was a wonderful, terrifying thing. Arriving back at the house, he looked around kind of lost until he settled into the kitchen. “Can I help?”

Olga looked up surprised. “Oh, ummm...sure.” None of the nannies, not even the previous omega, had condescended to even speak with the help.

Yuuri shrugged. “I grew up in my parents’ business, a restaurant and inn. I’m used to helping where needed.”

Olga nodded, impressed. She was happy to know he understood the value of work. “Well, I was going to do the shopping, then prep for dinner before making lunch.”

Yuuri had nothing to do until Yura got out of school so he fell into step with her, walking down to the market. He became lost in the quick chatter of Russian but listened and paid attention all the same. Olga noticed his watchful eyes and took the time to teach him the different names of the foods in Russian. “You won’t get it the first time, Yuuri Toshiyavich, but you will learn,” she reassured him.

Once home, he was given the task of peeling vegetables while she chopped, dropping them into a broth on the stove. “A cold wind will blow in tonight. You’ll appreciate a warm soup for dinner.”

For lunch, they had a simple baked chicken and steamed vegetable but Yuuri still didn’t eat all of his serving. “Are you sick?” Olga fussed.

Yuuri shrugged. “I don’t think my stomach’s on schedule yet. Give me time,” he murmured, dodging the question. After he helped clean up, he went down the hall to get his lightweight jacket and walk down to pick up Yura.

The walk was slower or maybe he wasn’t distracted by a five-year-old’s chatter. He felt tired and figured it to be jetlag. He hadn’t taken any catch up time sleeping, but instead jumped right into taking care of Yura. Reaching the step, he saw the blonde sitting on the step, waiting. Am I late?
A teacher stood nearby and started walking his direction.

“Yuuri Katsuki?”

Yuuri felt a knot of worry forming, “Umm, yes...I’m the…”

“Companion Omega. We’ve been informed.” The woman spoke a clipped English and he could tell she was annoyed. “I’m Yura’s teacher. I was hoping to catch you.”

Yuuri squirmed under her scrutiny of him, but felt comforted as Yura left her side to stand close to him, clutching his pant leg. “What’s wrong?”

She sighed, indicating to the little blonde standing half hidden from her view by Yuuri. “Well, Yura was fighting earlier and we were concerned.”

Yuuri continued to listen to her even as he knelt to examine the boy in his charge. He could see the scrape on his cheek and the darkening around his eye now. “And the other one?”

“Others,” she pointed out. “Some of the students were deriding the new student.”

“Otabek,” Yuuri supplied, glancing up her direction.

She seemed a little taken aback that Yuuri, a lowly companion omega, would be as forward as he was. “Ummm, yes...and well, Yura thought he needed to step in.”

Yuuri rose, looking directly at her. “So he was defending another student.”

She took a step back, pursing her lips. “It’s not that simple. Yura...threw the first punch. That means...he’s suspended for three days.”

Yuuri hated rules that were black and white and failed to look at the situation. However, he was caught in the educational bureaucracy. “Perhaps if the bullying had been curtailed to begin with,” Yuuri stated harshly, “We could have avoided this incident. However, I will make sure Yura’s
father is informed of the situation and keep him on track with his studies. Do you have his work?”
Yuuri stood up as he spoke and held out his hands. The teacher was harried and he hated that he made her day harder but he also hated that Yura was being punished for stepping in when adults failed to do so. She handed him the work. “We’ll return on Friday ready to go. I’m not sure what his father will say about this.”

Green eyes looked up at him, regarding him thoughtfully, before taking Yuuri’s spare hand. They walked quietly back towards home. Finally, he asked, “You’re not mad at me?”

“Nope,” Yuuri said although he was mad.

Yura didn’t say anything for another block before he asked, “You seem mad.”

“Not at you, Yura.”

Entering the home, Yura reluctantly went to the kitchen to get his snack, seeming to want to stay closer to the omega. Yuuri went to the family room and organized Yura’s work. He then pulled out his phone and sent a message to his sister.

Yuu-chan/ How did Mom handle it when you got suspended for fighting?

Mari-neesan/ Depended on why I was fighting.

Yuu-chan/ Defending me.

Mari-neesan/ We talked about what happened and why. Then we took care of my schoolwork.

Yuu-chan/ You didn’t get grounded?

Mari-neesan/ Not if the fight was just...even if it wasn’t over you.
He was still sitting in the living room when green eyes peeked around the corner. “Am I in trouble?”

Yuuri sighed and patted the sofa beside him. The blond bundle of energy crawled up and set beside him. “I’m...not mad at you,” he reiterated. “Today the adults didn’t do their jobs well enough and you got hurt because of it. That makes me angry. But defending someone that is being picked on...that...is noble.”

Yura looked up at the unfamiliar word. “What...does noble mean?”

Yuuri thought how to explain to a child, “It’s like...knights and princes. They do the right thing even if there are unfair consequences.”

Yura nodded, then added brightly, “Like the school sending me home.”

“They...have rules. And sometimes they don’t look at the reason behind the action. I don’t agree with that but we will take their punishment in stride.” He paused and brushed the blonde hair down. “What I don’t know is how your father will react.”

Yura shrugged. Neither of them knew what to expect and maybe that put them on pins and needles as they waited for him to come home. Yura followed Yuuri through the house as he cleaned in nervous energy. Olga stepped out of his way not knowing what was going on in Yuuri’s head. And maybe Yuuri didn’t know either. He was simply waiting for the shoe to drop. And when Shuji was mad, Yuuri wanted to remove anything else that could add to his anger, making sure everything was perfect.

Then Victor came home. He watched Yuuri’s nervous energy for a moment and then his eyes fell on the little boy hiding behind him. “What happened?”

Yuuri tried to gauge Victor’s mood by his tone but only heard concern. “Yura was in a fight at school.”

Victor went down to his knees and held out his gloved hand towards his son. “What happened?” he repeated, his eyes fixed on his son.

“They were picking on Otabek because he got held back and calling him bad words and the
teachers were across the schoolyard not paying attention so I walked in between Beka and the bullies and shoved one...and they hit me back.”

Victor sighed as he lifted his son’s chin and studied the damage. “I’d rather you find a way to handle these things without fighting.”

“Sometimes you can’t,” Yura argued.

“I know,” he murmured. “What’s the school say about this?”

“He’s suspended for three days,” Yuuri said quietly.

Victor held his eyes for a few moments. “Are you up for this?”

Yuuri blinked in surprise. “I can handle his lessons, if that’s what you’re asking.”

Victor smiled at the resolve, but had to point out the obvious problem. “Well, they’re in Russian.”

Yuuri stilled. He hadn’t thought about that. “Oh.”

Turning back to his son, Victor suggested, “Maybe you can be the teacher for the next three days and show Yuuri what you are learning. Do you think you can do that?”

Yura nodded vigorously.

“And if it’s too hard, ask Olga or Grandpa, okay?”

“I can do that, Papa,” Yura reassured him.

Looking back up to Yuuri, he shrugged. “This is my son.”
“And he’s very noble,” Yuuri said firmly, holding a hand out to Victor.

Victor hesitated, but then took the outstretched hand. Rising to his feet, he followed the two of them into dinner already losing himself into his son’s chatter, but...Yuuri didn’t let go of the hand...and part of him was glad. He glanced at the picture of Yelena, his eyes almost asking permission. Then something his son said caught his attention.

“Yuuri needs a coat, Papa.”

“Yura!” the Japanese man protested, dropping Victor’s hand to send his arms fluttering.

Victor laughed at the sudden surprise, “Did you not bring a coat to Russia, Yuuri?”

Yuuri huffed, dropping his head in shame. “I don’t have one.”

Victor took a long look at Yuuri, noticing the condition of the clothing he wore. They weren’t shabby but older, and very dulled from too many washings. “Maybe we should take you shopping and help you get properly settled. I’ve only seen you in workout clothes and as comfortable as they appear, it looks like we need to consider some upgrades.”

Yuuri immediately felt uncomfortable at the idea. “I don’t...really, I’m fine,” Yuuri protested.

Placing a hand on Yuuri’s back, he leaned in and stated firmly, “I insist.”

Yuuri could see he wasn’t getting out of it. “I guess...we can take it from my pay?”

Victor shook his head. “We will not take it from your pay. Room and board is part of our agreement and making sure you are properly clothed is part of board.”

“Oh.” Yuuri didn’t know what to say to that argument. He knew his mother would say the same, all he would have had to do was say something to them in Japan and they would have taken care of it. But Yuuri wanted to stand on his own two feet. Letting Victor take care of him...that felt
contrary to his goal of independence. “I want...to take care of myself,” he argued stubbornly although his voice was soft.

“I know...and I don’t want to take away from that. However, my job is to make sure everyone in this house has their needs met. Yura was right to let me know, don’t you agree?”

Yuuri’s eyes rested on the boy, his green eyes blinking up at him worried and a little afraid. “I agree...Yura is very noble and caring. I...don’t want to take away from that.”

“Let me call Yakov and I’ll go in late tomorrow. We can go shopping in the morning.” And then Victor promptly changed the topic closing the matter, something Yuuri noticed the son was picking up on. Yuuri watched the alpha as they settled around the table not sure what to think about him. *Maybe I could use a few things*, he admitted to himself. He looked across the table and caught a smirk from the green eyed monster. *At least you use your powers for good.*

Chapter End Notes

Yura cares fiercely for those he lets into his world as you can see, and that care extends to the new omega in his house. And like a typical five-year-old, he takes ownership of the people and things in his reach. So Yuuri is his omega. ;) He'll share with his papa, though.

As for Yuuri and the song quoted in the title, Yuuri has some Meg qualities...and he's been burned and used in the past. It makes it hard for him to let himself be loved and cared for because he's waiting for the hurt. So all the love for both of our Yu(u)ris, one for being noble and the other for the love he has for the little green-eyed monster.
These are a few of my favorite things…

Chapter Summary

Shopping and a new friend

Chapter Notes

Good morning! I thought I'd share a bit of fluff this morning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 5: These are a few of my favorite things…

Yura had remained close for the evening, still shadowing all of Yuuri’s steps. It wasn’t until he was tucking the little blonde in that he found out why.

“Are you going to stay?”

Yuuri pulled back, a little startled by the question. The voice was gruff from under the covers, but the little green eyes peeping out from the Lion King comforter were sincere, and frightened.

Yuuri rubbed the little tummy, watching the feet wiggle. “Why do you ask?”

“The others, they would have left after today. Helga said this was above her...pay grate.”

Yuuri smiled at the childish misunderstanding, “Pay grade. It’s an expression used by people who are lazy.” He studied the little boy, who seemed more relaxed but was still worried. “I would like to stay. Would you like that?”

The boy relaxed so much Yuuri could have sworn he sunk into the soft mattress. “Yes.” He blushed, realizing how eager he sounded. “You aren’t too bad.”
“You’re not so bad, yourself.” Yuuri rose to leave but felt a tug at his sleeve. His eyes watched as Yura pulled his wrist free of the hem and rubbed his ballerina tiger against the gland. The boy returned to snuggle into his bedding, tiger tucked to his nose. His breathing evened out and Yuuri could tell he had drifted off quickly.

The next morning Yuuri stood nervously near the door as Victor talked with Olga and Grandpa. “Yura would prefer to stay home if that’s okay,” he began looking between the two.

Yuuri smiled, the boy had returned to his normal, impish self after he woke and found Yuuri still in his room. Declaring shopping boring, he had decided Victor could be trusted with his Yuuri for this one day.

Olga waved away his concerns. “He can get a head start on his homework at the table while I’m prepping dinner.”

Smiling his beautiful smile, Victor nodded at that plan. Victor had already donned his coaching jacket, and pulled his heavy wool jacket from the closet for Yuuri. Draping it over Yuuri’s shoulder he frowned, seeing the omega sag a little under the weight. He’d noticed Yuuri struggling to finish his meals, each time a silly excuse was given. However, Olga had reported as much for the meals he hadn’t been present for. Maybe this isn’t just depression.

Victor placed a supportive hand on Yuuri’s back and guided him to the dark sedan, settling Yuuri into the front seat, brown leather, heated. Yuuri felt a sigh as he relaxed into it. He was also surprised to sit up front with the alpha, let alone to be seated with such care, Victor reaching over to fasten his seatbelt.

Victor came around and took the driver’s seat moving into traffic. “Do you drive, Yuuri?”

The omega shook his head before looking out the window. “I never had a chance to learn,” he said quietly. “I was eighteen when I went to live with my alpha. He didn’t see the point.”

Victor flicked his eyes quickly to the small framed man who was occupied with the sights they were passing. “Maybe we can arrange that as well.”
Yuuri looked over at him in surprise. “Oh...I…”

Victor heard Yuuri’s struggle, “I know you’re probably overwhelmed with learning a new language already. We’ll take it step by step.” He took another cautious glance, and saw the younger man relax. “But I want you to be comfortable here and you’ve already expressed concerns about public transportation.”

Yuuri nodded and it was true. All of it. “I wanted to take classes,” he reminded Victor quietly.

Victor frowned as he thought about it. “Maybe you could start out with something online until you have the language down. There’s a laptop on my desk. I don’t like to bring work home but sometimes it can’t be helped. However, you are welcome to use it for your classes. It’s not locked, just pull down the desktop. You’re welcome to take it with you while you work.”

Yuuri smiled at the generous offer, but there was a larger problem. “I don’t...they require a credit card. I looked it up on my phone.”

Victor thinned his lips thoughtfully, realizing how cut off the omega had been from the world. “I have an open card, one that I don’t use but Yelena kept in the house for emergencies. It has a large enough credit limit that you could charge your tuition and books without a problem.”

Yuuri started to shake his head, “I can’t…”

Victor reached over and settled a hand over Yuuri’s arm. “I know...you want to do this on your own. I...can take the credit card payments out of your pay.”

Yuuri considered the offer, “I’d...need to have it paid off before the next group of classes.”

“We’ll work out the payment schedule and get it taken care of.” He wanted to help this man reclaim something of what was lost, even if he didn’t truly know what he had been through. “I know this is important to you. I promised you we could make it happen. I’m...just backing the loan of sorts. Besides, as you work and earn credit you’ll have more options for payments in the future. This is to help get you started.”
Yuuri studied his hands in his lap before nodding reluctantly. “I guess...I can work with that.”

Victor smiled happily as he pulled into the parking spot. “This store is one I frequent and they will take good care of you.” He then frowned as he watched Yuuri nod, abandoning the coat as he left the car. Thinning his lips, he followed, muttering, “You make it very hard to take care of you.” The omega was already at the door and out of earshot especially with the wind but Victor could see him shiver violently before going inside.

Victor came up behind him at the front entrance. “The guardian to one of my students works here as an associate. I always go to her, that way she can get the commission.” He then smiled as the redhead came up and greeted him in Russian. Victor replied in kind adding, “This is my companion omega that just came to live with us and he needs a decent wardrobe. One suitable for Russia. I know you’re discrete. Could you...take his sizes in private and allow for growth where possible?”

“He’s so thin,” she blanched, her eyes wide. Then covered her mouth.

Victor blushed and felt Yuuri tense next to him, he put a comforting hand on the small of his back noticing that Yuuri settled into the touch. “He doesn’t speak Russian yet but I’m sure he’s aware we are talking about him. Please work your magic and make him feel at ease. I’m not worried about the cost but...he doesn’t seem to have a lot in the way of clothes.”

“Of course. You know I’ll take care of him.” Switching to English, she greeted the omega warmly. “I’m Katya Babicheva and I’ll be taking care of you today. Let's step back to the dressing room so I can get your measurements.” She noticed his uncertain gaze towards Victor and added, “He can come if you would like, or we can go alone.”

“I-I would rather just us?” he squeaked, a blush going up to his cheeks.

She laughed warmly and tossed back a teasing remark towards Victor. “Keep him guessing. I like that.”

In the dressing room, she pulled out her tape measure and began the process. She saw the sunken chest, the hip bones that jutted out, the wrists, so thin she could snap them and covered her reaction as best she could. “You have a slender frame and a smaller stature. Do you skate? Dance?”

Yuuri shivered a little, the room was warm, he was just feeling exposed. “I did both...at one time.”
“I thought so.” She put a soft robe over his shoulders, letting him relax. “My sister Mila is one of Vitya’s students. We’ve been friends for a long time. I used to take care of his Yelena.”

Yuuri nodded as he thought about those words. “He still misses her, doesn’t he?”

The redhead worked quickly, taking and recording his measurements. “He does...but theirs was a great friendship. He knew her from childhood. I think his mother and her mother were close friends.”

Yuuri processed those words. *Friendship.* “He...hasn’t talked much about her.”

Katya rose, she signaled for him to sit in one of the chairs of the fitting room and lowered the robe, measuring his back and chest. “She...was a fragile creature and when she had Yura, we all knew something had changed in her. She kept losing weight and then they found the cancer.” She pursed her lips and watched Yuuri take in a breath. “It was too late. So Victor made sure she was comfortable. But Yura...he’s so dedicated to her son.”

_Her son?_ Yuuri frowned at the wording but shook it off as a mistranslation. He smiled thinking of the little boy back home. “I’m here to take care of Yura...well, mainly. But Victor doesn’t tell me how to take care of him.”

Katya laughed warmly. “He wouldn’t. He’s the type of alpha who takes care of everyone around him and neglects his own heart.” Finished with the measurements, Yuuri was startled that she kept him so distracted he didn’t realize it. He looked up as she continued. “Just be his friend, listen to him and watch his expressions. He’s had to be strong for so long.”

Yuuri nodded realizing how much she’s told him. “You and Yelena...”

She smiled remembering her friend, “We’d get coffee together...and when she couldn’t come out as much, I’d go to see her and have tea. There was a chocolate tea I smuggled her.” She laughed caught in a memory. Then her beautiful eyes turned to Yuuri, “Perhaps you and I can be good friends as well?”

Yuuri smiled and hugged himself. “I think I’d like that.”
She extended a hand to him, helping him up. “Now, let’s see what we can find you to wear.”

As they walked into the store, she talked to him about lifestyle.

Yuuri was surprised again at the options he had. “Well, I was really physically active before… I would like to regain my active lifestyle...but I need to get stronger.” He looked down at his wasted figure and said quietly, “I don’t know how to do that.”

“In time,” she said quietly with understanding. “We have to learn new habits in time.”

“I didn’t realize how bad it was...until I left him.” The words came out before he realized it and he covered his mouth.

She reached out a comforting hand and gave his a squeeze. “Don’t worry. Your secrets are safe with me. Let’s see if we can find you something for now...then you can come back to me as you start to overcome your obstacles.”

Yuuri nodded in agreement. She led him through the store and they started with activewear, something he was comfortable with. Sweats that tied in the front allowing him to gain, t-shirts that were loose but fit his frame, hoodies and pullovers to help him stay warm. She suggested Underarmour to help him build layers and stay warm without weighing him down. And thermals to go beneath his sweats.

Katya smiled thinking it had been too easy with the omega. He was comfortable in the activewear section but she had to drag him over to more appropriate clothing for going out. “Now, I know for daily life, Vitya himself will dress casually like this. However, he’s going to want to go out from time to time. So let’s find you some nicer things.”

Yuuri hugged himself and looked around the store. “How nice?”

“Don’t worry, we’re not fitting you for a tux. Yet.” She winked. “I think we need to get you a couple of pairs of jeans, some button ups, and sweaters.”

He looked at the pile doubtfully. “It’s...already so much.”
She turned to face him, her expression open and sincere. “It’s hard to let someone love us when we’ve gone so long without it. However, this is important to him. He needs to do this. He needs to know he’s taken care of you. So let him love you.”

Yuuri’s eyes dropped down as he struggled with her words. Then he lifted his chin and nodded. “Okay.”

“Now, this isn’t where Vitya goes for suits or I’d be taking care of you in that department as well. He’ll probably wait until there is a need. But he did mention a coat.”

Yuuri squeaked a little and then whispered, “They are so heavy.”

She looked at him with understanding. “I think I have some lighter weight options that will provide the necessary warmth.” Soon, he had jeans, a black and blue pair, and button ups and sweaters, underwear, pajamas, a beanie, scarf, gloves, and a coat that wasn’t too weighty but definitely warm. He was overwhelmed with Victor’s generosity as he didn’t bat an eye at the price.

“Let’s get you home so you can get these put away,” he said warmly, making sure Yuuri was wearing the coat and scarf and hat before heading out the door. Yuuri didn’t know that Victor was satisfied twofold with the purchase because he now made sure his student had plenty to eat. “Katya is a family friend so we always make sure she gets the commission.”

“She’s...very kind,” Yuuri said quietly as Victor settled him into the car.  *Let him love you.* Those words echoed back and he realized how much Victor found joy in these little attentions, and made a point to start paying attention...and perhaps find a way to return them. After years trying to figure out ways to stay out of his alpha’s radar, he now found he wanted that attention. From this alpha.

Climbing into the driver’s seat, Victor continued to talk about the sales associate. “She is...Yelena took her under her wing when her parents died, helping her to find a place she could afford and take care of her little sister. She was also a dancer...at one time...but she knew she couldn’t take care of the two of them on that income. She wasn’t a prima, and sometimes the ballet world is gathering scraps of work while you can.”

Yuuri nodded, “She knew I danced and skated…”
“She probably noticed your form and posture. You carry yourself like a dancer.” He was quiet as he negotiated the car into traffic. “You...don’t dance anymore?”

“I’d like to,” Yuuri said quietly. “And skate...but I mean, I’m almost thirty and haven’t really trained in ten years.”

“Sometimes...we do these things because they bring us joy rather than medals. I can get you on ice...and on a dance floor. You should come with Yura when he has his lessons.” He held his tongue a bit longer before breaching another difficult topic. “You would be free to stretch out in the rink’s dance studio while Yura is on the ice. However, I can’t let you on the ice...yet. Yakov has very strict rules, for safety.”

Yuuri held his eyes forward before he said quietly, “It’s my weight, isn’t it?”

Victor nodded. “We’ve all noticed your lack of appetite. I don’t want to pry, but I can’t help if I’m not sure what I’m dealing with here.”

Yuuri tried to find the words to explain it to Victor, impossible since he wasn’t sure he could explain it to himself. “I...want to eat. And I start eating. But then I stop and I just...can’t seem to hold any more.”

“Maybe...we can talk to the nutritionist at the center and figure out a healthy approach,” Victor suggested.

Yuuri blinked, “Where you work?”

“If you’re going to be skating there, it’s part of it,” Victor stated although Yuuri knew otherwise. Those services were for the athletes training for competition. “You reach your goal weight, though, I’ll make sure you have the skates you need. Fitted to your feet properly. And then we’ll get you on the ice.”

Yuuri blinked up at him in surprise. “How do you make any money if you are constantly giving it away?” Yuuri covered his mouth, shocked that he had voiced the thought.

However, Victor, far from offended, laughed and shrugged. “It was never about the money. The house I live in is the city residence for my family, passed from generation to generation. I do what
I love because I can...and my mother raised me to be generous.”

Yuuri warmed at the mentioned of Victor’s family. “I’d...like to meet your mother one day...and your father?”

Victor laughed warmly. “He’s the business side of matters but indulgent of my mother’s generosity. He’s...good to his family and raised me to be aware of those around me.” Then he laughed again, saying, “They do think I’m a bit too informal with the staff. But we make family where we can.”

Yuuri thought about family dinners with Victor and Olga’s teasing, Nikolai’s gruff humor, and then him and Yura and realized that Victor was very different from anyone he’d met. Yet, he felt like home. Looking out the window, he thought about these things until Victor interrupted his thoughts.

“Yelena used that shop for her nesting supplies. They delivered the things as needed on the schedule she set with them.”

“I...I haven’t really nested in a long time. Shuji saw it as clutter,” Yuuri then covered his mouth, bits and pieces of his previous life leaking out when he was caught unaware.

Victor thinned his lips and Yuuri knew there was something he was choosing not to say. A part of him was thankful. But then Victor continued. “If you want or need to nest, Olga can help you set it up, get the things you need. You should feel free to express yourself, your gender, as you wish.”

Yuuri felt hopeful at the prospect of a nest for his next heat. They were uncomfortable at best but being surrounded by his scent, and in something soft and safe made it tolerable. “Before...I nested when anxious or before my heats.”

Victor hummed, “I guess we haven’t talked about how to handle your heat schedule.”

“I’m not due for another month,” Yuuri said quietly, turning towards the window. He could feel his cheeks warm with the topic. “I haven’t been allowed suppressants...so I have my heats every three months. Two to three days.”

If Victor had felt awkward about the topic he was completely baffled now. “ Haven’t...been
Yuuri realized he let something else slip and began to squirm, stressing over his words until he felt a warm hand on his leg, not...intimate, just grounding...like the hand on his back. “He was very restrictive,” Yuuri confessed quietly.

Victor pursed his lips, clearly holding in his annoyance at Yuuri’s last alpha. “I’m not, Yuuri. I want you to find your comfort place. Olga and Nikolai can handle Yura without a problem during your heats.” Victor’s cheeks turned a little pink and his eyes were LOCKED on the road before them. “Do you...ummm...need anything?”

Yuuri furrowed his brow, Need? Oh! Need! Yuuri chewed his lip, thinking of how little he brought with him. His meagre collection of...toys had been tossed by Shuji who insisted that heats were for breeding not pleasure...at least not Yuuri’s pleasure. “It’s not...something I’d shop for with my...umm...” He trailed off, knowing he was beet red.

“Maybe...order online?” Victor suggest, his voice a little high pitched and his words coming out very fast. “That card...you can get those things, too.”

Yuuri kept his eyes straight ahead as well. “I guess...since we’re taking it out of my pay it would be okay?”

Victor nodded, he seemed to relax now that THAT topic had been covered. “And don’t worry about Olga. She sorts the mail but doesn’t really think anything of it. I still get...questionable fan mail.”

That pulled curious brown eyes Victor’s direction and the alpha chuckled. “Yes, I get things very inappropriate along with offers to share heats and other...things. My fans don’t really know me or how much of a serial monogamist I am.”

Yuuri thought back to when he was 12 and sent Victor a birthday card. His own career never truly got off the ground, over before he made an impression on the ice, “I guess...I never got to the point where I had obsessed fans like that.”

They arrived home and Victor helped him unload the car depositing the packages on the bed. Victor’s eyes cast about the room and noted that very little of Yuuri existed in the space. A few pictures similar to the ones he shared with Victor but mostly of his earlier years, all before
marriage. He saw a family picture and could tell he came from loving parents. Of course, Yuuri’s care and concern over his son told him that. But none of them showed him with his alpha.

“Feel free to make changes to the room so that it suits you,” Victor encouraged.

Yuuri smiled at the offer, but hugged himself as he looked around. “I guess I didn’t bring much. Maybe...with time?”

Victor smiled warmly. “Of course. I just...want to make sure you know it’s okay.”

“Thank you.” He watched Victor leave, closing the door behind him. Yuuri sat on the edge of his bed considering how different the two alphas were. Shuji had only cared for himself, making sure Yuuri knew what a failure he was. Victor put everyone else first, and only wanted to help.

NOTE:

As a parent, my best conversations with my daughter were in the car. That’s where we delved into those uncomfortable topics because eye contact wasn’t required. So I made that a safe place for Victor and Yuuri to talk.

Chapter End Notes

So what are we thinking?
Whiskers on Kittens

Chapter Summary

Yuuri is back home after shopping with Victor and finding surprises as he explores the house.

Chapter Notes

Okay, this isn't my regular posting day for Songs...but it feels like it. ;) I had hoped to write up a Christmas story but it didn't happen. So consider this extra chapter as a Christmas surprise.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 6: Whiskers on Kittens

Yuuri removed tags and prepared to wash a load of laundry. With the laundry bundled up, he went in search of Olga. Every step was shadowed by Ren who had missed him that day and was now demanding his attention. Yuuri smiled at the antics of the little dog. She had grown so affectionate at the inn and it only increased after the move. Not that she was starved for attention, Yura loved the tiny dog.

Stooping down, he teased her, petting her head, “Okay, I’m here...go find a toy.” Understanding the promise of play, she took off searching for her basket of toys. Yuuri looked at the pile of choices she had. I brought more for you that I did myself. Finding his smile a little easier than before, he took the time to spend time playing with the poodle thinking sadly of the one he was forced to leave behind. “You will stay with me...I promise,” he murmured.

Her tail wagged happily, chasing after the toy Yuuri tossed bringing it back. Then a noise sounded in the hall drawing her attention and she went to investigate. As Yuuri bent down to pick up the laundry basket, he heard the warning yowl of a cat. Potya.

Continuing his search for Olga, Yuuri found himself in previously unexplored spaces downstairs. Opening a pair of French doors, he gasped. The room was breathtaking. Brightly lit but not glaring, the polished floor shone. He entered and twirled to face mirrors and a ballet bar. Turning back around, he faced three floor length windows that let in soft light from the wintry yard beyond.
It was small, but Yuuri could tell it was not neglected. *Is this what Nikolai does?* He really didn’t know much of the man, just that he was Yelena’s father and he worked somewhere in the home. The father and daughter were friends of Victor’s parents, though… Yuuri frowned as he thought of pieces that didn’t fit in that picture. Katya would probably know the truth of it.

He turned to leave the room when he heard a weak rustle and went to investigate. Behind a chaise was a pair of tiny kittens peeking out of a box. *Yura*. He wondered if his mischievous charge had rescued them. It wouldn’t surprise him. He looked for food, water, and litter and further felt certain of it. The little boy had left adult cat food, which wouldn’t do for ones so young, and while there was no litter to speak of, at least they had water.

He gathered them into his arms and went looking for his charge and Olga. *Where is everyone?* He finally found them in a work room, of sorts, but that room held the laundry and a large folding table along with pantry items and other storage. Yura spotted the kittens in Yuuri’s hands and ducked behind a stack of boxes. *Mmmhmhmhm, that’s what I thought.*

He brought the box forward and placed it gently on the table Olga was working at. “I seem to have found a couple of trespassers, Olga,” Yuuri began, keeping a side-eye on Yura.

Olga smirked at his find. “I wonder how they got here,” she picked up where he left off. They shared a knowing glance but silently agreed to keep up the charade to see if he would confess.

“We might have to take them to the shelter if we don’t figure it out,” Yuuri suggested. He heard a whimper behind the box.

Olga knew her face was hidden from Yura and cracked a smile at the omega she had decided she would like a great deal. “Oh, I hate those places,” Olga fussed. “Cold, damp. And no telling if they’ll end up in a stew…”

Yura came out of hiding. “They’re mine!” he trilled, his voice high with panic. “Don’t give them away.”

Yuuri, struggling to hide his smirk, knelt down and let Yura cradle one of the kittens. “We need to get them some kitten food. Potya’s food isn’t good for them. And maybe a litter box.”

“Okay,” Yura agreed reluctantly.
“Do you want to help me make a more appropriate space for them? Then maybe someone can get some kitten food from the store.”

Yura was thoughtful for a moment, “I think...Grandpa needs to go to town.”

Yuuri looked up at Olga for confirmation. She smiled down at them, “I’ll add it to his list.”

He took Yura back to the room where he had found the little pair and together he and Yura began cleaning up the mess, scrubbing the messes left by the kittens. “Was this your Mama’s room?”

Yura looked about the room, little ghosts of memories coming to him. “Yes...when she got really sick, she’d come here to dance.”

They went back and forth to get the supplies and discard the refuse, building a small area for the kittens to climb and play, a food and water station, and a litter zone. Finally satisfied with their work, they reintroduced the kittens to the space. Yuuri watched Yura play with them, his excited squeals at their antics drawing a smile from his lips. Yuuri had known enough of Victor to see that the father would welcome these kittens easily, he just had to make sure they were healthy and would get along with the already existing menagerie.

Turning back towards the mirror, he thought about Victor’s offer earlier. *Studio time at the rink...why, when this is right here? Perhaps we aren’t supposed to be there.* “Yura, are we allowed in here?”

The boy shrugged. “No one comes back here anymore.”

Yuuri began to feel awkward in this space, something set aside for just Yelena. Now abandoned, like a shrine. “Not even Olga?”

He shook his head. “This was Mama’s room. Papa closed the door when she died.”

He shivered, suddenly feeling like an intruder. “Maybe we should move the kittens upstairs.”

Yura’s eyes widened and he cried out, “But Papa…”
“I’ll talk to Papa...but I don’t want to be in a room your father isn’t ready to face. I think...that would be disrespectful of his feelings.” He picked up the box with kittens and started moving towards the door.

Yura hugged himself as he sorted through those words. “Okay…” The little boy had lived in the home his entire life, the idea of closed off areas made no sense to him. But Yuuri was still uncertain where he stood in the house. This intrusion could upset Victor, who had been so kind.

It didn’t take them long to transfer their work upstairs, finding a corner for the litter in the bathroom. Olga insisted the feeding station should be where the other animals ate and the kittens could learn to find the food. Finally, after an afternoon full of problem solving, Yura crawled into Yuuri’s lap and leaned his head back against the omega’s chest. “I’m just worn out.”

Yuuri chuckled. “Are you now? Well perhaps if you had just admitted to housing kittens instead of hiding them...”

Yura huffed and rubbed his head against Yuuri’s chest, blond hairs sticking out, “Da...can I put on my pj’s?

Yuuri warmed at the childish ways the boy showed affection. Thinking about the request, he thought about the father and how he’d have a late evening. Victor loves to eat as a family. He spent time with me and now he’s going to be home late. “Olga, could we push dinner out so that we can eat with Victor?”

The housekeeper had been working nearby and narrowed her eyes on Yura, knowing his desire to skip bathtime. “What will we do about Yura’s bath and bedtime?”

“I’m going to flip dinner with bath time...we’ll have a pajama dinner.”

She considered his request and then narrowed her eyes. “So...we all dress in pajamas?”

Yuuri grinned at her, “Why not?”

She smiled and shrugged. “I’m game.”
Yuuri decided he was going to like Olga, quite a bit.

Victor walked in the door, tired from a long afternoon to find his home in disarray. Yura ran past him giggling wearing pajamas chased by Yuuri...also in pajamas. The latter twirled around, looked him up and down and stated, “You're overdressed.”

Victor followed him further into the room and discovered Nikolai in his striped flannel pajamas, Olga wearing a flannel nightgown, her hair in curlers, his son in his favorite dinosaur pajamas, and Yuuri dressed in a long sleeved blue sleep shirt with matching plaid striped pajama bottoms. The hem of the pants dragged along the carpet, and the sleeves reached his knuckles. Victor noticed how well blue suited Yuuri...especially pajamas.

“Victor Andreivich, dinner is waiting on you,” Olga clucked. “Get properly dressed and we’ll begin.”

Victor snapped out of his concentration on Yuuri...Yuuri’s pajamas...and shrugged at the suggestion. Never one to be the strict disciplinarian, it shouldn’t surprise him that he lost control of his house. But Yuuri seemed to be the ringleader. Turning, he went into his room and found a set of pajamas, grey flannels and a black t-shirt. Slipping on his slippers, he returned and joined his family around the table.

“What brought this on?” he asked as dinner was passed around the table.

Yuuri shrugged, a blush on his cheeks. “I just...didn’t think you should eat alone.”

Victor’s eyes widened as he realized Yuuri did this...thinking of him. “Oh...ummm...thank you.” He felt some warmth growing inside as his eyes kept straying to the omega who was now keeping the conversation flowing and lots of laughs filling the air.

As dinner broke up, Victor watched Yuuri help Olga clean up. His attention was pulled by his son.
“Will you read to me, Papa?”

Victor smiled down, “I’m sure that can be arranged. Why don’t you bring me down a book?”

“TWO books?” he bargained.

“As long as it isn’t a novel,” Victor chuckled playfully swatting his behind as the boy took off up the stairs.

He was finding his seat in the family room when Yuuri joined him. “Thank you...for tonight.”

Yuuri shrugged and smiled. “I know family dinner is important to you. I didn’t want you to give it up because you were taking care of me.” He then stepped closer and shifted on his feet before whispering, “Thank you for that, by the way.”

“It...was my pleasure,” Victor responded. They were still staring awkwardly at one another when Yura jumped in the middle of them, climbing into Victor’s lap. “What have we here?”

“Berenstein Bears!”

Soon Victor was caught up in the antics of Brother and Sister with Papa finding trouble. Yuuri sat with the laptop balanced on his butterflied knees looking at course options but nearly dropped the computer when he heard Yura at the close of the story, “I want a baby sister.”

Victor’s eyes lifted awkwardly when he noticed Yuuri struggling, his entire body tight. Patting Yura’s leg to get down, he went over to Yuuri’s side and gently set the computer aside, putting a hand on Yuuri’s thigh and another to his face. “Yuuri?”

Those brown eyes began to blink rapidly and he could hear his breathing become jerky. Turning, Victor commanded Yura, “I need you to go to bed.”

The little boy was loathe to leave the omega, “But...Yuuri…”
“I’ll take care of him, Yura, but I need to know you’re safe in bed.” Victor checked to see his son rooted to the spot. He didn’t want to scare the boy but the situation could be very scary if he didn’t leave the room immediately. “Do as I say! Now!”

Yura’s breath hitched and he nodded, a squeaky “okay” in his wake. Olga came at the raised voice and saw the omega in distress, hurrying to see to the boy.

Victor knelt to maintain eye contact, “Yuuri, you’re in a safe place. I need you to calm down.”

Yuuri’s eyes remained unfocused and his breathing barely getting through.

“Yuuri, I need you to breathe with me. Breathe in,” Victor guided but received rapid shallow breaths from the omega. Finally, sighing, he whispered, “Forgive me. Yuuri I can’t think of another way to help you.” Gathering the omega into his arms, he settled Yuuri’s head on his shoulder and began releasing calming pheromones. The body was tense at first but slowly relaxed into Victor’s arms. Yuuri remained still for a long time but Victor could feel the movement of Yuuri’s eyelashes against his neck. He continued to rub his hand up and down Yuuri’s back, holding him securely, making him feel safe.

Finally the omega drew up, his body weary, his eyes downcast. “Sorry,” he whispered.

Victor’s hand stroked into his hair and leaned their foreheads together. “You don’t have to apologize for this. Does it happen often?”

Yuuri felt his emotions bubbling over. “I...don’t...maybe?”

“We have a skater that has anxiety.” Victor hoped Yuuri would feel safer knowing he wasn’t alone, that Victor understood. Smiling he lightened his voice, “Of course...I can’t do this with them. Professional lines and all.”

Yuuri nodded. “Companion omega,” he whispered.

“Exactly. I want to respect your space, but I couldn’t bring you back.”
“It’s bad...when I have a panic attack,” Yuuri admitted.

Victor held onto Yuuri, noticing he wasn’t trying to move from Victor’s embrace, “So...you’re okay...with me doing this if needed?”

Yuuri nodded. Hesitantly, he asked with a blush, “Can I...once more? To clear my head?”

Victor nodded and soon his arms were filled with the omega once more, breathing in his scent while Victor’s hand moved up and down his back. *Oh, Yuuri...what set you off?*

Victor had scooped Yuuri up in his arms and carried him upstairs, settling him into his bed. “What about Yura?” the omega tiredly fussed.

“He’s fine, Olga tucked him in. Take care of you for now.” Victor reached for the worn blanket he suspected came from Yuuri’s home and spread it over him. “Sleep. We’ll all be here and in one piece tomorrow.” He then leaned in and brushed a kiss into Yuuri’s hairline. Pulling back he held those brown eyes for a moment before murmuring, “Good night, Yuuri. It will be fine come morning.”

He felt those eyes follow him as he left the room. He closed the door softly, listening for the telltale snick of the latch catching. Walking across the hall, he found a pouting Yura waiting for him. Sitting on the side of his bed, he took the small hands into his. “I’m sorry I had to send you away.”

“He’s my Yuuri, too, Papa,” came the pouty response and Victor could see the remnants of tears.

Victor had to hide a smile at the possessive affection his son felt but couldn’t really express correctly. “He is, baby, I know that. But Yuuri needed my complete attention.”

The little boy was working hard to understand what had happened. “Is he okay?”

Victor sighed, he wasn’t sure how to explain what he suspected to his son without upsetting the
boy more. “I think something happened to him before he came to us and maybe a memory took him by surprise.”

“A bad memory?”

Victor nodded. “I needed to calm him down. And now ne needs to sleep. What he experienced just now, that was called a panic attack...and if they are bad enough, they have to go to a hospital.”

Large green eyes met Victor’s, “But Yuuri’s okay?”

Victor ran a hand over the blond locks, “Yes, Yura, he’s going to be okay.”

Victor leaned forward to kiss his son’s cheek before tucking him into bed. He then handed him his ballerina tiger. As he walked towards the door he stumbled over something moving and looked down with wide eyes at the two kittens wrapped around his feet. Turning back, he asked, “Do you know anything about these kittens?”

“Maybe?” the child squeaked.

Victor sighed, lifting them up to study them. Both tabby, both fluffy, one grey and one orange. “Do they have names?”

“I haven’t decided,” came the small voice.

“Well, figure it out. We’ll need to make a vet’s appointment tomorrow.”

Even in the dark he could see his son’s beaming smile, “Okay, Papa!”

Pulling his son’s door mostly shut, he looked at the omega’s door, his hand going to his neck, remembering the feel of him in his arms, of him breathing in Victor’s scent. “Yuuri…”

Chapter End Notes
A little angst...because Yuuri is recovering from his past. However, Victor is there to make sure he's going to be okay. And...kittens...because angst should be balanced against fuzzy blankets and kittens.
Dancing through my demons

Chapter Summary

Yuuri faces the day after his panic attack.

Chapter Notes

I hope you had a lovely holiday! Now we are back and it's time to move forward. Yuuri has a number of demons to face...is he ready?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 7: Dancing through my Demons

Yuuri woke up in the deep of the night with an uncanny awareness of self...and of the alpha sleeping downstairs. Somehow Victor’s scent clung to Yuuri’s clothing, mixing with his own. For a moment Yuuri buried his nose in the sleeve of his shirt, inhaling the salt and cedar mix. The aroma worked its magic, settling him further. For a blissful moment Yuuri felt relaxed, then guilt crept up his spine. It’s a job, he reminded himself. Looking at the time, he did some quick calculations and knew he could call Phichit. Pulling out his phone, he used the Skype app to connect with him.

Phichit picked up almost immediately, his face full of concern, “Yuuri! Why aren’t you sleeping?”

Yuuri pushed himself into the backboard of the bed, chewing his lip. “Phichit, god, I’m in so much trouble.”

The Thai man narrowed his dark eyes. “What’s going on? If he hurt you, I’m going to kill him!”

“Nonononono,” Yuuri protested, eyes flying wide. “He...wouldn’t. He’s...kind, generous...noble. Like a knight in fairy tales.” Yuuri sunk into the bed, his light form sliding easily over the soft sheets. “And...I think I’m falling for him. It’s too soon, though, isn’t it?”
Phichit frowned as he considered his friend’s words. “Well, you liked him before...maybe it’s...just kind of was suspended while you were with him... other him.”

Yuuri considered the idea.  I had such a crush on you, for so long. And for a decade I shoved it out of my mind...maybe everything is just coming to the surface. Yuuri remembered what else was bubbling underneath his skin, “I...I had a panic attack earlier.”

Phichit nodded, examining Yuuri’s face through the screen. “Are you okay?”

Yuuri nodded, his expression open to his friend. “Victor was there.”

“How did he handle it?” Phichit asked leaning forward to study his friend.

“He took care of me.” Yuuri hugged himself, remembering how warm it felt in those arms. “But...Yura...he wants a baby sister. I-I can’t…”

Phichit snorted holding up a hand, “Whoa Nelly! First of all, we are a long ways from babies...sister or otherwise.” He took a beat and turned softer. “Secondly, you weren’t...in good shape. It’s no wonder you couldn’t carry a baby to term. I know you hold yourself responsible, but Yuuri, it was him. And look at that inadequate care you got before and after. So...we don’t know that you can’t. Get healthy and see what happens.”

“I don’t think my heart can take another miscarriage, Phichit,” Yuuri murmured, hugging himself with his free arm. He could feel how even in just this short amount of time his body was relaxed, healthier. But he didn’t know if he would ever be strong enough.

Phichit tapped his cheek thoughtfully before answering, “Then consider other options. Adoption...surrogacy. It’s what gay beta men have to do.” Phichit craned his neck around in the camera, pretending to look around the room. “Now...how are you settling?”

Yuuri smiled at his friend’s antics. “I think...I think...I’m in love...with all of them. Can you fall in love with a whole family? Yura...I want him to be mine. He’s so sweet and spunky. Victor, he is so much more than I ever imagined. We all knew he was kind and caring, but Phichit he looks after people so well.” Yuuri laughed, shoving away tears as he realized he was crying. “I even love the housekeeper Olga, Grandpa Nikolai, and the cat...and...and…”
Phichit sighed warmly, “Oh, Yuuri...you deserve good things…”

Yuuri sniffled as the laughter slowed. “But...it’s been so hard…”

“I know. What he did to you...it should have never happened.” Yuuri watched Phichit’s eyes flash with that grey rage he admired, then soften. “But you are free...free to find happiness.”

“I’m scared, Phichit.” Rolling to his side he whispered to the phone. “What if...it doesn’t work out?”

Phichit winked, “What if it does, Yuuri?”

Yuuri wiped his face with his shirt, he knew he was a mess. “I don’t know how to do this. I’ve never...been able to do this.”

“And that’s okay...believe it or not, there is no instruction book. Just take each day and see what happens.”

Yuuri took a deep breath in, organizing his thoughts he started with the thing he wanted most at the moment. “I...want Yura to love me as a mother, and to support him as his mother would...my heart will break if I mess this up.”

“It’s okay to take it slow and easy.” Phichit felt now was a good time to point out the obvious. “You just got there.”

Yuuri sat up, it’s been a week...not even. “Oh, my god, Phichit...I just got here!”

Phichit chuckled from the other end. “So...what now?”

*Right, plans. I get to make lots and lots of plans.* “I...I’m going to take classes. Online. And...take care of Yura. Figure out how to get healthier...Victor said something about a nutritionist. Learn Russian and how to drive.” Yuuri felt himself trembling with excitement but also terror. “It’s so much….”
“It’s living, Yuuri.” He knew his friend needed an example. “Remember when I first moved here and had to learn Japanese?”

“Yes…I remember.” Yuuri smiled remembering how much fun it was explaining the bathroom alone was. Sneaking out when Shuji was out of town to spend a few days of freedom with the other omega. Then a thought hit him. “Oh…my heat. It’s in a month. I don’t have…anything.”

“That’s not a problem, there are supply stores all over now. You can even contact them online to deliver. Make a doctor’s appointment in the next two weeks for a check up and another one for afterwards. Just to make sure you’re okay…and don’t argue.” Phichit saw the rebuttal on Yuuri’s lips and shut it down. He was running through the list of pre-heat items in his head. His eyes sparkled again, “Hmmm…and what do you have for toys?”

Yuuri shook his head, glancing away from the screen. “I…wasn’t allowed…heats were for… his pleasure.”

Phichit seemed a little stunned and Yuuri grew pink with embarrassment. Both omegas knew how painful heat could be if they weren’t allowed relief. “Oh, Yuuri…then let’s figure out what you need.” He could see that Phichit was typing into his computer, chewing his lip as he looked at some options. “I’m going to link you some of my favorite toys. Some I use with a partner…some I prefer when I’m alone.”

“I don’t…” have a partner.

“You don’t… yet…but Yuuri, let yourself have this.”

Yuuri nodded and waited for the first link, clicking on it and studying the suggestion. “Does that dildo have a knotting function?”

“Yep!” Phichit said proudly.

“I’ll save that for later. I don’t think I’m ready to think about knotting.” Yuuri closed his eyes and remembered the painful connection that trapped him to Shuji for long periods of time. I should start...smaller? “Something…more simple. Think about what we would have used before we had an alpha.”
Phichit ran through his searches then sent him another link. “It’s your basic dildo but the size is a little more generous like an alpha.”

Yuuri studied the purple monstrosity then nodded. “Does it come in blue?”

Phichit grinned. “That’s the spirit.”

Soon the link came through and Yuuri started building a cart. Soon, he had a pair of vibrators, one internal and one external, lube, nipple clamps, and a fleshlight. “God, I hope nobody opens the box by mistake,” Yuuri moaned.

Phichit chortled on the other end. “Maybe Victor will open it...and offer to show you how to use them.”

Yuuri covered his face at the thought. “Oh, god...no!”

Sobering, he asked, “Do you have a safe place?”

Yuuri looked around his room and nodded. “I’m basically in an omega den, complete with scent locks. Only rescue workers can override.”

“He takes good care of you,” Phichit murmured.

Yuuri hugged his knees. “Yeah, he does.” He remembered Katya’s words. *Let him love you.* Opening his eyes, he answered both her and Phichit. “I’m trying.”

“I know...and I’m here for you if you need me.”

“Thanks, Peach.”

“Anytime, Yuu-chan.”
Yuuri came down to breakfast and ducked down at the watchful eyes from both Yura and Olga. “I didn’t mean to oversleep.”

“Victor Andreivich left orders for you to sleep as late as needed,” the housekeeper clucked. “What do you need to take care of today?”

Yuuri went through the checklist in his head, “Besides Yura’s lessons... I need to visit the omega store.”

Olga smiled nodding, “I know the place. We can go before shopping and set up an account.”

“I’m going with Grandpa to the hardware,” Yura chimed in. Yuuri noticed the ease the little one spoke with and determined he must have forgotten last night.

“Maybe homework after we both are back home?” Yuuri suggested.

The little green eyes narrowed, “Will you read to me tonight?”

“Of course,” Yuuri chuckled at the born negotiator.

A chorus of nods set everyone into motion, attending business. Yuuri looked up as Nikolai came in, a concerned smile was on his face as he studied Yuuri.  He’s worried about me being able to take care of his grandson.

The gruff man’s exterior dropped a little, “Do you mind if I take the boy with me to get supplies?”

Yuuri blinked in surprise. He’s asking me for permission? “Umm, no, of course not,” Yuuri answered.
Nikolai’s eyes lit up, “We should be back before lunch. I need to fix a leak in Vitya’s bathroom.”

“You...do the repairs?”

The older man laughed and indicated to the housekeeper, “Pretty much anything Olga doesn’t handle...in return, I get my apartment and a small allowance.”

“Have you always…” Yuuri trailed off, worried he was overstepping his bounds.

Nikolai stared at him, his eyes hard for a moment before the old man snorted in laughter. “Nope. I was the plant manager of one of Andrei Nikiforov’s holdings. I retired and moved here when Yura came. Victor needed a handyman. This old house is too much to handle on his own.”

“I’m sure he’s reassured you’re here,” Yuuri amended quietly.

The old man huffed and then guided Yura out to his old truck. Olga watched the exchange quietly before grabbing her coat and handbag. “He lost his savings due to a bad investment and had nothing. Thankfully, his wife was no longer living to see him fall. But Victor found out and brought him here.”

Yuuri smiled, *that sounds like Victor.* “Have you always been here?”

She shrugged. “My alpha left for the military and never came home. I lived with my sister then this position came open. Victor Andreivich needs someone to look out for him. He...spends much of his time looking out for others.”

Yuuri shifted nodding towards the door the grandfather had left by, “Do you think...Nikolai was insulted by my question?”

She shook her head, smiling sadly. “I think we all came here from a sad place. When you are ready, you will share your story.”

Yuuri appreciated how she didn’t push him, knowing by all rights she could. He pulled on his coat, hat, and scarf then grinned when she handed him the gloves. Soon they were out the door.
The omega nesting service was very cut and dry and soon Yuuri had everything ordered to be delivered two weeks before his scheduled heat. He also had an extra kit for anxious nesting to be delivered at the same time. The sets were both comfortable and very soft, something he was looking forward to trying. Once that task was accomplished, they went grocery shopping and returned home for meal prep. Yura hadn’t come home yet and Olga was humming quietly, lost in thought. Yuuri thought he was all but forgotten when she asked him, “Are you settling in okay?”

Yuuri frowned, caught by surprise then nodded, his eyes wide and sincere. “It’s been...much easier than I expected. Everyone has worked so hard to make me feel welcome. I can’t believe Victor couldn’t keep a nanny.”

She huffed at that. “No one wants to work these days. Yura needs someone who interacts with him, not just keep an eye on him. I can’t do that...he’s just so much energy.”

Yuuri smiled, his eyes dropping shyly. “I don’t mind spending time with him. I enjoy it.”

“Victor Andreivich said if you were up to it, I was to show you how to get to the rink for Yura’s skating and dance lessons. I don’t drive.” When Yuuri looked at her in surprise, she pointed towards the thick glasses. “It’s the eyes. I’m legally blind.”

“Oh...I didn’t realize.”

She waved him off before he could be conciliatory, “Most don’t...and I like it that way. But...if you could take Yura to skate, that would relieve some of my worries. I don’t like to stray too far from home, when it grows darker it’s harder to see. The only exception is when I visit my sister.”

“I can go...I know how to handle public transportation.” Yuuri assured her. “And usually the undesirable behavior is less when I’m with someone.” Omegas were often left alone when they were accompanying a child, being seen as the caretaker was evidently a turn off...for scumbags.

“I agree...when you get older, they leave you alone more. But I remember when I was younger...” she shuddered at a memory and pulled a face.
Yuuri smiled his appreciation to her. “If Yura was old enough, we could go on our own the first time. I just would hate to get lost.”

“It is fine. I’ll show you, and then you can do this for me.” She turned back to her work.

Yuuri smiled softly, and hugged himself at the prospect of studio time. And maybe... visit with the nutritionist. He wanted to get better. Really.

St. Petersburg, for a city as large and old as it was, was a marvel of efficiency. The trip only required two bus changes and Yuuri actually found the schedule printed in English and Cyrillic. Armed with the correct currency, he led Yura off the bus then watched Olga wave as she got ready to ride back. They would stay until Victor finished his day and go home with him.

Yura practically skipped inside, meeting with his teacher and introducing Yuuri. “This is my Yuuri, he lives with us now.”

Yuuri blushed at the introduction and the teacher chuckled. “I’m Georgi. I work with the Novices and Juniors. I think we may have skated together, though, in my earlier days.”

“Oh, um...yes...maybe?” Yuuri thought the man looked vaguely familiar, but something was missing... eyeshadow!

Georgi smiled, he never forgot faces and did recall the man as a younger skater with impeccable technique. “I thought so when Victor shared your name. My mate, Svetta, teaches third grade so I settled for the younger ones so I could stay closer to home. We’re expecting our second baby.”

Yuuri hid his wince, he knew Georgi only meant to share happiness with him as a friend. “Oh...um, congratulations?”

“I think babies are such a wonderful gift,” he went on effusively missing that Yuuri’s eyes went downcast. “My first is two, Mikhail. Such a sweet boy.”
“Oh...I have my hands full with Yura,” the omega sidestepped. “Victor said something about a studio?” Did my voice just go high pitched?

Georgi looked like he had been pulled from his thoughts, “Oh, yes...up those stairs and to the right. If it’s open, the door will be unlocked. Make yourself at home. Yura knows his way around.”

“Thank you.” He took off running, holding in his sobs until he reached the privacy of the studio, locking the door behind him. He knew the alpha didn’t mean anything...he was still hurting. He didn’t hear Yura tug on Georgi and tell him he made his Yuuri cry.

The studio was a beautiful space, a full wall of mirrors on one end with a bar for ballet and more advanced stretching. Another wall was glass, allowing one to see down the long corridor. This part of the rink was practically vacant, a young girl working on a routine adjacent from him. But Yuuri still felt the security of the room. Once he cleared his head of tears, he plugged his phone into the port and started playing music. Practiced classical that he had used to warm up since he was a child. One of the few rituals that Shuji couldn’t take from him. Yuuri had stretched daily, it helped with stress and anxiety. He began running through the rote routine, moving through the positions until he was limber. When he switched to music, he freeformed his dance to work through his demons. He was unaware he drew someone’s attention, her slender form watching him through the window thoughtfully.

Victor stepped up behind her and watched the body move through the music. “I wondered if he still had the music in him,” Victor murmured quietly.

“That kind of talent never dulls, and rarely marries early,” Lilia responded. Her perfectly narrowed eyebrow rose in suspicion. “I wouldn’t be surprised to learn that he was tricked or forced into bonding with his first mate.”

Victor grimaced, “I’ve been suspecting the same thing. He’s let slip a name...Shuji. You don’t think it’s Shuji Kobayashi, do you?”

She frowned as she considered the ramifications. Skating was a small world, made smaller at the international level. All coaches knew which officials were to be trusted and which...weren’t. And they guarded their students from them like hawks. “When do you think it happened?”

Victor thought about Yuuri’s programs. “His expressions started becoming more guarded in his mid-teens. I hate to think...but then again…”
Lilia’s expression became harsh when she was angry. Her cane stamped against the ground as if she were stabbing the man now. “Another skater disappeared...was it six months? Eight months back?”

Victor nodded. “I want to keep Yuuri safe but do you think his ex has another child, another teen in his hold?” The skater in question was eighteen. Technically an adult but very much a child. Especially to a man in his mid forties.

“I’ll begin making inquiries.” She turned, headed to Yakov’s office. This would not be the first time she tasked him with sniffing out the nasty element in their field. She stopped and spoke over her shoulder, “If what you suspect is true, you might want to get him into counseling. Abramovich would be my first choice.”

Victor turned his eyes to the dancer in the studio. “I’ve already talked to him about seeing a nutritionist. I worry it’s also psychological. That man...starved him.”

“Monstrous.” She turned her sharp cheekbones back towards the lovely form floating through motions. “Make sure he sees the nutritionist. Yakov said to use whatever resources you need.”

Victor smiled as the tiny soldier continued on. *I almost pity the person you declare war on.*

“Thanks, Lilia…”

Chapter End Notes

Now that's a woman I wouldn't want to cross...
I hope you dance...

Chapter Summary

Sometimes the steps to getting help need to come with the element of surprise.

Chapter Notes

Hello, all. I know...I received some impatient requests for a post on Saturday. I've spoiled you all. I want to make sure I can keep up so I don't want to overpost. So enjoy...and I'll be ready for the next post on Wednesday.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 8: I hope you dance...

Lilia left him behind, heading to Yakov’s office. Victor watched Yuuri’s graceful form as he continued to embrace the music, classical ballet mixing with modern in a freeform expression of his emotions. The alpha could see Yuuri’s pain but also his strength. Yuuri refused to be beaten. You would have been amazing on the ice. A small tinge of jealousy ran through Victor knowing he had been denied competing against this man. You would have made gold very hard. He couldn’t wait to see what Yuuri retained.

But first, he needed to get Yuuri healthy. Pulling out his phone, he reached out to a colleague. The phone rang twice before a cheerful female voice greeted him.

“Victor! What’s going on?”

“Hey, Natasha. My…” He hesitated, not knowing how to refer to Yuuri. Sighing, he decided to go with the facts. “My companion omega...I’d like you to visit with him. He’s having some eating issues.”

Over the line he could hear the rustling of papers and the quick scratches of her pencil. “Oh, when would be a good time?”
He mentally crossed his fingers, “Are you available now?”

“Now?” Another pause as she checked her schedule. “Well...yes. Is he here?”

“In Studio 8B. So yes.” He breathed a sigh of relief, knowing it would be easier to get Yuuri in sooner, rather than allow him to think up excuses to avoid meeting her.

“Bring him here.”

Victor hesitated interrupting the beautiful dance but it had been twenty minutes since Yuuri’s last break and yet the omega pushed on.  *God, that stamina! Even in the shape you are in.* He knocked sharply and watched as Yuuri settled his movements, drawing his arms into his chest, his eyes lowering as he curved his back into the lowered chin. Victor stood breathless.

Yuuri looked up, meeting his eyes...and then he smiled, moving across to flip the lock. Victor felt a small thrill vibrate through him knowing Yuuri was pleased to see that he had watched his dance and went as far as to invite him in. Victor entered the studio as Yuuri toweled off, grabbing his water bottle after.

“Thank you for this,” Yuuri responded and Victor could hear the bittersweet happiness in his voice. “I couldn’t skate...he wouldn’t let me...but I found a way to keep dancing. There was this room in the back of the house, unused and I claimed it. A quiet place for me. It didn’t require anything so...he didn’t fight me on it.”

“I can tell you still danced, you move beautifully and you’ve maintained your flexibility and skill,” Victor commented, his voice gruff causing color to rise into his cheeks. He then waved towards the room. “This...you’re considered my family You get to use the facilities because I work here. And once your weight is up, once you’re cleared…”

Yuuri breathed in, his eyes closing, a dreamlike expression as he whispered, “I can skate.”

Victor knew that desire...recovering from an injury or suffering through being banned, he knew that feeling. “We’ll get you there. That’s...why I’m here.”
Brown eyes blinked towards him curiously. Yuuri removed the dance shoe, worn and broken down from too many years use. Victor made a mental note to replace them. He watched as Yuuri moved slowly, as if suspicious of what was coming next.

“Natasha, the nutritionist, she has an opening.” He watched Yuuri’s eyes dart around the room, looking for a way out of the conversation. “Do you think you can meet her...now?”

“Now,” Yuuri repeated, his hands on his knees, his eyes forward. “Now...ummm...now.”

Victor knelt before him and placed a grounding hand on his shoulder. Yuuri’s eyes lifted and Victor continued to reassure him. “She’s just going to help you figure out how to take better care of yourself. Then you can let us know how to help.”

Yuuri nodded and Victor watched him squash his anxiety with resolve. “I’m ready,” he murmured finally.

Leading Yuuri through the maze of the enormous sports complex, he continued to chat lightly about his day, one of the jumps a skater was struggling with, how the zamboni might need replacement, anything to keep Yuuri’s mind busy and away from his panic. Soon they were there. He greeted Natasha then introduced Yuuri. “Yuuri, this is Natasha. She is amazing...even helped me figure out how to get Yura to eat more vegetables.”

After Victor walked off, Yuuri muttered, “He hides them under a napkin.”

Natasha snorted in response. “Well, he’s five.”

Yuuri smiled, liking her instantly. “True. I guess...we should talk.”

She nodded, guiding him into her office and closing the door. “I am a registered dietitian and a nurse. So I do have extensive medical background. Let’s talk about how you ended up in this place.” She took out a chart and got ready to make notes as he spoke.

Yuuri took a deep breath and let it out. “I...I was in a bad...ummm...not marriage, but my bondmate wasn’t good to me.”
“An abusive relationship?” she suggested gently.

Yuuri looked at his hands, shrugging. “He...never physically hurt me...but, well, he’d…”

She shifted in her chair slightly, drawing his attention to her. “Sometimes our partners can be emotionally abusive, controlling us through guilt.”

“Maybe? I mean, I didn’t care...I didn’t want…” Yuuri released his breath in frustration. He wasn’t ready to talk about Shuji and how he took his pleasure in Yuuri’s torment. “I just want to be able to eat...normally. And to gain weight. I want...to skate.”

Her smile was warm although he could tell by the corners that she knew there was a lot to his story. “Well, let’s see what’s keeping you from that goal. It’s a lot easier if we know where we’re going.” They spent the next fifteen minute taking vitals. However, when it came to the scale, he found he couldn’t step on. He was afraid of that number. She thinned her lips before suggesting, “Why don’t you step on it backwards? You don’t have to know the number you’re starting at, just how far you have to go. We can monitor you weekly and discuss it if you aren’t making progress.”

“O-okay.” Yuuri turned around and closed his eyes just to be sure. He heard her humming as he stepped back on the scale as well as the scratch of the pencil. After a minute, she reset the arms on the balance and had him step off. “H-how bad is it?”

She tapped him lightly with a pencil, eliciting a smile. Then hummed as she did some calculations. “It’s not about good or bad, but moving forward. To get on the ice, you’re about seven kg from the line...but I’d rather see you gain ten.”

Yuuri frowned at the numbers. So much. “H-how do I do that when I can’t get past that sixth bite?”

She considered his words and what they revealed about the restricted life he lived before coming to her. However, she wanted his focus on solutions so she asked, “Well, how often do you eat?” She indicated for him to sit again and joined him.

He shrugged as if the answer were obvious. “Three times a day.”

She tapped her lip thoughtfully. Yuuri blinked at the familiar action. Is that a Russian thing?
“Let’s try this approach. Let’s double it...you eat six times a day.” She saw the panic on his face, and held up a hand. “You aren’t eating six big meals, but smaller portions more often. Set a timer on your phone. And then practice the one more bite rule. Don’t look at the entire meal. That can be overwhelming. Eat what makes you comfortable and then take one more bite.”

“But...six times a day instead of three.” That felt like a lot. Too much.

“Yes,” she agreed. She then handed him a food list. “I want you to be eating these kinds of things when possible. They are higher calorie and will help you get the most out of your six plus one bites.”

“So...it’s not that bad?” Yuuri felt a little relaxed at the idea. *This is manageable.*

She thinned her lips and sucked her teeth. “Well, I’m going to be honest. I am concerned. In fact, I’m concerned enough that we’re going to walk down and talk to Dr. Romanov and do a quick physical with some blood work. But...I’ve dealt with worse, and I believe that you can be trusted to work towards your goal of skating again.”

Yuuri felt better now that he had an approach to take. He looked over the foods list and happily found most were familiar. His mother’s cooking had been high calorie, too. Maybe he could make katsudon on one of Olga’s days off.

Dr. Romanov welcomed him warmly and clucked over him when he learned he was Vitya’s *companion omega*. “So sad, that boy...and now I see smiles on his lips.”

Yuuri blushed and tried to protest the assumption but it was brushed under the rug. The doctor then examined him. He hummed a frown taking Yuuri’s blood pressure, and that deepened when he checked his pulse. However once Yuuri took off his shirt, the expression became much more concerned.

“You know you are several kilograms underweight,” the doctor commented. “Are you taking advantage of our services?”

He was determined to be confident through this. “Starting today. I met with Natasha and made a plan for healthy weight gain. Victor had me bring Yura but I didn’t expect to be seeing the nutritionist and, well, you so soon.”
“Well, it’s better sooner than later. I’d rather get you on track.” He was examining Yuuri’s glands, noting that Yuuri would wince slightly at some pressure. “How do you feel?”

“Feel? I’m tired a lot but I’m chasing after a five year old. I get dizzy sometimes. I have no appetite to speak of.” Yuuri looked at his hands before pushing in with his words. “I know...I’m underweight. I know I need to eat more. I just...can’t. I...wasn’t allowed.”

This gained him a sharp look by Dr. Romanov. “What do you mean ‘wasn’t allowed’?” the doctor encouraged, his voice warm and quiet. The doctor stopped his examination, giving Yuuri a little space.

Yuuri pulled on his fingers a little, noticing the swelling of his knuckles. “My alpha...my first alpha, before I came here...he...wouldn’t let me eat more than small portions. And when I try now, I feel anxious.”

Romanov nodded slowly, pursing his lips. “Did he...deride you if you ate more?”

Yuuri nodded, a blush on his cheeks. In a soft voice, he added, “I...never wanted to be there to begin with. I didn’t have a choice. So his suggestion to eat less...well, in my mind, I hoped to disappear.”

The doctor stayed quiet for a moment, waiting to see if the omega was alright with the admission. “He...forced you into mating.”

Yuuri nodded, chewing his lips and feeling the heat of shame wash over him. “I...couldn’t get away. Not until he let me go.” Yuuri huffed a bitter laugh, “Well, not until he tossed me out like trash. Then I took my papers and ran.”

“That was smart,” the doctor reassured him. “I...want to give you a couple of referrals and I highly recommend you follow up. The first is to one of our psychiatrists...Abramovich. He’s not a sports psychiatrist although we have those as well. He catches everyone else. People come from different backgrounds and have their own stories. He will help you find your normal.”

Yuuri nodded taking in the information. Then he lifted soft brown eyes and asked, “And the other?”
“An omegologist. I want to make sure there are no physical damages from your...relationship. I’m going to run some bloodwork to check your nutritional deficiencies.” He slowed his voice and held out a hand to the younger man. “If you like, I can also run a standard sexual battery panel.”

Yuuri’s eyes shot up to his face, “But I wasn’t…”

The doctor leveled a gaze at him and didn’t back down from the ugliness. “Yes, Yuuri, you were...I don’t know when he took you, but you were...you didn’t go of your own free will. And I want to make sure he didn’t leave you with any lifelong consequences.”

Yuuri gasped, the thought never occurred to him. “I went to doctors,” he protested.

Dr. Romanov grimaced thinking of the faults in his field. “Often times doctors can only see what they hear from an alpha. When did you visit a doctor and for what?”

Yuuri’s eyes dropped. “For...my pregnancies. I don’t know what kind of doctor...they were...in the E.R.?”

The doctor frowned, making a note on his chart. “You didn’t see a doctor for regular checkups?” Yuuri shook his head. “And during your pregnancies, for prenatal visits?” Another slight shrug was all he provided. “How many times were you pregnant, Yuuri?”

“For,” he answered, a soft whine slipping from his throat. “None of them survived,” he added in a whisper.

Dr. Romanov scribbled notes on his chart and did his best to keep his voice low. “Did you see a doctor for prenatal care?”

Yuuri thought back. “The first time, to confirm the pregnancy. That’s when I was pulled from competition. But then I never saw that doctor again. He...my alpha would switch doctors often. I didn’t see the same one each time. My alpha kept canceling my appointments or not showing up to take me. I couldn’t go alone as I was never allowed to learn to drive and never had money for public transportation. Then...with the fourth, he said there really wasn’t a point.” Yuuri quieted for a moment, biting his lip to fight off tears.

The doctor turned away, hiding his expression for a moment. *Likely moved him before he could*
be reported for omega neglect. Turning back to his patient, he stated, “Even more reason for you to see an omegologist. I’m going to bring in a lab tech, he will take a blood sample, but I want you to tell me when you are ready.” Romanov let Yuuri sit for a few moments, steadying himself. When the younger man nodded he called the labtech in to do the blood work.

After giving blood, the doctor returned and revisited the topic of the referral. “You need to see the omegologist to make sure you are healthy and ready for your next heat. You also need to be as open with them as you have been with me. They can’t help you if you don’t talk to them.”

Yuuri nodded. “I will.” *He was there when I went to the E.R. They asked him all the questions, and he did all the talking. I couldn’t have spoken up then. But maybe...now.* He stepped into the hallway with his referrals and prescriptions for nutrition supplements along with the papers from Natasha. He then found his smile as he spotted Victor striding up the hallway with Yura bouncing happily at his side.

“You had to go to the doctor?” the blond asked with concern.

Yuuri was grateful Dr. Romanov had made sure he was calm before letting him leave his office. He was able to greet the little blonde with a smile, “I’m okay, Yura...they just need to get to know me better if I’m going to use the facilities.”

He looked relieved, turning green eyes to his father. “I don’t want Yuuri to get sick, too.”

Victor’s expression softened, his hand carding into the boy’s hair for a little rustle. “Yuuri is going to be fine. But seeing doctors is sometimes about making sure everything is alright...early.”

Yura frowned then turned back to Yuuri. “Did they poke you?”

Yuuri laughed and answered, “A little.” He showed Yura the bandaid from where they took blood. “Not too bad, though.” The child grimaced and then hid behind his father to both adults’ amusement.

Yuuri watched the city slip by while Yura chatted with his Papa about his day. He was only half paying attention, his thoughts on the words of the doctor when he heard Yura say, “Gosha made
Yuuri cry.”

Yuuri stilled, trying to ignore the intense blue eyes that glanced his direction. Covering his face, he curled into the door and mumbled, “It’s nothing. Georgi didn’t mean anything. He mentioned something that brought up a memory.”

Victor didn’t push it and Yuuri felt relieved. Yuuri slowly unfolded as they continued the journey home. Finally, Yuuri was helping Yura get his things together and head inside. Victor seemed to take a little longer, a message on his phone distracting him.

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Chris/ Lunch tomorrow?

Victor/ Yes, please. I want to talk about Yuuri.

Chris/ I thought things were going great.

Victor watched as the omega helped his son into the house. The two were playfully tugging a scarf between them as they entered. Yuuri’s brown eyes called back to him and he smiled his excuse, indicating to the phone.

Victor/ They are...it’s just, tomorrow. Lunch. We’ll talk then.

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The house was full of warm scents when Victor followed them through the door. “Olga, are we celebrating?” his voice sang.

Her laugh met his. “I caught a brisket on sale. Thought you’d all be hungry when you got home.”

Soon, they were all around the table, the thin sliced meat served with sauce and vegetables filled
the house with a homey aroma that made the family relax into the wintry night. Even Nikolai groaned in approval.

*Six bites plus one.* Yuuri began to eat, tasting the braising sauce with the meat, the richness of the meat complementing the country vegetables of carrots, parsnips, and cabbage combined with the onions and mushrooms. Yuuri began working on his small portions, and lost count of which bite he was on when Victor distracted him asking him about his dance training.

Yuuri blinked thinking of his first ballet class as a child, “I trained under Minako Okukawa. She was a very accomplished dancer and traveled through Europe when she was younger.”

“Lilia was talking to me about your form.” He hoped Yuuri would dance more, perhaps talk with Lilia about it. “You impressed her...and she doesn’t impress easily.”

Yuuri blushed and returned to his meal. *Three, or was it two?* Olga tugged at his attention as he pushed his food around a moment before taking a bite.

“I’m leaving in the morning to go see my sister and won’t return until Monday morning. Do you think you can handle the kitchen?” She spread her hands, hoping he would do this favor.

“I’ve got the kitchen,” argued Nikolai.

Olga clearly had tried this once before and rejected the idea immediately. “The mess you leave? I think not. I’d just as soon leave it in Victor Andreivich’s hands.”

“Hey!” Victor protested and she just gave him a look. Sometimes, Yuuri wondered if they worked for Victor or if he worked for them.

“I’ll be fine,” Yuuri reassured her. She seemed satisfied and Yuuri looked down at his plate. *When did I finish it?* Then his eyes widened and he met Victor’s blue eyes, seeing approval there. He didn’t know if they planned the distractions or not but...it worked. He felt warmer, not just the food filling him, but knowing that the entire family would work together to help him as well.

They didn’t talk about it and soon Yuuri was in the whirlwind of getting Yura in his bath and ready for bed. They read two books and finally Yura stretched and curled on his side. Yuuri settled the blanket around the boy’s shoulders, sliding his wrist on the pillow. On impulse, he leaned
forward, and kissed his blond head, tousling it as he pulled back. He heard a contented sigh. As he left the room, Yura called out, “Good night, Yuuriii.”

He was tired. The day was emotionally and physically draining. But he felt a sense of satisfaction. I finished it! Heading downstairs, he entered the kitchen now clean and dark except for a small light over the stove and pulled a water bottle out of the refrigerator. Turning, he jumped before he realized the form that caught his eyes was Victor.

Victor held his hands up, “I’m sorry, Yuuri...I didn’t mean to startle you.”

Yuuri breathed out, almost laughing at himself. “It’s okay...I just didn’t know you were there.”

Victor held his eyes before tilting his head towards the living room. “Keep me company for a little bit?”

Yuuri felt tired but not so sleepy that he couldn’t sit up with Victor for a bit. They moved back into the living room and Yuuri took his favorite place on the sofa, pulling the crocheted blanket over him. He then barely covered his gasp when Victor took the seat next to him.

“I want to talk about earlier...in the car,” Victor said softly, and Yuuri felt his breath hitch. “Gosha...or Georgi...what did he say?”

“It was nothing, really,” Yuuri insisted. Why won’t people just let things go around here?

Victor took a breath in, pressing, “I don’t think it is...I can tell you are still upset. Talk to me.”

Yuuri hugged himself and murmured, “It’s just...he was telling me about his kid and then he started talking about how he and his wife are expecting a baby. The clear joy on his face, and then his love of his children...his family...it sort of became overwhelming...” He sniffed and his vision blurred as Yuuri tried to wipe them away. The tears kept coming. “I...I couldn’t have mine. I lost them. All of them. And h-he said it was because I was a bad omega. A good omega would be able to carry their children. But...I was so tired. And it hurt so bad every time I lost one.”

“How many times did you go through this?” Victor asked softly and Yuuri realized he had a hand on his back.
Moving further into his arms, Yuuri stuttered out, “F-four.” He rested his head on Victor’s shoulder, tucked under his chin. That hand continued to run slow circles on his back and Yuuri focused on the motion, shaking, his heart crying.

“Oh, Yuuri,” Victor said softly. “So much pain and heartbreak.” They stayed like that, locked into each other’s arms until Yuuri settled.

Finally, Yuuri sat up, shoving his tears away as if they were not warranted. “I just need to get stronger.”

Victor sighed, and took the omega’s small hands in his own. “You need...to mourn. That...man never allowed you to mourn, and he certainly didn’t mourn with you. After losing so much, you need to mourn each one.”

Yuuri stopped, thinking back. I could never mourn them. He was furious with me until it was time to breed again. “I-I don’t know how. All I do is cry when I think about them.”

Victor squeezed his hands and murmured, “That’s...a start. Four...that’s a lot of tears to cry.”

“I...wasn’t allowed to cry. He...wouldn’t let me,” Yuuri said quietly. “I did anyway. In the times when I was alone...but I never truly put them to rest.”

Victor thought of how awful it was to lose someone, but compounded with denial made it insufferable. “One of your referrals is for Dr. Abramovich. I...visited him when I lost Yelena. I didn’t know how to face my tears,” Victor confessed.

“So...you think I should go,” Yuuri said quietly.

“Yes,” Victor murmured.

Yuuri stillled for a moment, looking at Victor, “And...you are fine with it? It doesn’t make me weak?”
“Only the strong find courage to ask for help when they need it.” Victor squeezed his hands again.

Yuuri felt he had a lot to think about and nodded as he slipped out of Victor’s grasp. “I’m going to bed now.”

“Sleep well, Yuuri.” Victor worried he had pushed too hard, but knew to give the younger man space to work through this.

Yuuri’s eyes dropped down before he nodded. Turning, he went upstairs, his steps slow as he contemplated Victor’s words. Would he still want me here if the psychiatrist finds out I was a bad omega? A weak omega? What if I’m unstable? Slipping into his room, he spotted Ren in her bed. Reaching down, he pulled her to his heart and he felt the sob release into her curls. They cuddled into bed while Yuuri shook through his tears.

“I’m sorry,” he repeated over and over again. He didn’t know who he was apologizing to...Victor for leaving his side, Yura for not being his mama, his...babies...for not being strong enough to carry them. Pulling out his phone, he sent a message.

Yuu-chan/ What’s wrong with me?

The reply came quick.

Peaches/ Nothing.

Yuu-chan/ I can’t seem to stop crying.

Peaches/ Oh, Yuuri. You are hurting and need to take the time to heal. What's going on?

Yuu-chan/ I went to see a nutritionist today...and a doctor. Everything feels so opened up.

Peaches/ I’m glad you’re getting help. You need to learn to take care of yourself. For a long time, you weren't allowed.
Yuu-chan/ But my babies…

Peaches/ Loved you...every one of them. You would never have been able to take care of them there. You need to learn how to let them go and move forward.

Yuuri studied those words and hugged himself. *I need something to help me mourn...and let them go.* Pulling his phone back out, he texted his mother. He didn’t know if she was up yet but she’d see it when she woke up.

Yuu-chan/ Okaasan...help me know how to mourn my babies.

Victor slowly prepared for bed thinking about all that he suspected and had learned about Yuuri. He had been through so much and for some, that might scare them away. For Victor, it solidified his resolve to help him through this. His eyes rested on a picture on his dresser, Yelena holding Yura.

“How do I help him?”

As the words left his lips, he could hear her laugh as she would answer him, *be yourself.*

Chapter End Notes

;) So, how do you think that meeting is going to go?
Tears falling like raindrops on the keys of a piano…

Chapter Summary

Yuuri fights through grief that he held back, banked behind survival.

Chapter Notes

This chapter focuses on Yuuri and Nikolai. There is extensive links at the end, research I dug through for the coming chapters.

Read with tissue and a warm fuzzy blanket.

Ch. 9: Tears falling like raindrops on the keys of a piano…

Yuuri huffed, blowing his hair out of his face. The morning had been spent wrestling the five-year-old into his school uniform, getting the backpack together, searching for a book that had “gone missing” and oddly was found stuffed under Yura’s mattress, and then came the battle of wills over socks. Yuuri wasn’t sure what the boy’s reticence about school was, or maybe it was leaving the home, but he knew it was a conversation for the weekend when the little blonde was in a calmer state. The battle over, he wasn’t sure who won at that point but strongly suspected it was Yura, even though he sat on the bottom step pouting.

Yuuri took one last inventory, checking that all of Yura’s schoolwork was organized and tucked away in his backpack. He then went through the mental list of what he needed to do while out. With Olga leaving, he’d been put in charge of the shopping. He had the small change purse Olga had given him that held the shopping money for the day. He had a list of ingredients for katsudon, as well as some other staples he wanted to keep in the home for everyday cooking in case Olga was unwell. The kitchen, cooking, preparing for meals was something he knew he could handle. There was almost something rhythmic to preparing food and cooking it. Yuuri wasn’t worried over this, only about the travel and language barrier inside the stores. However, he had another task he was going to undertake today, one that would bring up unacknowledged emotions. His mother had sent him a list of what he needed for the shrine. It wasn’t an exhaustive list, nor would any of the items be difficult to find, however it was the purpose that weighed on him. Finally mourning the loss of his sons and daughter, giving himself over to that grief, was going to hurt. He worried he wouldn’t be able to face it when the time came. He ran fingers against the list in his pocket and felt very overwhelmed at the moment.
Nikolai walked in after seeing Olga off. Taking one look at the scene of a frazzled omega and a stubborn child, he waved to his grandson. “Why don’t I run you to school?”

“Yuuri has to take me,” the five-year-old demanded. Little green eyes darted to Yuuri’s, but softened when he saw Yuuri’s approval.

“You can ride in the big truck,” Yuuri pointed out, knowing how Yura adored pulling up in front of his fancy school in a truck that probably came from the Soviet era. He appreciated Nikolai watching out for him.

The old man leveled a gaze at his grandson. “Yuuri is doing a fine job but even the best...ah...” the older man’s eyes faltered looking a little embarrassed in his search for the more modern term and knowing nanny wasn’t quite right, “caretakers need a break. Let’s go.” Yura shrugged, looked once more at Yuuri who nodded in approval, and then skipped out the door. The old man turned back to Yuuri and added, “Maybe you and I can talk about this kitchen business when I get back. And I’ll take you about your errands. Can’t have you getting lost not knowing the language.”

Yuuri blushed and murmured, “Oh, okay...thank you,” appreciating the offer of help. And then he was alone, something he hadn’t really experienced since arriving. The house was quiet, little Ren was in the living room, sleeping on her favorite spot on the couch. Yura’s cat Potya had left the room and found a sunny spot to snuggle in contentedly. The kittens were still in the boy’s room, safely living in their small space. Makkachin accompanied Victor to the rink as was her habit. She only stayed behind when her aches and pains had her moving slowly. Even with the animals, the house felt still.

The raven haired man wandered about the kitchen, cleaning Yura’s plate and tucking it away. He knew Nikolai had some errands to run and it would be a couple of hours before he returned to take him to market. After a moment of thought, he decided to inventory ingredients and see what he needed for what he planned to prepare over the weekend. Olga let him know the grocer would deliver the bulk goods that day...in the late afternoon. He knew she put an order in the previous day and left a list on the counter...in Russian. “くそ.” The small curse slipped past his lips as he studied the words. 

Nikolai will be able to help me, but I can’t wait until at least some of these words look familiar.

Setting the paper aside, he found his feet leading him down the hall to the room he closed off after discovering the kittens. He heard the light tap of tiny claws on the polished floor and knew Ren was not far behind. Taking a deep breath, he opened the door.

The room was just as beautiful as the other day. Light poured into the space, softly reflecting on the floors and walls. He walked along the mirrored wall, his hand sliding down the barre. He closed his eyes and found his center. Minako, I am so thankful you took the time to instill this in
me. You don’t know how much ballet kept me alive. I couldn’t skate...but I could dance. Lifting his eyes, he saw himself in the mirror, really looking at the man he was for the first time. How much of me did he try to chip away? Did he succeed? Yuuri looked at his frame, knowing skinny wasn’t the word, he was gaunt, hollowed. His skin looked better, and he knew that Russia, even with the weather, was suiting him well. His hair was softer, thicker...and desperately needed a cut. He laughed at some of the fly-away strands sticking up. He considered his eyes; they lit up with laughter but soon that light faded, and he was left looking haunted. I hope Yura doesn’t see this when he looks at me. He straightened his position, improved his posture, and grabbing the barre, feeling a confident opinion resonate back from the wood. He began to work through the positions, opening his hips with first, into fifth, stretching his arms above and behind himself, breathing in time with the motions, hearing the tap of his teacher’s cane in his mind.

Limber and warm, he stepped onto the floor, beginning a series of Fouettés. The feeling of gravity on his body as he leapt and spun, closing his eyes, helped him to give over to the emotion that flowed through him. In his mind, the memory of a song or perhaps a song he created played, a rambling piano that seemed to tumble out of him, cascading up and down the scales. He struck a chord with sudden power, only to soften it almost into a childlike procession up the range. The complexity of one section was contrasted by the simple beauty of what followed. His steps showed this, complex footwork moving swift breaking into a slow stretch that demonstrated his power and control. Then the music broke, small drops of rain on the keys, and Yuuri faltered, standing for a moment, before stumbling to a knee and falling onto his hips, catching himself with his hands. The dance had been a war, not against gravity but his control, and the emotions won, opening the floodgates. Feeling himself break, a sob wretched out of him after months... no... years of trying to hold it in.

He didn’t hear him enter, but he felt the warmth of large, rough hands on his back, pulling him into the older man’s chest, giving Yuuri the nudge he needed to let the rest of it out. “Cry it out, boy, cry it out...let your heart empty.” The voice was sober, heavily accented and sincere.

And Yuuri did, sobbing a hard, violent torrent of tears, clinging to the older man as he let his sorrows free. Pain. Grief. Anger. Loss. Shame. The heavy emotions blended together, leaving his body with racking sobs, as if he were exorcising them from him.

“Let it all out,” Nikolai encouraged. He gently relaxed his hold on Yuuri as the younger man shifted, his energy failing him, his body laying down on the floor. A gentle hand maintained the connection, smoothing circles into his back, grounding him into the moment.

Yuuri finally stilled, sniffing occasionally, staring ahead of him but not seeing. Then he started to talk. “I never wanted to be with him...never wanted to mate, not with him, never wanted to get pregnant by him. But my heart wept for each of my babies, why?”

“They were an extension of you, not him.” Nikolai’s voice was hard, something in this man
knowing the pain of an unwanted mate. “And you loved them, even if you never got to meet. It is so hard to mourn for our children,” Nikolai’s voice murmured softly. “We are supposed to go first, they are supposed to live long lives, dream big dreams, love deep loves.”

Yuuri looked down at his empty hands. “They...didn’t even get to take a breath...except one...the second one...and then he was gone in the same moment. He was the only one I held.”

The man behind him hummed in sympathy. “Did anyone take a picture? My wife lost two before Yelena and her sister took a picture of her with them...twins...she held onto that picture and sometimes...I’d see her weep for the children she had held close to her heart that day. The picture helped.”

Yuuri’s cheek pressed against the floor, his palm spread over the cool surface before him. Did...I? He thought of Phichit, “My best friend was there for that one. H-he might have a picture.”

“It would be a start.”

Yuuri thought of the possibility, “And the others?”

The hand on his back squeezed as the older man shushed him, “One at a time. My wife never mourned the children she lost all at once. Except for the twins...but they were of one soul, she would say. She focused on one at a time.”

“There were more?” Yuuri blinked; as his mind became clearer he remembered Nikolai saying there were two...twins.

Nikolai’s breath hitched, were Yuuri to turn he would see this pillar of strength crying as well. “Two before our Yelena. Three after. My wife decided after that that her heart couldn’t take any more.”

“Sometimes...I think that I can’t...but I want… sometimes I want a baby so much…”

The hand on Yuuri’s back traveled up, grabbing his shoulder with a firm grasp, “Then you’re not through yet. Keep fighting for what you want, like my wife did...like my Yelena did.”
Yuuri sat up slowly and turned to see the face of the man who had comforted him, held him as he broke. The tears were no longer there but the trails they left behind still shone. *Whoever wrote that Russians were stoic clearly never met any.* He smiled his thanks to the man, then looked around the room guiltily. “I’m probably not supposed to be in here.”

Nikolai’s eyes narrowed in confusing, looking around the room. “No? Who said that?”

Yuuri couldn’t explain it; if Victor had this studio, why encourage him to dance at the rink? “No one...but Victor, he never suggested…”

The old man huffed. “Likely he never thought about it.” He saw the confusion on the young man’s face and laughed, “In some ways, Vitya is considerate as hell. In others, he’s an idiot, missing what’s right before his eyes. Likely as not, he just never thought of this room.”

Yuuri chuckled at that, his laugh coming out rough but sincere. Remembering his list, he asked, “Do you...think you can help me with something?”

Nikolai groaned as he rose on old knees, “Sure. What do you need?”

Yuuri followed, this time it was his turn to help the man find his feet. “I’m...trying to put together an alter of sorts? A shrine?”

“Well, I don’t know much about those things.” He thought of his wife, the tokens she kept to remind her of her losses. Traditions that his people had might that not fit what this young man needs. “Let’s talk about what you want and build from there.”

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After Yuuri shared what he needed, he decided he needed to bathe before going out. The old man excused himself to tinker with Victor’s leaky shower once more. “Call me when you are ready to leave,” he offered. “We can pick Yura up from school on the way back.”

The omega was thankful that his own shower was in good order, slipping under the steamy rainhead and letting the water wash away his sorrows. Yuuri smiled at that thought. It would be nice if it were so easy. *At least I can wash away the evidence of my pain.* He glided the soap over his skin, smooth and well tended, the lotions provided by his mother when he had left Japan
softening the years of neglect away. *I hope I didn’t freak Nikolai out.* Remembering the affection the old man bestowed upon him, how he held Yuuri’s tears while he cried out his heart, he knew the old man was not upset, but merely giving him the space he needed to put himself to rights.

Dressing with care, he craved the comfort of the soft clothes that Victor had provided him. *I would prefer to wear something of his, maybe an oversized sweater.* Then he stilled at the thought, realizing he was craving the comforting whiff of the alpha’s scent. He remembered how the soft fragrance had calmed him through his panic attack, and then smiled thinking of how Victor’s subtle scent clung to clothes. For a moment he turned, thinking of gathering something that had his... *Get it together Katsuki!* Pulling on the sweats and a soft t-shirt, he slipped a hoodie over the top, the soft greys and dark blues calming him. He quickly dried his hair, combing it into order before retrieving his phone. They still had four hours before picking up Yura. *Would it be enough time?* The shopping list was extensive and he had Victor’s credit card tucked into the change purse, a way to track his personal purchases.

Downstairs, Nikolai worked in Victor’s bathroom lilting an old song his own father had hummed while he worked. He noted when the shower went off, the sound traveling through the old pipes. *Old pipes. That is likely the problem.* He had the pipe wrench in hand and was in the process of breaking the seal when he heard the doorbell. He paused but really it wasn’t the best time to stop his work. “Yuuri will have to get it,” he muttered to himself.

Upstairs, Yuuri heard the doorbell, wrinkling his brow. *We aren’t expecting anyone that I know of. Not until the afternoon.* He gave his hair another pass with the towel then ran, hopping down the stairs to see to the door. Through the side windows set next to the door, he spotted a heavyset gentleman around Olga’s age standing expectantly outside. The bundles under his arm signaled a delivery but Yuuri still felt wary of letting this man in.

“Hello?” Yuuri opened the door cautiously, peering outside.

The man smiled, then in the fastest Russian Yuuri had ever heard, fired off what could possibly be a list of food, or maybe the instructions to Operation Deadhand.

Yuuri held up his hands only to have a well wrapped goose shoved into them. He stuttered an apology and moved back, a mistake as the man, still speaking, followed him in with more bundles.

“No, I don’t…”

The man stopped, gave Yuuri a sharp look and consulted his clipboard, “Нет, дыня.” He began his rapid fire cataloging, moving into the kitchen further while Yuuri, unsure what to say followed.
him helplessly. At the pantry the man piled a box, pointing at the box and repeating...or maybe not repeating...a series of words.

Yuuri pulled back, thinking to settle his goose on the table. Oh, can’t go there. He juggled the bird, growing heavier by the moment, “I’ll go ge...”

The man seemed thrilled. Communication at last. He pulled out two cucumbers shoving them on top of the bird already occupying the Japanese man’s arms, “Da! Огурец.”

Large brown eyes narrowed. This can’t be real life right now.

From behind him came a saving call of Russian, Nikolai began speaking to the man, who shifted gears and lost interest in Yuuri immediately. The two men exchanged talk for a moment, then Nikolai turned leading the man out again, the receipt in hand. But the stalky delivery man insisted on shaking Yuuri’s hand with a farewell.

Once the door was closed and order restored, Yuuri, two cucumbers, and a goose stood in the middle of the kitchen wondering how Olga managed. Nikolai walked in, laughing from deep in his belly at the sight. Crossing the room, he relieved Yuuri of the bird and fruit (cucumbers are fruit). “So that was Lev, he’s got something of a crush on Olga. I think he was hoping you would put in a good word. He’s been chasing her for years now.”

Yuuri snorted a laugh, “I’ll see what I can do.”

The two worked together to put the supplies away, Yuuri finally learning of the cold cellar for storing large meats and preserved goods. He also saw the artistry of Olga’s canning, making a note to ask the woman to teach him. The way she runs this house really is amazing, he appreciated.

Clapping his hands together at the completed task, Nikolai asked, “Shall we have an early lunch and then run those errands of yours?”

Oh, food...I forgot the second meal. “I-I think I can put something together,” Yuuri offered.

“Oh, good. I’ll just go clean up the mess I left in Vitya’s shower. If that doesn’t work, I may have to replace the pipe altogether.”
“I used to help my father work on the onsen pumps.” At the confused look from the old man, he added, “It’s a hot spring. My parents own and run a hot spring resort and inn. There is even a restaurant attached.”

“And you probably filled in where needed,” the old man admired, knowing a hard worker when he saw one.

“Yes, well, it was a family business. We had employees but sometimes it wasn’t enough.”

“I might call on you if I need to pull that pipework apart. Plumbing is my least favorite chore.”

Nodding towards the door, he added, “I’ll be back shortly.”

Yuuri felt a renewed sense of purpose and began assembling a quick sandwich. When Nikolai returned, he took one bite. The older man closed his eyes, enjoying the mixture of flavors.

“Mmmm, dill. I didn’t know if you’d think of such things.”

Yuuri smiled, the man before him was a lover of the simple in life, and he could appreciate that.

“I’ve been helping Olga since I arrived. I guess...I picked up on it. We use different seasonings in Japan.”

Nikolai hummed in interest, then looked at the younger man, “Perhaps you can make us something from your family’s kitchen?”

“I’d like that,” Yuuri murmured as he took another bite of the small sandwich.

“And while we’re talking about the kitchen...I have to gain access.” Nikolai’s phrasing sounded like he was requesting the keys to the kingdom but the look on his face was sincere. “I must pass down the family traditions...and that means piroshkis.”

Yuuri chuckled and shrugged. “I don’t know what that is but if we work together to put things back in order before Olga arrives, I don’t see the problem.”

The old man grinned. “You’ll see. Entirely worth raising Olga’s ire.”
Yuuri smiled, not sure if he agreed, but he was in for the adventure all the same.

A quick clean up after lunch and they were out the door. “Why doesn’t Olga order the rest of her shopping?” he asked as he climbed into the truck.

Nikolai grunted. “Has to check some things out herself. I think it just gives her an excuse to get out.”

“Well, I hope I don’t disappoint her trust.” Yuuri pulled at the cuff of his hoodie.

The old man cast dark grey eyes his direction. “You won’t disappoint her. You’ve more than impressed...both of us. After those heartless hags that came through here, we are relieved to see someone truly care for our Yura...and that alone is enough to cement you to us. All of us, not just my Yurashka. You understand this, da?”

Yuuri blushed, his eyes staring out the window, bouncing as the truck hit a pothole here or there. *It really must be Soviet era.* “Maybe...I needed to love someone. Needed to be needed.”

The old man grunted once more and Yuuri took that as approval.

Their first stop was at a hardware that had reclaimed wood. “I always like to find something with history for projects like this. Like they bring their own story in to mingle with yours.”

“My mother would say they bring their spirits to protect the home.” He ran his hands over the maple.

Nikolai came over to inspect the piece that seemed to call to the young man. “That piece has been well loved. We might look at maple, cedar, or possibly beech for your purposes.”

“Which...would you use?” Yuuri asked softly.
The old man studied the woods for a moment. “I...made Yelena’s crib out of cedar. You can stain it but I’d just use urethane to bring out its natural grain.” With Yuuri’s nod, he helped the omega pick out several good pieces for the project and picked up a can of polyurethane in the purchase. “Now, for the next.”

Yuuri paused, working out how to explain it across culture and language. “It’s...some vessels, like vases and such. Like china?”

The old man grunted once more. “I know a place.” He drove Yuuri to a resale shop and Yuuri was surprised to see the fine china on the shelves. “Folks give up their heirlooms at times for food on the table.”

Yuuri froze a moment. This is already sorrowful, do I want to bring in items already carrying their own pain? “I don’t want to build on someone’s heartbreak,” Yuuri argued.

Nikolai saw the hesitance in the younger man, and reached out to him, “You could see it like that...or you could see it as an honest trade. Over here, these aren’t valuable but they might have allowed someone to buy a wedding ring for their sweetheart. These all had a purpose at one point, now they have lost that. They could be redeemed by you.”

Yuuri smiled at how the old man created stories for the objects he pointed out much like how the omega once created stories on the ice. “I like this,” he said quietly. The selection he made was delicate white china, pure and simple, the shape elegant.

Once more, Yuuri left the store with his bundle. He knew his mother was sending what he wouldn’t be able to find in the store, but this was a start and with Nikolai’s guidance, he’d be able to create what he needed.

They stopped at the market last, picking up the things Yuuri needed with Nikolai reading the labels for him. “I’ve taken you from all of your chores,” Yuuri fussed at one point.

The old man chuckled. “I don’t have a schedule. It’s nice to get out like this. And I know Vitya would want you to have this.”

“Thank you,” Yuuri murmured, hugging himself before gathering the last of his goods. Checking his phone as he checked out, he knew it was drawing near time to pick up Yura. The afternoon had been spent but he felt it was well worth it.
The old truck pulled up in front of the school and Yuuri spotted the blond who looked both excited and disappointed. Opening the door and stepping out, however, he watched the boy perk up and break into a sprint to meet Yuuri. “How was your day?” The omega greeted, his hands smoothing out the blond flyaways.

“It was fine,” Yura answered, Yuuri felt a lie in the statement. “Better, now.” Yuuri bundled the boy into the middle of the bench seat of the truck and they lumbered back home. Maybe he could pry out of the child what was going on sometime over the weekend.

Notes:

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Chapter Summary

A glimpse into the lives of the people who love Yuuri.

Chapter Notes

Another song starts to filter through because we impact more than those immediately in our range. I hope you enjoy these glimpses into the worlds of those surrounding Yuuri.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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Ch. 10: For a son, for a brother, for a friend...for a mom...

Hiroko reached for her phone as she woke up, the text had come through in the wee hours and unfortunately had gone unnoticed in her sleep. She brushed aside her bangs and brought the screen within inches of her nose, not wanting to reach for glasses. Her eyes brightened as she read the words from her son. A small sob escaped her lips before she could cover her mouth to stop it. Next to her she felt her husband stir and then his warm hand was on her shoulder, pulling her towards him. With a hitch in her voice, “He’s going to be okay.”

Toshiya smiled, happily hearing what he already knew. Rising from the bed, “Perhaps...he feels safer far away from that bastard,” Toshiya answered. He pulled on his clothes for the day, then stopped, considering his family. “Best let Mari know.”

Hiroko lay in bed, answering the text, a smile playing across her lips as she tapped out her reply.

Hiroko/ Sweetie, I’d love to help you figure your way through this. Let’s start with an altar or shrine, a place to leave your sorrows.

His reply came through immediately.
Yuu-chan/ Thank you, Okaasan. I don’t know where to start.

Hiroko rose, thinking of her day and got ready quickly. As she entered her workspace, she called Mari into the kitchen. “Your brother...he’s finally ready to mourn his babies. Can you get these things for me? He won’t be able to find them where he’s at.” She handed the older sister the list.

Mari was stoic as always, keeping her emotions under tight control. But Hiroko saw a twitch around her daughter’s eye when she said, “You know, we all had gifts for those babies. Maybe there would be something in those things.”

“I...know.” She reached out, patting Mari’s hand. “I gathered them into a box in case Yuuri would want them later. Especially...after the boy.”

Mari cleared her throat, covering up her grief in her own manner. “I know Minako had a tutu for the first,” Mari reminded her.

“And I think Yuuko made some booties for the third.” Hiroko smiled, thinking of all the love these little children would have had were circumstances different for Yuuri.

They then put their heads together...something for the fourth child, the one that never stood a chance. “I have...something. It’s a little something, a rattle that belonged to Yuuri,” Hiroko suggested.

A call to Yuuko, and the cheery mother stopped by, triplets in tow. “So what are we working on?” she asked, her eyes dancing.

Hiroko waited until the three girls were amusing themself with reorganizing the souvenir display, then leaned in to Yuuko. “A...memory box. Something to send Yuuri for him to go through as he mourns his babies.”

Yuuko’s soft brown eyes fell, a soft ‘Yuuri’ passing from lips as she thought of friend’s sorrow. Then she lifted them brightly, “Have you contacted Phichit?”

The mother blinked her eyes in surprise. “I have not!”
“I can do that for you.” Yuuko smiled over a cup of tea, “Phichit and I commiserate often over Yuu-chan.”

“Thank you,” Hiroko said softly.

At her home, a trio of girls following her steps, she began gathering scraps of memories, calling Phichit as she walked through the house. “We’re putting together a memory box for the babies! I’ve got the dress I made for his first, she was a girl...and a blanket I crocheted for his fourth. There are booties around here somewhere.”

Down the line he heard Phichit click his tongue, “You must have talked to Yuuri. He sent me a text half an hour ago asking for a picture of the baby. The one that breathed.”

Yuuko brightened with hope, “You have one?”

“I do...I was there each time he lost his babies. Someone had to be and that piece of shit wasn’t going to step up.” She heard his voice hardened at the end.

Yuuko considered what support Shuji would have offered were he there. “It’s probably best he didn’t.” She shuddered thinking of that man with someone like Yuuri. Nishigori was gruff and blustering to everyone else, but to her, and their girls, he was a gentle kitten. That’s what a true alpha should be. “What else do you have?”

Off in Tokyo, Phichit rustled through some things, reaching far into the back of a closet before he pulled out his own Yuuri box. Pausing he ran a hand over the folded cover, silently taking a moment to pray he will never again add a sorrowful memory to this box. “I have...his ID bracelets for each hospital visit, the bracelet of the baby he lost, the blanket and cap they wrapped the baby in, the photo of Yuuri holding the baby, a silver brush he bought for the first, and a blanket I stitched for the last one.” Phichit’s fingers found the little cap and held it out. So tiny...will my children...

“That sounds amazing.” Yuuko’s voice buzzed in his ear, interrupting his thoughts. “Can you ship
those things here? Either to me or his mother!”

He pulled himself from his thoughts. Kissing the little hat he placed it back in the box. “I can. I’ll put them together and overnight them.”

Her voice was rich with warmth, “You’re amazing!”

Two hours later, Hiroko had the items for the shrine, the kamifuda, the mizuire, a Jizo statue, each object wrapped with great care and placed into the box that would be sent to her son. She went to her room and pulled out a box, taking out the things that she had made for these grandchildren, then tucked away with care. Now she was looking at each and wrapping it for travel. May you find healing in these tokens and not more pain. She thought of her son and how he had merely existed over the past months. Like a ghost walking through life, only leaving the inn if someone or something dragged him from its safe confines, dancing or skating when the spaces were deserted. Even as he took steps forward, something would happen to cause him to retreat. His eyes would tell her of the sorrow he carried, and the fear of the unwritten future. She’d been afraid to let him go when he told her his plan but she had also been afraid for him if he stayed. He had been stuck, and this move to Russia with its challenges had helped him. With her own prayers, she added her offerings to the box and waited for the rest.

Minako stopped by later, carrying a few things she’d gathered for the babies of her favorite student. “It’s not much,” she fussied. Hiroko knew better. The woman who claimed to never be the mothering type had played the role well for her son, giving Yuuri what he needed when Hiroko could not.

“I’m sure Yuuri will appreciate the good thoughts that went into each object,” Hiroko reassured her. Minako reluctantly relinquished her items and Hiroko watched her friend’s spirit lift...at least a little. Much like Yuuri, they had all been holding onto their grief stored into these small treasures, unable to move forward. Grief for the babies lost, grief for the omega enslaved by a cruel alpha. Hiroko realized that this was something they needed just as badly as Yuuri.

Yuuko arrived later bringing more to add to the box. Slightly embarrassed she offered, “The girls...they wanted to bring something as well. Do you mind?”

Hiroko’s eyes were soft, accepting the offerings from the young mother’s family. Yuuri, so much love surrounds you. “I’m sure Yuuri would treasure each one,” Hiroko encouraged. Small trinkets went into the box from their small hands. “Now, what are we waiting for?”
“Phichit...he’s expressing some things to you.” She paused, thinking of Yuuri alone in a hospital, no alpha, no family. *Thank goodness for you, Phichit.* “They...are from the hospital and things he shopped with Yuuri for the babies.”

Hiroko smiled, comforted that his friend stood by him at that time. “That sounds like the finishing touches. I’ll mail the boxes as soon as they arrive...maybe he can get it fairly quickly.”

“I’m so afraid they will be held up in customs,” Yuuko fussed.

“We will pray warm thoughts over this gift,” Hiroko guided her and they continued to bless each item within the box. She would send it off after Phichit’s additions were in the box.

The blonde watched the other children running about the playground. Their chatter drifted over to him, but he only looked away, digging his foot into the dirt in front of him. He sat away from the other kids and ignored the worried glances given by his teachers. They had stopped trying to get him to join in after the first two weeks and he was happy to be left alone. Beside, after the conversations with his own teacher this entire week, he knew they didn’t really care. Yura was thinking of the latest talk that bordered on a shouting match when he started as a tall figure dropped into the grass next to him.

“What’s up?” The little boy next to him ran his hands through the soft grass, it was cold enough to stay in, but Russians loved to defy the weather.

“Nothing,” he answered. He smiled at the new student’s appearance. He knew the school’s opinion of him had flipped after he proved himself excellent at dodgeball. Otabek, true to form, was cold but polite to those who had teased him and stuck with Yura. However the smile left, and he frowned. “Are you going to talk about your mom for parents’ day?”

Otabek shrugged. Looking ahead of them at the others playing a nondescript game of catch. “I mean...which one would I pick?”

Yura clucked his tongue, “I mean...your real mom.”
Otabek smiled, knowing the little blonde meant no harm, “They are all my real moms. But I know you meant my birth mom, and I could. I mean, she was amazing.” He smiled, thinking of his mother. “But it’s kind of a bummer to talk about someone who is dead. So I might talk about my other moms.”

“Yeah, I suppose,” Yura sighed. He was looking for something in his friend’s confidence.

Otabek let him sit for a moment, before prompting. “You want to talk about your mom?”

The blond shook his head, hair flying out in the action. “I want...to talk about my Yuuri,” the voice was determined, full of the fiery passion he had to bottle up earlier. “But the teacher said Yuuri’s not a parent.”

“Oh, that sucks.” The little Kazak boy sighed, keeping his mouth shut. He had overheard some not choice comments about his own family, specifically his father. Plural marriages were not common, even though they were legally recognized. Otabek stared across the playground thoughtfully. After a moment, he said, “You could do it anyway.”

Yura sat up a little, looking at his friend’s dark eyes. “I’d get a bad grade!” Yura argued, green eyes wide.

The older student grinned and nodded. “Yep! You would, but you’d also be kind of badass!”

Yura’s eyes widened at the use of the curse word, a mischievous smile played on his lips. Then he hugged his knees, turning thoughtful again. He really wanted to talk about his Yuuri. Yuuri played with him and listened to him. Yuuri told him new words and stories about Japan. He loved his mother, but he loved his Yuuri, too. “Maybe...maybe I will,” he determined.

Chris waited patiently at the restaurant for Victor’s arrival toying with his phone. He smiled when he saw his lover’s name come up asking for him to call when he had some time. He quickly replied that he was free after lunch. His eyes met blue and he stood to greet the alpha striding through the restaurant. Chris liked to think he turned heads but he never had the presence of his friend. Even with years off the ice, Victor still had an air about him making him look as those he floated through the room. Women, and men, flicked their eyes towards his form. Chris had to smile, his friend still had it, and was still just as completely oblivious to it.
“Chris, so glad you could meet with me at the last minute,” Victor greeted, taking Chris’s hand in his and covering it with the other. That was just like Victor. You could tell how close you were to him in his touches. A crisp, business-like handshake even if his voice was warm and inviting said you were just under the surface of his awareness. However, when he took you by both hands, you were close, a confidant. He knew only a few that shared that distinction.

“For a friend, I’d clear my schedule if possible.” They took their seats, and Chris continued. “So tell me, what’s got you concerned?”

Victor raised a sardonic eyebrow. “Straight to the heart of the matter, I see,” Victor murmured. “I’m wanting to know more about Yuuri.”

Chris straightened in his seat, “I don’t know what I can tell you…”

“Is he a widow?” Victor asked, then looked down shaking his head, “I think not…and now I wonder who his ex is. He mentioned his name was Shuji and I’d hate to think it is who I think it is.” He stilled his words, studying his hands folded on the table. “He’s been tortured, Chris…maybe not physically but in every other way. He…struggles to eat. He flinches at loud sounds. He…he thinks he’s a bad omega…when I couldn’t imagine a better caregiver for my son.”

Chris watched as his friend worked through what he supposed, and what he feared, the blue eyes darting around, then settling on the table. “So he’s working out,” Chris concluded softly.

The blue eyes flicked up, narrowing, “Chris…you know much more than you’re telling me.”

The Swiss man took a slow breath in, sighing as he said, “I do…and I can’t tell you what you want to know.”

Victor paused a moment, blinking, “Why?”

“Let’s call it…attorney-client privilege,” Chris suggested.

“But Yuuri’s not your client,” Victor argued.
Chris shrugged. “That contract was created to protect both parties. Under its stipulations I wouldn’t be able to disclose information about you to him either.” With the legality out of the way he moved to what Victor really needed to focus on. “Now, how do you feel?”

“I…I…” Chris was an expert at derailing a person’s thoughts and he studied his friend as Victor floundered with his words. Closing those eyes and opening them again, Victor shrugged. “He’s part of us. It’s like he’s always been with us. Yura is happier, and showing affection freely now, and I know it’s Yuuri’s influence. I just…I want...You know I have to protect him. It’s in my nature. The moment you put him in my care, you knew he’d be safe.”

“Yes, I did,” Chris agreed quietly.

Victor held his eyes before asking, “Is he free?”

“He is not in a relationship. I wouldn’t have done that to you, or Yura. But free...” Taking a drink, he said softly, “For now.”

“You’d tell me if he were in danger,” Victor pressed.

Chris nodded as they were brought their meals. French protected their privacy to a certain degree but he waited until the server was gone before he continued. “Yuuri’s safety is very important to me. But for now, it’s his story to tell. Trust me on this.”

“He’s determined…” Victor smiled softly thinking about the omega that took his home by storm and didn’t back down from a challenge. “He asserts himself, knows what he wants. Sometimes I have to get him to open up, but if it’s important, he speaks out. And...he made himself a part of the family. From the beginning. It’s not...just a job for him.”

Chris smiled thinking of his friend’s happiness, both of them. “It wouldn’t be. For him, it’s a fresh start…and I think he needed that.”

“In a safe place,” Victor added softly hoping to get Chris to talk but his friend just smiled. Sighing, they continued their lunch discussing other legal and personal matters. As lunch wrapped up, Victor extended an invitation. “Perhaps you could join us for dinner one evening.”
Chris leveled a stare at his friend before answering. “Let him get more settled before you bring me in to upset matters.”

As Victor left, Chris pulled out his phone and texted his boyfriend.

**SexBomb/ Our project seems to be progressing nicely.**

**EvilGenius/ I’ve heard from my end, too.**

**SexBomb/ I’ll call when I get home. Love you!**

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Yuuri stared at the email from Phichit afraid to open it. He marked it so it wouldn’t get lost but he wasn’t sure if he was ready to see his baby. Looking across the room, he found his smile as he watched Yura stretched out on the floor playing with the kittens. The little boy’s mood seemed to improve after he arrived home but the omega knew something was still hanging over the child. *You’ll talk to me soon.*

Chapter End Notes

So what are we thinking?
Vicotor woke to the silver light of early Saturday morning greeting him. Stretching into the soft smoothness of his sheets he hummed at the idea of a late morning followed by a free day. He had nowhere to be this day and planned to take full advantage of the weekend knowing competitions for many of his students and others at the rink whom he oversaw were looming in the not too distant future. He rose and washed, changing into soft sweats. He leashed Makkachin with the plan to take a nice morning walk while he worked through his thoughts.

He could hear the quiet clatter of dishes and peeked into the kitchen to see Nikolai working quickly. “Best not let Olga catch you,” he teased.

The old man huffed. “That old woman is a tyrant!”

Victor chuckled as he tugged Makka’s leash. “I’m going to take a long walk should Yuuri wake up in my absence.”

Nikolai grunted his acknowledgement and Victor guided the poodle out the side door and into the street. It was a slow morning for all of St. Petersburg and the streets were quiet as he followed his dog on her route. Makka knew the way and soon was weaving through the morning pedestrians. Victor let her take the lead; he had thoughts to puzzle through.
Chris...it was so frustrating that you wouldn’t tell me anything. I know you could. It was clear that you knew far more than you would say. The answer was right there on the tip of your tongue. Why won’t you tell me? What are you protecting him from? Certainly not me.

Victor stilled at that thought. The timing was perfect because he had to wait for the traffic to clear. Then they moved across the crosswalk, the flow of pedestrians picking up as he continued, familiar dogs being led or leading familiar owners. Victor found himself forcing a friendly but distant smile for them as he passed. He didn’t know their names, but he was familiar enough from his career to still stand out. A few called out hellos and Victor waved and gave the the hundred grand smile before continuing with his puzzle.

If you are protecting Yuuri, then there is something...or someone...to protect him from. That bastard is alive and I need to be able to protect Yuuri. But I can’t do that if I don’t know what I’m up against.

He tried to think of someone that might know, someone who would tell him. Names clicked off, people who skated with Yuuri’s generation. Two names came to his head quickly, Lee and Crispino. Victor tapped his lips thoughtfully. Seung-gil Lee and the Crispino twins had skated with Yuuri in juniors and then stayed in skating for a few years after Yuuri’s retirement. They seemed the best fit. However, while Lee could be tight lipped, the Crispinos suffered from just the opposite. He pulled out his phone and hesitated. Am I risking putting him in greater danger just to sate my curiosity?

He looked at the names and out of all of them, Seung-gil would be the most closed mouth. I might not get any information from you, but then you wouldn’t tell anyone a word of what I say either. He sent a text, short and to the point.

Victor/ What do you remember about Yuuri Katsuki?

No answer came immediately so Victor continued his walk until he stopped at a coffee shop. The atmosphere was casual and relaxed, the Saturday morning crowd there to wake up slowly and enjoy one of the last fine mornings before winter set her fingers into the city. There was a buzz from his phone just before he reached the barista. He forced himself to wait until he made his order and took a seat before pulling out his phone. Makka curled up next to his feet.

Lee/ I haven’t heard that name in a while. He was Phichit Chulanont’s best friend. Then he sort of disappeared.
Victor frowned, thinking of the bizarre background Yuuri came from, and the phrase “sort of disappeared” worried him.

Victor/ What do you mean?

Lee/ Announced his retirement at 19. Rumor was that he was pregnant but I never saw him with anyone.

There was a pause and during that time, his coffee came up at the counter. He went to retrieve it and almost stumbled when his phone buzzed again. Sitting down, he pulled it out to see Seung-gil sent a second text.

Lee/ Now that I think about it, I saw him a couple of years later at a figure skating event. He wasn’t skating, but was at the banquet as a guest of another. He was with Phichit and that Swiss skater Chris. I overheard them talking about hiding from his alpha.

Victor pursed his lips, this was the same situation Chris had mentioned. Perhaps he could offer more information than his friend had.

Victor/ Did you hear who that alpha was?

Lee/ Not directly but I saw him later with that ISU official Shuji something. He seemed to have a tight hold on Yuuri.

That’s closer. He had a little more information. Victor chewed his bottom lip, he began feeling a little uncomfortable about his texts. But it was fine because Yuuri was watching his child. He had a right to know. Taking a deep breath, he put his phone away. So why do I feel so guilty?

Victor pulled his phone back out, startled by the query he read.

Lee/ Is he free?

Victor/ Yes. Keep it quiet, please.
Lee/ Hate to see an alpha hurt an omega like that. I dated Phichit before Chris but only for a short period. Phichit was very upset but wouldn’t talk about it.

Victor stared at that information. Chris and Phichit dated. They...dated. Were they still dating?

Victor/ Thanks. You were a big help.

Lee/ Just glad to know he got out.

Victor drained his cup and crumpled it before dropping it into the trash.

Returning, he heard Yuuri’s warm voice coupled with the deep timbre of Nikolai’s floating from the kitchen. He released Makka and watched her run off to look for Ren. She didn’t get around as well but today was a good day. The younger poodle seemed to make her happy, they spent many days cuddling in sunlight. If Victor didn’t take her to the rink with him, he wondered if she would just follow the little toy poodle around all day. He moved into the kitchen and looked around for his son. “No Yura?”

Yuuri chuckled shaking his head as he sipped his tea. “He’s still asleep...in the middle of my bed.”

With a groan of a father who’s had his son crawl in bed with him only to have him toss and turn, stealing the blankets and kicking everyone away from him or snuggling so close that he scoots you off the bed, he asked, “And you survived?” Victor watched as Yuuri laughed once more, nodding, eyes crinkling. Thinking about it, though, Victor frowned. “Did he have a nightmare?”

Yuuri put his mug down on the counter and turned thoughtful, “I’m not sure...he seems intent on keeping me close. Hopefully I’ll get it out of him before Monday. If not, I’ll try to get a meeting with his teacher.”

“So you think it has to do with school,” Victor surmised and watched the omega nod once more. Victor’s nose then called him further into the kitchen and he found a plate of eggs and rice kept
warm for him. Returning to the bar, he asked, “How do you dress this?”

“Well, the eggs are seasoned and have ginger mixed into it. You could add a little soy sauce.”

Victor tasted it and nodded in approval. “I think I like them as is.” He caught Yuuri’s smile of approval and watched the omega slide off the stool and go to wash his cup. As he ate, he listened as Yuuri and Nikolai continued their discussion.

“So it’s basically a box,” Nikolai surmised.

Yuuri hummed, *it both was and wasn’t.* “Well, the kamidana is more like a shelf, a place I can make an offering and pray. The butsudan is more of a cabinet, it has doors. The one in my parents’ home is ornate but I’d prefer something...simpler.” He thought for a moment before adding, “And a low table with maybe a large cushion.”

Nikolai nodded thoughtfully. He stood against the sink, running through a plan in his head. “We can build the cabinet and shelf with the cedar we picked up on Friday. But the table, maybe there is something around the house.”

“It’s possible,” Yuuri agreed before turning to meet Victor’s eyes. The blue orbs had watched the two of them, following the conversation with interest until he was invited in. Yuuri started cautiously, still scared to overstep, “Is there something...maybe not used?”

“Here? This house is full of unused things. Likely a table. We can explore and look for one later,” Victor offered.

Yuuri’s eyes dropped and Victor waited for him to find the words to ask for what else was seeking. “I’m...trying to let myself mourn,” he said softly. “Is there...a room? Maybe a quiet place to dedicate to this process.”

Victor held his eyes and then nodded. “I’m certain there is a space for you. I want you to have what you need here. We’ll go explore and see if we can find an appropriate room for your purpose.”

Turning back to Nikolai, Yuuri began, “Now...about Yura…”
The grandfather waved him off, “Leave him to me. I already had plans, so I’ll take care of him.”

Taking Victor’s dish, Yuuri washed it and put it in the rack to the drain before he nodded towards the door. As they stepped into the hall, Victor placed a hand on the small of Yuuri’s back catching a whiff of the omega’s scent. In the close proximity he could make out the details of the cinnamon, ginger, and cloves. It was warm and rich, enticing, but there was something earthy and comforting in it as well. For a moment, his breath caught before he recovered, guiding Yuuri into a less used hallway.

Victor cleared his throat, focusing his thoughts, “This house has so many unused spaces, I’m sure we’ll find something that will meet your requirements.”

Yuuri laughed softly. “Just some place private...and quiet.”

“That’s why I thought the back of the house.” He opened a door and peered inside. “Oh, this room is the music room. I took my piano lessons here as a child before I decided I’d rather learn violin.”

Yuuri walked over to the piano and lifted the cover, his fingers tickling across the keys with expert ease. “I only studied piano but my teacher said it was a good place to start for any musician.”

Victor smiled, looking at Yuuri behind the beautiful instrument. He admired how the younger man never lost his touch. He moved forward, closer to Yuuri, saying, “My mother played piano and was very popular in her time. She loved parties that were more old fashioned, cards, piano, tiny sandwiches, fancy clothes. When they retired, they left the townhouse to me. They stay in the country. My brother took over the companies but most of their holdings are outside of St. Petersburg. So, I live here...close enough to work, social life, friends. On Sundays, I call home. During the summer and holidays, I visit.”

Yuuri had seated himself while Victor rambled, turning he grinned up at the silver haired man as he eased into a familiar tune that after a moment caused Victor’s eyes to widen. “Rhapsody in Blue!”

Yuuri nodded, his smile turning sad softening the edges on his expression. “My last skate before I retired. It felt like...giving up on a dream.”

Victor saw the disappointment in the younger man, “You could still skate...adults, international...I
have considered it for fun but…” he sighed, his knees, his back, his...everything forbade it. Shrugging it off, he added, “Filling Yakov’s shoes isn’t an easy thing.” His eyes brushed over Yuuri, watching the omega pull his knees up on the bench then butterflying out. He remembered Yelena doing that and wondered if it was a dancer’s thing.

“You could...get an assistant,” he suggested thoughtfully. “If you burn out, you’ll do nobody any good.”

Victor sat down on the bench next to the omega, “I sometimes miss the days when I was independent, a choreographer. These last three years weigh me down sometimes.”

Yuuri put a hand on Victor’s arm, “Why did you accept it?”

He shrugged. “Yelena. Her treatments were...expensive. I probably would have been fine but...I wanted the stability for my family. I think...the treatments gave her a few more months with Yura.” He felt the weight of his emotions and decided it was time to move on. He rose, offering a hand to Yuuri, “Shall we continue?”

Yuuri sighed, half regretful, and turned to close the cover before taking Victor’s hand and sliding off the bench, rejoining the man.

The next room was an office of sorts but Victor shook his head. “I think that was my father’s. I wasn’t allowed in there.”

Yuuri looked up at the face, still impressed with the importance of the room, “But now…”

“I try to leave my work at work when possible. Family time is too valuable. My father spent too many hours running the company even when he was home. I...never felt close to him. Not like my mother. I don’t want that for Yura. I travel enough with work.”

They closed the door and continued on down the hall. Yuuri unconsciously hugged into his bicep causing Victor’s heart to skip a beat. He opened another room, it was a cluttered sitting room and would take some work to clear out but Yuuri went inside running his fingers along a low bench. “Is this cedar?”

Victor examined the bench, “It looks like it. We’ll ask Nikolai to be certain. Will that work for
Yuuri ran a hand over the object, getting a good feeling from the smooth texture of the grain, “I think...do you mind?”


A bit of happiness showed in Yuuri’s steps as they opened two more doors. One room was too big, the other looked more like a closet used to store cleaning supplies. Then they opened one towards the end of the hall and Yuuri’s eyes lit up. As he stepped inside, he took in the light and the flow of air. “This one,” he breathed. The floor was bare, a few pieces of furniture were piled against one wall but would be easy to move into another unused space. “I want this one.” He blushed at his directness, but saw Victor smiling at him.

Victor nodded in agreement. “I just want you to make yourself at home. No rooms are really off limits...although Olga might disagree if you walk into her quarters and catch her in her curlers.”

Yuuri giggled at the mental image but then sobered. “What about...the ballet studio?”

Victor frowned at the reference. “You mean...at the rink?”

Yuuri smiled, in a house this size you would forget you had a ballet studio, “No, the room with all of the windows. It looks like it was used for ballet.”

Victor turned over his words then brightened. “The solarium! Oh, that was Yelena’s favorite room. She took it over because she loved the sun.” His expression soft, he rested his eyes on Yuuri. “Of course you can use it. I want you to be happy here. This is your home now.”

The smile Yuuri returned was fond, affectionate, making Victor feel warm inside. His voice came out soft, “That’s...how it feels. Like home. I just...I didn’t want to intrude if the space was private.”

Victor shook his head. “I suppose some would make a room into a shrine.” He thought of the mementos he kept of his best friend, “I...have her painting, a picture in my room, and several albums.” His eyes drifted to Yuuri, somehow Victor knew it was deeper than keeping images around. It was like how he still felt her in his life, “And...I still talk to her sometimes. Especially when it comes to Yura. I want...to respect her wishes with him.”
Yuuri hugged himself as he listened to Victor’s words. That’s sort of it. Here but not. “I...I guess everyone mourns in their own way. This...” He motioned into the room and shrugged, “My family...we make shrines, put pictures in them...it’s more complicated than that but then again, simple.” Yuuri moved further into the room, looking at the odd bits of unused furniture, wondering if they would store it elsewhere or if Viktor would give it away to others. Turning he looked back at the silver haired man standing by the entrance. You are the type that would give freely to another in need. “I contacted my mother...I don’t think I was ready until now. I...feel...relaxed here. Like I can allow myself to let go of my grief. Maybe...because you suggested it.”

Victor dropped his eyes, suddenly feeling like he might be intruding. “He...discouraged it, your alpha,” Victor murmured softly, more of a statement than a question.

Yuuri waited for the blue eyes to rise again then nodded, tightening his arms around himself, turning to survey the room once more. “He...discouraged a lot of things.” Walking to a small table with an overturned chair on it, Yuuri picked at the exposed bottom of a leg. Bits of dust flew away from him. “I never understood why, what...pleasure he got from it. He kept me from everything that made me happy - family, friends, my dog...and then he didn’t let me mourn my sadness.”

Victor had so many questions. How did he end up with this alpha? Is he alive? Of course he’s alive, but he wanted to hear it from Yuuri’s lips. Did he hurt him? Was he still a threat? But he knew instinctively to wait. Yuuri was already opening up. He felt safe. Victor didn’t want to threaten that safety.

He walked over to the smaller man who was still swatting away dust like bad memories and draped his arm around the slender shoulder, tugging him back towards the kitchen, the warmth, the happiness. “Saturdays are for family, until competitions take me away. Let’s see what Nikolai and Yura are working on.”

They walked into the kitchen to find flour on the counters, on the floor, in Yura’s hair, and painting his chubby, ruddy cheeks. The boy wore an oversized apron with the strings wrapped around twice before being tied into an efficient, albeit crooked, bow. But the smile on his face and the sparkle in his eyes could not be dulled. Victor knew these moments were priceless.

“Grandpa is showing me how to make piroshkis!” came the excited response. “I’m making them for our lunch.”

“Well, you couldn’t find a better teacher,” Victor praised and as he scratched his fingers through Yura’s hair, it came up in puffs of flour. He turned back to see Yuuri’s eyes sliding over the
messes, anxious doubt in his expression. Unlike the rest of the family, the omega didn’t fear Olga, but he would have hated to have lost any of her respect. “Don’t worry, Yuuri, we’ll get it cleaned up.”

Yuuri nodded dubiously but then pushed up his sleeves with determination and joined into the process. Victor watched Yuuri soon become just as flour-covered as his son but a smile formed on his lips and grew as the mess on his clothing did. This was what Victor wanted when he hired a nanny, someone who would integrate themselves naturally into his home and their lives. Everyone in this makeshift family worked together to keep things running and took care of one another. While others kept their distance... Yuuri jumped in with both feet and soon...he was making piroshkis.

Victor knew already that a part of him wanted more but their home was a carefully crafted balance. He also knew Yuuri needed to heal, and that meant time and space. Victor watched the movements of the younger man. He needed to heal from more than the loss of his babies. He carried pain with him, and it weighed on his small frame mightily. However, the omega was making forward strides.

*Time...you need time.*

Yuuri’s warm laugh filled the room and then brown eyes met Victor’s blue. They held each other’s gaze for a long time before Yuuri’s attention was called back by Yura. Not for the first time, Victor determined to watch over him, to take care of him, and maybe one day, they would have more. For now, he wanted Yuuri to have enough. He wanted the younger man to have what he needed, what would help him heal, and what would make him feel safe. He knew that Yuuri had to reach for these things himself. Yuuri wasn’t comfortable with being handed anything, and Victor had to admire that stubbornness, even if he worried it would be frustrating. However, Yuuri’s recovery would be all the stronger as the young man battled his demons himself, working for the goals he created and measured.

Victor was pulled from his thoughts as Yura tossed a handful of flour at Yuuri. At first the omega tried to pretend at being indignant, but no one was fooled. Then he smiled, brown eyes crinkling in delight, as another laugh filled the air along with a well aimed handful of flour towards the child giggling in protest. Victor realized he loved the sound of the laughter in his home. *I will dance to your songs of laughter, and hold you as you cry out your sorrow.*
Chapter Summary

Lazy Sunday mornings and calls home!

Chapter Notes

Of course if I ask the Songs audience what to post, they'd pick this one! ;) Here you go! You're extra chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 12: **Silencing my soul...**

In the quiet of the night Yuuri woke up crying, feeling the heaviness of his heart. Sliding from his bed, he padded down the hall and crept down the stairs before entering the studio. He sat before the mirror, allowing his tears fall freely, Ren curling up in his lap, her presence comforting and grounding him. Yuuri sat there for the longest time, feeling his body quake with sorrow, then calm into the dull ache he had carried for longer than he remembered. Slowly he pulled his phone from his side. Taking a deep breath he hit play, earbuds in place as the music washed over him.

Rising, Yuuri found himself slipping into the grace of the dance with ease, letting his movement capture the sorrow of the music building inside of him and echoed by the notes. *I lost so much. A decade taken from me. More than that. My future was taken from me. I don't know that I can reclaim any of it. Is a new start just that? Do I have no claim on my prior life, on what I would have been? Do I just walk away from who I was before him? Do I have to do that?*

He stilled, letting the song bridge through with music.

*What I would have been…*

*A figure skater…I’d likely have retired at this point. How far would I have gone?* He allowed his chest to pivot down, back arched beautifully as his leg rose behind him before reaching back to catch his foot with his hand creating a breathtaking teardrop Beilman.
Closing his eyes, he recalled his last program, switching the song over to play Rhapsody in Blue. He took a moment, remembering his opening position on the ice and began to recall the steps, the choreography he built as his final dance. Even then he knew his time was running out, that each skate could be his last appearance on ice...anywhere. Shuji made sure he knew it had been a privilege for him to skate once Yuuri went to his home. A privilege that ended the minute the alpha appeared at the onsen to claim him. Years of training were cast aside at the whim and will of a man Yuuri barely knew and greatly feared.

The alpha had been intent on keeping Yuuri subdued, slowly stripping away each pleasure in Yuuri’s life, isolating him, keeping him close. Losing the ice had been abrupt, but forcing him to leave Vicchan behind was heartbreaking. As soon as they reached Tokyo, Shuji introduced new rules into the home. No outside contact. No computer. No visitors. He cancelled school immediately, forcing Yuuri to drop out. The cupboards and refrigerator were locked until Shuji said Yuuri had reached his ‘ideal weight’ and then they remained on until the alpha knew he had broken the omegas will to eat. Even when Shuji was out of town, Yuuri felt the leash tight upon his neck. Everything had to be in place...perfect...The omega found himself folding and refolding towels one day, realizing he had spent three hours on the task. But the worst was learning to pushing himself down into nothingness. Yuuri learned to walk around on tiptoes, to be invisible, to silence his laugh, to quiet his tears...until he felt nothing.

As each moment of joy ripped from his fingers, he kept reminding himself. But through all that he focused on memories of freedom. Survive. Live.

I’m still here...

From the shadows of the back yard, a lone figure stood watching Yuuri’s movements, his own grief reflected in the soul of the omega. Makkachin settled at his feet, her business finished. “How do I help him find his way, Makka?”

A tongue licked at his hand and Victor knelt down next to her, his fingers sliding into her curls with familiar ease. The poodle had watched over him through so many heartbreaks. At fourteen, he worried about how much longer she would be there for him and that thought hurt more than most other concerns. Looking down at the poodle he spoke wistfully, as if she were in control of her aging. “I don’t think I could bear another loss, Makka...Yelena took so much of me. Most didn’t understand. It might not have been traditional, but it was love. But she was my best friend, my closest companion.” He looked down at the poodle and she rose up to bump her head into his gently. “Closest human companion,” he amended.
Looking back up to the figure in the window, the younger man’s sorrow easily reflected in those beautiful movements, he added softly, “I didn’t expect...I never considered...that I would fall so quickly, that he would become so much a part of me in such a brief time.” He stopped, looking into the black eyes of his faithful companion. Smiling at his own credulity, “It’s...only been a week. Yet...I feel like somewhere the song that was my life had been interrupted and it’s only just resumed, picking up the moment he walked into my life.”

The lights went off and he could see Yuuri’s shadow slip through the door. Victor waited a few more minutes, kneeling down and petting Makkachin, before returning to the house.

Makka followed him to the bedroom, crawling into the bed with him, steps added a couple of years back by Nikolai for her older hips. Stretching back into his bed, Victor thought about the upcoming competitions. He will be gone under a week for both, but it felt too soon and too far. Skate Canada and Skate America...where is my luck? I’ll have to be away. Is Yuuri ready? Will he be okay? I just wish I knew more about this other alpha...is he nearby?

Rolling over, he considered the rest of his family. Nikolai and Olga will keep watch over him. Those are a pair I wouldn’t cross. Closing his eyes, he knew he hated the idea of being so far away, his Yuuri too far out of reach. He had worried like this when he had to leave Yura the first time, but that boy was guarded by a grandfather that would burn down the world for him. He remembered Nikolai’s trick for warding off Yura’s boogeyman, two shoes at the end of the bed facing out, touching at the heels. If only there was a talisman for my Yuuri. Yuuri seemed to have a boogeyman of flesh and blood. As he drifted in a fitful sleep, worries filtered into his dreams and he saw the shadow of a man threatening the omega, grabbing the still too-thin wrist and taking him away, Victor coming home a moment too late to find his son crying as Olga and Nikolai stood by helpless to stop him. Victor jerked awake from the nightmare, sitting up in bed. Makka tilting her head at his sudden movement.

I need to find out who he is.

Yuuri rolled over, feeling the sunlight warming his bed as it filtered through the window coverings. Stretching his full body in the sheets, he blinked his eyes open. Oh, it’s Sunday. I need to make breakfast. He pushed his blankets back and slid his feet into his slippers. The floors were cold and Yuuri could feel a shiver rising up in him. Russia is much colder than southern Japan. He smiled thinking of how this was only the beginning of their coldest season. Resisting the urge to wrap himself up in the blanket his mother sent with him, he pulled his robe off the hook and quietly slipped down the stairs.

The kitchen and dining room were already alive with activity and Yuuri walked in to see Nikolai whistling as he cleaned up the mess from the previous day. Small pockets of flour clung to the sink and working table, but the older man was determined to clear the mess. Evidently Olga was commander-in-chief of this part of the house and her rule went unquestioned...even if there were
the occasioned mutiny behind her back. He looked up and grinned. “Olga would have pitched a fit if we went to bed on this while she was in charge.”

Yuuri returned the smile and shrugged, hugging himself. “As long as it gets done before she finds out, I suppose it will be fine.” A rustle of newspaper drew his attention to the dining room and he saw Victor studying the sports page. Something about waking up to see Victor in this small glimpse of private life filled Yuuri with warmth. The Russian was frowning at the results of game and grumbling over their prospects. Yuuri laughed at the picture of his childhood hero. “That’s very domestic,” he commented, a warm smile on his lips.

Victor looked up and grinned before taking a drink from his mug. “This was how my father did family time. Sunday morning around the table reading the newspaper and talking about the week. I’m just getting a head start on the paper.”

How would I have started my days? Yuuri thought of the simplicity of Victor’s home life and realized he would have lead a very similar one. Considering the paper he realized how little he knew of the world. “I guess I’m a little out of touch. I haven’t read or watched the news in awhile.” Yuuri filled the kettle and put it on, preparing a cup with his favorite tea, compliments of his mother. He felt a nostalgic smile at the thought. He went for so long without even these indulgences that having his favorite cup of tea seemed a luxury. He didn’t realize a tear slipped down his cheeks until he felt a firm hand on his shoulder. He looked up to meet the dark eyes of the old man.

“You okay?” The grandfather’s voice was gruff, but loving.

“I guess...a little homesick?” Yuuri suggested weakly. He knew it was more than that, but it was as close to the absolute truth as he could articulate.

Victor had lowered the paper and was studying the pair. “Perhaps you should make a point to call home today? It’s important to maintain contact.”

Nikolai huffed. “Says the man that calls his parents once a week.”

“Better than not at all,” Victor sang, ducking behind his paper once more.

The old man returned to his work but Yuuri could tell he didn’t approve of Victor’s response. Taking his teacup, Yuuri crossed over to sit next to Victor stealing a page of the paper. Victor
raised an eyebrow in amusement. Everything felt so wonderful, familiar. Yuuri with his cup, Victor and his mug. The paper shared between them. He grinned when Yuuri shoved it aside. One glance at the Cyrillic reminded Yuuri of a slight problem to the domestic bliss. Oh, I can’t read this.

“We have tutors at the rink. I could set something up,” Victor suggested.

Yuuri shrugged, irritated at feeling out of his element. He didn’t know how to respond to his illiteracy and general lack of knowledge of the language. He wasn’t used to it. Feeling inadequate because of Shuji was one thing, but because of his own ignorance was more painful. He reached for his phone and pulled up his notifications. He felt his expression soften into a smile as he spotted several Instagram posts from Phichit. Opening it up, he began scanning through some of the old pictures. His old phone would not update and he went for so long without the basics, his time with Phichit had been personal, time between friends, jealously guarded. Oh, he’s with Chris. Is that his boyfriend? Yuuri thumbed through several pictures and then one where Chris was wrapped around Phichit from behind nuzzling into his neck. Definitely the boyfriend. I wonder how long...

He set his phone down and took a sip of his tea, his dark eyes watching Victor from the relative safety of hiding behind the cup. Victor looked up, a smile on his lips. “Did you sleep well?” he asked, breaking the silence.

Yuuri shrugged once more.

“Not much of a talker this morning?” he asked quietly as he turned the page.

Yuuri smiled shyly, he had never been a morning person but learned to like it even less with Shuji. “I’m...enjoying the quiet. Sometimes...I need the quiet,” Yuuri answered softly.

Victor nodded as he mulled over Yuuri’s words. “Do what you need to feel settled,” he replied. “Maybe later we can take the dogs for a walk together.”

Yuuri’s eyes lit up at the prospect. Said dogs were out back playing in the yard but the idea of walking together with them on leash, getting to know the neighborhood, seeing it wake up on a Sunday, was attractive. “I’d like that.”

“Sunday morning walks are relatively quiet. Some are getting ready to head to church. The rest are
enjoying the slowness of the day.”

Yuuri hugged himself, a soft smile on his lips. He then looked up as a small body thumped into the room. The messy blonde hair turned spotting Yuuri and immediately crawled into his lap, snuggling into the turn of his neck and breathing him in. “Good morning,” Yuuri greeted, his voice still soft, a laugh in his voice as he indulged the boy’s neediness. He smiled over the blond head, his cheek leaning in to rest on the downy softness.

Behind the paper, Victor could feel a blush rise up in his cheeks. Nikolai busied himself with cleaning, whistling cheerily. Yes, as far as the old man was concerned, things were progressing nicely. Yelena would be pleased.

After breakfast, Yuuri chased the boy upstairs to get dressed for a walk. Victor, already dressed in a pair of khakis and a long sleeved pull over, readied the dogs who were both eager for the outing. He smiled at his Makka who wagged and jumped around excitedly with the puppy’s presence. Ren joined her and wiggled around with equal excitement. “Settle down, girl,” he commanded gently and Makka rolled a little then settled into a sitting position.

About that time, Yura came excitedly down the stairs with Yuuri holding him back. “Careful, Yura, I’d hate for you to fall,” he warned. “We won’t leave you behind.” The chastisement was gentle but the seriousness of the tone reached the young Nikiforov.

Yura reached the landing and ran to his papa. “Let’s go!”

“Coats first,” he chuckled handing over Yura’s cheetah print monstrosity. Yuuri eyed the strange coat. The boy didn’t inherit either parent’s taste in clothes. Yelena embraced understated elegance and Victor always dressed tastefully. Yura wanted loud and daring in everything he wore...and that translated to cheetah print.

Yuuri reached in and pulled out the navy peacoat, blushing as Victor quickly took command of buttoning up the large fastenings for him. Scarves, hats, and gloves in place, both Yuuri and Victor grabbed a leash, their free hands taking hold of Yura’s.

“So, Nikolai says you’re preparing dinner tonight,” Victor invited after they walked a block in silence.
Yuuri glanced over with a soft smile and nodded. “I’m making katsudon, a family recipe from back home. It won’t be as good as my mother’s, though,” he answered.

Victor laughed and nodded in agreement. “It never is when we make family recipes. I can’t wait to try it.”

Yuuri watched the sidewalk, a blush on his cheeks. “It was my favorite growing up.”

“It’s not anymore?” Victor asked.

Yuuri shrugged. He wasn’t really sure what was his favorite anything anymore. He would have to learn more about who he was before he could decide on favorite foods. “I’ve...been having trouble re-establishing my relationship with food. So...I’m not sure. Maybe...in time?”

“You have time. Take it slowly,” Victor reassured him.

Yuuri nodded, his eyes focusing on Yura and noticing the little shoes were untied. He pulled them to a halt and handed Ren’s leash over to Victor before kneeling down to tie the offending laces. Victor watched from above thinking how Yuuri’s attention rarely strayed from his son. The omega clearly took his role as companion omega seriously and Victor hoped he would stay. Yura seldom showed his affections so openly, or gave them so freely. The father knew he wasn’t the only member of the house falling for Yuuri.

Patting the shoe, Yuuri looked up at the blonde with a smile. “There you go. All fixed.”

“Thank you, Yuuri,” the boy singsonged. As Yuuri reclaimed his feet, he took the offered hand and then Ren’s lead once more.

On the walk back Yura grew tired. Victor started to hand Makkachin’s leash over so he could scoop up the boy but Yuuri was two steps ahead of him and soon the older man found himself juggling two dogs as Yuuri had his son on his back, long legs wrapped around the slender waist. “So, how much further?”

“We...could shortcut across the park,” Victor suggested reluctantly. He could tell Makka was
already slowing down and his son had reached the end of his energy, the blond head resting against Yuuri’s shoulder.

“Maybe a little quiet time when we get home,” Yuuri suggested.

“And more piroshkis for lunch,” Yura piped up, voice muffled as his cheek rubbed against Yuuri’s back. They had plenty wrapped up to reheat as needed, the fruit of their labor...and love.

Yuuri met Victor’s eyes with a smile crinkling the corners. In the depths of those brown orbs, Victor could see the residual pain but the warmth of the here and now seemed to flood his body with happiness.

Laziness drifted into their day, napping through the remainder of the morning and the early part of the afternoon. Yuuri drifted into the solarium and stretched as he thought about his family. Finally, he pulled out his phone and made the call.

“Yuuri!” came the excited greeting from his mother.

Yuuri couldn’t help the smile...feeling almost giddy at the freedom to be able to call home. “Hi, Mom.”

“How are you? It’s so good to hear from you.”

“I’m good...a little homesick but...it’s been a good move. I’m...I’m happy. Yura...he’s so much energy but you can’t help but love him. Although I guess...some of the others could help it.” He grimaced thinking of the litany of caretakers, each unworthy of that title, who had walked out on the little boy. “He was worried I’d leave at first. But I think...we seem okay now.”

“You sound so much more lively,” she observed. “And...the alpha?”

Yuuri cringed at the reference. “Victor is good to me.” Honestly, Mom, he’s got a name. “He’s made sure I had appropriate clothes and all the things I need. I have my own room and it has scent
locks. His father-in-law Nikolai looks out for me and is helping me to put together a shrine. He...seems to understand what I need.” Yuuri drew a deep breath and released it slowly. “There...is grief in this house but they deal with it. They don’t...tuck it away. I think...that’s helped me. They encourage me to face my own grief.”

“We always wanted the same for you,” his mother responded softly.

Yuuri shrugged. “I know...I wasn’t ready. I think...I feel safer here. Distance is helping. But today I said I was a little homesick and Victor suggested I call home. It...didn’t occur to me.”

“Because Shuji never let you, dear one,” she responded, her voice soft.

Yuuri drew his breath and let it out slowly. “I like it here.” Then he smiled and added, “There’s also a housekeeper. Olga. She’s omega and she is outspoken and warm and makes me think of Grandma.”

Down the line Hiroko chuckled softly, thinking of the elderly spitfire. “So she doesn’t mince words. You need that.”

“I do. And there’s a studio here in the house. I can dance in the middle of the night if I can’t sleep. And I’m gaining weight, seeing a nutritionist. I weigh in once a week. Once I’m at a safe weight, I can skate.” Yuuri smiled at that thought. At all of them. He really was in a better place.

His mother hummed happily on the other end of the call. “I’m glad you are doing so well. Oh, your papa and sister are here. Here’s Toshiya.”

The warm voice sounded down the line, “Yuuri! Are you okay?”

“I’m...good, Papa. For the first time in a long time, I’m good.”

“You sound much better, stronger. I’m glad for you.” There were voices in the background and his father returned to him. “Here’s your sister.”

“Is that alpha treating you right? He’s not trying to get you to do things you don’t want, is he?”
Mari’s voice was even but Yuuri could tell she’d worried about him since he left.

Yuuri sighed seeking the words to put her at ease. “We signed a contract, Mari-neesan. And my room...it has scent-locks.”

Mari paused on her end, Yuuri could hear her mulling over his words. Then, finally she asked, “Is he nice?”

Exhaling he knew the fight was over, “Very much so. And he encourages me to have friends outside of the house. I’ve made friends with a woman named Katya and that’s a start. Really, the hardest part is the language barrier.”

“Have you thought about watching TV with subtitles on?” Mari suggested.

Yuuri’s eyes widened. “I wonder if they have Deadly Omega in Russian!”

His sister snorted on the other end. “You and your obsession with Investigation Discovery.”

Yuuri jumped to defend his lifeline to the outside world during his horrible decade with Shuji. “Those crimes are real!”

He swore he could hear his sister roll her eyes all the way from Japan. “Sure they are...but, it’s an idea.”

Yuuri nodded as he thought about the TVs in the house. He realized there was only one...in the family room. And it was rarely on. He wondered what Victor thought about it. He seemed to prefer to read...which was fine. Yuuri liked to read, too. But he did miss his favorite series. As he said his goodbyes, he decided to investigate.

He found Victor and Yura in the living room on a Skype call with Victor’s parents. He heard the Russian but the words didn’t sound familiar Slipping past them, he moved into the kitchen.
Victor sighed, rubbing his forehead. The conversation with his mother had been pleasant but his father was stretching his patience. The older man was the main reason he only called home once a week. At least the elder Nikiforov waited until Yura had moved on to play with the kittens in another room. Unfortunately, this left Victor alone with the man and his judgments.

“So you brought in a mail order bride?”

Victor groaned and wished his wifi would just die. “It’s not like that, Papa,” he argued. “Yuuri is...well, officially, he’s a companion omega. His duties are to care for my son like a mother.”

The blue eyes on the screen narrowed with suspicion. “And his duties towards you?”

Victor remembered a conversation about sex when he was twelve and how he thought he could never feel as awkward...he had been wrong. “Just...help to keep the house running smoothly.”

“That sounds like a wife.” The father sat back in his chair, leveling a stare at his son who was squirming on the couch. “You act like I wasn’t aware of your proclivity towards the male gender, as if I didn’t know that it was odd for you to take that girl for your mate.”

Victor huffed, “That girl had a name. Yelena. And she grew up in our house, she was my best friend.”

Andrei craned his neck, shaking off the chastisement. “And friends do not always mean lovers. This one...is it a similar...arrangement? Are you rescuing him from some fate worse than death?”

“Papa...it wasn’t…”

“I had her investigated,” his father confessed as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Victor’s eyes widened at that information. “Father! How could you?”

Andrei’s hands went wide before him, clearly not used to justifying his actions, no matter how
invasive they were. “She was marrying into this family. I had to know what we were dealing with. Don’t worry, son, I won’t let the boy know...and your mother only sees him as her grandson when she thinks of the boy.”

Victor blinked at the information. “Does she...did you…”

“No, I didn’t tell her,” he frowned. Then with a shrug, he added, “Besides she has her own sources and likely knew before me. She and her friends...gossip so.”

Victor drew a ragged breath. “I…” He had worked diligently to protect Yelana and Yura from anything that might have hurt them, including the truth. He never suspected both of his parents would ferret it out in their own way.

“Don’t worry, your mother wouldn’t let loose any information that didn’t support you, son. Now...about this omega. What’s his story?”

Victor paused, taking in everything he had learned. ...any information that didn’t support you, son... Where did that leave Yura? He shook his head, pulling himself out of his thoughts. “He’s...a friend of a friend. Chris thought we’d...get on together. And I...was desperate for someone to be able to handle Yura.”

The older man nodded, “And how is he working out?”

Victor had to smile, there was nothing to reproach on that end. “He’s...amazing. Yura has all but claimed him as his own.”

Andrei grunted, clearly pleased. “So he’s very attached...what do you plan to do with him?”

“Wh-what do you mean?” Had Victor not been so taken aback from what he learned he would have recognized his father’s tone.

“Do you plan to make him your mate?”

Victor’s jaw dropped. “We just met!”
“And yet, your son is in his care. Really, son, think these things through.” Andrei spoke as though nothing was out of order, and all of it was his business.

“I… I…” He closed his eyes, letting the mask fall off of his face. “It’s been so long, Papa.”

The man regarded the boy he raised with concern. “I know it has, son...I just don’t want to see you hurt or used.”

Victor opened his eyes. He saw his father for the man he was. Concerned, loving, but someone who had seen the world and the ugliness that it sometimes carried. Swallowing, “Don’t worry...I can take care of myself. I just...I need to let this take its course. He’s… a part of this household now.”

“And another stray you’ve picked up off of the street?”

And like that it was gone again, Andrei was back to being...Andrei. “You know Olga...her sister manages your own house. And as for Nikolai, he was your friend at one time.”

“Nikolai and I haven’t had much to say since he mismanaged funds. Maybe one day.”

The son paused at his father’s tone. It was more than frustrated, there was something hurt in there. “Are you...angry with him?”

“Of course not!” Andrei almost laughed at the thought. “He fucked up...but hell, I’ve lost more in a wager than he lost over that bad investment. He just...left. It took a while to pick up the pieces and fix the problem but no, I’m not mad. He’s...got a good heart even if he’s lost his touch with money.”

“He never wanted to be plant manager, Papa. He was always an engineer. And now...he seems happy to just be Grandpa to my son.”

“As he should be.” The old man looked at the clock and grunted. “I guess it’s time to be moving on. You bring that omega with you when you come to the country next. Let us meet him.”
Victor cocked an eyebrow. “Are you going to be nice to him?”

“Why wouldn’t we be nice?” Andrei’s voice hinting at offended.

But Victor gave him not one inch, “Because you are still trying to figure out his story.”

Andrei paused. Inhaling he confessed, “You know I will be investigating him.”

Victor groaned and started to protest but the old man held up his hand to stop him.

“He’s taking care of my grandson...and is becoming close to my son. I know you. Servants do not stay at an arm’s length where you’re concerned.”

“He’s not a servant!”

Andrei’s palm turned up and his expression was fixed in the smug air of one who was just proven right. “And that’s what I mean...so yes, I will be investigating him. Just to make sure he’s a good sort. I will let you know if there are any concerns.”

“Papa…”

“Trust me, Son...we may do things differently, but I only have your best interests at heart.”

“Of course, Papa.” Victor stared into the black mirror long after the call had ended. He wanted to know Yuuri’s story, but he wanted it from Yuuri’s lips.

Yuuri bounced around the cabinets pulling out the familiar ingredients and began preparing the meal, creating the dashi from scratch like his mother taught him. He didn’t realize he was
humming until he looked up to find Victor leaning in the door facing him, a soft smile on his face.

“How was your call?” Yuuri prompted as he checked the temperature on the oil. He began the breading process on the pork cutlets and then dropped them into the hot oil.

Victor was tempted to lie, but if he wanted this man to share his past he knew he has to be truthful. “It was good. Papa still doesn’t understand our contract.”

“I... didn’t think my papa would understand,” Yuuri stated quietly. “I tried to tell him... it was just a nanny position. But when he looked at the contract, he picked out the language pretty quickly and made sure I understood what I was getting into.”

“Papa understands that it’s a companion omega contract but he is convinced you are a mail order bride. I tried to explain that people didn’t become mail order brides to get *into* Russia, only to get out.”

Yuuri snorted a laugh at that and Victor grinned. “I guess it is a bit odd... and I don’t know that we’ve pushed any of the boundaries of our contract.”

Victor blushed, realizing that Yuuri was quietly admitting that he felt the attraction both men felt for the other. “We’ve got time, Yuuri,” Victor reassured him. “I want you to be comfortable, to feel safe. There’s plenty of time.” The alpha watched mesmerized as Yuuri turned the pork cutlet with what looked like chopsticks. “You enjoy cooking.”

“It... was something I’d do with my mother. And... well, no one hits on you in the kitchen.”

Victor frowned at those words. “Even after you got out, you had no peace,” he realized.

Yuuri kept his eye on the pork sizzling in the oil, “No, not really. It’s better... here. So maybe becoming a mail order bride to get into Russia is not such a bad deal,” he quipped glancing up with a wink.

Victor laughed heartily. “Maybe not... we’re glad you’re here, though. And glad you feel happy... and safe.” He moved into the kitchen, sitting at the table but leaning forward to try to catch a glimpse of Yuuri’s motions.
The omega hummed, moving his body to music that only he heard. “I do.”

The family sat around the table and Yuuri showed him how he blessed the food in his culture. “Itadakimasu.”

The others repeated the words and Yura asked him with childlike curiosity, “What does it mean?”

Yuuri thought about it and finally answered, “I guess the closest translation is *I humbly receive*.”

“So it’s like saying a prayer,” the little boy surmised.

Yuuri smiled warmly. “Very much so...and I have much to be grateful for.” He then demonstrated the chopsticks and they did try, really...but in the end, both Nikolai and Yura focused on eating with forks. Echoes of joy and *vkusno* slipping from their lips in praise. Yuuri felt the warmth growing inside him. He really was...happy.

Later, Yuuri tucked the boy into bed, adding the new story to the stack of books growing beside the bed. They were about out of books in English. “Maybe you should teach me to read in Russian so I can read other stories to you,” the omega suggested gently.

Yura blinked the large green eyes, warming to the idea quickly, “I can teach you...but you have to *talk* Russian first.”

“Fair. How do you suggest we go about that?”

The little boy worked out a plan, slowly, “Maybe...we make a game out of it?”
“I think that’s a great plan.” He settled the bunny beside Yura. “Now...are you ready for school tomorrow?”

The little boy shrugged and looked away. “I guess...it’s just...we have parent’s night coming up.”

Yuuri saw the body language change, “Okay...when is that?”

Yura mumbled his response, pulling at the bunny’s ears. “Thursday...and everyone is going to talk about their parents, their moms and dads.”

Yuuri smoothed the blanket over the feet as they moved about in bed. “I know your mother is a very personal thing to you.”

Yura shook his head. “It’s not that...I just...will you come to my parent night?”

Yuuri’s eyes widened in surprise. “I...I would have to ask your father. I don’t...want to intrude.”

Those green eyes narrowed and he sighed in irritation. “Is this like the room in the back of the house? Because I don’t think Papa would care.”

Yuuri smiled at how clever the boy was, but he did worry he was too bold. “Perhaps...but I still think we should ask to be sure.”

“Fine,” came the exasperated reply before he continued, “but will you come if it's okay?”

“I would love to,” Yuuri answered adoringly, his hand ruffling that blond head. He then leaned forward to kiss his forehead. “Now, get to sleep.”

“Good night, Yuuri!” he sang out after Yuuri as the omega started to leave.

Yuuri turned back and smiled softly. “Oyasuminasai.”
The boy turned the new word over on his tongue before offering back his own. “Dobroy nochi!” Yura’s eyes sparkled when Yuuri echoed the phrase with his soft voice before slipping out of the room.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed the warmth of this family...even when dealing with a painful past, it helps to be cocooned in the warmth of a loving family. And just so you know, Victor's family (even his father) do love him and accept his choices. His father pushes him to be the best he can be but respects that definition may be different for each. But Victor needs his space from his father because he worries that the friction between the two will be something more. In the end, however, Victor's family just wants him to be happy.
A Place of Healing

Chapter Summary

Olga is back and she has a few things to say to Nikolai. Yuuri continues to reach out and accept help.

Chapter Notes

Hi, all...I know. I forgot to make a post on Monday for those reading Truth. It's written and I'll put it up once it's out of edits. We somehow missed that one in the mix.

As for this one, a lot of domestic fuzzies await you. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 13: A Place of Healing

Olga stepped off the bus that brought her back home and stared at her surroundings. The bustle of the city reached into the secluded neighborhood. Shop owners and clerks stood outside in the nicer weather, still not cold enough for Russians to admit discomfort, engaging in the national pass-time, gossip. Her eyes crinkled as she smiled, catching little bits of the conversations. She watched parents and grandparents walking children to the nearby school. Yuuri will be out with them right now. I hope...everything went well. Drawing a deep breath, she pushed forward towards her home, her suitcase wheeling behind her across the uneven pavement. A relic, but one that had taken her from one home to another and therefore a constant in her life. The old man had called her to ask when she’d arrive so she wouldn’t have to walk but she waved away the help. After a long ride on the bus, it was good to stretch the legs.

Then she was home, and the beautiful building that healed her heart and helped her find her feet again worked its magic. She closed her eyes. She still remembered her mate, echoes of his existence...his aftershave, how he hummed in the morning, always leaving the sink a mess after a shave. Her smile faltered as quickly as if formed, and she remembered the painful realization that he...had been killed. They hadn’t even begun their lives together. Not really. Then he was gone.

At her sister’s home, Olga barely lived. It was a half life, dull and colorless. She had routines that kept her busy but she was stuck, unable to move forward. She understood all too well where Yuuri had come from, what he’d fought to leave behind. Painful memories, no matter their content, were powerful and could become lead weights if allowed to remain. She stayed with her sister for five
years...working for a nice family, but barely making an impression in their household. She had been efficient, more so, she had been exemplary, but with so little interaction she was almost a ghost to them. It was walking home from their house that she met him...barely a man...yet he looked at her with such deep understanding. He knew she was floundering, that she needed...more. He had just taken over the townhouse, a monstrous building for such a young man. But he was determined, moving out of the dorms and out on his own, and he asked her, “Would you like to help me make a home?”

She didn’t know for sure what he meant. She thought it was just an offer of a position. She argued with her sister that she wasn’t ready. A live in position was more involved than the day work she had currently. And this young man, he was clearly the type that one became attached to. But Zelda insisted she needed this, to make her own place in the world. And she promised...she was only a bus ride away.

When they arrived, she quickly realized the boy needed her as much as she needed...this place. She now opened the door and remembered that first day, walking up the front steps she recalled seeing the house for the first time, moving inside, taking in the enormous expanse of the house. Then the ridiculous suggestion to make herself at home. It became clear he was just as lost in the house as she was. He didn’t even know where the servants stayed and offered her one of the upstairs bedrooms. She smiled warmly, rescuing him and suggesting that she’d prefer to be closer to her work. It took her some time, exploring the main floor, until she found the entrance to her quarters.

Her room had been small, but it was all she needed. She had nothing. Not really. Much like Yuuri, she came with worn clothes and little else. For the first few days she moved about the house, tending to what looked the most important. She surveyed the rooms and put things to rights, opening all of the windows and airing out any negative energy in the residence. Slowly she felt the house opening up to her, and herself becoming open to it. This...would be a place of healing and warmth. And that had been her driving goal, an unspoken agreement between master and servant.

She chuckled at that word as she hung her coat in the entry. Hardly a master. Olga thought of those first weeks fondly. He muddied the lines quickly and she soon was treated more like...an older sister, an aunt, sometimes a surrogate mother...the roles she filled in this man’s life were numerous but she found that the emptiness inside of her started to fill with each new role. It was good to be needed and she was always glad to come home.

She let her eyes slide around her kitchen, a space she claimed as her own in the larger residence and hummed happily. Yuuri had kept it in good order, and she could see that he respected her need for everything to be in its place, clean and orderly. She tucked her suitcase in her room, pulling the laundry out and walking through the work room, dropping them into the washer before moving back into the kitchen.

She began working out the menu for the night, pulling ingredients, when she opened the
refrigerator. With a groan, she frowned, pulling out a piroshki. Her eyes narrowed. *This was not Yuuri’s doing, Old Man.* However, after a moment’s consideration she placed it on a dish in the microwave. “That sneaky old man! What did you do to my kitchen?”

When Nikolai had moved in, the kitchen had instantly become a battleground of claimed and invaded territory they argued over. It was a friendly war, but one she would win nonetheless. He was always underfoot making this or that and leaving messes behind. If he’d just clean as he went, she probably wouldn’t have minded so much. Smiling she thought of her new favorite in the home. *Yuuri understood the concept.* But Nikolai made a huge mess and then spent the next day...the NEXT day...cleaning it up. She took a bite of the warmed piroshki and hummed in begrudging agreement. “They are good, though.”

She continued to survey the deliveries and grunted in approval. At least Lev didn’t screw up the order. Then she found the receipt of delivery and groaned at Nikolai’s signature. Because the old man would have been able to read the note on the receipt. *Why did Lev write that note on the receipt? He couldn’t have written it in an envelope, keeping things private. No, he had to put it out for all the world to see.* With a blush in her cheeks, she tuck it away. Well into her forties, she felt silly indulging in a romance. *I’m not some giggly schoolgirl,* she scoffed internally. But...she had to admit that after the family went to bed, she was...lonely.

Drawing herself up, she determined to have a firm talk with Lev. She washed her hands and dried them on the apron before heading off to complain to Nikolai. She found him in the workshop building what looked like a cabinet out of cedar.

“I can’t believe that old grocer making a scene like that,” she fussed.

Nikolai chuckled warmly, looking up from his work with a welcoming smile. Before him lay plans for a simple *cabinet,* the lotus design for the front, and the tools to make it all happen. “Glad to see you made it home safe and sound. Did you find a bite to eat?”

She huffed at that. “I told you to stay out of my kitchen.”

Nikolai grinned and shrugged. “Yuuri supervised and made sure everything was cleaned up good and proper before you arrived home.”

“You probably didn’t get to the cleaning until the next day,” she puffed.
Again the old man shrugged. “The cleaning is done. That’s all that matters. Now...what do you think of this?” He showed her the design and she narrowed her eyes in confusion.

“I don’t know what this is for,” she admitted.

Nikolai turned back to the work before him, indicating to the cabinet and design, “Well, I’m helping Yuuri with an altar of sorts...he’s Shinto or Buddhist. Not sure which this applies to. He said that the beliefs intermingle at times but Shinto focuses on life so most mourning ceremonies are more Buddhist in nature.”

Olga took a few steps closer, eyes following to Nikolai’s work. “Mourning?”

“Well, the poor boy has been through a lot.” He turned to look up at her from the floor where he knelt. “You’ve probably figured that out. I suspect that so-called mate of his hurt him quite a bit, probably some form of abuse. He lost four babies along the way and has never had a chance to properly mourn them.” His voice had turned hard, angry but at the outrage Yuuri had suffered. However it also carried the pain of loss. Olga waited while he cleared his throat, a sign that he was getting himself settled. “So Victor and I have determined to give him that chance. And this...is part of his process.”

She was touched that the two men, neither omegas, could be so thoughtful...insightful. “Is there...anything I can do to help?” she asked knowing how important it was to mourn and let go of those that are lost.

Nikolai considered, he didn’t trust her with a wood burning tool...“Well, I know he picked out a room but it’s in the back of the house. It could probably use some attention.”

She smiled, “Do you know which it is?”

The older man turned, narrowing his eyes, thinking. “Past that old cleaning closet at the back of the house. You’ll see it. The furniture is sparse but he and Victor moved a cedar bench in there the other day. I’m doing this cabinet and a shelf in cedar for him to work on building his altars.”

“I’ll get to that today. Thank you for letting me know.” She turned to leave, happy to move into work, *after the kitchen is truly cleaned.* She thought of the young man, still new but already so much a part of them. “Yuuri Toshiyavich has certainly been through a lot. It’s good to see that he’s decided to heal.”
“This is the place for it,” the old man grunted in agreement.

Yuuri watched his charge march up the stairs towards the front doors of the school with purpose and determination. *That can’t be good,* he thought with amusement. *His teachers are going to have fun today.* Turning back, he thought about what Yura had told him the previous night. *Parents night. I need to talk to Victor about this.* He then continued making a mental list of the things he needed to accomplish that day.

When he arrived back home, he breathed in the comfort of home. However, he quickly noted how quiet the space seemed without Victor and Yura, almost empty. Hugging himself, he wandered into the family room and found the TV. Turning it on, he found that it did have cable but he couldn’t figure out how to get subtitles on let alone if he could get them in a recognizable language. He knew Japanese was probably out of the question but maybe English could be accessed. He knew he managed to do so in the various hotels when he was younger and competing. *Competing…* He closed his eyes, remembering those days. The height of his career, he made Junior World Champion, a gold medal at seventeen. His time in seniors was less remarkable, getting used to the increased competition and the requirements, he’d barely gotten his first quad down when his body rebelled on him and he ended up pregnant. He blinked away the tears. Turning off the TV in frustration, he wandered into the kitchen, finding Olga intent on scrubbing the kitchen from top to bottom, muttering in Russian.

“Can I help?” he offered. *Maybe it wasn’t quite clean enough.*

She turned and smiled, and shook her head. “No, it’s okay. I do this every time I come back.”

He shifted with uncertainty. Her smile seemed to indicate that she wasn’t mad at him but he couldn’t say for sure. Moving back into the family room, he pulled out his phone. He had two referrals to tend to and called to make an appointment with the psychiatrist found at the rink. *Abramovich.* Yuuri was happy to learn he could see the doctor on Wednesday afternoon when he came with Yura for lessons. He then dialed the number for the omegologist recommended and was happy to learn they spoke English in that office.

“Ummm, my name is Katsuki Yuuri...or I guess you would put it as Yuuri Katsuki.” He took a moment to spell it out for her and gave her his address and phone number before continuing. “I just moved here but I need to schedule a preheat appointment?”
“When is your heat expected?” came the voice of the efficient receptionist.

“Three or four weeks. I’m already feeling some of the initial aches and cramps and I’m not on suppressants. Sometimes it comes early,” he informed her and heard her typing on the keyboard.

“Since this is your first appointment with us, Dr. Romanova would rather you come earlier than later. Can you come in tomorrow? Say...around ten?”

Yuuri did some quick calculations between dropping Yura off at school then catching the bus. He nodded feeling he could get there with time to spare. “That would be fine. Thank you.”

Appointments made, he knew he’d be seeing the nutritionist that afternoon to weigh in. They wouldn’t officially visit until Friday but she asked him to drop in and check with her that day. The family had worked with him since that visit to help him not focus so much on his intake and to keep his schedule. He managed to get in at least five meals a day and could finish half a piroshki or a small plate of food during that time. It was progress.

Studying his phone, he decided to reach out to family and friends, starting with Phichit.

Yuu-chan/ I’m seeing an omegologist on Tuesday.

He smiled when he spotted the dots indicating Phichit was already starting his reply.

Peaches/ Yae! I’m so glad you are taking care of yourself.

Yuuri tucked his feet under the cushion of the couch, thinking about those words and realized they were true.

Yuu-chan/ I’ve got an appointment with a psychiatrist and a nutritionist, too.

Peaches/ I’m so glad to see you working on your recovery.
Yuuri considered Phichit's words. He wouldn't have if he still lived in Japan. He hid himself away and his parents were content to allow that convinced he would make his way out. Except he wasn't. Here, Victor observed Yuuri’s struggles and encouraged him to get help, opening doors and making it easy.

**Yuu-chan/ Victor doesn’t make it sound like weakness to get the help I need.**

**Peaches/ It isn’t weakness. We all need to get help from time to time.**

He smiled at his friend’s words. Then he remembered the pictures from Instagram...Phichit with a certain Swiss blonde...and decided to be a little nosy.

**Yuu-chan/ Are you dating Chris?**

*I never was subtle,* he waited for Phichit to put together his words. Wandering through the living room, he pulled out the computer and opened it up. He wanted to take classes and he found one that would let him take one online course at a time. He had decided that was a good pace for him and, after researching the college’s credentials, began the admissions process.

**Peaches/ I am...for a while now.**

Yuuri smiled thinking of what he remembered of the fun loving older man. He would be perfect for Phichit, equally bubbly and open with his emotions.

**Yuu-chan/ I didn’t know he was an attorney.**

**Peaches/ He did his bachelors in business administration thinking he’d want to manage talent but then learned he’d be better suited to the job if he was an attorney. He hasn’t been practicing long. About four years.**

Yuuri paused for a moment. If they had been together for a while, why weren’t they living closer?

**Yuu-chan/ Why are you in Japan?**
The dots danced for longer than Yuuri felt comfortable about. It was clear that Phichit was choosing his words, editing, which meant protecting Yuuri from something.

_Peaches/_ Well...I had an opportunity to work for this software development firm to get my feet wet. I want to start my own company and work from my home. Perfect for when I start a family.

Yuuri closed his eyes at those words, feeling the world swirl around him. He let his thoughts settle and calm for the moment. However, it was that silence that probably sent Phichit into a panic because a flurry of messages followed.

_Peaches/_ I’m sorry! I didn’t think.

_Peaches/_ I should have been more sensitive.

_Peaches/_ Are you okay?

_Peaches/_ Answer me or I’m calling.

Yuuri opened his eyes and thinned his lips. _Am I okay?_ He focused on how he felt and realized for the first time, he was okay. For the first time, he felt centered, safe, warm.

_Yuu-chan/_ It’s okay. I’m okay.

_Yuu-chan/_ I’m working on being better. Please don’t worry about me.

_And please know that it’s okay to be happy for yourself._

_Peaches/_ I’m going to worry about you. You’re my best friend._
Yuuri hugged himself as he thought about those words. *I've been a lousy friend. It's always been about me...never you.*

**Yuu-chan/ Did you take the job in Japan because of me? So you could stay close? Watch over me?**

Again a pause and Yuuri knew the answer in the hesitance.

**Peaches/ Maybe...I mean, it’s a great opportunity and a great company but...all things being equal, yes. You were the tipping point.**

Yuuri squeezed his lids shut, small tears escaping. Feelings of both sorrow and gratitude battled for supremacy.

**Yuu-chan/ Peaches! And then I just leave you there.**

**Peaches/ I’m fine. Really. And maybe soon I can go off on my own and join Chris.**

Yuuri smiled at that then frowned. *Where is Chris these days?*

**Yuu-chan/ And where would that be?**

Hesitation then Phichit answered.

**Peaches/ Europe.**

Yuuri laughed at that answer. Phichit, usually the fountain of information was being coy today. *Vague but okay.* That would still be closer. He missed his best friend. *Russia is part of Europe, maybe they could visit.*

**Yuu-chan/ Well, I guess he’s from Switzerland.*
No confirmation. Yuuri closed his eyes and shook off the sneaking suspicion building in him. *They wouldn’t*... 

Olga opened the door to the claimed room after Yuuri left to take Yura to dance and skate. The room had several unnecessary pieces of furniture and she’d gotten out of Yuuri what he wanted for the space. She’d pull out her sewing machine and make him some decent cushions later. For now, this room needed a thorough cleaning.

With Nikolai’s help, she removed the excess furniture and then began working over the space, knocking down cobwebs, dusting, sweeping and mopping. She beat the rug into submission and then replaced it, vacuuming it for good measure. Moving around the room, she said her own prayers to bless the space. *My friend, I want you to find healing here.* Then finally pulling out the furniture polish, she brought out the surface of the bench, seeing the fine grain of the cedar come to life beneath her loving care.

*This home is for healing; broken spirits come together to rebuild one another under this roof.*

Victor looked around the dining room, always happiest when his entire family was back under one roof. He could tell something was on Yuuri’s mind and he’d work to get it out of him when they were alone. For now, he enjoyed the company of his loved ones, listening to Olga and Nikolai bicker back and forth, Yura’s description of his day and how Otabek stood up to a teacher that wasn’t being fair with an echo of, “he’s so cool!” Victor made note to follow up on that with Yuuri later.

As dinner broke up, he snagged the unusually quiet omega rather than letting him sneak into the chores of cleaning the kitchen. “Come with me while I take out Makkachin.”

Yuuri shifted uncomfortably but nodded, retrieving Ren’s leash, following Victor out into the night air. They wouldn’t go far but there was a park a block away. Victor’s hand rested casually on the
small of Yuuri’s back, guiding him towards the well lit portion of the park. “So, I have an event I need to attend this weekend. Saturday. It’s here in St. Petersburg. I was hoping you would be my plus one so I don’t have to endure it alone.” Victor could have laughed at himself, nervous like a school boy asking his crush to a dance. But that’s exactly how he felt at the moment.

Yuuri blinked and looked up in surprise. “I don’t...we didn’t get anything for me to wear...not for anything like that,” he protested.

Victor chuckled, tweaking Yuuri’s nose. “I’m aware. We’ll take care of that. Will you join me?”

Yuuri took a cleansing breath. He hadn’t planned reentering the skating world. What if Shuji is there? “Who...is attending?”

If Victor caught the tension in Yuuri’s voice, he betrayed no sign of it. “It’s a mixer for my skaters with their sponsors and some of the local officials. Not too big. I thought it would be a good place for you to get your feet wet.”

Yuuri thought he heard an emphasis on local, putting him closer to comfort. Local means Russian. Yuuri knew how to behave in these events. He’d grown up attending them. He’d gone in the beginning on Shuji’s arm...until he escaped his alpha that time with Chris and Phicihit. Drawing a deep breath, he nodded. “I can go.”

Victor’s smile was beaming, even in the light of dusk. “Good...now my schedule is packed but Katya volunteered to take you and help you pick out an outfit.”

Yuuri felt himself warming to the idea, especially if Katya was involved. “I’d...like that. I enjoy Katya’s company.”

“And she, yours. She’ll be happy to call and set up a time. And she drives, so you don’t have to worry about the bus.”

Yuuri scratched at his neck and tugged at his collar. Tomorrow, I’ll be alone on the bus. “Okay.” He needed to ask Victor about the parents night...and make sure he remembered. “About...Thursday...”

Victor pulled his eyes away from the two poodles and focused on Yuuri. “Yes?”
“Yura...sort of asked me if I’d go to his parent night. I didn’t know how you’d feel about that.” He ducked down, remaining still until he felt a hand slide down his back, fingers centering on his spine. He shivered and looked up.

Victor’s expression was soft, “I meant to say something earlier. I actually planned to take you.” Then he grinned sheepishly and added, “It helps...single mothers tend to latch onto any single man, single alpha...it helps.”

“So...you don’t mind?”

Victor laughed softly at the idea of being upset that Yuuri was an integral part of his son’s life. “Mind? I’d rather you be there than not, Yuuri. It’s fine. Really. I told you from the beginning that I want you to have a presence in my son’s life, that I wanted...more than a nanny for him. He needs a maternal figure...and he seems to have grabbed hold of you.”

Yuuri blushed, glancing away. “I...didn’t expect it to be so easy.”

“Honestly, I didn’t either. But he’s quite loyal to you. And I think this is a good thing.”

Hugging himself, Yuuri nodded. He did, too. If he was honest with himself, he’d admit that he wanted this family so much.

With a gentle urging of the hand, they turned back towards the house. Yuuri told Victor about his appointments and was met with a hum of approval. Victor supported his recovery and didn’t make him feel any less for it. For that, he was grateful.

Chapter End Notes

Did Victor just ask Yuuri on a date? Or is it just a work function, a contractual obligation?
Yuuri shifted nervously on the bus, his anxiety seeming to keep people away. Just as well, he didn’t want to deal with unwanted touches on his body. It was the last thing he wanted to deal with. Eyes would occasionally glance his way. An older beta woman noticed his discomfort right away and moved her body to block his view of the group of alpha boys sitting in the back. Yuuri didn’t get the chance to see them, nor them him as she hustled bags to close off his view. However, his panic did cause some of the others to move away from him. As the bus came to his stop, he quickly exited and focused on the clinic before him. Her dark eyes followed him, tempted to trial him, but she breathed a sigh of relief watching him step into the office building.

The omega lost no time getting inside, quietly grateful that the office could be seen from the stop. The nurse manning the front counter smiled her understanding, ushering him in the room. After an awkward greeting in which Yuuri used the far too formal “privet”, she learned he spoke English. The friendly woman had only a few broken phrases of her own but knew the receptionist was bilingual and would be able to help him better. She handed him a series of papers. Then the woman smiled and patted his shoulder, explaining in heavily accented, entirely broken English that she was going to “git da sectionary.”

Yuuri blinked at the odd statement, knowing something had been lost in translation, then stared at the clipboard holding the intake sheet. In Russian. He closed his eyes on tears of inadequacy. Today had beaten him soundly. The horror of the bus, the sounds of a city he didn’t know and the language he couldn’t make out, now this final stumbling block had him ready to give up. How am I going to do this? I can’t drag someone with me to translate. Swallowing, he looked up, hoping for help when he watched the nurse exchange words with another coming back from her break. The woman turned and offered him an encouraging smile before joining his side.
“Unfortunately, we don’t have this form in English. Perhaps I can help you. My name is Jeannie and I’m here with my husband from America. It took me some time to find my feet as well.”

“I...have a tendency to become overwhelmed,” Yuuri admitted softly, his hand shaky as he held the pen. He watched her take the pen and clipboard from him and they began working through the questions on the paper.

She gave him a warm smile and put a hand over his, giving it a light squeeze. “How will you be paying for the services today?”

“Oh...ummm…” He fumbled for the credit card and handed it to her. “My...ummm...he gave me this?”

“Your alpha?” she asked.

Yuuri blushed then shook his head, hugging himself. “I’m here...as a companion omega. To take care of his son,” he whispered.

She nodded and kept her voice light. “Oh, so...your employer?”

Yuuri scrunched his nose. It was a muddy word. Not really but yes. It was the closest to what they were...for right now. Yuuri nodded.

She hummed, copying the credit card information down, “I’ll have to call and make sure you’re authorized to charge on this card.”

“It’s fine.” Yuuri blushed at his quick response. Calm down. “He’s already arranged it. Another is on its way with my name on it but they said I could use this until then.”

Jeannie smiled again, “Good. Then we’ll handle it. A quick phone call and you’ll be in good order.”

Yuuri sighed with relief, his arms still wrapped tight around him, his stress levels still high and he felt her hand slide down his back.
“It’s okay, Mr. Katsuki, we’re going to take care of you.”

He turned to look into her eyes, not for the first time since meeting her did he notice that she had a kind expression. Feeling himself relax more in her presence, “Yuuri, please...and thank you. I-I’ve had a difficult journey to get here but so many people have been kind.”

She nodded in understanding, “Maybe I can help you a little more. When I first arrived, the hardest part was the language. Reading and writing in Russian. Most people don’t know this but Russian is one of the hardest languages to learn because it’s such a widely spread language.” She laughed remembering the intricacies of stumbling over sounds her American tongue had never formed before. “My husband found me a course. It’s an evening class but they focus on teaching adults trying to learn the language, both written and spoken. It will help you to become functionally literate...which is a start.”

“When does it meet?” Yuuri jumped at the opportunity. Something in him set into motion with the challenge. *Russian hard? Cute...I’m Japanese, we have three alphabets.*

She hummed as she thought back. “At the time, it met on Mondays. I can get the information for you while you are visiting Dr. Romanova.”

“I would love to find out more. Thank you.” The chance to learn, to become more independent energized him and Yuuri felt excitement all over. Looking down he saw his feet shifting, *my feet are excited. How long has it been?*

“Of course. I’m happy to help out.” She rose, offering him a hand. “Now, let’s go back and get your vitals. I’ll serve as your interpreter as needed.”

Soon his vitals were taken and he was in an exam room. Jeannie explained that the doctor spoke excellent English and left Yuuri in her care, returning to the front desk, but promising that she would speak with him again before he left. As the doctor entered, he began apologizing, “I’m sorry I pulled your receptionist from her work. I just...I haven’t learned the language.”

The doctor clucked at him. “Don’t be silly, Mr. Katsuki. It is why we hired her. I receive a number of English speaking expats here. As soon as one patient learned I studied abroad, and learned English that way, word spread and now almost one third of my patients are English speakers with limited Russian. Therefore, it makes sense to have someone who can help serve as an interpreter.”
“Thank you...you can call me Yuuri,” he murmured.

She smiled warmly. “Okay, Yuuri. Are you ready for your exam?”

He shook his head. “Not really...but it needs to be done.” He flicked his eyes down, hugging the gown around him. At least it wasn’t tissue paper. “I...I came from a bad place.”

“You’re safe here,” she reassured him slowly approaching him, making sure to catch his eye before she moved too close. “Let’s see what we have to work with.” She nodded to the male nurse and talked to him in Russian before continuing. “We’re going to begin with an external exam but then I want to do an internal exam to ensure your health. However, we’ll go slowly and I’ll make sure you understand each step. Is this alright?”

Yuuri drew a shaky breath and nodded. He allowed her to lower the gown to his waist. She didn’t flinch at the condition she found his body, but instead kept her professional mask in place, calling back notes to the nurse who typed them into the computer. She pressed and palpated different locations working through a thorough upper body exam including breast and lymph nodes.

Pulling the gown back into place, she asked him, “I need to do a genital exam next. We’ll do the external first, then I want to do an internal. I doing this because it’s important to make sure we don’t have any medical concerns before we move forward to discuss what you need and want out of your upcoming heats. Okay?”

Yuuri nodded, lying back. He felt the gown move up to his waist, her hands checking him to make sure there were no signs of swelling or long term damage from the abuse he suffered. She knew. Yuuri knew she knew. He wondered if she’d ignore it like doctors in the past ignored it. Then she adjusted his body to examine him internally, the rectal exam for an omega being a little more extensive than that of a beta or alpha male. Finally, she pulled the gown back down and helped him to sit back up.

She smiled warmly, “I’m going to let you get dressed. Then I’ll come back and we’ll talk about where we need to go from here. Okay?”

Yuuri nodded, his eyes wide. He watched her leave the exam room talking to the nurse. As the door secured, he retrieved his clothes and got dressed as quickly as possible, needing its armor to face the rest of the exam. He then waited, glancing down as his phone pinged.
Katya/ Are you busy today?

Yuu-chan/ I’m at my doctor’s appointment. Omegologist.

Katya/ Text me when you’re finished and I’ll pick you up. We can grab lunch.

Yuuri thought about the bus ride to the clinic and quickly sent a text to agree. He didn’t think he could emotionally deal with the bus after the clinic.

He heard a knock and gave a quiet come in, the doctor entering with a smile. This time alone. “I’ve ordered a blood panel and urine panel before you leave. Jeannie will take you to visit with the lab tech. I want to make sure you’re clean and disease free.”

Yuuri’s eyes widened. “Oh, but I haven’t…” He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “There’s only been him.”

She thinned her lips, seeing the harsh realities of life more often than not. “I suspect he wasn’t as loyal to you.”

“I wasn’t loyal to him,” Yuuri muttered. “I was afraid of him.”

Since he opened the door, she chose to push in. “Let’s talk about that. Are you still with that alpha?”

He shook his head. “I... he had it annulled.” Yuuri almost scoffed at the irony of that. After years of being kept, isolated, and abused, it would be Shuji who ended it. “I wasn’t... pleasing him anymore. Probably because I no longer cared; I no longer reacted with fear to the bullshit he put me through.”

She had sat listening to him in silence. Grim lines on her face deepening. “How long ago?”

How long had it been? He counted back. He knew Victor had two trips planned for November
and his heat would be at the end of October. “Eight months.” *Really? Eight months? That long but also that short a period of time.* “I was in Japan. I thought...coming here would put some distance between us, give me a chance to restart.”

“And how is it working out?” she asked quietly.

Yuuri looked up to meet her gaze. “I’m...much better than before. I still have bad days but I’m learning to smile again, to eat without counting my bites, to...find my place once again.”

She nodded, “Good. Now...I have some questions I have to ask you. Are you ready?”

Yuuri took a deep breath and nodded.

The doctor licked her lips, inhaling slightly. She knew the answer but had to ask the question, “Have you been pregnant before?”

Yuuri closed his eyes, biting back the tears. *I can do this. I can do this.* “Y-yes. Four times.”

She blinked, her mask slipping but quickly put back into place. Her suspicion confirmed but worse than she had assumed. “Do you have any children of your own?”

“They all...I had three miscarriages and one...died shortly after he was born,” he stated quietly, his hand going to his heart in a fist. “I guess...I’m not good to carry children.”

“I wouldn’t say that.” She took a deep breath. Sometimes it was hard to remain clinical. “I can tell from the exam that you’ve had some abuse, some starvation and neglect. If it’s been eight months, I suspect the starvation has been rather extensive.” She paused a moment, letting Yuuri rest before heading into the darkest part of their conversation. “There is some scarring that indicates sexual abuse from your partner. He...didn’t treat you gently.”

Yuuri shook his head slowly, his arms wrapping around his body, rocking to comfort himself.

She watched his body language carefully, making sure to give him time to calm before pushing forward. “Did you receive proper medical care during your pregnancies?”
“At first...but...he never let me see the same doctor twice,” Yuuri answered quietly.

The doctor couldn’t help the frustrated sigh that left her lips. This was a problem too common in her field. The alpha would move them to prevent reporting. “These factors alone could lead to the loss of your children. Once you get to a healthier place, we can discuss the possibility of more children. For now, I would like to see you on birth control at the very least to prevent pregnancy before your body has healed. I’d also suggest suppressant therapy until you are more emotionally healed to resume regular heats.”

Yuuri blinked at those words. “I...I’ve never been allowed either of those.”

She thinned her lips. “I’m not surprised. You’ve been denied the basic care afforded to most omegas. However, we can make that right starting today. And when you’re ready and you’re in a healthier place, both physically and emotionally, we can discuss pregnancy...if that’s what you want.”

Yuuri felt almost lightheaded as he allowed himself to be led to the lab tech’s office, blood and urine samples given, finishing paperwork and then he found himself outside the clinic. The possibility of children. It was something that startled him, terrified him...but a small part felt the warmth of hope. Looking down at the note from Jeannie, he smiled. Not only did she give him the information for the class, but her name and number with the offer of friendship.

Friends...oh, Katya! He pulled out his phone and texted that he was finished. Finding a bench, he sat and waited, his thoughts moving to the possibility of a child. He felt the elation but he also felt the nagging doubt quickly tumbling into panic. I’ve already lost four...I’m a bad omega...I can’t even do this one thing right. He blinked away his tears, hand going to his chest, rocking resumed. If I hadn’t gone back into that room with him, if I had stayed in the open where my coach could find me...I messed everything up. I...

A red Kia Sportage pulled up and a familiar form exited the vehicle, quickly going to kneel before him. “Oh, Yuuri...these appointments are so hard. I wish you would have called. I would have come with you.”

“It’s just...” He trailed off, letting Katya guide him to the SUV and situate him inside. He hated this weakness in him. She climbed in the opposite side and soon they were driving down the street. She didn’t push, merely waited. Finally, he sucked back the hiccup and began, “The doctor said I might be able to have a baby still...th-that it was because of the neglect that I probably lost my babies.” He stopped, memory began mixing with his guilt, changing the words. “I...didn’t take care of myself. I couldn’t keep myself healthy for my babies.”
“She said that?” Katya asked sharply.

Yuuri slowly shook his head. “Not...exactly. She said... he abused me, he neglected me.” Yuuri turned to her, not willing to let go of his own feeling of shame. “But...shouldn’t I be able to take care of myself?”

Katya drew a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Not necessarily. Sometimes we lack the means or we’ve been beaten down so much emotionally that we lack the will to take care of ourselves. That’s where your alpha comes into play. He was responsible for providing you with a healthy environment while you were in his care. But your alpha refused to do that, and made that impossible for you to do it for yourself. He orchestrated everything that happened to you, and to your babies. That’s not on you. That’s on him.”

Yuuri thought of their first year together, Shuji’s response to the pregnancy. The look of disgust on his face as his eyes traveled to Yuuri’s abdomen. The words he spat, just don’t get too fat. “I didn’t...please him. He...wanted me to stay small but without skating, with the pregnancy, I gained weight. And...he locked away the food. If I’d just controlled myself…”

She drummed the steering wheel, and the set of her face was that of barely disguised rage. “No, Yuuri...you don’t get to take this on yourself. Gaining weight is part of being pregnant. Your body changes. But control...monitoring what you eat to stay skinny...that’s not part of it. He was an abusive asshole, likely just looking for an excuse to hurt you. Just enough to keep the police off of his back. But still, enough to hurt you deeply, keep you dependent on him. This is on him. Not you.” She took a deep breath and let it out before continuing. “I know Victor well and he wouldn’t let you around his son if he thought you were a bad omega. And I know Yura...that little boy would make your life a living hell if you were a bad omega. The mere fact that he wants you around tells you all you need to know. You, my friend, are a fantastic omega.”

Yuuri hugged himself. He’d listened and some of her words soaked in. Only some, but for Yuuri that was a start. He still didn’t feel good but he knew he’d get there.

“Did she give you any prescriptions?” Katya asked.

Yuuri shook himself out of his panic, now settled in the car and more relaxed. He looked down at the paper, written in both English and Cyrillic. “I...received a birth control shot. She wants me on these vitamins and to continue the therapy with the nutritionist. She was glad I’m seeing a psychiatrist tomorrow and starting counseling. She suggested...a gentler, more organic lubricant for my heat.” Yuuri’s face went red as he realized he just casually slipped that out. However, Katya didn’t flinch.
“I’ll take you to the pharmacy and help you get what you need before I take you home. First, we’re going to a place I used to take Yelena after her appointments. They...left her shaken as well.”

Yuuri blinked out his window, whispering, “I’m sorry.”

They pulled to a stop at a red light and Katya used the moment to turn to him, taking his hand. “No, Yuuri...you are not a burden. You don’t say I’m sorry...merely thank you. Because I’m your friend.”

Yuuri drew a deep breath and let it out. How many times did Phichit say the same thing to him? He whispered, “Thank you.”

The teahouse was welcoming and soon they had warm mugs before them along with sandwiches. “I love a good chicken salad sandwich,” Katya murmured warmly. Yuuri watched her spoon jam in her tea and she caught him wrinkling his nose. Her eyes danced with mirth at the one thing Russians knew made them singular. “It’s a Russian thing. I’m sure you’ve seen Victor do the same.”

Yuuri nodded. “I think I wrinkle my nose at him as well. My mother is so particular about tea and I grew up learning how to recognize the different types of tea and the grade. I guess...part of growing up in a resort.”

“How that sounds fascinating,” Katya pushed gently. “Tell me about it.”

Yuuri shrugged. “It’s an onsen, hot spring baths that they began diversifying. They built up the restaurant first then added on the inn, turning it into a proper ryokan. It serves as a steady income and has provided jobs for the community.”

“But...it wasn’t for you,” Katya surmised as she took a sip of her tea.

Yuuri shook his head, his eyes straying out the window, watching the foot traffic. “Even there, I didn’t feel safe. After...he was gone, I had the mark tying me to him removed. People of my
hometown were okay, perhaps a little reserved. But some guests...they see an unmated omega and think...I’m open for...whatever.”

She hummed in understanding. “I get that. Even at twenty-four, I have to deal with that. It’s like they act as if I’m past the age of marriage. So therefore, I must be a bit of a slut. I just can’t wait until they see me as a pathetic old maid and leave me alone.”

Yuuri chuckled, “Beta women...do they deal with this crap?”

“Yes, but I don’t think to this degree. But it’s harder as an omega. We have to work so hard to be seen beyond our secondary gender. I would love to be seen as a person first, then as a hard worker, a caring friend, perhaps a bit of a daredevil,” she winked “and many other things second before my gender, either gender.”

“Agreed.” He continued staring out the window. *If only people had seen me as a figure skater and nothing else.* He wanted to say so much, to open up and tell her everything, but...she’s also Victor’s friend. Sighing, he decided to focus on the safe things first. “Yura wants me to go to his parents night.”

“That’s great!” Katya responded, her warmth effusive. Yuuri found his eyes drawing back to her, finally taking in her features, dark blue eyes, deep red hair. She was warm and open, a comfort. “Yura has been longing for someone like you for some time. Since...his mother passed away...he’s had a hard time letting someone in. He must see something in you that he wants to hold onto.”

Yuuri mulled over those words. *I’m someone...worth holding onto.* That thought overwhelmed him and he didn’t realize a tear spilled over until she reached across the table to gently brush it away. “It’s hard...to feel wanted. As a person, not a possession.”

Katya sighed, keeping her hand in place on his cheek, “That’s how he treated you, isn’t it? Someone...to own, not to love.”

Yuuri laughed bitterly. “Shuji didn’t know how to love. He only knew pain and his own selfish pleasure. He never asked what would make me happy, what would make me want to stay, because why would he care. He had me, and there was nothing I could do about it. With him it was always...how can I hurt you, turn you into beautiful agony?” He blinked at those words. A memory from the first years coming to his mind. “That’s...what he called it,” he whispered. “Beautiful agony...and I was supposed to achieve it. But...after a long time, I became numb. He would change up what he did, cut my diet, but nothing got the response he wanted and he started losing interest.”
“Oh, Yuuri,” Katya murmured softly. “No one deserves what you went through.”

He forced a smile, pushing to change the subject. “Victor said he wants me to go to this event.”

Katya smiled knowingly, “Yes...it’s for sponsors. As head coach of the club, he’s expected to be there to represent the skaters. I’ll be attending as my sister’s guardian. She isn’t old enough for commercial sponsors but Victor has put forth that she’s promising and he wants to start building interest in her career.”

Yuuri’s expression showed relief. “A familiar face would be welcome. I haven’t been to one of these in a long time. Shuji stopped taking me after awhile.”

“Don’t worry. Maybe tomorrow, we can go pick out our outfits together.” She sensed his mood had perked up, and decided to poke fun at herself. Putting on the air of a diva she continued, “I have dated several skaters in my lifetime so I’ve been to these things as well.”

Yuuri smiled at that. “Are you...dating anyone now?”

She shook her head, but then dropped her chin, a secret smile meeting a soft blush. “I mean...there is someone I like. He was once a figure skater and we’ve gone out before. Just as friends. But...I wouldn’t mind if it was more than friends. His name is Pyotr Rabinovich and he’s one of the coaches on Victor’s team.” She shrugged, her expression sobering. “But...I’ve got Mila. It’s not like he’s going to want to be saddled with a kid.”

Yuuri thought about that but then shook his head. “I can’t say for sure but I think...if he likes you, he’d take the whole deal.”

She chewed her bottom lip “Maybe...but what if he says no?”

Yuuri chuckled softly, his expression soft. “A friend would counter...what if he says yes? Wouldn’t that be an adventure?” He watched her blushed then shake her hands in front of her face.

“No...maybe.” She sputtered, “Next subject!”
He shrugged after, adding, “I don’t know about these things, though...I’ve never really had a choice.”

She sobered looking at the young man, “Wh-when did he take you?”

Yuuri sucked in his breath, blinking away his tears again. He knows somewhere inside he needs to talk about these things, that it’s good to talk. But some things he’s not ready to discuss.

Katya seemed to sense that because she followed up with a squeeze of his hand, saying, “It’s okay, Yuuri. You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to. Not if you’re not ready. But...I’m here if you need to talk. I can handle the ugly things in life.”

Yuuri huffed softly, “What do you know about the ugly things?”

“Not a lot...thankfully. I’ve been lucky. There have been a lot of people looking out for me along the way.” She squeezed his hand and added, “Something tells me there weren’t enough looking after you.”

“Just once,” he whispered. “Just the one time...is all it took. I lost track of my coach. I panicked. I went...to an official. They’re supposed to help you.”

“Oh, Yuuri…” she breathed.

Yuuri focused on his breathing, his voice was raspy but still came out strong enough to hear, “Fourteen...I was fourteen. I had presented early. And I was afraid to tell anyone what happened.”

She held his hand the whole time, held it with both of hers as if giving him all of her strength, giving him the courage to pull those words out of him. “You...have so much left of yourself,” she finally murmured into the silence. “So much to offer...I know sometimes you don’t see it but I know a little boy that greatly appreciates it.”

At the mention of Yura, the omega looked at the clock. “Shit! I need to go get him from school.”
She looked at the clock and nodded firmly. “Don’t panic. We’ve got time. Let me get the check and we’ll drive over to pick him up.”

She drove him to the school and could tell that he was emotionally drained. “I’ll take you both home,” she insisted.

“We can walk. I don’t want to be any trouble,” he protested.

She waved him off. “Don’t be silly. It’s no trouble at all.”

Soon he returned with Yura in tow, opening the door to settle the five year old into the back seat, fastening the seat belt. The child only politely acknowledged Katya, staring out the window in a full blown pout as they pulled onto the road. “Lilia would say your behavior isn’t very beautiful,” Katya pointed out.

Yura shrugged, unwilling to be baited into a conversation. Yuuri murmured an apology but Katya shrugged it off. “Yura and I’ve been around each other too long. I know his moods.”

Katya dropped Yuuri off at the house promising to pick them both up tomorrow morning for Yura’s school and then to take Yuuri shopping. “Now you make sure Victor pays for this. It’s his event after all.”

Yuuri nodded although he didn’t feel comfortable with it. He should be getting paid that evening. Maybe Katya could help him set up a checking account. Having his own income was an appealing quality. Independence came with a financial identity, and that was the first step to truly establishing himself...and possible citizenship. Before he could ask Katya must have sensed his reluctance, however, because she murmured once more, “Let him love you.”

Yuuri looked up, a blush on his cheeks. I’m scared...and so broken. Why would he want me?

The words remained unspoken but Katya smiled in understanding as if she heard the them herself. “He won’t shy away from it...and Yelena would approve.” And with that, she got back into the SUV and drove off. Yuuri turned back to enter the house after the pouty boy.
He found Yura in the kitchen begging a snack from Olga. She looked Yuuri up and down and then thinned her lips as she considered what she had on hand. “Why don’t the two of you share a piroshki?” she suggested.

Yuuri opened his mouth to protest but clamped it shut just as quickly. He’d just had lunch with Katya. But then again, it had been probably a little over an hour and Yuuri hadn’t eaten much throughout the morning. He was emotionally drained from the omegologist, which meant he should eat. So finally he stared at the half piroshki on his plate, turning to meet inquiring green eyes.

“You gonna eat that?” The little boy practically barked the question as an order.

“Going to...and I should,” Yuuri corrected quietly.

He watched Yura scarf down the other half, licking his fingers before taking off to play with Potya. Reaching for Yura’s schoolwork, he started sorting the work to be done. *Really, five-year-olds need to be playing, not doing homework.* As he dug through the folder, he found a note clipped inside. Frowning at the unfamiliar letters, he knew he needed to work on this, his illiteracy and lack of general knowledge of the language once again hitting him square in the face.

He brought the note over to the other omega, “Olga, what does this say?”

She read over it with a frown. “The teacher wants to make sure parents are coming to the parents night because there is a part dedicated to mothers and fathers.” She looked at the wording, the way parents had been written so deliberately. There was something tricky about it, but she wasn’t sure what. Eventually she huffed, returning the note to Yuuri, “Maybe they’ve had some too busy to make an appearance in past years.”

Yuuri raised an eyebrow, “I know Victor was planning to attend but I’ll make sure he sees this. I wonder if that’s what Yura’s all surly about.”

Olga shrugged, returning to her preparations for the night’s meal, “He knows you’re coming, doesn’t he?”

Yuuri nodded. “I just hate seeing him upset.”
Victor read the note when he arrived home, noting his son’s behavior during dinner. He didn’t think much of the note, reading it over and then tossing it aside. The little blond picked at his food and then sulked up the stairs for his bath. “I’ll talk to him after his bath and see what I can get out of him,” he promised both omegas, their expressions worried.

Yuuri attended the boy in his bath and continued to worry when he didn’t play that much, just washing up and then ready to get out. Dressed in his pajamas, he crawled into bed. “I want three books,” he demanded.

Yuuri smiled warmly, at least this was a spark of their little tiger. “I think your papa plans to read to you tonight. I’ll just go get him and tell him you’re ready.”

Victor sat down on the side of Yura’s bed. He’d watch Yuuri slip into his room ahead of him and fought the urge to follow. He could tell from Yuuri’s pinched expression that more than Yura’s behavior was weighing on him.

“So what’s on your mind?”

Yura shrugged, handing him a book. Victor tapped his lip and reached for a different one. “How about I read this one instead?” The story told of a petulant, impatient child and how they learned how exhausting it was to take care of one so demanding. Putting the book down, he asked Yura, “So, are you going to talk to me?”

Yura looked away and huffed. “I want Yuuri to be my mama at the parents night.”

Victor smoothed the boys hair and could tell this was really important to him. “Have you asked Yuuri?”

The boy shook his head, his chin dropping. “What if he says no?”

Victor pressed a kiss into Yura’s forehead. “Does that sound like our Yuuri?”

He shook his head, wideyed. “N-no.”
“Why don’t you ask him now?” Victor sat back as the boy scrambled out of his bed.

Yura first looked in Yuuri’s room and found it empty. Where would he be? He then ran down the stairs, finding his father moving into the family room, a book in his lap. But, no Yuuri. With a huff, he bounded into the kitchen and all he found was Olga finishing her clean up. She told him she didn’t know where Yuuri had gotten off to.

The little boy finally found Yuuri in the ballet studio stretching, lost in thought. Yura watched him work down into a split, his eyes closed as he breathed into the stretch. Pulling his small form to its full height, he walked with determination to Yuuri’s point of focus, standing in the middle of his splits. He moved to sit in front of Yuuri, his legs wrapping around him, bending over Yuuri’s legs. “Do you think one day I can do the splits?”

“You can...it takes a little work but you are already quite flexible. If you want, I can help you work on it,” Yuuri offered, resting his hands on those little legs. Yuuri could tell he was working up the courage to speak so he continued to stretch, reaching towards one of his feet and waited.

Yura’s hand danced up and down Yuuri’s outer arm. Finally, Yura asked him, shouting “willyoubemymamaforparentsnight,” all in one tumbling word.

Yuuri blinked in surprise, his brain did a quick translation. Then a sob slipped free, the entire day falling out of him at once, and the tears broke loose.

Yura started, horrified that he upset Yuuri and ran out of the room to get his papa, crying, “I didn’t mean to make Yuuri cry...I didn’t mean to…”

Victor met his son in the hallway and pulled the blubbering mess into his lap, pressing a kiss into that rumpled blond hair. “I know...and it probably wasn’t just you. I think something was bothering Yuuri from earlier. Okay?”

Yura nodded, his eyes turning back towards where he left Yuuri. “He’s really sad.”

Victor nodded to the boy’s question. “I tell you what. You go on up to bed and I’ll check on Yuuri.
You can look at books until one of us comes up to see you. Okay?"

Yura nodded, jumping down to do as he’s told.

Victor’s eyes watched the boy bolt up the stairs. Sighing he finally realized why his mother’s breath caught every time he or his brother ran up and down the stairs. Turning towards the solarium, he tended to the matter at hand. Entering the room, he found Yuuri knees to chest as he rocked back and forth crying. Victor frowned, not sure how to handle these tears.

He sat down next to the younger man, a hand on Yuuri’s back, his own legs butterflied out. Then he startled in surprise when the small form crawled into his lap, continuing to cry. Victor’s arms circled the man but he admitted, “I don’t know what you need,” he murmured, pressing a kiss into his hair. He resumed running his hand up and down Yuuri’s back murmuring assurances, “You’re safe. This is a safe place for tears.” And Yuuri listened, letting them on out.

He looked up and spotted his son lingering by the door. Of course, he’d come down and check himself. He nodded inviting him into the space. Soon Yura wound up into the knot of bodies, his arms also around Yuuri. He cried his own plea. “I didn’t mean to make you cry.”

Yuuri drew himself up slightly, shoving away his tears, focusing on the boy beside him. “You...didn’t make me cry, Yura,” he managed to get out. “I just...there were a lot of emotions for me today. And some bad memories mixed in there as well. And all four of them...my babies...all of them...they died. And I n-need to cry for them. I just now am finding my tears for them.”

Victor watched Yuuri swallow his sobs, wiping away his tears, sitting up straighter, focusing on the tiny blonde. He was a snotty mess and Victor found a handkerchief in his pocket, offering it to Yuuri. The omega thanked him and began mopping his face.

Yura was turning the omega’s words over in his mind. “Why...just now? Why didn’t you cry for them before?”

Yuuri leaned his cheek against Victor’s shoulder, needing his strength. Sliding his hand down Yura’s cheek, tangling into the baby fine blond hair, he murmured, “I wasn’t allowed until now.”

The boy seemed to be thinking hard about Yuuri and what he revealed. Finally he said quietly, “You don’t have to do the mom thing if you don’t want to. I don’t want to make you sad.”
Yuuri shook his head and answered, “The mom thing makes me happy, Yura...I want to be there for you. I’m very flattered that you asked me.” He pulled the small form into his arms, pressing a kiss into Yura’s hair. He didn’t know how to define what he felt in this bundle of arms but he thought it might be...family.
Chapter Summary

Everyone has a story. Yuuri learns more of his friends' stories while learning to find a voice to his own with Abramovich.

Chapter Notes

Oh, wow! We hit 1k in kudos! I think we should celebrate with...an extra chapter!

Ch. 15: Every ending is a new beginning...

Yuuri waited by the curb, Yura holding onto his hand smartly. It had been a bit of confusion for the little blonde to understand that they weren’t walking to school that morning. However as soon as he learned they were riding to school...and that he would arrived with one of the cooler older kids, he was very enthusiastic. The child pointed as Katya pulled to a stop nearby. “Hi, Katya,” he greeted. “Mila! How are you?”

The little redhead peeked out from the back, “I’m okay. We’re going to school together.”

The blonde tumbled into the backseat, suddenly urging to be independent like the older girl, “Is Beka in your class?”

Mila smiled at the little boy, an understanding forming in her mind. She realized that he didn’t want to impress her, but someone else. “No, but I’ve met him. He’s in the class next to mine. With Mrs. Polova.”

Yura mulled that over for a moment and then asked sincerely, “Is she nice?”

Mila made a face and shrugged before turning in interest to meet her sister’s friend. “Hi, I’m Mila.”
Yuuri chuckled as he settled into the front passenger seat, greeting the exuberant girl. “Hello, I’m Yuuri.”

“He’s my omega!” Yura declared.

Katya raised an eyebrow at the phrasing and Yuuri blushed. “I’m his companion omega,” Yuuri corrected. Turning to look at the little blonde and silently reminding him to buckle up.

“What’s that?” Mila asked with curiosity.

“It means he’s like my mom,” Yura explained as he sat back and fastened his seatbelt. He and Mila fell into conversation, fading back into Russian for the short trip to the school.

“She’s eight,” Katya explained with an eyeroll. “My parents had her late in life. I believe she was a surprise and she’s been surprising us ever since.”

“Mom didn’t think she could have any more,” Mila chimed in letting them know she was still listening before quickly turning back to Yura.

Katya blushed at her forward little sister’s words. “I’m sorry, Yuuri...little girls don’t know how to mind their words.”

“It’s fine...they are honest,” Yuuri murmured, his eyes drifting out the window at his side. *I need to be able to handle these innocent words.* Katya seemed to take the hint that he didn’t want to talk about it, however, and let it go. Outside people were walking more briskly, covered in thicker coats. He realized that it was finally getting cold for Russians... *Thank goodness for my coat. Victor really does take care of me...* He felt himself get a little warm and quickly mentally corrected himself, *everyone. He takes excellent care of everyone.* He felt surprised when the SUV pulled to a stop and realized he wasn’t paying attention to his surroundings. His eyes focused on his reflection before a cheerful call drew him from his thoughts.

Yura’s gruff, but still light little voice floated over the din of schoolyard noises, “Bye, Yuuri!”

Yuuri turned, looking out the car and offered a weak smile. “See you later, alligator,” but his voice
came out clear, and full of love for the little boy.

Yura beamed a wide and toothy grin hollering out, “After a while, crocodile!”

He felt his expression pull into a more genuine expression of joy. Katya watched, her eyes soft with concern for her friend but giving him the space he needed. After the kids were up the stairs, she pulled back into traffic. “I know just the place to find our outfits.”

Soon, Katya walked him through the store, talking with the salesman assigned to her friend and making it clear the type of event. Yuuri found himself grateful that she was the take-charge type as the boutique left him overwhelmed with the range of suits, cuts, and colors. Katya pulled a few pieces together, working with the clerk, and Yuuri found himself in and out of so many suits he knew he’d never be able to decide on his own. Yuuri stood in front of the mirror, the gray suit sitting on his frame. He smiled at the reflection but was puzzled when he saw Katya study his form with a frown. “It needs something to soften it.” She walked up to him on the dias, “You’re an omega. There’s nothing wrong with showing that side of yourself, right?” She smiled at the twitch of his lips indicating he agreed.

“A scarf?” the salesman suggested.

She shook her head, tapping her lip thoughtfully. “Let’s try a sweater. A cardigan or a vest. Something...in blue. Let’s see that.” She then studied Yuuri’s revamped form and hummed thoughtfully. “I like...the idea of this. But I think...the colors are all wrong.” She moved through the store and soon had a darker suit in hand, a red sweater vest, and a different tie, one that pulled the red out of the new vest, and added a little fire to the cinnamon in his eyes. The shirt was a crisp white with a subtle white striping for texture. Katya returned to Yuuri and sent him to get dressed.

Inside the dressing room once more Yuuri found himself thinking that maybe the “take charge Katya” was a bit much. Then he turned and saw himself in the mirror...his breath caught. This is what I look like? He had seen himself in the mirrors of the dance studio, however those were in sweats. This was...polished. He walked to the mirror, running a finger against the glass almost expecting it to be someone else. I’m still too skinny, but...wow. He noticed his hair, messy from changing and swept it back quickly.

Yuuri came out of the dressing room, watching Katya’s expression. Her eyes widened. “Wow!” Pulling him onto the pedestal, she straightened the suit with expert ease. “This is it, Yuuri. The cut, the colors are perfect for you. And do your hair like this!”

“Really? Do you think...” The words died on his lips but Katya heard the unspoken he’ll like it at
Her lips curled into a smile, but a moment their eyes locked in the mirror. “I think...it shows just how beautiful you can be,” she murmured, turning him towards the mirror and staring from behind him. “So very beautiful. And yes, I think everyone will love it.”

Yuuri studied the suit. He knew it needed to be taken in but that was fine. Beyond the suit, he saw a man staring back at him. Eating steadily over the last two weeks, he could already see the gauntness starting to fade away. He looked slender but not unhealthy. The reds brought out the cinnamon of his eyes, the pink of his lips and cheeks. “Can we...make sure it doesn’t show how thin I am?” he asked softly.

Katya nodded. “Absolutely.” Soon the tailor was in and making the quick marks and listening to Katya’s instruction. Yuuri had to smile at the woman, managing the entire thing. She knows what she’s doing. This is her career, after all. “I mean, if it were a more formal event, I’d have you decked out in a male version of an evening gown.”

Yuuri watched her expression as she described an outfit he’d more likely skate in than wear at an event. Still, the black mesh, large crystals, and half skirt lined in red did intrigue him. “Have you thought of designing your own clothes, Katya?” he asked as they moved into the ladies section of the store.

She laughed at him and tried to wave the idea off. “Who would wear my designs?”

Yuuri raised his eyebrows, he heard the ambition in her voice. “So...yes.”

“Yes,” she winced. Then she sighed, turning from the row of gowns in front of her. “But I can’t. I have Mila.”

“Said every single mother ever...but if men, alphas can have careers raising kids, why can’t women and omegas?” Yuuri had lost too much, and knew the bitter taste of frustrated ambition. He was not about to let this woman taste it.

Her eyes drifted off to the name of the designer above the gowns. The styles to safe to the point of boredom...and this woman got to design for Olympians. What could a risk-taker like herself accomplish? “I...I don’t know.”
“Start...with something small,” Yuuri encouraged. He then pointed at a rack of black dresses. “But for now...we don’t have time to work from scratch. So...where do you want to begin?”

Katya shrugged, pulling one of the gowns in front of her. “Rework...one of these?”

Yuuri looked at the dress, conservative, but not bad. “Do you want to wear them as they sit?”

“Lord, no…” She then blushed. “I see what you mean.” She then ran her fingers over the options pulling out a black silk. “It’s plain...but...I have a few ideas.”

“Can you pull it off in time?”

She thought about what she had available to her before nodding. “I have just the thing. Come...I want to try this on.” She pulled him back into the dressing room and he waited in the mirrored presentation space until she emerged. Stepping on the dias, she began describing where she’d add the lace, raise the hem line, create embellishment along the neck and back and then hugged herself. “It’s perfect.”

“It’s...a start,” Yuuri answered softly. “You’ll make it perfect.”

“I’ll pick up your finished suit on Friday and bring it to practice,” she offered as they left the store.

“And are you going to show me your finished dress?” Yuuri teased.

“You will see it Saturday night,” she winked coyly back towards him.

As they left the store, she asked, “So...what kind of career would you like?”

Yuuri shrugged. “Nothing extravagant. I like teaching. When I finally returned home, I taught ballet but...the rumors of my past made people prejudice and they started pulling students from the class. I enjoyed it, though.” Then he brightened a little before adding, “I love working with Yura and Victor is encouraging me to take classes.”
“So...what are you taking?”

“I’m taking some classes to maybe help me teach later. Psychology, child psychology...I really like working with kids.”

“Have you thought about working at the rink with Victor?”

Yuuri shook his head, glancing away. “I mean, I would love to but...I don’t think I could offer anything of value. These are champions...and I had to leave competition at nineteen.” He couldn’t keep the wistfulness from his voice. He wanted so much more. He blinked away the tears.

Katya dropped him off at the house. He had time to enjoy his lunch and rest before walking down to pick up Yura...before reentering the world. The morning had been wonderful, and Katya handled everything, but he still felt tired and drained. He’d held strong for the entire morning. Now, back in the safety of the home, he felt his mask slipping. And of course, Olga noticed.

“Are you okay?” She sat down across from him, tea in a clear glass with the dollop of jam sinking to the bottom.

Yuuri shrugged, studying his sandwich a little too closely. “I...I’m going to see a psychiatrist today. I...have to talk about what...I’ve been through, Olga. My...alpha, he wasn’t a good man. He...found ways to hurt me that no one could see.” He shook his head before adding, “Not that it mattered later on. I wasn’t allowed out. No one saw me at all for the last years of it.”

She took a sip from her cup, the steam tipping over the edge. Then she reached forward, taking his hands in hers. “We all...everyone in this house, we’ve all had to face pain at some point. I haven’t known, haven’t experienced...your pain. Nor has the old man.” She paused a moment, the lines in her brow becoming more defined. “Victor Andreivich, I am not sure. He’s always kept his pain close to his chest, choosing to protect others and build them up rather than letting his pain pull him apart.”

Yuuri looked up from his ignored sandwich, “I...didn’t know.”

Olga’s eyes met his. She was clearly sad for her employer, having seen him cover his sorrow and
busy himself with making others happy. “I don’t know much either. I’ve seen him pull himself back together. I’ve watched him put his mask back into place more than once. I know...he hurts. I’ve seen his tears over her, over Yelena...but I’ve seen earlier tears. He hides them well.” She laughed fondly. “The boy could put makeup on better than most ladies I know.”

“I used to be able to do that. Put makeup on. Cover up my anxiety with concealer and powder, just the right amount of blush.” He took a shaky bite out of the sandwich before putting it down, drawing a raw breath, swallowing tears with the bite of bread. “I...never wanted to be there.”

“Everyone has that moment of realization when they find themselves in the midst of pain. I’ve watched people go through this. They start by blaming themselves. ‘What did I do, what could I have done differently?’ Then, one day, they realize, it wasn’t them. ‘They...’” She paused then amended, “You never asked for that, never deserved it. And no matter what, you had no hand in creating your pain. It was him, that miserable alpha, not you. But that pain is there, on you, nonetheless. And only you can take it away.” She watched him drop his chin, his eyes resting on the hands now in his lap. “I’m not minimizing what you went through, Yuuri Toshiyavich. But...we want to hold you and give you the strength you need to face your pain.”

“I...I don’t think I can face that bus today,” he whispered. “I feel too vulnerable.”

“Let me make a call, then,” she suggested. Slipping away, she went into another room and he heard her on the phone, Russian words unintelligible to the man in the kitchen trying to eat a sandwich. Returning, she smiled warmly. “I called a friend. Some days when I couldn’t deal with the bus, he’d drive Yura and me to the lessons. He’s a good man...but he doesn’t speak English. You’ll have to wait until Yura is with you to have a decent conversation. I’ll make sure he knows where to take you though, and you’ll be delivered without a wayward look or untoward touch.”

“Thank you,” Yuuri whispered, relief flooding through him.

Olga patted his hand, the sandwich was half gone and that was enough for her today. She knew he was struggling, and wanted to take one thing off his plate...literally. “Now, go rest...I’ll wake you when he’s here.”

Yuuri wandered into the family room and fumbled around on the TV before turning it off in frustration. Olga walked by and frowned. “Is there something you are looking for?”

Yuuri shrugged, he was loathe to admit to his love of trash television. “I...have a guilty pleasure. Something I...started watching there. It gave me a sort of escape from my own hell.”
“And what would that be, Yuuri Toshiyavich?” she asked with sharp amused eyes.

“Deadly Omega,” he said softly. Once it was out he laughed and continued, “I thought...maybe I could find it here. Not in Japanese, of course...but maybe with English subtitles.”

She returned his laugh warmly before admitting, “I have a penchant for that program myself. I’ll play around with the television and figure out how to get the subtitles on it. But honestly, we might need to let Yura have a hand at it.”

Yuuri smiled up at her, grateful for an ally on all fronts. “I just thought...it might help me learn the language.”

She hummed thoughtfully. “It’s a fair start.”

His eyes lit up thinking of his new opportunity, “And then...the other day at the doctor’s office, the receptionist told me about a class on Mondays.” He looked away, his eyes resting on the clock and feeling time tick away. “But Victor leaves soon. He has competitions to attend.”

Olga clucked her tongue from across the room, “Don’t be silly. Victor Andreivich would want you to have this. We’ll manage.”

Yuuri wasn’t as convinced, “How will I get there?” Daytime buses were daunting enough. He didn’t want to think about evening buses.

“The old man will drive you. And if he can’t, I’ll call my friend.” Olga chuckled as if there was nothing so simple.

“I don’t want to inconvenience anyone,” Yuuri protested.

She huffed. “Nonsense. We’ve inconvenienced you, pulling you from all that is familiar and settling you in a country where you don’t know the language or the ways. The least we can do is help you find your feet.”
Yuuri smiled, blushing at her words. “Are you sure?”

“Absolutely.” She came over to the couch, putting a pillow down and pulling a blanket from the cabinet, settling it over his lap. “Now, rest...and maybe by tomorrow we can get you your **Deadly Omega**.”

Yuuri stretched out from his place on the couch, frowning as he squinted up to the clock. He didn’t remember covering himself with the afghan. Feeling around for his glasses, he located them on the coffee table. Voices drifted from the kitchen, one unfamiliar. He staggered a little as he headed into the other room.

“Oh, Yuuri, you’re up!” greeted Olga. She indicated to the animated man sitting across from her at the table. “This here is my friend Lev Sergeyevich. He’d be happy to drive you and Yura to the rink today, and whenever you need.”

The man smiled broadly, then erupted into a string of Russian. Yuuri smiled, recognizing the grocer and remembering what Nikolai told him about the man and his interest in Olga. From the looks of things, Nikolai was wrong, that interest went both ways. Olga had neatened her hair and put on a little lip color and was laughing a little more girlishly than usual. Yuuri was pulled from his observations of Olga’s flirting style...which was pretty good...by a hand grabbing his and pumping it vigorously in a handshake. Yuuri smiled nervously, his eyes darting to Olga for explanation, as Lev continued his foreign, well foreign to Yuuri, words.

She waved off his worried face, “Oh, he’s just saying hello.”

“Oh, ummm...hi?” Yuuri replied back, his eyes wide. “*Zdrastvuite*?” A single word in attempted Russian set the man off once again and Yuuri shook his head, lost.

Olga chuckled and came to his side, “Don’t worry, my friend. He’ll hardly notice you aren’t talking. He hardly breaks for air.”

Yuuri nodded as he was being guided to the door. Stopping to gather his own coat, he followed the man out to the delivery truck. *Well, at least Yura will be excited to ride in this.*
Lev didn’t pause in his chatter the entire way to the school. As he drew to a stop, Yuuri smiled his thanks and climbed out of the truck. Yura jumped up from the top step where he’d been sitting next to Otabek and ran down to meet him.

“We’re riding with Lev today?” he asked, his voice all squeaky with curiosity and sincere enthusiasm.

“Well, I’ve got to see a doctor and it...made me nervous. So he’s giving us a ride so we don’t have to take the bus,” Yuuri explained.

Yura’s smile faded, “What kind of doctor? Are you sick?”

Yuuri smiled reassuringly. It wasn’t the first time he noticed Yura worry about him getting sick. The boy felt the loss of his mother acutely and it came out in his worry about losing others close to him. He bent down to sweep the little form into a close hug. “No, not sick. Some doctors work on the way we think. I’m having a hard time but I want to get better. Okay?”

Yura squinted for a moment, giving the idea of a doctor who fixes the way people think very deep consideration. Then gave him a solemn nod. “I want you to get better, too. Can I help?”

Yuuri broke into a wide smile, the boy was so loving, he really did take after his father. “Oh, honey, you do help. Just by being you.” He hugged him once more before standing up and taking his hand, leading him to the truck. Pausing he turned to the little boy, “Will you tell him we’re ready to go to the rink, now?” he asked, leaning his cheek against the blond hair. Yura’s rougher Russian greeted the older man and they talked back and forth. Finally, the old man laughed and he nodded to Yuuri. Please don’t have told this man I’m your omega, Yura. He smiled nervously.

Yuuri was staring out the window when he heard a deep baritone fill the space. He glanced over to see the man singing and caught Yura’s eye roll. Yuuri gave him a severe look and the boy just shrugged.

They finally arrived at the rink and through Yura, the omega was able to convey his thanks. Lev waved, offering a warm smile before he departed. As they walked towards the building, Yura leaned in and asked, “Was that better than the bus?”

Yuuri laughed, feeling the strain of his tears in his voice. “Believe it or not, it was.”
The blonde looked back with disbelief but followed Yuuri into the building. “If it helps you, we can ride the green machine every day.” Yuuri worked to keep the laugh inside as he watched the little boy scuttle off to skate lessons with the other students. Yuuri stood still in the lobby feeling lost when he felt an arm rest around his shoulder. He turned and met Victor’s eyes.

“I hear from Olga you’re having a hard day.”

Yuuri breathed in, Victor’s scent was subtle but still present and calming. “It was fine… and then it was… not.”

Victor hummed in understanding, “Perhaps… it’s a good day to start visiting Dr. Abramovich. Shall I show you the way?”

Yuuri nodded, shoving away a tear that refused to stay put. “This… is hard.”

Victor pulled him into his chest, pressing a kiss onto the top of his head. “I know, Yuuri… I know.” He felt Yuuri’s hand knot into his shirt as he rested his cheek on Victor’s chest breathing in the alpha’s scent. Finally, Yuuri straightened, finding strength within and pulled back but stayed close. “Are you ready?” the alpha asked softly.

Yuuri nodded, not having words at the moment but allowing his hand to be taken and placed on the turn of Victor’s arm to be covered by his opposite hand. The alpha felt tall and solid at Yuuri’s side who in turn felt rather small, lost and unsure of himself. But he did trust the man that was an anchor holding fast to him as he was guided down the hall, up a set of stairs, and down another hall. And because Yuuri couldn’t quite let go, Victor gave a firm knock on the door.

“Yuuri Katuski?” greeted the older man. “Welcome to my office. I’m Dr. Abramovich.” He saw the hands on Victor’s arms, hesitant to let go. He extended his own, offering another lifeline.

Finally, Yuuri let go of Victor, accepting the hand offered in greeting, and taking a deep breath, entered the office.

“It’s always hard to come here the first time,” the doctor supplied. “It’s fine, you know. But that first time, it takes us doctors a little bit to figure out what will help our patients relax.”

“Tea,” Yuuri suggested then giggled nervously, a blush on his cheeks. “Tea helps me to relax.”
The old man nodded, going over to put the electric kettle on and setting a cup ready to steep. “I’d like to spend this first appointment getting to know you.”

Yuuri blinked up in surprise. “I thought...we would talk about...what happened.”

The man nodded slowly, and set a cup together. “We will...don’t worry. But for now, we’ll get comfortable with one another.” He handed Yuuri the cup, tea bag floating within steeping. “Do you take jam?”

Yuuri wrinkled his nose. “God, no.” He felt his cheeks flush with embarrassment and went to apologize but was cut off.

Abramovich laughed roundly at the rejection. “A purist, it seems!” He sat it the chair opposite.

Yuuri still blushed but felt comforted in the laugh. “Sometimes, honey...but not often.”

“The same...except for coffee. I like it black and uncompromised.” He smiled at Yuuri who smiled into his own cup. Then the doctor indicated to the recorder sitting on the table between them, putting it in order and explaining, “I find writing to be distracting and I don’t trust my memory. So if you’ll forgive me, I’ll record our sessions.”

“That’s fine.” Yuuri settled into the chair.

“Make yourself comfortable,” Abramovich encouraged, nodding towards the chair. Yuuri looked down at his hands for a moment before toeing off his shoes and pulling his feet up, butterflyng his knees out. His hands then wrapped around his ankles and he lifted brown eyes up to the doctor who grinned at the challenge he spotted in those brown depths. “Very good. Now, let’s get to know one another. Why don’t you tell me a little about yourself?”

Yuuri’s eyes focused on his hands. “I...I was once a figure skater from Japan.”

The old doctor huffed at that. “Once a figure skater, always a figure skater. My wife skates in her dreams.”
Yuuri blinked, shifting in the chair slightly for more comfort. “You’re married to a figure skater?”

Abramovich nodded, “Retired years ago but yes. So you’ll not be able to hide anything from me.” He smiled at Yuuri who snorted. “She’s still choreographing programs when she hears a fine tune. Became quite excited when they allowed words in the music. She is a big fan of the American singer Pink.”

Yuuri smiled at that. “I like Pink. She has a number of empowering songs.”

Abramovich hummed, “Is empowerment important to you?”

“I think...having no power is dangerous.” Yuuri paused thinking of his past, his lack of power. “I spent too long...helpless.”

“What changed?”

“A piece of paper annulling my bond,” Yuuri answered wryly.

“It’s amazing how much power we can find in a piece of paper.”

Yuuri looked over, the doctor kept his face and tone even, but the omega could hear the professional curiosity behind the statement. “I agree...but then I realized how much I lost over the years.”

The doctor shifted in his seat, crossing his legs in front of him. “It’s easy to dwell in our losses. However, I challenge you to find what you gained.”

He blinked up in surprise. “What I gained? But he...took everything from me.”

The old man shook his head in disagreement. “If that were true, you wouldn’t be here.”
Yuuri’s mouth fell slack. He lifted brown eyes up to meet the aging gray. “I hadn’t thought of it like that.”

Abramovich heard the impact his words had on the young man. He didn’t want to be harsh, but he needed the omega to see his future, his options and to become empowered, because, ultimately, that’s what Yuuri needed. “Sometimes we get caught up in what we’ve lost and forget to look for our gains. Even the worst of experiences, we can walk away with gains.”

“But...how?” Yuuri spread his hands wide, clearly struggling.

“Because your mettle has been tested, and you can see your true strength,” the old man pointed out.

Yuuri fell silent for a moment, considering what he had gone through, suffered, and survived. “I hadn’t thought about that.”

“Then I suppose that’s a good place to start.” He reached into his desk and pulled out an old style composition book. “You have homework. I want you to list ten things you’ve gained...and ten things you wish to regain before you return.”

Yuuri smiled, taking the book in his hands and feeling like he was beginning primary school again. “That’s...all?”

“It’s a start.” Abramovich corrected. “And isn’t that where every journey begins? Don’t worry there’s plenty more work, tougher work, ahead.”

A start.
Yura shifted nervously as Yuuri helped him dress that morning. “You’re sure you will come tonight?”

Yuuri met his eyes and smiled. “I wouldn’t miss it for the world.” He saw the worry only abate marginally in the large green eyes. What has you so worried? He tweaked the little nose adding a goose noise which had them both laughing. He knelt before the boy, “I’ll be there.”

The child took a shaky breath and nodded. He had a plan and Otabek agreed to help him out. The Kazakh boy was already helping his sister with a similar plan and had assured Yura he would help him as well. And if not, he’d do it anyway. Yura remembered the older student’s words. My mom would say choose your fights and make them worth it. The little blonde smiled to himself as he pulled on his socks, watching Yuuri tuck a stick of gum in the cuff. He hopped down and hugged the omega before skipping down the stairs, smirking when the omega called after him to slow down.

As they arrived at the school, he met Otabek’s gaze with a look of determination. He was a soldier, and would fight for his Yuuri...for his mama. He held onto Yuuri’s hand a little longer, squeezing it tighter before he looked up into the big brown eyes. Yuuri smiled, leaning down as the boy pulled at him. Yura hopped up on his toes to kiss the omega’s cheek before running up the steps to meet with the older student.

Yuuri removed his glove to put a hand to his cheek. Standing still for a few moments, letting the
warmth from Yura’s lips sink into his skin, he watched the boys dart into the school, and missed the scowl from one of the staff standing at the door.

Yuuri returned home, his feet slow and heavy as they retraced the path. His emotions had him on such a roller coaster these days and he hoped they weren’t affecting the child in his care. *Yura does seem worried. I hope it’s not over me.* He remembered how the little blonde would look for reassurance, constantly checking that Yuuri were still there, with no plans to leave. *It’s got to be the lack of affection from the others. I can only do my best to make sure he knows how loved he is by everyone, including me.* The front door appeared before he knew it and he steadied himself before opening the door. He drew a deep breath and let it out slowly. He could hear Olga humming in the kitchen and he knew he should offer to join her for shopping. Two carrying the purchases were better than one. However, he knew he’d be in a room full of people later that day and he only had so much social energy.

*He kept me isolated. I was never good at being around people, I picked up too much on their energy and it was always so much worse in my thoughts. But with Shuji it only got worse, and then I tried to shut out his energy as much as possible. I need to regain my ability to be around people more. Not just for Yura and Victor, but for myself.*

He smiled, thinking of Victor and Yura, how they both, in their own way, helped him find his way through. How both of them helped him to come out of his shell, how they pulled him out of himself when he needed it. Victor guided him through with grace, while Yura bulldozed through, but both made a way for him. The brown eyes sparkled as he thought about how Victor’s touch settled him the previous day and made it possible for him to face the psychiatrist. Remembering the progress he had already made seemed to invigorate him to make more.

*I need to...go with Olga. The more I’m exposed to these things, the better I will be.*

Yuuri entered the kitchen while the older omega added something new to her list. She looked up brightly and asked, “Are you joining me?”

“I thought I might...if you needed me.” He shifted his weight, watching her move about the kitchen as she prepared to shop.

She still, list in hand, and smiled at him, “Well, I was thinking I’d stop in to see the butcher if I had you to help me carry things. I thought I’d put on a roast since Yura has his presentation tonight. We could eat earlier.”
Yuuri hummed his approval, Olga made a delicious roast. He knew it was one of Victor’s favorites. “Should I remind Victor?”

Shrugging she reached for her coat, “It couldn’t hurt. He gets so busy and Yura would be upset if he was late.”

Yuuri nodded as he pulled out his phone and narrowed his eyes at the message he hadn’t noticed.

**Peaches/ I’m lost without you.**

Yuuri grinned as he typed back.

**Yuu-chan/ I’m here because of you.**

**Peaches/ It doesn’t mean I can’t miss you. Maybe I should come to Russia and kidnap you for the day.**

Yuuri knew this game and decided to take a few minutes to play with his friend. Phichit was in need of attention.

**Yuu-chan/ Can’t. I’m now a grown-up with responsibilities.**

**Peaches/ There’s that. How are you?**

Yuuri’s expression softened. He knew his friend’s antics, distracting him with silliness to get him to relax before asking what was really on his mind.

**Yuu-chan/ I’m better. I do have really hard days but everyone here takes such good care of me. Olga says this is a place of healing and I feel that now.**

**Peaches/ Are you eating better?**
Yuu-chan/ Much better.

Then on impulse, he snapped a selfie and sent it to his friend. He had to admit he was looking much better, even improved from how he left his family. He was putting on healthy weight and his skin had color, but best of all the spicy look his eyes had when he skated was back. The flecks of cinnamon returned to his brown eyes, making them richer.

Peaches/ Oh, you do look so much better! I’m so glad this worked out so well. I knew VN was always so warm and friendly towards the competition. I felt like he’d be good people.

Yuuri smiled at the expression. *He most certainly is...and why is my friend quoting Dolly Parton?*

Yuu-chan/ He is very gracious.

Peaches/ :) So what do you have going on the rest of the week?

Yuu-chan/ Parents night tonight and Saturday, Victor wants me to go with him to a meet and greet with sponsors and skaters. I have a new friend that will be there with her little sister.

Peaches/ You have a date????

Yuuri’s eyes widened at the words. *Wait...What? No...*

Yuu-chan/ No! It’s not a date.

*I mean..., it’s not a date. We’re not dating. Well...*

Yuu-chan/ I don’t think it’s a date.

*But if it’s not a date then why have me dress nicely. I mean...if he just needs a friend to go with*
him then he can just go with Mila’s sister. Yuuri thought of Katya and what she had said. Oh my god...

Yuu-chan/ He did have me pick out an outfit with a friend.

Yuu-chan/ Do you think it’s a date?

Somewhere in Japan Phichit watched the words frantically appear as his best friend contradicted himself, slowly coming to the realization that he was in fact dating his teen idol. Dark eyes sparkled knowing that Yuuri deserved this, he deserved ALL the good things. And Victor Nikiforov better remember that.

Peaches/ It could be a date.

Back in Russia Yuuri had managed to talk himself out of the compliment. A talent that rivaled his skating ability.

Yuu-chan/ He did ask me during the interview if I could be his occasional plus-one. Surely that’s all it is.

Yuu-chan/ I’m sure he’s not interested in me like that.

Because, who would? Yuuri thought of the picture he had just sent. It wasn’t...bad. He did look better and his eyes...were brighter, his face fuller...

Peaches/ He might be.

Yuu-chan/ I think...I’d rather think he’s not. That way I won’t be disappointed.

Peaches/ Yuuuuuuuiriiiiii!

Yuu-chan/ It’s not a date.
Yuuri thought of Victor. Tall, perfect Victor who could undoubtedly have anyone, would never look at him, not like that. And that’s okay. He’s lovely and kind to me just as a friend. That speaks more of his character than anything else.

Peaches/ *sighs* But you like him.

Yuuri stared at those words, blinking as he considered the possibility, thinking about all of the gentle ways Victor took care of him, considering how he was drawn to the alpha’s scent. He chewed his lips as he thought about it. I do.

Peaches/ Maybe you won’t say it out loud...but I know you.

Yuuri/ You do.

He brushed his thumb over those words missing his friend before turning his focus back to the reason he took out his phone.

Yuu-chan/ Olga said to remind you to come home early. Yura’s parent night.

Victor/ I hadn’t forgotten but would you send me a second reminder this afternoon? That’s when it gets hectic.

Yuuri smiled at the phone, feeling good at being asked to text again. He couldn’t resist indulging in a little way showing Victor his love, and texted back quickly.

Yuu-chan/ I will. Have a good day.

Across town, blue eyes rested on those words. He left the house so early that he missed out on those pleasantries. He could imagine Yuuri wishing his son those words every day before letting him go into the school. He smiled at the thought. Yuuri brought forward every domestic instinct
in him. Yuuri brought out a lot of other feelings, but Victor knew better than to act on any of them, not yet. Yuuri was a mystery, and Victor could see he was harboring intense pain from his past...which he could guess hadn’t been filled with kindness. He looked at the words sent to him by Chris in an earlier text.

ChrisG/ It’s okay to let yourself fall in love.

Victor considered his friend’s advice. It was sound, but he didn’t want to move too fast. It would be bad for all three of them. He began texting a reply.

Victor/ Is that what this is? It’s been so long since I’ve even been attracted to someone.

ChrisG/ And those weren’t good relationships. You had a lousy track record. Yuuri is all of the good in this world.

Victor huffed thinking of his past relationships. They were... *sad, pathetic...a total waste of my time.* The only real relationship had been Yelena, the closest, dearest friend. Her death had left him empty. He just couldn’t bring someone into his life after her. *And it always felt unfair to Yura. But with Yuuri...he just fits with us both so perfectly. He’s so kind...but then...*

Victor/ Then why did something so horrible happen to him? I know you can’t give me details but it doesn’t mean I haven’t figured a lot of it out.

ChrisG/ Because bad things often times happen to good people. They keep themselves less guarded because they see the better in people who seldom deserve it. But we can all work to make the rest of his life full of good things.

Victor thought back to Yelena. The similarities were too painful. Both wonderful, loving people, who unfortunately attracted the worst of monsters. *Maybe, monsters go looking for these people?*

Victor/ I know.

*And I will.* He closed his eyes in realization of where his thoughts were taking him. Thinking of the previous day when he took Yuuri in his arms to settle him down. It only confirmed those thoughts and he knew. *My Yuuri...* He smiled as those words flitted through his mind. He was as
bad as his son. He didn’t want to scare the omega away but he definitely knew he wanted to move forward...and if that upset the carefully created balance in his household, so be it. Perhaps it was time.

Yuuri shifted the packages in his arms thinking he should have brought a cart or a backpack at least. However, the butcher was having a sale and Olga became quite excited. He could hear her ticking off the different menu items and Yuuri realized she drew as much joy from cooking as his mother. Yuuri liked cooking but it wasn’t skating or dancing...or taking care of Yura. He realized he gained just as much pleasure from spending time with the younger Nikiforov and missed him when he was gone. *Will I feel the same about the father while he’s away?*

Once home Olga put him on vegetable prep while she saw to the rest of the purchases. She deftly put away the meat, bringing a good deal of it to the cold storage cellar, then she returned, humming as she worked. He watched her season the roast and put it into the dutch oven. She came over to Yuuri, nodding in approval at his job on the vegetables. Taking the onions, carrots, potatoes, and cabbage, she situated them around the meat. Once the roast was organized, she had it in the oven.

Knowing Olga would give herself a rest with her romance novel of the week, Yuuri cleaned up then wandered towards the shop. Peeking in he saw Nikolai at work. He knocked on the door frame coming into the room, “Hello.”

The old man looked up and grinned. “Morning. Come! See! I made the...ummm...shrine?”

Yuuri stepped forward and ran his hands along the lines of the cabinet tracing out the lotus design. “It means...rebirth...and purity,” he whispered.

Nikolai grunted. “I hope that is fine. I went by the design I found.” The older man played it off as if it were a simple thing, but Yuuri could tell he had put a lot of thought and love into this project.

“It’s...perfect.” Yuuri turned and smiled, his cheeks a soft pink. “I can’t believe you did this so quickly.”

He shrugged, rubbing his hand over the back of his neck. “Well, when it gets cool like this, it’s good to have a project. Keeps me busy. Shall we decide where you want it mounted?” Again, Yuuri could feel the misdirection. Nikolai knew what it was to mourn, and how important this
was. The omega would never be able to express just how much it meant to him.

They walked to the room set aside for Yuuri’s mourning. Yuuri’s eyes spotted the cushions Olga created for him and he ran his fingers over the fabric she chose. So much care bestowed upon him by his new family. He blinked away his emotions and worked with the older man to find the appropriate place for the shrine, sliding his fingers down the wood, he placed the pieces he collected so far. He knew to watch for more coming from home, the missing elements but, as the man left him alone, he let his tears go, kneeling and whispering...names. He had secreted them away in his heart...sharing them with no one.

“Aiko, my beloved little girl. Ginki, my lively son that held on until he could take breath. Haru, who should have come in the spring. And Kiyoshi, my quiet little boy...I felt you slip from me like a stolen breath. I wasn’t strong enough to hold onto any of you. May I be strong enough to let you go, to send you onto your next journey.”

He allowed himself a few moments to think of the children that might have been, but then blinked away his tears and drew himself upright. “I have one little boy here...and he needs me to go with him tonight, to stand in for someone who couldn’t be here.” He walked out to the main hall, his eyes lifting up to the portrait of the beautiful Yelena. She was smiling brightly, lively green eyes sparkling down on him. There was nothing in that portrait that had him worried. He loved her son, and he could see she would love him because of that.

“Your shoes are hard to fill...I’m trying, though. That little boy deserves someone willing to try.”

“That’s all she ever wanted,” a voice pulled him from his thoughts and he turned to see Olga standing there. She came up to him, their eyes returning to the portrait. “She was a good mother but she knew she didn’t have long. She spoke to me at length about what she wanted. Someone to love her son as their own...and someone who’d love her best friend in the way that he deserves.” Olga patted his shoulder then moved on, her nose telling her what needed to be done in the kitchen next. Yuuri remained for a moment, looking back up at the beaming blonde.

“Best friend. Is that where it starts? Friendship?” Yuuri nodded solemnly.

Yuuri walked nervously into the school. Sensing his fears the little blonde latched his hand into the omega’s, then grabbed hold of Victor’s, linking them as a family. Yuuri watched Victor greet the teacher, and didn’t mind when she all but ignored him. She gave him a cursory glance then
stalked off, and he breathed a sigh of relief at what she hoped was an insult.  Of course. In her eyes, he was the hired helped. Is that all that I am? I thought that was what I wanted. I thought...this was just a job. But now...I’m not so sure. I...don’t want just that. I want more. Looking down at Yura, he crossed his eyes to set the boy to giggling. Is it wrong to want this family?

He started from his thoughts as Yura lurched forward, dropping their hands and running up to greet a face that had become familiar part of picking up and dropping off Yura. Yuuri leaned into Victor’s space and whispered, “That’s Otabek Altin.”

“Oh, the famed Beka,” Victor hummed. He watched his son excitedly chat with the older boy and the boy’s mother. Turning to Yuuri he shared a knowing smile. Their eyes met for a moment, sending both to a blush. But instead of pulling away, Yuuri found himself moving into Victor’s space further when the alpha placed an arm around his shoulders, leading him into the room. Stepping towards the emissary standing in the group with is son, Victor introduced himself to Otabek’s father. “Consulate Altin, my name is Victor Nikiforov. I believe our sons have formed a fast friendship.”

The Kazakh man smiled warmly and laughed jovially. Yuuri felt at ease in his presence immediately. He was older than Victor, but seemed younger in his open attitude. “So it would seem, Mr. Nikiforov. I’m glad that someone has taken to my Otabek.”

Victor clearly felt the same as Yuuri, his body relaxing as they spoke, but his arm remained over Yuuri’s shoulders. “Call me Victor. Perhaps we can meet sometime and talk over coffee?”

“Then you must call me Bekarys and I think that would be a marvelous plan.” Turning to a pair of omegas behind him he motioned for them to step forward. A smiling pretty girl stepped up, but her partner seemed more reserved. “And perhaps the mothers can talk as well. This is my lovely wife Mehar and her twin brother, also my mate, Rohan. They come from India and speak both English and Hindi, although their Russian is much weaker. I’m afraid my son’s birth mother has passed on.”

Victor took in the information with a diplomatic smile before introducing Yuuri. “English is the common language I share with Yuuri as well. He is our companion omega.” As Yuuri stepped forward to shake the older alpha’s hand with a respectful bow of his head. Bekarys missed nothing and made note of the softness in those blue eyes as the younger man spoke of the omega at his side, however he kept it to himself. Desperately waiting to talk it over with his wife later that night.

“Japan?”
“Hai!” Yuuri answered then blushed. “Da? Yes?”

“I see you’re struggling with language just like my mates. Well, Rohan is further along with his Russian than Mehar.”

As Mehar stepped closer to Yuuri who smiled speaking softly, recognizing her. “I’ve...almost spoken with you more than once, but most don’t want to know me.”

She laughed, and Yuuri was dazzled by her beautiful genuine smile. “I feel the same. I don’t know if it is my foreign looks or my lack of Russian.” Leaning closer, she added, “I’m afraid it might be due to our...unique marriage.”

“I think for me it is because they think I’m a servant,” Yuuri murmured.

Mehar narrowed her eyes, smirking. She waved off the prejudices of others with her hand. “People are so closed minded to those who are different,” she agreed softly. “We should sit together, don’t you think?”

Yuuri smiled and nodded, glancing up to Victor who he could see agreed. “Thank you, Mehar.”

Feeling Victor’s hand on the small of his back guiding him to a seat close to his new friend, he was startled when she grabbed hold of his hand. Her brother, also an omega, smiled but remained reticent. She leaned in and whispered, “He’s a little slow to warm up to strangers.”

Yuuri smiled back his direction. He understood that reluctance. It’s sometimes hard to trust when one’s been greatly hurt...and he could see the pain deep in the other man’s eyes. \textit{In time}, Yuuri thought. \textit{We will be friends in time.}

They settled down as the teacher called the assembly to order. Children sat in chairs in the front, grouped by grade. Mehar pointed to a little girl not seated yet. “My Zaina.”

Yuuri followed her finger and spotted Yura watching out for her and then making sure she was safe. \textit{He watches over the sister as he does the brother.} Yuuri couldn’t help his smile and the softness inside as he looked at the little boy he so wanted to make his. A hand patted his knee and
he glanced up at the father. *I...think I want to be yours as well.*

An older teacher called the assembly to order and began to speak. Yuuri couldn’t understand her, but he could hear the sternness in her voice. One by one children started to file up to the stage and speak, presumably, about their parents. Yuuri watched bashful giggles, shy stammered words and proud cries from the audience. He didn’t need a translator to understand what was being said, and how loved the families felt as their children spoke in turn.

Then Zaina stepped up, her brother joining her from his class. Yuuri smiled softly as the little girl spoke...in English, translated by her brother into Russian. She talked about someone that wasn’t there. Aylin, a woman who rescued two Indian teenagers sold into the slave market and who had asked her husband to protect them through marriage as they came of age. Yuuri glanced over and saw Mehar reach out to squeeze her brother’s hand. Past Rohan, he could see Bakarys wipe a tear from his eye. *He still mourns his first mate.*

Zaina returned to her seat but Otabek remained where he stood, and then Yuuri realized he would also speak for Yura. *Oh, he’s speaking English for me.* He smiled, unconsciously leaning into Victor whose arm rested around his shoulder.

“I want to talk about my mama. He came to live with us a few weeks ago...”

Yuuri gasped, his hands going up to steeple over his nose as his breath hitched. He glanced over to Victor and only saw tenderness in those eyes. Victor nodded back towards the stage.

“He came from far away to be mine and my papa’s omega. We are still learning to be a family but he listens to me and bends down to talk to me. He reads me stories and makes me cat-suddon...which is not made of cats.” The little green eyes darted around the room to ensure that everyone in the audience understood this highly important detail. Yuuri chuckled through his tears, sniffing quietly, and he could feel Victor’s laughter through the warm arm draped over him. “I hope my Yuuri stays and will become my mama for real. I think he makes my papa happy, too.” Yuuri blushed deeply. But grew cold when he saw Yura peek towards the teacher and wince. Yuuri’s followed the where the blonde was looking to see the clearly upset teacher shaking her head. He started to motion to Victor but he didn’t have to. The alpha was already surveying the situation with a frown. Yura’s eyes narrowed, turning from the teacher and his chin jutted out, “I wasn’t supposed to talk about my Yuuri but sometimes you have to do what you think is right.” Then, straightening his back, Yura marched off the stage followed closely by Otabek.

More students went up but Yuuri could still see the teacher glaring at his Yura and he could feel the fight rising up in him. The cinnamon hues blazed in his brown eyes, *How dare she glare at my baby!* He settled a little when Otabek spoke, smiling now as Yura braved his teacher’s glares once more in order for Otabek to speak English. He knew the boy could speak a more complex speech
but kept it simple in order for Yura to keep up with him.

“Everyone heard about my birth mother, Aylin. I want to talk about Mehar and Rohan. Some of us are lucky to have more than one mother to love us and take care of us. I am watched over by Mehar and Rohan whom my mother trusted to take care of me when she couldn’t anymore. Mehar does all the normal mom things and most see her as my mother...and I agree. I love that she takes care of me, cooks for us, keeps our house nice. Most don’t see Rohan. He’s quiet but he listens to me when I’m trying to figure things out and helps me decide the right things to do. He’s very smart and Papa makes sure he can take classes and become smarter. I have great role models and I want to be like all of them but sometimes I think I’m most like Rohan.”

Yuuri glanced over and watched the shy smile from the quiet man and how each of the others squeeze his hand.

He then spotted Mila who talked about how her sister gave up everything to take care of her after her parents were killed. Her eyes rested fiercely on Yura’s teacher as she stressed her words that that families come in all forms and as long as there is love, then people shouldn’t judge. Smiling, she turned her eyes to Yura, Zaina, and Otabek. The three children nodding back at her. Then, with a haughty lift of her chin, she walked back to her chair.

Victor leaned in and whispered, “That one’s a warrior.”

“They all are,” Yuuri whispered back.

The assembly finished and parents were making their way to their children. Yuuri went straight to the blond, dropping to his knees and hugging him close. “You...I can’t believe…” He pulled back to see the self-satisfied, toothy grin on Yura’s face then pulled him in once more then whispering, “You sweet precious boy.”

Behind him, he heard the teacher approach Victor, speaking harshly. He didn’t need to know the language to guess what she was complaining of and as he came to his feet, rising to his full height, he stepped forward. Before Victor had a chance to respond, Yuuri broke into her speech. “I don’t care what you think of me, Mrs. Dorokhova, but you will not put that opinion on my Yura. This little boy has been without a mother long enough. I was brought here to be that mother figure and you will not disrupt that peace.”
She opened her mouth, speechless for a moment, then scoffed. “Nannies come and go...it is not healthy for a child to become attached.”

“I have made it clear that Yuuri is more than a nanny and I will decide what is best for my family, madame,” Victor stated, his voice harsh and commanding. “You will do as Yuuri has stated, stay within your professional boundary, and not interfere with this family. We may be nontraditional but my family, the Nikiforovs, still has power in St. Petersberg.” He stepped forward, narrowing his eyes and lowering his voice, a tactic that he hated using but one that worked on fools like this. “You would not want me to make a call to your superior?”

She backed off, her eyes wide. “No, sir.”

He nodded, as if she had made a wise decision, “I didn’t think so. If I hear your prejudices are causing undue stress on my family again, I will make that call. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to get my son and his mother home.”

Yuuri swallowed his gasp at Victor referring to him as mother and had to be guided through the crowd as he felt himself collapsing inward. Better to panic after than during, he reminded himself. Victor seemed to sense his struggle and guided him directly to the car, settling him into the passenger seat while Yura climbed into the back seat.

Victor kneeled before him, holding his eyes as he spoke gently but firmly, “I meant every word in there. We are a family. You wouldn’t still be here if I didn’t see it that way. And based on your words, I believe you feel the same.”

Yuuri nodded, a tear escaping. You called me his mother. He remained still, his breath catching as Victor thumbed it away.

“We may be nontraditional...but we are a family. All of us. Including Nikolai and Olga. And one day soon, you’ll meet my parents and my brother.” Victor laughed, knowing what Yuuri was in store for...and what they were in store for with Yuuri. “They may be harsh but they will accept you.”

“Babushka will love Yuuri,” the little boy argued.

Victor chuckled. “They all will...but Mama will give in the easiest.” He squeezed Yuuri’s hand before asking, “Are you okay?”
You called ME his mother! Yuuri knew his joy was too raw to express so he just nodded, knowing he still had no words but he felt settled in Victor and Yura’s presence. He licked his lips and then chewed the lower lip as Victor slowly rose, releasing Yuuri’s hand at the last minute.

Victor walked around the front of the car and climbed into the driver’s seat, looking back at his son through the mirror as he fastened his seatbelt. “Buckle up!”

“Okay, Papa,” the child answered as he scrambled into his seat and did as he was told.

Victor must have felt the worried green eyes boring into his skull. As he negotiated into traffic, he addressed the events at the assembly. “Yura, you were very brave back there. Your teacher was wrong.” He saw the satisfied smirk settle on the boy’s face and knew he had to check that. “However, you must still be respectful. She told me how you screamed at her when she denied your request to talk about Yuuri. The appropriate response would be to talk to me and let me handle the situation.”

Yura crossed his arms in a huff, “But...if I don’t stand up for myself, people will hurt me.”

Victor smiled, but had to keep his voice low to make sure his son learned from this. “And sometimes they will hurt you when you do stand up for yourself. This isn’t about that. Let adults fight adult battles.”

Yura wasn’t happy with that answer. It was more than just talking at an assembly, “But this is about me wanting Yuuri to be my mama.”

“And I get that, Yura. Truly.” He took a deep breath as he pulled into his driveway. I want that too. “Next time, talk to me. Sometimes adults will take advantage of their power. I don’t want you hurt in the process.”

Yura paused, the fight gone from his voice and now just the worry of a little boy, “Are you mad?”

Victor sighed, closing his eyes once he put the car into park. Not at you. Opening and meeting his eyes he turned to see Yuuri’s large brown eyes locked on his face, a soft smile on those plush lips. He smiled back before turning to look at the large green ones in the back, “Would you have done the same thing even if you knew I’d get mad?”
Yura thought about it then nodded. “I would. I want Yuuri to be my mama. He’s my Yuuri.”

Victor turned to rest his eyes on the omega who looked from one another with wide eyes. He took Yuuri’s hand in his, squeezing the fingers gently. “I believe he is our Yuuri.” He heard the gasp from the omega and didn’t know if Yuuri truly grasped the promises in his words. However, Victor Nikiforov hadn’t put his family together the normal way so far. Why should he start now?

NOTES:
(A glimpse into our editing chat!)

Denrhea: You know Phichit would love Dolly!

BluSkates: his fav movie is Best Little Whorehouse in TX…”It’s just a little bitty pissant country place”

Denrhea: I’m telling you…it’s a testament to american politics!

BluSkates: Sadly yes it is

Denrhea: I think Phichit is humming Meghera’s song

BluSkates: Oh, he sooooooo is

Denrhea: And Yuuri’s a disney princess

BluSkates: he sooooooooooooooooooo is!
It’s...not a date!

Chapter Summary

It's Friday and Yuuri is surrounded by friends. Nope, it's not date night...but that night is coming closer.

Chapter Notes

Happy Valentine's Day! So...it's not the date...but this chapter bridging between parent night and date night is full of good things. So I hope you enjoy this surprise...and grab yourself some chocolate. Because it's yummy!

Ch. 17:  It’s...not a date!

Yuuri watched Yura’s little body proudly march up the steps of the school with determination before the little imp turned and waved at him. Both hands raised in fists over his head as the blonde jumped into the air shouting “Yo, Adrienne!” Yuuri’s smile spread over his face as he waved back and dropped into laughter watching the small boy get high fives from classmates. *Why did I think Rocky was okay?* Yuuri stood for a few moments longer, the boy now laughing with his friends and disappearing into the school.

He jumped when he heard a newly familiar voice by his shoulder. “It is so easy to fall in love.”

He turned and was treated to Mehar’s warm smile. “I...didn’t expect it.” He looked back at the school, Yuri had gone inside and the rest of the children were slowly moving into their classes as the setting calmed. He turned back to the other omega’s beautiful smile. “I came thinking I’d be little more than a nanny.”

Her smiled turned into a small scoff as she took his arm, leading him away. “You are a companion omega. *More* is implied in the name. But I understand.” They began walking down the street and then Yuuri’s eyes widened when she climbed into a sedan with a driver and waved for him to follow. “Join me for breakfast? We’ll drive you home after.”
Yuuri paused only for a moment before nodding in agreement. As she gave directions to the driver, he thought of Olga knowing she would be fine without him for an hour. “How many languages do you speak?”

She hummed for a moment, “Two fluently but I do fine in Russian,” she turned to him, laughing at herself. “Well, I know enough to get around. It was spoken in Kazakhstan. I am probably just as fine in Kazakh. But I get confused sometimes when they speak too quickly.”

Yuuri frowned and looked at his hands folded in his lap, “I don’t even have a general understanding.” He peeked over to her, “Did you take classes?”

“No.” She saw his worry deepen and reached out, taking one hand in her own. “My brother did...and now he goes to university. He says sometimes he struggles keeping up but he records it so he can go over it again if needed.”

Yuuri felt a boost of hope flourish in him. That’s what I’d like to do eventually. He considered Rohan. He was quiet but seemed determined. “What does your brother study?”

“Political science. He wants to better assist our mate.” The car pulled to a stop and she guided him out, leading him to a small cafe. “I like this place. It has food that reminds me of home and the people here are friendly. Sometimes it’s important to have something that reminds us of home. Have you found anything Japanese?”

“No...I haven’t really ventured out and Victor is surprisingly a homebody.” Yuuri walked to a table, pulling a chair out for Mehar and watching her sit gracefully. He took a chair opposite her, smiling as the omega interacted with the waitress. He didn’t speak the language as well, but could understand she was ordering the breakfast buffet for them.

“Probably because he travels so much.” She then blushed, smiling as she was caught revealing her fangirl nature for the skating superstar. Yuuri smiled back. Soon one of the wait staff deposited a pot of tea and Mehar played mother. As her graceful hands poured out tea to his liking she started again, “My husband wanted to know more after we met last night so we looked you both up. Figure skating! Otabek has been wanting to try it. My husband is finally considering it.”

Yuuri smiled, he hadn’t been googled in years... more than a decade, and even then who would? “He should give it a try. Yura goes three days a week and there are several little boys in the class. Mila, in Otabek’s grade, goes five days, rotating dance and skating.”
Mehar took a sip from her cup, “That sounds demanding. She wishes to compete?”

Yuuri followed, drinking in the rich tea. It was a foreign flavor to him, but the taste was dark and very romantic. “That is her dream. It is demanding...but it gets in your blood and you don’t know how to live without the ice once you start. I’m working to regain ice privileges and hope to skate again soon.”

Mehar tilted her head, understanding that he spoke from personal experience. She reached over the table to pat his hand. “Surely with your alpha in charge of the program…”

Yuuri blushed and looked down. “Oh, no. I’m just a companion omega...for Yura. He’s not...exactly...my alpha…”

She laughed, her voice musical and inviting. “Oh, I think he is more than you realize. But these things sometimes take time.”

He shrugged, still blushing, but focused on the rest of her words. “I was underweight when I arrived so I’m having to gain so it’s safe to skate. I can understand not bending the policy for me. He has a number of skaters watching him for leadership.”

Mehar nodded, but something in her eyes suggested she believed Victor wasn’t protecting his reputation alone. “That makes sense. My husband has to think of these things as well.” She guided him through the familiar diner’s service and soon they were seated with porridge, an omelette, and a fresh pot of tea. “I remember when I moved in with my husband...before he was my husband, just my...ummm, owner?” She grimaced at the word and quickly added, “But not really. He would never think like that. Right from the beginning he made it clear he would make a way for us and that we were free. But he didn’t want us hurt. We were not quite sixteen.” She blushed, realizing she had rambled and stopped herself. Smiling at Yuuri the beautiful woman dug a fork into her omelette, “Where was I...Oh! Anyway, I ordered tea one day and received a glass mug with something they think is tea and it’s green with jam! Can you believe that? I grew up with milk tea.”

Yuuri smiled and hugged himself, enjoying her pleasant stream of conversation. “I was spoiled with tea. My mother makes her own blends, I’ll have her send some to me and share with you. My family owns a ryokan and onsen...it’s an inn with hot springs baths. They have a restaurant attached.” Yuuri blushed, realizing he too had rambled away from his thoughts. It was so easy to talk to this wonderful, engaging woman. “So, my mother is pretty particular about her tea. She couldn’t believe they put jam in tea here when I told her about it.”
Mehar leaned forward, as if she might start another revolution amongst the Russians if they overheard, “It’s just so wrong!”

They laughed and he knew he’d love getting to know her better. The breakfast was wonderful and Yuuri felt warmed and quickly filled. Mehar insisted on paying with the promise to let Yuuri pay next time. As she drove him home, he was wistful about leaving her car, enjoying the warmth she offered. Looking over to her, he murmured, “I’ll see you after school.”

Mehar smiled broadly knowing she had won a friend. “Yes, I look forward to it. We should do breakfast on a regular basis. Maybe a standing date? Yes?”

“I’d like that,” Yuuri answered with a soft smile.

Turning back to the home, he smiled as he felt lightened by the morning and practically bounced up the steps and into the foyer. Olga came out and greeted him. One look at his face told her everything and she chuckled at him. “You seem in good spirits.”

“I had breakfast with a friend,” Yuuri answered, and the happy bloom on his cheeks spoke volumes.

“I’m glad to hear that. Young people need lots of friends.” She lead him into the living room where she began to tidy up, cleaning the tops of furniture with her duster.

Yuuri laughed at that and responded cheekily, “So do older people.”

She shook her duster towards him with one hand on her hip. “I’ll have you know I’m not that old!”

Yuuri’s eyes sparkled before he took her in his arms, twirling her across the floor. “You do need to have more fun.”

“I have fun enough,” she laughed. “I have Durak on Saturday evenings when I don’t visit my sister and you lot keep me quite busy.”

Yuuri stepped back and studied her. She was a very happy and content person however he could
tell there was a loneliness to her. “And the grocer?”

She narrowed her eyes and smirked at him, “What do you know about him?”

Yuuri put on the best innocent lamb face he had, the one he used when Mari caught him thinking about smoking one of her cigarettes, and shrugged. He then danced away, calling back, “Only that he appears to like you...a lot!”

Victor had spent his morning watching over his skaters. Competition season was gearing up and they were entering a quad cycle, the beginning of the four years leading up to the Olympics. There were several skaters in both seniors and juniors who, if they stayed on track, and barring major injury, could put up one hell of a fight with the Japanese skaters. *If you still skated, how would you have fared against Uno and Yuzuru?*

He was now sitting with Yakov, listening to the older man’s worries. “You take too much on yourself. Three Grand Prix qualifiers? I know you don’t like to be away for so much.”

Victor looked up from his thoughts, the last sentence cutting through to his attention. “Technically, I’ll be taking Yura with me to Moscow. He and Nikolai take the time to visit family.”

Yakov sighed, shaking his head. “Still, it is time for Georgi to step up and be the assistant he was hired to be. He may have a young family but so do you. One more coach in the ranks will pull pressure off the rest of you.”

Victor shifted in his seat, “I’d like to wait to move him up until after Sveta comes off her maternity leave. If something were to happen during her pregnancy while he was away, I’d never forgive myself.” He watched Yakov preparing another argument and pointed out, “I stayed home with Yelena as much as possible. And it turned out to be a good thing.”

“Vitya...not every pregnant mate will end up with cancer,” the old coach said softly.

Victor’s eyes dropped and he drew a shaky breath. “If she hadn’t been pregnant, we could have gotten her the help she needed sooner...she may have survived.”
“Or she may not have...and she would have left no one behind to continue her legacy. You wouldn’t have your son, Nikolai wouldn’t have his grandchild.” Yakov watched Victor’s eyes move up to meet his. “Think where you both would be then.”

So painfully alone. Victor hugged himself, a habit he caught himself doing more since Yuuri came to live with him. “I loved her, you know. I know...those close to me think that it’s just because of Yura, but I truly loved her.”

The older man pulled out a bottle, pouring two glasses. He handed one to Victor, watching the younger man take it, swirling the liquor around slowly. “No one with eyes could doubt your love, Vitya. We’ve all witnessed your grief. But...it’s time to let it go. It’s time...to let yourself love again.”

Victor laughed hollowly then took a sip of scotch, letting it warm him. “You’re starting to sound like Chris.”

Yakov took a deep sip. Thinking of where he also needed to go in conversation, “This boy you’ve taken in...”

Victor rolled his eyes. “You definitely sound like Chris.” He let his eyes drift to the window that overlooked the main practice rink. Two girls on the ice were having a jumping contest and he wanted to go out there to put them back to work but something about watching their joy reminded him of Yuuri and the videos Victor had found on youtube. “He wants to skate, you know.”

Yakov huffed, following Victor’s eyes to the window. “It might do him some good.” He pounded on the glass, catching the girls’ eyes and circled his finger near his head. Watching the girls groan then move into run throughs. “We need someone to run figures. No edgework these days. How’s he improving?”

Victor laughed at the coach, ever the tyrant, ever the technician. “He’s eating now...and we don’t have to work so hard to distract him. That was a good idea.”

Yakov sat back at his desk, the chair, a relic from the soviet era, groaning under his weight. “I’ve worked with enough skaters that I’ve dealt with my fair share of eating disorders. Lilia as well.”

“It’s just that...he never intended to not eat.” Victor was quick to defend Yuuri, then his thoughts
darkened. “If I ever get my hands on that bastard…”

Yakov pursed his lips. *In the States and Canada they don’t have this. We need watchdogs at this rink.* “Did we ever get a confirmation?”

“Not from Yuuri…but I’ve talked to a few other skaters who recall seeing them together after Yuuri retired.” Victor sat forward, sipping off the rest of the scotch and putting the glass down hard on the desk. “I *know* it’s him…but I can’t do anything with that information.”

Yakov nodded, knowing all too well the frustration of seeing a villain and not being able to do anything about it. “We need Yuuri to make a statement in order to move forward with the investigation. Lilia’s got her contact with Interpol but she’s withheld Yuuri’s name until he’s ready to talk.”

“And with the ISU?”

The need in his mentee’s voice was apparent. He had worked with Victor since the skater was a child and could tell every emotion through his voice alone. “As soon as Yuuri states that he used his influence to manipulate him into a compromising position, we can get him suspended pending investigation.”

Victor crossed his arms and frowned. “I don’t want to hurt him further.”

Yakov paused, he inhaled deeply and pushed forward, hands folding on his desk. “I don’t either but Eiichi Tanaka is still missing.”

Victor nodded. He knew time was of the essence and the key to this case lived under his roof. “What if Chris or his friend Phichit comes forward?”

The bald head shook and the frown lines deepened, “We asked and they said they can’t move on their statements alone. It’s treated as hearsay.”

“I’ll see what I can do.” He rose, going to the door and paused. “Will you keep an eye on Yuuri while I’m away?”
From behind the desk Yakov smiled, another relic from the Soviet Era. “You know the answer to that, Vitya. I watch out for your entire makeshift family.”

Victor smiled, and the blush on his cheeks reminded the old coach of the boy he coached throughout the years.

Yuuri was coming back downstairs when he heard a knock on the front door. He ran up to it and peered through the window before opening the door cheerfully. Katya laughed and responded, “You’re cheerful.”

“I...am. I guess this is...happy.” He hugged himself, a soft blush covering his cheeks and neck. *Happy, and maybe a little bit confident.*

“You’re so adorable!” She followed him into the warmth of the house and then pulled the garment bag from behind her back. “So I picked this up! Why don’t you try it on and check the fit? Then I’ll help you decide on your hair and maybe...makeup?”

Yuuri blushed even harder then. He took the bag from her, but shifted a little at the mention of makeup, “I haven’t...not since I skated.”

Katya cut his self doubt off at the pass. “Well, you’re going on a date with a figure skating coach. I think it’s still deemed acceptable.”

Yuuri caught her tone, “It’s not a date…” He slowed in his bounce up the stairs and turned to ask, “You don’t think it’s a date, do you?”

Her eyes sparkled as she leaned on the banister and asked, “Do you want it to be?” Yuuri didn’t answer and she didn’t press, but when he turned to continue upstairs she couldn’t help but nod enthusiastically. She followed him up to his room and looked around while he went on into his bathroom to change. “This hasn’t changed much since Yelena,” she called out after a bit.

Yuuri came out dressed and went to the closet to retrieve his shoes. “What do you mean?”
Kayta sat on the edge of his bed, watching Yuuri bend to pick up his shoes. She nodded approvingly, the cut showed off his ass just like she wanted. “Yelena liked to be close to Yura and this became her room after he left the crib.”

Stepping into his shoes, he considered those words. “She didn’t stay in Victor’s room?”

Katya shrugged and her expression became wistful. “They had a very special relationship.”

Yuuri frowned as he reviewed what he had learned so far. *They were in love, very profoundly...but different bedrooms...* “Victor loved her...I see him looking at her picture with sadness.”

Katya smiled softly thinking of her departed friend, “Yes, he loved her greatly. They became best friends as children.”

Yuuri crossed the room to sit next to her on the bed. “And...Yura?”

The beautiful redhead sighed, “He...was why they were married.” She patted her knees and walked over to the vanity, pointing at the seat for him.

Yuuri knew he was missing a big piece of the puzzle but he could tell she wasn’t going to give him more and he wasn’t sure he wanted to push. *They loved each other, and that love helped create this wonderful little boy. That’s all I need to know.* He sat down in front of the mirror, a beautiful vanity from a bygone age. The entire room was decorated with a French country influence giving it a light and airy feel. He began to comb his hair back with a thoughtful frown. “I used to gel it in place.”

Katya looked at him, her fingers going through his hair, “I like it pushed back. It brings out your eyes and your cheekbones.”

Yuuri nodded as he considered his reflection. “I...have some eyeliner.” He opened the top drawer and pulled out a small makeup bag with a very basic stash of cosmetics. Looking up he saw her smile and explained, “Phichit came to visit me in Hasetsu before I left and insisted I have a few essentials.” He pulled the eyeliner out and handed her the bag to dig through. Investigating the liquid liner he ran the tip over his finger, checking to see the deposit, a trick from years ago. It took him a few minutes but he soon had acceptable wings. He blinked and studied them a moment before picking his glasses back up to see the result.
Katya handed him a tube of gloss. “Try this.” Yuuri made a face but she assured him, “It’s not waxy.”

The gloss went on smooth but softened the dryness from chewing his lower lip. He then considered the rest of the contents in the bag. With a liquid foundation and a beauty blender he evened out his tone, emphasizing the naturally elegant bone structure. Blush created a healthy glow and the addition of Northern Lights highlights on his cheekbones set his eyes flashing. He set the look with powder before turning to Katya for approval. “What do you think?”

She widened her eyes before smiling. “Wow, Yuuri!”

He blushed, but didn’t look away from her, “So, acceptable?”

A broad smile broke over her face as she grabbed his shoulders, “More than!”

He smiled shyly, his blush outdoing the makeup but softened by the powder. Looking at the clock, though, Yuuri knew he needed to clean up and get ready to pick up Yura.

“Why don’t I drive you?” Katya had already pulled her keys out as she spoke. “Really, I should take you every day since my sister needs to go as well.”

“I don’t want to be any trouble,” he murmured as he washed his face.

She snorted. “How is it any trouble? We’re going the exact same way.”

He smiled and shrugged before closing the door to change. Once dressed in more comfortable sweats and t-shirt, he followed Katya downstairs and out the door. “Wouldn’t it be terrific if we could be seen as attractive in just pajamas?”

“Says you and every woman, ever.” Katya held her hands up, praising the statement.

At the school, Yuuri spotted Mehar who was standing with both boys, Zaina, and Mila. She turned and greeted Yuuri as he approached and Yuuri introduced Katya.
“Otabek wanted to know if Yura could sleep over sometime soon,” Mehar invited.

Yuuri hummed as he considered but felt he needed to discuss it with Victor. “I need to talk to Yura’s father, but if he agrees, would Yura be able to stay tomorrow? Victor and I have a function to attend.”

“A date?” she asked, her eyes bright and sparkling.

_What is with everybody and this date?_ Yuuri started to deflect the question, saying, “noooo... not a date” but at the same time Katya answered positively, “it’s so definitely a date!”

Yuuri looked from one to the other and shook his head. “It can’t be a date...it’s part of our, ummm, employment agreement.” He only received eyerolls in response.

The Indian woman had seen how the alpha watched the omega the previous night. “Well, if you would like Yura to stay with us tomorrow for your ‘not-date’, just call me.”

“That sounds good.” He could see Yura jumping up and down in excitement at the possibility. As he guided his charge to the SUV, he stated to be clear, “I haven’t talked to your papa. He may not feel he knows Otabek’s family well enough.”

“But you let his mom drive you home this morning,” Yura argued.

Yuuri stopped for a moment, the little boy had been watching him from inside the school. “I did...but I’m an adult. You’re still a child and we have to be extra careful with you.”

This did not please Yura one bit. He puffed himself up quickly, asserting, “I can take care of myself!”

Yuuri sighed and then hugged him to his chest. “I thought that once, too. But then I was hurt.” He pulled back, looking at the little green eyes which softened with the admission. “I never want you to know that kind of pain. Okay?”
Yura sniffed, realizing he’d upset the omega and pulled in for a tighter hug, nodding into Yuuri’s neck. “Okay,” he answered softly, deflating and settling back into the seat.

Katya went to watch the kids skate, telling Yuuri to come get her after his appointment. “Maybe we can work out together.”

Yuuri smiled at her, knowing she was coming up with excuses to take care of him longer. His natural instinct used to be to push people away, mistaking their kindness for pity. But years with Shuji had taught him the value of kindness and how people wanted to show love. Climbing the stairs, he headed towards the familiar office and found Natasha reviewing his file. He backed up on the scale as he handed her the food log. “Olga has been keeping track of most of it so I’m not so conscious of how much I’m eating. I just add in the things I have on my own.”

Natasha hummed as she studied the journal and recorded his weight. “You’re doing much better. You’ve definitely gained. Just under a kilogram.”

Yuuri sighed at the thought. So far to go. “Ten kilograms feels like so much.”

The dietician closed the folder and focused on her patient, “What about ten kilograms feels too much?”

“It will just...take so long. I want to skate.” His hands spread wide, showing her his frustration.

She tapped her pen against the folder, “Well, I’d recommend the ten for training...but maybe I can talk to Yakov and Victor about low impact skating.” She stopped, seeing the brown eyes widened with expectation. “I wouldn’t recommend jumps but maybe something simpler.”

“Like figures?” Yuuri brightened.

Natasha chewed her lip, thinking, “We’ll see what they say. But you have to stick by their rules. If you deviate, they will ban you from the ice.”
Yuuri hugged himself and nodded, barely containing his excitement. He watched Natasha pick up the phone. The conversation was entirely in Russian and he squirmed in his chair nervously while he waited. Finally, she hung up with a look of consideration. “Yakov wants to visit with you before he agrees. Are you ready to speak with him?”

Yuuri hunched his shoulders in, reading her body language and knowing that he wasn’t walking into the easiest conversation. “Not really. I will...but...I remember him from when I skated. He’s rather...imposing.”

She snorted at his words. “He’s a grumpy old bastard...but really, he’s just a big old teddy bear. Keep that in mind when you meet him.”

Yuuri followed Natasha down the hallway and up another set of stairs. The office had a glass window that looked over the rink through which Yuuri could see Victor conducting practice. He smiled down at the sight but was brought back to the room when he heard a throat clear. Turning, he saw an older Yakov in a rumpled track suit, his grey hair loose and down to his shoulders, balding and freckled on top. The man was every bit as terrifying now as he was when the skater accidentally ran into him once at an international competition when he was a novice. Please don’t remember me. “H-hi?”

Yakov huffed and looked over the file brought to him by Natasha. “I’d leave this call up to Vitya but he wanted my judgment on it. He is afraid he’d be too lenient and you’d get hurt in the process.”

Yuuri blinked in confusion, “Sir?”

Yakov rolled back on his heels, the title was a welcomed change to the litany of other terms he was called. “The boy has a soft spot for you. And apparently so does Natasha. You probably have my team psychiatrist on your side, as well.”

Yuuri blushed, not sure what to say. “I just...would like to skate, sir. It doesn’t have to be anything more than just patch time.”

The old man hid his impression by turning to the window, joining Yuuri as they both looked out at the rink below. “Vitya said you taught dance and skating before you came here.”

Yuuri shrugged, “Just children...but then the parents wouldn’t let me teach them anymore.”
“Why not?” The old man’s eyes narrowed with suspicion at this new detail.

Yuuri looked down at his hands and he realized he’d been wringing them nervously. “My bond...was annulled,” he whispered.

Yakov looked at him incredulously and then snorted. “That’s all? Lilia and I have been separated and reunited I can’t remember how many times. That doesn’t affect my ability to coach, nor her ability to teach dance.” He turned, Yuuri turning to face the older man as well. “So...here’s my question. Did you like teaching?”

Yuuri looked up in surprise before nodding. “Very much so.”

“I see Yura with you...he’s difficult at best and you seem to have no problem with him.” His eyes drifted back to the ice as he weighed his words. “Vitya works too hard, takes too much on himself. I’d like to see Georgi taking some of the weight off of his shoulders. He’ll burn out, otherwise.” Turning back to look at Yuuri, he asked, “Do you think you’d like to work with the littles?”

Yuuri blinked in surprise. “I’d...love to. But I have Yura...”

“He will be in class with you,” Yakov pointed out.

“I...don’t speak Russian.” Yuuri said, almost as an apology.

“We are speaking English. There are many skaters at this rink using that as the common language, even some of the youngest are already enrolled in language classes.” He put a hand on Yuuri’s shoulder, feeling that while it was slender, it was steady. “I’m not going to put you in by yourself. You’ll be working with Georgi for the time being. And the language of the sport is universal...like ballet.”

Yuuri smiled, for the first time since stepping into the imposing coach’s presence, “And...I can skate?”

Yakov’s hand squeezed the shoulder and his eyes narrowed, “No jumps beyond singles, and only when you are demonstrating them...not until your weight is up five kilograms...then we can talk
Yuuri gasped, his eyes wide. It felt like he’d been given the world and he didn’t know what to do with it. “I’ll have to ask Victor.”

Yakov belted out a scoff, “He’ll agree...especially if he knows it makes you happy.”

Yuuri’s joy blazed, then deflated almost immediately. He took a step backwards, eyes falling. “I don’t own my own skates.”

The old man snorted at that. “I’m sure we can find a pair until you get some. And we keep a repair and sharpening team in house.” He then started guiding Yuuri to the door adding, “It’s a paid position. I know Vitya pays you for Yura’s care but this will give you a bit more.” He called out to an assistant and spoke to them briefly in Russian before turning back to Yuuri. “This is Liam. He’ll take you to get a pair of skates for now and I’ll meet you in ten minutes at the kiddie rink.”

Yuuri called out as the coach was already walking back to his desk, “Victor…”

Yakov waved him away, “I’ll take care of him.”

Yuuri found himself chasing after the youth who spoke too fast in a combination of languages and even if Yuuri could understand him, he was sure he wouldn’t follow. However, he soon had a pair of skates fitted to him and was headed to Yura’s practice rink. Katya brightened when she saw him hold up a pair of skates. “Yakov wants me to work with the kids!” Even he heard the excitement in his voice and he started when he felt an arm wrap around his shoulders. Looking up, he saw Victor’s warm smile.

“Yakov didn’t think you’d take his word alone. Do you want this?” The blue eyes looked down on his warmly.

Yuuri nodded eagerly. “I’m scared...I don’t know the language...but it’s ice, Victor.”

He laughed softly. “You should be fine with the puddleducks. Once you reach your five kilogram goal, we’ll reevaluate you and consider more responsibilities. This will be good, a transition period.” He waved Georgi over and reintroduced Yuuri. “Meet your new assistant. He’ll help you
“And I can wait until Sveta gives birth?” Georgi confirmed.

Victor smiled indulgently at the younger man. “Don’t worry. The travel assignments have been made through Nationals. You have until Europeans. I’d give you more time but Yakov is convinced I need a break.”

Georgi nodded sharply. “I can work with that time table. Thanks, Vitya.” Turning to Yuuri, he smiled broadly. “Well, Yuuri, shall we see how you are with the kids?”

Yuuri nodded. Soon he was on the ice scooping up fallen children and guiding them through their early skills. It was a learn to skate in every sense. Children, bundled up against the cold and gravity, were walked from one end of their portion of the rink to the other. There was no mention of edge work, muscles, or posture. It was entirely devoted to getting their sea-legs. Yura, initially with the more advanced children, wandered over from his class, beyond excited and the omega realized his most difficult task was not the language but his clingy baby boy.

However, when Mila’s group came on the ice, Yuuri did much better. Mila helped with any language issues and became his unofficial assistant. These children had survived the initial classes and were finally ready to begin really skating. Yuuri found working with them just as enjoyable. Mila was gifted as a skater, and at working with children. Maybe she could help when Georgi transitioned out? As class finished up, Yuuri sat next to Katya to talk while he removed his skates.

“We didn’t get that workout.” Yuuri sighed.

She winked, “Don’t worry about it. I think your schedule is about to see some changes. You may be here every day as well.”

He pulled off his skate, examining his ankle. Sure enough, boot bite ran up the inside of both legs. Not bad, but something he would remember. Okay, bunga pads for next week. He watched Mila putting away her skates in her Zuka and turned to Katya, pointing to the little girl. “What do you do if you work?”

“I have a couple of friends that will drop her off and Georgi takes her home.”
Yuuri smiled as he found a way to repay her kindness, “Maybe she can come home with us sometimes.”

Katya brightened at the promise. “I’d love that. And Mila can continue to help with your Russian. She’s very patient and it’s like a game to her. I couldn’t believe how quickly she picked up English.”

He waved as Katya and Mila left and then asked Yura if he could help him figure out where to return his borrowed skates. The five-year-old nodded eagerly and led the way.

Yura grabbed Yuuri’s hand as the older man slung his skate bag over his shoulder, “You’re going to be my teacher now?”

Yuuri smiled down at the eager eyes, “I think they are giving me a try for now...but I used to teach back home.”

Yura began to skip, “I can help, too...like Mila. With the Russian.”

Yuuri heard the jealousy in the little voice. “That would be wonderful, Yura. I’m going to start taking a class on Monday evenings, too. I just have to wait until your papa gets back from his trip.”

“Why do you have to wait?” a familiar voice asked and Yuuri turned to see Victor leaning against the wall. For a moment Yuuri felt his breath stop and Victor smiled all the brighter. Yuuri was very unaware how his features lit up on seeing Victor, who noticed it, but didn’t guess at the reason.

“I mean...I have Yura to take care of...and you’ll be gone.” He shifted back and forth on his feet, his cheeks pink, his shyness coming back as he looked down.

“Yuuuuriiii,” Victor began shaking his head. “I’m leaving Tuesday...and I’m sure Olga and Nikolai can handle Yura for one evening. My biggest concern is how you’ll get to the class.”

“I hadn’t thought about that,” Yuuri frowned. He hated the thought of public transportation in the daytime but downright detested it in the evening. However, he also hated to inconvenience anyone.
“Perhaps we can discuss this at dinner,” Victor suggested. “Olga and Nikolai may have some ideas. And I can drive you when I’m home.”

“I can’t ask you to do that,” Yuuri protested.

“So who’s asking?” Victor replied, a soft smile on his lips. He put his arm around Yuuri’s shoulders, leading him down the hallway. “Also, Monday, I’ll drive Yura to school and take you to get fitted for skates. My skaters are getting ready to travel and I have the morning off.”

“Victor!” Yuuri tried to argue but was stopped quickly.

“No arguments. I promised once you were approved to skate, I’d have a pair made for you.” He looked at the skates Yuuri was carrying, inspecting the edges, which were perfectly clean and impeccably sharpened...but not enough for Victor. “I can’t have you in cheap rentals.”

Yuuri tugged his hair and hunched his shoulders, a blush rising up into his cheeks. Victor wondered if he realized just how breathtaking he was when he did that.

At dinner, Nikolai scoffed at Yuuri’s arguments. “I’ll drive you if Vitya can’t. I don’t want you on those streets at night.”

“Especially so close to your heat,” Olga argued, clear concern in her eyes.

Yuuri blushed at the mention of his heat, his eyes dropping. “What about Yura?”

“Your class is after dinner...all that’s left is bath and story. I think I can handle that just fine,” Olga announced.

Victor just watched the family sort it all out. The way Nikolai and Olga had taken Yuuri in,
claimed him as part of their family, only confirmed what he felt...Yuuri was meant to be with them. He knew he didn’t have to worry about his son or Yuuri in his absence. He hated to be gone but at least they would both be in good hands. As Yuuri saw to his son’s bedtime routine, Victor tended to the call to Otabek’s father.

“Bekarys? It’s good to talk to you again so soon. My Yuuri said that Mehar invited Yura over for a sleepover...Tomorrow will be fine...Let me write down the address and I’ll drop him off before I take Yuuri out...Thank you. Perhaps we can watch Otabek for you sometime?”

NEXT TIME: “not a date” night!
I could have danced all night...

Chapter Summary

Date night...or is it not a date?

Chapter Notes

half a day early...but I've had to fight hard not to share this sooner...enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 18: I could have danced all night...

Victor had watched the young omega closely throughout the day and could tell Yuuri was a little freaked out by their social engagement. With a quick call, he was able to take one thing off the man’s plate. Soon he had his son loaded up in the car driving to the Altins’. It was only two but he had dinner reservations at six...and perhaps Victor also wanted to have one less thing on his mind.

Yura bounced in his seat excitedly jabbering about his plans with Beka for the remainder of the day, the evening, and the following morning. Victor listened patiently, praying that his animated son would allow anyone in that house to sleep. However, when a glance in the backseat showed Yura dangerously close to wiggling free of his seat Victor warned him to settle down or the seatbelt wouldn’t do its job properly. Finally, he pulled up to the address given to him and climbed out of his car before seeing to his son. As they walked up the front he noticed how well manicured the side garden was, and flawless the front appeared. Considering the area they were in a home of this size was very expensive. Victor couldn’t help but wonder about the rank of this consulate. He knew that Kazakhstan had a Consul General office in St. Petersburg.

Yura pulled his backpack onto his back. He’d gone back and forth about which stuffed animal to bring and finally decided on the ballerina tiger. The little boy ran up the walk and the small plushie fell from his grip. Victor bent to pick it up and return it but stilled. He brought the toy to his nose, inhaling deeply. Yuuri.

Little green eyes smiled at his papa. “I wanted to show it to Beka, and tell him about my mama.” He received the toy back from his father and buried his nose in it quickly. “But I didn’t think I would be okay away from Yuuri. So he scented it extra good for me.”
Victor smiled, “That was very smart of you, and very mature.” Rising, he tousled the blond hair.

Yura grew a little shy for a moment, “Beka doesn’t talk to me like I’m a baby. You don’t think he’ll think...about my tiger...”

Victor took his son’s hand, “Beka seems like the very best kind of friend to me. I think he will respect the things you hold dear.” His son beamed up at him, then resumed skipping to the front door, at least waiting patiently while Victor knocked.

The door opened and they were shuffled in by the housekeeper who had only just gotten Yura’s coat hung up when Rohan came out of the office. “Oh, you’re here!” The man came forward with his hand reaching out for Victor. “Bakarys was called into the office to deal with a matter regarding one of our citizens. However, he left me here to keep an eye on the children.”

“I thought Mehar was left in charge of the children,” Victor asked and then blushed at his assumption, shaking the offered hand to cover his embarrassment.

Rohan smiled benignly. “I am left in charge quite often, although Mehar is normally the one running the house. I tend to be with Bakarys at the office or in classes. But on weekends, I like to give my sister a break.”

“I understand you’re studying politics,” Victor smoothed over, showing an interest in the male twin.

Rohan seemed to brighten, his shyness slipping as he warmed to this older man. “I am! I know it’s unusual for an omega but Bakarys encourages me to not allow my secondary gender to become a limitation. In fact he’s often said it can be an advantage.”

Victor smiled wide, “I’m glad to hear that...I’ve encountered some nations in my travels that almost treat an omega as a second class citizen.”

Rohan saw Victor’s eyes grow dark as he remembered some of the interactions he’d witnessed. However the omega tilted his head, seeming to understand that Victor wasn’t speaking solely of the past. “I watched how you treated Yuuri at the assembly. He...has old sadness. But he seems happy now. Some omegas are lucky to have good alphas. Others have opportunities that give them greater independence. However, so many others are oppressed or even sold or traded like my sister...
and myself. I want to work to bridge that gap. Bekarys provides me a way to do this. I hope to one day speak to the United Nations and affect positive change for omega rights.”

“That sounds like an amazing goal. For now, I want my Yuuri to find his feet and to move forward. He hasn’t been with us long but is already reclaiming his independence.” Victor brightened, finding common ground between Yuuri and this interesting young man in front of him. “He’s enrolled in classes online and is talking about taking a class to study the language. I’m thankful he’s made a number of good friends since coming to stay with us.”

“He is...not your mate?” Rohan asked, his eyebrow furrowing in confusion.

Victor smiled and shook his head. “We have a contract to protect his rights...something I felt was important. He has to sign a waiver in order for me to pursue him in courtship...if he’s interested in something like that, of course.”

Rohan considered his words, a small smile coming to his lips as the alpha stammered out his last words. “I think...Bakarys did this too...without a contract. But neither of us wanted to risk another alpha...Bekarys is...safe. And my sister has deep affection for him. As for me, I’m not...that way. I don’t...desire that kind of closeness. So Bekarys...is safe.”

Victor nodded, coming to understand the younger man was asexual. “I understand and respect that. I came from a bonded relationship of mutual respect...and not necessarily intimacy. But...I have Yura.”

“Perhaps...I won’t have children.” Rohan shrugged easily. “I have my...nephew and niece? Sometimes relationships are hard to define.”

Victor smiled at the omega, “The title doesn’t matter as long as there is love.” He stopped, thinking that he had always believed those words, but somehow they felt truer today.

Then Yura ran up to him and pulled on his hand asking, “Can I go with Beka to the zoo tomorrow?”

“I had planned to pick you up around ten.” Victor frowned, seeing the disappointment in his son’s face. “I’m leaving town so I would like to spend as much time as possible with you before I have to go.”
Yura sighed but nodded in resignation, understanding but clearly torn.

Victor smiled down at his son before kneeling before him and pulling him into a hug. “Call Olga if you need anything. Yuuri and I will be at the party until late.”

“Okay, Papa. Love you.” The little boy was already pulling away, clearly eager to return to his friends.

“Love you more,” Victor called after him, a fond smile on his face as he watched his son run off to play with his friends.

“We will take care of him,” Rohan promised.

“Thank you,” Victor appreciated before leaving his son in their care.

Yuuri had his phone propped up on the mirror, opened to Facetime, and the computer he borrowed from Victor for classes opened to Skype. Both Phichit and Katya talked with him back and forth as he got ready. Yuuri had already watched a tutorial on perfecting his wing, and now needed his friends for a morale booster disguised as a last minute make up session. Both had agreed to help with last minute make up approval, neither believed that was truly what this was. Katya and Phichit knew their friend, and knew that this was to help keep his nerves in check as he got ready.

“It’s not like it’s a date,” Yuuri argued. He worked the upper lid line slowly, moving across and then slightly up. “I doubt Victor even thinks of me that way.”

He received two pairs of eyes rolling hard at him. “Yuuri, Yuuri,” Phichit complained. “You underestimate your appeal.”

Yuuri snorted at that and stuck his tongue out at Katya who was applauding Phichit. “What appeal? I had to learn how to put on eyeliner from a drag queen on YouTube. I have no idea how to be alluring. Shuji had me locked down at fourteen. I barely knew I was even omega at that point, and sure as hell didn’t know how to be one.” He then met Katya’s eyes seeing they were round as saucers. “My ex was not a nice man,” was all he explained.
Katya gaped. “At fourteen...that’s not even legal!”

“Apparently if you don’t report it until after sixteen, they take the alpha’s word over yours,” Yuuri answered wryly. He shook off the memories, though. He didn’t want Shuji to steal this moment, whatever it was, from him. He held up the highlighter, and seeing them both nod began applying it.

Phichit picked up on the switch and redirected the conversation. “I think you need to add the lashes.”

Yuuri smirked, “I haven’t added lashes in years.”

“But you’ve got them. I made sure of it.” Phichit tsked. “Take them, cut the far ends off and apply only those. It will look more realistic and it’s cuter.”

Yuuri sighed, throwing a pained look at his friends before fishing them out of his bag. He began studying the instructions then nodded as he remembered the process. “I think the last time I did this, I was with you.”

“Yeah...that was a good night.” Phichit giggled thinking of his friend. “You were convinced the glue would shut your eye.”

Yuuri started laughing, “It would have if you used the glob you were about to put on me!”

Katya watched both men laugh, then slowly the laughter quieted and their smiles fell as they darkened. Both men recalled why it had been the last time Yuuri applied lashes. Right after, he had been prevented from attending any more skating events, locked into a house full of fear and abuse...all because he didn’t stay under his alpha’s watchful eye. Phichit pretended to knock something from the table as an excuse to leave their view for a moment, wiping away a tear in the corner of his eye.

On his end of the conversation Yuuri sighed. He frowned critically and began picking up every mistake in his reflection. There was an impossible miniscule jiggle in the line, neither friend could see it but Yuuri insisted it existed, and a slight smudge in the shadow, again imperceptible to anyone other than the highest critic...Yuuri. Pulling out the blender to work it again his hand shook.
“Yuuri, what’s the name of the restaurant you’re going to again?” Phichit saw the tremor in his friend’s hand, the worry on his face, and immediately began to distract him.

“Oh, uhm...Sintoho.” Yuuri stilled as he answered.

Katya picked up on the hint, joining in, “Oh I’ve never been there, but I’ve heard it’s really good. What do you think you’ll get?”

“I’m hoping sushi, there was a roll I loved, tempura shrimp and avocado…” He put the unused blender back in the drawer.

“Sounds good. You look fantastic.” Phichit changed his voice to his Yuuri whisperer tone. “Now, I want you to take a deep breath, breathe in.”

Yuuri smiled, but followed orders. Breathing in, feeling himself calm, breathing out.

“You got this?”

“I got this.”

He opened his eyes, his two friends were trying to figure out how to high five in their viewers and Yuuri couldn’t contain the laugh at their silliness.

Finally, he turned back to the two friends and asked, “What do you think?” Brown eyes highlighted with plums to pull out the reds and golds were framed in wing-tipped liner and extra long lashes. He added the gloss while they both offered praise and whistles, Katya going further to tell him he had to help her achieve that good of a wing tip. Yuuri rolled his eyes, certain they were making it all up so he’d feel better.

He glanced at the clock and knew it was about time to leave. Bidding his farewells, he dressed in the dark, slim-fitted suit with a red vest. The black, white, and red tie pulled it all together. He pushed his hair back and worked with it until it fell a little messily. Studying his reflection in the mirror, he resisted the urge to chew his lip before taking a deep breath and slipping out his door.
“Here goes nothing,” he muttered under his breath. In his head he heard Phichit’s voice correcting, *here comes everything.*

Yuuri peeked over the edge to study Victor before he made his entrance. Below him in the foyer, Victor stood in an aubergine bespoke suit, the wider tie and pocket square holding a subtle paisley in the design. The cut of the suit only enhanced Victor’s athletic form. Yuuri stood frozen for a moment, torn between ready and not ready. How could he stand next to this man?

Then Victor looked up, lifting blue eyes to take in the beautiful omega as he descended the stairs, his breath stolen as he beheld the vision before him. Beauty didn’t begin to describe the graceful man approaching him, sumptuous brown eyes dropping shyly as he negotiated the stairs. Victor took in the makeup, the soft lay of the hair, the posture, the outfit, the gentle curves, the sway of the hips, and then deeper, the man, as Yuuri lifted his eyes to meet Victor’s. He could clearly see Yuuri was nervous but took his hand and gave it a squeeze.

“You know me, you don’t need to be afraid,” he murmured softly.

Yuuri smiled as his eyes dropped once more, a shy blush coloring his cheeks. “I haven’t...done anything like this in so long.” *Ever. I haven’t done this in...ever.*

“Then it’s high time...beauty and grace like yours is not meant to stay hidden away.” The complement earned the reward of an adorably deepening blush as Victor settled Yuuri’s coat on his shoulders. Yuuri hooked a hand on Victor’s elbow and the alpha patted the slender fingers that rested there. “Are you ready?”

Yuuri struggled to find the confidence he had only moments before, and not trusting his voice only nodded. Victor led him out the door, opening the waiting car door. Yuuri settled into the seat, already warm from the heat Victor had started moments before for his comfort. He sucked in a breath of surprise when Victor knelt down to buckle him in. Yuuri’s eyes sought his and they held each other’s gaze for the longest moment. “If I forget to tell you, I had a great time. Thank you for taking care of me.”

Victor blushed, patting his thigh lightly before standing up and closing the door. Outside of the, and unobserved, he lifted his eyes to the sky. Stars already shining, and focused on those as he caught his breath. Yuuri had certainly stolen it away. He knew the omega was beautiful. One glance and no one could deny it. He didn’t expect that beauty to go on display for him. Victor didn’t know what amazed him more, Yuuri’s ability to make himself even more stunning, or that the omega would go through such lengths for him. Moving to the driver’s side, he soon had the car in gear and negotiated into traffic.
Yuuri watched him, the silence starting to unnerve him. Drawing his words in order, he asked, “Do you like sushi?”

Victor nodded, keeping his eyes on the traffic. “I do...but I also thought you might like something familiar.”

Yuuri smiled, trying to ignore the permanent blush on his cheeks. “I haven’t had any since Japan. Thank you.”

“I guess I haven’t taken the time to show you around St. Petersburg.” Victor’s voice was lighter now. “Once the cycle is over we can explore the city more. The white nights are beautiful.”

“I’d like that.” Yuuri warmed at the thought of seeing more of his new city. “I didn’t get out much in Japan. Not unless Shuji was out of town.”

Victor glanced over and realized Yuuri didn’t notice the slip of tongue. “I want you to enjoy St. Petersburg and to feel at home here.” He focused on keeping his voice steady, but Yuuri had accidentally confirmed what Victor suspected.

Yuuri turned and offered a genuine smile. “I do feel at home here...I’ve met so much kindness.”

“And some that are not so kind,” Victor responded with a sigh, remembering the teacher.

Yuuri shrugged, his eyes drifting out the window. “It’s not worse than Japan...in many ways better. Here I feel a certain measure of...insulation. I’m not harassed nearly as much as when I was home. The best part is when I can’t deal, someone is always ready to help me out.”

Victor pursed his lips, thinking of how Yuuri had grown so accustomed to harassment that it slipped into his sense of normalcy. “You shouldn’t be forced to accept harassment of any sort as a norm.”

Yuuri tilted his head as he considered Victor’s words. “It’s hard, I suppose, when you don’t deal with it...this is my norm. People say things to me they would never speak in front of their mates...they leer at me...I’m touched and pinched. Sometimes people pretend it was by accident,
other times people don’t even bother to do that. And that’s a good day out. It makes me want to stay home if I’m not with someone. It impedes my independence. People assume that because I’m unmated at my age, there must be something wrong with me as an omega, as if I’m less, as if I’m...you know, that kind of omega.” He shrugged, letting himself drift once more.

Victor considered Yuuri’s words and recalled those from Rohan. “No one should have to mate someone in order to feel safe.”

“I agree,” Yuuri answered quietly. “Even those matings aren’t always safe. But until society changes, we face these decisions.”

Victor remained quiet for a moment, thinking of Yuuri’s life and his range of options. “I hope...you feel safe with us.”

Yuuri turned and offered a beautiful smile. “I do...it is...refreshing...to stay somewhere and not think about what is wanted of us, of me.” Yuuri looked at Victor, the blue eyes were focused on the road ahead of them, both hands on the wheel. He considered the man sitting next to him. Victor was astounding in his sincerity. How many times did I watch you skate, even after you were retired? I could see all of your love, pain, everything, out there on the ice. But it was barely the tip of the iceberg. You have such a great capacity for love in you, and you give it freely to so many. Yuuri grew thoughtful as he watched the man, the skater turned father, sitting next to him. You are so much more than what I had ever imagined. “To be honest, with most alphas, this situation right here would hold an inherit expectation for after...the date.” Yuuri held his breath. Would Victor deny that it’s a date? Is it a date?

“I would never put you in that position,” Victor protested, his lips thin.

“I know,” Yuuri murmured, his eyes dropping to the hands folded on his lap. Oh my god, we’re on a date. But now I made him feel like crap. I really do suck at this. My first date and I practically accuse Victor of bad intentions. He looked back at Victor who still looked a little worried. Taking a deep breath, he thought about Victor’s sincerity once more, “Victor...you are unfailingly kind. I don’t think you realize how rare that quality is today. And in turn, you’ve introduced me to other kind people. I don’t have to worry about being out with you...or home with you. And if someone hits on me, I know you won’t blame me for it.”

Victor accepted the compliment with ease but it was as he parked the car that the last part of that statement caught up to him. He frowned as he got out of the car thinking about his Yuuri hidden away from the world and made to feel every bad thing was his fault. He closed his eyes and focused his thoughts. The last thing he wanted to do was project those thoughts onto Yuuri. Opening the door he reached in to hand Yuuri out of the car. The omega’s brown eyes lifted up as a smile rested on his countenance. As Yuuri stood up, Victor tucked his hand into his elbow and
led him into the restaurant.

“I haven’t been to Sintoho in some time but I think you will enjoy it. I believe it’s one of the best Asian restaurants in St. Petersburg…and it’s lovely inside.”

They entered and Yuuri’s eyes immediately went up to the red and white glass sculpture hanging from the ceiling, his lips parting in appreciation, before turning and bowing towards the host showing them to their table. He felt Victor’s hand on the small of his back then looked up appreciatively as his seat was pulled back for him. “Thank you,” he murmured.

Victor took the plush bench seat across from him. When the server arrived with the menu, Victor asked if it was available in either English or Japanese for his companion. The waiter happily was able to provide either, and Yuuri found himself looking at a menu delightfully printed in Katakana. They discussed back and forth which to try, Victor wanting something with ikra (caviar) and Yuuri found himself so homesick for familiar flavors he wanted all the Japanese foods. And Victor was willing to order. It. All. But Yuuri stopped him, laughing at his extravagance. When Victor pouted, Yuuri just smiled shyly and answered, “It gives you a reason to bring me again.”

And with that promise…a promise of another “definitely a date” sitting between them…Victor settled on them trying several things, sharing between the two of them with the promise of ordering more of something if they really liked it. They started with the smoked eel and moved onto the botan ebi and akami sushi along with hamachi maki. Victor added in a variety of sashimi and several things with caviar.

As they continued talking back and forth, Victor found himself making a fascinating study of Yuuri’s expressions as he enjoyed one offering and the way he wrinkled his nose and promptly set down another. The only thing that would make it better was if Yuuri would let him feed him. He smiled at that thought but Yuuri noticed and asked, “What?”

Victor waved off the question a moment. He didn’t want to scare Yuuri off, so told half the truth. “I was just thinking about what we’d eat if you and I were in Japan.”

“In Japan…” Yuuri considered for a moment, titling his head from side to side, “I think we’d have to explore all of the shops and decide which were best…but as for katsudon, that would be my mother’s.”

“I’d like to go there with you…someday,” Victor felt the weight of his words as his eyes dropped down to the food. He mentally chastised himself for being too forward, but then looked back up at Yuuri, pausing on that lovely face for a moment, before Victor’s eyes began darting around the
room nervously. “I mean, I do take a vacation at the end of the season.”

“I know…” Yuuri shifted in his seat, “don’t you normally visit your family?”

Victor shrugged, not noticing Yuuri’s reticence. “I can do that on a long weekend. I think I’d like to take Yura and show him something other than Russia. That would be good, don’t you think?”

Yuuri looking down at his plate, picking up his chopsticks then laying them down. Finally he confessed, “I’m not ready to go home. I don’t...feel safe there.”

Victor blinked at Yuuri’s words before he whispered, “Oh.”

Yuuri’s jaw tightened a moment and then Victor watched the omega take a measured breath and let it out, and with a wave of his hand, he suggested, “Why don’t we talk about something else?”

Victor smiled and quickly nodded, “Okay...what do you think of working with the kids? I bet you hadn’t thought you’d come all the way to Russian just to pick up three year olds.”

This brightened Yuuri’s expression and Victor watched him relax back into the meal. Soon he was talking about Mila working on her first axel and how she squealed in excitement at the accomplishment. “Children are so open with their excitement and I love the looks of determination on their face. They aren’t afraid to make mistakes.”

Victor smiled, “That's why they make strides faster than adults.”

“I agree...it’s all about just getting the coordination and learning that falling on ice doesn’t really hurt that much.” Yuuri smiled as he watched Victor chuckle in understanding.

As they finished dinner, Victor paid while Yuuri disappeared into the bathroom to clean up. He followed and did a quick brush of his teeth and touched up his appearance. Finally satisfied, he met Yuuri outside and asked, “Are you ready?” He then noticed Yuuri was a little disconcerted and distressed while eagerly nodding, his eyes moving back and forth as Victor guided him out.

As he knelt before Yuuri buckling him in, he asked softly, “Do you want to talk about it?”
Yuuri waved back towards the restaurant. “Just...a stupid alpha acting the part. So no...I don’t want to talk about it.”

Victor frowned, hating that there were plenty of alphas out there giving them a bad name. “Very well...I’m sorry, though, that you had to encounter that.”

Yuuri shook his head. “No, I’m going to focus on the good tonight. I won’t let him steal our fun.”

Victor smiled and nodded, reluctantly standing and letting his hand fall away from Yuuri’s lap. Securing the door, he moved to his side of the car. Sliding into his seat, he reached for Yuuri’s hand and gave it a squeeze. “At this event, if anyone makes you feel uncomfortable, move towards familiar company, me if possible, but pretty much any of my skaters will look out for you.”

“Why?” Yuuri asked, his eyes open with surprise and curiosity.

*Because you’re mine.* Victor smiled at the thought, his jaw tightening, as he negotiated into traffic. “They know you are a part of my household and will look out for you on that merit alone but some, they’ve seen you...and respect you.”

Yuuri couldn’t help his eyes from going wide, “Oh...but I’m just Yuuri. There’s never been anything special about me.”

“You were junior world champion and were working your way up in the seniors,” Victor pointed out.

Yuuri shrugged, his eyes moving to the window. “It...was a nice dream.”

Still, as they arrived, Yuuri found himself surprised that some of the older sponsors and coaches remembered him. Many pulled him aside, talking about one of his programs or performances that they recalled. He smiled at the questions about coaches and costumes they associated with him. He listened as they told stories but would create a reason to leave quickly and drift away when they started asking why he disappeared. He finally spotted Katya and whistled appreciatively at the lovely black dress she wore, Mila dressing to match. As she observed the blush in his cheeks and the pitch of his giggle, she asked with a grin, “just how many glasses of champagne have you had?”
Yuuri looked at his glass with a frown. “I’m not quite sure. Every time I meet someone new, they give me another glass.”

She smiled but seemed more concerned than amused, “Oh, Yuuri...how are you feeling?”

He giggled and shrugged. “It’s fine...everything is fine.”

Then the meeting and greeting was past and the music began to play and Yuuri slipped into Victor’s arms. “Dance with me,” he demanded dramatically.

Victor laughed and answered, “With pleasure.”

Katya watched from Pyotr’s side, her sister sitting nearby with a couple of other younger skaters playing their handheld games. “He’s pretty sloshed.”

Pyotr looked over at the couple. To his eyes the Japanese man appeared tipsy at best, and Victor was thoroughly enjoying himself. “Let the boy have some fun, Katya. We’ll keep an eye on him. Besides, Vitya isn’t going to let him leave with anyone else.”

As Katya watched the two of them dance together, she hummed in agreement. They moved well together, but every time Victor’s hand touched Yuuri, there was a slight tilt of the wrist, scenting him, claiming him, making sure everyone knew who he belonged to. And they looked good together, Yuuri leading as much as he followed.

“Damn, that boy can dance!” Pyotr hummed in agreement.

After several songs passed, Victor was called away to check on a skater and Katya took his place, enjoying her friend’s playful vibe. Before Victor returned, Yuuri had also danced with Georgi and Sveta, and even Pyotr. Mila stood on his feet and giggled as Yuuri twirled her around.

Victor returned, watching as Yuuri gracefully danced Katya around the floor. He was amazed at how, even tipsy, the younger man moved with an elegance that was breathtaking. He came up to Yuuri and whispered, “Come on, beautiful, let’s get you home.” Yuuri whined but agreed, leaning in so his head rested on Victor’s shoulder. The alpha chuckled as he practically had to dance Yuuri
out the door. Katya offered to help and followed them out. Pyotr was behind her carrying Mila, falling asleep on his shoulder.

Yuuri giggled and spun out of his arms laughing as Victor guided him to the car. Finally, Yuuri was in the car and Victor leaned in to fasten his seatbelt. Yuuri’s hand slid up his arm to cup his cheek. “You always take such care of me.”

Victor took a beat, the warm of Yuuri’s hand on his face melted him, “It’s my pleasure, Yuuri.”

Yuuri’s head leaned back, his eyes closing. “I wish...you found me first.”

Victor watched Yuuri with a sad expression. *If only I could have spared you your pain.* Moving away, he slowly stood up, finding Katya leaning against the car. She’d heard the omega’s words and her expression was as pensive as Victor’s. As the alpha closed the door, she murmured, “He was fourteen...a baby. That bastard stole him away as a baby.”

Victor closed his eyes. He’d suspected as much. “We’re trying to find him so he can’t hurt anyone else but Yuuri won’t open up to me. Not really. Just slips of the tongue. I don’t want to force it. And I can’t go on hearsay. I have to have Yuuri willing to talk to Yakov and the officials. Interpol needs to get involved with this.”

Katya nodded as she considered his words. “I’ll see what I can do. He does talk to me.”

Victor looked back in his car, the omega was sleeping comfortably in the warm seat. “I wish...he’d tell me what happened.”

Katya put a hand on his arm. “I think he’s afraid he’ll lose everything, Vitya...and I don’t think he could handle that. This is the first place he’s felt stable and independent and safe for a very long time.”

Victor sighed, “I know. I just wish...you know there is nothing he would say that would push me away.”

His friend smiled, reaching out to squeeze his hand. Pyotr started to approach and Katya sighed. “I’ve got to go. Be careful going home.”
Victor laughed. “I will...I stuck to the one glass of champagne rule.” Glancing towards his date, he added, “I’m glad, though, that he had fun.”

“She’s got.” She waved and headed to Pyotr who helped her into the passenger side of the SUV. Victor smiled at the two of them. He’d like to see them together...if Pyotr could get past the we’re just friends idea. God, Katya was crazy about him. But Pyotr would have to make the first move. Katya wouldn’t. Not with Mila.

“I felt like that before Yuuri...like I couldn’t have love. Not with a kid. And I wouldn’t trade that kid for all the love in the world. Maybe...I don’t have to .” He climbed in and smiled as Yuuri shifted, his cheek against the seat, his eyes closed. Adorable even in his sleep.

At home, he had fun helping Yuuri into the house. The omega giggled and he ended up waltzing him to the stairs and then throwing the omega over his shoulder to get him up the stairs because Yuuri couldn’t seem to sort out the steps. As he settled Yuuri onto the bed, Yuuri was singing something...it sounded Japanese.

“Pajamas?” Victor asked. Yuuri pointed to the dresser where Victor was standing. That was a lot of help. He began to dig around and found the drawer, pulling out pants and shirt. He then came over to help Yuuri get undressed. Yuuri giggled and Victor learned even as he laughed along with the omega that Yuuri was ticklish. Somehow they managed to get the jacket off, the sweater, and finally the button up. He left the undershirt on, not wanting to invade Yuuri’s modesty and helped him to slide the long sleeved sleep tee over his head.

“Now for the pants .” Victor was nervous about helping Yuuri out when all of the sudden the omega surged up. “I’ve got to go pee!”

Victor laughed and handed him the pajama bottoms. “Well, put these on while you’re at it.” Yuuri looked at them confused for a moment, then nodded at the bottoms, as if agreeing to what they were. He took them from the hand and disappeared into the bathroom but didn’t bother to close the door. As Victor heard him relieving himself, he began picking up the clothes and putting them on the hangers. They’d have to be laundered before they went back into Yuuri’s closet. Too many scents and Yuuri was getting close to his heat.

Too close. And I’m heading out of town. He pulled out his phone and saw it was set just days after
he got back. He didn’t like his omega being unprotected so close to heat. Except...he knew Yuuri would be protected. Every one of his friends and family who had met him, fell in love with him. They would all work to keep him safe.

“Viiiiktoooru,” Yuuri slurred from the bathroom.

“What is it, Yuuuri?” he called back in answer.

“I can’t do this.” The defeat in Yuuri’s voice would have broken Victor’s heart if he didn’t know Yuuri was at war with his pants and nothing more serious.

Victor sighed and went into the bathroom and took a moment to enjoy watching Yuuri attempting to step into the pajama pants, which were simply in a pile on the floor. Chuckling, he went to help the boy not focusing on the cute black briefs hugging his even cuter derriere. Between the two of them, they got the pajamas on, Victor teasing him. “Just how many drinks did you have?”

Yuuri awkwardly held up his fingers to make an eight although Victor could bet that wasn’t an accurate count. “This many.”

“Uh huh...we might have to talk about drink limits.” He put Yuuri’s arm around his shoulder and walked him into the bedroom.

“I’ve never had alcohols before...Shuji wouldn’t let me,” Yuuri pouted. “I don’t think he wanted me to have any fun.”

Victor’s smile softened with wistfulness. “I want you to have fun, Yuuri...but only if it’s safe. Okay?”

Yuuri nodded before sliding into his arms, his cheek resting on Victor’s shoulder. “You smell so good, Victor,” he whispered thickly, fingers starting to play with the buttons of the alpha’s shirt and Victor knew things were moving into dangerous territory quick.

“Thank you, Yuuri,” he murmured. “Let’s get you tucked in, solnyshko. I think you need to sleep.”
As Victor tugged the blankets up to Yuuri’s neck, the omega murmured, “Stay with me...please.”

Victor felt his alpha nature surge forward, *just sleep here...Nope!* He pulled himself up, “Oh, honey...if you only knew how badly I want to say yes.” Victor leaned forward and brushed a kiss onto Yuuri’s forehead, his wrist sliding over the pillow and part of the bedding so that his scent would linger and comfort the omega. “I wish I wasn’t leaving for the next two weeks,” he added, hearing the change in his own voice. *I’ve got to get out of here quick.* He swallowed as Yuuri’s hand slipped from the covers and around his neck. The wrist flicked quickly against his gland and Victor was granted the scent of cinnamon, cloves, and maybe ginger...he could feel the sharpened scent of want coming from the omega and knew he was producing plenty of matching pheromones. Yuuri pulled him in for a kiss, just on the surface, exploring the softness of Victor’s lips, before letting him go. Victor’s eyes held Yuuri’s for the longest moment.

“Good night, *solnyshko.*” Victor winced at the thickness of his voice. He needed to escape...and maybe take a shower. A very cold shower.

Yuuri’s laugh chased him as he headed to the door followed by a whispered “Good night, Vitya...”

Victor stilled by the door facing as *that* word, *that* name, slipped off Yuuri’s lips. Glancing back, he could see Yuuri already slipping off into sleep...Victor was sure it would be a while for himself. He doubted Yuuri would remember the kiss...and if he did, would think it was only a dream. Victor had a lot to think about.

Chapter End Notes

And that was the banquet night replayed in this world. Thoughts?
Yuuri stretched and yawned as the sunlight filtered into his room through the curtain. Shifting beneath the sheets he felt a reluctance to leave the scent of cedar and fresh snow that seemed imbued in their fibers. He smiled happily until he opened his eyes. The glare of the sun hit his eyes and ignited every nerve in his body. Frowning and wincing at the sharp pain, he suddenly became aware of other pains; the dull ache over his body and the slight throb in his head. With a groan, he shoved back the covers and realized his undershirt was on under his sleep shirt. He studied the bedding, bringing it to his nose and breathing in deeply. His body relaxed and the aches began abating as he indulged in the aroma. His initial thought was that Victor’s scent had followed him to bed after they danced but now he wasn’t so sure.

As he stood up, he felt the nausea and slight dizziness but he stumbled his way to the bathroom and then the shower, keeping the contents of his stomach in. The running water helped wash away that last of the pain in his head and settle his stomach. However, it was under that running water he started replaying the evening, realizing there were huge skips...including how the evening ended. His frown deepened; he felt out of sorts and nervous at the missing bits of narrative for last night. He didn’t exactly feel unsafe… he had been with Victor and therefore, protected. Somehow, he felt like he should be embarrassed but couldn’t figure out why.

Finally dressed in the most comfortable clothes he owned, he headed down to the heart of the house. Olga, of course, was in the kitchen and turned, took one look at him, and laughed heartily. “You had a rough night, it seems.”

Yuuri’s eyebrows shot up, well at least one of us knows what happened. “I...I think most of it was...
good. I'm not so sure about the rest.”

He watched as her smile thinned but then she started moving about the kitchen. The older hands busily pulled ingredients from almost every corner; items from the fridge, the pantry, even the freezer went into the mixture. He frowned, seeing her take a whiff and remove it quickly with repulsion. Crossing the room, she placed the glass before him. Yuuri eyed it warily but she ordered, “Drink! You’ll feel better.”

He looked down into the glass offered, and pushed it away. Olga’s hands were there instantly to push it right back. Two brown eyes turned up to see the firm resolve in her face. It was a battle of wills and Yuuri knew he was going to lose. The omega highly doubted her words but sighed and slowly lifted the earthy liquid to his lips. The first sip was met with a grimace and she laughed at him once again. “You don’t sip it. Hold your nose and down it as quickly as possible.”

He did as he was told and fought the urge to hurl as he gulped it down. Finally free of the offending liquid, he gasped. “What the fuck!”

She only laughed once more, taking the dirty glass back to the sink and rinsing it thoroughly before letting it soak in hot water. “The cure is always worse than the disease. I think when my mother made it for me, she thought it would make me think twice before drinking so much.” She wiped down the counter as she considered her past before pronouncing, “It didn’t.”

Yuuri gave her a weak grin. “It’s nasty all the same.”

“It most definitely is.” She took a new glass, filling it with water and handed it to him. “Now...drink lots of water and maybe we can get you past this.”

Yuuri was tipping up his glass when he realized how quiet it was around the house. “Where is everyone?”

Olga hummed from the sink. “The old man is puttering about in his shop and Victor Andreivich left to pick up Yura a few hours ago. I suspect they are having a father-son day.”

“That’s good,” Yuuri stated, hugging himself. His eyes traveled out the window where he could see the dogs playing in the backyard. “I didn’t realize I was drinking too much. I’ve never drank before. I just followed what others were doing.”
The older omega turned, her eyes smiling at the younger man. “Likely they’ve built up a tolerance. It takes time and even then, some don’t manage it.”

“It was nice...not to think for a while.” Yuuri smiled at himself, *it was nice to feel young and have fun.*

Taking his litre of water, he decided to retreat to one of his favorite rooms, the solarium. He stopped at the back door long enough to let the dogs in and dry their paws. They followed him down the hall and found a pillow to curl up on in the sun. The cats, who had claimed the room as their territory, hissed at the invading poodles and rearranged themselves in the window sills. Yuuri settled in front of the mirror, stretching and preparing to dance. The sun, no longer a source of pain for Yuuri’s eyes, poured through the windows, warming the space, and as Yuuri warmed up, he pulled his tee over his head, tossing it over the barre. He caught his reflection in the mirror and studied the definition returning to his form. *I’m getting better. I need to rediscover the gym, though.* He ran his hand down his chest in thought, feeling the valleys and remembering how emaciated he had looked before. *I don’t see how this could be attractive but compared to what I was before...why did he want that? Why deliberately starve me to the point where I looked and acted like a corpse?* Then he remembered the words of the old psychiatrist. Control. *What did I gain from being there?* So far he hadn’t found much to write down. He’d gained sorrow, loss, but he was...unbroken. He held strong. He walked away. He could dance. *You didn’t break me. You thought you did but in the end, you couldn’t terrorize me. I no longer reacted to your torment. I was numb to you.*

Pulling his legs together, he gave one more stretch to his lower back then rose. Placing his phone into the speakers, he closed his eyes as he listened to the album he found earlier that week. He felt the music encompass him, become a part of him. He felt the sadness under his skin and now it worked its way up to the surface. He lost himself into the music and released his melancholy. He had learned to mask every emotion, to hide his joy, sorrow, and pain, finally seeing that he was no longer wearing a mask. He had grown dull, lifeless. Walking around that house in Tokyo with a wall up to keep Shuji out had taken its toll on him. He was the mask he wore. Nothing. He remembered his prison and how dance had been his only constant escape.

When he danced he came alive, all the emotions pouring from his body in a flurry of movements. Spins and jumps were desperate attempts at escape, while slower soulful moves were the tears he couldn’t shed over his lost children. He had stolen moments with Phichit but knew to be back before he was caught out. Pulling the mask off to join his friend became harder to do, and putting it back on became all the more painful. But to enjoy himself openly...those moments were rare and worth it. He thought about his new home and feared that the warmth, the sense of safety, would disappear in Victor’s absence. Indeed, he already felt the chill deep within him. *How am I going to do this without you?*

So lost in his dance, he didn’t notice Yura and Victor coming in from the backdoor. The little blonde burst into the solarium, startling a scream out of the omega. The boy crowed with joy at scaring Yuuri but Victor studied the omega with concern. He watched as Yuuri recovered from the
fright holding onto his chest and panting, the way the pallor in his skin abated so quickly. “Are you okay?” he asked carefully, studying Yuuri. He watched the younger man’s nod but didn’t quite believe him.

“Can I get a snack?” Yura interrupted, turning from Yuuri to his father once more. Fortunately, the child only believed what he saw, a person scared by being surprised.

Victor blinked, his attention pulled from the omega long enough for Yuuri to escape into the hallway. “Of course...if you can convince Olga it won’t ruin your appetite.”

The boy skipped off and Victor turned to the other door through which Yuuri had escaped. Following, he found Yuuri in the family room, sitting in the window with his knees drawn to his chest, his eyes following the activity on the street. Somewhere along the way, Yuuri had found a shirt and Victor had to work to hide his disappointment. Victor moved to the chair behind him, and reached for Yuuri. “What’s got you upset?”

Yuuri shrugged but then murmured, “I...don’t remember everything about last night. I...don’t like that.” He looked up, blushing. “I worry...I was foolish.”

Victor smiled, relieved in his misunderstanding that Yuuri’s anxiety came from something so small. He ran a hand up and down Yuuri’s back in a soothing motion. “We all watched after you. You danced and talked. Nothing embarrassing.” His dazzling smile became more impish. “No pole dancing. You didn’t lose your clothes somewhere along the way and end up naked in the fountain.”

Yuuri gaped at him a moment. “Those are some very specific examples.”

Victor blushed. “Well, before I became an old man, I had a few escapades. Nothing that led to too much trouble.”

“Your family is wealthy,” Yuuri pointed out with a smirk.

Victor shrugged. “Okay, that’s true. Wealth can often afford one a different set of rules. But the point is...last night you were charming.” He cupped the side of Yuuri’s face, looking into those deep brown eyes. “I danced and had more fun than I’d had at one of those functions in years.”
Yuuri smiled softly, hugging his knees more tightly. “I had fun, too.” He squeezed his shoulders together, his eyes closing as he remembered Victor’s arms around him, before resting his cheek on his knees his eyes opening to take in the man before him. “But I’m never charming.”

“Oh, I beg to differ,” Victor argued, his lips parted as he took in the boy before him. Taking Yuuri’s hands in his he coaxed the man from the window seat to stand with him, slowly they moved into a gentle waltz, a happy reminder of last night. “I learned while young how to moderate my alcohol. And maybe I ended up naked in a fountain. I also woke up in jail once. Of course, my father paid to get me out and to remove it from my record. I was young and impulsive...and Chris often led the way into a number of bad decisions.”

Yuuri smiled brightly, changing the tempo of the dance and taking the lead. “I remember Chris...he was fun. He made me feel safe, too...for a moment. Then Shuji found me.”

Viktor faltered in step, stilling and watching Yuuri’s face closely. “What happened?”

“He...wouldn’t let me out. Not for a long time. And I never traveled with him again.” Yuuri took a step back, hugging himself. “It was a nice dream, though...to think about being free of him.”

Victor reached out, running a hand down Yuuri’s arm, watching as the young man leaned into the touch unaware. “Is he...still alive?”

Yuuri closed his eyes, nodding with undisguised pain. “I was...set aside. The...bonding...was annulled. Unable to fulfill the duties of an omega. He used my inability to carry a child as an excuse to end something I never wanted in the first place.” Yuuri met Victor’s eyes and the alpha could see the trust in them. “I didn’t know how to move forward, though. I tried in Japan, but I was just...stuck. And then...I came here. Thank you for taking me into your family, trusting me to care for your child.”

“I can’t imagine a better person to care for Yura.” Or myself. Victor smiled warmly. “I just want you to be safe...and happy. Okay?”

Yuuri nodded. He could feel the weariness from the previous night. Steadying himself on Victor’s shoulder, he allowed the man to guide him across the room. He could feel Victor’s eyes following him as he moved to the sofa. Officially, Sundays were his rest day except when Victor was out of town. Today, he needed it. Curling up, he pulled the afghan over his body, resting his cheek on his hands over the pillow, his eyes drifting shut. “Chris and Phichit are dating, you know,” he murmured as he started to drift off.
Victor’s eyes narrowed, a suspicion was beginning to form. “Chris is a good man...he loves a good adventure, but he is a good man.”

Answering from twilight sleep Yuuri’s voice was soft. “I know...I’m glad. Phichit deserves a good man.”

“So do you,” Victor murmured but the lack of response told him Yuuri had already nodded off. He was reluctant to leave the sleeping beauty but he had paperwork to do and went in search of the laptop before moving into the kitchen to work. He preferred to not separate himself from family when working at home but didn’t want to disturb Yuuri. He listened to Yura talk back and forth with Olga and play with the dogs and cats on the floor. At some point, he climbed up beside Victor at the table to color. Then the little boy disappeared.

Victor frowned after a short while, realizing he had been so engrossed in his work he hadn’t noticed Yura hadn’t returned and went looking for him. He found his son curled up in the crook of Yuuri’s legs, napping. Reaching for a second blanket, he spread it over the two of them, his fingers drifting down his son’s cheeks then unable to resist the temptation, brushed them over Yuuri’s. His lips parted in a gasp as Yuuri, in his sleep, turned towards his scent.

He rose quickly, avoiding the temptation to gently rub his wrists all over the younger man, marking him and drowning him in his scent. Victor drifted away, his steps taking him towards the back of the house, needing activity. The movement brought back the previous evening, the feel of Yuuri in his arms, Yuuri’s cheek resting on his shoulder, breathing him in. Victor had dated dancers and grew up with Yelena, but none had equaled him as a partner so well on the dance floor. Yuuri matched him move for move and then went on to captivate him. And after, once he got Yuuri home...Victor closed his eyes, leaning against the wall of the hallway, his fingers going to his lips remembering that kiss. It wasn’t so much passion...but Victor had tasted the promise on those lips. I want him. He’s mine. I’m his.

Entering the solarium, his eyes moved around the space and he began to stretch himself. I’ve never really used this room. It was her space, something she’d claimed for herself. Now it’s his. Victor’s eyes rested on the t-shirt draped over the barre. Reaching out, he snagged it and, without thinking pulled it to his nose, breathing in the familiar scent. Blushing at himself in the mirror he pulled it away. I should take this to the laundry.

But his steps didn’t take him to the laundry. Instead he found himself in his room, looking at the half packed bags for next week. There were plastic bags for his toiletries sitting around. He packed the shampoo and conditioner he loved, then a few other items, sealing them for safety. Looking down he gasped, the tee shirt sat on top, sealed in a plastic bag and tucked into his suitcase. He stilled, realizing what he had done. Oh, god...
His eyes went in the direction of the living room and the sleeping omega.  *I want him but we have a contract. Yuuri hasn't agreed to this...any of this. When did I start courting him?* His hand reached for the tee shirt to remove it, but instead found himself closing the lid and locking it.

He returned to the kitchen feeling guilty and thinking he’d talk to Olga but found it empty. The pot was simmering with a warm borscht in the works. Smiling he thought of the housekeeper, knowing she wanted something comforting for Yuuri’s hangover. He knew Olga wasn’t far, likely in her own quarters curled up with a book. In the quiet, Victor felt...lonely. He wanted to wrap Yuuri up in his arms, to bury himself into Yuuri’s scent. He closed his eyes and remembered the spices and as they all came together in his memory, he realized the familiarity of the scent. *Gingerbread*. Opening his eyes, he sighed, knowing he’d never think of the familiar treat in the same way again.

Victor had managed to get through the necessary paperwork for the upcoming trips in time for Olga to suggest he wake the boys. Going into the living room, he found them still asleep. He rubbed Yuuri’s head gently, whispering “wake up” before moving down to do the same with his son. The two blinked into the dim light, Yuuri stretching up and Yura rolling to his feet. “Dinner will be ready soon,” Victor murmured.

Yuuri nodded, and as he found his feet, dashed upstairs. Yura chased after and Victor shook his head, a smile on his face.

Upstairs, Yuuri relieved himself and splashed water on his face. He couldn’t believe he’d slept the day away. Victor would be gone in another day and Yuuri would be left alone to care for his son. *I’m not sure I’m ready.* However, as he left the room and two small arms wrapped around his legs, he knew the truth of it. He’d risk everything for this little boy. He dropped down to his knees and hugged him properly, feeling the boy snuggle into his scent.

“I’m going to sleep in Papa’s bed tonight,” Yura decided holding Yuuri’s hand as they walked down the stairs.

Yuuri raised his eyebrows, “Does he know that?”

Yura shook his head but his gaze was determined. Yuuri held his grin behind his teeth. The boy was a challenge to sleep with on a good night. He kicked, shifted endlessly, and could manage to steal all the covers only to kick them to the floor, leaving the omega shivering in his sleep until he finally woke and placed blankets on top of them, which merely started the process afresh. After several nightmares, Yuuri had learned the best approach was to spoon the little child from behind, wrapping his arms around the boy to keep him settled tightly against the omega’s chest.
In the kitchen, Victor greeted them with bowls already set out to cool, dollops of sour cream in the center of each. As they surrounded the table, Victor kept the conversation flowing, keeping an eye on Yuuri and how much the omega was eating. He ate slowly but Victor knew he hadn’t had much during the day.

Yuuri tore a piece of the warm, homemade bread and smeared it with butter. The steam escaped and helped to melt the butter into each nook. Taking a bite, he felt himself begin to warm. It helped begin to settle the upset in Yuuri’s stomach. *Maybe...no alcohol.* The omega glanced up, feeling Victor’s eyes on him and shivering. *Why does he keep watching me?*

Their dinner was an easy affair. Olga joined them, but Nikolai was absent and the housekeeper set aside a bowl for him to eat later. As the meal ended Yuuri rose, taking bowls to the sink, but Olga waved him off, knowing he had Yura to attend to. The evening was busy with their routine, the addition of Victor’s upcoming departure putting emotional strain on the little boy. As Yuuri finally settled Yura into bed he caught the smug look on the boy’s face. Smirking, the little blonde reminded him not to worry if he wasn’t not in his bed later. Yuuri smiled indulgently and tucked him in all the tighter. *I wonder if I should warn Victor.*

Downstairs, Victor looked up from his place on the sofa, Makkachin warming his feet on the floor, and patted the place beside him. Yuuri hesitated, worried about Victor picking up on his nervous energy. As Yuuri pulled his stockinged feet up onto the couch, he felt prickles of warmth as the alpha’s arm rested companionably over the back of the sofa. A small whimper and Yuuri leaned over to pick up the smaller poodle, his fingers tangling into her curls as he relaxed next to the alpha. Emboldened by their recent closeness he opened a topic he knew they needed to discuss. “Ummm, you know my heat...it will be here not too long after you return.”

“I’m aware,” Victor admitted, a blush on his cheek. The truth was that the alpha was *more* than aware. He had noticed already that Yuuri’s scent had subtly increased, not enough for concern but he’d say something to Nikolai to make sure he was safe in Victor’s absence. He knew the older alpha would be less affected by Yuuri having already taken to him in a fatherly manner. But Victor could tell that any other alpha would follow Yuuri like a hungry wolf. The scent had grown richer, sweeter, and Victor had to admit it was incredible alluring. “Do you have everything you need?”

Yuuri nodded. “The nesting materials should arrive sometime this week.”

Victor nodded as he thought about how he could help. “You know...there is a bath in my room. It has jets. It might help...you know...if you get achy.”

Yuuri hugged his knees, peeking up at the alpha shyly. “I wouldn’t want to intrude.”
Victor’s hand drifted to run up and down Yuuri’s back and he felt the omega start to relax into his touch. “It’s not an intrusion. No place in this house is forbidden to you, Yuuri.”

Yuuri then smirked and added, “Except Olga’s room when she’s in curlers.”

“Well, I wouldn’t want to walk in on her but she might just forgive you.” Victor winked as Yuuri giggled.

“I’ll think about it…” Yuuri watched Victor’s eyes widen and he was quick to explain himself, “the bath, that is. I do miss the onsen. Not that I was able to enjoy it when I was with him.”

Victor paused a moment. He wanted Yuuri to open up, but knew that if he pushed the young man could easily shut down. “Did he not let you go home?”

Yuuri shook his head, his smile replaced by a wistful sigh. “Not much.”

“Once the season is over, maybe we can make a way for you to go home.” He saw Yuuri’s face fall slightly and knew he had gone in the wrong direction. “Only if you want to, that is.”

Yuuri sat for a moment considering Victor’s words. He looked into the clear blue eyes and allowed his smile to return. “You could come, too,” Yuuri suggested. “A hot springs resort would be a good way to recover from the season.” Maybe Yuuri wasn’t ready for all of Japan, but home...his parents’ home...that might not be so bad. Especially if Victor was nearby. He didn’t know what their date made them but he felt the more and was reluctant to leave his side.

“I’d like that,” Victor smiled.

The omega relaxed further into his side and didn’t seem to realize he’d settled against the alpha until a sound slipped from his own body that startled him. His eyes widened as he looked up at Victor who didn’t seem disturbed by it at all. In fact, he looked rather pleased. “What was that?”

Victor blinked, surprise evident in his expression. “You were purring, Yuuri...have you never…” His voice trailed off as he took in the shake of Yuuri’s head and his wide eyes. “It means you feel safe. Content and safe. It’s an involuntary reaction of your body to warmth and comfort. And it is
one of the greatest compliments an omega can offer an alpha.”

The omega chewed his lip as he worked out his question. “It’s not...weird?”

“No, solnyshko, perfectly normal. And I’m flattered that you feel this way in my home...with me.” He reached for Yuuri to settle him once more into his side, feeling Yuuri’s body relax again into the curves of his body. *My beautiful Yuuri...how am I going to bear being away from you?*

They remained like that, soft murmurs of conversation between them, Yuuri’s concerns about the alpha’s absence, Victor’s assurances and gentle reminders that he wouldn’t be alone. There were plenty of people available to support him. Then Yuuri found himself drifting off to sleep once more and as much as Victor wanted to hold the sleeping omega, he knew he needed to get him settled into bed. Yuuri’s eyes blinked open at Victor’s gentle nudging.

“Let’s go to bed,” the alpha suggested.

Yuuri nodded, looking around a little disoriented and a little reluctant to leave Victor’s warmth, Victor’s comforting scent. He did, though, finding his feet and moving quietly towards the stairs. He stopped and turned to look at Victor thoughtfully as he considered how easily they fell into intimacy that evening. “Did something happen last night?”

“We danced, lyubov moya,” Victor reassured him gently, tucking away that kiss into his memory. “And then I brought you home.”

Yuuri nodded before turning to climb the stairs. In the quiet solitude of his room, he went to his dresser to pull out fresh pajamas but part of him wanted the ones from the previous night. As he picked them up off the bathroom floor... *really, Yuuri, you don’t normally leave a mess on the floor...* and pulled them up to his nose, he realized he could smell the alpha in the threads. As he pulled them on, he moved to the bed and settled into the sheets. Ren barked and Yuuri smiled, shushing her and then turning on his side to run his fingers through her curls. Again, he noticed the cool scent of cedar and freshly fallen snow. *He must have tucked me in last night.* That thought brought a blush and a smile as he brought the sheet up and breathed in the alpha’s scent. *I’m going to miss you while you’re gone.*

Chapter End Notes

So...anyone notice Victor didn't mention the kiss?
Chapter Summary

The day before Victor leaves for his trip...

Chapter Notes

Is it Wednesday already? :) I think you need something to read. I'm working on a Truth chapter and I know fans of the other stories are bemoaning their loss. Don't worry, I'll get to them in due time. My goal is to finish Truth (I think I have ten chapters) then pick up Gravity for half a dozen chapters finishing off with Sirin. So much going on! ;) I do so love these stories but wow...I have a lot. So all in due time. This one has ten more chapters written, so enjoy them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 20: Already missing you…

Victor rolled over and breathed in the day. It was a rare Monday that he was able to sleep in and he could already hear life moving about the house. He stretched out in the sheets, careful not to disturb the little blonde cuddling into him. The extra hours of sleep that morning had been well earned. Slipping into the room just before midnight, two little bare feet slapped across the floor and the shuffled across the carpet until they crawled into bed with him. “To what do I owe this honor?” Victor teased.

Yura rolled his eyes, tucking the ballerina tiger under his chin. “I get Yuuri all week but you’re going to be gone.”

Fair. Victor had been flattered by the appearance of his son in the large bed. But Yura was hard on those he slept with, tossing and turning, pushing his ice cube feet against the other’s ribs, digging his toes into their side. It would be a long night.

Except it wasn’t. Once the little boy settled...after the little boy tossed and turned all over the place ...Yura curled up in a ball in front of him, facing out. Victor wrapped his arm around the blonde from behind and tucked him under his chin and there the boy slept most of the night.
Looking over he saw Yura still breathing deeply and Victor knew to let him sleep a few minutes longer. Quietly, he slipped into the bathroom to shower, his one from the night before leaving his hair going every which direction. Half an hour later, he emerged to find Yura sitting on the bottom step already dressed and pouting.

“What’s wrong, my little man?” Victor asked, taking a seat next to him.

Yura struggled to contain himself but the sob broke as he spoke his fears. “What if you don’t come back?”

Victor knew the boy’s terror came from losing people. Putting a hand on his shoulder he started with calm logic. “Have I ever not come back?”

Yura shook his head and hugged him, burying his face into Victor’s chest. He let the little boy work through his emotions, feeling him still himself as the tears came and went. The alpha made note that he needed to warn Yuuri that the nightmares picked up when he was gone. The little cherub was so afraid of losing someone else. Hoisting him into his arms, he carried the child into the kitchen for breakfast. No Yuuri? He hoped the omega slept well.

Ten minutes later, the truth revealed that Yuuri did not sleep well. But Victor watched as the rest of the assembly seemed unsurprised. Olga had coffee before him as well as a cup of tea as soon as he sat down. Slowly, he started to perk up with the addition of eggs and rice. Victor smiled as the cavemen that sat at the table transformed into the beautiful Yuuri. It was then that it dawned on Victor. Yuuri’s not a morning person. How did I not know that? Victor remembered that he left the house in the hours that his son and the lovely omega were still in bed. By the end of breakfast, though, Yuuri was awake and talking to his charge about his day.

“Do you have your folder in the bag? I don’t remember if I signed it.” Yuuri followed Yura over to where the backpack rested from Friday through the weekend and sat down next to him on the floor. A quick excavation, and Yuuri learned he most certainly had not signed it. “I’m sorry, Yura. I should have paid attention.”

Yura took it in stride, “It’s okay...you were with Papa.”

Yuuri smiled at the easy forgiveness. Victor came over to the pair and watched Yuuri as he looked through the papers, frowning at a note scrawled across one of the papers. Two large brown eyes turned up to him, handing over the note. Victor read the note and knew it was intentionally written
Dear Mr. Nikiforov,

Yuri has clearly not been studying his vocabulary words. While I’m certain your omega is doing the best that he can, perhaps someone with a greater understanding of the Russian language should go over them with your son. Education is important and at this formative age you want to make sure he is surrounded with the best possible influences.

Victor bit down on the inside of his cheek, reading between the lines to see the slight directed at Yuuri. He sighed and wrote back with greater patience than he felt: Yuri has our housekeeper Olga, Yura’s grandfather, or myself to handle anything in which language is a barrier and I’d like to point out this is the first problem Yura has had with vocabulary or academics in general since Yuuri has arrived. However, with parent night on Thursday, we did not have the time to review the vocabulary words before bed or the next morning. My son is at his best if he observes an 8 p.m. bedtime on a school night. As it was after 8 when we arrived at our home, it was directly to bed for him. You should see an improvement this week, as I’m certain you have seen a marked improvement in Yura’s grades since Yuuri’s arrival. Thank you for sharing your concern. V.

Yuuri blinked up at him, seeing the tight line of his lips and asked, “What did I do wrong this time?”

Victor huffed and rolled his eyes. “Apparently it’s not reading Russian. I explained to her that we share the duties of Yura’s studies but that we had to get Yura to bed.”

Yuuri eyes narrowed, “Baka...of course we had to put him to bed. He’d have been impossible otherwise...and still not got the words down.”

“She’s just looking for a reason to complain since I put her in her place at parent’s night. Don’t take it personally.” Victor hoped to soothe Yuuri’s feelings, but he knew the truth. The omega should take it personally, as the teacher was attacking him as a person.

“I won’t,” Yuuri responded but Victor could tell he was feeling sensitive that morning.

He led his family to the car and once both were securely fastened in, he drove them to school, smiling as he watched Yura bounding up the steps to talk to his friends. “So, are you ready for new skates?”
Yuuri’s eyes began to dance at that prospect but then he started to protest. “It’s really too much...I mean, I’m not competing…”

“Yuuri, you’re going to be on ice regularly. You wouldn’t rent shoes for dance.” Victor scoffed at the ridiculous idea of his Yuuri taking a pair of skates from the rental shelf every day and shuddered.

Yuuri thought about his worn dance shoes but nodded in agreement. “It’s just...they are so much.”

“I think your feet are worth the investment,” Victor returned. “And I think you need new dance shoes but we’ll save that argument for another day.”

However, Yuuri wasn’t ready to let go of their current argument. “If I’m getting paid, I can get my own dance shoes. Really, I can save up for skates.”

Victor smiled, while he really wanted to treat Yuuri to new skates, knowing the joy the man would get from returning to the ice on professional blades, he was thrilled to see the omega branching out and becoming independent. “You can...but I made a promise and I’m a man of my word.”

Yuuri sighed and turned to look out the window, knowing the argument was lost. Music began playing and he listened to the words filtering through the car speakers. Victor had a nice sound system...probably top of the line. So many things about Victor were top of the line. Yuuri worried about what the alpha would do when he realized he’d wasted so much money on Yuuri...who believed himself far from first class. He was just a broken omega, not worth a whole lot in the scheme of things. Sure he made Yura smile...but that’s just what omegas do. Any omega would be able to take care of Yura.

Yuuri’s pulse picked up and his eyes narrowed. A low hiss forming in his throat thinking of another omega raising the little blonde. *I don’t want them to, though. He’s my baby.*

Yuuri blinked his eyes rapidly realizing he had tears welling up. Not for the first time that morning, he found himself fighting tears, only moments after fighting himself. Victor didn’t comment but Yuuri felt a comforting hand on his leg.

*It’s stupid. I’m stupid.*
He leaned back against the headrest and stared straight ahead.

*There is so little of me left. Why are you investing so much in a shell of a person?*

Victor pulled into a parking spot and turned to face Yuuri. “I know you think I’m extravagant. Maybe I am in comparison to what you’re used to. However, this is how I take care of my family.”

Yuuri heard the apology in the older man’s voice and nodded. He’d already resigned himself to the skates. It was the clothes all over again. Every time Victor wanted to do something for him, Yuuri fought him. *Why? Why can’t I just accept your kindness, your compassion?* He let that question drum through his brain as Victor came around and opened the door for him. Gentle hands guided him out of the passenger seat and then, without warning, Yuuri was scooped into his embrace. *Let him love you.* Katya’s voice sounded warm in his memory. He didn’t fight it. Instead, he melted into those arms, seeking Victor’s scent and his calm.

“I’m sorry I’m difficult,” he murmured as they parted.

“You’re not,” Victor argued and when Yuuri leveled a gaze at him, he laughed. “Not really. You make it hard for me to take care of you, sometimes...I’m worried you don’t believe you’re worth the effort. I don’t agree. But it will probably take time to get you there, however I’m certain you will believe it, and soon.” Yuuri’s chin dropped and Victor could tell he’d hit the nail on the head. “Don’t worry. I’m a patient man.”

The coach led the skater into the familiar store. The clerk, a fan of Victor’s, led Yuuri to a seat where he was fitted with boots. After watching the young skater walk on the demo blades he determined the right fits. The boots were placed in the oven while Victor set about selecting blades. Yuuri smiled at the familiar process. Even with Victor helping him bridge the language gap, Yuuri made his selections with ease, depending on Victor for help on what was new in industry. Yuuri shook his head as Victor held up the pair of blades made famous by Chen and giggled at the alpha’s pout. It wasn’t that Yuuri needed competition grade skates, either. He’d be teaching and coaching children. Maybe later, he’d gain more students but a set of decent boots with the standard blade was fine...although Victor was willing to do more. Yuuri smiled as he ran his fingers along the blades he’d selected, remembering when he was younger, his feet growing, picking out new skates. The promise of competitions in his future...

As they mounted his blades, he let his eyes wander over the various options. Victor pointed out the different skates worn by the skaters at the rink and why they chose that option. Yuuri smiled as he thought about his future at the rink, something he never considered when he answered Victor’s ad. He’d only managed one quad, a mere quad toe-loop, by the time he had been forced to retire. He never figured out how to get the height. He looked down at the boots, still warm from the oven as they formed to his feet, a thin sock covering his feet. *When I was forced to retire a*
quad toe was all anyone could land. But he read the blogs and knew he had been the one to watch when it came to step sequences and his spins had been talked about as well. He smiled thinking of Jason Brown’s tweet rant about comparing Yuuri to Scotty Hamilton.

He smiled brightly as he stood in his new skates, walking back and forth to check for additional adjustments. He heard some words exchanged in Russian and ignored them, although he felt the fondness in Victor’s smile as he answered.

Victor, on the other hand, conversed with the man bringing Yuuri his skates. “I’m glad you were able to fit us into a morning appointment.”

“No, they have their skates, laces, socks all ready...and hopefully packed.” Victor grimaced at the thought, Russia had nearly lost an Olympic gold medal last time an athlete needed new boots that close to competition. His eyes drifted over to the omega, who had removed the boots and wandered to section of the store holding warm up clothes. “Yuuri...he’s a friend and hasn’t been able to skate for some time. I want to give him back the ice.”

The clerk straightened his back, stretching the cracks out. “He reminds me of my son when he received his first pair of skates.”

“He deserves all the joy.” Victor turned back to the clerk. Smiling, he added, “Thank you.”

Yuuri only needed minor adjustments and then Victor insisted on a proper gear bag. The alpha, sneaky as ever, got Yuuri to agree to a Transpack, only to fill it with the warm up pants he had seen the omega admire, then add two sets of bunga pads, extra laces and two pairs of socks. Yuuri hadn’t even noticed the additions until it was too late. Afterward they left, making a stop at the pharmacy on the way to pick up bandages and a few other necessities including a few things to make Yuuri more comfortable during his pre-heat (including a hot water bottle with a bunny wrap).

Yuuri was starting to droop by the time they headed back home for lunch. Olga laid out cold sandwiches and reheated soup. Then Yuuri eased into the living room to nap until Victor was ready to pick up Yura. He didn’t notice the alpha tucking a blanket around him and the drop of the wrist along the surface of the fabric. The housekeeper, however, watched unobserved from the door. She worried about the little omega and how he would fare in Victor’s absence. Now, she added the worry of Victor without Yuuri. She knew her employer...and he didn’t give his heart easily. Not anymore. She knew this would be for keeps. She hoped the younger man was ready.
Yuuri felt a gentle brush of his hair and cheek tugging him from his sleep and he moaned in protest. A warm laugh greeted him and he fluttered his eyes open. “I’m just so tired,” he explained as he pushed out of his cocoon.

Victor pressed a water bottle into his hand as he knelt down. “I’m sure it’s your body preparing for heat.”

Yuuri groaned. “I hate the preheat stage.” Finding his feet, he folded the blanket before declaring, “I hate postheat as well.” And as they stepped out the front door, he added, “I hate my heat in general.”

Victor remained silent and considered the boy’s experience. He could easily understand why this omega would find no joy in the experience. It likely held no good memories. He’d garnered enough knowledge to assess that not only had the alpha marked him as a child, stolen him away probably as soon as it was legal...but he was selfish and used Yuuri for his own pleasure. As he knelt down to settle Yuuri into the car, he felt the omega’s gaze upon him.

“Why do you do that?”

Victor kept his eyes on his hands as he watched them fix the safety device in place. “Buckle you in?”

Yuuri nodded. It was an extra level of care that Yuuri had rarely witnessed and certainly hadn’t enjoyed.

Victor knew it went back further than Yuuri, “I guess...it started with Yelena, to be honest. Those last months, really the last year, I’d drive her to her appointments. She didn’t have a lot of strength and everything seemed an effort. So...I did what I could to take things off of her plate and let her enjoy what remained.”

Yuuri studied him before blinking rapidly, sniffing back the startling tears. “I-I’m sorry. I don’t know what’s wrong with me.”
Victor smiled indulgently, reaching over to pull a tissue from a Makkachin shaped tissue box in the center console. “You don’t have to apologize for tears. Not here. Not with me, Yuuri.” Victor remained kneeling beside him, hand on Yuuri’s lap holding the hand that didn’t have the tissue until the omega settled. He knew it was likely hormones but he didn’t want to dismiss Yuuri’s emotions out of hand. The omega had been through so much and it could have been that this small kindness triggered something deeper.

Yuuri stared out the window as they drove. Victor noticed and wondered if it was something he did when he was with his ex. *It’s like a disappearing act.* Yuuri was present when caring for his son, and mostly in the presence of others. But sometimes, he slipped away, as if his thoughts were caught by a will-o-wisp.

He pulled to a stop and Yuuri shook off the reverie and smiled, a little embarrassed, before slipping out of the car to go and welcome Yura after school. Victor watched Yuuri drop down to his knees and pull the little boy into a hug, securing his coat as they broke apart and tugging on his mittens and hat. Once satisfied, he led Yura to the car and Victor noticed that Yuuri made sure the car seat was buckled properly despite Yura’s protests.

“I can do it myself.”

Rather than arguing, Yuuri simply requested, “Indulge me in this.” Yura thinned his lips and nodded, accepting the way Yuuri made the act a gift to himself.

At the rink, Victor left the two in the lobby needing to tend to his own skaters. He had several come up to him, checking in and double-checking their concerns. Today’s practice would be short for the travelers.

Yuuri walked with Yura up the stairs to their practice. They were early and Yuuri took advantage of the time, and after a quick warm up, moved onto the ice while Yura watched. The freshly sharpened skates had that magnetic quality to the ice and Yuuri laughed at himself as he stuttered on his first attempt at a stop. Two little green eyes narrowed at him but then relaxed as he watched the older man go into a figure eight. He didn’t know how long he’d worked out the pattern but he looked up to chattering children and a few claps and cries of “pretty” from both students and parents. He noted Katya wasn’t there yet with Mila and suspected they stopped for a snack since the older child started her lessons later.

Yuuri then smiled as he spotted two new students looking nervous but, knowing Yuuri already, relief settled into their expressions. Yuuri skated to the barrier and greeted their mother. “Mehar, I didn’t know you had enrolled them.”
“I didn’t know you’d be teaching their class,” she teased.

Yuuri blushed and glanced around. “It’s new...they offered me the position Friday. And...it helps Victor. Georgi, the regular coach, will be moving back into the regular arena and I can continue working with the kids.”

Mehar smiled broadly, leaning over the barrier to tap him playfully on the arm. “Well, good for you. Employment goes a long way into providing independence.”

Yuuri had to agree. He worked for Victor and that had its own freedom...but this felt separate, like he earned the job on his own. He knew Yakov had gone behind Victor’s back to offer him the position, knowing the head coach would readily agree with his recommendation. That gave the job more value, and by extension Yuuri felt himself having more value.

He soon had the younger skaters working through their basics. This included Zaina and Otabek but he could tell both would move to the next level fairly quickly. His favorite part was when he worked with Mila’s group. Yura tagged along and Yuuri could see the five-year-old keeping up without any problems. Georgi explained, “He should be with them. The boy grew up on the ice. But he’s so tiny, we didn’t want him to be trampled. So we have him with the intermediates.”

Then the class wrapped up and Yuuri packed away his skates, following Yura to his Papa’s office. Victor looked up, phone against his ear, as they entered and then Yuuri realized Yura stashed his skates. “Will we be able to get to them while you’re papa is gone?” he asked softly, not wanting to disturb Victor’s call.

Yura nodded and pulled him down to whisper, “Gosha and Yakov have keys.”

“And so will you,” Victor added as he disconnected the call.

“Me?” Yuuri asked, startled.

“Of course! Who else would I trust in my office? Both Georgi and Yakov come in here if I need something faxed to me while I’m out of town but this will give you a place to retreat to when you’re between classes. I suspect Yakov has bigger plans for you and is easing you into it.”
“Really?” Yuuri wasn’t sure if he should feel overwhelmed or flattered...or both.

Victor nodded, a grin making its way to his lips. “He peeked in on you earlier. He saw you skating figures and earlier this week he was complaining about needing someone to work with their edgework.”

“Oh, I haven’t really skated...not regularly...in years. I mean, Phichit sometimes got me on ice when he snuck me out but…”

Victor crossed the small office to put his hands on Yuuri’s arms, ending the argument. “Yakov is going to base his call on what he sees...but for now, we need you with the children because I do need Gosha out with me.”

“Okay,” Yuuri answered, his eyes wide. “I like working with the children.”

“I know...that makes it a perfect place for you to start. And don’t worry...I don’t think there are any plans to take them away from you.” He threw his hands up with a roll of his eyes and added, “I thought I was in charge of this rink...it turns out that I’m just a coach.” He then snorted and nodded towards Yakov’s office. “I don’t think he’ll ever truly let go. But...less travel will make it easier on him and Lilia.”

After a quick dinner, Victor led Yuuri out into the evening air. He’d already checked the address and told Yuuri he knew exactly where that community center was located.

“What are you going to do while I’m in class?”

“There is a coffee shop across the street and I brought my laptop.” He then frowned. “I’m going to have to take it with me for the trip.”

Yuuri stopped for a moment, then realized the implication for himself. “Oh.” I do need to figure out how to get a computer of my own.
He negotiated traffic while he thought through the problem. “You have a key to my office...you’ll just have to use that computer. I think we need to look at getting your own.”

Yuuri chewed his lip as he considered Victor’s suggestion. He had his paychecks from Victor but hadn’t managed to open a checking account. He had tried twice to open a checking account at a bank he passed on the way to Yura’s school. Both attempts ended almost in tears. They didn’t have anyone who could speak English and help him with the process. In frustration, he went home and put the check into a drawer in his vanity where he kept his other important documents.

“When I get back...or at least, after your heat,” Victor promised.

Victor walked Yuuri into his first class and met the instructor, getting the details on the length of the class before he retreated and left Yuuri in their care.

Yuuri looked around and realized he was in a room full of omegas. The instructor knew the turn of his thoughts and supplied, “Many omegas come to this country to be with their alpha. Alphas find resources with ease to meet language requirements. Omegas, however, struggle because they are often not as comfortable in mixed company.”

That’s a polite way of putting it. Yuuri smiled at the understanding woman, but it was only half of their trouble. Omegas didn’t mind mixed company, they minded sexual harassment, threats, aggressive behavior, and they really hated how alphas got away with it while the omegas bore the social stigmas. The fact remained, no one made alphas behave and even some betas would get handsy. The stigma of an omega’s purpose being to breed and please still remained. Yuuri was thankful Victor had come with him the first time. He’d been nervous. But now he knew it was a safe place.

Yuuri leaned in to conference with his teacher, “My heat is soon.”

“We are flexible here and you will find your partners will be able to work with you in that.” She smiled at Yuuri and picked up a series of papers along with what looked like a workbook. “Now...where are we...beginner or intermediate...or maybe…”

“Definitely a beginner. I’ve only picked up a few phrases since I came here.”

“Very well, come with me.” She guided him to a corner where several omegas were reviewing conversation scripts and introduced him. “This is Yuuri. He’s come here from Japan and it looks
He soon started learning their names and the different walks of life where they came from. He thought he’d feel insecure because of what Shuji put him through but he soon learned that he wasn’t the only one who came to Russia after a bad relationship, whether by choice or not. Soon he was at ease and they helped him move into the routine. Within each group was a native speaker, a volunteer who chose to help transition the foreign omegas. The one in charge of their group was a male omega named Boris, a social worker who was surprisingly large in stature. He laughed and said that most of his family was large. The man’s warmth and strength gave something to the rest of the group.

On the ride home, Yuuri asked Victor if he had been bored while waiting.

“I learned a long time ago to carry a book...it’s easier with phones and tablets these days.”

“Oh,” Yuuri blushed. He knew Victor read a lot and rarely watched television. He should have known the alpha would have been fine. “Our group leader...he’s a Russian social worker named Boris. I’ve never seen such a huge omega!”

Victor chuckled. “It’s not so rare in Russia...I’ve met a few that caught me off guard.”

They were silent for a few more blocks and finally Yuuri asked, “What if my heat comes early?”

“Don’t worry. Olga and Nikolai will take care of everything...including Yura.”

Yuuri nodded, sighing shakily. He didn’t realize he was rubbing his hands nervously until a hand reached over and patted his thigh. Under the cover of darkness, he murmured, “I hate my heat. Even after he was out of my life...it was a nightmare.”

“Your body...it takes a while to let your mate go. Even if you don’t want them. I went through several ruts before mine accepted Yelena’s passing.”

“I don’t want to...think about him.” Yuuri wanted to accept what Victor was saying but it was such a different situation. Yelena had been a warm and loving person, letting go of her would be hard. Shuji was a nightmare Yuuri was only just beginning to wake from.
“Then don’t.”  

_Think of me._ He forced a smile and turned down their street. He gripped the steering wheel, forcing the thought to stay behind his teeth where it belonged just now. “Think of someone you’d rather be with.”

Yuuri felt his face burn and thanked his luck for the dark sky casting no light in the car. “But...I have no intimate knowledge of anyone else.”

Victor blinked at those words.  

_Fourteen_.  

_Oh, you wouldn’t have had any prior lovers._ As he pulled into the drive, he suggested, “Olga has a number of saucy romance books. Perhaps read a few of them beforehand.”

Yuuri giggled a little thinking of the ridiculous turn of the conversation. “They are probably in Russian.”

“Not necessarily. Olga reads fluently in English and French as well. Before...her husband...well, she wanted to travel. Losing him broke her spirit. Now she wants smaller things.”

Yuuri understood that. “Sometimes just reclaiming your independence seems like a big thing.”

“I want that for you, though.”  

Victor patted Yuuri’s thigh once more before easing out of the car. He loved how Yuuri waited for him to open the door and help him out of the car...but he wondered if that was something Yuuri enjoyed. “Does this...make you feel less independent?”

Yuuri blinked up at him in surprise. “The car thing?”

Victor nodded, fighting the urge to brush Yuuri’s hair from his face. “I just thought about it...and you brought it up earlier.”

“I don’t mind the car thing,” Yuuri admitted. “It makes me feel...valued. Probably because you don’t make it seem like a control thing.”

Victor nodded, happy that he wasn’t impeding the omega’s progress. He led Yuuri inside. As he helped the omega out of his coat and he realized there were a number of small things he did for Yuuri to care for him, all of which Yuuri accepted with grace but didn’t necessarily expect or
require. As he hung the coat up, he noticed Yuuri approaching the stairs. *He won’t be awake when I leave in the morning.*

“If you...need anything...” Victor trailed off, not sure what to offer.

Yuuri leveled him a look. “I need your itinerary and good times to call in case Yura needs to talk to his father. Otherwise, I have his schedule down and everyone is willing to help.”

Victor watched as Yuuri stood on the steps, looking at him with suspicion. The alpha took in a breath, starting slowly, “About your heat...I talked to Nikolai. If...your scent might attract some untoward attention...”

Yuuri sighed, his face deepening into a nice shade of beet red. *Why couldn’t we talk about this in the dark car?* “I’ll be fine.”

Victor nodded, unconvinced, and chewed his bottom lip. “If Nikolai says not to walk...”

“Fine...I’ll let him drive me,” Yuuri declared in exasperation. He walked up three steps before turning back to reiterate, “I really hate my heat.” Then he was running up the stairs two at a time.

Victor woke up to Yura in his bed, the little boy pouting while Victor gathered his gear. “Do you have to go?” the little boy whined.

“I’m afraid so, *mal’yish,*” Victor sighed, bundling his son into his arms and carrying him up the stairs. He knocked on Yuuri’s door using the little boy for one last chance to say goodbye. Yuuri, hair sleep tossed, eyes blurry, took one look at the situation and gathered Yura into his arms, inadvertently leaning into Victor’s embrace. The alpha couldn’t pass up this invitation and wrapped his arms around both of them. Yuuri’s cheek rested against his shoulder, breathing him. As Yuuri pulled back, he felt Yuuri’s free hand, no...free wrist, sliding down his back in an unconscious scenting action. The alpha blushed with pleasure. “I’ve got to go now. Call me if you need me,” he whispered before turning to his son, tweaking his nose, and whispering, “Good bye.” He leaned and kissed the little boy’s cheek, his breath catching with the gentle nuzzle from the omega. *God, I don’t want to leave.*
Yuuri moved to the banister and peered down to the first floor as Victor reached for his suitcase and slipped out the front door. *I already miss you.* He tucked the little boy under his chin and carried him to bed.

Outside, Victor glanced up to catch a glimpse of Yuuri’s light darkening. *I miss you already.* Tucking his suitcase into the trunk, he pulled out his phone and looked at his home screen. A picture of Yuuri holding his son greeted him. *It’s going to be a long two weeks.*

Chapter End Notes

Both of them are going to feel this separation...much more than they realize.
Ch. 21: Safe and loved

Caim (n) lit. “Sanctuary”; an invisible circle of protection drawn around the body with the hand, that reminds you that you are safe and loved, even in the darkest times.

Yuuri faced Tuesday as he did any day. He diligently wrestled Yura into his uniform, battled him over socks and won, then dealt with the inevitable pout at the foot of the stairs. The fact remained: neither Yu(u)ri was morning people. You get that from me. Yuuri smiled thinking of the little blonde as being like him. However, they perked up over breakfast in their own way. Yura mulled over his bowl of oatmeal letting its warmth fill him up and gulped down the sweetness of juice, its sugar sparking energy in the mite before he jumped off the stool scampering after a kitty. Yuuri was better after a cup of coffee followed by a cup of tea. He never really drank coffee before moving to Russia but the demands of his morning required him to make sacrifices to his taste buds. After enough things were added to the cup of bitter darkness, it was almost good. Almost.

Tea was better. That’s why he saved it for last. It felt like curling up into a warm sweater, and tasted like heaven.

Two boxes had arrived from home the previous day. The smaller of the two was decorated in such a way to entice Yuuri to open it first with its brightly colored tape, cheerful stickers and stamps, and other fun details. Inside, he found things he could only get back home...including proper tea in a variety of blends. This morning, he needed that tea. Yamecha. The sweet full flavor would remove all memory of the bitter coffee. He remembered traveling with his class to see how it was grown and falling in love with the smell of the field as it grew richer in the rain. He recalled going
with his mother to the tea merchants and seeing how the leaves were dried, cured and added to spices to make the final product. His mother talked with the merchants like a wisened pro. She instilled this in her son, making sure he could tell the difference between teas...and this one in particular was special...unadorned and pure.

He didn’t mind the green teas he encountered in Russia...he grew up on green tea, starting and ending his day with it. What he couldn’t understand was destroying it with a spoonful of jam. Smirking at the offensive act he clutched the packet to his chest. *I’ll keep you safe.* He hid his prized tea away and refused to share it if they were going to mangle its flavor. When he carried it protectively into the kitchen, Olga just watched him with amusement and set the kettle on.

Yuuri’s box had other things of home. Candies he enjoyed, snacks his mother made, spices that he couldn’t find in Russia. Several of these went into the pantry...ready to be shared easily with the other members of his new family. Yuuri watched Yura make a face when he tried the bean bun but was impressed the child tried it although the treat was unfamiliar to him. By the end, Yura had happily devoured the dessert and was ready for another. Yuuri promised they’d try something different each day until the tin was empty. An after school treat.

Upstairs sat another box, unopened. Yuuri knew it was for the shrine. He was grateful to his mother for sending these pieces to him, and he felt the obligation to set it up, and allow the grieving process to begin. However, a part of him couldn’t deal with both the mourning and Victor leaving at the same time. Setting it in a safe place he slid a hand over the delivery label, recognizing his mother’s handwriting. She had taken the trouble to write out the addresses in both Haranga and Cyrillic wanting to ensure its proper delivery. He’d open it when he felt more stable, more together. *I’ve waited for years to get to this place, even without the hope that this day would come. There is no rush, no reason to hurry anything. A few more days won’t make a difference.*

He thought back to the early hours of that morning when Victor brought a sleeping Yura to him. There was an intimacy in the act, Victor trusting Yuuri with the care of his son, the comforting embrace that said both *thank you* and *goodbye*.

Yuuri hated goodbyes. He had experienced too many, and each one carried the worry of permanency. Every time Shuji forced a departure from his family or friends Yuuri would spend so long worrying about whether he’d see them again. Months without seeing his parents, his friends...and those were good stretches. There were two different times where Yuuri had been separated from all those who loved him for over a year...and once, he didn’t see any of them for over three years. Keeping him from family was one of the ways Shuji had controlled him.

Now, staring out the window into the rainswept yard, he missed his family but it didn’t ache near as bad. He knew the only thing separating him from them was distance, never Victor. *You can see them at the end of the season if you want.* The alpha’s warm voice rang softly in his ears, he knew the truth of those words before Victor even spoke them. Victor would make sure he knew he
wasn’t cut off from his family. He knew in his heart Victor would make a way for him to go if he chose. These months in Russia were different from the months in Tokyo. He wasn’t isolated. He didn’t have to worry about stealing conversations on a hidden away phone until it was discovered and smashed in front of him. Phichit had been his one constant, making sure he kept all of Yuuri’s contacts in a safe place, ready to put on a new phone and smuggle it to his friend.

He’d been thankful when Nikolai came in and took Yura to school, insisting it would start raining before Yuuri would return. He wasn’t wrong. The steady drizzle carried the cold with it and Yuuri moved restlessly from room to room, shaking off the ache only for it to return with a stubbornness. Olga was out at the moment with Nikolai doing the shopping. In the large, rambling home, Yuuri felt listless.

You can use my bath.

The large brown eyes sparkled with the prospect. A bath sounded good. Yuuri considered the time. It would be a while before Yura returned, a while yet before Yuuri would have to deal with people in general. Gathering a change of clothes, a towel, and a few other essentials, he tiptoed into Victor’s room. Walking down the hall from his room he heard a floorboard creak under his foot and stopped quickly, catching his breath. Years spent sneaking around and breaking rules came back to him. Years of listening for Shuji’s voice, or his footsteps. Years of straining his ears to figure out if he had time to hide his phone, or the food he was eating, or the book he was reading before… He shook off that feeling as soon as he realized what he was doing, straightened his back, and boldly marched down the stairs and into the room.

Closing the bedroom door, Yuuri relaxed against the wood and took in the space. Dark rich wood with deep antique gold and purple bedding. A small sitting area sat off to the side with coordinating fabrics and matching deep woods with the added warmth of rich leathers. Yuuri couldn’t help running his hand over the paisley pillow cases. He wondered if Victor made his own bed or if Olga took care of it. He suspected the alpha did attempt to make the bed and keep his space tidy but Olga went back through and “made it right.” Yuuri smiled at how well the house and family worked together, feeling warm that he was now part of this.

He relaxed as he moved further in the space, the scent of the alpha surrounding him and doing much to settle his nerves. He stopped near the bedside table to study the photos. In delicate matching frames stood images of Yelena holding baby Yura, a wedding picture with Victor standing behind her, a mischievous smile on his face while she looked up at him laughing, teenage Victor with Makkachin as a puppy, toddler Yura stretched over Makka’s back reaching for a kitten. Other surfaces held further snapshots of Victor’s life. He stopped before another painting, this one of Victor, a soft expression on his face, one Yuuri often witnessed when Victor was listening to his son. He could tell by the scale, composition, and background, the painting was the pair to Yelena’s portrait in the hall.
Yuuri finally opened the door into the bathroom and his eyes widened. The space was warm, full of dark woods, the flooring a slate gray with a mix of browns in the natural stone. The shower stood to one side separate from the tub, which was oversized and boasted shining copper fixtures. Yuuri could see where Nikolai had worked to replace one length of the piping and then the next. Running his fingers along the pipework, he could feel the wear of years. This was probably here with Victor’s parents. Still, the space was cavernous, the slate continuing up the wall and over the ceiling where lights were recessed into the ceiling. An arch separated it from the room but it was open otherwise, sloped to drain into the floor without run off. Yuuri could picture himself showering with Victor with room to spare. He thought about the floor, imaging their feet gently touching each other as the water rushed down their legs. Victor washing his hair, long fingers working against Yuuri’s scalp...then he blushed at the thought. He’d never showered or bathed with another man...well, not like that. Shuji wasn’t into intimacy, not the nice kind at least. And while he grew up in an onsen it wasn’t the same thing...nothing like he had just imagined.

Yuuri went to the jetted tub and groaned. He sat on the side, looking down into the deep, wide space. It would also hold two with ease. He suspected Victor added this later, replacing what was here. He could picture a clawfoot tub in this space. The stone moved halfway up the wall and was met with a deep wood chair moulding, a wallpaper repeating the muted tones from the plaid found on the couch and throw pillows. Running his fingers along the surface of the jetted tub, he could imagine himself curled in Victor’s embrace. Or Victor in his, Yuuri’s legs wrapped around the still slender torso as he rubbed soap down the older man’s arms and back...Yuuri rose quickly, shaking off those daydreams. It’s my heat, it’s just my approaching heat. He set the taps to run a hot bath before moving to shower off. He gave into the temptation to try Victor’s shampoo and recognized a citrus scent that complemented Victor’s natural cedar. He continued to bathe off, already starting to feel more to rights but he still planned to soak in that tub.

Moving from the shower to the tub, Yuuri noticed how he was able to move about the space as comfortably as he was. Granted, this was Victor’s space, and part of Yuuri felt like he was invading but another part...a much louder part...knew he needed to be there, needed to ground himself in this room, needed to surround himself in the alpha’s scent.

The water of the tub had warmed nicely, steam rising and the slight scent of lavender filling the room. Finally settling into the tub with a sigh, he let his eyes drift around the room. Above the tub hung a mirror, a chunky but ornate frame in the deep wood tones. Shelves held a number of bath soaps and salts. Across the room stood a double vanity set into cabinets that looked much more like an antique dresser topped off with a marble counter, the sinks copper vessels. Yuuri smiled as he looked above the mirrors, a matching set of ovals framed in deep heavy wood like the one above the bathtub, and spotted a pair of small chandeliers. The entire space was warm, masculine, but not overbearing. Like Victor.

Closing his eyes, he felt the jets easing tension he didn’t know he was holding. I feel safe. So then why do I feel so...off? Truth be told, he started feeling out of sorts after Victor left. He’s not mine. I should be fine without him. But his mind, body, even his heart argued otherwise. Yuuri being Yuuri ignored all and stuck to his own stubborn convictions.
Blinking up towards the ceiling, broken up with deep paneled beams of wood, he considered the man. Victor had taken Yuuri in with all of his struggles and trusted him with his child. The alpha never hesitated in caring for the omega. *Do I like to be cared for?* Yuuri had always considered himself to be an independent man. Even in captivity, he saw to himself. *What would it be like to be...taken care of? To be...loved? To actually...make love?* Yuuri gasped as he realized where his thoughts had taken him.

*I’ve never wanted another man...I’ve never wanted any man. I didn’t want the first.*

He closed his eyes and forced himself to put it into context.

*Is this my approaching heat talking?*

He considered where he came from, frowning as he remembered his captor.

*I never had the chance to want another man. I never knew what choice or consent would feel like. You tied me down right after I presented, Shuji. Pulled me from my life, stole my family, my future. You are a monster. I was a child!*

*I was a child...*

The sob broke free and he cried, his body shaking in the warmth of the tub, the jets pulsing through the water. “I just want to be normal. To allow myself to be loved without worry or suspicion. To return that love.”

Yuuri finally laid back, his hand sliding up his torso, mildly exploring his own body. His fingers found soft places along his belly and dips that were quickly shallowing. He thought about the man that belonged to this room, to this house. *Could you love me? Is that what I want?*

Climbing out of the tub, he pulled the plug and dried off with the plush towel. Hanging it over the bar to dry, he turned back and cleaned up the further evidence of his intrusion. *He invited me to be here. He told me to do what I needed.* He smiled at the thoughts, but then remembered he had, afterall, grown up in an onsen. *That doesn’t mean I need to leave a mess.* He dressed in the comfortable, soft warmth of sweatpants and a long sleeved tee.

Following his feet out the door, he stopped in the bedroom. Victor’s masculine scent unchecked
and eking into every corner, melding with the threads of fabric, greeted him once more. Resting his eyes on the bed, relaxed from the warmth of the bed, the sleepless night and hard morning caught up to him. He ignored warnings in his head that said not to and crawled into the bed. He didn’t pull back the covers but curled up on the top of the comforter.

His eyelids lowered slowly, opening and closing until finally giving in. And if his dreams led him to the man missing from the room, Yuuri could blame it on the scent surrounding him.

Olga went about the house cleaning rooms as she found them. She wondered, offhand, where Yuuri had gotten off to but figured he’d turn up eventually. She had noticed that sometimes the little omega needed to spend a few moments in quiet reflection. Opening Victor’s room, she sighed. The small lump in the bed answered her questions. Poor thing...missing his alpha already. Gingerly, she walked over and reached for the corner of the bedding, drawing it over Yuuri to ward against the chill before carefully leaving the room.

In the kitchen, she chatted amiably with the old man. “Yuuri Toshiyavich is showing more signs of his approaching heat.” She didn’t need to hide her concern from him, the older man held his own for the little omega.

“Vitya told me to keep an eye on him.” The older man rubbed his thumb against patch of rough skin on his palm. He had been thinking of ways to keep the young man close to home without making him feel stifled. "Yuuri is independent and proud but he doesn’t want Yuuri out by himself as his heat draws closer.”

“I agree...so you’ll see to Yura?” Olga raised her eyebrows, watching the older man take a deep breath in. For such a small, thin omega neither of them looked forward to butting heads with his stubborn nature. Yuuri would be reluctant to let another take care of his little one...even Grandpa.

“Of course! I’ve already agreed to take him on during Yuuri’s heat.”

Olga chuckled. “That room has a lot of soundproofing but it still lets noise in...and out. Can you imagine Yura’s questions?”

Nikolai snorted. “That boy is too curious for his own good.” He then quieted and nodded towards the door.
A sleepy Yuuri wandered in, his eyes going from one to the other suspiciously. “I...fell asleep.”

“I saw,” Olga answered, her eyes teasing.

Yuuri blushed in response and ducked into the dining room. He climbed into his chair and pulled his knees to his chest, his eyes looking out towards the back yard.

The housekeeper watched him with concern. “Do you need anything, dear?”

Yuuri turned back and studied the table before slowly shaking his head. “I should probably get ready to go pick up Yura.”

“Oh, it’s still raining,” Olga protested, moving quickly to block Yuuri’s path to his coat.

Yuuri shrugged. “Katya is stopping by to pick me up. Her call woke me up. She said I sounded like I need out of the house.”

As despondent as the omega appeared, Olga tended to agree. She quickly assessed the situation, while he would be out of the house too close to his heat, he would be with a trusted friend. “Will you be back for dinner?”

Yuuri looked up surprised by that question. “She said something about taking Mila to dance class. There is a younger version for Yura to participate in and start building his basics. We...were going to get tea. I just need to get out of my head for awhile. It’s probably the weather.”

Olga thinned her lips and nodded, letting him have his myth. That sounded like a yes so if they were late, she’d have something put back for them. “Let us know if we can help,” she offered.

Yuuri nodded, already extricating himself from the room and added attention.
Yuuri stood waiting under the shelter of the front stoop. Katya had texted ten minutes prior that she was on her way. He needed this. He felt the weight of Victor’s absence already crushing him. *I don’t understand it. We aren’t mated. We aren’t even dating. One “date” doesn’t constitute dating, does it?* Yuuri worried over these thoughts as the familiar SUV drove up. However once the Katya’s smile beamed from the driver’s seat, Yuuri lifted the umbrella to make his way down the sidewalk to where she had parked.

“Yuuri! How are you?”

Yuuri shrugged, closing the umbrella as he settled into his seat and then fastened the seatbelt. “I don’t...know?”

“Well, I thought at first I’d take you to one of my favorite places for tea...but now I think you could use the quiet...and I know just the place and we can stay out of the rain.”

“It’s just…” he began than released a huge lungful of air. “We’re not dating!” The words came out with a force.

Katya studied him, her eyes taking in the frazzled appearance. “Oh, god! You’re dealing with mate separation!”

“I can’t be…” Yuuri protested, “It’s got to be something else. I didn’t do this with Shuji...and he was gone a lot.”

She resisted the urge to dig too far and instead eased the SUV into gear, pulling into traffic. “He was?” Katya kept her focus on the traffic, which helped to make her question sound less searching than it actually was.

Yuuri nodded, not hearing her interest. “I knew how long based on the number of rations he laid out.”

Her jaw stiffened at those words. “Well, you can’t compare that to now. You didn’t really accept Shuji as a mate.” *Because he wasn’t.* She paused, keeping her cool. “Maybe under the law he was, but not in your heart.”

Yuuri shrugged, settling further into the seat. “And Victor? We went on one...date. Or maybe it
wasn’t a date. I don’t think…” Yuuri paused, looking at his hands. Then the large brown eyes shifted to her, full of self doubt, “he could do so much better than me.”

Katya spared him a look, reaching over to pat his hand. “You are still having trouble saying that. A date. That’s what it was. He even took you to dinner before the party.”

“It’s…hard for me to accept. And I don’t know...he may think I was too much trouble. I mean, I drank too much and I can’t even remember what happened. And I don’t want to risk losing Yura. I think…” he gulped in some air before continuing, fighting a sob, “that would hurt more than anything.”

Katya glanced towards Yuuri and reached over to give his hand a squeeze. “It’s going to be okay. Victor...doesn’t play with people’s hearts. If he seems interested, he is. He doesn’t believe in being false about matters of the heart.”

“I...know,” Yuuri whispered, his eyes turned towards the window. “I just...I’m not worth it.”

“Yuuuuriii,” her voice chased after him, chastising those thoughts. “You are worth so much...don’t let that man dictate your value.”

Yuuri sat quietly for a few minutes. His eyes were focused beyond the window, watching the activity just outside. “I keep thinking...what if he didn’t set me free? I wasn’t allowed to leave on my own.”

“And that is so very wrong...but that doesn’t mean you’re not worth it. To someone, I’d daresay to more than one someone, you’re worth everything.” She pulled to a stop at the curb, nodding towards the schoolyard. “There’s one someone now.”

Yuuri drew in a ragged breath watching the boy light up on seeing him, waving to his friend before jumping puddles to reach the SUV behind Mila.

“Am I really going to go to dance class?”

Yuuri laughed shakily. “It seems that way. We’re stopping on the way to get you the gear that you need, but I confirmed it with Madame Lilia this morning.”
“Yes!” The blonde fist pumped the air. Yuuri stifled a laugh wondering when the little Russian had seen *The Breakfast Club.*

Yuuri met Katya’s eyes, a smile finding its way past the ghosts of Yuuri’s past. He knew Yura was bored in his skating class. He couldn’t move up but he already excelled in his skills. *You’ll always push that line, won’t you? Jumps and spins long before you’re ready. We’re going to be constantly tugging you back.*

Yuuri watched Yura skip into the dance class across the hall from Mila’s and listened to the teacher’s instructions. Even in Russian, Yuuri instinctively knew what she was expecting. *I could teach this class with my eyes closed.* Then he smirked. *Maybe not with five-year-olds.*

Following Katya downstairs, the redhead led Yuuri to the cantina and then down a series of halls to a small alcove where a few chairs were strewn. “Some of the kids study here between practice but they’ll all be busy right now. I like to hide out here sometimes.”

They chose a spot near the window and Yuuri sipped his tea while he stared out into the rainy day. “Maybe it’s the weather...my mood, that is.”

“Yuuri, I think you’re ignoring the obvious.”

“Maybe it’s not so obvious if it’s so easily ignored,” Yuuri huffed.

Katya rolled her eyes as she sprawled back in the chair. “It’s okay, you know...to be in love even if you aren’t ready to admit it.”

Yuuri fussed in the chair, suddenly nothing was comfortable and all scents were too much. “It was supposed to be a job...a place to find my feet again. I’ve never had the chance to be independent.”

Katya stilled, catching his eyes. “Does Vitya prevent you from being independent?”
Yuuri slowly shook his head no. He knew Victor cared. Love, he wasn’t so sure...but care, he was certain. “I have nothing to compare this to...I’ve never...been in love.” He trailed off into a whisper, the word too scary to say out loud. “Victor is cautious about safety, but he would never try to stop me from growing. Not like Shuji...”

Katya watched silently as Yuuri trailed off, she could see from his expression that a nasty memory passed through his mind. “Have you ever considered...reporting him?” Katya began carefully. “Shuji, that is?

“Reporting him?” Yuuri asked, blinking. Then his eyes widened with understanding. “Umm...what good would it do? The laws favor the alpha.”

“Maybe in Japan...not everywhere.” Katya picked at her sandwich, hoping not to upset Yuuri with her following suggestion, “...not if he...kidnapped someone.”

Yuuri stilled as her words washed over him and didn’t realize his hands were shaking until Katya began removing the cup from them. Turning, his eyes wide, he asked, “Was someone kidnapped?”

_Yuuri, he practically kidnapped you._ She sighed, realizing then that Yuuri probably didn’t keep up with the news. Nodding, she reached for her phone, changed some settings and then found the news article she was seeking. Handing Yuuri the phone, she murmured, “He’s a Japanese-American boy...around eighteen. A skater. Disappeared while at the NHK.”

Yuuri visibly flinched at the mention of the Japanese entrance of the Grand Prix circuit. _That’s Shuji’s main event._ He took in that information and quickly did some math in his head. “That’s...when he moved me to the other place.”

Katya didn’t want to upset Yuuri further but had to ask. “Could he have...taken this boy?”

Yuuri nodded hesitantly. “He said I’d been replaced, that was his exact word. Replaced. I thought it was someone like me...someone that didn’t stand a chance. If he’s American, they can get him away from there?”

Katya took his hands and held them securely in hers. “If he’s been kidnapped, they can definitely get him away.”
Yuuri drew in a ragged breath, trying to pull free before giving into her hold. He surrendered into a hug while he sobbed, feeling her arms wrap around him. Finally, he stilled, his head resting on her shoulder. A couple of teens walked by and saw them together. Yuuri saw their concerned looks, but didn’t understand their whispered words. However, Katya heard them say, “That’s coach’s omega.” Smiling she’d remember to give Victor a heads up later that gossip was spreading about them. For now, her focus was on Yuuri.

Finally pulling back, he sat up, taking measured breaths as he considered her words. “I should have said something. He said...I’d been replaced. All I saw was my freedom.”

Katya heard the blame coming into his voice and was quick to cut it off immediately, “Yuuri, you’d been trapped by him for so long...of course that’s all you saw.”

“No, you don’t understand. I knew he had someone. I was just...glad to be free.” He was edging close to hysterical in his self incrimination. “I’m a horrible person. I let someone walk into that hell so I could escape.” His breathing started pitching again along with his hysteria.

Katya dropped to her knees in front of his chair. “Yuuri...Yuuri...you need to calm down.” She cupped his face and forced his eyes to meet her. “Breathe.”

Yuuri nodded, forcing his breaths in order, listening.

“Will you talk to someone?”

Yuuri blinked and then looked up and asked, “Who?”

“Coach Feltmsman...his wife Lilia. Either would work.” She saw the confusion on his face and supplied the information. “They would know what to do...and they would make sure you’re safe. Victor is very important to both of them.”

Yuuri scratched at his hair. Yakov was scary...but not in a threatening manner. He still held a lot of authority. That’s what Yuuri needed. Lilia...she reminded him of Minako. She was fierce and protective. He’d be safe with her. He slowly nodded. “I...can talk to them.”

Chapter End Notes
The weight of another is always the heaviest...even if we don't know them.
The best of friends…

Chapter Summary

Yuuri deals with his realization, reaching out to the one who's been there through the years.

Chapter Notes

I apparently missed my Wednesday post. We've blamed everything this week to Mercury being in retrograde. I don't quite know what that means but the kids have been crazy and goodness, we could use spring break already...one more week to go. But my nine weeks is complete and I've got another crazy week. Induction ceremony, pi day, and prom...oh, my! ;)

Ch. 22: The best of friends…

Phichit frowned as he looked at his phone. He had felt his phone vibrate twice during the Skype meeting with the designers for the latest game his company was putting out. As soon as the conference ended he knew immediately he had to check. His Yuuri sense was tingling. Dammit, two missed calls from Yuuri. This can’t be good. He quickly returned the call and within moments, Yuuri answered, a whine in the back of his throat as he breathed a heavy greeting. Phichit felt his eyes water, cursing himself for not being able to answer right away. “Yuuri, are you okay?”

“Y-yes?” The voice was small and high pitched, a sure sign his friend was nearing panic.

Phichit listened to the erratic breathing and the fear in Yuuri’s voice. He knew where his friend was emotionally and needed to get Yuuri’s rational side more active. “That’s a question. Are you not sure?”

Down the line the omega was struggling to put his thoughts together. “I-I don’t know what to do...I think I messed up.”

Phichit closed his eyes, picturing Yuuri chewing on his lip in worry, working himself up into a
panic. “Okay, what is going on?” He kept his tone light, but also business like, encouraging his friend to approach this the same way. *Take inventory Yuuri.*

“I, ummm, well...someone disappeared...not right now but...back when I was let go.” The words tumbled out in a jumbled mess but Phichit could follow his friend easily. “I think...do you think Shuji is capable of kidnapping?”

Phichit’s heart dropped at the first sentences. He pulled the phone away from his mouth quickly, putting a hand over his lips to stifle the sob that threatened to bubble up. *By the laws of the rest of the world, he kidnapped you, Yuuri*, the Thai man thought to himself. He regained control and answered, “It’s not an impossible thought. Where is this coming from?”

Yuuri let out a shaky breath and continued, “Did you know there was a skater that disappeared about the same time he let me go?”

Phichit frowned as he thought about it. “Chris said something about it but I was busy getting you to a safe place. So I didn’t really focus on it.” Phichit thought more of what his boyfriend had said when a detail struck him. “No wait, he couldn’t be...that skater was an American. Shuji has a type.”

“He was a Japanese-American, Peach!” Yuuri’s voice was a whispered screech.

Phichit felt himself blanche as the blood rushed from his head. *Oh god.* He was typing the search into his computer and scanning the headlines as he talked to Yuuri. Opening the article, the photo revealed a Japanese boy wearing glasses and a very serious expression. *Shit!* He already had his email up and was searching flights. Keeping his voice steady, he told Yuuri, “Yuuri, you’re going to have to talk to someone.”

“I know!” Yuuri’s voice pitched higher in his panic and Phichit needed to calm him down, now.

“Okay, I’m...booking a flight right now.” There was no getting around this, his friend desperately needed him...and truthfully, Phichit needed to hold his friend as well...if only to assure himself that the man was still safe in Russia.

Yuuri’s sobs had broken on the other end, “Phichit! No...you can’t just pick up every time...”
“Yuuri, who was with you during most of this?” Phichit reminded him, refocusing his friend’s thoughts.

The young omega shook as he tried to hold himself together, “You…but…”

“Yuuri, this is distressing news, but it’s going to get very complicated quickly. Do you think I’m going to leave you to sort through this now?” he continued to assure Yuuri.

There was a pause as he listened to Yuuri’s breathing even out. “N-no…”

Phichit knew he couldn’t be with his friend immediately, and Yuuri’s distress demanded help at the moment. He began considering where Yuuri could get help and asked, “Where’s Victor?”

“He’s...out of town.” Yuuri’s voice betrayed his sorrow at the loss of the older man. “He has two distant competitions back to back.”

Phichit cursed himself again for forgetting. Mentally he began running through people he could call on as he considered his friend. *Who will make you feel safe?* “That’s right, he’s working Skate America and Skate Canada. I remember you telling me now. Okay, don’t argue with me. I’m coming. I’ll be there...it looks like it will be late tomorrow.”

“Do I wait?” The Japanese omega sounded lost on the other end.

Phichit took a deep breath and let it out slowly. *It’s time to come clean entirely.* “I’m contacting Chris. He’ll be with you by tomorrow.”

Yuuri’s voice became erratic. “But...I can’t have you both buying plane tickets!”

Phichit sighed, “Oh, honey...Chris is already there. In Russia.” He heard a sharp intake of breath on the other end. “I...we owe you an explanation. We’ll sort it all out...but if you talk to someone, I want him by your side. Especially if Victor is not able to be.”

Yuuri paused, Phichit could hear him working out all the pieces, “But…”
Phichit was quick to cut off the last of the argument, “Yuuri, he’s a good alpha. You know this. He’ll look after you.”

He could almost see his friend’s head nod. “Chris is safe.”

Phichit smiled, thinking of the praise his friend just bestowed on his alpha, “Yes, he’s safe. He’ll protect you. Just wait for him. Okay?”

Yuuri took a deep breath and let it out. “I’ll wait.”

As soon as the call disconnected, he turned around and called his mate. “Hi, love...what do you say about a surprise visit from yours truly?” He had pulled his suitcase out of the closet and watch banging around draws pulling out clothing for the next few days.

A warm chuckle came down the line. “Always...when can I expect you?”

“Tomorrow...I’m emailing you my itinerary.” Phichit had been distracted pulling his passport out and hoped his alpha wouldn’t catch the urgency in his voice.

It failed. Across the miles, Chris sat upright. “What’s going on?”

Deflated, Phichit sat on the edge of his bed, facing into the closet “Yuuri has made a possible connection...and I think you were trying to tell me about it but I wasn’t really listening. I had my Yuuri blinders on.”

Chris’ voice was a soft murmur down the line, “The American.”

“God, yes!” Phichit breathed, realizing that his mate was already ahead of him on this. “Yuuri found out, he’s pretty sure the boy was taken by Shuji and he wants to come forward. But Victor’s out of town. And I need you to go check on him tomorrow, to be with him when he goes to talk to the powers that be.” He looked down at the sweater he had pulled from a drawer. It was one that Chris had left behind on his last visit. Phichit smiled, “Can you do this for me?”
The Alpha was already up and looking at his schedule as he began looking through his appointments on Wednesday. “I...have no court commitments. Only one major contract. Everything else can be postponed. And it looks like the rest of my week is equally flexible. I’ll contact Marina and have her start rearranging things.”

Phichit smiled into the phone, then began moving about his room, pulling together all that he would need to hop on a flight tomorrow. “Good...Yuuri knows to wait for you before talking with anyone.”

“Oh, thank you.” Chris laid the phone on the bed, opening his laptop to begin typing out a set of notes to his assistant. Pausing, “Does Victor know?”

Phichit smirked, “If he did, he’d be the one calling you.” And probably from his flight home to Yuuri.

“Fair point.”

“Oh, and honey?”

Chris smiled into the phone, trading one loving nickname for another, “Oui, mon cher.”

Phichit stilled at the endearment. Even in all this I love you so much. “I’ll see you soon. I’m clearing the rest of the week as well...god, I miss you.”

Chris closed his eyes, imagining the beautiful man before him. “I miss you, too.”

Yuuri wandered around the house, nervous energy keeping him from settling in one place long. Olga could see something was bothering the young man and kept casting worried glances in his direction. Less perceptive but just as concerned, Nikolai asked if Yuuri needed to go somewhere. Yuuri smiled his thanks to Nikolai and tried to avoid Olga’s searching eye. He loved both of these people but they couldn’t help him with this. He should have told Victor when he called to check on Yura and talk with his son. Instead, Yuuri was restless and passed the phone off to the boy after answering Victor’s questions.
Yura was great, it was Yuuri that was falling apart. The boy prattled into the phone telling his father of all the inconsequential bits of news from school and the house that Victor had missed. Yuuri used that as a chance to walk the length of the house unobserved, only to find himself at Victor’s bedroom door more than once. Each time he would shake his head, only to walk away. *This won’t fix anything.* He was pulled from his thoughts as the doorbell rang and Yuuri opened it to Chris. Before a word was traded between the two, Yuuri ran into his arms and hugged him, Chris picking up quickly on the distress and trembles of the omega.

“It’s okay, Yuuri. I’ve got you.” He looked into the house, the eyes of the housekeeper catching his hazel. She gestured to the a room beyond the kitchen, inviting him in. “Let’s get you into the living room and sit down so we can talk and decide what you want to do.”

“You talk to Phichit?” The question wasn’t as careful as Yuuri normally was with his grammar and Chris knew that he was still operating somewhere in the range of panic.

“Yes,” he assured the omega.

Yuuri could feel all of his nervous ticks exposing themselves but was helpless to stop them. He scratched his arms and tugged at his hair, nails digging into his hairline. His feet were actually frozen in place and it took Chris guiding him into the other room to get Yuuri moving again.

The living room was empty and far from the ears of others. The two men moved to the couch. Facing Yuuri, Chris invited the omega with a gentle command. “Talk to me, Yuuri. You are officially my client and anything you say is confidential.”

Yuuri drew in a deep breath and then a second, hearing the slightly panicked wheeze. Chris moved closer and gently began moving his hand up and down Yuuri’s back, something he’d seen his mate do to the omega. The alpha could see the omega was in distress, but there was something more than just anxiety. Chris moved closer, only by an inch, and could pick up the scent beginning to escape from the younger man’s pours. *Separation anxiety and abandonment. He’s pining for Victor.* If the circumstances were different Chris would have been overjoyed that his friends were so attached so soon. However, as they were there was nothing wonderful about the distress the little body was experiencing. He hoped he wasn’t confusing Yuuri’s instincts so close to his heat but all he felt from Yuuri was familial.

Yuuri’s breathing steadied and calmed as Chris slowly rubbed the small of his back. Taking a deep breath in, he began slowly, “You know about Shuji and me...I’m sure Phichit kept you informed.” Brown eyes glanced over waiting to see verification from the hazel. “But...when I left, he said I’d been replaced. I didn’t think about it. I couldn’t. I just needed out of there.”
“And now you’re free, the bond annulled.” Chris supplied.

Yuuri looked down at his hands, picking at the hem of his sleeve. “But...what about the one that replaced me?”

Chris moved his hand to Yuuri’s shoulder, stilling there but remaining to help Yuuri feel grounded. “Phichit suggested that it might be the Japanese-American skater that disappeared...and I have to admit that I have been wondering the same thing.”

Yuuri nodded. “Do you think...he’d kidnap someone?”

“He could have just forced a bond on him.”

An alpha, especially a mature alpha, unfortunately has a whole arsenal, legal and illegal, at their disposal that would allow them to take advantage of a younger omega. It takes a while to build an immunity to some of those tricks.”

Yuuri nodded, understanding fully. “And he could have just forced a bond on him.”

Chris took a deep breath and let it out before nodding. “I’m afraid so...even if he’s bonded to you, he could have had a secondary. Your bond wasn’t a closed bond, a mating bond, Yuuri. What he put on you is what is known in some less civilized alpha circles as a slave bond.” He saw a small shudder rip through Yuuri’s body. “For some couples, that’s what they prefer. Especially if they want the closeness of a bond while still being able to enjoy other partners. However, it can also be one that allows the alpha to continue to prowl while he has an omega locked up at home.”

Yuuri shrunk in on himself, “I knew...something was different about it.” **That’s what it felt like at least.** “But Japanese government views them all the same.”

“Unfortunately, that’s right. The mistake he made here... if he took this kid...is crossing international lines. He’s subject to other laws.”

The omega paused, collecting his thoughts. Slowly he turned two large eyes to Chris, “So...you think I should come forward. It would help this boy?”

Chris nodded slowly. “It might help him, and it will help you, too. But I want to be with you
while they question you. Victor would want me to be with you.”

Yuuri looked up at him as he considered his next question but finally decided to move forward. “You’re Victor’s attorney, aren’t you?”

Chris sighed in resignation before agreeing. “Yes...he was one of my first clients.”

“You and Phichit worked to get me here?” Yuuri’s voice was firm, but not hard. He was piecing together the puzzle of the last few months and Phichit’s influence while he was job searching. The ad that just seemed to pop out of nowhere, Phichit’s insistence that he apply.

“We wanted you someplace safe.” Chris removed his hand, sensing that the young man was past his emergency. “And...I saw a need in Victor I thought you could meet.”

“Yura,” the omega whispered.

_Not exactly, but I’ll let that lie._ Chris nodded and smiled lazily. “The little mite is a challenge to most...but I suspected that you would be good for him.”

Yuuri smiled slyly, “You’ve never seen me with kids.”

“Actually, that’s not true.” Chris chuckled, he wouldn’t have to lie to cover his tracks here. “One of the times Phichit sneaked you out, we went to the skating rink. There was a kid that became lost and stuck in the middle of the ice. Not only did you help them get to the edge, but you calmed them until their mother could be located. That’s when I noticed...a lot of the kids skating there settled down around you. Mothers felt easy seeing you interact with their children, and you were clearly competent and warm towards them. A natural. Their energy doesn’t seem to tug on you.”

Yuuri seemed to accept this and moved on. “Does Victor know?”

“He knows I knew you...that played a role in my recommending you.” Chris smiled at his seemingly absent-minded friend. Victor could walk into glass door while reciting poetry in his head. Brilliant fool. “He also probably suspects the rest.”
Yuuri smiled and turned to Chris, “I...I like him, you know.”

Chris nodded. *He would know...dating Phichit. No point denying it*. “I think he might like you as well.”

Yuuri hugged himself as he considered his next move. “Will this...testimony...will it push him away?”

Chris shook his head and patted Yuuri’s shoulder again, “If anything, it will probably draw him closer. He’s very protective of his family.”

Yuuri had seen that. He closed his eyes as he organized his thoughts before asking, “Will you go with me to talk to Yakov and Lilia? I think...that’s where I need to start.”

“That’s a great place to start...but I think you should tell Victor first.” It wasn’t that Victor hadn’t guessed most of this...but Yuuri needed to reach out to his...mate?

Yuuri took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “It’s...hard…”

Chris shifted to face Yuuri, “Would you like me to stay for that call?”

Yuuri didn’t know. “I’m...not scared of Victor. I think...I’ll talk to him tonight when he calls to check on Yura. Do you think it will be okay to wait until tomorrow to talk to Yakov? I think...I want Phichit here as well.”

Chris’ voice was firm, “We will do this however you want to do this, Yuuri. You are setting the pace and you are in control of who will know what.”

The omega took a deep breath and let it out...there was so much to say...so much of it was ugly. He reached for his phone and sent a text to Victor. He decided he wanted to get this over with.
Victor watched his skaters as they practiced. Next to him stood the Japanese coach Yamamoto Akane, her eagle eyes following her own skaters. He admired her vigilance and was about to crack a joke when he caught the expression on her face. She was clearly agitated and failed to suppress a hiss. Startled, he followed her eyes once he realized it wasn’t aimed towards him. The omega coach’s eyes rested on a Japanese ISU official walking on an opposite side of the practice rink. Through the wave of rapidly moving bodies Victor could make out a form. After a couple of blinks, he grumbled in a dangerously low voice, “Shuji.”

“Keep that asshat away from your skaters,” Coach Yamamoto warned. She waved her skaters to her, making a signal for two cool down laps. They stopped, confused but obediently followed orders.

Victor waited until he knew the skaters were far from earshot before asking in a low voice, “What do you know?”

Her eyes went back to the official, watching as he glad handed a few other officials, then made his way to the barrier, watching the skaters. Sucking at her teeth in disgust, “When I was skating, my coach told me of another skater that had been messed with.” She narrowed her eyes, calling the name into memory. “Katsuki. Had a lot of promise. But then the skater was suddenly bonded to Kobayashi Shuji…and not the traditional way. Then the rumors started to spread that the official got the skater by himself and forced the bond.”

Victor barely suppressed the growl. “Why is he still with the ISU?”

“No official report was filed. Can’t fire him on hearsay.” She watched as the figure in question waved at a skater, who pretended not to see. The man turned and left the rink. Victor could see the woman visibly relax. She turned her attention to him, “But those of us in Japan know to keep our skaters, particularly our male omega skaters, away from him.”

Victor closed his eyes at the confirmation of so many of his thoughts. “That American…”

Her skaters approached and she pointed at the barrier, turning to leave him. “We all suspect him…but we can’t do anything about it. We just watch…and guard our skaters.” She picked the guards up, pointing them at the door the slime had left by. “My mate…he’s nearby…and it wouldn’t surprise me to learn he’s tracking that waste of air.”

Victor suddenly wished Brian Orser were here. He’d know what to do. He’s Canadian Yakov. Turning his eyes, he watched Yamamoto attend to her skaters, both confused at being pulled from the ice soon but satisfied with her explanation. The buzz of his phone broke his concentration on
them, the words still processing as he looked down at the messages.

YuuriK/ I need to talk to you

YuuriK/ Not about Yura

Victor frowned at the odd contact from his omega. Signaling Pyotr over, he murmured, “I need to call home. Keep an eye on our boys and keep them away from Shuji Kobayashi.”

Pyotr’s eyes tracked where Victor was indicating and leaned in to whisper, “Is that the one that had your Yuuri?”

Victor winced. *Even those from work have noticed I’m courting the omega. Nothing to be done now.* He nodded. “I don’t know if he’s hunting. I just know I don’t want him to mess with our boys...and if they’ve heard the rumors, I don’t want our boys to go after him.”

“Understood.” Both men knew the Russian skaters would protect their own.

Finding a private alcove that would still give him eyes on the rink, he connected the call. “Yuuri?”

The omega’s voice was small down the line, “I’m sorry...I didn’t mean to disturb you. I know you’re busy.”

Victor warmed his voice, “Don’t worry about it...I have Pyotr here for a reason.”

“It’s just that...I didn’t realize. Not until Katya told me and I started researching. I think...Shuji grabbed that missing skater!”

Victor could hear the panic in the omega’s voice and wished he could be there, his instincts already needing to pull the omega into his scent. “Yuuri…”

“No, let me finish,” Yuuri cut him off in a rush. “Right when...he sent me away, he told me I had
been replaced. Those were his exact words, *you’ve been replaced.* That was just days after the other skater disappeared.” Yuuri paused, forcing himself to breath more normally. “I need to tell someone...but Chris, he said I should call you first.”

Victor sucked in a deep breath, realizing Yuuri had been dealing with this long enough to bring in a third party. “You’ve talked to Chris?” He couldn’t help the small wave of jealousy that his friend, an alpha, was there to help Yuuri when he was separated more than half a world away.

“Phichit sent him over to make sure I’m okay and to advise me. There’s a lot going on...and Phichit is coming here.” Yuuri’s voice broke, a small sob escaping. “I’m scared.”

Victor shook his head glad that he had eyes on the piece of shit. “Don’t be, Yuuri. I can see him from here. Shuji is in America.”

A small gasp on the other end let Victor know Yuuri hadn’t suspected that much. “You know who he is?”

Victor didn’t point out the number of slips Yuuri had made over the last weeks. Instead, he answered, “Another coach pointed him out, warning me against him.”

“Oh, shit! Sorry...ummm, what should I do?” Victor could see him in his mind’s eye tugging at his hear and his sleeves, chewing his lip nervously.

Victor focused on keeping his voice as calm as possible. “Talk to Yakov. He’ll take care of you. And take Chris with you...especially if he makes you feel safe.” It irked Victor a little, bruised his alpha some, that Chris was there for Yuuri when he wasn’t, that Yuuri turned to Chris first.

Although, technically he didn’t. Victor had to remind himself that Yuuri had actually reached out to another omega. Phichit. His best friend that had probably been there for him through all of this.

Yuuri’s breath slowed a little as he considered those words. “He does...he always has. Like...family.”

Victor’s tension melted slightly at the word *family.* That eased the jealousy a little. He trusted Chris. He needed to calm his omega. “He will watch over you until I get home. I trust him like a brother. I’ll be keeping an eye on things here, okay?”
“Okay...what about Yura?”

Victor considered his son. *Is he in danger?* He knew that was the omega’s concern. “What do your instincts tell you?”

Yuuri was quiet for a moment and Victor knew he was working past his panic and filtering the conflicting information coming from his body. “I think...he’s safe for now. He’s happy, and doesn’t suspect anything is wrong.”

“And most don’t know you’re with me. So trust the people I’ve put in place around you.”

“I will...thank you.” Yuuri’s voice was growing small again, almost childlike. “I’m sorry.”

“You’ve nothing to be sorry for, solnyshko.” He could hear Yuuri’s breathing even out as he calmed. *Good.* He’ll talk with him some more during his call later. “Just take care of you...and I know you’ll continue to take good care of our Yura.” Disconnecting his call, he narrowed his eyes on Shuji. At this point, he noted a Japanese man not too far from the man keeping a close eye on him. He suspected it was the Japanese coach’s mate but could see a few others keeping their eye on him. Looking around the rink, he watched many skaters and coaches closing ranks, girls in the senior division suddenly skating to those in juniors and bringing them to their shared coaches. Haruko Okamoto stood at the barrier, next to her Miyahara, both with their heads low and together. He could easily see the skater and coach clearly discussing Shuji as dark eyes flashed his way. *So many suspect you and nothing can be done. Hopefully my brave Yuuri can change that.*

Chapter End Notes

It’s got to be hard to be so far away when your love falls apart. (1500 kudos for extra chapter)

(Edits added on 4/6 after discovering BluSkates had more to polish.)
His great love...

Chapter Summary

Yuuri, with the support of so many people, shares his story with the authorities.

Chapter Notes

1500 kudos! Thank you all so much for the love! And this is how I show my love...an extra chapter for you. (Send some love for Blu...she took a bit of time in her day to help me get this ready to post.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 23: His great love...

**TW:** Yuuri is going over the details of his time with Shuji. There will be brief mentions of noncon/rape.

Phichit had arrived the following day and after a quick cry on both omegas part they agree to head to the rink. The Thai man declared that what was worth doing was worth being prompt. Yuuri shakily agreed and they were in Phichit’s sedan soon. The Thai drove carefully, mindful of his friend’s nerves and watching for any signs of *Yuuri Stress.*

The rink was relatively quiet with the main team out at competitions and training camps so they were able to glide through toward the offices without having to stop and chat with anyone. Phichit ran his hand up and down Yuuri’s back. “It’s okay...Coach Feltsman is hard on his skaters because he cares. It will be the same for you.”

“I’m not scared of Yakov,” Yuuri answered with a shake of the head. “I’m scared...that this is all going to unravel and I’ll be left...just Yuuri. Or that Shuji will change his mind and force me to return with him. Or that Shuji will figure out I told...and then come after me just to hurt me. I replay every scenario. And then I’m scared Shuji will hurt Victor, hurt Yura…” Yuuri gulped back a quick intake of breath. “I’m scared Shuji will take everyone away like he always has before.”
“He can’t get to you. Not with you here in Russia, with Victor.”

Yuuri nodded, understanding. Yuuri wanted to believe that but he knew Victor couldn’t protect him all the time. Even now, Victor was an ocean away. And he didn’t want to need that protection. He wanted independence, freedom, life. But there was more than his own fears, something deeper prompted him to risk everything. “I’m scared to lose what I’ve gained. But most of all, I’m scared he’ll make someone else feel like this.”

Phichit smiled at his friend. *No matter what that monster did to you, he couldn’t take the determination and strength that you’ve always carried.* “Yuuri,” he began with quiet reassurance. “Do this for you and the other one.”

Chris stood nearby waiting in the small conference room. It was no frills, just a small room and a table that could comfortably sit eight. The trio sat for a few moments with Phichit gently reminding his friend that he would be okay and Chris quietly watching the omega for any signs of panic. Finally, Yakov came into the room and with him, Lilia and two officials. Lilia walked directly to Yuuri and gave his shoulder a squeeze as she made her way to her seat. There was something reassuring about her touch, like she was lending him her steel. He felt himself straighten, his posture setting in as many years of ballet taught him.

Yakov opened the conversation. “Yuuri, I’m sorry if the appearance of these two officials surprised you, but I didn’t want you to have to repeat your story any more times than necessary. This is Cameron James with Interpol. I know he will have a number of questions that go beyond ours. And then we have Carlotta Frederick with the ISU. Let’s begin.”

Yuuri’s eyes searched each person’s face, eyes all resting on him. He started to feel himself cave but then Chris gave his leg a squeeze. Yuuri glanced his way, a silent thank you. Turning back to the others, he asked, “So...do I just start?”

“We don’t want to unnecessarily influence your story, Mr. Katsuki,” the Interpol officer began. “If you could give us an accounting, then we can determine our questions after. I will be recording this session.”

“As will I,” echoed Carlotta Frederick.

“Oh, umm, okay.” Yuuri closed his eyes and took a deep breath before he started his story. “I don’t know what’s relevant so I guess I’ll tell you from the beginning. I...was fourteen when I presented. It was a junior competition and I felt myself getting sick, so I excused myself from the group. I found the nearest bathroom and...well, I figured out what was happening.” He stopped,
blushing at the memory of presenting at the worst possible moment, then frowned realizing it was the moment after which was worse. “After that, when I couldn’t locate my coach, I started having a panic attack. An ISU official was nearby, he offered to take me to a safe place and promised me help. At the time I didn’t think anything of it. I thought...he was safe. He worked for the ISU. So I followed him. It never dawned on me that it was weird he would just be there, right outside the bathroom door, like he was waiting.” Yuuri shifted in his chair, forcing himself to clear his throat and refocus. “Then, he stepped up behind me. I didn’t like it...he was showering me with pheromones and it felt...personal. I started to struggle and he kept telling me to calm down, calm down, he was trying to help me. But the pheromones were almost choking me, and I felt really dizzy. I made myself breathe through it. I didn’t realize at first that he’d loosened my clothes. He said it was to make me breathe easier. That seemed reasonable as I was practically suffocating at that point. I began to relax. I closed my eyes. That’s when it happened. He forced the bond on me. Right here.” Yuuri indicated his shoulder.

Across the table Carlotta thinned her lips. Cameron gasped and shot a glance at her. She saw the confusion in his eyes and quietly muttered “slave bond.” Lilia coughed loudly and shot her hawk eyes over to them, hushing them like naughty children.

“Yuuri continue.” She bowed her head, as if giving the prima the barre.

Yuuri took a deep breath and let it out, reordering his thoughts. “I didn’t know what to do. He said...I wouldn’t be able to skate if I said anything. There were a number of other threats. My ISU license, the grants from the government, even Celestino’s coaching license...I think he knew something about my coach’s past. I was terrified. He made it...seem like my fault, or at least that everyone would view it as such.” Yuuri spread his hands open in front of him. “So...I didn’t talk. I said nothing for the next three years. Pretending it didn’t happen, but living with a countdown clock on my shoulder. Every time I saw Shuji at a competition, he’d remind me of our talk.”

“Everybody could see something was wrong, but no one could figure it out, and I wasn’t about to let them pry it out of me. He had made me so ashamed of what happened.” Yuuri paused, remembering the pain of when it finally did all come crashing to the surface. “When I was seventeen, my sister caught me changing and saw the mark. She freaked out and I was scared because I wasn’t supposed to say anything. Then my parents found out and they tried to deal with it but the cops weren’t interested, and attorneys we tried to hire said there was nothing they could do. At this point, it was my word against an alpha’s...and the courts always take the alpha’s word. So, at eighteen he just showed up at the inn, gave me one duffle bag to fill up with my belongings, watched as I kissed my entire family goodbye, and that was it. I was forced to go live with him.”

“He kept me captive for the next ten years, mostly at our different homes, rarely was I allowed out in public. I was isolated from my family, friends. Except when I was able to sneak away. I rarely was allowed to see family. He controlled what I ate, what I did, how I communicated.” Yuuri broke through the pain to remember his friend, softly crying at his side. He reached out for Phichit’s hand and grasped it. “Phichit kept smuggling me phones but when he found them, he’d take them away and break them. And then one day last winter...late February, or maybe early
March...he told me I’d been replaced, handed me that same duffle bag, and put me out on the streets with annulment papers.”

He grew quiet and watched them writing notes. Carlotta sighed, her lips thin as she typed a few things into her laptop. Finally, she looked up at him, her horned glasses moving down her nose as she spoke. “I’m very sorry this happened to you and deeply regret that an ISU official put you in this position. Given your age at the time of the assault, we are greatly disturbed that this man is still with us. I’m recommending immediate suspension pending investigation. Would we be able to count on you for a hearing?”

Yuuri turned to look at Chris who leaned in and whispered, “I’ll join you, if you agree, as your attorney.”

Yuuri nodded and turned back to Carlotta. “I would speak if...Victor and Chris can both be with me. I don’t trust Shuji and feel I need their support to go through this.”

“Of course. That won’t be a problem.” Turning to Lieutenant James, she added, “If this turns out to warrant an arrest, then of course the suspension would be moot. However, I need to ensure the safety of the rest of our skaters. I hope this doesn’t hinder your investigation.”

James shook his head. “Don’t worry...I’ve got some ideas. And I’m talking with Japanese officials with regard to this missing person.” Turning back to Yuuri, he asked, “Why do you think it’s Tanaka?”

Yuuri blinked, “The timing is right. Tanaka disappeared when Shuji moved me out of our previous residence. In the new place, I wasn’t roomed close to him.” Yuuri stopped, noting the confusion on their faces. “He never...kept me with him for sleeping. But I was usually next door. In the new house I was put into a small, windowless room off the kitchen. I think it was for a maid. He was building distance. He was more secretive than ever.”

“How many times did you move?”

Yuuri looked up to the ceiling as he thought about it. “Five...no, six!” He turned to Phichit for confirmation. The Thai man nodded in agreement. “Forgive me, this is Phichit and he was my lifeline through all of this.”

Phichit offered a perfunctory smile. “I have all of the addresses if that would help.” He then
pulled his phone out and opened his Yuuri file. Turning it to the officer, the other man skimmed the pages.

“You also logged your observations over the years?”

Phichit nodded. “Yuuri had no one to fight for him...and I’d committed myself to being his friend. So yes. And it will give you dates. I didn’t meet him until after Shuji...well...so I don’t have the initial report, but you can see there is consistency in his story. I’d be happy to share it with you if it will help you catch this rat-bastard.” Then he frowned before adding, “I shouldn’t include him in the same category with rodents. My hamsters will not be pleased.”

James’ lips jerked into a smile before returning to business. “A copy would be helpful.” He passed a business card Phichit’s direction. Turning back to Yuuri, he asked, “Has he ever indicated that there have been others?”

Yuuri narrowed his brows as he thought back. *I never considered that I wasn’t the first, but I couldn’t have been.* “Not...at the same time as me, but maybe before. He had a room set up for me, but nothing was new, it was like someone had just moved out. I think there was someone before me. They didn’t stay as long. I think they were the first. He needs someone he can control, someone to intimidate. He prefers mental games to physical. He rarely harmed me physically. Well, what happened in bed…” Yuuri’s face went scarlet as he glanced towards Yakov and Lilia. They maintained inscrutable expressions. And Yuuri liked that they were there. He was surrounded by people standing in for Victor. “He used fear and would set up little tests to see if I caught on...and fixed it.”

“What was the earliest date he raped you?” James did mean for the question to come out blunt, but as Yuuri had mentioned the abuse he would have to make it part of the report.

Yuuri blinked at that phrase. *Rape? Was it rape?* He turned and looked questioning at both Chris and Phichit and they both nodded. “I didn’t realize...i-it was rape? I mean, we were bonded.”

James softened his approach, seeing that Yuuri was still coming to terms with what he had gone through during his captivity. “By your own testimony, that bond was non-consensual. Do you feel you consented to sex with this man?”

*How many times did I beg for him to stop? That first night even more so.* In a whisper, he said, “No, I never consented.” He closed his eyes and thought back. “That first night...I was eighteen. It was a few weeks after my birthday. I remember I had to finish high school online. He wouldn’t wait for me to graduate. I still skated until I became pregnant. Then he used that to make me stop.”
Yuuri opened his eyes and focused in on the investigator. “He said he hated the idea of breaking in a child, he had to wait until I was old enough to do what was necessary. So he held back until I turned eighteen. It wouldn’t surprise me if he held onto his previous omega until he had me in hand...but I couldn’t testify to that.”

James consulted his notes and grimaced, “Tanaka turns eighteen in three weeks. In your opinion...will he have assaulted this kid?”

Yuuri felt something lighten in his chest, like hope blooming that they might be able to spare this child the horrors he had endured. “Oh...I thought he was eighteen already. I...think if he has him, he would...well, I guess the best way to word it is that he’d fuck with his head. But...if you find him before he turns eighteen, you might be able to get him out before he’s r-raped.” Yuuri glanced over at Chris who wrapped an arm around his shoulder and ran an encouraging hand up and down his back. Refocusing on the investigator, he added, “I don’t know if any of this would help. I just put everything together. He may not even be the right guy. But I knew if I said nothing…”

“Of course, and we appreciate you coming forward. Unfortunately, we can’t address his past crimes because they weren’t in our territory. However, you may have given us valuable information towards the current case. Do you mind if I leave you my card in case you think of anything else?”

“Sure...and if you have more questions…” Yuuri glanced at Chris before saying, “Call my attorney to set up a meeting.”

On cue, Chris reached into his wallet and pulled out a business card. “I will continue to represent Yuuri Katsuki’s interests in this matter, both with the ISU hearings and regarding the case with Interpol.”

They all shook hands and then the officials left. Yuuri released a large breath of air before looking at the others. “Did I do okay?”

Lilia offered a rare smile. “You did amazingly well. That was very brave.”

“I knew...I’d regret it. I would have said something sooner if I’d known. I just...didn’t know. Maybe I wasn’t ready to see it. I knew...if they were like me, a Japanese citizen, there was nothing that could be done.” Yuuri didn’t realize he’d been wringing his hands until Phichit took his hands and began rubbing them to gently relax them. Yuuri looked up to the other two and asked, “Are
“You going to tell Victor?”

Yakov and Lilia exchanged looks and the old coach finally asked, “How much have you told him already?”

Yuuri considered the different conversations and slips of information. “I think...he knows a lot of it already. Maybe not the details, which is...I guess...it’s okay. I don’t think I want to go over it again if I can avoid it. Dr. Abramovich is helping me work through it with therapy but that’s in...small bites. And I don’t have to rehash it all with him.”

“We’ll do as you wish, Yuura,” Lilia assured him.

Yuuri blinked in surprise at the change in his name, the difference in the U pronunciation giving it a slight differentiation from the boy he took care of. He saw it for what it was...kindness and affection...as when they called Victor Vitya or Georgi Gosha. He was sure there were many others. He nodded, taking a shaky breath in then letting it out. “I think...I’m okay if it’s discussed with Victor but I don’t want it to be general rink gossip.”

Lilia’s eyes widened and she responded, “Of course not. If I even hear part of it has slipped out, I’ll shut it down.”

Yuuri blushed, his eyes going to the hands that now rested in his lap. “I think...I knew that. I just...wanted to be clear.”

“We understand,” Yakov assured him. “Now, take the rest of the day off. It’s been a long morning.”

As they left, Yuuri was thankful that Nikolai would be picking Yura up. He wasn’t sure how long he’d be and didn’t want to leave the little boy waiting. Leaning into Phichit, he murmured, “Can you come stay with me for the rest of the day? I really need some Phichit time.”

His best friend’s face lit up. “I’d love to! Chris, you don’t mind, do you?”
Chris smiled indulgently as he shook his head. “I have some casework to catch up on anyway. What time do you serve dinner? Still at six?”

Yuuri nodded. “Yes, please join us. I’ll make sure Olga has plenty.”

Chris snorted and pointed out, “That lovely lady doesn’t know how to fix for a few but yes, please let her know.”

Chris walked them both to Phichit’s car with a promise to come later for dinner...and hopefully Phichit. Yuuri ran up to the door and unlocked it to let them both in. “Olga?” He called out the name of one of his first friends in Russia.

“Yes, Yuuri Toshiyavich,” came the answer from the kitchen.

Entering the room, he introduced Phichit. “This is my friend, Phichit Chulanont.”

She focused on the younger omega, her eyes narrowing. “Father’s name?”

“Oh, ummm, Punyaa?”

She grunted in acknowledgement. “Phichit Punyaavich,” she determined. “Are you staying for dinner?”

“Yes...and Chris is joining us, too,” Phichit agreed.

She looked from Phichit to Yuuri, her brow furrowed suspiciously. “Victor Andreivich’s friend?”

Yuuri nodded. “It turns out our friends conspired to bring us together.”

She snorted in response. “Figures. I don’t think there was anyone that could induce that boy out again.” She then returned to her task. “I’ll have something heated up for lunch in half an hour.”
Yuuri led Phichit upstairs to his room. The dark eyes of the Thai man took in the home that Yuuri had grown so used to in a short time. He examined the beautiful artwork, the tasteful furniture, the beautiful little amenities tucked into corners that created a welcoming and restful atmosphere. “So, this...Yuuri, you’ve landed the jackpot!”

“I don’t know what you mean,” the omega answered, the glance over his shoulder made Phichit wonder if he was being coy or not.

Phichit smiled, a curve of his lips thinking his friend was indeed being coy. “This house is amazing.”

“It’s family...Victor inherited it or something like that.” Yuuri brushed it off as if the home were inconsequential, but Phichit could tell it held memories and promises for his friend in these fine walls.

As they entered Yuuri’s room, the younger omega bounced around the space. “This is adorable!”

Yuuri looked around and shrugged. He didn’t have any particular feeling towards this room. If he were honest with himself, he’d admit that he had a greater emotional connection in Victor’s space. He felt he fit better in the softened masculinity of that room. “This was Yelena’s room. She liked to be close to Yura.”

Phichit, eversharp, narrowed his eyes on those words. “Yelena didn’t sleep with her mate?”

Yuuri sat down on his bed and paused, catching himself. *No, I guess they didn’t.* “I...don’t really know the particulars. It’s weird, really...I hear things like ‘they were the best of friends’ but never anything about being in love. People around him say they were married for Yura’s sake, but never say much more. So I...don’t know. I can tell Victor cared about her, loved her even...but I’m not sure that it was...like his great love.”

Phichit raised his eyebrows in surprise...but that surprise wasn’t what Yuuri assumed. “Yuuri...are you possibly vying for that position? Do you want to be...*his great love*?” He sunk down next to Yuuri on the comforter.

Yuuri’s eyes widened. “Nooooo! I mean...that’s impossible. I’m just...me. I think...” He closed his eyes and collected his scattered thoughts. Of course Phichit would misconstrue his words. “I just mean...people like Victor...you expect them to have that great love.”
Phichit blinked at his friend, then turned him around and walked him over to the vanity, seating him in front of the mirror. “Do you remember that night Katya and I helped you get ready? Do you see yourself now? That man took the time to help you find that person again, help you rediscover yourself. Men don’t go to that kind of trouble unless they care deeply…”

“I know he cares...I just don’t know...that he loves me...that he is in love with me…” Yuuri turned away from the mirror squeezing his eyes shut before continuing softly, “that he can love me.”

“Oh, Yuuri...Victor thinks you’re amazing...like the rest of us. And you know what else?”

Yuuri opened his eyes and looked at Phichit, tilting his head to one side. “What?”

“You are also the kind of person that people expect to have a great love. Your life was interrupted...it probably feels like everything is moving fast, especially after having it put on hold...but you are opening up, blossoming, and becoming the butterfly you were meant to be.”

Yuuri let Phichit turn him back towards the mirror. “I’m plain.”

Phichit was slowly shaking his head, “You’re...breathtaking. Even when you’re not dressed up, you carry yourself with a casual elegance. That is the kind of person that becomes a man like Victor’s great love.”

Victor listened as Yakov relayed the contents of the meeting. He’d already talked to Chris and knew the omega was now safely at home with his best friend in his company. He was thankful that Yuuri was surrounded by those that would protect him and take care of him. His ears perked up when Yakov told him that Yuuri insisted that both Chris and Victor accompany him to the hearing. He didn’t say Victor was his alpha...but there was an implication. Yuuri was trusting himself in Victor’s care. It was early Thursday morning and he’d soon be meeting his skaters for breakfast. I need to focus and my every thought is on Yuuri.

Chapter End Notes

So much love for Yuuri...and yes, he is Victor's great love.
Worth it!

Chapter Summary

A little bit of sassy Yuuri comes out when he declares he's "worth it"...or, when Yuuri makes strides towards his independence.

Chapter Notes

I love this chapter...and yes, I was listening to "Worth It" when writing this. :) I think you'll be just as in love with chapter, too. A bit of sassy fluff to follow last chapter's angst.

Ch. 24: Worth it!

Phichit drove over to pick Yuuri up mid-morning on Friday. They had several tasks to accomplish and Yuuri was determined to take care of them before Victor returned. His reunion with his friend, added with his cleansing testimony yesterday, gave him a new found confidence. With that came the desire to impress the alpha on his return home and that meant action. Paycheck in hand, the older omega climbed into Phichit’s car.

“How is it you have a car in Russia?” Yuuri huffed.

Phichit giggled and shifted the elegant black sedan into drive, navigating to traffic easily. “Because Chris knows I despise public transportation.”

Yuuri knew this truth and envied his friend’s independence. The car before him gleamed in that lustrous way rentals always do. The newest, trendiest amenities called out to him. He itched to drive once more but felt overloaded with his schedule as it was, adding driving lessons to all of the things he was already learning seemed like an impossibility. Glancing at his friend confidently negotiating traffic, he hated that he was so behind in life. He hated that he burned with jealousy and unwarranted embarrassment knowing that he was just now doing things on his own. Just now taking classes...albeit online. Just now opening his own bank account. “So this bank Chris recommended…”
Phichit heard the worry creeping into his friend’s voice, “They are international and speak English, in fact the paperwork comes in a number of world languages, and Japanese is, of course, one of them. A number of expats use them. I have an account there myself but most of my funds are currently in Tokyo.”

Yuuri breathed out, starting to feel a small amount of control return to him. “Okay...and the other things?”

“We should be quite finished in time to pick up your son,” Phichit reassured him.

“He’s not my son!” Yuuri flushed at the squeak in his voice, then stilled as he felt something hollow in him pang.

Phichit missed the flicker of sorrow in his friend’s face and quipped, “Have you told him that? That child has bonded with you and named you mother.”

Yuuri looked out the window and murmured, “I know.”

Phichit cast a soft smile towards his friend. “You want it...all of it...the child...the father.”

Yuuri simply nodded, his eyes still on the window. I do. I didn’t think I would, but I do...so badly.

Phichit put his hand over Yuuri’s, giving it a quick squeeze before returning to the steering wheel. “Let yourself have this...you deserve nice things.”

Turning back, he thinned his lips. “I have so little to offer.”

“I believe they only want love,” Phichit answered softly. “And you offer that in abundance.”

Yuuri nodded once more, his expression tight as he fought to keep his emotions intact. A tear slipped free and he wiped it away. “Sorry...heat. Emotions...easily overwhelmed.” Yuuri sniffed
and reached into his pocket for a teary tissue. “I hate all of these tears.”

Phichit spared a glance at his friend. It was clear as day that his friend wasn’t feeling merely heat emotions, “You’ve stored those tears up for years, convincing yourself you were numb. Forcing yourself to become numb as a survival instinct. In reality, you didn’t want to share them with him. Now, you’re safe, they can come out.”

Yuuri knew he was right. Phichit always saw right through him. So he didn’t try to deny the words. Instead, he pouted, “I hate my heat.”

“That’s because they are all associated with him. Have you thought about putting Victor into the equation?” Phichit asked slowly.

Yuuri huffed. “We have a contract...and besides, when he gets here, it’ll be too close for consent.”

“You have thought about it,” Phichit realized with wide eyes. He saw his friend flush and then shoot him that look which meant not even Phichit was allowed to cross a line. He paused, then started again, softening his tactic. “You could... imagine you’re with him.”

Yuuri squirmed a little in his seat, examining his hands. “That seems...non-consensual.”

Phichit sighed as he pulled into a parking spot. “Fantasies don’t require consent, actions require consent. And I suspect Victor would get off on the idea of you thinking of him while you’re...getting yourself off.”

“Phichit!” Yuuri squealed, covering his face.

Phichit chuckled watching his sinfully sweet friend erupt into laughter. “Seriously, Yuuri...that man has gone to a lot of trouble to take care of you. Do you think he’d do that if he didn’t love you? Caring for someone only goes so far.”

Yuuri settled his hands in his lap the laughter calming, and leaving too soon. He seemed to turn wistful and whispered, “I’m afraid to hope, afraid the disappointment would be too much, afraid...of losing Yura as well.”
Phichit reached over and squeezed Yuuri’s hand. “Sometimes we have to take a risk because the reward is worth it. Is Victor worth it?”

Yuuri nodded. As he reached for the door handle, he murmured, “Do you know...he opens my door, buckles me in and will stay beside me until he is convinced I’m settled?”

“It sounds like Victor has already decided you’re worth it,” Phichit pointed out.

Yuuri felt himself agreeing with Phichit’s understanding of their unique relationship. “How...do I know when?”

Phichit knew what he meant. When to move forward. He offered a smile and said softly, “You just do...there is that moment, a defining moment, and you decide to take that step.”

“How was it with Chris?”

Phichit’s smile softened into a gentle memory. “Yes, it was. That’s not how it started...but that’s how it moved from casual to something more...permanent...that moment where we decided on mate.”

It was Yuuri’s turn to examine his friend, “You never talked about him...not like that.”

Phichit’s smile faded slightly, “I didn’t want to talk about my happiness when you were trapped in misery.”

Yuuri closed his eyes, chin dropping, feeling the sorrow for his friend. “I kept you in Tokyo...away from your mate.”

Phichit reached over taking Yuuri’s hand and waiting until the large brown eyes were locked on his. “We both agreed to it, both knew it was the right thing to do. Someone had to be there for you. And I traveled frequently. My work lets me be flexible.”

“Is that how you’re able to be here?”
Phichit nodded. “I’m working on a visa to let me stay long term. I can do my work from home and work on my side projects. I’d occasionally have to fly back to Tokyo, but it wouldn’t be too bad.”

“I’d love to have you here,” Yuuri confessed. “I’m glad it’s Chris...and that he’s here.”

“Well, he’s Victor’s best friend,” he deepened his voice, leaning in for effect, “the keeper of his deepest, darkest secrets.”

Yuuri rolled his eyes. “I don’t think Victor is capable of dark secrets.”

Phichit sat back and cocked a perfectly styled eyebrow. “One would say the same about you.”

Yuuri drew a ragged breath, suddenly or maybe not so suddenly feeling overwhelmed. “Peach, I love you...but...I need to let this go for now. We have things to do.”

His friend nodded, a thin line in his lips. “I’m sorry. I sometimes don’t know when to stop.”

“It’s okay...I know you love me.” He looked out the windshield at the bank before them. Taking in a deep breath he rose out of the vehicle. “Let’s...get this done. My own checking account is the next step towards independence.”

They walked into the building and true to Chris’ word, they were quickly relegated to someone who spoke English and helped Yuuri process his paycheck. He also learned of a branch located near his home with the promise that several of the workers spoke English. With his new bankbook in hand and debit card in his wallet, Yuuri walked out to Phichit’s car. Now for the second item on the agenda. A new computer.

Shopping for a computer with Phichit was both a blessing and a curse. As a programmer, his friend was very up to date on modern technology. However, Yuuri also wanted all the things and the programmer in Phichit took over. “Yuuuriiii, a Macbook Air?”
Yuuri looked at the computer. “It’s perfect! And pretty...and does what I need it to.” It was more than that. It was slick, trendy, and was exactly what he would have carried to classes...scratch that, it was exactly what he WILL carry to classes.

“But...you don’t need this...a chromebook will suit your purposes.” The omega couldn’t help the whine in his voice.

Yuuri turned sharp eyes his direction and asked, “High school students play Fortnite on their chromebooks. A Macbook Air is for serious people...” He turned to his friend with big, wide eyes, “Don’t you think I’m worth it?"

“But...”

Yuuri pulled out the last card to play, “My phone is an iPhone. Victor carries an iPad for work. They apparently have good products...and I can match it to my phone.” He tapped on the rosegold version for emphasis.

Phichit slowly blinked at his friend, as if seeing him again for the first time in a very, very long time. “Oh my god! You are gay!”

Yuuri snorted at his response. “It’s not like I’ve ever denied that!”

“I just never realized you’re so extra!”

Yuuri narrowed his eyes and replied with a shrug, “I never had the chance.” _I never had a lot of chances, and now...I’m reaching for all of them._

Phichit dramatically rolled his eyes and walked off. “Get your Macbook!”

“Macbook _Air._” Yuuri smugly completed his transaction and walked out to the car with Phichit. “So where do you live when you’re here?”

Phichit shrugged and answered, “With Chris, of course...but I guess you’ve never been there. It’s a modern apartment not far from the rink.”
“Maybe you can show me after I finish working this afternoon.”

“Sure. Bring Yura over and we’ll hang out at my place.”

Yuuri looked over at his friend, “You do know you’re picking me up, don’t you?”

Phichit huffed, feigning exhaustion, “Pick you up. Drop you off. Take you shopping. What am I? Your chauffeur?”

“Of course not!” Yuuri laughed, “I can’t afford a chauffeur!”

“Nope! Because you bought a Macbook Air!”

Yuuri hugged his package to his chest. “Don’t you talk bad about my new baby!” He ran a hand down the pretty white box, “Don’t listen to mean old Uncle Phichit, he’s jealous.”

“I really don’t know how I missed how extra you were,” he muttered mystified.

“Considering you were my only influence for years…”

Phichit scoffed, “But you bought a Macbook Air!”

“Well, I don’t exactly know how to write programs! I just need something to let me do my work.”

“Chromebook…”

Yuuri scowled, “Something that will let me do my work and NOT look like a squeaker.”

Phichit sighed dramatically. “Fiiine!”
After they enjoyed lunch in a diner near the school, they drove over to pick up Yura and went back to the house. The little blond was fascinated by Phichit, following him around like a puppy. Yuuri leaned in and whispered in Japanese, “I think he has a little crush on you.”

“Should we tell Chris?” Phichit whispered back.

“I think it will come out on its own.”

Then a little boy voice broke through their whispers. “Peaches, I colored you a flower.”

Phichit turned around with all the drama and swooped down to take the picture. “It’s perfect! I’ll never find a more perfect flower if I search all the world!”

“And you call me extra,” Yuuri grumbled.


Yuuri directed his little ducklings through a follow the leader routine and listened to their giggles and squeals as he broke free and swooped in behind them. Of course they had formal lessons but a lot could be learned in play. They already loved “Teacher Yuuri” and clamoured for his attention.

As class wrapped up, he watched the students working their skates off or sitting with parents to take them off and switch to street shoes. He stood by the rail when he looked up to see Yakov. The old man hung back, standing close to the wall but his eyes were shrewd. Yuuri unconsciously straightened up and then he heard Katya calling him.

He skated over to the redhead, meeting her at the barrier and stepping onto the rubber mat. “I know you have a friend visiting but I wanted to see if you wanted to grab tea on Monday.”

“That would be perfect,” Yuuri agreed easily, accepting his hard guards from her. “Phichit has to
go back in a few days...but he may be moving here permanently soon.”

She smiled, following him to a bench. “Oh, that’s great news! I can’t wait to get to know him better. But for now, I’ll let him enjoy your company without interruption.”

“Are you doing okay?” He tugged his boot off, then caught something in her voice. “I know Pyotr is with Victor.”

She huffed. “He’s been too busy to call.”

He stopped and straightened up to see her face. The girl was as good an actress off ice as her sister, no poker face whatsoever. It was clear she was hurt, “I’m sure that’s not it.”

“I don’t know if Pyotr is the one for me. He doesn’t seem to want to get close. Not while I have responsibilities.” She nodded at her sister who was sitting with Yura rattling away about her school day...which involved a story about Otabek.

Yuuri shrugged, removing the other skate and beginning to dry them off before tucking them away. “Maybe he thinks you’re not interested.”

She stilled for a moment, thinking of her own end of their interaction. “Maybe...when we went home from the party, he carried Mila in and we stood at the door and talked for awhile. Then it just got awkward. So he left. It’s been weird ever since.”

Yuuri had to shake his head at her, “So...he was standing at the door hoping for a kiss, hug, or something...and you just held back.”

Katya spread her hands wide, “I don’t want to encourage him...he might feel obligated!”

Yuuri rose. Slinging the backpack over an arm, and linking his free arm in hers he started walking her towards their wards. “Or he might actually think you’re interested and you might have to go on an actual date with him. You do know I’ll watch Mila for you, don’t you?”

She nodded, hugging herself. “It’s just...I don’t feel right dragging him into a ready made family.”
“How does he feel?”

Katya stopped and turned to him. “I-I don’t know.”

Yuuri face her. “Maybe the two of you need to have a conversation.”

“What about you and Victor?!” she deflected.

Yuuri arched an eyebrow. “I’ve been here maybe a month and it’s a bit more complicated for us...how long have you and Pyotr danced around this?”

Katya sighed in resignation. “What if it’s been too long?”

“Maybe...maybe not. He might be waiting on you to be ready to let him in.” Yuuri nudged her towards the door again. He spotted Yura and Mila finishing putting their gear away in their bags.

“Like Victor.” She added smugly.

“I think…” He stopped quickly, shaking his head, “this isn’t about Victor and me.” He was the king...no queen...of deflection and he could see what she was doing.

Katya rolled her eyes, “Fiiiiine!”

Yuuri chuckled as she led her sister out of the room, helping Yura gather his gear. “Do you want to go to Uncle Chris’ apartment?”

“Is...Peaches going to be there?”

Yuuri laughed and nodded. “Yes...in fact, he’s driving us there.”
Yura lit up immediately at the prospect of a ride in Peaches’ car. “I can’t wait!”

Yuuri ruffled his charge’s hair. Checking his phone, he did the math on the time. “Papa will call while we are there but I’m sure we can find a quiet place.”

The call came through while Chris and Phichit were playing with Yura and the boy squealed in mock terror and laughter.

“What’s going on?” Victor asked, momentarily alarmed.

Yuuri’s laughter did much to alleviate his fear. “Chris is the monster or giant or some sort of beast and Phichit is trying to save him. Our son is having the time of his life...and he has a little crush on my best friend.”

Victor smiled at the slip of tongue. Our son...he might even forgive Phichit for stealing the little boy’s heart. The happy sounds coming from Chris’ apartment warmed him. After a stressful middle of the week, it appeared to be ending on a positive note. Best of all he could hear the change in Yuuri. Yuuri laughing and happy was life.

As he disconnected the call, Victor gathered the things he needed while out with his skaters. They would leave in an hour to report in. He glanced towards the door at the knock, sighing. Please don’t be one of my skaters. I can’t play, therapist, social worker, doctor, mother, friend, bartender, or cop any longer. God, was I ever this needy? No wonder Yakov has no hair.

Opening the door, his eyes fell on Pyotr. He waved him in with a grunt.

The other coach studied him as he leaned against the closed door. “I think it’s good that Dmitry is coming with the next round.”

“What do you mean?” He heard the snap as it left his lips. “Fuck! I don’t know what the hell is wrong with me.”

Pyotr thinned his lips as he studied the younger man. “Vitya, I’ve known you since you were my junior...and I remember when you freaked out because you were presenting alpha. Are you...approaching rut?”
Victor groaned, it was something he had worried about. “Yuuri is headed into heat...I’m not due but I’m wondering if I’m lining up with him.”

Pyotr hummed thoughtfully. “It could be mate separation anxiety.”

Victor shook his head. “Yuuri and I...we’re not, we haven’t been…”

The older alpha just leveled a stare at him. “You and Yuuri have exhibited every indication of a mated pair. You may not have consciously admitted it, you may not have done anything physically intimate, but...the biochemical signature is there. Your secondaries have clearly attached.”

“We’ve got a contract,” he stated weakly.

The laugh did nothing to settle Victor. “Maybe you do...and I’m not privy to the particulars. Your instincts don’t have a contract, and neither do his. You both are very professional, and it’s clear you respect his boundaries. However, that omega only lets you near him. He’s not unfriendly, but he does put off a vibe that says ‘do not approach’.”

Victor leaned against the dresser as he considered his friend’s words. “He is instinctively protecting himself. But...he says I’m his safe place.”

“He trusts you...and he’s open to your displays of affection.” At Victor’s wide blue eyes, he pointed out, “You hold him...a lot. Hug him to you, put your face to him, encourage him to scent you, and you scent him. It’s courting behavior, from both of you.”

Viktor shifted, he felt guilty at the thought of going beyond the boundary he wanted to respect. “It’s unconscious. I catch myself doing it sometimes. I...want him as my mate. I just don’t want to rush him. He’s had so little choice in life.”

Pyotr nodded, “So...about your temperament. Do we need another coach in here for Canada?”

Victor shook his head. “I’ve already committed and Georgi is the only one available. I’d hate to pull him away from Sveta...I promised.”
“What about Ivan? Surely he and Dmitry...” Pyotr had clearly come prepared.

Victor shook his head. “His grandfather is in bad shape. And Yulia isn’t ready to work with seniors. Elena is on leave...something with her mate. It comes down to balancing life and work. No, I’ve committed to this. I’ll try to be more conscious about my attitude.”

Pyotr blinked at him, studying the man. “Is there...something else?”

Victor considered how much to tell him. However, he’d known Pyotr for a very long time and the man had never broken a trust. If Victor couldn’t call Yakov, he knew Pyotr would know what to do when he got himself into a scrape...or needed help with a bad boyfriend. “Yuuri’s ex is here.”

Pyotr nodded slowly as he took in that information. “The asshole that took him from skating.” Pyotr crossed his arms, Victor knew enough of the man’s body language to see he harbored a serious grudge against the man.

Victor blinked quickly, “You know...about that?”

Pyotr narrowed his eyes with memory, “When your Yuuri retired, there was a large group saying something was off about it. They suggested that maybe that mating wasn’t on the up and up.”

“It wasn’t,” Victor confirmed. “Yuuri gave testimony to both Interpol and ISU that confirmed what I suspected. Shuji...isolated Yuuri at fourteen and forced a bond on him. At eighteen, he took possession of him.”

The arms tensed then slacked as the man’s shock wore in. “But he was fourteen,” Pyotr protested.

Victor shook his head. “He didn’t report it until seventeen. Evidently Shuji threatened him, making him feel ashamed as if it were Yuuri’s doing. Even here, they wouldn’t have done much. I’m just glad...that asswipe that Yelena was dating didn’t mark her.”

Pyotr remembered the hockey player. He was rough and loud and everyone was shocked to see the dancer hanging on his arm. And at first, she seemed to be enjoying herself. Then all of that changed and she started trying to get out of the relationship. “It’s hard...for an omega. I
wish...sometimes Katya is so stubborn.”

Victor raised an eyebrow as he studied his friend. “I thought you were the stubborn one.”

Pyotr huffed. “Since Mila came to live with her, she only lets me get so close to her. I don’t know how to get her to let me back in. Maybe...I’m just wishful thinking.”

Victor wanted to say something but Katya was a close friend as well. “Perhaps...you just need to sit down and talk. Lay it out. Tell her what you want and ask her what she needs from you.”

“Maybe...what about you and Yuuri?” he turned it around.

Victor crooked a smile before running his hands through his hair. “Yuuri and I talk...a lot. And we haven’t known each other long. We haven’t...you know...really kissed or anything. He’s been hurt so much, I don’t know what’s okay and what’s not. And then...there’s that contract.”

“What’s this contract you keep talking about?”

Victor sighed, thinking of how much the relationship and what he wanted from it changed since Yuuri’s arrival. “It’s the contract we signed when he agreed to come to Russia as a companion omega. I wanted him to feel safe, protected. So we have several clauses that would require Yuuri to sign a waiver for me to court him or become intimate.”

Pyotr frowned at this. “But you are courting him.”

“I didn’t realize it until the other day!”

Pyotr had to chuckle at his friend’s exasperation. “So what are you going to do now?”

Victor ran a hand through his hair. “I...need to talk to him. But this isn’t a cell phone conversation. And Yuuri’s heat is just around the corner. So really, no decision can be made once I reach Russia until after his heat.”
Pyotr sat down. Two men, completely stuck. “Well, fuck…”

Chapter End Notes

He is so worth it! He deserves all the good things!
Yuuri makes a decision to move forward as the pining continues.

Hi, readers...I may not get a chance to put a weekend post up but this one has some great gems in it. I hope you enjoy it!

Ch. 25: **Heart and Soul**

Yuuri sighed into the morning, the drizzle of rain against the window pane holding him to his bed. Yura scooted closer into his warmth. The omega smiled at the little boy, who whined slightly wanting more of Yuuri’s protective presence in his sleep. The man moved the tiny form closer into his embrace, his arm sliding down the tiny back, scenting and comforting the small boy. Yuuri’s instinct told him the boy would present omega and present early. He had strong omega characteristics, needing warmth and comfort, but also wanting to give that comfort to others.

Except, Victor said once he thought he’d present omega...until he didn’t. He was late to present and when seventeen birthdays had passed without his presenting as omega his parents thought he was beta, Victor thought he was beta. Alpha surprised him, and everyone who knew him. Yuuri studied the sleeping child. *Would you be like your father?*

Yuuri pressed a kiss into that blond head and chuckled as the boy snuggled tighter against him. The motion spoke the truth that the tightly shut eyes were denying. The little boy had woken, “We’ll have to get up eventually.”

A small pout formed, then disappeared with hope. Two large green eyes opened and found Yuuri’s face. “Is Peaches coming over?”

Yuuri pressed another kiss into Yura’s hair before resting his cheek against the floss. “Not today...he needs to have time with his mate.” Yuuri had insisted on it...especially now that he knew
Phichit had put his life on hold for him. It hurt his heart but Yuuri didn’t know if he would have made it through to the other side without his best friend. Those small rebellions that kept him striving for freedom fed by the omega on the other side of the wall. I would have given up. Phichit was my tie to the outside world. How many times had the man sneaked Yuuri out, brought him a new phone, made sure Yuuri had enough to eat when Shuji was out of town?

Yuuri pushed up out of the covers and when the little boy protested, Yuuri made monster sounds, his hands up in the air and then descended on Yura. “Tickle monster!” Yura’s squeals would have woken up anyone who remained sleeping...but Yuuri was certain that they were the last ones lingering in bed.

Finally up, he slid his feet into his slippers and urged the child to do the same. Down the stairs they went and found Olga humming in the kitchen. “Good morning,” he greeted.

She looked up and smiled. And if Yuuri had figured out she had a date with Lev the night before, he said nothing. “So you finally decided to join the rest of the world.”

“A morning to sleep in is a luxury that shouldn’t be denied,” Yuuri declared.

She huffed in disbelief. “Too much to do to sleep away the day.” While her lecture has weak, the tea she slid in his direction was strong and rich.

Yuuri sipped from the steaming cup and arched a well groomed brow in her direction. “The day doesn’t begin until we decide it begins.” He swallowed and hummed approval. Then nodded his head at the window behind her. “Besides, it’s rainy and gloomy outside. Surely you’re not going shopping.”

She shuddered at the thought of braving the weather today. “No, I’ll pull from the pantry. I have bread rising in the oven. A good sturdy loaf of black bread. And hot chocolate is in the crock.”

Yura started bouncing up and down in excitement. Hot chocolate was a weekend treat, and soon the little boy was carrying the prized cup carefully to the table. Yuuri watched him fondly.

“So what do you have planned?” Olga inquired.

Yuuri frowned because he really didn’t have a plan. He had Yura to care for but otherwise, the
household chores were in hand and he was rather listless. “I guess...it would be a good time to face that package from home.”

Olga’s expression sobered. “The one your mother sent for the shrine?”

Yuuri’s sigh became heavy as he nodded. He didn’t want to wait until Victor was home but part of him wished the man was there with him, to help him face this. The omega worried about falling apart and wanted to feel the alpha’s comforting strength. But looking around the room, he knew he was surrounded by love. And he wanted to learn to rely on his own strength, then in time be able to give it to those who supported him in his need.

Yura took off to chase kittens and Yuuri let him go, walking up the stairs towards his own room. In the private space, he looked around and considered what needed to be done for his upcoming heat. He hadn’t started building his nest, hadn’t even felt the compulsion. What is wrong with me? Shuji hated nests and would dismantle the beginnings of one immediately, within a year of living with him Yuuri’s nesting instinct was little more than a dull hint buried in anxiety. However, he was free of that... Do I want to nest?

He looked around his bedroom. It was nice, inviting even...however he felt no connection to it. It wasn’t like Shuji’s many homes where he knew he didn’t belong. That was like living in a museum, and he was just another collected piece. This house was welcoming and didn’t scare him. However, this room had the fingerprint of the original occupant, and while Yelana obviously created a beautiful and elegant space, it didn’t suit Yuuri. He thought about the room downstairs, a room that kept drawing him. He didn’t want to nest in his own room. He wanted...to become a part of Victor’s space, to share the room and make it a part of himself, to...become a part of Victor, and the alpha part of him. When did that change?

He hugged himself and thought about his interactions with Victor. Everything had been gradual...even though time was short. They connected immediately, an invisible thread drawing them to one another. Yuuri blinked in realization. Mate. His hands trembled as he sat down in the chair in front of the vanity. When? How?

Everyone else realized it...why didn’t I?

He looked around the room, the one he didn’t want to use for his heat. His eyes rested on the box for the shrine. I wasn’t ready. Just like I wasn’t ready to open this box. Did you know, Victor? Did you hold yourself back for me? Or were you also not ready?

Yelena...Victor stops and studies your image every day. You hold a part of him...You always will...
and that’s fine. He carries you with him in his heart still. I can tell that you both loved each other a lot. I never want to take that away from you or him. I just...want there to be room for myself as well.

Steps.

What do I need to do?

Suddenly, it was clear to him. He knew what that first step would be. Taking out his phone, he sent a text to Chris.

Yuu-chan/ I want to sign the waivers.

Satisfied that he was beginning something new he focused on starting the healing process from his past. Yuuri walked over to pick up the box while he waited on a reply from Chris. Placing it on his bed, his fingers traced along the tape. He could see the great care his mother took to ensure its delivery. Turning to his vanity, he opened the bottom drawer and took out a sewing kit he found there when he moved in. Inside, he located a pair of tiny scissors and carefully opened the box, slicing through the tape. Taking a deep breath, he opened the lid.

He hadn’t expected what he found within. Hiroko had thought beyond the mechanics of building a shrine, much like Nikolai, and supplied him with items that would help heal the mourning man. Part of the box held the things he requested, components he would use to complete the shrine. He knew those things were coming and he quickly pulled them out, organizing them. He also found the Jizu statue, remembering the god that would smuggle miscarried children into the afterlife and, later, bring gifts to them. His motions slowed as he discovered the other, unexpected items, small treasures his family and friends held onto. He remembered some of the gifts, the memory of carefully packing them and sending them back after he lost one baby or the next. Some, he’d never seen until now. However, they were each carefully labeled for each child. He began separating the gifts, his eyes misting. No child had been forgotten. And for Yuuri, that was everything to him. He didn’t mourn alone.

A chime brought Yuuri’s attention away from the box giving him the much needed break and he returned to his phone.

ChrisG/ Have you really thought about this?
Yuuri smiled as he thought about Chris wanting to tell Phichit and hiding his excitement. He knew they set this up. The wonderful couple conspiring to bring their two best friends, lost in the world, together. Chris knew of Yuuri, but was very close with Victor. Phichit knew Yuuri the best. And somehow talking back and forth, they decided their friends would be perfect together. When they had these covert conversations, Yuuri didn’t know. But he did suspect it was long before Yuuri was free. He blushed thinking of Phichit’s animated end of the conversation, Chris trying to keep everything in the context of reality. A dream. And then Yuuri was free. And it slowly became a reality. Or maybe not so slowly. Yuuri considered the question glowing at him on the screen of his phone. It had only been a month but it felt like several, a slow dawning of realization.

Yuu-chan/ Yes. I’ve put a lot of thought in this.

Yuu-chan/ I know it’s not been a very long time but in a way, it has.

Yuuri fumbled with his words, knowing that he wouldn’t make a great deal of sense via text. However, he needn’t worry. Chris had felt this coming...had hoped for it alongside the omega he had loved for so long.

ChrisG/ I will put the papers together Monday and come by. I have to ask this for the legalities of your situation and because I know it’s soon. Is your heat scheduled within seven days of Monday?

Yuuri flinched for a moment, feeling awkward. However he knew Chris was asking purely to make sure that Yuuri was in a position to consent to this change of his relationship with Victor. He did the math and then responded.

Yuu-chan/ It will be cutting it close but I should be fine. I have it projected to start the Wednesday following.

ChrisG/ I’ll need you to send me the actual start date once you have it. As long as it doesn’t fall within seven days, the waiver will be valid.

Yuu-chan/ I will. Thank you, Chris.

ChrisG/ Thank you. I have my Peach here with me for a few days...he came because of you but I needed to see him.
Yuuri’s eyes misted at the thought of his friends finally being able to spend their time together. He still held onto some of the guilt he carried, knowing that Phichit was never be able to leave Yuuri to find happiness with Chris.

Yuu-chan/ I’m sorry I was the cause for the two of you to be separated.

ChrisG/ We both agreed to the arrangement. You are important to both of us!

Yuuri hugged himself, a soft smile on his lips. Considering he’d been through some of the worst things that could be dealt an omega, he had the best of friends. That smile faltered as he rested his eyes on the gifts. He’d found notes from his parents, his sister, Minako, Yuuko, the triplets, and Phichit. He was sad but it was bittersweet. The gifts touched him more than he thought they would, each person had held onto the treasure until he was ready.

Everything has been on hold so long...in many cases, fourteen years. Not just me, but my family and friends. I’m ready. Ready to put my children to rest. Ready to move forward in this new life. Ready...to love and be loved.

Yuuri spent the rest of the morning laying out the components of the shrine. There was a reverence in his motions, a tenderness in the way he laid out memorials for each child. Yura could be heard in the halls running after the animals. Giggles would break through into the room and Yuuri would still. As it should be, the joy of children filling the air. I wanted each of you to know joy. You would not have with Shuji.

He broke for lunch, gathering his charge up and rejoining Olga and Nikolai in the kitchen. She had a simple lunch of sandwiches and soup laid out. The soup was welcome as the chill held onto the air. Outside the rain continued to drizzle, wintry and cold. Yuuri had added a sweatshirt over his long-sleeved tee. He’d done the same for Yura, laughing at the little blonde’s independent spirit as he protested but finally relented.

After lunch, Yura crawled into Yuuri’s lap in the living room, a book in hand. Yuuri listened to the child tell the story that went with the pictures smiling indulgently. It was a made up story but that was fine. As he snuggled in Yuuri’s lap, that blond head rubbed back and forth into his chest. At some point, those green eyes peeked up from below. “You smell like gingerbread.”
Yuuri had been caught off guard and snorted out his laugh. “I suppose I do.” Then he blushed self-consciously as he added, “My scent is getting pretty strong, isn’t it?”

Yura shrugged. “I like gingerbread.”

That was all that mattered. It hadn’t occurred to Yuuri to put patches over his scent. It wasn’t a luxury or a necessity before. Except at the onsen. He shuddered thinking of that heat. His first after leaving Shuji. He had been afraid, too many leering glances from customers seeing a free omega of a certain age, their distasteful assumptions that Yuuri would be easy. Then locking himself, as best he could, in his room, suffering through the heat and urges. It had been hell, one in which he hadn’t dared to pleasure himself for fear of customers. Traditional Japanese architecture left nothing secret.

He did notice Nikolai wouldn’t stand as close to him as usual. Olga seemed unconcerned, but she wouldn’t as an omega. He worked mostly with children at the rink and they were like Yura. Most parents were mothers who simply knew what Yuuri was about to undergo and thought nothing of it. Although he did notice Yakov would come into the room often, those sharp eyes were keeping an eye on him and anyone that could stand too close to Yuuri. The rest of the adults were students or colleagues of Victor. They seemed unconcerned. Why...oh, they already see me as Victor’s. To them, I’m a claimed omega.

Except I’m not.

I want to be.

He paused at that thought. The admission had come upon him faster than he had ever realized. I...want to be. I want to belong to Victor.

He reflected back on past conversations, touches, kindesses. You have made me yours...are you aware? Were you just making sure I was safe, or do you want more? I want more.

I want more.

I want you.
He hugged himself at the thought and then realized the little boy was watching him. “I’m sorry. I guess I have a lot on my mind. Why don’t you go play for a little while?”

With a cheery ok, the child crawled out of his lap and took off running down the hall. I probably should tell him not to run. But glancing out the window, he knew Yura would have little chance of exercise. I’ll get him in the solarium later and show him how to stretch out with some yoga.

With thoughts of Victor and their potential future in his head, he didn’t want to return to the altar. There’s always tomorrow. I’m not going anywhere. I’m home. He then remembered the music room. He opened a couple of doors before he found it again, smiling at the beautiful piano. Lifting the cover, he let his fingers drift across the keys and then his smile turned wistful as he settled into a listless, melancholy melody.

Little green eyes peeked into the room curiously. “Pretty,” Yura murmured as he edged closer, feeling shy at Yuuri’s new display and unsure if he was allowed in this particular room. It was always closed off.

Yuuri smiled over at him and patted the bench beside him. “Would you like to play?”

“I don’t know how,” he stated with an uncertain frown.

“You didn’t know how to skate once, and you’re still learning to dance. I don’t know how to speak Russian, but I’m taking lessons and putting myself out there to learn. I can show you some piano. I’m very rusty.”

The little boy screwed up his nose at that word. “Rusty? Like Grandpa’s truck?”

Yuuri laughed. “A little like that. When you don’t do something for a long time or very often, you’re not as good at it. So...I’m rusty.” He guided the little fingers to the keys and placed them on a set and mimicked the action. “Try this.”

They started with Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. Soon he had Yura playing the basics of the music. He then reached around the little boy on either side and added small filigrees of notes filling it out.
Yura looked up and grinned. “Pretty!”

Yuuri smiled indulgently. “My last year that I skated, one of the two songs I skated to was called *Heart and Soul*. Would you like to hear it? Then maybe we can work together to learn it.” With the boy’s eager nod, Yuuri began to work through the melody, introducing the melody then the words. “You can sing the song all serious...or silly. It can be fun or sentimental. It all depends on how you sing it.” Then Yuuri demonstrated silly, Yura joining in, loving the shared song between them.

The blonde’s attention span was long but eventually the child in him needed something else as diversion and he soon was off to find the kittens. As Yura skipped off to play some more, the omega felt his sadness slip back in almost unnoticed at first, like the mist of rain outside. He closed his eyes and knew...he missed Victor. He didn’t exactly feel lost without him, but like the air without the sun, his warmth was gone. Yura was a small sun and brought in sunshine but as he skipped out of reach, the warmth went with him. Hugging himself, he went to seek out Olga, needing to shake off his loneliness. She offered him an understanding smile as Yuuri picked up the dusting cloth and helped her work through the house. He could rest. There was nothing that ever required him to help out. However...he was as drawn to loving this house as much as the occupants and he saw the same attitude reflected in Olga’s work.

Victor called through Skype that afternoon, happy to hear his boy’s cheerful voice. Yura told him about the piano and sang what he could remember of the song only to have Yuuri’s hand slide up and down his back as he reinforced the words. Yura’s exuberance contrasted Yuuri’s melancholy...and Victor missed neither of those. As his son grew restless, he skipped away leaving Yuuri to face the man alone.

“So, why *Heart and Soul*?”

“Well, we started with *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*. ..but I skated to it my last year.”

Victor smiled into the screen, adding quickly, “Along with Gershwin.”

Yuuri blushed and nodded. He was a little impressed that Victor knew his last two programs, and off the top of his head too. Then he remembered they day Yuuri discovered the piano, playing *Rhapsody in Blue* and sharing how he knew it was his farewell. “I think...I wanted the dream. I wanted...to know love. I knew I wouldn’t, couldn’t. He wouldn’t let me. But...it was nice to dream.” He heard the wishfulness in his own voice. *I’m not back there.* He hugged himself,
reminding himself of the present. *I’m not with him. I’m...with you. Can I have the dream?*

“Will you sing it for me?” Victor’s voice came across as soft and maybe...hopeful.

Yuuri giggled and glanced toward the door Yura disappeared through, dodging the request. “I thought we just did.” *I don’t know if I can.* He fluttered his hands around his body self-consciously.

Victor smiled indulgently. “You know it’s not the same. I want to watch your expressions.”

Yuuri shifted nervously, chewing his lip. It *was* different. Before, the focus was on Yura. Now, it was on him. Yuuri swallowed and then closed his eyes. *Maybe if I don’t watch him.* He began tapping out the time and then the words started, Yuuri falling into the rhythm. At one point, those brown eyes opened, not focused on Victor but looking off, perhaps into the dream.

*Heart and soul, I fell in love with you*

*Heart and soul, the way a fool would do, madly*

*Because you held me tight*

*And stole a kiss in the night*

*Heart and soul, I begged to be adored*

*Lost control, and tumbled overboard, gladly*

*That magic night we kissed*

*There in the moon mist*

*Oh! but your lips were thrilling, much too thrilling*

*Never before were mine so strangely willing*

*But now I see, what one embrace can do*

*Look at me, it’s got me loving you madly*

*That little kiss you stole*

*Held all my heart and soul*
On the opposite end of the call Victor remembered that stolen kiss the night of their date, the magic of dancing with Yuuri...that moment when he let loose and held onto Victor, that moment Victor knew he was in love with Yuuri, truly, madly, deeply...with all of his heart and soul. He knew Yuuri didn't fully remember that night but Victor couldn’t help but think, but hope...maybe...a little part of him remembered or sensed they shared something more that night.
Monday hit Yuuri hard. He’d spent Sunday with Phichit and Chris, Olga insisting on keeping Yura home and entertained with her, letting the omega spend time with his friends. When Yuuri went to argue she simply put firmly, “It’s good for you to take some time to yourself.” Yura had been happily occupied with little tasks playing ‘handiman’ with Nikolai and only realized he had missed his Yuuri when the omega returned.

He came home, his cheeks blooming with happiness and maybe a little from the wine but in time to tuck in Yura. However, the little one didn’t stay in his own bed long. As soon as Yuuri had put himself down little feet padded into the room and soon were crawling up beside him in bed. The omega indulged him, pulling him into his chest. Inhaling the boy’s scent deeply he realized he had missed the child as well. Ren huffed, burrowing under the blanket to steal Yuuri’s warmth. And then, the omega was startled when the bed dipped down as the large poodle also joined their menagerie. We’ll have the cats here before dawn. But looking into the dark eyes melted him and reaching down, he took pity on the oversized dog, cooing softly, “Do you miss Victor, too?” The dog turned into Yuuri’s touch and then licked his hand before curling up at the foot of the bed.

“He’s been following me around a lot.” The little boy pulled back from Yuuri’s chest to look up into the big brown eyes.

“Poodles are very attached to their humans. They don’t do so well when they are away,” Yuuri instructed gently.
The little green eyes squinted for a moment, considering this information before deciding that, "Cats are better."

Yuuri chuckled. "Maybe better for you. I kind of like it that Ren looks out for me and I look out for her. Cats are more independent...but then again, so are you. So cats may be perfect for you."

Yura nodded with certainty before snuggling closer to Yuuri. "Maybe we should have Makkachin talk to Papa next time he calls."

The omega smiled at the instance of putting the dog on the phone to his... the alpha. "I bet both of them will like that. I’m not sure if he will call tomorrow. He has to travel."

"To Candida."

Yuuri snorted, picturing a giant, yeasty nation. "Canada, but yes."

Yura yawned, his eyes growing heavy. "I’ll be glad when Papa comes home."

"Me, too, sweetie. Me, too."

By the time Yuuri woke up, he’d been surrounded by dogs, cats, and Yura. He felt bruised and mangled, everything achy, and he didn’t know whether to blame his bedmates or his heat.

Downstairs, Nikolai was standing by the door as Yuuri prepared to leave with Yura. His wrinkled eyes following the omega through his motions but keeping a distance until they were about to put their coats on. Then Nikolai stepped forward, "I think it would be best I take the boy until you’re heat is over."

Yuuri blushed and started to protest but remembered that was one of the things Victor requested, that he lean on the people around him, and listen to their counsel. Drawing back his arguments, he nodded. "If you think it is best."
“I promised to keep you safe, so yes, I do.” Turning to Yura, he added, “Get your things and load up.”

Yuuri watched them leave before texting Phichit. He wanted to see Phichit off on his flight and then Chris was going to take him to his office and work through the waivers with him.

Half an hour later, he was sitting in the front seat with Phichit, Chris whining from the back. Phichit cast him a side-eye through the window. “You’re going to be fine. Besides, it is only a few more weeks.” Turning back to Yuuri, he added, “I was originally planning to stay a few more days but the boss wants me to sort out my contract and now there is a presentation.”

“Are you planning another holiday?” Yuuri asked, latching onto the phrase *a few more weeks* and feeling elated at the thought of seeing his friend once again.

“Not exactly,” the Thai man began. “I’m negotiating my next contract with work and one of the stipulations is that I get to work from *either* home, Tokyo or Russia. I’ll keep my apartment in Tokyo for now, because I’ll have to go into the office a week here and a week there, but for the most part I want to work out of my home here in Russia.” His dark eyes flicked up to rearview mirror to see the smile on his love’s face. “Maybe eventually I’ll be able to work completely from Russia.”

“That would be amazing!” Yuuri exclaimed, his eyes passing from one to the other and smiled as Chris reached through to slide his hand up and down Phichit’s arm.

Phichit took Chris’ hand, kissing the fingers before releasing it. He looked to Yuuri quickly before returning to the road. “It’s not the same being in Tokyo without you there. I just need to make the decision and move. I miss both of you.”

Yuuri blushed. He felt honored to be part of that equation. Phichit had put so much on hold for him. Of course, Phichit argued, he’d been skating and his coach was in Tokyo for most of that time. Yuuri pointed out that the coach was in Tokyo because Phichit insisted on Tokyo. And then when the omega retired, he stayed, taking a position with a computer apps company that was also banking on Phichit’s social media presence along with his minor celebrity status. Phichit was content with the situation for the time being. Now...he wanted to be with Yuuri and Chris in Russia. He felt left out.

At the airport, Yuuri was surprised by his own tears as much as Phichit’s as the omega hugged him for a very long time. Then the older omega stepped back and turned away as Chris kissed his love goodbye. He heard the hitch in Phichit’s voice as he called out, “Goodbye. I love you both.”
“We love you, too, Peach,” Chris and Yuuri called out together gaining a grin from the retreating friend.

Chris guided Yuuri back to his car and they drove to the law office. “What is your schedule like?”

Yuuri thought about that, it wasn’t really clear. “I...I’m not sure. Nikolai won’t let me take Yura to school but he has lessons this afternoon.”

Chris nodded, “After we finish here, why don’t I take you to lunch. Then we can pick him up and I drive you both to the rink.”

“Okay...that sounds good. I’ll text Olga to let Nikolai know.”

Chris snorted. “Because of course that stubborn old man doesn’t have his own phone.”

Yuuri laughed, knowing the text would go to Olga who would simply pass it on to the grandfather. “He does...he’s just not sure where he put it,” Yuuri argued.

Chris rolled his eyes and waved off Yuuri’s concerns.

In the law office, Yuuri looked around, seeing Chris’ degrees on one wall and some of his more prominent wins on another wall. He walked over to trace his fingers along the edge of one display frame.

Chris saw the omega’s eyes glisten over examining the medal. “I only ever won gold if Victor wasn’t there.”

Yuuri inhaled deeply, clearing his mind of the endless what ifs that ran around the space. Turning he looked back at Chris who was at his desk. “Why doesn’t Victor display his own awards?”

Chris hummed at that. “Victor always felt weird about showing them off. I think once the event was over, he put them away. He muttered something once about how he hated that everything we
did came down to three ugly necklaces. I’m not even sure if he enjoyed them in private. Now, I do believe some of them are on display at his parents’ home but Victor hates that.”

Yuuri thought about the man he was coming to understand better each day. Victor, who loved skating so much he brought beauty to the ice with even the simplest of moves, was never looking for the win. “It was the moment, not the medal...he wanted to make the audience happy,” Yuuri determined.

“Very much so,” Chris agreed. He let that thought settle for a moment before redirecting their attention to the papers on the desk. “Now...let’s talk about what restrictions you want removed from your relationship with Victor.”

Yuuri winced, returning to the chair across from Chris’ desk. “That sounds so weird.”

“What? Relationship? Why does that sound weird?” Chris smiled as he sat in his chair, motioning for Yuuri to do the same on his side.

Yuuri settled into the comfortable leather chair with a sheepish smile. “Because...we haven’t really...talked about it.”

Chris shrugged, lowering his voice as he pointed out, “Well, he can’t...not legally. Although I think he has taken a few liberties with you.”

Yuuri blushed as he looked away. “It could...be seen that way. I don’t know that he meant it that way.”

Chris smirked. “It may have caught him by surprise but I can pretty much guaranteed he meant it.”

Yuuri refocused on the stack of papers in Chris’ hands. “I want...us to be able to be able to have a relationship, for him to be able to court me if he chooses, for us to become intimate if we choose.” He smiled at the thought of their dating, growing closer, possibly falling in love. But then the dark worry crept into those thoughts, “I’m terrified. If this all goes wrong, I not only lose Victor, I lose Yura. But...” He trailed off, drawing a shaky breath and it was then that he noticed Chris had come around the desk and was kneeling before him, a steady hand on his back. “Sorry...do you think this is too fast?”
Chris took a hand, looking earnestly at Yuuri. “What’s important is...do you think it’s too fast?”

Yuuri slowly shook his head. “I...want this,” he whispered. “And I haven’t allowed myself to want anything in so long.”

Chris smiled, “Victor...he’s a good man. He’ll let you set the pace.”

“He’s still hurting, too. I see how he looks at her portrait. She’s still found in pockets of his room.” Then Yuuri’s cheeks heated up as he realized he’d revealed his forays into Victor’s private spaces. “He said...I could use his bath,” he quickly added.

Chris chuckled, a gentle hand patting his knee as he stood up and returned to his desk. “Victor would say that. Just because we sign these waivers, you do understand that you can still say no.”

Yuuri nodded. “I know.”

Chris nodded, then his look turned serious. Lowering his voice he began again, “And you also know that when Victor returns, there isn’t enough time for consent with regard to heat.”

_I can see why Victor trusts you, and why Phichit loves you so._ “Yes...I know that, too.” Yuuri studied his hands for a moment before adding, “I don’t think I’m ready to share a heat. I want to know...what it’s like without the muddled thoughts of heat. Does that make sense?”

“It most certainly does. Good sound sense,” Chris reassured him. He began sorting through the documents, pulling out the ones he needed. One by one, he went through and had Yuuri sign here, initial there, explaining as they went along what each one meant until the waivers were signed. “I have to hold onto these for a week.”

“Because of my heat?”

Chris nodded. “They don’t go into effect until we clear that window. However, I’ll bring them to you Monday morning. If for some reason I can’t, I’ll send them by courier.”

Yuuri smiled bashfully. “I guess, it doesn’t really matter when. It’s not like I’m going to use it just
“They are yours, though, for when you’re ready.” He glanced at the clock and segued into his next topic. “Now...about lunch. I know a lovely diner Victor and I always enjoy. My treat.”

“I’ve already inconvenienced you so much,” Yuuri protested quietly.

“It’s not an inconvenience if you’re a client, friend...and I believe we’re family. At least, through Phichit.”

Yuuri hugged himself and smiled. Chris and Phichit were definitely family. “Maybe...you can tell me how you and Phichit came together.”

“Oh, that’s a story…” He studied Yuuri a moment before settling the younger man’s coat on his shoulders. “It begins with a bit of worry, though.”

Yuuri put the pieces of a memory together, “That night...when you both helped me escape my alpha for a while?” They were walking to the elevator as they talked.

“Yes...we didn’t realize it then, and I certainly hope we didn’t cause trouble for you afterwards. But...I watched the way Phichit cared for you...and that planted a little seed in my heart.” Chris led him across the lobby and out the door. The diner wasn’t far. Then he’d take Yuuri to get the kid. “Phichit showed how much he cared for people, with such open sincerity. I couldn’t help but want to be on the receiving end of someone with that capacity for love. I started seeking him out during competitions. I’d ask about you...then we started talking about each other. It was slow and warming, sneaking up on you like a smooth drink. But then one night we’re at a banquet following a competition, and Phichit kissed me, looking away shyly.” Chris chuckled. “A lot like that look right there.”

Yuuri had ducked down, a soft smile on his lips. “Is that when you knew?”

Chris’ eyes practically glowed with the warmth of the memory. “That’s when I knew for certain...but over the months since I’d gotten to know him I’d been feeling things I’d not ever felt with another.”

Yuuri stared off for a moment and Chris gave him time to find his words. “I didn’t know...about
you, that is.”

Chris smiled sadly at the young man. “Phichit didn’t want to talk about his happiness while you were still in a bad place.”

Yuuri pulled at his sleeve. He knew they would never hold anything against him, and yet, he felt the need to apologize. “I wish he would have told me...I think I would have liked knowing he had good things.”

“You would have pushed him to leave Tokyo,” Chris corrected gently. “And neither of us wanted that. I talked about coming to Japan...but I already knew Russian, French, and English...Japanese seemed daunting.”

Yuuri laughed. “Maybe...the language isn’t so bad. It’s all of the alphabets. But Phichit knows several languages.”

Chris snorted thinking of his ultra-nerd fiance, “I know. He has us all beat! How does one get an international business degree WITH software development along with SKATING!”

Yuuri grinned. His friend really was amazing...smart and giving. “I don’t know...I barely finished high school and that last part was online.” The words came out small because sometimes he felt small.

Chris sighed, sliding a brotherly arm around him. “You had no choice. It doesn’t mean you didn’t have the ability. And Victor said you are taking classes now.”

“Just two...and the Russian class. It meets on Mondays. The other two are online.”

“It sounds like a solid start.” Chris was firm in his support. “You can do this...take back your life one thing at a time.”

Yuuri squirmed a little, thinking of how far ahead everyone else always seemed to be. “I’ve lost so much time.”
Chris was silent for a moment. He could understand how Yuuri felt, almost a decade and a half stolen from him. “I know...but it isn’t the amount of time, it’s the significance we put into the moments. You value the gifts others take for granted and will make more of them because of it.”

Yuuri chuckled bitterly. “That’s because I had nothing...for the longest of times, I had just a smuggled phone and my worn out clothes.”

Chris didn’t know what to say to a man whose life had been on hold for fourteen years. “Then you’ve got every reason to grab hold of happiness where you find it.”

Lunch lightened up into easy talk. Yuuri was very interested in Chris’ work and his plans with Phichit. Chris asked Yuuri if he could help him settle more in Russia, offering to show him around when Victor is busy.

They were walking out of the restaurant and towards Chris’ car as Yuuri answered. “It’s really the language that gives me the most trouble. But I have already made a lot of friends I’d even call close. It’s strange...but I’m in a foreign country, one that is often considered rough and cold...yet I feel safer than when I’m in my own country.”

“Perhaps with all that’s happened, you have reason to lose a little faith in Japan. They didn’t protect you when you needed it most.” Chris frowned, knowing Yuuri’s situation in his home country. “I scoured international law libraries to find a way to get you out of there.”

“You...did?” Yuuri looked up at him in surprise.

Chris nodded. “You don’t realize how much your story has driven others as they encountered you. Before I learned what happened to you, I didn’t think much about how different life was for omegas...then I learned the grim truth.”

Yuuri hugged himself as he considered those words. “But...Phichit’s story was different. I mean...we both dealt with inappropriate touches and other harassment, but Phichit wasn’t...stolen. Was he stronger?”

Chris was shaking his head immediately, “He may have had better people looking out for him when threats arose, but anyone who knows you wouldn’t doubt your strength, Yuuri. You held strong and waited until you found a way out.”
Was that strength? Was the very act of surviving Shuji, defiance? Yuuri thought about the passive resistance he put up after the loss of his fourth child. How Shuji’s shouting was met with a dead face, not even a flinch. “I just...decided one day I wouldn’t let him hurt me anymore. Once I stopped being affected by him, he grew bored.”

“And that is strength, Yuuri. So no, Phichit wasn’t any stronger. You were targeted by a predator.”

Yuuri shivered at the thought. He was ready to get his Yura, ready to skate, ready to shake off these negative thoughts. But...he was glad that Chris was his friend and he could safely talk about these things with him. The Swiss skater-turned-attorney didn’t sugarcoat things and spoke to him honestly. Still, he strengthened those around him.

As they pulled into the school, Yuuri smiled as he spotted Yura sitting next to Zaina, Mila and Otabek. Beka’s mother was standing nearby. “I may have a ride to the rink. Mehar is here. Can you give me a few minutes?”

“Of course...and I don’t mind if it doesn’t work out.”

“Thank you.”

Yuuri was out and the other omega greeted him, hugging him close. Soon he was waving Chris off and headed to her car. “Your friend Katya called me and asked if Mila could ride with Otabek to the skating lessons. I thought Yura would need a ride as well.”

“I need to figure out what to do during my heat,” Yuuri frowned as he scratched at his arms.

“Don’t worry. I will be happy to drive him. I live for my children and carting a few more around will be no extra trouble.”

Yuuri smiled at the ease with which she offered help. “Thank you. I’m not sure what’s going on with Victor but he said something about Yuri staying with his grandfather.”

“Perhaps I drive you home and we talk it over with his grandfather,” Mehar suggested.
Yuuri nodded in agreement.

Nikolai listened to the woman and then turned to Yuuri. “You trust this woman?”

Yuuri laughed at his bluntness. “Yes, but even moreso, Victor is comfortable with her and her family. Yura stayed at their house the night Victor and I went to the work party.”

Nikolai nodded in approval. “I’ll get your number from Yuuri. Then we can arrange things. This will help.”

Mehar smiled at the older man and his businesslike approach to her. “No problem. Anything to ease Yuuri’s heat apprehension.”

Yuuri blushed not liking to be so transparent. “What he means is that he wants me to enter it into his phone.”

The old man huffed and headed out back.

After dinner, Nikolai drove Yuuri to his class. “Perhaps you skip this time?”

“Why?” Yuuri asked, startled.

Nikolai’s blunt reply tumbled out. “Your scent...your heat must be close.”

Yuuri blushed and was thankful for the darkness in the car. “I know...but it’s among omegas. I’m sorry I’m inconveniencing you.”
An old hand, weathered from hard work waved off his concerns. “It’s not an inconvenience. I just worry.” He looked over at Yuuri, hoping that younger man would catch his meaning.

Yuuri smiled, understanding that he had become family to this older man. More than just the nanny that cared for his grandchild, Yuuri was a son. “My heat is over a week away. It will be fine.”

“You don’t like to rely on others so much,” the old man observed.

Yuuri decided to tease the older man into a good mood. “Well, maybe if someone could teach me how to drive, then I could do this myself.”

Nikolai grunted. “I taught Yelena. I can teach you.”

Yuuri blinked, not sure how he felt about that. Nikolai could be terrifying and he didn’t know if he’d like being scolded by the old Russian. But then he remembered how the old man held onto him when he fell apart. “I think...I’d like that.”

Boris smiled as Yuuri walked in and then the smile froze. He took Yuuri to the side and made him aware of omega services available in Russia. “I would have picked you up had I known your heat was so close.”

Yuuri huffed, do all Russians have amazing senses of smell? “It’s fine...Victor trusts his father-in-law Nikolai...and I’m not sure if he would trust many others at this point.”

Boris nodded, happy that Yuuri was already being looked over during this time. “Ah...yes, your alpha watches over you.”

“Not my alpha...” Yuuri stopped mid-sentence as he thought about it. “I mean, we, ummm...”

“It’s fine, Yuuri...but call me if you need to make use of those services. We look out for each other. That’s how we survive.”
Yuuri smiled softly and a little sad. If only such things were available to him before...or even better, if they weren’t necessary at all. “Thank you.” Yuuri looked down at the list of services and saw that it was printed in English as well as Cyrillic. He stared at one line with narrowed eyes. *International Omega Protective Services.* “What... is this one?”

Boris leaned over and grunted. “Good organization. Helps omegas out of situations where they are being abused or exploited.”

Yuuri jolted a little, “Are they...active in Japan?”

The older man frowned. “Not sure...the laws are tricky overseas. However, it’s part of a movement through the U.N. to protect omegas. Finally they are beginning to recognize the trafficking and slavery of omegas, and that simply forcing a young omega into marriage is *not* protection. This organization sees that omegas need someone to step up and change the image. Maybe one day we won’t need someone to stand up for us. However, for now...we have this service. Here we have our own but some places don’t have that luxury.”

Yuuri nodded hugging himself. “In Japan...I had no one except my best friend.”

Boris frowned before wrapping a protective arm around those slim shoulders. “In the end, it’s just omegas looking out for omegas. There are good alphas out there. Lots of them. But getting them to stand up to the bad alphas is hard. Nobody wants to call out their friend when it’s ‘just a joke’, but then that’s permitting a culture that supports omega oppression. There are still people teaching alphas that omegas are there for their pleasure.”

Yuuri shivered, those words hitting too close to home. His eyes strayed to the study group. “I’m safe now,” he whispered.

After his class ended, he found Nikolai waiting in the truck for him. They took the shortest route home...Yuuri wincing with every pothole, his body tense from pre-heat cramps and his head aching from the new knowledge and wondering...what if there was someone that could have gotten him out all along. Once home, Yuuri thanked the man and slipped off to take a bath.

He needed to feel Victor’s presence, his scent on his body. After a shower, he soaked in the tub. The aches were more steady now, his body preparing him for the changes pregnancy would put on him. The birth control he was taking suggested it might ease the symptoms but his doctor had told him that sometimes it took two or three cycles before he’d see that affect.
Slipping out of the water, he dried off and padded out into the bedroom. He only wore his briefs, his clothes lying neatly folded in the chair. He took two steps in their direction when he felt himself drawn to the bed, and soon found himself wrapped in its paisley sheets and residual cedar scent. *I should check on Yura* was his last thought before he fell asleep.

He didn’t stir for several hours but when he did, he hurried up the stairs terrified the boy went looking for him and didn’t find him. The blond was sleeping soundly in his bed, however, sandwiched between Ren and two cats. He petted the poodle who lifted her head in interest and whispered, “Thank you, girl.” She nuzzled his hand in response before laying back down next to the sleeping child. *You know how important he is to me.*

Chapter End Notes

Where is Victor? Traveling...to "Candida". ;) He'll be in the next chapter, though.

What I'm working on: My current focus is this story. Then I'll be moving to Gravity. The plan is to complete one story at a time and to reintroduce them as I go. So Gravity, Sirin, and finally finishing the forgotten Lifeline. Hopefully this doesn't become one of those best laid plans. Truth is in essence finished and waiting for edits.
The reluctant nest...

Chapter Summary

Yuuri is running out of time and he still hasn't nested.

Chapter Notes

Hello...I hope you love this chapter as much as I do. I thought this story would wrap up around 40 chapters but realized that would be rushing the ending. So it will be a bit longer. Story written through 37.

So let's see what's going on with Yuuri's nesting struggles. (Get ready for some warm fuzzies...)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 27: The reluctant nest...

Yuuri watched his little duckling go out the door chatting nonstop as his grandfather grunted at the appropriate spaces. He had to admit more than a little jealousy at the scene. But he had to remind himself that Nikolai was his grandfather, and had been in his life longer than Yuuri. *I won’t get to see him during my heat...I hate my heat!* He felt stormy, resentful of the idea of his heat. He flopped on the stool at the counter and watched Olga sort the ingredients for dinner. “I’m not ready for this.”

Without looking up from her vegetables she asked, “For what?”

Yuuri huffed, annoyed that he didn’t rate as highly as her turnips. “My heat.”

She looked up and studied him with concern. She knew they ordered nesting materials and Lev promised the water and high carb omega heat meals by the end of the week. Her eyes narrowed a little as she came to an understanding of where the younger omega’s annoyance was coming from. “Is it the inconvenience that is bothering you or something more?”
Yuuri shrugged. Moving to the window, he watched Ren chase after Makkachin in the backyard. Seeing the mud eke up their legs, he added *wash the dogs* to his mental chore list. “I’m going to try to get ahead on my schoolwork.”

She hummed her assent to him, but watched him leave feeling the conversation unfinished.

He left her working on dinner and moved upstairs to his room. He huffed unhappily before carrying his laptop...his Macbook Air...downstairs. However, even with the computer, the pillows, the blankets, the living room didn’t settle him. Yuuri knew where he had to go and walked down the short corridor to the beautiful room feeling still flustered. It wasn’t until he sat in the middle of Victor’s bed that he could really focus. He groaned when he opened the topic of the week. *The Psychology of Heat and Ruts*. That was when he knew the universe was actually conspiring against him.

Closing his computer, he shuffled to the bathroom to splash water on his face. Returning, he pulled out his phone and scanned through his messages. Phichit was back in Japan. His sister finally forced their mother to go see the doctor for her headaches. It was just seasonal allergies but she had a sinus infection. However, the lightheadedness that accompanied the headaches had Mari concerned. And then...Victor.

**Victor/ I’m checked in here in Canada. Call me when you get a chance. I don’t have skaters until morning.**

Yuuri smiled, pulling up his contacts. The call connected and he heard Victor’s voice purr across the line. “Yuuri...I’m so glad you called.”

Yuuri couldn’t lie to himself that he was glad he had called, and thrilled that Victor had asked him to. However, there was no reason to advertise that. “What’s up?”

“Nothing. I’m bored.” Victor’s voice was warm down the line.

Brown eyes rolled at the silly complaint. *I’ll show you bored. I’m on lockdown and you’re at an international skating competition.* “Nikolai has pretty much grounded me to the house. He doesn’t even want me to go do Wednesday lessons.”

“And?” The voice changed from friendly chatter to sincere interest immediately.
Yuuri knew Victor would call...attempt to call Nikolai who had probably lost his phone again to find out where the older man’s concern was coming from. It was better to be honest and assertive. “I think...I need to go in...if for no other reason than one more session with Abramovich.”

Victor was quiet for a moment. “What’s going on?”

A hand smoothed over the sheet of the pillow next to him. *You sleep on this side.* “I’m having trouble...I can’t seem to bring myself to nest. I’ve got the kit and it’s just sitting over in the corner ignored.”

Victor hummed thoughtfully, tapping his lip with his finger. “You said *he* wouldn’t let you nest...could it be that?”

A single silver hair lifted up from the pillow case. Yuuri rolled onto his back, examining the fiber as if he were seeing the man to which it belonged. “Maybe? I don’t really think so.”

“Do you have a safe ride to the rink?”

Yuuri smiled. “I think Mehar would give me a ride if Katya is unavailable.”

He could hear Victor thinking over the options through the phone. Finally the alpha sighed, “I’d feel comfortable with either of those choices. When Mehar drove you last time, I noticed her driver was also an omega.”

“I think Bekarys prefers to give opportunities to omegas so they don’t have to settle.”

“I can appreciate that. So what else do you have to do today?”

Yuuri smirked, tucking an arm behind his head and crossing his ankles. “I’ve got to wash the dogs because *someone* let them out into the backyard to roam freely...it rained yesterday.”

“Bring them in through the utility room. There is a dog shower with everything you need tucked
into the corner. It's a little higher and easier to handle.”

His eyes widened and Yuuri sat up, “How did I miss that?”

“The house is weird...things tucked away here and there. How was your class last night?”

“Boris, the social worker, gave me a list of omega resources...including an omega advocacy service.” He remembered the shock of learning all the options and legal venues he had available to him. Suddenly he really felt a need to have the alpha closer. “I didn’t know things like that existed. I’m not sure if they do in Japan.”

“I don’t know.”

Yuuri rolled back over again, the confidence from a moment ago fading, and his hand reached for the sunken spot in the pillow on Victor’s side. “Chris said he tried to find a way to get me out. I think if there was a way, he would have found it.”

“I think so, too. But then again, they don’t share that information with alphas readily. Some would use it against the omegas in their charge.” There was silence, the conversation taking an unexpected turn. “I’m sorry.”

Yuuri furrowed his brow. “Why?”

“I think I made you sad.” Yuuri could hear the regret in the alpha's words and wanted to reassure him.

Yuuri shook his head before answering, “You didn’t make me sad...but I’ve been really off. I think...I wonder if I could have gotten out sooner. Then again, I don’t think that kind of thinking helps me. It just frustrates me further.”

“Let’s focus on the now.” Victor inhaled, “You’re safe. In Russia. And no alpha is going to hurt you.”

Yuuri smiled shyly, thinking of how Victor’s words calmed him. He wanted to let the man in
more, and he knew he really wanted to see that beautiful smile so he tapped on the video at the base of the screen. Within seconds Victor’s face appeared and the heart-shaped smile beamed from half a planet away.

“Yuuri.” Victor said, in an attempt at being coy.

“Victor.” Yuuri returned, with no attempt at all. Leaning back he gave Victor a glance of his surroundings.

Victor peeked around him and raised an inquisitive eyebrow. “Yuuri? Are you in my room?”

The omega’s shoulders hunched together before answering, “Y-yes...I tried several places and felt most settled here. I think...it’s your scent?” He chewed his lip in uncertainty, afraid of Victor’s reaction.

Victor struggled to not beam back at him, but it was a fruitless effort. Yuuri saw clearly that the alpha was proud as a peacock that the omega found refuge in his room. “So my room helps you to relax. Maybe...you need something from my room...you know... for your nest?”

You . Yuuri rubbed the back of his neck. He’d already slipped a few things out of the master bedroom and up into a small stack in his room. “Maybe...I…” He closed his eyes and drew himself inwards. Without opening, he began talking. “I don’t think I’ve ever had a good heat. Even before...I went to live with him, I fought it...every inclination, the entire process, it was just another weakness, another thing to set me back, time lost in practice and performance. And inside, I knew it was one more heat closer to him . Like a countdown clock, reminding me that my time was running out.” He exhaled, opening the brown eyes to see Victor’s blue focused on him, “I know...it’s supposed to be pleasurable. I just...I don’t know how to get there. Maybe...I am a bad omega, something is broken inside me.”

“No, Yuuri,” Victor answered, his voice gentle but firm. “You are not a bad omega by any sense of the word. You were very young, heats are scary for every young omega, but as a culture we make it awkward for people to talk about it. And you had the additional burden that every heat reminded you that one day you would not be your own. I’m sure you dreaded it…” He watched Yuuri nod in agreement. “And then when you were with him, he didn’t prioritize your pleasure.”

Yuuri huffed at that, eyes slipping from the screen. “He said my pleasure was my responsibility...although he used my body for his own.”
Victor’s jaw tightened. He wanted to be there, to hold Yuuri through this conversation, to let Yuuri hide in his neck and find strength in his scent, to run his hand up and down Yuuri’s back, his other hand grounding him, holding his hip. But distance stretched out between them. “Pleasure is something a good couple works together to create. The best pleasure is selfless and derived from bringing the other to…ah…you know…orgasm.”

Yuuri peeked back at the screen, Victor’s nose and cheeks were tinted pink with his own blush. While the omega knew his face was heated up at Victor’s words, it was reassuring that Victor felt equally embarrassed. “This…got a little awkward,” Yuuri admitted, giggling nervously.

Victor laughed back, his hand going behind his neck. “I guess so…sorry.”

The Japanese omega shrugged. “I don’t mind.”

Victor cleared his throat and brought them back to the original topic. “So…my room makes you feel more settled.”

Yuuri nodded, his fingers pushing his hair back behind his ears. “It’s very cozy in here. I like the dark wood. Even though it’s a large space, it doesn’t feel cavernous.”

“I like to wrap myself in a warm fuzzy blanket when I’m struggling. I think I kept that in mind when I decorated it.”

Yuuri blinked in amazement. “You did this?”

“Mmmhmmm…every bit of it. A lot of the house is built from what was here before, replacing what was worn but otherwise scrapped together from bits and pieces here and there. You’ve seen those rooms. There is so much. And I didn’t want to waste. But for my room, it needed to be me. I like expensive but cozy expensive…not glitz but value. So if I spent money on a piece, I asked myself if its richness reflected the price.”

He thought about the man, this was expensive, right down to the sheets with such a high thread count of soft, Egyptian cotton he wondered if Pharaoh wove them himself. But it was tasteful and understated in a way. However…“But you do have some…glitz? I mean, that bathroom…”

Victor chuckled. “I remember when I picked out the stone. They fusssed about the existing tub and
I told them to take it out. That room...I knew I wanted to keep the shower but I decided it needed the jacuzzi tub as well. With training, sometimes a good therapeutic soak helps. I tried to bring the personality of the bedroom into the bathroom. But creating light with dark woods and stone...that was challenging. So I added reflective surfaces.”

“The copper…”

Victor’s smile widened, happy that Yuuri could appreciate the aesthetic he was going for, instead of just calling him a decadent aesthete...like Yelena had jokingly done often. “Da...and the mirrors. I mean, I could hang a painting over the tub but a mirror would carry the light through the room.”

“Oh...I never thought of a mirror as more than a means to check my appearance.”

Victor smiled as he thought about the room. “There is a shelf across from the tub. It has a lot of candles on it. Do this...light them all. Turn out the light. And then soak in that tub. It reduces all of the external stimuli and allows me to relax when I can’t seem to slow down.”

*I wish we could do that together.* Yuuri caught that thought and sat up a little tighter, “I will…” Yuuri studied the man in the small screen of his phone. Victor definitely showed signs of homesickness, Yuuri saw. The way he’d grab hold of everything Yuuri offered and built on it. “Maybe next trip, you should bring something of that fuzzy blanket with you,” Yuuri suggested. “I carried comfort items when I traveled and skated.”

“I keep my Makkachin tissue box...but a fuzzy blanket would be nice. I like that one on the sofa in the living room.” If only Yuuri could have read the alpha’s thought he would have heard, *the one you wrap up in and your scent clings to the fiber.*

“You should take it, then, when you travel.”

Victor sniffed, feeling his disconnect from the world so important to him. “I hate traveling, being away from family and home. I bet you are surprised by that.”

Yuuri hummed as he thought about it but then shook his head. “Not now...maybe before I knew you. But then, you were just my idol. You were important, someone to reach for, but I didn’t have that personal connection. Now I see how much of a homebody you are. You love being with your family and taking care of those you care about.”
The blue eyes held worry. “And do you like me more now or before?”

Yuuri laughed at that thought. “Now, of course. I never imagined how...sweet you would be. I knew you were kind and encouraging. You always lifted others up around you and encouraged other skaters. But...there is a softness to you.”

Victor blushed at the praise, his blue eyes slipping from the home. His voice turned soft, and Yuuri heard something of what he must have sounded like when much younger. “That’s why they thought I’d present as omega...then I didn’t present at all. We’d settled on beta. Alpha was surprising.” He smiled and looked back at the screen, catching the brown eyes. “I like surprises but I wasn’t ready for that. It really...made me think about how to define my identity. I...several of my lovers before, I’d receive. I didn’t know how I’d feel about being on top. My boyfriend at the time of my presentation wasn’t...he acted like I’d deceived him, hid away my gender. We ended up breaking up but we both lived in the dorms. He wouldn’t quit messing with me...and all I wanted to do was skate. That’s when I moved home for the summer and talked to my father about what I should do. Papa...he didn’t necessarily approve of my choices as he saw it but he supported me. He always wanted me to be in a safe place. So...I ended up here.”

Yuuri took in all of this new information with quiet consideration. Closing his eyes, he couldn’t keep the nagging question in place. Opening his eyes, he murmured, “You...prefer men.”

Victor nodded.

“Always?”

Victor slowly nodded, looking away from those brown eyes studying him, feeling naked under his scrutiny.

“Yelena...”

The blue eyes shot back to Yuuri’s. “Was my best friend...our story is complicated and only a few people know the details.”

Yuuri felt his eyes falling away, “If you don’t want to tell me...”
“I want to tell you...it’s just hard.” Victor closed his eyes as he organized his thoughts and found his words. “I had been just out of a relationship with another asshole. Chris called me a bum magnet...if there was a bum within a hundred meters of me, I’d be completely attracted to them.”

He smiled, shrugging. “That was then. I liked the bad boys. But then Yelena happened. She had been dating her own asshole...and he hurt her. Physically. She showed up at my house bruised up and asked to stay. She moved into your room upstairs and we kept talking. Neither of us wanted a relationship at that point. We each had a bad taste in our mouths...and I learned she had something more to protect. That abusive lover had gotten her pregnant. It wasn’t planned...they wore protection, she took birth control...but still, she was pregnant. She didn’t want him to have any claim on her child. So...she proposed we get married. I thought she was crazy. We’d always been close, like brother and sister...but never lovers. I mean...she wasn’t exactly my type. And truth be told, I wasn’t hers.” A faint smile crossed his lips, remembering the friend that became his mate in a very different sense than what most would term it, but one that worked for them. “But we did this...and I never regretted it. We married...she became my mate...we had Yura and made a family. My parents don’t know the details but both Nikolai and Olga know. Katya knows. Yakov and Lilia know. Chris knows. Those are the only ones. Everyone else assumes Yura is mine and that’s how we wanted it. He’s safe this way.”

Yuuri remained silent as he digested all of the information Victor shared with him. That...was his big secret. Then again, he now held so much of Yuuri’s past in his hand. “I won’t say anything,” Yuuri murmured.

“I know...one day I will tell Yura but not until he’s past the age where that man can hurt him. But I really felt like I should tell you.”

Yuuri nodded. They had moved into a level of intimacy that Yuuri craved but now didn’t know what to do with it. Something had slipped in that went beyond the intimacy of companionship, beyond sex, even. Licking his lips, he swallowed. “Victor...”

“Will you...call me Vitya?” the older man murmured.

_He feels it, too...this shift in closeness._ Yuuri nodded, the name coming off of his lips in a whisper. “Vitya...” He wanted to feel the older man’s arms around him. He wanted to bury himself into the alpha’s scent. “I think we need to talk when you get home. But...I don’t know if we can.” Yuuri huffed. “My fuckin’ heat.”

“Yuuri,” Victor murmured gently. “We’ve got time.”

“I don’t want...” He flung himself back into the pillow. “I’ve lost enough time. I’m not interested in losing any more. I guess...I’m impatient.”
The alpha’s chuckle reverberated around him. Yuuri knew he was being petulant. But he could feel himself on the cusp of something and he was having to hold himself back when he wanted to teeter over the edge.

“Yuuriiii...I needed this talk so much.”

Victor’s voice pulled him from his thoughts. Yuuri looked at the phone, examining the face he found there. The silver hair looked a little ruffled, and the shadows under the eyes gave away his fatigue. “Are you okay?”

Victor nodded. “Just homesick. We haven’t been able to really just talk since I’ve been here. Everything was with purpose.”

“I love our talks,” Yuuri murmured.

They continued to talk softly about family, about the rink, about Yuuri’s worries with his heat and Victor’s struggles with being away from home until Victor drifted off to sleep. Even then, Yuuri watched him for awhile, the lines of his face softened with sleep. Finally he disconnected the call, leaning back, his hand on his heart.

Victor’s talk settled Yuuri enough to emerge from the space (carrying a basket full of scented additions for his nest). He went up the stairs with purpose and finally opened up the first bundle of nesting materials. I can’t nest in your room and I can’t bring you up in this space. That’s really the problem. However, I’ll infuse this room with as much of you as I can.

He was putting the finishing touches to his nest, having wound fabric and pillows together in a tangle, tucking in clothes and towels that still held Victor’s scent into the crevices, when small feet came running up the stairs. Yuuri smiled as he thought about the little boy about to tumble through his door. Sure as predicted, Yura pushed open the door but stopped at the entrance, taking in the changes in his room.

“What’s that?” he asked, not even bothering to contain his curiosity. The little blonde advanced on the bed, eyes widening as he looked over the configuration.
“It’s a nest,” Yuuri answered. He could feel an amused smile settle on his face. How much he loved this little boy.

He scrunched his face up as he thought about it. “Like a bird?”

Yuuri thought of the connection, not too far off. “Somewhat...it can also be similar to a den. It’s a safe place for moms to care for their young. It’s also a place where moms and dads make their babies.”

“Are you going to have a baby?!!” Yura asked, his eyes dancing with excitement as he bounced on the balls of his feet.

Yuuri laughed softly. He anticipated that question. “No...but the instinct is still strong. So...I make a nest once every few months.”

Yura came around the bed holding the structure, studying the way the fabric wound around the cushions. “Can I sit inside?”

Yuuri hummed thinking of all of the smells Yura brought with him from school. “Maybe...after your bath tonight. We can sit in the nest and have story time. Does that sound like fun?”

Yura nodded eagerly.

“Now, go get your dance gear together. Mehar wants to take Zaina to ballet and asked if I could join her to help her understand the process.”

“Is Beka coming?” The green eyes sparkled with anticipation.

Yuuri suppressed his smile, thinking that Beka was becoming a quick favorite. “Maybe later. Mehar doesn’t want to overschedule them all at once. So they were allowed to add one thing. Beka chose skating and Zaina dance.”
Yura’s face scrunched in confusion. “But I can do both.”

“Yes, Yura. It’s time to add both. If you start struggling, we can adjust our decision later.”

“Papa decided?”

“Yes...after we talked about it earlier.” Yuuri stepped free from the nest and took the little hand, walking him across the hall to his own room. “When I was your age I had three things I enjoyed...piano, dance, and skating. I’d spend two days skating, two days dancing, and piano would be Wednesday. I would like to ease you into those things for a short period and then you can decide what you like most.”

“What did you like most?” Yura pulled his bag for dance out, loading it with dance wear and soft soled shoes.

Yuuri sat on the small bed, watching the little blonde work. “Skating...but dancing was a close second. I still played piano but it was more for understanding the music behind my programs.”

“Will you teach me?” He went to pull a pair of tiger striped leggings from the hamper but stopped and put them back in the laundry when he caught the stern look from his omega.

Yuuri smiled, thinking he would have to make sure to find Yura more pieces of animal print. “What I know...and then if you want to know more, we’ll find a teacher for you.”

The little boy hummed in acceptance before zipping his dance bag closed and slinging it over his shoulder. Soon, Yuuri had him downstairs putting his coat back on before grabbing his own from the closet. Mehar arrived and as Yuuri sat next to her, she studied him critically.

“You are going to have a hard heat,” she pronounced.

Yuuri raised an eyebrow and muttered, “Thanks.”

She chuckled softly. “Let me bring you to my house after the class and see if we can fix you a proper tea to help with your symptoms.”
“Yeeesss, please.” Yuuri practically melted at the thought of anything herbal that could take his heat and the symptoms down a notch.

Once they released their babies for lessons, Mehar followed Yuuri to a quiet corner where they could talk. “What’s going on?”

“I did finally build my nest...but it was with great reluctance.”

She hummed as she thought about it. “Rohan struggles with nesting. It’s like his nature fights against his mind. He doesn’t like the sex. But his body demands it. Our husband...he is good to Rohan...gives him the space he needs until he needs more.” She flicked curious eyes to his face. “Do you...like the sex?”

Yuuri frowned as he thought about it. “I...don’t know. It was always with him ...and I didn’t like him .”

“Maybe...you just want your alpha. He is far away.”

Yuuri bit his lip, a yes on the tip of his tongue but then doubt crept back in. “He’s...not really mine.”

She tilted her head, her lips pursed as she repressed the need to argue. “Maybe...not physically...maybe the words haven’t been spoken...but I’d be surprised if the two of you weren’t together within the month. Your both vibrate on the same frequency...that’s what Rohan says. Bekarys and his first mate were like that.”

Yuuri considered the woman in front of him. She spoke so openly about her life, “Was it hard...being second?”

She thought about it before shaking her head slowly. “No...but she was very kind. Like...a big sister. She protected us. Not everyone is so lucky.”

Yuuri thought about how he’d taken to talking to Yelena. Little permissions, questions of guidance. A big sister. Then he remembered how Victor said that the two of them were like
siblings. *What would Yelena say to me?*

“So how do I make peace with my heat?”

“You fight it...it’s not what you want, not when you want it...being separated from your Victor doesn’t help. Maybe...you need to read the *Kama Sutra.*”

Yuuri’s eyes widened, shaking his head in protest. “The sex book? I...don’t know.”

She smiled and began to giggle, a light girlish laugh, “It isn’t what people think! Not just a manual on sex. It is the art of living. I can loan it to you.”

He blushed at his cultural blunder. “Is it in English?”

She hummed as she thought about it before nodding. “I believe so. If not, we’ll find you a good version to download from the internet.”

“Thank you.”

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Yuuri walked into his home following after Yura who raced into the kitchen. *I really should talk to him about running in the house.* He carried a small tote that held both a book and tea. He would join the others soon but for now he decided to stash his treasures.

Running upstairs, he smirked. *No wonder Yura runs in the house.* He tucked the book in the nesting materials, and put the tea canister over by the electric tea kettle he’d picked up while Phichit was home. Glancing over at the nest, he shrugged. *I suppose it isn’t too bad.*

Later that evening, Yuuri curled up around the little boy after putting the story books on the
nightstand. Victor’s scent wound around him and the child and Yuuri began to feel content, a purr vibrating through him as he started to fade into sleep. Yura snuggled closer, happy to fall asleep safe and secure in his mother’s nest.

Chapter End Notes

Update on other stories...Truth is written for the most part. BluSkates has to work her magic on it and she's been tied up with skating. Since she writes one of my villains, her input is a necessity. Gravity is in the back of my mind and I hope to regather notes this weekend and restart it. I'm also committing to a personal project for the month of April and Camp NaNo...so if things don't pick back up until May, don't worry. My other projects are not abandoned. My goal over the weekend is to CLEAN MY ROOM...and in the process, organize my notes. I'm hoping to find my notes on Lifeline Olympics, too. I've seen requests for it's continuation and they aren't ignored.
Ch. 28:  **Shards of pottery**

Yuuri leaned back into the seat as Katya drove them to the rink. Her piercing blue eyes glanced over in concern several times as she negotiated through the midday traffic. He tried to ignore her searching look to stave off conversation. The Japanese omega felt more and more frazzled each passing day and on this day in particular, he was scratching at his arms and tugging at his sleeves. He didn’t say much, leaving it up to Katya to fill the silence.

“Pyotr returned home but oddly has been avoiding me.” She glanced his way and waited for a comment, Yuuri shifted in his seat, his eyes darting around. She sighed, unsure if he heard her. “I don’t know if he’s mad or just busy.”

“Busy. Two coaches gone.” He winced at the shortness of his words. The words came out terse and coarser than he’d like but he was just holding himself together as the heat approached.

Katya continued, pretending she didn’t notice Yuuri’s different tone. In truth she was talking to herself as much as to Yuuri. Her relationship with Pyotr had changed and she couldn’t put a finger on why or when, but she knew she didn’t like the change. “I thought so, too. But I figured he’d at least text. Maybe he’ll be there today and I can catch up during Mila’s lesson.”

Yuuri nodded, twisting, glancing back at Yura who remained oddly quiet, his green eyes watching Yuuri with caution. Finally, they pulled up to park and Yuuri helped the little boy out of the SUV.
Mila skipped beside her sister chatting away.

Entering the building, several eyes turned their way. Katya was startled by the attention but Yuuri didn’t notice, his eyes down, his fingers tugging at his sleeve. Georgi, however, turned from the crowd to look their way and thinned his lips. Cutting across the lobby, he met them.

“Perhaps you should go home, Yuuri,” he began, his voice gentle but even, holding the authority of being the one in charge.

Yuuri looked up panicked. “Why...what did I...”

Georgi sighed, his eyes glancing around before leaning in to murmur, “You’re too close to your heat and we have young alphas edging off of your scent and pheromones.”

Yuuri looked around the lobby of the rink. It wasn’t scary, but it was terribly overwhelming. He could see some of the younger skaters, alphas, clenching their fists and quickly pulling their skates on and moving away. Other omegas were looking at him with sympathy while pulling their confused children closer. The atmosphere of the lobby changed quickly, however he was reluctant to leave. “I...didn’t realize. I’m supposed to meet Dr. Abramovich.” He could hear the helplessness in his voice and winced inwardly.

“I’ll explain the situation,” Georgi promised, nodding towards the door. Looking towards Katya, he asked, “Can you take him home? I’ll bring the children after I finish up.”

She nodded, glancing wide-eyed between the two. Finally, she guided Yuuri outside and to her car. She could see his frustration with the situation. As she climbed in to sit next to Yuuri, he muttered, “I hate my heat.”

Yuuri watched the little boy skip after his grandfather feeling pretty useless. He’d been unable to see to Yura’s lesson, the homework written in Cyrillic and more complex than Yuuri could work out. He’d struggled waking up the next morning, Yura already dressed and sitting at breakfast when Yuuri joined him. And now, he watched Nikolai taking Yura to school.

Yuuri hated feeling useless. As he watched the others around him, he couldn’t help but mutter, “I
hate my heat.”

He gathered his laptop and the book borrowed from Mehar and went to Victor’s room to curl up in his bed. However, he spent more time sleeping than working. Olga finally nudged him awake with the suggestion he come eat, only to watch as he picked at his meal. The aches were now accompanied by nausea. About all he could handle was the tea provided by his friend or broths. But Olga insisted on solid food.

After lunch, he moved to his room and didn’t wake up again before dinner. Which meant he missed his entire afternoon with Yura. This did more than unsettle the omega. He wanted to cry. He barely ate but listened intently to the little boy telling him about his day.

“...and Beka told the teacher that omegas were just as strong as alphas, just in different ways...is that true, Yuuri?”

Yuuri didn’t feel that way at the moment. His heat left him feeling beaten. But he found a smile and nodded. Thankfully, Yura didn’t require a verbal reply because he picked up from there with his next story.

After dinner, Yuuri followed Yura up the stairs and helped him with his bath. He hated the slowness in his movements while the little boy splashed around in the tub. “Can I sleep with you tonight, Yuuri?” the little blond asked him.

“Umm, sure. Get your books.” He could feel his exhaustion along with his aches and pains but didn’t want to give up any time with the child. Soon they were curled up in bed and Yuuri read through three books and was picking up a fourth when he noticed the little boy was asleep, his head resting on Yuuri’s chest. He buried his nose in the blonde fluff and inhaled deeply. The boy’s scent did much to settle him, even if it couldn’t battle the aches and nausea it helped him feel more connected to the boy.

Yuuri blinked up in disoriented surprise when Olga entered his room. She was speaking in hushed sentences to Yura who was getting up and reaching for her. It took a few more minutes for Yuuri to realize he’d overslept. Yura had to go to school. He tried to pull himself out of bed but the aches were stronger, and insisted that he remained where he was.
Olga noticed, waving at him to stay in bed, a frown of worry on her lips. “Stay, Yuuri Toshiyavich. We can handle the boy.” And then she was gone.

Later, Yuuri was gathering Yura’s things for the rink, thinking of how he had missed the ice himself, when Nikolai sighed and came to sit next to him. “It’s hard when our body limits us. I remember when I couldn’t hold things in my head so well and had to eventually change careers. Thankfully, Vitya was there to help me out. It’s okay, Yuuri, to let go and take care of yourself.”

Yuuri knew the older man was trying to be helpful, fatherly even, but his stubborn will had him battling his nature. “I feel like I’m putting my responsibilities on everyone else,” Yuuri pouted.

Nikolai put a had on Yuuri’s shoulder. “And I understand how you feel. But...we don’t mind. At some point, you will have to cover for us. However, for now...I think you need to stay home and focus on yourself.”

Yuuri leaned back against the wall, his expression miserable. “Maybe if I could just move around…”

“Go out back to that room...when Yelena could no longer go to the studio with Vitya, she retreated to that room in the back of the house. But you need to stay home and inside.” He looked at Yuuri, waiting for the brown eyes to reach his. “I would worry if you left.”

Yuuri blinked at those words. “You...would?”

Nikolai’s smile spread across his face. The gruff older man seldom offered one, and that made this all the more meaningful. “Of course...we all worry for those we care about. You’re a part of this family.”

“I haven’t been here long,” Yuuri protested softly.

Nikolai took Yura’s bag from Yuuri’s hand and lead him away from the door. “Time doesn’t make one family...you just are. Rest today. Dance...like my Yelena. Make yourself eat something...but stay home.”
Yuuri sighed in resignation but allowed himself to be pulled into a hug, the old man was right but Yuuri hated to admit it. He wanted his freedom back...he wanted to move and go as pleased.

Victor watched Shuji as security escorted him from the event, watched as his pass was pulled, credentials revoked. The egotist didn’t fight, in some odd twist to preserve his status, Shuji acted as if this were some silly misunderstanding. The other officials, including a few judges, seemed to smile politely but everyone maintained a distance from him. It was Saturday and Victor had two more days before he could return home. He’d been talking with Yuuri...but what concerned him more was what everyone else was telling him. They were all worried about the omega.

Olga was worried he was losing weight again. Yuuri was playing with his food and always sleeping. Nikolai commented that Yuuri was struggling with moving around and yet was restless. Katya told Victor about Yuuri being sent home from the rink on Wednesday. That prompted him to call Georgi who said that several skaters and local coaches were complaining about his affect on the alpha’s at the rink...but trying not to. Georgi was quick to point out that they didn’t want to make the omega feel bad but they couldn’t focus with him near.

But what alarmed him the most was the depression he could see settling around Yuuri in a miasma of despair. And now, Shuji’s quick dismissal from ISU would be popping up in press alerts. He picked up his phone to call his friend. “Chris, I need a favor.”

“What can I do for you?”

Victor sighed, he’d already read the press leaks and suppositions. “Security escorted Shuji out of here...and the press has already leaked that he’s been suspended due to suspicion of sexual misconduct with a skater. I need someone to look out for Yuuri, to deliver the news in person...and to make sure he is okay.”

Chris hummed in agreement. “I wish Phichit were here.” He drummed his fingers as he thought about the situation. “I can’t stay...not this close to his heat. But I will go talk to him.”

“Thank you.”
Chris could feel something off in the house when he entered. Olga had given him a warning look as she led him into the living to wait for Yuuri. But as he heard the light feet pad down the stairs, Chris felt the hairs on the back of his neck rise immediately as the omega’s scent filled the room heavily, hitting him in waves. *Fuck!* Chris curled his fists into tight balls on his thighs, breathing deeply and trying focus his thoughts.

His eyes took in the omega as he entered. Yuuri was dressed in leggings, dance shoes and a tank. His arms showed evidence of scratching and he could see dark blotches, hives. His hair was disheveled and Chris worried Yuuri wasn’t taking good care of himself.

Chris stayed seated on the couch, keeping his voice even and steady, “Victor sent me to check on you.”

Yuuri shrugged, looking away, chewing his lip. “I’m okay.”

“I’m not sure that you are.” He felt something protective welling up in him. It wasn’t...attraction. Yuuri was family and he wanted to make sure he was safe. *Thank god, my alpha just wants to protect him.* With a soft voice, he asked, “Yuuri, when is your heat hitting?”

“I-I’m not sure,” he tumbled, tears breaking free, hysteria edging into his voice. “It’s supposed to be Wednesday or Thursday. I don’t think I’m going to make it.” He hugged himself, his eyes moving to a picture of Victor and Chris suddenly understood. Yuuri was worried that Victor wouldn’t be home for his heat.

“How long?”

“Maybe...Monday...Tuesday at latest.” Then his eyes widened. “Our waivers!”

Chris rose from the couch, he knew his reaction to Yuuri’s heat wasn’t a primal drive, or if it was, it was of a brother and he no longer feared himself. “Don’t worry, Yuuri...if you make it to Monday, you’ll be fine legally.”

Yuuri nodded, hugging himself once more and unconsciously rocking himself. “I-if I can’t give them to Victor, promise me that you will do so.”
“I promise,” Chris murmured. Then he took one step closer, stopping. He looked at the younger man in earnest. “Don’t leave this house, Yuuri. Okay?”

Yuuri nodded, a whine slipping from his lips. As Chris left, Yuuri moved back into Victor’s room, seeking something with a stronger scent remaining. He dug through Victor’s closet and then smiled with satisfaction. Pajamas. They had to have been worn the night before Victor left. He could smell remnants of Yura on them, his own scent brushed over the surface in passing, but mainly Victor’s scent, unchecked like the scent in his room. He hugged his prize to his chest and slipped out of Victor’s room, running up the stairs to bury them in his nest.

Chris called Victor and waited patiently for the man to answer. Finally, on the third ring, Victor picked up. “Not a good time, Chris.” His eyes were on his skater and watched as Dmitry stepped forward to sort out the problem, waving at Victor not to worry.

“I know...but you need to get home.”

Chris’ tone grabbed all of his attention and he turned his back to the ice. “What do you mean?”

“Youri...he’s going to hit his heat sooner than projected...and he’s not reacting to your absence well. I think he will fight it until you arrive but he’s starting to unravel. He’s very anxious and I can see signs that he hasn’t been taking as good of care of himself.”

The alpha thinned his lips as he considered his options. “I need to talk to Dmitry and my skaters. Thanks Chris for letting me know.”

Sunday morning, Victor stood waiting for his flight. It had been an expensive ticket but it would get him home to Yuuri in the shortest amount of time, which was his only concern. Dmitry assured him he could handle the skaters. His skaters told him to go home to his mate. My mate. Victor knew he couldn’t deny it any longer.
The flight took forever and Victor had to fight to keep his worry and anxious thoughts under control. The idea of Yuuri struggling without him...he hated it. I didn’t know I affected you this much, solnyshko. I didn’t know my being away during your preheat would make you anxious. They’d barely kissed...and Yuuri didn’t even remember the kiss. But so many shared touches and embraces, casual almost unconscious scenting, and words offering near promises to one another...they added up to one conclusion. Mate.

Victor walked through the door of his home late Sunday evening. He found Yuuri in the living room reading to his son, the little boy rubbing the back of his head into Yuuri’s chest as he praised Yuuri’s efforts. It was then that he realized Yuuri was reading...Russian. Had he been gone so long?

Green and brown eyes both looked up as he entered the room. “Papa” was echoed by “Vitya” between the two owners. And then Yura was launching off of the sofa, running into his arms. Victor scooped him up and stood. His eyes rested on the omega who stood nearby, shy, but arms clearly wanting to reach out. With his free arm, Victor pulled Yuuri in, leaning his cheek on the dark head, Yuuri’s scent washing over him. He now realized what people were trying to say. Yuuri was calling out to him with his scent and that call had remained unanswered. “I’m sorry I was gone so long.”

“H-how are you here?” Yuuri asked softly.

“I’ll explain in a little bit. Why don’t I put Yura to bed?”

Yuuri nodded and it was then Victor noticed the unconscious, nervous scratching, the torn and reddened skin, the hair tugged and worried, nails chewed into the quick, and lips dry and broken from biting.

Oh, my Yuuri. “I’ll be back down soon. Wait for me?”

Yuuri nodded and Victor carried his son up the stairs with confident steps. He should have known Yura wouldn’t be easy to extricate himself from. “Two stories,” he insisted. Victor complied. It was quicker to give in than argue...and his son needed him, too. Yuuri would disapprove if he didn’t see to his son’s needs.

Finally back downstairs, he found Yuuri curled up on the sofa. Clutched to his chest was Victor’s scarf, the one he wore home. A blanket stretched over that body. Asleep.
Victor knelt down and smoothed his hair, his wrists scenting him and watching the omega relax to his touch, to his smell. “I’m so sorry,” Victor murmured. “So very sorry I haven’t been here for you.”

Yuuri’s brown eyes opened. “Need...you,” he barely whispered. Victor eased Yuuri into his lap, felt Yuuri curl into his scent even as he continued to slide his wrist over Yuuri, his hand sliding beneath the fabric of his shirt. He knew legally he shouldn’t but legalities be damned. This was what Yuuri needed. And Victor could feel the realization coming over him that he needed this too.

He didn’t know how long they’d been curled up together scenting one another, Yuuri’s hands unconsciously knotting into his shirt then under his shirt, seeking contact. Victor knew there was a very present danger of the omega slipping into heat any moment and needed to get Yuuri to a safe place. “Let me put you to bed,” Victor said softly. Yuuri nodded as Victor lifted him, the form lighter than what Victor remembered. You have lost weight. He carried Yuuri up the stairs, the small body tucked in against his neck breathing him in, and pushed open the door with his elbow. Studying the structure of the finally finished nest, he carefully laid the omega within its walls, cautious to not disturb it. He could see half of his own wardrobe tucked into the folds. Yuuri continued to clutch the scarf, brown eyes moving up to Victor’s. Yuuri’s lips parted, a hand reached up from the nest, gently touching Victor’s cheek. The older man shuddered at the contact, everything in him screaming to stay, comfort the omega in anyway he could want. The alpha saw the want there and knew he couldn’t stay. But he also knew...he couldn’t leave without leaving part of himself behind. He reached for his shirt, pulling it over his head and tucked it into the nest, his wrist sliding over part of the surface. Leaning forward, he brushed a kiss into Yuuri’s hairline. He knew better than to go near those lips although his thumb brushed over them, Yuuri turning his cheek into his touch as he stood back up. He knew he had to leave, Yuuri's body already slipping over the edge, panting and radiating heat. Reaching for the remote to the scent locks, he placed it in Yuuri’s reach. “I’ll keep you safe.” It was a promise and Victor intended to keep it.

As he left the room securing the door behind him, he heard the locks engage. He’d barely made it home. Looking up at the clock, it was five after midnight. Monday morning.

Chapter End Notes

Now, you all know Yuuri’s scent has permeated Victor's room and the alpha is already edging towards his rut. ;)

...
Ch. 29: I burn with thoughts of you...

Victor entered his room and was instantly surrounded with the sense of Yuuri. His scent, his pheromones, the wrinkles his body left in the bed. You wanted to nest here. That’s why you fought it so hard. Your next heat...I promise. If that’s what you want, you will have it.

He could feel his rut demanding release but Victor had to take care of things, make sure his son was with Nikolai, ensure Yuuri was indeed safe, have rut rations delivered, inform Olga...she always went to her sister’s during his ruts. He had a text from Chris saying he would stop by in the morning. He started to put his friend off but then the words by Yuuri’s request went across the screen.

He undressed, slipping into his shower. As the water rained down on him, he imagined Yuuri in this room, showering off, stretching out in the tub. I want to know you here...in my spaces. I want to hold you as you soak in the tub, support your body as I wash you off in the shower...after we make love. He didn’t realize until it was too late that his hand had reached for his dick. Jerking it away, he groaned, switching the shower temp to cold. He had to hold it together a little while longer.

In fresh pajamas, he carried his laundry into the utility room and started sorting it into piles. Dry cleaning, lights, and darks. He put the first load in. Olga would see to the dry cleaning before she left.
He returned to the living room and hesitated. *If I shut myself into my room, I’ll be in rut before morning. There is too much Yuuri in there.* He checked his phone. It was one in the morning. *Olga will be up at five.* He decided on the recliner; pulling out a book he began reading.

He must have dozed off when he heard his son’s bare feet on the floor headed towards his room, a whimper cutting through the air. “I’m in here, mal’chik moy.” Soon those feet were carrying him into the living room and then Yura was in his lap. Victor pulled the blanket off the stool nearby and draped it over the boy. “There you go. It’s okay. Did you have a bad dream?”

Yura nodded. “I dreamed Yuuri was sick and going to die. Like Mama. But...then I couldn’t get in his room. Even when I was crying.” He sniffed dramatically. “Why wouldn’t Yuuri open his door?”

Victor closed his eyes thinking about just how much to tell a five-year-old. He edged in, wanting to know what the child had picked up already. “Because he is in heat, Yura...do you know what that is?”

He nodded slowly before shaking his head. “I only know that’s how you get babies. I heard Yuuri say the word and asked Beka about it.”

“Which is true but there is a lot more to it than that. The most important part is that Yuuri needs privacy. So you are going to stay with Grandpa for the next few days. I know Yuuri would be worried about you otherwise and wouldn’t be able to see to his own care.”

Yura mulled over this information before perking up his head and asking a little too eagerly, “Is Yuuri going to get another baby in his belly?”

Victor chuckled, hugging his son close to his heart. *Because of course you would go there.* “Not this time, miliy moy. Babies take a mama and a papa. And even then, there is no guarantee. Making babies is a very complicated process.”

Victor finally settled the boy to sleep a little longer in his lap and he dozed off as well. His presence must have startled Olga, for she cried out when she entered the living room and saw him curled up in the recliner. He smiled weakly towards his housekeeper.

“Sorry,” he murmured. “I’m about to go into rut and sleeping in my own bed would have sealed
my fate.” She nodded with understanding. She would have noticed Yuuri escaping into his room. Nothing got by that woman. “I have things to arrange before then.”

She huffed in exasperation. “Why didn’t you say anything? I could have had Lev delivered your supplies with Yuuri’s!”

“I wasn’t thinking, to be honest,” he answered with a slight shrug so as not to disturb his son. “I just knew I needed to get back here.”

She sighed as she pulled out her phone. “I’ll contact Lev. He’s getting ready to pick up his morning supplies. Maybe he’ll move us up on the list for deliveries.” She walked off grumbling about lack of communication. Victor smiled as he settled in to sleep another hour. That one conversation accomplished several items off of his list.

Two hours later, after a hearty breakfast for both of them, Victor saw Yura out the door. He needed to pack up his son’s belongings for his stay in Nikolai’s apartment. However, as he drew closer to his son’s bedroom door, he could hear panting through the opposite door. Fuck! And then his name came from those lips. Victor closed his eyes and imagined himself beyond that door, wrapped around Yuuri’s cock...and it was a good thing the door was locked. Still, he scented the door thoroughly once more before turning to Yura’s room. No one else is allowed to enter that space.

Half an hour later, he had a suitcase with several outfits in order as well as a few favorite toys and books. He frowned as he looked for one last thing...the ballerina tiger...but she remained hidden.

Maybe his son would be okay without it.

He heard Olga call up to him and he went down to greet Lev. “Thanks for getting this to me on such short notice.”

“I keep heat and rut supplies kitted up. This is early for you, however,” the grocer observed.

Victor grimaced, his glance going towards the stairs.

“Ah, the bigger Yuri’s heat. I should have known.” Turning to Olga, he asked, “Are you about ready?”
“Yes, my bag’s in here,” she huffed.

Interesting. So Olga isn’t going to her sister’s this time. He watched her lug her bag towards the door and Lev fuss over her, trying to take the bag and her stubborn refusal, holding onto her independence defiantly. He’d like to see them both together. She seemed reluctant and Victor always worried if it was because she felt she needed to look out for him. Would this house be too much for Yuuri? It wasn’t like they couldn’t hire someone else...but finding the right person was always tricky. Although he would willingly let Olga go, he also knew it would be with a heavy heart.

As they left, Victor decided to shower while he waited for his friend. His scent was overpowering and Chris might sense aggression on him. Chris promised to stop by around nine and he knew the Swiss attorney would see his way in if Victor didn’t answer the door. The house was secure but Victor’s closest friend had a key.

Showered off, he chose loose pants. He could already feel arousal settling in his stomach, his rut near, waiting for Victor to release his control. He then moved the supplies into his room. He just needed to deal with Chris. He began walking the house, scenting the entrances. It was a warning. Rutting alpha within. It was also a protection for his Yuuri. The alpha would be sensitive towards anything that didn’t belong, be it sound or scent, during his rut.

He heard the doorbell and was halfway there, when he heard Chris’ voice ring out. “Vitya?”

“I’m here.” He met Chris in the kitchen. “I was just securing the house.”

Chris took one look at his friend and shook his head. “You’re a mess.”

Victor’s hands unconsciously fluttered to his hair, trying to smooth it in order. (It was fine but the comment made him self-conscious.) “I know...I had to put Yuuri to bed last night. He slipped into heat soon after.”

Chris nodded in sympathy. “I’m glad you’re here. He was in bad shape. I’m not even sure he realized he was holding it off. Did he...hold off until Monday?”

Victor nodded, appreciative of his friend’s observations and frowning at the odd question. Monday? Why Monday? Still, he confirmed the schedule for his friend. “Just barely. Thanks for
calling me. What do you have for me?”

“Some legal documents. Yuuri wanted me to put them in your care.”

Victor took the packet and frowned when he saw both his own and Yuuri’s name on the envelope. “I’ll put them up until he’s out…”

Chris rubbed the back of his neck. “He sort of wanted you to read them.”

Victor thinned his lips and nodded. He closed his eyes as he felt another wave of nausea wash over him. “I...don’t have much time.”

“I know. I’m gone...but read those documents.” He shifted back and forth before he added, “I didn’t get a chance to tell him. You know...about Shuji.”

Victor nodded sharply. He’ll deal with that when Yuuri emerges. Perhaps it was for the best. It might have added more stress to Yuuri’s heat.

As Chris left, Victor sealed up that door. The only way in at this point was through Nikolai’s apartment. He set Yura’s things near the entrance. If Nikolai or Yura entered, it wouldn’t disturb the pair...their scents belonged to the house. But Victor didn’t want them to have to if avoidable.

Turning towards his room, he disappeared into the space Yuuri prepared for him. The scent greeted him like a long lost friend. He closed his eyes and relinquished control.

Yuuri whined as images fought with one another. Memories of Shuji forcing its way onto Yuuri warred with his desire for Victor. The underlying common factor was fear. Please Vitya...I...need you. Victor made him feel safe...even when he was scared, he knew deep inside he was safe with Victor. Victor’s home. He came home early. Did he do that for me?

He turned into the scarf and buried himself into the scent, remembering how the man held onto him, scented him, carried him to bed. Yuuri wanted him to stay. Why didn’t he stay? Something
inside told him it wasn’t the right time but he couldn’t reconcile it with the desire pulsating through him for the alpha. Reaching down, he began stroking himself as he imagined himself stretched out along Victor’s body. He could almost feel Victor’s hand on his back, soft whispered words and promises and endearments.  

Vitya...

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Nikolai arrived after taking care of Yura and running his own errands. Basic groceries to feed them both from his tiny kitchen. He should have prepared better. He could have made piroshkis and just reheated them over the next few days. He entered his door into the main house and walked through. Sure enough, he found Yura’s things just beyond the entrance.

He tugged the suitcase to the twin bed tucked into an alcove, a window of stained diamond shaped glass panes provided some privacy. Pulling back the curtains, he began unpacking Yura’s bag. There were already toys tucked away here and there. He placed the books on the shelf and found a working lamp and nightlight. The clothes were hung in a nearby closet with socks and underwear in a basket on the floor. Once satisfied, he moved onto the next task.

Victor trusted him to keep things in order when he was unable to be there for his family...that included the animals that joined the household along the way. He searched through the main house and found all of the critters. Two dogs and three cats. Now in his small attached apartment, they crowded around the small gas heater. Nikolai grunted. He couldn’t blame them. The air held a chill.

He took in his space. It was efficient, the only privacy in the bathroom. His own bed had its own alcove, room for the bed and a nightstand. In the sitting room, he had two chairs, both worn leather he borrowed from the main house, lovely crocheted afghans laid folded within reach, one of the few things that remained of his life with his wife and daughter. A stool with a worn tapestry sat at his feet. Tucked across the room against the wall was a table with three chairs. Sometimes Victor would come over and the three of them would play cards or dominoes. Next to that stood the kitchenette. Two burners, a small refrigerator, sink, and a short counter space. He had a stack of books to tide him over between the chairs as well as access to his shop. It would be cozy but he often had the little boy stay over. Hopefully those two in the main house will work out their struggles and come together soon.

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Victor reached for the lube. He was already too sensitive and he wanted Yuuri, he needed Yuuri...it was Yuuri’s name on his lips as he sought his next orgasm. Only Yuuri. His thoughts held fast to the omega upstairs, his Yuuri, his mate and in his mind’s eye, he could see Yuuri, feel
Yuuri, smell Yuuri. Turning into the pillow, he felt himself smile. Yuuri made sure he’d be able to smell the omega, his scent permeating the room.

His hand no longer satisfying, he rolled over, rutting against a pillow that was full of Yuuri’s scent. With a groan, he came once again, panting as he rested on his elbows. *Are you okay?*

Upstairs, Yuuri felt the tears streaking down his cheeks, the dildo wasn’t enough. He needed Victor. “Please, Vitya…” He worked the dildo, the motion not quite hitting right and he groaned in frustration. *You suck as an omega! You only deserve the Shuji’s in this world.* Those tears continued down his cheeks as he sobbed into the pillow. *Victor wouldn’t want a broken omega like you. He can have anyone.*

“But...he wants me…”

He knew it...everything the alpha did along the way to court Yuuri came to mind. With a flood of evidence, he couldn't deny the truth.

*I don’t know why...but he wants me...*

Yura peeked through the door connecting the apartment to the main house. “Grandpa,” he whispered, “I think they’re sleeping.”

“Hurry up, boy. Get the toy and hurry back.”

Yura scampered up the stairs and into his room. The tiger wasn’t on the bed or under the bed. As he re-entered the hall, his eyes widened at the sound coming from Yuuri’s room. Scared, he ran back down to his grandfather.

“*I think there’s a ghost with Yuuri!*”
Nikolai chuckled as he guided the boy back into the house. “Yuuri is strong. He can take care of himself.” He noticed the boy was empty-handed. Maybe he’d be alright without it.

Yuuri rolled over, burrowing into the top of the nest. There was a scent there that he needed. He finally located it. The shirt had been on Victor when he arrived home and the fresh scent protected by Victor’s coat and button up during travel was just the smell he needed. He succumbed to his need once more. Victor couldn’t fill him but the dildo helped ease the emptiness. It wasn’t Victor...he wanted Victor. In his thoughts, he could imagine Victor’s hands on him, running over him with purpose, seeking out his length. Yuuri arched into that imagined touch, a moan slipping from his lips. *I burn with thoughts of you*. He started to feel the build once again...but in the back of his mind, he knew it wasn’t Victor. And he knew he wanted Victor. *Vityaaa...

Olga curled up with a book. She was already bored at Lev’s home. There wasn’t enough to occupy herself. *Maybe I should have gone to my sister’s house instead. I don’t know why I let that man talk me into this.*

But then *that man* came through the door with a flourish of flowers in his arms. “For you, my beauty.”

Olga scoffed. She hadn’t been a beauty in years. Still, the red lilies were beautiful.

Victor curled into the pillow, taking in the stink of the room. A rut without one’s mate was unfulfilling. It was made even more frustrating knowing Yuuri was just walls away. He shoved up out of his bed. It was a lull and one he planned to take advantage of. He downed two bottles of water without pause and threw one of the high protein, high carb meals into the microwave. As he ate the results with a frown, he longed for Olga’s or Yuuri’s cooking. Maybe next time, he could arrange for Nikolai to make piroshkis. They would taste better than this even with the microwave.
Yuuri sat in the wooden rocking chair breathing in the tea Mehar provided. In the nearby cup, instant miso waited his attention. He’d tried explaining to Olga he didn’t have much appetite on or before his heat but she insisted he had something she considered sustaining. Yuuri could only glare at the “omega meals” that were no better than meals-ready-to-eat. Male omegas couldn’t eliminate as well when in heat. So they often fattened up for a short period, then slowed down the week before to get rid of what was unneeded. Broths and tea. That’s what he needed. That and the remnant of his little boy. Pulling up the ballerina tiger left from when Yura last crawled in bed with him, he smelled the child’s scent. There was something grounding in the moment, reminding him of how he came to this place, reminding him of days spent cuddling the little boy, reading, giggle. Russia had become his home along the way. He sighed as he considered the child. He’s probably missing his tiger. Settling it next to the tea service, he decided to steal a shower. I don’t ache near as much. This is almost tolerable.

Victor came out of his room before Yuuri. The house had an eerie emptiness about it. He stood at the foot of the stairs and listened for any sound that could be Yuuri. He was not disappointed as a moan carried across the vaulted space. He checked his phone and sighed. It was Wednesday. Late. Three days lost to an unplanned rut. He sent a message to Yakov.

Vitya/ I’m out.

He went into the kitchen and sought something to eat that wasn’t half way to nasty. The result was eggs and toast, tea with jam accompanying it.

Yakov/ Take the rest of the week. How is Yuuri?

Vitya/ Still upstairs.

Yakov/ We’ve got everything covered here. Yura even made his lessons. Mila’s sister brought him Monday and that new boy’s mother today.

Vitya/ Katya and Mehar. You need to get to know the parents’ and guardians’ names, Yakov.
Yakov/ Not anymore.  I don’t travel with them.

Vitya had to nod at that statement.  *Fair enough.*  He began making a list of things he needed to get done including a physical.  “I should double check with Yuuri and make sure he gets into a doctor.”

Yuuri groaned as he woke from the last fevered assault on his senses.  Picking up his phone, he saw that it was Thursday.  He’d lost more than a week to this given the struggle his preheat caused.  He stretched and stumbled out of the nest.  The walls gave way to the assault, fabric wrapped cushions falling to the floor.  Yuuri gave them a casual glance and moved into the bathroom.  *They’ve served their purpose.*  Then turning towards his bathroom, he made a beeline.  He had to pee...then shower.  That was his primary thought.

Back in the room, he flipped the switch to the ventilation system.  He felt the loneliness of the space and needed to escape.  *Who is home?*  He pulled on a pair of pajama bottoms and pulled on a robe over his top before flipping the locks on the room and slipping into the hall.  He picked up on Victor’s residual scent on his door and traced his fingers around the facing.  As he descended the stairs, he heard the quiet murmur of television and the flicker of the light could be seen coming from the living room.  Yuuri avoided that room and entered the kitchen.  *Not yet.*  As much as he wanted Victor’s company, he was afraid.  *What if he doesn’t want me?  Just because he scented my door, that doesn’t necessarily mean he wants me.*

Hunger gnawed at him and he found some jam and bread out.  Soon he had toast and a glass of water.  Something easy and solid after a week of mostly liquid diet.

Victor heard movement in the kitchen and then the definite pop of the toaster.  *Yuuriii...*  He entered the kitchen and allowed his eyes to adjust to the shadows.  Yuuri stood watching him, licking something off of his fingers before reaching over to the sink and washing his hands.  Drying them off, the omega studied the alpha, his eyes considering the man before he stepped towards Victor, one step, then another.

“I’ve missed you,” the omega whispered, their foreheads coming together, Yuuri’s hand resting on Victor’s chest.
“Me, too,” Victor answered, his hands skimming down Yuuri’s side to rest on his hips.

Yuuri slid his hands up and cupped the alpha’s face, hesitating, eyes questioning, before pulling him down into a kiss, a moan sliding out of him in a flood of relief at this connection. The older man licked into his mouth, tasting the sticky sweet jam on his lips. Yuuri’s hand moved around the alpha’s neck as Victor answered with a soft moan of his own. The alpha’s hands slid around to Yuuri’s ass lifting the omega up in his arms. So light. Yuuri’s legs wrapped around him. But strong.

Victor was gone, kissing Yuuri only to pull back and look at him before kissing him more. He was walking before he even realized the destination but everything was on autopilot. Yuuri belonged in one place at the moment. They entered Victor’s room and Victor couldn’t believe how well the omega moved in his arms, his legs tightening around him, seeking pleasure as he ground his hips into the alpha.

Victor crawled across the bed, Yuuri koalaed into his arms until they were stretched out beside one another, kiss after kiss now followed by searching fingers pushing up Victor’s shirt, demanding in his touch. Victor’s own hands tugging at the belt to the omega’s robe, sliding the sleeves down Yuuri’s arms. Fuck! He was drowning in him. The alpha moaned as he felt Yuuri completely opened up to him. “Yuuriii…”

“Vitya...need you.” There was desperation in his voice, arousal in his scent.

Victor pulled back and studied Yuuri for a moment. “Are you still…” Eyes blown with desire, he could still see that Yuuri was present and alert.

Yuuri waved off his concern, pulling him in to smell his scent. Yuuri...cinnamon and ginger...not the strong notes of heat, but definitely turned on. Victor held onto him and breathed him in. He’d missed this most of all in his absence. Yuuri’s scent, the feel of his skin. They had been stolen snatches before. But now, Yuuri let him savor the silk of his skin, the delicious flavor of his scent as the alpha dragged his tongue slowly over the scent gland. Vkusno! Yuuri groaned in response, arching his back and grinding into him, needing friction, needing...him.

Victor felt Yuuri’s restless kisses flutter along his cheek and rose up to capture those lips once more. Then he pulled back, putting their foreheads together. Although they could consent, the everpresent reality of the written promises between them came forward in his thoughts. “You don’t know how bad I want this.”
Yuuri rolled his hips into Victor and impishly responded, “I have an inkling.”

Victor groaned and rolled off of him. Yuuri stared at him in confusion. Running his hands through his hair, he shook his head. “We can’t do this, Yuuri...not right now.”

“I...don’t understand.” Yuuri had rolled to his knees and now sat up, leaning on his hand while the other reached for him, fluttering up his chest. “You...want me, don’t you?”

Victor’s gaze was seering. “Do I want you? I’ve never wanted anyone more.”

Yuuri narrowed his eyes in confusion. “Then what’s wrong...I want you, too.”

Victor groaned in his reality. “We have a contract.”

Yuuri chewed his lip still confused. “Didn’t...Chris give you the papers?”

*Papers...papers...what...oh, the day I went into my rut.* Victor rolled out of bed and went over to the seating area. Looking through the piles on his table, he spotted the thick legal envelope. Bringing it back to bed, he scooted against the headboard and broke the seal. “I sank into rut right after Chris left and it fell away from my thoughts.”

Yuuri crawled up to sit beside him, leaning in to kiss his shoulder as Victor perused the papers. It took a moment for Victor to realize what he was seeing. “This...is a waiver.”

Yuuri nodded, leaning into Victor and running his tongue along the alpha’s collar bone.

“You signed this...over a week ago. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“It wouldn’t be legal if I didn’t have a seven day cooling period. That ended Monday. If my heat started Sunday, it would be nullified and I’d have to start the process all over again.”

“Oh...” Victor read through the caveats once more. “Wow! I didn’t expect this. I mean...I want this. All of this...I just didn’t...we never even talked about it.”
Yuuri arched an eyebrow towards him mockingly. “You’ve been courting me since I arrived.”

“I…” Victor really had no defense. He glanced away, sighing, shoving his hands back through his hair in guilt. “I know! It was unconscious. I...I didn’t mean to disagree with the contract.”

“For me, this was supposed to be an employment situation. I didn’t mean to...fall in love.” Those last words came out in a whisper.

Victor leaned into Yuuri, capturing those lips in a slow, purposeful kiss that had the omega squirming against him. As he pulled back, their bodies now entwined, he whispered in return, “I didn’t expect to fall in love, either...yet here we are.”

“I’m scared...not of you but of...everything else. I’ve never wanted sex with anyone. I’ve never sought someone’s love. And Shuji...he hurt me.”

“He won’t hurt you any more.” Victor frowned as he remembered Yuuri didn’t know. “The ISU pulled his badge and escorted him out.”

“Has he been arrested? Have the found the missing skater?”

Victor shook his head but answered, “That’s just a matter of time.”

Yuuri curled into Victor’s shoulder, breathing in Victor’s scent. Regardless of the situation, Victor was his center, his calm, his safety. As he settled, he whispered, “Make love to me.”

Chapter End Notes

mmmm...time for Yuuri to know some real love!
You map me with every touch

Chapter Summary

"Make love to me..."

WARNING: If you missed it with the opening line, this chapter has sex in it. ;) On a serious note, remember Yuuri was abused for ten years, so there will be reactions due to this as they explore each other intimately. Don’t worry...Victor will take good care of him and make sure he feels safe and loved. However, I wanted you to be aware in case this might TRIGGER you.

Chapter Notes

I left you hanging the other day but here is the conclusion of that moment. ;)

Ch. 30: You map me with every touch

WARNING: If you missed it with the opening line, this chapter has sex in it. ;) On a serious note, remember Yuuri was abused for ten years, so there will be reactions due to this as they explore each other intimately. Don’t worry...Victor will take good care of him and make sure he feels safe and loved. However, I wanted you to be aware in case this might TRIGGER you.

“Make love to me.”

The words, spoken by the man in his arms, seared into Victor, the alpha inside him growling as he leaned into Yuuri, deepening his kiss.

He felt the “mine” ripped from him as their lips parted unsure which of them had voiced the idea both men shared. His fingers worked the robe the rest of the way off baring Yuuri’s chest to him. He slowly started to explore Yuuri, his fingers mapping out the surface of Yuuri’s skin, noting the dips and rises. Even underweight the natural definition of Yuuri’s athletic middle was apparent to Victor. He watched the abs tightening under his exploratory search, felt the back arching as Victor grabbed hold of a nipple with his lips, sucking as fingers made dimples in the flawless skin.
He gently turned Yuuri over onto his stomach and continued his exploration, running kisses down the omega’s spine, listening to the soft moans at each touch. Victor kept his hand on Yuuri, making sure there were no surprises, nothing too fast or sudden in his actions. His thumb ran around Yuuri’s waistband as he rose up and nuzzled into his lover’s neck. “Are you sure?”

“Please…” Yuuri breathed out, drawing out the single syllable. “Need you…” The smaller hand closed over Victor’s, which had stilled at the waist.

Victor backed down Yuuri’s body and soon eased off his pajama pants, dropping them off the edge of the bed. Finding himself overdressed, he divested himself of his own clothes leaving them to intermingle with Yuuri’s pants. Turning back, he took in the beautiful sight of a very naked Yuuri Katsuki lying on his bed. It was stunning, the skin glowed and Victor found himself in awe of the tight muscles of the pert ass, which held the beginning of a soft roundness. A smile crawled up Victor’s lips, thinking of how gorgeous the man will be with a full round curve.

Yuuri looked over his shoulder, an impatient eyebrow raised. Victor smirked back and lowered his lips to the back of Yuuri’s ankle, giving a gentle quick lick to the skin before kissing along the bone. Yuuri groaned, wiggling his toes impatiently and pulling a smile from the Victor. The alpha began working his way up the omega’s body dropping kisses at sensitive points along the way...the inside of Yuuri’s knee, the top of his thigh just beneath his ass, that ass...because Victor couldn’t pass that up...required a nip, Yuuri’s hipbone as Victor turned him back over. Yuuri answered every point of contact with a needy sigh or breathy moan.

Yuuri shifted his body, reaching down for Victor and the alpha climbed up into his embrace, trading hungry kisses, need echoing off the other’s call. The alpha felt Yuuri’s fingers digging into his hips, demanding contact, and he settled himself against the omega, their lengths sliding against one another. He captured Yuuri’s groan in a kiss.

Victor pulled up, crawling back down Yuuri’s body and experimentally ran his tongue around Yuuri’s crown. The omega gasped, his eyes wide as he watched Victor slowly take his sex into that sweet mouth. Senses tingled and then exploded in a symphony of feeling. Yuuri felt the inner muscles of his thighs start trembling immediately and he had to steady himself forcibly to push out the amazed question, “Y-you do that?”

Victor closed his eyes, realizing Yuuri had never even experienced a blowjob although he strongly suspected he’d been forced to give one. He answered with a hum, not wanting to spoil the moment and upset the omega. He could feel that slight body relaxing back into the sheets, could hear the omega panting as he fought not to buck into Victor’s mouth, could smell Yuuri’s slick still thick with the smell of heat. Intoxicating. He continued to suck on Yuuri until he heard the younger man’s breath hitch, that body tightening up in his arms, the taste of him releasing down Victor’s throat.
Yuuri lay utterly wrecked in the sheets catching his breath and waiting for his heart to slow, his eyes brightened by the experience, staring up at the ceiling. “I’ve...never felt like that,” he whispered.

Victor struggled to keep himself from growling with pride, knowing he had please his omega and fighting off anger because he knew the omega had never known pleasure. He shifted up, his body stretched out along Yuuri’s side, and reached over to turn Yuuri’s cheek so those brown eyes met his. “You should always know pleasure, my Yuuri...always when we make love.”

Yuuri turned the words over in his mind, make love. He felt that he was finally beginning to understand why people used that term. Victor’s touch ignited him, and left him breathless, but the alpha was there to hold him, waiting for him to grow strong again. It was love, the physical act of it in every sense. Such a stark, harsh contrast to...“H-he never...”

“Shhh...I know,” Victor soothed. He knew the memories of before would intrude. He only wanted Yuuri to know happiness...but to disregard Yuuri’s past would prevent his healing. Victor wanted Yuuri to heal, to be restored. “Please darling, let me show you how it should be.” He then leaned in and kissed him, his lips slowly moving over the slightly chapped ones. Smiling into that kiss, he thought about how Yuuri chewed on that lip when he was nervous.

As they parted, his brown eyes were wide. “Is that...how I taste?”

“Mmmm...yes, my Yuuri. That’s how your seed tastes.” Victor moved in to kiss into the mouth but stopped as Yuuri pulled back.

Yuuri huffed at that. “An omega’s seed isn’t worth much.” The voice had darkened, hardened with an edge.

“Why do you say that?” Victor blinked in surprise.

The omega looked away, shrugging, self-disdain evident in the bitterness of his voice. “I could never make anyone pregnant...and since I don’t know if I can get pregnant...” He winced and corrected, “stay pregnant...”

Once more Victor shushed those awakening anxious thoughts. “We are a ways from thinking about pregnancy, lyubov moya.” And there was that chewing of the lip. He watched Yuuri digest
his words before slowly nodding in agreement.

Yuuri sighed, his eyes focusing on the ceiling, tears finding their way into the corners before slipping out. “But...what if you want more and I can’t give it to you.”

Victor remained quiet for a moment. He wasn’t sure what he wanted, but he knew whatever it was Yuuri was part of it, more than a match to anything in their future. “I know it wasn’t an easy life you left behind...but know this. You. Are. Enough. Even if there are no more children, I couldn’t want for more.”

Yuuri shoved away his tears with a frustrated sigh. “I shouldn’t be talking about it. Not here. Not now.”

“I want you to feel free to talk about anything that worries you...even your past life... whenever you need to talk about it.” Victor leaned in and brushed his lips against Yuuri’s, working that worry out of him as he slowly deepened the kiss. Yuuri felt his body shift back on the bed, Victor’s weight on his frame as he demanded so much from that kiss. He cried out softly as Victor finally broke away from him.

“Yuuri...my sweet, beautiful Yuuri...you are so much more than you realize,” Victor whispered softly. “I want you...to be mine.”

“Yes…” The word came out without hesitation, brown eyes meeting blue, holding them steady. “I want...to be yours. I want...you to be mine.”

Victor felt a shiver run up his back at Yuuri’s sentiment, knowing there was nothing he would like more than to have Yuuri stake his claim all over his body. “I...I don’t know what to say...” Sky blue eyes sparkled as he fluttered kisses around Yuuri’s face, eyes, ears, throat, before brushing their lips together once more. “I don’t deserve you...I want you...but I don’t deserve you…”

Yuuri traded kisses during the spaces of his words. “I want you, too...and if anyone doesn’t deserve someone…”

Victor pressed his fingers to the omega’s lips cutting off those words. “You deserve all of the good things this world holds...and I plan to deny you none of those things.”
Yuuri’s hands cupped his face, his thumbs caressing his cheeks. “You *are* everything that is good in this world.”

Victor leaned in and closed the deal with a kiss. Shifting his body against Yuuri’s, he felt the omega’s need rising again. Victor began to once more give into passion, his fingers searching that small body beneath him. He felt Yuuri’s hand responding as his light touch grew stronger, pressing firmly against his skin, digging into the muscles of his back, then a hesitation and a sudden rush of adrenal as the omega grabbed at his ass. Victor felt himself melting into the touch, resisting the urge to whine. *He wants me. He has all but agreed to be my mate. Every moment we say it with actions and looks, the only thing missing are the words. My Yuuri…my sweet, beautiful Yuuri…*

Kissing up into the heart shaped mouth Yuuri pulled Victor’s body closer, needing contact everywhere. *If you claimed me tonight, I’d become yours willingly*, Yuuri thought even as he responded to the alpha’s touch. *No one has made me burn like this. No one has awakened me like this. No one could. I didn’t even know this was possible. Not for me.* Yuuri emitted a tiny growl as Victor kissed down his neck, grabbing the glorious silver hair and directing the man back to his mouth. *I thought…I was broken…yet you make me whole. I can believe in a future…with you. But then that alpha’s hand touched a part of him that made him shudder in fear, gasping, fighting for air.*

Victor felt the fear in Yuuri’s body before he saw the registry on his face or smelled it in his scent, and stilled his actions while keeping Yuuri in his arms. The alpha watched Yuuri recoil, connecting the location of his roving hand with the sudden change in the omega’s mood. He had brushed a finger across his entrance; as soon as the alpha realized it he pulled his hand back immediately, resting on Yuuri’s hips. “Yuuri…talk to me…what’s going on?”

The younger man sucked in deeply for air but couldn’t pull it together, feeling his lungs not cooperate. Then he heard Victor from far away, almost like down a tunnel, firmly talking to him, calling to him.

“Breathe for me, Yuuri…that’s good…in, one, two, three…out, one, two, three…in…”

Yuuri focused on that voice, on that grounding touch on his hip, on that body carefully holding its weight off of him, on that scent surrounding him, on those pheromones easing his anxiety away. He found his breath slowly becoming steady. He closed his eyes, felt the assurances of the man holding him. “I…I…” Words were still hard and he was frustrated with the struggle.

The ocean blue eyes smiled with relief as he hushed Yuuri’s broken works, “No rush, Yuuri…take your time. Find your words. I can wait.”
Yuuri sniffed and felt the dampness spilling from his eyes once more. He took a hand and scoured his eyes with the heel of his palm feeling his frustration in the action. He could hear the sob break through...and Victor’s soothing voice, feeling disconnected but needing to reconnect.

“Let it out, Yuuri,” Victor encouraged, “do what you need to do.”

Finally, he found his first words. “I-I’m sorry…”

It was barely a whisper but Victor heard, following quickly with assurances. “You don’t need to apologize to me. I can’t imagine what you’ve been through.”

“I want...to feel you...to know you...but...I’m afraid…” The confession was hard, but he knew he had to be honest, he couldn’t get help without honesty.

“What are you afraid of?”

The words didn’t come out as an accusation but a gentle urging for Yuuri to open up to him. And he did, slowly, stuttering out with his tears. “It always...hurt. H-he always hurt me.”

Victor was quiet as he considered his next words. Finally, he asked, “Before you...began, did he do anything for you? Did he prepare you?”

Yuuri furrowed his brow in confusion. Prepare? What is that? I was expected to take care of myself. “I...don’t know?”

Victor had figured as much as he leaned in and gently kissed away Yuuri’s tears before murmuring patiently in explanation, “Since I like to be fucked as well, I know a little time preparing my partner goes a long way. That’s why I touch with my fingers and mouth and gently work you open. It’s how I’d like you to take me when you feel confident enough. I never want to force my way in. Even though you’re omega and your body gives more easily than mine, your muscles are still tight until they are ready to let me in.”

Yuuri’s memory went back to what he knew of sex in his past. Simply being tossed onto the bed, ordered to lay on his stomach… “H-he...always pushed into me. H-he might use my slick to put on
his dick first...but...that’s...” Yuuri faded off turning his face, to hide. Victor pulled him close and he was able to hide into the alpha’s neck. He held onto the other man for the longest of times before whispering, “What do we do now?”

“Where are you?” Victor asked carefully as he leaned back and studied Yuuri’s expression trying to get a read on the omega. “We can stop if you’re not ready...or...we could try a different approach.”

“Like what?” Yuuri’s voice was open, expectant. He was still interested in continuing his exploration of Victor’s body, and allowing the alpha to explore his. And he was afraid if he stopped, he would have a harder time moving forward.

Victor hummed as he considered the options they had before them. “We could do a number of things...from a hand job...” He watched Yuuri’s eyebrows wrinkle and the omega shake his head. “Another blowjob...” Again another shake of the head. “I could...fuck those beautiful thighs.” Yuuri considered that before shaking his head with a whine. “What is it that you want?

“I...want you inside me,” Yuuri whispered in frustration, his fingers fluttering over Victor’s chest. “How...do we get there?”

Victor tapped his lip thoughtfully before leaning over to the nightstand and picking up a tube of lube. “This...has a muscle relaxer that helps while opening you up. I use it on myself.”

“But...I produce slick,” Yuuri argued. He had some for his toys but he’d never...not with...Shuji. He sighed, realizing everything Shuji did was to cause him greater pain and torment.

“Yes,” Victor agreed as he continued to explain patiently. “But that doesn’t mean you don’t need a little help from time to time. Especially now when you’re tense...but it does require that either you or I touch you.”

Yuuri frowned as he considered the options. He knew how to work a toy into himself, had spent the better half of the week doing exactly that. It was a slow process, his body getting used to each stretch. He didn’t know for sure how the mechanics would work with Victor’s suggestion. Yuuri’s toys were...modest. Victor was bigger than a toy but...his finger was not. “Let’s...do it together,” Yuuri suggested. “Until...I become familiar with you.” Or maybe with myself.

Victor nodded in agreement. He took the lube and squirted it on his fingers before handing it to
Yuuri who followed his lead. He watched as Yuuri put some of the viscous liquid on his fingers and rubbed it around, noticing how it spread easily and evenly, then waited and let Yuuri touch himself first, waiting to be invited into the play.

Yuuri seemed unsure but took those slick fingers and rubbed them across his hole. He always hated touching himself and even with the toys, he simply eased them in slowly. “I’m...not sure…” He hated the almost frightened whimper that came from his voice, the uncertainty that trembled out with his words.

Victor slid a guiding hand over his, and murmured, “Try a circular motion, to become familiar with your touch first.” He then urged that touch with a hand over Yuuri’s careful to only let Yuuri do the touching, watching the omega’s lips part, his eyes closed as he concentrated on the feeling.

Oh, this is different. The feeling sent a wave of desire through him and he didn’t quite know what to do with it. But he also now wanted together, he wanted Victor’s touch and as the alpha pulled back, watching, waiting...he knew he wanted more. “Please...help...” Yuuri breathed, inviting the alpha in further.

Victor traced his fingers along Yuuri’s perineum until it joined the finger circling his hole. He eased the tip of his finger into Yuuri and heard the omega moan in response. Yuuri’s finger stilled as he focused on what Victor was doing, the subtle exploration as Victor started working open the inner rim. Then he watched Yuuri align his touch with his and slowly, the two of them eased both fingers inside as Yuuri breathed out.

“That’s good, my Yuuri...breathe with it.” Victor realized Yuuri had never properly explored his body and he had to wonder how much pleasure he derived from his heats. “Let’s move our fingers in and out, now.”

Yuuri wrinkled his brow in concentration as he followed Victor’s suggestion, still keeping that finger against Victor’s, they began to slowly move. “Oooh,” he moaned as he felt new sensations.

Victor smiled at the beautiful noises that slipped out unguarded from the omega. As the path eased further, he murmured, “I’m going to add another finger now.”

“Do I…” Yuuri tickled Victor’s hand with another finger to finish his question, blushing as he shied away from the words.
“I think four might be too much for the moment. Just pay attention to what I’m doing and how it’s making you feel, love,” he directed gently. With the third finger, Victor started to stretch and open him up further, spreading his fingers apart while Yuuri furrowed his brow in concentration. Victor then crooked them to find his prostate. He heard Yuuri’s breath hitch, watched as the chest pushed forward as his back arched at the contact. He grinned as he murmured, “There we go...how are you feeling?”

Yuuri’s breathing became measured, focused and then he answered, “I-I think I can do four now.”

Victor heard the needy desire in the voice, the strength that came with the confidence and eased their fingers back out to invite the fourth inside, listening to Yuuri breathe through the stretch. “So beautiful, the way you open up for me, for yourself, my Yuuri,” Victor praised softly. Yuuri was now grinding into that touch, his own hand riding Victor’s.

“Fuck,” Yuuri breathed. “V-vitya...n-need more.”

“Are you sure?”

Yuuri’s brown eyes opened wide as he nodded. “I’m ready.”

Victor licked his lips at the erotic site of Yuuri riding him, demanding more. He guided their hands out and reached over for a wet wipe, handing one to Yuuri. After a hasty clean up, Victor rested his hand on Yuuri’s hip. “Do you...want to face me, or have your back to me?”

The cinnamon of the eyes sparkled again as Yuuri realized that there was a world of new positions to try. “I want to see you...this first time,” Yuuri whispered.

“Well, then...let’s see what that ballet has done for you,” Victor smirked. He guided Yuuri’s leg over his shoulder, the other, he rested the knee over his elbow as he lined himself up. “I’m going to move slow but if you feel the least bit uncomfortable, I want you to tell me to stop. Use your words, Yuuri...slow down, stop, red for a complete stop, yellow for me to hold on, hurry up...anything you need to tell me to help you find your pleasure, okay?”

Yuuri flushed at the amount of control the alpha just surrendered to him. Eagerly, he nodded.

“And if you get scared and need me out, I want you to tell me Salchow, do you understand?”
Yuuri’s brow furrowed. “Salchow? Like the jump?”

“Exactly. It’s a safe word. You are allowed to stop this anytime you want. I want you to feel safe with me,” Victor stated firmly.

Yuuri nodded. “Okay...I understand. Now...will you...please...in me?” The omega then pushed his hips towards Victor and received a warm chuckle from the alpha for his impatience. But then he felt the smooth head pressing into him slowly, the stretch making his eyes widen, making him gasp. “It’s...so much...more...” Yuuri tried to breathe through the intrusion. Victor didn’t know if that was good or bad but he stopped and let him get use to the pressure, waiting on Yuuri’s nod before continuing to press into him. Victor slowly filled him, and Yuuri felt his fingers knotting into the sheets. “Oh, god...so much...I’m so...full.”

“Is that good?” Victor asked, his voice sounding strained, and Yuuri opened his eyes to study the alpha holding onto his control. Victor, like this, waiting on Yuuri’s nod...he was beautiful...like a bow tightly pulled back, waiting for release but graceful in its power.

“Yes,” Yuuri breathed. “N-need...Vitya...” Yuuri lifted himself to deepen the insertion and Victor groaned. Grinding into Victor, the omega soon had him fully sheathed.

“Fuuuck,” Victor muttered, turning his head to kiss into the leg draped over his shoulder. It had been so long since he’d had a lover, so very long since he felt himself completely enveloped...and Yuuri was so tight. He had to breathe through his control and the omega was growing impatient. He eased out of Yuuri just enough to thrust back in, small movements that were rewarded with answering moans from the omega. “You feel amazing,” Victor praised softly and watched Yuuri’s blush spread down his neck and across his bare chest with pleasure.

“Vitya...please...m-more...” Yuuri begged as he ground his hips upward.

Victor had to bite his lip for control. He had never had a lover push him over the edge like this. He shifted Yuuri’s other leg over his shoulder and held onto his lover’s hips. The change of position took him deeper but it also gave him a little more control as he began to thrust more steadily, adding a little more length with each thrust. He heard Yuuri’s soft cries, his quickening breaths, his moans. He couldn’t take his eyes off of Yuuri and took in the way Yuuri’s fingers fist and unfist the sheet, the arch of Yuuri’s body as he worked to take Victor in while still claiming his own pleasure, the glint of tears still in the corner of his eyes.
“Are you okay?” Victor rasped.

Yuuri nodded and continued to move those hips in time with his own movements.

The building orgasm hit him all of the sudden and Victor’s breathing started quickening. “I’m getting close,” he warned softly, hoping he wouldn’t spill too soon. He wanted so much for this first time to go well.

“Me...too,” Yuuri answered in gasps.

Victor drove into him, his cries answering Yuuri’s until he released a growl. Yuuri’s answer was much more high pitched, an indescribable cry of release as Victor held onto him, feeling those waves of pleasure vibrating down his length.

Yuuri stretched out sleepily in his arms as Victor eased each leg down and slowly pulled out of him. The alpha laid next to him, running his hands down the omega’s body, making sure he was okay. Reaching over, he opened the drawer to his nightstand and pulled out some more wet wipes, cleaning Yuuri up thoroughly, the omega twisting in his arms to give him greater access. A quick clean up of himself and he stretched out beside his lover. Yuuri curled into Victor’s arms and soon was sleeping, a soft purr escaping him on exhale. As Victor relaxed into his embrace, he only thought, *mine...*
The loves of my life...

Chapter Summary

Yuuri is still processing and then there is family to deal with.

Chapter Notes

Greetings! I hope you’ve enjoyed receiving a Gravity chapter this week as well as a Truth Chapter. This one continues as scheduled. Our boys continue trying to stitch a family together.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 31: The loves of my life...

Victor stretched feeling the itch of an unwashed body. The bathroom called to him, however, he was reluctant to leave the warmth curled up in his arms. He looked at the beautiful man sleeping at his side, a peaceful smile on the slightly chapped lips. My beautiful Yuuri...do you realize how much life and love you’ve brought to this place?

He kissed the forehead and brushed some of the hairs to the side, wishing he could stay in bed with this incredible man forever. Unable to avoid the shower any longer, he slipped from the covers and moved with purpose. Turning on the stream, he first noted the water pressure discrepancy then the stream moving down the pipe. Whatever haunts this bathroom resents I traded out that clawfoot tub for the jacuzzi. The shower answered with a sputter of air pressure before it returned to a trickle.

He huffed in annoyance and fiddled with the knobs until he found a setting that allowed him to get more than just damp. He stood under the running water as he thought about the previous night, Yuuri coming to him, carrying the omega to his room, making love... oh, god...the way that body responded to him. I’m in love...with my son’s nanny.

Except he’s not just the nanny...he’s our companion omega. Both of us.
Victor thought about the contract. All of the protections he had built into the document, Yuuri signed them away with complete trust. He could imagine those hands shaking even as he stiffened his chin with resolve. *You are so many beautiful contradictions enticing me at once. I’m delightfully dizzy in your presence.*

*I...love you.*

Stepping out of the shower, he reached for the towel on the warmer. *At least something works in this bathroom. Maybe Yuuri can do something to soothe the spirits that haunt these walls, Nikolai has done all he possibly can.*

When he stepped through the door into the bedroom, he immediately drew himself alert. Something was wrong. The atmosphere and scent commanded his attention. He focused in on the bed and spotted the omega that filled his every thought these days sitting in the middle of the bed...in pieces.

“Yuuuriii,” he murmured, crossing the room in as few steps as possible and pulling the omega into his embrace. “What’s wrong?”

Yuuri, now tucked under Victor’s chin, his hand in a fist against the broad chest, sniffed and worked to pull himself together enough to answer. “I-if this doesn’t work out…”

Victor relaxed at the worry, initially horrified that the younger man was regretting last night. “Shhhh...why do you think it won’t work out?”

“I-if it doesn’t...I don’t just lose you...I lose my baby…”

Victor’s love rose as he saw that Yuuri was equally invested in his passionate love for himself as he was with his maternal love for their child. He kissed into his hair and worked on soothing the younger man with words and touch, his hands sliding down Yuuri’s bare skin. “You are the only one I’ve ever wanted like this...wanted to make you mine. I know...I bonded with Yelena, I moved her into my home...we made this makeshift family. And I loved her. I wasn’t...in love with her.”

Yuuri remained still in his arms, listening, waiting, giving no more than an occasional sniff and shiver.
“You...are my mate in every sense of the word.” Victor pulled back, taking a look into the widening brown eyes. “Yelena couldn’t be that. No one before that could fulfill that role. I didn’t want them...not like you.”

Yuuri reached up and wiped away a tear before rasping, “I-I’ve been here maybe five or six weeks...”

Victor released a soft laugh, understanding the younger man’s incredulity. “I know...I think I knew that first day I met with you. That interview...something drew me to you. I just wasn’t ready to admit it. I fell for you both suddenly and gradually. But that night we danced...I knew I was lost to you. I didn’t know how to cross that line. You...kissed me good night and that’s when I realized you were falling for me, too. I don’t know if you remember that.”

Yuuri sniffed and shook his head. “I think I remember it being a good night but then I kept worrying over what I couldn’t remember. It’s very disconcerting.”

“I made sure you were safe, Yuuri...you never have to worry with me.” His arms tightened around the small form. “I will always make sure you’re safe.”

In the softest whisper, he admitted, “I’m still scared.”

Victor frowned a little and chewed on his lower lip. “I wish I could snap my fingers and make that fear go away. All I can do is tell you every day I love you. I want you here.” He smiled quickly, “and point out that I’m just as amazed that you love me back.”

Yuuri took in the sincerity in those clear blue eyes then rested his cheek in Victor’s chest. Finally, he whispered, “I won’t be easy.”

Victor chuckled in response, pressing his lips against Yuuri’s forehead followed by his cheek. “I was never a fan of easy. Do you love me?”

“Yes,” Yuuri answered without hesitation. “Very much so.”

“That’s what I ask for...that you love me and my son...and maybe a little extra for Olga, Nikolai and the rest.”
Yuuri laughed softly through his tears, another sniff of his nose. “I can do that.”

Putting their foreheads together, Victor murmured, “You know I would bond you today, this moment, if that’s what you wanted. But I don’t want to rush you.”

Yuuri considered where he was at and knew he didn’t want to bond for reassurance. He wanted it to be a clear headed decision, one made with confidence. “I...I’m not ready. I’m still getting used to the feel of not having an alpha in my head.”

“And I get that...I never want you to feel that way with me. I just want you to know I’m serious.”

Yuuri hugged back into him, tucking up under Victor’s chin and nodding against his chest. “I know.”

Victor felt his courage rising from the contact with the omega. “I...would like you to move into my room. I don’t think I can bear the thought of sleeping without you so soon. Bond or not...you’re my mate. I felt that separation keenly while overseas.”

Yuuri turned up his face, brown eyes studying him. “I know...I felt it, too. I didn’t admit it at first...but that’s what I felt.” Then he nodded sharply, the decision made. “I’ll move in here. I...never felt at home in my own room. Only here. That’s why I continued to come here in your absence. That’s why...I struggled with nesting. I...wanted it to be here.”

“From now on...let it be here,” Victor whispered. He then leaned down to capture those lips. Yuuri turned further into his arms, leaning into the kiss until Victor was lying back, Yuuri awkwardly sprawled on top of him. Victor chuckled as he helped rearrange Yuuri’s legs to straddle him. “You’re so adorable, Yuuri.”

Yuuri sat up and blushed, the scent of arousal filling the air. Victor bucked up his hips teasingly, drawing a gasp from the omega. “I guess...it’s different when you actually want someone.”

“Very...and even better when that want is returned,” he answered, his hands resting on Yuuri’s hips, the bare skin smooth beneath his touch. “Do you want it like this?” He tightened his hands and waited.
Yuuri blushed profusely. “Ummm...umm...I...ah…” Yuuri’s hands went up to cover his face.

Victor couldn’t help but smile as the rest of Yuuri’s charms were definitely laid bare. He reached up and gently pried those hands away. “Don’t hide that beautiful face, lyubov moya,” Victor murmured.

“I...uh...don’t know what I want,” Yuuri confessed, his cheeks flaming up. “I...never...” He didn’t finish that sentence, averting his eyes in embarrassment.

Victor ran his hands up and down Yuuri’s thighs in a grounding motion. “I will guide you every step of the way. Do you want to try this?”

“Maybe?” he squeeked. Yuuri was pathetically bad at lying, he desperately wanted to try this...and anything else he might have missed and would absolutely enjoy.

Victor made sure Yuuri’s eyes were on him, understanding what he was doing. He reached around him, fingers sliding around the hips and down his cleft and teasing Yuuri’s entrance. “You’re still loose from last night. It wouldn’t take much to open you back up.”

Yuuri whined even as he pushed back into Victor’s touch. “I...god, Vitya…”

Victor chuckled softly as he slipped in two fingers easily. “I’ve got you, solnyshko.” He eased in a third as he added, “I always will.”

Yuuri closed his eyes on that promise riding those fingers as he moved his body up and down. “More…” he whispered.

Victor pulled his fingers free, the other hand had been occupied in making sure he was ready. Now he guided Yuuri to his length. “Lower yourself...slowly.”

The initial breech caused Yuuri to gasp and he clung to Victor’s repeated word. Slowly. A gentle rise, an increasing fall, Yuuri found his rhythm as naturally on Victor’s lap as he did on the dance floor.
Victor held him steady, hands on his hips, feeling Yuuri’s hands over his, watching Yuuri’s face morph with pleasure. “So beautiful…”

“Vityaaa…” he moaned, his body trembling as he settled onto Victor’s lap, feeling every centimeter of Victor within him. “So...full…”

“Just hold still a moment...let your body settle,” Victor coaxed even as he rubbed Yuuri’s back. Yuuri breathed through the pressure. “There you go, easy...nice...relax…”

Yuuri was leaning forward at this point, hands on Victor’s shoulders, when his eyes fluttered back open and focused on the man beneath him. “More…” he whispered.

Victor smirked before thrusting upwards. Whereas the previous night, Yuuri received all of Victor’s love, taking it into himself, letting it fill him, restore him...this morning, Yuuri met him halfway, demanding and giving at the same time. Holding Victor’s eyes, he tangled his fingers into Victor’s and rode him, finding a steady rhythm, shifting his body to understand this new pleasure and finding what felt best, watching Victor to see his own expressions of ecstasy. And then as Victor tightened his body arching into Yuuri, his blue eyes closed tightly.

“Vitya,” Yuuri whispered, his fingers trailing down his mate’s chest. “So beautiful…” He knew he was close but he needed a little help over the edge. Victor must have realized it, too, because he reached down to stroke Yuuri’s length. The omega began to move once more in rhythm to Victor’s hand. He felt the rising tide of his release and then his breath hitched as his body spasmed through his orgasm.

Victor pulled him into his chest, soothing words coming from his lips as he ran his hands up and down Yuuri’s back. “I’ve got you...I’ve got you.”

Yuuri felt himself come down, his body limp in Victor’s arms. Everything ached...pleasantly so. He loved the feel of neglected muscles waking up, the push of his body over the edge, the shakiness of spent energy. He closed his eyes, snuggling into the alpha and knew it was this man who brought him here. He lay still for several moments but then everything felt too much all at once and he had to pull free of Victor.

The alpha let him go, watching him. Yuuri could sense the hand more than feel it reaching for him but not forcing its way into his space. He appreciated it. He curled up on his side blinking into the morning shadows. Light came slowly to Russia this time of year and at the moment, he appreciated the early grays.
He felt safe, loved, and so many things denied him over the years. *I want you...all of you...all of this...and I’m scared to fully embrace it. I’m afraid it’s going to be snatched away.*

His eyes ran over the things on Victor’s nightstand. So many things the alpha held precious...and Yuuri had a feeling he was one of those things. Resting his eyes on the silver frame holding Yelena’s photo, he murmured softly. “I...wouldn’t mind if you wanted to talk about her...Yura’s mother...Yelena.”

Victor pushed up on his elbow as he studied his lover, thinking what it was he was to say to those words. “I don’t want to be inconsiderate of your feelings.”

“It’s not...she’s a part of you. You said last night I was to talk about *him* if I needed to talk...I want you to feel you can talk about Yelena. I know it’s different...but then again, it’s not. We both have a past...good or bad.”

Victor sighed, laying back, looking up at the ceiling, his hand running through his hair. “She’s all over this house. I was going to ask if you wanted me to...take some of her pictures down. I left them up even though it made the grieving process take longer. I never wanted to keep her from Yura. Sometimes I still talk to her.”

Yuuri shook his head. “Don’t take them down. I...find myself talking to her as well,” Yuuri confessed. “At first, it was little things...musing about how to handle her son, what would she want me to do...but then it was almost like she was an older sister. There was something comforting in her presence, still is. I’d feel a little lost without her in this house.”

“That’s how she was, too...she would have embraced you like a sister.” Victor smiled thinking of the amazing woman he had been lucky enough to have in his life, even if it was heartbreaking to watch as she slipped from it.

Yuuri frowned, a shiver moving up his spine as he turned to face Victor, his fingers dancing up the alpha’s chest. “If...she still lived...would we...” He closed his eyes, fighting for words and not knowing where to go with them. “Mehar and Rohan...”

Victor joined their fingertips, then their hands as he studied the beautiful omega. “I...don’t know. I never considered such a thing but I know Yelena would have encouraged my happiness. She knew what we had...there was always the understanding that if she found someone else, I’d let her go. I guess...it would have worked both ways. But...in a plural marriage like Mehar and Rohan...I never
thought about it.”

“I never considered it either...I just wanted out and would have willingly stepped aside for another. With him, that is.” Yuuri realized quickly that it would not have been a plural marriage with Shuji, the man had never taken his wants or needs into account, which would have been the foundation of a successful plural union.

“Could you have...would you have...with me?”

Yuuri noticed the uncertainty in his alpha’s face. “I...don’t know. The idea of sharing you...that doesn’t sit well with me. But...then there’s Yura.”

Victor seemed relieved and smiled, “Yura changes everything.”

The omega nodded. “I don’t know if it is because I’ve lost all of my own children...but he holds so much of my heart. I didn’t expect to fall so quickly...to fall for all of you. It scares me but...I want this. I think...I would have...with you.” He lifted his chin seeking a kiss, frowning as they parted. “I feel...gross.”

Victor chuckled, his fingers smoothing Yuuri’s hair away from his face. “I think I could use another shower as well. Let me take care of you.”

Yuuri’s legs shook as he stood for the first time after hitting the bed, reaching for Victor to steady him. “I don’t know if it’s all that we did or...the lack of solid food.”

“Likely both...let’s get you cleaned up and dressed. Then we can seek out food.”

“Deal.”

Cleaning Yuuri up with his shaky legs reminded Victor of the night he took Yuuri home from the party...their first date. He ended up scooping Yuuri up and carrying him to the bathroom, settling him on the bench in the shower and starting the water flow. He shook his head in bafflement as the water came roaring to life, the pressure deciding to cooperate. The ghosts seem to prefer you, my Yuuri. He wanted to have Yuuri soak in the tub but suspected that would have to come later. Yuuri now had a pallor settling into his skin that made Victor uncomfortable. Reaching for a washcloth, he made short work of cleaning the omega up. “I promise to do better next time. I just...think you
need to eat.”

“... fine... I should have eaten more before jumping you in the kitchen.” Yuuri stilled at his words then grinned.

Victor chuckled. “You were very eager...”

“All I could think about during my heat was how much I wanted you... and then you were right there.”

“I felt the same... entering my room, surrounded by your scent. If I hadn’t been already headed into rut, I would have fell headlong into it then.”

Yuuri covered his face. “I can’t believe I put you into premature rut.”

“Yuuri...” Victor tugged those hands away. “Let me see you, love.” He rested his forehead against his lover’s. “I would gladly spend every rut for the rest of my life with you.”

“You would?” Yuuri whispered.

Victor kissed his forehead, his nose, and then his lips. “Always.”

Yuuri blushed, his shoulders hunching together. “It’s hard to accept sometimes.”

“Then I’ll just have to keep telling you.”

Yuuri took several steadying breaths before stepping out of Victor’s room, the alpha not far behind him. He wore pajama bottoms and one of Victor’s long sleeved tee-shirts, the sleeves going to his fingertips. His feet were clad in a pair of Victor’s socks. He fidgeted, his hands running up and down his arms. Turning, he started to reenter the bedroom but Victor blocked the path.
“What do we say?” he hissed.

“That you and I’ve been reworking the details of our contract,” Victor answered warmly.

“What about Yura?”

Kissing Yuuri’s forehead and then nose, he assured him, “Yura will be easy. This is what he wants...you to be his mama.”

“Mama,” Yuuri whispered, hugging himself.

Victor slipped an arm around his waist. “Let’s deal with more immediate needs.”

Yuuri nodded even as his stomach answered with a growl. “Food.”

Victor grinned. “I love hearing you say that. Now...let me feed you.”

They entered the kitchen to face Olga who looked up with a raised eyebrow, Nikolai at the table who peeked around his newspaper, and Yura playing with the kittens in the floor. Both dogs groaned and covered their faces with their paws. “Good morning,” Victor called out cheerily.

“Fancy seeing you both come out of hiding...together,” Olga stated as she started pulling things from the cupboard to feed her people. “Now, I’m thinking breakfast. Eggs, toast...rice for Yuuri...and maybe some stir fried winter vegetables.”

“That sounds amazing,” Yuuri moaned. Olga glanced his way sharply and his face turned red. He tugged on Victor’s arm. *Say something!* He hoped he could convey those words with his eyes.

“So...Yuuri and I...”

“I think we are well aware of what went on between the two of you,” Nikolai stated gruffly, turning
the page of his newspaper and shaking it out. “You are both adults. It’s none of our business. Right, Olga?” They all heard the warning in the old man’s voice.

The older woman smirked at the grandfather presuming to shush her. “Right...whatever...I mean, as long as Yuuri was in a place where he could consent.”

Victor and Yuuri both gasped but it was Victor who responded. “Olga, you don’t think I’d…”

She began pulling together foods for their breakfast, “I really don’t know what to think. I receive a message you’re out of rut and I come home to find the recently heat laden omega in your room.”

Yuuri came up to her and placed his hand on her forearm. “It was...after,” Yuuri said softly. “I came out of my heat that morning, then went to Victor... after. But thank you for worrying about me.”

“Well, we omegas have to look out for one another,” she huffed.

“Yes, we do...but you know Victor...Vitya...and you know me.”

She sighed, her eyes cutting to Victor then back to the companion omega. “And so now what?” Resting her eyes on the boy playing in the floor. “What about him?”

“We’ll talk,” Victor stated, his eyes leveling with Olga’s. It was privilege of family to hold each other accountable. He knew his father wouldn’t stand for this. He also knew...this was how this house worked. “Don’t worry,” he added softly. “This isn’t a fling.”

She huffed. “Of course it’s not a fling. Neither of you are that kind of...” She screwed up her face in frustration before wadding up her towel and tossing it at the alpha. “You are the most ridiculous man.”

Victor grinned, catching the towel effortlessly. “You’ve watched out for me for so long, Olga...and for that I will always be thankful. And I know you already have a soft spot for Yuuri. It will be fine.”
Yuuri watched them, his brown eyes taking everything in even as she placed his meal in front of him. As he turned to the offering, he only knew one thing. Never had rice and eggs tasted so good. He drank the offered juice and finally received his tea once she was satisfied he’d restored himself to rights.

“You and I have a date to catch up on some TV,” Olga stated as she held the other omega’s eyes.

Yuuri giggled. “I think we are due a marathon.”

“I’ve been recording the episodes.” She nodded at the three generations sitting at the table across from the two omegas. “Once we get these boys back into their routine…”

“It’s a date.” Yuuri raised his tea cup in a toast to her.

Victor looked from one to the other curiously but they kept their secret. *Deadly Omega* was best appreciated with another omega. They shared a conspiratory smile and neither divulged their pastime.

The alpha turned back to his own breakfast. His eyes peeked over at his son who was purposefully ignoring them which means he was taking everything in with those ears. Finishing up his meal, he smiled appreciatively to Olga before leaving the stool and squatting down to study his son’s playspace. “What have you been up to the last few days?” he invited.

Yura looked up at Victor, then Yuuri, then back to Victor. Chewing his lip, he worked out his question. “Is Yuuri my mama now?”

*Oh* . Victor’s face went red. Although that was where he was headed with this conversation, he wasn’t ready for it all at once. Yuuri slipped off the stool and dropped down on the other side of Yura, pulling the blond into his lap.

“What do you want?” the omega asked softly.

Large green eyes opened wide with a plea, “Please? I want you for my mama.”
Victor’s eyes moved from one to the other, his expression tender. “Yuuri?”

Yuuri’s eyes never left Yura’s face, “I...want that, too.”

The blond turned in Yuuri’s arms and wrapped his chubby arms around him, burrowing into Yuuri’s scent. “Mama...”

Chapter End Notes

I love to hear from you! :)
Fitting our lives together around the holes of our past...

Chapter Summary

Yuuri faces his past in the safety of Victor's protection.

Chapter Notes

Happy Easter! Or Earth Day! Or maybe both! I thought I'd share this chapter before everything became busy. Thanks to both Songbirdsara and Bluskates for the attention you showed this story and to Blu for the rework you did of certain parts.

So...happy reading.

Warning...Yuuri will be sharing some of the more upsetting parts of his past once more.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 32: Fitting our lives together around the holes of our past...

Yuuri had his whole life laid out on the bed in the upstairs bedroom with room to spare. Even with Victor’s generosity, his footprint was small. The small stack of threadbare clothes he arrived in, the new clothes Victor insisted on, skates, the box of memories and mourning he was still processing, the makeup, and his Macbook Air. The possessions were a combination of his past, present, and future. The worn clothing were pieces that would never give up, holding a strength that he was slowly realizing he had possessed. The skates, a nod to his past taken from him too soon, but with a new life breathed into an old passion. He blushed looking at the makeup, telling him it was never too late to find the beauty in himself, and make it clear to others. He ran his hands over the surface of the slick computer...it represented his future. I have something to give back to the world. I’m not left behind, forgotten. A text drew his attention and he pulled out his phone, a smile touching his lips.

Peaches/ Are you out yet?

Yuu-chan/ Very much so. Call me if you’re free.

Within moments the phone rang. Yuuri answered with a smile. “Phichit!”
“Yuu-chan! How are you?” Phichit’s voice was breathless down the line and Yuuri could only guess that he had ducked out of his office last minute to put this call in.

Yuuri took a deep breath and let it out slowly. How did he describe this feeling? “I’m good. Victor and I...we...ummm..Phichit, Victor and I...I’m moving into his room.”

Silence. For the first time since he had ever known Phichit Chulanont, Yuuri Katsuki was met with dead silence. Yuuri wanted to find the humor but he knew better than to make a quip.

Phichit’s voice crept slowly from the receiver, “Oh...wow...Yuuri?”

Hearing the worry coming from the other omega, Yuuri quickly reassured him. “After my heat...I sort of...um...jumped him?”

Silence for the second time. He would have to mark the calendar as this was truly an auspicious occasion. Yuuri chewed his lip nervously, then he heard a giggle. “Oh, Yuuri...I knew you had it in you. Soooo…”

Yuuri giggled back, knowing precisely where the question headed. He looked around the room as if the vanity were going to lean in for the gossip as well. “Ummm...it was good?”

Phichit snorted, “Is that a question or you dodging my question?”

“Dodge,” Yuuri confirmed, feeling his cheeks heat up. “But...I want this,” he added, his voice warm and firm.

“Yuuri…” Phichit drew out the last syllable of his name before murmuring warmly, “Then you grab hold of this. I want it for you, too.”

Hugging himself, he whispered, “Thank you,” feeling all warm inside.

“I didn’t do anything,” Phichit protested.
Yuuri snorted in disbelief. “Of course not,” he agreed softly, a smile on his lips. “You were just my best friend when I didn’t think I deserved anyone and you never left my side.”

“Yuuri, don’t make me cry. My mascara will run and then I’ll be a mess…”

Yuuri smiled softly at his friend’s antics. “I know…but you need to know that I love you and I...I don’t know that I’d still be here if it weren’t for you.” He paused for a moment, feeling himself become more serious. Yuuri settled himself on the bed, surrounded by the artifacts of his life. “There were so many times I would have given up if I didn’t have you on the other side. You were my lifeline, my connection to the rest of the world...and you never failed me.”

Phichit swallowed several times, a sure sign he was trying to control himself. Then the Thai man sighed, and Yuuri could hear the tears in his words. “Oh, Yuuri...I wanted to pull you out of there so many times. We would have ran away and hidden you away from him.”

“We wouldn’t have gotten out of the district. He had my proof of identity, kept all of my legal documents under lock and key. I didn’t exist without his permission. Trust me, he pointed that out plenty when he first brought me there. I…” Yuuri stilled as he thought of something. A shiver ran down his body as a memory pushed forward from the fog of what he had repressed of his first year with the alpha. *White walls*… “Fuck...Phichit!”

The omega on the other end heard Yuuri’s panic in the high pitched change in his voice. “Yuuri? Are you okay? What’s going on?”

“I just remembered something. That first place...it didn’t have windows. He...put me there. You never knew about that place.” Yuuri was drumming his fingers as he thought about it. The grim realization was fighting its way to the top. “That’s where that kid is located...isolated, kept from everyone’s sight until he learns to behave.” He bounced up and down, turning towards the door but still tethered to Phichit. “Oh, god! I’ve got to tell someone.”

“Go. Tell Victor. He’ll know what to do,” Phichit guided him gently.

Yuuri was nodding, brushing his tears from his eyes. And then he realized Phichit couldn’t see him. “I’m going.”

“Okay...call me later...no matter the time.”
“I will!” Then Yuuri disconnected, running into the hall, his voice ringing through the house with panic. “Victor!!”

The alpha came running, meeting him on the landing of the stairs. “What’s wrong?”

Yuuri pushed out the words, knowing that they would only make half-sense to the alpha, but they would start him asking the correct questions to get the young skater recovered. “Th-there’s another place. Shuji has another place!”

Victor blinked several times before guiding Yuuri to the closet. Soon Yuuri was wrapped in his coat and Victor had his keys and his coat on, guiding Yuuri out the door.

Yuuri shook himself to clear his thoughts, seeing that they were leaving the home. “Vitya?”

“I’m taking you to Yakov,” Victor stated quietly, his firm voice doing much to settle the omega.

Yuuri nodded, even as he tried to put the pieces together. Suddenly guilt started washing over him. That kid...he’s in that place. He’s got to be scared, terrified, like I was. “I should have remembered sooner. What if that kid…”

Victor stopped their steps turning to Yuuri. He kept his voice firm, but hoped Yuuri would hear the love in it. “Don’t think about that. You did what you could when you could. Shuji is villain here, not you. Don’t take his crimes on yourself. You remembered now and that’s why we’re going to Yakov. Okay?”

Yuuri nodded, knowing he had to make this move, knowing another’s future, their very life, may depend on this.

Victor settled Yuuri into the car and even in his haste, still knelt town and buckled his seatbelt, taking Yuuri’s hand in his once he finished. “You are very courageous and I know you have a lot of thoughts going through your mind right now. I want you to trust me and know that I’m going to take care of you. Okay?”

Yuuri sniffed and nodded. He trusted Victor to be there for him. He took his other hand and brushed his tears away but Victor caught it mid-air as he started to return it to his lap and brought those fingers to his lips. “I’m sorry...I’m a wreck already and now this,” he whispered.
“You’re not a wreck. You never have to apologize for your emotions. For whatever the reason.” Then he smiled, his eyes dancing. “You’ve not seen me fall apart yet. I’ll show you a wreck.”

Yuuri huffed but a smile peeked through. “You’re too strong to fall apart.”

Victor smoothed Yuuri’s hair back from his face and sighed, shaking his head. “No...I’ve just had more practice covering it up.”

Yuuri thought of what he remembered of Victor on television. There was always that smile, so perfect, plastered on his face. When he was younger Yuuri fell for it, like they all did, the beautiful smile of the Prince of Russia. But later, he saw how empty it was when compared to his genuine smile, which was actually kinda goofy looking. He tilted his head studying the alpha in front of him thoughtfully. “You can tell me...sometime.”

Victor looked down at the tiny fingers he held in his gloved hands, avoiding the offer. “You’ve got enough to worry about for now...but maybe...sometime.”

Yuuri nodded, settling back into his seat. “Let’s go and get this over with.”

Victor squeezed Yuuri’s hand once more before standing and shutting the door. Walking around the car, he was soon next to Yuuri, seatbelt on, and negotiating the car into traffic. Yuuri watched his confidence behind the wheel and wondered what could have made that confidence falter, what could have shaken him. He suspected one of those things was Yelena...but he had mentioned bad relationships. Did those men make Victor doubt himself? Yuuri felt his hands tighten into fists as he thought about someone hurting his Vitya.

It was the feeling of his nails digging into his palm as he squeezed his fist tightly that made Yuuri pause, studying those fisted hands. So many times he wanted to fight...for himself. Now he was stepping outside of himself. *I finally found someone worth fighting for. No, I’ve found two.*

Yuuri sat next to Victor with Yakov’s desk in between him and the old coach. The wise eyes watched the younger man carefully. On speaker phone, they spoke to the officer that Yuuri met in the interview.
“I…don’t know where it was, just that it was in Tokyo. I thought…well, I didn’t have a lot of choice…and for awhile I could skate at least…my coach was good…he relocated to Tokyo to continue to work with me. But when Shuji first took me from…my family…” Yuuri felt himself begin to shake at the memory but clenched his fists, determined to work through this. “When he first took me from my life, we went to a place that I sort of forgot about. I guess, maybe I shuffled it away…it’s a scary memory.”

The officer an experienced interviewer, kept his voice even as he guided Yuuri into the discussion. “Okay, let’s go slowly. Can you tell me what you remember of this first place you lived in? Was it roomy or small? Modern or traditional?”

Yuuri blinked, *white walls.* “I was kept in a room, it was white. There was a cot, and he would let me out for meals and to clean myself. But I wasn’t allowed into the common rooms. He kept me there, letting me out more when I was friendly, but most days I’d retreat and just hope he was too busy to bother with me.”

Next to him Victor’s entire body clenched, but he kept silent.

The omega searched his memory, forcing his brain to surrender details that it had buried for years. “It wasn’t really an apartment building. It was like a factory that had been repurposed. Lots of exposed brick and concrete. I stayed in that room almost constantly, he kept me isolated until I learned how to behave.” Those last words came out bitterly.

“Do you know what district you were in?”

“After a while I was allowed out, but only if I followed him and kept my eyes down. I was new to Tokyo and from a really small town in Saga…” Yuuri heard the guilt in his voice and stopped himself. *This isn’t helping. Think!* “I remember…it was two subway stops from a major shopping district. Shibuya. Phichit took me to shop there later when he’d sneak me out. Not from there but from one of the other places. Phichit never saw that place, though.”

“Yuuri the information you are giving us right now might help us find this boy. Is there anything else you can think of?”

The omega felt the importance of his words weighing on him. “Ciao Ciao…” The words came out soft, almost subconsciously.
Victor looked over, nudging Yuuri softly.

The large brown eyes looked up at Victor’s blue. “Ciao Ciao, my old coach, Celestino. He picked me up there once. For a competition. He might still have the address!”

“Thank you, Mr. Katsuki. This helps.”

“Did any of the other addresses…”

“No...they’ve been vacated, cleaned professionally. No paper trail connecting him to the residences.”

Yuuri nodded slowly, disappointed that he bared so much to no end. “It’s just...he’s running out of time.”

“We know...and we’re still looking for Tanaka. And trust me...you’re helping.”

Yuuri tapped the table. Something...like it was on the tip of his tongue. Then Yuuri looked up and asked, “Were the apartments connected...to each other?”

The investigator shuffled some papers on the other end and then, “Fuck! Oh, sorry! It’s just...we didn’t see that connection. Language barrier, perhaps. They are not the same...not all of them...but there are three different holding companies. Okay...we’ve got to check this out! You're brilliant! Thanks, Katsuki!”

“I hope it helps.” He chewed his lip and looked over at Yakov as the call ended. The old coach was sending a text and finally looked up.

“Celestino is still in the business. I’m giving him a heads up that he will be contacted and what he needs to put together.”

The omega sagged against Victor. “What happens now?”
“We wait, Yuuri...and move forward.” Victor’s voice was calm and grounding.

Yuuri started to feel lost again, “That kid…”

“You’ve done what you could...and probably more than most,” Yakov pointed out. “Now we have to let the professionals figure it out.”

Yuuri nodded even as he pulled his knees into his chest. He tuned out as Yakov and Victor shared a few words in Russian only picking up on a couple of familiar phrases and “Rostelecom”. Finally, Victor helped Yuuri to his feet and led him back down the hall and stairs and through the front door.

“What’s going on?” he asked as Victor settled him into his seat in the car.

“Yakov wanted to know how I wanted to handle Rostelecom. I always take Yura and Nikolai so they can visit family in Moscow. I simply said you’d join me...in my room.” There was a blush on his cheeks and Yuuri thought it was interesting that Victor didn’t make eye contact. Finally, the alpha looked up and added quietly, “He’s concerned that it will draw some press attention and wasn’t sure you could handle it.”

Yuuri furrowed his brow, “Why would I draw attention?”

Victor’s lips quirked into a sly smile, “Because...I’m still a bit of a celebrity at these events...especially when they are in Russia.”

Yuuri’s eyes widened, and then he whispered, “Oh.”

“If you don’t want to go…”

Yuuri saw the clear disappointment in Victor’s eyes, and he realized immediately that he was not going to be separated from his alpha again. “I don’t think...I hated being away from you for two weeks and that’s before we...ummm…” He closed his eyes and took a deep breath before letting it out. “I...want to go...want to stay close to you.” Opening his eyes he saw Victor’s smile and he relaxed into his seat.
I was hoping you’d say that. Now...let’s go get you moved in.” Turning back to Yakov, he added, “Let’s make the reservations. Yura and Nikolai can share the room adjoining mine.”

Victor helped Yuuri carry his clothes down the stairs and situate them into the closet, humming thoughtfully as he noticed how little space Yuuri occupied. “We’re going to have to take you shopping again.”

“Really, I have plenty,” Yuuri argued.

“You don’t even fill up a quarter of the space I cleared for you in our closet,” Victor protested.

Yuuri’s lips parted at those words. “Our closet…”

Victor grinned pulling Yuuri into his arms. “In our room…”

Yuuri swallowed as it all hit him suddenly. “I’ve never...even with Shuji, we didn’t...share a room, we didn’t share anything..”

The alpha’s expression softened. “Are you okay?”

Yuuri nodded, but his wide eyes told Victor he was still processing. Yuuri looked around the space with new eyes. “I can...change something?”

Victor smiled and pulled back, inviting Yuuri to move about the room as he needed. “I’ve already cleared a nightstand out for you to put your things away. You have your own chest of drawers. And I was thinking you might like a desk for studying.”

Yuuri shook his head. “I mean...I can carry my computer anywhere but...I don’t think I want a desk for studying. I can...just put it on the coffee table. And...can we just let me fill in slowly? My
things are small...like me. They don’t take much space.”

“I...know...but I want you to know that you have room to grow.”

Yuuri closed his eyes, his hand resting on Victor’s chest as he formed his words. “I know...I never had much and there was even less with Shuji. You’ve...already been generous.”

“You...it’s not being generous seeing to your needs,” Victor chided gently.

“I’m...okay with that.” Yuuri smiled at the alpha’s stubborn streak. “But my wants...I’d like to see to myself.”

Victor pouted and Yuuri couldn’t help the smile, his hand going up to cup Victor’s cheek. “I love giving gifts.”

“I know...and I appreciate the thought behind them. You never make me feel...little. But I need to find my place in this world.” His words were gentle and firm as he held Victor’s eyes.

“As long as that place is with me,” Victor breathed, his eyes almost begging.

Yuuri smiled a little more, going up on his tiptoes to brush their lips together. “I know...your natural tendency is to give...and to do so generously. I need you to let me do this.”

“Okay,” Victor agreed. “But if I see you need something…”

Yuuri chuckled, putting one finger over Victor’s lips to quiet that thought. “If it’s a need...we can talk about it. Okay?”

“What if I...just want to give you something?”

“I...love simple things. I find value in the thoughts behind the gift.” Yuuri guided Victor back into the bedroom and in the middle of the bed sat a box. He opened it, taking a deep breath, his fingers sliding over the collection of gifts. “These things were all prepared with love for me and my
babies. These are the kind of gifts I love. Each one means something special to me because I know what went into them. I have...so little. But for me, these things are priceless. I want...memories...good memories. I yearn for...moments. Time is what you can give to me.”

Victor nodded, finally agreeing sincerely. “I want to be a part of those memories, the reason behind your smile.” Glancing back at the clothes they had put away in the closet, he ran his fingers over the suit from their first date. It still lay on the bed waiting to be tucked away. “Will you...let me help select a wardrobe for Rostelecom?”

Yuuri snorted like that was any big deal. “Well, I figured I’d take the suit and my two pairs of jeans and maybe a couple of outfits appropriate for the rink.”

“I can get you a pass to be down with the skaters. You can help me corral them.” Victor kept the invitation light, hoping Yuuri wouldn’t see he was also planning to keep the omega close.

“Would they...want that?” Yuuri asked with surprise. “I don’t want to throw them off.”

Victor smiled at his mate’s modesty. “Believe it or not, they respect and like you, Yuuri. Yakov said a few were upset when you were sent home due to your heat.”

“I’m so unaware of my scent,” Yuuri groaned, hiding behind his hands. “I didn’t realize it was so bad.”

“It isn’t bad, it was just noticeable and some of the skaters are very young and easily susceptible to it. It’s fine...it didn’t help that I was away.” Which was true. The omega was calling for him with his scent. Victor pulled Yuuri back into his arms, pressing a kiss into the omega’s hair. “Georgi wanted to make sure you were safe. I left him in charge. He wasn’t upset with you...moreso, upset he had to be firm in that situation. We get...other people at that rink sometimes. They might not have respected your importance to me.”

“I didn’t think about that.” He rested his cheek on Victor’s shoulder as he thought about traveling with Victor. “What...do you think I need for this trip?”

“At least...two suits. One for the events, one for the banquet. I’d prefer three. The rest of what you suggested is fine.”
Three suits...Victor! “But...that’s so expensive,” Yuuri whined. “And why can’t I just reuse my suit? People wear clothes more than once.”

Victor chuckled, his hand moving up and down Yuuri’s back. “It’s...an investment. And this way you could travel with me a little more.”

Yuuri pulled back, leveling a gaze at Victor. “If I’m with you, who’s with Yura?”

Victor’s smile softened. “We’ll play it by ear but I agree...your priority is to see to my..to our son.”

Yuuri shivered at the sound of that. “Our son,” he whispered. It was so much more than he ever hoped for when he agreed to come to Russia. Turning back to the box, to his past, he finally decided. “I think...it’s time for me to sort this out and take this to where it belongs.” It was time to start letting go of his past.

Victor helped him carry the box down the hall, asked if he wanted him to stay, and slipped away when Yuuri shook his head. The younger man laid out the trays one by one, until he had four plus one more for Vicchan. Yuuri laughed bitterly at the addition. Glancing down, he spotted Ren curling up by his feet. He knelt down and petted her head and knew that she sensed his sadness.

My life has been filled with loss. So much so that a hole wormed its way into my soul. It helped me to become numb, to become less, to become invisible to him.

But now...I want to be seen. I need to let go of this loss, this sadness. I need...to move forward.

Glancing towards the door, he thought of the man who claimed him as mate. Do you still hold onto your sadness?

Chapter End Notes

I am writing a fluffy chapter. It will hit around 35 but it is in process.
Yuuri sat nervously in the car next to Victor, an involuntary whine escaping as they drove to the omegologist. “I’ve never had a post-heat appointment before,” he argued.

“Nor have you had a pre heat appointment until this time,” Victor reminded him gently. He saw that Yuuri was on the verge of crossing his arms, a sure sign he was going to be stubborn, which would be cute except for the importance of the appointment. He softened his voice, “I want you to be healthy.”

Yuuri huffed. Looking out the window, he knew he was being difficult. However, it wasn’t the actual exam he worried about. It was the other things like his weight and the mental evaluation. Both would reveal that he wasn’t as far along as he had demanded of himself, and he hated to face that. “What if...something isn’t right?”

To his left Victor reached out a hand to smooth the material of Yuuri’s pant leg, “Then we find out what we need to do...is there something worrying you?”

Yuuri shook his head, scratching at his arm, his tells giving away the lie. Sighing, he decided to lay it out. “I’ve lost weight during my heat. I didn’t mean to, but it’s natural and...” he heard his
rambling whine and stopped himself. “I don’t want to lose the ice.”

Victor sighed, his expression relaxing. “You won’t...as long as you resume eating regularly...and you have, all weekend.”

“Then why are we doing this?” Yuuri pushed. “It’s not like I had a heat partner.”

Victor pulled into the parking lot and leveled a look at Yuuri. “No, you didn’t...you had a post-heat partner...one that would like to make sure you are okay. I can stay in the lobby if you prefer but I’d like to go in with you if you don’t mind.”

Yuuri huffed. “Fine!” He hugged himself, not very happy. Most of the doctors he dealt with in his past ignored the signs of abuse, ignored him entirely, putting their questions to Shuji and listening to only his answers. They were happy to get their pleasant lie, paperwork filled out, and quickly shuffled him out of the exam room, leaving him at the hands of the alpha in charge of him. They didn’t follow up on the signs of neglect. They never registered any complaints. And then there were all of the babies he lost along the way. A handful of doctors, each doing nothing to help him or them. He wasn’t sure that he saw any use in doctors.

Victor smiled at his petulant omega. Leaning forward, he brushed a kiss into his hair, drawing Yuuri’s attention out of himself. “You know I love you. Do this for me.”

Yuuri nodded but didn’t speak, still feeling the pull of the pout on his lips. He turned back to the building and watched an omega leaving the building with her child in tow, her ear attached to a cellphone as she put her kid into the car. It seemed such a sad commentary on her relationship. The child babbled happily for a moment, slowly realizing that it was of no interest to its mother who wrestled to keep her concentration on the phone throughout the ordeal of tucking the child into the carseat. Yuuri noticed a teddy fall to the ground, the mother failed to see it and nearly tripped over the stuffed arm. She scowled, picking it up and tossing out of the child’s reach, ignoring the cries of dismay and slamming the minivan door. Yuuri shivered at the interaction. *May I never be that disconnected from Yura.*

Victor startled Yuuri from his focus as he opened the door. The brown eyes looked up as the alpha reached in to unbuckle the seatbelt before handing him out of the car. Unconsciously, Yuuri leaned in to breathe in the rich scent of the taller man as they stood next to the sedan. Victor remained still, his hand moving up and down the other man’s back. Once Yuuri had settled, he moved back and took Victor’s hand. “I...don’t mind if you come in. But I warn you...the exam is less than dignified.”
Victor chuckled, pulling their joined hands up to his lips and kissing the omega’s fingers. “Nor is mine...but you’re welcome to come in with me as well.”

Dr. Romanova greeted Yuuri in the exam room and was surprised at the sight of an alpha following him into the visit. “I’d ask what’s new but you’ve seemed to have brought him with you.”

“Victor, this is Dr. Romanova. Doctor, this is my...ummm...mate, Victor Nikoforov.” Yuuri’s eyes dropped shyly during the introduction.

She raised an eyebrow in surprise. “Very new...did you share a heat together? The original plan was to be alone.”

Yuuri paused for a moment, realizing that she was talking expressly to Yuuri and not Victor. “Not exactly...it sort of happened right after?” Yuuri squeaked.

The doctor hummed thoughtfully as she studied Yuuri’s chart. “I’m going to need a quick blood test and an exam. We were talking about suppressants before.”

Yuuri nodded, slowly becoming comfortable. While the conversation would still be embarrassing it was his conversation, his decisions, and his voice that would be heard. “I’ve never been on them, though. So I don’t know if they are right for me.” He bared his arm and the nurse took his blood and vitals while he continued talking to the doctor.

“There are different kinds of suppressants. Some are long term and are designed to help you push your heat to once a year. Long term use of those suppressants can affect fertility. Then there is a skipper which is made to skip a cycle. Some omegas do this to cut back their cycles to twice a year. No side effects with regard to fertility but you will sometimes find yourself nauseous. The third one is what we call a slider and it allows you to push back your heat by a few days. This is the most common form because we all live busy lives. All of them are to give you a little more control over your heats.”

Yuuri considered the options, but knew his concern. “My birth control already makes me a little nauseous. I don’t think I want to add any more to that...”
Romanova looked up from her chart and smiled. “What do you want?”

Yuuri glanced up at Victor before answering, “I think...I wouldn’t like to have a heat without Victor present and that almost happened. Although we didn’t share a heat, I had trouble letting go until he was home. Will the, uh, slider...will it make me less...on edge?”

The doctor put her pen behind her ear, “Holding back heat naturally is a mating behavior but it is stressful, not just emotionally, but physically as well.” She watched Yuuri’s face and could see as recognition donned on him, the omega realizing why he felt so much worse after this heat. “The slider puts the control back in your hands. You have to begin it seven days prior to the heat date so you’ll need to track it but there are some great apps for that these days. However, you won’t have the stress and can push the heat out as much as ten days. And if you want to start sooner, you just stop taking it. The heat usually starts within forty-eight hours once you are off the pill.”

Looking up at Victor, he asked, “Are you...okay with my heat every three months?”

Victor smiled at the younger man, “I am more than okay with it, Yuuri...but I want you to be comfortable with the decisions you make for your body, solnyshko .”

The doctor smiled, glad to see that Yuuri’s partner let the omega decide what was best for him. And Yuuri did decide, walking out with a clean bill of health and suppressants if he needed them.

“So what now?” Yuuri asked as Victor buckled him in.

The older man chuckled even as he moved to the other side. Climbing in, he informed him, “You get to join me for my side of the exam.”

“You...didn’t act like it was awkward while she did the physical exam,” Yuuri murmured. Victor had stayed with Yuuri during the exam and rather than the nurse holding his hand for the internal, he had Victor and was surprised by the comforting scent the alpha released to ease him through the process.

“I...actually went to Yelena’s exams while she was pregnant with Yura. So I guess...I just consider it as part of being a couple.”

“Did she go to yours?” Yuuri asked curiously.
Victor chuckled and shook his head. “Actually, no. She didn’t see the point once we determined intimacy wasn’t a part of our relationship. But...I want you to be aware of my health and the things the doctor says to me.”

Yuuri swallowed, a little overwhelmed. “It’s so...personal.”

Victor hummed considering Yuuri’s word choice, “It’s intimate...and that’s what we’re in...an intimate relationship. That means we share these kinds of secrets between us.”

“Like suppressants and birth control?”

“Like fissures and whether or not I’ve hurt you,” Victor corrected gently. “Although we didn’t share a heat, future heats we will share...hopefully all of them...and that means things are sometimes a little rougher. Not on purpose, but it happens. I want to be a part of this relationship with your doctor if you will let me. And because I hope that you will one day...be comfortable enough to let me receive, I want you to know my doctor.”

“I guess...I never really thought about medical care as part of a couple’s relationship.” His eyes slid out the window as he thought back. With Shuji, he had been lucky to see a doctor at all, and the alpha made certain it was never the same one twice. Talking to Boris, he learned that it was because Shuji was hiding his abuse. And Yuuri realized he was denying it. “You’d never hurt me, though...so I’m just getting used to someone wanting to take care of me.”

“We take care of each other, Yuuri...and no, I would never hurt you on purpose...but things happen,” Victor confirmed, glancing towards his partner with concern. He knew that tone and that it indicated Yuuri had slipped back into his past for a moment. “This...is part of the trust I offer you. I trust you with my body...and hope to earn that trust in return.”

“You do...always...I felt safe with you from the beginning,” Yuuri returned.

They pulled into the urologist’s office and Yuuri followed the alpha inside. “How is it different?” Yuuri asked curiously.

“It’s a little less invasive although there is a digital exam,” Victor explained. He led his partner into the exam room as they were directed and soon he was talking with Dr. Petrov. “This is my Yuuri and I had an unexpected rut because I lined up with his heat,” Victor explained.
The old doctor chuckled. “Mating behavior, eh, Victor Andreivich? This is a first. You’ve never let anyone this close to you before.”

“I know,” he agreed, squeezing Yuuri’s hand. “He plans to go with a natural cycle for his heats, using a slider suppressant for timing.”

The doctor looked up thoughtfully before asking, “Do you wish to be pulled off of suppressants?”

Victor chuckled as he glanced over at his partner. “It appears biology made that decision for me. Yes, I’m okay with it. Perhaps it’s time to look at sliders as well.”

“Very well...since you aren’t training and competing, it’s something to consider and may be better for you as you’re not getting any younger.” The doctor wagged a finger at the younger man, enjoying tormenting his slight vanity.

Victor’s hand went to his heart. “I can’t believe you just called me old!”

The old man chuckled, familiar with his patient’s dramatics. “Not old, but older...and you and this lovely omega may one day want children. With a slider, that makes it easier, your sperm is more motile while unsuppressed.”

Victor nodded, glancing over at Yuuri with a smile. “I’d like that...one day,” he murmured and couldn’t help widening his smile as Yuuri covered his face to hide his beautiful blush.

After the doctor’s appointment, they grabbed lunch at a diner and then Victor took him shopping once more. “Three suits,” he insisted, pulling him into an upscale boutique.

“I think one more should be plenty,” Yuuri argued. “And something simple.”

“Two, then,” he settled and as Yuuri opened his mouth to argue, Victor placed two fingers over those lips. Yuuri’s eyes narrowed mischievously and he licked those fingers. Victor’s mouth opened in surprise. “I can’t believe you did that.”
“I can’t believe you tried to hush me up!” It was an admonishment but Victor could tell Yuuri wasn’t truly mad. However, the alpha was proud of Yuuri for using his voice.

“You’re right...and I’m sorry. That was bad form.”

Yuuri smirked, “I may not agree but...I do have my own ideas.”

“You do...and I respect them. I’ll do better.” Guiding him into the store, he lamented, “We don’t have time to get you a proper bespoke suit.”

Yuuri leveled him a stare and declared, “I don’t care if it’s bespoke. I just want to be comfortable. Besides, if I’m on the sidelines with you, no one should be looking at me anyway.”

Victor argued, “No. I will. I can hardly take my eyes off you.”

Yuuri turned and arched a well-groomed brow his direction. “You shouldn’t be looking at me at all. You should be focusing on your skaters.”

Properly admonished, Victor sighed turning to the sales associate. “I need two suits for my Yuuri,” he began but then Yuuri cut in.

“Two simple suits that can be used for multiple events. I’ll be assisting my mate on the sidelines coaching figure skating. Something professional, sensible,” Yuuri let the word hang heavy as he eyed Victor, “and comfortable for ease of movement. I tried on suits recently and prefer a slimmer cut.”

Victor may have wanted to dress his Yuuri and he planned to...one day, however, he couldn’t help the swell of pride as Yuuri took charge of his own fate. When he opened his mouth to say something, Yuuri cut his eyes his way causing Victor to close it.

“I don’t have the energy to try on a dozen or more suits to appease your need to shop,” he stated firmly where the sales associate could hear the request. “I’m thinking something gray and something blue. My measurements are already on file.”
Victor finally slipped in one more phrase before Yuuri completely shut him down. “Something to complement that beautiful ass of his.”

“Victor!”

The alpha grinned unrepentant. Soon they were brought out several suits to pick from and Yuuri let Victor select which ones he would try on. Victor couldn’t hold back his joy at one, “Oh, look at that **burgundy**!” but the glare from his partner shut him down. “Maybe next time.” Victor silently apologized to the beautiful suit as it was shuffled away, but he also made a mental note of it. He selected four looks for Yuuri to try on. One was a blue **plaid** with a red shirt. The second, a nicely cut charcoal **gray**. Thirdly, a more casual look with a tweedy **gray** deciding it would look lovely with a burgundy or lavender pocket square. The final wasn’t a suit at all but thicker **coat** to wear over his suit or jeans and sweater while at the rink.

Yuuri huffed at the final choice, “But I’ve already got a coat!”

“And I have seven. I don’t understand your point,” Victor argued.

Soon, Yuuri was trying on clothes. While Victor definitely liked the first, and also the second one, specifically how it showed off the curve of Yuuri’s ass, he wasn’t satisfied with the last.

The coat was kept back as well and Yuuri sighed with frustration. “I think I can make due with two.”

“I think...these two you have would be great rinkside. I also think we need something more formal for the banquet.” He eyed the burgundy once more. “Are you sure you won’t try on the burgundy? It’s very important that we present our best selves to sponsors...”

Finally, Yuuri put his foot down. Literally. With a stamp and a bit of a pout. He was having none of Victor’s little half truths disguised as pleas for skaters. “No. I will make due with these two and we can change out the shirts or sweater or ties but this is enough.”

“But you need an overcoat at least,” Victor whined.

“No, I don’t. I have a fine coat to keep me warm. This is not my time to shine, Vitya. This belongs to the skaters. I’m just helping...and spending time with you.” He pressed his forehead to the alpha
and peered through his lashes which had the alpha melting.

“Fine,” he agreed, turning back to the sales associate, “but bring me some ties to pick out with matching pocket squares.” Yuuri huffed but let him have this because he didn’t have to try anything else on. The suits were off the rack which Victor hated but then Yuuri promised he could spoil him later. And the alpha planned to hold him to it. Maybe in burgundy.

They picked up Yura after school who bounced around excitedly as he talked about his day. “I told my teacher that my Yuuri was my new mama and she actually rolled her eyes and said those kinds of moms don’t stay.” The little boy’s voice conveyed the joy he felt at tweaking his teacher’s nose, unphased by the idiotic prejudice of the woman. However, Victor’s jaw tightened as he fastened his son’s seatbelt, failing to find the humor in the situation. He rose from the car and was ready to walk up to the school to talk with the teacher when Yuuri reached out and stayed his movements.

“It’s not worth it to feed into small minds. I just want Yura to understand that I’m not going anywhere,” he turned to meet those green eyes with is own. “You are so important to me that I was afraid to give myself over to this relationship. I never want to lose you and I want you to know how much you mean to me.”

The little boy didn’t quite understand all of those words but the meaning was clear. His Yuuri wasn’t going to leave. And that was all that mattered.

At the rink, Yuuri’s ducklings were excited to see him return and swarmed him, hugging and chatting with him as he lured them away from the boards. Yuuri followed part of it with the mixture of English and Russian and he was picking up on more of the language. Teaching the children forced him to learn, reinforcing his Monday night classes. And it was Monday...he’d be there tonight. He wondered what Boris would think of this new development.

Practice ran long for Victor. So after Yurri saw his students off to their caregivers, he joined Mehar and Katya for tea, their own charges sitting with milk and juice talking about their own day. “So...you finally accepted that Victor is your mate,” the knowing Indian woman pressed, a smile on her lips.
“More than accepted...things have become quite a bit...more.” Yuuri blushed and the other two women chuckled in answer.

“Well, Pyotr and I finally talked,” Katya confessed. “We...ummm...went on a date Saturday night. Mila went and stayed with a friend and we talked about what we each wanted.”

“And?” both of the other two friends pressed.

“It turns out...we sort of want the same things. So...maybe I don’t have to give him up with my responsibilities. He adores Mila and he never understood why I pushed him away to begin with.”

“We all protect our hearts,” Mehar confirmed.

Yuuri hugged himself and nodded in agreement, his eyes resting on Yura. He was willing to not have this happiness if it meant losing the boy. And he loved the boy...so very much.

Yura kept Olga company while she put the finishing touches on their supper. The little magpie chatted away, sharing with her about what his teacher said. Olga looked up from her pot with a huff. She had noticed the teacher before and figured out where her real interest lie when it came to Victor. “If that woman had eyes, she’d see your papa has very different tastes than what she’s hoping.”

Yura giggled at that. “Papa only likes Yuuri.”

The housekeeper could see the two of them through a narrow angle into the living room, a stolen kiss and a bit of laughter. This house needed laughter and life and Yuuri brought it with him. “Your papa needs Yuuri...and Yuuri needs him.” Turning back, she added, “That teacher has some prejudices but I’d be surprised if Victor Andreivich didn’t demand she show some respect for his mate.”
Yuuri leaned over to kiss Victor before sliding from the car for class. “I’ll see you in a couple of hours.”

“I’ll miss you every moment. I’ll be across the street working through my paperwork.” The alpha had saved it for this time, the coffee shop across the street offering wifi as long as customers were buying.

Inside, Yuuri spotted Boris who waved him over. “It seems you survived your heat.”

Yuuri smiled shyly, “I have...and there have been some rather...interesting developments.”

Boris arched an eyebrow, returning the smile, “Oh? Do tell…”

Yuuri licked his lips and sucked in a breath. “It seems as if...Victor and I...I’ve agreed to become his mate.”

The mentor omega studied the younger man thoughtfully before asking, “And this is what you want?”

Yuuri nodded, hugging himself. “More than anything. He’s so much...more...than I expected out of a relationship.”

“And he treats you well?” Boris softened, but only a little, still wary about how quickly the change happened.

Yuuri’s beaming smile melted Boris’ reserve, “Very...I just want to be happy and be mom and be his partner. And he makes me his equal while still keeping me safe. I like that. Respect.”

The larger omega sighed, “It’s amazing how much of that we can find...when we demand it. But it’s nice when it is freely offered.”

“Very much so.”
Chapter Summary

What's the deal with Dorokhova?

Chapter Notes

It's Wednesday. Late Wednesday but it still counts as on time! It's the end of the school year and things get nuts around here. Hope all is well with my lovely readers. Now...about Dorokhova...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 34: Keep moving forward.

Yuuri breathed in the aroma of the chai tea in front of him. Across from him in the booth sat Mehar smiling as the young man enjoyed the aroma. He broke his reverie, “I’ve needed this.”

“I thought you might,” she answered warmly. “You’ve been a bit...on edge?”

Yuuri nodded. “I keep remembering more and more of my past, things I guessed I filed away and tried to forget. Part of me wishes it would have stayed there, out of reach of my thoughts.”

She nodded knowingly, both she and her brother had memories of their own that would rather forget. “Sometimes to move forward, we have to face our past and let it go. I know...my brother still struggles with that. Bekarys and I worked through many of my nightmares...and some of it, I worked through with the help of Otabek’s mother Aylin. She was very patient with my nightmares, and she helped me to face them and where they came from.” She paused, looking down into her cup, “Rohan bottles it up inside. He says he draws strength from it but...it’s just a way to hide his pain.”

Yuuri heard the warning in her voice, he knew the danger that lied in refusing to continue making progress, but he was thinking more of the other that was now living through the nightmare that Yuuri had escaped. “I...worry. This boy...I know he’s being...conditioned, trained to accept...him.
It terrifies me that another will go through what I went through. And this one...he didn’t have four years to prepare for it mentally. I don’t know...if that’s good or not.”

Mehar reached across the table, taking one Yuuri’s hands and noticing how cold it had grown. “There is no good in this business. But it is important to fight for those that can’t fight for themselves. This is what Aylin taught us and I hope I’ve passed that lesson on to Otabek and Zaina.”

Yuuri smiled as he thought of the boy who had befriended his own son, stood by him, and helped him with his own little battles. “He’s a good boy...and he does stand up for others. I think...he has learned the lesson well.”

She took a sip from the cup before setting it down delicately, wincing at the small clatter of china. “Before...when I was taken...they said I’d bring a better price if I were...untouched.” Her eyes flicked up to check if Yuuri understood her meaning, his grimace assured her he did. “Then they examined me. It was not...gentle. There was no dignity. I remember crying. I know my brother...he wanted to help me. I saw his fists at his sides. But there was nothing for him to do. Too many men...too many alphas. We were merely omegas.” She rolled her eyes. “This...lit a fire in him. He became determined. It was he who petitioned Aylin and Bekarys to save us...to save me. If they would only take one, would they please take his sister? Take her away from this. They took us both. It was...the better outcome for us.”

Yuuri sat in silence, taking in her remarkable story. He had known there was a terrible darkness in the background of the lovely woman and her brother, but he felt that it was something that would remain hidden. Then there it was, sitting there across from him, laid bare. He saw how the pain was still with her, but that she had fought back from it, overcome it. She was where he hoped to be, but worried he wouldn’t find. “I worry that my smile won’t come as readily as I’d like, that I’ll be caught up in my sorrows.”

“You’re alpha is patient. He will let you heal. Do not worry about these things. Tears heal the broken. So rejoice in your tears.” She smiled at him, knowing his worries.

Yuuri glanced at his phone as the alarm buzzed. “I have to go to a meeting with Yura’s teacher.”

Mehar caught his grimace. “She is not kind.”

He took in a long breath, rising from his seat. “No, she is not. And I hate that her prejudices are hurting Yura by extension.”
Mehar smirked, having had a run in with more than one of the staff members at this very expensive school. “I’ll drive you...it is good to have a friend when facing unpleasant things.”

Yuuri smiled and nodded. “I know...and thank you.”

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Yura stared at the note from his teacher with a frown. Most of the words were big words and he didn’t know what they said, but he could tell that she was using her angry handwriting...lately that was the only kind of handwriting he saw from her. Sitting next to his friend, he handed it to Otabek. “Am I going to be in trouble?”

The older student studied the words, understanding their meaning as well as the nasty implications behind them but simply shook his head, thrusting it back to Yura. “Give that to your dad, not your mom. It might upset your mom.”

Yura’s little hand balled the paper into his fist. “I don’t know why my teacher hates my mom so much,” he huffed.

The older student shrugged but the look on his face belied the truth. He understood more than he let on and he had to control his tongue to keep from explaining it and possibly hurting the boy further.

Yura unballed his fist and stared at his note miserably. “I was going to see if we could have a sleepover,” he pouted at the thought of abandoned fun pulling him into a deeper mood.

“I don’t think you will be in trouble, Yura,” Otabek reassured him. He thought for a few minutes, pondering how to best put the teacher’s latest complaint. “The note...it’s just complaining about Yuuri. I think she’s trying to make your mom look bad.”

Wide green eyes sparkled with indignation. “But...Yuuri is the best mom, Beka!”

The older one smiled, reaching over to give his friend’s hand a squeeze before jerking it back at sound of the teasing voices of his classmates.
“Beka and Yura sitting in a treee…” they taunted before running off laughing.

Yura blushed, hunching inwards. “Sorry they’re so mean.”

Otabek smiled, looking at the younger boy. He pushed his knee against Yura’s to draw those green eyes his way again. “They aren’t so mean. We all tease each other.”

“Really?” Yura slowly returned the smile.

Otabek nodded and then pointed at his mother’s car. “I’ve got to go. Are you sure you have a ride?”

Yura nodded. “My Yuuri said he had things to do and would pick me up from school. I’m glad. I kind of miss that.”

“See you later!” Otabek waved and took off down the steps, Zaina was already waiting next to the curb and telling their mother about her day. She looked up and smiled warmly and soon they were in the car and driving off.

Regardless of how much his friend had tried to settle his nerves, Yura continued to worry while he waited. He sat fiddling with the zipper on his coat and was so caught up in his worries that he didn’t notice the figure climbing the steps to sit next to him. “What’s going on, kiddo?”

Yura looked up and smiled at his Yuuri, leaning next to the taller figure. “It was just a day.”

The omega sighed and sat down on the steps next to the little body. “Want to talk about it?”

He considered that but decided to take Beka’s advice. “No...I think I just want to skate. Are we going to work today?”

Yuuri smiled at the wording but nodded. “Katya will be here in a few minutes and we’re catching a ride with her.” He then waved Mila over who joined Yura on the steps.
“What’s going on, Yura?” she ventured. “I saw you speaking to Beka.”

Yura glared at her for a moment before snipping, “Only I get to call him Beka.”

Mila smirked. “Whatever!”

Yuuri sighed, that ever-patient expression settling on his face. “Be nice, Yura... Mila is Otabek’s friend as well. It’s his choice whether to allow Mila to call him Beka or not.”

The five-year-old huffed and decided not to talk to either of them. *They’re all just stupid.*

Yura continued to be in a mood all evening, eventually growing so bad that he was soon lashing out at others, to the point where Yuuri had to make him sit out from practice. Otabek skated up to Yuuri and tried to defend him. Turning, he settled warm eyes on the other boy, but spoke firmly. “Yura may have had a bad day but that doesn’t give him permission to mistreat the other people around him. Okay?”

The boy nodded and skated off. Finally, they were finished and Yuuri moved to sit next to his son. “Do you want to tell me what’s going on?”

The little blonde head shook as he hugged himself tightly. “I want Papa!”

Sighing patiently, Yuuri nodded. “Go... but know I will be talking with him about your behavior today.” To say that Yuuri was exasperated was an understatement.

Victor looked up from the paperwork on his desk as he spotted his son peeking around the corner. “Do you have something you need to tell me, Yura?”
He sighed, and fished the note out of his pocket. It was a bit wrinkled and worn from the boy worrying it throughout the day. He handed it to his father and then climbed into the chair across the desk from him, pulling his knees up while he waited.

Victor frowned as he studied the note. “Did you read this?”

The boy shrugged. “I couldn’t read most of it. Beka said I should give it to you, not Yuuri. I figured it was bad. He said I wouldn’t be in trouble.”

“You’re not...not for this, anyway. But Katya told me you were being difficult for Yuuri in class. Why don’t you go and apologize for your behavior and maybe take him to get some tea while I deal with this.” The green eyes glittered with amazement but quickly ran to guilt as the little boy reflected on his behavior towards his mother and others.

“I...okay.” The little boy slumped out of the chair and out the door.

Victor thinned his lips and picked up his phone. Sending the call through, he spoke firmly to the principal of Yura’s school requesting a meeting with both teacher and administrator.

Yuuri didn’t push the matter all evening and he and Yura soon seemed to be back in good order. While seeing his mate and their son fall back into their happy companionship easily, it irked Victor that one of his son’s teachers continued to cause problems in his household. Studying Yuuri, however, he could tell something was bothering him as well. Yuuri was very careful with his words as he worked with Yura, and he second guessed himself when reading through the lesson. Victor knew Yuuri could read in Russian at a first grade level at this point and could understand more. However, something seemed to have shaken his confidence.

Victor didn’t have to guess what that something was.

Then Yura took off to take his bath followed by Yuuri, leaving Victor alone with Nikolai. Victor stood up and walked to the window, drinking his coffee while lost in thought.
“That teacher raked Yuuri over the coals earlier,” Nikolai intruded, straightening his paper.

Victor turned around and raised an eyebrow in interest. “Oh? Did he tell you about it?”

“He didn’t need to. I was here when he came tearing in after their meeting and disappeared to the room in the back of the house. I could tell he’d been crying but those were angry tears.”

Victor grimaced at the thought of his Yuuri crying bitterly alone. “I...can imagine. I’ll try to get him to talk tonight after Yura goes to bed. I didn’t want to push it since he was already struggling with our son.”

Nikolai thinned his lips and nodded. “That boy doesn’t deserve whatever that teacher is putting on him.”

“I know. I’ve got a meeting with the principal tomorrow.”

“Good.” The newspaper was tucked under his arm and then escorted back to his room as the grandfather retired for the evening.

Yuuri curled up on his side facing away from Victor after his shower. He didn’t want to talk. Maybe if he went to sleep, Victor wouldn’t push for conversation. He heard the shower shut off and could hear Victor working through his evening regimen. Closing his eyes tight, he pretended to sleep.

Victor came out of the bathroom and studied the still form. The uneasy breathing told him Yuuri wasn’t asleep, that he was likely fighting back his own sobs. Moving to his side of the bed, he slipped under the blanket, reaching for his mate.

Yuuri resisted at first and then his walls collapsed as he turned to bury himself into Victor’s chest. Victor pressed a kiss into that dark mop of hair even as the dampness spread through his shirt, the body in his arms shaking in his sobs. He could feel his anger building and he knew he’d have called the meeting even without the note.
“Talk to me, my Yuuri,” he urged gently.

He sniffed and pulled back. “Sh-she said I-I was hurting Y-yura with my selfish behavior. Th-that I was giving him false h-hope only to break his heart when I would ultimately leave. That my kind of omega was only looking for an easy way.” He sniffed before continuing. “But I don’t care about that sort of nonsense. She is stupid and small-minded.” He looked into Victor’s face, the worry there plainly revealed. “B-but then she said Yura was getting behind in his schoolwork and that it was m-my fault, that I was teaching him wrong. Playing house would never replace actual parenting, which is what Yura needs.”

Victor exhaled angry, Yura was flourishing under his Yuuri. “Did she have any specifics to say exactly where Yura was falling behind?”

Yuuri shook his head. “She didn’t offer anything concrete. I th-though maybe I was reading the directions wrong. I’m really trying hard to understand.”

“I suspect she’s been grading Yura extra hard out of her spite since she realized she can’t chase you off,” Victor stated with a frown. “Like you should give a five-year-old grades at all. And his other teachers tell me he’s been doing wonderfully since you’ve arrived. It’s just the one. Mrs. Dorokhova seems to hold some very old opinions and I can’t help but wonder if they are racist opinions.”

Yuuri listened to Victor’s argument, knowing that there was truth behind the words. But it’s always so much easier to believe the bad stuff. “I don’t want Yura to be behind because of me,” Yuuri countered.

“Yura is far from behind. He’s more focused with you here and will do anything for you...except maybe today. But I think today he was acting out because he received a note from Dorokhova. A note that he didn’t fully understand and made him worry about getting in trouble.”

Yuuri chewed his lip as he thought about Victor’s words. Finally, he asked, his voice small, “That note was about me, wasn’t it?”

Victor sighed, nodding. “I know if she’d caught you at your best, you would have told her bigoted ass off. But you’ve had a rough few days...and I know your bad dreams have been stealing your sleep. Without knowing this she found the perfect day to attack you, and you didn’t have it in you to clap back.”
Yuuri nodded. He’d awakened more than once burrowing into Victor’s arms to hide and breathe him in since he remembered the white room. He didn’t know if he’d want a white room in his house. Not one of painted concrete like a bunker. Hugging himself, he curled more tightly into Victor’s arms.

Victor held onto Yuuri livid with Mrs. Dorokhova.

Victor could no longer sit as he listened to Mrs. Dorokhova’s condescending words. “I’m sorry but I have to stop you here.” He turned to the principal who had sat listening, a little shamefaced at many of the statements made by an educator who had, until recently, been one of his best. “I will not allow this woman to continue to tear at my family. She shall be removed as my son’s teacher or I will withdraw him and place him with private tutors until we can find a suitable school free from these archaic prejudices.”

“Mr. Nikiforov,” the principal began, his voice placating. “I’m sure we can come to a better solution.”

Victor shoved his hands through his hair wishing that Yura was in the third grade and could be in Georgi’s wife’s classroom. “Yuuri Katsuki is my mate. The why’s and how’s are frankly none of Mrs. Dorokhova’s business. All she needs to know is that Yuuri has the authority of a parent. Something I’ve made clear repeatedly. However, she continues to belittle my mate to my son, continues to find shortcomings in Yura through a harsher standard than she places on her other students, and continues to meddle in our family affairs. Since she cannot maintain her professionalism, I believe the best solution is for Yura to have a different teacher.”

The principal frowned as he considered the woman before him. He couldn’t argue against anything the silver haired man had said. This teacher had become something of a thorn over the past few years, but this was something of a new level. “Mrs. Dorokhova, bring Yura to the office with his belongings. Prepare his records for transfer. Since this is a continued stress for you, why don’t I move the boy into Mrs. Lapina.” The teacher went to complain but saw the look her administrator flashed her and knew better. Instead she rose with a huff and sailed out of the room full of attitude. As the door closed, the principal turned back to Victor. “Mr. Nikiforov, as I’ve received no complaints of your son from other teachers, I’m hoping this change in placement will help him to have a much more positive kindergarten year.”

Victor let go of the breath he had been holding. “Thank you. I hope so as well. I also expect Yura’s new teacher to respect my new mate.”
“Mrs. Lapina is very warm and open minded.” The principal’s eyes flicked with memory. Searching through his files he pulled out a folder on the younger boy, finding the note he was looking for. “It seems that Yura was placed with Mrs. Dorokhova because his previous nanny suggested he would do well with a firm hand. Perhaps that was not the case.”

Victor rolled his eyes... *Helga, what a piece of work*. “There is a reason Yura did not get on well with his previous nanny. However, he’s taken to Yuuri from the start and I believe this is the right move for my family. We are nontraditional but that doesn’t mean we don’t weigh out our decisions carefully.”

“You do not need to defend your decisions to me, Mr. Nikiforov. What’s important here is that Yura is in a classroom where he will thrive.”

The door opened and Yura entered the office wide-eyed. “I didn’t do anything, sir,” he began.

The principal chuckled. “Of course not, Yura. You never do.”

Victor turned and those green eyes became impossibly bigger. “Papa…”

“You’re principal and I have been talking and we’ve decided you might do better with a different teacher. However, I do expect you to be respectful of your previous teacher. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, Papa,” the little boy answered, his eyes going from his father to the principal and back to his father. “Who’s my new teacher?” Moving close to his father, he grabbed hold of the two closest fingers with his chubby hand.

“We thought we’d see how you do with Mrs. Lapina,” the principal suggested.

Yura’s eyes widened. “That’s Zaina’s teacher!”

Victor’s eyebrow shot up, “Is that good?”
He nodded, squeezing his papa’s hand. “She’s really nice.”

“Good...now, be on your best behavior so we can make the most of this move,” Victor urged, sliding a hand over his son’s shoulder and giving him a firm squeeze.

Yura nodded. Turning back to his principal, he asked, “Can I go there now?”

“Why don’t we go together,” the older man suggested.

Victor watched them leave and was glad that his son was finally in good hands. He pulled out his phone as he approached his car and called his mate. “They are moving him to Mrs. Lapina’s class.”

Yuuri’s voice was relieved as he spoke. “Oh, that’s Zaina’s teacher. She’s been very kind. Thank goodness.”

Victor smiled, you would know the very details of his life down to his friend’s teacher’s name. “Do you want me to pick you up?”

“I’m already here. I caught the bus. I thought...I needed to talk to Abramovich. I think I need to start fighting through these new ghosts.”

“I’ll be there soon if you need me,” Victor stated with a smile. Of course his Yuuri would choose to fight.

Chapter End Notes

As a teacher, I want you to know I love my darlings and I stay out of their parents' lives. But there are bad apples in every profession.
Let’s have a sleepover!

Chapter Summary

Yura wants a sleepover and works to convince both Yuuri and his papa to let him have one.

Chapter Notes

Happy Mother's Day! I was thinking about what I could do to celebrate and decided on an EARLY CHAPTER. I hope you enjoy it. So make some popcorn, wrap up in a fuzzy blanket, grab a dog or cat or both, and enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 35: Let’s have a sleepover!

Yura kicked his feet back and forth while he played with his breakfast. He peeked up at his papa then over to Yuuri. His grandpa rustled the paper letting him know that he was paying attention. Finally, he sighed loudly.

Yuuri peeked up, his eyes amused before returning to the list he was working on. He had a busy day ahead of him that included counseling, checking in on his weight, and preparing for his classes. At least it wasn’t Monday.

Victor smirked knowingly, skimming through his email, marking those that needed following up. He waited for Yura to come up with his words. He didn’t have to wait long as the blonde had always been very direct, a gift from his first mother.

“I want to have a sleepover!”

Both parents blinked up, Victor’s eyes sliding from Yura over to Yuuri who hummed thoughtfully.

The brown eyes narrowed, but he answered softly. “Why don’t we see how the day goes with your
new teacher,” the omega suggested.

“So...maybe?”

Yuuri nodded.

Little green eyes sparkled, “Maybe yes?”

“Or maybe no. We’ll see,” Yuuri clarified.

He started to jump out of his chair in excitement when Yuuri tapped the table beside his oatmeal. With a sigh, he sat back down and finished his breakfast. He then took his bowl to Olga to wash before running up the stairs.

Yuuri watched him, his eyes amused while he leaned on his hand. “I really should talk to him about running through the house.”

“You could,” Victor hummed. “But then you’d have to watch your own running.”

“I don’t run, I’m just a very determined walker.” Yuuri huffed at those words before glancing back at his list. “Do we have time to stop at the store for some plasters? I’m out in both bags and I plan to spend some time in the studio with Alexie.”

“If not, I have some in the top drawer of my desk.” He studied the door where Yura had exited before asking, “Are you sure you’re up for a sleepover?”

Yuuri shrugged. “I was already going to suggest it. I owe both Mehar and Katya for taking care of Yura while I was on my heat and for all of the running around they do with us. I really need to learn how to drive.”

Victor considered those words before stating, “You’ll need to pass the written portion before you can get your permit to practice driving. So we might need to wait.”
Yuuri thinned his lips and nodded. He knew it was the next step towards his independence but it looked like it would take awhile. “Maybe I should have taken care of it in Japan,” Yuuri deadpanned. “You know...during that period between being homeless and coming here.”

Victor sighed at the self-deprecation but wanted to offer solutions, not roadblocks. “You had a lot newer, more immediate stumbling blocks to deal with. And the few times I was in Japan I could see plainly that driving wasn’t mandatory like it is here. We can pull up some practice tests online,” Victor continued. “When you feel comfortable with those questions, both reading and answering, we can set up the test.”

Yuuri’s eyes brightened at the prospect of progress. He added that to the list. “I have some down time between lunch and class. I could study then.”

Victor peeked over at his mate’s ever growing list. “You should definitely have time on the days you aren’t going to Abramovich...but don’t rush your therapy. Not everything has to be done at once. You’ve got time.”

Yuuri huffed impatiently. He had a quip on his tongue. He already felt behind and being left further behind was an enormous worry that had begun growing since he learned of his potential. But he bit it back and nodded, knowing his mate was right. It wasn’t like he had much choice. He could only learn so fast. And it’s not continuous, once I have it, I have it. I don’t have to move on to flying a plane. Yuuri smiled, thinking of himself piloting a plane, then shook his head. Let’s get the permit to drive first.

Then Yura was downstairs and ready to go. The family loaded up and drove to the school ready to meet Yura’s new teacher. They were surprised when she met them at the drop off.

“Good morning.” She smiled at the parents before bending slightly at the waist to talk directly to Yura. “I’m Mrs. Lapina and I’m excited to have Yura joining my class. Zaina was really excited that you would be coming to our room and I’ve arranged for you to sit next to her. How does that sound?”

Yura was a little taken aback by the warmth in her voice and found he could only nod with the widest of eyes. Yuuri watched the interaction, pleased that she ruled with kindness and understanding, the strongest form of classroom management.

Turning back to the parents, she added, “I believe we will get along famously and I hope to get to know both of you during the remainder of the school year.” She opened her satchel and pulled out two packets, handing one to each man. “I brought you both a welcome packet I give my students
the first day of class. Inside, there is a place for parent volunteers to complete their information. I hope to have you both visit my class.”

Yuuri’s eyes widened and he nodded, surprised and reassured at being included in the invitation. “I’d love to. Thank you. But my Russian isn’t the best.”

She smiled warmly and waved off his concerns. “I believe my students thrive when exposed to this world’s diversity. They need to see courageous role models come from all over the world, and that means they do not always speak well, write well, or read well...in Russian, of course.”

Yuuri smiled, a small blush on his cheeks as he felt Victor’s hand on his back, rubbing a reassuring circle on the small of his back. They followed her inside and Yuuri applauded the difference in the classroom. He had been entranced by her open and approachable manner outside, and rejoiced that she talked to Victor and himself as equals. No more, you’re just a ‘hired omega’ attitude.

She smiled, seeing Yuuri take in the colorful classroom with desks set into small groups, a reading area supplied with blankets and beanbag chairs. But the wall of books was the most impressive. Obviously cared for and respected, there were hundreds of books for all reading levels available. “Forgive me if this isn’t a Soviet era classroom. I was educated in the United States and came here to be with my mate,” the teacher explained. “Before I had left, I got to work with Penny Kittle! So my classroom is set up around book love and fearless approach to math.”

Victor had no clue who Kittle was, but if she could inspire teachers do this she must be amazing. He shook his head as he smiled warmly. “This reminds me of my friend’s wife’s classroom. Sveta Popovich.”

Lapina broke into a wider smile, “Oh, I know Sveta. She and I are good friends. Well, then I hope you find my methods to your satisfaction. What I can promise, however, is that Yura will feel warm and welcome in this classroom.”

“That is what we want,” Yuuri reassured her.

“Then please...contact me if you have any questions and I look forward to your visits to my classroom as parent volunteers!”
Yuuri felt warm as he leaned against Victor, the fire dancing before them. In the background, four children were giggleing while they roasted marshmallows in the fireplace before turning them into s’mores. Cats and dogs stretched out along the perimeter of the room.

Yuuri hoped for another night without waking up to bad dreams. If the scene that lay before him was any indication, then it was looking good. In the ballet studio/solarium, Yuuri had laid out sleeping bags, a couple of pop up tents, battery operated lanterns, and a “campfire” fashioned out of Christmas lights and tissue paper by the kids with Yuuri’s supervision. They were only in the living room because the kids wanted a real fire to roast their marshmallows. Victor delivered and soon they were giggleing, lying back, and patting full tummies.

Laughing, Yuuri pushed up out of Victor’s arms. “Alright, kids, let’s go back to our sleeping bags.”

“Can we tell scary stories?” Yura asked.

“Maybe,” Yuuri teased. “Do you know any?”

“I know a few,” Otabek offered.

They took turns in the bathroom and a quick wash up before following the adults into the solarium. Yuuri glanced over as Makkachin took post near the door followed by Ren. Their posture was protective causing Yuuri to narrow his eyes, peering past them into the moonlit back yard. He walked to the long windows, taking up an entire wall. In the day, with the warmth of the sun pouring in those windows were heavenly. Now, in the dark of a Russian night, they didn’t inspire confidence. He looked out, the night was just settling in, and the yard looked dull with grey. Yuuri tapped the glass with his fingernails, as if coaxing any spirits to come out and show themselves. When none did he didn’t feel satisfied. With a shiver, he shook off his fear and settled down to tell them a story around their paper fire. He didn’t need any help to feel spooked. Victor knelt near the dogs while Yuuri told stories to the children with Otabek adding in stories of his own.

“...I am the ghost of one black eye…” Yuuri continued as the wind started to howl outside causing every eye to look out into the eerie garden. It was cute for the kids, an added metonymy bringing the story to life and adding that electric thrill of fear. However, they felt safe in the warm house, and even more so in the presence of the omega. However, both adults turned to look out to the yard, almost lost in the low light of the evening. Victor rose to go to the long windows, casting a glance into the shadows. At his feet, Makka offered a warning growl to any ghouls that dared to enter their space. He turned to look back at Yuuri whose worried glance turned to a smile and he felt childish as the children giggled at him.
Then the children were curled up in their sleeping bags asleep, Yura sharing his kittens with the girls. Victor was reticent to leave the room with those windows. *I’ll talk to Yuuri about drapes.* *Oh this is silly...it’s that story and the wind.* With a sharp command, Victor directed the dogs to watch over the children, leading Yuuri back to their room.

“Should we even bother closing the door?” Victor lamented.

“I lay odds they will all be piled in here before midnight,” Yuuri smirked. They were already prepared. Blankets and pillows were on the sofa and chairs ready to receive the small bodies.

Victor smiled at his mate, always prepared like a Girl Guide. However, he would have preferred they just load the little tribe into the room right away but he didn’t want to mention his silly fear. Yuuri had just gotten asleep when the first child shuffled into the room afraid. Zaina peeked over the bed into the omega’s sleeping face and poked him tentatively. “You-rii...are you sleeping?”

“Maybe?” Yuuri whispered back.

“I’m scared,” she pushed.

With a sigh, Yuuri sat up, gathering the little girl in his arms. “Well, what do you say you grab that chair over in the corner?”

She glanced to the corner before burying into his scent and shivering. “It’s awfully dark over there.”

“I’ll turn on the lamp,” Yuuri offered. She glanced warily over to that corner but didn’t commit. Finally, Yuuri settled her down and took a seat in the floor next to her. The golden glow of the lamp filled the space while Yuuri rubbed his hand over the back of her head, humming softly until she fell asleep.

Next came Yura. He was in bed with Yuuri before the omega had a chance to shake off his sleep. Holding his son close, he whispered, “Do you think you could keep Zaina company?”

The boy looked a little uncertain but then squared up his small shoulders and nodded sharply. “I’ll protect her.”
“Good boy,” Yuuri praised softly, settling his son into place. He looked up with a smile as he smoothed Yura into sleep, and two other figures crept into the room and crawled into the couch on opposite ends. Once his son was asleep, he made sure the other two were covered up and warm enough before climbing back into bed. A glance at the clock said two in the morning. With a sigh, he tried to salvage a little bit more sleep.

He was nearly out, when a loud bang shook him awake, startling Victor as well. The children woke with a start. The alpha waved at Yuuri to stay as he slipped out of bed. Yuuri was torn but then his instincts told him to protect the nest. Besides the children had quickly gathered around Zaina who had begun to cry softly. Yuuri went to her, picking her up and moving to the bed. She cuddled into his scent and quickly calmed. He looked around at the wide eyes.

“That was pretty scary, huh?”

Yura nodded silently, feeling he might cry, but knowing he would follow Otabek’s lead and hold himself together.

“Well, this is an old house, and we have weird noises here all the time. Victor can barely get the shower to work for him most days.” Yuuri smiled and watched the tension in the room lift as the children giggled. He smiled at the group and patted on the bed. The small army made their way into the enormous bed easily. Otabek joining them so he could come over to his sister, giving her a reassuring hug before returning to his spot on the couch. The children snuggled down quickly falling asleep and Yuuri positioned himself, Zaina still in his arms and Yura cuddled into his back the smallest big spoon ever. Before letting sleep over take him, he spoke out softly to Otabek.

“You’re very welcome in this pile. We’ve still got room.”

Otabek smiled quickly, “Thank you, no. I think another alpha should stay up for Victor.”

Yuuri smiled, too tired to fully appreciate the little boy’s words. “Okay, well if you change your mind.”

Victor heard the dogs as he drew closer, and pushed his scent forward to warn any aggressors. Reaching for a broom, he moved into the solarium. He saw Ren growling in her tiny voice at a
window. With a whine, Makkachin looked up guiltily from the pile of tent and sleeping bag. Kneeling down, Victor soothed the poodle.

“Were you looking for Yura?” he whispered. “He’s with Yuuri.” Freeing the poodle, he murmured to both dogs, “Go to Yuuri!”

They bounced out of the back room and Victor could hear their claws clicking on the hard floors. He stood up and started to follow, when motion caught his attention. He turned as the back door swung open. He breathed a sigh of relief, having the earlier noise explained away. I need to get that latch fixed. But Victor could imagine what had startled Makka earlier.

He studied the loose handle with a frown on his lips. The latch didn’t match up with the metal making it hard to secure. Lifting up, he was able to get a solid click before setting the lock, but it was worrisome. Knowing that another strong gust would send the door crashing open again, he glanced around looking for a temporary solution that would make it through the night. Spotting a straight back chair, he wedged it under the nob and against the floor. It would do for now. Satisfied the door would remain closed he turned to leave, but found himself stilling. He turned his eyes to the windows and the yard beyond it. It was black as hell outside, and he could only make out the outlines of the bushes and trees that he knew were there. With the wind continuing to blow, everything was in motion, taking on new, unfamiliar shapes. He couldn’t help the chill that entered his bones.

At least the kids are safe with Yuuri.

Victor found Yuuri curled up with both poodles snoring lightly. Curled up around him were both five-year-olds and Mila. Even the kittens had found their way into the bed. Otabek was toughing it out on the sofa but Victor could tell by the glance Yuuri’s direction that he wanted to join the omega as well. Sitting next to the eight-year-old, he asked softly, “Did the back door open while you were back there?”

He shook his head but then added, “The wind rattled it. After those stories, they were all too scared.”

Smiling knowingly, Victor murmured, “Thank you for making sure they were safe.”
Nodding solemnly, the boy answered, “No problem, sir. I hope to grow up to be a good alpha, like you and my papa.”

Victor raised his eyebrow. “And how do you know you’re going to be an alpha?”

He shrugged and glanced towards Yura snuggling into Yuuri’s arms. “Sometimes you just know these things.”

Victor thought he understood. Looking at his own child he often felt those flushes of prediction. The little blonde likely was going to present as an omega. Of course, that was the prediction in his case as well...and now he watched over his family as alpha. Looking towards his family spread out over the bed with friends, he wouldn’t change the outcome. “Perhaps.”

Chapter End Notes

Sooooo...what's everyone thinking?
Family Matters

Chapter Summary

It's the day before travel and our boys are facing up to the facts that they might need to talk...really talk...to family members.

Chapter Notes

Hey, all...I'm out of pocket all next week so there won't be a chapter put up. I get a VACATION! This is a rare event for me and I'm quite excited. So...enjoy this chapter.

Also, this is unedited. So if there are any glaring mistakes, give me a heads up. Thanks so much.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 36: Family Matters

Victor loved the day before travel, being able to sleep in and watch Yuuri slowly come to consciousness. A blush settled into his cheeks, Yuuri’s lips curving into a soft smile, a purr slipping from his throat. And then...his son tumbled through the doors.

“Do I take my skates, Papa?”

Victor studied his son in amusement and considered their trip to Moscow. “Do you need to take your skates? Does Papa need to find you some ice?”

From the form curled up under the sheets and quilts, he heard a “yes” purred out of those lips. Victor raised his eyebrows and glanced at his son before he leaned in and tickled Yuuri. “Does my Yuuri want ice?”

Yura giggled and had to join in, crawling across the bed and tickling his mama. Yuuri was soon giggling and begging them to stop. “Please...please...” he laughed.
“There’s my beautiful Yuuri,” Victor greeted, a soft smile on his lips.

“*Our* Yuuri,” the little boy corrected, tumbling into Yuuri’s arms and cuddling up into his scent. Both looked fondly towards the little boy and Victor echoed his words, his fingers sliding along Yuuri’s collar, the other hand supporting his son so he didn’t tumble into the floor. “*Our* Yuuri…”

Finally satisfied, the little one rolled out of bed making kitty noises as he ran out of the bedroom. Yuuri’s hands went up to his face and pushed his bangs back. “I really should say something about running in the house.”

Victor chuckled. “You could try...and please do...but I think he forgets by the time he’s around the corner.” Leaning forward to brush a kiss in Yuuri’s hair, he asked, “How are you feeling?”

A blush filled him, knowing immediately to what he referred. Victor had made slow love to Yuuri the previous night, the omega falling asleep with his knot inside...a sweet reward to surviving the sleepover. “I...feel wonderfully achey. I could use a bath.”

“Your wish is my command,” Victor promised standing up and sweeping a dramatic bow.

Yuuri giggled and then reached into a full body stretch, his back arching and toes curling. “Thank you...I’d love that.” After Victor disappeared into the bathroom, Yuuri pushed the sheets aside, breathing in the musky scent of their lovemaking. “I need to wash the sheets,” he determined. Although Olga did the laundry in general, there were certain things that neither man would have her deal with. He began bundling up the sheets and was on his knees loosening one corner across the bed when he felt a pair of hands on his hips. He stilled, his breath catching and although part of his mind knew it was Victor, knew he was safe, another part of him couldn’t catch up and he found his body caving in on itself as he curled up into a ball, a frightened whimper escaping his lips.

Victor realized his mistake immediately and let go of Yuuri, moving into the omega’s line of sight and murmuring soft assurances and apologies. “I’m sorry, my Yuuri...I didn’t think. It’s okay...you’re okay.”

The omega moved closer to him, seeking out his scent, breathing him in, reminding himself where he was, who held him. “Sorry,” he whispered. “I don’t know where I went.” They both knew it was a lie but Yuuri didn’t want to talk about *him*. He wanted his Victor, wanted his home, wanted his family. Victor held onto him until he settled.
“That’s the first time you’ve reacted like that,” Victor murmured as he smoothed Yuuri’s hair, pressing kisses along his forehead.

“Maybe? I’m not sure...h-he...didn’t make it a choice and he liked to catch me when I wasn’t paying attention. I think he saw it as some sort of game.” Yuuri pouted, pushing his hands through is hair. “Another thing to go over with Dr. Abramovich.”

Victor could hear the frustration in his love’s words and began reassuring him. “Yes...I think that is a good thing. I want us to be able to play without worry...but I also want you to feel safe. That’s most important.”

“I feel safe with you,” Yuuri argued. “It’s just...sometimes I forget I’m here.” He huffed out his sigh.

“I think I understand what you mean. There’s time to get a session in today. I can make the call and some things can get switched around.”

“I think...it would be best.”

Victor rolled up and reached for Yuuri’s hand leading him into the bathroom where the tub was at just the right level. “Take a quick shower and dive in.”

“Join me?”

Victor smiled warmly and answered, “After my call.” A few minutes later, Victor returned, the appointment made. “One this afternoon. Will that work?”

Yuuri pouted but nodded. “Maybe...he can help me figure out how to tell my parents about us.”

Victor frowned as he considered Yuuri’s words. He was in a similar conundrum. Victor tried to tell his father during the last Sunday phone call but as he brought up Yuuri, his father waved him off saying he didn’t call to talk about the servants. He’s not, though...he’s family. Except, he says that regarding those who technically are servants. “We need to get it out in the open before the press figures it out,” he agreed.
Yuuri leaned forward as Victor stepped into the tub, cradling his mate into his arms, relishing in the hands that danced up his chest and the nose that turned into his neck. *My Yuuri…*

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Three bodies were headed towards the door as Nikolai passed them, toolbox in hand. “I’ll try and get that door in order while you are out today.”

“Good,” Victor confirmed, a smile on his lips. He didn’t really worry about the house with Nikolai about. The old man took with the old house’s aches and pains in stride.

“With the damp air, it’s likely swelled. I can adjust the strikeplate for now. Maybe add a backup lock for later.”

“I trust you to take care of what’s needed. We’ll see you later this evening.”

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Yuuri stared at his phone as he thought about Dr. Abramovich’s words. Open honesty hurts far less in the long run. *It’s just that they doubt my choices when really they don’t know me as an adult, only as a child.* Yuuri blinked up to the ceiling, stretched out on the wool rug on the floor, Ren lounging across his middle. The poodle could sense his agitation and moved to stay close.

*I’ll brush you later, girl…you deserve some attention before we go.*

Finally, he mustered up the courage to call. It took a few moments before he heard the familiar *moshi moshi* on the other end of the line drawing a smile to his lips. He loved that he had the freedom to call home when ever he wanted and that he didn’t have to hide his phone. “Hi, Mari. How are you?”

“We’re good, Yuuri. You caught us during a lull. What’s going on?”

“I think…I need to talk to you, mom, and dad. Can you find them and put them on speaker phone?”
“This sounds serious. Is everything alright?” his sister asked even as she moved through the business to gather the other significant people in their lives.

“I’m doing great...I just...I have something important to tell you all.” She grunted in answer before she went to do his bidding.

“Okay, Yuuri, we’re all here,” his mother called out and the omega couldn’t help but smile that she thought she needed to yell when put on speaker phone.

“What’s going on, little brother?” his answer urged.

Yuuri took a deep breath and plunged in. “It’s...about Victor...and my being here.”

“It didn’t work out...you’re coming home,” his father worried...or was he worried? He sounded a little happy at the thought. Why do you want it to fail, dad? Yuuri shook that off.

“No, I’m not coming home...just yet. But maybe...I’d like to bring Victor and Yura when I came.”

“We can always make room for guests,” his mother suggested densely. “Should we make up the banquet room next to your room?”

“Well, perhaps...but...let me talk.” He could feel himself growing more anxious with every moment.

“Okay, Yuuri,” his sister took over. “Tell us what’s on your mind.” He could hear her shushing them and making them wait.

Closing his eyes for courage, he began in a stutter and finished in a rush. “It’s just that...I’ve grown really close with this family...and they make me feel like family. So much so that...I’ve...agreed to be Vitya’s mate and Yura’s mama.” He waited and thought the connection had gone dead because of the silence on the other end. It was his sister that spoke first.
“Your heat! Did he force you? I’m going to kill him!” she pushed forth angrily.

Yuuri’s eyes widened, feeling that panic tip over the edge. “No, no...it wasn’t…I spent my heat alone. It was...after. Well, I knew before...but we talked...after my heat.”

“Yuuri,” his mother began, keeping her voice equanimical. “Did you choose this? Is this what you want?”

“Yes, Mom...it is.”

“And no one is pressuring you.”

“No, Mom.”

“And...you’re happy?”

“I...am.” He then realized he was crying and laughed through his tears. Wiping them away with his spare hand, he continued. “Very much so. I didn’t know...I could have this. Any of this. I thought...he ruined me. I thought I could only help with other families and not have one of my own.”

“Oh, Yuuri,” his mother murmured softly.

Then his father asked, checking on the legalities, “What about the contract? Did he keep his word?”

Yuuri chuckled. “Yes...he did. He waited until I requested the waivers to make a move. He never even suggested it. I just...knew this was what I wanted.”

Yuuri could imagine his sharp nod. “I just wanted to make sure you weren’t taken advantage of. Some of those alphas…”

“He’s different. He treats me...like a person.”
Knowing where he came from, his family understood that statement. However, his father had one more question. “Do you feel safe with him?”

Yuuri smiled at the thought. “I’ve felt safe since I came here. Always with him. From the first moment…and Phichit knows him. He approves.”

“Oh, if Phichit approves,” his mother began.

“Mom, Phichit is his best friend,” Mari argued.

“Yes…and he has Yuuri’s best interests at heart.” Refocusing on the call, she said to Yuuri, “I look forward to meeting this alpha. He won’t keep you from us?”

“I can come home whenever I want. I’m just…very busy right now. I’m going with the family to Moscow. You might see me on TV with him.”

“Oh, maybe we should do a viewing party,” she fussed. And Yuuri could picture her starting to plan.

“Mom, it’s not like when he skated,” Mari corrected.

“They won’t be skating?” She genuinely sounded confused.

“Well, yeah…” Mari fought hard to keep her impatience out of her voice.

His mother seemed to shrug it off. “So…what’s the problem? I get to see my baby…”

“Mooom,” Mari stated with fond exasperation before turning back to the phone. “I guess we’ll be watching. Take care of yourself…and be careful. I know Shuji was kicked from the ISU…but I don’t trust him.”
“Nor do I,” Yuuri answered quietly as the call disconnected. Feeling restless, he pushed himself up off of the rug and ran to the room he now shared with Victor to change to some of his shabby clothes. He preferred working around the house in the worn but comfortable t-shirts and leggings and grooming dogs was a messy business.

Victor made his way into the quiet of the kitchen, Olga working on laundry in the utility room leaving this pocket of rooms empty. Taking out his phone, he thought about what he’d say. His father wasn’t an easy man. He was stern with his love. Very different from Victor. Not that the younger Nikiforov doubted his father’s feelings...he just handled things differently. And that often meant they butted heads. “Hello, Papa,” Victor greeted as the call connected.

“Is everything alright, son? It’s not Sunday.” Victor winced at the alarm in his father’s voice. Calling on Sunday had become a habit because Yelena said it was important to connect with family even when things were rocky. A middle of the week call usually meant something was wrong.

“I know...it’s just...we need to talk before I’m in the limelight again. About...Yuuri.” Victor waited on his father hoping he didn’t push this away once again.

“The nanny?” his father asked in confusion.

Victor took a deep breath in and let it out slowly before answering patiently, “Papa...you know he’s more than a nanny.”

“Oh, you and your labels,” the elder Nikiforov huffed. “Alright...companion omega,” he enunciated carefully.

Victor chewed his lip, closing his eyes to prepare to dive in. “He’s...more than that. He’s...my mate.”

The other end of the line was quiet as Andrei took in the information. “You...bonded with the man?” At least it wasn’t alarm. Andrei was processing.

“Not yet...he’s not ready. He’s come from so much abuse, Papa...but that’s what I want. To bond with him and to become his husband.”
“But...what about Yelena?”

“She’s gone, Papa...and I think it’s important for me to let her go.”

“But Yura...how will he ever know the love of a mother?”

“Yuuri is a mother...and Yura wants him to be his mother,” Victor defended gently. He wanted to get mad but he also knew his father struggled with understanding this part of him. “Papa...I prefer men. Yelena...she was different, but all in all, I prefer a male for a mate. I...prefer Yuuri.”

“These circumstances are just so unusual, Vitya,” his father continued. “First you only dated alphas...then when you do marry an omega, it’s a female. Now you want this male omega? I don’t get you.”

“If you would just meet him. Maybe...I can bring him to meet the family for Christmas.”

“I need to talk to your mother.” Victor rolled his eyes at that statement. It was his father’s favorite tactic to avoid a topic.

“That’s fine, Papa...but either I’m bringing him or we’re skipping Christmas. He’s...my family.”

His father huffed. “By that argument, you may as well bring the housekeeper.”

“Maybe I will,” Victor stated, his voice becoming firmer. “See you at Christmas.”

“Fine,” responded Andrei in exasperation and then the call was disconnected.

Victor rolled his eyes and caught Nikolai watching him from the entrance. “He’s so closed minded.”

“There...is an old idea. You marry a woman, you play with a man. You’re father needs to see
Yuuri as more than a toy. Perhaps if he saw Yuuri with Yura, the way the boy adores him and the way Yuuri cares for the boy...I think this would help.”

“I hate this idea...I’ve never wanted a woman.” He stopped, then sighed heavily as he realized what he said. “I’m sorry...that came out wrong.”

Nikolai shook his head. “I know what you and Yelena were to each other...but you provided her shelter when she had none. So I won’t begrudge your relationship. She chose you to be the father of her child.” He nodded towards the hall where Yuuri had disappeared earlier and added, “That young man has had little choice in life...and when given that opportunity, he also chose you. I think that speaks highly about the man you’ve become, Vitya. Your father...he may or may not accept your Yuuri...but that’s on him. You’ve given him the chance. Your mother will love Yuuri, however. Of that I have no doubt.”

“She never fully supported my relationships either,” Victor argued.

“Your unhealthy relationships, Vitya. You and Yelena...neither of you could pick a decent man...until you picked each other. Only then did you both refuse to settle. For Yura.” He glanced towards the streak of blond that ran down the hall. “Because of him, you raised your standards. You decided it was better to be alone than with the wrong person. Yuuri...is not the wrong person. He is a beautiful omega and a perfect match for you.”

Victor hugged himself as he looked out the window. “I just want them to accept my Yuuri.”

“Give them time...but don’t wait life on them. When they are ready, they will make room.”

“Christmas…”

“It’s an opportunity...and maybe they say yes?”

Victor smiled sadly but nodded. “I’ve always been different. I don’t know why they expected me to be normal .”

“You are your kind of normal. And what if you’d been omega as you thought? Would they want you to be treated as a plaything?”
“Fair point...one I may use if put in a corner.”

“Just don’t put my name with it,” the old man chuckled. “Now, shall we see what they are up to?”

Victor found his Yuuri in the solarium brushing each dog and talking to them soothingly. Yura sat at his feet and now had one of the cats reluctantly allowing him to comb their fur as well. The omega looked up and smiled. “I knew they’d miss us...so I thought I’d spend the evening lavishing them with attention.”

“So you gave them a bath and brushed them?” His eyes slid from Yuuri to the door and back. The new repairs were evident and he hoped they would hold. For now, the wind was calm and the door still.

Yuuri nodded, hugging Makkachin to his chest, nuzzling into her fur. The old poodle quivered but panted happily. “They took such good care of me while you were gone but I could tell Makkachin missed you. She’d wander around the house looking for you.”

Victor knelt down beside the poodle, his hands going into her curls. “I’m sorry, old girl. I know it’s always been hardest on you when I traveled. At least you can join me at the rink these days.”

She barked in answer, her paw going over his shoulder in a doggy hug. Victor smiled towards his Yuuri who now turned his attention to Ren. He realized that Yuuri had pretty much taken over the daily grooming of both dogs and used the example to teach his son how to care for his animals. It was unconscious but the rink had been demanding of his time since he’d returned and Yuuri simply stepped in where he saw there was slack and took on what was needed.

“Are you always like that?”

“Like what?” Yuuri asked, his eyes sparkling in mischief as he tickled Yura, the child squealing as he ran off down the hall once more. Likely to retrieve another cat.

“You seem to just see what needs to be done and take care of it.”
Yuuri shrugged, his expression growing serious. “That’s how I grew up, Vitya...we had a family run business and because of skating, I didn’t have regularly assigned tasks. I came home, assessed where they needed help, and stepped up.”

“You’re doing more and more at the rink as well. I worry I’ve put too much on you.”

Yuuri shrugged, his eyes looking out the windows, the shadows growing long in the yard. “I...like to be useful. I think that was one of the hard parts about being hidden away. I had no...purpose. Not one that I wanted, anyway. Since coming here, I tried to help out around the house but really, Olga runs it so smoothly that I’m just left with small pickup chores. But with Makka...I was already taking care of Ren...so it was one extra dog. And Yura is with me when he’s not in school except on Mondays during class and when you or Olga or Nikolai force me to take some time to myself. So...I just do what needs to be done...and if it pulls some of the strain off of you, then that’s even better.”

“Are you being compensated for your work at the rink? I know you’re not on salary.”

Yuuri winked and pointed out, “I may be paid better as an hourly employee.” He then tilted his head thoughtfully before answering, “I’m good...I have...independence. I make choices with my money although you take care of all of my needs.”

“Well, that’s what we agreed on.”

“When I was just the companion omega,” Yuuri pointed out. “It seems...strange...for you to pay me and see to my expenses now. I...don’t want to be a kept omega. That is to akin to how we used to be viewed. I’m not...your mistress.”

“You don’t want me to pay you,” Victor stated carefully.

Yuuri shook his head. “I haven’t cashed a check since our relationship shifted. It didn’t feel right.”

“But you still make enough to be independent?” Victor pressed quietly.
Yuuri nodded, a soft smile on his lips. “I mean...I’m still going to let you provide my room and board. So...yes.”

Victor pulled Yuuri into his arms as he thought about his father’s words and what Nikolai told him. Yuuri did so much for him, for their family, and he refused to be seen as a...toy. Hopefully Victor’s parents will see the Yuuri he sees.

Chapter End Notes

I hope this chapter bridged well from the sleepover. I started to write something for in between but it didn't come together. Next chapter, they are in Moscow!
News Crews and Ugly Necklaces

Chapter Summary

Victor takes his family and skaters to Moscow.

Chapter Notes

TW: More of Yuuri's past comes out in this chapter.

This is an unbeta'd chapter...have fun and shout out if you see a huge grammar mistake or if you aren't sure what I am saying somewhere.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 37: News Crews and Ugly Necklaces

Rostelecom, Moscow

Yuuri stood nervously next to the Russian prince of figure skating. Even with the passing of years, the alpha still held records on the books and the Russian fans loved him. They were curious about the omega on his arm, however, and that drew a lot of speculation. Especially when Victor pulled him in and kissed his hairline reassuringly. Especially when the alpha was seen with his arm around Yuuri during much of the first day. Especially when Hisashi Morooka identified him awakening gossip about the Japanese hopeful forced to retire early due to pregnancy...and a questionable alpha bonding.

They caught Russia’s attention, not at the press conferences but skating together in an open air rink, Yura clapping his hands excitedly while Yuuri and Victor wove in and out together, their hands reaching towards one another, taking hold of one another, Yuuri’s fingers brushing across his cheek with affection. It didn’t take long before the video of the laughing alpha and his sweet omega graced social media. And then Victor kissed him before Yuuri and Victor each took the hand of an excited five-year-old, his grandfather watching fondly. They both cheered as the boy showed out a little with his waltz jump and the steps he’d learned from his Yuuri, the little boy excitedly crying out that magic word “Mama” as he skated into the omega’s arms. And the entire world fell in love with the Japanese sweetheart, watching how he adored this child that was not of his blood.
And then, somewhere during the night Tanaka was found, the Japanese-American boy a little underfed but holding his head high and refusing to back down. Pictures surfaced of the boy being led out of a modern Tokyo residence with lots of concrete and not enough windows before it was sealed off by crime tape. The skating world loved him. The rest of the world wanted to protect him. His parents were crying with relief. He wanted to know how they found him...and that was how Yuuri’s name was linked in connection to the lead that led them to the American skater.

More rumors and whispers and all Yuuri wanted to do was enjoy the event and soak up an atmosphere that may have been his if there hadn’t been a ten year interruption. When the press caught up to them, Yuuri wanted to hide in Victor’s neck. He tried to deflect their questions.

“This isn’t about me. It’s about them.”

“Yuuri Katsuki, do you deny being a part of the biggest breaking story in figure skating history?”

“Mr. Katsuki, what is your association with the alpha who took skater Tanaka prisoner?”

“Katsuki-san,” came a voice, familiar and warm and Yuuri turned to focus on the Japanese reporter. “Years ago, you were Japanese great hope for figure skating. What happened?”

Yuuri held his eyes for a long moment before murmuring, “I...don’t want to talk about it. Not now.”

“When you get ready, would you be willing to talk to me?”

Again, Yuuri held his eyes. He slowly nodded. “When...and if I talk, I will talk with you, Morooka-san.”

The reporter bowed, backing off, and it didn’t take long for the other reporters crowded into the space, yelling out questions. Victor’s arm wrapped around him, though, guiding him into the practice facility.

Yuuri leaned in and whispered, “I didn’t expect this.”
Victor thinned his lips. He did. Well acquainted with the press, he very much expected this. “It’s fine, Yuuri.”

“I don’t want to take from their skating. They’ve worked so hard.”

“And Alexei asked for you to be here. I promise you. It will be fine.”

Yuuri nodded, following Victor down the stairs towards the ice where their skaters were warming up. He smiled as he watched the young skater take off for his jump and that smile widened when he landed it with a whoop of triumph.

“He’s been working so hard on that.”

Victor chuckled warmly, knowing how much Alexei struggled but he kept looking toward Yuuri and seeing the omega’s quiet strength, seeking to model Yuuri. The skater found his way to the boards in front of them.

“Did you see that, Coach?” And Alexei wasn’t looking for Victor’s approval.

Yuuri’s eyes widened but he smiled. “You’re going to be beautiful out there.”

“It’s my first year to be in the Grand Prix series. I just hope not to fall on my face.”

Yuuri laughed, feeling that memory come forward. “I know what you mean. My first year in seniors, I fought so hard but everything was new, everything a new obstacle to surpass.”

“Da!” He turned as his name was called out. “I’ve got to go back out and practice. Later, Coach.”

As he skated off, Yuuri looked up at Victor, his eyes wide with wonder. “He...called me Coach.”

“Well, you’ve been working with him.”
Victor wrapped his arms around Yuuri’s waist from behind as they rode the elevator to their floor after practice. They had to wade through another sea of reporters, Victor haven sent his skaters back by another route. Shaken, Yuuri took the key card and jammed it into the reader, seeking the refuge of their room. As the door closed, he turned and buried himself into Victor’s arms.

“I shouldn’t have come...this is a mess and I’m drawing attention away from the skaters.”

Victor lifted his chin and studied those brown eyes. “Do you know how crazy I’d be if this news broke and I couldn’t get to you? *This* is where you belong. At my side…”

Yuuri took several breaths to try to steady himself but the sob broke through. Victor held onto him, whispering soothing words. Victor finally settled Yuuri enough to get him into a shower and ordered their dinner. While he waited, he called and checked on his son.

“We’re fine although I think it might be good if we stay the night at my sister’s house,” Nikolai observed. “How is Yuuri?”

“Shaken. He’s in the shower right now but I know we’re in for a rough night.” Victor’s eyes rested on the sliver of light escaping the bathroom door. Yuuri couldn’t bring himself to close it completely, wanting to maintain a connection.

The old man grunted in agreement. “You take care of your omega and let me watch out for the boy. Do you want him there for the competition?”

“Before all of this happened, I’d have said yes...but now…” Victor shook his head, hating this helpless feeling.

Nikolai understood, taking the decision on himself. “I’d keep him clear of it myself...and it would be just another thing to worry Yuuri.”

“You’re right. Let me talk to him a few minutes, please.” Soon he heard his son’s singsong hello. “Hey, Yura...are you having fun playing with your cousins?”
“Da...is Yuuri okay?” The boy sounded more than just curious and Victor couldn’t help but wince in response.

“Why do you ask?” he dodged, hoping to draw out the source of his son’s worry.

“Aunt Irina turned the TV off but I saw Yuuri hiding in your neck like he does when he’s sad or scared. Did someone make Yuuri sad?” Victor could hear the fight in his son’s voice and was certain he was ready to take on the world for his mama.

“I think...a better word is overwhelmed. He didn’t expect people to remember him.”

This seemed to redirect the five-year-old as he tumbled out excitedly, “Beka found Yuuri on Youtube and he was really good.”

The alpha smiled as he remembered the videos he’d also dug up. “I know...he probably would have been some of my best competition.”

“Why did he stop skating?” Yura asked, his curiosity laced with genuine concern.

Victor sighed, not sure if this was the right place for this conversation. He knew Yura wouldn’t let it go. Not really. Not until he knew the story to his satisfaction. However, for now, Victor determined to redirect him. “Why don’t we talk about that later...when we’re home. I think that Yuuri will need all of the love we can give him over the next few days.”

“But Grandpa says we’re staying at Aunt Irina’s house,” Yura huffed. “How can I give Yuuri love if I’m here?”

Victor’s lip puckered a little, wanting to pull the little boy into his arms. “I think...for right now, it is best. I need to take care of Yuuri and if you’re at Aunt Irina’s, I’m not worried about you.”

“Can I talk to him?” There was that worry again.

As if on signal, Yuuri came out of the bathroom drying his hair. Victor waved him over, handing him the phone. “It’s Yura.”
Yuuri nodded taking the call, settling between Victor’s legs. The alpha took the comb from
Yuuri’s hand and started working out the tangles while Yuuri put the call on speaker and answered,
“Hello, baby...are you having a good time?”

“Yes,” he answered, his words sounding worried. “Are you okay?”

Yuuri closed his eyes, leaning back into Victor, taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly
before answering honestly, “I will be, Yura...I just had a lot of things happen today.”

“Are you sad?”

“Not...exactly. In many ways, I’m relieved. But for now...it’s a lot to process. Are you worried
about me?”

“A little. I saw you on TV.”

“Well, maybe you shouldn’t watch a lot of TV over the next few days. There’s a lot of news
people and they aren’t always nice with their questions. They might make me a little sad or
nervous but as long as my two favorite people are okay, I will be okay.”

“I can come with you and fight them for you! Beka and I will get our knife shoes.”

Yuuri found himself smiling, laughing, and crying all at once as he chuckled through Yura’s
defense. “Oh, baby...you are so very brave and I wish I was as brave as you sometimes. I’m going
to be okay...but I think I’ll let your Papa fight them for me this time.”

The little boy hummed before answering, “Papa has knife shoes, too.”

Yuuri leaned back against Victor’s chest as the little boy started telling them about their day and
talking about Aunt Irina’s cat Helga. Yuuri turned up and asked Victor, “Wasn’t that the Nanny’s
name?”
Victor nodded. “One of them.”

Yura heard and added, “*Da* ...she was a piece of work!”

“Yura!” they both admonished automatically but were glad they didn’t have to hide their smiles.

“Well, she was...she probably was friends with my old teacher.”

Victor nodded in agreement careful not to answer out loud. And then in the background Yura’s Aunt Irina called out in Russian and the little boy announced, “I’ve got to go eat dinner. I love you, Mama. Love you, Papa.”

Victor smiled, answering, “Love you more” as Yuuri sniffed and murmured, “I love you, too.”

They were still in the silence for a few minutes and then room service knocked at the door. Yuuri shook out his limbs as he leaned forward to let Victor stand up. Yuuri reached over and pulled a couple of pillows into the floor. They sat around the coffee table eating their meal mostly quiet, though not uncomfortable. The exhaustion was clear in the omega’s demeanor and Victor let him have his peace. Then Yuuri dressed for bed while Victor showered and soon he was wrapped up in the alpha’s arms. The omega was almost asleep when Victor asked, “Would you like to do an exhibition skate with me? Maybe for an ice show?”

Yuuri blinked his eyes open, surprised but felt something spark inside of him as he thought about it. “I’d...love to...but I’m not any good now. I’m not sure that I ever was.”

“Yuuri...I’ve seen your video,” the alpha challenged incredulously. “You were good. You would have challenged me. And...I would love it if you’d play around with a piece of choreography with me. We had...so much fun yesterday skating together.”

The omega hummed in thought. “What do you have in mind?”

“A similar pairs skate...it’s an old number of mine but I’ve got another version of it. It always felt incomplete...like an unanswered question. Maybe...you were the answer all along and you just couldn’t speak out at the time.”
Yuuri smiled, snuggling closer to his mate. “I’d...like to see it.”

Victor pressed a kiss into Yuuri’s hair, loving the scent of his own shampoo on Yuuri’s hair. The body grew still and slowly faded into sleep, exhaustion taking him over. Victor smiled softly, feeling how much he loved this man.  You are my answer.

It was between the short and free that Yuuri and Victor were dining with their skaters and the youngest one, Alexei, asked, “So did they catch that guy? The one that kidnapped that skater?”

The eyes of the other skaters darted Yuuri’s direction and several made shushing noises as Yuuri carefully lowered his spoon. He’d called the detective Cameron that morning and so far, Shuji was at large. “It seems he’s slipped away.”

Another skater, one of the pairs partners, set his fork down, a swear slipping from his lips. Looking up, he met the omega’s eyes and apologized hastily. “It just makes me so angry that alpha’s like that make the rest of us look bad.”

Yuuri reached across and took his hand, giving it a squeeze. “I had a kind father. My best friend growing up could be an ass but if anyone messed with his friends, he’d be first in line to take them out. I know there are a lot of good alpha’s out there...and I…” Yuuri stopped, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath before continuing. “I lived with Shuji and his abuse for ten years...fourteen if you count from the time he marked me. But...you all...I know you are good alpha’s...and omegas...and betas. I wouldn’t trade any of you.”

They all blinked in surprise, not sure what to say. It was the first time Yuuri had admitted openly to the rumors that had been flying around the club. They had figured it out soon after Yuuri showed up at the rink, the skaters digging in and finding out about the new omega in Coach’s house...especially when they realized their coach was falling hard for him. They weren’t prepared for what they found but the lot of them made a pact to protect this omega with their lives.

Yuuri looked up and smiled...and it was genuine, appreciative towards all of them. “SOOO...who’s going to bring me an ugly necklace tomorrow? I want pictures with all of you.”

They all grinned one by one, happy to be a part of this omega’s team. Although there were omega coaches and beta women coaches at their skate club, until now, they realized they hadn’t had a
team mom since Lilia had stepped back. Not that Yakov and Lilia ever truly let go...but they were more like grandparents at this point. But most had seen Yuuri work with the littles and knew he had a lot of skill to share. A couple had even approached him to see if he could still do edgework like before and could he work with them. It was quiet work, patient...and Yuuri had the temperament for it.

Chapter End Notes

I'm crazy busy here but I am reading your comments. If there are things for me to address or answer, I'll try to get to them as soon as possible but I may not respond to comments of love right away. I do love to hear from you, however, and hope you keep writing.
Haunted Reality

Chapter Summary

Banquet night...

Chapter Notes

There are some good things in this chapter. Some questionable things. And you may get mad at me...but know that I do believe in happy endings.

TW: Yuuri remembers more of his time with Shuji and acknowledges that he was raped by the Japanese alpha.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Ch. 38: Haunted Reality

The Russian team walked away with four medals, two of which were gold. At the banquet, Yuuri stood with Victor to watch over their skaters fondly. It was private, no reporters...and Yuuri felt himself relax. “I forgot how much I hated the press.”

Victor’s hand rested on the small of Yuuri’s back and moved up and down as he answered, “I still fight with them but you handled yourself well this week.”

“I guess Celestino’s training didn’t go to waste. I think he worked with me handling reporters almost as much as the ice.”

“How long did you train with him?”

Yuuri frowned as he thought about it. “I think from around sixteen until I retired but I still trained from home until eighteen. Coach was so mad when Shuji took me away that he found me and made sure I was able to continue training until...I couldn’t.” Victor’s arm slid up around his shoulder and Yuuri leaned into his comfort. He then pointed at one of the pink drinks a skater was carrying and leaned up to whisper, “You should bring me one of those.”
Victor chuckled but agreed, slipping away from Yuuri’s side. The omega watched him retreat before turning to talk to one of the other skaters, a Japanese skater that was quickly working up the ranks. It was nice to speak his home language as they talked quietly. The younger man was too polite to ask about Shuji and Yuuri was thankful. They instead talked about where they were from and who coached them.

“I skate out of Detroit. There are a number of international skaters there and it’s kind of nice. I’m able to attend college while I’m there and they waive my international tuition and fees.”

“I would have loved to have attended college while I was skating,” Yuuri admitted.

“What would you have majored in?”

Yuuri laughed softly. “I don’t know about back then...maybe dance...but I’m looking at psychology now.” He sobered but his soft smile didn’t slip. “I think...I’d like to work with others that came out of situations like my own. I didn’t know what resources were out there but talking with a social worker friend, I’ve learned that...I didn’t have to go through everything that I faced.” The topic slipped out so easily but seemed less taboo since Yuuri broached it.

The boy shifted, his eyes dropping shyly. “My coach always kept me away from him. I’m sorry...you didn’t get away.”

“He...took advantage of a moment of weakness. There are bad people in the world...and sometimes you just have to survive.”

The boy looked up and studied Yuuri before admitting, “I watch your skates sometimes...my coach uses you as an example. Maybe one day I’ll be just as good.” And then the boy was walking away, called over by his coach.

Yuuri’s eyes followed the Japanese silver medalist, his words settling into his chest. He wanted to be as good as me? But I didn’t make it very far. He turned to meet his mate’s eyes, the man waiting patiently across the room, giving him space while he talked to the Japanese skater. He took two steps in Victor’s direction when a figure loomed in front of him. Instinctively, Yuuri stepped back and then he knew...that scent. Shuji.

“How the hell did you get in here?” Yuuri hissed, taking another step back.
Shuji followed, “Y-you...this is all your fault. I should’ve never let you go.” His words were loud and slurred and Yuuri could smell the alcohol on him, could feel eyes turning their direction, could see others moving towards them protectively, coaches stepping between their skaters and the man. Murmurs were filling the space as Yuuri and Shuji squared off.

The words were lost on most people’s ears, the Japanese losing its politeness as Yuuri continued to slowly circle and step away from Shuji. He knew his ex was dangerous when he had Yuuri cornered and the omega refused to allow himself to be vulnerable to the man any more. “You should’ve never had me. I didn’t belong to you.”

The nasty laugh that erupted from the alpha soured Yuuri’s stomach. “You belonged to me, wore my mark so obediently. You wanted to be owned. And you came to me so willingly when old enough.”

\textit{Vitya, where are you?} He suppressed a whine, not wanting to give Shuji the satisfaction of seeing his fear, hoping his scent didn’t give him away. He knew he needed to move them in the direction where Victor could reach him, however and began to slowly circle around.

He kept the alpha challenged, his attention drawn on himself. “I only came because of the way the laws were twisted in your favor. But you chose to release me, annulling our bond.”

“Only because you became such a cold fish. Sex with you was like sex with a corpse.”

Yuuri felt his cheeks turn crimson at such intimate talk in public. He glanced around and watched the Japanese student step behind his coach. Swallowing, he maneuvered the man where he was towards the door. “Perhaps if I had an alpha worthy of my attention, things would have been different...but anyone who has to force an omega to bed with them must be pathetic indeed.” The words dripped with contempt, his expression one of disgust. He knew he’d angered the alpha and the man lunged towards Yuuri with a growl.

Then someone stepped between them and Yuuri realized with a start it was Mikhail. “I don’t believe you have the credentials to be here,” the Russian skater informed the Japanese man in accented English. And then Alexie and the other Russian skaters were between them, hands pushing him back.

“That’s my omega,” he declared, slurring on the last word, lunging in Yuuri’s direction.
“I was never yours,” Yuuri grated out as he took another step back.

“Not until I let you go,” Shuji sneered, not even attempting to hide it in Japanese.

“And why do you think you did that? Because I chose to not be what you wanted. So go...leave...I won’t be a part of your world any longer. I won’t live as a ghost. I will find my happiness in spite of you. You stole too much of my time.”

Yuuri’s eyes widened when he saw the alpha’s fist draw back, and he hated that kids were standing between him and Shuji. He didn’t want any of them to be hurt. But when he tried to move them out of the way, Mikhail argued, “You stay back, Coach.”

He didn’t know when he received the honor of coach. Alexei he understood but he now realized he held the respect of the other skaters. He didn’t know why they were protecting him but then he spotted Victor, his hand closing on Shuji’s fist from behind and the Japanese alpha turning with an expletive on his lips. “What the -”

Victor was known by most as easy going and most underestimated his strength. However, the atmosphere began to grow heavy and Shuji slowly sank to his knees, Victor holding his hand firmly. “You will not lay a hand on my mate or my students,” he commanded, shifting the atmosphere, the air growing heavier.

Shuji’s head bent, forced submission drawing a groan of frustration from his lips. “H...he’s mine.”

“Not anymore,” Victor countered, holding the alpha secure.

It was Yuuri’s whine that shook Victor from the challenge. Glancing up, he spotted the room, all kneeling, not resisting, heads bowed. But Yuuri...his sweet Yuuri...his courageous, strong Yuuri...slid his hand over Victor’s and whispered, “Let go.”

The atmosphere of the room shifted immediately and people were shaking it off, helping each other up. Victor apologized to the crowd but held Shuji in check. As security approached, Victor handed Shuji over. “He’s wanted in connection to the kidnapping of the American skater Tanaka. When you call the police, make sure they contact Interpol.”
The two guards nodded, leading him away. Victor turned, gathering Yuuri in his arms. He whispered, “I’m sorry. I needed to get him away from you.”

“I’m okay...and I didn’t back down. He has no power over me. Not any more. I just...didn’t want anyone else to get hurt.” As Yuuri clung to Victor’s shirt, he knew it was important for him to acknowledge that.

“You were amazing. When I realized who stepped between us, I moved in your direction but you kept him dancing, kept him from trapping you.” Resting his forehead against Yuuri’s, he added, “Nicely done.”

“I...learned a long time ago how to stay out of his reach for as long as possible,” Yuuri confessed. He glanced around the room and could tell the others were still shaken. “I should apologize.”

“No...this isn’t on you, solnyshko. Everyone knows your were just reacting. Let him carry the blame for tonight.”

Yuuri frowned, rubbing the back of his neck. He didn’t like the weight of all of those eyes on him and he could still hear Shuji’s sneers in his head. “I’m tired now...can we go back to our room?”

Victor nodded, turning to Mikhail and leaving him in charge of making sure the others made it back to their room. He led Yuuri to the main elevator and held onto him as it climbed to their floor. In the safety of their room, he had just soothed Yuuri to sleep when he received the call from hotel management.

“Mr. Nikiforov? The man who threatened your mate at the banquet escaped before the guards could secure him in the holding cell.”

Victor thinned his lips glad he’d be taking his family back home soon. He could still remember Yuuri’s quiet words before he went to sleep.

“Shuji blames me for his situation.”
Victor woke up to Yuuri squirming next to him, tugging at his underwear to free his cock, urgent hands reaching down. Brown eyes lifted to meet his. “Need you...in me...”

“Yuuri...what’s wrong?” Although they understood that the other would provide what was needed, Victor knew something was off with his omega and who to blame. “Talk to me, lyubov moya .”

Yuuri was shaking as he crawled back into Victor’s arms and it was then that the alpha spotted the remnant of tears. “I...I can still feel him...and I remember. I spent so long trying to forget and it’s all right there...and I don’t, I can’t smell like him. Please, Vitya...make me yours.”

Victor leaned in and kissed him, soft reassuring brushes of his lips as his wrists worked under Yuuri’s shirt. Scenting Yuuri, he felt the form collapse against him, shaking with tears as he released the tension of not only the day, but the week. Victor kissed his cheek and murmured, “I won’t make you mine. Not with a bond. Not now. Not like this...but know you are mine. No bond or lack thereof will change that.”

“H-he...I-I hated what he did to me. Every touch, every bite, every time he fucked me. I hated all of it. I just...I need you. To know...I’m with you. To feel every bit of you.”

The alpha heard Yuuri’s need, the omega’s demand for his alpha. Victor kissed him, running his lips along Yuuri’s jaw. “What do you need?”

“You...in me. You...filling me. You...touching me.”

Victor pulled Yuuri’s shirt over his head and tossed it to the side before he rolled Yuuri onto his back, nipping and kissing his way down Yuuri’s chest, fingers reaching down to Yuuri’s pajama pants and slipping them over his hips. Yuuri shifted, impatiently lifting his hips. A soft “please, alpha” slipped from his lips. Victor growled possessively.

He knew what Yuuri was demanding. After fighting over him, Yuuri needed the reassurance that he was claimed. Victor’s hands tugged at those pajama pants and then Yuuri was kicking them off even as he spread his legs for his alpha. His scent was strong, seeking to belong to Victor...and if the older man didn’t already know that Yuuri wasn’t ready, he’d be tempted. However, Yuuri spent too long held captive to give up his freedom so easily. It was hard fought, too hard fought to give up on a moment of need. However, Victor could give him relief, could give him reassurance, could give him connection.
Yuuri reached for him and Victor moved up into those arms, claiming the omega’s lips into a kiss. As their lips parted, Victor rested his forehead against Yuuri’s. “Where are you?”

Yuuri didn’t answer immediately. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, his fingers tightening in Victor’s hair before sliding his fingers down the alpha’s back. “With you.”

“Are you sure?”

Yuuri nodded before tipping his head to the side and leaning in for another kiss. As they parted once more, Yuuri nuzzled into Victor’s scent before murmuring, “I am a little disconnected, though. I had a bad dream.”

“Tell me about it,” Victor invited with quiet authority. He didn’t want Yuuri to relive the dream but he needed to know where he was coming from.

Yuuri blinked several times and Victor could feel the movement of lashes against his neck before the omega began to describe the dream, his voice distant as he narrated. “I was back there. I remember the white walls, the place he took me at first. He left me there. I had a small bathroom...barely a sink and a toilet. The futon was thin and moldy. I had the smallest of blankets that I’d wrap around me and curl up in the corner. He...I was allowed out when he desired my company. He wanted me...willing. As long as I fought him, I was confined.

“I remember...the day he took me...how it hurt. I bled for sometime after. He said it was my fault. A good omega would know how to prepare themselves. I went back to the room and glared at those walls. Those damned white walls. I took out the sharpie I had stolen from the table and began to write. Tiny lines of script. He probably painted over them but you know...sharpie bleeds through. Every time he took me out of there, I came back and wrote on the walls.”

Victor held onto Yuuri, his hand moving up and down Yuuri’s back as he rocked him. Finally, he asked quietly, “What...did you write?”

Yuuri smiled. Victor couldn’t see him but felt the motion against his skin, tucked into his neck. “I wrote...songs...and choreography...and every thing he took away from me.” Yuuri’s expression shifted and he sniffed back before adding, “And I wrote...what he did to me. A chronicle of every time he...he...raped me.”

Victor’s arms tightened around him as he held Yuuri to his chest. “I...don’t know how to fix this,
Victor hugged him and murmured, “He didn’t break you, either. You held on until you could get away.”

“It’s just...sometimes when I dream, I’m there once again. And tonight...I needed you to pull me back to the presence, to ground me, to make me feel real and not a ghost.”

Victor frowned at that word. He heard it before. “Why do you say ghost?”

Yuuri drew a shaky breath and let it out. “Because that’s how I lived my life for the last ten years. I haunted the rooms but I wasn’t a part of them. I always felt...apart. Separate from the reality I lived. Maybe...it was a survival tactic.”

“Maybe...but I never want you to feel like you are a ghost in my home...in our home.”

Yuuri nuzzled into Victor once more before answering, “I...never felt that way. You made me a part of your family from the beginning.” Yuuri shivered and then looked down at his naked body. “I think...I’m cold now.”

Victor reached for the blankets and pulled it around his lover, his mate. “I want you to know...I will always give you what you need. But tonight...I didn’t want to...”

Yuuri laughed. It was self-deprecating and Victor winced. “I’m still trying to understand all of this...everything. I just knew I needed to be close to you. Closer than I was. And feeling you touch me...it helped me to feel real again. I didn’t want to...fade into the dream, to become a ghost, to...disappear.”

“You’re here...with me, my Yuuri.”
“Will you...touch me? More?”

As Victor’s hands began to slowly explore his mate, he noticed everything lost that desperate edge to it. When Yuuri leaned in to claim a kiss, it wasn’t as if his life depended on it. Even sensing Yuuri’s desire, it felt more natural, two lovers giving to one another. Victor’s hand slid down Yuuri’s spine even as the smaller man reached for his hair, pulling Victor in for another kiss. A low moan slipped from Yuuri’s throat as Victor’s fingers began working him open.

Yuuri closed his eyes, focusing on the feeling of Victor’s fingers in him as he fucked himself open. There was no romance in their movements now, just open need. Victor sought Yuuri’s lips once again, tasting Yuuri’s needy moans, feeling Yuuri riding his hand as he cried out in pleasure.

Victor withdrew his hand, hearing Yuuri’s moan of protest before the smaller hand began reaching for Victor’s length. The alpha closed his eyes as he felt Yuuri’s touch pulling his need out of him. He wanted Yuuri on him. And then he was being pushed back into the mattress, Yuuri mounting him, a look of determination in his expression as he guided Victor into his waiting hole.

Yuuri’s lips parted as he slowly took Victor in, a groan escaping his throat as he bottomed out. Victor rested his hands on Yuuri’s hips. He stared up at the beautiful omega, strong and powerful, taking his pleasure as he began riding Victor. The sounds coming from that beautiful throat was intoxicating. How will you be in heat? The thought of it brough Victor’s own groan forward.

Yuuri rose and dropped, his expression lost in pleasure as he took his need from Victor, his hip movements reminding Victor that his mate had studied dance and figure skating for years. Shuji may have taken from Yuuri but he never had this. This was for Yuuri and Victor. This building pressure within Victor begging to be released.

“Yuuri…”

“Vitya,” he answered, leaning forward, seeking Victor’s kiss.

Victor closed the gap, pulling Yuuri in as he felt Yuuri’s tight hole swallow him once more, those hips never ceasing. The kiss turned demanding and desperate even as Victor’s hands guided Yuuri, seeking release. He groaned, hearing Yuuri’s chuckle as the younger man took Victor’s buck into him, dropping to meet him halfway.

“Fuck, Yuuri…”
“That’s what we’re working on,” Yuuri came back with.

There was a relief in Yuuri’s humor, a reassurance that Yuuri wasn’t in that dark place but in the present with Victor. Impatience wearing on Victor, he flipped his lover over and began driving hard into him. Yuuri’s cries met his groans even as he watched Yuuri’s eyes closed, felt those powerful thighs wrap around him, and sank into those hips rising up to meet him in time.

“C-close,” Yuuri moaned.

“Me...tooo...” Victor answered. He then felt that body tighten around him and watched as Yuuri spilled onto his belly. Victor continued to push into him, not letting up until his own release filled Yuuri.

Panting, he rolled off of Yuuri, watching the omega turn onto his side, his legs pulling up in front of him. “It’s a good thing I don’t have to skate tomorrow,” Yuuri snarked, opening one eye.

“No...tomorrow, we head home.”

Yuuri reached for him, ignoring the stickiness between them, and buried himself into Victor’s neck. “And I get to hold my baby again.”

Victor tightened his arms around Yuuri. He loved the way his mate loved his son. Victor didn’t regret keeping Yura clear of the drama but he had to admit, he missed his son as well. Tomorrow...home...

Chapter End Notes

I hope you still love me...and the story goes on. If you see any glaring grammar errors, give me a shout. I read back through this twice but I could have missed something. Thanks so much for reading and supporting me in this story (and in all of my stories).

;)
Find your smiles among your sorrows...

Chapter Summary

The family returns home.

Chapter Notes

TW: Yuuri will talk more about his past with Shuji.

This is where you want to keep your fuzzy blankets and cuddly things nearby. Nature of the beast.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 39: Find your smiles among your sorrows...

Victor watches as Yura curled tighter in Yuuri’s arms, both of them sleeping off their presumed jetlag. We only went to Moscow that’s barely a time difference. Victor shook his head in amusement before slipping quietly into the other parts of the house. He knew the need for closeness between the little boy and omega. Yuuri had scented their son thoroughly before they left for the airport and upon return wouldn’t let him out of his sight. The little blonde’s rebellious nature vanished at the sight of Yuuri and would have followed him like a shadow unbidden even if the omega hadn’t asked.

While that warmed Victor to see, something else gave him serious pause. While they were in public, moving from the airport to the home, the omega kept looking behind him, fearful eyes ever watching for Shuji. Victor hated to break the news that Shuji had evaded capture, unsure how Yuuri would take it. The reaction was scary. As the words left Victor’s mouth he watched the brown eyes fade from focus, then settle on the floor, staying there for the longest time. Yuuri remained perfectly still, simply staring at the hideous carpet in front of him. Finally, he nodded and stated in a determined voice, “It’s time to get Yura.” Victor wasn’t sure how to take that, but at least Yuuri was moving again.

At least we’re safely back home. Glancing back towards the bedroom where his mate and son slept, he knew he needed to follow up on his concerns. He reached out to the detective Cameron via cell.
“So any luck tracking him?”

Cameron’s voice failed to hide his frustration, “It’s like he vanished. If he’s still in Russia, you’d think he’d be easy to find.”

Victor laughed, good old fashioned racism was something Russia had in spades. “With somewhere near 1,500 Japanese in all of Russia, you would think...but how did he hide and, more to the point, how did he make his way into a private party?” Victor mused.

“That was actually the easy part,” Cameron groaned. “The ISU has some of the most laxed safety precautions I’ve ever seen, they were nowhere prepared to keep out a stalker, much less one that knew them from the inside. He hid himself among the catering crew and just walked in. It’s probable he also was at the competition, but decided to approach Mr. Katsuki during the banquet as there were less people and even less security there.”

Victor tapped the console table beneath the painting of Yura’s mother. He had to admit it, they were too exposed to be safe, the entire sport was. The only reason most of the younger skaters were so safe was because of very heavy parent involvement. But that did little for the coaches and older skaters. “I’m just worried Yuuri isn’t safe with him moving about. I have skaters to take to Sochi in two more weeks and I’m afraid to leave his side. But I’m also afraid to take him with me.”

Across the line Victor could hear Cameron sigh. It was clear the detective was reluctant to respond but finally conceded, “As an alpha, I know where I’d be.”

Victor did, too, and he couldn’t conscientiously leave Yuuri unprotected. Glancing up at the painting, he could see Yelena agreeing with him.

Getting dressed for work, Victor continued to mull it over in his head. At least they had the protection of this home in a good neighborhood and Yuuri would be with Olga and Nicolai all day. That thought gave him the confidence he needed to pull on his trainers and prepare to leave. He pressed a kiss onto Yuuri’s forehead and received a sleepy protest. Chuckling, he murmured. “Go back to sleep. I was just heading to work.”

Walking through the building, he talked with Pyotr and Mikhail and the other three skaters going to Sochi. “I don’t know what to do,” he stated honestly.
“Coach, you’ve got to stay with Yuuri,” Alexie argued.

“I agree,” echoed Mikhail. “Pyotr can handle us and I’ll be his backup.”

Victor smiled, this had evidently already been discussed in his absence. “I hate to abandon you all at the final but if something were to happen and I couldn’t get to Yuuri…”

“We know, Vitya,” Pyotr cut him off. “Katya said herself that she wants to hide Yuuri away. I think we all feel the need to protect him. So, you do what you need for your family. I’ll pull Ivan or Dmitry to go to Sochi.”

“Georgi’s wife is so close to delivering…”

Pytor was quick to counter the weak argument, “And we can give that to him...I don’t mind the travel. You and Yuuri handled Rostelecom. You’ve been to three major events. And that creep is clearly out there. This time, he only approached Yuuri and accosted him; what would he do next time he got close? You can’t risk it until he’s apprehended. Let someone else handle this.”

Victor shoved his hand through his hair. He knew...he couldn’t be at two places at once. It still caused some worry. Resigned, he headed upstairs to Yakov’s office to inform him of the change in plans.

The old coach wasn’t surprised. “Just like Yelena...once you set your mind to protect someone, nothing gets in your way.”

Victor looked up, “But this threat can actually get to Yuuri.”

Yakov put down the documents he was reading over and crossed to the younger man. “You don’t think Kostya couldn’t actually get to Yelena...or Yura?”

Victor felt the breath knocked from his chest as he collapsed into the nearest chair. Yakov was right, he had been right even back then. Victor lived in fear their plan would fail. He had three different legal documents stating Yura belonged to him because of that. He looked up at the old coach who had seen him through all of the failed romances that came before Yelena, all the
worthless men he dated, all the heartbreak from when it ended badly...and they all ended badly. “At least...Yelena and Yuuri aren’t bums,” he stated weakly.

Yakov shook his head, that fatherly expression settling in over his coach’s mask. “Vitya, you were never a...what was it you called it...a bum magnet. You try to fix people, fix their lives, fix their situation. You rescue those who need saving. Just like with Makkachin. Even when you thought you would be omega, you were trying to make things better for the person you were with. That’s not an alpha or omega trait. That’s a Victor trait. You are kind. You seek the best in people. You love wholeheartedly. And it took you awhile to find someone that would love you in the same way. And you found two someones. That’s more than most people get.”

Victor blushed, “But Yelena and I…”

Yakov waived off his protests. “I know Yelena and you did not have a traditional mating...but no one could doubt that she loved you, and that you loved her. But this thing that you have with Yuuri...it far surpasses any relationship you have had before. It’s complete, and a perfect match for you both. So...protect it. It’s as precious as being Yura’s father.”

Victor sniffed, feeling his emotions overwhelming him and nodded towards his mentor. “I think...I need to go home to Yuuri and figure out how we’re going to do this.”

“Do what you need to do and know we have everything covered here.”

Victor found Yuuri sitting in the middle of the living room floor, his computer at one side, two textbooks spread out, and a very intense expression on his face. In other words, Yuuri in study mode. Victor stifled a laugh at the look of the young man. He had done well in school, but Yuuri took it to a whole new level. Yura was stretched out on the couch, his foot dangling off the edge, reading quietly...and listening to someone’s iPhone. Victor narrowed his eyebrows and picked up the rose gold phone, studying the music his son was listening to when he heard a huff from Yuuri as he blew his bangs out of his face.

Victor smiled, seeing the sharp focus in the brown eyes again, that spark of Yuuri-life. “Do you need some help, solnyshko?”

And eyebrow quirked up, “I’ve got a final exam to prepare for and I’m not really making any
progress organizing my notes or preparing any arguments.”

Victor narrowed his eyebrows and glanced at his son. “Should we go to another room?”

Shaking his head, Yuuri closed his computer and stood up. “I think I need to go study in your room now that you’re home. Is that okay?”

Victor nodded, watching Yuuri take frustrated steps out of the room. Yura pulled the earbud from his ear before stating, “He’s not happy.”

The father looked down at his young son, “I don’t think he’s unhappy...Yuuri has been denied so many things that now that he’s getting the chance to take classes, he values them and doesn’t want to mess up.”

Yura looked past his father and tapped his lip thoughtfully. “I think Yuuri works too hard.”

*I’ve noticed that, too.* “Do you?”

Yura nodded as he sat up. “He’s either taking care of me or working with you. I don’t think Yuuri gets enough Yuuri-time. And when he does he crams it full of school or language classes. That’s not fun.”

Victor hummed as he considered his son’s words. In his own childish vocabulary Yura had put the pin in the matter. Yuuri worked, constantly. He was driven, but at some point he should relax, and reward himself. “I think...you may be right. Before he came to us, he had a lot of time to himself.”

Yura sat up and turned. “Even though he lived with that bad man.”

Victor blinked, his lips parting as he took in his son’s words. “What do you know about that?”

Yura shrugged, “He hurt Yuuri and made him sad.” Then the little boy narrowed his eyes, recalling something that he noticed often. “I don’t think he let Yuuri go outside a lot. Sometimes Yuuri just sits outside and disappears.”
Victor sat down on the couch next to his son, “Disappears?”

Yura struggled with words, “Like...he’s there but not.”

Victor felt like someone stole his breath as he realized Yuuri had been living two lives. “I thought I was paying attention to his needs.”

Yura shrugged and added, “He hides things. He doesn’t know I’m watching.”

“What kinds of things?”

“When he’s sad. His voice sounds different. He makes himself sound happy. Like you used to do sometimes.”

Victor thinned his lips, guilt sliding across his expression. Of course Yura would be able to read him. Even at five...well, almost six, he noticed everything. Then he honed in on the next thing Yura revealed.

“Sometimes he hides food.”

Victor frowned at that revelation but was honestly unsurprised. “The bad man didn’t always let Yuuri eat.”

Yura considered this. With a huff, he hugged himself but he really wanted to hug his Yuuri. “The bad man was at Moscow?”

Victor nodded. Victor would love to shield Yura from all of this but at this point, secrets were dangerous. “He threatened Yuuri but Yuuri was very brave.”

Yura shook his head, “I think...he hid being afraid. He had a bad dream earlier and then he got up.”
The alpha pulled his son into his arms. He needed to hug Yuuri, too...but his son was a close second. He felt the little boy snuggle into his scent and then he felt the tears, the boy sniffing but keeping his tears tucked into Victor’s shirt. Running his hand up and down his son’s back, he swallowed his own tears.

Finally, Yura sat up and looked at his father. “Sometimes you have to cry for someone, you know...because they can’t cry themselves.”

Victor carded through the blond hair, “You think he’s hiding his tears?”

Yura’s eyes looked past his father’s shoulder towards the bedroom where Yuuri disappeared and nodded. “He’s...very busy.”

Victor closed his eyes and sighed. *Of course*. Victor did the same thing at first...when they lost Yelena. He didn’t hide from his son...he included him in the busyness. Taking care of Yura and his job became consuming...until Victor broke.

“I think...you’ve had a very important talk with me and really made me think. Do you mind if I go talk to Yuuri, now?”

The little boy nodded, sliding out of Victor’s lap. “I’m going to go help Olga.”

Victor smiled as he watched the little boy skip off. *If only we could all bounce back so easily.*

In the bedroom, he found Yuuri stretched out in the middle of the bed, buried in his book, highlighting as he read and pausing to write notes here and there. Victor turned the chair around and sat backwards as he watched the omega work. Finally, Yuuri stopped and looked up.

“Is...something wrong?”

“I don’t know,” Victor answered thoughtfully. “I’m just wondering if you are...avoiding something.”
Yuuri shrugged. “I have exams.”

Victor could hear the challenge in the voice, but still pressed on. “When?”

Yuuri glanced down guiltily. “About two weeks…”

“Yet you’re cramming like it’s in a few days.” Victor rose, coming over to sit on the edge of the bed. “So...tell me what’s going on.”

Yuuri set his book down, the highlighters and pencil falling into the sheets nearby, and hugged his knees to his chest. “I’ve...been having bad dreams. The last one shook me up a little. I was hoping that if I worked my mind it would clear him from my thoughts.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

Yuuri shook his head slowly. “Not really...but I probably should. It’s just...disturbing.”

Victor took that in, “What happened?”

Yuuri pulled at the cuff of his pajama bottoms, “I was sleeping...in my dream, you know...and then I felt your hands on me moving up my body. I could feel myself responding, waking up slowly to your touch, but I couldn’t see you.” Yuuri stiffened, the memory of the dream pulling on him. “You were behind me. And then...you were pushing into me...without any...prep. And that’s when I knew it wasn’t you. I heard him speak and...and...he wouldn’t let me go.” His breath hitched and a tear escaped, sliding down his cheek. “I said it hurt. H-he said it was...because I was a bad omega. A real omega produced enough slick.” Yuuri lifted brown eyes to meet his, tears threatening to break dam. “H-he hurt me so bad, Victor...over and over again. I looked up what you meant when you said anal fissures. I think...I had tears inside. I think...no, I know he would hurt me again if he got his hands on me and I’m scared. I’m afraid of reliving that pain, but also of everything he can take away.” Yuuri sniffed as he gave over to his tears. Victor moved across the bed and soon Yuuri was wrapped up in his arms.

The alpha pressed kisses into his hair as he soothed the omega in his arms. “I think...I was so focused on making sure you were safe that I didn’t check on how you were feeling...not like I should. I’ll do better next time.”
Yuuri allowed himself to calm before speaking. “How...did you know?”

Victor smiled, “Yura...he notices more than you realize.”

Yuuri nodded, settling into Victor’s chest. “I know...he wants to fight my battles. But he’s a kid...he shouldn’t carry those kinds of burdens.”

“If he asks...and you feel comfortable telling him, Yelena and I always believed in honesty to his questions.”

Yuuri nodded. “I think I was still denying everything coming back up. I’d been doing so much better. I didn’t want to regress and I thought if I admitted what was going on, it would set me back.”

“Have you been better all of this time or have you been avoiding?”

Yuuri considered those words before finally admitting, “I think lately I’ve been avoiding and filling my time. I couldn’t...not with my heat. But after...I just didn’t want to pull it back up. I thought...I’ll just put it behind me and keep moving forward.”

“Except it’s sat there festering.”

Yuuri nodded, swallowing, feeling raw and opened up inside. “What...now?”

Victor inhaled deeply, “We talk to Abramovich and see if you need to go more often. We cut back your workload...”

“I’m not giving up the ice,” Yuuri argued stubbornly.

Victor smiled, happy to see Yuuri refused to surrender what he loved. “That’s not what I’m suggesting. Yura thinks you need to take some Yuuri time. I happen to agree.”
Yuuri groaned, and pulled away to sit up, “I’ve lost so much time...I can’t slow down.”

Victor kept hold of his hand, refusing to break to contact. “There is no rule that says you have to learn everything at once. You get to do this at your own pace. Classes, working, parenting, relationships...all of these take from you. And you...tend to be shy and introverted. You aren’t restoring your energy. How do you need to spend your quiet time?”

Yuuri hugged himself as he thought about it. “Before...Shuji, I would spend time alone on the ice.” Yuuri laughed, remembering. “It would be school figures, you’ll think this is silly but I looked up some of Ulrich Salchow’s original patterns and tried to recreate them.” He looked over and saw Victor wide-eyed, “yeah, that guy was a madman. And then I’d skate through different programs, some of mine...some of...yours.” He blushed at that admission. “I had to set timers because I’d lose myself on the ice...but that was where I was most at peace.” Silence stretched out between them, Yuuri waiting, resting his head against Victor’s chest as the alpha thought about Yuuri’s words.

“A part of me needs to keep you close as much as possible,” Victor began quietly. “Shuji has made us aware that he is a very present threat and until they catch him and put him away, I won’t feel comfortable leaving you alone. So...I won’t be going to Sochi for the Grand Prix Final.”

Yuuri looked up at him with surprise, his eyes sharp with protest. “Vitya...this is your job…”

“It is my job...and I have eight assistant coaches beneath me. It wasn’t hard to find volunteers. I didn’t even have to ask. For now...I’m staying close to home. It’s fine. My skaters are fine. They, too, feel my place is here.”

Yuuri sighed. “Mikhail and Alexie…”

“All of them.” Victor looked into the brown eyes, “You are important to them.”

Yuuri smiled and raised an eyebrow, “Because of you.”

“Parly, but I think...because of you. I don’t think you’ve realized that you’ve already started carving a place into the skate club. You have a power, a strength that they all gravitate towards.”

Yuuri looked away shyly. “So...what now?”
“I’m going to go in later and take the afternoon, early evening shift. I think if we talk to Mehar, she’ll bring Yura with her kids to the rink.”

“She won’t mind,” Yuuri assured him.

“I want...you to take time on ice. After the lessons, after the parents have picked up their children, I want you to skate. Send Yura to me. Take the time you need. Just remember…” He made sure Yuuri was looking at him, large brown eyes taking in every word. “No jumps...not yet...and not without a spotter. I’m not joking, nothing beyond half rotations.”

Yuuri huffed a laugh but nodded. “And my sessions?”

“We’ll get them scheduled before the kids arrive. Now...I know a couple of my skaters have you working with them. We’ll settle them in between your sessions...maybe Tuesday and Thursday. I also...want you to continue talking to the nutritionist.”

“But I’m eating!” Yuuri stopped, even he heard the petulant whine in his voice.

Victor thinned his lips at Yuuri’s defensive tone and the blatant lie. “You are...and you’re hiding food. So there is still an issue.”

Yuuri’s eyes widened in surprise. “I...didn’t know you knew,” he whispered. “Are you mad?”

He shook his head, resting his hands on Yuuri’s hips. “I’m uncomfortable that there is food around the house, that’s unhealthy. But more importantly I want you to make peace with food...and I’m not sure what the issue is. I’m here any time you want to talk about it. But...I never expected you to be better overnight.” He smiled, smoothing Yuuri’s hair as he settled his mate into his lap, taking in those cautious brown eyes. “We fell in love in the middle of that...it doesn’t mean you’re finished healing. I’m not finished healing. Maybe we’ll always have a part of us that has to be lanced and drained periodically. And that’s okay, too. We take care of each other.”

Yuuri sniffed, seeking to hide in Victor’s neck but the alpha held him back. Blinking up at him, Yuuri whispered, “I’m not very good at being taken care of.”
“Me, neither,” Victor conceded. “Let’s figure it out together. We’ll meet each other halfway.”

That evening as Yuuri finished his meal, he handed his napkin to Victor and it was then that Olga picked up on what was going on. As Yuuri retreated for Yura’s bath, she turned to Victor. “Why didn’t I see it?”

“He’s good...but he forgot to take into account a five-year-old that is always watching. Yura says he hides things. We just have to watch. I know...he doesn’t mean to. He’s been through so much and this fresh encounter with Shuji...I’m afraid it’s set him back in his recovery.”

Olga growled, something that was rare for omegas, but happened, “Someone ought to hang that bastard and give him a slow and miserable death!”

Victor’s eyes widened, she was a passionate woman and he loved that she cared for Yuuri so deeply. “I heartily agree...but he’s still free and I’m worried he’ll try to get at Yuuri again.”

Her eyes narrowed, thinking of weak spots in their home. “What should we do?”

“Keep the house locked down. I don’t want to give him a way in. And someone should always accompany Yuuri when he’s out. I’ll be doing a lot of that and I’ll bring Katya on board as well as inform the Altins. Everyone at work knows.”

“He was doing so well,” she lamented.

“He made us believe he was doing so well...but he’s had to hide everything from Shuji. The good and the bad...and he’s had a twisted view of what was bad.”

“Food,” she said quietly as understanding finally settled on her.

Victor nodded. “That and so many normal things...and all of them used to convince Yuuri he’s a bad omega.”
She shook her head, “But he’s so good for Yura, so good for you...I’ve never seen you so happy.”

Victor smiled at her words and nodded, closing his eyes. “What was it that Yelena would say? Find your smiles among your sorrows.”

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Yuuri turned in the bed he shared with his mate, seeking the comfort of his scent, the reassurance that the man next to him was indeed Victor. “Don’t let him take me,” he whispered and felt those strong arms tighten around him. Victor stared at the ceiling in the darkness as Yuuri fell back to sleep breathing his scent. *He can’t have you. Even if you didn’t want me, I wouldn’t let him lay a hand on you. My brave, beautiful Yuuri...keep fighting...keep fighting.*

Chapter End Notes

I have no more fingernails! I blame this story!
Secret Places

Chapter Summary

Two steps forward, one step back...Yuuri continues to work towards recovery.

Chapter Notes

Hey, all...I'm out of town dealing with life matters but had this ready so I thought I'd share. Hope you enjoy it. For those waiting for a Gravity chapter, it's in the works but I can't stay at the computer for long periods. (((back spasms)))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 40: Secret Places

Yuuri’s eyes fluttered open, Victor’s scent hitting him as soon as he woke up. Yuuri surged up in his arms and kissed along the alpha’s chin.

Victor groaned softly as his eyes opened and he could tell his omega wanted attention. “My Yuuri...” he murmured as he became more aware and it was then that he noticed Yuuri’s scent though aroused also held a sour edge of distress. He gently held the omega back and searched out those brown eyes, seeing the fear in his expression. “Oh, love...you’ve had another nightmare.”

“I just...need to know you’re here,” he whispered.

Victor pulled him into his embrace, leaning his cheek into that crop of brown hair as he tightened his arms around the slight form. Yuuri was being reevaluated later that morning by Dr. Abramovich. Yuuri was nervous but knew it was what he needed. What Victor struggled with at the moment was whether or not making love to Yuuri was a healthy choice for the omega. But as Yuuri ground his erection into Victor’s though, he felt his resolve slipping.

“Please,” Yuuri whimpered softly.
Victor slowly rolled Yuuri onto his back. Then, keeping his weight off of the omega, he asked gently, “Where are you?”

“In bed with my Vitya,” Yuuri answered softly, vulnerable brown eyes staring up at Victor.

“And how clear are your thoughts?” The alpha studied the omega and fought against the urge to lean in and trace a line of kisses along that jaw.

“Very...I know I had a bad dream...but I also know this is what I want,” Yuuri leaned up on his elbows to brush kisses over the alpha’s cheek before continuing, his voice begging. “You...make me feel good, Vitya. I know you won’t hurt me.”

“I never want to hurt you,” Victor stated with quiet resolve. “That’s why I have to make sure. That’s why I have to check in when you wake me up with kisses and fear in your eyes.”

Yuuri nodded, his expression sober and serious. “I think...I still had some of the dream clinging to me when I first woke up...but I’m fully here, now. Will you...I want…”

As Yuuri’s voice faltered, Victor prompted gently, “What do you want, darling?”

“You,” he whispered softly, his fingers going up to trace along Victor’s chin. Victor followed that touch and stretched his body across the top of Yuuri’s, their legs tangling together while Yuuri’s arms wrapped around him, his lips demanding response, his tongue teasing the alpha’s mouth open, deepening the kiss.

Victor’s hands slid down Yuuri’s side, his fingers finding the hem of the omega’s t-shirt and was soon pushing it up, breaking from the kiss long enough to pull it free, Yuuri’s hands making quick work of his own shirt as he rose from the omega’s body. Yuuri then started working Victor’s pajama pants down, his hand massaging into the alpha’s ass.

“How is it that you’re ass is still so sculpted?” Yuuri’s voice was sultry taking in the perfection in his hands. He blushed, thinking of how a teenaged Yuuri would never believe that this amazing ass was now in his hands.

Victor had given into the urge to kiss along Yuuri’s jaw but that blunt question caused him to pull back, laughing. “You do realize I still work out regularly, don’t you? And I have to keep it tight,
for you.”

Yuuri huffed, his hands now going down his own body critically. Victor caught the direction of Yuuri’s thoughts and pulled those hands away. “You are beautiful, my Yuuri. Let go of those thoughts and trust me.”

Yuuri sniffed but nodded. So many years of being told he wasn’t enough, chubby, ugly, frigid...he felt those words in every pocket of fat he found in his skin. “I...I want to.”

“I know...and maybe one day I’ve said it enough that you believe me.”

Yuuri blinked at the tears that threatened to spill. He hated melting down when they made love. Victor always waited on him, made sure he was present. But it frustrated Yuuri that it was needed. As he still beneath the alpha, he felt Victor’s lips back on his jaw, progressing towards his neck. What would it be like to have your bond?

He didn’t ask those words. They felt dangerous at the moment. Yuuri’s own thoughts were loud and crowding, a constant battle.

Victor’s lips were now teasing Yuuri’s nipple, and the omega let those ideas slip away as he arched into the wet warmth. “Vitya...” he moaned, his fingers now tangling into the alpha’s hair. He combed his fingers through them after realizing he had pulled it, soothing the scalp and wondering about when Victor’s hair was long.

Victor looked up and met Yuuri’s brown eyes and the omega realized he let his thoughts wander. “We don’t have to...” he murmured reassuring.

Yuuri nodded. “We do...I need this...but...” He stopped, looking for words to describe where he was at, what he needed. “I’m not grounding well. Maybe...can we...” With a hand on Victor’s hip, he urged the alpha over. Victor let him guide him into place.

“You want on top,” Victor murmured, a delicious smile playing on his lips. “Do you want to ride...or fuck me...”

Yuuri smiled at the hope in that latter phrase. “We will...not tonight. Not with my head all scattered. But I promise...we will. For now...I want to be in control and still feel you within me.”
Victor nodded giving himself over to the omega. “I still need to open you up,” he reminded Yuuri.

The omega winked and leaned forward to kiss him, dragging the kiss down his chin and along his jaw. When he rose up, Victor could see Yuuri’s hand working himself open. Watching Yuuri ride on his own hand, Victor was mesmerized, there were moments that Yuuri showed him how sensual he was. Victor knew this was just the tip of the iceberg and squirmed in anticipation of the day that the omega became the sex god he knew was in there. Then the omega smirked, pulling his hand free, and murmured, “Are you ready?”

Victor, wide-eyes and at a loss for words, could only nod. His hands settling on Yuuri’s hips. The omega reached between his legs and lined himself up with the alpha’s cock already dripping with precum. Yuuri closed his eyes, his head tilting back to reveal his long neck as he slowly lowered himself down. Victor then had to close his eyes and focus on staying in control. *Fuck!* One benefit to skating was that Yuuri always tightened up and Victor had to breathe through his control. One of his hands moved to Yuuri’s abdomen and he could feel the omega also taking measured breaths as he finally bottomed out.

They remained still, their bodies settling. And then Yuuri rose up the smallest amount before dropping once more and Victor realized Yuuri had a little more to take in. Yuuri remained still once more before sliding his hand down his side and covering the alpha’s. The other sought the hand on his stomach, fingers lacing into the older man’s as brown eyes rested on him.

“Vitya…”

“My Yuuri…”

The omega smiled, reaching for him, pulling him up so they could kiss, Victor’s arms now wrapping around him, Yuuri’s hands sliding over his shoulders and around his neck as they kissed hungrily.

One thing Victor noticed about Yuuri even those months ago when they just met were those naturally powerful thighs. Victor imagined them wrapped around a pole to show the world just how beautifully strong the omega could be. Right now, they had Victor between them and Yuuri ground into Victor, rising up, and letting himself fall again. As Victor continued to kiss the omega, swallowing his moans, he didn’t know what turned him on more...the feeling of Yuuri’s wet heat or watching the omega get lost in his own sensations.
Victor guided Yuuri with firm hands on his hips but the alpha knew Yuuri was in control, feeling those muscles bunch up and relax as that ass took Victor in deeper each time. Victor watched Yuuri’s expression become more open and Victor knew he couldn’t hide a secret in their bed. The omega babbled in Japanese and Victor truly wished he knew the language, knew the words Yuuri made when he was lost in passion. He could imagine Yuuri confessing every secret, giving himself over to every word of love.

And then Yuuri’s arms tightened around him. “I’m close,” he whispered into Victor’s neck.

“Come for me, Yuuri, my love,” Victor invited softly.

Yuuri smiled into Victor’s scent before sucking a mark into his skin. “My Vitya,” he murmured.

“Always,” Victor promised with a groan, his hands tightening on Yuuri’s thighs, feeling his need about to topple over. And then Yuuri’s body tightened in his arms, spilling his seed in the space between them. Victor could feel the orgasmic spasms of the small body enveloping him. 

And then he was gone, enfolding Yuuri in his arms as he released into the warmth of the smaller body.

After, they laid beside one another. Victor had cleaned them both up, pulling the quilt over the two of them. Yuuri skated pictures on his arm and Victor smiled softly towards his omega. Then those brown eyes looked up at him, a sharpness deep within. “I’m going to have to look at those other hormone methods of birth control.”


Yuuri leveled a look at Victor, so oblivious in his bliss that he couldn’t even remember that they had forgotten condoms. “Because we never remember the other things.”

Victor sighed as he remembered his promise to Yuuri. “I don’t know what to say.”

Yuuri huffed. “We’re both guilty. We get too caught up in one another.”

The alpha chewed his lip for a moment, not ready to allow himself to relax. “I don’t want you to be sick.”
“We can try the oral ones...find the right level, and hope for the best.”

Victor tightened his arms around Yuuri. He wanted to believe in the omega’s optimism but he knew Yuuri well enough to know that he was hiding his doubts. Brushing his lips through Yuuri’s hair, he settled the omega down to sleep.

Yuuri sat curled up in the oversized, armchair in Abramovich’s office. He liked this chair. He could wallow in it, twisting into a comfortable position. Right now, his head rested on the arm, his legs hung over the opposite arm. Staring up at the ceiling, he recounted the events at the banquet, his voice disconnected like he was a disinterested observer.

Dr. Abramovich noticed and wrote in his notes the monotone of his voice, the way Yuuri stared off in space, the stick-to-the-facts recounting of events. “Yuuri, you’ve given this to me like a police report. But please, how do you feel?”

The omega shrugged. He wasn’t meaning to be obstinate. He was just afraid if he gave this matter a voice, it would overwhelm him. He stared up at the ceiling, closing his eyes, let ting himself be still. The doctor waited. He’d worked with Yuuri enough to know this was one of the ways the omega recentered his emotions.

“I feel...afraid. I’m...waiting for the shoe to drop, waiting for it all to fall apart. And his voice...my anxiety now carries his voice. Every critical thought sounds like him. I don’t know if I’m remembering things he said to me, anticipating what he would say, or if it’s my anxiety.” He felt tears slide down his cheeks slowly. “I’m not good enough,” he whispered.

“What’s enough?” Abramovich prompted quietly.

“Victor...he deserves an omega that is amazing, not someone broken like me. Not someone that has nightmares of him turning into the monster that tortured me for fourteen years.”

“You are having trouble accepting his love,” the doctor stated.
Yuuri nodded. “I mean...he’s patient and kind and understands when I mess up. I just hate...disappointing him.”

“Has he said he was disappointed?”

Yuuri thought about it before shaking his head slowly. “But...I mean, I hide things from him.”

“What kind of things?”

“There are the obvious things. I mean...the food’s not too shocking. He seemed to think it was perfectly normal. I guess...normal for me. But...he doesn’t know that I stash away other things.”

“Is this something you need to keep secret?”

“It’s something I need...to stop. I don’t want to hide things away. But it seems worse since Moscow.”

The doctor hummed at the thought. “You were threatened. This is part of your defenses coming into play.”

Yuuri sighed heavily, “Maybe? I didn’t think about it like that. So...what do I do?”

Abramovich smiled, at least this patient was active in his recovery even if he thought otherwise. “I think that it would be important for you to come clean with Victor, for you to show him your hiding places. Doing this will put him in a place of trust, though. Do you trust Victor?”

Yuuri nodded without hesitation. “Very much so.”

“Then I am going to give you some homework. I want you to reveal all of your hiding places to Victor.”

Yuuri frowned as he considered the task. It felt huge, overwhelming. Chewing his lip, he pushed back a little. “I...don’t know. All of them?”
“Yes,: the therapist answered, not budging. ‘I’m not putting a deadline on this but I think this is something you want as well.’

Yuuri found Victor in his office when his session ended. The omega would be going to sessions three days a week for the foreseeable future. As he entered the office the alpha pushed his chair back from his desk and soon had the omega in his lap, Yuuri seeking out his scent. Victor held onto him until he felt settled. Sitting upright, Yuuri took his hand and had Victor stand up and follow him.

The first hiding space was near the practice rink where Yuuri taught the littles. It was a loose brick in the structure that Yuuri pried open. Behind it rested scraps of paper and Victor soon realized it was weight slips from the nutritionist. “Why did you hide this?”

Yuuri turned from facing the wall but couldn’t bring his eyes to meet Victor’s. “You wanted me to gain...this was when I lost. I...didn’t want you to be mad at me.”

Victor sighed, gathering Yuuri into his arms. “I know your weight is going to fluctuate, sweetheart. I don’t want to put pressure on you. I only want you to be healthy. For your sake.”

“For so long...my weight was something that displeased him. If...I failed, he’d take away my food and lock me away.”

“So you counted calories.”

Yuuri nodded. “I...didn’t want the ice to be taken away and once I started hiding the results, it...stayed with me.”

Victor pursed his lips as he thought about how Yuuri’s perception of the world was so different from his own. The abuse still held on even after Yuuri was in a safe place. He pulled back to look into Yuuri’s eyes. Holding Yuuri’s gaze, he stated emphatically, “I will not take the ice away from you. I may restrict you for your own sake, but you can continue to skate figures and patterns all you’d like. Yakov and I talked about it. I explained that it was a calming mechanism for you. He agrees that you should continue to be allowed this even as your weight fluctuates.”
“Really?” Yuuri’s eyes were wide with disbelief.

Victor nodded, hugging the omega close. “Really. I can tell this condition actually adds to your stress and that could hold you back in your recovery. And...I trust you.”

“Yakov watches me sometimes,” the omega murmured, his chin dipping down guiltily.

Victor nodded, unsurprised. “While I was gone, he was making sure you were not being hassled as your heat approached. He also knew your reputation from before and wanted to see where you were at.”

“I like helping the younger skaters...but they were calling me coach,” he dropped his chin bashfully. “I didn’t feel like I deserved it. I didn’t put the time in. Not like you and Georgi and the other coaches.”

“Time...was stolen from you. However, you had the talent and now you have a new talent for teaching, and passing this on, developing. I’d like to see you continue.” Victor’s jaw tightened as he closed his eyes and Yuuri could tell anger was boiling up in him. Opening, he added, “We were all cheated not being allowed to compete against you.”

Yuuri blushed, turning away to replace the brick. He sighed as he thought about what he was working through. It wasn’t just stolen time, it was stolen opportunity, stolen experiences, stolen dreams. Tapping the brick with his finger, he murmured, “I...have to show you all of my hiding places. But the rest are not here.”

“Do you want to do them all at once or take them one at a time?”

He turned to face Victor, slipping into his arms. “I think...one at a time. It’s...a lot of emotions to process.” He rested his head on Victor’s shoulder while the alpha continued to rock him in his arms, the motion soothing. Finally, Yuuri spoke again. “I...didn’t mean to hide. It’s just that...I’ve done this for so long.”

“I know, solnyshko. I’m not mad. I just want you to get better. We’ll work through this together.” Victor guided Yuuri from the bricks and down toward the rink where he’d meet with the children in a little less than an hour. “Why...don’t we skate together.”
Soon, they were both in a pair of skates. They only had half an hour but Yuuri loved how they felt together when skating at the outdoor rink in Moscow. It wasn’t long before they fell into a rhythm on the ice, and Yuuri then smiled as he recognized the song Victor hummed, *Heart and Soul*. With a laugh, he gave himself over to it, moving in Victor’s skilled hands and letting the alpha lead. Neither realized they drew a crowd watching them until several tiny hands clapped excitedly and Yura’s voice could be heard saying proudly, “That’s my Mom and Dad.”

As Yuuri turned in Victor’s arms, he took in the watchful smiles of not only his students, but several other skaters from the rink…and Yakov. He ducked down embarrassed and missed the curious frown on Yakov’s face. Victor spotted it, though, and knew he’d be heading into Yakov’s office once he left Yuuri to his students. A quick kiss just in front of Yuuri’s ear left the omega a blushing mess and the little ones in a mix of “aaaws” and “eeews”.

Yura declared, “They do that all the time.”

Victor was laughing as he found his guards and followed his old coach. “I forgot how fun that could be,” he declared.

The elder coach nodded and then indicated his skates. “Change out of your skates and meet me upstairs.”

Victor frowned but hurried to do as he was told. Yakov rarely issued a direct order to the head coach but when he did, Victor tended to fall in and listen. Upstairs, Yakov stood near the window watching the skaters on the ice. Victor waited, a skill he was gaining as he dealt with Yuuri.

Finally, the coach turned and studied Victor thoughtfully. “Have you considered bonding with that boy?”

Victor was taken aback. Coach Feltsman had never pushed into his personal life. Not to this level, anyway. “I mean…I want to. But Yuuri…he’s not ready. He spent fourteen years with an unwanted alpha in his head. I was even considering more non-traditional paths of courtship. Maybe…a proposal with rings and such.”

“An indirect mark that he is yours,” the coach hummed but then shook his head, a frown deepening with concern. “I worry that Kobayashi might make a move on him again.”
Victor frowned. It wasn’t that he hadn’t considered it himself. “It’s hard to balance...I want what’s right for Yuuri, I want him to have choice...but I also want him to be safe.”

“Shuji’s been spotted back in Japan but then he blended in and got away once more. I suspect he has multiple identities. He likely has a number of financial resources as well. He’s a predator that’s hidden under our noses for years.”

“Not so hidden. I spoke with a Japanese coach at Skate America. They knew...and because of that, kept their skaters away from him. But no one reported him.”

Yakov shook his head in frustration. “Why didn’t they report him when he was discovered to have messed with Katsuki?”

“Yuuri said their attorneys said there was nothing to be done. Yuuri was trapped. It just...all feels wrong.” Victor shook his hands in frustration before facing his coach. “I can’t help but wonder if there was some misinformation. How could that have been legal? Why would he have been forced to live with a man who forced a bond on him?”

Yakov’s eyes became distant as he chose his words. “Yuuri would have gone willingly. He’d been conditioned over the previous years to accept his fate with Shuji Kobayashi.”

“The early bonding...but why change his method now? He literally kidnapped that American skater. That’s a risky move, and one that failed immediately.”

“That’s a question I wonder as well. He took the time to grab Yuuri early and condition him to do as he was told. And Yuuri mentioned there was another before him. Yuuri didn’t know much but felt they didn’t stay long.”

“Tanaka had a lot of fight left in him,” Victor picked up on Yakov’s thoughts. “He wasn’t conditioned into that life.”

Yakov was stuck on what Victor had told him, “But who was the first?”

Victor shrugged, “What do we know about Shuji from before he became an ISU official?”
Yakov shook his head. “Not much. A mediocre skater that barely made it into seniors before he was forced to retire due to an injury. It was a hard collision with an omega skater.”

Victor whistled. While rare, those did happen. “I don’t suppose there is any footage.”

Yakov’s eyes darkened as he slowly understood Victor’s question, “Old news footage. Why?”

“I wonder... if it was an accident. I wouldn’t be surprised if he was sabotaging the other skater and it backfired.”

Yakov rubbed his forehead as he tried to remember. “Anytime these things happen, there is always a comparison to those American girls. But I think they threw it out because Shuji was injured, the omega was unhurt and continued their career.”

Victor sat in his office, the conversation with his old coach buzzing in his thoughts, performing search after search on Shuji. He had Skype up with Chris sharing his findings.

**ChrisKnowsBest/ Phichit did these searches years ago.**

**PrinceV/ Maybe he missed something.** I was looking at some old news footage from when he skated. I think he purposely tried to take that skater out. There were questions but then Shuji retired and they dropped it. The collision was with an omega skater. Do you think he is one of those who has issues with omegas skating after presentation?

**ChrisKnowsBest/ That’s actually not a bad theory.** It was pretty prevalent in the late 90s and early part of 2k. Remember the epic fight involving Elvis Stojko?

Victor rolled his eyes. JJ wasn’t the first and only annoying Canadian. But in this case, Stojko was just an over-eager Alpha.

**PrinceV/ He’s calmed down in his retirement, and that fight between him and Browning in**
Lillehammer was blown out of proportion. But I think this could explain why he targets Omegas. He tried to take one out, only ended up hurting himself and then the omega recovered and continued their season.

ChrisKnowsBest/ Have you considered reaching out to that Japanese coach you talked to in America?

He hadn’t. So much had happened since he returned to his Yuuri...including their mating. However, after Sochi, their relationship was public. He reached for his phone and searched out her contacts.

Nikiforov-V/ Good morning.

The delay wasn’t long but felt like an eternity when he saw the response.

Yamamoto-A/ You didn’t tell me you were dating Katsuki when we spoke.

Nikiforov-V/ It wasn’t official until I returned home. He’s been staying with me and my son as a Companion Omega.

Yamamoto-A/ He seems happy. I’m glad. He deserves that.

Nikiforov-V/ You had a lot of information from back when it happened. Do you know if Shuji had another omega locked up before Yuuri?

Things were quiet and Victor worried he’d crossed a line with the Japanese coach. He finally left to check on Yuuri, watching the omega work with Mila, patiently explaining what he wanted from her and how to achieve it. His phone buzzing in his pocket drew his attention away from the ice and his make and he frowned as he read the response.

Yamamoto-A/ I contacted my old coach. He said that he thinks there might have been a local skater in his control. Shuji attempted to coach Junior levels but it wasn’t long before he couldn’t get any skaters.
Nikiforov-V/ Impropriety?

Yamamoto-A/ Maybe. His prize was an omega skater named Sato. They were stuck in Juniors for a little longer than necessary and couldn’t attract much international attention. My coach said it was because of Shuji. As soon as she left Shuji she shot up into Seniors and...well, Bronze at the Olympics isn’t a bad way to cap off a career.

Nikiforov-V/ Keep a close eye on your omegas since he’s lost Tanaka.

Yamamoto-A/ I will. I always do. You do the same with Katsuki. He’s a vindictive bastard.

Nikiforov-V/ I have eyes on him as we speak. Thank you.

Yamamoto-A/ You’re welcome.

Yuuri was climbing the stairs as Victor closed out the conversation and put away his phone, the omega easily moving into Victor’s embrace and his warmth. “I need a shower but I know my toes warming up are going to ache,” he pouted into Victor’s shoulder.

The alpha smile, hugging his lover close. “Are you going to skate a while longer?”

Yuuri shook his head. “I think I’m emotionally exhausted. I just want to go home and curl up with Ren.”

“Go shower, then...I’ll see if Mila needs a ride.”

Mila stayed with them until her sister picked them up, her constant chatter keeping Yuuri from sinking totally into his emotions. When Katya arrived, she took one look at her friend and announced, “We need to have breakfast.”
Yuuri nodded. “I’d like that. With Shuji out, I’m not allowed to walk Yura to school.”

She hummed, understanding the restriction but wanting to take care of her friend. “Why don’t I pick you both up and drive you in the morning? Then we can have breakfast and talk.”

“I could use that...but no talking about him.” Yuuri wanted a break from his worry. He seemed to wear it like an old coat, a moth-ridden rag that almost invited the chill.

“She left and Yuuri joined the others in the kitchen as they prepared to eat around the dining table. The omega visibly drooped by Victor’s side and the others looked on with concern. He barely touched his food and Victor finally had Olga put it up for him later.

While Yuuri tended to Yura’s bath, Victor ran one for Yuuri. The omega walked into the bedroom and began to strip, curling up on the comforter in nothing but his underwear. Victor stepped out of the bathroom and smiled indulgently.

“I ran you a bath, love.”

“I don’t think I can make it that far.” And then Yuuri gave a startled gasp as Victor scooped him up and carried him into the bathroom. He only stood the omega up for a moment so he could step out of his briefs before lifting him once more and settling him into the tub. “Join me,” Yuuri whined softly.

Victor smiled. He knew he wouldn’t leave the sleepy omega unattended in the bath. He removed his clothes and added the pile into the hamper before stopping to turn off the lights. The candles he’d lit earlier reflected around the room and Yuuri’s breath gasped.

“I forgot,” he admitted quietly.

“I thought you could use a little less visual noise.”

Yuuri nodded, leaning forward to make room for Victor before settling into the alpha’s arms. He
lifted his hand to cup Victor’s cheek affectionately, before it rested in a loose fist on his shoulder.

Victor could hear the evening of his mate’s breathing even as the jets and warm water soothed their muscles. If Yuuri had noticed the knots Victor carried in his muscles, he said nothing. The alpha wondered what else the omega was carrying.

Chapter End Notes

Victor takes such good care of Yuuri. And who doesn't want to take a bath there! (I would kill for a jetted tub right now.)
Ch. 41: Behind

Yuuri followed Katya inside the diner, glancing over his shoulder, shivering with discomfort. “The weather has an extra strong chill to it,” he commented.

She hummed in agreement letting him have his lie. “Why don’t we sit in the corner booth?”

He nodded, relief filling his expression and he was unable to hide it. He immediately took the wall, running his eyes over the few other diners eating around them. Katya saw the concern in his eyes and smiled an apology up at the waitress as she accepted their menus. Glancing over at her friend, she directed his attention, “Do you want to try and read it?”

Yuuri glanced at the letters and recognized a few common words. Eggs. Juice. Water. But he shook his head in frustration. “I’m not focused enough to work it out. Will you just order me something simple?”

She hummed before rattling off their order to the waitress. Turning back to Yuuri, she told him, “I ordered Grenki...think French toast...with a side of bacon and orange juice.”

“That sounds perfect,” Yuuri answered with appreciation.
“They usually serve it with a side of fresh fruit. I’m hoping for blueberries,” she added. Glancing around the room, she finally rested her eyes on him. “How are you doing, Yuuri?”

The omega shrugged, his eyes tracking around the room studying the customers once more while he straightened the sugar packets absently. Finally, he answered, “I’m...frustrated. I felt I was doing so well and now I think I’m back to where I started.”

Katya pursed her lips as she considered his response. “I disagree, Yuuri. You are much more open, the Yuuri from only a few months ago would not have admitted that much. And you embrace life now. I know you are afraid but who wouldn’t be? That’s a very human response to all that is happening.” She reached over to his hands, taking the packets from them and folding them into her own. “But Yuuri, you don’t let that control you.”

Yuuri listened, glancing up as the waitress placed their food before them and nodded his thanks before turning back to Katya and shaking his head. “I don’t know if that last part is true. I...I’ve turned back to some old habits. Maybe I...never let them go.” He was quiet as he used his fork to cut through the eggy toasted bread. Looking up, he sighed shakily. “What if...something is broken in me? Some irreparable damage that will come up later...I don’t want to hurt Vitya or Yura.”

Katya put her fork down, tilting her head with a sigh. “Oh, Yuuri, you will not hurt them. You love them. That’s what is important.”

“But...I never want to hurt them or put them in danger. What if he...” Yuuri stopped, breathing in and releasing it slowly as he realized he broke his own rule. “Sorry.”

Katya let him sit quietly for a moment, watching as he returned to a calmer state. “It’s fine, Yuuri. We’re friends. And the thing about friendship is that we take the bad with the good. Like Phichit.”

Yuuri hugged himself as he thought about his best friend. “Phichit put his whole life on hold for me.”

She picked up a piece of crispy bacon, using it to point at him, then bit into it with a smile. “He *chose* to do that because he did not want you to be forgotten. He believed someone should be on the outside fighting for you. We will all fight for you. Me, Mehar, Victor, Yura, Olga,” then she laughed and added, “Even Nikolai. You might be surprised how many of Victor’s skaters and coaches would stand up for you.”
Yuuri blushed and shook his head. “Maybe not now,” he murmured as he remembered Alexei and Mikhail.

“We do that because you are important,” Katya continued emphatically. “You are worth it. And we don’t want to see anyone take that away. We just need you to keep fighting with us.” She picked up another piece of bacon holding out at him.

Yuuri drew a shaky breath but his nod was determined. “Thanks. I think I needed that.” He smiled, picking up another piece of bacon and tapping theirs together. “Cheers.”

She snorted a laugh, “Anytime. Now...where can I drop you?”

“I’m going to the rink. Today is my session with the nutritionist.” He frowned as he looked at his plate. “I thought I was better. I didn’t even realize...it was so unconscious...”

“Yuuri,” Katya pulled his attention with her gentle firmness. Brown eyes looked up to hold hers. “You won’t get better overnight. You underwent fourteen years of his abuse before you finally broke free. Don’t expect to shake off the damage overnight. Let yourself heal. There’s no rush.”

A little smile pulled at Yuuri’s lips. “That’s what Vitya says. I don’t have to do everything at once. I’m...impatient.”

“Of course you are,” Katya laughed...and it was warm and friendly, safe. Yuuri took her hand and squeezed it. “You’ve awakened from a long sleep to find that the world has moved on without you. You will catch up...just not overnight.”

Closing his eyes, Yuuri took in her words. Not overnight. “I think...I’m ready now,” he murmured. He followed her out of the restaurant and to her SUV. He watched as she drove with confidence. He wanted that confidence, that self-assurance that he could take care of himself and those around him. Today, he had to fight for it. Maybe...tomorrow. Or the next day. But one day, hopefully, it will come with ease.

Yuuri rubbed his head as he looked at the number on the weight slip. He was down. He’d really tried to eat like he was supposed to. Swallowing the sob, he fought against the impulse to hide it.
He thanked the nutritionist as she handed him his guidelines to help him past this. He was to show it to Olga. He missed her words of encouragement, saying that this was all part of the gaining process. He missed her reminding him that weight had many factors to it. He heard only his own doubts and fears crowding his thoughts. Pushing up out of his chair, he left the room and looked both ways, wanting someplace to hide.

The small rink where he trained the little ones was in use that morning. The entire building was busy and the flow of life around him was overwhelming. He started to run and didn’t even know where he was going...until the door closed behind him.

Victor’s office...and his mate was on the phone. Those blue eyes met his and Victor excused himself from the call before reaching for Yuuri. The omega, breathing hard, looked for an escape before running into those arms, collapsing, burying himself there.

Victor gently petted him, asking, “What’s wrong, solnyshko ?”

Yuuri hiccuped the sob he’d been holding back before handing over the weight slip. Victor frowned as he studied the numbers. Reaching his hand up, he smoothed Yuuri’s hair as he soothed with a soft whisper. “It’s okay, Yuuri. I expected it. You’re appetite hasn’t been quite there with all that’s been happening.”

“I...want to be...better,” he stuttered, curled into Victor.

“I know...and you will be. But there will be weeks like this one where there is too much on your plate. So...what is important today?”

Yuuri paused at that question. He didn’t know where to focus. He felt like everything was out of his control. “I...I…”

“One thing, Yuuri...what is in your reach today?”

“I can...I can…” He closed his eyes and worked at settling his thoughts. “Yura. Yura is in my reach. I can be Mom.”

“Good. Then let that be your goal and your focus today. Let everything else go. Let me shoulder the rest.”
“It’s not fair to you…”

Victor stopped the argument immediately, “It’s my honor, Yuuri. I don’t mind taking care of your needs.”

Yuuri sniffed before letting his head return to Victor’s neck. He sat in Victor’s lap for the longest time feeling his lover’s reassuring hand moving up and down his back. Breathing in the alpha’s scent, he found his stillness. “I-I think I can move forward now,” he whispered.

“If you are ready, Yuuri...there’s no hurry,” Victor answered warmly.

“I can do this,” Yuuri responded with renewed determination, sitting up to meet Victor’s eyes. Their foreheads met and Victor smiled up at him.

“You’re going to be fine, Yuuri. Maybe not today. Maybe not even tomorrow. But you’re going to be okay.” Victor stroked the black hair, unruly on the sides.

Yuuri’s eyes closed as he breathed out, but remained close. “Sometimes...it doesn’t feel that way.”

“I know...but trust me. I promise to believe in you when you can’t believe in yourself.”

Yuuri’s lips parted even as he felt fresh tears start to build, but different tears, not full of sadness, not fear and hopelessness. Yuuri knew his hope lay before him and he wrapped his arms around Victor and hugged him close, feeling an arm slide around his back and a hand cup the back of his head. “I love you,” he whispered.

“I love you, too, my Yuuri,” Victor responded softly.

Yuuri finally found his feet, standing and offering a grateful smile before slipping out of Victor’s office. He went to the bathroom to clean himself up before making his way down to the practice floor. Alexei waved at him.
“Hey, Coach...do you want to look at my step sequences?”

Yuuri smiled at those words. Somehow he hadn’t lost value in his absence from life. He nodded. “Show me what you’ve got.”

Victor came into the living room after dinner to find Yuuri and Yura curled up in an oversized chair reading. His son was keeping careful watch on the words Yuuri was sounding out, patiently correcting the missteps. A calm had settled over his mate as the evening wore on, his focus on the little boy. Victor had to remind him a couple of times to let everything else go. However, now he was focusing on the one that mattered and Yura responded well to his Yuuri’s attention.

Bathtime followed and then more stories. Victor finally went up the stairs to check on Yuuri to find him sound asleep next to his son. Reaching for a blanket, he draped it over the two of them. Casting his eyes towards heaven, he prayed to whatever gods were listening that his mate would have a peaceful night’s sleep.

Victor opened the backdoor watching Makka and Ren run out into the darkening yard. It had been turning colder the past few days but the dogs were unaware of it. Makka ran to a spot, barking and sniffing, then giving up and finding a place to relieve herself. Victor turned, examining the door and fiddling with the knob, confident the dogs were in a safe place to run. The old house did have its creaks and the door to the back garden had been weak even when he was a child.

As the dogs chased each other happily, Victor walked the perimeter, checking the lock on the back gate and rattling the bars of the fence every so often. Finally, he walked back to the door, calling the dogs in. Ren came in directly, but Makka went back to the same spot as before. She spent a moment sniffing around, then uttered a sharp bark and ran past him into the house. He laughed at the old dog’s antics and then turned his attention to the door, playing with the latch until he managed to get the lock to catch.

Victor walked back towards his room, his eyes moving up the stairs as he passed by. Yuuri, I just want you to be safe. Passing Yelena’s portrait, he almost sensed the worry in her eyes. Shivering he found his way into his own bed.

The dogs claimed Yuuri’s half of the bed and Victor rather tiredly undressed before taking his side of the bed. He reached over and ran his hand over Yuuri’s pillow. Traveling without his mate was going to be more and more difficult. Even now, Victor missed Yuuri’s presence. At least for now,
he would remain home.

Victor’s eyes fluttered open as he felt the bed shift and welcomed his mate beneath the covers. “Did you finally wake up?” he teased.

Yuuri mumbled something that sounded like an agreement but the way he knotted his hands into Victor’s shirt told the alpha that he’d had another nightmare. Victor hugged him close, soothing words and hands already settling the omega. Yuuri finally fell back to sleep. However, sleep alluded Victor a while longer as he stared into the darkness. He hated that one man could steal his mate’s peace but he admired Yuuri’s fight. Pressing a kiss against Yuuri’s forehead, he continued to run his hand up and down the omega’s back. You’re safe, he thought over and over as a mantra of protection...or maybe he was trying to convince himself. His thoughts kept returning to the back of his house. Something felt...off about Makka’s behavior.

Makka laid next to the back door, unable to settle after Yuuri disturbed her sleep. Ren had gone into the next room and was pacing back and forth in front of the windows but Makka had more experience. She knew where the weakness lay. Something was moving behind the house. The wind kept the scents from settling, sending it this way and that but Makka knew. Something was afoot, something inky and foul.

Chapter End Notes

Are you creeped out? Because I am!
Chapter Summary

Yuuri and Victor contemplate the looming danger around them.

Chapter Notes

I've been quiet...crazy, crazy busy week and then throw in a lab partner that skips out every time you turn around. My other lab partner is good at least. (sorry...venting) I've got another week in the program then back-to-school. So I make no promises for next week but I haven't forgotten my stories. (In truth, I was having writing withdrawals.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 42: Disquiet

Yuuri rolled over restlessly, moving closer to Victor’s side and into his warmth only to find the bed cooling. Still in twilight sleep he whined as he found the bed vacated, his eyes fluttering open. Across the room, Victor stood at the window staring into the early morning light.

The omega sat up in bed, remaining silent and looking at his beautiful mate. It was a sight he wanted to become used to, but he could feel a sorrow coming from the Alpha. “What’s wrong?” he asked, his voice muffled by sleep.

Victor turned slightly, keeping his chest to the window. “Nothing...maybe. I just heard Makka bark and realized she wasn’t in bed with us.” He turned back to the window, looking out at the early Russian morning. “I thought it strange.”

Reaching for his glasses, Yuuri pushed up out of bed, wrapping a blanket around his form as he shuffled across the floor. Victor’s arms went around him automatically bringing the smaller man into his chest. Yuuri focused on the backyard and then pointed at the swing swaying in the wind, the metal on metal creating an eerie squeak. “She was probably startled by that noise. We’ve been tying it to the side pole and I guess we forgot to do so last night.” Turning, the omega frowned as his eyes rested on their rumpled sheets in thought. “I’m surprised Yura wasn’t in bed with us.”
“Yura?” Victor questioned, his eyes resting on the younger man.

The omega nodded. “We started securing it because it is really loud in our rooms upstairs, especially his as it’s right above the swingset. When I first came here, Yura kept crawling in bed with me because he heard a noise at night and it scared him. It took some time but then Nikolai and I realized it was the swing.”

Victor sighed, turning from the window, guiding Yuuri back into the shadows of the bedroom. “Sorry. I think I’ve been extra jumpy since…” He faded out, his eyes looking past Yuuri’s shoulder before closing them, fingers resting on the omega’s arms as he sighed.

Yuuri stopped them both, turning and cupping Victor’s face in his small hands. “It’s okay. You can say his name.” Yuuri made a face before asking, “I’ve...did you read what they wrote?”

Victor focused his eyes on the omega questioningly. “You’ve been reading about him?”

Yuuri dropped his hands into Victor’s, thumbing over the knuckles, his eyes following. “I...needed to know. They...released photos. That room. There are pictures. It’s...the same room. He’s painted the walls but...the marker bled through...where I wrote in captivity. And…” Yuuri closed his eyes before shoring up his courage. “That kid...he wrote his own words.”

Victor stood frozen for a moment, concentrating on his mate in front of him. He knew Yuuri needed to talk but he feared pushing too hard. “What did it say?”

Yuuri broke contact, startling Victor but then quickly pulled out his phone and opened up the search page. They moved to the edge of the bed, settling side by side. When he found what he was looking for, Victor’s eyes rested on those words, translated for the English source. The photo accompanying the print showed a mix of English and Katakana.

*I know at least two others have shared this cell, their words are on this wall. First, Ito Tamotsu. I don’t know if you live. I hope that you somehow got away. Your words are small, shoved in a corner behind the bed. You were terrified that if he found them he would hurt you worse than he already had. Next, Katsuki Yuuri. Your words are loud and bold, all over the place and not hidden away. The walls are littered with them, passionate and uncontrolled. Lashing out in anger. You fought him every day. You used whatever you had to defy him for as long as you could. May I have the same courage and hold out so long. And one day, may we meet face to face. All three of us.*
Victor’s blood ran cold as the realization that Yuuri could see plainly that his story was out there for the world to know. “Yuuuriiii,” Victor whispered.

“I-I’ve been trying to find him.” Yuuri’s eyes rose, there was a fire, small, but burning in them. “Ito. The first one. I know he, too, skated.”

Victor thinned his lips as he considered what to share, not wanting to overwhelm Yuuri. Finally, he conceded his information. “Another coach told me that Shuji coached for a short period, focusing on junior skaters...do you think it’s one of his students? He could have tried to control him.”

Yuuri’s brow wrinkled, then he nodded slowly, “Like he did me...do you think Ito is still alive?”

Victor thought over Yamamoto’s words. “I...can’t say for sure. But he, too, fought.”

Yuuri nodded. “He was young like me. Why?”

“There’s never a reason to hurt another person. Sociopaths come up with their own narratives, but we’ll never understand them.” Victor wrapped Yuuri up in his arms while he put his words together. “I...studied some old footage. It...looked like Shuji tried to sabotage an omega skater back when he competed and it failed, he only hurt himself. He could see this as revenge for what he interprets as a wrong done him.”

Yuuri huffed at those words. “He never thought omegas should compete past juniors. We should take our place and make babies,” he mimicked bitterly. “Idiot would hurt himself and then blame another.”

Victor tapped his lip thoughtfully with his index finger. “It’s a weak motive but combined with a weak mind...”

“Trust me, that’s as weak a mind as you’ll find.” Yuuri considered those words. Finally he groaned, rising and shaking himself out of the blankets he reached for his robe. “Let’s make something to eat if we’re going to talk this out.”

Victor followed Yuuri to the kitchen and sat at the bar while Yuuri hummed, making a quick breakfast of sweet eggs and reheated rice. Adding cups of tea to the mix, they soon moved to the dining room table and sat across from each other.
Yuuri was silent as he took his first few bites of egg. Victor watched, he had figured out what faces Yuuri made at certain levels of thought and this was thinking furiously Yuuri. Finally, he asked, “Was it just...because I was a convenient omega?”

“Possibly.” Victor pulled out his phone, though, and presented two photos he had saved. “But...the other two, they look a lot like you. The skater he sabotaged and the junior he possibly coached. Just like this Tanaka kid. I think he has a type.”

Yuuri shivered as he studied their facial features. Eyes full of emotion, slight traces of baby fat on their faces giving off a more childish appearance, disheveled hair that went slightly curly in exercise. He pulled out his phone and finally found a couple of small wikis that told him a little more about their stats. He shivered once more and felt Victor’s hands slide over his arms across the table. Turning back, he read more details. Even their heights were close to his. “That’s just...creepy.”

Victor nodded in agreement. “I don’t know what has driven that obsession. Was it just the initial skater he sabotaged or something deeper?”

“I was...so small. And then I had that panic attack. I thought...it was just because I was vulnerable. Convenient. I never considered that...he singled me out.”

“I...think he probably waited for that moment where you were vulnerable and took advantage of it. I hate that he hurt you. That he hurt anyone, really...but you…” Victor closed his eyes as he rested his hands over Yuuri’s, squeezing them to ground himself as much as for Yuuri. He soon felt Yuuri’s hands in his and he tightened his hold as he felt the tremble in those smaller fingers.

“I wish...they had caught him and that this would be over. I am constantly looking over my shoulder when I’m out. Even the house doesn’t feel completely safe when I’m alone. I avoid rooms with lots of open windows. I don’t think I’ve visited the solarium since the sleepover. I keep thinking...what if he finds me?”

Victor reached across the table, taking his hand. “You’re not on any registry…”

“But we’ve been photographed together multiple times.” Yuuri pointed out the obvious, with social media he could be found with only a few clicks. “He’s not stupid. Just crazy.”
The rattle of the windows drew the alpha’s attention with a frown. He could feel his own restlessness filling the space and he knew Yuuri was feeling more and more unsettled. He opened his mouth to speak but didn’t know what to say.

Slipping his hands from the alpha’s grasp, Yuuri stood up and walked over to trace his fingers in the cool condensation forming on the panes. “Do you think he’ll come here?”

Victor wanted to say no. He wanted to reassure Yuuri that Shuji wouldn’t dare come near him. Victor couldn’t offer that reassurance. But...he had come to Moscow, he had crashed the banquet, he had lashed out at Yuuri publicly, risking arrest and imprisonment. What else would that madman do to get what he thought he deserved? “That’s why I can’t go to the Final,” Victor muttered into the cool air.

Yuuri continued to peer out the window and Victor could feel the disconnect in his mate’s demeanor. “I don’t want to put you or Yura in danger. Maybe...we should end this.” The words finished in a whisper. Quickly, Victor rose from his chair, crossed to Yuuri, and wrapped his arms around his middle from behind.

“Noooo,” Victor cried out softly next to Yuuri’s ear. “Let me protect you. I can keep my family safe.” Victor wanted to say more, that he needed Yuuri, couldn’t bare thinking of a life without him. And Yura...where would the little boy be after one more rejection?

Yuuri turned in his arms, resting his forehead against Victor’s. “You shouldn’t have to. I should just...go. It’s the best solution. If something were to happen to you...to Yura...I’d never forgive myself. I’m...not important.”

“Don’t say that.” Victor’s hands rose to Yuuri’s biceps, squeezing them. “You’re important to me, to Yura, to so many people! You’re important to yourself, to your future and your life. You’re not expendable!” Victor didn’t realize he was crying. Not until Yuuri’s hand went up to cup his cheek, wiping the tears away with his thumb. “Don’t go,” he whispered. “I love you.”

Yuuri sniffed. He didn’t know if he was strong enough to leave. Not when Victor was holding him so tightly. Yuuri rested his cheek against Victor’s shoulder and felt the alpha rocking him, soothing him, asking him to stay. “I...don’t want to go,” Yuuri admitted in the quietest whisper. “I...don’t know what else to do.”

“Don’t run. Not this time. We plan, and make ourselves safe, but we aren’t running. You’re home now.”
Yuuri let the alpha rock him into a slow dance. He loved this family of his. Outside, the wind howled, and Makka shuffled into the room where they stood, licking at Yuuri’s hand. Beyond the older poodle sat Ren watching thoughtfully as if to say, *we take our stand here.* Yuuri knew he couldn’t leave. But he also knew he couldn’t let Shuji hurt his family.

The next few days lacked routine. It was purposeful. They traded off who left and when. Even the person dropping Yura off at school switched out. But Yuuri was always accompanied, even if it was just to sit outside. Victor often sat with him, watching Yuuri’s eyes slide around searching the perimeter of the yard. The dogs sniffed out the space and barked every so often as if checking for any stray scents.

Watching as Makka repeatedly return to the same spot in the yard Yuuri frowned. He pushed up to walk over and study it. Victor wasn’t far behind. Yuuri could feel his hand on the small of his back, the alpha needing the contact to know Yuuri was safe and in reach. Kneeling down, he studied the space, the leaves were crunched and there were a few twigs broken. However, at this closeness, he could smell the residual scent.

Yuuri moved his hands as if picking up bits of trash, but signaled for Victor to kneel with him. His voice was deathly calm as he murmured, “He was here. It’s been awhile, but he was here. He knows where I am and who I’m with.”

Victor wasn’t able to keep his cool as well as his mate and took a sharp intake of breath. Not only was Shuji in St. Petersburg, but the nasty creep had been at his house...in his yard. Victor balled his fists thinking of how close the monster had been to Yuuri...and Yura. Would that sick man hurt their son? He thought back, remembering the disquiet when all of the kids were in the ballet room. “Do you think it was that night? During the sleepover?”

“Maybe. They hadn’t yet found Tanaka but perhaps he felt them squeezing in on him and he fled. He may have wanted to make sure he knew where I was...although I don’t know how he figured it out then. We hadn’t been public.”

“The skating community is small...and he’s been involved with it for so long. As much as we try to close ranks against scumbags like him there are probably some that support him, even if only privately. Surely there were people that still associated with him.”
Yuuri stood up, shivering but not from the cold as he settled into Victor’s arms. “I would hate to think there was a network of others like Shuji out there.”

“I think...people like Shuji work alone. But they are aware of others who wouldn’t be...bothered by their activities. If he was more pedophilic...”

Yuuri shook his head adamantly. “He liked to make sure we were at least eighteen when he...when he...raped us...though he has no problem securing them earlier.” Yuuri hugged himself, fighting off a shiver. “The age wasn’t the turn on, it was the control he could exert. It was always about control.” Glancing around the yard, he rested his eyes on the windows into the solarium as he added, “I don’t think he’s been in the house. There is no residual scent inside, and the dogs would have been losing their minds had he. Here, though...he stood for awhile. He...watched me.” He lifted his eyes and realized he could see the window to the omega room. How long have you known where I was at? How long have you watched me?

Victor frowned as he took in Yuuri’s shiver. Yuuri leaned against Victor’s shoulder while his eyes turned outward to study the spot in the yard. There wasn’t a break in the fence but would it really be hard to scale over the structure? It was really more a garden wall, designed to keep good neighbors, not sociopaths out. The bushes grew close and provided privacy and although the wall was tall, it was climbable. He didn’t like this at all, and it must have registered with his omega because a whine escaped his throat.

Victor turned to reassure the smaller man. “I’ll have some security cameras installed back here and maybe some other things. There are glass break sensors and alarms that sound if the door is opened. Don’t worry, I’ll keep you safe.”

Yuuri ran a hand up Victor’s back, “We’ll work together to keep us all safe.” It seemed like an easy solution but part of Yuuri couldn’t exactly settle. If Shuji was watching the house, would he not locate other weaknesses? How many ways can someone get into a house this size? However, the security measures would help. Yuuri would feel better knowing they were in place, less exposed.

Yuuri expected Olga and Nikolai to protest the system. However, they worked with the security company to help them find the optimum locations to install the features. Both knew the house best and soon, the house was nailed down.

Nikolai laughed as he muttered, “I’ve got to punch numbers to go into my own house. Fancy!”
For Yura, they created a passcode that he could call out, most keypads being out of his reach. Of course, he chose “Puma Tiger Scorpion” because...why not? Yuuri and Victor just laughed and went with it. The words seemed to empower Yura and the child loved being the one to lock down the house at night.

As the changes were created in Victor’s world to secure his family, the Russian skating team were preparing to leave for the Grand Prix Final. Some were reluctant when the time came, Alexei leaning in to give Yuuri a hug and asking, worry in his voice, “Are you going to be okay?”

Yuuri forced a smile and answered, “We’re doing everything possible. Now, bring me home an ugly necklace.” Yuuri patted his cheek affectionately. The young skater felt more confident in his step sequences after their work. It was time for the boy to show the world.

Others checked in with Yuuri before they talked with Victor on their way out the door. Victor watched them leave one by one, his lips turned in a frown. He wanted to be there for them and hated that Shuji was threatening his family, keeping him tied down. He turned as he felt Yuuri slip under his arm, his own arm slipping around his waist.

“I’m sorry I’m keeping you from them,” Yuuri murmured.

Victor shook his head. “You’re not. I’m right where I’m supposed to be,” he assured Yuuri. All of this is on Shuji, he added silently in his head. He leaned over and kissed Yuuri’s unruly hair. The team was on their way to the Grand Prix Final and Victor would stay with his family.

Chapter End Notes

So...what's on your minds?
Yuuri took the next few days off to study and take his exams. Victor drove him to his appointments and back home, often returning after a quick nutrition break to attend to his students not competing in the Grand Prix Final. Overall, there were fewer skaters demanding attention at the rink and as school was on break, the younger students’ practices had been suspended so their families could spend time together. Victor did have some students to prepare for Nationals and the paperwork that went with them. The first few days leaving for work had been a struggle, Victor felt distracted while out. With the security system in place, however, he felt he could let Yuuri remain home with Olga and Nikolai. He was a phone call away.

Yuuri for his part was far too invested in his classwork and his tunnel vision was, for once, paying off. The omega had two favorite places to study; the first was the bedroom, spread out across the bed. Yura would often park in the small sofa with his game system or a stack of books or coloring books with crayons, two or three kittens crawling over him, the dogs often claiming floor space or curling up in one of the chairs together. The second space was the living room, taking up the entire floor and today, Yura was occupied playing the floor is lava. Somehow, Yuuri became one of the islands and grunted as the little boy crawled on his back. He looked over his shoulder and smirked at the little boy who frowned at his books.

“You should play with me,” he pouted.

Yuuri closed his laptop, pulling the little boy over his shoulder and into his lap. “I will. I just need to get ready for this big test. It’s my last one, though, and then I’m done until the next semester
Yura squirmed a little, standing next to him. “When is that?”

“January,” Yuuri reassured him. “I’ll have almost a month for a break.”

The little blonde paused, clearly working out the timeline. “And then we can play?” He swung himself around to hug Yuuri from behind.

“We will play,” Yuuri reassured him, reaching back to tickle him and was rewarded with a giggle.

Yura moved on and the omega returned his attention to his notes. He could use his resources but the exam was timed. Once begun, he only had two hours to get through the materials and it was comprehensive. Organization, therefore, was key.

He planned his exam time to begin once Victor came home and could distract Yura. Although Nikolai and Olga offered to watch the child, Yuuri knew he’d slip away and pop into the room where Yuuri was testing. His baby needed his father’s attention.

Finally, Victor was home and after a brief kiss, Yuuri gathered his notes and set up for his exam in Victor’s father’s old office. The stern desk and austere room, while not inviting comfort, did encourage serious concentration. He arranged himself at the oak desk, setting up the computer and his notes as earmarked for his use at his side. Once satisfied that he had everything and it was all in order, he closed the door to signal others to not disturb him.

The distractions of his worries about Shuji fell away, assisted by the security Victor had installed. He hated the expense but he was surprised how much he felt better, more settled with the security system in place. At least while home, he didn’t have to worry about looking over his shoulder. He had a safe place, he had a haven in this storm once again. He still found himself accompanied into the backyard and that was fine, but he ventured into the solarium more and more often. At first using the room to stretch, staying only for a short while before inventing a reason to leave, but soon dancing again and losing himself in the music and in time.

For now, he shook those thoughts away and focused on his exam, opening his Macbook, he signed into the testing site and found his exam. The timer ticked away in the corner. First question...
After the exam, Yuuri found Victor in the living room, Yura distracted with a coloring book featuring tigers. Peaking over his son’s shoulder, he then moved to Victor’s side, settling into his lap and breathing in his scent. “Is that a new coloring book?”

Victor chuckled softly as his mate snuggled into his scent gland. “I thought it might serve as a good distraction while you took your exam. How did it go?”

Yuuri thinned his lips as he hummed thoughtfully. “I think...I feel pretty good about it. My Composition grade is already posted and I got an A.”

Victor grinned proudly. “I knew you would. You worked so hard on that paper.”

“Well, ‘the unequal treatment of omegas in government and healthcare’ is a topic I’m well versed in,” Yuuri responded. “And then tying it to the three lit pieces...let’s just say it was clear the professor is also omega.”

“It’s a story that needs to be told over and over.” Victor ran his finger tips down Yuuri’s arm, watching the body relax into his touch. “I’m sure Rohan had quite a bit of input on the matter.”

“He did and even showed me some great world legislation to cite. I was also able to tie in the inconsistencies in Japanese law that allowed omegas to be exploited. There are laws in healthcare that were clearly written to protect omegas but through the execution allows for alpha dominance over an omega under the guise of protection. Those were the exact laws used to trap me in my own situation, and probably countless others in similar positions.”

“At this rate, it sounds like you’re going to join Rohan in his fight.”

Yuuri hummed as he thought about it. “I’d support him...that’s for certain. But I think I’d like to do something more direct and concrete. Legislation can be abstract often. I want...to help others pick up the pieces but I also want prevention. Boris thinks I should look at social work. Maybe...but I think the struggle is bigger than that. I’m still...undecided.”

Victor leaned in and kissed his forehead. “It doesn’t have to be decided today.”
Yuuri, true to his word, spent the next day playing with Yura, needing the time with his son just as badly as the child did. Victor had reluctantly left them to attend to his work, making sure to put the alarms back on alert as he left. Nikolai was out picking up supplies and had a list from Olga so she could stay home with their boys. The day had turned gray and the clouds heavy with the threat of snow. Yuuri stared out the kitchen window, his hands moving up and down his arms in a warming motion.

Behind him two big green eyes saw the same weather out the window, but had a very different reaction. “If it snows, can we go outside, Mama?”

Yuuri turned with a soft smile at that word. He’d been hearing it more and more from the little boy although Yuuri still occasionally slipped from his lips. “We’ll see. I think we need to make sure Dad is home first.”

Yura groaned disgruntledly. “But what if he works really, really late.”

Yuuri chuckled. He knew the alpha would be home as soon as possible and wasn’t worried. “Well, it’s not snowing yet and we want enough on the ground to make a decent snowman.” Then with a wink, he sang, “Do you want to build a snowman?” making tickle motions with his fingers.

Yura giggled, dancing away from Yuuri’s touch before grabbing his hand and skipping out of the room.

They settled in the living room where Yuuri found the movie. As Elsa and Anna worked through their struggles, Yura turned and pointed out in a very mature voice, “She should just tell her sister. It sucks to not know.”

Yuuri nodded quietly, remembering a time he didn’t tell his own sister. “Sometimes not telling seems like the right idea, like you’re protecting those around you...but in the end, I think it’s best to tell.”
Yuuri hummed in agreement, turning back to the story.

Yuuri curled up around Yura and they were soon drawn into the movie. Giggles slipped out of the little boy as he laughed at the antics of the film. Yuuri tickled the blonde to increase them, smiling and feeling all warm inside. He inhaled deeply rejoicing in this wonderful moment with his son, the warmth of the little body cuddling into his center and soft fluff of the downy hair all meant so much to him. Yuuri felt himself falling into that sleepy state in which his body was completely relaxed. It was a feeling he was new to but one that he was learning to love. The soft purring of his chest rumbled Yura’s back and the little boy responded snuggling into Yuuri’s embrace further. It was as Elsa was running into the mountain that the clatter of glass and a groan filtered through from the kitchen. “Olga? Are you okay?” he called out.

Yuuri frowned as he heard a series of odd, rushed sounds from the other room. He sat up straight, focusing his attention to hallway. Makka jumped up from her perch and ran into the other room with a growl before Yuuri could call her back. Ren moved over by the two Yu(u)ris and growled in the direction of the kitchen, her stance protective. Yura had snapped out of his love of the movie and turned to look at him with wide green eyes, lips parted in fear. Then Yuuri’s blood ran cold as he heard Olga’s voice.

Yuuri couldn’t make out exactly what she demanded but he recognized enough to know she was asking who it was and what they wanted. There was no response but a commotion, the sounds of a scuffle in the kitchen and then her cry as she took a blow.

The omega jumped to his feet even as he heard Makka’s growl followed by a sharp cry from the dog. He was torn, needing to go check on her and Makka, but overwhelmed by the need to protect his baby first. Yura looked up at him from the couch and whined. He motioned for Yura to stand behind him and get ready to move. Yuuri hissed protectively as he stepped between Yura and the threat, edging them out of the living room. Ren kept her body in between them and the threat, growling.

In the hall, Yuuri’s eyes met Shuji’s at the opposite end near the kitchen. The older man smirked, taking a breath, “There you are!” Time stopped for a moment as Yuuri felt panic set in, the walls around him melted, changing from the ornate Russian oakwork to the stark white washed walls of the house he had been kept in, then tossed out of. Shuji, standing at one end of the hall, Yuuri at the other that look in the man’s eyes a vengeful, violent lust. Then he heard Yura whine with fear snapping him out of it as Shuji took a single step forward. Time sped into a frenzy. In a move that could only be achieved by years of dance and a mother’s instinct, Yuuri twirled and scooped up Yura, taking off running for the stairs. He needed a safe place and could already hear Shuji scrambling after him. Ren barked and growled, snapping at Shuji and trying to keep him away from Yuuri. Shuji kicked the dog and Yuuri winced as he heard the dog hit the wall. *Please be okay.* Blinking back his tears, he continued up the stairs but Shuji was lunging towards him.
“You’re mine!” he growled.

Yuuri fell forward with a whimper as he felt a hand on his foot. Instantly he released Yura and pushed him forward as he turned and hissed at the threat. Shuji had lunged up the stairs, successfully grabbing Yuuri’s foot but had fallen forward himself. Using this, Yuuri kicked back into his hand and face until his sock started to slip, fighting to get away. As the sock came away, all of a sudden another force pulled against Shuji, grabbing him from behind.

“Let them go,” Olga cried out, and Yuuri could see blood on her head and he swallowed his own sob, the courageous woman dragging him off of Yuuri. Shuji fought against the fierce woman, her hisses and scratches causing him to lose his grip on Yuuri, the sock sliding off, the younger omega surging forward.

Yuuri found his feet and focused on Yura, the little boy frozen on the top steps, eyes wide with terror. Again, Yuuri picked him up, dashing into the protective security of the omega room, slamming down the scent locks. He slid down the door as he heard Olga’s body hit something hard and her strangled cry. He fought his own sob, shoving the back of his hand into his mouth. She’s okay. She’s going to be okay. Turning towards the door, he closed his teary eyes. Please be okay. I’m sorry. This is my fault.

On the other side of the door, the pounding continued, pulling Yuuri from those thoughts. The locks held, and would withstand much more than what Shuji could offer but Yuuri’s instincts jumped into overdrive. He heard the threat beyond the door, knew that he and his child were in imminent danger. Inside his body the omega took over, telling him to find a safer place. Moving Yura to a corner of the room he pushed furniture in front of the door, pulling even the mattress to the pile. He grabbed Yura and pushed him into the back of the closet, pulling in the comforter and pillows, piling back into the end of the closet, before pulling Yura to his chest.

He shivered, fighting his own fear, feeling the whine in his voice. Stay safe. Stay safe...

Nikolai walked up the back steps, noticing immediately that all was not as he left it. He frowned when he found the lock on his private entrance forced, the wires cut to the alarm system. Oh, hell! He entered the room, his phone already at his ear as he called the police.

“Don’t go into the house,” they directed him. “We have officers on the way to assist.”
“I’m already in the house,” he argued. He moved through his apartment and into the main home. “My family is in here.”

The voice on the end of the line was clearly displeased with Nikolai’s decisions but learned to not argue. “We’re dispatching units. Stay clear of the invasion. Stay on the line…”

Nikolai, frustrated with their directions, hung up and called Victor. “Son, he’s here. You need to get home now.”

Victor didn’t take time to process the words. “On my way!” And then he was gone. Mila watched as he ran past her in the lobby and something within her screamed to call her older sister.

Nikolai eased open the inner door and could see Olga lying unconscious at the bottom of the stairs. Please be the tough old woman I know you to be, he muttered in silent prayer. He knelt to help her, but was very aware of the noise at the top of the stairs. Upstairs, he could hear the man beating on Yuuri’s door, shouting words in a foreign language. He cautiously slipped from the hall into his apartment making as little noise as possible, relieved when Olga roused. He made eye contact with her and raised his hand in a shushing motion, reaching in a corner for a heavy pipe wrench. Maybe Victor’s cursed shower had a purpose after all.

He eased up the stairs knowing which ones creaked and which ones didn’t, his steps slow and cautious. The alpha at the door seemed unaware, screaming in a frenzy of madness at the unrelenting door and the omega beyond. Nikolai drew closer, waiting for the right moment. That’s when the wild man broke from his fury, seeming to sense someone near, turning towards him as he spotted the approaching man.

He look practically feral and spoke in a snarling broken English, “What are you gonna do, old man?”

Beyond the door, he heard a whimper and Yura call out “Grandpa!” in alarm. Nikolai took a moment to look at the door protecting his grandson, the impression of knuckles and claw marks evident, even traces of blood where the madman’s fingers had cut against the wood as he tried to reach those beyond. The old Russian didn’t waiver in his focus. Someone failed to tell this Japanese whelp about the tough stock Russian old people were made from. They’d survived the stark Soviet years, no food, no water, no power. They’d merely shrugged as one government fell and another, just as useless rose up. They stood tall, stout and determined. When Nikolai lurched forward, Shuji held up his arm to block the blow and another hand out to push him back but it was like holding back a freight train.
The first blow connected with Shuji’s extended arm, the next set hit his shoulder and back. But the Japanese man was quick to find his feet and adrenaline made him responsive beyond belief. He rose quickly, shoving Nikolai back, and almost overcoming him, but the older man was fast. He brought the wrench down on the side of his head, knocking Shuji against the wall and to the floor. The man struggled to get up and Nikolai felt something within him snap. Suddenly, there was no Japanese man, there was a tall Russian, smug, smiling and there was Yelana holding a broken wrist, covering her black eye with sunglasses…

When Shuji rose again Nikolai let loose his anger pummeling the man before him and the ghosts of his memory. The old man didn’t know how long he beat the man threatening his family but a warm familiar hand rested on him, covering his fist, and Victor stated with quiet authority, “It’s over.” Nikolai was startled, he dropped the wrench and grabbed Victor’s shoulders.

“It’s okay, they’re safe.” Victor helped the man to the wall, settling him. “Don’t look at him.”

Nikolai’s face contorted into grief. He had saved the young man he had grown to love when he couldn’t save his daughter. “Yelena...I couldn’t…”

Victor brought him into an embrace as the man broke into tears.

Downstairs, pounding at the door announced the police arrival as they came through the open door, finding Victor holding the elderly man who now wept with relief in his arms at the top of the stairs. A flood of activity followed quickly. Paramedics immediately went to check on Olga, sitting up and leaning against the wall, now insisting she was fine. However, they wanted to be sure and much to her annoyance, shined a light in her eyes. Another set immediately began to look at Shuji who could only moan through his barely conscious state. The police stood on the stairs taking statements from both men, removing the wrench lying next to the old hands.

“Is there anyone else in the house?”

Victor nodded, his eyes on the door the other man was trying to break through. “My Yuuri and our son are in there. If you could clear out this garbage, I’d like to try and get him out of there.”

Victor watched as they removed Shuji’s limp form. The hall was a bloody mess but no one died. Not even that worthless piece of trash that invaded their home. He spotted Katya and Pyotr now sitting with Nikolai answering police questions for him. Pyotr looked up and met his eyes, a phone to his ear. Victor knew he was calling Chris. His attorney needed to be there...and Chris would bring Phichit. Turning back to the door, he thought, I may need Phichit.
Knocking gently, he called through the door, “Yuuri, it’s me. Please open the door.” He listened and heard nothing. He turned as an officer approached.

“We have an emergency release key on the way,” he offered.

Victor nodded. “I’d like to try and talk him out if possible. His best friend is on the way as well.”

The police officer left down the stairs giving Victor space to coax the omega out. He wrinkled his nose at the smell of foreign alpha and the metallic scent of blood filling the space. He was pulled from the smell by the buzzing of his phone.

Chris/ We’re on our way.

Chris/ Phichit, too.

Victor almost fainted with relief knowing that his friend and Yuuri’s closest ally were both on their way.

Chris/ Phichit’s driving.

A guilty smile broke over Victor’s face at that. Phichit’s driving was scary but he was good. Chris told Victor he thought the omega learned how to drive playing *Grand Theft Auto*. Turning back to the door, he tried once more.

“Yuuri?”

The answer that came was small and not that of his mate, but his son. “Dad? I’m scared. Yuuri is...stuck. He won’t come out of the closet.”

Victor wasn’t surprised by those words. He needed to get into that room. “Yura, I can’t open the door. It’s made to keep Yuuri safe...even from me. I need your help. Do you see the remote? It should be by the bed.”
Some scrambling could be heard beyond the door, it was muffled but Victor knew his son was working with him.

Close to the door, laying down so his small voice would carry underneath the crack, the little boy shouted, “I’ve got it.”

Victor smiled. “Good boy! Now, it has a hole in it. That has to read Yuuri’s scent...and it might take awhile because Yuuri’s scared. And Yuuri will probably fight you if he realizes what you’re doing.”

Yura thought a moment. Victor could picture that tiny forehead wrinkling in thought while he tapped his foot. “I’m going to give Yuuri a hug!”

Inside the room, Yura slipped the remote into his sleeve. He was a resourceful little boy and knew how to hide things. He’d been watching Yuuri do it for months. Moving back into the hole where Yuuri was buried, he called out softly, “Mama?”

Yuuri looked out of it, unfocused, and Yura was scared for him and a little of him but he’d fight hard for his mom. “Baby, get back in here,” Yuuri hissed, reaching for him to jerk him back into the makeshift nest. “Mama has to keep you safe.”

The slight blonde struggled over the mountain of pillows and blankets that had been piled up at the entrance. As soon as he was within arm length he felt the strong tug of the omega pulling him close. Yuuri hugged the little boy to his chest and Yura hugged him back positioning his wrist just so even as he breathed in Yuuri’s scent. Even soured with fear, Yura knew his mama’s scent and waited for the locks to release. Then he heard the click.

Yuuri did as well, his eyes wide with fear, thrusting the little boy behind him as he fought hard not to whine, even now keeping him safe. He covered the little boy with a pillow and comforter, hiding him from what he assumed was an angry Alpha. “No…” he whined. “Stay away from my baby!”
Victor entered the room hesitantly. While the door unlocked the furniture was still piled in front of it. He moved slowly, making as little noise as possible. When the door was cleared he looked around. He saw the remnants of the bed and the barely open door to the closet. He began releasing his scent heavily into the room to start building the layers needed to call out his mate.

Crossing to the center of the room he crouched down, “Yuuri, it’s me…it’s Victor. Come to me, solnyshko.”

There was a whimper and he heard a hissed “trick” come from the darkness.

“It’s not a trick, darling. It’s just me.” A buzz on his phone jerked his attention and he smiled at the text that just came in. “Phichit is downstairs. Can I call him up?”

Yuuri whined but didn’t say no. Victor quickly sent a text out to invite the omega up.

“Yura, are you with your Mama?”

Yura’s voice was a little muffled, “I’m here, Papa…I’m scared.” Inside the closet he could hear Yuuri comforting the child with soft words in Japanese.

Victor reassured his son and hoped his words reached Yuuri. “It’s been a scary day, love. It’s okay, now. The bad man can’t hurt you...either of you. Not any more.”

He heard the whine and some shuffling as Victor slowly reached for the door, opening it slightly to allow his scent to enter the closet. He heard the steps of another enter the bedroom. “It’s just me, love. I need you to come out now.”

There was a warning hiss and Victor stilled, glancing up at Phichit with pleading eyes. Phichit placed his hand on Victor’s shoulder and guided him away from the door, kneeling down next to the opening.

“It’s just us omegas now. Talk to me, honey.”
Yuuri inhaled quickly, switching to English, “Peach?”

Phichit sighed in relief and flashed Victor a smile over his shoulder. “Yes, love...I’m here. Chris is downstairs dealing with the police.”

Yuuri’s voice changed, sounding clearer, “Shuji...I think he hurt Olga really bad.”

Phichit chuckled softly. “That old bird isn’t going to go out that easily. She’s got a bump on her head. They’ve cleaned her up.” He could hear her yelling at the EMTs to leave her alone as she needed to start cleaning their mess. “She was arguing that she needed to come up here and I convinced her to let me.”

“Oh,” Yuuri responded. He was quiet and Phichit knew from experience he was processing the information. Finally, he asked, “Where’s...Shuji?”

“The police have him in custody...and he’s pretty banged up. Someone gave him a fairly good beating?” Phichit raised a well-groomed eyebrow questioningly towards Victor.

“Vitya?” Yuuri asked, concern lacing his voice.

Victor came closer at Phichit’s signal. “I’m fine, darling. I’m right here with you. I just need you to come out to me right now.”

After a moment, he heard a murmured, “Alright.” Then movement beyond the closet.

Yuuri pushed open the door cautiously, still on his hands and knees. Yura was behind him, his green eyes looking around. Phichit sat on the floor, his knees folded beneath him. Victor was kneeling ready to take both of his Yu(u)ris into his arms. There was a moment of hesitation and then he had them, their bodies relaxing into his embrace. Victor swallowed down the sob in his throat, relief now flooding him. “I’ve got you. I’ve got you both. You’re okay. It’s safe.” He sniffed, blinking through his tears.

Phichit tapped on Victor’s shoulder and nodded towards the hallway. He then reached out and gathered the child into his arms. “Yuuri, I’m going to take Yura down now.” Yura reluctantly allowed Phichit to carry him, tucking his chin in as they went out the door. “Don’t look, love. It’s messy business and we don’t want to scare your mama,” he whispered as they slipped past the
blood stained doorway. The paramedics were immediately reaching for the little boy to examine him as they reached the first floor.

He turned and spotted his grandfather sitting with cuffs and whined in fear. “Grandpa?”

“Hush now,” Phichit murmured. “It’s just a formality. Uncle Chris will take care of him. Grandpa has to talk to the police and they have to make sure everyone is safe.”

Yura was on the verge of tears, everything becoming too much. “B-but…”

Phichit released a pheromone to calm the boy, “Shhhh…Grandpa is fine. I’ll take you over once the paramedics have cleared you.”

Yura turned towards the men and women in white coats, chewing his lower lip a moment. “No shots!” he stated as his ultimatum. They chuckled and held up their equipment to show they were unarmed.

Victor held onto Yuuri for a long time. Long enough for Phichit to get down the stairs. He needed to get Yuuri through that door and clear of the stairs. “I...want you to hide in my scent, okay?”

“Hide?” Yuuri blinked up at him in confusion.

Victor settled on a half truth. “You’re still really sensitive to Shuji’s scent and he’s flooded the hallway...I need to get you through the door.”

Yuuri processed that a moment before nodding, letting Victor tuck him into his neck. It should be awkward walking with Yuuri hiding in his embrace. However, Yuuri knew him, knew his moves too well. They danced too often in the shadows of their room, and Yuuri could follow his movements in his sleep. He guided Yuuri past the door frame and turned him to face the stairs.

As he released Yuuri, the younger man started to turn back but Victor chastised him gently.
“Don’t look back. Just keep moving forward.”

As Yuuri reached the ground floor, there were several sighs of relief and a scattering of claps. Victor stayed close while the paramedics checked them over. Finally, Yuuri’s eyes found Olga and he cried out in alarm, breaking free to go to her side. His hand shook as he lightly touched the edge of the bandage around her head.

She took his hands and smiled. “It’s okay. Just some bruises and maybe a couple of stitches. I’ll be fine.”

“He could have…”

“He didn’t…he wasn’t interested in me. And it allowed you to get away.” Her words were firm, no hint of blame, just the gentle protectiveness of family.

Yuuri turned and that’s when he spotted Nikolai, detained in cuffs. Turning back to Victor, his lips parted in a silent I don’t understand.

“I didn’t get here in time. Nikolai found you,” Victor explained softly as he wrapped his arms around Yuuri. “Nikolai stopped Shuji. He’ll be released soon. The police have assured me they aren’t pressing charges. This is just procedure.”

Yuuri sobbed as he pulled from Victor, going to Nikolai. “You sweet, wonderful, old man…what am I going to do with you?”

The old man chuckled softly. “Yelena would have turned over in her grave and haunted me if I let anything happen to the two of you. And she’d probably have dragged her mama with her.” He smiled warmly as he studied the omega before him. “It was the right thing to do.”

Turning to look at Victor, he asked, “How’d he get in?”

“Through my door,” Nikolai grumped. “Broke it. After he cut the wires so the alarm wouldn’t go off. He did it in a way that it would have read as a power outage.”
“I thought surely... it would have been that one door out back,” Victor groaned.

“Me, too,” the old man agreed, “but we were watching that one closely. He came in through my shop and into my apartment. The shop gave him cover while he took the time needed to cut the wires to my entrance. I suspect he’s been watching this house for weaknesses over some time.”

Turning back to Yuuri, he murmured, “It’s over, now.”

Yuuri glanced around the crowded foyer and asked, “Where do we go now?”

“The police want us to stay elsewhere for the next few nights. Yakov invited us to stay with him and Lilia but I think you might prefer Chris and Phichit.”

Yuuri would but he worried. “What about Olga and Nikolai?”

Olga huffed. “Don’t worry about us. Lev will put us up.”

“I’m not staying over at your lover’s house!” Nikolai announced.

“And where will you go, old man? They won’t let you sleep on the streets.”

He huffed as he considered his options before announcing, “I’ll go visit family in Moscow.” The police talked back and forth on that announcement and the old man narrowed his eyes. “Is that going to be okay? Or do you worry I’ll make my grand escape to Mexico?”

Two police officers rolled their eyes as the sergeant signed and radioed it in. Finally, she returned and answered, “As long as we can contact you for questions.”

Nikolai leaned in and wrote down his contact information and was relieved when the cuffs were removed from his hands, rubbing his wrists gingerly. He looked at them sternly as he announced, “I’d do it again. One shouldn’t be punished for protecting their family.”

The police officer answered unfazed, “Procedure, Mr. Plisetsky.”
Yuuri then looked around as he thought about their four legged friends. He remembered the horrible sound of Makka’s yelp and the vicious kick Ren received. “Victor, I think he hurt Makka and Ren!”

One of the paramedics brought forward Ren who limped towards Yuuri, a bandage wrapped around her ribs. Yuuri knelt down, tenderly picking up the little toy poodle. He’d have to get her to a vet. He looked around for Makkachin and Victor seemed to be looking as well. The alpha whistled, calling out to her and he heard her yelp. Then she limped around the corner, her fur bloody and stressed but she was wriggling, glad to see her person. A paramedic approached with Victor, the owner reaching towards her, cooing softly. “That’s a girl. Come here and let me check you over.” With Victor’s secure and gentle touch, the paramedic was able to look over the older dog.

The paramedic was able to assess her quickly, feeling for any broken bones and finding none. She fingered through the thick curly fur, “I don’t think most of this blood is hers. I’d get her to a vet but otherwise, I think she’ll be fine.”

Pyotr stepped forward and offered, “Katya and I will take care of the animals so you can see to your mate, if you’ll let us.”

“The dogs need a vet,” Victor stated, worry filling his voice. He had to see to his family. All of his family. But it was too much. He finally nodded, relinquishing them to Pyotr. He saw Katya calling the kittens out of hiding, gathering them in a carrier she retrieved from the hall closet.

Yuuri surrendered little Ren to Pyotr, and watched all of this take place, processing slowly before he turned to the police officer and finally asked the question weighing on his thoughts. “And Shuji?”

The officer turned with a firm expression and thin lips as he told him the expected timeline. “He is in our custody now and will be remanded to the prison hospital while his injuries are being treated. Tomorrow we will begin the process of arraignment and he will face charges of stalking, breaking and entering, and attempted assault as well as reckless endangerment of an omega and their child. He’s facing extradition and after what he did to that American, he’ll be looking at a number of international charges.” Thinning his lips, he added, “It’s not a matter of if he’ll go to prison but which country will get the privilege of housing his sorry ass first.”

Yuuri nodded as he processed that information. “So...he can’t hurt me.”
The officer shook his head. “You will likely need to testify but...he will not be able to hurt anyone ever again. Move forward with your life. And I suggest counseling.” Turning to the room, he nodded to the pair of servants. “For all of you. This is a traumatic event. You need some after care.”

A paramedic stepped forward, examining Yuuri once more to check him out before he added, “And you should probably go to the hospital overnight. Burrowing is a natural defensive instinct but also a sign of a possible approaching drop. We need to monitor your pheromone levels.” The paramedic glances at her associate, both looking at the reading of his blood pressure. “It’s lower than we’d like and I think it’s a good idea to have your heart rate observed for 12 hours.”

Yuuri looked around panicked. “My baby…” He reached towards Yura who ran into his arms.

Phichit reached over and took his hand. “Would you feel okay if I took him with me? I’ll keep him with me the whole time so that Victor can stay close to you.”

Yuuri turned wide eyes to Victor and the alpha smiled warmly. “I trust Chris and Phichit with Yura. Let’s get you to the hospital.”

Yuuri protested when the paramedic tried to put him on a stretcher. “Can’t Vitya just drive me?”

The one that spoke to him about going to the hospital, came to his side once again, calming omega pheromones released as he spoke. “I want to monitor you as we travel. Your alpha can ride with us, though.”

Yuuri reluctantly agreed and allowed them to settle him and secure him to the stretcher. He looked over at Yura who watched him with wide eyes from Phichit’s arms before the other omega shifted him and carried him to the car he shared with Chris. People were slowly dissipating from the house, the police busying themselves with locking down the premises.

Yuuri stared at the ceiling of the ambulance as he began to shift through the information. Flicking his eyes at Victor, he felt guilty about separating father and son. “I’m sorry...I should have opened the door.”

Victor hushed his worries. “You protected our son. You are a good omega.”
Yuuri turned back to look at the ceiling. Perhaps...but he felt like it was all his fault.

Chapter End Notes

The dogs will both be okay. I promise.
**Rainbows after the Storms**

**Chapter Summary**

Yuuri is in the hospital recovering.

**Chapter Notes**

I promise there will be some fluffy goodness in this chapter but Yuuri does have worries and concerns.

(Note: There have been some edits added on 8/2 to improve the tone and to give greater insight into Yuuri’s emotions. They do not change what have happened in the original chapter.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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**Ch. 44: Rainbows after the Storms**

Katya dropped by with an overnight bag holding fresh clothes for both of them. She didn’t stay long but squeezed Yuuri’s hand reassuringly. Yuuri’s eyes were dull and she worried. She needed to leave some reassurance, something to anchor him. “We’ve got the animals and Mila is helping to take good care of them. Phichit wanted me to reassure you both that Yura is doing fine.”

Yuuri nodded although his eyes sparked at the mention of Yura. He slid his eyes to Victor but he couldn’t seem to form any questions. Victor thanked Katya and watched her leave hesitantly, concern in her movements.

After she left, Victor eased Yuuri out of his worry soaked clothes and wiped him down, pulling on a fresh t-shirt and sweatpants. Yuuri felt heavy in his arms, his brown eyes watching Victor’s movements. Victor settled him back into the bed, smoothing his mate’s hair. “Rest, my Yuuri,” he murmured. The nurse returned and reconnected Yuuri to the instruments monitoring him as he finished.

Victor felt those brown eyes following him as he stepped into the bathroom. Victor made short work of cleaning himself up and wiping down his body. Sweatpants and a T-shirt felt welcoming on his form. When he returned, Yuuri’s eyes fluttered and then closed, relief filtering across his
features before relaxing into sleep. Victor took his place by his side, sliding his hand into Yuuri as he occupied the chair by his side. Victor barely left afterwards, glaring when his body demanded he use the facilities.

Victor watched his mate as the omega slept in the hospital bed looking so small. He worried about the setbacks the omega would suffer and started formulating strategies to make sure he was well nourished and had the emotional care in place. His phone died on him in the middle of his third email to Phichit. He looked into the brown paper bag and frowned at the lack of cell phone charger. Looking over at Yuuri, though, he decided it could wait. He settled back into his chair and tried to find some sleep, dozing and slipping into dreams only to be startled awake as they turned dark, pulling forth all of his fears of losing Yuuri to that man.

It was almost a relief when he looked up as the night shift doctor stepped in once more, his eyes studying the numbers on the chart and then thinning his lips. “You’re mate’s pheromone panels still show to be quite elevated. To be honest, I’m surprised he’s not in drop.” The doctor lifted Yuuri’s wrist and took his pulse as he frowned.

Victor grasped at explanations as he told the doctor, “The man...the one that tried to get to him...Yuuri spent years being abused by him.” Victor thought of how Yuuri must have a wealth of strength built up in his small body. “His instincts took over today trying to protect our son...and I’m sure himself.”

The doctor nodded but something still seemed to be bothering him. “It’s a lot of trauma...we may be keeping him more than one night. I’m not comfortable releasing him with pheromones at this level. He could still slip into drop.”

Victor looked up surprised. “After the danger is past?”

“Adrenaline,” the doctor stated. “Once it cleared his system, the rest was able to surface. Did you notice the lethargy?”

Victor nodded. “He seemed to crash after we settled him into the room.”

The doctor nodded in agreement. “That’s an expected response. We’ll keep an eye on him. I’ve ordered periodic blood panels to check his hormone and pheromone levels. His endocrine system will tell us a lot about how he is progressing.”
Victor turned back to his mate feeling helpless. “What...do I do?”

“Stay nearby. If he’s still guarding, we might bring the child in to settle his concerns tomorrow. If he drops, I’ll need you nearby though. So don’t leave. I prefer we not bring him back using drugs. It’s hard on the body...especially if…” The doctor frowned before asking, “Any chance he’s carrying?”

Victor slowly shook his head. “He was checked twice after his last heat.”

The doctor pursed his lips before shaking his head. “I’d like to run a test just in case. If he drops, it will save us time knowing which protocol to take.”

“Oh...okay,” Victor answered, rattled and staring at his mate with worry, disregarding the pregnancy test as inconsequential. He focused on the present danger. If Yuuri dropped, Victor had to be ready and he’d already expended a lot of energy holding his family together. “May I...rest beside my mate?”

The doctor nodded even as he gave the nurse the orders. “It will probably do you both some good. A lab tech will be up shortly to take another blood panel. Make sure the arm with the IV is not bound.”

“I’ll lie behind him. Maybe...it will help?” Victor was pulling at any hope he had left.

The doctor heard the need in the alpha’s voice and turned. He smiled reassuringly, “It could...omegas respond much more positively with their mates nearby. After the tech finishes taking his blood, then both of you can get some rest.”

Victor nodded and a few minutes later, a tech entered the room and took the sample. They offered a reassuring smile and then slipped away. Victor slipped out of his shoes and set them carefully next to Yuuri’s, reaching down to reset his mate’s shoes with care. Standing up, he crossed over and slipped in behind Yuuri, an arm resting around his mate’s waist. He slipped his hand up under Yuuri’s shirt, scenting the omega and reassuring him of the alpha’s presence.

Victor could feel his mate jerking in his arms pulling him from his sleep. A groan slipped from his
lips followed by a whispered, “please,” elongated with pain, a whimper escaping his throat.

“Yuuri,” Victor murmured, pulling him close, releasing his scent to help ease the omega’s fear. The form turned in his arms, moving into his neck. “That’s it, solnyshko. Take from me what you need.” He helped ease the wires and connections as he settled Yuuri.

The moan that followed settled into a sign, Yuuri burrowing up into his neck and breathing him in. Yuuri knotted his hand into Victor’s shirt and slept a while longer. Victor watched the IV tube feeding from the saline sack hanging from the stand until he dozed back off.

The lights were still dim in the room as the doctor entered. Victor had only dozed on and off through the rest of the night and he moved stiffly to slip from his mate’s side. The doctor studied the charts and spoke quietly with the alpha. “I’d rather tell you both this, but as his mate I feel comfortable telling you first. The tests show that he is pregnant and his body has instinctively stayed in a protective state because of this.”

Victor blinked processing that information. “The other tests...they were negative. H-how...Will he...will the baby...are they okay?”

The doctor cut the concerns off. “It’s too early for us to know anything for certain.” He didn’t want to worry the man, but worse was to give him a false hope. “We’ve contacted his primary care physician and she’ll be in later this morning to address the obstetrical matters. However, I would like to listen for the fetal heartbeat.”

Victor nodded, looking at his mate with worry. “He’s lost four others. I don’t know if he’s ready…”

“Ready or not, he’s pregnant.” The doctor removed a stethoscope from his pocket, placing it around his neck. “Now we have to deal with that.”

Victor helped to reposition Yuuri whose eyes blinked open to look at him sleepily. “What’s…”

“The doctor just wants to examine you,” Victor explained gently.
Yuuri nodded shifting further with a grunt. He laid still while the doctor palpated around his abdomen and then used a stethoscope. After confirming a heartbeat, he looked up at Victor and nodded. Victor sat next to Yuuri sliding an arm around him.

The doctor pulled the chair forward and took a deep breath, watching the omega who looked so small and fragile and mentally preparing to give news he wasn’t sure how the patient would receive. He watched the alpha rub a reassuring hand up and down the omega’s arm. “We’ve been trying to determine why your body is still holding onto elevated pheromones and we think we’ve determined one piece of the puzzle.”

“Okay?” Yuuri responded, his eyes moving from the doctor to Victor and back, his brow wrinkling in confusion.

“We normally see this when an omega is pregnant or guarding their young,” he continued.

Yuuri relaxed visibly, assuming he understood. “Oh...I thought we told the intake doctor. I was protecting Yura.”

The doctor narrowed his eyes and then looked up at Victor uncertainly.

“Yura is my son, Yuuri’s adopted son.”

“I believe we talked about him last night. It might be good to bring him around today.” He refocused on Yuuri and continued. “Your levels are moving down at an even slower rate than I could fully explain but your mate explained some of the trauma you’ve experienced in your past.”

Yuuri nodded, hugging himself, his eyes dropping down to his lap. “What’s going on?” He lifted his eyes, tilting his head.

The doctor exchanged glances with Victor before focusing on Yuuri. “One of the tests I ran was a pregnancy test.”

“Oh, but I’m not pregnant. We’ve already checked that,” Yuuri clarified, ready to dismiss that concern and move on.
The doctor pursed his lips. “Well, sometimes our bodies aren’t as forthcoming in the early stages of our pregnancy.”

Yuuri narrowed his eyes as he processed what the doctor was telling him. “But...I was on birth control,” Yuuri argued.

“For how long?” the doctor asked, looking for a way to help the omega adjust to the new information.

“Ummm, around two or three weeks? Just before my heat. Victor and I...we didn’t...you know...have sex until after...well, right after my heat broke. And I guess Victor had come off of his rut…”

The doctor nodded as he listened to the tumble of information. “You were only on it for a couple of weeks. That’s a little soon for it to take full effect. Your fertile cycle will have begun the week before your heat and concluded the week after...although it is possible to become pregnant beyond that window of opportunity.”

Yuuri stared at his hands as he processed the information. “You’re saying...I’m pregnant?”

The doctor nodded. “I just listened to your baby’s heartbeat.”

Yuuri remained still, and then in a small voice, he asked, “Can I hear it?”

The doctor smiled warmly. “Yes, of course. I’ll arrange that now.”

The doctor was surprisingly swift and soon an obstetrical nurse had him connected to fetal heartbeat doppler. Yuuri’s eyes then widened at the swift beat of the tiny heart, looking up at Victor. The alpha could see the questions, the worry...but also the wonder and the almost fearful happiness.

“I don’t know...how I’m feeling right now,” he whispered.

“That’s okay,” Victor reassured him. “We’ll take it one step at a time.”
Yuuri nodded then turned back to the technician. “Thank you.”

She smiled brightly, “You’re scheduled for an ultrasound later this morning.”

Yuuri blinked and turned back to Victor. “I get to see them?”

Victor nodded.

Looking back at the technician, he murmured, “I’ve...never heard them or saw them.”

The tech didn’t quite know what to say to that, but kept her face peaceful. What was considered basic prenatal care seemed to have been out of Yuuri’s reach. She smiled reassuringly. “It will be at ten, I’ll come by to take you there myself.”

“Thank you, I’d like that.” Yuuri watched everyone leave and chewed on that information, biting the inside of his jaw with worry. Finally he turned back to Victor. “What if...I’m underweight?”

Victor could hear in Yuuri’s voice the tidal wave of worries that were building up in him. “Dr. Romanova is coming in to see you later this morning. I’m sure she will be able to address all of your questions. Dr. Alexandrov seemed unconcerned.”

Yuuri processed that information but then shook his head, rejecting it outright. “But Dr. Romanova said I needed to gain more weight before I became pregnant.”

“Ideally,” Victor added. He knew his mate was focusing on the negative, not allowing himself the hope of a happy outcome. It was a defense mechanism, one that served him well for years. “However, when we came to her with the concern before, she wasn’t worried. She said we’d work together to bring the baby into the world healthy and fully developed.” He hoped the words would give Yuuri something to hold onto until she arrived.

Yuuri sighed, turning to stare out the window. “I guess.” The omega blinked as tears slipped out of his eyes. The turmoil in his heart forced a disconnect from the world as he focused on the small trails of rain sliding down the window. So many questions kept crowding into his thoughts...and he’d like to say they were all about the baby, part of him continued to push other worries back...but
he could remember every baby, every loss, every moment of emptiness...and the words that followed. A good omega wouldn’t keep losing their baby. You’re broken. You’re lucky that someone even wants you. And then one day, he didn’t...and Yuuri was relieved. But...one day maybe Victor wouldn’t want him...and Yuuri knew he wouldn’t feel relieved. Something would die inside of him...the part of him that had awakened since Victor came into his life. If I lose you, something inside me would die. If I lose both of you...

Closing his eyes, he reached down and tentatively ran his hand over his tummy, not yet a swell, the thinness felt through the t-shirt. But...what if...

Victor watched him and guiltily thought, at least he isn’t focusing on Shuji...maybe this is a good thing. He slipped his arms around Yuuri from behind, pressing a kiss onto his shoulder. That body relaxed into him but there was still a distance, Yuuri lost in his thoughts. Victor worried for him and knew they had a long day ahead of them.

“I’ll contact Phichit to bring Yura by,” he began.

Yuuri shook his head. “No...I mean...I want him near but...this isn’t a good place for little boys.”

Yuuri was relieved that his doctor arrived. She warmly greeted him. “It seems we have some surprising news.”

Yuuri nodded anxiously. “I don’t...maybe...what if…” He blinked and took a deep breath. “I...have some concerns.”

She sat down next to his bed and invited, “I can understand that completely. Let’s address each of those one by one.”

Yuuri slowed down, took a breath and began. “I...the reason I’m here...h-he tried to get to me.”

“And you’re worried about the stress your body has undergone,” she surmised as she reached for his charts.
Yuuri nodded with quick jerky movements, scratching at his arms, his eyes looking around the room.

“You are in a hospital and here we are able to monitor not only your pheromone levels but your stress.” She waved to all of the instruments attached to him. “All of these things will keep track of your blood pressure and other indicators of stress so that we can act quickly to see to your...and baby’s needs.”

“But what if…”

She hushed that thought. “We won’t worry about what if’s. Only what is. For now, you have elevated pheromones in a protective state.” She looked around thoughtfully before adding, “It might be good for you to bring your other child close. Your omega instincts might settle better with your little one nearby.”

“I...don’t want to upset him,” Yuuri argued. He met Victor’s eyes and saw the disagreement in them.

She shook her head, arguing, “He’s likely already worrying about you. I understand that he couldn’t come with you in the ambulance and that you might want to send him home with a friend or family if you have to stay another night but...it may help settle you enough for your panels to normalize.”

Yuuri considered those words and felt the soundness in the argument. He slowly nodded and then looked up at Victor. “Do you think…”

Victor was already nodding his agreement. “I’ll call Chris after the good doctor leaves.”

She smiled at the quick action of this alpha. “Good. Now...what else is concerning you?”

Yuuri looked at his hands. “I...I’m underweight.”

The doctor hummed, seeing how guilty the man felt. “Your weight isn’t where I’d like to see it ideally but we’ll pull your nutritionist onto your pregnancy care team and develop the best approach for you to provide proper nutrition for your growing baby.”
Yuuri drew in a breath and let it out slowly. He opened his mouth and closed it, afraid of putting his greatest fear into words. Finally, he pushed out the words. “I don’t want to lose my baby. I’ve lost...too much already.”

She nodded, as she reached out to squeeze his hand. “We are going to do everything to prevent any loss of life...including more frequent prenatal appointments, prenatal vitamins, appropriate activity levels, dietary concerns, and psychological support. I want all of your caregivers on your team...including your mate and the staff that looks out for you.”

Yuuri nodded hesitantly before murmuring, “But what if...I don’t know if I’m ready to tell everyone.”

She pursed his lips knowing she would need to push him, “I’m going to be blunt. I want people around you to know so that we can get you to proper care as needed. Further out, you decide when. However, for those close to you, I recommend you be more open.”

Yuuri nodded, sighing. The truth of the matter was that they had a five year old. The baby wouldn’t be secret long. Yura noticed too much and would figure it out fairly quickly.

“So...the technician said something about an ultrasound?”

She beamed. “Yes! Are you ready to see what your little bean looks like?”

He took a deep breath and nodded, grabbing hold of Victor’s hand. Soon the nurse returned with a wheelchair and he was disconnected from the various instruments and escorted to radiology. With his doctor in the room, he not only had the attention of the technician but the doctor was able to add in her experience.

Yuuri watched the screen with wide eyes, the small bean shape of his baby peering back at him. He reached for Victor’s hand and laced their fingers together. This is real. They are real. He blinked, realizing his eyes were tearing up. “Hello, little one. Stay strong. I want to meet you.”

Victor pressed a kiss into that dark crop of hair. They hadn’t been together half a year and already they were bringing a life into the world. “We’ll work together to make this happen, my beautiful Yuuri,” he murmured.
Yuuri’s eyes remained trained on the image, feeling his throat tighten with tears. “All of those times...I didn’t get any of this. I never...got to meet them.”

Victor wrapped his arms around Yuuri, pressing his cheek into Yuuri’s hair, his eyes fluttering shut for a moment. Swallowing, he peered up at the doctor, as overwhelmed as his mate.

“It looks like your little one is developing nicely. They are about the size of a raspberry. You are right on target for eight weeks. There are a lot of great apps out there that can help you follow or even record your progression and to give you an idea about how your baby is developing.” She wrote down a series of notes to herself and then began again. “I will call in a prescription for prenatal vitamins and we’ll go over your medications before you leave the hospital and make sure we don’t need to rethink anything.”

“I don’t really take anything that’s not over the counter,” Yuuri murmured, turning his attention to the doctor. “An occasional tylenol for muscle aches or headaches. I am on nutrition supplements suggested by my nutritionist. I usually try to rest when I’m not feeling well.” He’d become used to taking care of himself without a physician’s care over the years. Shuji denied him that luxury.

The doctor took on a positive attitude as she answered, “That’s actually good. I will give you a list of restrictions and we’ll be able to move forward from there.”

Yuuri nodded, and as his eyes caught another glimpse of his baby, he felt himself tearing up. “I just...want to do my best...for them.”

“We’ll all do our best for them,” Dr. Romanova assured her patient.

Yuuri nodded as the technician handed him a tissue to clean up the coupling gel from his stomach. Looking up at Victor, he asked, “Did Chris answer you about Yura?”

“Phichit is going to bring him by after lunch and will pick him up when we call or close to eight.”

Yuuri nodded. He needed his other baby close. He was quiet as they loaded him back into the wheelchair and returned him to his room. He took a bathroom break before they reconnected him to all of the instruments. But he noticed there weren’t as many as before. *That has to be a good thing*, he determined.
Yuuri was dozing, the lab tech having just taken another vial of blood for more tests minutes before when a bundle of blond energy burst into the room. In vain, Phichit reached for him, calling out, “Slow down!”

Forewarned, Victor caught the squirmy boy who looked worriedly at his mama. Fierce green eyes studied all of the instruments and appraised the situation in true childhood fashion, all hospital visits were bad. “Is Mama okay?”

Victor righted the child against his chest, pulling his attention and signalling for him to quiet down. “He is...they just want to watch him because...of yesterday.”

Yura nodded, hugging into his dad. “It was real scary.” Now that his initial panic was over he was able to find comfort in his father’s arms.

Victor breathed in the scent of his little son, feeling the body calm. “How did you sleep?”

Yura shrugged. “I had a bad dream but Phichit slept with me after.” He was wriggling once more reaching for his mother. “I want...my Yuuri.”

Victor chuckled, murmuring, “Our Yuuri.”

They watched as a pair of warm brown eyes opened and rested on the boy before Yuuri reached out. Phichit was pulling off Yura’s shoes while Victor was settling him into Yuuri’s arms. The little blonde hugged into his embrace and they both remained like that for a long time.

Phichit sat down next to him in the chair vacated by the doctor earlier. “So...what’s going on?”

Yuuri smiled over to his friend, “My protective pheromones are still high. They were watching to make sure I didn’t go into drop.”
Phichit had long since graduated with a Masters Degree in Yuuri Katsuki studies, and he could hear when his friend was giving him only half the story. The Thai man studied him, his expression worried. “But...they are keeping you another night.”

Yuuri shrugged. “Dr. Romanova thinks having Yura nearby will help but things are leveling slowly because...well…” His eyes flitted up to Victor.

The alpha reached for his son but Yuuri held onto him, reluctant to relinquish the little boy. The omega held his eyes and shook his head. He mouthed the words to the alpha, *I can do this.*

Phichit waited patiently, knowing Yuuri needed time to get to where he needed to be mentally. Finally, the older omega said the last few words. “I’m apparently...pregnant.”

Phichit’s eyes widened, flicked up to Victor and then back to Yuuri. “Oh, Yuuri...how far along are you? Is the baby okay?” He realized he wasn’t sure exactly how to react. Wanting to make sure Yuuri didn’t feel pressured he moved his focus to his friend. “How...are you ?”

Yura’s ears perked up at that and he raised up his head to ask, “Is Mama having a baby?”

Yuuri smiled shakily. “It appears so.” He pressed a kiss into that blond head. It was Yura’s excitement that helped him begin to love the idea, even if it was tentative. *Maybe that little sister will happen sooner than you expect.* Looking back up towards Phichit, he answered, “I’m about eight weeks in. I...am hopeful? But still scared. But...I heard their heart and it sounded strong. And then I was able to see them.”

“You can see the baby?” Yura asked, his eyes studying Yuuri’s tummy.

Yuuri and the others chuckled. “They used a special machine that uses sound to make a picture. The baby is still very tiny. Think of an acorn. Or...a raspberry.” Yura looked at him with big round eyes and Yuuri smiled warmly. Just having the little boy there beside him was warming up all of the spaces inside of him, making it easier to accept...the possibility. “Yes...and the picture...they are a little bean.”

Yura’s eyes sparkled with joy, “Can I see it?”

Yuuri hugged him close and nodded. “You can come with me when I have an official ultrasound,”
he promised, resting his forehead against the little boy’s and holding those intense green eyes. “That’s how they look at the baby.”

Phichit smiled as he watched his friend somehow focusing on the good after the bad, the rainbows after the storms. He sent prayers up that this baby will come full term and thrive. He worried that Yuuri couldn’t handle another heartbreak. Catching Victor’s eyes, he could see a similar concern in the alpha’s expression.

“Well, I’m going to leave you to enjoy your family time and I’ll be back later,” Phichit promised, relinquishing his chair.

Yuuri turned and met Phichit’s eyes before saying with meaning, “I don’t mind if you tell Chris but...I’m not putting it out there that I’m pregnant until I’m past a safe time frame.”

“Thank you for letting me tell Chris...and of course. You share this news on your terms,” Phichit promised but then nodded towards Yura. “Of course, you told a five-year-old.”

Yuuri nodded as he hugged him close. “Yura is good with secrets but if it slips out, we’ll take it in stride.”

After Phichit left, Yura laid next to him, green eyes blinking up at him. “Why is Baby a secret?”

Yuuri ran his fingers through Yura’s hair as he thought about his reasonings. “I guess it’s because...I’ve lost so much. I want to keep this close to my heart as long as possible.”

Yura hugged him and murmured, “I lost my Mom and you lost your babies. I want to hold you close to my heart, too.”

Yuuri could feel the swelling of a much too full heart within him and his eyes flicked up to Victor as he felt the warmth of the alpha’s hand close over his own. One look at the man’s face and Yuuri could see that he felt as much. Returning his gaze to Yura, he whispered, “And I as well...you are my first...my most beautiful son.” He then kissed Yura’s forehead. There might be a baby coming into their lives but Yuuri wanted to make sure his son didn’t feel second to the other. Hearts grow with the addition of more people, not divide.

Chapter End Notes
Oh my goodness!
Recovery

Chapter Summary

As Yuuri approaches his recovery, it takes a team of caregivers and friends.

Chapter Notes

I rewrote this...I wanted to make sure it didn't feel rushed. I've had an exhausting summer and maybe I rushed the last chapter a little. I did return to it and went back over it, making minor adjustments. It may have shifted the tone a small bit but for the most part, the story stays the same. And now we are here...and Yuuri needs to get better. And not just Yuuri...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 45: Recovery

Yuuri shifted uncomfortably in Phichit and Chris’s family room. He’d been released from the hospital and while he just wanted to go home, he couldn’t. Not yet. The police had it taped off, it was a crime scene after all, and had them blocked out. The police were thorough, and even though they understood the family’s desire to return to normal, it was paramount that they collect all evidence to ensure Shuji’s conviction. Yuuri understood, intellectually if not emotionally. The omega didn’t have access to any of his comfort items and although Phichit’s space smelled like his best friend, nothing smelled like Yuuri.

The room was beautiful, creative with color and design, and if this were a friendly visit, Yuuri could focus on his friend’s tastes. But that wasn’t the case. They were there almost as refugees from their home. Yuuri had suffered the trauma of the attack, survived a near drop, been shocked with the news that he was pregnant all while he was unable to comfort himself inside familiar smells and surroundings. The pressure was mounting and he found himself being drawn into unhealthy coping techniques. He scratched at his arm anxiously. He withdrew and disappeared into himself, staring out the window and losing himself in his thoughts. He pushed food around on his plate and Victor had to remind him that baby needed more for him to force the bite down.

As nighttime fell, he found himself battling to fall asleep in a guest bed sterilized from previous guests. He’d had the little boy snuggle in the sheets prior, insisting on watching a movie to create a nest sense in the bed. Yura’s scent was beginning to build up in the surface so Yuuri could almost
relax. Almost. However, it was the hospital all over again.

Victor understood, he had watched his Yuuri pull at his hair, scratch then abruptly stop scratching at his arms. Fortunately the omega was able to keep himself eating on the schedule the nurses had given him before being discharged. But the alpha knew it wasn’t enough and pushed his scent out as much as was acceptable. It was, after all, their friends’ home. Yuuri pulled his son into his arms, the small form quickly falling asleep with his mother’s scent nearby. Victor’s hand wormed in between mother and son and rested on Yuuri’s tummy, a protective touch over the unborn baby.

Hours later both Victor and Yuuri groaned, waking up drenched. The little boy whimpered, rubbing his eyes and trying to hide in Yuuri’s arms. “I’m sorry,” he cried softly.

“Oh, honey, you don’t need to be sorry,” Yuuri murmured. “Little boys wet the bed. Let’s get you cleaned up.”

The sound of the shower must have pulled Phichit from his sleep for Yuuri emerged to find the teakettle on and Phichit sitting at the bar with Victor who had taken the other shower. Settling Yura into a cocoon of blankets on the sofa, the dim lights offering a cozy retreat, he patted the boy until he dozed off before joining the other two adults.

“I should have said something about the bedwetting,” Phichit murmured, as he poured the tea.

Yuuri studied the cup, his expression pensive. He started as his mate’s hand slid over his own. “I’m sorry,” he whispered, taking the little boy’s troubles onto himself. *If only I’d stayed away, Yura wouldn’t have to go through this.*

“This isn’t your fault,” Victor argued.

Yuuri shook his head. “Then whose is it? Yura wouldn’t be having these struggles if it weren’t for me.”

“That doesn’t mean that it is bad for you to be here. He…wet the bed when Yelena passed away. He’d only been recently potty trained and regressed. That’s when I made an appointment with a child psychologist…I wanted to make sure I was getting him the care that he needed.”

Yuuri let those words wash over him but they didn’t alleviate the guilt he felt. Just as he felt guilty
for keeping Phichit from his mate for all of those years, for Olga’s concussion, for Nikolai’s violent outburst...for Victor having to shoulder all of this. A tear escaped, sliding down his cheek and he found it hard to swallow the lump in his throat. “I’m stuck,” he admitted, his voice a whisper.

Phichit and Victor both slipped arms around him, hugging him close. His best friend. His mate. Yuuri knew he couldn’t get through this without them. Still, he hated it. Hated hurting those around him. Hated his own weakness.

“Tomorrow,” Victor murmured, “we need to start moving forward. We’ll go into work. You will go see Abramovich. Yura will visit Zoya, the child psychologist. And we will find our routine again.”

To the untrained eye the sports complex looked cold from the outside and perhaps it felt cold on the inside but as they stepped through the door, they were surrounded by nothing but warmth. The team had returned from competition and each of the skaters who had to travel returned worried about “Coach Yuuri”. As the three of them walked through the door, Victor with Yura on his hip, Yuuri looking small under the heavy coat and beanie, they were encircled in warm bodies.

The skaters needed to touch him, to know he was okay. Respectful of his space, and mindful that he might not like being crowded, they kept a distance, but still some hands lit upon the jacket. Yuuri shed his coat and beanie, handing them off to Victor who had handed Yura over to Pyotr. The omega then moved forward, reaching out to each skater and confirming he was alright.

“Coach, are you okay?” Alexie inquired, worry in his voice, not quite trusting his eyes.

“I’m getting there,” Yuuri answered with a shaky smile. He reached out and squeezed the hand offered by the skater he’d been working with one-on-one. He stiffened a moment as a hand clapped onto his back and he turned to see Ivan’s tooth-confident grin shining at him.

“That vermin is gone now. You’ll be fine.”

It was meant as reassurance, Ivan believing in Yuuri’s recovery. Yuuri envied the assurity that alpha seemed to possess, and hoped it was from an ability to see into the future. He offered him a smile. He wasn’t able to quite believe it as Ivan clearly did but his hand brushed over his tummy.
He had a promise, hope growing inside of him.

The group soon changed the subject to their competitions, each vying to show Yuuri their ugliest necklaces to date. Many were gold and Yuuri listened patiently to each of their stories, smiling as they discussed the latest gossip.

As the crowd dispersed, Yuuri knew it was time to face his first hurdle. Victor told him it could wait but the omega wanted to take care of it before his courage failed him.

Yakov looked up as Yuuri entered his office. Motioning to the chair, he leaned forward thoughtfully. “I...didn’t expect to see you here.”

“It was...a last minute decision. Before I lost my nerve, so to speak. I...needed something normal in my life but...” He shrugged. “I don’t know what can be normal after…” His words trailed off and the old coach studied the omega thoughtfully.

“Sometimes we just have to keep working towards normal. It doesn’t happen overnight. Are you seeing Abramovich?”

Yuuri nodded. “This afternoon. And Natasha. It’s just...I need to tell you something.”

Yakov waited. He knew Yuuri wasn’t the most forthcoming and he had to work up to his words. The fact that Victor hadn’t come with him hadn’t escaped his notice but he suspected it was part of the omega’s independent streak, something he greatly admired.

Hugging himself, Yuuri took a deep breath and let it out carefully. “I...may not be as available for a few months.”

Yakov nodded as he motioned towards Yuuri. “Of course...you have just gone through an ordeal. We want you to take the time that you need.”

“It’s not just...that…” Yuuri took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. Finally he whispered, “I’m
pregnant.”

Yakov was prepared for a number of things but that one took him by surprise. Finally, he erupted.
“I told that boy to be careful! How many times have we talked, had whole seminars on safe sex and prevention.” He then stilled as he saw Yuuri shrinking. His eyes gentled. “I’m sorry. I...worry. You’ve gone through so much and this...is just one more thing.”

Yuuri offered a shy smile. “I’m...worried, too. But...I thought it was important for you to know. I’m not...putting it out there. Not yet. Yura knows, though...so we’ll see.”

He sat down once more across from Yuuri, straightening papers to keep his hands busy. “We will review your time on ice and talk with your doctors about what is best for you and the baby. We had one coach that was on the ice right up until the baby was born but...”

Yuuri nodded. He knew. He was high risk. “I’m going to talk to Dr. Romanov as well. Natasha and Dr. Abramovich will know. Otherwise, I’m just taking it easy. I think most...will assume it’s because of Shuji?”

“Of course. That’s what I assumed. And...are you okay?” It was a ridiculous question. Yakov knew the moment they left his lips. But he did worry. Yuuri, in the short time he’d been in Russia, had become a part of the lifeblood of the rink. They were a family. And family worried about one another.

Yuuri smiled shyly, sadness shining in his eyes. “I...am working on being okay?”

“If you need another place, you are welcome here. Sometimes...I think Vitya forgets that.”

Yuuri shook his head. “He knows...he’s proud, stubborn.” He shrugged once more, the smile a little more genuine. “Like me, I suppose. I’m...finding that part of myself more and more.”

“I’m here just the same,” he offered.

Yuuri nodded as he stood to leave. Yakov saw the reluctance to join the real world but then Yuuri found his resolve and offered a little wave as he left.
Yuuri watched his little Yura under Lilia’s care as she guided him through the positions on the barre. The little boy prattled on, talking about how scary it was but how he was glad that his Yuuri is okay. His Yuuri swallowed the knot in his throat. At least Yura was talking but...the omega closed his eyes... this is all my fault. He shouldn’t have to deal with this. He’s just a baby.

Further down the hall, Yuuri took the turn that would lead him to Abramovich’s office. He stood outside, hesitating, when he felt a warm hand on his back and a comforting scent flooding the space. Looking up, he found Victor’s encouraging smile. “Why is this hard?” he whispered.

“You tell me,” Victor murmured.

Yuuri rested the flat of his hand on the door, his eyes boring into the surface. “I...I’m afraid this is all my fault. I’m worried about Yura...and you...and Olga and Nikolai...I brought so much evil into your world. You were...better off without me.”

“We are not,” Victor stated emphatically, pulling Yuuri into an embrace, feeling Yuuri seek out his scent and then resting his cheek on the alpha’s shoulder. He continued softly, “And that’s why you have to do this, to see Dr. Abramovich...because we’re worried about you, that something was taken from you along the way...and we only want you to be restored, to be well, to...find joy again.”

Yuuri remained still as those words washed over him. Finally, he murmured, “I’m scared.”

“It’s okay to be scared. But I know how brave you are. I know you don’t let fear keep you from doing what is needed. And you need this, my Yuuri. Just as I need it. Just as Yura and Nikolai and Olga need it. And I will make sure we all get what we need but...you need this now. So please...go inside...let Dr. Abramovich take care of you.”

Yuuri nodded, swallowing the lump in his throat. He knocked lightly, hesitantly and a warm voice greeted him, inviting him inside. Opening the door, he rested his eyes on the old psychiatrist and there was something comforting and familiar about that brown sweater vest and aged face. “Hi,” he murmured, his voice small.

The psychiatrist smiled, his expression gentle as he motioned towards the chair. He looked past Yuuri to Victor at the door and nodded, agreeing to look after this most precious person for him.
before quietly closing the door. “Let’s talk,” he invited as he took the leather chair opposite of the one Yuuri now occupied, his knees gathered to his chest.

Yuuri stared at his knees, his eyes studying the hands resting there trying to find his words. “I’m...not sure where to start.”

Abramovich thinned his lips and hummed thoughtfully. “What feels...most pressing?”

Yuuri flicked his eyes up before refocusing on those hands. “Everything.” He then fell quiet for a moment before he finally whispered, “I’m pregnant...again. And I’m so afraid of losing this one.”

“Let’s talk about those fears.”

Yuuri nodded, used to how Abramovich worked and trusting the therapist. “I...want to love this baby but...I feel so hesitant. Sometimes...it slips out...the love but then I bottle it up like I’m guarding...a secret.”

“Is it a secret?”

Yuuri laughed and could hear the bitterness, wincing at the realization. “I guess...yes, it is. As much as possible. Yura knows.”

“Who else have you told?”

Yuuri shrugged. “Besides my doctor, my mate...I’ve told my best friend Phichit and he told his mate with my permission...and Yakov.”

“Who does this secret protect?”

Yuuri slid his hands down his shins, hugging his knees closer. “I...I don’t want to cause any more pain than necessary. My parents, my sister, my friends back home...they all mourned for the others. I was trapped in my own sadness and didn’t see it. Not at first. But now I know.”
“Mourning is not a bad thing, Yuuri. We do this to move on. It’s when we don’t mourn that I worry.”

“But...can you have too much sadness?”

Abramovich considered that question before answering, “We can sometimes get stuck in our sadness. That’s when you need help from people like me. Do you feel stuck in your sadness?”

Yuuri half shrugged before slowly nodding. “I...think I’m getting better then get pushed back.”

“Let’s talk about what pushed you back this time,” Abramovich guided.

“Well...Shuji...I told you last time that he’d found me, that he’d been in my yard.”

“We talked about that and discussed how that is stalking behavior.”

Yuuri nodded. “And...well, he broke into my house and tried to get to me. I...grabbed Yura and hid in the omega room. It has scentlocks.”

“That sounds...amazingly sensible. What happened next?”

Yuuri shrugged. “I started to shut down. All I could hear was his incessant pounding on the door and I was terrified he’d get to us. I...pushed things in front of the door. I don’t even know that they would have stopped him but I needed to put as much as possible between us. Then...I grabbed Yura and burrowed into the back of the closet. At that point...I disconnected.”

“Omegas are wired to protect their young against all potential threats. You felt your son was threatened as well as yourself. You did what was natural. Tell me about...after.”

“Victor and Phichit talked me out. Then I had to go to the hospital. And now...I’m here.”

Abramovich thinned his lips at the glossing over of facts. Studying the omega, he suggested gently, “A part of you is still back there, buried in that closet...or maybe in that white room.”
Yuuri blinked, hugging his knees closer as a whine slipped from his throat. The psychiatrist reached into a box, he had one for every alpha and omega patient. Inside, he retrieved a small shirt belonging to Yura that his patient brought to him early on, a scent touchstone. Removing it from the ziplock, he handed it over to Yuuri who snatched it, pulling it to his face, before his arms wrapped back around his knees.

“Let’s focus on how to get you out of that room. Have you thought about...going back there?”

Yuuri shook his head violently.

“What about...the room upstairs?”

Everything in Yuuri tightened up but then he saw an out. “I-I can’t. The police...the house…” Shaking his head he said, “They won’t let us in.”

“But they will...and I think that’s an important goal. To face that room.”

Yuuri shrugged. Maybe later. He didn’t have to deal with that for now. “I think...I need to make sure Yura is okay.”

The doctor could see Yuuri’s avoidant habits slip into place, practiced to the point where the transition was seamless. To an unpracticed mind, he may have gotten away with it. “And that’s important...but you can take the best care of him if you take care of yourself.” Yuuri huffed in response and the doctor ducked his head into his notes to hide his smile. “Let’s talk about what we can do for now.”

Yuuri nodded in agreement. “I’m focusing on making sure I’m well for baby. I go to see Natasha next. And I need to go talk to Dr. Romanov…” Yuuri continued to go on making lists and the doctor could see that this was another avoidant strategy. He let it continue for a time, the lists letting him know Yuuri’s priorities. And then he broke into the nervous chatter.

“I’m glad to hear you are focusing on self-care for the body. Let’s see if we can focus on some mindful activities.”
Yuuri nodded, his lips stilling as he listened to the doctor. Activity was good. Activity kept him from digging too deeply. Kept him...from dreaming of that room.

“Many patients I work with come on board with certain strategies they use to take care of themselves, things that have helped them through in the past.”

Yuuri considered this before he murmured, “I danced...the places he kept me were sparsely furnished. There was always room to dance...as long as he didn’t lock me up.”

Abramovich studied Yuuri a moment at this sudden insight and decided to push...gently. “What did you do when he did lock you up?”

Yuuri laughed bitterly, almost maniacally and the psychiatrist could see the lack of focus in Yuuri’s eyes. “I stole a marker and wrote all over the walls.”

The psychiatrist blinked at this, and realized where most saw a cry for help, Yuuri...was finding a way to fight back and keep it from consuming him, he was finding his voice. “Then that’s what we’ll do. Dance...and write.”

Yuuri blinked at the doctor’s words, surprise registering in the part of his lips. “I can’t go back there.”

“And you won’t. You’re not ready for that. Certainly not while pregnant. However, you will build on the foundation of your own self-care strategies. I want you to pick up a journal. It can be something small, something simple...or you can search out the stores and find something that really resonates with something inside you. What’s most important is what goes inside. This is a place to spill out all of the messy things inside. It is also a place for you to set your intentions of the day...what do you want for the day? It doesn’t need to go beyond that. Just work on each day at a time. For messy things, spilling out your emotions, your anger, your sorrow...I suggest setting a timer. That’s all of the time you’re allotted for those emotions. Then close the book on it and move forward. This way you aren’t avoiding them...you’re just putting them in their place.”

“Can I have...two journals? One for the messy stuff and one for the good stuff?”

“You can as long as you understand...the messy stuff is not bad...it just is. I can tell you are still carrying a lot of blame. You blame yourself for getting caught in the first place...for keeping it secret...and finally for bringing your troubles to Russia. None of these are your fault...and giving
yourself permission to purge those thoughts I think is a good thing.”

Yuuri nodded as he accepted the psychiatrist’s words. “And dance?”

“It’s a way to become physical with your emotions. Again, I suggest a timer. And then you move forward.”

Yuuri hugged himself as he considered Abramovich’s words. They were small suggestions, attainable. He could do this even while living with Chris and Phichit. He nodded, putting his feet on the floor firmly, sitting up straight. “Thank you.”

“Of course, Yuuri...and I expect to see you in two days.”

“I’ll be here.” He stood and reached for the door before he hesitated. Looking back, he asked, “Do I bring the journal here?”

“You may...if you feel that you need to share it. However, you don’t have to. This is for you.”

Yuuri breathed a sigh of relief, nodding before he slipped out the door.

Yuuri felt the exhaustion of the day settling into his bones as he entered Natasha’s office and he couldn’t help the thankful smile when she placed a paper plate holding a few healthful snacks before him. Cheese, nuts, fruits and vegetables, and peanut butter. He looked up with questioning eyes.

“I received your text and appreciate you giving me a heads up to prepare for our meeting. I want you to look at the things before you. Do you think you can eat a plate like this?”

Yuuri nodded. Truthfully, he thought he could devour it right now. “It seems doable.” Then he studied the plate and asked, “Where are the carbs?”
She laughed warmly. “You have some natural sugars in there and peanut butter is full of sugar. But don’t worry. I have a second plate for you to consider.” She pulled out another plate and this one had some granola, yogurt, and fruit. “How about this?”

“I think...I could do this for breakfast...or maybe a snack.”

“And it’s something you can pack to bring with you, just like the previous option. Now...about lunch...” She set out a third plate and Yuuri saw the wrap, the tortilla encircling the meat, cheese, veggies trailing out the ends.

“It feels...like a lot.”

“I thought you might think so. That’s why I suggest you cut it in half and eat some before and some later. What I’m putting together is an idea of snacks you can bring with you to keep you going throughout the day. You will have breakfast at home. What does that typically consist of?”

“Eggs, rice, and tea...preferably the matcha my mom sends me.”

“Good...now if you could toss in some stir fried vegetables and fruit on the side, that would be ideal.” She watched Yuuri draw inward and she smiled a gentle smile, before adding, “I know that feels like a lot for you. So that’s why I’m suggesting a second breakfast midmorning...to keep your energy up for baby and for you. Something light like yogurt, providing calcium and helping to meet baby needs. Then a wrap for lunch. A snack. And if you are hungry before you leave, you can finish the wrap...maybe half it with Yura if it still feels like too much. Then at home, you will have dinner...I know Victor’s housekeeper will make something wonderful for baby and mama. Finally, I suggest something with protein and fiber before bed. Maybe peanut butter on celery.”

Yuuri hugged himself. “It seems...like a lot.”

“It does, but I’ve calculated the calories for your day and you are well within the demands of your body.”

Yuuri thought about how he could accomplish this. Writing it down was dangerous because he’d focus on the muchness of it all. Then he remembered his water and finally suggested, “I have a timer to remind me to drink water every two hours on my phone. Maybe...something like that to keep me on track?”
“I think that’s an excellent plan.”

Yuuri then looked over the options and then reached for the first plate. “Can I…”

She grinned and handed it back over. “Of course...and I am always available if you need a friend to grab a snack with.”

Yuuri smiled shakily but nodded. The cheese seemed to hit something he’d been craving and soon he devoured the entire plate. Then he stared at the scale with worry, holding onto the seat of his chair reluctant to face the numbers.

Natasha stood and guided him to the scale, turning him backwards, her eyes encouraging. “You don’t have to face the numbers,” she suggested.

Yuuri nodded, sighing. *I shouldn’t be like this. Baby needs me to gain.* “Can you...just give the numbers to Victor?”

“Is that what you want?”

“If...I’m not doing well, I think I should know. But sometimes...I get stuck on the number and it feels like failure when maybe...it’s not?”

She nodded. “I understand. Let’s set celebration points. I’ll keep your partner in the loop since you requested it but otherwise, we’ll celebrate your gains at certain intervals.”

Yuuri walked into Victor’s office and laughed at the new sofa. Victor was on the ice with his skaters but Yuuri didn’t need him there to know that he bought the sofa and had it delivered for the omega’s comfort. And Yuuri couldn’t complain as his body demanded rest. Dimming the light, he kicked off his shoes and settled onto the sofa, pulling the plaid throw over his body. He smiled at the present. *You think of everything, Vitya.*
Abramovich is preparing Yuuri for Exposure Therapy. Yuuri will eventually have to face the room in his house. It is one of many therapies that could be used with Yuuri. However, for now, it is important for Yuuri to take care of himself. One thing he will be utilizing is journaling.

Natasha, on the other hand, is concerned with Yuuri’s eating disorder along with his pregnancy. It will take a team to bring this baby into the world. It’s a good thing Yuuri has a good one.

Yura did talk to his therapist that day regarding the scary things he was exposed to and she is aware of the bedwetting situation. It doesn’t surprise her given how Yura’s other bout of bedwetting. You will see a therapy session with little Yura later.

Chapter End Notes

We will see the rest of the family's struggle but we were already up to eleven pages...so be patient.
Yuuri groaned and sat up disheveled from sleep to find Victor sitting at his desk and Yura cross legged on the rug, coloring book in hand. The scene felt normal, but something was odd… “Good evening, sleepyhead,” Victor greeted without turning his head. Yura continued to color, almost in a trance.

Feeling unsteady, Yuuri pushed himself up, wrinkling his forehead. His body felt dry, empty inside like there was a large hollow swelling in the middle of him. The scribbling of the coloring book started sounding like scratching and he noticed that Yura was running the crayon across the page in wild fashion, over and over again. He looked over to Victor and saw the man doing the same motion. The sound was bordering on unbearable. Unable to find the words he shook off the image
and reached down to feel his stomach. It was freezing cold to the touch, like a rock in the forest. His eyes searched down as he pulled back the covers, that’s when he spotted the blood. So much blood everywhere. He looked from the blood soaked bed to Yura and Victor, still scribbling furiously, the noise drowning him in panic. Yuuri cried out in alarm.

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Yuuri sat up with a gasp, the dream still holding him in his clutches. He was alone, sweat drenching his body, the tangle of the blanket wrapped around him frustrating him as he tried to get free, to see, to make sure. He finally pulled the blanket off of his body, a whine slipping from his lips as he checked himself. Relief met with tears as he dropped to his knees on the carpet, prostrating himself, his body shaking with sobs.

He didn’t hear the door open, a gentle hand sliding over his shoulder. “Yuuri,” the voice called to him. Lilia. He let her pull him to her chest. She rocked him her voice soothing. “It’s hard to be strong all the time. Let it out. Every time we break, we come back stronger.”

Yuuri sniffed back, lifting his teary face to look at her. “Is it possible to break too much?”

“If you can ask, you’re not there. Let’s go get you cleaned up.”

Yuuri didn’t question the private bathroom in Lilia’s office. Instead, he let her tend him, wiping away his tears and smoothing his hair. She frowned at the scratches on his arm but said nothing. I must have done that in my sleep. Finally, she led him back into her office, closing the door. They sat next to each other on the sofa, the ballerina taking his hands in hers. Yuuri was startled a little by the sincerity of the motion. Lilia was clearly a loving person, but how and when she chose to show her affection was a formula known only to the rink’s paragon. He smiled, feeling the warmth and strength of her hands.

“Your little boy told me a secret I don’t think I was meant to hear,” she began carefully.

Yuuri’s eyes darted up to her face and offered a quick smile to show he wasn’t upset. “I was going to tell you. It’s fine.” He sniffed a little clearing himself as he felt better, the nightmare leaving him. “I’m not...telling everybody. Maybe I won’t have to.”

She chuckled softly, the sound strengthening as she squeezed his hands. “Perhaps not. You take
your time. Most...will know not to bring it up until you are ready to talk. I think, though, you and I need to talk.” She closed her eyes, taking a deep breath before turning to pick up a small album. Opening it, she touched the pictures with reverence. “Yakov and I...we had a daughter. After many attempts, we were able to hold our own child in our arms.” She flipped through the pages showing an adorable brunette baby with bright eyes growing into a little ballerina. Yuuri smiled at a picture of the little girl skating across the ice to her papa, Yakov offering a smile so unguarded.

“Nadia...was with us for eight years before we lost her.” She closed the album, empty pages filling the remainder, setting it to the side. “I...was angry. I blamed everyone. Doctors. Yakov. But mostly, myself. It...was hard and Yakov and I nearly split over the loss. I still...dream of her. Sometimes they are so vivid and real, it’s like I can feel her, smell her hair. I wake up in a mix of emotions. Joyous to have lived in that moment, enraged that it was just a fantasy.”

Yuuri listened, feeling everything inside of him frozen. He knew what that turmoil of emotions felt like. Too many feelings all fighting for space in his heart. “I lost so much because of him. My skating, my dreams. But what hurt the worst was...the babies...I lost so many because of him, his carelessness and cruelty. I’m so afraid I’m going to lose this one...that for some reason I’m too broken to carry a baby.”

Lilia’s grasp tightened, pulling Yuuri’s eyes to her face. “You have Yura. You were trusted with a beautiful boy. If you have nothing else, you have that.”

Yuuri hugged himself and finally smiled. “I do have that.” He took in a deep breath and released it slowly. “Thank you, Lilia.”

“Of course.” She straightened herself and caught him in her vulpine eyes. “Now...do you want to talk about what distressed you so much? And that?”

Brown eyes fell to his arm and he pulled the sleeve of his shirt down past his thumb, instinctively hiding the marks he had made. Yuuri shrugged, tightening his arms and rocking back and forth. “I think my fears of losing this baby is causing nightmares.” He took a deep breath, rubbing over his wrist. “I used to do that to calm down after he...But I hadn’t done it since leaving him. I must have done it in my sleep. In my dream Victor and Yura were scribbling, the noise was so thick and I think...it was my scratching.”

“You’ve been through a lot...you need to take care of yourself.” She sat back, tapping her lips with her fingers in thought. “Dreaming of scribbling often means you are worried about communication, about understanding and being understood.” She watched for any signs in his face, but as he remained still she moved on. “How can I help?”

Yuuri smiled at the offer. “Everyone is taking such good care of me. Both those who do and don’t know about the baby. I...I really don’t deserve all this.”
“Nonsense,” she chastised. “We all want to see you better. Do you not realize the life you bring with you?”

Yuuri looked up with surprise, shaking his head slowly.

“You are more than just yourself for yourself now. You are someone to so many of us. The skaters all look up to you, many of the younger follow you like little ducklings. The older have all watched you on youtube so often I’ve noticed their step sequences changing to emulate yours. You’re an influence, a most beloved influence to all you’ve touched here. Those skaters have all claimed you as one of their own.” She spread her hands out to indicate how wide his influence has reached in their makeshift skate family. “You have basically been adopted by this ridiculous family and we take care of our own. Now...how can I help?”

Yuuri blinked as those words settled around him. “I’m...not sure. This helps, talking to you. And...Dr. Abramovich says I need to dance. Like...cathartically. But...I-I don’t think I’d want to be seen for that and the studios...they have those windows.”

She hummed thoughtfully as she thought about his needs. “So...some privacy. I think I know a place.” She stood up and reached a hand out to Yuuri who let her help him up. “Come with me.”

They walked through several hallways and up a set of stairs, the space around him holding storage, old training riggings, several racks of costumes, discarded skates. However, past all of that, she opened a door to reveal a room that was brightly painted and had well-sprung wood floors. Turning on a light switch, she made a face at the dust. “We might need to clean…”

Yuuri smiled walking into the room, breathing deeply of the seclusion of the space. “I-I can do that. It...will help me to claim the space and make it my own.”

She nodded with satisfaction. “Good. It’s been abandoned for a long time.” She looked around, her expression softening as her eyes rested on a daisy painted on one of the walls. She walked across the room and traced the flower. “This...was her space. We’d come up here and dance while her papa worked late.” Turning back to Yuuri, she spread her arms wide. “I couldn’t come back up here for a long time. It’s time for it to breathe again. Rooms shouldn’t go empty like this. Rooms need people or they develop an energy of their own.”

Yuuri didn’t know what to say. He blinked rapidly fighting away the tears of his own. How many times had he picked up the pieces of someone else’s story. Do you realize the life you bring with
you? Victor had said similar words to him. He didn’t quite understand how his struggle seemed to revive others around him. He...felt like he was always faltering, always falling, always failing.

“Thank you,” he murmured, taking the key offered to him. She nodded, squeezing his arm, before leaving him alone.

Yuuri turned slowly on his feet, examining the room. How much do we share, you and I? Would we have been friends? He thought of Yelena and her struggle. Her desperate flight from an abusive man. How hard she worked to keep her son a secret. And through all of it she found solace in dance and music, just as he had. Am I continuing in your steps? He then lifted up on the ball of his foot, feeling her presence in the room. A fouette followed. Then Yuuri closed his eyes, his childhood rising up in him, all of the teachings instilled in him by Minako-sensei, all of the years surviving on those teachings. He reached deep inside, and he found a yell, almost a guttural growl as his anger licked up his body.

The song flicked into his memory and he dug out his phone, finding it on an old playlist. Setting it to play on repeat, he began to work through the choreography, finding his voice in the movements, his shout, his cry. He personified the song, becoming the music, finding something within him he’d buried so deeply he’d thought it extinguished. But it was a rage that fired him, kept him alive in that room when all he had was a marker and walls. Yelena had walls of her own, battles she fought and won. He was like her, freed and growing. Able to move beyond the rage and cry out his existence. He could feel his past falling away, could feel his wings lift with his cry, could feel his determination slide into place. He finished, finding his strength, finding his resolve.

Looking around the room, he knew he would revive this space...and one day, he would share it with his Yura, with his little one. He smiled. It was the first time he thought of his child as a probability and not just a possibility. His hand brushed over his tummy, slipping beneath his shirt. “Fight, little one, and I’ll fight for you. Together we will fly.”

Yuuri had found cleaning supplies and was in the midst of raging war with the dust when he felt Victor’s presence behind him. He turned and spotted the lovely man leaning against the door facing. Stilling, he half shrugged, as he glanced towards the windows, so many windows, stars now glittering through the glass.

“I guess...I became lost in the activity.”

Victor nodded, reaching a hand out to Yuuri. The omega ducked down as he took that hand,
feeling Victor’s fingers lace into his, the omega’s head tucking under the alpha’s chin. Victor slid his hand around Yuuri’s waist and the gentle sway of music, the natural rhythm of Yuuri...just Yuuri, led them back into the room.

They moved with the music, Yuuri guiding Victor through the steps, Victor adding his own movements. Yuuri could feel the questions and answers, the flow of their story, the building thread of connection. They slowed to a rocking movement, back and forth, step to step, lips finding one another.

Yuuri rested his head on Victor’s shoulder. He remembered that night, how Victor held him very much like he was holding him now. Cradling him, and practically dancing him out of that room, guiding him to safety. “You...were protecting me from seeing something that night,” he whispered.

“You didn’t need to see that,” Victor answered softly, his voice steady.

Yuuri nodded, feeling the scruff from Victor’s beard growth against his skin. “I know...but...you saw everything.”

Victor sighed, tightening his arms around Yuuri. “I...can’t imagine what you’ve gone through all of these years. If I could spare you one moment of violence, so be it. I wish...I could take it all away. I wish I could protect you from all of the evil of this world.”

Yuuri listened, the words reverberating through his chest, his hand resting on the alpha’s heart covered by the other man’s hand. “I...wouldn’t be who I am. This...all of this...is what made me. And I wouldn’t want you to give up who you are, either. I wouldn’t want Yura to be lost to you along the way. So...these bad things happened...but I think...we’ll be okay. I know...I have a long way to go. I know I need to take each day as it comes but right now...I’m okay.”

Victor hugged him close, pressing his lips into Yuuri’s mop of dark hair.

“Now...where is my baby?” the omega asked as he pulled back.

Victor chuckled softly. “He’s with Lilia and Yakov. I told them I’d swing by to pick him up once you were ready.”

Yuuri nodded in acceptance. “I’m ready now.”
Yuuri smiled towards Lilia, appreciating her benevolence. It had to be a sacrifice to give up such a precious space, one that held sacred memories for her. He thought about her words and how he was feeling earlier. Dr. Abramovich wanted him to return to those spaces. The room upstairs. The white room. Yuuri knew he wasn’t ready yet. For either space. But one day he would be. One day he would choose to face his demons. Perhaps then, the rooms could find new life.

Yura was ready to go home, grumpy and sleepy as he curled up in Yuuri’s arms. The omega climbed into the backseat with him, leaving Victor to the front. Yura looked up at him sleepily while the omega buckled him into his car seat and said accusingly, “You were gone a long time.”

Yuuri smoothed his hair, leaning forward to brush a kiss into his hair. “I know, baby. I know. Mommy need to clear his head.”

Those green eyes became sharp as they looked over his mama. “Are you better now?”

Yuuri kissed the blond floss, a soft smile on his lips as he finally settled the boy in the car seat. “For now, love. How about you? How are you?”

The little boy shrugged, his expression disgruntled. “Lilia and Yakov made me eat green beans.”

Yuuri chuckled, envious that this was a true issue at that age. “Did they now?”

He lifted his hands up dramatically to show the number two. “TWO green beans, Mama. TWO! Don’t ever leave me like that again.”

Yuuri couldn’t help his smile. *Focus on the present. Focus. On the present.* “I’ll do my best, darling. How about a bath and then I read you stories when we get to Phichit and Chris’s house?”

Yura pinched his lower lip together in a motion Yuuri was sure came from watching him as he considered that option. “I suppose,” he agreed diplomatically.
Yuuri chuckled, reaching forward to tickle his green-eyed monster. They were giggling hard as Victor parked the car.

Yura was sleeping, the bed now holding liners like those found in the bottom of an omega nest, sleeping in just his underwear and t-shirt. Tucking the quilt around him, Yuuri leaned forward to kiss him, smoothing out his hair.

Rejoining the other adults, Yuuri settled in the space next to Victor in the oversized chair. Phichit watched him, raising an eyebrow as he took a drink from his glass. “I’m surprised you didn’t just curl up next to the little tiger.”

Yuuri laughed. “I considered it. I just...needed to talk.”

Victor squeezed his mate into his side. Phichit leaned forward and Chris’ hand slid up the younger omega’s back. Phichit invited the conversation with a soft, “Okay.”

“I...am not doing well. But I want to. Really want to. I...need to be more proactive in this journey. I think up until now, I’ve been reacting to the world around me and well, at best I’m treading water. Some days, I’m drowning. Up until today...I fought against everything. I heard but I didn’t listen. Not well. I’ve made it difficult for everyone to take care of me. Still, you all did it. Today...I realized I was free.” Yuuri took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Free...I didn’t even feel that when Phichit picked me up on the side of the road. Part of me kept waiting for him to change his mind.” His eyes flicked up and then down to his hands, wringing together. “I guess...he sorta did. I allowed myself to be lulled into a false sense of security but...I don’t know that I ever really believed it.”

“Youuri,” Phichit whispered.

“I know...it’s just...he’s let me go before only to drag me back. He’s stripped everything from me time and time again until...until I no longer believed I deserved anything. I felt...devalued. I felt...worthless.” He felt Victor’s arm tighten around him and he glanced up, offering a smile before continuing. “I know, Vitya, I know. You do everything to let me know what I mean to you. And you’re not the only one. So many. Alexie tried to give me his medal.” He sniffed that back. “It’s hard, you know. I keep waiting for the shoe to drop. I’m scared that it will all fall apart, that somehow I’m going to lose everything. And this time, I’ll not survive it, I have too much to lose. But I know that this is my insecurity talking. I’m safe with you, with my family, with building our future together. I’m ready to stop treading water. I want to get better. I want...to learn how to fly...learning to fly.”
Across the room Phichit’s smile beamed as tears silently fell down his cheeks. He cuddled into Chris, stifling a sob.

“We’re all here for you,” Victor reassured him.

Yuuri looked up with a smile before refocusing on his hands. “I know. There...are some hard roads ahead. Dr. Abramovich...he thinks I need to face...those rooms. And I’m terrified at the prospect. I...don’t want to go upstairs. I know...Vitya was shielding me from seeing the worst of it...but I heard him, I can still hear him beating on the door and yelling his threats to me.” Yuuri wrapped his arms around himself and started to rock back and forth. “I still...hear every single thing he said to me, every negative word. I don’t know how to silence his voice. I don’t...know how to keep moving forward.”

Victor’s hand moved up and down Yuuri’s back as he listened to those words roll off of Yuuri’s lips, his eyes moving towards Phichit and Chris, the omega’s gaze intent on Yuuri. Finally, in the silence, Victor confessed, “I’ve been stuck before...maybe I still am. I focus on everyone around me and don’t...deal with my own problems.”

Yuuri looked up at him and offered him a shaky smile. “I know.”

Victor blinked, and glanced over at Chris and could tell he knew as well. “Fuck it...I’m not fooling anyone but myself.”

Yuuri took Victor’s hand, “And you’re failing at that. I guess...we’re a couple of broken souls trying to hold one another together.”

Victor shoved a hand through his hair as he leaned back in the chair, a smile tugging at his lips when Yuuri turned in his arms and settled in his embrace. Neither knew how to fix this...just that they wanted to.

It was Phichit that spoke, his words quiet but no one could ignore him. “I know Yura saw a therapist today and Yuuri talked to his psychiatrist. Did you talk to someone, Victor?”

The alpha huffed even as Chris grinned, his hand sliding up and down his mate’s back. “I intended
“You’re worse than Nikolai. You have to make time,” Yuuri murmured, his voice sounding tired.

“I will make time tomorrow. I promise,” Victor agreed softly even as he began shifting his omega in his arms. “I want to be there for you...I hear you, love.”

Yuuri continued, his voice sounding distant, his eyes closed. “I...want to fly again. I want to sing for me. I want to dance and know joy like...before him.”

“I want that for you, too.”

Yuuri’s eyes fluttered open, his hand resting on Victor’s cheek as he held those blue eyes. “I want that for you, too.”

Victor swallowed, glancing over at Phichit who watched them both intently, a thoughtful expression in his eyes. “I guess I’d best get Sleeping Beauty to bed. Good night, you two.”

“Good night,” sang Chris echoed by a thoughtful, “Sleep tight,” from his mate.

Victor scooped Yuuri up in his arms, the omega curling into the turn of his neck breathing him in. He wished he could spend the evening scenting Yuuri and making sure he felt real. For now, Yuuri seemed somewhere in Limbo.

He helped the omega undress, settling him into his bed. The alpha worried about his tiny family curled up in their temporary bed. Reaching for the switch, he turned out the lights.

Victor didn’t know what woke him at first. His son was curled up against his side. Dry. Sleeping soundly. *Well, it isn’t Yura.* He then heard the sound that pulled him from his sleep and caught the scent of his omega in distress. A whine and a scratching sound, constant scratching.
He found Yuuri in the corner, huddled up, scratching into the drywall, repeating the symbols. The omega’s eyes were open but not seeing.

Victor reached for his mate, tentatively, not quite touching him. “Yuuri,” he whispered. “Come back to me, love.”

The scratching stopped at his words, but Victor was still too cautious to reach out of Yuuri. Yuuri took a few ragged breaths, then turned to see Victor. The omega’s eyes seemed to clear, and he was in the present again. He looked back at the walls, then to his hands, nails destroyed and bloodied. He blinked and then fell into Victor’s arms, seeking his scent. Victor remained still, waiting but then realized Yuuri was asleep. “Oh, my darling,” he whispered, gathering Yuuri up and carrying him back to bed. For the first time, this felt too big for the alpha. Sleeping between his two broken angels, he felt helpless.

Notes:

助けて - tasukete - Help me!

Chapter End Notes

Hey, all...I know some are wondering about my other stories. I haven't forgotten them. I just only had the headspace for one right now.
Team Yuuri

Chapter Summary

Yuuri learns how to build a support network.

Chapter Notes

The last chapter was intense. And Yuuri’s still struggling. He has PTSD. That’s the fact of it. And he needs lots of love and support along with therapy. My initial write up of this period of time glossed over it and I don't think you would be satisfied with that. So I went back in and replaced half a chapter with about ten chapters or so. There are good things ahead. There are good things in this chapter. But there is also the struggle.

Keep the following in mind...I believe in happy endings. There are always a good supply of fuzzy blankets, chocolate, kitties, and puppies to absorb the stress and tissues to catch the tears.

Also, Yura is well cared for. When Yuuri is not able to give him the attention he needs, he makes sure that someone else can attend to him. Phichit and Victor and a number of other friends are ready to step in as needed. Yuuri was never brought in because Victor needed help in the physical sense. There have always been people. Yuuri came because Yura needed a mom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 47: Team Yuuri

Yuuri reached up to pull Victor into a kiss as he woke up, a smile soft on his lips. “Good morning,” he murmured.

Victor’s expression was tender and worried but it was always a mix of those emotions. “Did you sleep well?”

Yuuri shrugged, “As well as ever. The day holds promise...maybe it won’t take too much work to get there.” He turned away and pushed up out of the covers, frowning when he spotted his fingertips. I must have hurt myself in my sleep. He hid his fingers into his sleeves, offering a smile
to Victor. “I think...a shower. Then we can move forward.”

Victor watched Yuuri leave the room, his steps steady and sure, and it was as if the dream, sleepwalking, the scratching never happened. The omega seemed none the wiser. Victor shoed Yura into the living room, grabbing his robe and following behind. Yura crawled up into the couch, reaching into the hamster ball to free one of Phichit’s friends. Victor could hear his son making tiny voices for the hamster and was thankful his son grew up around animals and knew to be gentle. Phichit seemed unconcerned. Yuuri’s best friend at the bar, laptop open, studying code while he sipped coffee.

“Phichit?” Victor murmured but something in his tone caused the omega to turn with a frown. Victor motioned for their host to follow him back into the bedroom. He stepped over to where the fresh damage laid in the open.

Phichit frowned and sighed before he knelt down and traced the carved words. “Help me,” he murmured.

“I...I don’t know what it says,” Victor hissed, frustrated and feeling helpless.

“No, that’s what it says. Help me. It was written down the corner of one wall of the white room, over and over again.”

“How do you know?”

“There are pictures.” Phichit looked away before adding, “I’ve translated every wall.” Both wanted to solve Yuuri’s problem and both were coming to the same conclusion.

“I...don’t know how to fix this,” Victor breathing, denial curling into his gut. *This has to have a solution. Every problem has a solution.*

Phichit tilted his head, a soothing smile on his face as he reached out for Victor to help him to his feet. He heard the underlying need and decided to give a necessary push. “You can’t. It’s got to run its course. You can keep him safe. You can make sure Yuuri has the resources he needs and you are. But...it will wear you out if you don’t take the time to take care of yourself. If you need
me to sit with him, I will. Anytime. You don’t have to do this alone. But you can’t continue indefinitely without help. You are the one who needs help.”

“I-I have to do this,” Victor echoed in disbelief. I have to. I fixed Yelena. Victor took a quick intake of breath, his voice hitching as a sob surfaced. I didn’t fix Yelena. I lost her. I can’t lose Yuuri.

He didn’t know when his mate entered the room, Phichit’s comforting hand replaced by Yuuri’s tentative reassurance. Victor blinked his eyes open and found Yuuri’s concerned face looking up at him. “I’m sorry,” he whispered.

“What do you need?” Yuuri asked, a question that seemed so out of place coming from this source. Victor should be asking that question.

“I’m failing. I can’t do this.” He then allowed himself to be wrapped up in Yuuri’s arms, the omega pressing kisses over his face, brushing away tears. “I-I don’t know how to fix this. I’m trying…but...I don’t...I c-can’t fix this.”

“No, you can’t,” Yuuri whispered, understanding he was the source of Victor’s struggling and knowing how hard it was for Victor to admit how powerless he is. “I just need you to be there for me, to not give up on me, to please believe in me when I can’t believe in myself. Because those moments are going to happen. And I...will believe in you in return.”

They rested their foreheads together, a promise sitting between them. Both knew. This problem was a mountain they must climb together. As much as Yuuri hated putting it on his new family, he knew there was no where else he could be as he faced it. In Japan, he was still frozen. At least with Victor, he had a fighting chance. And Victor knew that Yuuri had to go through this. There were no shortcuts. He could only be there to catch Yuuri as he falters and help him to the next foothold.

Victor wasn’t sure if he should tell Yuuri about the wall but the omega spotted it and sighed. “I...was doing that back home. I don’t ever remember it but my mother or my sister or sometimes my father would find me. I hate that I hurt so many around me. I hate the pain I cause.” Victor heard the defeat in Yuuri’s voice as he traced the letters, then looking down at his fingers, sighing with understanding.

Victor reached for those torn digits and brushed his lips over them, just past the damage. “You don’t cause it...that word has some intent to it, my Yuuri. What is it Yura says? Sometimes you have to cry with your friend because it’s too big for them to go through it alone. This is too big.”
Yuuri found a misty smile as he closed his eyes, imagining those words from Yura’s lips. “Our Yura is the wisest of five-year-olds.”

“Soon to be six...in about three months.”

Yuuri’s hand clutched at his heart, his smile quivering. “Don’t rush...I just got here.”

Victor finally smiled, pressing a kiss into Yuuri’s forehead. “This is what makes me love you so much...the way you embrace us all. We didn’t stand a chance. We couldn’t help but love you.”

“That’s what held me to you for so long,” a voice came from the door and the couple turned to find Phichit leaning against the door facing. “Let us help you through this, Yuuri. All of us. In our own way.”

Yuuri looked from one another with worry in his brow. “What if it’s too much?”

Phichit smiled, grace filling his expressions, that all-knowing expression offering the most logical of comfort. “Then you get a bigger team. Until it’s not too much.”

A blond head poked around the corner and chimed in, “I want to be on your team, Mama!”

Yuuri chuckled dropping down and reaching for the little boy who landed in his arms. “You, love, are the most important member of my team. I couldn’t do this without you.”

Yura offered him a cheeky grin. “Mama has a big team.” They all looked at the little boy, eyes narrowed, not quite understanding. Yuuri very patiently started counting them all out. “You have me, Papa, Peach, Uncle Chris, Olga, Grandpa, Katya, Mehar, Rohan, Mila, Beka, Zaina, your mama and papa, your sister, all the Russian skaters and coaches because Yakov says we take care of our own”...the others smile at the gruff imitation of the old coach as the little boy continued… “the police because they made the bad man go away, the doctors…” He trailed off with a shrug. “I think there are more but I don’t know everyone you know.”

Yuuri laughed, pulling him back in for a hug. “It is a lot. And you’re right, I do have more.” Looking up at Victor, he asked, “Do you think you can take care of Yura today? I want to reach
out to friends and family back home. I think...I’ve been trying to do this alone, keeping this struggle too closely held.”

Victor nodded, accepting Yuuri’s words. “Of course, my Yuuri. Would you be upset...if I reached out as well?”

Yuuri shook his head, a smile on his lips. “I think...I’d be upset if you didn’t.” He then shook his hand through his son’s hair before adding pointedly, “But Baby is still a secret.”

Yura groaned but agreed reluctantly. Victor simply answered, “Whatever you want.”

Yuuri sat before Phichit’s computer waiting for the Skype call to connect. Texting back and forth with his sister and Yuuko, they arranged everything on their end. Finally, he spotted his parents. It was late evening, after customers had left and his parents looked tired but happy to see him.

“You look good, Yuuri,” his mother commented, reaching out and he felt the ache of wanting to curl up into her embrace as well.

“I’m...working on it,” he murmured. Sighing, he struggled with knowing where to start. Finally, he just dove in, “I think...I have been trying to do it all alone. Even back in Japan. I...didn’t let anyone help me.”

“We understood. The pain was fresh, too close,” his mother responded, glancing up at her husband as he squeezed her shoulder.

“Yuuri, we...we all have been fighting this pain,” his father picked up. “We feel guilty that you went through this. We were powerless.”

Mari leaned in, her lips thin as she added, “So many times I wanted to go up and drag you out of his home. But then...he’d move you. And the police...they were on his side.”

“I know,” Yuuri whispered. “I knew all of that. So many times, I just wrote I want to go home
repeatedly on the walls. I wrote it like a prayer, like a wish. And then when I finally came home, I...couldn’t connect. It...had been too long. I didn’t know how to move past anything.”

“Perhaps you were not ready, my son,” his mother suggested.

Yuuri nodded. He knew that was it. “I think...I’m just now reaching the point where I’m ready. Before...I...was afraid it would all go away.”

“How can we help?” his father asked. Yuuri could see the need for action in his father’s eyes.

Yuuri hugged himself, blinking back tears. He missed this, his family taking care of him. Finally, he answered, “Just be there. It’s...going to be hard. I can’t just lean on Victor. It’s too much. Too much for Phichit. I need...to lean on everyone. Even if that means calling home at midnight.”

“You can call home anytime you want,” his mother invited. “I’m so glad you are in a place where you can finally call home.”

So many years between them, distancing them while Shuji isolated Yuuri. It would take work but he wanted his whole family. “Thank you,” he whispered.

An hour later, he sat on Facetime talking with Yuuko. He didn’t want to talk about what happened. He wanted to talk about growing up together. Yuuri laughed as they remembered how Yuuko stood up for him to the bully...and now she was mated to said bully who turned out to not be so bad. Stories of antics at the rink, tricks they played on their teachers and classmates, dance lessons, recitals, skating competitions. The day Yuuko told Yuuri she was pregnant, teary eyed and not knowing what to do. Axel, Lutz, and Loop coming into the world. Their whole childhood had been spent together. And then Yuuri was taken away.

“We miss you, Yuuri,” she told him, her voice soft, becoming shy in worrying that she was saying too much.

“I miss you, too,” Yuuri agreed. “All of you. I know...this is where I need to be...but part of me would love to come home.”

“Maybe...you could take a holiday. Just a short visit,” she suggested, her voice hopeful.
Yuuri shrugged. He was going through so much and he didn’t know if he could handle the anxiety of travel. His hand unconsciously covered his tummy as he considered how heavy he’d be when Yura went on summer break. “We’ll see.”

As the call disconnected, Yuuri sat back and considered his emotions. He wanted to introduce his two families together, to let them get to know each other in person. He knew Victor would support him in this. But...he couldn’t pull his mate away from his work. Those skaters relied on Victor and Yuuri had taken away too much already. He shook off the wish.

Restless, he needed to go out. Phichit was working and in the middle of a conference call. Yuuri picked up his keys and jacket, phone in pocket, he slipped out the door. He missed running and took that opportunity now, breathing in the cold hair and pushing it out, his breath turning into a cloud in the frigid air.

Yuuri made the block, taking measured breaths as he avoided pedestrians while keeping a steady pace, pausing once to pet a dog that had gotten away from their person. The person thanked him with repeated “spasibo”, thankful Yuuri was able to keep the little dog from darting into traffic. Yuuri smiled, jogging in place as she carried the puppy off in her arms. He then turned and took the crosswalk, entering the park with a running path.

The turn around the park was uneventful, stalwart winter birds defying the cold with their calls, owners with their dogs trudging through the park in a defiant effort for exercise, children playing and laughing in spite of the gray cold. At the end of the path, Yuuri jogged in place waiting for the light to change and crossed the street planning to complete the block and return to Phichit’s place.

It was the heavy banging of a fist on a door that triggered Yuuri, brown eyes staring at the hearty man unseeing as he paled, panic stuttering his breathing. He must have made a noise because the man turned, his expression concerned. Yuuri backed up, fear spiking his scent. The man spoke to his companion who had opened the door, and the omega stepped around him, his smaller form less imposing, his scent instinctively calming, the Russian words losing meaning for Yuuri.

The Japanese omega needed help and he didn’t know how to ask for it, his breathing quickened, becoming jerky. A part of him objectively knew he was hyperventilating, as if watching from afar. The other omega was close now, his voice soothing even as Yuuri’s knees crumpled beneath him. The fall dislodged his phone.

A familiar word made its way through the thickening thoughts. “Friend?” The Russian omega was motioning towards the phone, hesitantly reaching for it. Yuuri nodded, desperate for help. With shaky hands, he found Phichit in his emergency contacts and handed the phone to the other man.
Yuuri heard one side of the exchange, the worried response from the Russian omega, the relief from Phichit’s response, and then he handed the phone back to Yuuri. “Friend come,” he promised.

Yuuri was now sitting on the curve, head between his knees. The other sat next to him, not touching him, merely staying nearby. He was talking and Yuuri wished he could sort it out but everything felt so out of reach.

And then Phichit was there, his soothing voice, kindly thanking the Russian who looked after his friend. A tentative arm offered Yuuri refuge and Yuuri turned into it with a whine. Phichit offered a familiar scent, softly promising, “You’re safe, Yuuri...it’s okay. You need to breathe for me.”

Yuuri held onto him, focusing on his breaths as Phichit led him through, counting softly, releasing calming pheromones. Finally, he felt still, his eyes closed, his breathing normal. Lifting his head, he turned and spotted the concerned couple on the steps of the home.

The Russian omega hesitantly stepped forward. “Is he okay?”

The words were clearer, making more sense although Yuuri didn’t think he could work out a more complex sentence. Phichit answered for him, though, taking that strain from him. “He will be. Thank you.”

“My papa. He panics from loud noises...war.”

“I guess...you can say my friend has been through a long war himself. A personal fight.”

“My house is here,” the motioned. “It is safe if he needs to hide. I am Semyon. My boyfriend is big but sweet. Bogdasha, come.” He introduced the nervous alpha Bogdan. “He’s afraid of scaring your friend.”

Yuuri looked up, hugging himself, shivering as the rush of adrenaline spends itself. “I’m...not afraid of you,” he murmured, his Russian broken and uncertain.

Semyon smiled, pleased, clasping his hands. “I have a bakery. You come tomorrow. I make you
breakfast. Perhaps...you could use a friend.”

Yuuri hesitated, glancing over at Phichit who nodded encouragingly. Turning back he nodded his agreement. “Can Phichit come? He’s better with Russian.”

Semyon nodded eagerly. “Yes, please! We talk.” He hesitantly offered his hand and added, “It’s hard...when the fear comes over you. It is good to know your neighbors.”

Yuuri thought about that. He...didn’t know his neighbors, often keeping to himself and focusing on his family. Socializing took so much emotional energy and the small network he had seemed exhausting. But there was wisdom in Semyon’s words. He looked up at Bogdan who stood nervously wringing his head and offered a small smile. “Thank you...for making sure I was okay. Both of you.” The Japanese omega didn’t know what would have happened to him otherwise. Leaning into Phichit, he asked, “Can we go home?”

Phichit nodded, helping Yuuri to his feet. He kept a tactile connection on Yuuri the entire walk, not letting go until they were safely in the apartment. “I didn’t know you were gone until I went looking for you after my call. I thought you were napping or reading.”

“I was restless and I didn’t want to interrupt your work.”

Phichit waved off his concern. “If you need to get out, let me know. I will make time. I would rather you not face the world on your own just yet.” He studied Yuuri a moment and smiled. “I may be overprotective of my best friend...and you were very brave to go out into the world on your own...but I don’t know if you’re ready yet. You don’t know how you are going to respond.”

Yuuri grunted. “Apparently,” feeling a little bitter and shaken from his weakness. Sighing, he held out his phone and showed him his contacts. “You’re one of my emergency contacts. You’ve...always been my emergency contact.”

Phichit squealed as he pulled his best friend into a hug. “Oh, Yuuri...I will always be there if you need me.”

Victor and Yura arrived home, the little boy bouncing around excitedly then running to hug Yuuri.
“Mama, I went to Katya’s today and played with Mila and saw the kitties and the dogs and they are all okay but Makka has a big bandage and I had to take it easy because Katya said she has a broken rib but she’s going to be okay.” It all came out in one breath and Yuuri had to really focus to hear everything.

Yuuri shot his eyes up to Victor. “A broken rib?”

“She’s going to be fine. She just needs to rest.”

“How is Ren?”

A bark came from behind Victor and Yuuri’s eyes widened as he dropped down, welcoming the little dog into his arms. “Phichit called and said he thought it might be good for you to have your little dog here. The rest of the menagerie might be a lot but Makka is well loved and the kittens are getting plenty of play with Mila.”

Yuuri hugged his dog to him, a tear slipping from his eyes. “You sweet precious baby. I’ve missed you. Are you okay? Did that mean man hurt you?”

The poodle sniffed all over Yuuri and barked in answer to Yuuri’s coos. And then she jumped up and licked Yuuri’s nose. Yuuri laughed and at the end of a trying afternoon, that sound was music.

Yuuri was napping with Yura and Ren while Phichit filled Victor in on their afternoon. The alpha was relieved his mate was safe and asked about the neighbors.

“I haven’t met them before because they are on the other side of the block, but their bakery is nearby. Yuuri and I are going for breakfast tomorrow. I think...it’s a good thing. Yuuri’s felt isolated in his fight. Semyon let him know he’s not the only one, that there are others like him fighting similar battles.”

“I’ll wait here tomorrow and we’ll go in late.”
Phichit smiled at Victor’s support. “I’ll bring home some bagels.”

In case you are worried about Yuuri getting cold on his run, Victor picked his jacket up for him from a nearby athletics shop suitable for cold weather running. Yuuri, of course, has no idea about the price and wasn’t mentally together enough to argue. Recommended from this site: https://classpass.com/blog/2018/11/05/best-winter-running-jackets/

Chapter End Notes

“Ohana means family. Family means no one gets left behind.” I love how they constantly check on one another.
Chapter Summary

So much help and support...

Chapter Notes

I'm so excited about the art posted by bectara! Please pop over to their tumblr.

Also...this chapter hits on some family therapy care. I have resources at the end.

Ch. 48: Lean on Me

Yuuri sat across from Semyon, the smell of fresh-baked bread surrounding them. Yuuri closed his eyes savoring the mixture of aromas around him. Thought of his mother and her kitchen filled him, her flavorings for noodles, the saffron in a sticky bun she made during festivals. In his hand was a warm, thick slice of Russian black bread slathered with butter melting into the crevices. He hummed as he enjoyed the first bite. “This warms me from within,” he praised.

Semyon had watched the younger man enjoying more than just a slice of bread. “I’ve heard that scent is the most strongly tied sense to memory.”

Yuuri looked over, “My mother cooks and bakes. I was thinking of how our home always held these aromas, carried from room to room.” He looked at the bread in his hands, “I think I miss them.” He took another bite, realizing the butter had a slight cinnamon flavor to it, “She would love this!”

His host laughed warmly. “Thank you. My Bogdasha and I make a fair partnership. He makes all of the sweets and I make the more savory breads.”

Yuuri chuckled, thinking of Victor in the kitchen. “My mate was hoping we’d bring back bagels.”
“You should have brought him.”

Yuuri smiled and shrugged. “Maybe...next time. This...is for me.”

Semyon nodded with approval. “Being by yourself, keeping your identity separate is important to you.” He watched Yuuri nod slightly, “There’s nothing wrong with that, in fact it’s very healthy. You don’t let the fear pull you down. You push through it.”

“No...I mean it does in the moment but...I want to keep moving forward. I lost so much.” Yuuri then told the Russian omega a brief overview of his story wrapping up with, “So you see, when I heard Bogdan’s pounding, I was back there, hiding from Shuji.”

His friend remained silent for a moment, taking it all in and letting Yuuri settle from having to share his trauma. “You tell your story. That’s good. That means you don’t let it control you. My papa...he didn’t talk. He said it wasn’t for friendly ears. I think he was afraid of scaring us.”

“My Vitya gave me a safe place so that I could make peace with my past. I just didn’t expect it to rear back into my life.” Yuuri laughed bitterly before he added, “Well, I wanted to believe that. I think part of me knew he wouldn’t let me go so easily.”

“I know it’s difficult to open up and let new friends into your life...especially when everything you’ve gained feels hard fought, but...if you have room for a couple more friends, I invite you to come to my shop and relax.” He motioned around the small bakery and cafe. It was intimate and warm. “We all need a refuge from the real world.”

Yuuri looked around the homey bakery, the whitewashed tables, the lamps giving off the warmth of a morning’s light that made a cosier space. He felt at ease, the need to hide in a corner seemed to have dissipated, but he noticed a few available should he show up and require just that. “I am getting better. With him in jail, I feel more safe. It’s just...there are moments…”

Semyon offered an understanding smile. “Those moments will catch you by surprise. It’s important that those around you know this.” Taking Yuuri’s hand, he gave it a squeeze. “Make friends. Get to know your neighbors. And please...come see us.”

Phichit had been talking with Bogdan as he prepared the order, never one to miss an opportunity to learn about other people. He had a bag holding two more loaves of the Russian black bread along with the bagels Victor requested. As Yuuri joined him, he waved his thanks to the large man
piping the most delicate details on a cake.

As they walked back to Phichit’s apartment, Yuuri had a soft smile on his lips. “I think...Semyon is right.” He looked over to see his friend’s confused look. “We were talking and said that the more people I can bring into my circle means the more people can help me. I need to reach out and make more friends.”

Phichit raised a surprised eyebrow. “Really? Is this my best friend Yuuri talking?”

Yuuri chuckled at his antics, giving Phichit a playful shove when the other omega attempted to take his temperature. “Yes. I’m doing better with the language. I think initially that kept me from making friends…”

Phichit rolled his eyes. “Mmmhmm...it was the...language. Never mind the fact that you isolated yourself in Japan where you speak the language perfectly…”

Yuuri groaned. “You know what I mean. I’m not saying I’d have been the chatty Cathy my best friend tends to be, but...I would have felt more comfortable talking.”

Phichit smiled warmly. “I think this is a good thing, Yuuri. Are you going to continue with your language classes?”

Yuuri nodded. “I’m working on literacy skills...and I miss my Monday night classmates now that the class is on holiday.”

Phichit decided to give a little nudge. “You could, you know, reach out to them outside of class. Maybe they could meet you at a certain bakery?”

Yuuri hugged himself as he thought about it. He’d spent so long compartmentalizing his life, keeping people at arm's length. “Maybe...I could call Boris.”

“That’s a start. Feel free to invite a couple of friends over, Yuuri. I know it has to feel confining staying with Chris and me…”
“I won’t lie, Phichit. You and Chris have been the definition of inviting and welcoming, but I really want to go home, to be in my own space…”

Phichit waited, feeling the incompleteness of the sentence before gently prompting, “But?”

“I’m scared,” Yuuri whispered. “That day…it’s still raw. I think…it’s good to have some distance but I worry…the longer I wait, it might become another white room.”

They paused on the stoop leading into the apartment building. Phichit’s eyes tracked up the side of the building and picked out his apartment. Not looking at Yuuri, he offered, “If you ever want to go back there...to that place in Japan...you don’t have to go alone. I would go with you. It might help to see it as just a place, with no power over you any longer.”

Yuuri slipped an arm around his best friend’s waist, hugging him from the side, their temples touching one another. “I know, Phichit. I’m...not ready. Not for that. I don’t know if I’ll ever be ready.”

“The offer stands,” Phichit returned gently.

Yura sat in the tiny chair, the black crayon doing a number on the figure, scribbling them out. He frowned when Zoya interrupted him, putting the crayon down and crossing his arms stubbornly.

“Who are you drawing, Yura?”

He shrugged. “He’s nobody.” The green eyes stayed glued to the paper, as if they were afraid the figure would jump off the page.

“You seemed to have put a lot of effort in nobody.”

Yura glanced out of the side of his eyes before reached for the paper and wadded it up. “It’s nobody!” he yelled.
Zoya didn’t flinch. She’d worked with Yura when he lost his mother. This older, more outspoken version of the child was more challenging but that’s why she’d gone into this line of work. She knew he needed a safe place to express his anger, his fear, his withdrawal. Zoya reached for a fresh sheet of paper and laid it in front of Yura. The child flicked those green eyes up.

“Why...don’t you draw me something you like?”

Yura shifted, hesitantly picking up a brown crayon. “Can I draw my cat?”

“Of course.” She smiled as the fingers began the outline working quickly. “Maybe put him some place you like.”

Yura thought about it and then began drawing a large house with lots of windows. He put lots of flowers in front of the house and nestled in those flowers, a brown blob with triangle ears. One of the upstairs windows had a bunny in a ballet skirt. The other window, Yura drew a black figure. Zoya watched thoughtfully, realizing Yura hadn’t even realized he’d done that. It was enough for her to know, he didn’t feel safe. She made a note in her file. She wasn’t surprised but she also knew it would take longer to work through this than the loss of his mother.

When the timer went off, she praised Yura for his art and asked if she could keep it. Yura shrugged, putting the crayons back in the basket. He really was well behaved as far as her patients went, always picking up at the end. She looked up and met Victor’s eyes, the new omega mate standing not so far behind.

“Perhaps Yura can go for a walk to the snack machine with his mama,” she suggested. Victor understood turning to relay the request to Yuuri who knelt down to reach for the little boy. Yura ran into his arms and after a quick hug, they were headed out of the room. Once they were out of sight, she pulled out the artwork. “It will be hard when you return home.”

Victor studied the dark shadow in the upstairs window. “This would be Yuuri’s old room, the omega room. They hid here when Shuji attacked.”

She inhaled, the pieces of the puzzle falling into place. “You said he’s started wetting the bed.”

Victor nodded, a frown on his lips. “You know, he’s always had bad dreams but they are more frequent. He’s very clingy, especially with Yuuri, but when he’s afraid, he comes to me. It’s
almost like he wants to keep Yuuri safe but sometimes the job feels too big.”

“it is too big for such a little boy.” she motioned to the picture. “this tells me he doesn’t feel safe.”

“what...do we do?”

“patience. and continued reassurance that he is safe. be careful about television and stories. avoid scary plots especially those with bad men. let him talk about how he feels but then divert him so he doesn’t dwell. he may revert to younger behaviors. that will clear itself up in time. this is normal and we will work to pull him back. and spend time with him. he needs to know he’s safe.”

victor took in all of her advise, listening and making lists in his head. “and the bedwetting?”

“like before...clean him up, make sure he doesn’t feel ashamed, give him a sense of safety and assurance.”

yuuri helped the little boy with his coat, straightening the blond floss, and then started with surprise when he noticed yura sucking his thumb. sighing, he gathered the child into a hug. “rough day?”

“my picture got thrown in the trash,” yura whined.

“did zoya throw it away?” he asked gently, his hand soothing on that head on his shoulder.

yura shrugged before snuggling closer.

“maybe you can make a new picture,” yuuri suggested. “something for phichit to put on his refrigerator. would you like that?”
Yura nodded eagerly. “Can I draw a cat?”

“Phichit would love a cat.”

“I’ll make him a very happy cat,” Yura decided excitedly. He began bouncing up and down and Yuuri stood up, taking his hand.

“Are you ready to go?” Victor asked as he joined them.

“I think so. We shared a snack from the machine. Maybe you can take us home so we can rest before you go to work.”

Victor studied his mate, not sure if this was for Yura’s sake or Yuuri’s. “Of course. I’ll just call Yakov.”

“No, you can go on. Phichit can drop me off later. Maybe he’d like to help out and skate a bit.”

Victor smiled, giving Yuuri’s spare hand a squeeze. “Of course. We’d love to have Phichit on our ice.”

As they drove to the apartment, Yuuri asked, “Does Chris skate anymore?”

“Sometimes. He stays busy with work but I can tell when he gets the itch. He’s lucky he has a friend with the keys to a world class training facility.”

“I suppose we’re all lucky like that,” Yuuri responded with a smirk. Glancing back, he could see Yura’s eyes growing heavy. “We’ll be in after our nap. I won’t miss my appointment with Abramovich.”

“I know...call if there is a delay.”

Yuuri nodded, gathering Yura in his arms as they came to a stop. The little boy snuggled into Yuuri’s neck. Victor watched them climb the stairs realizing Yuuri instinctively handled the boy
the way Zoya suggested. He drove off to attend to his work. It would take time but maybe he could get time in with the psychiatrist before Yuuri and Yura joined him.

Yuuri cuddled the little boy, reading *Ballet Shoes* until the child fell back asleep. The omega leaned back onto the pillows he had been using to prop them both up and watched as the little blonde snuggled closer to his mama. He ran a light touch over the downy hair, looking for any sign of distress in the sleep, but found none. Laying the book down, he closed his eyes. *Just a few minutes*, he thought before he slipped into a sound sleep.

Phichit peeked into the bedroom happy to see what his wish granted, that they had both drifted to a peaceful sleep. Smiling he took in the sight of his friend and the little boy that had wormed his way securely into the omega’s heart. Walking softly into the room he settled a soft blanket over them both, watching Yura’s little hands grab onto a corner eagerly. *He still needs security, but he’s getting better...I hope.* Setting his alarm, he crept back to his office. Yuuri wouldn’t miss his appointment but there was no harm in letting the omega sleep.

Victor sat across from Abramovich, his legs crossed, tea sweetened with jam balanced in his knee, which was the only thing keeping it from bouncing nervously. “I’ve never been good when things were out of my control.”

Abramovich eyed him cautiously, his patient was clearly a bundle of tightly wound nerves. “This is something we’ve struggled through before...but now the stakes are higher.”

Victor sighed, looking down at the tea. *Too much jam, why did I do that? Oh, Yelana took her tea that way.* “I worry I can’t meet their needs, that one of them will be lost to me...and I can’t bear that.”

“This is not Yelena...” Abramovich, pointed at the cup. Victor blushed, caught. “Yuuri is not dying, the one that threatened to take him away is gone. Securely. Locked away.”

“I guess, maybe I am afraid this will turn out like the last time. Yuri and I alone in the world again.” He could have bitten his lip. They hadn’t been left alone, Nikolai was there, as was Olga. And this was nothing like the last time. Shuji would likely be imprisoned for life. “I know he’s
safe... we’re safe. But they don’t feel that way. I have Yuuri sleepwalking and carving words into the wall. Yura is wetting the bed. Both are having nightmares. Yuuri jumps at every loud thump. Yura is clinging to his mama like it’s his personal responsibility to keep him safe. The list goes on and on.”

The doctor listened to the alpha’s concerns. They were valid, horrifically so. “And what’s going on with you?”

Me? Victor sighed, staring past the good doctor, his eyes focused on the window. It was raining again. The skies were gray, always gray, what little sunlight they received. “I... keep focused on them, making sure they are safe, making sure they have what they need.”

“That’s good, but what are you doing for yourself?” He watched Victor shuffle around the tea that he hadn’t touched. Abramovich waited a few moments. “Victor?”

“I’m busy trying to keep them safe. I’m juggling work and family and getting back into our home and I don’t have time for me right now. But I’m fine. I’m... I’m...”

“Avoiding?” Abramovich had worked with Victor before and knew how he could disappear into another person, just like how he had disappeared into a role on the ice.

Victor nodded. He’d done this before. When Yelena died, he threw himself into his work until he broke. “I... wasn’t there for them. That monster came to our home, knowing I was away. If I had just stayed home…”

“You said it yourself, he knew you weren’t there. A determined stalker would find his opportunity.” He watched Victor squirm, still feeling the blame of the attack that he placed solely on himself. “Yuuri did what was necessary. He survived. He protected his child. Your child. He found a safe place until his alpha could get to them.”

“What if…”

Abramovich held up his hand, the quick action caught Victor’s eyes and he focused on the doctor. “That’s a dangerous path, Victor... let’s deal with what is.”

Victor nodded. He needed to focus on the reality of the situation. There was plenty of trouble
without borrowing more. “I...I am not sleeping well. I keep checking on them. I wake with every
whine. I’ve...called and talked to the police at least once a day,” he paused, embarrassed at the lie.
“I’ve called a lot more than once a day, making sure he is still incarcerated. I think they are getting
tired of tolerating me. But he’s gotten away before. I’m terrified that if he gets free, I won’t be
there to protect my family.”

“Sometimes we have to step out of the problem, trust our family in the hands of others so that we
can take care of ourselves,” Abramovich suggested.

Victor laughed bitterly. “I did that today. I think...Yuuri gave me a little push. He said they
needed a nap.”

“And maybe they did.” Abramovich laughed, spreading his hands wide to invite Victor’s
laughter. “But you took advantage of that and came to get help. That’s a good first step. Maybe
you might supplement your sleep with a nap here and there. You do have some time flexibility.”

Victor nodded. “Yakov and the other coaches have all offered to help out.”

“Have you thought about taking some time off,” the psychiatrist suggested.

Victor hedged, “I thought routine was good.”

“It is, routine is very good and very healthy. But that comes after you’ve been strong enough to
build back to it. When we start losing ground, we sometimes have to take the time to get our feet
back under ourselves.”

Victor considered those words, he finally put the cup of tea, stone cold at this point, on the table in
front of him. “Yuuri said something about visiting his family in Japan but then pushed it aside. He
thought we should be here for the skaters.”

Abramovich watched Yelana’s cup settle on the table, he would keep that for today and only bring
it up if Victor did it again. Then focusing on what Victor had relayed he made a note to bring that
up with Yuuri. “There are others that can see to the skaters. Perhaps a few days and a change of
scenery would be a good thing.”

“What about my Yu(u)ris’ therapy?”
"All of these things can be rescheduled. If your omega brought it up, perhaps this is something he needs and is afraid to ask for."

Victor thought about it before nodding. "Yuuri is quick to push his own needs aside if he thinks it will inconvenience someone else. I think you’re right. I’ll go and talk to Yakov about some time off and see about booking plane tickets."

Yuuri woke, worried that he would never make it in time for his appointment. But thanks to Phichit and his grand prix driving skills managed to arrive on time. Phichit let Yura lead him to the small practice rink, the omega excited to skate again, even if it was with children. Yuuri watched them retreat and turned towards his appointment. He still hadn’t journaled. He began kicking himself for not doing the one thing Abramovich asked of him.

Dropping into the leather chair, he was in the middle of self-recriminations, when he saw the cup of tea placed before him. Looking up, he met those kindly old eyes. "I messed up," he confessed in a rush.

"Ah?"

Yuuri nodded. "I didn’t keep a journal."

"Starting a journal is actually very difficult, then keeping it is even harder." Abramovich could see that Yuuri was not accepting the out and continued. "Let’s talk about why."

Yuuri didn’t hear blame in that voice and slowed down, his thoughts relaxing. "I think...I became caught up in all of the change in routine, taking care of Yura, and looking out for Victor. I also had an episode. I did call my family. I-I’m...trying..." Those last words came out defeated.

"Trying is all you can do. So much accomplished." He leaned forward, capturing the brown eyes in his. "Yuuri, I recommended the journal for two reasons, the one we discussed but also because I think if you’d kept track of these things, you’d feel more accomplished than defeated."
Yuuri nodded. “I just never got to the store. I...don’t have access to anything. It’s all locked away in my house. I think...a part of myself is locked away as well.”

“Let’s talk about what you can do in the meantime.”

Yuuri shrugged. “I...I’m living out of a suitcase. Not really. But proverbially. I am washing clothes every day because we only have three sets. I feel emotional. I want to cry. I want to sleep. I want...to throw up. And I just don’t...have time to do any of that.”

Abramovich nodded, this would unsettle anyone. He had counseled a couple displaced because they were remodeling a bathroom and the man had crumpled on the first night. “Washing out your clothing every night seems excessive. Couldn’t you buy a few items so you won’t have to do that? This busyness...is it necessary?”

Yuuri shrugged, feeling a little caught. Victor had said the same thing, but Yuuri was able to hide behind Japanese frugality...a national trait made up entirely by him on the spot. If he were honest, the busyness kept him from thinking and wore him down so much that he was too tired to even dream. “I...don’t know. I don’t want to mess up. And I am trying.”

“I know...you’ve said that. Let’s talk about these emotions. What are you feeling?”

Yuuri hugged himself as he looked for the words to describe his emotions. “I...I’m lost. I feel disconnected from my life. I’m...angry. I’m afraid. I’m...tired. I don’t know what’s stress, what’s baby...”

“What if it was both...or neither.” He would never discuss what the other had said, but the doctor remembered that Victor mentioned Yuuri’s nap. “Sometimes we just need rest.”

Yuuri hugged himself, nodding. Then in a small voice, he murmured, “I want my mom.”

Abramovich smiled at that confession, his own expression gentle as he suggested, “Can you go home?”

Yuuri shook his head. “It’s...not convenient.”
“What is? Life isn’t convenient. If we keep waiting for convenience, we end up not doing what we need most.”

Yuuri focused on a metal sculpture on the psychiatrist’s bookshelf, his eyes tracing the lines. “I can’t ask that of him. He’s already given me so much. I’ve disrupted his life so much.” Yuuri thought of Victor’s life, peaceful, steady, and reliable. Yura had been lonely but safe. *What have I brought them? What have I taken?*

“It sounds like you are still blaming yourself.” Abramovich watched the eyes dampened then hide in the hem of a sleeve. “Remember that it’s an alpha’s instinct to take care of his omega and children, making sure they are safe and happy. Perhaps...Victor needs this as well.”

Yuuri walked into Victor’s office as the alpha hung up his phone. “I want to go home...to Japan.”

Victor chuckled, reaching for Yuuri and pulling him into his lap. “That’s good because I just booked us some tickets. We fly on Monday and we’ll be there for a week.”

Yuuri felt light headed, he sat down quickly, hand on his stomach. He would be home, in Japan, with his Yura and Vitya and...“My family?”

“I’ve contacted them.” Victor nuzzled into Yuuri’s scent gland, the aroma telling him all he needed to know. Yuuri was beyond pleased, he was excited, happy to the point of tears and smelling of cherry blossoms. “Your mother cried. I think she needs this as well.”

Yuuri sniffed, tucking in under his chin, breathing in Victor’s rich scent. “What did I do to deserve you?”

Victor chest rumbled in comfort. “I think it’s the other way around. You saved me and Yura from a life half lived. And you, on the other hand, went through hell to get here.” He brushed his lips into the omega’s hair. “Let me take care of you.”

“I’m trying. I really am trying.” Another sniff filled the air.
“I know, love.” He held onto him while Yuuri shook in his arms, his collar dampening from his tears. “Let it out, darling, let it out.”

Finally, Yuuri pulled up, wiping his tears and accepting Victor’s handkerchief to clean himself up. “I’m such a mess.”

“My beautiful mess,” Victor teased, tweaking his nose. “Shall we see what Phichit and Yura have gotten into?”

They found the two working together to teach the puddleducks that made their way to the rink to skate, Phichit laughing happily at their triumphs. Each child battling to show off a t stop or scratchy three turn. Victor leaned in and murmured, “I think we’ve found your substitute.”

“He’s so busy,” Yuuri protested.

Victor wrapped his hands around Yuuri, “I’ve noticed he makes time for whatever he wants to do...and look at that smile.”

Yuuri’s expression was fond. Phichit was having a ball and it was clear that he loved children. The omega waved at them when he noticed them but made no move to pass the class back, clearly enjoying himself as the smallest skater held onto his hand. He was a natural with them.

____________________________________________________________

NOTES:


https://childrensnational.org/visit/conditions-and-treatments/mental-health-behavioral-disorders/posttraumatic-stress-disorder

https://www.rainn.org/articles/self-care-after-trauma

https://www.curiouscuisiniere.com/russian-black-bread/

https://www.kingarthurflour.com/recipes/russian-black-bread-recipe
Ch 49: **Fight song...**

Yuuri’s eyes rested on the two suitcases, loaned to them by Phichit. The small family wouldn’t need more than that, as Yuuri had explained to Victor...several times. At the moment, all that they had would settle into the spaces leaving nooks and crannies for things to be brought back.

A shiver ran down his spine as an uncomfortable feeling of *deja vu* crept into him. A memory of Yuuri looking at his meager collection of belongings packed into a single suitcase in Hasetsu flashed, making the omega feel very small. *It feels like...before. When I had nothing. But now it’s my family.*

Yuuri could not stop blaming himself for their banishment from their home, for the imposition they were forcing on Phichit and Chris, for Yuri’s regression. No matter how illogical it was, no matter how often he was gently corrected by Victor or reassured by Phichit and Chris, he could not forgive himself. All he could focus on was that he was the reason they were cut off from all they owned, Victor’s memories, Yura’s comfort items, Olga forced to stay with Lev, Nikolai displaced all the way to Moscow. The omega longed for home...but at the moment didn’t feel deserving.

Phichit leaned into the guest bedroom and asked, “Are you going to have breakfast?”
Yuuri kept his face hidden from his friend, pulling his shoulders in. “Katya called last night to see if I’d join her for breakfast. I thought I’d visit the animals after.”

Phichit could sense his friend’s distress and took a tentative step into the room. “Is Yura with you, me, or Victor?”

Fair question and Yuuri frowned, realizing that he and Victor hadn’t discussed the little boy’s whereabouts for the day. “I’m...not sure.” Yuuri roused himself, focusing on the care of his little son. Phichit came to his side touching his shoulder lightly and earning a small smile from his friend.

Yura was lying down in the middle of the living room, his head resting on a pillow shared with Ren while he told the tiny poodle a dramatic story about a fairy. Yuuri smiled as he sat next to the little boy, picking up a sock to slide onto his wiggly foot.

“Where did you hear that story?”

The little boy tapped his lip thoughtfully, Yuuri smiled thinking of how Yura really did favor his father. “I think...Beka read it to me. He said he could be the prince but I’d be the fairy because I’m very brave.”

“And the fairy saves the prince?”

Yura nodded emphatically, twisting away just as Yuuri finished putting his socks on.

“And do they live happily ever after?”

The little boy shrugged. “Don’t know. Beka said he hasn’t wrote the end.”

“Written,” Yuuri corrected with a smile. “Beka wrote that story?”

Yura nodded. “He writes lots of stories. He calls them hero tales.”
“Do you think he’d let me read them sometime?”

Yura shrugged, reaching for his shoe and wiggling his little foot into it. He then looked up and sighed heavily. “I miss Beka.”

Yuuri could see the truth in the little boy’s confession and perhaps this was something he could fix. “I miss Beka, too. Would you like me to see if you can go over and play? Maybe tomorrow?”

Yura’s eyes lit up. “Please?” he begged, bouncing up and down, the heal collapsing in his shoe that wasn’t quite on his foot.

Yuuri caught him and settled him down. “I’ll call this morning. I’d like to visit Mehar as well. Now, I’m going to have breakfast with Katya. Do you want to go with me?”

The little boy screwed his face up thoughtfully. “Will Mila be there?”

“I’m...not sure. Would you like me to find out?”

Yura nodded decidedly. “I want to play with Mila.”

A few text messages later and it was determined that Mila would go to the rink with Pyotr and Yura could catch up with her there.

Victor came to sit behind him, his hand sliding down the omega’s backbone. “Focus on yourself this morning, my Yuuri. I’ll take Yura. We’ll go to visit Zoya...” The alpha raised a warning eyebrow towards Yura when he huffed, crossing his arms poutily. “We’ll go to visit Zoya,” he repeated for emphasis. “Then to the rink where he can meet up with Mila.”

“I’m not sure when I’ll get there,” Yuuri murmured quietly.

“Take your time...we’ll be fine, solnyshko .”

Yuuri nodded, shivering, allowing himself the luxury to worry for a moment. “I have
appointments this afternoon. Both Abramavich and Natasha. I thought...it was important to get in one more visit before we travel.”

Victor smiled, nodding. “Of course. Do we need to pick anything else up before the trip?”

Yuuri shrugged. “I suppose...if we need it, we can get it there. We’ll be at my parents’ home. It’s...crowded. An inn and onsen. The family quarters are separate, though.”

Victor frowned for a moment, he could tell Yuuri was trying to talk himself out of this much needed trip. “We won’t be an imposition and it would be good for Yura to meet his new grandparents and aunt.”

A smile tugged at Yuuri’s lips. “Yeah...I suppose so.”

Katya sipped her tea as she studied her friend. “You look...amazingly well.”

Yuuri shrugged, setting his own cup back down. “I suppose I have good days and bad days. Right now...I think I’m putting on a brave face.”

The Russian’s smile softened as she reached over to cover his hand with her own. “You have no need for bravery among friends. We accept you as you are, Yuuri...both highs and lows. And in turn, you support us when we need it. You have a great capacity for love, people see that.”

Yuuri huffed out a small laugh and Katya noted silently the bitter notes. “Thank you. I think I’m putting on this mask, hoping to fool everyone. I know...it’s more for me, I think. I need it to keep from falling apart some days.”

She sighed, squeezing his hand. “I understand. Truly. Not from what you’re coming from, but I know struggle.”

Yuuri’s smile came and went quickly, like the peak of the sun in the grays of winter. He looked off as he thought about his situation. “I bring sadness, pain and hardship to all who know me. First
my family, then friends, now Victor and Yura. I hate this.”

“You are the only one who says this. Everyone else, Pyotr talks of nothing but good things with regard to you. The skaters all adore you, flock to you. You have a nurturing care that we’ve all been missing without knowing it. And Victor...the change in him is phenomenal. He has a light in him now that I’m not sure was ever fully there. Vitya was lost in himself, just doing what he must before you. He...is full of life and purpose now that he has you.”

Yuuri blushed, picking his cup back up, twirling the warm liquid around before taking another sip. “And...I love him.” Yuuri laughed bitterly. “I love him to the depths of my soul. Both him and Yura.”

Katya waited as they both enjoyed the quiet of Yuuri’s confession. “What can I do?”

Yuuri shrugged, his smile not reaching his eyes. “Let me see Makkachin. I think...for now, I need to know she is well. I need to see with my own eyes that she’s going to be okay.”

“Of course...let’s go now.” Katya called for the check and paid for their meal before leading Yuuri to her SUV. The drive to her apartment was quiet.

Yuuri followed her up to the flat and continued to remain quiet while her keys rattled in the locks. Entering, he took in the space. He had not been to visit her apartment since she moved in with Pyotr. The space was white and clean, quite modern and Katya’s vibrancy gave it warmth. But Yuuri couldn’t help but shiver.

She saw his reaction and understood right away. “It’s so...sterile. I’m not much of a decorator, and Mila would paint the whole thing pink if I let her,” she laughed even as she called out to Makkachin. The poodle peered out of the bedroom and Yuuri knelt down to greet her, cooing with delight. “She’s been doing quite well, resting up...but I know she misses all of you.”

“I miss her, too,” Yuuri murmured, burying his face in her fur. “I’m sorry you had to go away. We’ll all be home soon, I hope.” He hugged her close, careful with her bandages. “Soon.” He sat with her for some time, simply running his fingers through her fur, something within him aching. For her. For himself. He looked up at Katya who sat at the table drinking more tea and it was then he noticed she’d prepared him a cup as well. “I’m sorry...I guess I became lost in myself.”

“It’s fine, Yuuri. I wouldn’t let you stay lost.”
There was something reassuring in those words. “Thank you,” he whispered, rising up gracefully, years of dancing showing in the movement as he joined her. “I’ve...been terrible company.”

She smiled, reaching over to take his hand. “It’s fine. I just wanted to see my friend and make sure he was okay.”

Yuuri drew his shoulders in. “I’m not so sure.”

She squeezed his hand and answered, “You’re making progress. It hasn’t been that long. Your wounds won’t heal overnight.”

His gaze shifted towards the window, the clouds reflecting his mood. “It sometimes feels like it was just yesterday.”

“In a way, it was. Time...seems to play tricks on us after we’ve gone through something traumatic.” She put down her cup, her lips turning down as she recalled her own difficult time. “It did so for me after I lost my parents. I’d lose whole blocks of it. But...I had my sister to take care of. And you have Yura. I found myself lost in caring for another person, forgetting everything about myself and obligations I had.” She suddenly laughed, “which would explain my interior design flaws.”

Yuuri sighed, nodding. She spoke truth. He looked up as she rose up, rinsing out her cup and he followed her to the sink.

“How about a little shopping before I take you back?”

Yuuri smiled and nodded. “I’m supposed to be writing in a journal...and I haven’t even taken the time to pick one up.”

Yura reached for his papa as he climbed out of the car. “I want my Yuuri,” he pouted.

“You chose to come here with me,” Victor reminded him firmly, stressing the word chose.
Yura twisted in his arms and kicked himself free, Victor catching him in time to settle him onto the sidewalk. “I want to play with Mila with Yuuri,” he fussed.

“Mama will be here soon,” he reassured the little boy. “Katya was worried about him and wanted to see how he was doing.”

This sobered the little boy even as his lip trembled. “Is...he going to be okay?”

Victor winced at his word choice and sat down on the step to invite Yura into his arms. “Yes, he’s going to be okay. Not today. Probably not tomorrow. But eventually he’ll be okay. And we will, too.”

“Zoya thinks I’m bad,” Yura huffed.

Victor pulled back to look his little son in the face. “No, she doesn’t think you’re bad. She wants to make sure you get better. Both Mama and myself are seeing a doctor, too. What happened was scary.”

Yura sat down between Victor’s legs as he stared out towards the street. “Is the bad man still in jail?”

Victor sighed, he was caught. Little ears hear everything and he knew Yura had overheard him on the phone with the police several times. “Yes. I call almost every day just to make sure. But lots of people want to see him in jail.” He winced at the lie, he called more than once a day, but he didn’t want to alarm Yura.

“Did the bad man take Mommy away?”

Victor blinked in surprise. “Yelena?”

Yura nodded. “He hurts mommies. Did he hurt my mommy? Did he make her die?”
Victor pulled Yura up into his lap. “Mommy died from a disease, a thing called cancer.”

Yura struggled to understand. “But...a bad man hurt mommy, too.”

Oh no. Victor winced, knowing what Yura was talking about. His arms tightened around his son. “Where did you hear that?”

Yura shrugged. “Older people talk. They don’t know I’m there. Did that bad man hurt my mommy, too?”

Victor shook his head, his head at war with how to answer his little boy’s questions. “No. Mommy...had a bad boyfriend, not the same one as Yuuri, a different bad man. She got away from him like Yuuri did. But then she came to live with me and we had you. Her bad man never came back.”

The little boy processed that information. “The bad man...was Yuuri’s boyfriend? He had a bad boyfriend like Mommy?”

Victor tried to think of the best way to answer his son’s question. “Yuuri...was mated to him.” He saw his son’s face scrunch in confusion, “It's sort of like marriage for omegas and alphas. Then Yuuri got away. He tried to stay in Japan but he didn’t feel safe. So Uncle Phichit and Uncle Chris made sure we met.” He quirked his lips, laughing at himself for not seeing their ruse earlier. “Yuuri came here to be safe.”

“But the bad man found him anyway,” Yura argued, then he froze and realization washed over him. “And mommy’s bad man will find me!” He scrambled out of Victor’s hold and onto the cement of the side way, stamping his feet, so much anger in that small body...or maybe fear was a better word for it.

Victor blinked, startled. “Yura, why do you think mommy’s boyfriend will come after you?”

Tears started welling up in the large green eyes. Yura wasn’t sure how to phrase what he was feeling but it was a combination of horror, frustration, and fear. “Because...he can’t know about me.”

Victor nodded, seeing his son on the verge of a meltdown. He rose, offering Yura a hand, “I
think...we need to talk about this. But would you be okay if we talk about it with Zoya?”

Yura started to calm down, he huffed at the idea of talking to Zoya. “Will you stay?”

His father nodded solemnly, “I think that it is important that I do at first.”

Zoya listened as Victor recounted the morning conversation and then sat across from Yura at the small table. “Yura, what do you know about your mommy’s boyfriend?”

“I have bad dreams.” He shrugged. “He’s there in the shadows, and sometimes he will walk out of the shadow but it’s like the shadow comes with him, always hiding him. That’s what he looked like before.”

Victor quickly explained that Yura wouldn’t know what the man would look like. The doctor nodded understanding, the boy would give an unpleasant image to him, and Yura was afraid of shadows.

She leaned forward, addressing Yura, “You said ‘before’. Does he still look like a shadow man?”

Yura shrank in his chair, the hand holding a crayon stilled. “No...now he looks like the bad man. Yuuri’s bad man...but Papa said he’s not the same.”

Zoya looked up at Victor trying to gage where to go with this. “Sometimes it is easy to confuse information...especially when they are similar in nature.” The little boy tilted his head, not quite grasping her words. She looked up at the father, hoping he would handle this. “Yura, have you ever seen something from far away and thought it was one thing, only to see that when you got closer it was something else?”

Yura pouted for a moment then smiled, “Yeah, when Mama walked me to school there was a big dog, but when we got closer it was just a plastic bag. I thought the dog was flying.” He giggled at his silliness.
Zoya smiled, “Well, memories and dreams can work the same way. Since you don’t know what your mommy’s bad man looked like, your dreams are putting your mama’s bad man in his place. Does that make sense?”

Yura nodded slowly, understanding the how, but not the why.

The doctor turned to Victor for more information on this new nightmare in the young boy’s life.

Victor reached for his son, pulling him back into his arms. “Yuuri met Shuji a long time ago. Shuji marked him as his mate and Yuuri was forced to live with him. It took ten years for Yuuri to be free of him. They were in Japan. Mommy’s old boyfriend...he was Russian. Your Grandpa, my Papa, made sure he was sent far away. We all wanted to keep Yelena safe. And then...I married her.”

“Because you loved her?”

Victor smiled, kissing his son’s head. “Very much so.”

“And you love Yuuri now?”

Victor nodded. “It’s different from the way I loved your mommy but I love him very much. And just like mommy, I wanted to make sure he was safe.”

Yura thought about these words. “Does mommy’s bad man know about me?”

“Why would he?”

Yura shrugged. “But...I’m a secret.”

“Your mommy knew that the best way to hurt her was through you. She loved you so very much. So we did everything we could to make sure you were kept safe.”

Yura frowned and Victor knew how shrewd his son was. “So he doesn’t know about me.”
“He’s far away,” Victor assured him.

Yura knew his father wasn’t answering his question and tugged at his lip in a very Yuuri fashion as he processed that information.

Yuuri rode back to the rink with Katya, a couple of new tops for his trip and a new journal with a phoenix emblazoned on the cover. He thought about what the bird represented, rebirth after passing through fire. That is what I want. Rebirth.

When they arrived, he thanked her and ran up the stairs. He wanted to find his family and he needed cuddles. As he opened the door to Victor’s office, he started when he heard a little bark, laughing as he scooped the poodle into his arms.

“Well, hello, Ren!” He hugged her, snuggling his face into her fur. “I didn’t expect you to be here.”

Victor’s warm voice filled the room, “Yura insisted Ren needed her family today...who am I to argue?”

The omega narrowed his eyes as he studied the alpha’s resignation. “How did it go with Zoya?”

Victor shrugged, sighing. “Yura is fighting her...and there are more drawings.”

Yuuri nodded, nuzzling into the poodles fur. Pressing his cheek into the puff of hair on her head, he said quietly, “Yura is finding his own way through...and if that means he fights monsters, then let us give him the weapons he needs.”

“And you...are you fighting monsters?” Victor crossed the small office to the smaller man.

Yuuri nodded, turning to face the puppy who jumped up to lick his nose. “Every day.”
Victor leaned against the edge of his desk, watching the omega cuddle the tiny dog. “And...what do you need?”

He hugged the dog to his chest and answered softly, “You.” He then grinned, shrugging as he added, “And an army of friends.” He stood up and walked into Victor’s embrace, smoothing his hair from his face. “I think Yura needs to visit his friends. I’ve called Mehar and we’re spending tomorrow morning with her family. Beka is worried about Yura as well and it might do them both some good to see each other.”

Victor held him close and murmured a confession. “I wish I was enough for both of you.”

Yuuri clicked his tongue before pressing a kiss into his forehead. “Such a jealous heart,” he whispered, a soft smile on his lips.

Victor whined softly, “I just...fall short.” He was horrified to speak the truth that he was unworthy of Yuuri’s love because he had failed to protect him. His alpha was forever on edge these days.

Yuuri cuddled into the embrace, “You are human...and there is inherent weaknesses to that state.”

“Would that I be born a dragon,” he argued.

Yuuri snorted remembering the movie they watched with Phichit and Chris a few days ago. “I think...kidnapping is not the way to induce my heart into love. That’s already been tried.”

Victor looked crestfallen as he made the connection. “Yuuri, I didn’t mean…” he back-peddled.

Yuuri smoothed his hair, before pressing a kiss into his forehead. “I know what you meant...you are strong enough for me and Yura. Just because we need more doesn’t imply that you lack anything, my sweet Vitya.”

He sighed, hiccupping as he released a sob, burying his head into Yuuri’s chest. The omega continued to stroke his hair while the alpha let his tears flow. Soft words soothed while Victor clung to his mate. “You’re hurting for more than me,” Yuuri finally murmured, feeling the depth of Victor’s grief. “Tell me what’s on your heart.”
It felt selfish to lay it all bare. Especially to him. But Victor did because Yuuri asked it of him.

“Yura...he knows that Yelena was fleeing her old boyfriend when she came to me. I don’t think he’s made the connection. He doesn’t really know what that means...but he knows to be afraid of him. That night...when she came to me...I think she knew. I don’t think she would have asked me to sacrifice a lifetime. She was...so thin. I knew she was carrying Yura. I could feel his life growing within her, she was so far along...like I feel our own. But I think I knew something deeper was wrong. I tried desperately to get her the help she needed but she pushed the doctors away. She only wanted peace. So...that’s what I worked to give her.”

Yuuri listened as Victor unburdened himself, piecing together her story. *She must have known she was sick, possibly dying when she finally escaped to Victor. How many people see you as their safe haven? How much can you take upon yourself before you break, Vitya? “And...the man that hurt her?”*

“Kostya...he’s my cousin. I don’t think I told you that. My brother introduced them. I don’t think he realized the danger he placed her in. She trusted the connection.” Victor pulled his face up, looking to Yuuri’s soothing brown eyes. “But Kostya...he’s from bad stock. Our mothers are sisters but his father...my aunt would put on a brave face but makeup can’t cover every injury. I think...I’ve been angry with my brother for a long time for introducing them.”

Yuuri remained silent, letting Victor get it all out. Then his worry changed, “Can he get to Yura?”

Victor sensed the tension in his Yuuri and was quick to confirm their boy was safe. “He’s stationed far away. The army. My father saw to that.”

Yuuri nodded even as he stroked Victor’s hair. Pressing a kiss, he whispered, “My troubles brought all that to the forefront.”

Victor was slowly shaking his head, “Only that...I couldn’t save her in the end.” He sighed, “I failed her, and I failed you too...and I’m so afraid of losing you, of losing Yura.”

Yuuri closed his eyes, absorbing his mate’s pain. “Vitya, you gave her a safe place, peace to find herself again before she passed on. You saved her...you just weren’t allowed to keep her. And you...saved me. Over and over. You’re not going to lose me. And I’ll fight to my very last breath to keep Yura safe.”

Victor groaned pulling Yuuri into his lap, holding his mate closer. “I...I will always marvel at your
strength, how you even find strength when you are breaking, how you hold us all together.”

“We hold each other together. Trust in our love.”

Victor looked up, seeking his lips, and Yuuri didn’t flinch at the teary, snotty face before him, leaning forward to answer that kiss. “I love you.”

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Yuuri found Yura sitting with Mila in a dance studio. They were playing a silly game and Mila lifted him up in the air, the little boy fighting her until his mother’s voice warmly corrected him.

“You need to keep your body stiff or you will hurt your dance partner, Yura. Strength and trust go hand in hand.”

“But she’s a girl!” he protested.

“She may turn out to be a strong alpha.”

“Omegas are strong, too,” Yura argued.

And Yuuri smiled at that. “We are...we protect those we love with every fiber of our being.”

Mila let him down, sensing it was important and Yura immediately ran into his mother’s arm. “You made me safe.”

Kneeling down, he gathered Yura close, smoothing his blond hair back. “And you protected me right back, getting me help when I couldn’t. You were very brave.”

“But if the bad man came through the door...what would you have done?”
Yuuri sighed, feeling a frown pull at his face. “I would have thrown myself at him to keep him away from you. I would have told you to run while I kept him focused on me. I would have done anything to keep you safe.”

“But...I want you to be safe, too.”

“And I am safe...because your papa built a safe place for us to hide, because your grandpa and Olga and both dogs worked hard to stop the bad man from getting to us, because your papa made sure we were all taken care of after the fact. I am safe. And so are you.”

The little boy buried himself into Yuuri’s neck and whispered, “Sometimes I’m scared.”

“Me, too. But that’s when I need people around me to remind me I’m safe.”

Mila’s hand rested on Yura’s back and she murmured, “You’re safe. It’s okay, Yura.”

The little boy turned and hugged her while the little redhead stroked his hair.

Victor curled around his family, a protective hand on Yuuri’s tummy. Yuuri’s arms were wrapped around their son. Ren stretched out next to Yura and a small hand tangled into her fur. The Russian hoped time in Japan would help his family reset their emotions. He hated the feeling of being stuck that seemed to surround them.

Phichit sat in the living room, the blue glow of the television providing the only light in the space, Chris holding him close, his lips in the younger man’s dark hair. “Do you think Japan is a good idea?” He was worried that this would be only more triggering for Yuuri.

“Right now it is further from Shuji than they are here. They are holding him for crimes committed in Russia before sending him on to either Japan or America. Perhaps they can decide who gets first claim in the meantime,” Chris suggested.

Phichit settled his back into Chris’ chest. “Part of me wishes Nikolai had ended him.”
Chris hugged him close. “But then I’d have to fight to keep that old man out of jail...and there is nothing fair in that. It is better this way and Vitya knew that when he stopped him.”

“Even though they all suffer in the wake of it all?”

“They would be struggling no matter what...but Yuuri is recovering faster than before and his family is following him in that recovery. And you, mon cher, are part of that recovery.” Chris tweaked Phichit’s nose and grinned as it wrinkled in response.

“So are you,” Phichit argued, tipping up to kiss him. “I sometimes feel like Victor, though...like I’m not enough.”

Chris hugged him closer before murmuring, “None of us are...but all of us will be.”

Chapter End Notes

Before you ask, there will be some Yura and Otabek time in next chapter. They go to Hasetsu in 51. It's still a work in progress but 50 is written and awaiting edits. So I hope you enjoyed 49 and I look forward to reading your comments. (Hopefully this weekend I can backtrack through multiple chapters until I'm caught up on comment replies.)
Heroes come in all sizes

Chapter Summary

A visit with the Altins before leaving for Japan.

Chapter Notes

Soooo...my birthday is coming up and I'm trying to decide between one shots.

(1) Yuri's Angels - a Good Omens crossover fic.
(2) Songs Universe - Yura and Otabek as teens
(3) Summer smut - random Victuuri

Let me know what you think in the comments!

Ch. 50: **Heroes come in all sizes**

Yuuri pulled off Yura’s coat in the threshold of the Altin home, which proved to be a challenge as the little boy bounced with excitement, running off to Zaina and Bek’a’s arms as soon as he was free. Yuuri smiled, shaking his head. It was good that they came.

Looking over at Rohan, he watched as the younger man studied him with worry in his eyes. Finally the brother stated quietly, “Mehar had to run a quick errand and apologizes for not being here to greet you. Perhaps...you’d join me for a cup of tea?”

Yuuri nodded. Rohan was usually reserved, never cold, but it was clear the Mehar was the welcome wagon of the two. However, Yuuri found his expression warm and inviting. “Tea sounds lovely...and I had hoped we, too, could catch up.”

The other omega smiled, relief in his features. “I’m...not as good with people. Please,” He motioned Yuuri to follow him into his library. Newspapers, books, and notebooks were scattered about indicating the intense research Rohan was engaged in and two monitors were flickering between news channels. *And I thought I was taking on too much all at once...what is he chasing?* Yuuri’s host went over and turned off the monitors before indicating a pair of chairs in the corner with a small, round table in between. A pot simmered on a small hotplate on the back of the table.
He carefully poured the milk into the pot Yuuri watched as the tea turned a warm brown, the scent of ginger and cardamom filling the space.

“I’ve been researching the politics around your case,” Rohan began hesitantly, eyes directed into the pot in front of him.

Yuuri wasn’t surprised. Through many conversations, Rohan had expressed an interest in the politics behind the abuse permitted by the laws. “I don’t know what to do about it. On one hand, he’s in jail and there are others vying to take him after Russia is through with him. So I’m safe...but how do I keep it from happening to others? Should I...do I even have any power to do anything about it?”

Rohan nodded as he poured their cups, straining out the chunkier spices. A plate of small cookies sat between them and he took one and dipped it into the warm liquid before taking a bite. His cheeks dusted pink as he smiled at Yuuri. “A habit left over from childhood. One of the few good memories. Mehar fusses with me about it.”

Yuuri smiled knowing there were things from his childhood he clung to and shared with Yura. “I think...it helps us to hold onto the good things of our past.”

“So do I...Mehar...she remembers the bad...so she always tries to forget by pushing it and everything she remembers away. I suppose I don’t blame her. She...lives in the present. I straddle the past and the present but I want to make it better...for the future.”

Yuuri sat silenced for a moment. He was also living that straddled life. “I think...I do as well. I just don’t know what to do.”

Rohan studied him while he took a sip of the warm liquid before lowering his cup and answering. “It’s...a difficult thing, to help. You have to open yourself up and make yourself vulnerable. I often share the plight of Mehar and myself during various lectures, knowing my story will raise awareness. The abuser tries to silence our voice, they will try to keep us all silent so their power is never questioned, tested. It is important that they don’t succeed. You must...tell your story.”

Yuuri hummed as he drank more of his tea. “I think...you are right. I’m still dealing with the aftermath and my psychiatrist encourages me to journal. Maybe...if I put it down, wrote my story out...do you think that would be good?”
Rohan thinned his lips then rose from his chair, crossing the room. Reaching into a desk drawer, he pulled out a small volume and brought it over to Yuuri, passing it over to him. “Read it. I want it back when you’re finished but...it’s my journal.”

Yuuri held out a hand tentatively, “That’s...so personal. Are you sure?”

Rohan looked at the volume, his thumb running over the spine as he held it out to the other omega. “I...share my story. As often as possible. And when it is hard, then it is even more important that I share it. Read it. And realize as you write your own story, it becomes easier with time. The first pages are hard. You don’t know where to begin. But by the end of the first month of writing, I found my words.”

“Thank you,” Yuuri murmured, holding the book to his chest as a treasure. “I’m traveling...may I take it with me.”

“You may...but you might want to read it in privacy. Some of the passages are...difficult.”

“I...will,” Yuuri responded, his voice as he felt overwhelmed by the generosity.

A door opening and closing in the foyer followed by his friend’s voice singing out their names bringing a smile to his lips. Rohan called back, “In here.”

Then Mehar was there, hugging him and fussing over him and offering to cook him something. Yuuri met Rohan’s eyes over her head. He was right about his sister. Keeping herself as busy as possible kept her from remembering the horror she had lived through. She lives in the present so she doesn’t have to face the past.

Yuuri didn’t want that. He knew there was much to learn from his story. He placed the book gingerly with his and Yura’s coats, following Mehar into the kitchen, enjoying her warm chatter. She talked about the kids and her husband as she pulled things from the cupboard to prepare their lunch and he realized how much she reminded him of Olga and his own mother.

Up the stairs, Beka and Yura were curled up on a beanbag chair holding one another for a long time. Zaina was in and out, patting Yura’s back, chattering in a childish manner but she seemed to
know this was for Beka and Yura. So she would move onto other things, playing with her cats and
dolls, tinkering on the child-sized piano, setting up a pretend classroom for her plushies and dolls.

Yura clung to his friend, feeling the protective embrace of the older boy. “I was so scared when I
heard what happened,” Otabek murmured.

“Mama kept me safe...but then he...he...couldn’t come out. Not by himself.” Yura looked up at
him, big green eyes finding the deep black. “Papa found us, though. I had to help.”

“Are you okay now?”

Yura shrugged. “I get scared. I don’t like the dark much and the closet is scary.”

Otabek’s intense face scrunched, “Why?”

Yura’s eyes took on a dreamy quality, but one of a person being suck into the dream. “I think there
is a monster inside it.” Yura’s voice turned quiet and soft, a rarity for the tiger child. His skin
became chilly to the touch, and light in the room seemed to dim as shadows from the corners crept
out of their holdings. The little boy felt Otabek shift next to him and suddenly found himself more
alert. “I’m okay, though, if Mama and Papa are there. Monsters don’t like grown-ups.”

Otabek thinned his lips as he considered those words. “Maybe the monster hasn’t realized you’re a
very brave fire fairy.”

Yura blushed and giggled at that, warmth returning to his body. “Maybe.” Then he sobered and
whispered, “I’m not very brave, though. I...keep feeling scared.”

Beka hugged him tighter. “I’ll tell you a secret. Being brave doesn’t mean not being scared. I feel
scared all the time. But...I still do what needs to be done. Like when you had to help your mama.”

Yura thought about that and then nodded in agreement. “I like that. So I can still be a brave fairy
and be afraid sometimes?”

Beka nodded. “Sometimes, though, it helps to have something like a charm or a talisman to keep
you safe.”

“Like...magic?”

Otobek gave him a sage nod. “Like the ballet bunny your other mom left you when she died.”

Yura hopped out of his lap and grabbed his little backpack, unzipping it to reveal the bunny as he climbed back into Otabek’s embrace. “I still have her. She smells more like my Yuuri than my other mom, now. Do you think she still works?”

“It’s important that she smells like a mom,” Otabek confirmed. “But your new mom works, too. I have a bear that Rohan and Mehar both scent regularly.” He reached up on a shelf and handed Yura a small wrapped box. Suddenly, the little boy that was so confident he would be an alpha felt himself tremble with nerves. “I...got you this, too. Because we’re friends, you know. Maybe it can also be a talisman.”

Yura carefully unwrapped the box and the charm fell into the little boy’s hand. He turned the metal over and then realized it had both Yura’s and Otabek’s first initial in Cyrillic intertwined. A leather cord allowed it to be worn as a necklace. Beka reached for it and helped to pull it over Yura’s head.

“I have one, too. That links us together.” He saw Yura studying the metal of the charm with curiosity. “It’s iron. Made of old nails, it protects against dark things. It says so in some of Papa’s old books. I was reading about how people would put up horseshoes to keep away witches and demons. Papa told me all about how iron keeps away the evil spirits but can’t hurt anything good, even fire fairies. I asked Rohan to help me figure out how to put it together. I don’t think he believes in these things but he still helped.”

Yura reached up and lifted the matching charm out of Beka’s shirt with wide eyes before hugging him tightly. Beka hugged him back, murmuring, “I wish I could have kept you safe but I’m glad you have good parents that work hard to make sure you’re okay. I’d have had a hard time if I lost my...best friend.”

“You won’t lose me, Beka. We’re friends forever,” Yura declared. As Beka rocked him, he heard the sigh and small purr from the little boy. It was an early sign and could be a false sign but every instinct in the older boy told him this one would present as omega. A very brave omega, just like his moms.
Mehar insisted on seeing Yuuri and Yura home. “No point in dragging out your friend and I can spend a little more time with you,” she argued. Otabek and Zaina insisted on accompanying them and with all three children secured, the adults took the middle seat to chat while the driver took them to Phichit’s apartment building. “I know when you go back to your home, you will have bad days. I want you to call me and I’ll come over and spend time with you,” she offered her comfort. “We will work together to help dispel the darkness that has settled into your home so that you will be comfortable once again.”

Yuuri hummed, home. “That seems so far away and even when it’s cleared, Victor’s having it professionally cleaned. Hopefully that will do much to help.”

Mehar patted his hand, “Cleaners can remove scents but there are still memories. Darker memories, sadness and violence, they can cling to a place. We need to open it up and air it out, shoe out the darkness and invite in the light.”

Yuuri smiled at her warmth. “That sounds wonderful. I would love for you to be there. I don’t know where to begin with such things.”

“I’d be happy to. Now...you have a safe journey to see your mother...and know there are so many here that both love and miss you in your absence.” She hugged him as he climbed out of the car, and waved as she drove off, holding Rohan’s journal to his chest. Yura’s hand held onto his shirt while his other chubby hand waved at Beka and Zaina with a teary “bye.”

Yuuri bent down and scooped him up with one arm, the little boy tucking into his neck. “We won’t be gone long, sweetie...just a week. And you get to meet my family.”

“What if...what if they don’t let you come back?” he whined pitably.

Yuuri chuckled warmly. “I’m a grown up...I’m allowed to make my own decisions...and I will always choose you and your papa.”
volume. Opening it up, he smiled at the easy script.

***

June 1st -

I don’t know that dates matter. Everything happened before but it seemed like a place to ground myself, something to tell me that at least on this day, I recorded something of what happened.

It’s so hard to think about what happened, but Aylin says it might help me to process all of the emotions inside. It’s still hard to believe I’m free. Both my sister and myself. To think where we might have found ourselves...I don’t really believe in higher beings but sometimes it seems as if someone had intervened.

I have people that make me feel grateful. Maybe I’ll start there...at some point I’ll voice my anger...but for now, I have Aylin and Bekarys. There is the little boy Otabek. I’m not sure what he thinks of me. I don’t know what to think of him. But his eyes are sincere. I wonder if I looked at the world with such sincerity at such a young age. Do I still?

***

Yuuri closed the volume. Focus on the positive for now. Process the negative later. He pulled out his own pen and began writing about his gratitude, listing, as Phichit and Yura put it, his team.

And the list grew long. He knew in time more would be added but he was already overwhelmed as he looked at the names forming on the page before him. He felt someone tugging on him and turned as his little boy crawled into his lap.

“Why are you sad?” Big green eyes startled him with the question.

Yuuri started at that then realized he had tears. “‘M not sad...happy...” his voice was a little quavered from the tears and he used the cuff of his sleeve to wipe away the telltale sign. “because I just realized how many people care about me.”

Yura looked at the paper Yuuri indicated and then spotted his name at the very top spot. A chubby
finger darted to that name, and a delighted voice exclaimed. “I’m first...that means I’m the most ‘portant.”

“Im portant, and yes...I think you helped me to love myself and that made me more open to love and be loved by others. So you are...so very important to me.”

“Is that why you hided me from the bad man?”

Yuuri hugged him. He’d like to think he would have protected any child but he knew this one...he would have protected with his life. If Shuji had come through, he would have commanded the child to stay very still and to not come out until his papa came for him. He would have surrendered to Shuji to keep Yura safe. “I will always protect you,” he promised.

“Beka says I have a tallyman, too. Ballet Bunny, he protects me. And now this.” He pulled out the necklace and it twirled lazily on its cord.

Yuuri fingered the charm carefully, “Did he give you that?”

“It has our letters,” he declared with an eager nod. “Now I’m safe from the monster.”

“What monster?” Yuuri asked softly, carefully.

“The one in the closet. The one that took my mommy away. I don’t want him to take me away, too.”

Yuuri hugged him close. How things get confused in young minds. “Don’t worry. We will all keep you safe. I bet your list of people will be twice as long as mine.”

Yura’s eyes widened but then he started listing people, counting out his fingers as he went, while Yuuri gathered him up and settled him in bed. He was still naming off people after he had his pajamas on and was tucked under the blankets. He then stopped, his eyes focusing on Yuuri. “I think my mommy sent you to me to keep me safe from the monster.”

Yuuri felt a lump form in his throat and the tears threatened to come back. I’ve been wondering the
same thing. But I think the guardian angel in this story is very much alive, and loves Chanel. “I’d stand between you and any danger,” Yuuri promised solemnly. Smoothing the blond hair, he slid his hand down and rubbed Yura’s earlobe until the little one dozed off to sleep. He couldn’t help but wonder if the monster Yura spoke of has been the subject of the many nightmares that drove the little boy into his bed at night. At least he’s talking, Yuuri thought to himself. I just hate what he went through to find his voice.

With a sigh, he rose and walked across the room, closing his journal and Rohan’s, securing them into a small pouch and tucking them into his carryon luggage. He knew Victor was arranging some things with Chris and would join him soon. He slipped out of the room and made his way to the small balcony outside the living room, opening the French doors so that he could step out.

He was staring at the dark spaces, parks and unlit streets, a star that managed to cut through the light pollution here and there when the door open and he glanced up to see Phichit join him.

“What’s on your mind?” Phichit asked quietly handing him a mug of hot chocolate.

Yuuri breathed in the steam and smiled his thanks before answering quietly, “Yura...thinks there is a monster in the closet that will take him away like it took away his mother.”

“Well...cancer is a monster of sorts,” Phichit pointed out.

Yuuri nodded in agreement. “Is it wrong that I hope the monster he’s referring to is the cancer? That’s...oddly a threat that it feels like we can fight. I’m terrified he’s somehow learned about...” Yuuri trailed off, not wanting to speak the name of the real monster aloud.

“I think we all have monsters in the closet and we all have to face them one at a time. Some monsters are outside of us and some within us.”

“Like my anxiety,” Yuuri murmured.

Phichit nodded quietly. And perhaps he had his own monsters but he kept them to himself.
Victor made sure everything was ready and by the door for when they left in the morning. Phichit handed him a stack of clean clothes. “Yuuri packed everything else. Thought you might need something to wear,” Phichit stated pointedly.

His beautiful mate stubbornly refused to let him buy the three of them a fresh wardrobe, keeping their clothing down to the bare minimum. Oh, Victor had slipped things in and would occasionally receive a glare but then he’d spot Yuuri wearing the new top or leggings. Yura was easy to shop for and he’d picked up a few more pairs of underwear and a couple of extra sets of pajamas given his renewed tendency to wet the bed. As for himself, he hadn’t needed much. Between the couple of extra suits he kept in his office, practice clothes he wore on the ice and in the gym, he’d managed fine, like when he traveled. However, he’d be glad when they could return to their home.

According to Lt. Golubev, who was quite tired of Victor’s calls but still patiently answered his questions no matter how many times he had to confirm that Shuji was in a cell, they would pull the tape on his home Tuesday. Victor had already called Olga and Nikolai as well as a professional cleaning company to make sure it was ready when he brought his family back from Japan. Yuuri didn’t know yet and he hoped the news would be a welcome surprise.

Wishing Phichit goodnight, he slipped down the hall for a quick shower before bed. When he entered the room, the soft glow of a nightlight cast a warm light over his family. Yura and Yuuri faced each other, Yuuri’s hand resting on the little boy’s side, Yura with thumb in mouth and his other arm over his head. He hated to see that thumb in his mouth but knew to focus on the bigger picture. The rest would resolve itself.

He leaned over to kiss his son watching that sucking motion increase. Reaching over, he found the dislodged bunny and tucked it into the little boy’s arms. Yura shifted, pulling his thumb from his mouth as he hugged the bunny, snuggling into its comforting scent.

His mate’s eyes fluttered open but Victor could tell he wasn’t truly awake. He leaned over and kissed his forehead, letting his wrist settle close to Yuuri’s face. The omega breathed in his scent and settled once more. It was the little things here and there Victor did to ensure his family’s safety and comfort. The alpha didn’t even think about them. He just did them automatically. His mind worried about the bigger picture and struggled with his own failure to be there when they needed him most. Still, as he stretched out next to his family, Yuuri turned to snuggle into his neck and his son followed, crawling somehow between them without dislodging Yuuri, his arm going around Victor’s middle.

Ren watched from her corner and as if waiting for a nod from the silver moonlit shadows, she made her way onto the bed, stretching across her two charges. A long hand reached down to scratch her head and she considered the bigger one for a moment. He might need her as well. She
had seen the carrier and wasn’t too keen on the journey ahead but she’d go...to keep her humans safe.
Sometimes you just need your mom…

Chapter Summary

Finally home in Hasetsu!

Chapter Notes

It's a busy week but BluSkates managed to get this edited over the weekend. So we are ready to go up two days early! (Or five days late...you decide). If you missed the oneshot which flash forward into Otabek and Yuuri's life, please take a peek. I don't think I spoiled the story except to let you know there is a happy ending ahead. ;) I believe in happy endings.

I know I went home and visited my own mom after writing this chapter. My moods are up and down and sometimes you just need your mom. #relatable

Enjoy...I have several chapters planned for Hasetsu.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 51: Sometimes you just need your mom…

Yuuri tried desperately, and failed, to keep himself contained as he approached his hometown, but his knee bounced excitedly as he watched familiar landscapes slide by on the train. The city slowly melted away into the pastoral scenes of lush green. As they headed south the country took on an older look, one that Yuuri would always consider more sophisticated, more grown up. As a child he felt the importance of being worthy of his surroundings, southern Japan. Now, as a grown man, parent, and soon to be mother, he saw the beauty of what the people of this community were doing. Honoring the past. Holding their way of life as sacred in the face of progress. Making those changes work without losing what was important to their core. He looked over to Victor, holding Yura’s waist as the boy stood on the seat next to his father pointing at everything that passed them.

*This is what I’m doing. I’m building from my past, putting in the new to fit with it.*

Yura pulled him from his thoughts, rushing to the omega’s side and demanding to have each monument, each sanctuary, each tree identified and explained. Yuuri laughed, wondering if every Russian knew each detail of their entire country. He indulged the boy, giving the story of what he did know and breezing over those he didn’t. They both turned towards Victor, the alpha holding
onto their luggage and more importantly, a reproachful Ren. The poodle huffed and turned her back on the three of them.

Lifting Yura down, the omega went to sit next to his mate, leaning against his shoulder. “Are you nervous?”

Victor flashed camera-ready-smile #7, “Meeting your parents? What’s to be nervous about?”

Yuuri laughed warmly seeing through the facade. “So yes…”

The smile faded, to be replaced by one that was easy, relaxed, and very sincere. Yuuri loved that smile as it was Victor’s true beauty. “Very…although I think I’m more nervous about meeting your sister.”

Squeezing Victor into a hug, he agreed, “Fair.”

As the train pulled into Hasetsu station, Yuuri jumped up, pulling his son into his arms. “It’s time.”

Victor grunted while he shouldered the carryon, lifted Yura onto his shoulders, and grabbed the handle of the larger suitcase. Yuuri took the smaller suitcase and the dog carrier. Several people shuffled towards the exit, others nabbing vacated seats out of the commotion. And then, after a flourish of movement, they were on the platform, Yuuri’s past staring right at the small family. Yuuri turned and sighed, a smile that was half way between embarrassment and nostalgia at the sight of an old poster hanging on the wall. He approached it, his fingers tracing the younger version of himself in one of his last skating costume. For the first time he really looked at himself, this photoshoot was one of the last time he had been allowed out. Shuji had already marked him, sentenced him to a prison term, but hadn’t collected him. The photographer had done a wonderful job making him look wistful, as if he were a young man looking into his future with trepidation. What he really felt was horror and despair.

“Is that you, Mama?” Yura asked excitedly, bouncing on his papa’s shoulders, causing Victor to tighten his hold on those little feet.

Yuuri blushed but nodded. “Mmmhmm...a long time ago.” A lifetime. “It was…the beginning of the end of my career. But at least I had my moment.”
Feeling the omega’s mood shift, Victor moved closer, the little boy settling enough for him to be able to slide a hand around Yuuri’s shoulder. “You’ve had so many moments. You should have had more but...you were seen. And you have a lifetime of more moments to come.”

Yuuri smiled, there was a moment he wanted to discuss, the words on the tip of his lips. Then they heard a voice calling out Yuuri’s name. “Yuuri! There you are!”

Yuuri rolled his eyes and found his smile. Victor grabbed the handle and scrambled after him. “Minako. I didn’t expect you.”

“Well, your mother didn’t want you walking home from the train station and I volunteered. I couldn’t wait to meet your family.” The former ballerina, who magically defied aging, held out a hand to Victor, greeting him like a European. “Hi. I’m Minako.”

Victor smiled, letting go of the suitcase and offering his free hand. “Oh, hello. I’m sorry. I’ve been juggling my family. Victor Nikiforov and my...our son, Yura.”

“Oh, Victor, we know who you are,” she chuckled warmly.

“Oh...yeah, I guess Yuuri was a bit of a fan,” Victor stated, pink rising up in his cheeks.

“Minaaakoooo,” the omega groaned, rubbing his hand over the back of his neck. “Let’s just go home, okay?”

“Of course,” she chirped.

Soon they were loaded up and Yuuri settled Yura in a child seat. “I don’t know where this came from,” he murmured.

The teacher smiled at him from the driver’s seat, “Oh, your mother borrowed it for your stay. She wanted to make sure you could move about while you were home.”

Yuuri paused for a moment, understanding the silent message Hiroko had sent. These newcomers were not guests, they were family. “Oh...that was very thoughtful.”
“Of course it was...she’s your mother, after all.”

Yuuri hugged himself then studied his son. For the longest time, he chased after his dreams feeling how unattainable they were. Love had seemed so distant. Having his son, his mate, and hopefully his little one...how could he express how complete he felt at that moment. He reached out and ran his fingers through Yura’s blond hair and smiled as the little boy turned into his touch.

Victor sat in the front seat talking with Minako. His nervous excitement caused him to chatter away and Yuuri couldn’t help but smile. The alpha was so endearing. Then the van pulled to a stop in front of the inn and Victor jumped out, opening the door to help his mate out and then his son. Yuuri led them away to the family entrance and then the door was thrown open by Minako.

“Hiroko,” she sang out. “Look who I found at the train station.”

His whole family emerged from their work stations, coming through the entrance that separated the family quarters from the rest of the business. Yuuri’s hand went to his heart, spotting his mother had been more shocking than he realized. Hiroko spread her arms wide and he instantly was running into them. He cried. She cried. The other members of their family knowing that the two omegas needed a bonding moment. However, the other two couldn’t resist for long. And then his father and sister’s arms were around him, hugging him, fussing over him.

The circle of love finally broke up and Yuuri wiped away his tears, turning towards his new family. He reached out his hands and then his arms were full of his son, the little boy whimpering softly, not understanding the emotions of the room. Yuuri laughed, tears renewed, even as Victor’s arm slid around him, his hand resting on the omega’s shoulder. “Let me introduce you to my parents,” he invited, his voice shaking nervously. However, as soon as he turned Hiroko had scooped Yura out of his arms and began fussing over the little blonde, offering him sweets in the kitchen. His father patted Victor on the back and invited him for a drink.

And Yuuri realized he was left alone with his sister. Turning to look at her, he didn’t know what to say. “Oh.”

She shrugged and waved for him to follow. “Help me finish the towels. Then we’ll go and see what damage Mom has done.”

They were sitting in the laundry room at the folding table rolling towels, Yuuri could arrange them in his sleep, tucking the corners so that they would hold their shape. Mari studied him, the relaxed
shoulders, the easy smile, the blush at her teasing. She hadn’t seen him this happy and easy since...ever. And finally, she pronounced, “He’s good for you.”

Yuuri blinked in surprise at the unexpected statement before shrugging with a smile. “I know. He...helps me to find the best of myself. And even...when I don’t feel deserving, I can’t imagine myself anywhere else.”

“I’m glad. I was worried about you for awhile, squirt.” She then tousled his hair which led into a small wrestling match but then Yuuri rolled out of her arms, his hands going down protecting his middle. She narrowed her eyes at the motion, humming thoughtfully. “Anything you want to share, little brother?”

Yuuri shrugged, turning away so his face didn’t give away the lie. “I...ummm...Not just yet?”

She clicked her tongue before nodding. She knew the motion well, all of her friends were at that age, and he was hiding nothing in that action. “Very well. You keep your secrets.”

Then they were up, heading into the kitchen where Yura’s face was covered with red bean paste and crumbs. Yuuri scooped him up off the stool and he giggled. “Mama!”

Yuuri was happy to see the little blonde shared his love of the sticky bun treat, “Are you having fun?” Victor had admitted to trying them but finding the taste funny.

“Grandma gave me a cake and it has jam in the middle.”

Yuuri smirked and neglected to tell him that it was bean paste. “Do you like them? I know how to make them.”

“Yes!” he declared, wide green eyes sparkling at the prospect of eating the sweet cakes daily at home, and sharing them with Zaina...and Otabek.

Yuuri laughed at the little boy’s enthusiasm and, turning back to his mother, he asked, “Do we still have cats in the inn?”
The hands stopped work on the night’s dinner for only a moment as she thought, “There are three wondering around here somewhere.”

Yura began bouncing excitedly. “Can I look for them?”

Before Yuuri could answer Mari was there, extending her hand to her nephew, “Why don’t we look together, Sport?” Mari eyed her brother. “I’ll take Ren out while we’re at it.”

“Thank you, Aunt Mari!”

Yuuri watched them leave before crossing over to his mother, his arms wrapping around her from behind. “I’m so happy to be here. Just being here now, with you, with them. It all feels different than before.”

“It is different.” She reached up and patted his hands. “You are no longer afraid.”

“Some days,” Yuuri agreed. “Which is better than being afraid all the time.”

“Your Victor...he is a strong alpha, good heart.”

“He is...I worry about him.” Yuuri had to be honest. “I don’t want him to lose himself in this struggle.”

She turned and this time embraced him, “You must work together. You get help. He gets help.”

“We are...and our Yura as well.” Yuuri pulled back to look at his mother, hoping she had some guidance. “Mom...he started wetting the bed and sucking his thumb because of this.”

Hiroko hummed for a moment, thinking of her experiences with her own children, of the other younger mothers she helped in town. “I think that’s okay. This happens for many children, nothing is a straight line. You always went forwards and backwards growing up. Your anxiety would make you regress. Then you’d take huge strides forward. Let him find his path and catch him along the way as needed. You will do fine. That little boy loves you very much.”
“He does,” Yuuri agreed, his eyes straying to the door where Yura exited. “And I love him.”

“And for now, we do what needs to be done.” She dried off her hands and he found himself following her out the door. They entered the family quarters once more and she stopped at a closet, pulling out various stacks of linens, handing part of them to him, then marched him upstairs.

Yuuri entered his room and his eyebrows rose when she quickly stripped the bed and taking a couple of quilted liners, she spread them out over the surface. Pulling a sheet over the top, she reset the bedspread, before turning to lead him into the next room.

“Put extras over in the corner...in case he has a rough night. I also had your sister put a child’s futon in the closet if he needs to be closer.”

“Thank you, Mom,” Yuuri appreciated. He dropped down to his knees next to the bed and smoothed his hand over the thick comforter. It wasn’t sterile like it would be for the inn. These fabrics held his mother’s, his sister’s, and even his father’s scents. He breathed it in, feeling their comfort and then slid his own wrist over the pillow. His mother left him to his own ministrations and soon he had both pillows well scented before rising up and going into his old room where Yura may be sleeping. He made sure the linens held his scent. He then opened the closet and dug around in the back until he found some toys he enjoyed as a child. He set the box out in easy reach and added the plushies to the bed.

His fingers lingered over the stuffed poodle he received during his first Junior competition. It had been such a thrill, ending his program, hearing the audience boom and then watching as the little stuffed poodle hit the ice. Normally, skaters would let the volunteers bring over the offerings, never wanting to look eager or greedy. However he couldn’t resist. Whoever had thrown it knew him...it was a dead ringer for Makkachin, the famous poodle of Victor Nikiforov. The dog had accompanied him to the Olympics that year, and had even been present at some of his interviews, charming the press with her antics. Yuuri had harbored a crush, but after that he knew all partners would be measured against Victor.

He then heard quick steps up the stairs and a “mama” calling for him. “In here, sweetheart,” he answered and soon the little blonde came into the room.

Big green eyes looked around the space before climbing up on the bed. “Is this your room?”

“It was when I was younger.” He opened his eyes as Yura cuddled into him. “I thought you might
like to stay here.”

The little boy looked a bit concerned and then asked, “Where will you and Papa be?”

Yuuri rose and pushed open the door a little wider. Pointing to the open door down the hall, he answered, “In that room right there. Just next door. Do you think you can stay here?”

Yura blinked as he thought about it. “What if I get scared?”

Yuuri returned to the bed, sitting on the edge. “What do you normally do when you get scared?”

“Crawl in bed with you and Papa.” The little boy crawled over the comforter to his mother.

“None of that’s changed.”

“Okay.” Then the little boy looked around and he pointed at the posters. “Is that Papa?”

Yuuri blushed and laughed, his giggle becoming a little squeaky. “Ummm...yes?”

Yura stood up on the bed and touched the one closest. “His hair is so long. I want long hair.”

Yuuri smiled, wrapping his arms around the little boy. “Let’s wait until you’re a little older. Long hair is a lot of hard work.”

Yura was clearly not pleased with being told to wait, so he struck a bargain. “Can I have it Yuuri long?”

The omega reached back to his own hair, part of it pulled back into hairband, the rest falling around his shoulders. “I think...that would be an appropriate length. We can try it.”

Yura gave an excited, “Yae!” climbing off the bed. “I have kitties to find.”
Yuuri smiled as how quickly the boy could turn, “Oh?”

“Aunt Mari told me where I can go. She said this house is a busyness.” The boy sounded out the word slowly.

“Business and yes, my parents and sister run an inn and restaurant and hot springs resort.”

The little boy paused, thinking of all that meant. “That’s a lot.”

Yuuri laughed, it was many businesses in one and not something he would be exposed to living in a city. “I suppose it is. They have people to help them like Papa has people to help him coach.”

That seemed to satisfy the little boy and he skipped down the hall ahead of Yuuri. For reasons known only to five years olds, he then decided to scoot on his butt down the steps, one step at a time. Yuuri rolled his eyes and stepped around him intent on finding Victor.

He found his mate sitting next to his father, the two of them intent in conversation. “I have a number of investments, sir. Yuuri will be well taken care of should anything happen to me.”

“And nothing is going to happen to you,” Yuuri reiterated as he slid his arms around his mate’s neck from behind. He flashed his father a look to stop the interrogation. Toshiya was an open book normally, but when it came to his children the sparrow turned into a hawk.

Victor smiled, looking up at him. “It is important for fathers to know their children are well cared for.”

“And will you be the same when Yura announces he has chosen his mate?”

“Absolutely,” he responded solemnly before turning back to Toshiya, raising a hand with a toast.

Toshiya patted the space next to him and Yuuri moved away from Victor to sit next to his father. The omega smiled as his father prepared him a drink and then shook his head. “Why?”
Yuuri quickly worked up a lie. “I’m...still a little foggy from the flight and I haven’t really been drinking much,” he answered with a smile.

His father huffed. “More for me and your mate, then.”

Mari sat on the other side of their father and offered, “I’ll join you, Dad.”

Again he huffed, indicating to Yuuri. “This one is too much like his mother.” He offered the drink to his daughter, the one that truly reflected him. “You drink for your brother.”

She chuckled. “Whatever suits you.”

Yuuri felt a slight sting at his father’s words. He knew his father hadn’t meant anything by it, but he worried that he was a disappointment to the man. Leaning in, he hugged his father before slipping away. Victor caught his eyes and saw the look that passed before he moved towards the door. Ren ran to his side and the omega reached for the lead still hanging on the hook where he left it months ago and led her outside.

He walked, smelling the familiar salty scent of Hasetsu, stretching his travel stiff legs, and listening to the sound of the seagulls. St. Petersburg had these things but it was different, more crisp and sharp. The two homes he had were mirror reflections of one another. Similar but vastly different. Here, the waves licked up into the shore lazily and that laid back behavior was reflected in the people, more intent on visiting and sharing the latest gossip than a busy day of work. There were no busy days of work in Hasetsu. Even the fishermen brought in their catch early and then went on about their day.

He stood by the rail at the top of the hill and watched the town stretch out before him. He’d show his family around tomorrow. For today, he drank it in, watching the comings and goings of the people below.

Ren curled up by his feet, her panting tongue lazing out her mouth. She wasn’t really hot. It was winter, after all. But she wanted to make sure he understood that she should be carried. Yuuri smirked down her direction.

Gathering her up, he turned back and as he entered the yard, started at seeing Victor waiting for him.
“Are you okay?”

Yuuri shrugged. “A little...disconnected. It’s like coming home after a long time. The last time...I don’t think I was really here. This is truly like a homecoming, or at least, closer.”

“I wasn’t sure. You seemed...not upset, but like something was bothering you?”

Yuuri grimaced. “My...father sees me as the weaker of the two of us. He doesn’t have to worry about Mari, she can take care of herself, and everyone knows it. But with me, it’s like I have to be watched over, protected. I know he loves me and supports me but there is a decided difference.”

Victor frowned at those words. “I didn’t see that. I thought he saw that the two of you were unique...and it seemed to me like you are closer to your mother. Maybe, if anything, he is a little jealous of that closeness. He lost you for a long time as well and I don’t think he knows how to express that.” Victor paused, “Speaking as a father I wonder if he is harboring guilt for what you went through, for not being there for you to stop Shuji.”

Yuuri huffed, “Dad shouldn’t feel guilty for that. What Shuji did was his fault and no one else’s.”

Victor raised an eyebrow, “It’s good to hear you say that in defense of your father. I hope you remember this next time you want to blame yourself. And perhaps you and he are more alike. Both taking on blame for the actions of another?”

Yuuri frowned at that thought and shrugged. “Maybe?”

Hiroko fed Yuuri and his family before the dinner crowd so they could rest from their trip. She knew her son and could see his energy flagging. “Now go rest. We’ll see plenty of you tomorrow.”

Upstairs, Yuuri wrestled Yura into the shower while Victor sorted out their clothes and hung the things that needed hanging in the closet. The door was open and Yuuri rolled his eyes when he heard the older man call out, “You should let me sign these old posters.”
“I don’t think I can see you as my idol since we sleep together,” Yuuri called back.

Yura wrinkled his nose. “Eew!”

“Don’t be silly,” Yuuri chided, not sure if Yura knew what he was ewing about. “You sleep with us most of the time.”

“Not tonight. I’m sleeping by myself like a big boy.”

“That’s because you are a big boy.”

After Yuuri dried him off, he sent the little boy to his father with a pat on his behind and took the shower for himself. Yuuri closed his eyes and felt the water sliding over his body, thinking about the leaky shower in Victor’s bathroom. Maybe he’d talk to his father about it. He used to help him with the repairs but things changed after he came out about Shuji. I became less.

Yuuri felt the mood settle into him as he stepped out of the shower and he dressed in his pajamas. He tag-teamed Victor with Yura letting the alpha grab his own shower.

His son was snuggled into the bed, surrounded with every single stuffed animal, three cats, and Ren. “I see you managed to find them all.”

Yura grinned. “Mari told me there are kittens outside somewhere. The mama will have to go outside.”

“Would you like me to take care of that?”

The little hand rubbed at the fur, “Maybe...after a story.”

“Okay...what kind of story?”
“Tell me one you liked as a little boy.”

“Hmmm…” Yuuri squeezed his lower lip together in thought. “How about I tell you the story about the boy in a peach, Momotaro?” Yuuri thought back to the childhood story and began recounting it while his son listened, eyes getting heavy. At some point, Ren crawled into his lap then found a place to snuggle next to Yura. As he finished the story, his son watched the omega’s movements with sleepy eyes, opening and closing slowly. Yuuri leaned over his head and kissed the blond locks. “I’m going to take Mama Cat out and then I’ll be in the next room over if you get scared. Okay?”

Yura nodded, his eyes finally closing for sure. Yuuri reached over and patted Ren. “You watch over my baby tonight, okay?”

Ren huffed and then watched as Yuuri scooped up the furry mother and slipped out of the room. “It must be hard to be away from your babies so long. Thank you for your time with my baby.” He crept down the stairs and could hear the guests down the hall connecting to the business. As he slipped out the back door, he found his sister smoking.

She snorted as Yuuri let the cat go. “The little squirt found them all, did he?”

“I don’t think he knows where the kittens are located. I hope the mama hasn’t be gone too long.”

She shook her head, “They are older. Like to hide in the tall grass and under dad’s shed.” She put out her cigarette before studying her brother for a moment. “What’s wrong?” she finally asked.

Yuuri nodded, his eyes growing distant. “I just thought...maybe by now, he’d see that I can stand on my own two feet.”

“Oh, Yuuri...it’s not that. It’s just that...that creep broke into your home and nearly got you again. That terrified us, learning how close he came to succeeding. We are glad he’s in jail but...it’s pulled a lot of the old stuff back up.” She slipped an arm around his shoulder and missed the way Yuuri made a face at the smell of cigarettes. “Before...we were talking about how healthy you looked, how strong you’ve become. And I know...you haven’t lost that. We were just scared.”

Yuuri nodded, hugging himself. “I was, too,” he murmured. “But Vitya...Victor...he’s good to me.”
“I can see that. So...if you two are mated, why hasn’t he...you know, marked you?”

Yuuri ran his hand over the back of his neck. “He’s sorta waiting for me?” Mari’s expression told him to go on. “I just got Shuji out of my head...and I wasn’t ready. Not yet. And then Shuji showed up. I think now the wounds are still very fresh.” Yuuri shrugged. “I think now I wouldn’t mind it but before...it was just too soon.”

Mari nodded, “I appreciate that he’s waiting for you. It takes a lot of trust.”

“He and I...we...ummm…” Yuuri couldn’t bring himself to share about the baby even as his hand brushed over his tummy. It was too soon for that as well. Mari didn’t push it. Shrugging, he wished her good night before slipping up the stairs. He found Victor waiting for him in bed.

“There you are,” he murmured, reaching for his mate. Yuuri settled into the space created by Victor’s arms, turning to snuggle with him. The alpha read the darkness in his mate’s mood. “It’s hard coming home no matter how bad you need it and want it.”

Yuuri nodded and sniffed. He hated the tears but needed the tears. “I just thought...with him in jail...”

“I know, lyubov moya, I know.” Victor’s hands rubbed up his mate’s back.

“I just...hate feeling helpless, like...I’m not enough.”

Victor hummed thoughtfully as he considered those words. “That’s how I feel when I’m with my parents...when we visit them for Christmas, you get to hold me while I fall apart.”

Yuuri laughed through his tears. “But my parents love you already. I came home with my childhood idol. You’re bringing home Jane Eyre. Yours...will probably wonder what you were thinking.”

Victor chuckled, “Not at all, my Yuuri. Russians don’t read a lot of Victorian Lit, so you’re in luck.” The alpha leaned forward and kissed Yuuri’s forehead. “They will wonder how I managed to find such a perfect omega.”
Yuuri huffed. “I’m far from perfect. I’m a mess.”

“You’re my mess and I love you.”

And that seemed to work its magic on Yuuri’s mood, slipping into the seams and warming him within. With a sigh, he snuggled close to Victor. His eyes had been closed for some time before he murmured, “I’m glad I came...I just feel raw. Last time...I didn’t feel safe. I had to explain that to my parents...that moving to a stranger’s home in a foreign country felt just as unsafe as living here where he could snatch me up again at any moment. And then there were the others.”

“Did someone try to hurt you?” Victor asked.

Yuuri shook his head. How could he explain it...but then Victor at one time thought he might be an omega...he might understand. “This is the first time I’ve felt safe here in my parents’ home in a long time. Before...the customers would leer at me. They made me feel...cheap.”

“You are far too classy for that, my Yuuri. But people are small minded no matter where you live. And opinions are harsher towards omegas and women.”

Yuuri breathed out, happy that his mate understood the predicament. “I wish...I could be just me and do so free of opinions. When I was younger, I’d run to the rink in the middle of the night and practice. I didn’t feel like anyone would hurt me.”

“A lot has happened since then. You’ve had so many bad experiences that it’s opened your eyes to the dangers of the world.”

Yuuri’s thoughts drifted to the little boy sleeping in his childhood bed, the one that he believed with his entire heart would grow into an omega. “I hope...Yura doesn’t have to go through that. I want him to be somehow shielded from it all.”

“Me, too.”

Yuuri snuggled back in as Victor’s arm tightened around him. Victor was his safe place. That’s why he felt safe back here in the inn. “Vitya?”
“Mmmm?”

“Will you...would you mind…” He snuggled into Victor’s neck before mumbling, “I need your scent.”

The alpha chuckled, reaching for the hem of Yuuri’s shirt and drawing it up over his head. “I always love for you to wear my scent. Will you scent me as well?”

Yuuri nodded, sitting up in Victor’s arms. For the next hour, Yuuri sat in Victor’s lap, his legs wrapped around him while they started reacquainting themselves with one another’s bodies.

“I guess it’s been awhile since we’ve done more than casual scenting,” the alpha observed, feeling his mate relax into him. He continued to slide his hand up and down Yuuri’s back and down his arms. Yuuri was becoming limp even as he reached for Victor, his hands and wrist sliding over the older body. Lying Yuuri back, he ran a hand around the waistband, watching Yuuri for permission. The omega answered by lifting his hips and Victor freed him of the pants.

He began to massage and rub Yuuri’s legs down to his feet and back up, Yuuri then rolling on his stomach and letting Victor continue the massage. “You’ve needed some love and we’ve lacked the privacy for me to properly take care of you,” he observed.

“Can’t here either. Walls too thin,” Yuuri huffed. It was true...although he’d kill for some time alone with his mate. Damn all Japanese architects!

“So are you saying you can’t be quiet?” Victor teased.

Yuuri turned his head to the side so he could see Victor and asked, “Can you?”

The older man snorted. Fair question. “Wouldn’t want it if it didn’t inspire some...singing.” He laughed at the blush that rose in Yuuri’s face. “Maybe we can figure out a way for the two of us to escape our little munchkin for a few hours.”

“Mom will have him spoiled rotten,” Yuuri warned.

Victor snorted at that. “Like our presence will hinder that.” He continued to work Yuuri’s muscles until the omega was boneless beneath him, settling into a deep sleep.
NOTES:

Momotaro

Chapter End Notes

One thing they lacked after Shuji's attack was time for intimacy. They were surviving but that reassurance that comes from touch seemed lacking. Now, they get a little privacy...and maybe Mama Hiroko can provide for a little more.
Contrast

Chapter Summary

Sometimes we just need time alone...and it is especially important for an alpha and his omega after a traumatic experience.

Chapter Notes

Hi! I've been popping around putting up chapters for my various stories! I hope some of you have enjoyed the revival of some of those titles. No, I haven't forgotten Gravity. I haven't decided what I want to do with the last part of Lifeline. But nothing is dead. (I have to reread Lifeline to revive it again, however. And I wanted to clear my plate a little, first.) This one, however, may turn out to be one of my longer stories. I know some of you will not mind one bit! ;) Send me love in the comments below and thank you for reading.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch 52: Contrast

Yuuri’s eyes blinked open. That sixth sense granted exclusively to parents and Miss Clavel told him that something was not right and pulled him from his sleep. Sitting up, he reached for his glasses and focused on the space around him. But it was his ears, not eyes that led him. A faint whimper from down the hall helped him piece together the puzzle. Pulling himself out of bed, he went in search of the source.

He found Yura sitting on the floor of the hall, the sheet pulled off the bed and trailing behind him. The little boy had made it out of his room, but pride and shame locked him there unable to go further. Yuuri knelt down and smoothed his blond hair. “What’s wrong, sweetheart?”

“I-I-I wanted to fix it.” He lifted the sheet and Yuuri could see Yura’s damp pajamas.

Scooping up the little boy, he moved them both into the bathroom. He cuddled the child, speaking softly to him. “Don’t worry about it. I’ll take care of it...and you. Let’s get you cleaned up first. You are much more important than some old sheets.”
“B-but I made a mess.”

Yura’s lip quivered and Yuuri knew he was about to come undone. He knelt down to deal with the heart first, reaching out to wipe away the tears on those chubby cheeks. “I make a mess every day. And every day you help me clean them up. Now I get to help you. Give and take, we help each other. We just pick up the pieces and move forward. Home should be a safe place to make mistakes.”

Yura sniffed and then a hiccup escaped. “I-I-I miss home.”

The omega guided those clothes off the little boy and warmed the shower just right, swallowing the knot in his own throat. *This is my fault.* “I do, too. I needed to come here but it’s no longer my home. St. Petersburg with your papa is my home.”

“And me?”

Yuuri smiled and tousled the blond’s hair. “Of course, you...silly. Now let’s get you cleaned up.”

As Yura stepped into the shower, he muttered, “I made a big mess.”

“Not so big.” Yuuri reassured him, his voice warm and reassuring. “Don’t you worry about that. I’ll take care of it. For now, let’s get you clean. You’ll feel much better.” He closed the curtain, blinking away his tears. *I’m so sorry, baby.*

As the little boy washed himself, Yuuri turned to find a towel to wrap Yura in. He’d set a shirt and pair of undies out the night before just in case. The cheetah print underwear were new, as were a number of their clothes, and Yuuri opened them up to make sure no stickers or pins were holding them together. He then heard the shower curtain slide and turned to help his son dry off. *Keep focused on the task at hand. Don’t let him see how sad you are.*

The little boy was then dressed in clean clothes and Yuuri guided him into the bedroom with Victor and sent him to curl up with his papa, a gentle pat on the behind urging him forward. After his son was settled down, the omega turned to deal with the mess. He gathered the sheets, the quilted pad, the pillow with case, and two of the stuffed animals and headed down the stairs. He sighed wearily as he loaded the things into washer, carefully putting the stuffed animals into a pillowcase to keep them safe in the wash cycle. He was watching the clothes cycle through the
clear door and trying to blink away the tears when he sensed his mother behind him.

“Rough night?”

Yuuri swallowed but his voice still shook as he answered. “I think Yura had another nightmare. I got him cleaned up and he’s asleep with Victor but...this is my fault.” Yuuri turned to face his reflection in the glass of washing machine, unable to look at his mother. “He had nightmares before but he didn’t wet the bed. I don’t know what to do?”

She came into the room further, hovering at the folding table. Knowing that approaching her son too soon would make him feel crowded, smothered. “We never do, my son.”

Yuuri nodded, a silent gesture letting her know to come closer and soon he felt his mother’s hand on his arm. He turned and rose into her embrace, then did something he hadn’t done in a very long time...breathed in her scent. Once more he was crying and she held onto him, lending him her strength. “Sometimes...I think they would be better off without me. I know I’m not better off without them but I hate that I dragged them into my darkness.”

“Oh, honey...you don’t have darkness. Shuji was darkness. It was always his. Your Victor and your Yura anchor you in the light...where you’ve always belonged. But anytime Shuji is involved, his darkness will spill over.” She reached up and smoothed away his tears. “It takes work because we hold onto what is familiar but you have to learn to let it all go.”

He stuttered his sobs as he breathed in his distress, letting his mother guide him into the family room. He looked up surprised to see a cup of tea and he realized it was his father. “He’s still hurting me even though he’s far away in prison.”

“Yuuri, my son,” his father began. “That man took a lot of years from you. Don’t let him take anything else.”

Yuuri blinked at his father and then he sucked in air, sharp intakes of breath before the overwhelming sob overcame him. He wept, his mother and father sitting on either side of him. Before...he didn’t let them in, he couldn’t. Perhaps he was still in shock. Now...he couldn’t close that door, couldn’t shut them out as he fell apart. And perhaps that’s why this time he felt better. As if crying, sobbing, was letting it all go. Each tear was pain, each exhale was loss, all leaving his body.
“Yuuri?” A sleepy, disoriented voice laced with worry broke through before Victor came into the
room. He studied the scene in worry.

Hiroko smiled, standing up to clear a place for him. “I believe our work is done, dear. Let’s go
back to bed.”

Toshiya grunted but not before he gave his son a comforting squeeze on his shoulder. “I’ll leave
this to you.”

The married couple moved with the ease and confidence of long love. Toshiya leaned into his
partner and murmured, “He might just do.”

Hiroko chuckled softly, thinking of the silver haired man with their son. “You doubted?”

Toshiya hummed thoughtfully. “Well, I suppose no one would be good enough in my opinion.
He’s our beautiful son.”

She glanced back before adding, “He’s not just ours any longer. I think, though, he’s found his
home.”

Opening the door to their room, he huffed at that. “We just got him back and now we have to let
him go.”

“It’s different this time. Last time he was running from his past, this time he’s moving towards his
future.” Hiroko sighed as she slid out of her robe. “When he finally got free of Shuji, he never truly
came back to us. Perhaps this visit will allow us to heal some old wounds but Yuuri...he has to find
his own way.”

Toshiya sat on the edge of their bed, the mattress groaning under his weight, “I missed him. When
he came home...you know, before...I had hoped...but, well, then he locked himself away. I don’t
know what I expected. I just wanted him to find his feet again. I think...I was looking for the boy
that left us ten years ago.”

“I just wanted him to no longer be afraid. If that takes him moving far away, then it’s worth it.
And I think he’ll get there.” She sat down next to her husband. “That boy that’s taken him in...he’s
most determined to take care of him in the best of ways.”
“So...I have to let him go.”

She chuckled. “Toshiya, dear...he wasn’t ours to hold onto.”

In the family room, Victor’s arms slid around his mate. “I knew you were upset and then I couldn’t find you.”

“I cleaned Yura. He had another nightmare and bed-wetting episode. While I was helping him, I kept thinking of how this was my fault, and I couldn’t shut out the thoughts. I think I sort of...unraveled.”

Victor sighed and pressed his forehead to Yuuri’s. “Why didn’t you come to me?”

Yuuri shrugged. “I didn’t want to risk upsetting Yura. He’s...just a child. I’m an adult...I have to learn how to handle these things.”

Victor pressed Yuuri’s cheek into his shoulder. “Not alone. You don’t have to handle these things alone, but I understand your need to protect our child. But I wish you could understand my need to protect you. It’s just as strong as your need to protect me.”

Yuuri’s laugh was watery even as he wiped away another tear. “Didn’t you see? I was far from alone. And when we’re back in our home in St. Petersburg, we’ll have Olga and Nikolai to lean on. I just...needed a moment to fall apart before I picked myself up again.”

Victor felt the small chuckle Yuuri’s body, “Do you feel better now?”

He nodded, his eyes growing heavier and it took a moment before he realized that Victor was releasing comforting pheromones. “You don’t have to do that, you know. I won’t break. Shuji tried for ten years to break me and didn’t succeed. I just have moments where I feel myself cracking.”
Victor pulled back to study his mate’s face. “I know you won’t break…I couldn’t break you, no one could. But there is no point in you feeling more pain than necessary. You are too loved to go through any of this alone.”

Yuuri lifted his chin, a soft smile on his lips. “I love you, too. Can we go to bed now?”

“Of course.”

Yuuri found Yura settled in the middle of the futon, his arms wrapped around Ren. He stretched out in front of the little boy and smiled as he squirmed towards the omega’s neck. You are too loved to go through this alone. “So are you,” he whispered, pressing a kiss into the little boy’s hair. “So very loved.”

Victor surprised him by slipping in behind him, an arm snaked around his waist. “Sleep, my Yuuri,” he murmured. Yuuri’s eyes fluttered closed and with the comfort of his mate and his son both in reach, easily slipped off to sleep.

Yuuri laughed as Victor carried the little boy on his shoulders, the little boy pointing excitedly towards the various lights. “I should bring you in the summer. It seems like there is a festival almost every weekend,” Yuuri teased.

“I could get time off,” Victor considered thoughtfully. “Summer is choreography, which is really Yakov’s domain still. He brings in Americans and Canadians for that nowadays. It would be easy to travel.”

“I know…but you and I know that I will be in no state to travel.”

“Can babies fly on airplanes, Mama?” the little boy asked.

That’s how secrets are spilled, he thought to himself but settled a smile on his lips. “Not newborns. Maybe later. I wouldn’t want to take my baby out amongst the germy people, anyway.”
Yura made a face, European fear not the germs! “You could wear a mask like Uncle Peach!”

Yuuri laughed softly. “Those only work when the whole community wears them, and they don’t protect babies. I think it would be better to wait. There will be plenty of festivals and we could come the following summer.”

“Okay,” Yura decided and then pointed towards a tall structure on a hill. “What's that?”

Yuuri’s eyes widened and he answered with a voice that promised mystery, “That’s a ninja house.”

Both Yura and Victor looked at him with interest. “Can we see inside?” they both singsonged excitedly.

The omega chuckled and nodded. He was happy that that little boy was delighted, and had to confess the alpha’s enthusiasm matched the child’s. “That could be arranged. We’ll check when the tours are taking place. Now, I thought you two wanted to go skate where I skated as a kid.”

That seemed to send them back on track and soon they were climbing the steps to ice castle. Victor lifted his son down just before they went inside. Yuuri opened the door and spotted his old friend behind the counter putting away skates.

“Sorry. We’re closed,” she singsonged and Yuuri smiled. There was something comforting in the unchanging warmth of his old friend.

“Even for me?” he asked, his voice teasing.

She turned and then her eyes widened. “Oh, my goodness! Yuuriiii!” she squealed, rounding the counter and running to hug him, bouncing up and down. “I can’t believe you’re here!”

The omega shrugged and waved his family into the space. “Victor thought it would do me some good to have a little time back home.” He then introduced everyone. “Yuuko, you remember Victor...the one that we both watched religiously growing up.”

She was jumping up and down with excitement. “I can’t believe it’s really you. Oh, wow. This is
amazing. And to think...you and Yuuri...I remember telling Takeshi that I thought the two of you would be perfect together.” She then turned and hollered back towards the rink. “Honey! Come here now! You need to see who is here.”

And while they waited, Yuuri finished the introductions. “Victor, this is Yuuko. We grew up skating together and she showed me the first video of you.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” Victor stated warmly. “This is our son, Yura.”

“Our son...he calls the little boy ours? Yuuuuuuriiiii!!”

Yuuri chuckled as he knelt down to gather his little boy in his arms. “You have to understand. I think Yura adopted me first.”

“Papa said he was our omega, though, so I had to share,” the little boy supplied causing Yuuri to turn a dark crimson red and Yuuko and Victor to laugh just as Takeshi entered the room.

“Well, if wonders never cease,” the stocky alpha greeted as he come into the room. “Yuuri blushing like a teenager...it’s been awhile.”

Yuuri rose to look at his childhood friend, “Well, kids will do that to you.”

“Tell me about it,” Yuuko echoed. “Oh, the girls will want to see you. Are you staying? Will you skate?”

“We were hoping we could,” Yuuri answered, a smile on his lips.

“Then I’ll run and get them. You know your way around.”

Takeshi nodded back towards the rink. “I just smoothed the ice out. Might as well take advantage of it before the hockey team gets here.”

They had half an hour on ice, warming up and then Yuuri continuing his son’s lessons while Victor
picked his way through some choreography, until the triplets invaded. Victor’s eyes widened at the three little girls who skated onto the ice excitedly, fussing over Yuuri first, then Victor (how did they even know who he was? Oh right, youtube.) before settling their attention on the little blonde. Yuuko joined them in case she needed to corale her kids.

“Let me know if they get to be too much.” Yuuko apologized. “They grew up hearing your name...the lives of a skating otaku’s kids.”

“I think they are now otakus in their own rite,” Yuuri pointed out.

“I admit...I raised them right.” They were skating lazily side by side now, and she pointed to Yura who had finally tucked his freeleg for a forward scratch spin, sending the triplets into overdrive with praise. “So, what’s it like raising a future figure skating champion.”

He smiled, looking at the children playing together. This could have been my life...no, this is my life. “And your girls don’t aspire to be champions themselves?”

She shrugged. “Sometimes...other times, I think they plan to be some kind of business mogul or perhaps supervillains intent on taking over the world.” She laughed. “I just want them to be happy. You know what that’s like, I’m sure.”

Yuuri watched Yura showing them some of the things that he taught the little boy with a smile. “I want the same for mine.” His hand unconsciously slid over his stomach as he said that, wanting the same for all of his children...just the chance to grow, feel safe, and be happy. He glanced over towards Victor and caught his eye before offering a smile.

Yuuri sat at the family table talking with his sister while they snapped the ends off of the green beans, when their mother joined them. “I’ve been thinking…”

“Uh oh,” Mari responded echoing Yuuri’s thoughts.

“What about?” Yuuri asked, hoping the dread didn’t come out of his lips.
“You must have difficulty finding time to be intimate with a five-year-old crawling into bed with you.”

“Ummm, Mom?” Yuuri squeaked. *I am not having this conversation with you. Nope.*

“So you should let him spend the night with your father and I. We can put him a futon together in our room. But that’s only half the problem, if you know what I mean.”

“I do and I wish I was dead.”

Hiroko swatted him, “Don’t be prudish. You’re sister…”

“Nope!” Mari rose both her hands, letting her mother know that ‘Mari’ was not part of this conversation and went back to the beans.

Yuuri put the beans down and thought, “I mean, we technically have our own room upstairs,” Yuuri suggested.

“Yes, but you know how thin these walls are. So I looked it up, and those rooms down by the docks are still open. You should take Victor there. For some *privacy*.”

Yuuri didn’t think he liked the way she emphasized privacy. “Umm...are you suggesting…” He couldn’t say the words but apparently he didn’t have to.

Mari snorted, “She means the love hotel!”

“Is that what you young kids call it? How appropriated. Now, if you need some money…”

Yuuri dropped the beans and covered his face. *My mother is shelling out money to get me laid. This is my life. I’m sure Victor can cover the costs it’s just...a love hotel? Mom, this is not a conversation I want to have with you.”

“Well, I’m not going to get into the intimate details with you, my son, but...it’s important. You
“What I need is a lobotomy to forget this conversation.” Yuuri pursed his lips, letting Hiroko know the topic was closed. He looked at Mari who just shrugged. “How long has this new sexual revolution been going on?”

Mari stopped working, “oh you missed a lot. Mom got weird years ago.” She sucked in a breath, “but she’s not wrong…”

“No. I’m absolutely NOT going to a love hotel.”

And that was how, later that day, Yuuri and Victor found themselves standing outside the only love hotel in Hasetsu.

Victor tilted his head to one side as he considered the idea. “So...this is not a heat house?”

“Nope.”

“But it’s a place for sex.”

“Yep.” Yuuri’s clipped answer spoke of both annoyance and amusement.

“And your mother...suggested it?”

He shrugged and turned to his mate, “Practically demanded it.”

“How...odd.” He then took Yuuri’s hand. Victor could barely contain his joy, “Might as well check it out.”
Yuuri rolled his eyes at the forced hardship the Russian was about to endure. Yuuri was very glad for automation when he entered the building. He began dialing through the menus, a curious Victor looking over his shoulder and then he groaned. He couldn’t read the Kanji, but the images told him the truth soon. Of course the ONE love hotel in Hasetsu had a Yuuri room.

Finding himself suddenly no longer thrilled at the aspect of a nice intimate time with his mate, Victor did feel a compulsion to investigate. “We should check it out,” Victor urged. “That is your image being used, and frankly I think we should find out to what extent.”

Yuuri was surprised at himself when he agreed. There was a disgust, but also a need to know more. “I feel like I should get paid to use it.” He was hoping a joke would soften the blow. “Perhaps it’s just a sports themed room with press release photos and my show music playing?”

“There’s part of you that’s public, but I mean...you didn’t exactly license them to use your name...and not in this manner.”

“And that means it has to be over ten years old. I can’t imagine who would use it.” Then he shivered and added, “I don’t think I want to imagine who would use that room.”

“I’m uncomfortable too. But I think we should really look into this while we’re here.”

A few selections later, they were riding in an elevator up to the top floor. Yuuri wondered if he should have felt honored that it was one of the most expensive choices but part of him was still creeped out. “If they have…”

Inside the room, the decor held true to Yuuri’s favorite colors and his skate costumes of the past. Deep stormy blues with pops of red were woven throughout the space. The walls were soft fabric of deep navy with threads of silver weaving down, matching drapes, and a thick carpet of a deep purple went wall to wall. Yuuri slid his hand over the comforter, a giant fleur di lis, a design he had always loved embroidered in silver and scarlet over deep navy panels. At least it didn’t feel too cheap, in fact this was a well crafted room, no expense was spared. But there was still a violation of his privacy, and that question remained...who would want this? Victor studied the art on the wall. Artist’s renderings of Yuuri’s skating holding to the same color scheme. The manga style of art provided drama in Yuuri’s expressions. The flow of the story captured the choreography and told the story.

“I remember this program,” Victor commented, tracing his fingers through the air. “I watched the video of it but now I wonder if I actually saw it live. Not the one from the video but another performance.”
Yuuri looked over to Victor, who was admiring a video of one of Yuuri’s last performances in seniors, “You watched me skate?”

Victor nodded. “This program. The video I found was grainy and I didn’t see the detail but now…”

Yuuri moved to stand beside him, his eyes scanning the figures. “This was my last year skating. I...did skate in Moscow for one competition.”

Victor turned to look at his mate, watching his light brown eyes dance across the screen, following his younger self, “I may have been there to support a rinkmate.”

Yuuri looked around the room and although it wasn’t nearly as distasteful as he feared it still felt...violating. “Who would have authorized this?”

Victor had an idea but he didn’t want to say anything. “I’d like to get Chris on this. I agree it is unsettling. Do you want to leave?”

Yuuri nodded, his arms crossing and then one of them straightening. “Where...do you want to go?”

“Well, this may be the only love hotel, but I’m sure there is another inn around here. You look for somewhere else to stay, I’m going to reach out to Chris.”

Yuuri had his phone out as they rode down the elevator, looking for another location. Victor was on the phone with Chris. He lapsed into French and Yuuri thinned his lips. Victor doesn’t want to upset me...but I’m already upset. This was done without my consent.

As Victor disconnected, he pulled Yuuri into his arms. “We’ll get to the bottom of this and take care of it. One thing Chris knows how to handle is violation of licensing. Just trust him to do this.”

Yuuri nodded, swallowing his emotions. “I-I know. I trust Chris.”
They stepped out of the building and Yuuri lifted his phone and showed Victor their options. Of course the alpha chose the most expensive one, leaving Yuuri to call an uber. The driver smiled pleasantly towards Yuuri and chatted warmly about his handsome alpha. Yuuri figured this would get to his mother somehow and he gave minimal information for him to report. Once they were dropped off, Yuuri led them towards the building, the modern Christmas tree welcoming them as they crossed the courtyard.

The clean opulence greeted them with a striking contrast to the traditional inn Yuuri’s parents ran. The pristine marble floors reflected the expense of the space. Yuuri hugged himself. This seemed silly, a ridiculous expense. They were just coming here to get laid.

Victor seemed determined, however, and handed over his credit card to the desk clerk. Victor ordered sparkling juice and dinner to be sent up and the clerk made the necessary arrangements with room service. Soon, they were headed up to their room.

The room was beautiful, lavender and gray. When Yuuri ran his hands over the fabric, he felt the difference. There’s spending to impress, and spending to reflect. This is quality. His mother would approve. “I think...Mom didn’t know what it meant to go to a love hotel.”

“I think she knew what it meant but perhaps she thought the quality would be higher. I was just curious,” Victor commented.

Yuuri settled himself on the edge of the bed, feeling the soft plush mattress beneath him. “It’s just...that room…”

Victor’s arms were wrapped around him. “We’ll get it shut down and take care of it quietly.”

“Good. I’d hate for my parents to find out. Right under their noses! In our own town, I mean, how was it a secret? They would be so upset.”

“Sex isn’t discussed by many people across many cultures. I’m certain she didn’t know, neither did any of your friends. Don’t worry, my Yuuri.”

Yuuri stretched out on top of the bed, the plush comforter sinking down to envelope him. “Is it wrong that I want to just sleep?”
Victor smiled and brushed his cheek lightly with his finger tips, “Rest. I’ll wake you up when our dinner arrives.”

Yuuri didn’t know how long he slept but he found himself walking through a fun house, the mirrors reflecting moments of his life drawn out in horrifying cartoons, grotesque caricatures mocking him in his failings. When he jerked awake, he found Victor sitting next to him, gently soothing him. Yuuri rose up and buried himself into Victor’s neck, the alpha’s scent wrapping around him.

“I wish I could have wine right now. Something alcoholic to settle my nerves,” he pouted.

“How about some dinner?” Victor gently guided his mate out of the bed and to the low table with the matching low sitting chairs. Laid out on the table were champagne glasses with sparkling apple juice, katsu sliced and placed on a bed a thinly sliced cabbage arranged into a nest, oshinko, rice, and miso soup. Yuuri breathed in the scent of the food before him and nodded his approval.

Yuuri began to relax as they traded bites, sharing the food and the intimacy that came from that. “I love the way you take care of me when I’m like this.”

Victor shrugged. “I like to take care of you but I always want to respect your boundaries. I know how important your independence is to you...but sometimes we just need someone to look out for us.”

“This has turned into a very expensive date.”

“You are worth the expense and more...I hope one day you will accept that.”

Yuuri didn’t argue with him although inside he could think of all of the years he was treated as worthless, an object to be owned and shoved into a corner. He was a collectable and not even a well-loved one, cared for and treated well. He was an object collected to replace an old worn out version, and when he was finally worn out, he was tossed and replaced as well. However, he was slowly learning that his worth wouldn’t...couldn’t be dictated by another. His worth came from himself. And with Victor and Yura in his life, he was learning that he was an invaluable source of love to them both. His new life was a complete turnaround from his old.
Chapter End Notes

This was a hard chapter to write because it became something unexpected. The love hotel turned out to be a much darker experience but it also showed how much strong Yuuri is becoming. I thought it interesting that many of you suggested a love hotel because I had written this and was thinking, you don't even know.
Ch. 53: **Safe Harbor**

Yuuri woke from his nap immediately feeling guilty. Once again he’d gone to sleep and here they were in this nice hotel...for the express purpose of getting laid. The omega sat up and looked around, noticing the dimmed lights. Where was Victor?

Motion beyond the balcony door caught his eye and he slipped from the sheets to join his mate. “I’m sorry” was on his lips when Victor turned and held his finger to his lips in a shushing motion, reaching out to draw him into his arms facing the view. From the balcony, they could hear the lapping of the waves and the trees rattling in the wind. Across the bay, the lighthouse shined into the sea to provide wayward fishermen a safe journey back to shore.

“A storm is moving in,” Yuuri murmured.

“I checked the weather...just normal stormy weather.” Victor’s voice was rich and warm above him. “Look over there.”

In the distance, lightning lit up the sky, outlining the shape of the clouds above it. And then another flashed, illuminating the darkening sky. Yuuri realized Victor had stepped out to enjoy a spectacular light show put on by nature. The omega worried about his little boy being scared, taking out his phone to call home. Victor took it from him, pocketing it with ease.
“I’ve already checked on him.” He chuckled, thinking of his little son excited by the lightning. “He’s playing video games with Aunt Mari and your mom has a bed made up in her room so he won’t be sleeping alone. I think Ren is already warming it up for him.”

Yuuri blushed but tried to force himself to relax. “I haven’t been the best of dates,” he fussed, tugging at his sleeve.

Victor tightened his arms around the omega. “I love all of you, even the anxious parts.”

Yuuri smiled coyly, “And the part that keeps falling asleep on you?”

“Carrying our child is wearing. Yelena was about as far along as you when she came to me. I remember her sleeping a lot. She would tell me when I checked on her that growing a baby takes a lot of energy. You sleep as much as you need.”

Yuuri closed his eyes as he settled against Victor. “Thank you.” He stopped himself from saying how Shuji would become especially demanding with Yuuri’s pregnancies. You wanted a baby so deal with it. Why a kid would want to be saddled with such a shitty omega is beyond me. Then later, we’ll see if this one decides to stick around.

He didn’t realize he had started crying until the breeze kissed his cheeks. Yuuri turned to bury himself in Victor’s arms, the alpha soothing him without comment letting Yuuri work his way through his thoughts. Victor never minded waiting on Yuuri.

The night had closed in around them as they stood, the air taking on a chill as it rolled in off the sea. As another gust hit them, they moved inside, Victor securing the door. “Why don’t you take a warm bath. I set some clothes out for you. Something to make you feel pretty.”

“Vitya,” he began to protest only to feel fingers pressed over his lips.

“For me, then. Indulge me?”

Yuuri nodded slipping from his arms. In the bathroom, he set the water to fill the tub before turning to look at the gifts laid out. The sheer black sleep shirt was interrupted by bits of silk
around the collar and over the top of the breast pockets. It was simple but Yuuri could feel the quality. Accompanying it was a pair of boxers also in silk. I won’t be able to wear these for long. His fingers rested over his tummy, a bulge hardly noticeable pressed against his fingers.

He released his breath as he turned towards the tub, closing off the spout. He eased out of his leggings and oversized shirt before slipping into the warmth of the water. Lying back, he closed his eyes once more. The water felt smooth against his skin; the heat relaxed his muscles and lulling him. Looking down he saw his legs through the gentle ripples of the water. They were stronger now, not quite defined but toned. Yuuri ran his hands down his arms, the biceps feeling stronger than he could remember in a long time. Smiling he thought of his body, something that he had wished to starve to death, something he had tried to shrink so tiny he could escape a living nightmare, now something that was full of life. Running a hand over his stomach he recalled the night that brought her to him. The wild need in both of them.

He didn’t hear Victor come into the room but then the sound of the disturbed water pulled him from his ruminations. The alpha settled across from him, his expression tender...and something else.

“I couldn’t stay away any longer,” he offered. “I needed to be close to you.”

Yuuri turned in the water and settled into his arms. “You are always welcome.”

Victor shifted, making them comfortable in the giant tub, “I shouldn’t have insisted on seeing that room. You’ve been upset all evening.”

Yuuri waved away that concern. “I needed to know so we could deal with it. The art looked nice, though.”

Victor hummed thoughtfully, “I wanted to get you out of there before we started looking further into the space. I was afraid of what we’d find.”

“I’m more concerned about who authorized it.”

Victor thinned his lips. He had his suspicions and suspected Yuuri’s matched them. “Your mother couldn’t have known.”
Yuuri turned quickly, ripples splashing up, “No, of course not. I don’t think Mari knew either. She would have followed up...and possibly burnt the place to the ground.”

Victor sighed resting his chin on top of Yuuri’s head. “I don’t want to force intimacy between us. Don’t feel pressured into sex by this situation. If you aren’t up for it, then let’s just be together. I just need to be close to you.”

Yuuri turned in his arms, his hand going up to cup Victor’s cheek, drawing him down into a kiss. They traded back and forth, held together by Yuuri’s touch until the omega slid his hand to Victor’s neck. “I never feel pressured by you. I always feel safe and respected with you.”

The alpha smiled, his hands holding Yuuri’s waist. “Good. If I am anything, I want to be your safe harbor.”

Yuuri leaned in once more to steal another kiss before pulling back and moving back across the tub. His eyes seemed to have shifted even as he murmured, “Go...get ready for me.”

Victor’s eyebrows rose. “Are you sure?”

Yuuri nodded as he promised with a soft voice, “I will join you soon.”

Victor climbed out of the tub, drying off as he walked proudly naked from the bathroom. Yuuri just smiled as he shook his head. Pulling the plug, he also left the tub, taking his time to dry off and focus on his mood, settling his scent. Reaching for the pajamas Victor provided, he smiled as he realized the boxers were also sheer. With a giggle, he pulled them on, looking at his reflection in the mirror. He was also pleased to find some of the cosmetics he had become accustomed to using were replaced...mascara, lip gloss, eyeliner. He added them to his appearance and felt even more himself. Taking a deep breath, he gave his hair a fluff and turned on the balls of his feet and entered the bedroom.

Victor was in the middle of the bed, his black silk robe open and a similar pair of boxers leaving him on display. Yuuri giggled before hurrying across the room, crawling up the bed to settle between Victor’s legs. Casting his eyes about the room, he spotted the lube on the nightstand and had an idea.

Walking his fingers up Victor’s inner thigh and watching the way Victor responded with a shiver, he asked coyly, “Can we...do whatever I want?”
“I’m at your beck and call,” he responded, his voice roughened in his interest. Blue eyes focused on those fingers slipping beneath the fabric of the legs of his boxers. He drew in a shaky breath.

“I...haven’t done this before,” Yuuri murmured, peeking up through his lashes. “Will you guide me?”

“Yes,” he responded, and then groaned as those fingers slipped further up to slide up the loose skin of his scrotum.

Yuuri watched him intently, studying the way he responded. He lowered himself to kiss his length through those boxers. He breathed in the scent of Victor’s interest. “I’m going to fuck you, Vitya...and I’m going to do so slowly.”

Victor gasped, not trusting his voice and nodding eagerly at first. “P-please,” he answered, his voice going high before cracking.

Yuuri smirked in response. He reached up to the waistband of those boxers, sliding his fingers around them before offering, “Let’s take these off.”

Victor nodded, lifting his hips to assist, one shoulder of his robe sliding down. There was something patently vulnerable in Victor at that moment and Yuuri knew the amount of trust it took for the alpha to show that side of himself. As sexy and gorgeous as Victor had always appeared, there was something even more seductive in this subdued Victor. Yuuri felt himself warm to the idea of watching his lover fall apart in his arms. He lowered his head, dragging his tongue up that now bare length, taking time to tease the frenulum.

“Fuuuck,” Victor groaned. Yuuri’s tongue then swept around the head before sliding down the slit. Victor tightened his hands on the sheet beneath him. Brown eyes held his as Yuuri slowly swallowed him down. He traced the vein up the alpha’s length with his tongue as he came back up, popping off of him, his eyes dancing as he worked his way up Victor’s body, kissing those tight abs and watching them contract, sliding his tongue around his right nipple, pulling back enough to blow on it, watching that nub harden, kissing his way up his chest and along the column of that beautiful neck until finally he found Victor’s lips.

As Yuuri closed in on that kiss, his hand reached down to grasp the still saliva slick cock, swallowing Victor’s groan, those hands that were once wound into the sheets, now pressing into Yuuri’s back. The alpha wanted to roll Yuuri over, to slide into that waiting hole, but Victor
wanted what Yuuri offered more and he held onto the omega for dear life.

He missed that Yuuri grabbed the lube until he heard the cap click open. “How much do I use?” Yuuri asked, his eyebrows furrowed, and Victor couldn’t help but appreciate how Yuuri’s own vulnerability slid in place without overtaking him.

“You want your fingers to feel slick and you might have to add more as you go.”

Yuuri grimaced, the answer was too vague. “So...do I start with one or two?”

“It’s been so long, you might start with one...but I should ease open as I relax for you to add the next.”

Yuuri nodded, seeming satisfied with that answer. Victor groaned once more as Yuuri’s free hand took hold of his dick also now slicked with lube even as he leaned forward to tease the other nipple, before tripling the stimulation with a finger tracing circles around his entrance, waiting for him to relax enough to ease the way in. Victor’s breath stuttered as he tried to figure out which stimulation to focus on, Yuuri’s thumb focusing on that F-spot, his mouth sucking that nipple, and that seemed to do the trick as Yuuri’s finger slipped past that ring of muscles.

Victor moaned even as he shifted his leg to rest on Yuuri’s shoulder to increase the omega’s access. Yuuri smiled against Victor’s skin, loving that Victor was still quite flexible. He had plans for that flexibility. He rested his cheek on Victor’s chest, focusing now on opening his mate up.

Victor stuttered, “M-mmore.”

Yuuri teased the entrance with his second finger waiting for it to give, easing inside and listening to Victor’s breathing, the hitch and then moan that followed.

“Yeeeesss.” Victor shifted to feel those fingers better. “S-scissor me open...” he directed and then his eyes fluttered shut as he focused on those fingers.

Yuuri watched him intently, his lips twitching into a smile when Victor’s expression gave away the more pleasurable movements, applying pressure on the front wall as he stroked into Victor with his fingers. That’s when Yuuri really saw Victor, the panting mess of the man in front of him. He was wrecked, well, almost. The blue eyes were watery from pleasure, and his skin was blushing pink all
over. The omega felt a thrill run through his body, a wave of possessive lust he didn’t know he had in him, as he looked at his mate. Something about being able to make Victor feel this way, fall apart on his fingers, had Yuuri craving more. He let go of Victor’s shaft to add more lube before inserting the third. Victor stilled his hand before he reached for him again.

“I don’t want...need to…”

Yuuri understood, letting his focus rest on opening Victor up. Instead, he used his second hand to make himself ready and the simultaneous stimulation of watching his fingers disappear into his mate and his other hand stroking his own length was affecting his breathing. He could also feel Victor’s eyes on him and that always did things to him...but now, he wasn’t reacting to Victor’s touch. He was performing for his mate...and he liked being watched.

When he was satisfied Victor was ready, he withdrew those fingers, hearing Victor’s cry of protest. Shifting his lover’s knee down, he guided him to turn over. “Is this okay?”

Victor nodded, even as Yuuri pressed down on his shoulder blades, forcing him down on his elbows. Firm hands, settled Victor’s hips into place, spreading his knees to allow Yuuri space to settle between his legs. “Are you comfortable?”

“Yes,” Victor agreed. His voice had a small quake to it, which Yuuri hadn’t picked up in the heat of the moment. Victor appreciated that Yuuri saw to his needs before moving to pleasure. So many in his past...did not. It was incredibly hot.

Yuuri reached down to add more lube to his length before teasing his lover’s entrance. “Talk to me,” he murmured, and Victor could hear the fear in his mate’s voice.

“Don’t worry...I’ll let you know if I need you to slow down,” he reassured the omega.

“Thank you.”

Yuuri slowly pushed inside and Victor groaned as he stretched to accommodate Yuuri. The smaller head and shorter length would not stretch Victor like that of an alpha...but it had been a long time and Victor could feel the stretch, could feel the presence of Yuuri.

The new sensation was overwhelming at first and Yuuri had to focus so he wouldn’t spill into his
mate right away. He wasn’t used to holding back, as an omega, he had a short refractory period and could be ready for sex only a few minutes after orgasm. However, he wanted to spend his time with Victor. He wanted Victor to have what he wanted, had asked for on several occasions but respected Yuuri’s refusal without guilt. He now listened to Victor’s breathing, the hitches, the groans, the gasps, stopping as he heard the laboring. He kissed up Victor’s spine as he pressed into Victor, following that path up the spine with one finger, until he was settled into Victor. He pressed his lips against the primary bonding gland, kissing it, hearing Victor whine, before resting his cheek against his neck. “Are you okay?”

“Yes, my Yuuri. Are you?” Victor answered but Yuuri could hear the strain in the alpha’s voice. He was having to hold tight to his control.

Yuuri lifted his cheek, kissing Victor’s shoulder. “I am...are you ready?”

“Please,” he begged.

Yuuri smiled once more against the alpha’s shoulder and began rocking into Victor. His mate closed his eyes and focused on every way Yuuri touched him, that Yuuri filled him. His hand on Victor’s hip was firm, grounding...yet the touch of his lips and his other hand was tender, as if he was afraid Victor would fly apart and at the same time wanting to hold him together. The glide and pull of Yuuri’s length tugged at Victor’s rim, brushing along his walls, pressing against his prostate. Victor knew it was different than anyone else who had ever fucked him and he felt overwhelmed by the care Yuuri gave him. So used to holding everyone else together, to allow himself to be taken care of, to become vulnerable and open to another...it could only be Yuuri. Only Yuuri was given that trust. Only Yuuri ever showed him this kind of consideration. Only Yuuri had ever loved him like this.

Kisses fluttered over those lightly freckled shoulders, a tongue traced around the divets of his spine, moving back up to his neck. Victor gasped as Yuuri’s tongue once more laved over his bonding gland followed by the scrape of teeth. Something in him pushed out a “yeeeeesss...please”.

Yuuri heard the need in that whine dropping his forehead against Victor’s neck. They hadn’t talked about this and he couldn’t consciably break the skin into that gland. “Not...yet,” he murmured. He squeezed his eyes shut as he hugged Victor to him. He wanted this, too...but they needed to talk. Victor would make him talk if the roles were reversed. The alpha whimpered but he knew the man was pushing down the desire. To distract Victor from the matter, he reached around him and began stroking the other’s length, the answering groan telling Yuuri he was succeeding.

Yuuri began to rock into him more quickly and he could feel his own pleasure growing, everything centering on the movements between the two, smiling as Victor cried out desperately, “I’m about
“Not yet,” Yuuri stated in a firm but softly spoken order. Victor whimpered. Yuuri continued to stroke into him as he felt his own orgasm start to build. Then with a firm snap of his hips, he pressed against the small of Victor’s back and counter-ordered, “Now.”

Victor groaned as he started to spill, the vibrations of his walls pulling Yuuri on over. Those knees gave away, and Yuuri held onto him as they dropped down onto the bed. Kisses fluttered over Victor’s shoulder and then moved back down his spine. Yuuri massaged the alpha’s lower back as he slowly withdrew, gently turning Victor on his side so he wouldn’t be lying in his mess. “Let me get something to clean you up.”

Victor’s eyes closed, his limbs shaking, overwhelmed by everything coursing through him. Then he felt the warm cloth, wiping him down, gently tending to him, hands turning him so that he could provide the necessary care. He opened his eyes slowly, resting them on Yuuri. The omega’s expression held nothing but love and concern. A fresh towel was laid out over the mess in the sheets.

Then Yuuri set the bowl to the side, the cloth inside it. Crawling back up Victor’s form, he pulled the upper sheet and blanket over their bodies. Gentle fingers searched the alpha’s face. “Are you okay?”

Victor pulled himself back from that blissed out state where he had retreated to and nodded. “I...you...took care of me.”

Yuuri smiled, happy that his mate had found his words again, but also at the sweet innocence of the statement. “Of course...you would take care of me.”

Victor snuggled into Yuuri’s arms, feeling how strong the omega was and how well cared for he made him. “In the past...my lovers weren’t as considerate as you. None were horrible, but many were...thoughtless.”

Yuuri ran his fingers through the long silver hair, brushing it out of his eyes. “I’m sorry. You are precious to me and I want you to feel that way always.”

Victor thought about those words then remembered the refusal. “The...bond...”
Yuuri sighed. “I shouldn’t have teased you like that. We haven’t talked.”

“You said...not yet ,” Victor pointed out. “So...that means at some point, you want...my bond?”

Yuuri nodded, smoothing Victor’s hair from his face. “I’m closer to ready. I hate...that I’m constantly putting you off. But it’s no longer a no...but a soon .”

Victor rubbed his cheek against Yuuri’s chest, “I never wanted to pressure you.”

“You don’t, Vitya. You’ve always made sure I’ve known that you would wait, you would even find an alternative path, if that’s what I wanted. I...want you. I want your mark, your bond, to be yours in all the way this body was designed to be yours. Soon...when the moment is right, after clear discussion and consent.” He ran a hand down Victor’s arm, seeing how the little goosebumps still rose from the stimulated man. “I think that’s the worst part of what happened...that he took away my right of consent.”

Victor sat up, “I will never deny that with you. Even if we’ve been mated thirty years, you can tell me no and I’d stop without anger, without making you feel guilty.”

“Thank you. I think I knew that already but it’s good to hear.” Yuuri’s hand stroked down the side of his face, cupping his cheek. “I was tempted for a moment earlier...but your consent, your clear, level-headed consent, that is also important to me. You are important to me...and I want you to know that I value every part of you.”

“Thank you. So many...others...they haven’t shown me the consideration you offered me tonight.” Victor’s hand moved up and down Yuuri’s back, feeling the sheer fabric separating them. “Can we take this off? I want to feel your skin against mine.”

Yuuri chuckled, sitting up to pull it over his head before settling in against his chest. “I want to feel you, too. No telling when we’ll get to enjoy this skinship.” Yuuri could feel the heaviness in his limbs and as Victor tightened his arms, both of their breathing becoming steady. Yuuri felt the weight of darkness on him.

Yuuri turned over in the bed at the sound of the flash. “Please...don’t.” He brought his hands to
his face only to receive a sharp slap on his thigh telling to not cover up again.

Shuji’s laugh was ugly as he continued, lifting that camera to capture him, “You’re mine to use as I please. I can sell you over and over again and you have no say. Consider yourself lucky it’s only pictures. Keep pissing me off and it might be worse. The law supports my rights as the alpha.”

Use...that’s all he ever did...Yuuri was nothing more than an object.

Yuuri blinked his eyes open, finding Victor gone. He wrapped a sheet around him and stepped around the corner into the seating area of the suite. Victor was on the phone, looking up and reaching for Yuuri as he entered. Yuuri sat on his knee, Victor already dressed, Yuuri only in a sheet. The omega curled up into his scent and listened to Victor's end of the conversation.

“I see,” Victor responded to the caller. “And for the one’s you’ve found?...I won’t make those decisions for him, the entire essence of this violation is that Yuuri was never allowed to consent...we’ll set up a meeting upon our return. Perhaps Phichit can help you find more...okay, thank you, Chris.” Victor disconnected the call, his expression pensive. Finally, he focused on Yuuri. “Good morning, lyubov moya.”

Yuuri wasn’t going to be placated easily, “What did he say?”

Victor took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “The licensing at the love hotel was authorized by Shuji as we suspected and that there is more. He’s uncovered several...questionable agreements Shuji made on your behalf. Apparently Japan has a type of power-of-attorney granted to the alpha over the omega to ‘protect their interests’ and Shuji has exploited this for profit. It appears that he’s been leeching off of your prior fame for years.”

Yuuri felt himself grow cold at the endless possibilities of that statement, all equally terrifying. “What...can I do?”

“Chris can dissolve their legal bindings for the most part given that you are legally no longer bonded to him. He’s already started filing injunctions. However, he wants to know if you want to sue. It appears that many of these connections Shuji made were fully aware of you not having any knowledge of these dealings. Although he could legally consent on your behalf, he was supposed to inform you of how they were using your brand. I think...I’d like to talk to your old coach. Some
of this goes back to that last year skating.”

“Minako will know how to reach him.” Yuuri thought about his options. “I would like to sue...especially if that’s the only way to make them stop. Is that what I’ll be meeting with Chris about when we return?”

Victor hummed, “That and...other things. It turns out that...Shuji hid a number of assets under your name. We do not yet know the extent of it all but Chris will continue to look into it.”

Yuuri drew a deep breath and let it out slowly. “And I thought sending him to jail would mean that it was all over.”

“It is...the worst of it. What we’re doing now is picking up the pieces and cleaning. We just didn’t know how far this extended.”

Yuuri huffed. “I suppose.” He then winced. “Do you still want to go through all of this with me? It sounds like it’s going to be messy.”

“I will not abandon you just because things are...messy.” He pulled Yuuri in to kiss him slowly on the lips. “You’re my beautiful mess.”

NOTES:

In full disclosure, the following was referenced (I guess it’s been awhile since I’ve written a smutty scene...I hope you all haven’t been too thirsty).

31 Erogenous Zones
The Sexy Thesaurus
*shivers* glad they had some bedtime fun but wow...that Shuji is a bad penny. Always turning up.
Old Habits

Chapter Summary

Yuuri feels his anxiety building bringing out old habits. Victor tries to lovingly give him what he needs. (There is smut somewhere in this chapter.)

Chapter Notes

This may be my last chapter written so I'll need to refocus on this story. It's been a week of ideas so I'm drafting some outlines I've created and then I'll get back on my stories. But I hate to lose all of the plot bunnies that seem to be hopping around in my head.

Thank you, Blu, for the edits. I appreciate you taking the time out of your busy weekend to look it over. (I'll try to warn you better about smut content so it doesn't catch you off guard next time.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 54: Old habits...

The couple returned in the early afternoon, Yuuri threw his energy into work as a means of avoiding everyone, including himself. Victor watched him, his expression growing more concerned as the younger man became more obsessed on small tasks. The omega’s behavior did not go unnoticed by his family either. He was refolding the same towel when Mari finally pulled Yuuri to the side.

“What’s wrong?” she asked once free of all other ears. They were in the backyard, isolated from the hot springs and guest area of the inn. It was a place of refuge the two had used as children during busy seasons. But as Mari aged she needed it less and less while Yuuri needed it more and more.

Yuuri watched as she took out a cigarette, lit it quickly and inhaled a long drag. She blew a slow stream of smoke out into the air around her as she flicked her ashes on the ground.

Yuuri shrugged, looking past her, watching as the smoke made a trail up to the sky, stretched out and then died on the air. “It’s fine.”
She turned on him, “It’s not fine!” Then Mari pulled back. She had never snapped at him, not even as children arguing over a toy. The alpha took a deep breath and slowed herself. “I listened as you said that bullshit all your life. ‘I’m fine…it’s fine…’ When people picked on you, when you were hurting yourself, when your self doubt ate you alive, that’s all you ever said. But it wasn’t fine then, and it’s not fine now.” She took another long puff from her cigarette. “That monster…he marked you. I didn’t follow my instincts. I never knew, not until it was too late…and even then you never came to me. I always thought if it was important, you’d come forward and talk to me. You always talked to me before.”

“I’m sorry,” Yuuri whispered, his eyes dropping to the ground, a cigarette butt mixed into the gravel, long forgotten. Mari was normally more careful, but then again, it could belong to other employees.

“Don’t give me that shit,” she pressed. “You don’t have to apologize, to anyone. Just tell me what’s wrong.” Her eyes went past him towards the door. “Did he…”

“Victor?” Yuuri asked, his eyes widening. “No…he’d never. Victor wouldn’t do anything to hurt me.” Yuuri froze, his eyes darting up, catching the narrowing of his sister’s eyes.

Mari knew her brother far too well. His defense of Victor was entirely sincere, which meant there was a villain out there. “Soooo, who?”

Yuuri hugged himself. “It’s stupid.”

“Not if you’re upset.”

Yuuri glanced off, shifting from one foot to the other. He was never any good at lying to his sister. Finally, he shrugged. “Fuck it…” He then began to spill, telling her about the room at the love hotel and the other things they’d learned. “It seems that getting rid of Shuji isn’t as simple as tossing him in a jail cell to forget about and let rot.”

Mari had been fuming all the while he had divulged everything to her. “That bastard…” Then her eyes went wide as she remembered the conversation with their mother. She quickly added, Yuuri, we didn’t know…”

“I never thought otherwise,” the omega quickly reassured his sister. They smiled awkwardly at
each other for a moment. Each settling into something more easy.

“When Victor called...we just figured it was...not very nice.”

“The Seaside Inn made up for it,” Yuuri answered with a smile. “It was nice. And private. And well…” Yuuri took a deep breath and let it out. “I talked with Victor about bonding. I’m not sure when...but I know it’s what I want.”

Mari let out her breath and pulled him in for a quick, one-armed embrace. It was always quick with Mari, never one to show a lot of affection through touch. She was more likely to show it through protective anger. Her terms of love ran from quick, silent hugs to punching the lights out of those that attacked her family. “I want you to be happy, little brother,” she added as she brought the cigarette back up for a quick drag before putting it out. “I need to quit these things.”

Yuuri chuckled. He knew, of course...the cigarettes was her way of dealing with her own anxieties and temper. They steadied her. He preferred other things but respected her methods. “Just take care, big sister.”

His mother handed him a cup of tea, catching the shake of his hand. “What’s happened now?” she asked, cutting through the chase rather than the usual talk around. He smiled, perhaps that is the best method with me. Little Yura does this as well, direct to the point, like an arrow.

The omega shrugged. “Just more Shuji things. I found out he has been...profiting off of my name. Chris is working to clean it up but it’s just...one more thing.”

She sat down across from him, “Let Chris work it out. That’s his job. Don’t take that on your shoulders.”

Yuuri sighed, if only it were that simple. “I need to make decisions.”

“Then follow your gut. Your instincts will keep you steady.”
The cup of tea in his hand shoved little rivers dancing back and forth across the surface. He knew he was beginning to shake harder now and took his hands away, hiding them in his lap. “I just...it feels so violating.”

“That...that...snake,” she began and Yuuri couldn’t help but smile at the strong words his mother was using. “It’s the only thing he was good at, violating all he came in contact with.”

“I just...if I had come to you sooner, you and Dad, could you have fixed it?”

She took his free hand and squeezed it. “We would have done everything possible, no matter how hard, no matter how illegal. I don’t know how much the laws would have given to us. But if you were still legally a child, I think it would have gone more in our favor. Yuuri, if getting you away from him and preventing any of this meant leaving behind all we had, we would have done it gladly for you.”

Yuuri shook his head, setting the cup down, giving up on holding it with steady hands. “I guess...it’s all done now. Dr. Abramovich would tell me not to dwell on what ifs.”

“That’s good advice. Otherwise we stay mired in guilt.” She took the cup away, dumping the contents and giving him a new cup. A strange superstition she had brought from her family. “So what now?”

He tapped the table as he thought about his question. “I...I want to share a bond with Victor. A proper bond, not that sham of one that Shuji forced upon me.”

Hiroko couldn’t hide her smile, “I think you should have what you want, provided the alpha wants the same.”

Yuuri nodded as he considered his mate. “Mom, I know Dad is a beta, but when you bonded...I don’t know what a real bond is supposed to feel like.”

She lit up. “I had hoped to one day talk about this with you. When you were younger, you would blush at the mere mention.”

“Well, I think given everything else I’ve gone through, the things that once embarrassed me seem much less important.” Yuuri gave her a shaky smile. Maybe.
“Well, then about the bond...I don’t remember the pain although I’m sure it hurt at some point, but there was a sense of euphoria and then the confirmation of my Toshiya’s love seemed to thrum in my veins. That was the most reassuring part about it.” She pressed out the milk dough and began to roll it up. “Most don’t realize that betas have a bonding gland, they just don’t normally feel driven to complete that bond. But with your dad,” she hugged herself as she remembered. This conversation had been too serious for her and it was time to tease her son. Lowering her voice in a sultry manner she added, “He would say that he wanted to know all of me.”

“Mom!” Yuuri squeaked, rising up and heading towards the door in escape. He was wrong. There were things he wasn’t sure he wanted to know about his mother.

She chuckled in his wake. Perhaps Yuuri still could find himself embarrassed.

Victor held his son, the little one snuggling into his neck. He listened to Yura’s stories about how he spent his evening and morning, how cool Aunt Mari rated and how much he loved Grandma’s hugs and helping Grandpa in the yard. But then the little boy became quiet and soon a frown formed.

“I miss my other Grandpa. Will I get to see him when we go home?”


Yura shrugged. “He doesn’t like to talk on the phone. He says he can’t hear.”

“That’s very observant of you.” Victor smiled, thinking the real reason was Nikolai hated all technology...still drove a diesel car from the Soviet Era. “No, he doesn’t do so well on the phone.”

The little blond head peeked out from his father’s neck, “But I can see him soon?”

Victor nodded. “Very soon.”
“Okay,” Yura answered, clearly satisfied with the concession.

P/ I know it’s personal but I’d like permission to dig around in your finances. Specifically the past ten years.

Yuuri stared at the text message from Phichit. It wasn’t that he didn’t trust his best friend. He trusted the other omega with his life...time and time again. Phichit had always been there for him. And he always asked. He never pushed. He never...violated. Phichit always respected his space and still looked out for him the best he could. He was just afraid of what he would find.

Y/ Of course. Do what you need to do. Tell me if I need to sign anything or give permission to any authorities.

P/ I have most of the information I need. I kept it from when you were with him. I just wanted to ask first.

Yuuri smiled at that. His friend could have gone into the deepest pocket Yuuri had without leaving a trace, rifled through his diary without Yuuri being the wiser. But he wouldn’t invade his privacy or space without direct consent. Even though Phichit had more access to what Yuuri thought were his financials in the past the man would still ask each time before delving into his friend’s business.

Y/ Thanks. I’m just worried about what you will find.

P/ I am too. But we have to know so we can control it and stop it.

He shivered, feeling his fear rising up.

Y/ I’m scared.

P/ I know. But Chris is good at what he does. And so am I.
Yuuri smiled, his friend was amazing and his confidence never failed to impress.

P/ We’ll get things cleaned up but first we have to know the extent of the damage.

Yuuri put his phone down. He could feel the anxiety under the surface of his skin. Putting on a brave face, he went downstairs. He found Victor and Yura helping to lay out the dishes for dinner. His mother and sister followed behind with their dinner.

They sat around the table, the meal his mother prepared with love before them. Each of them echoing the thanks. “Itadakimasu.” Yuuri smiled as he heard the word clumsily come out of his son’s lips and only slightly better out of Victor’s. They had both worked so hard to fit in, helping around the inn, pulling some of the work off of his family so that they could take time to spend with Yuuri. I love them with all that I have in me.

And for awhile, his anxiety subsided and he enjoyed the company around him, the laughter, the food, the drink. Then he took his son upstairs and got him ready for bed. Tucking him in, he read another story, smoothing out that blond hair.

“Mama?”

Yuuri could hear the concern in the little voice, “Yes, baby?”

The little green eyes were laying low, staring at the finger toying with the blanket. “When you...have the new baby, will you still read to me?”

Yuuri smiled softly, leaning forward to kiss his forehead. “I will read to you for as long as you let me. Those moments are precious to me.” Sitting back he saw the little eyes finally reach up to him, but there was still doubt.

“But babies need a lot of help.”

“They do...but we will all work together to take care of them.”
Yura brightened at the thought of being involved, “Can I help?”

Yuuri nodded. “I’ll teach you.” Then he smiled, his hand sliding over his tummy, “This will be my first baby, too. We can learn together and help each other out.”

Yura lurched forward in his bed and pressed a kiss into Yuuri’s tummy. “Good night, baby.”

And for a moment, Yuuri’s anxiety stayed tucked away.

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Yuuri curled up into Victor’s arms, feeling the calm reassurance of Victor’s love. “Good night,” he whispered before they shared kisses. Then the darkness crowded in and as Victor’s breathing evened out, Yuuri could only toss and turn, restless energy dragging him from the alpha’s side.

Downstairs, Yuuri took Ren outside, standing out near where his sister would smoke. The air had cleared in the winter breeze. He stared up at the haloed moon. *Yelena, do you see us out here? You’re probably thinking we’ve abandoned you. I want to come home, too. I want all of this to be over. I want...to just move forward.*

He took the dog back in and let her off the leash, petting her head and scratching her chin before standing. He needed more. Reaching for an old familiar key, he slips back out into the night air.

The jog to the rink was familiar, one he’d taken for years through trails he’d created that zigzagged across Hasetsu. When he arrived, he went around to the side entrance and unlocked the door. Inside, he made his way to the locker room where his skates were tucked away.

The ice welcomed him like an old friend. He warmed up with a couple of laps before slipping into the peaceful monotony of figures. He began working through an intricate snowflake pattern. Takeshi would know he’d been there when he arrived the next morning. Only Yuuri would leave the rink floor looking like this.

The ice seemed to freeze his anxiety and eek it away. With each beautiful grind of his edge into the ice the voices in his head screaming doubt and abuse would quiet and settle. The slow, repetitive melody of blade to ice relaxed him, made his feel stronger, more in control. Her remembered mastering each edge, each turn of the blade and how powerful he felt. As always, he
could give himself over to the ice, let it take him, cleanse him, make him new. The world around him was a blur but within the safe confines of the rink, his world was small and just for him.

A muffled cry pulled Victor from his sleep. “Yuuri?” he groaned, reaching over blindly to not only find an empty space, but to find it cold. He frowned, sitting up to see his son by the door, shuffling his little feet back and forth on the floor. Victor rolled out of bed and went to tend his son. He was worried about his mate but he needed to take care of his son first.

Yuuri had set out a change of clothes in the bathroom anticipating the need. He stripped his son down and gave him a wipe down with a warm washcloth. “Feel better?” he asked.

The little boy nodded, chewing on two fingers before asking around those fingers, “Where’s Yuuri?”

It took him a moment to make out those words but then he frowned, and answered, “I’m not sure. Let’s see if we can find him downstairs.” Once the little boy was dressed, Victor carried him downstairs tucked under his chin.

The lower level was as dark as the upper and his worry must have transferred to his son because he heard his muffled whimper. Hiroko woke as well because she came out into the hall and asked quietly, “What’s wrong?”

“I can’t find Yuuri.”

She frowned, walking over to the genkan. Shuffling through things hung on the hooks, she nodded confidently. “He’s skating. When he was a teen, he’d sneak out at night and go skate. It helped him work through the thoughts in his head.” She reached for the boy. “I’ll take care of Yura and you go find him. The side entrance will likely be unlocked.”

Across town, Yuuri could feel the ache building up in his legs and he knew he’d been going for a long time. Still, he skated as if the deep edges across the surface of the ice could scratch away the bad memories. Shuji had taken so much away, his freedom, his safety, his body. He corrupted his
future leaving him empty before finally tossing him away. But it wasn’t enough for that monster. He had to take more. Yuuri’s privacy, his safety. He sold Yuuri’s name, his face. The room was a terrifying reminder of what else Shuji had put Yuuri through and in his mind he feared what would come to the surface. Sliding to a stop, mid ice, Yuuri could almost hear a camera snapping pictures and his own voice begging for it to stop as he fought against restraints.

Then a more terrifying thought came to him but he remained numb to it. What if those pictures are out there? What if Victor sees them...or Yura? Yuuri knew that Shuji had a private collection of disgusting pictures of his body, but if that monster would sell his name to a love hotel there could be other connections out there with worse tastes.

“I never wanted this,” he whispered into the cool air. The chill hitting his cheeks told him of the tears, drying away and leaving its icy trail on Yuuri’s face.

Unnoticed in the shadows stood his Victor watching the man lost in thought on the ice. The alpha worried about his mate, about the risk of a late night run, about the danger of skating alone, especially in his mental and physical state. He waited for Yuuri to become aware of him.

In a slow dawning, the omega caught sight of him and quietly came to a stop in front of Victor at the rail. “Hi,” he greeted quietly, his chin dropped and Victor can smell the fear and despair on his mate.

“I was worried. You should have woke me. I would have come with you,” Victor admonished gently. “I know you need space, and cherish your independence, but safety comes first.”

Yuuri shrugged. “I...needed to be alone to sort out my thoughts. And...I don’t feel unsafe in Hasetsu anymore. It’s like...they know I belong to someone. People don’t look at me...in that way.”

“I’m sorry that your safety isn’t something granted you as just an individual, but I’m certain people love you and want to protect you in your own right. Good people. But some don’t care if you are respectable or not, darling. Some don’t care if you are taken. I want to know you’re safe.”

Yuuri stopped to think about his past interactions with people in Hasetsu. He had never been all that good at making friends and read situations, and emotions, wrong often. “What if...I just misinterpreted how people viewed me before. I had such a skewed perspective because of Shuji. I expected the worst because it was drilled into me. I mean...he made me feel worthless, used and set aside.”
Victor considered those words, his lips thin and thoughtful. Yuuri was perhaps right because all of
the people he met were warm and friendly. An occasional tourist could take too much sake,
unused to how potent it was, and got out of hand but Mari or Toshiya handled them with an
experienced ease. Still. “I think perhaps...people, for the most part, are good. But there are still a
few exceptions everywhere. I’d prefer to be with you.”

Yuuri nodded. He understood that Victor was trying to make sure he was safe. “Let’s go home,”
he said, almost a whisper. Victor watched the dejected figure move towards the entrance and met
him with his guards. Yuuri stepped out on the mat and then put on his guards, moving on down
the hall towards the locker room.

Victor followed a few steps behind. When he came into the space, he saw Yuuri in the middle of
the room, his form shaking with tears. The alpha immediately went to him, drawing him close.
Yuuri nosed into his neck and continued to cry bitterly. No words passed between them, just
Yuuri’s hiccuping sobs and Victor’s caressing, reassuring touch, hands moving up and down
Yuuri’s back.

Finally, Yuuri settled, pulling away his face still hidden and moving over to take off his skates and
tuck them away. Victor waited. Finally ready, Yuuri took his hand and led him back towards the
side entrance. Victor shut off lights in his wake.

In the night air, Yuuri moved closer to Victor, now feeling a chill with the reduced activity. It was
halfway home when he finally found the courage to ask, “Do you think...there are photos out
there?” He looked at Victor, hoping the alpha would catch his meaning and not force him to
explain further.

Victor blinked at those words, his blood running cold. “Did...Shuji take pictures of you?”

Yuuri nodded. “I...had forgotten about them. It was the first year, almost a year and a half that
we...were together. It’s been awhile. I wasn’t...pretty later on. My body had gotten soft and flabby
by his standards. He blamed it on the babies.”

Victor was controlling his breathing to not alarm Yuuri any further. “I-I don’t know. I can have it
investigated if you want...but are you sure you want to know? I can have Chris look into it, find
them, stop them and you’ll not have to know.”

Yuuri shook his head. “I’m scared to know, but I’m scared to not know.”
“Let’s...worry about this current situation first. We can stop that. Then we can tackle the other.” Victor’s words were meant to placate Yuuri but in his mind, he knew he’d investigate the possible other allegation. He dreaded what he’d find.

But Yuuri didn’t need to know.

The omega was already breaking from everything else.

Except, with every break, he could see his omega rebound stronger, more secure. His back was straighter, his chin higher, his will much more determined. The fight that he saw in the boy that took Junior World’s was nothing in comparison to the one of this man.

They arrived home, Yuuri leaning into Victor. “I didn’t mean to upset you. I used to do this when I was younger...before I learned how to be afraid.”

“I just didn’t know where you were and Yura was crying and wet. I guess...I rely on you more than I realize.” He smiled at the omega, slowly coming around. “I never want to take you for granted.”

Yuuri shook his head, dismissing the worry. “I take care of Yura out of love, not because it’s expected of me. I just...I should have told you so you would know to look out for Yura. I was just...wound up.”

“Next time, we’ll talk...and if you need to skate, I’ll take you myself. Even in Russia. I happen to know the guy with the keys.” He finished with a wink.

Yuuri rolled his eyes and mock-punched him, “Idiot.”

Victor reacting like he was wounded. “But I’m your idiot and you love me,” he tossed back.

Yuuri grinned. “Very much so...and you’re lucky.”
His voice softened as he responded back, “So very lucky,” his finger tracing along Yuuri’s chin. He dipped forward and brushed their lips together. The halloed moon was their only witness, the too lovers trading kisses under its light before slipping into the entrance, toeing off their shoes, Victor leading him upstairs. They kissed back and forth and entered the bedroom, closing the door behind them.

“I want you,” Victor whispered.

Yuuri tipped up and murmured, “You’ll have to be extra quiet.”

Victor chuckled softly. “I can be quiet. Can you?” He was already playing with the edge of Yuuri’s shirt, his fingers brushing against the skin just beneath.

The omega shivered, nodding as he took Victor’s hand and pulled him further into the room. They stopped halfway across the room trading kisses, fingers working their shirts loose before separating enough to discard the fabric, immediately reconnecting. Fingers explored the planes of the other’s body, dipping into their waistbands.

Yuuri was the first to groan as he reached a frustrated hand into the omega’s pants and stroked down his length. Victor grinned as he shushed the omega who immediately covered his mouth with both hands, before erupting into giggles.

Victor lowered to his knees, his fingers skimming down the omega’s body. Yuuri’s slim body was sensitive, and shook with giggles at the slightly ticklish touch, Victor knew this and took advantage to tease but not mercilessly. He felt Yuuri’s hands in his hair as he slid his lover’s pants over his hips. One thing he loved was taking his time loving Yuuri as if he was making up for all of the love the young man was denied in Shuji’s time. He nuzzled into that patch of hair, breathing his lover’s scent at its strongest.

From above he heard a gasp and needy pant. Fingers slid through silver hair, gently carding through. Looking up through silver lashes, he could see Yuuri’s loving gaze as he watched Victor. The alpha turned back, teasing the corona with the tip of his tongue, pressing into the frenulum and licking up. Yuuri hissed in response. Victor smiled into the kiss he pressed onto the head before opening his lips to suck him in.

He watched Yuuri watching him as he bobbed up and down. Then he shifted on his knees, wincing at an old injury. Yuuri noticed, a gentle tug on his hair and he popped off.
“Why don’t we move to the bed? I don’t want you to hurt.”

He nodded taking Yuuri’s hand and following him to bed, watching as Yuuri crawled across the bed, turning to invite him closer. Victor crawled up his body, dropping a kiss on his knee, his inner thigh, his tummy nuzzling baby before climbing further up his body and kissing his lips.

As the parted, Yuuri tangled his fingers into Victor's hair, leaned forward and whispered,”Vitya...fuck me.”

Victor barely suppressed the groan that welled up in him. He felt Yuuri’s leg wrap around him. Running his hand down that lithe body, he cupped that plush ass. Yuuri’s eyes closed, shifting, seeking more.

Victor’s fingers slid down the cleft of Yuuri’s ass, seeking that tight ring. Teasing it open, he could smell Yuuri’s scent spiking, saturating the air. Victor dipped in feeling Yuuri already wet and eager for him.

He was so focused on preparing Yuuri that he was startled when the omega grabbed him and pulled him up for a kiss. “Mmmm...sorry Yuuri.”

“I’m fine. I’m made to stretch. I need you in me now.”

Nodding, Victor settled in between those legs. Yuuri held his eyes as he slowly rocked into him. The omega let out a groan of satisfaction as Victor filled him completely. The alpha grinned as he felt his lover warm up in embarrassment.

“So noisy,” he teasingly whispered.

Yuuri stuck his tongue out like the mature omega he was. He then pinched Victor’s ass. “Move,” he hissed.

Victor smirked as he took hold of Yuuri’s hips. “So demanding,” he quipped before he slowly dragged himself out of Yuuri only to slam back into him. A pleased gasp came from his lover.
The promise to be quiet was quickly forgotten as they found their rhythm within each other. Yuuri pulling the man into his arms, demanding more from Victor with each motion, and Victor, for his part, answering enthusiastically. Lovely little sounds slipped out of the omega as Victor rocked into Yuuri at a steady pace. Yuuri, pushed up, greeting Victor with a kiss before leaning back and watching the alpha starting to come undone.

“M-more,” Yuuri begged. “F-faster…”

Victor could deny Yuuri nothing. Soon he felt that body tensing around him and Victor realized he was close as well. Yuuri came with a cry. Victor continued slamming into him until he found his own tipping point, burying himself deeply into the omega.

Yuuri’s eyes grew heavy and Victor knew he wasn’t far behind but he refused to allow his omega or himself wake up in filth. He slipped away long enough to get a wet washcloth and come back to clean his Yuuri up. The omega’s breathing evened out as he turned on his side.

Victor stretched out next to him, humming happily as Yuuri snuggled into him and breathed in his scent.

“Sleep well, my sweet Yuuri.”

Chapter End Notes

So, who's doing NaNo...and who's doing YOI NaNo? One project? Multiple projects?

I'm doing unofficial NaNo trying to get through with at least one of my projects by the end of November. Hopefully another by the end of December. This one will likely take the longest. We shall see. But I'm already looking at what's coming up next. So many stories, so little time!

Thanks so much for those lovely people I met in Discord. I get overwhelmed easily and can't stay for long but I'll try and stop in from time to time to talk. I'll get better as I get to know everyone.
Chapter Summary

The family spend time with loved ones as they prepare to go home.

Chapter Notes

Hello...how are you all? I'm busy reading, writing, grading, teaching, and making time to explore the fall colors. I love fall, and October is my favorite! So between fall walks, crunching leaves underfoot, exploring and picking sand plums along the way (I may look for elderberries next, since I now know how to tell them from poke berries)...I'm tapping out chapters and little short stories. If you haven't read my short '"Kiss and Tell"' hop on over and take a look. It's set in cannon after the kiss scene...and I think you'll love this Yuuri and Victor (whom several have dubbed Subiforov). ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 55: Home

Their time in Hasetsu was drawing to a close and Yuuri knew they needed to go home. Leaving this time felt different, he wasn’t running, he wasn’t hoping to hide himself away. He was returning to his home with his child and his mate. It was almost time for his next doctor’s visit, he needed the consistent structure of his visits to the psychiatrist, and he missed his students. Tapping his feet, he knew he had a day and a half to go.

His mother kept coming into his space, wanting to remain close. He didn’t mind. He appreciated her calming presence. He wasn’t the only one. His son would often run up and give her hugs, then crawl into his lap. He had to smile, a little pink on his cheeks as Yura would hug his middle and plant a little kisses on his tummy, saying something to baby thankfully in Russian. He’d look up at his mother. “Kids,” he’d comment and leave it to her interpretation. She’d hummed noncommittally, her eyes sparkling. Yuuri didn’t dig into those thoughts. Perhaps she figured it out but she didn’t force the issue. He appreciated that.

They were having one of those moments, neither talking, both just enjoying the other’s quiet company as Yura bounced in and out, searching for more kittens. Victor was quietly catching up on all the news from the rink on his phone. And Yuuri was thinking of making them both a cup of tea when he was surprised by the singsong voice of his former ballet teacher gracefully entering
the inn. He turned to smile and froze. She was escorting an old friend. “Coach Celestino!” Yuuri squeaked, rising up to meet his old mentor.

“Yuuri,” he greeted warmly. “I had heard from Phichit that you were finally...on your own. How are you?”

Yuuri took his hand in both of his own, he could see how happy the coach was but also a slight discomfort as he fumbled for the right words. “Thank you for taking care of me as much as you did.”

Celestino smiled, but then his eyes fell to their clasped hands. “I wish I could have done more.”

Yuuri took a beat, he knew he didn’t want to think about the darkness in his life. But he also knew that his coach felt a horrid guilt. “I know...but it was good to know someone was looking out for me.”

“If I had been there, this would have never happened. Not on my watch.”

Yuuri watched the ponytail bob as the taller man shook his head. It was almost humorous, and the omega knew he was growing stronger if he could see the humor when discussing the worst of his times. “I know.” He then turned and motioned his family forward. “Coach, this is my mate Victor and our son Yura.”

Celestino shook Victor’s hand. “I know Victor…” his eyes sparkled with amused curiosity, “but I’m intrigued to learn how the two of you met,” he invited, his eyes moving from one to the other.

“Phichit,” Yuuri supplied.

“Chris,” Victor added.

The old coach snorted and rolled his eyes. He knew of the Swiss alpha and had some interesting reports of him from the skaters’s coach. And he knew first hand how Phichit could work his magic to manifest what he wanted most. “Of course...a little friendly interference. Well, I’m glad it worked out.” Turning to the little blond clinging to Yuuri’s leg, he knelt down. “And you must be the next generation Nikiforov. Do you skate like your dad?”
“I skate like my mom,” he stated defiantly before tugging on Yuuri’s shirt.

“I’ve been teaching him,” Yuuri added, as he lifted up the little boy with a grunt, Victor coming in behind to support him in the lift, his hand fluttering over Yuuri’s side and resting protectively over the little pooch growing in the middle.

“Then he’s in exceptional hands,” Celestino responded, taking in the view thoughtfully.

“Are you staying here long?”

“Mina and I are going over some students together. There are a couple of Japanese students I’m looking at in the area and I wanted an extra set of eyes. Besides, it helps to have a friend native to the tongue.” The words came out too quickly, and stumbled a little as the older man rubbed the back of his neck, eyes darting about.

“But you speak Japanese quite well by this point,” Yuuri protested.

Celestino cleared his throat, “I do but I went to the States for a couple of years after Phichit retired. It was fine but I preferred working one-on-one like I did in Japan. So when my services were requested, I decided to see what there was to work with.”

“We may be working out of Fukuoka,” Minako added. “A bit of a train ride but I’m sure I can stay with a friend if the day runs long.” Her eyes rested on Celestino, her expression full of meaning.

Oh. OOOOOOHHHHH!!! Well about time. Yuuri decided he didn’t want to dig too deep in that meaning. He was happy that the couple were finally figuring out how to be together, even if it were a secret...and who doesn’t have their secrets these days? But the conversation stirred up more than he could handle in company and Yuuri knew he would need his space for a moment. As he watched the two of them continued into the restaurant to order dinner, Yuuri ducked out, handing Yura over to Victor who set him down and sent him into the kitchen.

The Russian didn’t let him run far. Following Yuuri out to the garden, he asked, “Are you okay?”

“Yes...no...maybe?” He spread his fingers out and shook his hand. “Coach...he tried to get me out
of there. The Japanese courts sided with Shuji. It’s just...everything was always a roadblock. And then Shuji started cutting me off from the world little by little until...there was nothing.” Yuuri felt himself carried off by dark thoughts as he spoke, each word becoming soft as his voice faded. Slowly Victor disappeared, the rocks beneath his feet smoothed out and turned to the cold linoleum. The night air, slightly chilled and carrying the scent of his mother’s cooking turned harsh as the scent of cleaning powders choked him. The walls were white, and closing in on him. Then a new smell filled his nose...sharpie. He started tearing up as the acrid scent filled his nose and burnt his eyes. He knew his breathing was erratic and felt lightheaded. Then from beyond the walls he heard a voice, not Shuji’s...it was soft and warm. Yuuri fought his way towards it. He didn’t even realize he was in trouble until he felt Victor’s hand rubbing up and down his back reminding him to breathe. Coming back to himself, he murmured, “I don’t know what just happened.”

“Where were you?”

Yuuri blinked, unsure he wanted to talk about it. “I was back there. That white room. I need...it’s time to go home. I need to see Abramovich.”

Victor drew him into his arms, remaining still as Yuuri sought his scent, his hand smoothing through the younger man’s hair. “We’re going home soon.”

“I know...I just...I’m glad we came.” He thought of his mother, and how she needed to see how happy he was. He could see his father assured of Yuuri’s strength and confidence in Victor. “It helped me make peace with a lot of the disharmony I left behind. I just...I need the spaces I’ve claimed back home. I want to go home.”

Victor knew, he felt it too. He started to say something but he hadn’t received confirmation from the cleaning service that the job was done. The last thing he wanted to do was dangle hope only to have to take it back. Instead, he soothed the omega. He pressed his lips into Yuuri’s hair. He whispered soft assurances. The body leaned heavily into his arms and Victor began to guide him back inside, leading him up the stairs where he put the omega to bed.

“I’m okay,” Yuuri protested but his words felt heavy. He blinked up at Victor feeling the slowness in him.

Victor put a soft hand on Yuuri’s chest, not pushing him down but feeling the slowing heart beat, “You are always tired when you have a panic attack. Let your body rest and recover. If not for yourself, then for the baby.”
Yuuri’s hands slid down over the growing baby bump. Victor leaned down and kissed those fingers, pulling them apart to kiss his stomach. Sitting up, he could see those eyes almost closed, watching him between lashes. He bent over and kissed those plush lips. “Rest.”

Victor was in the family room looking over some video sent to him by Georgi when an imposing figure filled the entrance. He glanced up to see Yuuri’s old coach. He rose to greet the man, waving him in as he stood. They shook hands and sat across from one another. The Italian coach sat back in the chair, his ankle crossing and resting on his opposite thigh. There was an openness about his entire demeanor. So Victor adopted the same attitude.

“Youuri’s been through a lot.”

Victor sighed, truer words were never spoken. “We’ve been dealing with it little by little. Counselors, doctors, and a lot of love and patience.”

Celestino nodded, “Minako said he didn’t go initially to be your mate but to be a nanny of sorts.”

“He was our companion omega, yes.” He had to smile, at least Celestino was being polite about his questions. But in truth, he liked the direct approach Mari used. “I’d had nannies but they always fell short of Yura’s needs. I needed something more, someone who would have a mother’s touch. So Yuuri came to live with us.”

“That was quite a risk, given all that he’s been through.”

“My gut instinct is a pretty good guide and I knew he wouldn’t do anything to hurt my son. My household...we’re all a bunch of misfits holding each other together. Yuuri fit right in.” Victor thought about how quickly Yuuri became part of the family and how soon he found himself falling in love with the man. In retrospect he could see it happening in little ways almost immediately. “And we’re all helping him to find the healing he needs. He’s getting the right support.”

The coach was comforted, he knew Victor as an honorable kid...well, man. And it was clear as day that the Russian simply worshipped his former student. In fact he had always thought they would do well together. “And you and...Yura?”
Victor’s lips thinned. “I take care of my family if that’s what you’re implying.”

Celestino sighed, leaning back. “My apologies. I seemed to have overstepped.” He paused for a moment, pushing a loose strand of hair behind his ear. He thought of all the horrors he watched Yuuri go through. The programs dying on ice, the body shrinking slowly. “I just know...some of what Yuuri went through. I would pick him up with ill disguised bruises from that man’s house. Not like he was hit but a hand too rough on the arm and the like. Finger bruises. And slowly, Yuuri would withdraw. I couldn’t have been happier when he made friends with Phichit and that’s what prompted me to take the other on as a student. Phichit has a way of reaching others when no one else can. I had hoped, prayed really, that Phichit would be able to find out what was wrong, and help me to pull him free. But even then it was far too late.” Celestino’s eyes watered thinking back to the darkest spot of his otherwise brilliant career. Shit, Brian Orser must keep his students under lock and key, he never has these problems. “Losing Yuuri to that man...I had to seek counseling. Part of me felt like it was my fault even though he wasn’t my student when it happened. I wasn’t able to get him out.”

Victor took in what the older man had told him, understanding why Celestino would ask about his family as well. “Yuuri said you followed him to Tokyo, you helped him continue to skate until...he couldn’t.”

Celestino’s eyes went to the ceiling, a huff on his breath. “That bastard flushed his suppressants and his birth control. He knew it would look bad if he forced Yuuri to retire. But if Yuuri were to get pregnant, no one would say a thing. In fact this sport is so fucking old fashioned it would be a scandal for an omega to continue to skate after giving birth. The women are all expected to retire after marriage, omega, beta, or even alpha.” He stopped and watched Victor grimace, it was the same throughout the sport, regardless of location. Skating was a *virginal* sport. “He manipulated that child until there was nothing but a tiny spark for awhile.” He refocused on Victor. “Seeing him today...knowing he got out and regained his self...it’s as if this weight lifted off of my shoulders.”

“So many people blamed themselves for what that man did.” Victor sighed, pushing up out of his chair, closing his laptop, suddenly feeling restless. “Yuuri needed to come back for his own sake but I think it was also important for him to come back for everyone else. He has so many who love and care for him.”

“I don’t know what you did…”

Victor smiled, thinking of how it wasn’t him, it was Yuuri. “I provided him with what he needed to stand on his own feet. I made him feel safe. I gave him structure and worth. And Yuuri clawed his way out of the darkness that surrounded him.”
Celestino closed his eyes, his jaw tightening. “May the asshole rot in jail.”

“Agreed.”

The old coach stood up as well. “Perhaps you can join me for a drink at Minako’s before you leave.”

“I need to make sure I won’t be spoiling any plans, but sure.” Victor didn’t know who would win in this drinking contest of a Russian, Italian, and Japanese woman. Little did he know it would always be Minako.

Yuuri’s family didn’t want to overwhelm him so they had a small gathering to celebrate his second departure. Katsudon, friends, and family all filled the warm space. Yuuko, Takeshi, and the girls hugged him making promises to keep in touch.

Minako appraised him thoughtfully. “You’re getting there.”

Yuuri smiled, shrugging. “Slowly but surely.” He watched her leave and shivered, turning to look at Victor. “I can’t believe she’s going on a date with Celestino.”

Victor snorted. “Well, he invited me for a drink. If you were fine with it, I thought I’d walk over after this gathering.”

Yuuri shrugged. “Maybe...I’ll go?”

Victor hugged him into his side. “Of course, darling. You are always welcome at my side.”

His mother and sister cleaned up as they pulled on their coats. Yura wore an oversized apron as he helped and waved at them with a rubber gloved hand.

“He’ll be soaked before he’s done,” Victor commented.
“Mmmhmمممم,” Yuuri agreed. They wouldn’t be gone long. Yuuri couldn’t drink and Victor agreed to just one.

An hour later, Yuuri had his head down on the bar fighting sleepiness as he watched his mate match glass for glass with his old coach. He huffed, wanting to go home. Victor already had his tie loose. Minako leaned in. “You want some juice or something?”

He rubbed his tummy with a disgruntled look before nodding. *Maybe*. But the orange juice didn’t agree with him as he pulled it to his lips. Setting it down, he was suddenly coming off the stool and heading towards the bathroom.

He was surprised when he felt a cool cloth on the back of his neck, the contents of his stomach in the toilet. He looked up expecting to see Victor and finding Minako there instead. “I want to go home.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll take you. Then I’ll make sure Victor makes it home safely later.”

Yuuri curled up around his little boy, feeling better after a shower and snuggled up in his pajamas. His mother was in the room as well, humming as he read to Yura. As he tucked in his son, he met his mother’s appraising eyes.

“Motherhood looks good on you.”

He warmed at the compliment, “I hope so...it makes me...happy.”

“I can tell.” She moved them out of the little room they had made up the tiny blonde. “I wasn’t sure how you would do when you left us but I can see now it was the best move for you.”
They padded down the hall to the room he shared with Victor, “I needed to put distance between myself and what had happened. And Victor...he’s been nothing but supportive. It made it easy to...fall in love.”

She sat down on the bed, patting the side and her son joined her freely. “So what’s held you back from carrying his bond?”

“Mainly...I needed to be whole. I still had a lot of things going on with Shuji. And a lot of pain from...losing the others.” The pain of losing those lives would never leave him, but the promise of this child and building his family helped him find peace. “I am closer now than ever. I could...now. I want to...but I think in our home.”

“Maybe during your next heat,” his mother prodded gently.

“That’s so far a...way…” His cheeks brightened and he looked down at his hand, the way they subconsciously rested on his tummy. “You knew.”

She smiled knowing she was caught. “Yes, I know. I always know. But I had hoped you would have told me.”

Yuuri slid back on the bed resting against the headboard. “I just...I was scared. I am scared. I don’t want to lose this one.”

She shifted to follow him with her eyes, “I can’t promise you that you won’t. All I can say is that you are in a much better place than before, mentally, physically, and emotionally. Let us all help support you.”

Yuuri nodded. “Okay.”

Victor came in and showered before crawling into bed, finding his mate and son curled up together, Yura having joined Yuuri during the night. Ren had also carved out a space as well as did two or three random kittens. Victor couldn’t say for sure since they scattered when he opened the door. He lifted the quilt and found his way under the covers, pulling his lover to his chest.
“You smell of beer,” Yuuri muttered.

“Celestino wouldn’t let me go. He had a lot of stories. I had to hold on because...some were of you.”

Yuuri huffed. “I’m sure there weren’t any good stories where I’m concerned.”

Fighting his way through to sobriety, “I disagree. You...are peerless. You hold yourself and your pain in such a manner that doesn’t beg for pity, doesn’t shout out for attention. You...are graceful. And that amazes me.”

Yuuri stared into the darkness even as Victor’s breathing evened out. Those words slipped under his skin. Graceful. Peerless. Amazing. He felt...admired. How could he be admired when his whole life was a mess? But Victor said it was in how he approached his pain. Was there something worthy of being admired in the middle of a struggle?

The next morning was full of messy goodbyes and then they were on the train headed towards Fukuoka and the airport. Once more Victor had them in first class. But this time Yuuri didn’t huff at the expense. He wanted Yuuri to be able to rest on such a long flight and Yuuri was grateful for the thought and rest. They landed in Russia, piling into the car, Yuuri watched as Victor maneuvered into traffic.

Clearing downtown they moved into the residential section, Yuuri frowned as they took a different turn. “Honey, this isn’t…” He then realized where they were headed. “Victor?”

“I called this morning to make sure it was ready.”

Tears started sliding down Yuuri’s cheeks. He was scared but more than that, he was ready. He wanted to go home. He needed it, and he knew they, as a family needed it. They needed to reclaim their home, ridding it of its demons. And by the bouncing in the carseat behind him, Yuuri suspected his little munchkin felt the same.
As they drove up, Yuuri stared at the facade. It looked the same. Minus the police tape, of course. But still...it had the air of home. As Shirley Jackson would say houses look back at us, and Yuuri could feel the welcomed eyes of this home gazing at the family it had missed. Was it Yelana looking out from the window or was it something more? Something that she felt as well? As Victor pulled to a stop at the curb, he got out and stepped onto the sidewalk, staring up at his home. Yura was freed by his father and stood bouncing on his feet holding his mama’s hand.

Yuuri brushed his tears from his eyes. Turning to Victor, he released Yura to through an excited hug around his neck. The little boy joined in, the little poodle bouncing all around them.

They were... home.

Chapter End Notes

I'm trying to get better at replying to comments. I do love to hear from all of you. Comments and kudos are life. And thank you for reading.
Ch. 56: Home fills the hollow spaces of the heart

Yuuri stood outside the door leading into their home. It had been three weeks. Three long, painfully long, weeks. Phichit and Chris were the most welcoming of hosts, and they had done everything in their power to keep Yuuri calm and happy, but now he was home. Even with the time back in Japan, this was where he wanted to be. So why can’t I seem to move? Yuuri felt frozen to the spot, taking in the house before him. Shirley Jackson often wrote about houses that seemed to look back at the people, like imposing prisons, or gateways into evil. This home was never that, and it still wasn’t. But there were mixed emotions in the way he studied the brick facade. He wasn’t the only one to notice a change in the way the house appeared now. A tiny Yura hid behind him, clinging to his arm.

After the police released it, Victor took another week, hiring professionals to thoroughly clean and descent their home. The firm was one of the finest in St. Petersburg, and were highly recommended for crime scene clean up. He knew the quality of work from testimony of friends who had been burgled in the past. They cleaned, vacuumed so thoroughly that the furniture indents were gone from carpeting, and freshened the air not just with neutralizing sprays but with open windows, even in the deep Russian winter. Victor knew they would leave his home freed from any traces of what had happened. But there was nothing like a break in to create ghosts in every shadow. He didn’t want his family to have to deal with the mess left behind by the police forensics team...and by him. Everyone was dealing with too many emotions within.

Victor watched from behind as Yuuri struggled with the emotions he felt about being home. The trip to Japan provided a necessary distraction and he could see that Yuuri was a good deal stronger
for it. Confronted with evidence that Shuji not only took Yuuri’s freedom, he exploited him, profited from him, and financially raped him, Yuuri stood up for himself. He fought. He’s still fighting. His head held high, his back straight.

But before him was home. Victor knew Yuuri wanted nothing more than to return to the familiar spaces and smells...but now he was afraid. The house, even after being cleaned and aired, still carried the memory of the attack. The omega stood frozen at the doorway. Victor smiled, watching his small son slip a tiny hand into Yuuri’s, and he followed quickly, putting his hand into the other. Yuuri turned to him, smiling a thank you. He knew they weren’t the first to breach the threshold, that the home held familiar faces and voices waiting for them to make it complete and whole again. Olga and Nikolai had moved back in that morning. Victor had asked Olga to bake something, anything, and make the house smell like home. He didn’t know how Yuuri would react to the sterile smells of a professional cleaning but if they could all walk in and feel their home building itself back up it would be a good first step.

Yuuri stepped in, his nose wrinkling in uncertainty. “The cleaners...they did a thorough job.” He smiled weakly as he watched Yura walk a little further ahead into the living room. He wanted to be positive, to move forward. Yura came back, snuggled into Yuuri’s wrist. “I know, baby...we’ll have to refresh our smell. It’s been three weeks.”

Victor nodded, glancing around the space, spying Yelena looking on thoughtfully. “They did a very good job...but I didn’t want anything...from what happened to remain.”

Yuuri glanced up and nodded. Then a flash of panic crossed his face and he asked, “Did Nikolai get his door fixed?”

Victor was quick to settle him. “As soon as they lifted the tape and let us in. The old man couldn’t wait to get back into his rooms.”

Yuuri calmed visibly. “I hope...he doesn’t blame himself.”

“Everyone is in counseling processing what happened,” Victor reassured him gently. Well, almost everyone, that stubborn old boomer probably isn’t going.

Yuuri shook his head, murmuring, “I’m sorry, this is my fault.”

Victor sighed. Two steps forward, one step back. “Don’t you take on that man’s crimes,” Victor
chastised gently. “None of this is your fault.”

“But if I hadn’t come…” Yuuri argued but Victor tightened his arm around Yuuri’s shoulder. They were back home, back to the reality of their life.

Victor lifted his chin and looked into his eyes, his expression soft. “Then Yura wouldn’t have found his Mama...and I would continue missing the answer to my song. Our lives were...incomplete before you.”

Yuuri smiled softly. “I don’t think I lived until I found you both,” he whispered.

Victor nuzzled into the inky black hair, breathing deeply. “I know a part of myself was missing.”

They walked further into the space and found Yura standing frozen at the foot of the stairs to the second level. Yuuri walked to the little boy’s side, thinking to make a joke about ghosts but then he was grabbed by the same dread the boy felt. They stood there, staring up the stairs, neither wanting to climb up. Yuuri finally straightened his back and put one foot onto the first tread only to whine and pull back. Yura sniffled and hid behind his mother, green eyes shut tight. Victor thinned his lips as he took them both into his protective arms. “Let’s go up together.” He hated it but knew they needed to face it.

Their steps were slow and Victor remained their rock the entire way. Yuuri turned to enter the omega room, now scrubbed clean and put to rights. It was if possible more pristine than it began. He shivered, knowing at least this was not his room and would never be his room again. Yura entered his own room cautiously, his eyes examining the things he left behind. He walked over and picked up his ballerina bunny and sniffed at it before taking it to his dad. He grabbed the alpha’s hand and rubbed the bunny into the scent before going to search for his mom. He froze at the door, looking inside. He placed a toe into the room and felt himself go cold as his eyes fell on his mother standing with his back to them both.

Yuuri stared out the window, his eyes on the back yard. “How long did he watch me?”

Victor crossed the room to reach out to Yuuri in an attempt to pull him from his darker thoughts. In truth, he didn’t know, he couldn’t offer Yuuri any answers. Perhaps the man didn’t think Yuuri could move beyond his reach. In the end, it proved right...temporarily. However, now everyone was out of Shuji’s reach. Governments were arguing custody but the important part was that the man was incarcerated. He couldn’t get out, probably would never breathe the air as a free man ever again for not only what he had done to Yuuri but to the other victims. Victor wrapped his arms around Yuuri as Yura finally braved the room to reach out for the omega’s hand. His family was
“Let’s not dwell on that,” Victor suggested, moving Yuuri from the window and inviting him to leave that room. “Why...don’t we close this room off?” he suggested. “We’ll not need it again, at least for some time. We can use it as a guest room.”

Yuuri nodded, taking the little boy’s hand. “I think...that would be good. Maybe...before it’s put to use again we can redo it.”

Victor nodded as they stepped into the hall, closing the door securely. “That would be fine. Yelena suggested we remodel it but...then she became ill. Or at least, she finally admitted to us she was ill.”

Yuuri closed his eyes. So much sadness in that room. Yelena’s death. So many nannies who couldn’t seem to settle in. And then Yuuri. Mom, what would you do?

As they moved through the house the smell of cleaning products and sterilizations started to give way to something much friendlier. As they reached the kitchen it became obvious, orange cranberry muffins. The perfect thing to bake, combining the base scents of both Yuuri and Victor. Turning the corner they spotted Olga standing by her stove and Nikolai at the kitchen table. Yura let go of Yuuri’s hand and ran in crying out, “Grandpa!”

The old man chuckled, accepting those arms and lifting him up to seat him on the counter. “I’ve missed you, boy. Tell me what you know.”

Yura looked over at his dad then back before admitting, “A lot...but some of it I can’t talk about.”

Victor sat down in the next chair, pulling his son into his lap as he declared quietly, “This is a safe place. You can talk about all the things here.”

Yura’s voice was soft and low. “Even...?” He eyed Yuuri’s middle then raised his eyes to his dad.

Yuuri sighed and nodded. Here they can’t hold secrets.
“Yuuri’s going to have a baby!” the little boy rushed as he turned back to the others.

“What?!!” exhaled both Nikolai and Olga, the former rising up from his chair to escort Yuuri to sit down and Olga putting down her towel and joining them.

Yuuri’s chin dropped, pink rising up in his cheeks. “It appears timing has never been my strong suit. They discovered I wasn’t getting better...because my body was protecting a baby.” He rubbed his hand over his tummy adding, “They’re just a little bean but...maybe...hopefully...I can bring this one into the world.”

Olga’s eyes were dampening quickly, “How far?”

Yuuri frowned as he counted. “I think...eleven weeks.” He pulled out his phone and opened up an app. “It says here they’re about the size of a lime.”

“A big lime or a little lime?” Yura asked.

Yuuri chuckled. “I’m not sure...maybe I need a better app.” He focused on the others and added, “I really want this but...I might need some help.”

“Anything!” Olga gushed, Nikolai nodding eagerly. Yura moved to his side, wrapping an arm around him. Victor held his eyes, a soft smile on his lips.

“Thanks. I’ve been tired and I feel nauseous a lot. Phichit kept crackers and soda water on hand and it helps.” He smiled as Olga fished a pad of paper from her pocket and started making a list. “I...sleep a lot...but I’m supposed to eat at least six small meals a day.” He huffed at that, thinking of the irony of being supposed to rest but having to remember six meals a day. “I...wanted to keep working but Yakov has already cut back my schedule.” He rolled his eyes, Olga giving him a smirk of confederation. “I’ve had to talk to Dr. Romanov and he added it to my file at the rink. Natasha has adjusted my caloric needs and I have that here.” He pulled up a picture and handed his phone over to Olga who forwarded it to her own phone. “I still see Dr. Abramovich three days a week. Well, I will. We were in Japan for the last week, of course.”

“I’m seeing him once a week myself,” Olga murmured. “Are you...okay?”

Yuuri nodded, surprised he hadn’t seen her there. “I am...well, better, anyway. I am learning that
it’s okay to *not* be okay.”

“Indeed it is...and when you’re not, I’m always ready with an episode of *Deadly Omega* and a hot cup of tea.”

Yuuri smiled, hugging himself. Pregnancy had only made him even more obsessed with that show. He found himself watching it in the middle of the night after being sick, only to be caught by Phichit who was, fortunately, another devotee. “Thank you.” He looked around and finally settled his eyes on the two people he’s missed over the last three weeks. “How about you two...are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Olga confirmed. “Glad to be back in my own home. Lev was driving me insane. Kept telling me to sit down, that he wanted to wait on me, hand and foot. Do you know that fool even tried to make me dinner? I was never so happy when Victor called to tell me I could return home. But now, I’m right as rain. And I’m glad to have my family home.”

Nikolai snorted at her ordeal. “I think the fool was hoping to convince you to leave this life of toil and servitude to spend it with him.”

She balked at the idea and pushed back from the table, heading back to the stove to make a cup of tea.

Both Yuuri and Victor noticed Nikolai avoided the question entirely. They exchanged worried looks. Leaning forward, Yuuri took the old man’s hand. “Nikolai, have you been to a counselor?”

He shrugged. “What for? I mean...I’ve been through so many things. You young people don’t remember how hard it was living in this country. The violence, the starvations, the police. Bah. It’s just...another day.”

Victor saw his son playing with the bunny, not hearing their conversation, however he wanted to keep the boy unaware of adult problems. He motioned for the trio to follow through the door into the dining room, leaving Yura to his imagination at the counter as Olga served a warm, buttered up muffin with cocoa. Once they were free from the room Victor started slowly, “It seemed...when I found you that your anger was more than defending Yuuri.”

Nikolai’s face clouded and he shrugged his shoulders. “It’s fine.”
Where have I heard that before? Victor shook his head, he could feel the man battling his own inner demons. “It’s not fine. You...haven’t dealt with Kostya’s abuse of Yelena. So...I want you to find someone to talk to.”

“I...don’t go in for all of those doctors.” Nikolai gruffly rose from the table, clearly upset. “If a doctor had paid attention, I’d still have my wife.”

Victor didn’t argue, he simply offered another solution. “There are a number of places to get help. I mainly want you to talk to someone you trust. Maybe...your Rabbi?”

Nikolai grunted. He looked at Victor with sympathetic love. “I haven’t been back to temple for years. That was always Marta’s doing, she was active in the community. I assumed that if Yura wasn’t going to be Bar Mitzvah’ed, we wouldn’t worry.”

Victor knew this. He’d watched the man shut down after losing his wife. “Maybe it’s time for you to start rebuilding networks? Who would you have talked to before?”

Nikolai shook his head but Victor could tell there was...someone. He tilted his head to encourage the old man to speak. Finally, he muttered, “I’d talk to your father. I could always talk to him, a good listener who knew that sometimes I wasn’t looking for advice, but just a pair of ears.” He stopped quickly and his voice changed, “But he doesn’t want anything to do with me. I cost him too much money.”

Victor sighed wearily. It was time...time for them to delve into past mistakes. “My father is a lot of things, but he’s not one to hold a grudge...and certainly not over money. He was more upset about losing his friend than he was about losing the money, which in case you hadn’t noticed, my father has plenty of. Things can be replaced, people cannot. You and I both learned this the hard way.”

Nikolai raised his eyebrows. Looking at Victor he knew their house of cards could tumble down if the truth got out to the wrong people. “He doesn’t know the truth about...him.”

Victor followed Nikolai’s glance through the opening into the kitchen, to his son now giggling with Olga as she flicked flour in his face. “He doesn’t know for sure about Yura...but he probably suspects. I think he knows the boy isn’t my biological child, but I’m not sure he knows who the father really is...was.” Victor felt a chill run through him. After all she did to keep Yura from that man, would it come to light? “And he’s worried about us. All of us. He’s always tried to shield us from the dangers of the world. That’s why he sent Kostya away. Even not knowing for sure, he wanted to keep Yelana safe. I plan to take Yuuri to meet them next weekend. Perhaps you should
join us?”

Nikolai’s head snapped back to Victor’s face, “And make an already awkward situation more awkward?”

“Why not? Get it all out in the open and over with.” He reached out and squeezed Nikolai’s hand. “You are both stubborn but I can’t stand between you forever. I think…it will be good for you to talk.”

Nikolai’s eyes wrinkled a little, but the corners of his mouth turned up. “Maybe…”

Victor smiled and nodded. “I’ll take a maybe. We leave Friday after work. Be ready.” Standing up, he helped Yuuri out of his chair to which the omega rolled his eyes.

“I said maybe,” the old man called out after them in protest.

“I know,” Victor called back. He smirked at his mate, peeking over to see Yura making cookies with Olga. It wasn’t back to normal…but maybe closer than before.

Chapter End Notes

If you haven't found them, read my other stories.

Currently in process is Sirin's Child, a modern day Sci-fi/Fantasy AU where Viktor is younger (19) and Yuuri is the adult (23)...and Viktor's parents have disappeared (or were they killed?) under mysterious circumstances while researching the origins of secondary genders in myths.

There is also Gravity that doesn't get into secondary genders but the very real struggles of Viktor being gay in Russia and Yuuri recovering from an injury that drew them together to begin with.

So click on my name, read my stories...and keep talking to me. I live for comments and kudos. Your words are life to us writers. Thank you.
School days and monsters

Chapter Summary

Back home and facing their monsters...healing takes work and time.

Chapter Notes

So, I'm going to move all of my postings to weekends. So look for me on Friday-Sunday. I will try to get two chapters of something up each Wednesday and there may be an occasional third.

Thanks, BluSkates, for all of your edits. You give my work great polish.

Ch. 57: School days and monsters

Yura pouted and fussed a little as his mother got him ready for school. “But I want to stay home with you. Can’t you teach me? You’re smarter than my teachers.”

Yuuri smirked, he could tell that the little blonde was trying to play him. “Unfortunately, no. You’re better at Russian than I am.”

“We can learn together,” he suggested.

Yuuri paused, he needed to get to the bottom of what was plaguing Yura before they left this morning. “You love your new teacher. Don’t you miss your friends?”

“I miss Beka and Zaina but they can come over and play,” the almost six-year-old reasoned.

Yuuri could see that the boy had an answer for everything, as do most children, and pressed further. “Well, I think it will be good for you to go back to your routine.”
Yura put two fingers in his mouth then took them out as if realizing what he was doing. That was good. A step forward. “But what if...they will laugh if they find out I wet the bed.”

Yuuri sighed, here was the problem finally. “You don’t have to tell anyone anything. Beka and Zaina both love you and they would never laugh at you. As for the rest, they won’t find out if you don’t tell them. I’m going to talk to your teacher in private. No one else will hear.”

The lip quivered slightly but then stiffened. “Are you sure?”

“Positive. That’s why we are going early.” He took the little hand and kissed the fingers.

“Papa, too?”

“He wants to go and make sure there are no misunderstandings. And the school will call us if there are any problems. Okay?”

He huffed but nodded, holding his feet out to subjugate them to socks. “I suppose,” he agreed.

Yuuri had to stifle a chuckle at the grandiose way the boy allowed socks on his feet. I’ll have to ask Vitya’s mother about this, I have a feeling extra runs in the family. Finally dressed, Yura skipped out to the kitchen as if that entire argument never occurred. Yuuri rolled his eyes as he gathered the little boy’s backpack and other things to sit by the door. He had an appointment with Abramovich and then lunch with Phichit. Afterwards, they would pick up his son and head back to the rink. Yuuri wanted to teach his kids and he planned on speaking with Yakov about making sure he stayed on the roster for as long as he could. He felt an itch under his skin to return to his own routine, as complicated as it was. He was thankful, however, that it was a short week where school was concerned...and work.

He came into the kitchen and Olga already had his meds laid out along with a glass of orange juice. “We’re having bagels and a smear of either cream cheese or jam,” she offered. “Do you want an egg with that?”

“I probably should although it seems like a lot,” Yuuri commented dryly. He could feel his stomach protesting but he felt he could keep it down. He spotted a lunch box set up for him. “Oh, I’m having lunch with Phichit,” he reminded.
“I know but the lime may get hungry and you said the crackers and seltzer helps with your nausea. Just snacks. Nothing big.”

Yuuri had to laugh at the new nickname bean had picked up. He reached for it and opened the box to peruse the contents. He smiled at the mix of carrots and celery sticks along with some nuts and peanut butter. Digging deeper, he found half a chocolate bar. “Thanks, Olga.” He then turned towards his pile of pills and began working through them distastefully. For the most part, they were vitamins, nutrition supplements for him and baby. He knew one was to keep him calm and hoped to one day be off of it. But for now, calm was good for baby.

After finishing off his half bagel with cream cheese, he headed to the door where he met Victor and a freshly cleaned up Yura. “Are you ready for school?” Yuuri asked hoping the excitement in his voice would make it all the better.”

“No,” Yura huffed. *Guess not.*

Yuuri kept his smile in place, looking at Victor who shrugged and tried not to look so defeated. “Well, let’s go anyway. Mommy has to go visit the doctor.”

Yura’s eyes widened and watered in an instant. “No! No school! I want to see baby!” the little boy demanded.

Yuuri dropped to his knee and laughed, ruffling his hair. “Not that doctor, silly. I scheduled *that* appointment for after school. You won’t miss the ultrasound, it’s very important that you be with me.” He watched as Yura visibly relaxed and suddenly school wasn’t so horrible if it meant he could see the lime baby. Maybe it was good they had a baby on the way. Something good to mitigate the struggles.

Yuuri and Victor sat across from Yura’s teacher, the door closed behind him, their little boy playing in the corner. “As you can see, it’s been a very traumatic break.”

She smiled a comforting, warm smile. “Don’t worry. I’ll keep an eye on him and let you know if there is anything concerning. He’s in counseling and so I know he’s getting the help he needs.”
“He’s worried the kids will find out he’s wetting the bed again,” Yuuri murmured quietly so that Yura’s selective hearing wouldn’t kick in.

She leaned in and whispered, “I’ll let you in on a secret. He’s not the only one. Some kids have bladders not quite caught up to their age. That’s why we keep a change of clothes in their cubby.”

There was almost a sigh of relief between both parents. “He has other...regressions,” Victor continued.

“Are there particular stims you noticed and corrected?”

Yuuri narrowed his eyes at the term, “Stims?”

“Stimming, it’s a form of stimulation to handle anxiety or stress. In some countries it’s associated with only Autism, however, many people on and off the spectrum use stims to self soothe. Think about how you may have a repetitive motion or gesture you make under certain pressures.” She waited, watching as both men realized that they had their quirks as well.

“I would run a figure eight pattern on ice...for hours.” Yuuri laughed, “My rink mates thought it was edge work but I was calming myself.”

She smiled, “Some stims are less noticeable than others, and others are accepted by society as being common quirks, or in your case, perfectionism. How are you handling them at home?”

“His counselor says to not make a big deal and to redirect when possible. For the most part, it’s been clinginess, a little thumbsucking,” Victor explained.

“I’ve got more than a couple that we are trying to break from thumbsucking or fingersucking. Any time there is a new baby in the house, we see that in the classroom. Sometimes some babytalk, even. They aren’t ready not to be the center of their parents’ world even if they are excited for baby.”

“Oh...umm, I am pregnant,” Yuuri added on hearing that.
She smiled widely. “Well, congratulations, you two. I’m sure Yura is quite excited and we’ll hear all about it.”

Yuuri chuckled. “It’s been kind of a secret but you know how it is with five-year-olds. Everyone knows. I guess...it’s time to open up about it.”

“Of course,” she answered, her expression understanding with veiled concern. “I can discourage his open sharing if you’d prefer.”

“No...it’s just, I’m worried about what this event, this trauma...I don’t want the other students…” Yuuri sucked in a breath and Victor’s hand rubbing circles in his back staved off the sob but he nodded voicelessly. “The man...the one that broke into our house. He...he was my ex,” Yuuri’s voice shook as he talked, thankful for the patient educator. “I’m sorry...you probably don’t want to hear this.”

She smiled encouragingly. “I won’t pry. It’s not my nature and it’s not professional. I just want to make sure I can see to the needs of my student. You can tell me as much or as little as you think is important for me to know.”

Yuuri nodded. “Perhaps listen and if he needs to find a safe place to vent…”

“We have our own school psychologist. I can suggest he take a note to him and give him a chance to talk if he needs to. He’s a very friendly omega and will call you if there are any concerns. With your permission, I can give him a heads up.”

Yuuri let out a breath, “That would be...wonderful. Thank you.”

Victor led Yuuri out as the school bell went off, the doors opening to admit the students. Yuuri glanced back when he heard his name and smiled as he spotted Mila. “I’ll see you after school. Bring your skates.”

Normal. That’s what he wanted. Things to return to the normal he’d established. Leaning on Victor, he released a shaky sigh. His mate hugged him, loaning him his strength. Some days were harder than others.
Abramovich sat across from Yuuri, his expression warm. “So how was Japan?”

Yuuri smiled, happy to be able to speak about something positive for a change. “Good. I finally told...my mother. About the baby, that is. I think it helped me settle some things with my family. I wasn’t ready when I was there before, you know. I was still there even though I had escaped.”

“And now you are back home. How is that going?”

Yuuri shrugged. “I went up there. That room...it feels full of ghosts. I think Yura feels the same. He doesn’t like to go upstairs without one of us with him.”

“It takes awhile to deal with the trauma of a break in on any level. Some are unable to move past it, never feeling safe. There’s a sense of betrayal that some people can’t get past. Their home, which they always considered their safe place to retreat to, was violated. They end up selling their home and moving but that sense of not feeling safe, if it’s not dealt with, will follow them.”

Yuuri’s eyes went up to the ceiling, tracing a beam of light and watching the dust motes dance in the air. “I...don’t feel unsafe. I mean, a little...but he’s in jail. It’s more, the memories. And more and more keep coming back. Things he did to me before. I wonder if I’ll ever make peace with my past.”

“Sometimes we simply have to accept them. Acknowledge they happened and let them go.”

“With some of the things I can do that. Others...seem determined to chase after me.” He was quiet for a moment before whispering, “He took pictures. He...sold me. Not me personally, but things associated to me, licensing things I would never consider. We’ve uncovered things. I don’t know how to undo it all.”

The doctor sat quietly, watching his patient, “And if you can’t?”

Yuuri shrugged, “I...guess I’ll fix the things I can and just have to accept what remains. It makes me angry but...you know, once things are out there, you can’t always take them back.”
“Everyone has a past and it haunts us from time to time. The point is to not let it control us, to not let it take more from us. You seem determined not to allow that. I think that trip home did do you some good.”

Yuuri sat up straighter in the chair, “I feel...stronger. I still break down but then the tears go away and I can think through to the next step. I can put it in perspective. I don’t want him to control me so I don’t let him. I have a family I love, a home. I just need...to face those rooms. That feels like my greatest obstacles.”

Abramovich studied the man looking for anything withheld. “Do you think you need to drop back your visits?”

“Maybe...can we try twice a week? At least until I’ve dealt with the ghosts in the house.”

“I want you to work on entering that room. Once a week. You don’t have to stay. You might just do a small chore. Dust a surface, raise a window and air it out. The more you visit it, the less power it will have over you.”

Yuuri nodded slowly, I can do that. “I want to get better.”

“You are getting better. This is just another obstacle.”

“And the white room?”

Abramovich paused, taking in the man sitting across from him. “You will one day face that room as well. Let’s get you through this one.”

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Yuuri sat across from Phichit, the booth tucked away in the corner providing a bit of privacy and security while he and his friend talked in Japanese, discussing what the other omega found. “There are pictures and I can and have removed a number of them. It takes awhile and I can’t guarantee that I have removed all of them. The products, though, those licenses are being revoked one by one. For the most part, it took a letter from Chris, an email, a phone call. Most didn’t want to be entangled in a lawsuit. It costs money to withdraw product but it would cost more to pay a lawsuit.”
However, there was another interesting turn of events. “So digging through your finances, I’ve uncovered some things you may be unaware of.”

Yuuri felt his stomach drop but at this point, it was just one more thing. “Okay...so what now?”

Phichit pulled out his ipad and opened up a spreadsheet. “So this is what I’m finding. These assets were hidden into shell corporations listing you as the sole owner.”

“Me?” Yuuri squeaked, he wasn’t sure how to feel.

“Yes.” Phichit smiled. “Shuji thought by hiding his assets under your name, they’d never be linked to him. What he failed to do was reorganize them under another name when he sent you packing.”

Slowly pieces were coming together in his head, “What does that mean?”

Phichit grinned widely, “In essence, you own practically all of his assets. The house, the properties, all the licenses, his car, everything except his private banking account which has surprisingly little in it. He’s penniless. So everything he profited off of your name and reinvested comes back to you.”

Yuuri blinked, setting his fork down. “Wait. What? So...I get all of his money?”

“No, you get all your money. It was off of you that these profits were made. He figured you never would find out and probably thought he could continue business as usual.”

“And he probably could until I saw that room,” Yuuri mused.

Phichit shook his head. “Not necessarily. Victor has some very astute business managers. Someone would have located your interests as they prepared Victor’s tax statements. Shuji is smart but not as smart as he thinks.”
“So...what do I do with this?” He spread his hands to indicate all of this.

Phichit shrugged. “Whatever you want. There are some legal issues to some of them, Shuji wasn’t honest in many aspects, but there’s nothing that can’t be cleaned up quickly. I’m going to have Chris create legal documents allowing you to dissolve the ones that we think you should dump immediately and we can talk about the ones that you may want to keep.”

Yuuri blinked for a moment. “I...own the house with the white room.”

Phichit felt himself go cold, “You do. It’s locked down as a crime scene but once it’s released, you decide what happens to it.”

Yuuri inhaled a few times, working through his feelings. “So I can demolish it.”

Phichit nodded slowly, watching his friend’s eyes to make sure he was thinking clearly, “If you choose.”

Yuuri thought about it. “I think...I need to face that monster first but then...demolishing it myself would mean it has no more power over me.”

“I’ll carry the sledgehammer for you,” Phichit offered, a slow smile spreading over his features.

Yuuri laughed giddily. “I don’t know what I want to do with the rest, but this...this I can destroy. I can break down the final walls he has around my life.”

“Literally. I’ll make sure Chris knows your wishes. He’ll convey it to the city and they can let you know when it’s released.”

“I can’t believe this.” Yuuri chuckled at the thought of tearing that house...that prison to pieces. Maybe he could sell off the nice new house Shuji had bought for himself. He might end up with enough to pay for college. “So what does this mean...how much do I actually have?”

Phichit flipped the tab and showed Yuuri the grand total. “It comes to approximately 2.5 million American dollars.” He could see Yuuri doing quick conversions in his head with wide eyes.
Yuuri’s fork with his chicken dropped to the plate, the omega gaped. “I don’t know...what to do with all of that. I didn’t know. He always seemed to have so much. I never thought it was that much.”

Phichit smirked, “It’s not so much as he’d lead someone to believe but it’s enough. It’s...freedom.”

Yuuri huffed a laugh at that. “Ironic. Freedom from my years of imprisonment.”

“It’s yours. You get to decide.”

“And what if I don’t want it,” he added bitterly.

“Then you can decide how it’s destroyed,” Phichit suggested.

Yuuri kind of liked that thought. Destroying all that Shuji owned, leaving him poor. He didn’t even feel bad about it. “Let me think about it.”

“Think about it. Talk it over with Victor, with Chris, with me even...but you get to decide this.”

Phichit drove Yuuri to pick up his son at school. As they pulled up, he saw Yura standing beside his teacher and had a knot in his stomach. What if my baby had a bad day? They had had enough bad days.

He got out and walked up the steps, kneeling before his son. “How was your day?”

Yura shrugged. “Can I go sit with Peach?”

Yuuri glanced up towards the teacher and then nodded hesitantly. “Sure. I’ll be there in a minute.” As the little imp trotted off, he stood up to meet the teacher’s eyes. “Is this something
“Just for a moment if you don’t mind,” she answered, but her expression was neutral, warm even. Inside, they ducked into a conference room near the front door and she shut it. “It’s nothing bad,” she assured him and Yuuri tried to relax but really, he was still on edge. “I wanted to let you know about Yura’s day. Normally, he is open and outgoing. He plays with other kids. He has a wonderful imagination and invents complex stories to go with their pretend. But today...his stories became a little dark. The other kids started shying away from him and I think it hurt his feelings. This led to him acting out aggressively. He pushed another little boy down and stomped off in tears.”

Yuuri deflated thinking of how his son was hurting and unable to articulate it. “Oh, dear...he said he wasn’t ready.”

She shook her head. “I don’t think it’s a matter of being ready. This is something we go through when there is upset in the home...and you’ve been very open and thankfully gave me a heads up so I can keep an eye out. He spent the rest of the day close to me after a short period in time out.”

Yuuri nodded slowly, then remembered, “And the little boy?”

She waved it off, “Perfectly fine. I’ve called the parent and explained that they were frustrated in one another and that Yura was handled. No one was hurt.”

“You don’t get paid enough for what you do.” He breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank you for looking out for my Yura.”

“Not a problem. He says he sees his counselor tomorrow. Perhaps something to bring up. I’m more concerned about the dark stories. Maybe they can provide me with some strategies to redirect that behavior. We all need an outlet...but kids can be cruel with any perceived difference.”

“I hate that but I know what you mean. I was a quiet kid and that led to me being bullied.”

“One thing we know...Yura won’t be bullied.” She smiled, her eyes dancing. “He will defend others from them, though...so that will give him some sympathetic friends. Thank you for including me in the loop and let me know what I can do to help.”
“Thank you. I hope you have a good rest of your day.”

In the car, Yura sulked until Yuuri entered. He looked up from his carseat, keeping his chin in a pout. “Am I in trouble?”

“We will talk about what happened and see if we can find some better solutions,” Yuuri suggested. “Your teacher said you accepted her punishment without any sass so let’s see if we can move forward without pushing our classmates.”

“Kay,” he puffed.

Yuuri sighed, turning to face forward and glanced down as his friend squeezed his hand. “I guess...this is parenting,” he murmured in Japanese.

“Good and the bad,” Phichit answered back.

“And the ugly,” Yuuri snorted. He heard a snort from the backseat and knew the little boy felt left out, returning to their common language. “Do you think you can get along with your rinkmates?”

“Probably,” he huffed.

“Good. I’d hate for Zaina to get better than you because you aren’t allowed to skate.”

Yura sucked on his bottom lip for a moment, “Are you going to tell Papa?”

“I have to tell your papa...why don’t you make sure I don’t need to tell him more,” he suggested.

Yura gave a long-suffering sigh. “I guess.”
Yuuri was happy to have ice under his feet. His little puddleducks were excited to see him. Most were just coming off of break and didn’t know Yuuri had been away. Not really. He did introduce his friend and some of them stared in awe at the retired figure skater. “Sometimes I won’t be able to teach you,” he explained. “So Phichit will be helping out on those days.”

“Why, Teacher?” one of the smaller children asked.

Yuuri sighed, now or never...it is time. “Because I’m going to have a baby and some days I need to focus on taking care of me and baby.”

Small gasps and then hugs. One kid patted Yura on the back. “I have a new baby sister.” Yuuri snorted at the condolences offered to his son. He then clapped his hands and whistled, calling them back in and running them through their fundamental exercises.

As they left, there were a number of hugs and finally, he walked Yura to his father’s office. The little boy clung to him, scared. Although Yuuri didn’t punish him, it didn’t mean his papa wouldn’t.

As they entered, Victor was finishing up a call. Yuuri sat the little boy next to him on the sofa, bringing his own legs up into a pretzel. The little boy imitated the action, leaning his head back and rubbing it against the couch. He looked bored. Annoyed and bored, to be exact. Yuuri rolled his eyes. Finally Victor hung up and took in the view. “So, what’s up?”

Yuuri started, “Just a little scuffle in school.”

“Lexi said I was bad!” Yura defended.

Victor looked from one to the other. “So let’s start from the beginning. Tell me what happened.”
“We were playing and we were monsters. I jumped out and scared Lexi and he got mad.”

Victor listened patiently and added, “Sometimes it’s not nice to scare people. They aren’t ready for the game. And maybe Lexi was having a bad day, did he know you were going to scare him? Why did you fight with him?”

“He said I was mean,” Yura cried out, big tears falling from his eyes. “I’m not mean.” He kicked his foot against the couch, crossing his arms and drawing up inside himself.

“No, you are not mean...but if we don’t think about how others feel, we can be inconsiderate and that can be mistaken for mean. Maybe we can work on that,” Victor suggested. “Was there a consequence?” He looked from Yura to Yuuri who answered.

“His teacher said he was given a time out for his behavior. She called the other kid’s parents and explained briefly what happened but no one was hurt.”

“I had to stay with teacher the rest of the day. I missed second recess.” Yura sulked openly.

“Well, that doesn’t sound so bad,” Victor suggested.

Yura shrugged. “I wanted to sit with Zaina.”

“Maybe you can tomorrow,” Victor soothed. “As for the other little boy, maybe you can draw a picture to apologize for pushing him.”

Yura felt nothing but outrage at this, “But he called me mean!”

“I know...but you are only responsible for your own behavior.” Victor reached into a drawer in his desk...the Yura drawer...and pulled out some crayons and paper. “I know we had a hard few weeks, zaychik , but we don’t know...that boy may be having a hard time, too.”

“He is?” Yura’s tantrum came to a sudden halt, as if a light dawned.
Victor smiled, if his son was listening he was learning. “We don’t know…but let’s be generous. Sometimes a bit of forgiveness and kindness goes a long way.”

“Okay.” Yura took the paper and began drawing.

Victor came to bed after reading for awhile and found Yura and Yuuri curled up, a ballerina tiger and a ballerina bunny squished between them. For now, they would have a little one between them. He kissed the little mop of yellow hair as he stretched out behind him. One day you will feel safe enough to go back upstairs. He’d spent the evening fetching things for the little boy who was convinced there were monsters in his closet.

The next day, Yura ran up the steps of school and stopped in front of Lexi. “I drew you a picture. I’m sorry for scaring you. Can we still be friends?”

The little boy with dark hair hugged himself. “It’s okay. Monsters scare me.”

Yura nodded empathetically, “They scare me, too. So I thought that if I was a monster I could scare them away.”

Lexi took the paper looking at it, “Really? Does that work?”

Yura shrugged. “Sometimes. I can show you.”

They ran off hand in hand towards the playground to wait for the bell to ring. Yuuri watched from the curb. His little boy was going to be okay…but he worried about the monsters that shadowed his heart.

The weekend was fast approaching with the short week and holiday. And Yuuri had to meet his in-laws. He turned back to the car, Victor waiting patiently knowing Yuuri had to be sure his little boy was safe, appreciating that he had to do this. As he climbed in, the alpha asked, “Are you
ready?"

“As ever…” They drove quietly and finally, he broached the subject. “Do you think your parents will like me?”

“They will love you...just as they love Yura, loved Yelena, and although he would disagree, love Nikolai.”

Yuuri studied his hands as Victor drove through traffic, “But your father and Nikolai…”

“Have some hurt feelings but...it will do them some good to face them. Nikolai needs his best friend as does my father.”
Chapter Summary

So...it's a family gathering. Not very Christmasy but it basically is their Christmas.

Chapter Notes

I can't wait to hear the comments! ;)

Thank you, BluSkates, for the edits!

Ch. 58: Meet the Nikiforovs

In a cold panic, Yuuri’s hand tightened on Yura’s as they stood before the door of the large and imposing house. No, I grew up in a house, we live in a house. This is a mansion...or maybe even a castle? His grip became too much and soon the little boy twisted out of his hold, shaking his hand to restore circulation and tugging at the little necktie. It was January 7 and Yuuri wasn’t sure about the family celebrations. He glanced over at Nikolai and saw that he was equally uncomfortable. Victor’s hand settled on the curve of his back and guided him in as the door opened, greeting the butler warmly in Russian. Yuuri caught part of it but they spoke more quickly than the omega could grasp. He turned wide eyes to study the rich fixtures and paintings, double staircases sweeping up either side of the foyer. As the servant continued into the living space peaking through between the stairs, he jerked on Victor’s sleeve. “You didn’t tell me your parents were like royalty rich,” he hissed between his teeth.

Victor chuckled and led him on into the space, following the servant’s exit. “Don’t be ridiculous. Royals aren’t that wealthy.” He paused, then turned to Yuuri, “Yuuri, this is Russia. We killed all the royals generations ago.”

Yuuri turned towards Victor, eyes wide with disbelief. Victor smiled his golden boy smile (it was fake and Yuuri knew it), gliding into the sitting area full of lovely and decidedly uncomfortable furniture that looked like reupholstered antiques. Several family members were lounging casually as they entered. Well, lounging casually for Russians, which meant backs straighter than iron rods and limbs locked in position. Yuuri gulped audibly noticing the rigidity of the scene, as if it were laid out in a horror movie.

“Wine, sir?”
The omega jumped a little, the voice from his side startling him back to reality and not the Russian version of *Get Out*. “Sorry, what?”

“No thank you. We’ll have Perrier.” Victor filled in wonderfully, sending the butler in retreat.

Yuuri breathed a thank you under his breath, but wasn’t spared for long.

“Since when do you turn down a drink, Son?” Andrei greeted, coming forward to lead in the introductions. Yuuri turned, brown eyes, wide and then dropping shyly. “This is him? Your omega?”

“My *mate*, Papa.” Victor’s voice held the edge of annoyance, but he kept himself calm. “Yuuri, this is Andrei Nikiforov, my father. Papa, my Yuuri. Yuuri Katsuki,”

Yura stepped forward grabbing Yuuri’s spare hand and added with force, “*Our* Yuuri.” Yuuri appreciated the gesture and found strength in the little boy’s claim.

Victoria’s overly-perfect smile softened into his natural one as he looked down at his son. “You are correct, my son. *Our* Yuuri.”

“H-hello,” Yuuri managed, bowing and then holding out his hand.

The elder Nikiforov smirked and took the offered hand. Yuuri, always one to rise when he is challenged, responded with a confident squeeze. Andrei’s eyes met his, and a bit of the demeanor defrosted instantly.

Softening his voice, he murmured, “We heard about what you did to protect our little Yura. I admire and respect someone who can keep their head together in danger.”

“It was...instinct. I was protecting my child,” Yuuri argued, feeling inadequate with the praise. *I didn’t keep it together. I fell apart and had to be tricked out of hiding.* All of these thoughts remained quiet, though. He felt fraudulent, not quite what he was built up to be...but then Andrei continued, almost as if he heard those doubts, his voice reassuring and Yuuri spied a bit of Victor in the sire.
“You did far more than something just out of instinct. You held yourself together long enough to get him to safety. You then ensured he remained close until the threat was gone, without concern for yourself. That’s not instinct, that’s character. Good work,” Andrei persisted, clapping Yuuri on his shoulder, and guiding him into the family mix. Yuuri glanced back wide eyed towards his mate but Victor’s smile had lost its false edge as he watched his father ease Yuuri’s way into the family. “This is Victor’s new mate, Yuuri Katsuki.” And at that point, Yuuri was surrounded, meeting different aunts and uncles and it was at this point Victor noticed his mother wasn’t present. He stepped forward and leaned close to his father to murmur his concern. “Your mother is upstairs. She’s not...been well,” he stated quietly. “It might be good for you to take Yura to see her and introduce your mate.”

Victor felt the air spill from his lungs, as if he had been punched. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

His father guided him away from the crowd and into a more private space. “You were dealing with everything, helping your mate, your son, getting the house safe again...she...declined quickly. Time isn’t a friend. I’m...I don’t know…” He closed his eyes and Victor watched his father’s strength sag, tears at the corners of his eyes. “She...didn’t want anyone to know and she was fighting so well but...it’s cancer, son.”

Victor’s eyes turned towards the stairs, his face broken. He reached out and squeezed his father’s arm. “I...I need to see her.”

From across the room Yuuri turned to catch Victor’s eyes, his brow wrinkling. His mate could see his pain. As the elder Nikiforov nodded, watching on, Victor step forward to gather his mate and son and lead them towards the stairs.

“What’s wrong?” Yuuri asked softly when Victor’s feet stilled at the foot of the stairs.

Victor drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly. “My m-mother...she...she has cancer. Sh-she didn’t want anyone to know.”

Yuuri’s hands cradled Victor’s face immediately, he touched his forehead to the taller man’s, letting him breathe through his sorrow. After making sure his mate was steady he looked down to Yura, watching the little boy’s eyes widening. Kneeling down before the little boy, he gathered him to his heart before the little boy shook with tears, falling apart in his arms. “I know, baby, I know...let it out.” His hand ran up and down Yura’s back.
The alpha watched frozen but thankful his mate could see to his son when Victor could not. He could feel Nikolai’s eyes on him, standing quietly in the corner talking to a few old acquaintances. Olga would know by now, visiting with her sister in the kitchen. Swallowing, the alpha put his hand on the stair rail. “I-I need to go see her. She wants...to meet you.”

Yuuri looked up and held his eyes before nodding, his expression grim and determined. “Then let’s meet her.” He led them up the stairs, a firm hand on Yura’s. As they reached the landing, he turned towards Victor for direction. Victor couldn’t process words but motioned toward his parents’ room.

Yuuri knocked at the door and heard a warm invite into the space. The family found the matriarch lounging in a sitting area. Victor surged forward and pressed a kiss onto her cheek. She huffed at him.

“No, much fuss.”

“Mama...Papa told me…” Victor’s voice came out watery and soft.

She waved off his words reaching for her grandson. The little boy crawled into her arms. The little boy sniffed and then said, “You don’t look sick.”

She smiled. “Just a little tired, love,” she answered. Turning to Yuuri, she reached out a hand in his direction. “You must be Vitya’s Yuuri,” she greeted.

“Yes, ma’am,” he responded taking her hand. He could feel stubborn strength but also the frailness in her touch. She was trying to hide it. Yura curled into her side. He knew this was bad. The boy watched his mother waste away from the same illness. “Thank you for seeing us.”

She smiled and Yuuri could see the tiredness in her eyes. “Oh, hush with the ma’am. You may call me Vasilisa or some motherly affectation. I was downstairs but my husband made me come up and rest. I’ll be back down later.”

It felt like a lie, or maybe a half promise. Yuuri accepted it, “Of course, M-mama.” He watched her smile, moving back so Victor could come forward once more. His mate looked so small as he sank to his knees next to his mother.
“You should have told me, Mama,” he murmured.

“And what would you do?” She ran her thin fingers through his silken hair, brushing strands from his forehead. “I don’t want you spending your time watching over me. I want you to live your life. Now tell me something wonderful in your life.” She peeked around to Yuuri and the omega had the feeling she knew. Yura looked back at his mama, the omega nodding, a gentle smile on his lips.

“I’m going to have a new baby brother or sister!” the little boy tumbled out excitedly.

Victor’s mother chuckled warmly and motioned Yuuri closer. “I thought you had that look about you. How long?”

“Twelve weeks. I’m due in the middle of July.”

She fanned herself for affect. “So hot! Still, they are coming into a happy family. My Vitya is a good father.”

Yuuri looked over at him and smiled. “I know.”

She turned back to her grandson, and murmured, “You should go down and play with your cousins.”

Yura sulked and pulled himself into her again, “They’re big and I’d rather stay here with you, Grandma.”

She smiled softly and then looked at the omega for help. Yuuri reached for the little boy. “Yura, will you help me? I can’t understand everybody, they talk so fast.”

Yura glanced at his grandmother who nodded her approval. “Okay.”

Yuuri watched both of his men lean forward to kiss her, and then he leaned forward to accept her
kiss on his cheek.

“You take care of my grandchildren,” she murmured.

Yuuri swallowed but nodded. “I’ll do my best.”

She squeezed his hand and then Yura was pulling his other hand. He waved and smiled as they left the room. They could hear the muffled voices down the stairs. Taking a deep breath, he headed down the stairs.

Victor remained at his mother’s side a bit longer. “Yuuri...he loves you both,” she observed.

“I never expected to fall so hard, so fast. I...closed myself off after Yelena.”

“You had someone to protect.”

Victor closed his eyes as he thought about his son. There had been initial questions about Kostya but nothing that truly identified the man to the boy. “I think...you need to know. Kostya...he and Yelena…”

“We know.” She silenced him with a smile. “That’s why your father stepped in to get him as far away as possible. He...was afraid of the two of you meeting.”

Victor swallowed, nodding as he took a deep breath and let it out. “Yura...knows that Yelena had a bad man before me. He doesn’t know much more. What if he finds out...that I...that I’m not…”

She sniffed at those words. “Think how quickly he came to love your Yuuri. The little boy is smart enough to know that love isn’t defined by bloodlines. You are the only father he knows...and Kostya, he stays far away. Your father made sure of that.”

Victor smiled at that thought. His father was a hard man at times but he would do a lot to protect
his family. “The military...they won’t keep him forever.”

“Kostya...he is no longer welcome at family gatherings. Your father made it seem like he was doing the bastard a favor, keeping the police from investigating him for abuse and other...criminal things. Still...I worry.”

“I can’t believe we are related. At least he’s stationed far away.” Khabarovsk may be on the eastern side of Russia but Victor knew a plane could diminish distance.

She placed a hand on his, “Your father and I love that boy dearly. We want to keep him safe as well. I wish...you and your father got on better.”

Victor smiled, shrugging. “It’s not that we dislike each other...we just see the world differently. I know you both care.”

She squeezed his hand. “Good.” Leaning back, she waved him out of the room. “You go now. See to your family. I’ll be down later.”

“Yes, Mama.” Victor leaned down to kiss her cheek. He could imagine how overwhelmed Yuuri would feel.

As it turned out, he didn’t need to worry. Nikolai had him talking to one of the aunts, Nadia, about ballet and Yuuri talked about studying under Minako Okukawa throughout his younger years. She fusses, stating she wanted her son to take ballet but her husband thought it wasn’t masculine enough.

Yuuri laughed at that misconception. “A number of people think that but I found the strength and grace very necessary as I grew through my awkward phase. Yura is now taking ballet.”

“Is Lilia teaching him?”

Yuuri shook his head. “I’ve been working with the younger students. Ballet and ice skating. It’s a
nice way for me to stay in touch with my past.”

Nadia looked him up and down thoughtfully. “It seems to have held on.”

Yuuri nodded, answering quietly, “Ballet was one of the things I was able to continue while...being held all of those years. It helped me to stay strong physically and mentally.”

She nodded with determination. “That settles it. I will have my Gavriil in ballet before the school year lets out.”

Yuuri shrugged. “If that’s what Gavriil wants, it’s good...but if he is interested in other things, it can also be good.”

She tapped her lip thoughtfully and Yuuri couldn’t help but note that it seemed to be a family affection. “Fair enough.” She spotted Victor entering the room and waved him over. “It appears your mate is rejoining us. Thank you for your insight, Yuuri.”

As she walked off, Victor slipped an arm around his shoulders. Yuuri leaned into that embrace and asked softly, “How are you?”

Victor rested his head into the black hair, “I can be brave for awhile. I have to. It’s the Nikiforov way.”

“When we are alone, I give you permission not to be brave,” Yuuri answered back.

Victor smiled gratefully. He then nodded towards Nikolai and Andrei. “They’re talking.”

Yuuri smiled at the old men, “It seems...they are dealing with a few demons and bonding over mutual love of our little kitten.”

“Father...he didn’t give Nikolai a chance to mourn. He thought the man would do better if he kept busy.” Victor lost himself in the memory of the two men, each hurting so much. “Nikolai crumpled.”
“I...can’t imagine. I don’t think I would hold it together.”

Victor wrapped Yuuri in his arms from behind and murmured, “I know I couldn’t.” Glancing towards the stairs, he added, “I’m going to miss her when she goes but he...he won’t know how to move forward.”

Yuuri patted the arms encircling him, “We will help as much as possible.”

“I hoped...I guess I knew you would say that.”

Yuuri turned in his arms and hugged him close, letting Victor draw strength from him for a change. Victor’s hands slid down his arms and then rested on the nearly invisible bulge of his stomach. “They’re only the size of a plum,” Yuuri muttered, an impish glance up towards the alpha.

“But we’ve made it twelve weeks,” Victor murmured.

Yuuri nodded, enjoying their little bubble while the party continued to flow around them. Yura had found some playmates. They were a little older, more like Otabek’s age, but they seemed friendly. “I met your brother.”

“Leonid? How...did he treat you?”

“He asked me if you were treating me well. I said yes.” Yuuri paused, thinking back to the quick conversation from only moments ago. “It was awkward. I don’t think he knew what to say.”

“He...is the one that introduced Yelena to Kostya. We fought about that...and I tried to warn Yelena. I tried so hard to get her away from him but she was always one to have to figure things out herself.”

Yuuri laughed bitterly. “I suppose we both have that in common. At least...we both found you.”
Victor sighed, resting his head on Yuuri’s. “So...do we tell them about the baby or not?”

Yuuri rolled his eyes, “Yura’s pretty much told everyone he’s met. I don’t think it’s a secret any longer.”

Victor chuckled. “Well...he’s five.”

Yuuri shrugged, a smile on his lips. “Perhaps it’s better. I’m...afraid but Yura forces the celebration.”

Victor looked up on his father’s approach and smiled as he handed Yuuri a Perrier. “Why are you keeping the new mama on his feet?” he chastised teasingly, before he tucked Yuuri’s arm into his elbow and led him away from Victor. The alpha watched on as his family all fell in love with his Yuuri. How could they not?
You are My Sunshine!

Chapter Summary

12 weeks! Yuuri is getting further along!

Chapter Notes

Oh, Yura gets to go to the ultrasound and more moves forward to making their home more welcoming.

Thank you, Blu, for the edits! I really appreciate them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 59: You Are My Sunshine

(Smut alert)

Yuuri held the excited little boy’s hand, the energy from the little blonde was infectious and Yuuri felt himself warming to the idea of the ultrasound. It was as if everything until this moment had been abstract, however, now they were on the cusp of little bean...lime becoming a very tangible reality. Brown eyes followed down to the glimmering green that met his. Yura was nearly bouncing on his toes as he waited to see his baby sibling for the first time. The little boy could had faced death, having lost his mother, but he was too young to understand Yuuri’s fear at losing this baby. The omega cast a worried gaze to his husband as he felt Victor’s arm cross around his shoulder. What if I lose them? he worried to Viktor the previous night. Yura is already so attached.

Victor calmly pointed out, we can’t protect his little heart from everything and I think it’s important for him to be a part of this.

It wasn’t as if they could back out or try to limit Yura’s engagement on the baby’s progress. Since learning that the little lime existed the boy had become an endless enthusiast, joyful at what he was convinced would be his baby sister. Yuuri smirked wondering if the little boy got this little psychic twinkle from his mother. The blonde had talked about what the baby would look, sound, and smell like. Now, he would have a grainy face to add to his excitement.
Once in the reception area, Yuuri checked in and soon they were called back. He smiled to himself as the receptionist, a fellow omega, directed all of her questions to Yuuri, practically ignoring Victor. He knew she wasn’t rude, it was important in this office to treat patients with dignity and respect. It was a first, visiting the doctor with Shuji had been awkward. He imagined it was what appliances felt like at the repair shop. Yura sat out in the hall with a nurse while they did the more private part of the checkup but Viktor stayed by his side, holding his hand through the exam. Yuuri still winced, uncomfortable with another’s hands on him even in a clinical sense but knowing this was necessary.

Then came the blood tests, measuring plasma protein-A and HCG, to help Dr. Romanova to predict the risk factors Yuuri would face. Once they finished that portion, the three followed the nurse and doctor to the ultrasound room. Viktor helped him up on the table. He pulled his shirt up and shivered at the cool coupling fluid spread over his tummy. Yura was fascinated by the entire process. Yuuri watched as the little green eyes darted over the equipment, listening intently as the nurses explained with smiles what they were doing and how it would help him see the baby. *I wonder if you will be a doctor or a nurse?*

As the fast swishy heartbeat filled the room, Yura’s eyes went wide. “That’s your new sibling’s heartbeat,” the tech explained. “Would you like to see them?”

Yura nodded excitedly and both parents chuckled while the tech smiled indulgently. Soon they located the baby and Yura giggled. “So tiny!”

“Three inches,” the tech confirmed.

The doctor hummed in agreement. “Good growth. Right on schedule.” The tech then took the other measurements the doctor wanted and printed out pictures of the baby, handing the first to Yura.

“Is it a girl?” Yura asked as he studied the printed picture.

“We won’t know until around 20 weeks...and we will only tell your parents if they want to know.”

Victor and Yuuri studied the grainy picture of their little lime, or according to Yuuri’s app, their little plum. They could see tiny spidery legs and arms, a bean shaped body. Yuuri felt soft and overwhelmed at the realness of all of this. “I think...I want to be surprised.” He looked over at the other two, wide brown eyes imploring. “Is that okay?”
Victor softened as he pressed a kiss into Yuuri’s hair. “Whatever you want, solnyshko. I love surprises.”

Yura studied the picture a little longer, it’s a girl, but they can be surprised if they want. He nodded dramatically. “They’ll be like a present.”

Yuuri laughed through tears. “Yes...very much so.”

One thing that didn’t make Yuuri happy was the light duty orders from his doctor. When he turned them in at the rink, he found his hours cut to three days. It was for good reason and entirely important, and that failed to ease Yuuri’s intense annoyance over it. Yuuri’s blood pressure was elevated and Dr. Romanova wanted him to take it easy. However, it was left to the bravery of the rink’s onstaff physician to inform Yuuri as Yakov immediately disappeared and Victor was too chicken. The rink doctor demanded he come in each work day for a blood pressure reading. Yakov, after Yuuri had simmered down, was constantly telling the omega to put his feet up.

“It’s like he’s the father,” Yuuri huffed at the overprotective older alpha.

Victor chuckled, Yakov had been that way his entire life, it was a shame he and Lilia had never managed to work children into their lives. He nuzzled into the black hair, hoping to distract his mate, “He doesn’t get the fringe benefits.”

Yuuri was having none of the joke. “I just want to do my job,” he whined.

“We made sure to keep your skaters. Lilia is going to take your ballet classes.” The alpha knew Yuuri would speak out his protests but in the end, the welfare of baby would overrule his upset.

Yuuri wasn’t happy but nodded. “Light duty...but still with something. I’m not going to just sleep away my day.”
Yuuri woke from his nap with Yura curled up next to him. The little boy had become more and more clingy since returning home and Yuuri worried. He understood. Dr. Abramovich said it was to be expected. Still, he couldn’t help but worry. The little defensive and lonely boy he met had melted into this sweet, loving, tenderhearted child. He loved the cuddles and closeness, but he knew that Yura would have to learn to pull away and develop relationships outside of his family to truly mature with his peers. His fingers smoothing out the blond floss, Yura’s nose wrinkling in response. The omega stretched before rolling away from him, finding his feet and leaving the room quietly. Olga smiled sympathetically at his rumpled form.

“I don’t think he’s slept in his own room since we moved back in.”

“Too much bad energy up there,” Olga surmised. Yuuri couldn’t disagree. She shivered and Yuuri noticed, everyone hated the upstairs. It would need to be exorcised at some point. “Have you thought about opening up the old nursery?”

Yuuri frowned, narrowing his eyes. “Nursery? What old nursery?” How many hidden rooms does this house have? Seriously, is this Hogwarts?

She chuckled warmly and led him back through the bedroom and to the opposite side. There, amongst the paneled walls, Yuuri saw the door blending in until needed. Yup, this is Hogwarts. Olga must have sensed his surprise because she filled in the explanation. “This is one of St. Petersburg’s oldest homes. After the revolution, and even before it, many wealthy families had hidden rooms for their wealth, and sometimes their safety. The homes are sold to families with incorrect or incomplete blueprints. It’s like rooms appear as they are required,” the older omega commented. With a turn of the knob, Yuuri followed her in, sneezing upon entry. It was dusty and it needed some care but as Yuuri looked around, his eyes rested on things he would need for the baby.

“I’ll get that old man in here to look things over and make sure everything is sound, but I can tell by looking that most of this is good, solid furniture.” Olga fretted before determining, “A good cleaning, though, would do this room a world of good.”

Large windows to the back of the room and high in the wall illuminated the room. The room was full of sunshine and Yuuri could already picture it painted yellow. “Sunflowers,” he whispered even as his fingers lightly danced down the old tattered curtains.

“When Victor Andreivich was a baby, he stayed here. I think the big house was going through some renovations and the family moved into town. Sunflowers and bunny rabbits. That was the theme.” She chuckled and added, “I guess the bunny rabbits passed onto the boy.”
Yuuri had moved on into the room finding a twin bed. “Yura could sleep here until he was ready to move back upstairs.” *It would be a good transition, he’s not far but still separate.*

Olga smiled from the doorway, noticing how comfortable the man was in this room. “So...it’s decided?”

Yuuri nodded. “I’m going to call Phichit and Katya...and maybe Mehar. I wonder if Rohan would like to help.” He took pictures of the room and sent a group text.

**Yuuri/ Let’s make a nursery.**

Soon they were all chiming in, words going back and forth with ideas. Yuuri knew he wanted yellow. This baby would know none of the storms that came before them. Only sunshine. He left the room humming *You Are My Sunshine* even as his little boy roused from his nap.

Yura peeked into the room then tripped after Yuuri. “Is that room for the baby?”

“Mmmhmmmm,” Yuuri hummed happily. “But before baby arrives I was thinking you could spend some nights here. Perhaps it can be a space for you when things are too scary upstairs. What do you think?”

Yura clearly loved the idea, “Can I bring my bunnies down?”

Yuuri move the twin bed aside and was pushing the crib to the wall, making piles of what he intended to keep versus what he would move to storage. “Yes!”

“And my blanket?” Yura spotted a small tea table and pushed it over the to keep pile following his mother’s lead.

“Mmmhmm,” Yuuri agreed.

“And my clothes?” He stood next to the dresser, which also served as a changing table.
Yuuri paused on that because Yura had a lot of things upstairs. “Let’s figure out what is most important. But first...we need to clean and change out that mattress. Do you think you can find Grandpa?”

Yura nodded and skipped across the hall and into the apartment, out the other end, into the shop. Yuuri wasn’t far behind, although stepping cautiously, knocking and calling out, “Nikolai?”

They found him at the workbench carving out a cabinet door.

“What’s that for?” Yura asked curiously.

“It lets me lock away some things I want to keep safe,” he answered.

Yuuri heard the uncharacteristic vagueness in his voice, “What kind of things?”

Nikolai brushed off the question, keeping his voice light to not startled the other two. “Well, I want to make sure no one can cut the power to the alarm system. So I’m giving it a safe place.”

“So the bad man can’t come!” Yura determined.

“Exactly.” He looked up at Yuuri with a look of resolve in those wrinkled eyes. “I need to make sure my family is safe.”

Yuuri nodded with understanding. It was diligent...and perhaps hypervigilant. Yuuri wanted to give him a positive focus. *If this is how he mends then he needs to do it.* “I thought...maybe you could help me with another project.”

The old man grunted. “What do you have in mind?”

“Oh, Olga showed me the old nursery. I would like to use the crib and some other furnishings if they are safe. They were Vitya’s...sooo…”

Nikola nodded approvingly, “Old things are best. Newer items are meant to be discarded but if
they are good they will last. I can look them over. They can probably use a good cleaning up and a tightening of the joints. And I know where Yura’s things were stored if something doesn’t work out.”

Yuuri nodded. “The whole room needs some care. And...I’d like to keep the little bed in there for Yura. He doesn’t like to sleep upstairs since...since...it happened.”

The old man held his eyes while Yuuri fought for words to describe that night, understanding when he faltered. “I think we can figure something out. Why don’t you show me what we have to work with.”

As they walked back, Yuuri continued talking about what he wants. “Sunflowers and sunshine and happy things. I want so much happiness.”

Behind him Nikolai grunted an assent. “We can paint the room and the furniture easily enough. Olga can probably help you work out the bedding and other things.”

“We probably need new mattresses,” Yuuri considered as he continued to think through the process, leading Nikolai into the space.

The old man looked around thoughtfully. “I’m surprised Yelena didn’t use this room.”

“Well, she and Vitya…” Yuuri stammered a little embarrassed.

Fortunately Nikolai’s laugh saved him, “I know they never slept together. But we both know there are many types of love.”

Yuuri smiled, the older man was absolutely right. They didn’t share a room long although there was a lot of love between them. They just loved each other differently.

Nikolai surveyed the pile Yuuri wasn’t interested in, making a mental note of what should be scrapped and what could be repurposed. “Perhaps we can first throw out these rotten things and I can take the pieces back to my workshop and check their joints.”
Victor came home to Yura singing *You Are My Sunshine* at the top of his longs having finally gotten the words out of Yuuri. In the bedroom, he discovered a long forgotten door open, Yuuri and Olga in the process of cleaning.

“I thought Yakov sent you home to rest,” he eyed critically, leaning against the door facing.

“And I did,” Yuuri answered, looking over his shoulder. “Then Olga showed me this room and we’re reclaiming it for a nursery.”

“I hope you don’t plan to do all the work yourself,” Victor pressed, a little worried as Yuuri jerked down some old wallpaper from the wall.

“I’m not.” Yuuri answered in a tone that let Victor know he would stop fretting or face a very annoyed omega. “Olga and I are cleaning. Nikolai is looking over the furniture and helping me to get new mattresses.”

“Mattresses?” Victor’s eyebrow arched at the pluralization.

“I want to keep a little twin bed down here for Yura...a safe place until he’s ready to go back upstairs.”

Victor smiled at his Yuuri’s thoughtfulness. “I think...that’s a great idea. How can I help?”

Yuuri pulled the last of the stubborn wallpaper off the opposite wall from the door. The floor was littered with scraps and he swept them into a pile. “Nikolai is in the shop. I’m thinking yellow for the color. Sunflowers. Sunshine. I want...a happy space.”

“And so it shall be.”
Over the next week, the room was transformed. Yellow and white stripes on the wall with the help of Katya and Mahar who joked that they should open a business. The two women were masters at sanding and painting a wall. Rohan joined Victor and Nikolai and painted the furniture clean and white. Rohan cleaned and stained the floor, the new, lighter color shone against the streaks of light pouring in. Katya showed her true gift for art by painting a mural on the glass of the east-facing window so that each time the morning sun shone into the room sunflowers glowed. The twin that went with the crib was repaired and painted, made ready for Yura. The bedding had a gray and white tiled pattern with a soft white baby blanket added to the top. Victor’s mother had found her son’s crocheted blanket made by his grandmother, having it cleaned and sent to them. Chalk art was hung on the wall. Victor insisted on a chandelier much to Yuuri’s chagrin. Phichit found fabric and had curtains, a blanket, a pillow for the chair, and a few other accessories to add the sunflower theme to the room.

The twin was placed against a solid grey wall with bees and flowers rotating above it. Yura’s sheets matched the baby’s sheets but he brought his own blanket downstairs. A shelf sat at the end of the bed to give him a place to bring his most precious things. Books filled the lower two shelves, Yura picking out his favorites. Bunnies and tigers crowded into the upper shelves. A small reading lamp sat on a white nightstand beside the bed. They even found a place for Yura’s freshly painted white table and chairs. The little boy had bins under the bed to keep the most important things and his underwear (which Yuuri argued was important but Yura did not necessarily agree since he learned about going commando) and they hung his in season clothes on the lower rod in the closet. It was a temporary arrangement but Yuuri felt something settle inside him.

Yura finally deemed the room acceptable when Beka gave him the thumbs up, Zaina begging for a sleepover. Yuuri laughed and said, “Give me a week or two then maybe we can set something up.”

As Yuuri tucked Yura into a bed of his own that night, Victor reading softly from his seated position on the white faux fur rug on the floor, he glanced over at his lover with promise in his eyes. Their own bed...alone.

A soft lullaby and Yuuri turned on the projector night light, soft classical music playing quietly in the background while stars danced across the ceiling.

Yuuri slipped through the door, closing it softly to not wake the sleeping child. Victor quickly had him in his arms as soon as he turned around, kisses soft and tender. “Is this okay?” he whispered as they parted a moment.

Yuuri nodded, his fingers tracing along the light stubble on his chin. “I need you. I have for a
while but Yura came first.” They both understood what that meant. They had only been home for a few days and Yura had slept between them every night.

Victor led Yuuri to their bed, Yuuri leaving his robe somewhere along the way. The t-shirt slipped over his head as Victor turned towards him and soon Victor’s hand was sliding between the elastic and skin of the omega’s sleep short, chuckling. “I guess Yura isn’t the only one going commando these days.”

“I told him to put his underwear on!” Yuuri argued with defeat in his voice.

Victor grinned and shrugged. “Like mother, like son.”

Leaning into Victor, he sought his lips for a kiss feeling hands knead into the globes of his ass. “I didn’t want too many barriers between us tonight,” Yuuri whispered as he took a breath.

A low growl slipped from Victor at the promise of those words. He eased those shorts over Yuuri’s hips and let them fall to the floor. Warm laughter bubbled out of him as he felt Yuuri’s insistent hands pushing his own pajamas out of the way. Then Yuuri pushed him back on the bed climbing on top of him, settling into his lap.

“Oh, it’s like this,” Victor teased, his fingers sliding down Yuuri’s back, feeling those hips grinding into him.

“I need it like this,” Yuuri breathed and Victor knew. Yuuri didn’t want to risk feeling pinned down. Yuuri had nights like that.

The alpha nodded, taking Yuuri as he came, meeting him halfway. “Whatever you need, lyubov moya. Whatever you need.” Victor let Yuuri push him back into the pillows and watched as he reached for the top drawer of the nightstand. The alpha took the lube from his lover’s hand and offered, “Allow me.”

Yuuri nodded, shifting around and as the omega presented his ass, Victor groaned at the perfection that was Yuuri, his fingers finding Yuuri’s entrance and easing in slowly. Yuuri’s slick was slow to build and Victor knew part of it was nerves, part of it was anxiety and worry about how the attack continued to affect him, residual memories of abuse, part of it was simply the knowledge of a little boy sleeping just beyond that door. But the alpha found Yuuri’s magic spot and felt the omega pushing back against that hand, soft desperate noises slipping from his lips.
Finally satisfied Yuuri wouldn’t hurt himself, he gave Yuuri a light tap on the ass getting a sharp look from his lover as the alpha settled back into the pillows. He reached for Yuuri and the omega found his way back into Victor’s lap. But now Yuuri had had time to think and Victor could see the uncertainty in his expression.

“It’s just me. Take your time, love. I’m ready when you’re ready,” he encouraged, hands sliding up and down Yuuri’s thighs and then around his hips only to work their way back again. He continued the repetitive motion, grounding Yuuri and then he felt Yuuri begin to shift, picking up the rhythm of Victor’s touch, leaning forward with a rocking motion to kiss Victor’s lips. Victor allowed his hands to continue those motions up Yuuri’s back keeping the rhythm.

Yuuri reached between his legs, suddenly feeling clumsy with his own hands and Victor could see the omega become upset, his scent starting to sour in his anxiety. “Can I help?” he whispered, sliding his hand down Yuuri’s spine and teasing the cleft of his ass.

Yuuri nodded and Victor hated the tears he saw shining in those eyes. Pushing up, he hugged Yuuri as he gently guided himself into place, holding his length still while those hips slowly sank down onto him.

Victor didn’t expect Yuuri to be wild that night. He could taste the anxiety in the air. He also knew Yuuri’s determination. The omega began rocking their bodies together, stretched out over Victor’s chest as the alpha laid back. It was two bodies reminding one another they were there for the other, reconnecting, breaths answering breaths, kisses answering kisses.

It was what Yuuri needed. That lifeline connecting to Victor, making sure his alpha still wanted him, making sure he still belonged to Victor. And Victor...he could never let Yuuri go. The house had shaken something in Yuuri, this touch pulled them back together just as much as the nursery.

They found release slow and easy like the sex, resting in one another, holding one another, remaining connected until nature pulled them apart. Then Victor eased Yuuri back, reaching for a wet wipe to clean up his lover, not wanting to leave him for a moment.


Yuuri groaned. “Give me the damn shorts and don’t tell Yura I’m sleeping commando.”
Victor grinned, hooking the shorts off the floor along with his own underwear. “Your secret is safe with me.”

Finally Yuuri nuzzled into Victor, breathing in his scent before he turned to press his back into Victor’s chest, pulling Victor’s hand to rest on his tummy. Yuuri didn’t always feel he could keep baby safe but he believed in Victor. And he wanted this. So very much.

“Sleep tight, solnyshko ,” Victor whispered as Yuuri settled into his arms. *May you dream of only sunshine and sunflowers and happy things.*

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**NOTES:**

Sources on 12 week gestation (I thought I’d better double check...it’s been over 25 years since I had my own).

[https://www.babylist.com/hello-baby/12-week-ultrasound](https://www.babylist.com/hello-baby/12-week-ultrasound)


**Chapter End Notes**

Yuuri’s developing several superstitions regarding pregnancy after his losses. How many have you picked out so far?
Monsters in the Closets

Chapter Summary

Important talks take place for Yura's recovery.

Chapter Notes

It's been busy but I hope you all are enjoying the different stories that have been developed. I've been doing "The Skater and the YouTube Star" in installments rather than chapters. I'm trying to get at least three done a week. They are quick writes. Then at least two of my regulars. (Sometimes I only get one out of my regulars.) And I've added an episodic story set in a maternity home. It won't be a weekly. Just something to burn off that "Call the Midwife" energy. If you haven't checked it out, Yuuri's a midwife. :)

As always, I greatly appreciate BluSkates for their edits.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 60: Monsters in the Closets

Yura sat with Zoya while the counselor worked with the little boy through some of his struggles. “So tell me about closets.”

Without looking up from his coloring, Yura shrugged. “You’re a grown up. You won’t believe me.”

Zoya smiled moving forward in the overstuffed chair. She pulled a purple stuffed cat into her lap, “Oh, I believe in at least six impossible things before breakfast.”

The crayon halted. Yura tilted his head. “Really?”

“Of course.” She smiled, sitting back happily aware that the little boy was learning to trust her. “Working with kids, we have to have wider brains. I bet your Yuuri is like that.”
His eyes lit up at the mention of his mother who seemed to have a limitless capacity to believe him, or at least to make him feel heard. He nodded. “Yuuri believes me when I tell him things.”

“That trust is very important.”

Yura glanced towards the door, his expression grave. “Do you have monsters in your closet?”

The doctor, a lifelong fan of Stephen King, grimaced and recalled one the scarier short stories of the author. A man, laying impossibly stiff on a couch, confessing the murder of his children all while staring at the closet door, waiting for the monster to spring out and claim him for last. She shuddered a little, reminding herself that children get a separate god, free from King’s universe. “Most people do...they just don’t see them for what they are,” Zoya confessed. “But sometimes the more we understand the monster, the less scary they are. It’s the not knowing that makes them so scary. So...what do you know?”

Yura picked up a new color, black, and began drawing a large lumpy shape with loops for fur. “He’s really big. And he tried to hurt Yuuri.” The blob morphed into something, long looping lines spread out with arms that reached out to grab and hurt. He then put the crayon down as he tried to work that out, scrunching his nose in concentration. “That...that wasn’t my monster.”

“It wasn’t?” Zoya leaned forward to offer more crayons, before tilting her head in interest.

That blond head shook in earnest. “No...Yuuri has his own monster. I just saw it. Kids see things that most grownups don’t see.”

“That’s so true,” she agreed as she watched Yura pick up another color. “So, are you scared of Yuuri’s monster?”

He resumed coloring, now on a new sheet of paper. A large cat started forming, black with green eyes. “Not really. He’s in jail. Yuuri said I was very brave and got him help.”

His counselor hummed thoughtfully, straightening up a stack of fresh papers while she waited for the little boy to finish his picture. Yura reached out and snagged another paper. “But you’re still afraid to sleep in your room. Is there...another monster?”

Yura shrugged, but he saw the expectant look in the counselor’s eyes. He knew he wouldn’t get
away with a mere deflection. “I don’t know what he looks like.” He began to draw a house and once more black figures appeared in the upstairs windows.

Zoya watched as the rooms down stairs had yellow streaks to represent light and warmth, a few of the windows upstairs were empty. But a few caught glimpses of a black figure, tall and gaunt, walking by, never in plain sight. *Why do monsters always know to do that, to hide in the corner of your vision?* “What do you know?”

Yura sighed, as he considered that question. “I think...he’s my mama’s monster. He made her sick and then she died.”

“So...does your monster have a name?”

He whimpered a little before nodding. “And he’s hurting Grandma now, too.”

She knew of the Nikiforov troubles. The little boy’s father had filled her in over the phone while setting up this appointment. “Is your monster named Cancer?”

Yura looked up at her with wide eyes, nodding. “It’s really mean. But you know what else?”

“What?”

“Mama had two monsters. She had a bad man, too. It’s not the same bad man as Yuuri’s.”

Zoya grimaced, she knew a little of Yura’s birth mother’s past but had hoped that Yura knew even less. But as always, little ears learn every secret. “Really. Is that bad man also a monster in your closet?”

Yura hesitated before nodding. “I’m afraid he’s going to jump out and...GET ME!” His eyes widened before he squeaked and jumped down to hide under the table.

She frowned, *exactly like The Boogeyman, but this one terrorized the adults and is now going for the children.* Zoya sat down on a pillow next to the playmat and peeked under the table. “Hey, down there. Are you okay?”
Yura nodded, looking a little sheepish. “I think I scared myself.”

She laid down on his level, peering under the table to meet a pair of vibrant green eyes. “Sometimes we do that. We create monsters in our head. Those are the strongest fears, the one that live inside of us. In fact, often the monsters in our closets are much bigger in our thoughts than in real life.”

Yura listened, thinking about her words. “How...do I make them small?”

“Ask questions. The more we learn, the smaller our monsters become. There is a lot of research out there about cancer. There are lots of medicines available and new ways to fight it. That doesn’t mean someone won’t die but fewer die now than they did twenty years ago, or even a few years ago. You can learn more about cancer and then you won’t be as scared.”

Yura took in her words, but he knew she was only talking about the first half of the problem. “And the bad man?”

She pursed her lips, “I think you need to talk to your father about him. That’s an important conversation and you might want to be home in a safe place.”

“I...I can do that.” Yura hugged himself, “Papa keeps us safe.”

“He does. And you are strong, too. The smarter you are, the better you can keep yourself safe.” She reached out a hand to the little boy, still under the table. “But you have to ask questions and keep learning.”

Yura took her hand and squeezed it. “I’m going to be very strong.” Yura decided, crawling out from under the table, and stretching his arms and legs wide. “And big like Papa.” He paused for a moment, then frowned, “Will I have to be an alpha to keep people safe?”

The counselor sat up on the floor, crossing her legs, “No. You can be strong and an omega, like Yuuri.”

The little boy smiled at that. “That’s very strong.”
She nodded, “So...what are we going to work on today?”

“I’m going to ask questions.” He thought about it for a moment. “Maybe I can go to the bathroom at night.”

“Are you scared to go to the bathroom?” she tilted her head as she added to her notes, another possible cause to the bedwetting.

Yura squirmed a little, “It’s dark. I thought...maybe there’s a bad man in there?”

Zoya shrugged, letting him feel more comfortable in his confession of fear. “Maybe you can get a nightlight in the bathroom. Do you think that would help?”

The little green eyes sparkled immediately, “And one in the hall...and one in my bedroom. I have a new nightlight in my new room, the one for baby. It puts stars on the ceiling. Do you think Yuuri would let me take it to my room when I go back upstairs?”

“You could ask him,” she suggested. She led Yura to the door where his parents waited. It was a good session. As Victor looked at her questioningly, she just said, “We had a good talk. We talked about the importance of asking questions and nightlights.”

As they walked out to the car, Yura asked, “Can we get a nightlight for the bathroom?”

“Sure,” Victor answered easily.

The little boy tapped his lip and then asked, “What about the closet?”

Victor scooped him up and lifted him up in the air. “You can have all the nightlights you want. Would you like to go to the store and pick some out?”
As he secured the carseat, Yura asked, “Do you think they’ll have tiger nightlights? Tigers are really strong.”

“We can look,” Yuuri answered from the front seat as he secured his seatbelt. “If not, they probably have one on Amazon.”

“Amazon has everything,” the little boy stated, spreading his hands wide for emphasis.

Yuuri and Victor laughed before the omega answered, “It seems that way.” Sighing he realized that the little boy would never inherit his own frugal ways, too much like Vitya.

It was amazing what a few well placed nightlights did to open the house back up to their little boy. He still wanted to sleep close to his mama and papa but with some nightlights filling in the dark spaces, he ventured alone upstairs if he needed something from his old room. Sometimes he fell asleep snuggled up to his mama in bed, but that was okay. Victor would often carry him to his own bed and tuck him in. “Mama smells good,” he’d say sleepily.

“I know,” Victor would reply, his fingers smoothing through the blond floss, a gentle motion that would lull the little one back to sleep.

Victor was stretching out in the home gym when he heard a small form near the door. “What is it, malen’kiy?”

Yura edged in and then found himself sitting in front of his father, holding onto his toes as he worked out his question. “Who was Mama’s bad man?”

“Shuji?” Victor asked in confusion thinking he was talking about Yuuri.

Yura shook his head and stressed the word, “Mama.”
“Oh…” He drew his legs up, crossing them and inviting Yura into his lap.

He made a face as he settled down. “You’re all sweaty, Papa,” he protested.

“I am but I don’t think we should wait on a shower for this talk and I want you close so that I can hug you. So…about your mama…you know I loved Yelena very much.”

Yura nodded. “You married her.” Then he wrinkled his nose. “She slept with me upstairs though, like Yuuri used to. Did you fighted?”

Victor chuckled at the word. “No, we didn’t fight. We got along very well. Your mother and I were best friends and when she got in trouble, she knew she could come to me.”

“What kind of trouble?”

Victor thought of how to put it as close to honest, without traumatizing the small boy with the harsh reality of violence. “She dated a bad man and he would sometimes hurt her. But then one day, she was afraid he’d hurt something, someone more precious to her than herself. So…she came to me and asked me if she could stay, if I’d protect her. And…I said yes.”

Yura was quiet as he processed those words. “So…I was in her belly already?”

Victor nodded, hugging him close. “You were.”

“But…you’re my Papa,” he pressed, chewing on his lower lip.

“I am…and I have papers to prove it,” he reassured the little boy. “Families are made by love. The rest is just details. Otabek loves his mothers, and while they didn’t bring him into the world, they are helping guide him through it. Like Yuuri does for you, and me too.”

That seemed to settle the little boy for now. “So…is the bad man in jail? Like Yuuri’s bad man?”
Victor sighed as he shook his head. “He’s not...he’s in the military and he lives very far away.”

Yura didn’t like that answer. He knew that being very far away was not as safe as being in prison. “Does he know about me?” His fear produced a whine in his voice and he felt his papa’s arms tighten around him.

Victor sighed, “He knows Yelena had a child after we married. That’s all he knows. We don’t really talk.”

“Was he your friend?”

“No.” Victor stopped himself, his distaste for the man making his words bitter. “He was not...I knew him. We are related. Even when we were younger I knew there was something bad about him and so I never made friends. I wasn’t happy when your mother started to date him but she was a very stubborn woman.”

“Am I stubborn, too?”

Victor laughed. “Yes, I’m afraid so. And strong willed, so very headstrong. But that’s...not necessarily a bad thing. Yuuri is also all of those things.” *He might be the most stubborn of us all.*

Yura reached down and grabbed his feet before leaning back against his papa. “Did he kill my mama?”

Victor leaned over and kissed the top of the blond head. “No, your mama was sick when she came to live with me but kept it secret. By the time I knew, it was too late to get her help...although I don’t know if the help would have mattered. She wanted to make sure you were in a safe and loving home...and that’s what I promised her.”

Yura settled quietly for a few minutes, but Victor could feel more questions in the little body. “Why...did she sleep upstairs and never come down to your room, like Yuuri did?”

Victor blushed a little, hugging his son close to his chest. “There are different ways to love someone. Your mama and I found we made better friends. Yuuri and I...it’s something much...more. Yuuri is my soulmate, my other half. My mate.”
Yura thought about that before divulging, “I like Beka.”

Victor chuckled at the innocent of the admission. “Do you now?”

He nodded sincerely. “I think he will keep me safe like you keep Yuuri safe.” He rubbed the back of his head into his father’s chest before adding, “Like you kept my mama safe. And I’ll keep him safe and tell him what to do. I think that’s the best kind of love.”

Hugging the little boy, Victor agreed, “I do, too.”

Chapter End Notes

Hope your approaching holidays, whichever ones you celebrate, are coming together nicely. Warm blankets and hot chocolate for all of you *waves magic wand*. Thank you ever so much for your reading and kind words. They have done much to lift me out of my seasonal doldrums.
As Yura faced some of his monsters, Yuuri began to face his own more and more. He would do small things in the omega room, running a vacuum one day then repairing a hole in the back of the closet the next. While the room would never feel like his own, the fear it held slowly faded like the chill. It was something for Yelena, her place was here and this room held her beautiful, graceful spirit. His place would forever be in the warm and masculine room he shared with Victor. Thinking of how this room would forever hold Yelana’s gentle spirit he decided to move a small shrine into it.

“What’s it for?” Yura asked.

“A few things. First, it’s for your mother, Yelana. This was her room, and I think I can feel her here. But it’s also for all of the years that was taken for me,” the omega answered sitting cross-legged on the floor. Before him laid a scrapbook and things printed out that he missed while in his prison. “I didn’t get to see when your papa retired...or when Phichit retired. I wasn’t allowed to finish my career the way I wanted to. While there are things I can do now there are some others that I missed my chance forever. So...I’m thinking about what I missed and learning about them.
That way I feel like I was more a part of that time.”

The little boy had remained quiet, appreciating his mama’s desire to honor his past and his mother. However, once he heard ‘learning’ he knew he could help. The boy’s eyes widened and he bounced excitedly on his knees. “Oh oh...Zoya said you have to learn about your monsters so they won’t be so big.”

Yuuri smiled, hugging the little one close to him. “That’s what I’m doing. I don’t think I had the words to describe it, but that’s what I’m doing. I’m filling that space.”

“Are you going to do school stuff?” The little boy had noticed Yuuri wasn’t doing lessons and was curious.

Yuuri sighed, he had decided to take a semester off, unable to make sure he would be able to work with the movement of their small family while waiting for their home to open again. “I am...I just think I need to take care of myself first. I have you, a new baby, a bunch of decisions...and my own monsters to deal with along the way.”

Yura picked at the corner of the scrapbook page. “Are you still scared?”

Yuuri had to think about that. Am I? “I think...I feel safer knowing he’s put away. He’s locked up in a Russian jail and if they release him for his crimes here, he’ll go to America to serve time there, and then Japan. He’s going to be behind bars for a very long time, probably the rest of his life. I know this with my mind, but sometimes my heart feels nervous. I still feel...vulnerable at times.”

Yura squirmed in the embrace to look into Yuuri’s face, “What’s v..v...what’s that word mean?”

“It means that I don’t feel as protected. But it’s not the right word, either. Because I do feel safe. There are just things I have to resolve,” he smiled at the confused look on Yura’s face. “I have to fix some of the things that he broke. Things that belong to me. Things inside me.”

“Like when that one kid tore my bunny and you sewed it up?”

“Very much like that. So I’m not scared. I’m just figuring out the missing pieces and fixing them as I go.”
He reached forward and tapped the book in front of them. “With a scrapbook?”

Yuuri smoothed another article on the page marked five years prior to the date. Many of the articles were figure skating but there were other things, popular culture events, major changes, legislation that hurt or protected omegas. The omega couldn’t help wonder how his life would have been different if he hadn’t been imprisoned...but on the other hand, he couldn’t imagine a life without Victor and Yura. “A scrapbook is one way to put the pieces together. Uncle Chris is helping me with more things. I have a lot of decisions to make and although your dad supports me and will offer advice, these are things I have to decide.” He closed the scrapbook and placed it on the dresser. At some point it would be moved, the room used for someone else but for now, this was how he would use it.

Downstairs, he found Victor studying video of one of their skaters, Yuuri looked over his shoulder and made a comment on the axis of his spin. “I noticed it was off,” he murmured, leading Yuuri to sit in his lap. His hand slid around the tummy. They could no longer hide the baby growing and Yuuri now wore a mix of stretchy clothes and Viktor’s clothes...yoga pants, leggings and oversized t-shirts and sweatshirts.

Thinking of the skater he had just watched, and how easily he could offer the young man help, he became frustrated easily. “I hate staying home as much as I do,” Yuuri pouted.

Viktor leaned his cheek into Yuuri’s shoulder as he hummed thoughtfully. “Why do you hate it so much?”

Yuuri shrugged. “I mean...I like to feel useful. Now that I have it back, it’s hard to let go of it.” He pointed at the frozen figure on the laptop screen, “That kid just needs to make sure he’s over his skate and he’ll have coffee cans on the ice.”

The alpha thought about those words before he found the hidden meaning. “You were left at home a lot with him. He kept you isolated so he could control you.”

Yuuri nodded, his hand fisting over his heart. “H-he hated it when I needed to go out. He was convinced that I would find a way to escape him...or that I might find some bit of happiness. He resented anything that made me smile.”

Victor rubbed small circles into Yuuri’s back, “I’m not trying to isolate you or control you. We cut you back to three days a week for your sake, for the baby’s sake. But you aren’t under house
Yuuri huffed at the offered activities, feeling like he was being placated. “But if I could do that...why can’t I go to the rink? Why can’t I skate and dance and teach the other two days?”

“Because your blood pressure was elevated and your doctor ordered that we cut back your hours so that you would have less stress,” Viktor pointed out.

Yuuri huffed, turning back to the video. “How am I going to help Alexie with his step sequences?”

Viktor chuckled at the little temper tantrum. For that was what it was. “We have him scheduled on your three days. You aren’t restricted from the ice...just from the number of days you’re working.” He leaned in and kissed his cheek, reaching out to guide Yuuri into an awkward kiss. “You know the person with the keys. If you just need to skate, I can sneak you in sometime during the off hours. I can even run the zamboni and erase any evidence of you being there.”

Yuuri tucked his head into Victor’s shoulder, “So Yakov won’t find out?”

Viktor snorted. No matter who was actually in charge of the rink, Yakov was the old man and everyone did what he said. “No, he won’t find out.”

Yuuri squeezed his shoulders together, a teenage part of him settling at the idea of sneaking out and skating. “Okay.”

That evening after dinner, Olga promised to watch Yura while Victor and Yuuri escaped into the icy January night. Victor confidently maneuvered his vehicle in the streets and drove towards the darkened training facility. Unlocking the front door, he locked it behind them. This was just for the two of them.

Inside, there was a skeleton crew working. A single security guard reading his latest book, two ladies making their way to the vent room for routine maintenance, and a janitor having just cleaned the last locker room putting away his cart. Some of the staff could be found finishing up
paperwork, but their usual chatty personalities were quieter after a long day of students, and emotions. The European Championship was approaching and there was a rush to make sure everything was ready. The coaches were pressured to finish forms for travel and the last check ins with the FFKK, the skaters were beginning to show signs of strain.

The couple slipped through the shadows, an occasional wave or greeting from others, until they arrived in Victor’s office. Inside, the coach went over to the small set of lockers he kept for himself, his Yuuri, his son, and also Chris for when he occasionally came out to blow some steam. It occurred to Victor that that was exactly what Yuuri needed.

Skates in hand, they headed down to the ice. The practice rink they chose was the one Victor liked to use when working out some choreography. The alpha had his skates on a little quicker than Yuuri but soon the omega was ready and they made their way to the ice. Victor stepped on the surface first ready to steady his mate if needed. It was not and soon they were skating quiet circles hand in hand to warm up before Yuuri let go and began picking up speed. Victor watched Yuuri work through the remnants of a program tucked back into the omega’s memory. He recognized it, having watched and memorized every program he could find where Yuuri skated, King, where Yuuri skated in black with large, rough cut stone and bits of mesh. He was beautiful and carried himself like a king.

Not for the first time, Viktor thought how the skating world was cheated by losing Yuuri from competition. He watched the omega skater, even after years off the ice (although now Victor knew he stole ice time with the help of Phichit), Yuuri was still a picture of grace. He loved watching the beautiful man skate.

As Yuuri tired from his solo act, he skated up to Viktor and took his hands, swinging him around, a smile on his lips. “I needed this.”

“I want to give you everything you need,” Victor assured him.

When they arrived back home, they found their son curled up asleep on the sofa, Olga reading one of her trashy romance novels, a shirtless alpha dressed in Scottish plaid on the cover. She looked up with a warm smile. “He’s had his bath but he didn’t want to be so far away. So we agreed on this room.”

Victor lifted the long-limbed child with a grunt while Yuuri chatted with the housekeeper, finally saying good night and following his mate back to their room. He had Yura tucked in and was
changing into his pajamas when Yuuri moved into his arms. It didn’t take long for Victor to notice the arousal coming from Yuuri’s scent.

“My Yuuri has been quite demanding of late.”

“Mmmhmommom,” he hummed. “It might be the pregnancy.”

The alpha swung his mate around and danced him towards the bed as they exchanged kisses. “I’ll take good care of Mama,” he promised. His hands already working its way under Yuuri’s shirt. His thumbs found Yuuri’s waistband to slide down his pants. Now on his knees before Yuuri, he kissed his belly, the baby starting to make its appearance known. Hands caressed Yuuri’s tummy, tracing down the tiny stretchmarks starting to develop. Yuuri pushed his hands away, trying to cover them up.

“Don’t,” Victor countered, his expression soft. “I want to know everything you go through to bring our baby into the world. You’ve earned these marks...and they are no less important than bearing my mark.”

Yuuri thought of his first set of stretch marks and the reaction of Shuji, absolute disgust. Then the loss of the child, followed by the demand that he use cold water and pumice scrubs to remove any trace of them. “You don’t think they are ugly?” His voice sounded tiny, embarrassed, as he tucked his chin in.

The alpha shook his head but he could imagine someone else making him feel that way. “I think they are beautiful.”

Yuuri studied him, trying to believe him. Finally he pulled his hands back and allowed Victor to continue to worship his body. Kisses fluttered along the imperfections, a tongue tracing one of the lines. Yuuri tried not to fret and give himself over the sensation that Victor was eliciting in his body. He knew he had stretch marks gained over the years through fluctuating weight and prior pregnancies. Yet, he’d never been made to feel they were a thing of beauty. They marred him, took away from him, like a crack in a vase. Then again, Victor was fine with Yuuri gaining some weight, even encouraged it. Maybe he really saw them as beautiful, or maybe because Victor saw Yuuri as a human, made beautiful by the flaws, by the signs of time, and not as an object to be possessed. He wasn’t sure, the arousal growing in his body shattered his thoughts as they formed.

“Vitya…” He watched, waiting for those blue eyes to look up at him. “I...I need you...more.”
Victor chuckled. “So impatient, my Yuuri.”

“I…” How could he say he hated the focus on his stretch marks? Not when Victor seemed so sincere. So he didn’t. Instead, he redirected his lover. “Kiss me.”

Victor chuckled warmly, climbing up that lovely body, kissing him slowly, his tongue slowly teasing his lover’s lips apart. As Yuuri let him in, he tasted the possessive growl of the alpha. Yuuri’s eyes fluttered and then focused on Victor. “I’m yours,” he whispered.

Victor pulled back to study him. “Yuuri…”

“I’m serious. I’m yours.” His fingers fluttered up the alpha’s chest. “I...I want us to bond. I don’t know when, I don’t know where...but I want…” He trailed off, glancing to the side, chewing his fingernail uncertainly.

“You want the fairy tale,” Victor concluded. “Something to make you feel special.”

Yuuri looked back up at him, feeling moisture collecting in the corners of his eyes. “Is that silly?”

Victor laughed softly. “You’re looking at the king of silly. Silly or not, I want you to have your special moment, our special moment. And I want it to be memorable.”

“Thank you,” he whispered, pushing up to kiss him. As their lips parted, he added, “And maybe before baby gets here.”

The alpha grinned. “I think that can be arranged.”

“Now...you need to fuck me soon.” Yuuri held his eyes, his expression serious before he broke and smirked.

Victor laughed, leaning in to kiss him. “I love you so much.” Their kisses started becoming heated and Yuuri shifted back in his arms, wrapping a leg around him while he rutted against him. “So needy,” Victor teased.
Yuuri’s eyes sharpened, his expression becoming more determined. Wrapping his legs around Victor, he turned them over, leaning over the alpha who stared up at him with a surprised expression. “And you continue to tease.”

Victor’s grin grew slowly into a playful smile. “So assertive. I’m yours, take what you want.”

Yuuri blinked at that use of words, sitting back on his heels. “Vitya…”

The older man leaned forward, capturing his lips. “I mean it...I’m yours just as much as you’re mine.”

Yuuri swallowed and nodded, moving so that Victor’s cock slotted along his ass. A slow rise and fall while he worked up to what he wanted. Victor’s hands rested on his hips, his eyes holding those golden browns. Swallowing once more, Yuuri chewed his lip as he nodded. “I...want to turn around. Will you help me? From behind?”

Victor nodded, guiding Yuuri into position as he turned. Faced with that beautiful plush ass, he ran a finger along the cleft, settling into that ring of muscle. He slowly teased it open, watching in fascination as Yuuri’s slick dripped so easily from him. Satisfied he wouldn’t hurt his lover, it hadn’t been a day since the last time they were together, he positioned his length, the head already starting to breach the omega as Yuuri pushed back into him.

“God, do you know how beautiful you are?” Victor gritted, feeling how tightly Yuuri sheathed him. *Fuck!* He focused on his breathing but then his beautiful omega was moving again, lifting those hips and dropping with a twist to those hips that should be illegal. He could feel Yuuri’s hands tightening on his thighs as he controlled the drop. Victor could tell this would be short lived for him. Yuuri felt too good around him, riding him and using him to chase his pleasure. He watched the rise and fall of that ass and groaned. Yuuri took him so well.

“Vitya, I need…” Yuuri trailed off as his breathing became more ragged.

“What do you need, baby?” Victor breathed.

Yuuri shifted back into his arms. “I want...you to hold me.”
The alpha rearranged them once more so that they were lying on their sides, Victor rocking into Yuuri and soon reaching around to take his omega’s length. This was much better for Victor, he always wanted to give Yuuri exactly what he wanted but for Victor, wrapping their bodies together as they sought orgasms was heaven. The alpha could take it slow and control his orgasm a little better. He continued to rock into Yuuri, listening to the other’s pants.

“Want...your kn-not,” he stuttered out.

Victor could definitely make that happen as he continued to work Yuuri with his hand, continued to rock into Yuuri’s ass. God, he was so perfect. The alpha pressed kisses along his shoulder. “Give me your orgasm,” he murmured against his skin.

“So close…” Yuuri’s breathing seemed to shudder through him

“So am I...cum for me, my Yuuri.”

Then that small body tightened in his arms as he released with a groan. Victor thrust into him several more times, feeling Yuuri’s walls tighten around him as waves of orgasm overtook the omega. Victor couldn’t help but tumble over the edge with that much stimulation. As he buried his cock into his omega’s ass one more time, he popped his knot. The little omega settled sleepily in his arms, a contented purr slipping from his lips. They remained locked together, soft purrs and growls for the next little while.

Yuuri snuggled into him in the aftermath, now clean from his alpha’s care, his hand rubbing his tummy thoughtfully, worry scrunching his forehead. “Will you still want me when I’m fat with baby?”

Victor snorted at the question but then sobered realizing Yuuri was struggling. "Two steps forward, one step back. “Lyubov moya, I’d want you if you were fat without baby. You are more than your body...and carrying extra weight doesn’t detract from your beauty. That’s a lie people tell you to control you and make themselves feel better. I want you healthy...so that we can have a long life together. I want you happy...so that you will embrace that life. I want you with me...so that we can love one another.”"
“You…didn’t want me to be overly thin,” the omega countered, looking back to the beginning.

“Because I want you healthy,” he reminded Yuuri.

“But if I was overweight…if I was fat, that wouldn’t bother you?”

“I’m going to let you in on a secret,” Victor began. “I love being able to press my fingers into your skin and feel the indents.” He followed those words up with a gentle squeeze of his hands into Yuuri’s side. “But I want you to be happy with your body.”

“I’m…happy if I can dance and skate,” Yuuri answered quietly, his words. “If my body keeps me from these things…aside from bringing baby into the world…then I’m not so happy with it.”

“I think those are good things to like about your body. And baby…are you happy now with baby?”

Yuuri nodded. “I’m even rather excited. I’m just afraid to be too excited. Part of me is still afraid…that I’ll lose them. This one…I won’t name. Not until they are born. I think…that’s why I want to wait on the sex. Maybe…I don’t know…is it superstitious?”

“I think you should do what settles you with this pregnancy…and if these things help you to find peace, then so be it.”

“And you’re really okay about waiting on the sex of our baby?”

“Yes. I’m okay with waiting. I’m okay with knowing. But I want to do what you need or want. If we wait or know, we do it together.”

“And…the rest of it?”

“All of it. We’re in this together.”

Yuuri snuggled into his arms. “Thank you. I love you so much.”
“And I love you, my Yuuri,” he murmured, settling his lover into his embrace.

NOTES:

Yuuri is thirteen weeks pregnant right now and baby is the size of a lemon. He is now in his second trimester and starting to feel an increase in his sex drive. After his appointment, his doctor was concerned about his blood pressure and wrote orders for light duty. Yuuri is at the end of his thirteenth week and bucking those orders (but inside, he’ll do anything to protect baby). He is starting to show a bit of a bump (though quite small).


https://www.babylist.com/hello-baby/13-weeks-pregnant

Chapter End Notes

Enjoy your holidays and your loved ones, whether they be of your blood or your choosing...and be thankful for the blessings you've been given. It seems those who have little have much to be thankful for, and those who have much are thankful for nothing. Merry Christmas and happy Hanukkah and enjoy all of the other winter holidays you might celebrate...love one another...and look out for each other.
Baby’s a Peach!

Chapter Summary

14 weeks! And Yuuri is entering the honeymoon period of his pregnancy.

Chapter Notes

Everyone has been busy with the holidays but I wanted to get you a Songs chapter out. I went over this but if you see a glaring mistake, please give me a nudge in the comments below. Be safe and don't drink and drive! And have a very happy New Year.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 62: Baby’s a Peach!

“But I want to go with Yuuri to see baby!” the little boy pouted with a stamp of his feet. He’d been a terror to get ready for school that morning. It was another doctor’s appointment and he was determined to go.

Yuuri placed a hand on Victor’s arm and took over, settling the five-year-old (almost six...as reluctant as Yuuri was to admit it) onto the bed. Yura kicked his feet but stilled when he watched Yuuri wince.

“Mama?” A worried tremor quivered his lip.

Yuuri bit his lip as the small spasms settled out. “It’s okay...baby is just growing. But it would help if you would cooperate.”

“Why don’t I get to go to the doctor?” he pouted

Yuuri ruffled his hair. “It isn’t always about looking at the baby on a screen. Sometimes, the doctor is just looking to see how baby is growing and making sure Mama is healthy.”
The little boy still held a pout as he lifted questioning eyes up to Yuuri. “So...I’m not going to miss seeing baby?”

“I promise...if I schedule an appointment to see baby, I’ll make sure you can come.”

With that promise, Yura settled down and Victor was able to take his son to school. Yuuri moved into the kitchen, rubbing his tummy feeling the aches of growing pains. Olga already had his prenatal vitamins laid out with a glass of orange juice. Yuuri made a face.

“What’s the matter?” the housekeeper asked with an amused raise of the eyebrow.

“Orange juice gives me heartburn.”

“Lately, anything does.” She placed a light breakfast of eggs and toast in front of the omega. “Eat up. You weigh in today.”

Yuuri groaned. “I think I’m going to have to find bigger clothes.”

“Maybe you and some of your friends can shop for maternity clothes.”

Yuuri laid his head on the counter thinking about his options. Victor would buy things far too expensive for temporary use. Phichit has helped him find what he needed before and would sneak them in for him. Katya works in clothes but hasn’t been pregnant. Mehar had a daughter and might have some wisdom to impart.

Yuuri/ Who wants to shop for maternity clothes with me?

Soon, all three chimed in. Now...to break the news to Victor.

While he waited for his mate to return, he worked on his social media, trying to include friends and family now that his pregnancy was out. He posted the screenshot from his app that showed the size of baby. They were the size of a peach. A smile touched his lips. He knew one friend who would be pleased.
Victor returned from dropping off their son and located his mate in the kitchen, now enjoying a spoon of chocolate silk yogurt while he texted back and forth with his friends and chatting with Olga about the latest episode of *Deadly Omega*. Victor wrapped his arms around his mate, nuzzling into his neck. Once satisfied with the omega’s sweet scent, he settled onto the next stool accepting a plate of eggs and toast.

“So after your appointment, what do you want to do?” the alpha asked. He had the day off and hoped to spend it spoiling his omega.

“I thought we could have lunch and then you might drop me off at Phichit’s apartment,” Yuuri suggested as he licked the spoon clean.

Victor watched the movement thinking of other things he’d like to do with his omega. “What are you and Phichit up to?”

Yuuri sighed, it was now or never. “Katya, Phichit, and Mehar want to take me maternity clothes shopping.”

Victor blinked and Yuuri could see his face fall. “Oh.”

“I mean...it makes sense. They have a better idea of what I need to look for as I grow and develop.”

“It’s just...I thought we could do that together. You and I.” Victor pouted, lifting puppy dog eyes in his direction.

Yuuri sighed. He could imagine what that trip would be like. Still, he hated to see the disappointment on his lover’s face. “Why don’t you help me find some things more appropriate for skating and dance?” he suggested. “We can go on another day.”

Victor looked a little more mollified. “Okay. We can go Saturday before we head to my parents for dinner.”

They had decided since learning of Vasilisa’s illness that they would try and see them rather than a
Sunday evening phone call whenever possible. Time was short, shorter than either imagined, and they wanted to cherish that time. It was a little over an hour’s drive outside the city...and the visit depended on how Victor’s mother was doing.

Now Victor had to decide how to spend the day since he had planned to spend it with his Yuuri. He could go back to work. Maybe take an early day on Friday.

Yuuri could tell he was still upset and suggested, “Perhaps I could model what we find later tonight.”

Victor tilted his head in interest, knowing the three omegas joining him. “Okay.”

That settled, they finished up their food and started to go wash the dishes but they were taken out of their hands. “A lady’s got to earn her living somehow. Now go. Check on that baby.”

Yuuri grinned, waving goodbye. Victor leaned in and smacked a teasing kiss on her cheek before she popped a towel in his direction. “Go,” she pressed, shooing them away.

Yuuri sat in the doctor’s office, so far the visit routine. He felt fine and baby seemed to be growing fine. More bloodwork was taken. “Tell me any concerns you are having,” his doctor asked as the nurse took his blood pressure.

“I’ve been a little achy and there have been these sharp pains in my sides.”

She nodded, checking her chart. “Growing pains. Your body is adjusting to the baby’s growth and demands. You might look at various support wraps and belts to help out as baby grows. How about your energy levels?”

“I’m actually great. Bored, more than anything. I’d love to…” He paused, glancing over to his mate before finishing, “...to return to my normal hours at work.”

She took the reading from her nurse and hummed. “Your blood pressure has improved. If you can
promise me you’ll get daily readings from Dr. Romanov at the rink, I can lift the restriction. But if it goes back up, I’ll put them back in place just as quick.”

Yuuri nodded excitedly. “I can work with that. I just find myself not knowing what to do with myself. I’ve become used to being useful.”

“Our work isn’t the only place where we can be useful. Make sure you strive for balance. And soon, you will have a baby demanding your attention.”

“And I want to be a very hands on parent.”

“So no Russian nannies,” she teased, knowing how Yuuri had come to be in the Nikiforov home.

Yuuri laughed along with his mate. “No, I can handle it with Olga’s help. And I have several friends who have already volunteered to babysit if I just need to get in some ice time.”

“Or some alone time with your mate,” Victor added with a wink and a smirk.

The doctor smiled at the eager alpha. “I take it your sex drive has increased.”

Yuuri quickly covered his face, red blossoming over the surface. “Ummm, yes?”

She chuckled. “This is what we call the honeymoon period of pregnancy. Enjoy your second trimester. Now, how has your appetite been holding up?”

Yuuri pulled his hands down, glad for a safer topic. “I seem to be making peace with my food for the most part. Some days...it’s hard. I’m still seeing Dr. Abramovich and I leave control of my diet mostly in Olga and my dietician’s hands. I know Olga will make sure I get what I need and if I mention cravings, she looks for good healthy options.”

“Are you overly concerned about the gains?”

Yuuri paused then nodded honestly. “Some days I am. Vitya is very supportive when it comes to
body image issues.” He offered his mate an appreciative smile. “It’s just...I was told the opposite for so long. That stretchmarks and the extra...weight...that it was undesirable, that I was undesirable, for so long that sometimes it gets lodged in there.”

“Well, as far as weight gain goes, you’ve been gaining right on schedule for someone starting slightly below the target weight. So what you’ve been doing is working and you have the healthy growth baby needs. I’m glad you are still talking to your counselor and dietician to see to those needs.” She paused and looked at her list of questions and concerns. “Now you may start feeling an increase of breast tenderness. There are bras out there specific to male omegas for pregnancy and nursing. Do you plan to nurse?”

“If I can, even if I have to supplement with formula. I’ve been looking at different breast pumps online and thought I’d see if you had any recommendations.”

“I could make some recommendations but I’d rather put you with a lactation consultant. We have one that I like to use with my international patients. She is American and lives here with her husband. I’ll make sure to get her number to you so that you can set up an initial consultation. Any other concerns?”

“No, I think I’m good. Thank you.”

Turning to Victor, she asked, “How about you? Do you have any concerns, Mr. Nikiforov?”

“Only that I find myself becoming more overprotective. I don’t remember that with Yelena.”

“It is your parental bond strengthening. Remember, we had to establish that after Yelena gave birth to Yura because he wasn’t your natural child. With this one, it’s a little different.”

Victor nodded. There were small differences he noticed between Yuuri and Yelena. “I just want to make sure I’m not becoming overbearing.”

“As long as your omega feels safe to speak up, that shouldn’t be a problem.”

Yuuri nodded, squeezing his hand. They soon left the appointment, referrals and new orders in hand. Yuuri was practically skipping with excitement at returning to his old schedule.
“She said as long as you maintained your blood pressure,” Victor warned. “I don’t want you to skimp on that.”

“I won’t. I think a lot of the blood pressure problems was a combination of travel and getting settled back in, facing a lot of my stressors. But...I feel stronger, better.”

Victor pulled him into his chest, pressing a kiss on his forehead. “I’m glad. Now, let’s get you fed and to your friends.”

As they drove to Phichit’s house, Yuuri asked tentatively, “You’re not too upset about me going with my friends to shop.”

Victor hummed, glancing out of the side of his eyes. “I was disappointed...but only because I want to keep you to myself. I realize that isn’t healthy and you need to be independent and have your friends. So, no...I’m not too upset.”

Yuuri seemed to settle back, relief filtering into his scent. “I’ll make sure to pick out something special to share with you.”

The alpha couldn’t help the smile pulling at his lips. “I look forward to it, my Yuuri.” He pulled up in front of Phichit’s building and asked, “Do you want me to walk you up?”

Yuuri sat still, considering his mental well-being. “I think I’m in a good place today. Thank you for checking.”

“I will see you later then. I assume Phichit’s bringing you home.”

Yuuri nodded, then turned to look at his mate after stepping out of the vehicle. “Can you see that my new orders are submitted. I’d love to get back on my full schedule as soon as possible.”
“I’ll take it by this afternoon.”

Yuuri leaned in to kiss him. “Thank you.”

Victor waited at the curb until Yuuri was safely inside the building before pulling away. He decided to grab a drink with Chris before picking up his son. It seemed lately that his best friend spent more time with his Yuuri than himself.

He found the attorney in the lobby waiting on him, turning to fall into step with Victor as they headed into the small bar at the base of the building. Victor ordered up two Black and Orange Russians and soon they were at a small table nursing their drinks.

“So, how have you been?” Chris asked, cutting to the chase.

“I am great...as long as I don’t think about it. I can’t believe...she’s always been such an abiding strength to me. She stood as a buffer between Papa and myself when we couldn’t see eye to eye. What...am I to do?”

Chris took a sip of his drink, nodding with approval. “It seems to me that things sometimes happen in perfect timing. You came into Yuuri’s life just as he needed you most...and perhaps Yuuri is in your life just as you need him the most.”

Victor huffed. “Yuuri came into my life because of you and Phichit.”

“Because we knew...you both needed each other. You’ve come alive since Yuuri danced into your life. There is much more purpose, more relevance to your life. Your smiles are rarely forced these days. It’s almost like you can’t help but smile...or laugh...and they go all the way to your eyes. I’ve never seen you so happy.”

Victor smiled softly at the words listening to his friend, knowing he was going somewhere with this.

“And yes, your mother’s health casts a shadow over things. But what hasn’t so far? You both have fought to be together, to find joy, to bring happiness to that kid of yours. I think...you came into each other’s lives at just the right time. And with Yuuri by your side, you’ll come through this next thing, and the next thing after that.”
He nodded. He knew this but it felt good to hear it. He lifted his glass and murmured, “To the good omegas in our lives.”

“Salut,” Chris echoed, clinking their glasses before taking another drink.

“So how are things with you and Phichit?”

“I think...working on this project with Yuuri has given him some of the healing he’s needed. He bled right along side Yuuri all of those years. I knew what I was getting into when I entered into a relationship with that man...but I wouldn’t have him any other way. For all of those years, Phichit tried so hard to help Yuuri get through this...and he’s been pretty much in charge of asset recovery. I’ve just stepped in on the legal matters. Shuji...that asshole...he affected a lot of lives.”

“Yuuri was saying he wanted to connect with the other two omegas. Have you managed to locate the first?”

Chris shook his head. “Not yet...but Phichit is on it. I know Yuuri said something about making sure each of them were taken care of.”

“And...about the baby front?”

Chris groaned. “Nothing yet. Phichit still hasn’t settled down enough to make it happen although I know he wants this. We have time, though. And if we can’t...I know some great adoption agencies.”

“You know I’m here if you need to talk as well. This friendship thing goes both ways.”

Chris grinned. “I know. I’m stubborn but I know. I’ll let you in. I promise.”
Yuuri stood in the maternity department of the store where Katya worked. She planned to apply her employee discount to Yuuri’s purchases. Maybe he didn’t need the discount at this point but the omega couldn’t give up his frugal ways. He had a list of things he wanted to accomplish. Two bras, some stretchy, pee/slick proof underwear (the struggle was real these days), half a dozen tops and at least two pair of nicer pants to wear out that didn’t pull at his tummy. Katya suggested a pair of jeans and a pair of slacks. Phichit was on the mission for undies. Mehar helped Yuuri find some tops that were both flattering and offered the give Yuuri desired.

Phichit insisted on a top with a graphic of baby peeking out of the tummy. “You should have fun with it.”

Yuuri huffed. “We have plenty of fun.”

His best friend snorted. “So I’ve heard. Do you need something sexy?”

Yuuri paused, a blush on his cheeks. “I don’t...need it? But maybe I want it?”

“And perhaps some comfortable sleepwear for after,” Mehar suggested, her eyes dancing with amusement. She held up a top that transitioned to breast feeding for Yuuri to consider. He nodded and it went into the cart to try on later.

Soon, they added two sets of pajamas, a lacy robe, and a nightie to the cart. Yuuri also tried on several outfits suggested by his friends and although he felt exhausted at the end of the day, their steady banter kept him from feeling overwhelmed. He already knew what he would be wearing that night after Yura was asleep and he tingled with excitement. But for now, he was ready for a nap.

Victor came home to find Yuuri curled up on the sofa, the TV flickering on some crime show from ID. His mate, however, was asleep, snoring rather cutely. A quilt was draped across him and he suspected Olga’s doing.

Yura stood next to him. “Do I have to take a nap?” he asked in a whisper.

Victor chuckled warmly, leading the little mite towards the kitchen. “We’ll just let you have an
early night. How about a snack for now?”

Olga was ready to accommodate the request. “I made these snickerdoodles earlier today. Yuuri had a craving but fell asleep before they were ready. Perhaps you can see if I did well.”

Yura bit into the cookie, his eyes widening. “Mmmm...and they smell like Mama!”

Both adults chuckled with Victor snagging a stack and sitting at the bar next to his son dipping cookies in cups of coffee. “I remember doing this with my Papa.”

“Do you think Grandpa would like to do that now?”

“Maybe...we shall see. They are coming over next week. Mama has an appointment and I asked if they’d like to stay here. They plan to at least take a rest.”

“I’ll make sure and have the cookies ready,” Olga promised, and Victor watched her mark the calendar where she kept track of her menu.

“It might be good to pull some stress off of Papa.”

Yura was still as he focused on his cookie, and then a large tear slid out of her eye. “Is Nana going to die?”

Victor sighed, sliding a hand up and down his son’s back until the little boy curled up into his arms. “We don’t know yet. She’s trying to get better but the medicine isn’t a sure thing. So we just support her as best we can...and spend as much time with her as possible. I think we spent too much time apart already. Hurt feelings for no reason that I can recall.”

Yura lifted his chin, his eyes still watery but he nodded solemnly. “I will help Nana!”

“Just give her lots of love. That’s what she wants more than anything.”

“Okay. I can do that,” he chirped.
Victor looked up as movement caught his eye and smiled at the bleary eyed omega entering.  
“Why is everyone crying?”

The alpha shrugged. “Just some talk about Mama.” Yuuri narrowed his eyes with concerned but Victor quickly shook his head. “No, nothing new. Just...working through acceptance.”

The omega approached, sliding his arms around his two men. Pressing a kiss onto Victor’s cheek and Yura’s hair, he hummed softly in agreement.

Yuuri tucked in his little boy, his expression tired as he smoothed out the little blond’s hair. Yura noticed and looked up at his mother with worry. “You need to sleep tonight instead of wrestling with Papa,” he determined.

Yuuri’s eyes widened, his cheeks going scarlet even as a chuckle came from the door. “Don’t worry, son. I’ll make sure Mama sleeps tonight.”

Back in the bedroom, Yuuri looked at the clothes laid out on the furniture. His fingers ran down the lace of the nightie. “I wanted to do this tonight.”

“I know, darling,” Victor murmured, pressing a kiss into his neck from behind. “Why don’t we do that on a less busy day?” He reached for the snuggly gray pajamas and handed it to Yuuri. “I’d like to see this on you tonight.”

Yuuri smiled, hugging the soft fabric to his chest. He could do this. Slipping into the bathroom, he gasped at the sight of a bath ran with bubbles and rose petals. Candles were lit in front of the mirrors bouncing light across the room. He turned to see Victor standing in the doorway waiting. “You did this for me?”

“I thought you needed some pampering and I needed to take care of you. Indulge me?”

Yuuri nodded even as Victor stepped forward and slowly undressed him. The alpha kissed him
even as he kept his fingers on task. Yuuri knew he would have tried if Victor wanted to make love...and so did the alpha. So the Russian made his intentions clear. He wanted to tend to his Yuuri’s needs. Guiding him into the bath, Victor sat on the stool next to the tub. He had stripped down to his pants. Bare arms reached in to take the sponge and wash the body. Yuuri followed his movements until he started to relax, leaning his head back on the provided towel pillow, his eyes closing.

At some point, Yuuri heard soft music playing and smiled. It wasn’t sexy music. Piano. *Yiruma*. Yuuri felt himself slip further into a restful state. As the water chilled, Victor reached down and let the water out. His hand remained secure on Yuuri as he helped the pregnant omega out and dried him off.

Yuuri felt like his bones were rubber and Victor had to guide him into his pajamas, seating him before the dressing mirror to tend to his hair. He combed Yuuri’s hair with care and then picked up the blow dryer and styled it until it was settled out enough for bed. Yuuri was still pretty boneless when Victor led him to bed and tucked him in, crawling in behind him. Soon, two dogs joined them and Yuuri sighed, closing his eyes. It had been a long day...but a good day. He could feel a quiet sleep overtaking him and appreciated Victor’s love and care leading up to it.

“I love you,” he whispered.

The alpha pressed his lips into his neck. “I love you, too, my Yuuri. Now sleep, love...let your body recover from such a long day.

Notes:

Yuuri is 14 weeks pregnant and the baby is the size of a peach or a small orange. For obvious reasons, I chose a peach as our point of reference. Here are some links to let you know where he’s at on his prenatal life.

The next chapter will still be during the 14th week and we’ll have some time with the senior Nikiforov family.

Chapter End Notes

I had planned on sexy times but Yuuri was too tired. Maybe next chapter...
All That Matters

Chapter Summary

What can I say...this is a smut chapter. Yuuri is making plans and following through on others. It's a good day.

Chapter Notes

You might say...it's about time. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 63: All That Matters

(Smut alert...hormones or something else?)

Yuuri stepped into the ballet studio breathing in the scent of the freshly cleaned floor, his eyes sliding across the shine reflected across the surface. The room felt alive to him like it was welcoming him in, begging him to fill the space. But there was something seductive in that want of the room to him, and he to it. He wanted to feel his body become hot, lithe, feel the muscles tighten and loosen in this room as the wood heated up under his feet in response. Longing to express the power he felt alive within himself and within that room. He gave himself over to this, putting on a sultry song and using it to loosen up. The sweat on his brow was from work and something a little more. Desire.

Finishing in a slow descent into a split on the floor he caught sight of his face, flushed with anticipation and for the first time the sight enticed him. He was drawn to himself. The cinnamon eyes, burning bright shown against his glistening skin, his lips were plump as if having been kissed full. He saw what Victor saw, what he should always see, that he was beautiful.

Rising he plucked a towel from the shelf and wiped himself free from sweat. Cold water helped reduce the flush in his face as he prepared for his classes. Dance never failed him throughout all of his years and he wanted to engender that in his own young students. Some would continue on with Lilia’s guidance and recommendation to study at The Voganova Academy. He hoped to see Yura there. Where would I be if I had that opportunity? He hoped still with Victor, still holding Yura’s hand and guiding his raising. He thought of the incredible woman who had brought the child into the world at the cost of herself. Would you have still turned to him if I had been there? Perhaps the dynamics would be different but Yuuri felt certain he’d be secure in Victor’s love. They would
have found a way to make a family. Vitya has strong shoulders and a big heart.

He had a busy day ahead of him. Two skaters asked to come in and work on their choreography. He had his littles, the five to seven year olds. Then his intermediates that ranged from seven to nine. Some were the same he worked with on skate days. Some were different, their mothers and fathers hoping the little ones would catch Lilia’s eye.

But for now, this time was his, a moment to make peace with his own body and the struggles he went through. He attended to his own heart, his own spirit. In the background, soft classical music played while he warmed up, quiet stretches to help him maintain his flexibility, elongating his muscles. He heard the door open and close and glanced up to see his mate, slide down behind him, his fingers finding Yuuri’s, stretching along his body.

“You should mirror me,” he breathed.

“I wanted to hold you,” Victor answered, equally soft. The alpha had been staying close, his instincts crying out to check on Yuuri often. Yuuri knew it was time.

Catching his own eyes in the mirror Yuuri saw the fire still burning in the cinnamon hue. “Tonight,” he murmured.

“What’s tonight?” Victor asked, pressing a kiss in Yuuri’s hair.

He turned, catching Victor’s face with his palm, “Tonight, we soothe your alpha. I’m ready. I want to feel you in my thoughts, to know the reassurance of you.” He leaned back, showing Victor the graceful line of his neck. “And I know you feel the same.”

Victor’s breath stopped for a moment, “Are you saying…”

Yuuri could feel Victor’s breath against his neck, the warm air whispering over his skin. “Yes, I want your bond.”

Victor tightened his arms around Yuuri as he considered what they needed to do to prepare. “Yura…”
Yuuri titled his head back up, a smile on his lips. “Mehar has invited Yura for a sleepover. She’s picking him up with Zaina after ballet. I have his overnight bag in the office.”

Victor pressed a kiss on the back of Yuuri’s neck, tenderly thinking about that night. Knowing that Yuuri had planned this, had wanted it, made the prospect of the evening all the more enticing. “I want you.”

“I’m yours,” Yuuri answered even as he felt Victor’s arms tighten around him.

Victor’s phone vibrated and he groaned. “I have to go back.”

Yuuri smiled up at him as he rose to his feet. He let a finger linger a little too long on Victor’s face, watching the eyes grow wide as he slipped a solicitous smile. “Tonight, no interruptions. You’re mine.”

Yuuri giggled as he was greeted by his students running in, crying out “uchitel...uchitel” (teacher...teacher), or “Yuuri-sensei”, something started by Yura when he asked Yuuri how he addressed his ballet teacher. “Welcome,” he answered. Then tapped the cane, a necessity to all Russian ballet teachers. “Into position.” Frere Jaque playing in the background, he was in his element as he guided the students through the positions, correcting a few with their posture.

Lilia had visited with him regarding the spring recital for the dancers and the spring show for the ones on ice. He was already working out what he wanted to do with him, remembering shows he did with Minako. He considered the Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy. Tchaikovsky was such a staple in Russian ballet and figure skating. Still, a part of him wondered if he should do something more modern. Maybe I’ll call Minako this weekend and see what she suggests.

The class was over all too soon and the children were gathering their bags. Yura came to hug him goodbye. “Don’t forget your bag in Papa’s office.”

“I won’t.” Yura pulled away, excited at the sleepover with his friends.

“And be a good boy. Mind Mahar and Rohan.”
“Don’t worry. I will!” The boy was bouncing, ready to go. Yuuri was happy to see his enthusiasm, even if it was tinged with a slight jealousy.

Then with kisses on the cheek, Yura was gone.

Yuuri sat with Abramovich, nursing his cup of tea. He smiled across at the older man, no longer a stumbling block, or even an authority. Anymore, it was like talking to an old friend. Yuuri had grown to see that the therapist was a lot like himself, and they served the same role to their students; a guide. “I am redoing that bedroom upstairs, giving it a new personality.”

“That sounds like an excellent way to expel it’s demons,” the old psychiatrist agreed.

“For now, I have a shrine but I found an old iron bedframe up in the attic the other day. This is what happens when I’m left at home and to my own devices.” He paused while he and the good doctor chuckled and then took a sip of tea. “Nikolai is cleaning it up for me. I’m working in blues and whites. He thinks he can find me some crystal knobs for the nightstand and dresser. We are painting them blue.”

Abramovich sat back in his chair, pushing his notepad away. “Sounds like you’re staying busy.”

“I am...but I don’t feel…” He thinned his lips as he searched out the word.

The therapist allowed him to think, then offered, “You’re not avoiding?”

“No.” Yuuri was surprised by how quickly and honestly the word came out. Shrugging he continued, “When things come up, I stop and deal with them. I even have a scrapbook upstairs where I’ve started filling in the missing gap of time. I think...I feel whole for the first time in a long time.”

Abramovich smiled, then reached across to his desk and pulled his calendar over. “That’s good because based on your progress, we’re dropping you back to once a week.”
Yuuri sat shocked for a moment. “Really?”

“I’m here if you need more, but I think you’ve progressed marvelously well. Perhaps we’ll have you down to once a month by the time the baby comes.”

“Goals!”

Victor found Yuuri in his office, legs pretzeled while he sat on the sofa, laptop off to the side, paper and pencil in hand. It had taken him longer to finish work with his skaters than planned but it seemed Yuuri was keeping busy. “You could have used the desk,” Victor pointed out.

Yuuri shrugged. “This felt more comfortable.”

Victor peeked over the omega’s shoulder to glance at the screen as he passed to his desk. “What are you working on?”

Yuuri kept his eyes on his work, “Lilia suggested I organize a recital and a small student ice show. I thought I’d be overwhelmed but it’s kind of fun.”

Leaning against his desk Victor studied the frown on his mate’s face. “Do you have some help?”

He nodded and shifted so half the couch could now be occupied. “Phichit wants to help me with it and I have a few parents already signed up. The good parents. So hopefully the drama won’t be too bad. I will showcase each child equally.”

Victor snorted, “There’s going to be drama no matter what. This is figure skating, the fights are vicious because the stakes are so low.” He settled next to Yuuri as the other man giggled. “Depending on your timing, some of the older skaters might be able to help you...a bit of service will do them some good and allow them to get their volunteer hours in.”
Yuuri tapped his lip with his pen. “I like that plan. Okay, I’ll open it up. Who do I need to talk to in order to schedule everything?”

Victor sat back against the plush couch, putting an arm up on the back and resting his forehead to his hand. “Facilities management but really, Yakov.”

*No wonder it’s always so difficult between him and Lilia, that man lives here.* “Always Yakov. Does he not understand the word retirement?”

Victor chuckled. “I think it just means more home time and slow down just a might. Oh, and it’s my job to yell at the skaters, not his.”

“Like that stops him,” Yuuri giggled.

Victor smiled as he watched his beautiful omega. “You seem...happy.”

Yuuri blinked up at him, surprised. He closed his laptop and moved to face Victor, “I am. Did you not know?”

He reached out to caress a fallen lock framing Yuuri’s gorgeous face. “It’s like...today it hit that you really are happy to be here.”

“I’m happy to be with you and you opened doors to allow me to be more. That makes me happy. And I think I thrive when challenged.”

Victor sat for a few moments, thinking over his lover’s words. Then he inhaled and patted the couch, “So we’re back to the show.”

Yuuri grinned as he nodded. “I plan to call Minako-sensei this weekend...I’m hoping to freshen up the recital.”

“You must have Tchaikovsky,” Victor argued in an exaggerated voice. “It’s tradition.” When Yuuri’s musical giggle filled the room, he knew his mate took the statement as intended.
The house was quiet and Victor soon learned that Yuuri had arranged for Olga to take the evening off. Nikolai was tinkering in his own apartment and giving the couple some space. “I thought...I’d make supper simple,” Yuuri suggested, looking away. His expression was shy, which Victor found enchanting.

“Whatever makes you feel the most comfortable.” He followed closely, brushing his fingers against the fabric of Yuuri’s shirt. “I can help.”

The omega turned, pulling Victor into an embrace, “Olga picked up some things for me before she stepped out for the night.”

Victor’s eyebrows shot up, “Did she go out with Lev?”

“And griped the whole way out the door,” Yuuri agreed with a grin.

Yuuri released the alpha and began taking the things out of the refrigerator. “I’m making a wonton dumpling soup but with a Japanese flare. It’s something my mother would make on her day off.” He began browning the meat, adding in the soy and pepper, turning the pan over to Victor to keep turned while he chopped the leek. He then showed Victor how to make the wontons.

“Yura would love doing this,” Victor mentioned.

“I’ll have to remember that for Sunday dinner.” Once the wontons were made, Yuuri covered them with a damp cloth and began making the soup base. Victor watched Yuuri chop the vegetables and garlic with the ease of someone who grew up in a kitchen. Once the soup was well on its way, Yuuri finished cooking the wonton dumplings before adding it to the soup. Victor had two bowls out when it was finished and they moved to the bar to eat, Victor pouring two glasses of sparkling cider to enjoy with their meal.

“This tastes amazing.” Victor praised, with his first bite of wonton dumpling.

Yuuri blushed, looking down as he took another bite of his soup. “It’s nice...to be able to cook
something and have it appreciated.”

“It wasn’t...who…” Victor trailed off, the look in Yuuri’s eyes telling him enough.  *Shuji*. “You are appreciated for all you offer this home, my beautiful Yuuri.”

“Thank you.”

Together, they cleaned up, put away the leftovers, and washed the dishes. The cleaning slowly turned into unspoken promises as they stood in each other’s space, their mutual scents mixing with the lovely smell of domesticity. Yuuri watched from the doorway as Victor put away the remaining dishes. Then cleared his throat indicating it was time to take this to the privacy of their room. Victor smiled, placing the dish towel on the counter and picking up the bottle of sparkling cider and glasses to follow the graceful omega down the hall.

Inside the dimly lit room Victor noticed how Yuuri’s glow from earlier returned. “Do you still want this?” he asked softly. He poured fresh glasses and handed one to Yuuri.

Yuuri nodded, taking a sip. He began to feel that quiet heat pour into him from that morning. A hunger for his husband overtook him. “There have been so many times where I wanted to tell you not to stop, where the scrape of your teeth made me want...more.” He moved onto the bed, rising on his knees to study his husband. Placing a hand on the man’s chest he gently raked his nails over the fabric, catching the nipple. Victor groaned at the slight stimulation.

“You know I wouldn’t...not if we hadn’t established that intent beforehand.” Victor studied Yuuri for any trace of doubt.

“I know. And that’s what I’m saying. I want this. Now.” Yuuri took another sip of his drink before setting the glass aside.

Victor nodded, setting his own glass down. “Then we shall have this.” His lips parted as he stepped forward, leaning into Yuuri to claim a kiss. Victor’s hands went around him, marveling how amazingly slim Yuuri remained. Healthy and fit with his pregnancy, Yuuri wore their baby in front, the bump showing when he turned on profile but not from behind. Victor’s fingers found the hem and soon he was pulling the shirt over his head, ducking down to suck a mark along Yuuri’s collar bone, a possessive growl at the back of his throat.

Yuuri arched into the contact, feeling himself grow weak in Victor’s arms. His hands grasped
Victor’s hair as a soft moan escaped his lips. Bonding was best created at the peak of pleasure, echoing that pleasure throughout the body. With Yuuri already pregnant, it wouldn’t throw him into heat but they both knew he might experience a pseudo-heat, Victor rutting in response. It was fine. They had the entire night and Yuuri was more than willing to take his knot over and over again.

Thirty minutes in, and Yuuri was panting, Victor behind him, deep within him, rocking even as the omega moaned. “Please...please...I need to…” Those words tumbled off Yuuri’s lips in plea. Victor licked and kissed the bonding gland, Yuuri bowing his head, submitting, wanting to be a part of Victor. “N-need you.”

“You’ve got me, Yuuri,” he answered, even as he rested his cheek against Yuuri’s neck.

As Victor shifted, dragging his shaft along Yuuri’s walls at a different angle, he heard the intermittent, “F-f-f-fuck,” slipping from Yuuri’s lips in a hiss.

“Do you need me to stop?” he teased.

“Don’t. You. Fuckin. Dare.” Yuuri grated, grinding his ass into Victor to make himself clear.

Victor smirked and resumed the push and pull. He knew he just needed to get Yuuri to give in that first time, to relax just enough. He leaned in and whispered, “You know, it’s just us...and that doesn’t happen often.”

“Mmmhhmmm,” Yuuri moaned, grinding back in answer.

“There is no need to hold back. Just...let go.”

“I’m trying,” Yuuri whined. “I-I…” Yuuri’s breathing pitched up and Victor realized Yuuri had wrapped his fist down his length. Victor’s joined his, giving Yuuri more to pump into.

“That’s it...keep going. Give me your release,” he encouraged.
Yuuri became more ragged, Victor leaned in and scraped his teeth across Yuuri’s neck and then that body stiffened with a cry. The alpha’s teeth locked down, breaking the skin even as the body in his arms shook through his release. Tightening his arms, Victor could feel himself coming undone and he would have his knot in Yuuri. As that body stilled in his arm, Victor let his knot expand in that ass. “You take me so well, my love, my bondmate.”

Yuuri whimpered, clutching at Victor’s hand, both now covered with Yuuri’s spend. He held Victor’s hand to his heart and the alpha understood. He could feel the overwhelming love from the other and he found himself speechless. He kissed Yuuri’s shoulder, the fresh mark on Yuuri’s neck, licking around to help it heal. They still had to create the omega bond but he could tell Yuuri was scattered at the moment. He reached down and pulled a blanket around the omega. Yuuri rested through the knot, growing restless when it started to go down.

Many alpha’s took their omega bond on their wrist, a sign of helpmate. They had talked about that but Victor could tell that wasn’t what Yuuri wanted. So Victor offered. “Do you want me to bend my neck to you?”

Yuuri had hesitated but Victor saw the want stirring in his eyes. “You would do that for me?”

Victor smiled, “Haven’t you figured out that I’d do anything for you?”

Yuuri, now free of the knot, turned to face his mate, his hand reaching behind Victor to slide over the back of the alpha’s neck, his fingers kneading the flesh, softening it to receive Yuuri’s bite. Victor could feel the heat of his rut rising up and that would help Yuuri tease the gland out, preparing it to take his bond. “Are you sure?” he whispered, studying Victor and the alpha knew Yuuri would not place his own wants over Victor’s.

He breathed out his answer, “Yes.” Leaning forward, he caught Yuuri’s lips in a kiss and could feel the omega’s body mould into his. Victor wanted to completely submit to Yuuri, to feel Yuuri inside him, to feel Yuuri’s teeth on his neck, to find his release at that moment of perfect contact. As if reading him, Yuuri began to turn Victor’s body, sliding his kisses along the alpha’s chin then back to his ear. Victor continued to turn for him until he lay on his stomach.

Yuuri was now straddling him, his kisses working from the back of his neck down his spine. Fingers teased down his side then his hips and finally along the plug that held all of the prep work Victor put in place as he showered earlier. As Yuuri worked back up his body, Victor felt the scrape of teeth, the sucking feel of Yuuri’s mouth, fingers still digging into his flesh, and then a tongue over his neck and that’s when he felt his rut break though. With a groan, he writhed into the sheets.
Yuuri kissed and licked at his neck, his hand reaching around, his fingers teasing up the alpha’s length. “Let me be a part of you,” he whispered against Victor’s skin.

Yuuri continued to awaken his rut, as he kissed and nipped, his hand grasping Victor’s length, the alpha fucking into it. “Give me your seed,” Yuuri ordered, his words whispering over the alpha’s skin. “Give me all of you.”

Victor could feel everything building into him and it took every bit of control not to grab the omega and dive between his legs. But this was Yuuri’s game and it was sweet torment, the way those fingers and lips teased. Then one finger slipped into the ring and pulled the plug from its nesting place. Victor moaned. He needed more. He wanted that stimulation. As much as the alpha in Victor wanted to fill, the man wanted to be filled and soon, those fingers were back, sinking into him. With a stuttered groan, Victor was now rocking onto those fingers and into the hand that held his cock. God, how was he going to survive this? But then those fingers were gone and one hand was firmly placed on Victor’s hips.

Yuuri sank into him with a slow steady movement, his kisses working back up to his neck. Yuuri lavished attention on that gland now fully exposed and aroused. His hips worked Victor’s ass and he heard Russian whispers slipping from the older man’s lips, Victor becoming lost in all of the stimulation Yuuri offered. He continued to kiss and lick the gland, his hand now lost in all of the stimulation Yuuri offered. He continued to kiss and lick the gland, his hand now reaching for Victor’s length. “Give me your seed,” he demanded. And then sank his teeth into Victor’s neck.

The alpha cried out even as he released into Yuuri’s hand. Yuuri stroked a few more times into Victor before finding his own release. He laid the alpha down on his side lovingly, continuing to kiss and lick the fresh bond. He felt the deep affection of his mate welling up inside him, answering with his own love. Victor remained still, staring straight ahead as he processed all of this information from his mate.

“I love you,” the alpha finally whispered.

“Mmmmm, me, too,” Yuuri agreed crawling over Victor and into his arms. Their lips found each other, their need still not sated. The night was still young and the newly bonded pair needed to solidify their connection, each subsequent mating making it stronger.
Yuuri lay next to Victor, spent when the alarm went off. He groaned, silencing it. “Call in. I don’t think I can walk today much less dance and skate.”

Victor chuckled and kissed into the turn of his neck. “I already arranged the day off for the two of us to rest. It’s a Friday. And with the pending snow, we called afternoon classes for the little ones.”

Yuuri was blissfully sleepy and understood only the part about rest. “Okay...then...let’s sleep.” Inside his omega was delighted as he cuddled into the alpha, their scents forming something new and altogether unique to the couple. It was both intoxicating and comforting. It was them.

Victor tucked himself around his mate, his bondmate, his partner. “Of course, lyubov moy .” He didn’t experience a rut when he bonded Yelena. They already knew they weren’t compatible. It was for show. He didn’t expect the intensity the night brought but Yuuri was equally demanding. He’ll get the omega to eat later even if he has to bring it to him in bed.

But the warm emotions coursing through him, the happy gurgle in his heart...it was like all of his emotions were echoed in Yuuri. Love, affection, joy, hope. He’d never felt so whole in his life.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I broke up the smut chapter because I never could do a long (pseudo)heat chapter. The smut was a device to get to the bonding. So there it is.

Don't forget to comment!
Chapter Summary

Visit from Victor's family in St. Petersburg.

Chapter Notes

Hey, all...writing some more chapters and I think this story will wrap up in about 20 more chapters. Don't worry, if it starts to feel rushed, I'll add more. I like a nice, solid ending.

Thank you, BluSkates, for the edits. I really appreciate you.

Ch. 64: Orange you glad it’s a baby?

Yuuri was still in bed when Yura came home, bouncing into the space and crawling into his arms, chattering about his sleepover. Then as he snuggled into Yuuri’s arms, he pulled back, wrinkling his nose. “Mama? You smell more like Papa.”

“He probably smells more like me, as well. We are now officially bonded, sweetie.”

He tilted his head thoughtfully. “So...you got married?”

“It’s...sort of like that. Without the ceremony.” Shifting in bed, he leaned forward and Yura caught a glimpse of the bondmark.

The little boy leaned forward and touched the healing mark. “Oh, did that hurt?”

Yuuri thought about it. Did it? When Shuji forced the bite on him, it hurt excruciatingly. He felt a part of him was destroyed that day. And then the command not to tell anyone. Yuuri wasn’t sure if he could tell anyone. But he was too afraid to try. With Victor, he felt like the missing pieces to his heart was put back together. “It may have a little but with the right person and consent, it’s...like finishing a good story. Everything just feels right like you’ve fallen into place.”
Yura listened thoughtfully before he asked, “Do you have to do that?”

Yuuri tilted his head thoughtfully before shaking his head. “No...there are more ways to be close to a person you love but this allows me to sense him even when we are apart and that is comforting.”

The little blond thought about that for a moment before stating, “If you had the...the…”

“Bondmark,” Yuuri provided.

Yura nodded and continued, “Then that bad man...would Papa had known sooner and got there in time?”

Yuuri thought about how Victor would have responded if he saw his mate and child being chased up those stairs. It might have been a very different ending indeed. Finally, he forced a smile. “Thinks happened as they should. And we are fine. So people came in time.”

Yura thought about it and snuggled up to him. Victor joined them soon after with a tray of fruit and bottles of water. Yura, in curiosity, leaned forward to sniff his papa. He thought about it before saying, “You smell more like Mama but you’re still you and Mama smells more like you but he’s still Mama.”

“The scent is to let the world know that Yuuri has an alpha, so they won’t try to...date him.”

Yura tapped his lip at that. “But our Yuuri has us. He wouldn’t date anyone.”

Both omega and alpha laughed warmly. “I would still occasionally be asked,” Yuuri murmured. “Although your Papa would scent me well, there are some very bold alphas out there that doesn’t respect a lesser claim. With a bondmark, they are less likely to ask because...another alpha would not settle well with me. My scent would sour to ward them off and Vitya...he’ll know something was wrong.”

Victor hugged Yuuri at those words while Yura frowned. “They better leave my Mama alone!”
Yuuri smiled at that but the knowledge that he could take the bus or even an uber without any untoward attention was reassuring. “Think of it this way. It gives me more freedom because no one will mess with me. It’s not always the safest world for an omega...even if they can fight like a tiger,” he added as he tickled his son’s tummy. The little one giggled and squirmed before snuggling into his arms.

“I’m not going to have a bad man!” he declared. “I have a Beka.”

Yuuri smiled at that, thinking, *I had a Phichit but it was a little too late.*

Yuuri and Yura walked through the produce section. While the omega was picking out vegetables, the little one held up a lemon. He frowned, concentrating on the imperious citrus then glanced an eye at Yuuri. Turning back to the fruits he asked, “How big is baby?”

“Hmmm,” Yuuri answered, taking out his phone. “The app says...week fifteen, a navel orange.” He moved over to the display of citrus and pulled out a perfect example, handing over the fruit. “About like this.”

Yura gingerly took the orange and quickly tucked it under his shirt. “About like this?”

Yuuri suppressed the urge to roll his eyes and merely chuckled. “Of course. Now give that here. We have to buy it now.”

“Can I eat it?”

Yuuri hummed and offered, “We’ll split it for a snack. How’s that sound?”

“Yummy!” Yura agreed, rubbing his tummy.

“Okay, but don’t get any bright ideas. I’m not buying a packet of biscuits just because you tuck
them into your clothes.”

“No promises.” Yura smirked.

Yuuri watched as the boy skipped ahead, nearing the dairy section. Cheeky!

With the promise of a baby, Vasilissa Nikiforova found her desire to hold onto the world a little longer. In fact, it erupted like a volcano within her. She wanted to hold that baby, to celebrate her younger son’s growing family, to embrace what was left for her life. The resigned mentality of accepting her fate melted the minute she remembered the smell of a newborn, the soft coos and the finger grabbing. Then she smiled to herself, remembering that Victor howled when he wasn’t being paid attention to, grabbed her earrings so often she stopped wearing them until he was five, and snored...even as a baby. It was that memory that settled it. She would live to hear her grandbaby snore. So as she sat in her oncology appointment going over options, she kept this in mind.

Before, it was about dignity. She’d rather go quietly with her chin up than to lose her hair and become something that was a dim remnant of herself. Her husband wanted her to fight but she refused. She heard stage four and wanted quality and dignity rather than quantity. She didn’t hear her doctor when he promised a positive prognosis.

But now there was a promise of a baby and baby’s are the death of dignity. She told the oncologist, “I’m going to hold that baby.” But it was more than that. She was going to change diapers, she was going to play peekaboo, she was going to be there when Yuuri cried over stretchmarks and show him her own. She was going to be present in a way she had never been before. It wasn’t that Vasa hadn’t been active in her Victor’s life, but there was a difference with grandchildren.

“That’s what I like to hear. Determination and a strong attitude are our greatest weapons.” She smiled broadly at the older woman. A few weeks ago this conversation was entirely one sided, the doctor practically begging Vasa to take charge of her fight. But it looks like all the fight came into her at once. Good luck, cancer. “Now, with stage 4 Hodgkin’s Lymphoma has a 65 percent survival rate over 5 years. I’m recommending twelve weeks of Stanford V protocol chemotherapy.”

She nodded, holding her husband’s hand that rested on her shoulder. “Will I lose my hair?”
The doctor pursed her lips, she didn’t want to see any of that fire dimmed. “You could lose your hair. We recommend you embrace it. It is a sign of courage. Select a scarf to wrap around your head in defiance.”

She had identified herself by her signature silver hair along with her brilliant green eyes for so long. To lose that…but then there was a new baby on the way. And those tall women on that show about drag racing from the States wore such fabulous wigs. She could do something like that. So she nodded. “Okay. Let’s get started.”

She was tired after her treatment and glad that her son opened his home up to her and her husband. Yuuri even offered their bedroom but she said she could sleep upstairs. She walked into the newly decorated omega room with both Andrei and Yuuri behind her and smiled at the warm touches. It didn’t look like Yelena but had a home feel to it.

“Did you find this old bed frame in the attic? It was my grandmother’s,” she stated fondly. Yuuri nodded, humming in the affirmative while her hand stroked mirrored frame showing Yelena holding Yura. She was beautiful even as the ravages of illness became apparent. “She went with grace.” Still torn with her decision she sat down on the bed and sighed at the softness. Lying down on the white bedspread, she smiled up as a blue throw was tucked around her. “Thank you, Yuuri. I’ll be down in a bit.”

Andrei smoothed her hair. “Call us if you feel lightheaded. Don’t take those stairs alone.”

“Of course, Dryusha,” she answered affectionately.

Yuuri and Olga were cooking when the other men came into the room, Yura trailing after. “Can we have cookies?” the little boy begged.

Yuuri glanced over with an amused smile. Yura wouldn’t let his father forget a promise. “There are gingersnaps and snickerdoodles in the cookie jar,” Yuuri offered.
Victor poured four mugs of coffee, a smaller, shallower cup for Yura. They all sat around the bar eating the cookies and coffee.

Andrei hummed thoughtfully as he chewed his cookie. “I forgot how much I enjoyed doing these things.”

“Having kids around helps to remind you,” Victor provided.

The father looked at his grown son, catching Victor on his shoulder with a soft hand, “You left too soon and Leonid...he was never a child. I swear.”

The other two men laughed. Leonid was determined to be the man of the house after his father. He never seemed to make a mistake. “I remember looking for Yelena and finding her at the main house,” Nikolai reminisced. “She and Vitya would follow Vasa in the garden or sit with her and have tea.”

“With me, it was always cookies and coffee. They both loved it. Said it made them feel grown up.”

“I just like it ‘cause it tastes good,” Yura piped up.

The others laughed indulgently towards the little boy. Cookies and smiles, the scent of the broth Yuuri was preparing filling the air.

“Do you always cook, Yuuri?” Andrei asked, interest and curiosity resting in his smile.

The omega shook his head, smiling shyly. “I thought I’d share a bit of my home with you and Olga is indulgent enough to let me in her kitchen.”

“That’s very kind of you. I can’t wait to see what you prepare,” the elder Nikiforov responded.

Victor watched his mate with a sweet smile, love evident in his expression.
When Andrei finally escorted his wife down, Victor went to her other side as she left the stairs but the matriarch was not about to be turned into a golden calf. “I’m not a china doll,” she protested, although her voice held affection. As they entered the kitchen, she smiled at the waiting cup of tea and a mild chicken soup. “This isn’t your normal fair, Olga,” she teased.

“That’s because Yuuri prepared it, ma’am.”

The Japanese omega ducked his chin shyly. “It was something my mother would make when I wasn’t feeling well. I thought…it might set better on your stomach. It has ginger in it.”

Vasilissa smiled warmly. “Thank you. That is most thoughtful.”

The rest of the family came around and Andrei sat between his wife and Nikolai with Victor on the other side of Vasilissa and then Yuuri who fussed over Yura followed by Olga. Yuuri blessed the food with a simple *itadakimasu*, the rest of the gathering echoing the phrase as best they could. It was clear that Yuuri had prepared the entire dinner that evening with Olga helping with the cutting and chopping. “This was my childhood favorite meal,” the Japanese omega explained. “It’s called *katsudon*, or pork cutlet bowl.”

Having settled her stomach with the soup, Vasilissa prepared a small bowl of the meal. Soon, they were all commenting on how it tasted. Yuuri blushed bashfully. “My mother’s is much better,” he deflected.

They all laughed warmly. “Mother’s food is always better,” Vasilissa agreed.

After their meal, Nikolai and Andrei were about to head out to the shop and Yuuri was tending Victor’s mother. Victor wasn’t sure where he should go but then Yuuri assured him warmly. “I’ll take care of her. Spend time with your father. It’s time the mothers to talk in private.”

As the others left, Vasilissa smiled softly. “How is the new mother?”

Yuuri smiled sheepishly thinking of how much better he felt moving out of the first few months of
pregnancy. “Better now. I guess the second trimester means more energy.”

She paused, watching him as he spoke and hearing more from his quiet times than others. “This isn’t your first, though…”

Yuuri shook his head sadly. “My first…the alpha that held me…he controlled what I ate so I didn’t have the appropriate amounts to maintain my strength…or my child.”

“I’m sorry,” she murmured quietly and put a gentle hand over his. “The…shrine upstairs?”

“It’s part of my healing process. If it makes you uncomfortable, I could remove it.”

She shook her head, squeezing his hand. “No…no, I wanted to respect it. Is it…for your children?”

“No…it’s more for the time I lost…and for Yelena for sharing her family with me. The shrine for my children is down this hall.” He led the older woman back and opened the door.

She entered quietly and studied the room. The sadness that filled these walls created a shiver and she soon backed out with a soft smile. “I’m so sorry for your losses.”

“It’s…what was meant to be,” Yuuri said quietly. He closed the door and led her into the main living room. He watched as she hugged herself and he could tell she felt displaced. “Tell me about what this house means to you.”

She smiled at that opening and took the sofa, Yuuri taking a seat next to her. “We would stay here for events in town usually. Plays. Ballets. Vitya’s competitions. He attended the Vaganova from age twelve on…and we arranged for Yelena to attend as well. They were both so talented. We imagined them together, her mother and I. But then it became apparent that Vitya and Yelena…” She paused looking for the right way to put it. It wasn’t that she was homophobic, she couldn’t love her son more, nor be prouder of him. She was just from a generation that never talked about sexuality. “They were into the same type. I thought for sure Vitya would be omega. He was so nurturing and protective. But then sixteen passed and he didn’t present. Eighteen caught us off guard in more ways than one. I think Vitya was surprised as well.”

“Victor said that he lived here as a baby,” Yuuri offered, noticing her voice drifted with memory.
She smiled warmly at the memory. “Here, oh, yes...we also lived here the first year or two of his life. Our home in the country had to have some major repairs. Age and a very damaging storm one winter. The nursery…” She drifted off into a memory of a room she had loved.

“Would you like to see it?” Yuuri asked as she faded to quiet.

She hesitated, then nodded. “I saw the pictures, but that’s different from seeing it in person.”

Yuuri led her through the hall and into the master bedroom. She paused, looking around, her eyes taking it all in. “It’s so different...so...Vitya.” She marveled at the changes in the room, and how beautifully suited it was to the new family that would use it.

Yuuri smiled at that. That was why this room was his retreat. It was like being held in Victor’s arms. He continued on through to open the hidden door. “Yura has been staying in here. He still has bad dreams and isn’t ready to go back upstairs,” Yuuri explained.

“He’s sensitive like Vitya. Always feeling so much for those around him.” She stepped in, and her expression brightened. “This is a room for a happy baby.”

“I hope so. I hope for them to be happy and healthy. That’s what I want. Mostly I hope to hold them, to be able to love them and raise them.” He looked around, his expression serene. “I hope this one won’t know the struggles from before.”

She allowed him a moment to quietly reflect then broke the silence bringing joy back to them. “Is Yura still excited?” she asked as she picked the ballet tiger up off the floor and settled it back on the little bed.

Yuuri laughed, snapping into the present and thinking of his little boy’s sincere interest in the baby. “Very. It’s a good thing he can tell everyone now. I think he would explode from holding back.”

She chuckled, then sighed. “Some days I think...how much like his father. Then I remember. But then, Yelena was a lot like Victor. Perhaps...”
“There’s a lot to be said about how one is raised,” Yuuri provided. “I know this has always been a loving home...even when Victor was in mourning.”

“He holds his pain so close to his heart,” she whispered, turning back to Yuuri and stepping towards the door. Yuuri led her back into the master bedroom. “When...I know I’m fighting but that just buys time. Hopefully.” She sat down on the large bed, running her hand down the soft fabric of the comforter. She looked up at Yuuri with imploring eyes. “When...I go...he will take it the hardest. Promise me you will take care of him.”

Yuuri took her hands and squeezed them in his. He didn’t argue with her and tell her she was going to have a long life. He knew time held no guarantees. “I will,” is all he said and she knew it to be true.

NOTES:

Yuuri is 15 weeks and although his high risk has him at an appointment every other week, he gets this week off. His baby is the size of a navel orange or a pear.
Absence makes the heart grow...

Chapter Summary

A little time apart supported by friends.

Chapter Notes

Hi...I am home for the day (getting my gas turned on after three weeks...this is cause to celebrate) and thought it was a good day to post. An early chapter. A long chapter. And there is sex. Does it get any better than this?

Ch. 65: Absence makes the heart grow...

(SMUT alert...in the last scene)

It was the first week of February when Yuuri, in a streak of independence marched over to Victor and told him, “Go to Europeans with your skaters. I'll be fine.”

Victor squeaked at the thought, pouting quickly to point out, “I’ll miss your 16 week appointment.” The alpha in him only wanted to be with his mate, scenting him, watching over him, and most importantly he wanted to watch their baby grow. If Victor would admit it, this was the strongest pull, and one that he was feeling very heavily. But Yuuri had been working with the skaters as much as his mate had and he understood the stakes. The European Championship was the continent’s precursor to Worlds, and while the IOC would never admit it, this was where they thinned the crowd down to the top five. Yuuri might have been from Japan, but as a skater he knew how important this championship was. And with several coaches out with the flu, they needed someone reliable at their sides. All eyes, including those of the International Olympic Committee were staring at Russia this year...for both good and bad. Victor needed to be there not just to support his skaters, but to help keep the Russian flag at competitions.

Yuuri watched his mate shift to another foot, meaning he would come up with several excuses if he didn’t act quickly. “It’s going to be pretty much like the 14th week. Blood drawn, blood pressure, measure my tummy, internal exam.” Yuuri watched Victor’s face, reading that the man was not dissuaded by the mundanity of the appointment. He reached out to put his hands on Victor’s hips, “But my 20 week hits close to Worlds. You want to be at that one.”
Victor moved into Yuuri’s embrace, putting his hands on the shorter man’s shoulders. Putting their foreheads together he nodded. “But…”

A soft chuckle opened his eyes, Yuuri was still pushing. He woke up that morning deciding he didn’t want to stand in the way of his mate’s career. For some reason, it was very important to him. But even more important was feeling that he could do this on his own, he didn’t need Victor shadowing his every step, watching him eat, watching him stretch, watching him watch TV. It was becoming a little claustrophobic. And it would be good for Victor to go to Euros, support the skaters, remind people that Russia deserved to be on that podium.

Victor was reluctant. “What if something goes wrong and I’m not here?”


Victor wanted to argue but with a serious flu going around among coaches, he knew he really needed to go. Swallowing he smiled at his mate and nodded. He called Yakov and told him what Yuuri said but in the privacy of his office he voiced his worry to his faithful coach. “What if something goes wrong?”

The gruff voice down the line snorted, “You’re starting to sound like Georgi. It might be good for you to take some time apart. We’ll all keep an eye on Yuuri.”

The phone call kept him in his office at home, working quickly to have tickets changed to his name and travel information updated. Fortunately, changing coaches and travel teams was a common occurrence and the transition went smoothly. Victor was able to print off all he needed soon after.

With that Victor returned to their room and quickly packed his bags, plane tickets for him and his skaters tucked into his travel wallet. Itineraries. Hotel reservations. Everything but Yuuri. One more time, he reached out to the omega who he found sitting in the middle of his nest surrounded by their dogs and a couple of kittens. “Are you sure?”

Yuuri came up on his knees and kissed him over the edge of their bed. “I’m fine. Because of you, I’m fine.”

Victor rested his forehead against his mate’s. “I’m taking your scarf.”
“Probably a good idea,” Yuuri chuckled. “Yours is wound into the nest somewhere.”

Victor smiled, warmed by Yuuri’s actions and thoughts. “I’ll call when I get there.”

“I’ll keep my phone on me.”

Victor pulled back, placing his hands on Yuuri’s arms and turning serious. “If something happens, call Chris. And Yakov.”

“I will,” Yuuri reassured him. It was understood that Yuuri would, of course, call him as well.

Phichit sat next to Yuuri at the doctor’s appointment. “It’s been awhile since we’ve done anything like this.”

Yuuri nodded, squeezing his hand. “At least this time I’m not going in early labor.”

Phichit heard the fear in his friend’s voice disguised as humor and let go of his hand to put his arms around his best friend. “And you’re not going to. This baby is going to come and be healthy and wonderful.”

Yuuri smiled weakly. He didn’t have the cruelty in him to say that he remembered Phichit saying something very similar a few years ago. His friend was just as painfully aware of how even with all the conviction in his heart some things couldn’t be just spoken into existence.

The room around him dissolved into memory. A very different doctor’s office in Japan. The nurses smirking at him as he sat there, alone, alphaless. They offered what a thin pity to him, never realizing he was grateful to be alone, without Shuji’s constant snickering at his weight, at how ugly he was. Once behind the door he would get a snide lecture about nutrition and ‘if you want this one maybe you’ll do a better job taking care of it.’ Then he was shown out, into the lobby and into Phichit’s waiting arms. Yuuri never told his friend of the cruelty he received from those pledged to preserve health.

Yuuri took the memory as it came. But unlike the past this horrid stroll didn’t leave him empty and terrified. There was something in him growing stronger...well, two things. He smiled at the
bump, placing a hand. *You and me against the world.*

Phichit nudged him, “You good over there?”

Yuuri forced a smile. It would be real before long. Once he shook of the dregs of memory. “Thank you for coming with me. I didn’t think I could get Victor to go to this competition but a couple of the skaters were very nervous when the other coaches started getting sick.”

Phichit smiled, “I should admit I’m here for me as much as you.”

Yuuri furrowed his brow at his friend. “Peach?”

The Thai man sat silently for a moment. His hand slowly making its way to cover Yuuri’s over his belly. “This one will happen. I just know it.”

Yuuri felt warmth rush over his body. He knew his friend believed whole-heartedly that this baby would make it. That he would hold it, love it. With those words Yuuri felt a confidence he hadn’t dared feel before.

In with Dr. Romanova, Yuuri sat still while the nurse took the necessary fluids for their tests and then laid back for the exam. She smiled reassuringly. “You’re progressing nicely and your weight is right on schedule for where I want it to be.”

“And my blood pressure?”

She hummed before answering, “Acceptable. It’s slightly elevated, I’m sure due to your mate being away but nothing alarming.”

Yuuri exhaled slowly. He was fine with that. He had an afternoon full of children to fill his time and Phichit offered to let him stay with them if it gets to be too quiet at his home. Yuuri knew he couldn’t. He wouldn’t be able to sleep outside of his nest at all. But maybe he’d pull Yura into the nest with him. The little one loved napping with him.
As he left the office, Phichit joined him for lunch. Yuuri studied him across the table thoughtfully. “You’ve been upset since the doctor’s visit.”

Phichit shrugged. “It’s...got a lot of mixed memories.”

Yuuri nodded, slipping inward. “We have shared some rough times...but there have also been good ones.”

Phichit shrugged once more, retreating into his cup of tea. Yuuri watched his friend quietly sip his tea and avoid his gaze. “Peach, what is it?”

The Thai man put the cup down, keeping his eyes on the table. “Chris...Chris and I are trying to get pregnant.”

Yuuri reached a hand out, but saw Phichit pull it back. He was hurt by the refusal but kept silent. His friend was working through very hard emotions.

After a moment Phichit began again, “I don’t want to hurt you, but I’m jealous. We’ve been trying, meeting with doctors, and nothing’s working.” He looked up, “And then you get pregnant.” He ran fingers through his hair, “I know I’m sounding awful, it’s not as easy for some as it is for you. You get pregnant without trying. And we’ve...been trying for a while.”

Yuuri listened quietly before saying to his friend, “It doesn’t count unless it sticks. I think...we have both been struggling and you’ve been carrying the weight of my struggles too long. It’s okay for you to focus on you. I’m...going to be okay.”

Phichit smiled at that. It was good to hear Yuuri say that. “I still worry.”

“I know...and I’d tell you to stop, but it won’t do any good. Take some time for you, though...if there is one thing I’ve been learning from Dr. Abramovich and everyone else around me, it’s that self care is our most important tool for healing. And maybe...you need to heal as well.”

“I’ve been right there with you this entire time.”
Yuuri reached across the table to take his best friend’s hands in his, this time Phichit met him halfway. “I know…and you’ve taken such good care of me. It’s almost habit between us now. I lean on you and you support me. But…we need to work on some new habits. And I’d like to be able to support you as well. It’s time. And I’m strong enough now.”

Phichit squeezed his friend’s hands back before answering, “You’ve always been strong. To go through what you’ve been through and to come through to the other side…that takes a mountain of strength. I just…I think I’ve taken care of you for so long that I don’t know how not to take care of you.”

“Then let’s take Saturday and have a spa day.”

Phichit lit up at that thought. “I’d like that.”

Stay busy. Yuuri used it as a mantra, almost like Dori singing *just keep swimming*, the omega found himself humming *just keep skating, dancing, stretching, teaching...hell, just keep doing laundry* was potentially going to drive Olga insane. However, it was successful. It was almost as if Victor were just working somewhere else in the building. Yuuri led his students through their steps and talked to them about a recital to see what everyone wanted before he designed the program. Minako had sent several programs she’d done in the past to him and he liked them. However, they just didn’t feel right. Listening to music on his way out, he was glad to see Katya waiting to take him home.

“I promised Vitya I’d take care of you,” she informed him, giving him a hug. “I’m here for Mila anyway. So I’ll see you home while he can’t.”

“I didn’t know or I wouldn’t have made you wait,” Yuuri answered. Transportation was his last problem, and unfortunately it was proving to be an impressive hurdle. He thought about it as he loaded up his gear and Yura climbed in to sit next to Mila, clipping into the carseat with practiced ease. “This would be easier if I could drive.”

“Mahar was saying something about that the other day. She is fine with a driver but some days she’d like to go out on her own. Rohan already drives.”
Yuuri thought of the omega pair, both new Russian like himself, driving. “Maybe I should get Nikolai to work with me while Victor is out of town and not being overprotective.”

“Good plan!” she agreed with a giggle.

That night, he talked to Nikolai and the old man grunted in agreement. “I’ll take you outside St. Petersburg. Country roads are best at first.”

And so they began the next morning, Yuuri determined and deciding if he can learn in this ancient truck, he can drive anything. Nikolai took him out of town, and they traded places. With Nikolai’s patient instruction, Yuuri put the truck in gear and took his first tentative steps towards driving and his eyes lit up in excitement. “I’m doing it!”

The old man chuckled. “You will do fine. We practice. You get better.”

Yuuri grabbed his phone and answered on the first ring. It wasn’t as if he was watching the device hoping for a call to come through. He was perfectly fine. He was just psychic about his phone, and Victor…and when Victor would finally call his phone. A warm chuckle greeted him through the speakers. “How are you, my Yuuri?”

“I’m good. How are our skaters?”

“They are fine.” Yuuri could hear his voice change as he smiled when he spoke. “Alexei wants to send a video for you to review.”

“Okay. I’ll get on the computer after this call. How is he?” He worried about Alexei who could overwork himself and get into his head. He reminded Yuuri so much of himself at that age.

“He’s fine. He just wants to make his Coach Yuuri proud with his step sequences.”
Yuuri huffed. “I’m not really a coach.”

“Well, I’m not going to be the one to fight him, because as far as he’s concerned you are...the rest is just paperwork. That’s how we all feel. Now, my darling, tell me what you’ve been up to.”

Yuuri giggled and started to tell him about his day. “Nikolai took me out this morning for my first driving lesson!”

Victor laughed warmly. “In the old dinosaur, I bet.”

“Of course. Can you see him in anything else?”

Victor’s warmth came through the phone in his voice. “I guess not. At least you aren’t learning from Phichit and Grand Theft Auto.”

Yuuri snorted and agreed readily before sobering. “I talked to him yesterday, after my appointment. I...I hate that I took so much of his life. It was really like he was there with me, my struggles were often his struggles. He kept his life on hold while I was...held.”

“I don’t think you had much choice in the matter. Phichit decided you were his mission. And you don’t give his emotions enough credit, there’s no way he could move on without you.” Victor paused. “Chris said that he knew that was part of the relationship when he went in. He did it anyway and your struggle also became a driving force behind his practice. He does the entertainment and personal attorney work to pay the bills but his passion is when he can help an omega gain independence and restore their rights.”

Yuuri considered this and couldn’t help the soft smile as he thought about Chris as someone else’s white knight. Then turning his thoughts back to his friend, he said, “They...they want a baby.”

Victor hummed down the line, “Yes, Chris said that, too. They need to take some time for themselves.”

Yuuri tugged at his lower lip with his thumb and finger. “And Phichit needs to take some time for himself. He’s still taking care of me.”
“I agree...so what can we do to help?”

Yuuri was silent for a moment, considering. “I suggested a spa day on Saturday. I thought we should emphasize self care.”

“Okay, that’s a start. I’ll push the idea with Chris and maybe suggest they take a trip.”

Yuuri nodded sharply in agreement and then remembered he was on the phone. “I think that’s a great idea! A sort of honeymoon.”

Victor was quiet for a moment, thinking about Yuuri’s words. “Are you upset we haven’t taken anything like a honeymoon?”

Yuuri blinked at that because the idea never occurred to him. “I...I never really thought about it. We’re mated and people know that, but we never had a ceremony. Not that I need one.” He chuckled thinking that Victor probably did need one, and desperately wanted one. Eventually I’ll give in and we can have that, but now is just for us. “I mean, you don’t keep me from my family and include me in yours. We go out together, and I go out alone when I want, so I’m not locked down. And I always feel spoiled when I’m with you. I guess...we sort of have a honeymoon at home.”

He heard Victor’s smile through his voice. “I like that. Now...how are our babies?”

Yuuri rubbed his tummy as he answered, “Our little avocado is doing great. And my numbers look good. She said my blood pressure was only up slightly but figured it was the separation. As for Yura, he’s begging for a sleepover with Beka.”

Victor chuckled, “Let him have it so you can focus on Phichit. Maybe for your spa day.”

“That’s a great idea! I’ll double check with Mehar.”
Victor watched his skater as he practiced. His mind wasn’t where it should be and he knew that but it couldn’t be helped. Between his mate and his mother, he was distracted. And he knew Yuuri would be upset if he was the distraction keeping Alexei from doing well. Yuuri had sent back his critique of the video the same night after their call. Alexei was his first adult student.

However, Victor’s priorities were different now and he understood Georgi and why he chose to focus on his family. As Alexei came off the ice, Victor handed him his guards and they talked, the mentor skater telling the student some last minute corrections. It was Alexei’ first time at the European Figure Skating Championship and he deserved better, a coach that wasn’t distracted by family concerns. But he had Victor.

“Do you think Yuuri will be upset if I make this change, Coach?”

Victor snorted. Of course he’s worried about Yuuri’s approval. Victor wasn’t the least bit jealous of his skater’s crush on Yuuri. He suspected several others had one as well. But they would all protect his mate and after the past few months, he was fine with that. “I’ve recorded it and I’ll make sure I share it.”

“Thanks, Coach.” And then Alexei was gone and Victor’s eyes followed him back towards the dressing room. Victor sighed, pulling out his iPad and sending the file to Yuuri followed by a message.

Victor/ Alexei wanted you to weigh in on his practice.

He walked over to the spot where he was working. He had ladies coming up next. Six skaters in all at this competition spread out over singles, pairs, and dance. It would be a long day.

Yuuri/ I’ll look at it as soon as I get home. Do you want me to respond through you or directly?

Victor sighed, feeling his exhaustion set in and the day had just begun. Maybe Yuuri could assist him from home.

Victor/ Can you send it directly and copy to me? I might send you some others. Is that okay?
Yuuri/ I have no kids and was going to fold socks. I think I can work it in.

Victor smiled at Yuuri’s lovely sarcasm.

Victor/ Thanks. I need an objective eye.

Yuuri/ Wish I could be there to help.

Victor/ I know. I think you should look at taking that coaching exam.

Yuuri/ I’ll think about it.

Victor smiled at that. It wasn’t a no.

Phichit stretched out and wiggled his toes. “I can’t believe we haven’t done this sooner. How was your prenatal massage?”

“I can’t talk to you, I’m a dead lump right now I’m so relaxed. And I think baby is equally relaxed. The avocado is dozing, I can feel it.”

“It’s all of those feel good hormones,” Phichit teased. He sighed, his face covered in some green goo, cucumbers over his eyes. “Besides the massages, we can do the other stuff at home. Facial mask, mani-pedi…”

Yuuri summoned all of his strength to holding up a finger, “No no. The point is to take a time out.”

Phichit snorted. “I think you’ve been around Victor too long.”
Yuuri hummed at that thought. “Oddly, we haven’t done this together. A couple’s massage sounds great, though.”

“Maybe you should do lessons. Learn how to take care of each other.”

“And maybe you should do the same,” Yuuri stated pointedly. He watched Phichit’s cheeks pink at the thought and he knew his friend was enchanted with the idea. *And Chris will love it even more.*

Alexei was proud of his silver and Yuuri was surprised to see himself tagged in the photo as he sent out in social media, “I couldn’t do this without my amazing team of coaches!” Yuuri was happy for him. Maybe he was living vicariously through the skater, doing the things he could not...but perhaps that was okay. They were both gaining from that relationship.

The most important part at the moment was welcoming Victor home. Yura was on another sleepover, Mahar insisting that the little boy spend another night with his friends. Yuuri knew what she was doing, giving him a night alone with Victor and smiled a secret thank you dropping the boy off. He ran a hand over the new nightie he still hadn’t worn. So, after a luxurious bath, Yuuri dressed with care. The black lingerie made him feel beautiful. Sitting in front of the makeup mirror, he moisturized his skin and tried to think of all of the things Phichit would have him do. Eyeliner is a definite yes. Lip gloss. He looked over at the eye shadows, picking some warm neutrals. He picked up the blusher and added color to his cheeks. His lips, he lined in a natural shade and began building color. Eyeliner, winged like Phichit had shown him. Eyeshadow blended to bring out his brown eyes but still natural. Powder. Then gloss. As he finished, he was pleased by the soft appearance in his mirror. He arranged his hair, pushed back and still soft. His nightie in place, the matching robe resting on his shoulders, he shuffled into their bedroom and crawled into his nest.

Now to wait. He thumbed through his social media. Checked Pinterest. Read some more on his book. Texted back and forth with Phichit, sending a picture to confirm that he looked good. Petted the dogs. And slowly, his body overrode his desires as his head fell back and he drifted off to sleep.

He’d missed the text from Victor saying he’d be home soon, which is why the alpha was treated to the sight he was now taking in. Victor smiled as he walked into their bedroom finding Yuuri spread out beautifully for him...and asleep. He quickly snapped a picture before Yuuri woke up. Yuuri turned onto his side, his hand slipping under his cheek and Victor had to steal another
picture. He’d get them approved by Yuuri later, to keep but not to share. First, he planned to
shower off and rid himself of travel scents. Yuuri loved him but he would not welcome foreign
smells into their nest.

He returned to their room with barely any clothes on, if you count skimpy black briefs. Crawling
in bed next to Yuuri, the omega roused and smiled, welcoming him in. “I tried to stay awake.”

“There was a delay. You’re...beautiful,” he whispered.

Yuuri’s smile blossomed all soft and blushy. “Thank you. I wanted to be beautiful for you.”

“Do you want to cuddle...or make love?” Victor asked, his voice deep and husky.

Yuuri’s blush deepened and Victor could smell a spike of arousal in his mate’s scent. “Well, when
you put it like that...” He leaned up to capture Victor’s lips. “Make love...I need you in me.”

Victor kissed him long and luxuriously, Yuuri’s scent so strong for him he could taste it. “Did you
touch yourself while I was gone?”

Yuuri smirked. “No. I wanted to wait for you.”

“It’s okay...if you want to.” Victor kissed down his neck, “I think it’s hot to think of you laying
here wanton hands roaming over your glorious body.”

Yuuri leaned in and kissed him, trailing to his neck to suck a mark before falling back into his
pillow to answer. “I can’t...without you. Like, I can only go so far and it gets stuck.”

“You need me to orgasm.”

Yuuri nodded, chewing his lower lip. “It’s stupid, I know.”

“It’s not stupid. I didn’t touch myself either. I did take your sweatshirt with me and curl up with it
to sleep. I need your scent just to sleep.”
“I am spoiled in that I had our nest.”

Victor kissed Yuuri’s nose, then his chin, then his lips. “Probably piled up with dogs, cats, and one kid who is very much the bed hog.”

“I didn’t mind,” Yuuri murmured, his fingers tangling into Victor’s hair. “Are you okay? You seemed...off when we talked or even texted.”

Victor tried to be honest, but light. “I just missed you. I worried, often, and about everything. I think...I’d prefer traveling with you in the future. The separation was hard for me, harder than I thought and going in I knew it would be bad.” He paused, looking at Yuuri sincerely. “I was serious about your coaching certifications.”

Yuuri shrugged. “I mean, I’m not very good. I’m okay with kids but with older skaters…”

“You’re amazing, and you’re the strongest technician we have at the rink. And you’re tireless. You know that’s the one problem we’ve been having since the Soviet era, stamina.” He laughed knowing that Yuuri could skate the entire club off its ice. “The skaters love you and they all want your opinion. I felt...like I was missing half of my team and I’m not talking about all of those coaches with the flu. I needed you.”

“I wish I could have gone with you,” Yuuri murmured, his hand sliding over Victor’s cheeks. “But you are the head coach of this skate club. I know you can do this job without me looking over your shoulder. You were already doing it without me.”

“I wanted you to look over my shoulder and to stay close to me.”

Yuuri smoothed his hair and asked, “And who would watch our babies. I need to be home...as much as possible. But...I can go on an occasional trip with you.”

Victor smiled at those words. “Babies...how many do you want?”

Yuuri hummed as he thought about it, rolling his hips into Victor’s thigh. “Including Yura...probably two or three more. I would be fine with more than that but...there is an empty
space in my heart and I need my babies. Starting with this one.” He pressed Victor’s hand on his stomach. “And this house...it could hold half a dozen kids with ease.”

“It definitely could. Do they all have to...do you have to give birth to them all?”

Yuuri hummed as he thought about his relationship with Yura before shaking his head. “I think...before Yura, I believed that. I thought I’d have to give birth to feel that connection. But Yura is so much a part of my heart, I can’t imagine a life without him. He is my baby as much as this one.”

He pulled Yuuri’s hand up to his lips and kissed it. “I was talking to Chris...he was saying he’d be fine adopting. I guess...it made me start thinking. We have so much love.”

“And we have crazy busy schedules,” Yuuri reminded him, then his face softened. “It’s something to consider, though. I’m not opposed to the idea.”

Victor smiled softly, pressing a kiss onto Yuuri’s forehead, then nose, then chin, before ducking down to kiss the swell of his tummy. “But you, darling, are going to make a splash in this world.”

Yuuri laughed softly. “Yes, they are. Quite literally.” But then he was distracted by Victor’s continuing journey down his body as the nightie was pushed up, and fingers eased down his panties... sexy maternity panties. He fought the urge to snort-laugh at the oxymoron. But then he felt Victor’s lips on the tip of his length, his tongue edging around the foreskin as Yuuri released a groan. God, he needed this. Victor slid his tongue down the length and ducked down to suck one ball then the other as Yuuri bit into his lower lip. Hands eased him out of his panties and then Victor was back, kissing his way up Yuuri’s legs and inner thighs.

As Yuuri’s legs relaxed, open and ready for Victor, he moaned softly as he felt fingers slide back towards his entrance. He wanted his lover so much, to feel him inside, to wear his scent. Lifting his hips to welcome the intrusion, he started as he felt teeth in the soft flesh of his inner thigh and then lips sucking. He loved it when Victor marked him, with scent, with hickeys, anything that made him his. Then he was distracted by two fingers sinking into him. “Yeeeess,” he breathed out, needing that connection with his mate.

It wasn’t long before Yuuri was panting, begging for his alpha to fill him up. “Please,” he cried out, looping a leg around Victor’s shoulder.
The alpha chuckled. Pregnancy had no effect on Yuuri’s flexibility. “You are so impatient,” he teased.

“It’s been a bloody week, and I’m a horny pregnant omega!” Yuuri grated out.

Victor didn’t want to challenge that thought, his hand going down to his own length, a few pumps to get him ready for Yuuri. Then he pressed slowly in, listening to the amazing moan that Yuuri rewarded him with.

Another leg going over the alpha’s other shoulder as Yuuri groaned out, “I want it deep.” And who was Victor to deny him that request. Victor rolled his hips and heard the sinful moan that escaped Yuuri’s lips. Slow and deep, Yuuri’s soft cries slowly building into pants. Yuuri’s legs started to slip from Victor’s shoulders, wrapping around his hips, his heels helping him to meet Victor’s thrusts. “I’m close,” he panted out breathlessly.

Victor shifted them so he didn’t need to support Yuuri with both hands and reached for Yuuri’s length. Finding his timing once more, he continued to rock into Yuuri, his hand working Yuuri with the same rhythm; Yuuri’s pants in time with his movements. Yuuri was amazing, beautiful, ruined for him. He couldn’t imagine life without this omega in it. Then Yuuri’s cry of “I’m coming” followed by his warm release and Victor knew he needed something more, pulling out of Yuuri and releasing across Yuuri’s stomach. Sliding his hand along the spend, he mixed their seed before sliding along Yuuri’s scent gland. Yuuri groaned, reaching down to copy the movement.

“Shower?” Victor suggested once they caught their breath.

“Get it warm for me?” Yuuri asked with a whine. And Victor couldn’t say no to that pout. He went into the bathroom and started the shower, pulling out the towels and washcloths so they could bathe off. As the steam started to build, he popped his head into the bedroom and asked, “Are you ready?”

Yuuri huffed. “I may need a towel to clean up this mess before I get up.”

*Always practical.* Victor smiled and tossed him another towel.

Soon Yuuri joined him, dropping the dirty towel in the hamper before stepping into the shower with his mate. Leaning in, they shared a long kiss before continuing to wash off.
Yuuri curled up into Victor thinking how comfortable they were in sex, talking and enjoying one another. Sex was just another form of communication, like dance, like skating. With Victor wrapped up around him, his hands wound into Yuuri’s, his chin tucked over Yuuri’s shoulder, Yuuri felt himself relax more than he’s been able to all week. He snuggled closer to Victor, the curve of his ass caught in the curve of his lover’s body. I’m at home when I’m with you. Victor hugged him as if he heard his thoughts bringing a smile to Yuuri’s lips.

NOTES:

Yuuri is 16 weeks pregnant and this lets you know how baby is developing: https://www.whattoexpect.com/pregnancy/week-by-week/week-16.aspx
Yuuri woke up with a start, breathing heavily. The gruesome dream still had hold of him, the sweat that had soaked him awake quickly grew cold on his skin leaving him shivering. A small whine escaped his throat as foggy eyes focused and unfocused on the room. And then, like the warmth and strength he needed, Victor’s arms were around him. “I...I dreamed that I was covered in blood.”

Victor pressed a kiss into his shoulder. “The baby?” In truth he could tell from his mate’s scent that there was something more than a nighttime kick.

Yuuri was still at first before shaking his head. The dream, which had been so vivid only moments before was fading quickly, leaving only the impression of dread. “It wasn’t...it felt...violent. Like someone attacked me and then...and then...I struck back. And there was so much blood. And I didn’t know if it was mine...or his.” He hugged himself, protective arms wrapped around his belly. “I think...it was Shuji.”

Victor tightened his arms around Yuuri, feeling the smaller man tremble in his embrace, the fear sliding across the bond connecting the two of them. “I’ve got you, solnyshko. You’re safe and he is far, far away. Behind steel. With lots of guards making his life a living hell.”

Yuuri sucked in a sob. “It’s supposed to be over,” he argued jerkily. He sniffed, feeling the pain of his past. He continued to let it out, streaming tears, wracking his body. Victor held onto him. Yuuri was almost tempted to push him away, guilty for forcing Viktor to see this, to have to endure
hiss and his endless weakness. “I’m sorry...I’m so...”

“Shhh...you’ve nothing to apologize for. Just let it out. However long it takes.”

Yuuri turned and crawled into his arms, burying his head into the turn of Victor’s neck. The alpha tightened his embrace in response, supporting the omega as he continued to cry. Finally, after some time, Yuuri grew still, an occasional sniff letting Victor know he was still awake. The alpha rocked his mate, soothing him with his touch and scent but holding his pheromones back. He didn’t want to cheat Yuuri’s pain. He’d be better if he worked through to the other side.

Finally, Yuuri patted his arm, wiping his eyes with hands as he sat up. “I read...in the book it said that I might start having weird dreams.” He shifted, laying on his back as Viktor hovered above him. “I hadn’t expected nightmares. Just maybe sex dreams about Wayne Gretsky…” He stopped as Viktor’s face crumpled with repulsion. Yuuri’s eyes widened in mock rage, “I’ll have you know in his day that was a sexy man.”

Viktor couldn’t keep the laughter back. “Well, maybe the hat trick would do it for you, but I think I can beat it.”

Yuuri burst into laughter, snorting at the ridiculousness of his mate’s jealousy over a fantasy of an elder hockey player. They settled into the mattress, holding each other. Eventually however Yuuri had to return to his fears. “I...don’t know if I can handle more dreams like that.”

Victor pressed a kiss into his mate’s head. “We’ll talk to Abramovich tomorrow. Maybe he’ll have a suggestion.”

Yuuri nodded, hugging back into his mate, his body suddenly feeling heavy and depleted.

Their little blond hellion was as hyped up as Yuuri was tired the next morning. Nikolai and Olga noticed the omega barely keeping up with the bundle of energy and immediately jumped in to help. When asked, Victor simply explained, “Nightmare.”

It is a fact known by all parents that when the child can sense a weakness, they immediately begin pushing the boundaries. Instinctively, Yura was bound and determined to test all of the rules that
morning and Yuuri just watched as he stuffed a sockless foot into his shoe. He had failed to create
the reaction he had hoped for, in fact the act garnered no reaction at all. That’s when the little boy
grew still, noticing something was off about his mama. “Are you okay, Yuuri?”

Yuuri shrugged, standing up to leave the room. Yura limped after him, his foot half in and half out
of his shoe. “But Moom...you’re supposed to make me wear my socks.”

Yuuri simply nodded, sitting on the top stair, his eyes resting on the new carpet in the upstairs
hall. Yura huffed dropping down into the floor next to the rail and halling his shoes off. “See, I’m
putting them on. Okay?”

Yuuri patted his foot but remained listless causing the blonde to frown as he pulled on his shoe.
But then, he had a problem. “I...can’t tie them, Mama.”

Yuuri turned and pulled the little foot into his lap and efficiently tied the shoe and then the other.
Yura then crawled into his lap. “Are you mad at me?”

Yuuri blinked at those words before hugging him tight. “No, I’m not mad.” The tears caught the
blonde off guard and his green eyes widened as he looked down the stairs for help. Ren was
already headed up the stairs and Victor came out of the living room and was soon climbing the
stairs behind him.

Kneeling down, Victor disentangled his son and patted his behind lovingly. “Mama is just having
a rough morning. Why don’t you go help Olga with breakfast.”

Yura looked worriedly towards his mother before nodding, leaving the adults on the stairs alone.

Ren crawled up into Yuuri’s arms and the omega held onto her in place of his little boy for a long
time. Victor wrapped Yuuri up into his larger hold, the figure feeling slight at the moment as he
wept. Patience . He learned this with Yelena. She cried so much when pregnant, all of her
nightmares coming to life. He should have expected it with Yuuri.

Yuuri sat in Abramovich’s office, withdrawn and worn down by his tears. Victor was nearby,
needing something to help his mate when he was like this. “This could be a result of hormones
while baby develops but it could also be repression of trauma coming to the surface. I would like to visit with Yuuri further on this.”

“He was so proud of being down to once a week,” Victor sighed, hating that they were talking to Yuuri in the third person but his mate was unresponsive.

“And I’m not saying we need to up his visits on a regular basis but he is clearly shaken. We need to help work him through this. Since it is a dream problem, I’d like to try hypnotism. It would simulate sleep and perhaps help us navigate through the dream triggers.”

“Do I need to sign something?”

“No, I will need Yuuri to sign the paperwork.” He leaned forward and snapped twice, smiling warmly as Yuuri’s eyes blinked in his direction. “There you are. You looked like you weren’t with us. But you’ve been listening all along.”

Yuuri’s response was slow but he finally nodded.

“I know it feels like you’ve gone backwards. However, these little hiccups are expected. Think of it as a little regression to help us suss out a boil so that we can lance it.” He watched as Yuuri grimaced, but the metaphor reaching home. “Do you think you can work with me on this?”

Again a slow nod.

“Do you know what I want to do with hypnosis?” He waited for Yuuri’s nod before continuing. “If you agree, I’d like for you to sign this paper for consent.”

Yuuri shifted forward, his body heavy, and studied the words before reaching for a pen and signing it. “I already feel so heavy.”

“And because of that, you will go under fast,” Abramovich explained. “Would you like your mate in here while we do this?”

Yuuri nodded. He knew he’d feel safer with Victor nearby. “Please stay,” he added, lifting tired
eyes towards Victor.

Going under felt like an extension of his reality. He knew everyone was there, could sense his mate’s presence. The feeling of walking through a waking dream overwhelmed him at first, and then the walls of the room fell away and he was there.

His body tingled with a cold energy, fear...no terror. It was cold, sparse. He no longer felt weighed down but he was absolutely trapped. "The walls are so white, like he could erase his crimes with paint," Yuuri stated. His voice felt flat, like he was narrating his story rather than living it. "I hate this fucking room." He was so exposed, naked in this room. He was kept there until he was broken. Even then he couldn’t push the passion of his hatred into those words. They felt empty.

He felt his head fall back. His thoughts sliding a million miles away, trying to forget him, trying not to feel him as he took what he wanted. If he cooperated, he could get out. So he eventually quit fighting and the door was left open. The first time he held the knife in his hand, it felt empowering. He wanted to...he wanted to...

Crying out, he was in the middle of the dream, covered in blood. Then a word. A safe word to pull him out before he drowned. He blinked, his eyes turning to look at his husband. Victor was quiet, studying him. He turned his eyes towards the doctor. “I feel...disconnected from those thoughts, that place.”

“You likely had a number of escape plans while you were there, some that you would only dream of putting into action.”

Yuuri paused, wondering if he should share what he had just recalled. Looking at the doctor he offered, “Like...murdering my...my...kidnapper?”

“It’s not murder if it’s self defense,” the old doctor pointed out.

He turned to Victor, sitting up. “I think...I think you’re safe.” It was a sad attempt at a joke but Victor gave him a weak laugh anyway. “I don’t suppose you convinced me not to dream those things.”

“I implanted a failsafe. We worked out a word that you could use to escape those dreams, any dream that troubles you.”
“And...can I know what that word is?”

“It’s me,” Victor said quietly. “My name. Vitya.”

Yuuri blinked at that before nodding. “Because if you’re there, I’m safe.”

“Exactly,” Abramovich answered. “I’m here if we need to continue working on this but I think giving you an escape will help.”

Yuuri picked up his phone, Phichit’s contact open, before putting it down. Victor noticed. It had been the third time. Finally, he asked, “Do you need to call Phichit?”

The omega shrugged. “I want to...but I can’t. He’s enjoying Chris’ birthday and his heat is just around the corner. They are getting ready for it and I...I can’t add my stress to the situation. I want him to have a good heat.”

Viktor admired his mate’s restraint but worried that he was going to bottle up his emotions if he didn’t have an outlet. “Can I help?”

Yuuri shook his head, stretching out his arms and legs in front of him. “I need to learn how to do this on my own. I can’t keep running to Phichit.”

Victor moved over to pull Yuuri into his arms. “No, you don’t need to learn how to do this on your own. It’s okay to let other people in.”

Yuuri sucked in a sob before turning into Victor’s arms. “It’s just...for the longest time, it was just the two of us. He was the only one that could get to me. Even when...even when Shuji would move me, Phichit always found me, always reached out to me.”

Victor settled Yuuri into his lap, a gentle rocking motion to soothe his partner. “I wish…” He sighed, changing his mind. “I don’t know what I wish, what to wish for, even. I just want to take this away from you.”
Yuuri snuggled into his scent and settled quietly in his arms. “I just...need to sleep this off. Will you stay with me?”

“Of course.” Victor carried Yuuri into their room and placed him into the safety of their nest, quickly undressing before crawling in and loosening Yuuri’s clothes. They curled up in their underwear, arms holding onto one another. Yuuri tucked in under Victor’s chin.

At some point, one dog, then another joined them, Yuuri’s body still, finally succumbed to sleep. Then, his little boy came in after an afternoon with his grandpa. Nikolai and Olga had taken over with the little boy after seeing the state Yuuri was in. Yura whined and Victor smiled warmly, his arm opening up to welcome his son. Worried green eyes watched his mama.

“Is Yuuri okay?”

“Just a really bad dream. He’ll be okay. I’m just staying close until he settles.”

The blonde considered those words, squeezing his lower lip between two fingers in a very Yuuri fashion. “It must have been a really bad dream.” He reached over his papa’s tummy and patted Yuuri’s cheek, the omega nuzzling into his early scent.

Victor smiled at the magic of his son, feeling Yuuri settle just a little more. “That helps,” he informed the child.

Yuuri got up from his nap, his mate and son stirring from his movement. He needed to eat and felt a little shaky. “Vitya, I need you to come with me to the kitchen,” he hissed as he shook the alpha more awake.

Victor blinked as he processed those words and then nodded. “Kitchen.”

“I need to eat something,” Yuuri added, climbing out of bed. He closed his eyes as he felt the clammy coldness slide over his body. “I need...I need to pee but...”
“Let me help you,” Victor guided, now more alert and supporting his mate. While Yuuri sat on the toilet, Victor texted Olga so she could have something ready. “Do you think you can eat that chicken soup Olga made last night?”

Yuuri thought about the leavings and asked, “Can she poach me another egg in it? I need the protein.”

Victor quickly texted the request and received an affirmative. “It’s in process. She’s got some juice waiting for you in the meantime.”

In the kitchen, Victor guided Yuuri into a seat, watching over Yuuri as he breathed through the dizzy spell. Once seated, he hovered, handing Yuuri his glass of juice and making sure he drank it all. The omega drooped against his chest once he finished the glass.

Soon he had some soup in front of him. Yuuri picked through it at first, the nausea accompanying the dizzy spell slowing his appetite. It was a good soup. Yuuri was just struggling after his blood sugar crash. Once he had his fill, he made sure to thank Olga who waved it off with a huff.

Yuuri spent the evening in the living room, curled up with Victor while Yura watched Ponyo. He felt listless and tired and when Yura’s bedtime came around they all decided it was time to turn in for the evening. The blonde managed to wiggle his way into the bed with the adults. Victor scented them both well and they settled in to sleep snuggled up in the middle of the nest.

Victor woke up to an empty bed the next morning. They were supposed to go to his parents’ for lunch and he wondered how Yuuri was doing. He found his omega and son in the kitchen enjoying breakfast. Victor’s eyes widened as he watched Yuuri scoop mayonnaise onto his rice and eggs.

“Why did you do that?” he asked, his expression horrified. He assumed Yuuri had another bad night, and the missing sleep must be driving him insane.

Yuuri’s eyes glanced towards his bowl before licking the spoon, causing a shiver of revulsion in his mate. “Baby likes mayo.”

Somewhere in Viktor relief blossomed, but then he gagged at the thought of anyone eating mayo
like that. “Couldn’t you just crave something strange with pickles?”

Yuuri’s eyes sparkled as he suggested, “Like pickles and peanut butter?”

Another shiver, Victor’s face screwed up in disgust. “I take it all back.”

Yura, ever curious, crawled up in the stool beside his mate. “What’s it taste like?”

Yuuri took the spoon and scooped up a bite with all of the components and held it over to their son and Victor watched in horror as Yura took a bite and then proceeded to make yummy noises, asking for mayonnaise in his bowl. This is where Victor exited, retreating to the shower.

An hour later, given Yuuri’s good spirits, they were on the road. As they were leaving the city, Yuuri leaned in and suggested, “You should let me drive.”

Victor raised an eyebrow and glanced back at his son in the back seat. “Are you ready for that?”

“I’ve driven almost every day with Nikolai this week. How hard can it be?”

“Well, the steering isn’t as stiff and is a bit more sensitive. You’ll have to adjust the seat and mirrors.”

Yuuri huffed at what was clearly Viktor stalling. “Just...let me try.”

Pulling over, the two adults traded places, Victor meeting wide green eyes in the back seat. “Mama’s going to drive.”

Yuuri looked around, pulling his lip between his teeth. “Where’s that stick thingie...and...I’m missing a pedal…”
Victor chuckled at his mate. “The old truck is a standard. So you have to change gears. This one is an automatic so it changes the gears for you. You just put it in drive and ease off the break.”

Yuuri nodded, a determined look on his face as he followed Victor’s directions. He gasped as the car lurched forward a little faster than expected. He then settled into a smile as he got the feel of the car. Yuuri was a natural according to Nikolai and Victor could tell his sense of space and rhythm helped him figure out the mechanics pretty quickly.

An hour later, Yuuri pulled into the Nikiforov drive and he put it into park. His eyes sparkled with excitement as he got out on the driver’s side, looking up as Andrei stepped out to greet them. “I drove almost the whole way!”

“Really, it seems like you are reclaiming more of your independence,” the elder Nikiforov observed.

Victor looked relaxed as he freed his son. “I wasn’t expecting Yuuri to take to driving so easily. Before long, we’ll have him testing and getting his license.”

“The street signs make more sense in context than reading about them in a book,” Yuuri pointed out.

Andrei chuckled warmly as he ushered the family inside. “It’s supposed to rain later. You’ll need to be more careful if you drive back.”

NOTES:

So at 17 weeks, baby is about the size of a pomegranate. Mama has some itchy boobs and weird dreams (in this case, bad dreams).

I kept looking for a place to put the itchy boobs in there but it just didn't fit the tone of this chapter.

On another note, I remembered my ex-sister-in-law had the bloodiest dreams when she was pregnant.
Yuuri opened up his phone and checked his app. Rolling his eyes, he read what week 18 had in store. *Is my child a vegetable, fruit...alien?* “Okay, Artichoke…” He grimaced knowing that he would be very grateful in a week when the child’s temporary name changed. “I think you’ve had more pleasant names along the way.” He groaned as he rolled out of bed that morning. Victor was already in the bathroom and if he hurried, Yuuri might be able to join his mate in the shower.

Victor gave a surprised gasp as Yuuri pulled the shower curtain back and slipped in behind him, pressing a kiss between the alpha’s shoulder blades. “Do you have to go in early?”

Victor felt his body melting under Yuuri’s touch. “Mmmm...I can delay an hour. What...do you need?” Victor offered, raising an interested eyebrow. He saw the open want in Yuuri’s face and immediately felt himself tingle with anticipation. *Yuuri you can take me apart right here, right now.*

Yuuri slid his hands down Victor’s side watching the Alpha’s eyes dilate, the breath hitch. He stepped into Victor’s space, running a hand up his back and into his gorgeous silver hair. Pulling the man’s ear to his lips he whispered in a sultry voice, “McDonald’s french fries.”

Victor deflated immediately and leaned against the opposite wall. He took a moment, then chuckled warmly. “Alright. I can pick you up some fries after dropping Yura off. Do you want to go with me or for me to bring it back?”
Yuuri grabbed the soap and turned for Victor to shampoo his hair as he hummed through the answer. “I should probably go with you. Alexei texted me last night about going over his program this morning.”

Victor rubbed the conditioner into his mate’s scalp, watching the beautiful black hair swim around his fingers. “You have been keeping track of your hours on the job, haven’t you?” Victor asked, making sure Yuuri was paid his worth.

“Yakov already cornered me as I took on more responsibilities at the main rink. I enjoy it so it doesn’t seem like work but he insisted.” Yuuri leaned back his head to rinse before turning in Victor’s arms to steal a kiss.

Victor’s arms slid down, resting in the curve of Yuuri’s back. “That’s the best kind of job, you know...something that you enjoy and it doesn’t feel like work.”

Yuuri hummed happily and turned to reach for a towel, handing another to Victor as his mate followed him out of the shower. Pulling on his briefs, he left the bathroom to get dressed. The omega giggled as arms slipped around his waist, hands resting on the bump. He shivered at the flutter he felt at the touch in response to his own joy. “I think...I think I just felt baby move.”

Victor’s eyes widened, his hands suddenly feeling around Yuuri’s tummy, turning him around and kneeling on the floor. “Baby? Are you ready to put your dancing shoes on?”

Yuuri laughed softly, his fingers fluttering through Victor’s damp hair. “Maybe not shoes, but definitely little flutters.”

The alpha pressed a kiss onto Yuuri’s abdomen as Yura came out of his room, tilting his head sideways, and asked, “Why is Papa kissing your tummy?”

Yuuri chuckled and answered, “He’s just excited that I felt baby move.”

Yura’s eyes widened as he bounced towards Yuuri. “Can I feel them?”

“Not yet...but soon. Right now only I can feel the baby because they are inside me.” Then he
smiled as the little blonde hugged Yuuri’s middle. His two men were taking such good care of him.

Yuuri sat with the tray containing fries between them, Victor snagging an occasional fry but, for the most part, leaving them to Yuuri. He tried to ignore the glob of mayonnaise and ketchup mixed together into a ghastly pink concoction that Yuuri now dragged the fries through as he groaned in pleasure, devouring the bizarre mix. If they weren’t in the middle of a fast food restaurant, Victor might be turned on. He would admit to himself that feeding the omega, watching him enjoy the pleasure of food, was a turn on.

And then he would see the pink glob of condiments and change his mind.

As Yuuri finished the last fry, eyes closed, a particularly obscene groan of pleasure rumbling from his throat, Victor knew that, if truth be told, mayonnaise or not, he’d find the nearest vacant room and fill Yuuri until those cries were Victor’s name.

Yuuri seemed oblivious, wiping his hands on a napkin and standing to put away the tray. Fortunately the restaurant was filled with families, women and other omegas who remembered being pregnant and knew sexual pleasure moaning from that of finally eating what the pregnant mind wants. The two of them headed out the door and Victor knew he’d only be half an hour later than planned which meant he had to shuffle around his paperwork hour but nothing important.

Yuuri watched Alexei with a critical eye. Victor was not far away, attending another skater, but it wasn’t close enough. The skater worked through a series of difficult footwork, one that the omega had designed from the already existing choreography. Try as Yuuri might, he found his concentration being pulled from the skater’s movements. It was flawless, but Yuuri felt...odd. He wasn’t uncomfortable, the rink was a second home, but it was like there was an unwelcome guest. He shrugged off a shiver once more, frowning. It was no longer that sweet bubble down in his center but an unease working its way up his spine. He glanced towards Victor who seemed very focused on his skater.

I’m just being silly, he brushed the feeling away once again. He forced himself to watch Alexi. The footwork sequence was working out well, he just needed to be more reckless in his approach. But as the young man turned a corner into his final loop Yuuri felt that cold fear creeping up his back. He’d feel better once Yura arrived with Mila and Katya. It was important to make sure he kept his little man close. Scratching the back of his neck, he renewed his attention on Alexei.
“Well, Coach?” the skater asked a few minutes later.

Yuuri still didn’t feel deserving of that title but he was soon able to break apart the problem his skater was struggling with during the transition. Alexei took it in with a nod and skated off, giving Yuuri a thumbs up as he set up for another run through. By the third time, the skater seemed to work through the difficulty freeing Yuuri to move closer to his mate.

Victor shifted his gaze momentarily to Yuuri, an arm sliding around him, hugging him close to his side. “You okay, solnyshko?”

Yuuri shrugged. “Just an odd feeling.”

Victor frowned before asking, “Is it baby?”

The omega shook his head. “I’m more anxious about Yura at the moment. I’ll be glad when he gets here.”

Two hours later, Yura arrived with no ceremony, telling the story about a boy on the playground who ate a bug on a dare. Yuuri sighed and put a lid on that anxious feeling.

“It must be just pregnancy nerves putting me on edge,” he huffed towards his mate, not that he wanted anything to be wrong but he hated the false reads.

“You were having nightmares last week. Maybe a little of that?” Victor pointed out.

“Maybe,” Yuuri agreed reluctantly, turning to attend to his students as they started to file in.

As the last student left, Yuuri rubbed his back, starting as his mate came up behind him, slipping his arms around Yuuri. “Backache?”
Yuuri sighed with a nod, letting Victor lead him back to the office, Yura walking on his other side. “My back aches, hands and feet feel tight and puffy...and my boobs itch.”

The little blonde cracked up dramatically. “You said boobs!”

Yuuri rolled his eyes, hugging the little boy into his side. “They are a necessary evil.”

Victor settled Yuuri on the sofa in his office and had him lay back, putting his feet on a pillow. Yura went over to the corner where a lego table currently sat and played quietly while his papa fussed over Yuuri. Victor pulled out a jar of body butter he kept in his desk and scooted his chair over so he can fuss over his mate. He started with Yuuri’s hands, the omega was reluctant at first but then finally surrendered to Victor’s care. The alpha smoothed the lotion into Yuuri’s hands, thoroughly covering them before moving to the omega’s feet. Easing off the dance shoes, he frowned at the marks left behind due to the compression. “We may need some bigger shoes.”

“Nope,” Yuuri stated, his chin lifting stubbornly. “I just...need to remember to put my feet up more.”

“I’m not going to argue with you about that.” He repeated the process with his feet, laying a towel over the bare feet once finished. Scooting his chair up closer to Yuuri’s chest, he glanced over to make sure his son was involved and blocked the boy’s view with his body while he surreptitiously slid his hand under Yuuri’s shirt to spread the body butter over one nipple then the other. He smirked as Yuuri bit his lips to keep from making any verbal response, brown eyes flicking over to Yura. Once Victor had finished pampering his mate, he pulled a blanket over him and dimmed the lighting.

“I’ve got to meet with Yakov and the coaches and then we can go home,” he murmured. Turning to Yura, he added, “Keep an eye on Mama.”

Arriving home, Yura discarded and dropped his coat on the floor, taking off into the house. Yuuri sighed, looking at Victor who simply smiled and held his hand out for the omega’s coat. “Go catch him, clearly he needs to play tag right now.” Yuuri shook his head and followed the little boy into the home. Victor hung the coats, making his own way in. Alone in the hall, Victor walked by the familiar portrait of Yelena. He caught a glint from her eye and stilled, the scent of rosemary and lavender filling his senses. He looked up to meet the frozen eyes in the painting. *What’s wrong, old friend?* Much like Yuuri, he shook it off for the most part, but his eyes trailed after his son.
Finding the other two into the family room, he once more caught a whiff of rosemary as he drew close to his son. He frowned as he studied the little ball of energy who was demanding a snack, Olga hushing him, stating dinner would be ready soon. He came out triumphant with ants on a log, exaggerating the deaths of the poor ants (raisins) as he gobbled down the peanut butter covered celery. Nothing seemed to be up with his son, but he recalled Yuuri’s earlier sense and didn’t want to dismiss it.

As the evening progressed, Yuuri fussed over Yura, worry etching his eyes. “Maybe you should sleep in the nest tonight,” he suggested at one point hoping Victor would forgive him. He just couldn’t let go of this feeling that something was going on.

And as much of a cosleeper Yura was, he shrugged off the suggestion. “I’m a big boy. I want to sleep in the baby’s room.”

Yuuri didn’t point out the contradictory statements, glad that the little boy would be close and both parents would be between him and the rest of the world. “Fine,” he answered and those shrewd green eyes caught the shaking hands as Yuuri tried to shake off his jitters.

“What’s wrong?”

Yuuri honestly didn’t have an answer, nor did he want to alarm the little boy. “I think being pregnant makes me clingy.”

Yura huffed and finally said, “Okay.” He skipped off into the nursery and returned with his pajamas covered in tiger cartoons. With Yuuri’s help, he pulled them on and then climbed into the middle of the nest. “Baby and me want a story.”

Yuuri smiled, warmed by the compromise. “Baby and I...and okay. Anything in particular?”

“Tigger.”

Yuuri chuckled. Of course. He went into the nursery and pulled out the story book, returning to
climb into bed next to Yura. Victor came in as Yuuri was reading, “The piglet lived in a house in the middle of a grand birch tree…” He settled in and listened, smoothing his son’s hair while Yuuri’s voice settled them all into sleep. It was an off day and he was glad to have his sweet boy close and as Yura fell asleep, he pulled the blanket up over him, making no move to put him to bed.

He met Yuuri’s eyes over that blond head. “Are you still uneasy?”

“Maybe...It’s probably one of those weird pregnancy vibes.”

Victor frowned, shaking his head. “I think I want us picking him up and dropping him off over the next few days. I may be picking up on your feeling but…” He wanted to mention what he felt in the hall, but couldn’t find a way to make it seem sane. “I also feel ill at ease. And I keep smelling rosemary and lavender.”

Yuuri tilted his head, not picking up on the significance. “I don’t remember if that was in Olga’s cooking tonight.”

“It could have been, she likes to use both when she broils her chicken. But...I smelled it when I walked by Yelena’s picture.” Seeing that it still hadn’t clicked for Yuuri, he added, “That was her scent. You probably pick up a little of the lavender in Yura’s baby scent.”

Yuuri nodded. “Lavender and cedar. That’s why I didn’t realize...at first, I thought he was your biological son.”

Victor hugged the little boy close, Yura shifting, putting his thumb to his lips but not quite sucking it, a small pucker making the motions initially before he settled out. The alpha ran his hand up and down the boy’s back, casually scenting him before relaxing into his pillow, looking up at the ceiling. “I mean, in theory, he does carry some of my genetics. Kostya was my cousin, my mother’s sister’s son. But both father and son had a tendency towards violence.”

“And he looks so much like Vasa.”

Victor felt a smile tug at his lips. “He does. I’m glad we’re spending more time with them.”

Yuuri smiled wistfully. He loved spending time with Victor’s family and needed to be here. Japan still held painful memories. But one day, he wanted his children to have a relationship with his
parents and sister. Maybe during the summer vacations they could all go to Japan.

NOTES:

Week 18, third week of February. Artichoke. Prego symptoms Yuuri is experiencing: Baby kicks, although Victor can’t feel it just yet. Backache, itchy boobs, swollen feet and hands.

https://www.thebump.com/pregnancy-week-by-week/18-weeks-pregnant

Chapter End Notes

So...what are we thinking?
Out with the old...

Chapter Summary

Yuuri makes positive moves at home, but then has to deal with Victor's relatives at a family dinner.

Chapter Notes

Thanks, BluSkates, you're the best!

Now for the rest of you...I can't wait to read your comments.

Out with the old...

Yuuri helped Olga clean deeply as the end of the month approached even though Olga protested the entire time. But thankfully his pregnancy hormones were giving him additional energy, and the smell of white vinegar they used for cleaning was satisfying an addiction he didn’t know he had. He now stood upstairs, having just polished the bannister leaving the wood gleaming smelling delightful. Pausing he realized that it was here that a horror had grabbed him, and instinctively his body, his omega, took over forcing him to grab his child and run. But now, standing there, he couldn’t feel the ghosts of his past, as if their hold on him had lost their tight grip. Opening Yura’s door, he studied the space. I wonder if you’d like a fresh, new room. Maybe that would make this space happy again.

He went down to retrieve his macbook and returned, sitting in the middle of Yura’s bed, began plotting redecorating. His goal was to finish before Yura’s birthday, making the space warm and friendly, and more appropriate for his age. Something you can grow into, and grow with. It was time, now that the dark clouds of December had cleared. Had it only been two and a half months?

He quickly had several items bookmarked, leaving the tabs open to share with his mate later and see what he thought about the plan. Yuuri knew he wanted to start from scratch, leaving the other bed down in the nursery for those days he needed Yura close. But he didn’t want his son to not have his own room. There was too much space in this house, but it was also necessary to let Yura develop his individuality. The most important thing, though, was that he didn’t want to take anything away that Yura was attached to. So after talking to Victor, he’d talk to Yura and make sure it was something the little blonde wanted.
Victor came home to Yuuri sitting at the desk in their bedroom, computer open, notebook to the side with a list started. He smiled at the inky haired omega who took on such a professorial tone while working, “What are you working on, lyubov moya?” he asked, leaning down to press a kiss into the upturned cheek.

Yuuri pulled back from the desk and tilted the laptop’s monitor back to show his mate, “I was thinking...remodeling the omega room worked out really well in making it less...just less. I can go into it without a problem now. I thought we might do the same for Yura.”

Viktor looked at the monitor, eyes gliding over furniture and decorative touches, “You want to redecorate?”

“If you’re okay with it...I thought maybe let it be part of his birthday and I wanted to involve him in the process. I have some ideas but I want him to love it.”

“I...think that’s an amazing idea.” He ran a warm hand down Yuuri’s back. “I’d like to look through the things that come out of the room to make sure they aren’t sentimental.”

“I thought so as well. I’d hate to throw out something his mother made for him.”

Victor nodded, a smile on his lips. “So, what do you have in mind?”

Yuuri indicated to the monitor and began browsing through the open tabs with different items highlighted. “I know he loves animals, especially lions and tigers. So I was thinking of a safari theme.” He showed Victor the beginnings of his idea. “I want him to have a space that makes him feel safe, so I thought about this canopy. It looks like a safari tent and I thought it would give him a safe space, small and allows him a sense of control. And there are other versions, so we can figure out what works best for us and what we can achieve but that’s the first idea.”

Victor nodded towards the second idea. “He might like a bunk bed since he is so into sleepovers. And that canopy could be created fairly easily. The tent, we’d have to special order it and if he outgrew it…”

“Well, there are other kids coming up so there is that...but I agree. And we can even get some mosquito netting to add to the effect.” Yuuri closed out the first tab and left up the second. “So I thought we’d get a duvet cover with safari animals and a matching sheet set to start with and we could transition it to something more neutral as he grows.” Then he frowned, doubting himself.
“Do you think he’ll see it as too babyish?”

Victor smiled at his mate’s self-doubt. Yuuri knew Yura’s tastes perfectly and had probably picked out exactly what the toehead would want for himself. “We can make a suggestion and then let him weigh in on it. Since his best friend is a little older, he may push that one aside and go for the older version.” He then hugged into Yuuri and reminded him, “You can baby the next one.”

Yuuri still pouted but nodded in agreement. “I also had this one in mind as well.”

Victor looked over his shoulder and studied the different animals quilted into the set. “I like it. We just have to see how Yura will react.”

“And maybe this lamp,” he added, showing the geometric design picking up on warm tiger tones. “I thought it would go on his dresser so he could leave a light on when he is scared of the dark.”

“I like that and it feels a little older so it should transition well.” Victor hugged him and then raised an eyebrow. “Shall we see what Yura thinks?”

Yuuri drew a deep breath and let it out slowly, nodding. But before he called in the little boy who was enjoying his snack with Olga and Grandpa, he expressed his fear, “You don’t think he’ll worry that we’re pushing him away, do you?”

Victor put a warm hand on Yuuri’s arm for comfort. “We’ll have to reassure him that we will continue to have a bed for him in the nursery but we want him to have his own space to grow,” Victor answered.

Yuuri nodded. “I like that.”

Victor left his side and went in search of his son and the little boy came skipping into the master bedroom. “What’s up, buttercup?” he asked before cracking up bringing a smile to Yuuri’s lips, the rest of the tension leaving his shoulders.

“Well, I was thinking...and if you don’t like this, just tell me. But do you know how we redecorated the omega room?”
Yura nodded slowly. “You wanted to make the bad things go away.”

Yuuri nodded and jumped in. “I think we should do the same to your room...so you’ll like being there again.” He watched the little boy’s face as Yura pulled at his lower lip, his eyes narrowing. He was a mixture of suspicious and curious, Yuuri was eager to engage in only the positive so he quickly clarified the plan. “We’re going to leave the bed in the nursery for you...but we wanted you to have a place to grow into.”

“Can I have a bunk bed? Beka has a bunk bed and they are cooool.”

Yuuri chuckled, shooting Victor a look. *Okay, nothing to worry about.* “We were actually thinking just that. And my thoughts, tell me if you have other ideas, but maybe a...safari theme?” He hunched his shoulders, unsure of what Yura would say.

He tilted his blond head. “Can I have tigers and lions? Like the really big ones?”

Yuuri chuckled. “Well, we will have to see how they fit. But I was thinking, yes. Would you like to see the ideas I had in mind?”

Yura nodded, climbing on the stool Victor had moved over close to the desk. Yuuri showed him the pictures one by one. Seeing the bunk bed in the setting with the canopy, he screwed up his nose. “No pink. Maybe green, like my eyes. Or jungle leaves.”

“I wasn’t thinking about...do you like that plain bedding or would you prefer something like this.”

Yura looked at the options before pointing at the quilt. “That one has a big tiger. I like that one.”

Yuuri smiled at his little boy. “We could do the safari print for the sheets and the quilt for over the top.”

“I like it!”

Yuuri laughed warmly, hugging the little boy close. “I just wanted to give you your room back,” he whispered against Yura’s head.
Yura returned the hug then sat back, his expression calculating. “Is that all I get for my birthday?”

The adults laughed warmly. “I think we can arrange for something to be opened on your birthday,” Victor promised.

“Good...because I want a leather jacket like Beka...but with cheetah print on the collar,” he demanded, running his hands around his neck as he described it. “That would make me so cool!”

Yuuri smiled, ruffling his hair. “It sure will.”

Saturday came and brought with it another trip to the country, this time it was a family gathering with Victor’s brother and his family. Yuuri had met him once but he still didn’t know him well enough to be comfortable. While Victor was warm and open his brother was very different, not cruel but guarded. This time, he didn’t drive, his nervousness obvious. “I know I’m being silly.”

“It’s fine, Yuuri,” Victor reassured him. “You’ll feel more relaxed as you get to know my brother and his family a little more...but we were never close. He was older than me and even as we aged together he kept the distance. We just never became friends.”

They pulled into the drive and Victor came around to open the doors for his family, escorting them inside. At least Yuuri had been here several times since that first party. He felt more at ease and smiled when his eyes rested on Vasalissa. She was up and looking much better from her last treatment. Some people responded to chemo better than others, but the truth was Vasa responded to a challenge better than even her Olympic Gold Medalist son. He went immediately to her side, followed by Victor and Yura. “I’m glad to see you are feeling better.” He bent down to kiss her cheek as it is offered and then stepped back so her son and grandson could do the same.

She chuckled warmly. “I’m still resting but I need the energy of youth around me. Especially this little kotenok.” She ruffled Yura’s blond hair and smiled as the little boy decided to sit next to her, cuddling into her side. “So, any news about my grandbaby?”

Yuuri laughed warmly. “Not since your last visit. We go next week for the ultrasound...and we can learn the primary gender if we wish...but I don’t know.” Yuuri frowned, glancing back as his husband was led away by father and brother to discuss business. “What do you think?”
She hummed thoughtfully. “It is nice to know but then again, our children don’t always turn out as we expect. So the knowing doesn’t always tell us what we are really looking for. Why are you hesitant?”

It was the right question to ask and Yuuri pulled up a chair and explained, “I’m worried that if I know too much, it will all disappear...like magic. I don’t want...to do anything to lose this one.” He watched her eyes dance around his face, “Right now it’s like I’m living in a stolen moment. It’s safe in here because nothing is close to the surface. But knowing the gender, seeing feet and hands...that makes this real, finite. And I worry about the bubble getting to the surface and...popping.”

She held his hand, “You’re thinking you’ve been through this before, but the truth is you haven’t. This situation is entirely new, to both of you.” She looked up at Victor. “And you have some superstitions you’re clinging to. I understand you skaters have your own charms and rituals, maybe you need a ritual for this to help you get ready...and maybe with the gender, you might have the name and speak positive things over the child.”

Yuuri smiled warmly at her. The strength in her hand filling his own, “I...hadn’t thought about that. We already sing to them and tell stories...well, we’re also doing these things with Yura but...it’s sort of the same, you know?”

She nodded, a warm smile on her lips. She lifted her eyes and motioned for another woman to join them. “Did you meet Irya when you were last here?”

Yuuri lifted shy eyes and nodded. “We spoke briefly but I was a little overwhelmed.”

The other woman laughed, the tone strained and he wondered about that. “I believe Nadia was monopolizing your time, trying to get her son into Vitya’s shadow.”

Yuuri thinned his lips but nodded. “I suppose so.” He could hear...no sense something in this woman that felt like a tired wolf.

Crossing her legs, she leaned in. “We were of course glad to hear that Vitya mated again. Will there be a ceremony? With Yelena, it was such a rushed thing. We didn’t even know they were dating.”
Yuuri’s eyes widened and he realized not everyone was as privy to the details of Victor’s previous marriage. “We haven’t really discussed it but really, a bond is stronger than a vow so I’m not too concerned,” he returned, adding a touch of ice to match her words.

“Well,” Vasa intervened. “I can certainly speak highly of what you’ve done with the place since you arrived. It’s so full of life. Even Dryusha laughs heartily when we visit.”

“That would be something to see,” Irya commented dryly.

Yuuri glanced towards his mate, warmed and strengthened when Victor met his eyes. *I can do this.* Turning back, he noted, “My mother always said warmth comes in the small touches.”

Irya twitched in her seat, turning to look at her husband. His eyes flicked towards her but then bounced off her like she was a hot coal he was loath to touch. She seemed to feel the intention keenly and shifted back to force a smile at Vasa. “You’re looking so well.”

In her voice there was genuine compassion, Yuuri could feel it. It was as if the woman knew love, could identify it, but wasn’t sure how to give it or ask for it in return. Something had snuck into her heart and dug a little hole there, leaving an empty spot that she felt.

Before he was able to reach out to her, they were called in to dine. Irya rose sharply making for a mirror over a table and fusing irritably with very expensive looking earrings. Yuuri watched her go, but turned to see to Vasa. She leaned on him, murmuring, “Don’t let her get to you. She isn’t as secure in her marriage as you are in your mating.”

“I wondered as much. I’m...sorry for her.” Seeing Vasa to her chair, he was glad to find his place at Victor’s side and away from Irya. Victor smiled and rose slightly to make sure Yuuri got to his chair easily, planting a soft kiss on his lips. Yuuri watched Leonid, the man’s eyes moving past his wife, not really seeing to her comfort yet holding an expectation that she would see to the children. He cleared his throat at her, and she hurried to the table, practically ordering the children into their chairs. Yura marveled at his cousins in their starched insecurity. She arranged the boys like setting up dolls for a photo, then sat next to her husband. He murmured something and her eyes fell instantly.

Yuuri watched the entire interaction. *I may have started a servant but I became fully integrated into this family. She married into the family and became a servant.* He truly was sorry for her but thankful he had Vitya. Leaning into his mate, he felt a hand rubbing reassuring circles into his back.
The conversation flowed and warmth filled the space once more, Yuuri content to tend to both mate and son and to have those attentions returned. Vasa sat across from him and they continued to talk, Yuuri telling her how he was going to redecorate Yura’s room, the little boy adding his own thoughts on the matter.

“That sounds quite adventurous,” Vasalissa pronounced. “I can’t wait to see it.”

At the conclusion of dinner, Vasa chose to rest. “Don’t leave. I just need a few minutes.” And she allowed Andrei to lead her to their room.

Victor was caught up with a conversation with his brother, the older Nikiforov explaining their latest investment.

Irya was nursing a glass of vodka, ignoring the kids and trying to stay close and relevant to her husband.

Yuuri sighed, shaking his head and moving into the corner with the children. “So what are we up to?”

“Yura says you’re a dancer and a skater like uncle Vitya,” one of the boys stated accusingly.

“Mikhail, right?” he verified and at the nod, he continued. “Well, you’re correct I am. Perhaps you would like to try dance? We can’t skate unless we flood the room and freeze it over. And I’m not sure your grandmother would like that!”

The younger child giggled at the idea Yuuri posed and looked ready to agree. But Mikhail was not amused. Those green eyes widened in surprise. “I don’t do sissy dancing,” he declared.

“In Russia, ballet is far from a sissy dance,” Yuuri corrected. “But I know other dance styles. My teacher was versed in a wide variety and won awards in the dance world.”
Yuuri looked around, making sure he wouldn’t knock anything over. He raised his leg out for a
pirouette then swept it under his standing leg to tuck into a roll, ending in a backspin from his
breakdancing days. He spun out, planting his feet on the floor to propel himself onto his palms,
pushed back and landed on his feet again. Standing in front of the boys he smiled, winking at his
son. “That last part I learned with my best friend.”

The two boys’ eyes widened and then glanced over at Yura with greater respect. “That’s cool!”

Yura raised his chin proudly. “That’s my mom!”

And with their approval, the three boys huddled up to talk, Yuuri overhearing them ask his son,
“Can you show me that?”

Yuuri started to drift back to his mate, Andrei now back in the mix, when the front door flung open
and a belligerent voice filled the hall, arguing with the servants. “This is my family. Leave me, old
man.”

Yuuri caught the warning glance from his mate and stepped between the boys and the man coming
into the room. Without a word to or from her husband, Irya crossed the room as well, standing
next to him, leaning in to whisper, “Kostya, the bastard. He’s a cousin of theirs.” Unknowingly
telling Yuuri information he already knew. “What the hell is he doing here?” She motioned to her
boys to stand behind a couch, which they followed, taking Yura with them. Yuuri watched,
catching her eye. She nodded slightly. He took her hand, a tight smile on his lips.

Leonid inserted himself between Victor and their cousin, Andrei coming from the side. The older
brother addressed him with the practiced ease of a bouncer talking a drunk into leaving. “Kostya,
what brings you here? I thought you were all the way over to the east coast.” He held out an arm,
trying to catch the man on his path and guide him right back to the door.

The other man snorted in derision. “I finally got my transfer. Now I can be close to dear old Mom
and Dad.” He pushed the offered arm down, planting his feet.

Yuuri felt a tiny hand wrap around his fingers and he knelt down to pick him up. His son was
sensitive to the mood of the room and hid in Yuuri’s neck, a soft whimper muffled into his mama’s
shirt. Irya moved to stand in front of the omega and child slightly.

“Is that so?” Andrei asked, narrowing his brow in irritation. So much for best laid plans.
“Mama wrote to tell me how my dear Aunt Vasa was so ill and that I was needed back home. She of course wrote to my commanders, and they were so touched, they transferred me.”

Yuuri watched his mate, Victor turning away to hide the sickened look on his face. Clearly disgusted with how the cousin used Vasalissa’s illness against them.

“You’ll have to come another time to see Vasa,” Andrei stated without argument. “She’s lying down and doesn’t have the energy for unexpected visitors. Now, this is a fam…”

“I am family,” he argued. Staggering into the room, his eyes rested on Irya and Yuuri. “I don’t think I’ve met your mate, Vitya…this one looks stronger than Lena.”

Yuuri felt nauseated at the approach. The man’s scent was spraying out around the room. Next to him he felt Irya’s hand turn him to face away. “Do you mind pulling that back? Children are present?” Irya had mastered bitch voice.

Kostya stopped, taking in her regal manner and snickered at her. While he didn’t pull back his scent her attitude had stopped him in his tracks. But his fascination in Yuuri hadn’t slowed, “Might carry a few pups into the world.” He took another step towards the omegas and Victor stepped in between, a warning growl causing Kostya to be taken aback. “You think I’m going to hurt your mate? I don’t have a death wish, cousin.” His eyes then rested on Yura as he studied the blond hair and green eyes before the little boy tucked his face back into Yuuri’s neck. “That’s Yelena’s welp. How old are you now?”

“A little younger than my own. Almost six,” Irya supplied gaining a glare from Yuuri for her efforts. Her eyes met her husband’s, then dropped to the floor.

Kostya laughed at the interaction, moving around Victor to study Yuuri and Yura more closely. “Shouldn’t baby him so much. He’ll grow up weak like his mother.” He reached out to run a finger through the blonde hair. Yuuri pulled back, hissing.

That was the last straw. Victor jerked the unwelcomed cousin back by his collar, drew back, and decked him. Kostya reeled back, landing on his ass. He looked up, shocked for a moment, then growling was on his feet. Leonid was there before Victor had a chance to drop the second punch, knocking Kostya out cold. Andrei closed his eyes, looking for patience from across the room. Finally, he turned to a servant and ordered, “Take him out and let him sleep it off in his car. I don’t know what he’s been drinking, but I don’t want his drunk ass around the kids.”
The drive home was quiet, with Yura staring out the window. Yuuri could sense his disquiet and rode next to him, leaving the front seat for Victor alone. “Are you okay?” he asked finally, several miles out from the house.

Yura shrugged but then stated, “He’s a bad man.”

Yuuri met Victor’s eyes in the mirror before agreeing, “He is...and if you see him, I want you to come to us immediately.”

The little boy chewed over those words before he stated, “He’s Mama’s bad man.”

Notes:  https://www.thebump.com/pregnancy-week-by-week/19-weeks-pregnant

Chapter End Notes

I believe in happy endings!
We made it to 20!

Chapter Summary

At 20 weeks, Yuuri is faced with the final decision...did he want to know the baby's gender? Of course, Kostya's appearance has a way of dampening the mood.

Chapter Notes

Long chapter, guys...the characters had a busy week 20! Can you believe Yuuri is this far along? At this point, I'm working through the pregnancy about every 2 weeks. Yura's birthday is on the way (Ch. 71, 24 weeks) and I'm struggling as I write 72 (26 weeks, mid-march) but it will come along. (Note, I may have my timing off because in my head, Yura's birthday was the end of March but I just checked it and it is the first of March...oh, well...I may have checked it before I laid out my timeline...I'm just not sure.) Thanks so much to BluSkates for their brilliant edits! And if you haven't read their story, take time to pull it up. It's full of the angst we all love so much.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Victor chose to focus on the positives over the next week. Kostya, so far, had only offered a lot of bluster and that goes with his personality. While it was horrible to have Yelena's ex so close to home, and to his family, there was nothing the man could do to challenge them. His family instead focused their energy on matters at hand. They had their twenty week appointment and could learn the gender if they chose. Victor knew Yuuri was on the fence about it and they had talked back and forth on knowing. While it was initially a no for Yuuri, the omega was again on the fence when faced with the immediacy of the decision. He knew Yuuri was worried about knowing too much. Yuuri explained that he thought that distance would keep him from being too attached should the worst happen. It hurt Victor to think that his mate needed to keep his happiness at an arm’s distance, always preparing himself for something horrible. And they talked about that, pushing away the joy would only hurt him more. Eventually, Yuuri admitted that he was attached to this baby and invested in their life as it grew within him.

“I think...if we knew the gender, we could plan a little better,” Victor argued as they sat in the restaurant having lunch. They needed to decide before they picked up their son for the ultrasound appointment. Yura had been so excited for the appointment that afternoon that both parents felt very sorry for his teacher. Yura, on the best of days, was an untiring ball of energy. But today, with the possibility of knowing more of the baby, he was like lightning.

Yuuri paused, his fork halfway to his lips. “How does it help us plan? Their gender doesn’t limit
what they can do. Nor does it change our expectations.”

Victor smiled, reaching out for his mate’s hand. “I don’t mean...Yuuri!” He playfully admonished. “I want to know if I’m buying dresses or cute little pants. You know me, I’m thinking of surface things, clothing, decorations, letting our friends know as they desperately want to prepare for baby as well.”

Yuuri smirked. “So...this is shopping that you’re planning.”

He shrugged, ducking his guilty eyes into his lunch. “And names. Names are tricky.”

Yuuri hummed thoughtfully at that. He knew better, his mate was thinking of outfits and designer shoes, but he made a good point... names are tricky. They had agreed to go with a Russian naming custom for their first and would modify it for later children if they were so blessed. Yuuri’s argument was that he wanted them to fit in and he didn’t see them moving to Japan anytime soon. He smiled at Victor who looked up, Russia is our home. They will know Japan but they will be Russian children.

Yuuri smiled, not giving his mate the satisfaction of knowing, instead he ate heartily. His belly was rounding out nicely with baby’s growth. Something that evidently delighted Victor who ran his hand over said bump with a soft smile over his lips as they rose to leave. Victor’s alpha watched the movement with a satisfied smile. Yuuri was beautifully round with his baby and he knew that, confidence blooming in his cheeks. Although the alpha enjoyed being with Yelena through her pregnancy, he felt so much more with Yuuri. Yelena was a wonderful woman, and he loved watching and supporting her through the pregnancy but it had been hers alone. This was something he shared with Yuuri. Their connection was strong even though they’d barely been together six months. This was something he could never share with Yura’s mother. But then again, he didn’t expect to find it at all.

Victor guided Yuuri out of the restaurant with a protective hand on his back. Although the omega was quite unaware of his affect, the alpha understood the stares that followed them out. While it wasn’t a predatory look some of the diners gave Yuuri, Victor’s alpha instincts still protected his mate whose sweet mother scent had drawn their attention. He settled Yuuri into the car and buckled him in before going around to the driver’s side.

Half an hour later, they had picked up Yura and were pulling into the parking lot of the clinic. Yuuri was quiet and Victor knew he was collecting himself. He gave his mate the time he needed,
allowing the car to be quiet as he pulled into a spot and cut the engine. Yura, quicksilver as ever, kicked his legs back and forth, impatiently pulling at his seatbelt and finally unbuckling it, crawling up through the middle into Yuuri’s lap.

“Oh, hi,” he laughed in surprise at the same time that Victor said disapprovingly, “Yuuuraaa!”

The little boy rolled his eyes towards his father before turning to Yuuri. “Are we going to go see Baby now?”

Yuuri nodded. “I’m just readying my heart.” His eyes turned to the building ahead of them. He had been several times before, however today was a turning point.

The little boy, however felt only the extreme joy of the moment, never doubting that the baby would be healthy, happy...and exactly what he wanted all alone. So when his mother hesitated to move he tilted his head with a frown. “Are you scared?”

The omega considered his son’s words before finally answering, “No...not scared. I just want to be in the right mental space.”

Yura seemed to accept that, nodding solemnly. However, in true fashion he immediately reached for the door. “Let’s go now. I want to see my baby sister...or brother” The boy added the last for the sake of the adults in the car who just couldn’t see it was clearly a girl.

Laughing, Yuuri followed the impatient child out of the car, Victor already around the car to grab hold of Yura before he took off into a parking lot. The omega closed his eyes as he stood up, finding his center of gravity both literally and figuratively. He then smiled as he felt a strong arm slide around his waist, leaning into that embrace. “I want to know,” he decided.

Victor’s eyes widened. “Are you sure?”

Yuuri nodded, feeling it was the right decision. “I think...I need to prepare my heart and I want all of the information.” But there was more, he was ready to believe this whole-heartedly, he was ready to put all of his heart into this, succeed or fail. He was ready to meet them.

They entered the clinic, checking in at the desk and settling in to wait for their turn. Yuuri was called back and Victor corralled their son while he went through the routine blood work and exam
portion. Yuuri focused on the pins and pricks, the measurings and charts, waiting for the inevitable. And then it was time for the ultrasound.

Victor and Yura joined him in the room as Yuuri reclined on the table, his son bouncing around trying to get the best view until Victor scooped him up and settled him on his hip. He took in a steadying breath as they spread the coupling gel on his belly. Yura was fascinated by the procedure, and the omega wondered if his little one would work in health care. The wand pressed down and the connection was made; Yuuri’s smile widened at the sight of his little baby. Reaching out, he touched the screen. “Hi, sweetheart. I can’t wait to meet you.”

The technician told him the quick facts. Six and a half inches. Around ten and a half ounces. All normal, all healthy, all right on course. “Now, you decided to learn the sex after all. Let’s see if we get lucky.” The tech locked eyes on Yuuri, who gave one last affirmative nod, then moved the device around. He took several stills and then smiled widely. “There she is.”

Yuuri’s eyes glistened. “A girl,” he breathed out. He could hear the delighted gasp of his mate, the squeal of his son but right now he felt enclosed in the moment, his fingers once more brushing over the screen. Finally, he turned his teary eyes towards those of his mate, a soft smile on his lips. “We’re having a girl.”

Victor leaned in, brushing a kiss into Yuuri’s hair. “I would love them no matter the sex, but this makes it more real.”

Yuuri smiled, understanding what he meant. Baby girl, just a little bit longer.

Yura’s eyes were big. “Told you so. I’m going to have a baby sister just like Beka!”

As Yuuri wiped the gel off of his tummy and put himself back together, Victor accepted the thumbdrive holding the digital images of their daughter. They thanked the technician for their work. Yura was extra delighted as he had a printed out picture to show off in his hands. He waved a happy goodbye before bouncing out the door.

“So, how are we going to announce this?” Victor asked as he drove back to the house.

Yuuri snorted and glanced at his son in the mirror. “We won’t have to. We’re just lucky he hasn’t discovered social media or everyone would know already.”
Victor chuckled, he couldn’t agree more. “So something fast. Well, maybe we could do this tonight.”

Yuuri hummed thoughtfully. “What do you have in mind?”

“I have thoughts.” Victor’s eyes narrowed and sparkled.

As Yuuri leaned back in the leather seats of Victor’s car, he smiled contentedly. “I’m fine with whatever you come up with.” It was a dangerous statement as his mate could be the most extra person on the entire planet and that included the cast of RuPaul’s Drag Race, but he knew Victor was very protective of him and he’d think hard on this decision.

As Victor tapped his lip, he announced, “We need to buy baby’s first skates.”

“Tonight?” Yuuri asked, blinking into alertness. “How soon do they let kids skate here in Russia?”

Victor was laughing at his husband’s mock rage, “White skates, pink ties...I think the message will be clear.”

Yuuri smiled, sitting back again. *Yup, Sherry Pie’s got nothing on you babe.* Before the night was out, Victor had posted a picture of Yuuri’s belly with a picture of their baby stretched over it followed by the image of the white skates and pink ties, captioning, *It’s a girl!* Within seconds their phones were flooded with congratulations. After talking with his mother, father, and Mari, Yuuri turned his off, retreating to his nest. Victor tucked in his son who had fallen asleep on the living room floor before joining his mate.

The alpha watched fondly as Yuuri’s hands ran up and down his belly. Yuuri’s eyes were unfocused and Victor knew he was thinking and he waited for Yuuri to find the words for what he wanted to say.

“I wanted to ask you something and I need you to tell me honestly what you think,” the omega finally began.

“Okay...I promise,” Victor answered, watching as Yuuri rolled onto his side.
“I know we talked about a traditional Russian name and that involves a version of your name as alpha and father...but...I was thinking...” his eyes lifted to a section of the warm room, the gentle scent of lavender secreting through the air, “her spirit is so strong, her presence almost tangible at times...and she has given me the opportunity to raise her son...I thought maybe...we could name our daughter Yelena.”

Victor hadn’t expected that but listening to Yuuri’s stumbling words, he knew he had to suss out the entire motivation. “I...think it would be lovely to name her after Yura’s mother. Before I agree to this, I want to know if this is really what you want. Most mates don’t want to keep reminders of a past mate around.”

Yuuri’s smile softened immediately, “You know I don’t care about that. You’ve never given me a single reason to doubt my place in your heart, and I’ve grown to love her memory. I’ve never even hinted at having her picture removed and...your mating with her was very different from the one you have with me. I’ve...always felt like she was the guardian of this house. I want to honor that. Is that weird?”

Victor shook his head. “No, not weird. And very...Yuuri. I would ask that you talk it over with Nikolai first. If you are at peace with this name, then so am I.”

Yuuri paused for a moment, thinking of the wonderful grandfather who had welcomed him so openly, I only hope you love this as much as I do. “I will...and thank you.”

Victor knew his support was important to Yuuri and leaned in to press their foreheads together. “I don’t know if you realize what a beautiful spirit you possess. I know she would have loved you.” He tilted his head and Yuuri met his lips, humming as their lips parted. “You’ve been thinking about this for awhile.”

Yuuri nodded. “I mean, there was always this caveat, if they’re a girl...but now we know she is.”

Victor pushed his hands under Yuuri’s sleep shirt, fingers teasing over Yuuri’s skin, circling his belly button that started to push itself out. Yuuri shifted on his back, his eyes closing as those hands smoothed outward on his tummy.

“Mmmm...you should book me an appointment for another prenatal massage,” Yuuri moaned softly.
“First thing in the morning. I’ll even drive you.”

“We are two coaches down,” Yuuri argued.

“And several skaters down...everyone is at Worlds,” Victor countered.

Yuuri sighed, his eyes closing. The excitement of his day catching up with him, lulling him into sleep. “I want this...what you’re trying to stir up...but today pulled too much on my energy.”

Victor leaned forward and kissed his eyelids. “It’s fine, Yuuri. I just wanted to feel a little closer to you.”

Yuuri sighed, curling into him, relaxing into Victor’s touch. He was aware of his mate continuing the massage of his belly and moving down into his hips and finally his feet. He faded slowly to sleep, enjoying his mate’s attention.

Yuuri wiped the dusting rag through the front hall, his in-laws would be visiting later. They were excited to know the sex of the baby, Vasa practically screaming with excitement over the phone to Victor. A girl. After so many boys, a girl! Yuuri knew that, just because she was a girl, didn’t mean she wouldn’t be an alpha. Secondary genders often took people by surprise, Victor was a perfect example. Yuuri caught a whiff of his son’s scent and smiled. He also suspected his little boy would present omega. Yura had already started making small nests when he napped.

Upstairs, the work on Yura’s room was coming along. They had packed up his son’s toys and the things they would keep and moved them to one of the other bedrooms. Then everything else was removed and stored in the attic. Yuuri and Katya worked on painting the walls and she was working on adding a jungle scene to the closet doors. Yuuri appreciated that she would share her gift so freely. However, both he and Victor insisted she accept some form of payment, artists like her were fewer and fewer, making it all the more important to support them.

Yuuri climbed the stepstool that allowed him to dust the top of the frame holding Yelena’s portrait and felt compelled to talk to her. “Raising Yura has been such a blessing...he’s healed my heart so much over these past six months. His laughter and rambunctious nature draws me to him...and he has such a great capacity to care. I know this must come from you and I thank you for such a gift.
I...I would like to honor that gift and the life you lived. I don’t have much but...if you would allow me, I’d like to name my daughter after you so that she will know your courage and strength.”

He continued dusting the portrait climbing down from the stepladder and looking up to study her image. A peace wound around him and an odd scent of lavender. He glanced around to find Yura but then recalled the boy was still in school. “I’m being silly.” He put the ladder away and started to leave the space but his eyes were drawn back to the image. The smile bestowed so much peace that Yuuri couldn’t help but think she approved of his offering. It wasn’t much...but then again, it was a lot.

Victor and Yuuri were glad they could provide a place for Vasalissa to rest after her treatments. Sometimes she stayed the night but often they would leave after dinner, a nap giving her the strength she needed to make the trip home. This night, she would stay and of course, with her, Andrei.

She was delighted at the video showing her new granddaughter. “I’m already quite taken with her.”

“Have you thought of a name?” Andrei asked, his voice booming and firm. With his wife taking such an active interest in their newest grandchild his life had taken on a new vitality. No longer was he caring for a dying mate, worrying that any moment he would lose the woman that had carried him through so much. Now, he was running to keep up with her dynamic will. Andrei knew it was all in pursuit of the baby and he loved that little girl all the more for it.

Yuuri met Victor’s eyes before answering, “We have...but we’re not ready to share it yet. We will be naming her in Russian tradition however.”

Victor’s father nodded approvingly. Vasa huffed at her husband. “I’m sure any name you give her will be charming. A baby girl! I’ve always been surrounded by boys. If it weren’t for Yelena coming to see me as she did, I would have been quite lost.”

Yuuri smiled, squeezing her hand. She had a tendency to stay close to Yuuri after her treatments. His omega scent comforted her and she seemed more able to deal with the after effects of her treatment. With Yura on the other side of her, she was well tended. She promptly returned to the coloring page she was working on with her grandson. “Are you excited about your new room?”

He nodded. “I get bunk beds and there is going to be a tent and a tiger. Monsters are scared of tigers.”
She chuckled warmly not knowing the significance of the monster talk although Yuuri met Victor’s eyes with worry. “So they are.”

Curled up on his side, Yuuri had his son in his arms, a nightmare bringing him to their bed. Ever since Kostya made an appearance in their lives, their son started exhibiting signs of fear. It wasn’t as bad as Shuji’s invasion, but it was enough to make the boy clingy again. Victor leaned over his shoulder, studying the little boy curled up in Yuuri’s scent.

“I don’t know how to fix this,” the alpha admitted.

“Time. He needs time.” Yuuri tilted his head back to look at his mate. “I know you will keep us both safe. That doesn’t mean there won’t be a struggle but we will be safe. Yura knows this as well. His subconscious is allowing him to work through his fears.”

“That sounds like Dr. Abramovich,” Victor pointed out.

Yuuri smiled and shrugged, turning back to his son. “I am just applying what I’ve learned.”

Victor was determined to celebrate with his family and took them out on Thursday, timing it so that his coaches and skaters could reach them. Both Yuuri and Victor had already reviewed practice video sent to them, replying with their comments.

They chose a family friendly diner so that Yuuri and Yura could both dress comfortably. It offered classic diner favorites of the American midwest, which oddly was a big hit in Europe, with an 80s feel, which oddly was a big hit everywhere. Yuuri ordered a chicken basket to share with Yura and Victor broke his diet and ordered a cheeseburger basket. Really, Yura just ate one of the chicken strips and a handful of fries stolen from both mom and dad.

Yuuri was just about to lecture both father and son for blowing straw wrappers at one another when
that warning chill shivered through him. As he tried to shake it off, the scent of lavender and rosemary invaded his senses. His eyes darted around the room, looking for what had him on edge when he spotted, in the corner, a pair of green eyes studying their small party with interest. The eyes met Yuuri’s with a contemplative nod, which Yuuri did not return.

Instead he softly kicked his mate under the table. “Vitya,” he hissed and then nodded toward the corner. As Victor turned and spotted his cousin, the other alpha stood up and walked their way.

“Kostya,” Victor greeted, polite but cold. In his mouth the name felt like a swear word he was loathe to use around his son.

The other man studied him, his expression calculating. “Fancy meeting you here with your...brood.” The last word came out distastefully. “I’m afraid I didn’t get a chance to properly congratulate you.”

“Thank you,” Victor responded glacially. He knew there was nothing accidental about their meeting, his cousin left nothing to chance. He glanced toward his mate who modeled his cold expression and son who scooted closer to his mother. “As you can see, we are having a family outing. Perhaps you and I can talk later.”

Kostya nodded, “Of course, Vitya.” He paused to enjoy his younger cousin squirm at the affectionate term, which he knew Victor hated hearing from him. He turned his attention to Yura, “I would like to become better acquainted with my extended family. Perhaps this boy wouldn’t be so shy if he knew me better.” He bowed slightly, tipping his ascott cap towards Yuuri and the child. “Until later.”

As he walked out of the diner, Yura sniffed, “That man scares me.”

“Shhh,” Yuuri soothed. “Papa will take care of this. You’re safe.”

Victor noted the calming pheromones his mate was releasing softly for the child, but their dinner was soon forgotten. Allowing enough time to pass for Kostya to be gone, he suggested, “We should leave.”
At home, Yuuri busied himself getting their son ready for bed. Victor called Chris. He briefly described the encounter and asked his friend, “What can we do?”

Chris sighed knowing Victor wanted a legal means to keep him away. Unfortunately, he could offer no such assurance. “He hasn’t technically done anything wrong. So legally, the ball is in his court. I’ll pull the Yura file, though, and familiarize myself with the fine points of this case. Yelena and I worked hard to tie up loose ends but it was one of my earlier cases. Maybe experience will show me some other methods.”

Victor took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I think he knows, or at least suspects.”

“Of course he suspects. Do you think he didn’t suspect before? But at that time, he was happy to have no responsibility.” Chris paused, fingers drumming on the desk he sat at. “Something changed and renewed that interest. But Yelena and I accounted for this.”

Victor heard his friend’s confident voice and felt relieved. “So trust you.”

“Yes,” Chris laughed but Victor could hear the bitter notes of caution. “And report every encounter. You might keep a log.”

Hanging up, he found Yuuri in the bedroom writing in his journal at the desk. “What did Chris say?”

“Log everything and keep him in the loop.”

Yuuri put his pen down and showed Victor his journal. “It felt like maybe he was following us or watching us. I wrote everything down I could remember.”

Victor read through his words and paused at the scent notes. “Rosemary and lavender?”

“I know you said that was Yelena’s scent and if it was just lavender, I would think it was Yura. But...it may sound weird...I think Yelena’s spirit is here.”

Victor shook his head but shivered. “I’ve felt the same way. I started sensing her right before
Kostya made an appearance. I didn’t say anything because I thought...well, it’s not rational.”

Yuuri shrugged. “Only because we don’t really know what happens...after.”

Victor nodded in agreement. Looking towards the nursery door, he asked, “How is Yura?”

The omega looked sheepish as he answered, “I sort of cheated and calmed him with my pheromones. These things are always less scary with the light of day.

Victor thought of how his little son had finally fought off one boogeyman only to have another walk in to take his place. This one could do even more damage, though. “We’ll sit and talk as a family tomorrow,” he decided. “Thank you...tonight was supposed to be a celebration.”

Yuuri shook his head. “Tonight was about family and we stood together...as family.”

Victor didn’t know if he could love Yuuri more than this moment. He did know that he wanted to reconnect and reinforce their bond. He pressed a kiss into Yuuri’s shoulder and felt that body grow pliant, leaning into his touch. “Do you feel like…” He faded off but his hand continued a suggestive circling his hip.

Yuuri tilted his chin up, pulling him into a kiss. “I think I need the reassurance of your touch.”

Victor’s hands started exploring the omega’s body, pushing the oversized t-shirt up to reveal the rosebuds hardening in the cool air. He lowered down and breathed warm air across the sensitive nips, Yuuri moaning as he arched towards those lips. “Do you feel like…” He faded off but his hand continued a suggestive circling his hip.

His hand slid over the firm tummy, smiling at the swell formed around the baby, teasing a circle around Yuuri’s belly button before fingering into Yuuri’s waistband and finding the omega’s length leaking already, the scent of aroused omega intoxicating on its own. Yuuri came up so easily these days, a wayward brush stirring his interest. “I’m going to ease these off.”

“Please,” he begged breathlessly. “Need you.”
Victor carefully eased Yuuri out of his shorts, breathing in the scent of his sweet slick in the process. “I can’t wait to sink into you.”

Yuuri spread his legs in response, wantonly opening up to his mate, a moan punctuating his invitation. Victor’s fingers found his twitching hole and two sank into him with ease, opening Yuuri. He withdrew long enough to turn Yuuri on his side, freeing his own cock and teasing Yuuri’s entrance with the head. Yuuri muttered something in Japanese and Victor smirked at the lewd tone. He came from behind Yuuri, the omega stretching around him with a groan that Victor worried would wake his son. He stilled, holding Yuuri against him as he listened. Silence met his ears, only interrupted by Yuuri’s panting.

Once satisfied his son continued to sleep, he began rocking slowly into Yuuri, feeling the omega push back into the movements. “There you go, my lovely Yuuri. Take what you need from me,” he encouraged.

“I...need...you...harder,” he demanded.

Victor groaned, knowing this position wouldn’t reach that need. He pulled out and snorted at Yuuri slamming his hand on the mattress in frustration. “Patience, love...I’ll take care of you.” Repositioning Yuuri onto his hands and knees, he moved behind him and pushed in once more. “I think this will meet that need just a little better,” he pointed out, and to make his point, he pulled back and slammed back into him.

“Yeeessss,” he groaned.

With hands on Yuuri’s hips, he picked up the pace and gave his mate what he wanted, the cries coming from the omega’s lips filling the room. Victor could feel his control slipping, the need to release growing in his gut. “Yuuri…”

“A little more,” he begged. “Hold on just a little more. I’m close.”

Victor nodded, a determined set in his chin as he continued to chase after that orgasm, focusing on Yuuri’s pleasure so he didn’t give into his own. “Yuu…”

Those pants echoed the slapping skin as Victor pounded into that gorgeous rounded ass. And then Yuuri sobbed out, pushing back into him as the omega released, his body shaking as he came down from the orgasm. Victor wrapped his arms tight around him as he both supported him, and filled
him. “Oh, my Yuuri,” he groaned.

Yuuri worked to catch his breath and gave himself over to Victor, feeling the other man’s arms hold him up. “Vityaaaa,” he moaned, elongating the final vowel.

“I’ve got you.”

“I’m shaky. Feel...heavy.”

Victor eased Yuuri back down onto the mattress, settling him on his side. “I’ll go get a cloth to clean you up,” he offered, sliding off the mattress. He awkwardly half limped, half hopped towards the bathroom, feeling his age and the abuse of his body at that moment. In the bathroom, he quickly washed himself off and prepared a warm cloth for Yuuri. When he returned, those beautiful brown eyes were already heavy. Victor wiped him down and tossed the cloth in the corner, helping to pull his mate’s underwear back into place, Yuuri shifting sleepily to assist. Getting himself back in order, he curled up around Yuuri. At least if Yura joined them later, they would be decent.

The next morning, the family sat with Nikolai and talked about Yelena’s “bad man” with Yura.

The little boy listened intently as they explained his mother’s past. As much as they tried to protect him from the truth, the boy was able to cut through to it. “Is he my...my...Papa?” came a tremulous inquiry from the little blond.

Victor took a deep breath meeting Yuuri’s eyes for strength. “Your mother was with him when she found out she was pregnant. That would mean he’s your biological father, not your Papa. Your mother gave me papers naming me your Papa.”

Green eyes flicked from Victor to Yuuri, then back again. “So he can’t take me?” the little boy looked torn between the adults.

No one had any guarantees. Courts didn’t always do what was best for the child. And while no one wanted to lie to the child, they also could not leave him in terror. “Chris believes strongly that we can protect you legally,” Victor answered. “Your mother worked hard with him to keep you
away from that man. I have to believe in those safeguards.”

Yura processed those words in his almost-six-year-old mind. “Mama always took care of me even when she was really sick. Okay.” Then he looked towards the others and asked, “Is this a secret?”

Yuuri leaned forward to take his small hand as he held his eyes. “This is not something you want to bring up in conversation, and it’s not something you want to talk about at school.” Yuuri explained. “But you can talk to us about it...and Uncle Chris might be talking to you about it. So let’s say it’s a secret unless we or Uncle Chris tells you otherwise. Okay?”

The little boy nodded solemnly.

It was a lot and both parents decided to keep him out of school that day to help him process the matter. Nikolai suggested it was a good day to pay their respects to Yelena. The three of them dropped Yuuri off at the rink before going to the cemetery. Yura laid flowers on her grave and the men spent the day telling Yura good stories about his mother, the trouble she and Victor got themselves into growing up, and most of all how important her son was to her.

“Why did she pick you to be my Papa?” the little boy asked at one point.

Victor smiled at those innocent words. He had asked her that very same question long before she passed. “She said that I was the one person outside of her parents she could always count on. When I found out she had begun dating Kostya I tried to get her to break up with him. He was a horrible guy, but I was too pushy and she was too stubborn. Your mama thought I was jealous of Kostya, and to be fair I was but not in the way she thought. I didn’t want to lose my friend to him. We fought, and soon we couldn’t be in the same room without arguing. She even pushed me away for the time. She wanted my support but I couldn’t give it knowing what kind of man he was.” He was quiet for a moment before continuing, “I loved her...she was my dearest friend and the closest to a sister I had. I didn’t want her to be hurt. We didn’t talk for a long time. And then she showed up and she was pregnant with you. She wanted to leave him, hide you away. She asked me to help her and I didn’t even hesitate.”

Yura picked at his shoes while he listened and finally worked up the courage to ask the scary question. “Do you want to be my Papa?”

Victor smiled, unexpected tears springing to his eyes. “Very much so. I never regretted my decision that day.”
“So what do we do next?” Nikolai asked, knowing at some point they would have to take action.

Victor shrugged. “Chris says the ball is in his court but knowing Chris, he’s laying down strategies as we speak.”

Victor would never know how right he was. Chris had a well laid path constructed almost six years ago. The former Swiss skater sat in his office late at night, a very personal case laid out in front of him. In the center was an envelope, his ace card. He had been instructed to open it only if all else failed. He wasn’t there yet, but he knew after an extensive conversation with Yelena that something in that envelope could be used should this go to court. He reviewed the other contents, and the affidavit Yelena gave as they talked. He narrowed his eyes as he noticed one thing that hadn’t stood out before. She never really stated for certain that Kostya was Yura’s father. She was clever, the little angel. She knew I might have to use these statements in court. He huffed, a sad smile on his lips. I made a promise to you. We’ll keep him out of Kostya’s hands no matter what.

Notes:


Chapter End Notes

So...thoughts?
There is an unwritten law for villains and that is ‘patience is key’. Kostya was nothing if not patient. His years in the military taught him a ruthless sort of self-discipline, which he employed vigilantly. If he used that discipline to cruel ends, that was his decision and all the better for him as it was all the worse for the golden boy that had taken everything from him his entire life. Now it would be Victor’s turn to know what it felt like to be robbed. However, he wasn’t a fool. The people protecting Victor and that brat of a welp he pretended was his were wealthy and connected, and that meant powerful. He knew who was behind his assignment to Siberia and who influenced his superiors to keep him far away. Once again Victor had managed to steal what should have been his, promotion, success, and esteem within the military. Instead he was left in a practically deserted base, watching over the nomadic travels of drug dealers. He learned from those scumbags. If the military was disciplined, these people were tireless. And he used those skills now to take Yelena’s pup. Ironically, he had no real interest in the boy. He had no use for children. But this one could be helpful in enacting the revenge he owed to Victor. And if that slutty omega Victor carted around was hurt as well, all the better. The high and mighty Nikiforovs, who used their military contracts to sway his superiors, would finally fall.

“I’ll take custody of the brat out of spite and send him as far away as possible. Some wretched boarding school, forgotten, cold winter blowing through like the Siberian barracks.” He felt a chill run through him, and the smell of dying lavender passed him. He chuckled, the witch’s spirit had joined him. *Good, I like to think I’m tormenting you now even in the afterlife.* “How would you like that, Yelena? I know you are listening, you…”

In answer, the lid to her old music box popped open, a childish ballerina dancing to a discordant
Kostya bolted up immediately. His eyes darted over to the cheap box. Calmly he walked over to the box. “How many times have I thrown away that damn box?” he shouted into the empty room even as he reached to slam shut the lid. It haunted him, coming back to torment him.

Victor woke up restless. He leaned over his mate and kissed his cheek. “I’m going for a run.”

Yuuri pushed up and asked groggily, “You want me to come with you?”

Victor smiled indulgently. “You should rest for our little angel’s sake.”

Yuuri pouted although not at the extra sleep. He wasn’t fond of being coddled. However, he was tired after spending the week at the rink. He had been able to use the dance studio uninterrupted and unobserved recently. It was nearly empty, most of the skaters taking holiday after Worlds, coaches following in their wake after paperwork was completed. It was much needed time off and the wide open ice gave Yuuri space to think…and plan. While he certainly wasn’t jumping, and baby refused to let him spin, Yuuri was able to use footwork and patterns to help him find focus. He had a recital in the works and was also working with Victor to plan an ice show featuring their younger students. His ducklings would be on the ice at some point and he wanted them to showcase well.

Victor knew Yuuri had been working on the upcoming show and while he wouldn’t dare insist the younger man relax he could at least make sure he left for a run too early in the morning to keep the omega in bed. Exiting the door alone he smiled as both dogs abandoned him for the warmth of his bed with Yuuri. Part of him was jealous. However, as he slipped into a steady pace, he took in some familiar faces, neighbors walking their dogs, a group of omegas and beta mothers jogging with their strollers. He veered to the right to pass them, chuckling as he caught them from the corner of his eye checking him out. Still have it, I’ll have to tell Yuuri and hope he gets possessive. Yuuri had been invited to join them but complained to Victor that their pace was more leisurely. Yuuri would always be an athlete, and competitive.

Taking a sidepath, Victor cut through and wound his way to jog along the Neva. People thinned out due to the brisk breeze, so he was surprised to hear footfalls drawing up to his side. But the surprise slowly faded into something of a dull headache as he caught the identifying whiff. He looked up and his eyes met fierce green. A nod of acknowledgement and they fell into step.
Half an hour later and Victor drew up to a stop. Kostya was gasping for air and Victor drained his water bottle, waiting on the other man to start. He was happily concealing his own fatigue but delighted to see that Kostya had to kill himself to keep up.

“You haven’t slowed down much since retiring, cousin,” the other alpha began.

“I’m not sure that I agree,” Victor responded dryly. “You were able to keep up.”

Kostya looked up, eyes narrowing, not falling for the bait. “Ha,” he barked out. “Military training.”

Victor detested the game Kostya was playing. Leveling a gaze at the other man, he measured him up and pressed. “What do you want, Kostya?”

A smug smirk crossed his lips, Kostya immediately felt the shift and interpreted it as having the upper hand. The man held his gaze before responding, “To see my son.” His eyes darted to the water but not before Victor caught the calculating gleam in them. “You think I did not know?”

Not admitting anything, Victor answered, “I don’t know what you know.”

“Yuri!” he snapped, raising to full height and taking a stride toward Victor. It was a power play, one designed to make Victor lose ground. It failed. “He’s my son. If I wasn’t for sure before, those green eyes, that golden blond hair…”

Victor shrugged before answering smoothly, “This is Russia, more than half the country is blonde...and green eyes. Next you’ll say that you’re both right handed. He takes after my mother. Now unless you have something more meaningful to say, I’m returning home to my family.”

As Victor turned to leave, Kostya called out, “You can’t just take whatever you want anymore, we’re not children. Someone will come for a reckoning. You’re not the spoiled darling of the family and country any longer, so you’d better quit acting like it.”

Victor paused as he turned and stated in a low growl, “I’ve earned every gain through hard work and determination. Not all of us can remain stagnant in a stale military career.” He heard a grunt of
frustration as he turned and took off. He needed to be close to his family.

Yuuri was up when Victor arrived, breakfast finished and he was now stretched out in the studio. Olga was able to direct Victor when he arrived and the alpha looked around to see if Yura was about before coming to kneel before his mate. Yuuri’s eyes were wide with concern as he took in the expression of his lover, his scent showing his distress.

“H-he...he wants to see Yura.”

Yuuri’s eyes narrowed even as he settled his mate into his embrace. Reaching over with one hand, he sent a text to Phichit.

Yuuri/ We need to come over. Is Chris around?

Peach/ He will be after his workout. What’s wrong?

Yuuri/ It’s complicated.

Peach/ Come over in an hour.

“We’re going to see Chris in an hour, okay?”

Victor nodded but then his eyes went towards the entrance. “I don’t want to talk in front of Yura.”

The omega smiled. That was a simple solution. “I believe that he and Nikolai had plans to make piroshki for some kind of festival.”

Yuuri kept him there until he settled and then they went to check with Nikolai who agreed with the plan. “Keep him in today,” Yuuri added. “Kostya approached Vitya this morning.”
Nikolai’s entire jaw clenched so hard Yuuri worried about the man’s teeth. His eyes set firmly on the brown hue of Yuuri’s. “I see.” He flexed his fists, as if trying to calm himself down. Then he started again, in a lighter tone. “No, we’ll take over the kitchen after Olga leaves. She’s going to spend time with her sister. Or is it Lev...I can’t keep track of that old woman,” he grunted.

Yuuri snorted. “That old woman is twenty years your junior.”

“Pshht...you’re supposed to be on my side.”

As they started to leave, Yura erupted. “I want to see Peach!” The little boy seemed ready to lose his mind in either anger or sorrow and the omega could see a temper tantrum forming.

“Oh, hush now!” Yuuri directed, an edge to his voice that caused the little boy to pause. “We don’t throw fits. That’s for babies. You’re about to be six.”

The little blond pouted but backed down.

“Now...your grandfather had already planned to spend the day with you and your papa and I have business. It will be boring. So spend the day with Grandpa.”

“Apparently, I’m not getting any younger,” the old man huffed from the door frame heading through to the kitchen.

Yuuri looked his way and smiled, offering him a wink that surprisingly caused the old man to blush a little.

“I’m going to have to watch you with old men,” Victor teased.

“A little love and attention goes a long way,” Yuuri argued.
Victor appreciated how Yuuri could lighten the mood. The heaviness wasn’t gone from his chest but it felt a little lighter. He needed Yuuri’s touch and appreciated how his mate handled the logistics, allowing him to sort out his thoughts.

Victor and Chris were ensconced in the home office while Phichit and Yuuri were making Thai food in the kitchen for lunch. As Victor relayed the confrontation to Chris-his-lawyer, Chris-his-friend poured him a whiskey and handed it over. “Okay, so he’s made his move. You also played smart and never actually admitted Yura was his son. Very well done, by the way. Keep doing that, offer him no information and confirm nothing to him.”

Victor offered a small smile at those words. “I didn’t lie. I mean, he’s my son.”

Chris patted him on his back reassuringly. “He is your son. Let’s work on keeping him that way. Now, I’ve had Phichit check Kostya’s finances...I really should have the firm hire him. He’s brilliant.”

Victor snorted at Chris bragging about his love before raising an eyebrow expectantly. “Did he find anything of interest?”

“He recently got his hands on a small inheritance.”

Victor huffed. “I could have told you that. His paternal grandfather passed away a couple of months ago. No relation to me and I didn’t bother with the funeral.”

“Well, he looks like he doesn’t hold his funds long. Gambling habit and his bank account goes empty quickly in the month. So he doesn’t have much to work with. Mind you, I take his words seriously but he doesn’t have a lot to fight with, we can easily outspend him.”

“What if his father pitches in?”

“Ivan Matveev could put up a solid fight but he’s not a Nikiforov. Your family’s influence far outweighs his as evidenced by Konstantin’s departure to the wilderness.”
Victor tapped his fingers on the desk surface as he frowned and tried to sort out his options. “What will be the next move?”

“Paternity. He has to prove that he is the father. If he can establish they were in a relationship at the time of conception, any judge will likely grant the court order for Yura’s DNA.” Chris typed a few words in the search bar. “However, because the you and Yelana were mated, and quickly...there is a legal presumption of paternity, a sort of signal to a shotgun mating. You signed a voluntary acknowledgement of paternity, and she also put your name on the birth certificate.”

“Yura hates needles,” Victor muttered as if that was the major concern.

Chris shook his head. “We can do this with a cheek swab...but we don’t want to do it until it’s forced.”

“Any chance...since we’re cousins...that it might be inconclusive?”

Chris sighed and shook his head. “Yelena had me research this. There are not enough genetic markers that are the same. Even if you were brothers, it may be similar but not identical.”

Victor exhaled, releasing the tension he held, “So again...we wait.”

Chris nodded. “But we prepare while we wait.”

Yuuri stood in the home studio, black tights with long leg warmers in gray and a matching sweater hanging loose around his hips. In the background, music played from *Finding Neverland*, another piece he was considering for the recital. The *Peter Pan* theme flowed into the ice show as well, two skaters arguing about performing to *Lost Boy* earlier that week. Victor intervened and suggested they collaborate since there was more than one lost boy in the story.

Lost in the music as he let the notes claim him, he was unaware of an audience until he stilled, his eyes resting on Victor leaning on the doorframe. “Oh...you startled me.”
“My apologies. Yura said that you need to take him to the store to get a coconut?”

Yuuri laughed. “Well, I guess I can take a break. We are trying the different fruits and vegetables they are comparing the baby to in my app. I thought it would be a fun way to get Yura to try new foods.”

“So...our baby is a coconut this week?”

“Yep.”

“Well, that explains why he is belting the Coconut song at the top of his lungs.”

As if on cue, Yura came into the studio singing quite loudly, “Put the lime in the coconut...:” He paused. “Mama, if you had twins, would you have a lime and a coconut in your belly?”

Yuuri snorted at that. “I don’t have the fruit in my belly. The baby is considered the size of the fruit. And if they were twins they would grow at the same rate.”

“Boy, when baby was a banana, they were very skinny.”

Yuuri rolled his eyes at his very literal child. “I think they were using the length. You saw baby that week.”

“So, are we going to go get a coconut?”

Yuuri huffed his hair out of his eyes and nodded in agreement. “If you can talk Papa into driving us while I change.”

Half an hour later, they were heading out for a family outing to the grocery store. An hour after that, Yuuri realized why you didn’t take alphas to the grocery store. Apparently Victor shopped hungry because they returned with a number of snacks along with the coconut. Olga studied the stash with disapproval but tucked most into the after school basket of goodies. “You never take Victor Andreivich to the store. This is why.”
“I’ve learned my lesson,” Yuuri agreed. “On the other hand, I was kind of glad he was there. The lady in front of me in line tried to touch my tummy. I didn’t even know her!”

Olga waved a finger at Yuuri. “Oh, an alpha in that situation might be handy...unless he encourages such behavior.”

Yuuri raised his eyebrows, “Definitely not. Vitya picked up on how uncomfortable I was and he intimidated them away. I just hope they don’t think we were rude.”

The older woman clicked her tongue, “They were rude. You don’t touch people without consent, especially total strangers in a supermarket.” She took the last of the shopping and shewed him away. “Go put your feet up. I’ve got this.”

Yuuri rubbed his belly and answered, “Thank you.”

Yuuri woke up from his nap to find that Victor had put Yura to bed and was now rubbing lotion into his feet and calves. “Oh, you’re a godsend. Being active helps with the leg cramps but they still sneak up on me.”

“I never mind rubbing your feet or massaging your tummy and back. Just say something.”

Yuuri nodded. “I’ll try. It’s still hard to ask for help sometimes.” He wiggled his toes, the minty lotion cool on his skin. “I just know you’ve got a lot on your plate.”

Victor hummed, “And these small moments help keep me grounded. I need this as much as you do you know.”

Yuuri let Victor help him up and leaned on him as they walked towards the bedroom. “Let me undress you?” the alpha asked. Yuuri hummed in agreement, raising his arms as Victor worked Yuuri’s shirt off. Kneeling down, he nuzzled Yuuri’s belly.
“Don’t mess with my outie!”

Victor looked up and grinned, Yuuri’s belly button popping out his current obsession. “You have an adorable belly.”

Yuuri rolled his eyes and maybe huffed. Victor was too enamoured with said belly to notice. “At least I didn’t get that brown line.”

“It could still happen,” Victor chirped happily.

Another huff and he started to push down his pants, Victor reaching up to pull them down where he could step out of them, hands on his mate’s shoulders for balance. Victor leaned in to nuzzle Yuuri’s cock still enclosed in his underwear and the omega gasped in response, leaning into the stimuli.

Looking up, Victor raised a suggestive eyebrow. “Shall we?”

With a groan, Yuuri answered, “Of course I want sex. I’m five months pregnant. I always want sex.”

Victor snorted and took care of Yuuri’s underwear situation while he was still on the floor. “Baby, you might need to help me back up.”

The two clumsily got Victor to his feet and tottered over to the bed, Victor tugging and shedding his clothes as they went. Yuuri giggled as he stumbled on his pants and landed gracelessly in a pile on the nest. Yuuri would have to repair that wall tomorrow but it might be time to freshen his nest anyway since it smelled so strong of sex it made him think of a heat nest.

Crawling up into the middle of Victor, he placed his hand in the middle of his alpha’s chest, pressing him back into the mattress. Curious blue eyes looked up at him, waiting for Yuuri to show him what he had planned. Yuuri leaned over him, lowering himself and bending at his elbows to nip along his chin. Victor’s hands rested on Yuuri’s waist. After a moment, the younger man whispered, “I want to ride you.”
Victor groaned, “Yes...please…”

It took little to no stretching to become ready and as wet as Yuuri seemed to stay at this stage of his pregnancy...it’s a hormonal thing...in no time, he was sinking down on Victor’s cock. “Oh, this is what I need,” he moaned. And those well earned thighs of steel rose up and dropped down. “Yes...definitely.”

Victor smirked from his position, watching his beautiful mate take his pleasure. And Yuuri danced on his lap, not a simple rise and fall, but a twist of those hips, a strategic tightening as he pulled up, loosening to allow himself to drop with ease. Yuuri leaned forward and kissed him, biting his lower lip as he pulled back. With a smirk, he settled down, continuing his dance, his hands gliding over his body, sliding over his belly and circling his belly button and then up to his nipples. He pinched and squeezed them before sliding them around his neck and through his hair.

Victor appreciated the view and rested his hands on Yuuri’s hips once more. He began answering his lover’s rhythm, thrusting upward. Yuuri answered him with moans, his eyes closed as he continued bounce, his body moving to some unheard music although Victor could see every note in his movements. He could see Yuuri as an exotic dancer in another life and he’d pay for every dance.

Yuuri’s cries became more urgent, his movements more demanding. “Vitya…” he whined.

“What do you need?” the alpha asked, grunting as he held himself back.

“I need you...hard…” Yuuri was struggling with English words, a sure sign he was slowly losing himself to pleasure.

Victor pulled Yuuri tight with his hands on those hips and flipped them over, and soon he was driving into Yuuri, the omega’s cries answering his movements as Yuuri gripped the headboard. And then the body beneath him tightened around him even as Yuuri spilled, going limp in his arms. Victor quickly stroked through to his own orgasm, before pulling free.

They both laid on their backs, panting as they stared up at the ceiling. Yuuri’s hands reached for Victor’s. “I think...we needed some stress relief.”

Victor snorted a laugh. “Is that what that was?”
Yuuri hummed an affirmative. “I’m not worried, Vitya...about Yura. I trust that Chris and Yelena knew what they were doing. I know you’re scared...but I believe Yura is meant to be with us.”

He hoped so...because to lose Yura...and to that monster...Victor hated to think about it.

NOTES:

Baby is at 22 weeks at the end of this chapter and the typical spacing will be two week intervals until baby is born. Links for 22 weeks:


https://www.thebump.com/pregnancy-week-by-week/22-weeks-pregnant

I get the food comparisons from the bump.

RESEARCH LINKS:

https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/putative.pdf

https://www.babymed.com/pregnancy/who-can-request-paternity-test

https://www.courts.ca.gov/selfhelp-parentage.htm?rdeLocaleAttr=en


https://dnacenter.com/blog/paternity-testing-when-two-possible-fathers-are-related/


https://www.reddit.com/r/legaladvice/comments/4eg4mw/mo_can_another_man_force_married_couple_t (Yes, I went down the reddit hole.)

There is an assumption in this story that legally, the approach will be the same to establish paternity anywhere.

Chapter End Notes

These chapters are so full of late! I hope you are enjoying them.
Ch. 71: **Birthday boy!**

Yura woke with a start on the eve of his birthday, sending him running to crawl in bed with his parents.

The motion of the little boy snuggling into his mother woke the Omega. “What’s wrong?” Yuuri asked in a hushed voice.

Yura struggled with the emotions. It was a good dream, but left him with something akin to fear. “I-I saw Mama...and she hugged me so tight and told me to trust her.”

Victor’s eyebrows knitted as he looked over Yuuri’s shoulder before reaching out to pull the little boy into the middle of the nest, Yuuri turning to face him while Victor smoothed his hair. “That sounds like a good dream to have on your birthday eve,” Victor suggested.

Those green eyes looked up as he asked, “Why?” He wanted to be happy, any memory of his mother was precious to him but there was an urgency in her hug, something that made him afraid to let go and wake.
Viktor soothed the boy with a finger across his brow, “Because we sometimes dream of what is to come. Your mama was telling you that she’s got everything under control.”

Yura swallowed, “With the bad man?”

Victor nodded as he answered, “Mmmmmmm. And not only her, you have so many other people looking out for you.”

Yura sighed, snuggling into his papa’s arms. “I’m just happy I’ve got you and Yuuri.”

The omega’s hand slid up the little boy’s back as he quietly scented the boy. Yura had been drawing close to his papa since Kostya had disrupted their lives with his presence and Yuuri couldn’t blame the boy, the stranger made full grown adults cautious. He was scared of losing those he loved most. And if Yuuri was honest with himself, he often feared the same.

Yuuri, feeling a little heavier and much queasier than usual, laid out the futons in the living room while Nikolai and Olga fussed in the kitchen. Yura wanted piroshki and there was no way one Japanese man would take away that honor from two Russians...and there was no way he could wrap his head around the recipe. Olga wanted to make sure there were a variety of snacks for the party, so she elected to allow the grandfather the joy of cooking while she prepared finger foods. Veggie and fruit trays, something Yuuri could handle. It wouldn’t be a large party according to Victor, close friends and family with Mila, Otabek, and Zaina staying the night. He found himself smiling, looking forward to their guests, although *small party* had a different meaning apparently to each of them. He supposed that according to Victor it wouldn’t be a large party since half the city wasn’t involved with the press sitting on the lawn. At least the cops wouldn’t make a showing.

Victor had just come in with the dogs from the backyard when the doorbell rang. He walked through and opened up to greet Chris and Phichit. A cry of “Peeeeeaaach!” mowed past him and dove into the omega. Phichit laughed as he scooped up the little blond. “Happy birthday, kiddo.”

“And you going to spend the night?” he asked hopefully.

Phichit’s eyebrows raised and he looked past him to Yuuri who now leaned against the entrance into the living room. “Ummm, Yuuri? Do you need some help?”
The other omega laughed warmly and shrugged. “I mean I have Olga, Nikolai, and Victor...but yeah, if you want to stay, we can make it work.”

He turned back to the little boy and shrugged. “Let’s see how the evening goes. But I can.”

Chris huffed at that. “If you’re staying, I’m staying.”

“I’m sure we can put you both up in a guest room upstairs,” Victor offered.

Phichit turned with wide eyes and suggested, “We could christen the omega room.”

“Yeah?” Chris asked, turning back towards Victor who groaned.

“I mean, I don’t know what Mom and Dad have done...and I don’t want to know,” he hastened to add. With a shrug, he added, “Have at it.”

Yuuri scowled at the entire crew for the reprobates that they were. “I’m sure we can find some pajamas for you later,” Yuuri suggested.

Yura was looking from one adult to another, curious uncertainty in his eyes but he was sure Beka could clear it up for him.

“It’s fine...I sleep in the buff,” Chris pointed out with a smirk.

Yuuri’s eyes widened, darting to Yuri who still sometimes slipped off to school commando. “Ummm...”

“Gross!” Yura declared, turning to Phichit to ask, “Do you sleep in the buff, too?”

He laughed warmly and answered, “Never when I’m a guest at someone’s house and Chris will wear pajamas, too.”
Both parents looked slightly relieved and knew Chris would follow Phichit’s lead anywhere. They tried not to let their minds go to bedroom dynamics with that thought. Yuuri was also glad that this wouldn’t be another battle with their son.

Victor cleared his throat and led them into the dining room where the party was being set up. Gifts went on a table off to the side, animal print balloons tied to each table leg and floating up above in bunches of five and seven. The cupcakes were decorated with animal heads and one could tell that Yura had a hand in them.

Yuuri smiled as he remembered walking in to find them both covered in orange frosting before marching them off to their respective showers. Yura had emerged wearing his six-year-old tiger shirt sporting a Roar! on its front. Victor looked nice in jeans and a red button up. Yuuri loved him in red and had to walk up to him and kiss him which continued until they heard the six-year-old’s “gross!” in the background. Victor was equally pleased with Yuuri’s black clingy top that showed off his baby bump over black maternity leggings. He slipped his arms around Yuuri from behind every chance he got, his hands resting on that bump.

The bell rang pulling Yuuri from his daydream and he slipped away from the crowd to greet their next guests. He opened the door and was immediately embraced by Mehar with both of her kids waiting respectfully by her side. He led them inside, taking their coats. “Everyone is in the dining room.” He smiled as the kids made their way through the familiar space. Mehar helped him hang up the coats.

“It’s beautiful outside but such a strong chill to the air,” the Indian woman fussed. “I miss warm springs.”

Yuuri laughed at her desire for predictable weather, something he had never enjoyed in southern Japan. “Back home, we never knew what we would get. I’ve known it to snow in April.”

She visibly shivered at that thought. “I suppose it could snow here as well. I’m ready for spring. True spring.”

Yuuri led Mehar into the kitchen where she greeted the other adults. The children quickly broke off into their own group and were engaged in their own conversations. Yuuri looked back to check one last time, seeing that Yura had broken out the safari hats. Katya promised to do animal face paint when she arrived. Glancing over, Yuuri saw the gift table was already starting to swell. He smiled at the love the little boy received from his friends, entirely well deserved in his opinion.

Another knock and Victor returned with his parents. Andrei looked around with wide eyes. “You
Both Yuuri and Chris snorted at the idea of Victor doing anything by halves. Yuuri smiled as his mate tried to justify the overdone decorations. *Like Vitya could approach something like this without being a little extra.* Victor beamed proudly. “Nothing but the best for my Yura.”

Yuuri noticed Vasa was looking a little worn from the trip over and guided her to a chair. Soon, Olga had a glass of lemon water with a sprig of rosemary in her hand. She thanked them both and smiled fondly towards her grandson. “I wish Irya did these things. It’s barely a celebration with her.”

“Well, she has three and I’m sure they can be a handful,” Yuuri suggested although he hoped he would celebrate each child equally. He had reached out to Irya earlier in the week to offer her three a sleepover, and the couple a night off, but she had turned down his invitation saying they already had an obligation this weekend. Yuuri could tell it was an excuse. He wondered if Leonid controlled her to the point where she couldn’t get out or if it was a self-imposed prison. However his smile returned when he heard Andrei across the room admiring the cupcakes.

“Leonid doesn’t know what he’s missing with these cupcakes.” The grandfather was eagerly licking frosting from one hand while helping himself to another.

“I helped make them,” Yura stated proudly.

“Well, I’ll need to make sure I get one of your masterpieces over to your grandma,” he crooned. The softening of the elder Nikiforov over the last few months let Yuuri see a bit of his mate in the old man. He hated that it took such a drastic event to bring it to the surface.

Vasa smiled at her husband of many decades, and waved a hand indicating that she really couldn’t handle the sweet of a cupcake but that he was very welcome to eat her portion.

The next doorbell, Yuuri tended to, greeting Katya, Mila, and Pyotr. “Georgi texted saying he and Svetka are on their way,” Pyotr supplied.

“Lilia and Yakov are right behind us,” Katya added, both seeing to their coats. “The dining room?”
“Yes, I’ll stay nearby if you can see yourselves through.”

Katya dropped a quick kiss on his cheek and a squeeze on his shoulder before she led her family back. Boisterous greetings filtered through the house as the doorbell rang again. Yuuri turned to greet Yakov and Lilia. “Come in,” he welcomed them, letting Yakov take Lilia’s coat then taking it from him to hang in the closet before taking Yakov’s.

“You must be quite overwhelmed with all of these people,” Lilia fussed, studying him at arm’s length, both hands on his shoulders.

Yuuri shrugged. “So far it’s just been family and everyone makes themselves at home. I am thankful I have Olga to lean on, however.”

“Well, let’s get on in there,” Yakov grunted. “Is there Vodka?”

Lilia raised an eyebrow, “Yakov, really...it’s a kids party!”

“I’m sure Victor can provide you with something satisfactory,” Yuuri added with an amused smile. He guided them back and soon they were enveloped with warmth. Yakov made his way back to sit at the table with Nikolai and Andrei, the three men sipping vodka and happily chatting. Lilia found her way to Vasa’s side, inquiring after her health and recovery in quiet solicitous tones. And Yuuri was enveloped in his small group of friends. They expected one more group of guests and when the bell rang, Yuuri turned to hurry towards the door.

Opening, his eyes widened. “Irya, Leonid! I thought you couldn’t come!”

Irya looked away guiltily and answered, “It seems our plans changed. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Not at all, I’m very happy they changed to bring you here. We have plenty.” He quietly thanked the gods of mass merchandising that party packs came in tens so he had plenty of supplies for the boys. “Come on in.”

Victor greeted his brother with surprised warmth and Yuuri heard Leonid tell him, “I’m not sure what Irya was on about. We didn’t have any plans this weekend. Figured I should come considering how things have been going lately. Solidarity among the Nikiforovs and all.”
“Oh, thank you,” Victor replied, his eyes meeting Yuuri’s in confusion who shrugged. “We’re...avoiding unpleasant topics such as unwanted family members for the party.”

Leonid nodded sharply, “Understandable. Now...do we have a drink?”

“They have coffee,” Andrei grunted. It wasn’t a direct dismissal but it was clear that the old men were not ready to have Leonid join their ranks.

Leonid blinked, “Oh, very good then.” He turned back to his brother.

“I’m sure we can sneak away for some vodka later,” Victor suggested with an amused smile.

“Oh, thank god!” Leonid answered with obvious relief.

One more door chime and Yuuri slipped out to let in Georgi and Svetka. “Sorry we’re late,” the young coach fussed, guiding his wife and their children into the party.

Yuuri leaned in to fuss over the baby as he added, “Not at all. These little ones sometimes take a lot more time.”

His wife smiled warmly. “Thank you for including us. Sometimes all I do is teach and take care of children.”

For a small party, it was a houseful. The table had been extended to accommodate the extra adults. The ballet studio had a series of blankets spread out to provide a picnic atmosphere for the children. Yuuri tended to the younger bodies while Victor focused on entertaining the adults. The omega was thankful that his friends gathered around him. But he caught Irya looking lost, unsure where she belonged in the mix until Yuuri invited her to join them.

She smiled gratefully, coming over right away. Slowly she warmed to others, finding similar small talk topics. Yuuri went to get water, and she followed him, finally working up the courage to apologize. “I...never feel comfortable in these domestic things. I don’t know what’s expected of me.”
Yuuri blinked at those words before answering, “Just be yourself.” He knew too well what it was like to live in a cage, and to have to guess at what he was supposed to do, how he was supposed to act...or react.

She shrugged, glancing back towards the boisterous laughter in the dining room. “I...think I’ve forgotten how along the way. It’s...not easy being his wife.”

Yuuri didn’t pretend to know what she went through in her marriage. They didn’t know each other that well. However, he did know what it was like to be in an unhappy relationship. “I think you know where I came from. I was most unhappy when I was focused on pleasing another, trying to read their mood so I could alter my own. It was like living a half life. And it didn’t accomplish what I was trying for. So I started focusing on myself. I think...if you worked on figuring that out, you will be more happy...and that will filter into your family.”

She laughed and Yuuri could hear the slight bitterness. “Maybe...you are so wise for someone so young.”

Yuuri snorted. “I’m not so young. I’m twenty-nine.” He patted his tummy and added, “And pregnant.”

She hugged herself, her eyes resting on her boys. “They can be a handful. So much energy.”

“Perhaps get them involved in some activities,” Svetka offered as she walked up. “I teach third grade. They are all full of energy at that age.”

Irya liked the idea, but seemed overwhelmed with the options. “My husband suggested hockey...it’s just sooo...”

Both Yuuri and Svetka laughed warmly. “I suggest you see what they are interested in,” the teacher pointed out. “They’ll be more invested. And you’ll find it’s less work for you then,” she added with a smile.

Yuuri nodded in agreement. “True. Yura and Zaina take ballet and then Otabek joins Yura in figure skating. I have Mila in both.”
She blinked as she processed those words. “You...teach?”

The omega smiled and nodded. “I spend quite a bit of time at Vitya’s side. I spent so much time not able to do what I love that I’m so thankful Vitya encourages me to explore my interests. I teach the younger students ballet and skating as I’m able.” He paused to rub his tummy meaningfully before continuing, “And I help with the older skaters working out their step sequences. I guess I still have it in me.”

Svetka smiled, nudging Yuuri gently on his arm, “There’s no ‘I guess’ about it according to my Georgi.” She turned to Irya, “Yuuri is a sought after critic at the rink. Evidently his word is law.”

Irya smiled, watching Yuuri blush at the praise. She thought about his words, her eyes resting on her boys. “I...I was an accountant before I married Leonid. I love working with numbers, the way they fall into perfect order. There is an elegance in them. You can watch the trends and predict what might be coming.” She smiled at the other two, “Nerdy I know, but I...miss that.”

“Did Leonid make you give up your career?” Yuuri asked, a frown scrunching up his nose a little.

She shook her head quickly at first but then slowing as she thought about it more. “He never made me. Not directly, and certainly not in words. But...It was just expected that I take care of the kids. I couldn’t balance both.”

“But if it’s what makes you happy, perhaps you should have a conversation with him. And of course you can’t manage both, no one can...and no one should be expected to when they have a partner. Let him know that parenting is a shared responsibility,” Yuuri pointed out.

“Oh, I don’t know if that will go over well.” She hugged herself as she thought about her life. “We were happier when I worked outside the home, though.”

Yuuri knew that the couple was happier because they were happier as individuals. Yuuri looked across to where Phichit was running a balloon relay race and Katya was doing face painting. “It might be worth starting a conversation.”

She was thoughtfully quiet for a moment. Then her voice almost whispered, “And...if it breaks us?”
Yuuri felt her worry, but could tell they were already breaking because of this, “Do you want to spend your life as it is?”

She hummed thoughtfully. Leaving the question unanswered, she walked over to the races, her boys’ laughter drawing her over. She wasn’t used to this, but it was something she wanted to become very familiar with. The warmth of the younger brother’s home was not something she could have. At least, she didn’t think she could have it. Maybe she could find a job that would be flexible to her parenting schedule. Maybe she could get her boys into activities allowing her more freedom. Maybe she could find herself and in that find her marriage again. It might be worth a conversation. Looking at her husband standing next to his brother she smiled at him, they were both worth that conversation.

The adults started to leave, Irya’s boys asking if they could join the sleepover. At first she had to turn them down, afraid to take advantage of Yuuri’s generosity...and possibly afraid to be alone with her husband after thinking of how much change she wanted. However, Victor assured her that they could handle a few more. Especially with Phichit and Chris volunteering to stay. She reluctantly agreed and let her husband lead her to the door. Maybe it would be a good day to breach the topic. She didn’t want to continue her cold existence.

Victor urged Yuuri to take a short nap. The rest of them could handle the kids. Soon everyone was spread out on couches and cushions and futons, coloring and watching Lion King. In the corner, two of Leonid’s boys were playing war with a deck of cards. The youngest one was stretched out next to Yura coloring on the other side of the coloring book. Victor joined Phichit and Chris in a game of dominoes. “I’m glad you had Yuuri lie down,” Phichit stated quietly.

“I know he’ll push himself to the point of exhaustion trying to be the good host if I don’t intervene,” Victor pointed out.

“He would at that. He talked for a long time with your sister-in-law. Maybe that will smooth out a little.”

Victor sighed, playing a domino before saying quietly, “Neither are happy. I think my brother has stepped out on her a few times.” He flashed a look to his friends, ensuring they understood. “She was jealous of Yelena as well. But early on, they were better. She just...disappears and he loses interest. Not an excuse, just an observation.”
“Maybe it was a good talk,” Phichit suggested. “Yuuri would want her to be happy.”

“I wonder if he should be studying psychology instead of education,” Victor added.

Phichit hummed at that thought before saying, “I think he’s happy with what he is doing right now and doesn’t feel rushed to pick a career. He gets to teach, to make a difference in other people’s lives. He needs that significance.”

Chris also added, “Yuuri from a few months ago is not the same Yuuri we have now. He’s found his strength. He’s more and more independent. And he will continue to grow as an individual.” He patted Victor’s hand, “You give him a healthy environment for growth.”

A sleepy Yuuri stumbled out of their room, soft pajamas replacing his outfit from earlier. He wrapped his arms around Victor from behind. “What are you talking about?”

“Irya,” Victor answered with ease. “How is she doing?”

Yuuri shrugged, walking around him to sit in his lap. Sleepy Yuuri can be a rather clingy Yuuri. “She’s not happy. We talked about what she wanted. She misses working. I suggested she talk to her husband about going back to work. I think if she can find what makes her happy then she’ll be able to communicate that to Leonid.”

Victor hummed at that thought. “They were both happier back then. It might be good for them. And the kids are older and easier to keep busy. The youngest is like a year older than Yura.”

Yuuri hugged Victor, then pulled back to look at his mate and partner. “I just know that you support me when I want to try something and help me find a way to make it happen even if that means you have more parenting responsibilities.”

Victor chuckled at that. “I’ve never minded parenting responsibilities. I would be amused to see Leonid left alone with the kids.”

“I think they made movies about that,” Chris added with a snort.
“Speaking of kids,” Yuuri stated, turning towards the living room. “How are they doing?”

“So far we’re good. Just waiting for the first squabble to break out. I think they are all tired at the moment.”

Around midnight, the last kid fell asleep. Some were upstairs in Yura’s new room with Yura who claimed the top bunk. Others were spread out in the living room. The house was a mess of kids and toys and snacks but that would all be resolved after they went home. The adults retired to their respective bedrooms. Yuuri was a walking zombie and Phichit wasn’t much better. It was a good day, though, and they needed it.

Notes:

https://www.thebump.com/pregnancy-week-by-week/24-weeks-pregnant

https://weirdrussia.com/2015/05/17/how-do-russians-celebrate-birthdays/

Chapter End Notes

You know I want to hear from you!
Messages from Japan

Chapter Summary

Chris receives some legal papers, though not the ones he was expecting. This forces some decisions to be made.

Chapter Notes

So I wrote this chapter twice...and then realized it and had to combine the two chapters because they both had good things in it. I hope it sounds good. It did get some love and care from BluSkates whom I love so very much.

Ch. 72: Messages from Japan

Victor rolled out of bed, frowning at the empty opposite side of the bed. A toilet flush answered his question. Yuuri rejoined him with a huff. “I think I spent half the night in the bathroom.”

“Are you ill?” Victor asked with concern, knowing Yuuri was well past his morning sickness.

He shook his head with a weary sigh. “No, I just have to pee a lot. And she’s been really active at night.”

Victor opened his arms to welcome his darling mate. Yuuri pouted even as he curled up in the older man’s embrace. “When do we have to go in?”

Yuuri hummed before answering, “I have kids at three and my last formal appointment with Dr. Abramovich at two.”

“Your last one?” Victor stroked the omega’s back lightly, encouraging the closeness.

“Mmmhmmm,” he answered, snuggling closer. “I can go back if something happens but for now, I’m stable and ready to move forward on my own.” It was a good feeling, an accomplishment.
“Well, since we have time, rest. I’ll get Yura off to school.” It was a luxury he could afford since most of his skaters were on break. He gave the sleepy man a quick kiss and left their bed. Yuuri grumbled at losing his husband, but couldn’t deny he loved the idea of not giving up the bed and even a few minutes more of sleep.

Chris held onto his partner, that feeling of dread growing in him. Yesterday had been a hard day with worry. When the letter came across his desk, he had groaned thinking it was Kostya making his move but it turned out to be notification that the tape had come off of Yuuri’s properties in Tokyo. He didn’t know how the Japanese omega would take it and decided to hold off the conversation until today.

“Do you think you should say something?” Phichit asked quietly into the darkness. He could feel the tension in his mate’s body and while he knew Chris would never betray client privacy, he could tell it was Yuuri worry.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Chris responded, rolling on his back and studying his nails with care.

The omega huffed and punched him in the arm. “He was my best friend long before he was your client, in fact I’m the whole reason that he even is your client.” Phichit would claim it was omega intuition, but it was probably more that he had caught Chris fiddling with the letter earlier may have led to his knowledge.

Yuuri checked the app on his phone as he considered his daughter. She measured around 2 lbs, 14 inches at 26 weeks. He frowned at the pronouncement that his daughter was kale. Reflecting towards his earlier babies, the omega had only made it this far with one of his babies and they weren’t nearly as active as this one seemed to be. And with one kick to the bladder, Yuuri was headed out of the room in search of the bathroom.

As he returned, Victor commented, “It seems our ballerina is doing fouettes.”
“Or our soccer player is using my bladder for the goal,” Yuuri added dryly. *It’s like you’re aware that I’m overthinking my past and doubting you and as punishment you make me almost pee my pants.* Yuuri smiled, there were worse problems. He leaned forward against the rails as Alexie skated his direction. “Lyosha.”

“Coach Yuuri, Coach Victor.” He then waited to hear his critique from each coach before bowing as he left.

“He gets that from you,” Victor commented quietly.

Yuuri snorted. He knew that but imitation was the sincerest form of appreciation. The skater was promising, more than promising, he was gifted in the best of ways. Hardworking, teachable, humble...but he just dragged that left side and Yuuri wasn’t about to let that happen.

The Japanese omega sat on the floor, his legs crisscrossed while the small class surrounded him. “We will be telling the story of Peter Pan during our recital. Is there anyone who hasn’t heard the story?”

Several hands went up so he began to tell them of the boy who refused to grow up and his lost boys, of Wendy and her brothers, the jealous and stubborn Tinkerbell, Captain Hook and Mr. Smee. Then he talked about how it started as a play and later became a story in a book. But *Peter Pan* was meant to be performed.

“I’ve been looking at a number of musical numbers for our recital. We are working with the kids on ice and will tell our version of the story together.”

“How?” asked Zaina as she scooted closer. “We can’t dance on ice.” The little ones sitting near her giggled in response.

Yuuri laughed warmly, shifting his weight as he rubbed his tummy. “We will make a stage for you and the skaters will do their numbers in the foreground...that’s in front of the stage. Also, some of the older skaters have volunteered to help out but this will take a lot of hard work and cooperation. Do you think we can all work together?”
The kids were excited and soon they were talking about songs as Yuuri played the music he was considering.

Yuuri stared at the large manilla envelope. It had been delivered to him from the company holding his properties through Chris. His lawyer had wanted to meet in person, deliver this personally to be there as Yuuri sorted through everything, and to ensure the younger man didn’t become overwhelmed. However he had a busy week of meetings and trial dates, and currier was the only option he had once he called Victor to ensure that the alpha would be there to support Yuuri before sending it. Now it was in Yuuri’s hands, and he couldn’t believe it. The police tape was gone, the homes were open and ready, the other properties were waiting for information about possible changes in ownership...and he didn’t know what to do with that information.

“Vitya, if I went to Japan...it’s just so much...but maybe I shouldn’t.” He ran his hand over his tummy as he huffed once more. He had known that he would eventually have to deal with the properties, and the emotions that would come from seeing some of those places again...one in particular being a nightmare for him. However it wasn’t until Chris called to ask them to join him in his office that it became urgent to Yuuri.

Victor sat next to Yuuri driving carefully as they navigated towards Chris’ office. “No decisions are needed right now. All you have to do is familiarize yourself with this so you can make informed decisions later. We’ll be at Chris and Phichit’s soon and you can talk it over with all of us. I think once you work through what you want, you’ll feel more at peace.”

“You’re probably right,” Yuuri agreed, his eyes turning towards the buildings they passed. He could hear Yura in the back seat singing a song he picked up from school. Is it even important? Will seeing that house really free me of the ghosts that sometimes creep into my dreams at night? Abramovich said yes, he wants me to face my ghosts so I can start locking them away. Victor also says yes, but he’s far more concerned with my health and that of our child.

What do I want?

He was glad when the car pulled to a stop and let Victor work to get Yura out. The job was much harder these days for him, baby made more demands on his body every day. In some ways he was delighted, the little girl was making her presence known. But Yuuri would be lying if he didn’t also hate that her activity came at the exact wrong time...always.
However, while Yura allowed his father to unbuckle him, he had quickly decided it was a mom day, letting go of Victor the moment they were free of the car and running over to Yuuri. The omega started to kneel down and scoop him up but the little boy stopped him.

“I can walk...I just want to walk you into the building.” He stood up as tall as he could then held out his hand.

Yuuri smiled at the sudden burst of responsibility the little boy exuded. Six was fitting him quite well. “Oh...okay,” Yuuri answered, standing back up and taking the offered hand. “I guess you are growing into my little man.”

That cherub face grinned up at him, green eyes twinkling. “So why do we need to talk to Uncle Chris?”

Yuuri turned to smile back at Victor who was keeping a chuckle to himself. “Well, I have some valuable properties in Japan and I need to make some decisions on how I will handle them.”

He stillled, looking up at Yuuri with narrow eyes. “Wait a minute. You’re rich? You didn’t even have a coat when you came to Russia.”

Yuuri sighed. *Kid has a point*. “Well, I didn’t have those things when I came to Russia. This is all brand new. My ex made a foolish choice and now I get all of his things.”

Yura snorted at that. “What an idiot!”

“Indeed,” Yuuri agreed.

They continued into the building and Yura asked quite seriously, “What are you going to do?”

Yuuri tightened his grip on the little hand, “I’m not entirely certain. That’s why we’re here talking with Chris. I know I don’t want us to live in those houses and besides we live here in Russia as a family.” He looked down to see that Yura was happy with that statement, but the little boy was so confident in their family that he knew where Yuuri went, Yura and Vitya would come too. The omega was warmed by the reassurance. “It’s a lot to maintain them for rentals and I don’t know how to do that. I’m thinking I’d like to sell them and invest the money.”
Yura nodded, pretending to understand, until the facade came down and he admitted, “What does that mean?”

“Invest?” At the nod, he continued. “It means I take the money and turn it into something else. Like if someone has a good idea I can give them money to develop it, then they pay me back a little more because I believed in them. Your Grandpa Andrei invests money to make more money. I...want something more meaningful. Sometimes you can invest the money and even if you don’t get it back, it went to help people. I want to do something to keep people from hurting omegas.”

Yura frowned at that, tightening his hand reflexively in Yuuri’s before asking, “Why do people want to hurt you?”

“Not everyone, just some bad people. They think it makes them big and strong when really, it shows how weak they are. People like your papa who help omegas rise up...they are the truly strong ones.” Yuuri felt Victor’s hand touch lightly on his shoulder. He glanced up at the man who loaned his strength so willingly before turning back to the boy.

“Can I help?” Large green eyes, fierce and determined held his eyes as he continued. “That bad man hurt my mama. I want to help.”

“I’m sure there is a place you can help,” Yuuri reassured him, stopping in front of Phichit and Chris’ door. He looked up as he felt Victor’s hand on the small of his back as the older man knocked firmly on the door.

Inside, Phichit led them into the dining room which was spread with stacks organized into different files. “Okay, don’t get overwhelmed,” Phichit began. “I have a system.”

Yuuri’s eyes flitted over the surface as he answered with a basic, “I see.”

Phichit could tell that Yuuri was already beginning to check out so he encouraged him into the room with the system he developed. “So, we’re going to work these properties into stacks. The first stack is for the properties you wish to hold onto for now. You can let them go later if you want, or keep them as you see fit. The second stack is for properties you want to sell off. The third is for undecided, and it’s okay if after today that’s a big stack. We have time to sort through all of this.”
Yuuri started to calm down. Then as his logical side took over he noted, “You already have things in every stack,” Yuuri pointed out.

Phichit smiled, he was a Yuuri-whisperer whether his friend acknowledged it or not. “Just things based on our conversations or recommendations. There are notes attached to the front explaining why they are where they are.”

Yuuri sat down at the table. Reaching tentatively for the pile closest, “And...the first one?”

Phichit sat next to him. “I know you want to do some things there first. It’s in the keep section. I actually shuffled all of the places where you lived into that stack in case you needed to walk through all of them. The ones in the sell pile have no attachment to you whatsoever. Chances are you’ve never been there and didn’t even know about them.”

Yuuri began thumbing through the different assets. “It’s so much...more than we originally thought.”

Phichit sighed, then laughed softly, “For as much of an asshole Shuji was, he knew real estate.”

Yuuri nodded slowly, taking in the task ahead. It was so much more than he had worried, but his friends were all there to help him. “What if I don’t really want to hold onto any of this but want to maximize my resources from it?”

Phichit had clearly already thought of this in advance. “We list it based on the market. As it’s on the rise, we put it up for sale. Until then, we put a property manager with a security contract in charge of it.”

Yuuri continued to thumb through things and quickly reduced the keep pile to four properties. Each of them held memories he had to work through, his capture, the loss of his career, the loss of each of his babies, and his eventual release. Everything else, he had no problem letting go. “I don’t want him to get out and somehow manage to get any of these back. I want his finances to be completely crippled.” The coldness of his voice surprised even Yuuri.

Chris offered him what he needed. “Since you’ve taken ownership of each of these assets, he cannot touch them. He no longer has any legal hold on you or any of them.”
Yuuri pressed two fingers against his lips thoughtfully. “I want to sell these properties and to make sure the other two omegas are well taken care of. Then I want to take the remainder and invest it where it’s making money while I decide how I want to approach making changes. Can I do that?”

Chris nodded in agreement. “We can definitely make that happen. Some will move faster than others. What about these in the undecided category?”

Yuuri pushed his glasses back on his nose, before pressing the back of those two fingers to his lips once more. “These have people living in them.”

Phichit nodded, “Exactly, rentals...and if we put them up for sale, they might lose their homes.”

Yuuri shook his head. He wasn’t going to gain through another’s misfortune. “I don’t want that. Offer to them, and see what they can give. If they can come close, I’ll sell at a loss to market value. That’s fine.”

Chris chuckled and hugged his partner, “That’s what Phichit thought you would say. That’s why we held them back. This last one is just land but it borders an animal rescue. A no kill shelter.”

Yuuri didn’t even hesitate as he stated, “Donate it. Let them expand.”

Chris paused for a moment, “Are you sure?”

Yuuri nodded. “I don’t even have to think about it.” He reached for the one property that was most significant in the keep pile, flipping it open, studying the pictures. Tracing his fingers over the marker bleeding through the white paint, he whispered, “You can still see them.”

“And they will be there when you’re ready to face them,” his mate’s words cut through his thoughts as he wrapped his arms around Yuuri.

The omega leaned back into his embrace, closing his eyes. “I’m not ready.” He knew that now. Having it within his reach, he knew he needed to wait.

“And that’s okay.” Victor moved so he was facing Yuuri, still seated. “Focus on baby for now.
On family for now. On you for now.”

Yuuri nodded, setting down that folder once more. He turned to help Phichit pick things up, boxing them according to their destination. He heard Victor and Chris now in the kitchen behind them preparing dinner. “I really appreciate all that you’ve done to help me with this.”

Phichit smiled to his friend as they cleared the last of the files. “I think it’s important that we do this together. We...sort of went through this entire journey together.”

“Journey...more like a nightmare.” Yuuri put down the files he was holding, then turned to his friend. “I don’t know how you had the fortitude to stay by my side through that...situation.”

Phichit shrugged, stacking the boxes over by the wall. “It was the right thing to do, and it always will be. And I care a great deal for you. You became my family.”

Yuuri hugged him, sniffing as unexpected tears started falling.

“Did you make my mama cry?” the little blond demanded.

Yuuri laughed, wiping them away with another sniff. “I’m okay. Phichit has been with me a long time and it’s good to share this happiness with him.”

And then those small arms wrapped around his waist. Enveloped in so much love, how could Yuuri feel anything but happiness.

“Hi, Okaasan, how are you?” Yuuri hadn’t expected a call from his mother but of course welcomed it.

“I’m doing well, my son.” Her voice was tiny down the line but still warm. It was good to hear from her, and Yuuri had to admit he missed her more than he knew. “I’ve been thinking, and your father and sister both support me in this...I’d like to come to Russia and be with you in your last trimester. Would that be too much of an inconvenience?”
Yuuri’s eyes widened at the unexpected request. “I, umm, no, it wouldn’t be. We have extra rooms. I do have people helping me, however. So…” He didn’t want to say more and make her feel unwelcome and she didn’t take it as such it seemed with her next words.

“Oh, I know you have friends and that housekeeper, Olga. It’s just...when you went through your other pregnancies it was impossible to be with you...you were kept so far from us...and us from you. I want to be close.”

Yuuri breathed out, he knew how much this meant to her, finally being able to be there with him and watch her first grandchild. It was the last bit of reality he needed as well, his mother being there, “Okay. Let me know when you are coming and we’ll be ready,” Yuuri promised. As he disconnected the call, he caught Victor’s curious gaze. “My mother is coming to Russia.”

Victor simply hummed. “We should probably make sure one of the other rooms is ready.” His own mother had taken over the omega room when she visited and neither wanted to displace her.

Yuuri and Victor spent the next hour looking through the other second floor rooms, finally settling on the one next to Yura’s. “Do you think our son will keep her up?” Victor inquired.

Yuuri huffed at that. “My mother has lived in an inn for so many years, I’m more worried about it being too quiet.”

“Do you want to redecorate this one or hire it done?” Victor asked, placing emphasis on the hire. Yuuri had already dealt with two other room redos and as he drew closer to baby coming into the world, it might be better to let someone else deal with it.

Yuuri shook his head. “I’ll know better than a decorator what will put my mother at ease. But I’ll make sure I get help with the lifting.”

“Not help...you let them do it. You can supervise if you’re so determined,” Victor corrected.

Yuuri huffed but agreed.
By the end of the week, Yuuri had his next appointment with Dr. Romanova with everything on track with the birth. Seeing the doctor every other week kept his nerves at ease as he could talk over his concerns and be put at ease with her care.

He had a couple of volunteers to help him with the room in the form of Alexie and Mikhail. They were happy to do whatever they could to keep Yuuri healthy and satisfied. He wanted an upholstered headboard because his mother liked to read at night. He unearthed some modern accessories as he searched other rooms, pulling out things with metal legs and wood accents, which turned into having one of the boys carry them for him after he had been caught. He chose slate blue, orange, and brown as his accents. A mid-century modern chest of drawers was found on the next floor and carried down to the second and placed into the room. Yuuri knew his mother would want a place to put away her personal things. An oval mirror was added to the wall behind it and a few plants were scattered about the room, situated to take advantage of the natural light.

“Will she want a TV? My mom likes a TV in her room,” Mikhail suggested, rubbing the back of his head thoughtfully.

Yuuri rolled his eyes and snorted. He appreciated the thought but he knew his mother. “My mother would never want a TV in her room. She says they steal her rest.”

Looking around, they all nodded. The room was done.

Although they volunteered, Yuuri paid the boys for their work and they thanked him for his generosity. He knew how expensive it was to be a figure skater even with government subsidies and these boys were still building up their sponsors.

Downstairs, he picked up a dust rag and moved into the shrine room. He didn’t visit near as often as he did in the beginning. It was the room that held all of his sadness and heartbreak. He rather liked that he could close the door on it. He had the boys help him take the shrine down from the omega room and move it into this space while they were there. It seemed fitting at this point. It’s now the chamber that held Yuuri’s pain and if Yuuri watched, he’d catch Olga praying a blessing on it every time she passed as if her faith alone could keep that pain locked away and out of reach.

Wiping down every surface, he stopped and paused, studying each item brought into the room with care, symbols of his loss, symbols of those watching over him. He turned as he finished and spotted Ren curled up on the rug by the door keeping watch over him. “Such a good girl,” he praised, reaching down to scruff her fur before leading her out, closing the door behind him once more.
Somewhere in Japan, the tape had been taken from the house holding the white room. Yuuri was itching to knock down its walls but knew he needed to wait. He had a more important task at present. Patting his tummy, he started as he felt the kick. “I can’t wait to meet you face to face.”

NOTES:


https://www.thebump.com/pregnancy-week-by-week/26-weeks-pregnant
This chapter has a lot of angst...fair warning. Kostya makes a move sending everyone in turmoil.

Chapter Notes

Hey, all...I hope you are all well. I thought I'd send something to read during this time of quarantine. Also, gave blood today. Went to a donation center. Everything was nice and spread apart. Lots of control. It was all good.

So many thanks to Blu who not only edited this one last night but two other chapters and started on another. We both fell asleep on that one, though. Past our bedtimes!

Happy reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

73. Secrets (AKA turning six sucks!)

(TW: Some homophobic speech. It’s Kostya. We don’t like him.)

With his third trimester just around the corner, Yuuri felt unsettled. He couldn’t identify what it was, but it was if an unseen problem lay just outside his reach, like having left the iron on, or smelling a quick wisp of smoke. It was there, tangible, then gone immediately. Something was wrong and he didn’t know what. Since his pregnancy, he’d been exceptionally sensitive to the atmosphere and over the last week, he’d sensed Yelena’s worry all over the place. Lavender and rosemary would fill his senses unexpectedly, and he could feel himself grabbed with dread, then it would disappear as quickly as it came, like the former dancer had just floated past him in the hall. Yuuri knew Victor was having a similar experience, he had seen him check over his shoulder several times, only to see nothing there. Meanwhile Yura hummed along, the aroma filling the little boy with comfort. He would stop, raise his nose to the air and inhale deeply then with a smile return to his coloring, trusting his parents to take care of everything.

Chris was busy with another case but still found time to check in with Victor every day or two to see if he’d encountered Kostya again. The other man had grown quiet and hadn’t reached out, nor attempted to disrupt their lives again. However, neither Victor nor Chris were hopeful enough to think he’d lost interest. In fact, there was something worse about the silence, a torture that was far more intense than a direct attack. They didn’t know what the enemy was up to, and that was
scarier.

The household had been holding their breath for almost two weeks then the papers came. Chris called Victor immediately, the older alpha at the rink with Yuuri nearby. He knew that Victor would take the news poorly and was grateful the omega was nearby to comfort him...so they could comfort each other. This had been what they planned for, feared, but it was still horrifying. Down the line Victor’s hands visibly shook on the cellphone as he talked to Chris in a gruff voice, clipped answers to keep his voice from breaking. Yuuri wrapped him in his strength listening to Victor’s end of the conversation. Then the phone fell limp in Victor’s hand.

“Kostya is suing for a paternity test.” The words came out quiet but Yuuri could hear the deflated fear in them.

Yuuri’s embrace tightened around his husband. “Can we fight it?”

Victor shook his head slowly, “Chris has plans to take to this court, lengthen this, pray that Kostya just gives up...but he said to be prepared. We may have to go through with it.”

Yuuri didn’t know who was leaning on who as they sank to the floor, holding each other. Everyone gave them space for the rest of the day and if the parents seemed exceptionally clingy towards their son, then so be it.

In the States there’s a saying, Justice delayed is justice denied . However in this case, justice delayed would have been a blessing as the courts moved fast. Yuuri worried about the swiftness of the justice in his new country when it seemed more of an injustice. In a week, they stood before the judge. “Allowing this test opens up a precedent that any claimant can allege paternity without proof other than an acknowledged past relationship. There is no indication that this child is the offspring of Konstantin Matveev,” Chris argued. “The mother, Yelena Plisetskaya, married my client, Victor Nikiforov and in her own written words the next thing she knew she was pregnant. It is clear that the mother identified the father of her child, Yuri Plisetsky Nikiforov, as her husband and mate, Victor. During her entire time with Konstantin, she had not become pregnant. She made sure she wouldn’t conceive and bring a child into their abusive relationship.” He handed over the affidavit to the judge.

It was always more difficult when the chief witness wasn’t alive. However, the statements she made were notarized and verified as her words. He had one more tucked away just in case.
“Given the child’s birthdate, the mother was still in a relationship with my client at the time of conception,” Kostya’s lawyer argued, his voice nasel and holding a sniff.

“The birth certificate names Victor Nikiforov as the father,” Chris pointed out.

The judge rubbed his temple, holding up a hand to silence the courtroom. Both lawyers knew they were to remain quiet while waiting. In front of him laid birth certificates and other papers as he frowned over the case. He hated cases like this. Turning towards Chris, he asked, “Do you have anything else?” Neither lawyer would ever have guessed that the judge prayed the Swiss man had more.

Chris pursed his lips and sighed, pulling out a sealed affidavit and handing it over to the judge, who opened and read it out loud. “During the last month and a half I was living with Kostya, however he was away a lot and we rarely spent time together even when he was there. Certainly nothing that could possibly cause conception. I was tired of him and wanted out. Perhaps the years of torment from his abuse had already worn me down. Kostya probably felt that and he lost interest in me quickly, thankfully. I wanted out and I sought comfort in the arms of another man. I met him often, even while still living with Kostya, who had no idea. That man, the son of Andrei Nikiforov, is the father of my son. For that I am sure. Therefore, I mated Victor Nikiforov as soon as I was free of Kostya and we welcomed our son into the world months later.”

Chris frowned at the wording, his eyebrows knitting in suspicion. However, the judge folded the paper and placed it with the other documents. It wasn’t the magic document Chris had hoped for and now he wished he had opened it ahead of time.

“While the testimony of the mother is compelling, and does not shine the best light on your client,” the judge held up a hand to keep Kostya’s attorney quiet. “However, it is not concrete evidence of paternity. The only legal course of action left in this case is to run a paternity test. It is so ordered.”

Victor felt his heart sink as the gavel banged. Sucking a deep breath he glanced over to his cousin, who smirked as he walked by.

They were left with two weeks to comply with the court’s order. Victor just wanted to get it over with. He knew he wasn’t the little blonde’s biological father, but deep down he prayed that neither was Kostya...or that Russia’s notoriously faulty lab system would work in his favor. They sat with
Yura and explained what would happen at the doctor’s office.

“Are they going to poke me?” he asked, fear edging into his voice.

“Not for this,” Yuuri assured him. “They take a swab like this,” he lifted up a cotton swab, “and wipe it inside your cheek like this,” he demonstrated the motion on the inside of his cheek.

Yura’s eyes followed every movement then he looked at his papa, his true fear slipping out, “Will he be able to take me?”

Victor turned his head to keep the boy from seeing his tears and settled himself. Chris said he had a feeling that Yelana had one last trick and it was a trump card, but that didn’t do much to calm his fears. Victor didn’t know what it could be but knew he wasn’t as closely related to his son as the birth records indicated. “We see what the courts say. Your mother named me your papa, and her wishes must be respected still. My father will back that and we will keep him in court for a long time if needed.”

The little blonde grimaced, not understanding exactly what his father meant but he felt the warmth in the words. Turning to Yuuri he buried himself in the embrace of the omega. Brown eyes caught the glacial blue and a hand embraced the other. Victor realized how much Yuuri brought to his family, “I don’t know what we’d do without you.”

Chris read through the letter from Yelena and the cautious, if deliberate wording. At the bottom was directions to a safe deposit box and a key taped to the paper. It was a lawyer’s intuition, somehow the crafty woman had ensured the safety of her son. He itched to open it and see what was inside but felt Victor, as the true owner of the box, should be with him. However, at that moment Victor and Yura were at the doctor’s office complying with the court order.

Yura sat between his mama and papa at the doctor’s office. They had been lucky to schedule this with Dr. Romanov, the rink physician. The doctor was well known to Yura as the man whom he brought his bumps and bruises to, so this helped to keep the boy calm. The older man hummed as he looked over Yura’s records. “We have two shots to update since he’s now six. We should take care of them while we are here.”
And with that statement the calm was gone. Yura’s eyes widened and he whimpered. “You said no needles!” he accused both of his parents. He watched Yuuri wince but then kneel down in front of him, his hand on Yura’s arm gentle and secure. “I’ll stay right here the whole time.” He then moved the little boy’s hand to his hip. “My doctor had me do this when I got my shots. It hurt less because I was less tense.”

Yura held his mother’s eyes while the doctor gave him the first shot. He was surprised to find that Yuuri was right. It stung a little but nothing like before when the nurse held him tight in her arms. Yuuri did the same for his other arm to receive the second shot and the doctor talked to both parents about tylenol to help with the achiness that would come from the inoculations. Then both father and son had their cheeks swabbed.

As they gathered their coats, Yura huffed, “Turning six sucks!”

Both parents exchanged glances but decided to give him this one. In this case, the little boy was right.

They left to go home as Victor took the day off for the entire family to focus on family needs. They drove home subdued, Yuuri staring out the window and Yura already sinking into a nap. At home, Yura was fussy as they got out of the car. They settled into the living room, Yura soon falling asleep at one end of the couch. Yuuri was on the edge of tears but holding them back for the sake of his mate. Victor looked defeated.

It was an unspoken agreement not to talk about what might come next as if in silence, they could keep it from happening. Four days would reveal the results.

Kostya smirked at the doctor taking his cheek swab. Romanov was a professional but he couldn’t help the sharp glare he returned to this man. “You know, when we treat our partners like crap, sometimes they step out on us.” He dropped the swab into the tube and put it on the lab cart.

“That’s very true, but stepping out with a fairy can’t really help a lady get pregnant.” He rose, and stood too close to the older doctor, smiling as the man backed away annoyed. “It takes a man for that.”
Kostya was an ugly bigot, but he wasn’t wrong. Victor had only dated men, so when he arrived at the rink with the beautiful, and very feminine Yelena as his mate the gossip and guessing started immediately. There were a few that knew the truth of it all but they were bound by ethics and their friendship. Yelena spent a lot of time with Abramovich. She also came to him for some of her daily care. He spent quite a bit of time with her during her decline from cancer. But he couldn’t say anything. It was all confidential.

He watched the smug bastard stalk out of the room before turning and putting his paperwork away. *Please come out the way I think these will turn out*, Romanov prayed to no one in particular. He wasn’t a praying man. He didn’t believe there was anything to pray to. But if there was...someone waiting on the stars listening...

The scent of rosemary and lavender settled around him and he looked around to see if someone was there. No one but he couldn’t shake the chill that rose up his spine as he submitted his labs to the courier.

Yuuri sat in his own appointment. He had made it to twenty-eight weeks. After the nurse did the usual pokes and prods, Dr. Romanova listened to his heart and lungs before having him lie back, feeling around his baby bump to determine his measurements. “Baby is around 15 inches long and two and a half pounds.”

“Wow, she’s much bigger than I realized,” Yuuri responded. He thought of his previous pregnancies and wondered if she was his biggest.

“They are starting to put on fat at this point, it’s good. Now I want you to start doing kick counts. Time how long it takes baby to do ten kicks.” She went over the details of the process, telling him to switch sides if they start to slow. “You made it to your third trimester,” she concluded. “I will probably move you to weekly appointments around 32 weeks,” she added. “You’re developing fine so I’m not particularly worried. I just want to make sure we do everything we need to do to bring a healthy baby into the world.”

“Thank you, Dr. Romanova,” Yuuri smiled as he climbed off of the table with her help. He met Katya out in the waiting room. She would take him to the rink and hopefully Victor would be finished with his appointment with Chris. Chris called him in to talk and he had to be squeezed in between appointments but there was so much nervous energy coming off of his mate with good reason.
Victor looked completely defeated, “What are we going to do?”

Chris sighed, pulling out the letter that the judge read in court. “Let’s go see what she left us in this safe deposit box.”

His eyes caught the key and a glimmer of hope sparkled there. “Yelena,” Victor breathed. He was starting to realize she had more secrets than he realized.

They drove across town and entered the bank, asking to see the safe deposit box. Chris was given access as the boxholder’s attorney and Victor followed.

Inside, they pulled the drawer and set it on the table, Chris hesitantly pulled open the lid, finding a few normal legal documents, her birth certificate, some heirlooms from her mother that Victor would hold for his son, and a diary. Victor smiled, his hand picking up the small leather bound journal. He should have known. Yelena, like his Yuuri, was a journaler, chronicling her life in privacy rather than out in the open for people to see on social media.

They left with the contents of the box, handing the key over to the bank and closing out the rental. Victor sat in the passenger seat, the weight of the journal in his lap. “It seems wrong to read it.”

Chris shook his head, “She left it for a reason. For one, I think she wanted her son to know her. And...it’s a legal document, admissible in a court hearing if needed.”

He opened the first page, his eyes resting on her flowing long and narrow script. She’d take up two lines per sentence. The first page had her name, the dates contained in the book. It was her last five years. He closed it quickly, knowing he would find evidence of the abuse she suffered in the latter years. Victor wasn’t sure he could stomach it, but then remembered the woman. She was strong enough to suffer it, live through it, and even come out on the other end. If she could do all that he would honor her memory by reading this journey she left behind for him. He wondered what else was within those pages.

Fingering the cover, he asked Chris, “Do I have time to digest it?”

Chris hemmed a little, “Don’t take too much time. When those test results come through, Kostya will make his move.”
One look at Victor was all Yuuri needed to know something was wrong, watching the Alpha walk into their rink and directly to his office. He excused himself from Alexie and followed his mate. “What’s wrong?” he asked as he closed the door.

Victor sat at his desk, “There was a key in the letter the judge read. It led to a safe deposit box. Inside was this,” he indicated the journal before him.

Yuuri covered his mouth, a white wall with black ink on it flashed before his eyes and he blinked to wash it away quickly. “I guess...we all are driven to record our pain.”

Victor had been absorbed with the journal and missed Yuuri’s reaction, “And healing...it’s over the last five years of her life. The time we were together...and the time before. Maybe records of the abuse will keep Yura out of his hands...but someone has to read it and I think it has to be me.”

Yuuri reached across the desk to take Victor’s hand, “We have the weekend before us. I’ll keep Yura busy…”

“I hate to waste this time with him,” Victor murmured.

The omega came around the desk to stand before him. “We are not losing him...you will have plenty of time. Read this and see what she has left us,” Yuuri demanded firmly, hands on hips.

Victor needed that, winding his hand in Yuuri’s, resting his head against that belly, smiling at the kick he felt in response. “What did the doctor say?”

Yuuri placed his hands around Victor’s neck and into his hair, he answered softly, “Baby is fine, healthy, almost fifteen inches and two and a quarter pounds. I’m supposed to count kicks.”

Victor leaned into the belly and kissed the spot he felt the most recent kick, “I’m sorry I didn’t go with you.”
Yuuri huffed at that. “You were where you needed to be. Now, let’s get through this day. Routine keeps us sane.” He urged his mate out of his chair and led him towards the rink. Soon they were working with their skaters, Yuuri only leaving his side to work with his students. The afternoon waned and the rink emptied, leaving the little family to pack up and head home. Weekend approached and Victor worried about what he would learn.

As he studied the journal later that evening, household noises flowing around him, he knew time was short. He closed his eyes and listened. The water running in the kitchen as Olga hummed while cleaning up. Yuuri and Yura picking up the living room before bath time. The rattle of Nikolai’s paper and occasional grunt towards what he read. Paws clicking on the floor and the thump of the dogs rolling around. Then he felt a lick and a nose under his hand.

“Hey, Makka...how are you girl?” He blinked back tears as he ran his fingers through her curls. “I’m scared. I don’t want to lose my baby.”

Rosemary and lavender wrapped around them and Victor breathed in the familiar scent. “I’m trying to trust in you, Yelena...I’m just so scared.”

NOTES:

I know they would have used an independent doctor in real life but I wanted Romanov, the rink doctor, in on this. I thought it would put Yura a little more at ease with a familiar face.

Yuuri finished up in his 28th week during this chapter although it spanned over two weeks. Baby is around the size of an eggplant.


Chapter End Notes

Check in and comment below, either on the story or what's been going on. I hope
everyone is well. (( air hugs ))
Chapter Summary

Yelena's Journals...

Chapter Notes

Hey, all...I think I'm a day early but what is time at this point? Hope you are all well. So far, so good here. Just trying to figure out how to teach over the distance.

I hope you enjoy this installment!

(Thank you, BluSkates, for the amazing edits!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Ch. 74: In her words...

Yuuri offered to sit with him while he read but Victor knew the omega should stay close to Yura instead. He checked on his omega and son before he started into the journal, satisfied they were asleep curled up together in Yuuri’s nest. He knew he’d be a mess, and with Yuuri there it would only slow the reading process. It was best to rip the bandaid off all at once. Yelena was all around him, her scent filled the room as he turned over the journal in his hands. He could feel the almost tangible presence like reassuring hands resting on his shoulders.

He opened the journal to the second page.

_I stashed my previous journal with the others under the floorboard in the shed in the Nikiforov’s garden. Vitya will know how to find it. Oh Vitya, how I wish I had listened to him all those years ago. Now I have nothing but regrets. Kostya has shown himself as every bit the monster Vitya warned me about. He may wear a charming exterior but he is a beast underneath the surface._

_But he can’t break me and that angers him. Sometimes I think I’m surviving as nothing more than an act of defiance. I need a plan, though. I can’t leave without a place to go. My papa is a wreck. I love him but losing Mama has made him unreliable, and I can’t put the burden of me on him and his meager income. I have nothing, no money, no job. Kostya’s made that impossible now. No one would hire a used up dancer such as myself. Where could I go and who could I turn to?_
Wouldn’t it be funny if I came to you after all of these years. Would you take me in, Vitya?

“Of course I would,” Victor whispered. “Always.” He sucked in a sob as he felt her presence next to him, wrapped around him. “I wish...you would have trusted me with everything.”

He skimmed through pages and pages chronicling her abuse, reading quickly. Arguments, physical fights, cutting words, all meant to demean her and put her in what Kostya saw as her place. Victor felt his anger at his cousin growing, but kept himself in check to focus on what she wanted him to find. He was amazed that through all of this, she continued to look for a way out.

He read through the evening and into the night. It comforted him to know that Yuuri and Yura were together in the nest, cuddling. It was close to two in the morning when he reached the year before Yura was born.

He’s been gone more and more. Good. I hope he’s cheating on me, my only worry is for the other woman. Maybe she’s smarter than me and will see him for the garbage he is. I think he’s grown bored with me. Which is fine. I don’t want him to want me. I want him to let me go, push me out. I want to be free of him entirely. I’m visiting my papa this weekend. A bit of reprieve in one sense but I’m worried about Papa. He’s not been himself since Mama passed. And he seems more lost than before. Like a little light in him is growing dimmer and dimmer...what happens when it goes out entirely?

...

I’m home. Papa is happy to see me, I know but he is keeping to himself and I don’t know what to do. So I wandered up to the main house to visit Vasa. We sat for hours just talking, watching ballet on television. She is so refreshing and warm. I love her like family.

...

Why do I keep making the same mistake? I’m running from a monster to a cold fish. Oh, I’m such an idiot. What was I thinking? It’s not like he can help me escape. He’s married. He wouldn’t jeopardize his family or his name. Did I seduce him? Did he seduce me? What led us to bed that night? We were talking, speaking of regrets and wishes, how life hadn’t turned out like we wanted. He opened a bottle of wine, but it was innocent, we weren’t there to live out some scene from Onegin...and then we were kissing. Vitya would kill me.

...

We agreed to never let it happen again, and yet we keep meeting. It feels so good to be with a man that just wants to hold me, and to be held by me. I’m not delusional, Leonid’s words soothe me but
they aren’t real. We are both so unhappy. But our situations are different. He’s married to a 
woman that has slowly become an empty shell of her former self. I’m...just waiting to escape a 
lover. An abusive lover. Some may think it’s easy. Just leave. It’s not so easy. Kostya would never 
let me go. He knows how to find me, how to hurt me. And if he can’t get to me then he will hurt 
those I love. Getting him to let go of me will be difficult.

Kostya suspects something. I had grown comfortable with his lack of attention, he was gone so 
often and when he was around we barely even spoke. So I snuck out while he was gone and met 
Leonid. But when I came back he was there, just staring at me like he knew. We didn’t speak, he 
simply walked past me and left again. But it has me so rattled. I’ve never had an affair before...and with a married man. I know I should stop this. Kostya would kill us both without 
thinking twice.

I thought it was the flu, or maybe something I had eaten. But no. No, no, no. I’m sick all the time, I 
can barely stand without getting queasy...and I’ve a missed period. I know it’s not Kostya’s child, 
that at least is something. He hasn’t touched me in months, not like that. That means it has to be 
his. I’ve only been with L.

Victor set the journal down with a grimace. He felt disgusted with his brother, betrayed. Leonid. 
And you knew. You knew! You bastard. No wonder your wife is so miserable with you.

I can’t believe it. I tried to keep pretending the little one away, but they aren’t letting me. It’s been 
weeks since I realized it, and it’s passed so much faster than I thought. Time is much shorter that 
it seems in the demands it makes upon your body. Perhaps years of abuse wears you down, takes 
away your strength. Kostya watches me like a hawk these days. Something happened with his 
family, I don’t know what and he won’t tell me. But he is called into his commander’s office almost 
daily now. He comes home and it’s everything I can do to avoid his slaps. I could fight but then I’d 
lose the little one inside me. The irony of life, the choices we must make. I’d rather give my child a 
chance.

won’t help me. He refuses to even speak to me. He said he can’t help me directly. Not directly. I 
have no idea what that means. But he apparently cares about his marriage suddenly. He won’t 
even acknowledge the possibility that this is his child. It’s not a possibility, it’s a fact. Kostya 
comes home wild these days, something about his job and a transfer because of problems on the 
base. I don’t know, I don’t care. All I care about is my baby. I won’t leave this child with Kostya, 
nor will I raise it with him. But where can I go? L has refused me, cutting me out entirely. The last 
time I saw him he actually tried to push money into my hand. Then he suggested I turn to Vitya.
I’m so afraid. Vitya is my only hope and after I was so stubborn, and pigheaded, towards him, would he ever listen to me? Help me? The last time we met it was horrid. I wouldn’t listen, he wouldn’t stop talking, and we fought. I said horrible things to him. And now I know that everything he said was true, and in the voice of love and friendship. I betrayed all of those words and ridiculed him. But I know the only reason he was so obstinate was because he cared so much. Hopefully that still holds.

Victor closed his eyes, thinking about all of those wasted years with his best friend. Gods, Yelena. I’m sorry you ever even doubted our friendship. He thought back to their last meeting. He had gone in guns blazing, thinking how he would force her to see his point, that Kostya was garbage and she would leave him. But ultimately he was being a stubborn bully. He hadn’t listened to her or he would have seen that his cousin had already groomed her against good advice. That’s on me. I will do what I can to keep our son safe, however.

Victor closed the journal. His mind buzzing. Why didn’t she tell me? She was probably afraid I’d be too angry and turn her away...and she had nowhere. I would have been disappointed but not in her, never in her...I would have never have turned her away. She was always welcome here. But our last meeting, I had been so horrid to her, I gave her no reason to reach out to me. There was much to decide but he finally had hope. All of Leonid’s kids had their mother’s coloring. Maybe... She was adamant, but we’ll not know until we have proof.

As much as he hated his brother for taking advantage of Yelena when she was vulnerable, the idea that Yura was his... would Leonid want him? He quickly pushed that out of his mind. If Leonid wanted Yura, he would have taken him when he had the opportunity. Victor thought of his brother, never thinking of him as greedy and cowardly before. He hadn’t been close to his brother since they were kids, but this was a new low light to see him in.

He had nervous energy now and didn’t know what to do with it. The clock was barely four and he couldn’t sleep. He knew it would hit him later. He moved into the studio, running his fingers along the barre. He hadn’t danced ballet in so long, he wondered if he still could.

Putting a playlist featuring composer Ludovico Einaudi into the speaker, he eased into the rhythm of the music. He had a couple of skaters looking for choreography. Maybe he could come up with
something for them to work with. It had been awhile since he danced out his emotions.

He was lost in the flow of dance when the scent of his mate washed over him. He turned and found Yuuri leaning against the entrance.

“I couldn’t sleep,” he murmured. “That journal…”

Yuuri nodded, crossing the room. “It’s hard to dig through someone else’s pain.”

Victor reached for Yuuri and pulled him close. “You’ve shared some of what you’ve gone through, and I appreciate your pain. I hope you know that.”

“I know,” Yuuri murmured. “I choose not to live in my pain. I...choose to celebrate my future, my triumphs.”

“I think...Yelena was similar. She was focused on what was ahead of her. She knew. Knew about the cancer. She found out when she confirmed her pregnancy. Some of the tests were atypical. She chose to have her son, to make sure he was in a positive environment...and Yuuri...oh my god Yuuri...she had an affair.”

Yuuri frowned and then shook his head. “I can’t judge her for that. I’m sure she was seeking escape,” Yuuri murmured.

Victor shook his head. “I’m not upset with her. I’m upset with him, the man she tried to find comfort in. She...she was with my brother.”

Yuuri narrowed his eyes, his brows turning down. “Leonid?”

“He could be the father,” Victor pressed.

Yuuri felt dizzy with the news, moving to sit down, taking Victor with him. “The affair was just before she left?”
Victor nodded before continuing. “And he didn’t acknowledge the child. He wouldn’t help her.”

Yuuri shook his head. “I...I would want to hear his side of the story before I made that determination.” His mind was reeling at the information. *No wonder Vitya couldn’t sleep.*

Victor huffed at the idea of Yuuri standing up for Leonid, “He was worried about his marriage. He took advantage of someone who was vulnerable.”

“Maybe...and I understand your anger. But sometimes we lose ourselves, lose sight of what’s important, and make mistakes. I think we should hear his side.” Yuuri personally didn’t care for Leonid but if that man was Yura’s true father, it would be beneficial to learn more about his motivations. The omega also knew that keeping him as an ally only helped their case for Yura.

Victor knew Yuuri made sense and nodded in agreement. “She just...went through so much. And she regretted it right after it happened.”

Yuuri nodded but focused on the important part of the revelation. “But...if he’s the father, would we get to keep Yura?”

“Leonid would have claimed him if he wasn’t planning to keep it secret.” Victor took a deep breath and let it out. “I’m almost afraid to hope but I need to hope.”

Yuuri pulled him back into his arms. It could still turn the other way but now they had hope.

The weekend was spent with family time. They played with the dogs, went on a picnic, flew kites, watched movies, cooked dinner together, slept together in Yuuri’s nest, and then Monday came. Yura knew his family was nervous but he had to go to school. Yuuri insisted that routine is important. He just wanted to know what was going on and didn’t quite understand.

Sitting next to Beka at recess, he talked about it. “And then they took this stick and ran it over my cheek before putting it in this tube.” He imitated the act with his finger on the inside of his cheek.
The dark haired boy narrowed his eyes, taking in the information with his stoic resolve, “If they make you live with that bad man, you can hide in my room,” Beka offered.

Yura nodded at the solution but he really wanted to stay with his mom and dad. “Why can’t Papa hide me?”

“He’ll go to jail,” the older friend stated. “But I can hide you because they don’t put kids in jail.”

Yura huffed. “This is such crap.”

“Agreed.” The third grader hesitated before asking, “Are you scared?”

Yura hesitated before nodding with his whole heart. “Maybe they will know when I get home. But I don’t want them to know...because what if...what if…” He felt the tears coming and pushed them away. He felt Beka’s arm slide around him.

Zaina walked up with Mila, bending down to look up at Yura’s face. “What’s wrong?”

“Grownups,” Beka explained.

The two girls nodded with understanding.

Victor was useless at the rink and Yuuri wasn’t much better. Yakov pulled rank and sent them both home. They curled up in Yuuri’s nest and held onto each other. “I can’t lose him,” Victor whispered.

“You haven’t. I have to trust Yelena. I think she was walking a tightrope. In her heart, she knew he wasn’t Kostya’s.”

“Maybe she just wanted it to be true.”
It was close to noon when they received the call. Victor loaded Yuuri up and they headed to Chris’ office. Kostya and his attorney would meet them there.

In the conference room, Kostya leaned against the wall looking smug. It was all Victor could do to keep from knocking that grin off of his face. Chris shot him a warning look. Yuuri placed a hand on his shoulder directing him to his seat. Both attorney and omega bracketed him on either side. Kostya and his lawyer sat opposite of them. The results lay between them.

“Shall I do the honors,” Chris suggested, his eyes resting on his opponents.

Kostya shrugged, leaning back and crossing his ankle over his knee as if he didn’t have a care in the world. His attorney seemed confident and relaxed as well. Victor remained still, Yuuri’s hand on his thigh under the table to ground him while Chris opened the envelope.

Chris pulled the paper from the manilla and frowned. “Hmmm…” Turning it for the other lawyer to see, he added. “Inconclusive.”

Victor’s eyes blinked in surprise.

“They set this up,” Kostya leaned forward, his eyes narrowing in irritation. “I told you we should have gone with an independent doctor,” he argued.

“The lab is independent and it says we need to submit the mother’s DNA. It could be due to your close relationship…genetically,” Chris suggested, indicating between the cousins.

Kostya’s attorney was looking over the material and he honed in on a few lines. “We can go there and submit directly. Do you have anything?”

“Yelena died years ago, which you would know if you had been the slightest bit interested in her or this little boy whose life you’re trying to destroy.” Victor leapt from his seat but was held in place by Yuuri, who the alpha was surprised to find very strong.
Chris cleared his throat as Victor regained his seat, embarrassed that Kostya had goaded him into betraying himself.

The judge redirected the silver haired man, “Do you think you would be able to provide anything to help?”

Victor blinked at those words. “I-I don’t know if I have anything that would have her DNA.”

The other man narrowed his eyes. “Like you would admit to it,” Kostya spat out.

Victor wasn’t sure if he would but he didn’t know of anything. Instead, he turned the question on Kostya. “You lived with her longer. Don’t you have something?”

Kostya’s eyes said that he had nothing. Then, he pointed out, “Her old man lives with them.”

In the end, they parted with the matter unresolved. Kostya’s attorney said he’d be making a court date seeking custody. Chris shrugged. “Fine...it won’t get far without paternity you have no claim and the court will deny it.”

As the other two left, Victor turned to Chris and asked, “What does this mean?”

“They will likely order a second paternity test but the lab said there was nothing that indicated contamination so it will likely render the same result.”

Victor thought about the possessions she left behind, “I honestly don’t know if I have anything with Yelena’s DNA. We kept pictures and her portrait. I have some jewelry that was her mother’s.”

“I hate to say it, but it is once more in his court.”

Victor chewed his lip before asking, “What if it wasn’t?”
Chris leaned forward, hoping to hear what he had suspected. “Did you find something in the journal?”

“A location for more journals that likely detail the abuse over the years and well...she did have an affair.”

Chris blinked then breathed out, “Leonid…”

Victor let a breath go, “You knew?”

Chris spoke quickly, seeing his friend’s face crumble, “No...I suspected when I read that letter. Let’s get those other journals and perhaps have a talk with your brother.”

Victor groaned. “I may need a mediator to keep from decking him.”

Chris chuckled at that. “I don’t mind joining you but your brother is stronger than you.”

Victor chuckled, “Maybe, but I’m faster...honestly, I don’t think he’d talk with you present. Not the first time.”

Chris realized that Victor was correct. In the presence of a lawyer, Leonid would be a fool to admit anything, “It’s all a mess. Do you have any thoughts, Yuuri?”

Yuuri looked from Chris to Victor, “I think talking to Leonid is the best course.”

“So be it,” Victor determined.
Baby is around 15.5 inches and 3 lbs. We're at the 30 week mark.

Chapter End Notes

So the reveal of the genetic tests...well, I wasn't quite sure how that would work out. So just roll with it.

Thoughts?
Yuuri stretched, reaching something deep inside himself. His body found the rhythm quickly, finding his story in the music. It was his. It was Yelena’s. Intertwined. How many times did he shout out “I don’t want to die!” He found his freedom the only way that he could, bending to the will of his aggressor, taking the game out of the prison. Yelena found another lover, found a motivation to leave, to seek someone outside of herself.

So many times, so many times did he cry out...so many times did he shout with pain. So many times he was shut down, ignored, forgotten...but no, he wasn’t. His best friend remembered him, like Yelena’s remembered her. His best friend was there when he finally found his feet, just as Victor was there for Yelena. In the end, they both found their salvation, their strength in the love of one man. He dropped into a plank, his form strong even as his tummy brushed the floor.

He looked up from the plank as a shadow crossed his space and rolled over to reach for his son. The little boy straddled him just below the rounded belly, a frown on his face. Pulling him in, he felt his son huff as the tears broke through.

Yuuri rubbed circles into the small back of the tiny boy, “I know, baby, I know...this is scary.” How he wanted to give this child a world without pain.

Yura’s voice was frantic, “I don’t want to live with that man. I want to stay with you and Papa and Grandpa.”
“We want that too, and we are working so hard to make that happen.” He pulled back to look at the little boy, “Your papa is looking at some clues your mother left for him as we speak.”

Yura shot up, “Why didn’t we go with him?”

“Because he didn’t think the other person would speak to him with witnesses.” Yuuri then laughed out dispassionately. “I’m sounding ridiculous. Too much Deadly Omega.”

The little boy had rolled off Yura and was rubbing his face with his sleeve. “Is that the show you watch with Olga?”

“It is.” Yuuri pulled a tissue from a nearby box and handed it to the boy, “I started watching it when Shuji had me. It oddly gave me hope that I could escape my reality.”

Yura was quiet for a moment before asking, “Why did you go with him?”

“I didn’t.” Yuuri laid back, blinking up towards the ceiling dappled with sunlight. “He stole me. And at the time I didn’t know how to defend myself. You will know. I will make sure of it.”

Yura looked at the tissue in his hand. He didn’t want to upset his mother, but he needed to better understand what had happened. “You said you were little.”

Yuuri nodded. “Fourteen. Which I’m sure seems very old to you, but trust me, it’s very, very young. I had presented as an omega recently, and I didn’t understand what my body was doing most of the time. He was supposed to be someone I could trust.”

Yura was quiet for a moment, it was a hard lesson to learn, that the worst predators often come disguised as guardians, but one that the boy had to be aware of. “Was...Mama’s bad man someone she was supposed to trust?”

“I think she thought so. She was introduced by someone she trusted. Not your Papa but...someone.” Yuuri didn’t want to betray the family connection, now that it was finally starting to form.
“So you can’t always tell.”

Yuuri shook his head. “No you can’t, baby...but you don’t have to stay with them. Leaving is hard but once you’re out, you try to figure out why it was so hard.”

“Did you try to leave?”

Yuuri brought the boy in for a hug again, “A few times. I didn’t speak up when I was found. I was taken back. You have to hold onto your voice. No matter how hard, you have to hold on to that.”

Victor chose this restaurant for its private rooms as Leonid was shown back, he studied the man before him. His brother regarded him warily. They never met outside of family gatherings. Neither of them ever asked for it. Somewhere in their childhood they had grown distant, and that rift widened each year until finally Victor believed the man seated across from him to be a complete stranger in his brother’s skin.

As Leonid took his seat, Victor laid the journal between them. Leonid eyed it but said nothing, playing his hand close to his chest. Instead, he coolly turned to the waiter and listened to the specials with a practiced air of indifference. After the charade of ordering their meal finished, he turned back to Victor, smiling like an eel. Finally they were alone.

“So what is this about?” the older brother asked as he spread his napkin over his lap.

Victor resisted the urge to lunge over the table and shake his brother into confessing right there. “Yelena. You know Kostya is trying to force custody proceedings.”

Leonid nodded, busying himself with the silverware. “I’d heard.”

Victor watched as his brother expressed more concern over the flatware than of his own son being carted off by a monster, “Why...didn’t you say anything?”
Leonid stopped, placing the fork back Victor noticed the hands shaking, “It...wasn’t supposed to happen.” He took a deep breath and sighed it out, his eyes closing and he looked so much older than Victor at that moment. “Irya and I were having trouble. It was a weak moment.”

“She trusted you.” Victor practically spat the words out.

He nodded, “I know. We were just talking. We had met in the city, I took her out for dinner. It was nothing, like catching up with a sister. She was telling me what a mistake Kostya was. I wasn’t really listening, I was saying that I think Irya was as well. I was so full of my own problems that I didn’t hear what she was saying...what she wasn’t saying. I didn’t know what depths of a mistake Kostya was. Not until she ran.”

Victor leaned forward, “But then she said she came to you and asked your help.”

Leonid grimaced, remembering with shame how he acted, “She did...Irya and I were trying to make it work. She was quite far along in her own pregnancy. Can you imagine what bringing my pregnant lover home would have done? I might have lost my youngest son.”

Victor blinked at his brother, realizing in that moment he never actually knew this person at all. “You did lose him...you gave him away.”

He sighed deeply, his eyes resting on Victor and the younger brother realized he never knew how tired and worn out the older Nikiforov offspring looked. “To someone I knew would take care of him, someone that I wondered would ever find happiness. Who do you think gave her the push to come to you? To hide in you?”

Victor blinked at that. “You...wanted me to take Yura?”

Leonid shrugged as if this were the simplest of transactions, just shuffling numbers from one column to the next, “Of course I did. I knew you’d protect him with everything you had. And I wasn’t certain that the child was mine. It was the only solution.”

They fell quiet, each in their own thoughts as their food was brought to them. Victor thanked them and they left. Finally, he whispered, “The paternity tests were inconclusive. You could…”

Leonid waved a hand, shutting down the idea, “Please don’t ask that of me.”
“We could be discreet about it. You could make sure it's all legal. A quiet adoption.” Victor leaned in, “Please, you lost him once. Now you’re going to make me lose him...and to that monster. You would do that? To your son?”

Leonid held his brother’s eyes. He finally broke it, leaning forward to eat some of his meal. They were both quiet as they moved the food around on their plates, eating some, leaving more behind. Finally, Leonid coneded, “I’ll think about it.”

“I’ve never asked anything from you. Don’t make me lose my son. Don’t let that man have any say in his life.”

Leonid held his eyes for a long time but offered no more assurances. “I’ll think about it,” he repeated. Nodding towards the journal. “Are you going to tell Irya?”

Victor closed his eyes, *selfish to the end,* “I could tell you I’ll think about it...but I’m not an ass. Your marriage is your own. I won’t interfere with it.”

Leonid nodded. “Thank you for that.” He rose up and offered his hand to his brother but the other didn’t take it. With a downturned grimace, he nodded. He shouldn’t have expected more.

Yura sat next to Otabek as he plotted his next move. “Mama said that I don’t have to stay with a bad man. To run and use my voice.”

Otabek nodded, he had always liked Yuuri and thought highly of the omega. “So if he tries to take you, you’ll run away to my house.”

Yura followed his friend’s logic and added his own. “And you’ll hide me.”

“As long as it takes. Zaina and I can take turns sneaking you food.” Beka had the entire scenario planned out. His friend was small and would easily fit in the cupboard living off cheese and crackers. They could live that way until they were grown.
“I’m glad you’re my friend.” He scooted forward and felt Beka’s protective arms around him.

Yuuri held Victor’s hand while Nikolai gave his own sample to the lab in the next room. Both were trembling and one didn’t know where one began and the other ended. The court order came through and Nikolai threatened to leave for the country. Victor convinced him to do the right thing, knowing that Yelena would not want her father isolated in his old age and definitely not in jail.

Victor still trusted in Yelena. He had to. Rereading her journal, he felt more and more convinced Yura was his brother’s. Still, there was that small chance that Kostya had gotten in there, planted his seed. He leaned against Yuuri, his arm tightening as his thoughts spiraled.

Nikolai came out and surveyed the two of them. “It’s done. Let’s go. May these ghosts finally be put to rest.”

If Kostya got his hands on Yura, Yelena’s ghost would never rest. Of that, Victor was sure. He led the two back to the car to drive home, picking Yura up on the way.

Kostya walked into his shabby apartment. The midmorning light would have streamed warmly into the east facing window if it weren’t for the grime covering the glass. His smoking had increased and the room had yellowed quickly. It had been not such a horrid little place when he took it, a cheap room in an old building. But the women who kept the building were kind and clean...and gay. Same sex pairings being ‘allowed’ only when secondary genders were alpha / omega. These two were betas. And he used that to blackmail them into surrendering the place and ignoring his dirt.

He stomped in, kicking wrappers of food across the floor as he entered. From a corner he heard the discordant notes of the music box. Spinning he saw it sitting on the middle of the dresser. Crossing the room in an instant he glared at it. He’d tossed it in the garbage that morning and carried it out to the dumpster. “Can you not leave me be?”
The scratchy sound from the box made him think of an old record, the needle dragging across it and sounded very much like “Noooo!” He shivered, slamming the lid down on the box. “Witch! I should have strangled you that night I had you tied down.” He had thought about it. Thought hard about it. Ranted about it in front of her, large blue-grey eyes wide with fear. She probably thought that night would be her last, and it should have been. But he stalled, his only problem was the body...how to dispose of the body. After, he wanted to be rid of her. Pushed her away but not quite letting go...until she was gone. She was his yoyo, to push and pull until the string was so worn it wouldn’t work. Then, and only then, could she limp out of his life.

The scent of lavender choked him. It was overpowering and sour. He coughed up, spat on the floor. She didn’t stay though. She fell, leaving him before he said she could. And she went straight to him. The little golden boy.

Vitya. Why do you always have to win? Well, not this time.

Yura waited for Yuuri to come pick him up, Otabek sitting with him, having asked his mother if he could watch over him. Mehar smiled at the request and instructed both to climb in as they waited. The smaller boy sat inside the sedan keeping warm between Otabek and his mother.

“It will be okay,” Mehar reassured him. “I have a good feeling in my bones.”

The little blonde nodded, squeezing Otabek’s hand in his. He wanted to believe her, the warm tones of her voice sincere and soothing.

Victor’s car pulled up, Yuuri getting out of the driver’s side from practice driving, his eyes looking around with worry until Mehar opened her car door and waved to him. Victor opened the passenger door in his car, his eyes narrowing towards the familiar sedan.

“I have him,” she reassured him. “Beka didn’t want him to sit alone and I offered him the warmth of my car.”

“Oh, dear...am I late?” Yuuri fussed, striding over to reach for his son. “I was held up in traffic and Victor made me face it and work my way through.”
“And you did just fine,” Victor reassured the omega before turning to Mehar. “Thank you for looking out for my son.”

“He is always welcome,” she answered with a shy smile before ushering her family back into the car.

Yuuri settled Yura in the back seat, fussing over him. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to be late.”

“It’s okay, Mama, I’m okay with Beka there. He always looks out for me.” He leaned forward, sharing a big secret, “I can trust him. He’s not like the bad people who pretend to be good.”

Yuuri sat back and studied his son. “He’s a good friend.”

Yura nodded in agreement. “Will you ride with me?”

The omega knew what he meant and closed the door to the backseat, passing the keys up to Victor who moved around to the driver’s seat. “Of course. I’m right here.”

They drove through town and towards the rink. Then Yura’s eyes widened when they moved past it. “Where are we going?”

“With everything going on, we thought it would be good for you to visit Zoya,” Yuuri explained.

The little boy huffed. “But I’ve been good.”

“Yes, you have,” Yuuri reassured him. “This isn’t a punishment. This is about taking good care of you.”

“Fine,” he huffed with a kick of his foot.

Victor laughed in the driver’s seat. In the rearview mirror he caught Yuuri’s raised eyebrow and shrugged, “what can I say, like mother, like son. He clearly gets this from your side.”
Yuuri narrowed his eyes, kicking the seat in front of him.

Yura thought for a moment, “Am I half Japanese now?”

Zoya welcomed Yura warmly and led him to the playmat. “I understand you’ve been dealing with some troubling things.”

He shrugged. It was always like that at first and she had to work her way back into his trust. She let him pick his toys and enjoy the safety of the environment. Finally the little boy asked, “Can the bad man take me from Mama and Papa?”

“Is this the bad man that your mother Yelena dated before your papa?” she clarified.

Yura nodded. “He made me get shots and scrape my cheek with this stick thingie and they put it in a tube.”

She waited a moment, “Do you know what they were doing?”

He shook his head.

“Our bodies have a code in them that makes us very unique. It tells our body how to develop and grow, what color our eyes and hair will be, and a million other things. We call it DNA. That stick was to check your DNA.”

Yura sat up, thinking over her explanation, “So they want to see how I’m made?”

She nodded.

“And Papa, too?”
“And Papa, too.”

He focused as the pieces started coming together...then falling apart. “So if my code doesn’t match my papa’s code...What if...he’s not my...my...” he floundered, peeking under his hair for help.

“Biological father?” Zoya supplied.

Yura nodded. “Can the other man take me away?” His voice came out small and scared.

Zoya would never lie to a child, but neither would she needlessly scare one. “It’s a little more complicated than that. Especially if the other man has known you were his all along. Let’s talk about that. What if the worst happens?”

Yura held his feet together, his thumb wrapping over the insteps as he leaned back to look up. “I guess I’ll run away.” He couldn’t tell her his entire plan, but he could let her know pieces of it.

“Running away isn’t safe,” she warned. “And it won’t guarantee that you would get to be with your papa.”

“But he’s a bad man! I won’t be safe with him!”

Zoya lowered herself to the carpet with him, “In cases like these, the court assigns someone to make sure you settle in okay. Someone will be there with you, making sure you are safe and comfortable. Someone will be looking out for you. And if they think you are not safe, or not comfortable they will fight to take you home.”

Yura whimpered, “I just want to be with Mama and Papa. Why can’t he just go away?”

I don’t know. I have no idea why people see children as pawns in emotional warfare. She wished she could offer reassurances. She hated this part of her job. “Let’s talk about what you can do.”

Yura at first seemed to shut down, not offering much. Then he remembered what Yuuri had taught
him about his voice. “My Yuuri said I can speak up, to not be quiet if someone is trying to hurt me.”

She smiled, “That’s very smart. The best way to get help is to get other people’s attention. You make lots of noise.”

Yura nodded, then his eyes sprung wide, “Will he keep me from Grandpa?”

The psychiatrist shook her head, “Your grandfather can demand visitation. That will give you a chance to speak out.”

“And I can see Mama and Papa,” Yura added as he thought about it.

“As long as your grandfather is still living with them, I’m sure of it. Now, let’s talk about how well you’ve been sleeping.”

He shrugged. “I’m okay if I sleep in Mama’s nest. He makes me sleep better.”

“He uses his pheromones to calm you.” Zoya noted, it wasn’t unusual for omegas to help children of Yura’s age sleep in this manner, and built a healthy bond between parent and child.

Yura nodded. “But when I’m by myself, I get scared.”

“What scares you?”

The little boy’s eyes were brilliant green as he looked up at her, “I’m afraid the bad man is going to steal me like Yuuri’s bad man stole him.”

She took a breath in. Zoya hadn’t learned the full background of Yuuri, but she had suspected an abduction in his past. “Those are very different situations,” the child psychologist explained.

He shrugged. “I just want to stay with Mama and Papa.”
“Why don’t you draw for me?” she suggested, needing to give Yura an outlet for his emotions.

Yura agreed, moving to the table and pulling out the box. A house showed up with a big window lit up in the bottom. Yura drew himself with his family and dogs and cat. The upstairs window remained empty but outside, a man with yellow hair and green eyes was drawn hiding behind the bush. It was enough to tell the psychologist he was distinguishing his monsters.

She met with the parents, asking to talk to Victor while Yuuri saw to the little boy. Alone, she stated quietly, “I’m concerned that he sees running away as a way to escape the situation. I wanted to make you aware.”

Victor blinked at those words. “I...didn’t know. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Reinforce that home is safe and his voice is heard, which you both do. I suggest he continue weekly visits until this is resolved.”

“We will.”

Victor watched his son lying in front of Yuuri, hands on his mama’s belly as he helped Yuuri count kicks. He was worried and hated Kostya even more for creating all of this fear in his family. The idea of losing Yura in any capacity terrified the alpha and he wanted to do whatever it took to keep his family whole.

Sneaking away, he pulled out his phone and sent a call through. “Sorry for bothering you this late. Have you thought about what we discussed?”

“I can’t talk about this here, Vitya,” Leonid answered but then seemed to notice the desperate change in Victor's voice. With a heavy sigh, he asked, “What’s going on?”

“Today at his counselor’s office Yura admitted he had thought about running away if Kostya makes a move. All of this fear stirred up has him looking for a way to protect himself. Surely as his biological father, you don’t want this.”
Victor heard the sharp intake of breath from his brother. “No...I don’t want this at all. Meet me at Giacometti’s office tomorrow. We’ll figure out what to do from there.”

“Thank you,” Victor breathed in relief.

Chapter End Notes

Just remember, I could have let this cliffhang on Kostya. ;) Comments are welcomed and encouraged. Please share and subscribe.
Chapter Summary

Victor meets his brother at Chris' office, Yuuri struggles with overdoing it, and will we get the results?

Chapter Notes

Hello, all. I know this is early (I'm sure you won't complain) but I'm making room for updates on Sirin's Child. Which isn't edited yet but hopefully will be soon. I realized I had 11 unedited chapters! Can you believe it? Just sitting there. SO hopefully you will see all three of my main stories being updated soon.

Thanks so much to BluSkates for all of the lovely edits. You are the best! :)

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Ch. 76: Family Ties

(Now that's an 80s throwback!)

Victor arrived at Chris’s office just in time to run into his brother. He stopped in his tracks looking at the older brother who had always mystified him, and then faded from his social life. Leonid was pacing nervously in the lobby, he looked haggard and tired. Victor could spot the telltale need for a cigarette as his fingers danced around nervously. Leonid looked up as his brother approached and studied the younger Nikiforov. Two men, clearly closely related, had somehow let a distance grow between them that seemed so wide, so vast. With a nod, he turned towards the elevator. “Let’s get this done.”

Chris had managed to clear his schedule for the two brothers. Leaning back in his chair, he watched while the two men entered and sat opposite his desk. “Leonid, it’s been awhile.”

The older Nikiforov ducked his head, unsure how to act. “Christophe, not the best of circumstances but let’s take care of this.” He leaned forward to study the document Chris had lain before him. “This says I agree to everything Yelena says about me in her journal, but I haven’t really read it. Do we have time?” He looked from Chris to Victor, uncertain who had it.
Victor produced it, pulling it out of his trench coat pocket and placing it before his brother. “I went through last night and flagged the parts involving you.”

Leonid nodded, thanking him quietly under his breath. It wasn’t a matter of the older brother not trusting the younger. He simply wanted to verify the contents he was signing off on. He skimmed the contents before nodding. “It’s...to the point. I hate...that I caused her pain and regret. It wasn’t a good situation. We were both talking about our relationships, lamenting over shots of Vodka. And then we fell into bed together.” He looked over to Victor, almost laughing at his own stupidity. “At Mom and Dad’s house no less. I’m surprised they didn’t catch us.”

“I can imagine what Papa’s response would be,” Victor pointed out dryly.

“Indeed.” Leonid’s eyes went wide. He turned back to Chris, “It was stupid. Irya wanted counseling and I...thought it meant I was weak.”

Victor shrugged. “I see a counselor as needed. Yakov had me on a regular schedule early on...maybe my poor choice in men those days. Then learning I was alpha when I expected to present as omega, or not at all.”

Leonid thought about what his younger brother had offered. “Papa had certain expectations of me...or maybe I thought he had them. I can’t decide anymore. He’s so different since Mama’s cancer.”

“He is,” Victor agreed.

He sighed, signing the affidavit. “I was trying to protect my marriage. But I won’t at the expense of...of...Yura.”

“What are your plans should the test prove your paternity?” Chris asked, as he tucked that paper into the file.

“Plans?” His eyes went from Chris to Victor. “Oh, you mean custody. Well, I was the one who sent Yelena to Vitya. I suppose it would be hypocritical of me to take him back now. Besides, he’s grown up seeing my brother as his father. I won’t change that.” He stopped, reading the diary, hearing all of their past from Yelena’s voice hit him. He had been stupid, arrogant, but worst of all he just failed to listen when someone was asking for help. “I don’t want to hurt that boy, to do anything that will upset his life with my brother. Draw up the papers and I’ll sign paternity over to
“What are you going to tell Irya?” Victor asked quietly. He needed to know if this would be kept quiet. He didn’t agree if that was his brother’s choice but he’d already decided he’d go with it.

“I-I don’t know.” Leonid leaned forward, raking his fingers through hair slightly darker than his brother’s. More the color of wet steel. It felt good to admit that he didn’t know, but it was also terrifying. “Back then, I panicked. But I knew the child would be in good hands with you.”

Victor’s lips pulled at a tight smile before he murmured, “Thank you.”

His brother nodded. “I’ll sign over rights, Christophe. Kid’s been through enough and I suppose a lot of it is my fault. If I’d come forward years ago, there wouldn’t have been this fear hanging over his head.”

Victor murmured a soft “thank you” once more. His brother grunted and asked directions to where he needed to go to submit his blood or whatever.

“It’s just a cheek swab,” Chris provided, handing him the address.

“Can I just walk in or do I need an appointment?”

“It’s all been arranged.” They watched Leonid leave, his shoulders a little lower than they were before. “That man’s eaten up with guilt,” Chris determined.

Victor sighed, agreeing with his friend. “I want to be angry, I want to be outraged that he let Yura get this close to danger...but really, I just feel sorry for him.”

Chris wouldn’t have expected anything else from his best friend. Looking ahead towards the contingency, he asked, “Do you think you can get those other journals just in case?”

“I can. I called Mama and she knew where we stashed things. She just didn’t know anything had been tucked away recently. She’s already gotten them out with the help of Olga’s sister and they are being sent to me via courier.” He ran his hand through his hair before looking at his friend. “Is
it wrong that I’m afraid to read them?”

Chris squeezed his hand. “Not in the least. I’m certain that she spoke of abuse, of heartbreak. All of that will be difficult to learn about. If you find you can’t, don’t punish yourself. Bring them to me, and we’ll have them if needed.” He watched as Victor’s face softened and relaxed. “Go about your day. I’ll call if I need anything else.”

Yuuri didn’t say much in the car as they drove home from the rink, he simply kept shifting uncomfortably. As they arrived home, he moved wordlessly into their room, shedding his clothes along the way. Victor followed him with concern, picking up the clothes and dropping them in the hamper as he followed Yuuri through. “Are you okay?”

He huffed. “Just cramps. Probably Braxton-Hicks, but my back really aches. Baby managed to keep me up at night.”

“You spent too much time on the ice with kids pulling on you,” Victor critiqued as he started to follow Yuuri into the nest. Yuuri hissed at him causing him to step back.

“You’re covered in rink germs,” he offered, glaring at Victor.

The alpha rightly did not mention Yuuri hadn’t showered either but instead suggested, “Maybe a shower would do us both some good, ease your back pain, clean the germs from my body.”

Yuuri considered those words before batting his long lashes and asking in that so, so sweet voice, “Will you please run me a bath? With bubbles?”

Like Victor could tell him no. “Consider it done. I’ll come get you when it’s ready.”

Yuuri nodded, adding, “You should shower while it’s filling up.”

Victor knew not to argue and slumped off to the bathroom. He groaned when the shower decided once more to be disagreeable, spraying him in the face at the junction. “Fuck!”
“What’s that?” Yuuri called from the bedroom.

“Oh, nothing. The pipes are acting up once again.”

“Did you piss off Yelena?”

Victor blinked at those words. Why would that ...then he remembered refusing to read her words. “Maybe,” he answered more under her breath. He was startled when he heard Yuuri’s next words much closer.

“You should probably fix that.” He then pulled the shower curtain and stepped inside, naked and baby pulling heavily on his posture. “I’m glad I dance, this would be harder.” He reached down and messed with the pipe and it seemed to respond to Yuuri’s touch. “Temporary fix. I’ll look at it later with Nikolai.” He then leaned into the water, the hot spray hitting his back causing him to groan. “Oh, this is a good idea.”

Victor quickly washed off, and then tended his lover, his hands moving over the sore muscles with care. “I’ll give you a massage after your bath.”

“I’ll be a useless pile of jelly,” Yuuri admits before adding, “But please do.”

Victor chuckled and guided Yuuri out of the shower, supporting him as the omega eased into the tub. Yuuri leaned back with a sigh, closing his eyes. Victor folded a hand towel and laid it on his forehead. Another under his neck. He heard soft sighs of pleasure.

“Papa! Mama!” interrupted their retreat but Yuuri just waved him off.

“You deal with it.”

Victor chuckled, slipping from Yuuri’s side and grabbing his robe for a quick cover up. He found Yura in the bedroom, his eyebrows furrowed. In his hand was a chewed up toy. The child held it up to his papa.
“See what Ren did?”

“Did you not put your toys away before you left this morning?” Victor suggested.

Yura huffed. “Mama didn’t tell me to.”

“Mama shouldn’t have to tell you.” Victor gently admonished the little blonde. “If you are in a hurry, close the door in the morning to keep the dogs out. I’m sure they were just bored. We’ve been out all day.”

“So they don’t get a spanking?”

Victor smiled at the thought of swatting a dog. “Well, should I punish you for not picking up your toys or is this little reminder enough?”

“It’s enough,” his son sulked before leaving the room.

Victor rolled his eyes. *Like anyone gets spanked in this house.* He returned to Yuuri’s side and found his mate snoozing. Reaching over, he pulled the plug getting a cry of protest for his effort.

“Why’d you do that?” Yuuri huffed.

“You were sleeping...I actually prefer it when my mate doesn’t drown. How about that massage?”

Yuuri pouted a moment before reaching up to Victor who helped him to his feet and out of the tub. Fresh underwear and he was back in the middle of his nest. Wrinkling his nose, he rolled his eyes. “I need to redo this nest. It smells.”

There were days when every little thing bothered Yuuri and this seemed to be one of them. “Do you want to do that first? I can fetch the kit and linens.”

“Do you mind?” Yuuri asked, moving to his knees, eyes batting once more.
Victor chuckled. Yuuri might be difficult on days like this but when he batted those deep brown eyes it was worth it. “Just give me a moment.”

When the alpha returned, Yuuri already had the bed pulled apart, pieces separated for the omega service or the laundry. He greedily took the bag from Victor and began working the nest back together, making his weaving tight to keep it together. Victor could see that he was forgotten so he carried out the laundry and went to check on dinner.

Olga huffed at him. “Probably another hour. Why?”

“Yuuri is a bit demanding and I wanted to make sure we were fine on time.”

“You take care of your omega. I can always reheat dinner,” she clucked back at him.

He returned to find Yuuri working in the finishing touches. Victor left his mate to build the nest and occupied himself with tidying up the bathroom. Once done he took the massage oil and ran the bottle under warm water, knowing Yuuri’s skin would be very sensitive to anything cold. He then found his omega curled up, waiting for him. “Can I enter your nest?”

Yuuri huffed at him. “It’s our nest. Of course you can come in.”

Victor rightfully didn’t mention that Yuuri refused to let him enter earlier. He placed the vitamin E oil to one side for later. He decided to start with Yuuri’s feet, rubbing them with lotion, starting with gentle circles on top and working towards his ankle. Yuuri moaned softly, his eyes closed as Victor tended his mate.

“You’re making me horny,” Yuuri confessed quietly.

Guilty. Victor smirked and answered, “Olga offered to reheat our meal if needed but I’ll have to lock the door and hope Yura doesn’t pitch a fit.”

“Nikolai should be back by this point,” Yuuri responded, his voice more relaxed, that frantic state letting go of him.
Victor took the hint, squeezed his ankle and slipped out of the nest to secure the door. He popped into the bathroom to grab a towel before returning to his mate, touching Yuuri’s ankle once more to alert the omega of his presence. “All taken care of.” He situated the towel so they wouldn’t spoil the bedding later, removing Yuuri’s underwear in the process.

“Mmmm, good,” Yuuri sighed.

Victor picked up the lotion and squirted it on his hand, the noise making Yuuri giggle. Victor chuckled warmly before he smoothed it along Yuuri’s calf. With languid movements, he worked the knots from that muscle before moving to the other calf. Victor then worked his way up Yuuri’s leg, massaging the long muscles of his upper thigh. With a gentle tap, Yuuri turned over so he could offer the other thigh the same treatment. Yuuri’s expression held a peaceful smile and Victor was glad he took this time to tend to his mate.

He reached for the vitamin E oil and began smoothing it over Yuuri’s tummy in long strokes, the omega relaxed his leg down on the mattress, allowing Victor to move to a pillow for support. “How are you feeling, love?”

“Heavenly. I needed this.”

“Good,” he capped the oil closed and set it aside, picking up the lotion as he moved behind his lover to tend to his back. He started out making long strokes up and down either side of the omega’s spine before focusing on working out the knots. He finally worked his way up to Yuuri’s shoulders and the omega finally stretched out, relaxing into another sigh.

“You’re the best, you know,” Yuuri murmured, a lazy smile sliding onto his lips. Victor leaned forward to kiss him sloppily and Yuuri moaned softly into the kiss. “You should fuck me,” he murmured impishly, shifting forward once more.

Victor groaned, reaching down, his fingers finding Yuuri’s entrance twitching, opening easily for him. “Someone was busy in their bath when I left the room.”

Yuuri smirked. “Maybe?”

“You little imp!” he chuckled, his fingers preparing Yuuri with familiar ease. “Now, are you ready?”
“Yes, pleeease,” he groaned.

Victor positioned himself to push into Yuuri from behind and slowly fucked into Yuuri who tried to push back. The alpha held onto his hips preventing him from hurrying things along. “Patience, love.”

Yuuri huffed in response then moaned as he felt himself being filled. “Oh, god, Vitya.”

“I’m not, but thank you,” Victor smirked.

Yuuri giggled in response, wiggling his ass back and gaining a groan from Victor in response. “I need you to continue moving now, my dear.”

Victor snorted, loving this demanding extra version of his mate. “Of course.” He began to steadily rock into the omega, noticing Yuuri was now holding onto one of the posts in the headboard. Reaching around he began stroking Yuuri’s length, relishing in the soft moans his lover released into the room. “God, do you know how good you feel around me?”

“I just know…I’m really close…and I really love you right now,” Yuuri panted.

Victor huffed a laugh. “I love you, too, my darling.”

Yuuri hummed, as Victor continued to fuck into him, his hands working the omega’s length. He could feel his own desire unfurling and knew he wouldn’t be far behind Yuuri. And then that smaller body tensed up around him. “Let it go, my Yuuri,” he encouraged as he stroked Yuuri through his orgasm. He then rested his forehead against the back of Yuuri’s head as he found his own release with a groan.

In the kitchen, Yura bounced around eating some apple slices and peanut butter while chatting with the two older caretakers. “Do you think Mama and Papa are finished wrestling?”
Olga and Nikolai’s eyes met for a moment as the little blonde played with his food. Nikolai coughed and rattled his paper, desperately trying to hold back a snort. Olga huffed in his direction before answering, “Mamas and Papas need time alone. But you’re fine with us. Now sit on the stool so I can finish dinner without tripping over you.”

“Do we have to wait for them? They sometimes take a loooong tiiiiime,” he complained with a frown.

Nikolai chuckled from behind his paper, earning a snap from Olga’s dish towel. However, the matron snorted as she peeked at her casserole. “I’m sure we can go ahead and eat when it’s ready. If you get tired after, you can just sleep on the sofa.”

“I need a bath,” the little boy pointed out as he walked his apples across the counter like they are a herd of wild animals before eating one with with a dramatic, “Omp!” Then he giggled. “I’m a dinosaur.”

Olga rolled her eyes even as she smiled at his antics. She loved this little boy so much. “Dinosaurs can go one night without a bath.”

Yuuri was quite languid as Victor cleaned him up. “Do you think you can bring me dinner?” he suggested with a pout.

Victor raised an eyebrow and answered, “I believe that can be managed. Should I get you your underwear first?”

Yuuri huffed but agreed. “I guess. Otherwise squirt will think he can run around naked.”

Victor not only brought Yuuri his underwear but some pajamas, helping him into them before settling him back into bed but propped up on pillows. Victor left and returned with a tray of food, Yura bouncing in behind him and crawling up to sit by his mama. “Yura missed you.”

Yuuri laughed softly. “I see.”
The little blonde cuddled in close, “Are you okay?”

“Just tired, sweetheart,” he answered, reaching out to ruffle his blond hair.

Satisfied that everything was as it should be and his parents were just doing boring adult stuff, he sighed contentedly. “Can I read baby a story?”

Yuuri blinked at that then smiled. “Of course. Why don’t you pick something out,” he suggested.

Yura jumped out of the bed and the omega was glad he wove a tight nest. Turning back to Victor, the alpha ran his hand through his hair awkwardly. “Go eat. I’ve got Yura and I feel much better now.”

“I hate to leave you,” he confessed.

Yuuri smiled softly in his direction. “I know...but you need to eat. I need my alpha to be strong.”

It worked and Victor reluctantly left as Yura crawled back up in the bed, a half a dozen books in hand. “I thought you might want to read to baby sister, too.”

Yuuri snorted as he reached for his bowl, knowing full well his son wanted to be read to. “I’m sure I will.” He hummed in approval as the potato and beef casserole warmed up his insides. “I should have started with this.”

“But then I couldn’t come in and read to you,” Yura pointed out. “Why do you and Papa lock the door when you wrestle?”

Yuuri blew through his lips, sinking back into his pillows. “It’s not always wrestling. Tonight, Papa was rubbing my feet and back to help me relax. He just wanted me to not tense up from a lot of interruptions.”

Yura considered that answer and decided to accept it. “Does it hurt?” he continued. “You made ouchy noises.”
And here I was thinking Japan had the thinnest walls. “It’s...a good kind of pain. Because it hurt before and sometimes you have to have a little more pain before you get to the other side.”

“Okay.” Thankfully Yura simply accepted the answer and moved on. He then pulled out the green book and showed it to Yuuri. “I’m going to read this. My teacher read it in Russian but this one is English, baby.” He then pointed at each word as he sounded it out. “T-e-n Aaap-ples u-up on T-o-op.” And Yuuri appreciated his brilliant son who decided to learn the letters to their common language since Yuuri worked on his Russian letters. After Yura finished, he handed his mama a book in Russian and listened as the omega worked through the letters and put together the words.

Victor worried about his mate taking on too much but knew the omega was too stubborn to let go of the job. So he talked to Yakov who suggested the alpha arrange an assistant. “Tell him they can take over his classes while he’s on maternity leave.”

“Oh, that’s actually really good. Thank you.” He was walking back to his office when he bumped into Alexie. “Ah, just the skater I was looking for. How would you like to pay Yuuri back for the time he put in with you before we realized he wasn’t being paid?”

His eyes widened. “I’d love to. What do you have in mind?”

“Well, I haven’t talked to Yuuri just yet but I think it’s time he had an assistant to help him with his classes and take over while he’s on leave. The perk to this is that we will compensate you.”

Alexie was bright, and figured out the real scheme quickly. “Ummm, wow. You’d trust me with your mate like that? To watch over him?”

Victor smiled at the young alpha. “Actually, I would. I know how much you look up to him and how protective you are towards him.”

The dark blue eyes widened, “I didn’t mean anything...”
Victor chuckled and held his hands up, “No, that’s not it. I’m flattered that you feel that way towards him. Yuuri seems to bring out the best in people, and everyone would want to protect that.” He watched as the boy calmed down, realizing this wasn’t some ridiculous Alpha pissing contest. “So what do you say?”

“Oh, o-kay. I-I’ll do it.” Alexie was like a puppy dog, loyal to Yuuri. He would grow into a good man.

Victor smiled warmly. “Good. Meet him at three-thirty in studio C. Today is a ballet day. I’ll go talk to him now.”

He found Yuuri in the lounge sitting with a couple of the juniors helping them with their online courses. He looked up and met Victor’s eyes, noting the surprise in them. “I sometimes come down here and help them practice their English and they help me practice my Russian,” he explained.

Victor smiled at his mate, it’s amazing Brian Orser didn’t recruit you. You take every opportunity to learn. “I didn’t know that. That’s an excellent exchange. I was wondering if I could talk to you about a similar exchange.”

Yuuri nodded, excusing himself before following Victor along. The alpha was reluctant to talk and stopped near the entrance of the small rink where Yuuri often worked with his students. “So Yakov and I have been talking and we decided it would be good to train an assistant to take over while you are on maternity leave.”

Yuuri nodded as he thought about it. “Phichit has been quite busy lately between the law firm investigations and his own work with app building. I don’t want to take this away from him, though.”

“Phichit is always welcome to come by and take a class,” Victor reassured the omega. “This person would give continuity to what you have planned for the class.”

Yuuri narrowed his eyebrows knowing that wheels had already been set in motion, “Who do you have in mind?”

“Alexie...you two already have good chemistry.”
Yuuri tilted his head thoughtfully. “It would be good experience for him.” Nodding with decision, he agreed. “Okay, I’ll take him on.”

Victor blinked at this then pointed out, “I want you to start easing up on your own body demands.”

Yuuri hummed, before answering, “I think I can do that. After the way I felt last night, I could tell I was overdoing it. I was meaning to talk to you about it but I’m glad you saw my need and took care of it.”

Victor smiled in relief. He didn’t expect it to go so well. “And with the show?”

“Lilia and I are working together. It will be fine.”

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Chris looked up as Leonid walked into the office. “So it’s done, now,” the elder Nikiforov stated. Only hours prior the paternity test came back with ninety-nine percent reliability that the elder brother was the child’s father. Chris was impressed with how quick Leonid came by to close matters up.

“I’m glad it turned out to be you despite the complications,” Chris confessed, opening the folder holding the papers Leonid needed to sign.

“Well, life is full of complications.” He sounded almost glib, then turned solemn. “My, umm, Irya...she and I talked. She wasn’t surprised, it seems. She apparently always suspected there was something between Yelena and I. Odd that. We were only together the one time. But you know, there was always this sort of chemistry between us.”

Chris flipped a couple of pages and had Leonid sign more pages. “So are you two able to reconcile?”

Leonid huffed out a laugh, “I’m not really sure. We are...separating for now but seeing a counselor. Maybe we can figure this out. She said she needed to figure out who she is now. And suggested I do the same and decide what I want.”
“Well, if you need legal matters, I can recommend someone,” Chris responded, showing Leonid the last line. Looking at the final signature, he handed it over to his assistant who handled the notarization. “Be sure and file those papers with the court immediately. Make copies, and send them via courier within the hour.”

“Of course, sir.”

Turning back to Leonid, he asked, “Where do you stand in all of this?”

“Honestly I don’t know.” Leonid looked lost in all of this. A long buried secret had come through and was now upsetting what he had thought was stable, manageable. “I’m at peace with my decision. I handed my youngest son over to Victor six years ago. It...was a good choice. But now my own family. I don’t know. Looking at this, was I a good father, partner? If anything, this has me thinking.”

Chris leaned forward, it was rare to see this usually stoic man open up so plainly. “Well, that’s a start. You can decide what you want, and see what Irya wants. Maybe work together? And don’t forget Victor. Perhaps you can find a way to build that relationship as well. It’s rather nice to have a brother that can back you up.”

Leonid hummed thoughtfully. “I guess...we were always in two totally different spheres.”

“Perhaps look at the overlap,” Chris suggested.

The older man nodded. “It is something to consider. Thank you.”

After the man left, Chris picked up the phone and called Vitya to tell him the news. “It was Leonid,” he stated firmly.

Down the line Victor’s voice was silent, then erupted, “Yura is his son?”

Chris smiled, knowing Victor was finally feeling the release knowing his son was safe. “Yes. Ninety-nine percent probability. He’s already signed the papers stating he would not seek custody of Yura.”
Victor breathed out, “So it’s over.”

“Almost.” Chris wanted to make sure Victor knew there would be at least a small amount of legalities to tie up. “I’m calling Konstantin’s lawyer as soon as I get off of the phone with you.”

“Do it. I’ll let you go now.”

Victor knelt before Yura, taking his son’s hands in his own. Yuuri sat next to the little boy, his hand resting on his back. “We just received very good news, Yura. We have legal papers saying no one will take you away from us.”

Yura blinked, processing those words. “The bad man went away?”

“No, but he can’t take you away from us, or from here. He’s not...your biological father.”

The little boy tilted his head, frowning in response. “But you said…”

“I’m not either...it turns out your mother had a...friend...between Kostya and I.”

Yura’s eyes narrowed, he could tell there was information he wasn’t getting. “You know who it is.”

Victor closed his eyes and nodded. “They’ve agreed to let you stay with us. We’re officially adopting you so no one can ever try to take you again.”

Yura was happy with this, he wanted to be completely happy...but there was a small voice of curiosity burning in him. “Who is it?”

Victor chewed his lower lip for a moment. “I promise to tell you when you’re older...unless he decides he wants you to know sooner. But he wanted you with me all along.”
“Oh, I understand. Fucking Vitya takes gold again.” Kostya’s voice dripped with venom.

“That’s not…” but the lawyer’s voice was cut short as Kostya hung up and slammed the phone onto the table, smashing it.

Kostya stared at the wall seething with anger. “You always win. Why is it everyone protects you, looks out for you? The golden boy. Spoiled fucking brat. Even those that don’t like you try to protect you. This is fucking bullshit. I get sent to Siberia, fucking Siberia! You get to live a life of luxury.”

A discordant song in a minor key rang out from the music box mocking him.

NOTES:

We are approximately around 31 weeks pregnant. (every two weeks, ha! That went out the window when I finished plotting this baby!) Yuuri’s baby is around 16 inches and 3.2 lbs. About the size of a coconut. Or asparagus?? Well, you can try and explain that one. Want to do a prenatal massage at home? This article talks about it towards the end.
Friendship, Babies, and Mamas

Chapter Summary

Yuuri and his family settle into baby matters.

Chapter Notes

Hello, and it seems like I sort of have a routine going for posting. Songs on Monday, Sirin's Child will start going up in the middle of the week, so around Wednesday, and Gravity at the end of the week on Friday or Saturday.

Thanks to BluSkates for all of the edits. We've been talking back and forth about a cute version of baby Yelena. I currently have Len-chan. Blu suggested Le-chan or Lena-chan. What do you think? Vitya and company will be using Lena.

Notes at the end including some translations of words. Look forward to hearing from you and I know I need to reply to some of last week's comments.

77. Friendship, Babies, and Mamas

Yuuri’s almost endless stamina seemed to finally come to an end by his 32nd week of pregnancy. He felt breathless as if his lung capacity had been cut in half. Or maybe it was those tiny feet that stretched into the space that should be occupied by his lungs. When she wasn’t digging her toes into his ribs, she seemed to be doing jumping jacks on his bladder.

“Len-chan,” he groaned as he moved once more towards the nearest bathroom. It was a universal truth among the pregnant that they knew every bathroom in every location they frequented, including the store he stood in with Katya. She offered him a knowing smile and took over his cart while he moved away, headed towards the nearest bathroom to relieve himself.

As he reached the location, he frowned at the options. Women and men. Nothing designated omega. Maybe it would be okay. He had his hand on the door when an alpha came out straightening himself in the process, his eyes falling on the very pregnant omega. “Oh, umm...yeah,” he started, his hand going over his stomach protectively.

The alpha nodded with understanding. “My mate uses the genderless bathroom. It’s single occupant. A little less awkward.”
Yuuri flushed in appreciation, taking the other man’s direction and finding the facility around the corner. Why can’t they all be genderless? Why can’t a series of private stalls be built so everyone can take care of their bathroom business with a modicum in privacy. He opened the door and was relieved that this bathroom was much more welcoming. Even a changing table. They all should be like this.

After he cleaned up, he found his way back out into the store and to Katya’s side. “They didn’t have an omega bathroom. It’s just male, female, and a gender neutral, but that’s a single stall bathroom.” He knew that stores couldn’t build fifteen single stall bathrooms, but there had to be a better way to accommodate their customers.

Katya tilted her head thoughtfully. “Is that something that bothers you?”

“It didn’t before but now,” He paused thinking about his life. “I’m a man, so I would normally use that, but being a pregnant omega complicates it. I’m more sensitive to alpha scents. And bathrooms can be overwhelming.”

She hummed as she considered his complaint. “I may have to mention something in our store. I never thought about it. I guess being pregnant makes you more sensitive to odors.”

“More sensitive to a lot of things...but also, why do bathrooms have to be gendered? Couldn’t they just have more of those genderless bathrooms?”

“Like the family stalls?”

“Exactly that,” Yuuri suggested. “I’m having a daughter. I want a private place to tend to her as she is potty training.”

“I like the family stalls. Mila and I use them all of the time, we just take turns. I agree, though. There should be more.”

“With Phichit, we use the buddy system. Victor tends to go in with me to the men’s bathroom and makes sure it’s fine. Although now that I’m bonded most leave me alone. I guess they worry it will bring an angry alpha protecting his mate into a fight.”
She hummed, realizing the problem, “This is a messed up system.”

Yuuri sat next to Phichit at his doctor’s appointment. The other omega shifted nervously until Yuuri reached over and put a hand on his thigh to ground him. “What’s wrong?”

Phichit squirmed a little, “I’ve been off...really ever since Yura’s party.”

“What do you mean... off?” Yuuri asked.

Phichit drew a deep breath and let it out shakily. “W-we had a false positive. And then the tests came back from the doctor that it was negative. It was before the party. And then...then...I just focused on helping you with Yura because he’s precious.” He sniffed back. “I just want it so bad,” he whispered.

Yuuri drew him into his arms, holding him with a rocking motion. “You will have your time, Peach. I believe that with all my heart. And I’m thankful that you can still be close to me and celebrate with me while carrying this burden. Please always feel like you could talk to me. You don’t have to hold it back.”

“I just...you had so much on your shoulders. And everyone was trying so hard to be happy at the party...because we didn’t really know what was going to happen. I’m sorry,” he finished.

“Don’t be sorry, love...never be sorry. I’m here for you when you’re ready to share. I just want you to know that you don’t have to hide it from me. You took care of me, I take care of you. We’re a team. Always.”

“Always,” Phichit answered, nuzzling into Yuuri’s neck. The older omega’s scent had changed so much since they first started out as friends. In those early days Phichit wondered if Yuuri was sick, with the acrid scent of Shuji overlaying Yuuri’s own sweet cinnabon scent. And then it slowly cleared away but held the sourness of Yuuri’s depression. Now...the cinnamon had a more wild and woody scent mixed into the cedar of Yuuri’s current mate. And the subtle scent of lavender from the child that he loved and cared for mixed in. A perfect aroma. It was comforting and strong. Yuuri had grown so much in the last year and Phichit realized he’d been selling his friend short.
Yuuri could handle this. All of this. And when he can’t, he reaches out. The younger omega needed to work on reaching out.

As Yuuri went back to see the doctor, Phichit waited in the waiting room, a flutter in his heart at the other pulling from him. He pulled out his phone to keep his mind occupied so he wouldn’t drift off to sleep. He napped so much lately.

Peach/ Hello, ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Chris/ Are you home yet, mon cher?

Peach/ Waiting on Yuu-chan. He’s back with the doctor now.

Chris/ I want you to rest when you go home. I think you might be catching a bug or something.

Peach/ I’m not sniffly. Just tired.

Chris/ And you were feeling a little nauseous this morning.

Phichit stared at those words. A little flicker of hope bubbled up in his chest. Tired...nauseated… But he was quick to stamp it down. Those tests were negative.

Peach/ You’re probably right. I’ll rest.

Chris/ I’ll pick something up for dinner tonight and we can curl up and watch a movie.

Yuuri came out just then and the younger omega tucked away his phone. “Everything okay?”

Yuuri patted his daughter as she danced about, happy with the attention. “Baby is right on schedule. Dr. Romanova is a little concerned about the recent stress but my kick count diary shows an active baby. And her heartbeat...I think that is one of the most beautiful sounds.”
Phichit smiled up, *I’ll get there.* “I’m glad to know you both are doing well. Can we go home now? I think I want to lie down.”

Yuuri’s eyes flashed in his direction in concern. “Are you okay?”

“Just tired and my breakfast didn’t sit well with me this morning.”

Narrowing his eyes, he asked, “Are you sure it was a false positive?”

Phichit nodded as they walked out of the office towards his car. “Doctor confirmed it. Let’s take a raincheck on lunch, okay?”

Yuuri rubbed a hand over his friend’s shoulders, “Okay, hun...you let me know if you need something, though.”

“I will. I’m glad we got to spend some time together today.”

Victor had been surprised when Leonid called him up out of the blue and asked him to lunch. Arriving, he took in the posh but business casual atmosphere of the Russian restaurant. He was taken back to where his brother was waiting, the other man standing up as he approached and motioned towards the chair across from him.

“How are you?” Victor couldn’t help but notice his always well polished brother was looking a little shopworn at the moment.

He shrugged. “Irya decided I would have the kids this weekend. She is going to some business retreat and working on rebuilding her resume. She hopes it will help her make some contacts.”

“That sounds like that might be good for her,” Victor observed before pausing to give his order. Returning his attention to his brother, he asked, “How about you?”
“For her, yes, sure...it’s just...I haven’t been alone with the kids since...well, ever.” He took a strong drink from his vodka. Setting it down, he looked past Victor’s shoulder as he pulled his thoughts together. “I’ve never been good with kids. Hell, I wasn’t good with kids when I was one.”

Victor laughed a little, he knew that all too well. His brother had never been a cruel bully, but he was born a thirty five year old man. When given coloring paper and crayons he made spreadsheets. “The trick with kids is they want you to notice them...and respect them like human beings,” Victor laid out in all its simplicity.

Leonid shook his head, “They’re so...active.” Victor had a quick image of the three boys running ramshod over the house, with Leonid asking them to sit quietly and watch a documentary on economics.

Victor resisted the smirk at the almost pout on his big brother’s face. “What do you have them involved in?” Victor asked, welcoming his dish with a smile to the waitress who blushed as she left.

“Well, the oldest is trying out football. The middle one wants to play hockey. And well, the youngest wants to take dance...with Yuuri.”

Victor chuckled warmly. “Yuuri is a great instructor with kids. You might wait until after the baby is born. I know Yuuri was talking with Lilia about expanding the offerings. However if he wants to get started we have many instructors he can work with until Yuuri comes back.”

Leonid opened his phone to look at the schedule, “We have them all in football for the moment but agreed to let them rotate with the seasons so that we can see what fits them best. The rule is they have to finish the season they started.”

“That’s fair. What about when they are not involved? How do you plan to use your time with them?”

His brother squirmed a little in his seat, “I thought I’d get them involved at the country club. Maybe teach them a little golf.”

Victor snorted at that. “They are kids, they want to do kid things, not boring old man things. You
realize you’re going to have to be pretty laid back about what makes a game at first, don’t you?”

Leonid shrugged, grinning sheepishly. “I guess I don’t know how to do any of this.”

“Well, there are lots of activities to do in St. Petersberg. You just have to look for them. However, sometimes it’s good for them to be home. How...are you handling that?”

“We’re letting the kids stay at the house and we are rotating our stay there. It seemed better than uprooting them.”

Victor was truly impressed with how thoughtful that was of both parents to take the burden of movement off their children. “That’s...actually a great idea. So...let them play but get involved with it. Kids like to know their interests are important to you.”

“That makes sense. If I get stuck…” He let his words fade off even as he handed his card to the waitress.

“Just call me. I can at least help you come up with some ideas.”

“Good...good.” Leonid twisted his hands nervously. “About...Yelena. I didn’t just leave her hanging. I may not have taken her home and introduced her to the kids but...I tried to fix the situation. You know I’m over military contracts.”

Victor studied his cup of tea as he considered his brother's words. “You sent him to Siberia.”

He huffed at that. “Well not directly...but I pulled a favor. I thought if I could get him away...well, she was safe with you for the most part. I didn’t expect you to marry her but you always were rather impulsive.”

Victor shrugged as he took a drink from his cup, setting it down firmly, his eyes still focused on the glass and stainless mug. “I...not so much anymore.”

“You and Yuuri...”
Victor smiled at those words. “Yuuri and I just fit...and we needed each other.”

“Well, regardless as to how you look at it, I knew you would take care of Yura. You take care of your own. I just wanted you to know...I didn’t completely abandon her.”

Victor thinned his lips. “I think...she knew in the end. She didn’t say it in so many words but as I read through again, I got the impression she was at peace with how things finally turned out. She just...never trusted Kostya. Not in the end.”

“With good reason.” Leonid’s eyes grew distant before he murmured, “I should have told you. If at no other time than when Kostya made a move. I...didn’t know how. So much time had passed by.”

Victor sat silently for a moment. “It’s behind us...and Yura is safe.”

Leonid nodded appreciatively, “What did you tell him?”

Victor frowned at those words. “I said...that his biological father was someone else and that I’d tell him when he was older and ready to handle that information.”

“I guess...I’ll try to be ready when he comes to me.”

Victor smirked at those words. “Nobody is ever ready for Yura. He’ll be pissed...but he’s smart.”

He nodded, pursing his lips. Glancing at his phone for the time, he pushed back his chair and stood up.

Standing up, Victor held his hand out to Leonid who surprised him by pulling him into a hug. Victor laughed warmly and murmured, “Let’s move forward from here.”

“I think so, too,” he agreed.
Yuuri stood up in the guest room that would house his mother fussing over last minute details to make her feel welcome. Victor had gone to pick her up at the airport, insisting Yuuri stay home and try to put his feet up. The omega had particularly bad swollen ankles that morning and there was no hiding it. He wasn’t exactly disregarding what Victor said. He simply needed to bring up the electric teakettle and tea set so that she could relax in relative privacy.

Finally satisfied, he went back down the stairs once more and caught Olga’s amused smile. “It’s my mother,” he stated with a shrug.

She simply chuckled and went back to the kitchen to give it a last cleaning. She knew the woman coming into their home was a well known cook from Yuuri’s town and didn’t want to disappoint. “Now, if that old man would stay out of my kitchen,” she muttered as she hung the towel on the hook to dry.

Then a chime on Yuuri’s phone elicited a squeak from the Japanese boy. “They’re here!” And then Yuuri ran to the entrance, opening the door. Victor held open the screen while Yuuri’s mother came inside, tired but smiling. Yuuri bowed, saying “Okaasan...Mama...come in.”

She smiled, taking his hands in hers with a squeeze as she murmured, “Ojamashimasu...Yuu-chan...mata oai dekite ureshii desu.” She then pulled him into a hug. “So beautiful, my sweet boy.”

Yuuri sniffed, not realizing how much he wanted his mother there until she was. “Thank you so much for coming.”

Victor quietly slipped around his mother-in-law and her son and carried her luggage upstairs to the room she would occupy, laying it out on the luggage rack Yuuri found upstairs. Coming down, he found the two of them in the living room, Olga having presented her with a cup of tea. He sighed to see that Yuuri was sitting with his feet up, finally.

“This is good tea,” Hiroko commented. “I learn English good?” she asked, turning back to her son.

“You sound amazing,” Yuuri answered her with a warm smile.
She smiled in appreciation. “Good for business. Your father learn, too. Mari teach.”

“I bet that is a lot of fun,” Yuuri answered with a laugh. He then worried that Mari would teach his parents to swear and made a note to send her a warning text about that.

“Oh, she gets mad at us,” Hiroko laughed. “But we love each other. And we love you...and your family.” She lifted her eyes and let it pass over Victor and then Yura who was hanging back a little, feeling shy, then finally to Olga and behind her Nikolai. “You take good care of our son.”

NOTES:

■■■■■■■

 Hvän cî

Sweetheart (according to the great google translator)


Football in Russia = soccer

Ojamashimasu...mata oai dekite ureshii desu

I will disturb you...I’m pleased to see you again.
I'll Keep You Safe

Chapter Summary

Yuuri spends time with his mother and the rest of his family but some disturbing things start to occur in the neighborhood.

Yuuri is at the 33-34 point in his pregnancy.

Chapter Notes

No dogs were harmed in this story.

That being said, there is a mildly disturbing scene involving a dog on into the chapter. Nothing graphic. But I will mark it with a ### at the beginning and the end of that scene.

Otherwise, just a little angst to start your week off. Grab your comfort items, and let's go!

(So much thanks to BluSkates for her edits on this!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch. 78: I'll Keep You Safe

( You are reading the right fic. This isn’t Gravity. But I needed the right mood with this chapter and sometimes Sleeping at Last is just it. )

Hiroko came down the stairs quite early and was surprised to find herself not alone in the kitchen. Olga had the coffee brewing and teakettle set up waiting for Yuuri. She smiled at the guest joining her. “Good morning,” she greeted.

Yuuri’s mother took a moment before offering a hesitant “hello” in reply. She had liked the Russian woman immediately but was now impressed with her. Anyone who would rise at dawn to begin work had to be good in Katsuki Hiroko’s book. “I want to make breakfast for Yuuri.”

Olga blinked at that, thinking what she had on hand. “Yuuri starts his day with eggs and rice.”
“I know. I make it special.” She waited to be invited into the kitchen and the housekeeper reluctantly stepped aside and watched the older lady bustle about pulling out ingredients, setting the rice cooker to work.

The house slowly came to life and Olga watched as she worked, the housekeeper now sitting on the stool unless Hiroko was looking for something and couldn’t find it. But the old housekeeper paid attention to the breakfast Yuuri’s mother was preparing.

“Are we not getting oatmeal?” Yura asked curiously.

Hiroko turned and smiled at the little boy. “I make breakfast Yuuri likes.”

As if on cue, Yuuri wandered in, his hair a mess, rubbing his tummy as he still worked to wake up. Olga reached over and flipped on the electric tea kettle and watched the Japanese omega’s face settle into a nostalgic smile. “You’re making me ginger eggs, mom…”

“I make katsudon later.”

“You don’t have to make all of my favorites at once,” Yuuri assured her, his eyes sparkling with happiness. “But thank you.”

Soon the dish was served, eggs seasoned with soy, ginger and mirin, cucumbers with honey and vinegar, and rice. A sprinkle of green onions was added to the top along with sesame seeds and Yuuri was offered the first dish. By this point, the rest of the household residents were up and all watched as Yuuri put together the best bite, closing his eyes and luxuriating in the taste. “Amazing as always, Okaasan.”

That was enough for Yura whose initial reserve melted and he demanded, “I want some, Grammy.”

She chuckled warmly and put him together a small plate. She then dished up the rest of the family their servings while Olga set to preparing their drinks, coffee, tea, juice, milk, as they liked it. As the family settled around the table, Hiroko breathed a sigh of relief. She felt like she fit in and perhaps this Olga lady would share her kitchen...for Yuuri’s sake.

“ Itadakimasu ,” she pronounced and the others followed suit, familiar with the phrase through Yuuri. Hiroko reached over to her son’s hand and gave it a squeeze.
Yuuri smiled at his sister’s voice on the phone as she proclaimed, “I got your text, I’m not teaching Mom to swear!” He laughed a little thinking of how his sister loved those gory, violent movies and would freely quote them. He could hear her take a long drag from her cigarette, “How’s Mom doing?”

“So far, quite well. I think she and Olga are still working out the kitchen boundaries but I’m confident they’ll get there. So...when did she decide to learn English?”

“She wanted Russian so she could talk with her grandbabies but I couldn’t help her out. I convinced her that the children will probably also know English so we started there.”

“And Dad, too?”

“Yeah, when you visit next, I think you’ll see the difference. It’s brought in more tourists so we’ve kept busy.”

Yuuri warmed at the idea of a visit, his family all together at the inn. “That’s good.”

“How are you doing, baby brother? I’m kind of jealous that I couldn’t come as well. And Minako threatened to join her but Mom said she was a grown woman and could travel on her own.”

Yuuri laughed, imagining his mother’s stubbornness. “I’m good. It’s much better now that Kostya isn’t trying to get Yura. We all just sort of took a collective sigh of relief. Baby is growing and active as predicted although she loves to dig her toes into my ribs.”

Mari laughed. “You did the same thing to Mom.”

Yuuri frowned at that but he felt the warmth of his sister’s love.
“So this is the room,” his mother concluded as Yuuri reverently opened the space everyone helped him put together to mourn his losses.

The omega nodded, standing back as his mother entered. He watched her pay her respects to the babies and pause at Yelena’s picture. “This is Yura’s mother?”

Since it was the two of them they had slipped back into Japanese. Yuuri felt a serenity being able to talk about this special room in the language he shared with his mother, the one person who could truly understand him. “Yes...it still feels like her spirit is here,” Yuuri confessed.

Her eyes narrowed shrewdly as she asked, “Good spirit?”

“Very good, Okaasan. She’s watching over us. I believe she’s happy that Victor and I found one another.”

He watched his mother’s eyes close, inaudible words tumbling off of her lips. It was a gentle urge, asking the spirit to give a small sign. A breeze moved through the room carrying the gentle scent of lavender. As Hiroko looked up, she narrowed her eyes, nodding in confirmation. “She has unfinished business. She will rest once she’s done.”

Yuuri agreed. He didn’t have near the sensitivity as his mother but Yelena had ways of making herself known. Guiding his mother out, Yuuri secured the entrance, whispering a soft prayer as he rested his hand upon the center of the door. Smiling with a blush, he turned to his mother who looked upon him with understanding eyes.

“You...are like me.”

“Only lately...before…” He offered almost as an apology.

She stopped him, “Before you were too busy with your own torments to hear those of others. And that...is fine.”

Yuuri considered her words, “So...there will be others?”
She tilted her head thoughtfully. “If they feel a kinship with you. Most will move past you, maybe a brief greeting like sniffing the air, but they will move on.”

He hugged himself as he thought about her words. “It makes me sad to think she’ll one day not be here.”

“If she leaves, you should feel peace. She will stay for a while though and then slowly fade away. Or sleep. I suspect she’ll never truly fade until her son passes on.”

Yuuri and Victor took some time to themselves, leaving Hiroko and Olga fussing over kitchen territory and Yura hanging out in his grandpa’s workshop. They had both dogs on lead and were walking in the nearby park. Yuuri leaned into him, a soft sigh of contentment.

Victor broke the silence, “You’re happy with your mother here.”

Yuuri felt the smile slip onto his lips, “I am...I had so many questions and she’s here and I feel at ease that there is someone that can answer them.”

“What kind of questions?”

Yuuri snorted and raised an eyebrow. “I’ve actually never changed a diaper or breastfed or a myriad of other mothering tasks. I knew the la leche coach could help me with breastfeeding but it’s nice to have my mother here. I’m more comfortable in her presence.”

“You seem more settled,” Victor observed.

###

They turned a corner and entered their street. It was a small, tree lined neighborhood with a few houses on each side. As Victor and Yuuri drew closer to their own home they found a neighbor in
distress on her doorstep. “Are you okay Mrs. Kuznetsova?” Victor asked as he approached the familiar neighbor.

The older woman was visibly upset, she came down from her stoop to the street, “It’s horrible. Why would anyone...I called the police…”

Victor and Yuuri exchanged glances and Yuuri handed over the leash to Ren and approached her gently. “Mrs. Kuznetsova, what happened?”

“Someone took my dog.” Tears sprung from her eyes as she talked hurriedly. “Right out of my yard. My son Dima saw him but couldn’t stop him. Why would someone do that?”

Yuuri came over and put an arm around her, allowing her to lean on him as she cried. Soon, Dima came around the corner...thankfully dog in hand. “I didn’t catch him but he finally let go of Nikita. Strange man.” He handed the tiny dog to his mother who cried and coddled the little thing into the house.

“What did he look like?” Victor asked.

Dima scratched his head, “I didn’t see much. He was covered up pretty good. All in gray including a beanie. But I thought I saw some blond hair out the front.” He looked up the steps, knowing he should help settle his mother. “Regardless, keep your dogs inside unless you are with them.”


Shuffling to their own door, Victor saw the disquiet in Yuuri’s expression. “Yuuri...it was just a miscreant. She probably pissed him off.” He laughed, and it sounded hollow even to his own ears.

Leveling a gaze at Victor, the omega stared pointedly, “You don’t really believe that, do you?”

Inside, Victor slipped away to call Chris. Describing the incident, his attorney’s silence spoke volumes. “What do you think?”
“I think paranoia can be a very dangerous thing, but I also think that being cautious is wise.” Chris wanted to calm his friend, to remind him that the old woman had annoyed half the neighborhood, but there was something gnawing away at him on this. “Kostya had an agenda when he went after Yura and it had nothing to do with paternal concern and everything to do with hurting you. I think you should journal these incidents. If they start to escalate, we may have to file a restraining order. However, if we can’t link them to him, there is nothing we can do.”

“Fuck,” Victor breathed. “Why can’t this house have some peace? I just want to bring my baby safely into the world.”

“It seems that she will have to fight her way into the world.”

###

Snuggling into Victor’s arms, Yuuri sighed, wanting to feel safe in Victor’s hold. Yura was asleep upstairs. The room makeover plus having Grammy, as he’d taken to calling her, upstairs seemed to settle the little boy into his space. Neither parent mentioned the neighbor’s alarming news, and since the dog had been recovered they didn’t want to upset the boy. However, both adults took a head count of the dogs and cats with Victor asking, “When did we get number five?”

“Five, also known as Shy, was hiding in the hedge out front about a week ago,” Yuuri reminded him as he picked up the little tortoiseshell cat. “We took her to the vet and put up notices but have heard nothing. She’s been fixed but we think she was abandoned. We’ve talked with the shelter and will continue to foster her until her owners show up or someone wishes to adopt her.”

“How did I miss this?” Victor asked dramatically.

“You’ve been a tad preoccupied,” Yuuri pointed out. “I thought it would be a good service activity for Yura and he seemed excited to help the kitty find its forever home. Yura needed to feel some form of control and power, and what better way than to care for a living creature?”

Victor pulled Yuuri into his embrace, kissing his hair before leaning into him. “Have I told you what a wonderful mother you are?”

Yuuri hugged him back, tilting his chin up to kiss his lips. “That’s my most important job. The rest of the experiences are just frosting.”
They returned to their bedroom, Makka following but Ren saying her goodbyes before heading upstairs either to sleep with Yura or Hiroko. They undressed, dropping their clothes in the hamper and moved toward the bed in nothing but their briefs.

Snuggling into Victor’s arms, Yuuri sighed, wanting to feel safe in Victor’s hold. His nose pressed into Victor’s neck and he lay still breathing him in. Victor’s hand was moving up and down his back but Yuuri knew his mate’s mind was not settling down. Yuuri’s mind wasn’t either. He was worried and scared and he hated feeling this way all of the time.

Finally, Yuuri broke the silence, asking the question aloud that had been floating around in their thoughts. “Do you think it was just a random stranger?”

“What do you think?”

Yuuri closed his eyes, knowing they both felt it was Kostya. “I’m worried that it’s Kostya messing with us. Do you think he’d do something like that?”

Victor leaned in and kissed his forehead. “I...don’t know. I called Chris earlier. He said to keep a journal just in case but we couldn’t do anything yet.”

“What would the neighbor’s dog accomplish?” Yuuri puzzled into the darkness. The smell of lavender and rosemary sent a shiver through the omega’s body causing him to snuggle closer. The scent hung around Yuuri as he fell asleep.

Victor stepped outside to get the paper the next morning and frowned. Under his shoes glass splintered and cracked. He pulled up his foot to see shards of glass littered on the front stoop. Rising he examined the sconces on the side of the door, both had been smashed by rocks thrown.

“They mischievous kids!”

Looking out he spotted his neighbor across the street was waving his newspaper at his own lights, also knocked out. “They hit several other houses, too.”
Victor frowned but still managed a friendly wave to his neighbor before returning inside. He wasn’t so sure it was teenagers. Going to his office, he pulled out the journal he started and added the incident to the list. His eyes met Yuuri’s as the omega came out of their room in his robe. It was a Saturday and they would stay home. Yuuri said something earlier about a “pajama day”.

“I need to get a broom. There’s glass on the front step.”

Yuuri sounded suspicious, “Glass?”

Victor tried to play it off easy, “Yeah. The neighbor thinks it’s a bunch of kids.”

Yuuri hugged himself. “Do you?”

In answer, Victor lifted the journal.

Yuuri’s lips parted, his eyes darting towards the living room where Yura was watching children’s shows and coloring while chatting with Hiroko. “I don’t want to scare him.”

“I think we should be cautious and make the people around Yura aware of the possible threat.”

Yuuri dabbed his eyes, swallowing his tears. “O-okay. Then let’s get this over with.”

At breakfast, Victor held Yura in his lap while he talked to the family about the two incidents. “For now, be cautious. It could just be a group of rowdy teenagers. However, I don’t want the pets or Yura outside without an adult.” He hugged the little boy tightly and rather than fighting him, Yura snuggled closer. “I’ll be putting the word out to the rest of our friends so they can watch for anything strange. I have a journal in the entry to record any...incidents.”

“Do I need to be scared?” Yura asked, lifting his chin, his eyes solemn.

“Cautious, Yura. You need to be smart. And don’t take any extra chances.”

Yuuri held his mother’s hand and translated softly the things that were harder for her to
understand. Her eyes were wide as she hugged her son. As Yuuri helped her clean up after, she mused aloud, “I worry about all of this stress and the baby. I worry about my grandson.”

“So do I, Okaasan,” Yuuri agreed.

“How can I help?”

Yuuri breathed in as he thought about it. He certainly didn’t want his mother in danger or to take any unnecessary chances. “You are more sensitive than me. Listen to Yelena and share what you learn. The others may be hesitant to believe you but I will listen. I promise you. And...be careful.”

“I will, Yuu-chan. Don’t worry about me.”

Yuuri gave him a crooked smile. “I always worry. About everyone. But only...because I care.”

“I love you, too,” she responded with a smile, hugging him before popping him with a towel. “Go! Put your feet up.”

Yuuri chuckled. He hadn’t really done anything but he agreed, slipping off to the family room where Yura was building a fort in the corner and Victor was reading from his iPad. “I’m banished.”

“Your mother just cares for you. We’ll update Olga when she returns from her weekend off.” Glancing towards the kitchen, he added, “I didn’t mean for her to take over Olga’s chores.”

Yuuri snorted. “Are you going to tell her she can’t run the kitchen?”

Victor grinned and decided that wasn’t a battle for that day.
Can you believe there are only ten more chapters left to go?!!! Makes you wonder what I could do with ten chapters.
Yuuri was excited for his doctor’s appointment. This was different than any of his previous appointments because today his mother would get to see his daughter, her granddaughter. Hiroko could sense the joy bubbling over in his son and she was almost giddy and giggly with him.

The strange occurrences in their neighborhood melted into the background with the promise of today’s joy. There was an air of security in the neighborhood. With all of the complaints, the police had picked up patrols and that seemed to calm things down. For now they would focus on family. Cautiously. But it was time to celebrate.

Yura held tight to his mama’s hand, the other hanging onto Grammy as he skipped along between them. Victor saw to the doors, his hand resting on the small of Yuuri’s back where space allowed it. Yuuri signed in and chatted excitedly to the nurse, his hand brushing over his tummy. Turning affectionate eyes to his mother, he accepted this new story of his. She would be a part of his baby’s life. And when his daughter was old enough to travel, he’d take her to meet everyone else. Of course, there will be many facetime and skype calls before then. Yuuri’s hand ran up and down his tummy. How different this child was already, with Victor and Yura, and now his mother at his side he knew that this little girl would be the final act of the misery of his earlier life and bitter disappointments. She was like a star, shining brightness into his life and all she will know is laughter and sunshine.
The visit with his doctor included introducing his mother. “I would like her with me during the
delivery,” he stated.

Dr. Romanova approved of this plan. “When patients have a good maternal connection, it can be
very calming for them to be present. I am glad you are here for him during this final leg of his
journey. Now...let’s go take a look at the ultrasound. Shall we?”

They went down the hallway now familiar to Yuuri and his little family. Yura held Hiroko’s hand
while Victor walked next to Yuuri, hand around his back for support. Once inside, Victor then
helped Yuuri up on the table with the assistance of the technician. Victor then moved up towards
Yuuri’s head so that the other two could draw near while the tech prepped Yuuri with the coupling
gel.

As the image came on screen, Hiroko gasped, her hands going to her mouth. “*That’s her! My
beautiful granddaughter.*” In her excitement, she slipped back to Japanese. Yuuri answered her in
kind to keep her at ease.

“*I can’t wait for us to meet. She’s so active. Even the one that...well, that’s in the past.*” He
sniffed, blinking away the tears and felt Victor’s reassuring hand squeezing his shoulder, the wrist
tilting to give Yuuri access to his scent. Yuuri’s cheek leaned into it, eyes closing momentarily to
compose himself.

“Mama! She’s sucking her thumb!” Yura squealed excitedly.

Yuuri’s eyes snapped open and a smile spread over his lips. He glanced up to Victor who’s own
eyes were misting. They were really all a giggly, teary mess but that was okay.

“So it looks like baby is about seventeen and a half inches. I estimate her weight around five
pounds,” the tech declared with the doctor nodding in confirmation. He continued to take the
measurements as directed by the physician while the family listened to the heartbeat and stared at
the screen.

The most popular shot of Len-chan was the one of her sucking her thumb but they left with video
and several pictures that would go up on their baby page for friends near and far. Yuuri felt a
peaceful contentment settle over him as he leaned into Victor.

As they rode home, his mother was studying her printout. “Strong lines...comes from my side of
the family. Like you,” she determined.

Yuuri shook his head, thinking back to all of those years of captivity. *How many times did I break? How many times did I cry? How many times did I try to end…* “I’m not that strong.”

She put down the picture and looked hard at her son. “You...my son…” Struggling with her words, she abandoned English and continued in Japanese. “You overcome so much. After years of abuse, you could have let it beat you. You didn’t. You survived because you couldn’t be broken. You came out of that and continued to fight. You still fight. For this one.” She concluded by stroking Yura’s head he turned her way with a smile even though he didn’t understand her. “And this one,” she added as she motioned towards the picture. Turning back to English, she added, “You are backbone of your new family.”

Yuuri shook his head, overwhelmed by her words. “N-no...everyone is wonderful to me but…”

“My Yuuri,” Victor interrupted gently. “Have you not realized how you’ve held us together over these past few months? Between my mother’s cancer treatments and the threats from Kostya? I don’t know how I would have survived any of that without your support. You never wavered. You were constant. Steady.”

Starting to choke up Yuuri forced out the words, still in disbelief. “B-but you stood with me first.”

“And that’s okay. Because that’s what families do. It’s not about who does it first or second, because it’s a constant give and take.” Victor’s hand reached over and patted him on the thigh, a soft smile on his lips as he watched the road, finally pulling up near the house.

In the house, Yuuri and his mother went into the living room now talking about Yuuri’s birth plan. The language switched to Japanese so that he could communicate the idea more clearly. Victor guided his son into the kitchen where Olga was already preparing lunch of chicken salad on croissants.

“So when will baby be born, Papa?” Yura asked as he climbed into the stool. Olga had a glass of milk in front of him, his sandwich cut in half.

“We still have a little over a month but that time will go by before you know it.”
Yura huffed, a small pout on his lips. “I wish baby was here now.”

Victor chuckled warmly as he accepted his own sandwich, choosing to sit next to Yura at the bar. “She will be here when she’s ready and not a moment sooner. And we want her to grow as much as she needs in Mommy’s tummy. That way she will be stronger in the world.”

Yura considered this but then nodded, satisfied by that answer.

Yuuri was happy he had so many volunteers as the recital came together. Kids bustled in and out trying on costumes. The rink seemed filled with new faces all of the sudden and he couldn’t keep track of who most of the people were. While many were parents he recognized, some were caregivers hired to cart the kids around, and some were the new maintenance crew. His mother offered her skill along with Katya and they were making adjustments as each child came up to them, their own parents helping them in and out of the costumes. Once they were out of the costumes, Lilia had three other volunteers on sewing machines and two more garnering thread and needles adding the finishing touches. Soon they were finished and the kids left with their parents.

“This is turning out to be quite the production,” Lilia declared with satisfaction.

Yuuri blew a low whistle through his teeth thinking of all the work they had accomplished, but still faced. “I’ve had a lot of help with this. Even Phichit and Chris have come by to offer a hand.”

“The skaters are excited for the program as well. Everyone feels vested in it. I think it will be a success!”

Yuuri laughed. “Well, don’t jinx me.”

The usually stringent former ballerina offered him a rare smile, “Your mother coming at this stage...that has to be a relief.”

“It is. She used to help Minako-sensei with costumes for our own recitals.” He smiled as he watched her move over to where one of the volunteers was working a sewing machine that was giving them a hard time. “She tried to be involved in my world as much as possible. She just couldn’t travel with me. She trusted my coaches to keep me safe.”
Lilia frowned at that. “Apparently they didn’t.”

Yuuri grew quiet, he didn’t want to blame his coaches, “I have anxiety. It causes me to make irrational decisions...and my early presentation threw me off course. I was having a panic attack, and I got scared so I isolated myself. There was an official, and he talked to me...I was supposed to be able to trust an ISU official. It’s not my coach’s fault. And...it wasn’t my fault.” Yuuri watched the children giggling in excitement as their costumes were finalized. He realized those words were very important and he drew in a shaky breath as he repeated them. “It...wasn’t my fault.” Closing his eyes, he let those words settle on his shoulder before he opened them again, his eyes now holding a fierce protectiveness. “But I know to watch closer. I know that we can’t just trust officials because they pass the weakest of background checks. America learned that lesson at too great a cost, I learned that lesson up close and personal, and I’ll do everything I can to make sure it’s not repeated here, or anywhere that I can help. I won’t let anyone harm one of my kids.” And every teacher would know that he meant his students with that statement.

Yuuri was pleasantly surprised when Phichit joined him at the rink. “What brings you here?”

“I have an open invitation to skate here per your mate,” Phichit laughed. Then quietening, he added, “I wanted to check on you. I heard about the neighbor’s pet. You’ve been to yourself lately and...I worry.”

“I’m sorry.” He embraced Phichit quickly, then pulled back to explain. “It’s just that Mom is here and I’m trying to focus on baby and positive things. But it’s disturbing. Does it make sense? Maybe I’m reading too much into it. My instincts are still keyed up from trying to protect Yura from before.” He kicked off on the ice as the two of them took some lazy laps around the small rink Yuuri used to teach children and work with some of the skaters one on one. Turning around, he let his head fall back with an annoyed huff. “It’s not fair. Everything...one right after another. I’m...tired. I just want to take care of my family.”

Phichit was about to respond when a text alert sounded on Yuuri’s phone. Pulling it out, he paled, turning it to Phichit. The lockdown alert from the school assured them that all students were safe. An intruder was found on the premises during recess.

“Let’s get you off the ice and out of your skates. I’m sure both you and Victor want to be there when this resolves to pick up Yura,” Phichit stated quietly but not before taking a screenshot and texting it to himself and Chris.
Yuuri was glad Phichit was there to help him out of his skates. His hands shook too much and his breathing was stuttered. “Yuuri, you need to calm down.” The words came from a distance even though the familiar touch of his hands on Yuuri’s ankles grounded him a little.

*I know* ...but the words didn’t come out aloud. He was still struggling to breathe. His eyes were wide and focused on Phichit, his thoughts on his babies. And then Victor was there.

“Yuuri,” came the alpha’s firm voice. “Stay with me, love. He’s okay. We’re going to go to the school right away. I need you to come back to me.”

“Breathe, Yuuri,” Phichit directed. “Like me...in, one, two, out one, two...that’s good...keep that up. Count each breath.” Turning to Victor, he asked, “Can I go with you? I can help with Yuuri.”

“Please...and thank you.”

Yuuri was quiet as he followed them to the car, his eyes wide with worry, his hands plucking at the fabric of his clothes. Phichit helped him settle into the passenger seat but stepped back at Victor’s touch on his shoulder. Kneeling down, Victor hummed softly as he reached around Yuuri to fasten the seatbelt, his hand reaching up to cup Yuuri’s cheek and draw his focus to the alpha.

“We’re going to him now but we may not be able to get inside right away. The school is doing that to keep them safe.”

Yuuri nodded. He shifted to glance back as Phichit climbed into the seat behind him, reaching forward to put a hand on Yuuri’s shoulder. “Let’s go,” he finally whispered.

The heavy exhaustion that settled on Yuuri was only held at bay by his worry. He needed to see his baby, to know he was safe. Victor’s white knuckles on the steering wheel said he was feeling the same. They arrived to utter chaos at the school. Several parents were pooling around in groups as cars were piling up in the driveway. Victor managed to get their car as close to the entrance as he could and a couple of the parents he knew waved him over. He put the car in park and asked Phichit to wait with Yuuri.

Yuuri shook his head. “I want to be there when Yura comes out of the building.”
The three of them exited the car. A school official was standing in the entrance checking the ID’s of each parent one at a time before letting them pass. They looked up at Victor’s familiar face and reached for the ID. “Procedure for the safety of the children, Mr. Nikiforov.”

“I’m glad there are structures like this in place. Do what you need to do. This is my mate and his best friend. We left in a hurry.”

The official studied Yuuri, knowing his face and seeing the advanced state of Yuuri’s pregnancy. They allowed Victor through and he led Yuuri and Phichit to the office. Phichit stood behind Yuuri, hand on his back as Victor asked for his son. They waited and then Yura ran up to hug his father before reaching for Yuuri, who cried as he took the six-year-old and ignored his discomfort.

“I’ve got you, baby, I’ve got you.”

“They made us go to our class and then all the doors were locked. We all sat on the circle. Teacher told us a dumb story but we couldn’t go outside even to go to the bathroom.”

Yuuri inhaled the scent of the little boy’s hair, praising the gods that the only complaint the imp had was boring stories and no bathroom breaks. “Let’s go home, Yura…you can go to the bathroom as much as you need.”

Later, Yuuri sat on the sofa, Yura’s head in his lap as he ran his fingers through the blonde floss. The room was full. Olga went around seeing to everyone’s needs until Victor had her rest. Hiroko had taken a chair near her son, a reassuring hand on his leg. Nikolai sat in the recliner. Victor sat with Chris near the computer. Phichit was on the floor in front of Yuuri. On the television ran the news.

A man entered the campus of the Gymnasium No. 695 today, grabbing but quickly releasing several children as he moved through the crowd. Caught on CCTV, the footage clearly shows a man, approximately 5’10” who obscured his features. One can tell that the man was trying to look at their faces before moving on to another child. However, fast moving staff alerted the police and called the children in, putting the school in lockdown immediately. Authorities arrived within minutes, however the culprit left the scene without a trace and did not return. Police on scene conducted a search of the grounds, and connected neighborhoods but nothing turned up. If anyone has any information concerning this man they are asked to contact St. Petersburg Police Department at their call in line. No children or staff were harmed.
Chris frowned, reaching for his phone. He made a call to the police station. He had a suspicion based on what they could see. “I think we need to let the police know what we think.”

Kostya muttered in the semi-dark room. He sat on the floor, a knife in his hand with the tip drilling a small circle in the wood. The shadows moving about the room like villainous claws swallowed his words, growing and looming as they became more vindictive. “I was so close! Yura was there, I could feel it. I could smell him...I could smell you on him.” Over his shoulder and across the room the music box slowly crept open but remained silent. “What are they thinking sending him to such a fucking weak school. Children at play, storytime...fucking weaklings. What kind of parents send their kid to such a pussy school? Exactly what I’d expect from Vitya, the little baby...the bunny. The kid will be lucky to be with me. The school I plan for him will instill discipline. I know. My own father sent me there.”

The music box began its tormenting song, the minor keys dragging the shadows deeper into the space.

Covering his ears, he shook his head. The knife slipped from his hand, cutting his leg. In a rage he shot up and over to the box where it sat on the nightstand. “No no no...you don’t get a say in this! You’re dead!” He then grabbed the box and threw it against the wall, shattering it. The song became more flat as it finally died, the ballerina rolling up to his foot. For extra measure, Kostya brought his booted foot up, then stamped down on her tiny form, feeling it crunch under his heel.

He then started to laugh, the maniacal sound echoing off the bare space. “You failed! You lost, whore! Now what are you going to do about it? I’m free!”

Hours of muttering later, Kostya took to his cot, closing his eyes. As he slept, the sour minor key of the music box played as a ballerina danced in the shadows of his dreams. Kostya turned, moaning out, “Noooo...please...no more…”

The dancer stilled and then her face was next to his as she demanded ominously, “Then leave him!”
NOTES:

In Russia, schools are referred to as Gymnasiums and are often blocked by numbers. I chose the number at random and it wasn’t meant to depict any school in particular.

We are probably at the end of 34 weeks, the beginning of 35 weeks at this point. I know I posted thebump version of the 34 weeks last week. Here is another. And since we are bumping week 35, here are those pages:


And guess what? That means we’re eight months! Baby time is almost here! I don’t know about you, but I’m so excited.

Chapter End Notes

Happy endings...happy endings...happy endings. However, happiness never comes easy. I hope you all are doing fine and are safe. I’m for the most part isolated and only two active cases in my county.

Take care. Be safe. And love one another.

End Notes

Let me hear from you...they have to sustain me through the week. :) Your words are the life blood of writers. Thanks so much for all of your support so far and thank you for reading. Please check out my other stories. Sirin is my baby, and I love the world that I'm developing for him. It is also ABO with a younger Vitya. Then Gravity is our boys facing the realities of life...injury and recovery, homophobia, oppressive laws. And some of my others...if you love the age switch, check out my Glitters series. If you love the more realistic stories, then look at Semicolon and Lost and Found. Finally, if you really love the angst, look at my first, Lifeline. Thank you all for reading my stories, sharing them, and giving them all of the love (kudos).
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!