1 Corinthians 13:4-8

by khadajkaddish

Summary

“Vicchan is so interesting and does so many things and goes so many places and must meet so many people who are more interesting than me.”

Viktor wanted to deny it. To tell Yuuri that for the last several weeks, he had been the most interesting thing in his life, but Yuuri clutched him closer, so closely that the condensed clouds of their breath nearly mingled, and the surprise shut his mouth.

“I don’t want to just be a boring omega who only knows how to dance and look pretty,” the youth charged on with his eyes suddenly becoming clearer and more adamant with each word. “I want to be someone that Vitya can be proud of.”

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Viktor Nikiforov gains firsthand experience in love and its myriad of forms when he inherits the title of Head Alpha and decides to grant his family's omegan ward, Yuuri, a birthday wish.
NOTE: This work features alphas and omegas with both sets of genitals. I know the intersex tag is often used to convey this, but with respect towards the struggles the intersex community goes through in regards to misinformation and incorrect perceptions, I no longer feel comfortable using it. Dual sexed seems to explain the concept nice and easily so that is what I will go with for now.

Hello! This is my very first foray into the Yuri!!! On Ice fandom and I hope that I have done the series justice. This is purely a fan-work with no profits being made and excluding original characters created for the story, none of the characters belong to me.

Before we start, I've just a few things to go over so the story is more understandable.

The genderless pronoun xe is used in this story as mage children decide whether or nor to be male or female upon coming of age. It works as follows:

Xe - He/She
Xem - Him/Her
Xyr - His/Her
Xyrs - His/Hers
Xemself - Himself/Herself

Credit to fanndists on Tumblr for terms "oma" and "apa"
Oma - Omega Mother
Apa - Alpha Father

Credit to Tongari Boushi no Atorie for the concept of ateliers, soar shoes, and magical placement tests.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Yuuri was just a few weeks shy of 18 when Viktor’s father, the Nikiforov patriarch, the First Living Legend of Rhurshya, Nikolai Mikhailovich Nikiforov, died of magical exhaustion. As heir apparent, Viktor had always been told that he would know the exact moment his sire passed from this world onto the next, but Viktor- despite of (or in spite of) all the forewarning he had received during his first 27 years of life - still found himself completely blindsided by the magic of his father’s death.

One minute, he was performing step 48 out of the nearly impossible Dance of 1,008 Petals needed for a city sized protection spell and the next, he was being engulfed by blue, swirling wisps of magic that frosted his breath and caused him to shiver.

'The magic would tell him' was what his father used to say; the words usually accompanied a bitter smile, one that met the older man’s eyes but had never made Viktor feel comfortable.

Perhaps, his sire thought his son would look forward to this moment - to the knowledge that now he was lord and master of the entire Nikiforov clan. Viktor wouldn't know and couldn't understand how this moment could possibly make him happy but his father's generation of mages was a strange lot: Savage and trapped by tradition. Viktor didn't understand much of what they thought.

And it was not like he could ask now...

Grief hit him with the realization. It tried to smother him like a curse by deadening his limbs and blurring his eyes. Heaviness settled deep into his heart and he was only dimly aware of the cold, wet rivulets running down his face.

Caught off guard by the sudden wave of emotion, he almost flubbed the 49th step as the urge to crumble pressed down on him with unrelenting cruelty. The heat of rebounding magic sliced against his incorrectly positioned fingers reminding him of the stakes of poorly executed magic but by Araak’s grace, his arms continued to make enough of the right arcs that he was not dead from his mistake.

He hoped the magic would forgive the blood, or at least ignore it. He couldn’t afford to die from the backlash that came from mishandling elemental magic. No Nikiforov had ever died from botching a spell and Viktor did not want to be the first (The embarrassment would be too much and he would honestly have to die second death just from the shame of it).

Because Nikiforov was not just a name or a clan house. It was a way of life. Nikiforovs were sovereign. Untouchable. Divine. Gods come to rest in human flesh. They did not do weakness.

So, Viktor narrowed his focus to just the movement of his body, the position of his fingers and the arching of his arms. Distantly, he could hear the sound of sobbing but he ignored it just like he ignored the magic slowly weaving a crown of icicles around his head.

Without warning, another type of magic yanked at the edges of his mind, nearly jerking him out of the correct position for the 50th step. It was a vague feeling, almost like ghostly fingers skimming across his brain, but it was enough to let Viktor know that the person responsible for the sensation was in acute distress. His alpha reared up in response.

Yuuri.

But, for all that Viktor could do for the omega now- stuck thousands of miles from the Nikiforov
estates and heavy into powerful, dangerous magic- they might as well be universes apart. As quickly as possible and before he began the pirouette for the 52nd movement, he threw up a mental barricade against the waves of anguish that were not his own.

Guilt ate him but he shut the feeling down by remembering exactly what had happened to him when he lost focus for a moment less than 4 steps earlier. The blood running down his hand itched as he continued to deftly weave his own proprium magic into the natural tendrils of aether; the movements only coming out correct due to a muscle memory forged from decades of grueling practice.

The dampness on his face increased but he managed to stifle the sob that threatened to rip from his throat. Sorrow tried to batter further at his control for what felt like two eternities stitched together, but eventually all those hours spent meditating paid off, and he wrangled the feelings into a submission that at least dulled the pain enough for him to concentrate properly.

It took another five days of solid spell weaving, but by the time Viktor was finished, the mayor of the Ormill declared the walls surrounding its harbor so strong that nothing short of Araak’s wrath could destroy the city. Viktor followed her words with a quick prayer of apology - ‘For Araak hath created and thus taketh away’- because really he didn't want the goddess to demolish Ormill so soon after such a difficult spell. Once the mayor was finished blaspheming their Illustrious Mistress (really he hoped Araak did not take it personally), Viktor was allowed to leave the dais that had been his home and stage for the past week.

He took approximately three steps past the spelling platform before his body began to drop into a faint. With the hard cobblestones rushing up towards him, Viktor wryly hoped that any photos taken of the moment captured his good side.

He woke up to the sharp, vinegary smell of distress irritating his nose. He tried to open his eyes to see who was so distraught, but it seemed to take a full year for him to wrench his gummed lids open. The task was completed with only a small groan of acknowledgement over how truly awful he felt. His joints ached. His stomach roiled. His head was pounding as if his brain wanted to bounce right out of his skull.

“Viktor?”

He grunted. It took more effort than it should. At the sound, the unpleasant smell dispersed and gave way to the much more agreeable edelweiss and cedar of a perchten alpha. Viktor sighed with relief. More so than most alphas, he hated the scent of distress. He shifted his head to the side, even though his entire body screamed at the movement, to take in the blond man whose stubble was slowly sliding into a full on beard.

“Chris?”

Xiv’s Teeth, his throat felt like he had swallowed glass. He winced and licked his lips only to grimace at the feeling of chapped, peeling skin. How long was he out? His personal reservoir of magic must be nearly gone to feel like this. He attempted to ask Chris but his words came out as another loud groan.

Much to his relief, a glass of water was held to his mouth and he gulped it down before pleading
for another. Three glasses later, and he finally felt alive enough to try to speak again.

“How long, Chris?”

The acidic smell returned and Viktor could feel Chris grappling for his hand. It hurt but he hardly had the heart to tell the younger man that when his friend's eyes were swimming so dangerously close to tears.

“How long?”

Chris’s voice was low, soft. It trembled; like as if he were to say the words at full strength, he might break down. A tear strayed from one of his eyes, and despite the pain, Viktor stretched his free hand out and wiped it away. Strangely, his own eyes remained dry. Uncomfortable with the feelings Chris's emotions dredged up, Viktor tried to change the conversation’s course.

“Shouldn’t you say the Blessing now?” he murmured, withdrawing his hand.

More tears fell down Chris’s face and he laughed, his voice nearly strangled with incredulity and frustration.

“Even now you are trying to be the perfect heir. Do Nikiforovs have no shame?”

His voice broke on the last word and Viktor closed his eyes against the heartbreak that was so evident in the other man’s gaze.

He could feel the grief again, pushing up from behind his eyes, climbing up his throat and digging in his belly. Of course he cared. Nikolai Nikiforov was many things but he was also Viktor’s father, the man who had raised him to be the mage he was today.

A tear slipped from Viktor. Then, a sob was caught in his throat before he could stop it.

“Leave me,” he croaked, unwilling and unable to look at Chris as his mask crumbled.

The acrid scent became stronger, almost overwhelming.

“Christophe, please,” He squeezed his friend’s hand hoping that the man would understand, “I’ll be fine, I promise. I-I just need a moment alone.”

Chris’s gaze wavered and his hold tightened as if he were going to refuse. His eyes grew glassier but he stood up and moved away from the bed towards the door.

“If you need me...”

Viktor let a small smile come to his lips at the air of concern his oldest friend gave off in waves. They both knew that even now he was performing, trying to chase the invincibility of the Nikiforov name.

“If I need you, then I will call.”

Chris relaxed at that; and, with the quiet click of the door, was gone.

Viktor’s shoulders slumped. In the silence, with no distractions save himself, he could feel the gentle pull of Yuuri again. Desperate for solitude, he severed the painful link within seconds and let out a sigh at the sensation of being truly alone.

Then, in the dark, hidden deep under the covers, in a bedroom somewhere in Ormill, Viktor
When Viktor woke again, his face was sticky and his head was full of cotton but at least his body
did not feel like it was trying to tear itself apart at the seams. Instead, the pain sat in his soul,
somehow floating but also pushing heavy on his stomach and chest like it was trying to crush him
from the inside out.

He attempted to sit up, pushed himself on shaky arms until he could support his back with the solid
wood of the headboard behind him. It was a struggle and by the time he had accomplished his task,
his heart was thundering against his ribcage and the grief had turned into noisy shuddering cries.

“Bravery, Brotherhood, Purity. The Lord is Dead. Long Live the Lord.”

The voice was gruff but after listening to it nearly every day for the last ten years of his life, Viktor
would know Yakov Feltsman anywhere. His head snapped up and he searched the room until his
eyes landed on the profile of his mentor semi-staring out of the open window located on the
opposite side of the room. The curtains billowed in and out, playing a game of hide and seek with
the old man’s face, but even half turned towards him, Viktor could see the wet lines on his
mentor’s cheeks.

It made Viktor think of Chris with his pretty face made ugly with anguish. He wondered what his
own must look like. Then, for a fleeting painful moment, he thought on what Yuuri must look like.

Viktor’s insides twisted. He cut through the thought before it could go any further. There would be
enough time to fret over the xem when Viktor returned for the funeral rites.

Yakov turned to face Viktor fully looking all of his 70 years, worn out - exhausted. *Fragile* like
Viktor might not have much time with him either.

It hit Viktor *hard*.

“Yakov....”

“Let it all out, Vitya.”

It was like a dam broke. His breath quickened as fat, ugly tears leaked from the corner of his eyes.
He keened, the sound high and drawn out like a wounded animal as he curled in on himself. Grief
was painful, he realized as he fought to blink back tears. His father could tell him about the magic
but why did he never tell him of this?

Dimly, he was aware of Yakov coming to sit next to him; how the man hesitated before he rested a
hand on Viktor’s back and tried to reassure him with gentle pats. Yakov was heavy-handed so the
petting felt more like slaps but Viktor took it and let the physical pain ground him against the
emotional pain raging within him.

“That’s right, Vitya, let it all out. Soon, the world will demand that you put on a mask and grieve
as a Nikiforov so cry it all out as just Viktor now.”
Yakov allowed him two more days to mourn privately before the Maester dragged Viktor back to Rhurshya, to the family’s stronghold of Ost Pyotrsborg, and shoved him in front of the city’s screaming crowds. Even though he could barely keep from bawling every other minute, Viktor understood his duty as an heir.

The 3 Blessings awaited him. The first was done. The ice crown was his father’s blessing. Today, he would gain the people’s. A week from now, his family. Only then would he have a legitimate claim to his inheritance.

Viktor sighed. The procession home to the Nikiforov estate already sounded like a nightmare as would any 3 day journey that involved a lecturing Yakov minus the fun of electronic devices. It was really and truly a tragedy that mages tended to build their estates on the magical outskirts of the world where technology had difficulties trying to coexist. Viktor supposed he would just have to grin and bear it just like he had been for the last 27 years of his life.

The hotel staff was doing their best, only pausing every so often to wipe at their tears. Chris was trying too. Even though his eyes had clearly been red-rimmed this morning, he had helped Viktor straighten his epaulettes with no more than a gentle smile. And Yakov who had only days before been ridden with emotion and was going home with Viktor to bury a close friend, announced his pupil’s name and new title as if it was one of the happiest things to occur in the history of the world.

Everyone was working so diligently that there wasn’t anything else for Viktor to do but to do his best, too.

As he stepped onto the balcony of the hotel to make his first public announcement since his father’s death, he was nearly bowled over by the stench of vinegar and salt that wafted from the crowds. It took him a few minutes to realize that much of the din coming from the audience was actually the wailing of his sire’s name.

Viktor suddenly became aware of the fact that to the general public - Nikolai Mikhailovich Nikiforov was a much loved man.

How marvelously terrifying Viktor thought dryly to himself. If only these people had grown up with him for a father.

He prayed to Ore and Xiv that one day he might compare.

Though he could not see very many faces from the balcony, he bet that onlookers were already forming half baked opinions of him from the 20 seconds he had stood silent in their sight. He took a deep breath, preparing to give them a show that would be the talk of the town for ages. After all, as his father used to say - mages were addicted to the spectacle of life.

Viktor rolled his shoulders and allowed his pheromones to pour out of him in such clouds that Chris, who was standing nearby, choked. He sent the man an apologetic smile but the display of dominance would be necessary with the announcement that marked the start of the succession rites. He was stepping into the shoes of Nikolai Nikiforov, the once Living Legend, the greatest Nikiforov the world had ever known. Though he found it utterly ridiculous, it was important to show everyone that he was every bit the alpha his sire had been.

A camera drone whizzed by, whipping about the heavy curtains that opened out onto the balcony.
It stopped at an angle just above where Viktor would be standing in a few minutes, a red blinking light the only indication that it was recording and would be broadcasting his speech throughout all the magical and mundane realms.

He pasted on a media smile in response to it, though he knew his remaining family would not be watching. Yuuri was not allowed to access to projectors or scrying magic and Viktor’s mother would probably be too preoccupied with comforting her ward to bother watching a ritual that was more about pageantry and ceremony than actual substance.

There was a silence as Yakov ceded the podium to Viktor. Several faces in the crush looked surprised. He did not blame them. The Viktor Nikiforov they were used to was jovial, blithe - a gossamer thing. This Viktor he was forced to be now, stuffed in a military suit and hemorrhaging alpha pheromones must seem like a far cry from the man most tabloids gossiped was secretly an omega.

He repeated the words that Yakov had drilled into his head during the trip back from Ormill. His training as a mage made the memorization easy. His emotions did not. He spoke until his mouth was dry and his throat burned. By the end of his speech, he felt thirsty, tired, and unsteady on his feet as he marched (and for split second almost stumbled) to the front of the balcony, right to the edge of the railing where the crowd could see every inch of his Nikiforov finery, every singel stitch of blue and silver laced splendor.

“Ost Pyotsborg, will you have me?” he roared over the feelings that had threatened to overwhelm him as soon he woke up three days ago.

The crowd roared back, seemingly pleased with their new lord.

Using his own magic, Viktor attempted his next test for the approval of the public- petitioning the guardian dragon that would take his sire to his final resting place. He blew the bright, blue words of the summoning into the ball of proprium magic gathering in his fist. Then with a small hop for power, he pitched the spell into the air, praying that the dragon would find him suitable enough to appear.

The blue light soared into the snowy sky before bursting into the shape of thr snarling, snapping dragon that decorated the Nikiforov family’s coat of arms.

When it swooped down low over Viktor, close enough to ruffle a few silver strands of hair and then swept back up to the sky with an ice shattering roar, the denizens of Ost Pyotsborg went wild.

“Bravery, Brotherhood, Purity. The Lord is Dead. Long Live the Lord,” the crowd shouted.

Viktor shivered as the succession magic began to form a crown around his head for the second time. The enchantment solidified with the citizens’ cries, the crown becoming harder and colder with each call of the chant.

The journey home was a mess of mishaps, break downs, and being waylaid by people trying to pay their respects. It ended up taking nearly six days and if Viktor wasn’t already crying over his father, he was sure he would have wept with relief when his escort finally pulled up to the main entrance of the Nikiforov estate.
As soon as the doors opened, his soul pulled him in only one direction and he set off on a mission, not even taking the time to bother with Yakov who had seen him home. There were servants for that he reasoned and they would treat the maester with the unrivalled hospitality that the Nikiforovs were famous for.

He walked into the main house past twisting staircases, long hallways, and opulent rooms with a sense of urgency quickening his steps. Then, he was out through the back entrance and racing through the gardens, crashing through hedges and trampling any vegetation that dared to get in his way. He would probably hear from the gardeners later but for now all he could focus on was the white, ornate set of buildings that called to him in invitation.

Guards bowed as he reached the front gate. They were hardly necessary though. Nikolai Nikiforov would never leave his most precious treasures to the sole guardianship of others. Viktor’s skin tingled from the brush of deadly blood magic that warded the entrance, the sensation receding once it recognized he was friend. Viktor smiled. He remembered pricking his finger to create the wards for Yuuri’s bower.

“Pay attention, Vitya! The blood must drop like so if you want to protect your Yuuri.”

His heart twisted at the memory. Yuuri used to be his world. But now… 10 years was a long time. Yuuri was not his. He was not even sure if Yuuri would want to even see him after all this time. Would Yuuri have changed? Would he hate him? Would he allow Viktor to one day explain the jumble of circumstances, thoughts, and feelings that had kept him away for so long.

With a spike of horror, he realized that he had not thought of what he would do if Yuuri wanted nothing to do with him. He had just assumed and run to the Sanctum like he was some snot nosed mageling, thinking that Yuuri would greet him with open arms and smile.

How foolish. How stupid of him. He contemplated turning back and helping Yakov after all but the alpha in him dismissed the thought as he reached the inner door to the Sanctum, the complex that had safeguarded generations of Nikiforov omegas. It too searched him for ill intent before allowing the mage to open its heavy oak door.

He was hit instantly by the scent of sandalwood - Creamy, Woodsy, Soft. Divine. Omega.

Nostalgia, ache, and yearning filled him to the brim.

“Vitya?”

As Viktor turned towards the familiar voice and laid eyes on his mother, he was torn between running to her like a small child or showing her how much of a man he had become by walking up to her slowly, cool, and collected.

She made the decision for him when she opened her arms with a smile that had been the constant companion of so many of Viktor’s childhood memories. Though her eyes were bloodshot and her skin was as pale as fresh snow, Viktoria Nikiforova was just as beautiful as she was on the day that Viktor had been sent off to Yakov’s atelier. The hallway swirled with snowflakes as the strength of her emotions loosened her control on her magic. She laughed, the sound a bit rough, as Viktor became a puddle of wet, snotty adult man in her hold.

“Welcome home, Vitya. Oh Viten’ka, oh my pretty boy, your sire would be so proud of how beautiful you’ve become.”

Her hands were everywhere. Petting him. Combing through his hair. Hugging him. Raining kisses
down his face, she rocked her son from side to side as if he little bigger than baby.

Covered in her shroud of omega strength and softness, Viktor sank to his knees, the weight of himself carrying him down. He didn't deserve her praise. Within the cradle of her arms, he showed her his underbelly. His weakness. His grief.

He was a terrible son, a selfish son. There were so many faults under his Nikiforov veneer, so many things that he had done wrong. He should have visited more, argued with his parents less. He should have come home that last time his father had asked for him. Maybe if he had tried more he would have learned to understand the motivations and thinking of his sire- the man. It all seemed so petty now compared to the great hole his father had left. All the thoughts and regrets he had held in his heart for the last few days poured out of his eyes as tears.

His mother, Viktoria Viktorovna Nikiforova - Lady Nikiforova, lowered herself down beside him and forced her son to look her in the face. Her eyes were a thousand shades of blue. Her gaze was gentle; her hands gentler still as they brushed back Viktor’s bangs. She pressed a kiss to one eyelid and then the other. She laid the final kiss upon Viktor’s brow.

“Mama...,” he cried, unable to say anything else for fear of breaking.

“Bravery, Brotherhood, Purity,” she whispered, drawing Viktor back into her hold, “The Lord is Dead. Long Live the Lord.”

Viktor sat safe in her arms and let his heart ache.

Eventually they made it to her bower where Viktor was scented to within an inch of his life and shoved down into the pit of cushions, pillows and blankets that made up his mother’s nest. To his surprise, there was no familiar Yuuri shaped cocoon.

His mother must have seen the confusion on his face because she paused her scenting frenzy to chuckle.

“Yuuri is in xyr own bower, tonight,” she explained, the corners of her lips twitching up in amusement, “ Xe has been running everyone ragged waiting up you and Minako finally lost it and pretty much frog marched the poor dearie to bed a few hours ago.”

“Oh.”

The tense feeling that had been bothering earlier in the day unfurled into an unexpected disappointment. It wasn't as if Viktor expected to see Yuuri the minute he came in but it was hard to stop the frown that his face fell into.

His mother laughed again.

“Don’t look so down, Viten’ka. You'll see your duckling in the morning. Besides...,”

Viktor's frown grew deeper as his mother’s eyes darkened and her scent turned peppery.

“Can you really be disappointed when you barely visit?”

He spluttered, unprepared for the question. Annoyance filled him, poured white pepper into his
scent. Her face transformed from harmless cheeriness to cutting seriousness in the instant it took for her to catch Viktor’s answering scent. He thought her anger completely unfair. They both knew the reason for his distance. He was lying on a cold and frozen slab deep within one of the estate’s many cellars.

He tried to shift the blame as his mother stalked towards him like a lioness enraged.

“It’s not my fault.”

Even he winced at how childish the words sounded coming out of his mouth. His mother looked even less impressed with him than before. She held his gaze like a snake would a mouse, her blue eyes cold and glittering sapphire.

“10 years, Vitya?” she hissed. “10 years you’ve been allowed to run away. Yuuri is fragile. You should understand that best out of all of us. Is your anger for your sire worth breaking your omega’s heart?”

. It was always unsettling when your dam figured you out in an instant. Chastened thoroughly Viktor looked down at his lap as shame threatened to engulf him. It was more than that and as simple as that at the same time. He felt like he was five years old again, like he was being scolded for smashing a vase. But this time it was Yuuri’s heart. Did Yuuri hate him now? He could understand. He had hated himself those first few years too. After all, he was the reason they were separated in the first place.

It wasn’t anything purposeful, at least not in the beginning. It was just that seeing Yuuri and knowing there was nothing he could do was hard. His feelings on the omega were complex, always tangled in the bitter history he had with his father and were so difficult to unravel when he had spent a lifetime only tending to shallower things.

At first he had only meant to stay away the few weeks that his father demanded, but the weeks turned into months and the months became years and now he was staring at the wrong side of a decade.

He heard a snarl erupt from his mother before she snatched his face up to hers so fast that his neck cracked.

The ice collecting in her palm stung his chin.

“Do I make myself clear, Viktor Nikolayevich?”

Crystal.

Viktor gulped. Whoever said you stopped being afraid of your dam once you grew up was full of dragonshit he thought as he nodded his head slowly in her harsh grip.

“Y-yes, Mama.”

He was rewarded with a small smile, just a slight uptick of the lips.

“You will visit Yuuri properly this time, yes?” Viktoria searched his eyes. “Not just a gift and a few words of encouragement passed through to a servant?”

Viktor nodded as far as the hand would allow him.

His mother’s angry look eased but instead tears threatened to spill from her eyes.
“An alpha’s life is so short; Vitya and you already wasted ten years of it. The time together is like a blink to an omega.” She shuddered on the last word, her own current situation most likely overwhelming her. “Promise me you will see him?”

“I-It will have to wait until the ceremony and I can't stay too long this time but I promise to at least take tea with xem.”

He must have answered correctly because the silver haired woman positively beamed. The quick switch in emotion would throw Viktor off guard if he was not so used to it.

“You should come home for Yuuri’s coming of age ceremony, too,” she said after smiling at him for what felt like a century, hand clasped tightly around Viktor’s face, preventing him from escape, “You are probably the only person, outside of Kolya, that could tempt that child out of childhood.”

Had Nikolai Nikiforov been alive to see it, Viktor doubted he would even have been invited to Yuuri’s coming of age. The former head alpha always made sure that anyone who crossed him paid their pound of flesh. His father’s forgiveness was hard like that.

But now the man, who spent the last nearly 18 years taking iron control of his ward’s life, was dead and it was Viktor’s responsibility to oversee things now. The idea of it sent a forbidden thrill up Viktor's spine instead of the expected sorrow.

“Yes, I will come.” He swallowed, hoping his unfilial thoughts would go down with the action. “And I will tempt him.”

He barely had time to react and catch his mother before she threw herself at him, the former harsh mood gone as if it had never happened. Affection swelled within him. He smiled as she nuzzled into him, his own dark feelings abating with her touch. Like mother, like son, life came easier when it was carefree. He reveled in it. The last few weeks had been so hard.

“Do you need blood?”

Viktor heard the harsh click of his fangs before he even realized they had descended. He flushed. Well, that answered that question. He shouldn’t be embarrassed really. Wanting the blood of an omega was as natural for an alpha as going into a rut, both of which he did. Still, he could not help wishing that there were other ways to get his proprium magic replenished.

His mother fell back into the softness of her nest with open arms. It was little surprise to either party that she had to pull him towards her. He allowed his mother to pet his hair and breathe his scent. She sighed and tugged him closer, releasing her personal fragrance of sandalwood, vanilla, and roses.

Knowing that she would not let go until he drank, Viktor lifted one of her delicate wrists to his mouth and kissed it before gently pricking her pulse point with the tip of his fang. His whole body went lax as the first drops spilled into his mouth. His veins burned and came alive with the flood of magic. He pulled a mouthful of blood once, twice, and then licked the wound to seal it.

“One day, it will be Yuuri’s blood you take.” Her voice sounded wistful with the edgings of hopefulness creeping into it.

Viktor grimaced. Could he tell her that he had nightmares about it? That even just the thought of sinking his fangs into Yuuri’s neck sent him into a cold sweat? That there were moments when he would rather die of magical exhaustion than ever expose Yuuri to the true beastly nature of alphas?

“Yuuri is a child, Mamochka,” he murmured instead.
She did not miss a beat. She smiled at Viktor as if he was the one who was still a child.

“For now, yes, but there are expectations for Nikiforovs and even our dearest Yuura must one day learn to live up to them.”

Viktor did not answer. They had upset each other enough tonight. Instead, he closed his eyes and let his dam’s soothing touch draw him down into the waiting clutches of slumber.

Yuuri literally ran into him the next morning just as he was leaving his mother’s rooms.

Viktor's only warning was the yip of the teen’s familiar, a small toy poodle, before a solid mass of overexcited omega slammed straight into him. Startled by the sudden weight in his arms, Viktor fell over, dragging Yuuri onto the ground with him. Vicchan, the poodle, increased the chaos by jumping onto the pair and trying unsuccessfully to lick both their faces.

Yuuri entangled first, laughed - the sound chiming like silver bells throughout the corridor.

Vitya, you're home!” xe cried.

Light from a nearby window caught the garnet tones in xyr eyes as Yuuri gifted Viktor with one of the most beautiful smiles the older man had ever seen. Long, wild black hair curtained them as Yuuri leaned forward, xyr hands curling into Viktor's robes for purchase as xe lowered xyr face.

Gazing up at the omega, Viktor felt trapped in more ways than one. Yuuri had grown, changed in areas Viktor did and did not expect. It was like looking at a stranger.

It was frightening. He felt completely unprepared and undeserving of the look of joy and adoration that radiated down on him. A part of him wanted to run away from it, from this Yuuri that he wasn’t worthy of.

The hallway became saturated in the scent of ginger as Yuuri's excitement grew stronger. It nearly cancelled out the subtle scent of salt that clung to omega's clothes. Viktor was gifted with the sight for only a moment longer before Yuuri was hauled up and off him with a sharp,

“Yuuri, what have I told you about running?”

Viktor looked up to see an irritated Minako holding Yuuri by the collar. Her hair was mussed and tangled like she had scrambled out of her nest to chase after her charge. She looked unchanged but for the few crow’s feet that lined the corners of her eyes as she frowned at Yuuri and gave xem a little shake when the teen didn’t answer fast enough for her.

“Yuuri, apologise! You can't just run away from your governess and knock over the Head Alpha like that!”

Yuuri flushed.

“Sorry, Ms Minako and... Vitya.”

Viktor chuckled. Minako was probably the only person on the entire estate and possibly the world who had never treated Yuuri like xe was made soft rime.

“Vitya, is everything alright?”
He felt his mother's presence come up behind him, no doubt to investigate all the noise outside her rooms. Viktor tore his gaze from Yuuri to see her eyes light up in mirth and exasperated fondness.

“Yuura,” she scolded as she took in the younger omega's appearance, “you look an absolute sight. Did you come here straight in your bed clothes?”

At this, Yuuri pouted, xyr long black eyelashes lowering as xe pursed xyr lips in displeasure.

“I wanted to see Vitya,” xe mumbled, fingers fiddling with the hem of xyr sleep-shirt. A tear rolled down xyr face and then another. The teen's expression fell.

Both women let out a long sigh.

“Yuuchan, this isn't the time for this. Viktor will be busy preparing for your guardian’s funeral. He won't have time to play.”

Yuuri's tears turned into shoulder shaking sobs.

His mother stepped around Viktor to pull Yuuri into a hug.

“Oh Yuura, don't cry.” she half crooned, half pleaded, “I know it's hard with Apa being gone but Vitya isn't leaving just yet. You'll get to see him. He's promised to have tea with you before he goes back and to come home for your coming of age.”

“Really?”

It was muted by the fact that Yuuri's face had been firmly pressed into his mother's sleeping gown, but Viktor could hear the disbelief loud and clear.

It actually hurt when Viktor remembered little Yuuri taking his word as gospel but then he supposed he hadn't given this older Yuuri a reason to trust him. His mind pushed at him to take Yuuri in his arms, insisted that he hold the omega for as long as it took for the doubt to melt away. Always a servant to impulsivity, Viktor gave into the voice. Now was a good enough time as any to prove to himself and to his mother that he could be a half decent alpha.

Viktor pushed himself off the floor, and gently took Yuuri from his mother's grasp. Immediately, Yuuri burrowed into his chest with a sigh and the sniffling stopped. Despite Viktor's proactive feelings, he stiffened under the contact because the closeness felt awkward, like trying to fit together the wrong pieces of a puzzle. He fought the urge to excuse himself and pull away.

Yuuri followed his tenseness with a sour scent that made Viktor's nose itch. Remembering his mother's words and daring himself, Viktor forced his body to relax and wrap his arms around the younger mage. Yuuri went lax as well, curling further into Viktor like when the teen was a child. Xyr scent slowly released its notes of distress.

“Alpha,” xe sighed, the word barely audible.

Viktor froze. He didn’t deserve it. Not after what he had done. 10 years...The familiar weight of guilt crept up on him. Did he even deserve to hold Yuuri like this? To smell xyr sweet scent or see Yuuri’s lovely smile?

He could barely stop the distress from leaking into his scent at the thought. Yuuri, little Yuura, who he promised to protect forever. How much had he hurt xem? How much had he made xem cry?
The idea was almost too painful to bear.

His mother was right. His father was dead and with him, their separation. He should bury it now - the grudge that had eaten at him for ten years. If only for Yuuri’s sake, he needed to let it go so he could heal. So, that he could heal with Yuuri. It was so blatant now. He had been a terrible alpha and if he ever hoped to be the alpha he had always wanted to be, that needed to change.

He pulled the teen in tighter, gave xem the comfort of his scent.

“I promise, Yuura. Just bear with things a little longer.”
Thank you to everyone who commented or left a kudos. It was a very warm welcome!

Before we start, I've just a few things to go over so the story is more understandable.

The genderless pronoun xe is used in this story as mage children decide whether or nor to be male or female upon coming of age. It works as follows:

Xe - He/She
Xem - Him/Her
Xyr - His/Her
Xyrs - His/Hers
Xemself - Himself/Herself

Credit to fanndists on Tumblr for terms "oma" and "apa"
Oma - Omega Mother
Apa - Alpha Father

Credit to Tongari Boushi no Atorie for the concept of ateliers, soar shoes, and magical placement tests.

He didn’t see Yuuri again until the funeral.

Viktor took a deep breath, pushed the door open, and entered the ceremony with the traditional prayer echoing loud and clear from his lips. The whole place reeked of roses, the scent so thick that he nearly gagged from the smell. It had been nearly 10 years since Viktor had stepped foot in the main hall, but he immediately remembered how much he used to dislike being stuffed into it when he was a child and heir apparent at his father’s side.

The thick belt that he was forced to wear as Head Alpha chafed around his waist; and the empty pomander that hung from it bashed into his leg with every step. Sweat itched down his back. His robes of heavy blue velvet and silver lace were a furnace under the heat of the scent killing candles that lined nearly every corner of the room. He ignored the unpleasantness and kept his eyes forward, looking only to the monument of his father.

As he came to stand before the two meter tall statue of his sire that made up the shrine centerpiece and held the glowing blue orb said to house the man’s soul, Viktor vowed before his predecessor to become a Head Alpha beyond reproach. Protected from the heat by a simple ice spell, its majesty gave him a sense of peace. Beautiful frozen shapes depicted every mighty heroic exploit of Nikolai Nikiforov in painstaking detail. Viktor had spent the last few nights running his fingers along the little figures and statues, his mind replaying the stories he had learned at his father’s knee; his grief and guilt growing a little easier with each recollected tale. A veritable genius, he wouldn’t be surprised at all if his father had purposely planned his memorial this way to give one last comfort to his son.
Viktor continued his prayers; thanked Araak for creation and praised Ore and Xiv for the coupling that led to the gift of his mage blood. Then, he pleaded with Anud to escort his father quickly into the dark belly of the Underearth so that he might rebirth quickly as well. He finished his supplication with an “As Araak wills it” that the mourners repeated twice in voices loud enough to cause the more delicate hanging carvings on the memorial to chime. Viktor then turned to face the congregation as two priests entered from the side to take his place in front of the shrine and continued the prayers for his father.

He surveyed the people gathered ahead of him, his head high and his robes billowing as he took a few steps away from the shrine and towards his audience. Queued before Viktor, in two neat rows, sat all the important members of House Nikiforov with their heads bowed, reciting the Prayers of Safe Passage. As was custom, the path from the monument was covered in blue rose petals to show Viktor the way. He would have to receive all parts of the blessing - the maxim, the valediction and benediction - from each member in order to achieve the third and final blessing.

Two distant alpha relatives rose from their positions at the front of the lines to come before Viktor. Their thin, silver belts told him that they were Grigoris – heads of the smaller branches that served as archivists and council to Nikiforov affairs. One carried the urn that held his father’s heart and the other, his ashes.

The heart would rest with his mother on her altar until she too passed; the ashes in the Chapel of Ice where the Nikiforov mausoleum stood. Viktor bent to kiss both - to give his thanks and to show his respect for the former lord. The two alphas withdrew once Viktor said the Prayer of Safe Passage and encased the urns in ice. In acknowledgement, they began the Procession of the Blessing.

“Bravery, Brotherhood, Purity. The Lord is Dead. Long Live the Lord.”

The air was heavy, oppressive - full of everyone’s expectations of the next Lord Nikiforov. There was the constant sound of sniffling but very few wails. He risked a glance at Yuuri. Lately, all his thoughts seemed to be filled with the omega. Xe was placed near the back of the hall, by the doors should anything happen. If Yuuri had to be here, then at least Minako or his mother could get xem out with little focus or fuss. The knowledge relieved a bit of tension from his body. Slowly, one foot steadily following the other, Viktor made his way down the row of mourners. There were only 41 and then Yuuri.

Xe did not look up at Viktor’s approach. As an immediate member of the family, the teen had also been dressed in the heavy velvet and silver trims of the Nikiforov house. But whereas Viktor’s clothing amplified his stature and virility, Yuuri looked small and frail, weighed down and swallowed up by the enormous lace cuffs and collar.

The Prayers of Safe Passage poured from xyr mouth, wooden and mechanical. From the hunched set of Yuuri’s shoulder to the way xe was twisting xyr robes, Viktor could tell that Yuuri was trying xyr best to power through xyr emotions.

“Yuuri”

The teen looked up at the call of xyr name. Minako must have styled Yuuri’s hair in a braid away from xyr face but it had come undone over the course of the ceremony and thick strands of it stuck to Yuuri’s cheek where tears had flowed. Taking in the omega’s swollen, puffy eyes and blotchy face, this was everything that Viktor had been dreading since Yuuri’s first pull on the bond. He was terrible at comforting people even if that person was his beloved.

The omega looked the picture of misery and even though Viktor thought it must be impossible to
hurt more with how much grief he was feeling, the sight of Yuuri so unraveled made his soul ache.

When Yuuri made no move to stand, Minako and his mother pulled the omega up and stayed close to xem as if xe needed their support to remain standing. At first, Yuuri was silent, xyr head bowed and tears dripping to land in soft plips on the hardwood floor. Then, Minako gave Yuuri’s elbow a small nudge, just enough to jostle the teen and Yuuri opened xyr mouth to speak,

“Bravery, Brotherhood, P-p-purity,” Yuuri began but then xe choked, whimpered, and stopped.

Viktor let xem cry for a few moments. In so many ways, this was Yuuri’s father too. The hall and Viktor’s nose was filled with the acrid scent of distressed omega despite the battalion of candles. A few mourners coughed to show their displeasure.

Viktor ignored them.

“Yuuri?” he questioned.

The sooner Yuuri said the words, the sooner they could finish but Yuuri just wept while shaking xyr head. Most likely seeking comfort, xe stretched his hands out and grasped the edges of Viktor’s robes pulling forward into the older man’s space.

“If I say it...” Xe whined, xyr fingers curling stronger into Viktor’s clothes, “then Apa’s spirit will be sent away. I don’t want him to go... Please don’t make me say it, Vicchan. ”

Protocol be damned, his betrothed should not be anywhere near here. Yuuri was still too young, too soft. Only 17 years old - coddled, protected, hidden from the world. The bond made his chest throb with the need to soothe but they were in the middle of a ceremony. Yuuri had to say the incantation. Viktor closed his eyes and steeled himself. Tradition meant blessings had to come from every member of the family. That included Yuuri. Xe was a ward of the House, a Nikiforov - raised from infancy and blood-bound to its proud bosom.

And like all Nikiforovs, xe must serve with pride.

Viktor apologized mentally and hoped that Yuuri could sense the feeling through his expression. Then, slowly but gently, he pried Yuuri’s fingers from his clothes.

“Vicchan?”

Viktor kept his gaze cool and controlled. Nikiforovs must always be collected.

“You must say it, Yuuri.”

The omega’s face crumbled and xe started to back away with what looked like horror but Minako and Viktor’s mother caught xem by the arms. Trying to shake from the hold but finding xemself trapped, Yuuri started to sink to xyr knees but Minako and Viktor’s mother gripped Yuuri upright. They dragged the teen back onto xyr feet. The trio stood there while Yuuri sobbed, xyr shoulders hunched, making no move to lift xyr head.

“Youuri, you promised!” Minako hissed. Her own scent starting sharpen as Yuuri’s distress grew.

“Yuurochka, you said that you could do this. You said that you could see Apa off to the next world like an adult.”

Viktor’s mother’s voice was much calmer, more soothing. Her hands floated to brush some of Yuuri’s hair from the teen’s face. She nuzzled into her ward, discreetly releasing a small puff of
calming scent that was only tainted by a snowflake or two.

“I can’t,” Xe whispered, his voice breathless with a hint of strain, “please don’t make me.”

The hall erupted into chaos.

“Get the child out of here!”

“The brat should be old enough.”

“The kid’s a Nikiforov. They have to do it.”

The voices grew into shouts and jeers. Viktor turned to deal with the disruption but Yuuri’s hand whipped out to grab at his robes again. This time, Yuuri clenched the fabric before pulling Viktor down into xyr line of sight. The older man frowned and began to try to pry the youth’s hand loose again but the sound of shallow, frenzied breathing caught his attention. All of sudden, Viktor felt a horrifying sensation run through his body. It felt like he was falling into an endless abyss.

He realized with sudden horror that Yuuri was Dropping.

Without thinking, he grabbed the teen by the chin and jerked xyr face up to where he could look at it better. Yuuri’s pupils were so dilated that all Viktor could see was black and under the distressed omegan scent, all he could smell was the telltale cinnamon of Katsuki magic. Sure enough as Yuuri’s breathing sped up, little flames began to form in the air. Viktor acted quickly and locked eyes with the omega while barking an alpha command.

“Yuuri!”

Yuuri’s eyes glazed over within seconds. The flames disappeared and the air surrounding the omega began to cool immediately. Seeing that his strategy was working, Viktor was careful to thread his tone with all the authority he could muster because without a complete bond, his command was just a very strong suggestion. Beckoning Minako and his mother closer, he signaled them to build a shield of their bodies as he discreetly brought his wrist to Yuuri’s nose and released a small puff of his alpha pheromone. He used his free hand to cup Yuuri’s face, holding the teen’s gaze in place.

“Yuuri, relax.”

The effect was instant and Viktor felt himself also calm as the omega’s body language switched from tightly wound panic to nearly boneless. He let his relief cancel out the heavy stone of guilt that would normally weigh him down. Yuuri’s eyelids drooped until xyr eyes are half hidden under his lashes. Xe swayed in the hold of xyr guardians.

Viktor straightened a little, knowing that the sight of him looking down on Yuuri would only strengthen the command.

“Yuuri, repeat after me.”

He had to go slowly. Alpha commands (or suggestions) did not allow for complex thoughts or actions.

“Bravery.”

“Bravery.”
"Brotherhood."

"Brotherhood."

"Purity."

"Purity."

Viktor paused at the next line, the valediction, understanding all too well why Yuuri had trouble saying it. For all the man’s faults, Yuuri adored Viktor’s sire. For seventeen years, he was the only father Yuuri had ever known and had raised the teen with a softness not even extended to his own beloved flesh and blood son.

"The Lord is dead."

"T-the Lord is dead."

Yuuri closed xyr eyes and shivered after the valediction. Viktor felt the command break and just as he was steadying himself to make another so they could complete the last line, the teen’s eyes slid open. They shimmered as tears spilled forth, ceaselessly beautiful down Yuuri’s face. It was like staring into twin pools of the richest red wine. Viktor shook himself from his moment of wonder to speak but Yuuri cut him off,

"Long live the Lord."

The hall took on a dark blue aura as soon as Yuuri finished the words. Particles of silver and blue drifted up from his skin and the skin of everyone else from House Nikiforov.

This was the third blessing and to hear the last line of it come from Yuuri’s mouth, for Viktor, it was the most bittersweet.

His lips quirked upward at the thought and his chest twinged as his long ignored alpha woke just enough to take in Yuuri’s calmer scent of sandalwood, clove and chamomile.

Unable to help the new feeling that welled up inside, Viktor let go of Yuuri’s face and grazed a knuckle across the teen’s flushed cheek. He let his smile show Yuuri that xe had done well; that xyr alpha was pleased. Yuuri blushed and though Viktor knew that he should not; he took a moment to appreciate the reddened cheeks and the dark lashes that hid the mahogany gems that were Yuuri’s eyes.

Then it was back to business.

He sighed, and locked his alpha away in a cage made of years of honed control. Then, he stepped back from Yuuri, ignored the small whine the teen gave at his withdrawal, and schooled his face back into media perfection before signaling to Minako and his mother to take Yuuri back to xyr seat.

The pair pulled Yuuri away slowly, arms wrapped around the youth’s shoulders as they whispered soft praises and reassurances. Viktor had no doubt that they would remove Yuuri from the ceremony as quickly as possible, and return the omega back to the safety of the Sanctum, but he would not be able to check until later. Yuuri’s scent grew fainter with his retreat and like all things involving Yuuri for the last ten years, Viktor told himself not to miss it.

As the trio drifted from his sight, the blue and silver lights began to swirl around the hall. Viktor gasped as the succession magic wove its spell. This time was different from the others. The ice
burned as it formed into a tower on the top of his head. It built and built until it was so heavy that it felt like the weight could snap Viktor's neck. He stood tall, careful not to show any signs of discomfort on his face. It was time to say goodbye and he must do it with poise and triumph.

He raised two fingers to his heart.

The Nikiforov maxim.

"Bravery, Brotherhood, Purity."

Viktor focused and lifted his other hand to his lips, pressing a kiss to his middle and forefingers before pointing the digits at his father's monument. The magic that had been restlessly twirling around the room gathered around the conduit of his arm and centered on the outstretched limb.

The farewell.

"The Lord is dead. Long live the Lord."

The energy whorled into a spiral that concentrated into a single, pulsing beam of raw power. With the flick of Viktor's wrist, the spell rushed towards the shrine in the form of the Nikiforov dragon. Its jaws spread open wide enough to swallow a man as it neared the monument, and with a roar that made Viktor's ears ring, snapped its maw closed around the orb that carried Nikolai Mikhailovich Nikiforov's soul.

As the dragon made impact with the shrine, the monument exploded into a fine, frozen powder that settled around the room and its attendees like dust. Then, the dragon turned back and brushed against Viktor before it pierced through a screen door and soared out of the hall towards the heavens. Viktor and nearly half of the mourners raced to follow it outside and watched as it became a small black dot and then a burst of silver light in the sky.

The cold sting of winter wind made Viktor realize his face was wet but he did not know if it was from crying or the runoff from his rapidly melting crown. Either way he did not care. It was done. His sire had been seen safely to the next world. Viktor let out a breath in relief as he turned back into the hall for the final act of the ritual.

He stepped into the remains of the shrine and grasped a handful of its powdery remnants. It was time to end the mourning period and begin the celebrations.

"Long live the Lord!" Viktor cried, his voice taking on the giddy edge that most of the public knew him for.

Then, he blew a column of his own proprium into the magic swirling in the air and tossed the powder into the stream. With a mini sonic boom and a burst of white light, snow began to fall around the hall like confetti. The mourners turned into revelers as the room erupted into chants of the benediction.

"Long live the Lord! Long live the Lord!"

Viktor signaled to the servants for the honeyed vodka to be brought in. The cries turned even more delighted as cups were handed out.

Viktor spared a moment to see if Yuuri was still here for the celebratory end to the mourning rites but there were neither signs nor scent of the omega anywhere. The bond let him know that the teen was steady, most likely asleep. He would check on xem later once everything went quiet.
“Lord Nikiforov!”

One of the men from the funeral procession called out to him from amongst the throng of guests. There was nothing remarkable to commend him to Viktor other than the trademark Nikiforov hair and eyes until a hand brushed their caftan aside to reveal a band of silver at their waist. A Grigori. Viktor stiffened as the man came up to his side wearing a clearly fake smile.

“Bravery, Brotherhood, Purity. Long live the Lord,” his voice was flat and lacking any sort of warmth or sincerity as he said the words.

Viktor nodded to show he acknowledged the address but it was cut short by a sudden chill. He blamed it on the windows thrown open by the dragon’s flight. He turned to ask a passing servant to shut them but the action was interrupted by his unwanted visitor grabbing onto his sleeve. He looked at the hand then its owner with a frown.

The Grigori had the grace to realize his mistake and let go of the sleeve with a small bow of apology.

“It is forgiven,” Viktor murmured even though he wanted to shoo the man away. He shifted and hid his hands in the cuffs of his sleeves to conceal how they had clenched into fists. He was never very fond of them and he hoped that he would not have to deal with any family affairs or requests so soon after such an emotional day. Always mindful of his manners, he forced himself to smile and respond politely, “Thank you for your Blessing, Grigori…?”

Viktor smirked inwardly as the man’s smile strained once he realized the Viktor had no inkling of who he was. The smirk was wiped off when the grigori held out his hand in greeting.

“I, Grigori Evgenij Avgustinovich, watch thee so that I may give account. Let my work be done in joy.”

“I will give you no grief, Grigori Evgenij Avgustinovich. May you watch my days until the end,” Viktor shook Evgenij’s hand as he finished the greeting; trying his best not to let his displeasure show on his face.

“The Lord Nikiforov’s manners are impeccable,” The man’s smile grew wider, oily as they pulled away. “I will look forward to watching you.”

It took ages for Evgenij to release Viktor’s hand, but as he did so, it was with a sigh. The grigori bent to kiss the signet ring. Viktor suppressed a shiver at the fish cold lips that briefly touched his skin.

He was only too glad when a tipsy Yakov rushed over to interrupt the moment by shoving a mug into his face. Viktor wasted no time accepting and using it as an excuse. He gave a polite goodbye before turning and walking to the other end of the hall. Yakov followed him, his drunkenness falling away the further they got from Viktor’s unwanted guest.

“Drink up, Vitya,” Yakov ordered in a perfectly sober voice. “Don’t let them watching bastards bother you until your mourning year is up.”

The sweet taste of honey and vanilla poured into his mouth. The burn of the liquor warmed his tired, cold, and aching body from the first sip and he quickly forgot his encounter with the grigori.

Yakov clapped Viktor on the shoulder, his face shining with pride for his student and tears for his dear friend. Through mouthfuls of alcohol, he crowed that the younger mage would do a great job.
Viktor smiled.

He downed the rest of his drink in one go and raised his mug up with a roar for another. The revelers, full in their cups, screamed the benediction with great cheer and raucous laughter.

“Long live the Lord!”

With the warmth of vodka burning through his system, he laughed along with them. Yes, long live him! He would make a damn fine lord.

His tea with Yuuri took place the following day.

His head hurt, his mouth tasted awful, and he had a (hopefully) three day journey back to his apartment in Ost Pyotsrborg, but Viktor promised so here he was, sitting in front of Yuuri and pretending that his guts and head did not feel like they wanted to escape out of his mouth.

It helped that Yuuri was so beautiful that it made his fangs ache. Looking at the teen took the edge off of his hangover which was definitely a better outcome than the tea parties that Viktor was forced to attend when he was younger and attached to a different Katsuki heir. Not that he had hated Mari, but the omega was too different, too jagged in ways that made it hard to be pleased with the idea of them being tied together forever.

“Viktor, if you put one more spoonful of jam in that cup, I’ll strangle you!”

“You’re such a brat! It’s not like I want to marry you either but who in all of Anud’s Hells is going to listen to us?”

The clink of a teacup being placed in front of him dragged Viktor out of his memories, and he realized as he looked at the omega before him just how much he had missed the warm fondness that he felt when he was near Yuuri. It reminded him of when he was younger and spent nearly every free minute with the teen. Yuuri seemed content too. Though they were seated in one of the innermost rose gardens, all Viktor could smell was the happy scent of orange blossoms.

It might be the effects of his hangover, but watching Yuuri prepare their tea with so much happiness made Viktor feel like he was going to cry. As Yuuri busied xemself with placing the cakes and dainties on their respective plates, he wondered how he could ever make up for his atrocious treatment.

Yuuri fidgeted under his gaze, the edges of xyr ears turning pink the longer the alpha stared.

“Viktor?”

“Hmm?”

Yuuri bit xyr lip and Viktor found himself pulling it from under Yuuri’s teeth with a gentle touch of his thumb. One of the Sanctum guards chuckled from his post at the garden’s edge. Both Viktor and Yuuri jumped at the sound and Viktor snatched his hand back. His face warm with the heat of a blush. Yuuri mirrored him in the action.

But, a part of Viktor bristled in annoyance as well and he knew it was his alpha speaking. He told it
to be quiet. He was wrong to try anything so intimate. Yuuri was so young and so impressionable and so Viktor's to hold in safekeeping.

The omega went back to biting xyr lip but this time Viktor used words instead of actions.

“Is something wrong, Yuura?”

The teen bit into xyr lips so hard that the older man thought he would have to physically intervene again, but then Yuuri let go and closed xyr eyes with a sigh. Worried, Viktor began to reach over the table only to be shocked still as the youth took a deep breath and then snapped xyr eyes back open.

The teen's eyes blazed. Viktor’s eyes widened in surprise.

He was burning. He couldn’t even breathe, trapped in the molten gaze of the omega. Yuuri’s burgundy orbs licked up his skin like flames and he felt his alpha stir into a fuller alertness as warmly and slowly as embers stirred awake in coal fire. The youth stood up and leaned over the tea table, positively bent forward into Viktor’s space. In the air was the spiced trailings of Katsuki magic.

“Vitya...what should I be to you?”

Viktor choked on his tea completely unprepared for Yuuri’s bold question: It was so serious and so something he would only expect to hear from a person his own age. He had to clear his throat three times before he could answer and it came out as inelegant “what?”.

Yuuri's gaze became stronger, hotter. Viktor swirled in its inferno.

“Should I be a brother, a friend, or a...?”

Yuuri flushed at the tail end of the question and Viktor nearly aspirated his tea again. ‘What in Anud’s Hells, Yuuri,’ he thought frantically. Had xe gotten into Yuuko’s romance stash again? (Yuuri had but Viktor would only learn of this when they are old, gray, properly married and Viktor could laugh at the memory instead of choke). He swallowed the tea in his mouth - even though it burned all the way down- and set his teacup onto its dish so hard that it made Yuuri jump.

“No, just be you Yuura. Just be yourself,” he squawked, unable to bear the pressure of this foreign Yuuri.

The teen smiled in response and was suddenly back to xemself, shy and so innocent that it hurt. Viktor could breathe again and found his body uncurling from a tension he didn’t even know he was carrying.

In the silence that followed, and with Yuuri turning xyr attention back to xyr tea, curiosity -the treacherous mistress that she was - clawed at the edges of his mind and before he could stop himself, Viktor asked,

“And, what do you want me to be to you, Yuura? A father figure? A brother? A friend? A...lover?”

He winced as Yuuri bloomed into a full body tomato red blush. Luckily, his companion wasn’t drinking tea, so Yuuri was able to - with a little embarrassment- reply to Viktor's question without choking.

“No, I want you to stay as you are, Vitya,” xe whispered and with a small smile added, “And... I’m glad you’ll be the host of my coming of age ceremony...and that you’ll grant m-my wish.”
As Yuuri tried to hide xyr trademark flush from the other mage by returning to prepping the tea, Viktor started to see the omega in a new light as a familiar feeling seized him.

It drowned out his feelings of guilt.

The heady sensation of anticipation swarmed him and made him shiver. With an excitement for Yuuri that he had not allowed himself to feel for years, he wondered at what favor the teen would request in exchange for leaving childhood.

Viktor, himself, had been absolutely boring and only asked for golden soar shoes.

The tea was short, barely a handful of hours but Yuuri laughed throughout it so that was all that mattered. When it ended, Viktor was not sure who looked more disappointed.

Still he was the adult, so with care and a firm hand, Viktor guided Yuuri back to his mother's bower. Her eyes were red, most likely from grieving, but as she saw the pair, her smile lit up like the sun. They walked Viktor to the front door of the Sanctum (Yuuri, unless under special circumstances, had never been allowed any further) and gave each other pleasant, proper goodbyes.

The heavy door groaned shut and then Viktor was alone, lonely. He sighed. He did not have time for feelings like this. He couldn't stay. He had a competition in six days time and he needed to be home to prepare for it.

Not that the preparation would matter he thought darkly. He would win. He always won. Competing used to be thrilling, exciting, and help banish his darker thoughts but it was starting to become stale, suffocating and Viktor had begun to wonder if it was still worth it if there was no challenge.

As he turned from the gate that separated him from his remaining family, he paused with a bowed head for the moment of silence that was customary on leaving an abode. In the quiet, he found himself yearning, wishing to stay. A dangerous thought came to him then, slithered from the back of his brain to whisper blasphemy straight into his ears.

Give it up. Be the Head Alpha. Live a quiet life with Yuuri.

And, walk away from thaumaturgy? From being the Living Legend?

He'd be a fool.

Viktor cringed and dispelled the wicked thought with the shake of his head before it could take root. He shivered - though he was suitably wrapped in a fur coat and scarves - and trudged back towards the main house trying hard not to think any further on it.

It wasn't as if the world was completely devoid of interesting magicians. Every year more and more debuted. In all probability, someone interesting, someone worth watching, someone worth competing against would eventually come along.

Viktor just had to wait.

Chapter End Notes

Please weigh in with your thoughts or comment
Much to Viktor's surprise (and despair), the world continued to turn as normal despite the death of his father.

Not that he had expected it to stop but there were days where he was drowning and when he noticed that everyone else was flowing forward, living their day to day life, it left him feeling raw in a way that he could not explain.

His troubles did not stop him from winning the Rhustelekom Cup, but even on the top of the podium - once his most favorite place in the entire world - he could not get his smile to reach his eyes. Chris commented on it from his spot in second place, but Viktor ignored him to wave at the crowd that he was too exhausted to care about. There were questions dancing in the other man's eyes as they stepped down from the platform but Viktor slithered out from under the hand Chris rested on his shoulder and made a beeline straight towards the nearest exit.

He was tired of the questions and pitying looks. He came to soar, not be a tragic figure. Unfortunately for Viktor, his wish for escape proved elusive as the second he walked backstage, he was swarmed by reporters.

One man asked about his father and Viktor found that for the first time in his entire career as a thaumaturge that he did not want to talk. There was a lump in his throat and he felt that if he opened his mouth, something raw and painful, something un-Viktor Nikiforov would pour out.

What would the world do then? Once he dropped his perfect act?
Would they recoil? Cower? Ask him even more questions until he snapped and told them to “Get lost in all of Anud’s Hells”?

The shocked faces staring back at him made Viktor realize - to his complete and utter horror - that he had said the last bit out loud. Thankfully, Yakov butted in to save the day by pushing his horrified apprentice to the side and taking over for the cameras. Once satisfied, the piranhas moved on to the next unsuspecting skater, leaving Viktor to be awkwardly eyed up by his coach.

He tried to explain himself but the older man held up his hand, cutting Viktor off.

“You should go home, Vitya. I can spare you a bit of time.”

The way Yakov enunciated home told the younger mage that his mentor did not mean his Ost Pyotrsborg apartment. He opened his mouth, ready to argue but Yakov walked away and back into the storm of the press before he could even get a word in. With nothing to say and no will to say it to, Viktor snuck out of the arena without speaking to anyone else, figuring for the first time in ten years, he might as well listen to his coach.

He left for the estate a week later, after countless press conferences, sponsorship meetings and an interview or two about his latest win. He hated every minute of it and could feel his mask slipping further and further with each intrusive question or faked laugh. The moment Yakov declared his schedule free; Viktor bought Yuuri an obscenely expensive dual realm phone, ran home to pack his clothes and his familiar, Makkachin, and booked the quickest escort he could find.

It felt so strange go back so soon after being away for nearly ten years but Viktor was sure that Yuuri would welcome the visit if xyr reaction to Viktor’s previous visit was anything to go by. He smiled to himself with only a small tinge of bitterness. He was hardly worthy of Yuuri’s warm welcome but he would bask in it for as long as he could.

Thinking of the gift sitting in his bag; he hoped that Yuuri liked it. His mother probably wouldn’t, but that did not matter. Viktor was Lord Nikiforov now and he, unlike his predecessors, had never truly believed an omega did best in a gilded cage. He wanted Yuuri to at least have access to the world. He had fought for it, been banished from his home for it. And now that he had the power to back his beliefs, it would be up to the Yuuri to decide what to do with the universe that Viktor wanted lay at xyr feet.

By the time Viktor reached the manor, the sky was already dark and the atmosphere heavy with the crisp scent of snow. He expected everyone to have retired to their bowers for the night but neither his mother nor Yuuri were there to greet him when he checked their rooms. His alpha, which had merely been a low buzz since his last visit, grew agitated at the sight of Yuuri’s empty nest. It felt strange and he tried to soothe it by telling it that Yuuri hadn’t regularly been in their life for nearly ten years, but that only made things worse.

Biting back a wholly unnecessary and uncharacteristic whine, he decided to wander the halls in the hope that he might find a servant or a guard to tell him where everyone was hiding. Perhaps, then, he might calm down and quiet the beast pacing just under his skin. He met at least five house servants but it took him nearly ten minutes to find one who knew where Yuuri might be. They pointed him in the direction of the Sanctum’s lone ballroom.

When he finally did arrive at the right place, Viktor threw open the double doors with a cry of “Yuuri!” expecting to get an armful of excited omega for his troubles. Instead, he nearly lost his
bangs to a blast of ice energy.

“Straighten your working leg, Yuuri! The ice you just pulled was entirely too sloppy for a member of House Nikiforov. Do it again properly,” snapped the sharp, familiar voice of a severe looking vila.

Heart pounding from his near death experience, Viktor looked up to see Lilia Baranovskaya guiding Yuuri’s leg into the correct position with an air of complete indifference as if it hardly mattered to her that Yuuri’s mistake had almost murdered her former pupil. Catching the hint, Viktor slunk against the wall to stand next to Minako who was trying to cover her laughter with a hand. Her work was in vain because eventually she let out a snort better suited for a pig than a noblewoman’s lady-in-waiting.

The noise made Yuuri turn towards her which put Viktor in the teen’s line of sight. Yuuri burst into a giddy smile, and without any regard for the lesson, launched xemself at Viktor with a force that knocked the alpha backwards. Viktor’s inner self purred in response, and he could feel the tight coiling in his muscles slowly start to relax.

“Vitya!”

Viktor was just about to open his mouth with his own cheery greeting when the clearing of a very annoyed throat interceded on their moment. The warning made Yuuri realize xyr mistake and xe scrambled back so fast that xyr ponytailed hair whipped out behind xem as xe turned.

Viktor was left stunned by its new length. For years, Yuuri’s hair had been past xyr waist but as the strands flew after the older man, he realized they only fell to Yuuri’s upper back now. With wide eyes, he turned to Yuuri’s guardian and whispered,

“What happened to Yuuri’s hair?”

Minako scowled.

“Miss Vika and Lilia were trying to convince Yuuri on the merits of presenting as a woman but Yuuri took it upon himself to make his own decisions,” she said with a face that looked like she had been sucking on a lemon.

Viktor chuckled, fondness making the tone warm. Deciding things on xyr own was a classic Yuuri move. He could only imagine the scene the omega’s haircut must have caused. Knowing the theatrics of his mother, Yuuri must have been scolded to within of xyr life.

“Him?” Viktor tested the word out in the open and felt even more shock at the realization of what it meant.

“Yes, him. It seems that he wants to follow in his beloved’s footsteps,” the brown haired woman groused with a barely concealed look of distaste at Viktor’s own hairstyle, “Just took a pair of scissors to his hair after everyone had gone to sleep for the night. Your dam nearly had a drop when she saw how jagged and uneven it was the next morning.”

Viktor chuckled. Yuuri’s new gender didn't displease him. In mage society, the only things that really mattered were whether you were alpha, beta, or omega. Everything else like secondary genders and who carried was for mainstream society as a means to fit in.

Yuuri was a boy. He rolled the idea around in his mind deciding whatever Yuuri wanted, Yuuri got. It was just different, a little strange as he got used to it like everything else that involved the omega growing up.
In light of Yuuri’s new development and unable to help himself, Viktor gave the phone to Yuuri that same evening under the guise of a presentation gift. After a short master class on how to charge the device with a simple energy spell and how access videos on Yootoob (child locked because Viktor didn’t have a death wish), he proceeded to show Yuuri one of his thaumaturgy videos.

“And now introducing four time Grand Prix champion, Viktor Nikiforov of Rhurshya.”

The omega squealed with surprise and excitement as footage of Viktor appeared the small screen. He stared with attention, only turning his eyes away once the replay screen popped up.

The gaze he turned to Viktor with was a galaxy of stars.

“Is that you, Vitya? Are all those people cheering for you?”

The mage felt his face grow warm at the rapt attention the youth was showing him. Did Yuuri really not know how famous Viktor was? Did he not understand how all of his Viktor photos and posters came to be? He tried to play it off, play it cool but he could feel his alpha stirring in a desire to preen.

“Did you like it?”

Yuuri nodded so furiously and earnestly that it made Viktor’s heart swell two sizes bigger. He was so glad he came back.

“Would you like to see more?”

Viktor did not need words to know Yuuri’s answer. The scent of orange blossoms told him enough.

Viktor stared at his mother as he found it harder and harder to hide his growing annoyance at the spontaneous meeting the woman had demanded between the three of them. If she hoped that he would join her in her campaign to force Yuuri’s gender, then she was going to be sorely disappointed. As it was, he had said almost nothing in the ten minutes that she had stood holding her adoptive child captive in front of the mirror.

“But Yuuuuuuuuura, you're so pretty,” she whined, threading her hands through the younger omega’s newly shortened hair. “It would be such a waste.”

Yuuri did not look convinced. He was frowning and the hands at his sides were clenched into fists.

“Vitya, what do you think?” His mother threw the question at him easily, perhaps assuming that he would just go along with tradition and support her.

Viktor scowled. He was not his father. And while he was nearly positive that the other man would have made the same demands as his mother, and even possibly forced Yuuri out of his choice, Viktor would do no such thing. Yuuri's secondary gender was Yuuri's choice.

If he, as an alpha, had faced little resistance with his own choice, then it only seemed right that Yuuri should be able to choose without hassle. Sure, there had been speculation on what he would
decide when he was quite young and androgynous but as he grew older, thinner, less pretty and more muscular; there was little argument when he chose to be male. In fact, it was expected and little part of Viktor was always a little upset that he had gone so easily with everyone’s expectations. He didn’t want Yuuri to feel that way.

But, his mother was making things difficult. She didn’t even wait for Viktor’s answer.

“Look at this round face. These long eyelashes,” she purred, turning the boy’s face from side to side. “See these big, brown eyes and these cute, pouty lips. When Vitya gives you a child, your chest will grow heavy and your hips will swell. Do you really think that you will be taken seriously then?”

Yuuri’s frown deepened.

“If Vitya takes me seriously,” the teen whispered, his eyes catching Viktor’s in the mirror, “then that’s all I need.”

His mother whipped Yuuri away from the mirror to face Viktor. From the glower on her face, he knew she would not stop pushing. And, from the set of the younger omega’s shoulders, Viktor knew the teen would not budge. With growing dread, he realized that this fight would probably end in tears.

“Viktor!”

His mother pointed a finger at him. That was never a good action from his dam. He cringed and almost thought about finding an excuse to leave. Then, his gaze met again with Yuuri’s pleading eyes and there was no other choice but to stay. His normally dormant alpha demanded it of him, punished him for even thinking of leaving the omega by prowling around in the back of his head with a pounding fury until Viktor agreed with it.

“Vitya, help me persuade Yuuri,” his mother demanded. “Xe will listen to you!”

No one could miss the gasp and hurt look that crossed Yuuri’s face at the use of xe.

He wouldn’t persuade Yuuri of anything. Especially, with his mother insulting Yuuri by using a child’s pronoun. He stayed calm though his alpha was roaring inside. This was his dam and another omega; he would hardly give into the creature’s insensible need for display. Viktor rubbed at his temples to soothe the beginnings of instinct induced tension headache. The mixture of tightening around his skull and his mother’s rudeness made him want to snap.

“We should respect his wishes, Mamochka,” he murmured instead, his eyes locking again with Yuuri’s. “As the head, I think that he should be the gender he desires.”

Beaten by Viktor’s words, (more like his decree), his mother let out an animal scream of frustration before kicking them both out of her bower without warning. Yuuri looked like he was near the point of stubborn tears so Viktor wrapped an arm around the boy’s shoulders, an idea already brewing in his head where he could work out the omega’s frustrations.

“Don’t worry, Yuura. She’ll come around,” he said, keeping his voice light and jovial. “She was angry at me too when I first cut my hair.”

Yuuri relaxed at that and the scent of salt that had threatened the air disappeared into the steadiness of sandalwood, clove and chamomile. Pleased, Viktor gave Yuuri a short but tight squeeze before directing them towards Yuuri’s bower for a set of outdoor clothes.
“Minako tells me that you have been practicing a new soaring jump. Shall we go to the lake where you can show me?”

Yuuri turned 18 on a snowy day in Nayabr.

The party was tiny by Nikiforov standards, consisting of only around 25 guests. For such a small occasion, only one grigori was needed but Viktor hated to see that it was Evgenij.

He made a mental note to ignore the man as much as possible.

The rest were mostly Sanctum servants but Yuuri did not seem to mind. His friends Yuuko, a beta maid, and Takeshi, a beta guard, had been invited and that was enough to make the birthday boy smile with glee (which in turn filled Viktor with joy too).

But the joy could also be from the amount of alcohol that had already started flowing.

Though it was completely against protocol, Viktor only laughed when Takeshi, already tipsy, offered Yuuri his first drink of the night and Yuuri, after being egged on by his friend, pounded it. The partygoers cheered after he thrust the empty glass back at the beta guard and demanded another. It marked the start of a long night filled with heavy drinking and probable debauchery.

Rhursthians loved ritual, and thus as fanatics of pomp and circumstance, every birthday had its own set of ridiculous rules and protocols. At 18 and his secondary gender chosen, Yuuri was a man now and Rhurshyan men on their 18th birthday - regardless of their primary gender- were expected to show the world how well they could drink.

Viktor could barely remember the finer details of his own 18th birthday for that same reason. He grimaced. He was not so sure he wanted to see a drunk Yuuri. And, as he watched Takeshi line up a row of shots, the older man could safely guess that was very much what Yuuri would be by the end of the night. It was the first time the omega had ever had any alcohol and the poor kid would probably end up drunker than a fish.

In the spirit of true love, he hoped that Yuuri’s first hangover only made the teen suffer for a few hours instead of days like his did. He could not take any more than that. His nerves were already fraying at the idea of Yuuri being sick at all.

If he was being completely honest with himself, Viktor's nerves and internal organs would have fared much better if Yuuri had decided to present as female tonight. Then, the guests would have challenged Yuuri to dance, to show off the teen's grace and beauty. Viktor could have handled that, would have mostly definitely enjoyed that. Yuuri, after spending years under Minako and Lilia’s tutelage, was a beautiful dancer.

Viktor risked a glance at his dam who was currently scowling from her honored position on the dais. It was unbecoming and definitely un-Nikiforov but Viktoria Nikiforova never hid her childishness when she was in the safety of her home. At least, she had cooled down from their initial discussion over Yuuri’s decision.

Viktor sighed. He and his mother had fought over it for nearly a week but he had stood firm. Even if she was not happy about it, she could not stand against the head alpha's choice.

But, she could at least smile though.
Viktor shook his head and decided to search for his betrothed instead. He found the youth struggling to win an arm wrestling match against Takeshi. Yuuko was doing her best to help Yuuri win by draping herself over her mate and trying to distract him with kisses. The public display of affection would be improper at any other type of formal gathering, but birthdays were different: They existed for everyone to get drunk and have fun. Ready to indulge in said fun, Viktor ignored their antics, and keen to show off his strength to Yuuri, asked for the next battle.

There were several more bouts of arm wrestling and challenges to pick up people and things; all tests of power and strength. As an omega, the guests did not expect much of Yuuri’s physicality and some even made it a point to ask Viktor instead as his intended alpha, but Yuuri exceeded their wildest expectations when he performed a handstand that lasted a full ten minutes.

And then, amidst the applause and whistling at his feat, he surprised everyone again by slipping into the slow sensual, hip wagging dance for female omegas. It was greeted with hoots and hollers and soon, everyone else was dancing and cheering around the omega in a traditional round dance.

Viktor held his breath when Yuuri broke through the crowd surrounding him to approach his mother. They too had been fighting all week and the arguments had been taking a toll on their relationship.

“Oma,” he called, his hand outstretched towards her as revelers twirled and spun like music box ballerinas behind him, “won’t you come and dance with me?”

Viktoria stared at Yuuri for what felt like an eternity before she burst into tears and swept her foster son into a waltz that put both Lilia and Minako to shame. It seemed all was forgiven. Viktor smiled with relief.

The party continued late into the night, everything running perfectly until it reached its end. Which came about because Yuuri, so drunk and full of irresponsible ideas, decided to attempt a pole dance on one of the hall’s pillars, failed, and landed flat on his face. The small trickle of blood coming from the omega’s nose alarmed the alpha but Yuuri staggered towards Viktor and slurred that he was fine. Viktor called things to an immediate halt anyway.

And in all of Araak's mercies, it was the correct decision.

Yuuri was getting drunker by the minute and could barely stand when Viktor urged him to close the party with the customary snowfall spell. The wasted teen sent out a rainfall of blue flames instead. His heart nearly leaping into his throat, Viktor had seconds to spell all of the water in the room into snow so that nothing and no one burned into a crisp; but more importantly so that no one recognized the tell tale signs of a Katsuki firefall.

Their guests ended up thankfully none the wiser and drenched for his efforts and Yuuri, the little ungrateful, yet utterly adorable wretch, just laughed until he hiccuped, and then crowed - with such mirth that he fell over - that everybody looked like a drowned Vicchan (The dog, not the person - Yuuri was quick to correct - though Viktor was sure they were both equally wet).

One flick of his wrists to dry clean their guests later, and Viktor was hauling Yuuri back towards the Sanctum after an unsuccessful attempt to sober him up with a few meat pies.

Luckily, Yuuri was quiet and compliant during the trip. Mostly, because he looked like he could pass out at any moment. They staggered from the main house and through the gardens with Yuuri giggling and stumbling through the snow. After a particularly bad fall, Viktor had to haul the teen back up and onto his feet.
He chided the younger man, urging him to move quickly so that the cold didn’t seep into his bones. Yuuri getting sick would have his mother furious at him since it was his alpha duty to see the omega home but it seemed like Yuuri was having none of it though, as he swung around to wrap the alpha into a bear hug that made it hard for Viktor to move.

Viktor tried his best not to have a heart attack. Yuuri was pressing against Viktor in a way that would have made their guests squawk at the impropriety.

“Viktorrrr,” Yuuri purred, rubbing his face into the older man’s robes like a cat searching for a pet. The omega had never done anything like this before. Seeking comfort? Yes. Using his robes and his person (innocently) like a blanket? Yes. But, Yuuri had never held Viktor by his waist like this, had never looked at him like this, and a part of him was already cataloging the moment to save forever.

It was romantic and hardly romantic all at the same time.

The teen’s coloring would have better suited a tomato, his nose was running, and he smelled like the inside of a seedy tavern and yet, Viktor could hardly tear himself away from the omega looking up at him with eyes full of adoration, like he was the sun and moon. Like Viktor was his air. His magic. His Xiv to Yuuri’s Ore.

They stared at each other for a few moments, the quiet surrounding them only broken by an occasional drunk giggle from the younger man. Then, Yuuri broke into a drunken smile that showed off the slight dimple in one of his cheeks.

“Neee,” Yuuri said so cutely in Jih Roh that Viktor's heart nearly pounded out of his chest in response. “Bityaaaaa, I’ve been watching your videos and I know what I want for my ‘ticement wish.”

The universe stopped for a second, everything zeroing down to Yuuri's words. Excitement, something Viktor had not really felt since his last meeting with Yuuri, began to color his world and turn his scent into ginger. He silently thanked the gods that they were alone because he was definitely going to make Yuuri tell him and having anyone other than the Tempter hear your wish was bad luck.

His demand came out breathless, punched out by the anticipation building in his chest,

“What do you want most, Yuura? Tell me. Anything, and I mean anything you want, will be yours.”

Yuuri’s bravery seemed to retreat at Viktor's passion. He pulled back, his scent slightly souring. Viktor aching with the desire to know did not let the omega escape so easily. His hands slid up Yuuri’s back to gently but firmly hold the younger man in place.

The teen tried to break free but when Viktor's arms proved immovable; he sunk back into the man with a whine and said,

“Vicchan is so interesting and does so many things and goes so many places and must meet so many more interesting people than me.”

Viktor wanted to deny it. To tell Yuuri that for the last several weeks, Yuuri had been the most interesting thing in his life, but Yuuri clutched him closer, so closely that the condensed clouds of their breath nearly mingled, and the surprise shut his mouth.
“I don’t want to just be a boring omega who only knows how to dance and look pretty,” the youth charged on with his eyes suddenly becoming clearer and more adamant with each word. “I want to be someone that Vitya can be proud of.”

Viktor’s head spun with the possibilities and potential interpretations of Yuuri’s words. But he needed Yuuri’s wish to be clear, to be explicit. It would not do to give Yuuri the wrong gift.

So, he asked again.

“What are you wishing for Yuurochka? Say it and I’ll grant it, whatever it is.”

Viktor was smothered by the scent of Yuuri’s euphoria. His alpha reveled in it, his chest near vibrating under the intoxicating suggestion that he could fulfill the omega’s desires.

“I want to soar over the same aether as you, Vitya. I want ...,” Yuuri whispered, his head tilted in a way that made the night lanterns illuminate the honey of his eyes, “... you to watch me and only me as I win you gold.”

Viktor had always known that he loved the younger mage; that his love began on the day a newborn Yuuri curled his hand around Viktor’s finger for the very first time. But this feeling was different, this was new. This was burning like Yuuri’s eyes right now as the omega held his gaze.

Viktor felt giddy. He felt like throwing up. This was scary. This could change everything. This could destroy everything. His father had forbid it and his mother would not like it. They would be breaking hundreds of year’s worth of Nikiforov tradition and upsetting the world of competitive thaumaturgy.

The scandal. The freedom. The chance to make all his guilty feelings right.

But most of all, the surprise it was going to cause. He knew Yuuri could do it, had seen the potential in the last soaring session they had had on the family lake. Yuuri had the spins, the step sequence, and even some of the jumps. Only the magic was left, but Yuuri practiced so hard to pull it that Viktor hardly had the heart to doubt the omega’s consistency.

There was no other choice for him. Viktor laughed and startled Yuuri as he crushed the younger man close enough for them to feel the heat of each other’s bodies.

“Yes, Yuura,” he breathed, his nose filling up with the scent of happiness. “If that’s what you want, I’ll take you everywhere. I will teach you everything. As Araak wills it, so I will grant it.”

“You are kidding me, Vitya. You a Maester? In which of Anud’s Hells?”

Viktor pouted. Yakov was being surprisingly unsupportive of Viktor taking the Third Test to become a maester. He had thought that his teacher would have at least have had an encouraging word or two for his oldest student.

“But Yakooov, don’t you want me to leave the nest? To be the best I can be?”

Yakov laughed for so long and wiped away so many tears that Viktor actually started to feel embarrassed instead of annoyed. This was not how he planned things to go. Some grumbling? Okay. Some yelling? Fine. Even the threat of bodily harm he could handle, but his coach nearly puking from laughing at his dreams was just a step too much.
Thoroughly piqued, he cut the blood connection with his soar shoes and slid down the rink barrier onto the aether. It stunk of ozone and he really wanted to get up the moment his face touched the ground but he had theatrics to perform.

The move seemed to snap Yakov out of his fit.

“Get off the aether, Vitya.”

Viktor turned over to starfish and raised a hand to his head like he was going to faint from the cruelty.

“You laughed at my dreams, Yakov.”

“Vitya.” The growl was more like it but Viktor would not give up in just the first act.

“My dreams!”

“Vityaaaa,” Better. This time had Yakov’s face turning red.

“Dreams,” Viktor said faintly like a movie starlet pained over the mention of her dead lover’s name.

“Vitya, get off the aether before it turns you into a frog.”

Viktor jumped up, suddenly remembering that capricious quirk of the performance ring. There was a junior who had fallen and refused to get up a number of years ago. Rumor had it that the aether turned xem into a pig. The story had given Viktor nightmares for weeks. He shivered, brushing off the residue wisps before they could turn him into a newt or something equally as hideous. For safe measure, he stepped off of the rink completely.

“Did I say you were done practicing?”

“No, but Yakov I’m being serious. I want to coach Yuuri.”

The maester gave him a sour look.

“Your omega?”

Yakov’s eyes widened when Viktor didn’t correct him.

“Are you serious, Vitya? This isn’t just some strange grieving process, right?”

“No, Yakov. Please, Yakov.”

Viktor gave the man his best puppy eyes and even clasped his hands together in supplication. Yakov stared at him with his mouth agape but after a few moments, the old man’s face shifted from surprise into a thoughtful, considering expression.

“Xiv’s Teeth. You really are serious. Look how about this...”

Yakov pulled him into his office a week later with a curt call. Viktor entered the dark and trophy cluttered room to see his coach sitting in his well-worn chair, looking at a stack of apprenticeship applications like the mere sight of them gave him indigestion. The older mage barely waited for Viktor to sit down before he said,

“I got an application from the main branch of the Plisetskys.”
“The Plisetskys?” Viktor repeated, hearing the name somewhere but not really remembering where, “...but they don’t have any alpha chil—...Oh.”

Oh.

Yakov gave Viktor a smile that looked more like a grimace.

“Exactly. The kid is an omega. 19. Just come of age.”

“But, there’s never been an omega competitor before.”

The older mage's lips quirked up just a smidge. Viktor strangely felt afraid. Yakov didn’t usually smile for anything other than sadistic practices, booze or gold medals.

“But, you want your Yuuri to compete don’t you?” He quickly pulled his lips back into his default frown. “Even though the brat’s just an omega too.”

Viktor wanted to get offended at the jibe but he had a creeping suspicion that something important was going to come out of this conversation so he pushed the argumentative thoughts away and settled for keeping his tone respectful but firm.

“That’s different. My Yuuri is a Nikiforov. Omega or not, he’s trained with some of the best masters for years. I don’t know anything about this other Yuri.”

“Well you can find out,” Yakov declared with a sound clap to Viktor’s shoulder. “Word on the street is Plisetsky’s good, young you good and the Plisetskys are willing to spend anything to get their brat where the kid wants to be. I’m curious but I’m also an old man, Vitya. I don’t have the energy to waste on shaping the unsteady magic of omegas into something ready to compete.”

Viktor's brows furrowed. Yakov could not possibly mean what he was suggesting. Tutor two students during his coaching debut? He voiced his concerns but the other man just smirked and said,

“But you like challenges, don’t you, Vitya? Surprises too?”

Yakov continued like what he was suggesting was not about to turn his student's world on its axis, that it was not going to turn the thaumaturgy world upside down.

“What could be more surprising than a new maester debuting with not one but TWO omega apprentices? Show me how hungry you are to be a maester. Take on the Plisetsky kid and I’ll recommend you, Vitya. I’ll let you train your Yuuri and Anud’s Hells, I’ll even let you use my atelier.”

Viktor could not speak for a few moments; his brain was still rushing to parse what he had just heard. He turned the thought over in his head, over and over like a gold coin. He did not hate it. It was quite the opposite really. His heart was beating an allegro furioso in his chest and there was a fluttery feeling in his gut.

“Two Yuuris! Yuris on ice...”

He almost laughed at how giddy the thought made him feel, at how much he was actually looking forward to it.

“I'll do it, Yakov.”
They decided to announce Viktor’s retirement after the Grand Prix Final. In the meantime, they talked and planned. Viktor wanted a surprise. Yakov wanted an official announcement. The older man won in the end after he reminded the younger mage that it was his atelier and his recommendation that were allowing any of Viktor’s dreams to happen and that it would all be announced -Yakov told him in a booming voice - once Viktor- who hadn’t done anything else in the decade he had been doing thaumaturgy- won gold.

He let these thoughts buoy him throughout the competition. His short program had been flawless, perfect. Today, he was sure - and Viktor was always sure about his magic-, that his free program would go down in history. This performance was supposed to be a parting gift to all of the people who had supported him throughout his entire magical career, but in his heart, Viktor knew it was a greeting to his Yuuri, the one who would see him to the next stage.

While changing into his costume, Viktor found himself nearly vibrating with glee at the drama it was going to cause, at the surprise that was going to ripple throughout the thaumaturgical world when he told them he was stepping off the aether. This feeling, however, paled in comparison to the absolute elation he experienced when he thought of revealing Yuuri to the world as his apprentice.

His mobile phone buzzed, dragging Viktor back from his thoughts. Disregarding Yakov’s bark to ignore it and hurry up, he looked down at the device’s glowing screen.

“Good Luck :)”

It was the first text he had ever gotten from Yuuri, and by Araak’s stars, it was the most wonderful thing he had read in months. He couldn’t hide his grin or the cloud of orange blossoms that surrounded him. He briefly thought about using scent blockers but then there were no rules against emotional pheromones. How could there be when thaumaturges basically conjured their feelings on the aether?

If Yakov noticed anything different with his student as Viktor approached him, he did not comment on it. The old man only gave his apprentice a pat on the shoulder and a grunt before guiding him up to the entrance of the rink.

Viktor spelt the aether ring with a tap of his toe, turning it into a sheet of pure ice before his soar shoes could even touch the rest of the surface.

His music started.

A voice full of longing reached out over the melancholic piano notes, stretching, searching over the ice for something or someone to take the loneliness away. It reminded him of Yuuri - pretty, pretty little Yuuri - who he had neglected for far too long.

I hear a voice weeping in the distance

Have you maybe been abandoned as well?

Yuuri was watching. Viktor was sure of it. Beyond, perfect or flawless, the alpha in him screamed that this performance needed to be beautiful for the omega. Viktor soared into the first quad and landed it with ease. No one could jump like him; could soar as cleanly and beautifully as he. He preened and let ice magic dance from his fingertips.

The aether became his partner and matched him step for step during the intimate tango that only
they knew. He conjured, twisted and twirled the ice and his body into magnificence for the omega that was watching him, judging him. He danced, keeping limbs faultless when needed and teasingly beautiful when not; no movement was inelegant or unnecessary.

He pushed harder, faster, pulled on the magic of the aether until it was taunt, ready to snap. But not at him. Never at him. He was strong, powerful, a master and he manipulated the elemental magic until it heeded his bidding. Until it was gorgeous crystalline flowers. Until it was delicate floating petals. Until it was roses of ice for as far as the eyes could see. He spun into his final pose, whipping the magic around him into enormous, majestic arches.

It was a curled finger, a delicate invitation to Yuuri to join him on the ice, on the aether; anywhere where magic would swirl under their feet. As the final notes of Stammi Vicino died down, Viktor opened his eyes to find the rink transformed into the rose garden where he took tea with Yuuri only a few short weeks ago.

The audience exploded into a standing ovation that lasted nearly seven minutes and echoed throughout the arena.

But Viktor could barely hear the roar of the crowd over the sound of his own beating heart. As flowers and toys rained down around him, he found that for the first time in a long time, he could greet his fans with a proper smile.

He was on top of the world and he only floated higher when his score was announced.

“It’s a new world record, folks. Looks like Viktor Nikiforov has made history again!”

It was his fifth consecutive win. There were no mages alive or dead that had done what he had done. And it was all because of Yuuri, all because he was soaring for Yuuri. From the bond, Viktor could feel the omega’s response to his performance; a flutter of happiness that felt like butterflies in his stomach and strangely, a slow uncurling of heat. When he had time, he would ask about the latter sensation but for now, he would celebrate. He blew a kiss to the waiting cameras and walked backstage towards the crush of waiting reporters.

He woke up the next morning to a message spell furiously tap, tapping at his window. Bleary-eyed and half awake, he stumbled over to it with a grumble and thrust it open. The message flew into the room so fast it nearly slit his throat. Annoyed and now fully awake (near death would do that to you), he contemplated burning it in revenge but the soft curling handwriting of his mother warned him that that would be a bad idea.

As he broke the seal and unfolded the envelope housing the letter, he wondered why Yuuri let his mother waste personal magic (not that omegas had to be so careful with it, he thought wryly) when the teen could have just sent a text message instead. Two seconds into reading, he understood why:

To My Darling Vitya,

My heart, I write to you with joyous news. Your performance last night was of so spectacular a nature that it sent our dear Yuuri straight into his first heat. Minako was quite taken by surprise as she said that Yuuri’s line is not disposed to early presentation, but this early maturity is all the better for us as House Nikiforov, its future heirs, and for your position as Head Alpha. At any rate, I am sure the news will please the Grigori and have them off your back about heirs for a little while longer. (But not for too long (You know your duty). I have heard rumor, though it would be
best to disregard it as the useless gossiping of omegas, that there are already whispers amongst the lower Nikiforov families of betrothing heirs …)

For now, I must take watch and instruct as is custom, but when Yuuri is recovered and understanding of the coming of age rites, I will be in contact with you to start the preparations. Be rest assured that your omega will come to adulthood in the most capable of hands.

Love,

Your Dearest Mother

He smiled, his eyes running over the missive a few more times before they misted over. He was a little annoyed at the mention of the grigoris but warmth spread over him as he folded the letter back into its envelope and set it on his side table for future reading. ‘This was it’ he thought with an almost painful level of fondness.

“Yuurochka,” he breathed, his body nearly shaking with emotion.

Six months ago, he would have received this letter with dread. He would have been frightened and angry at this news and the impending mating it would have meant. But he did not have to think about that now. Even though he shouldn’t, he felt relief that his father had passed on. He was the Head Alpha and he no longer had to worry over being summoned back home by his sire to breed Yuuri like he was some mindless stud alpha.

He inhaled and forced his mind to think happier thoughts. This was good news, after all. An adult Yuuri meant a Yuuri that could compete. His little duckling would be changing from now on, growing and evolving into a beautiful swan and he almost squealed at the image of Yuuri that popped into his mind; dressed to the nines in a fresh pair of soar shoes and proudly wearing the red and white of the Feltsman uniform.

He felt a few tears slip down his cheeks but he was sure that they came from a happy place. There was no going back now, only forward and Viktor found that he could not wait.
Chapter Notes

The genderless pronoun xe is used in this story as mage children decide whether or nor to be male or female upon coming of age. It works as follows:

Xe - He/She
Xem - Him/Her
Xyr - His/Her
Xyrs - His/Hers
Xemself - Himself/Herself

Credit to fanndists on Tumblr for terms "oma" and "apa"
Oma - Omega Mother
Apa - Alpha Father

Credit to Tongari Boushi no Atorie for the concept of ateliers, soar shoes, and magical placement tests.

Credit to Songs of Solomon from the Bible for inspiring several of the ritual lines and also credit to 1 Corinthians 13:11 for Yuuri's coming of age speech.

Credit also belongs to Mitsurou Kubo for use of a few lines from Duetto: Stammi vicino, non te ne andare.

CONTENT WARNING:
Mentions/References to suicide/suicidal ideation

There was a collective gasp from the press as Viktor announced his retirement. He grinned at his audience, daring them to be shocked when they had spent the last few years speculating and gossiping on when he would retire to take up his “real duties” as Heir Nikiforov. The continuous preoccupation with his body and its ability to reproduce pissed him off. Now, they had the answer that they so viciously sought after, and watching them stumble over it, felt surprisingly good.

“Lord Nikiforov,” shouted a brave reporter from the back of the press room. Viktor whipped off his sunglasses and flashed an award winning smile. “What will you do now? Is there someone special?”

‘Of course’ is what he wanted to say. He was chomping at the bit to tell the world about his two Yu(u)ris but Yakov was determined to keep things a complete secret until next season’s opening ceremony. However, he thought with an internal smirk, that didn’t mean he couldn’t have a little fun.

The corner of his lips curled up in glee as an idea struck him and he tapped a lone finger to his mouth as if he were seriously contemplating the question. He could see his coach stiffen and let out a small warning growl as the older man easily recognized his mischievous look.

“Who knows,” he quipped, with a smile that could make a devil proud. Yakov turned an absolutely
inhuman shape of red as he spluttered out,

“Viktor!”

Viktor’s smile turned soft, fond, thinking of Yuuri. “But there are still many beautiful things that I want to show the world.”

The crowd of journalists sprang into a tidal wave of questions the moment he finished his response. For a few seconds, everything was drowned out by the calls of questions he wouldn’t answer and the rapid clicking of press cameras.

He laughed and posed for the shots that would inevitably grace the covers of all the major newspapers and tabloids tomorrow.

“No more questions,” Yakov barked as the reporters’ queries grew into a roar.

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Greeting Yuri Plisetsky was like running face first into an angry wasp. Viktor was not even sure what could make someone so pissed off at the world but apparently young Yuri had found it. The older mage had barely finished introducing himself before the short blond was screaming in his face, demanding an award winning program.

“It better fucking take gold, old man,” the little shit snarled, with a challenging flash of his teeth.

For a minute, a whole entire 60 seconds, Viktor considered calling the whole thing off. Who wanted to work with a brat that could be best described as rabid if you were being kind or an utter asshole if you were not? But then he realized that Yuri Plisetsky was a condition for him to coach his Yuuri and miserably came to the understanding that the universe was unfair. Why give him two Yu(u)ris with such opposite natures?

Viktor rarely gave into his alpha. More than messy hair or frumpy clothes, he hated giving in to the stereotype that he, as an alpha, was little more than a barely restrained animal. However, things were always different when someone was screaming in your face, so he could forgive his inner self for leaning into Yuri’s space - close enough to see the flecks of blue in the teen’s mostly green eyes -and giving the kid a short bark of a warning.

Yuri backed up against the wall with a snarl.

Good. Viktor was tall; intimidating when he wanted to be and this kid was short, probably up to Yuuri's chin on a great day. Viktor smirked. There was a pecking order and Yuri Plisetsky was not at the top of it.

“It’s up to you whether you win or not, Yuri,” he purred with a smile that reeked of conceit, “If I performed the program, I’d win for sure.”

The way the kid gaped and spluttered up at him was priceless. The tirade of curses that followed was not. Still, ruffling the brat’s feathers was very satisfying and Viktor felt like he could very easily get used to it. It might be the only sort of amusement he would get out of Plisetsky if this initial meeting (which was when one was usually on their best behavior) was any sort of indication of what their future relationship might look like.
He sighed. The things he did for Yuuri…

“You can’t be serious, Viktor!”

“What was it with all the people in his life shitting on his dreams?” Viktor thought savagely as he listened to Chris choke from laughter.

In fact, Chris laughed so hard and for so long, that Viktor hung up on him only to call back when he was sure that the other man could have a conversation without guffawing.

“I’m being serious.” Viktor hoped his pout transferred over the phone so his friend could know how much his feelings had been hurt.

“I’m sorry, my little cabbage, it’s just I can’t imagine you raising a child.”

The older man sighed. There were times when Chris was insufferable.

“Don’t be creepy, Chris. He’s my betrothed. Besides, I’m not raising him. I’m letting him learn more about the world.”

Viktor’s chest puffed out on the last bit but the perchten chuckled again making Viktor’s hackles rise.

“Oh Viktor, what will he be but a child? He’s 18? Barely left your estate. Never dealt with society and has been hidden from the world. He sounds like he will practically be a baby with how well he will function.”

Viktor actually bristled like a cat.

“Yuuri will learn. He’s very smart, Chris. In fact, he has already figured out how to use his phone with no help on my part.”

“Viktor, a mobile phone and modern society are two very different things.”

“So will you help me?” Viktor cut in, impatient with Chris’ critique of Yuuri, “Yakov has already said that he won’t come because ‘he is too busy overseeing his other students to have time for the death of his dumbest’ but if anything happens during this … test, I’ll need someone to let my family know.”

Not that he planned on dying but with Tests you just never knew.

Viktor came out of the Third Test naked, shaking and bleeding from about seven different spots on his body but he was alive.

And most importantly, he was a maester now.
Christophe, who had been waiting by the entrance as promised, wrapped Viktor in a blanket while his arms worked furiously at trying to rub warmth back into his friend’s half frozen limbs.

“Chris,” it came out shaky because the mage was fighting as hard as he could not to faint, “will you be my Watchful Eye?”

The younger man paused, his eyes sparkling in a way that promised mischief.

“Aren’t they supposed to be responsible?”

“Chris!”

“Of course, my friend. We’ll make lovely co-sugar daddies.”

Viktor opened his mouth to tell Chris to shut up but found himself cut off when he fainted (ungracefully) right into the other man’s arms.

Two days after his ordeal – none of his wounds had even healed yet - Viktor received a message from his mother demanding that he immediately begin the preparations for Yuuri’s coming of age ceremony so that it occurred before Springan and its inauspicious melting of snow and ice.

One month later, Viktor was staring at the doors of his family's massive shrine, ready to tempt Yuuri into full fledged adulthood.

Waiting out the final hours of Yuuri’s childhood, Viktor wondered what recollections his mother would share with the teen as the pair sat waiting, deep within the belly of the shrine, for the dawn and the god of water and marriage, “Xiv”, to come and tempt “Ore” into the world. Knowing Yuuri, who had never on Araak’s good Eorthe been a morning person, the omega was probably curled up in his foster mother’s lap, half asleep like a cat. Viktor smiled a bit to himself at the thought. That too was a memory; so many memories had been made in the 18 years since Minako brought Yuuri to their doorstep, smushed faced and stinking of Katsuki fire and amniotic fluid.

He glanced at the clock, one of the few devices that worked here. It was 5 o’clock in the morning. He grimaced. He still had a few more hours until daylight. Tonight was going to be hell with only a few hours of sleep, a full day’s worth of performances, and a small nation’s worth of alcohol flowing.

90 carefully selected guests sat behind him, trying their best not to nod off. He checked to make sure they were still artfully arranged around the circle of ice where the bulk of the ceremony would take place. Some stared back. Their eyes, heavy with expectations, put him on edge. They must be Grigori.

He chose to ignore their unsettling presence and hoped everyone behaved. Memories of the funeral still plagued his mind and if he heard one cross word against or towards Yuuri today, he was sure his alpha would get him sent to jail for ripping out someone’s throat -which would be par for the course for how Viktor had been feeling since he got the order to come home.

He would be lying if he said he hadn’t spent the last few weeks and a good part of the previous night stinking up the estate with his pheromones of protectiveness and pride. It was his first official appearance as the Lord Nikiforov and Yuuri's formal introduction to society and he wanted to make
sure that Yuuri came into the adult world perfectly.

And, he would. As surely as Xiv loved Ore, he would.

When the darkness of night began to give way to the light of day, a priest opened the ceremony by crying Yuuri's name, his birth date, and a call to end his childhood and give up childish things. After a beat of silence, the drums started, signaling to Viktor that it was time for him to perform.

The heavy Xiv mask Viktor wore made it difficult for him to see enough to avoid the rows of candles lined up to light his path but somehow he managed to run down from the opening of the circle to the front of the shrine without catching his long robes on fire. Shards of ice followed in his wake, building tall frozen walls on either side of him so that Yuuri would have nowhere to go but forward once he stepped out of the shrine.

The magic ended when Viktor reached his destination. Stopping just about a foot's length from the shrine doors, Viktor began the traditional dance as the drummers increased their tempo. He pirouetted with all of the might and majesty that he had acquired training as a mage for the last nearly 28 years until he was a swirling snowstorm. In the moment, he was Xiv come to coax the mortified Ore from the depths of the Erorur Caves after Araak changed their form. He danced to show Xiv's love, Xiv's acceptance of the two sexes gifted to the demi-god Ore's body.

The beat of the drums quickened into the next dance and Viktor leaped to signify Xiv's joy at the Goddess's gift of childbearing no matter their forms. With the last notes of the drums thrumming out, he banged on the doors of the shrine to plead with Ore, to tell them that he adored his mate's new body and self and would be both mother and father if only his love would come out.

No answer.

Viktor did the dance of staggering back. As Xiv showed Ore, he would show Yuuri his love too.

“Yuuri!” he called, his voice loud, thunderous - a proud alpha.

Still no answer.

“Yuuri.” A purr this time, a promise of what they could be.

Nothing.

Just be yourself.

“Yuuuuri!”

Viktor grinned as he said it, remembering years of Yuuri crawling, toddling, walking and then running behind him.

The doors of the shrine creaked open just enough for Viktor to see a tiny sliver of Yuuri's face.

“Rise up, my beautiful,” Viktor said and he meant every word of it despite the fact that his lines were part of the ritual text, “and come away with me.”

“Only if I may have a wish” the teen answered, a red blush spreading across the visible parts of his cheeks.

Viktor tried to hold Yuuri's gaze through the narrow eye holes of the mask. He itched with the desire to rip it off, to see Yuuri's expression with no obstruction when he said,
“As Araak wills it, so I will grant it.”

Yuuri opened the doors a hairbreadth wider and that was all the opportunity Viktor needed to start the second part of the ceremony. With a rough tug, he pulled Yuuri through the doors of the shrine and up and into his arms. The drums started again and then Viktor was running along the walls of ice back to the circle. Yuuri played his part by pretending to weep like Ore wept to have the world see their nakedness. Behind them, Viktor's mother struggled to keep up as she was slightly dragged by the belt of red ribbon that connected her to Yuuri.

Viktor set the youth down just outside of the opening of the ring of ice and leapt away from him into a grand jeté towards the chest and smaller shrine of Ganae positioned in its center. He stood over them and gestured to the dagger lying near the entrance of the circle by Yuuri's feet,

“We exult and rejoice in you; you who have grown fat and lovely on your mother’s milk and father’s strength. Come away, o beautiful one, and let us give you a blessing.”

Without a shred of hesitation, Yuuri bent to grab the knife before using it to sever the ribbon that represented his childish dependency. Viktoria Nikiforova wept as her foster son stepped forward and away into his adulthood. Viktor closed the opening of the circle with a sheet of ice.

It was just the two of them now, hidden within a world of frozen crystal.

Yuuri walked towards Viktor, the rehearsed lines coming easy, teasingly from his lips,

“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, and I loved as a child; but now I am grown, and so I must put away childish things.”

Yuuri blew wisps of Katsuki fire to light the candles on the top of the shrine (It would be his and Viktor's little secret). The first candle in gratitude for a carefree childhood. The second was to accept his responsibilities as a Nikiforov. The third was a prayer for a happy and successful adulthood. With one smooth movement, the teen cut off the braid his hair had been woven into and kneeled with it in front of the shrine of the goddess of youth, Ganae. Laying it gently on the altar, he then cut his childhood talisman and belt off too before placing them on top of the braid.

He bowed his head and gave thanks to Ganae for seeing him safely to maturity just as Ore had thanked the goddess for watching over them while their body changed in the caves. The urn with Nikolai Nikiforov's heart rested at the center of the shrine below Ganae's effigy. Yuuri kissed it too and with only a small waver in his voice, thanked his foster father.

He then turned from the altar to face the coffer with his head bowed. He kept it lowered even as Viktor came to stand before him. Without a word, the older man held out his left hand and Yuuri kissed Viktor's signet ring before he pressed his forehead to the back of the appendage.


The older man smiled; his body filling with warmth at the sight.

“Behold this blessing, you who are young and beautiful,” he murmured, while gathering the blessing spell in his hands, “May you increase in wisdom and stature, as Araak wills it.”

Viktor touched two fingers from his right hand to the nape of Yuuri’s neck. A blue and silver aura gathered from the spot and wrapped around Yuuri’s body.

He stepped to the side so that Yuuri, skin glowing with a thin sheen of blue light, could approach the neglected chest. Yuuri dragged the dagger across his arm and with the flick of the youth’s
wrist, sent out a powerful whip of kinetic energy that smashed the box into dust. Barely waiting for the smoke to settle, he plucked his enticement wish, written on a marble tablet, out of the debris.

Tears ran down his face as he read it but then he scrubbed at his eyes and with a look that could incinerate, faced Viktor and shouted so that the whole hall could hear it,

“I accept!”

Viktor’s mother was the first person to respond. Her voice rang out high and clear throughout the room. “Return, return so that we may gaze at you.”

“Return, return so that we may gaze at you.” The other spectators joined in after her command. They cried out for Yuuri just like the mourners that stood calling outside Ore’s cave. Amongst the loudest, Viktor could pick out Minako, Takeshi and Yuuko.

Yuuri grinned and with a look that would have Viktor starry eyed for days, tilted his head, trailed his blood to the tip of his finger, and with a pirouette that put Viktor’s earlier ones to shame, blew the circle of ice into flurries.

Viktor took off his mask, shook the powdery remnants of the circle from his hair, and smiled just for Yuuri. All around them guests cheered, clearly impressed by Yuuri’s display of power. None of them could be more amazed than Viktor who gazed at his betrothed in the same marvelous wonder that he was sure Xiv must have felt when Ore stood before the world in all their demi-god glory.

Yuuri preened at Viktor’s look, the two lost in a moment before Viktoria stepped up to Yuuri and ran her fingers through his now shoulder length hair with a cry. It startled the omega out of his daze making him drop his dagger and with a deep flush; he rushed to pick it back up and gather the other items lying forgotten on Ganae’s shrine. Falling into an uncoordinated and deeply apologetic heap, he prostrated himself before his foster mother’s feet and held the offerings above his lowered head.

“Thank you, Oma,” he said, his face beet red but blessed with a smile, “for taking care of me. For loving me so much even though I am not your blood son.”

Frost latticed through the older omega’s hair, and ice crystals formed on her lashes as she stared down at Yuuri. Her tears froze and dropped onto her adopted child’s head in little hailstones that made Viktor wince at the audible thunk they made, but Yuuri kept his head bowed as he waited for his foster mother to respond.

“Oh Yuura,” Viktoria sobbed, her expression as delicate and crystalline as melting verglas, “My little Yuurochka, how can Oma want you to stay little if you are so beautiful grown?”

Heedless of the offerings, she snatched up the teen and held him so close that Minako had to step in when Yuuri started to turn blue from her leaking magic. After he had recovered enough to look a healthy pink again, Yuuri also bowed to Minako; who gave a small cry of surprise and hauled her charge into a hug - that looked so painful that Viktor's ribs ached in sympathy - before she and Viktoria dragged Yuuri into a side room to change him out of the tunics and braided girdles of a child into the proper collared shirts and woven belts of adults.

He came back to Viktor smelling like ice, like the pure unadulterated power of Nikiforov magic. Viktor reached out to touch the fine silk blouse that billowed out around Yuuri’s still immature frame and felt omega blood magic tingle and chill against his fingers as he ran his hand along the embroidery on the teen’s collar. It must have taken days and several Nikiforov omegas to complete the work.
He thumbed at a particularly beautifully embroidered button and almost let out a gasp at the small spark that jumped out at his finger. It was Katsuki blood. He let his hand drift further, delight filling him with every tiny and barely noticeable flicker until he came to Yuuri’s belt; knotted to the left for his omega status. It too brimmed with magic that he could feel thrumming through the strands of Yuuri’s black hair that were embroidered into the belt’s talismans and good luck wishes.

The magic roused the older man’s inner alpha, so much so, that Viktor felt unexpectedly possessive when Takeshi tried to lift Yuuri into the ceremonial chair for the last part of the ritual. It took all three of them by surprise when Viktor growled and pushed the servant out of the way. Yuuri stared at him with wide eyes but Takeshi had enough grace to understand Viktor’s embarrassment and wordlessly sidled back to the chair.

“I’m sorry,” he mumbled as he helped Yuuri into the seat. “I don’t know what came over me.” He couldn't quite meet Yuuri’s eyes as he said it. He hated when his alpha burst through his control.

“It’s okay.”

“Did I frighten you?” Viktor found himself asking, a little afraid of the truth.

“Never.”

Yuuri said the words with such fire and determination that Viktor swore he saw flames burning around the omega. Comforted, Viktor smiled and signaled for the priests to start their drums.

The guests gave Yuuri three counts before they tossed the chair a good few meters above their heads.

“Rise up, o beautiful one, and let us give you a blessing,” the throng cried as Yuuri soared up into the air.

The teen held onto the sides of the chair for dear life but the hall rang with the his peals of his laughter.

“Again,” he shouted with glee after every throw, urging the participants to send him flying.

They would toss him up higher and higher until he threatened to reach the rafters, each throw symbolizing the years of good luck they wished the new adult. Then, they would ply him with vodka honeyed like Ore’s lips and urge him to drown him in cups, mugs, and flaggards of it until he was drunk enough to belt out the traditional Rhurshyan love songs adored by old men. Everyone would laugh, dance and party well into next morning light.

Viktor watched it all with fondness and just a small twinge of worry over the thought of Yuuri falling. Not that anyone would drop him. Viktor was sure that the chair - which had been in the family for centuries-, was probably bespelled by another just as mother-henly ancestor. He silently thanked whoever they were because even though it was tradition and even though Yuuri was giggling like a maniac, there was a part of him that wanted to spell the whole room into a giant water bubble so not a hair on the omega’s head had a chance of getting hurt.

Viktor sensed his mother come up to him and felt vindicated when she let out a gasp after a particularly vivacious toss. He looked at her and took in the tears still pouring down her face, but Viktoria only had eyes for her ward. And turning his gaze back on Yuuri, Viktor could easily understand why.

The teen was absolutely breathtaking with his raven hair falling about his face and his dark ruby eyes shining with joy. Viktor’s fingers itched for his phone, wishing - despite the taboo - that he
had the device to capture this moment forever.

No tears or screams, no masks, just joy—raw and unfiltered; his heart squeezed with some unknown emotion as he watched the omega squeal in delight after his head brushed the edges of a rafter. It was such a good reaction, a good omen that it settled all the jittery feelings that had been following Viktor for the last few days.

Viktor would not be backing down.

He knew there would be risks if he said yes to Yuuri’s wish, knew there would be consequences to face. One was standing right in front of him, decidedly unhappy with what was written on Yuuri’s enticement tablet.

However, to say that his mother was simply unhappy was an understatement.

Her glare could turn a lesser mage into a block of ice and he was not kidding. He could actually see his breathe with how cold the room was turning. Secretly, he congratulated himself on withstanding his dam’s wrath on not one but two separate occasions without pissing himself or dying of fright

“Viktor Nikolayevich Nikiforov,” she hissed, “you cannot grant this wish. I forbid it.”

He backtracked on his earlier bravado after the temperature started to make his teeth chatter. She must be pissed if she was using full names, hissing, AND trying to freeze him to death. Still, he was a grown man and as such, he should be able to talk to his mother without turning into an icicle.

“Mamochka, you are leaking magic.” He was careful to keep his tone low and respectful but his hackles were starting to rise, “and no, I will not change my mind.”

His mother made an impatient tutting noise, and Viktor fought the urge to snap. Society gave allowances to omegas because of their unstable natures but it was still rude to go around leaking like a broken tap. A high-born lady like his mother knew this.

Well, she should know this but the room continued to chill until permafrost started to creep across the ceiling.

This had to be on purpose. Accidents were one thing but using magic deliberately to make someone uncomfortable during a conversation was another. It was disrespectful beyond measure, especially to Viktor who was now Head Alpha and therefore her alpha and he had to swallow the growl tumbling in the back of his throat before he could speak,

“Mother.”

She must have heard the roughness in his voice because the room grew several degrees warmer, much to Viktor’s relief. The sensation of being magically threatened by your dam and wanting to retaliate back was unnatural enough to make him feel sick.

“I can't not grant it, Mama,” he explained, knowing already from the set of the older woman's shoulders that she was looking for fight. “It’s what he wants.”
His reprieve was short lived as the temperature dropped again.

“What Yuuri wants is not always good for Yuuri.” Viktoria's eyes were hard, cold but also brittle like ice about to crack in spring.

Viktor took a deep, steadying breath.

“It's Yuuri's choice, Mama. I will not change my stance.”

“Oh, you insufferable boy!” She cried, her fists clenching and crunching around the ice slowly climbing up her hand.

A chunk of ice flew at Viktor as she rushed to cover her eyes. Snow fell from under her palms.

He wanted to tell her to stop, to pull herself together and out of her tantrum but then she dropped her hand to glare up at him with her eyes swirling icicle blue and suddenly Viktor realized that maybe it wasn’t all just an act- maybe it was just that easy for her to lose control when it came to Yuuri.

She was, after all, the first person who rushed across the garden paths towards Minako’s crumbled form; the first to drag the screaming child from the depths on the unconscious omega’s robes. The first to cradle the newborn close, paying no attention to the milk leaking from her chest as she crooned to the naked and shivering child mewling in her arms like a kitten. It was her pheromones that had calmed baby Yuuri down to small, shuddering whimpers. It was her scent, heavy with the rich sugary smell of a recent pregnancy that gave the foundling his first taste of House Nikiforov.

The tears that had been lingering in her eyes cascaded down her cheeks in small waterfalls, but she kept her gaze steady, on Viktor as she shook her head and gripped the edges of his robe in a plea, “Please don't take him away from me, Vitya. I need him; please don't take him where I can't follow.”

He smelled only salt as his mother wept. Salt, salt...

Salt from the baby in xyr dam’s arms.

“Oh, my dearest, don't cry. Yes, that’s it.” She smiled wide as the baby blinked up with dark, wine colored eyes. “Oh, Araak's gift, look at the color of those eyes.”

Viktor felt his heart leap. Oma never smiled like that anymore, not since she lost the last baby. But now her smile was so big and bright, and curled with a heart just like how it used to be. Viktor found xemself grinning as xe tiptoed to look at what had made xyr dam so happy.

Xe crinkled xyr nose. It looked like a potato and smelled oddly spicy and sweet at the same time. Xe sneezed and backed away from the overpowering scent. Xyr dam clucked and rocked the baby gently to and fro.

“Oh Vitya,” she sighed, and Viktor tried not to make a weird face as she sniffed the baby’s head and ran a cheek against it, “wouldn’t it be nice if Apa let us keep xem?”

It was just a spicy potato but Viktor didn’t say that out loud. Xe looked at it again and watched xyr dam’s smile go wider. It still looked mushed, like a boiled dumpling, but if it could make xyr dam smile like this, then xe guessed it wouldn’t be so bad if it stayed.

The sound of his mother sobbing pulled Viktor out of the memory. Viktor let her lean into him and brought his arms around her, hugging her as tight as he could dare. He let out a shaky breath, his
dam's pheromones -as salty and acrid as an acid sea- affecting him more than he expected.

“I have to,” he croaked because Yuuri wanted this and he wanted this for Yuuri even if it would break his mother's heart. “I have to.”

The younger omega couldn't keep being a surrogate for all the children his mother had lost. He deserved a life of his own.

“I won't give my blessing.”

Viktor didn't need her blessing though. They both knew that.

“Even if you don't need it, I won't give it. I won't say it is okay for you to take Yuurochka away!”

She sounded young, petulant like the stereotypes of omegas that said they did not age (They didn’t. Viktoria was 15 years older than her husband and he was still the one to succumb first to magical exhaustion). Viktor ached for his mother.

“Mama, you could come visit us. You know I'd make space for you.”

“I can't, Vitya...This is my home,” he followed her eyes as they drifted towards the frozen urn at the center of her altar, “This is where my heart lies.”

Even dead, the man was still making decisions for his omega. Viktor’s visage soured in displeasure as he found yet another thing to dislike about his sire.

“A few weeks away would hardly break the law,” he responded, his gaze narrowing just a little at his father’s ashes.

His mother coughed at the unpleasant change in his scent before releasing a much more agreeable and neutral puff of sandalwood. She didn’t say anything as they stood in her cloud of pheromones.

So, Viktor waited and watched.

She sighed. “This is blasphemy, Viktor. To take an omega, a godling, out of the safety of the Sanctum is a sin. Your father has declared it so. The Grigori would never let you do it.”

He shrugged. “I am not asking their permission.”

They would bend when he said so but he would not let Yuuri’s dreams be waylaid by the year he still had to wait before he could properly take control of Nikiforov clan. Grigori opinions mattered little to him, just like they had mattered little to his grandfather. It was his father who had always seemed to quake in fear of them.

“The outside world isn’t any place for an omega. What would you say to your father, Anud rest his soul, if something happened to Yuuri?”

“My father is dead,” he snapped with flair of annoyance at the continuing challenge of his position. Did he not sit at the top? He hadn’t suffered all of those years of his father’s baiting and domination to be questioned like he was still just the heir. Why was she treating him as if he were a child? “I am the lord now.”

He hated himself the moment the words left his mouth. His sudden anger chilled as her expression crumbled. He blamed the restless alpha lurking under his skin. It was reacting so stupidly to the smallest of things lately.
“Vitya...How could you say that...” Her voice was quiet, but even through the soft tone he could hear the quiet undercurrent of anger.

He was in trouble.

His mother pulled out of their hug and Viktor braced himself for the blowback for his harsh words. Nothing happened and when he opened his eye, his dam was just staring at him and somehow that felt even worse.

There was heat in her eyes, yes; but, there was also resignation and a tiredness that was probably born from grieving. For a second, the aroma of bitter almond circulated in the air before disappearing just as quickly.

The fragrance scared Viktor. It expressed an idea that was absolutely too terrifying to even consider. He knew the history and the shameful tradition of killing omegas after their alpha’s death. The practice was said to have fallen out of use by the time his grandfather took over the family but the old alpha had called the act a mercy in that resigned, world weary tone he only used when explaining mage savagery

Viktor sank to his knees and bowed his head, exposing his neck to his mother in apology. It was a child’s pose for punishment or forgiveness, but he knew it suited his actions. It had been a raging and stupidly inappropriate thing to say. And, to a grieving omega? A dangerous thing to say.

He shivered. Just because tradition ended, did not mean things stopped. Isolating omegas was old fashioned by his grandfather’s era but that had not impeded his father when it came time to decide the fate of his family’s omegas. Most traditions never really changed with Nikiforovs or any of the High Houses. Just because they did not say things aloud didn’t mean that they didn’t practice them in secret.

His grandmother had jumped onto the pyre before anyone could stop her; his great aunt had chosen a hard fall from the roof of an ayrie.

Viktor, as his father’s heir and companion for official duties, he had been old enough to be present at the last offices for both. It had been a horrifying experience to see their bodies mutilated beyond recognition. On each occasion, his father’s expression twisted his beautifully cruel visage into something almost human.

Once a tear had slipped out as his sire ran his hand in prayer over what Viktor assumed was a leg. It was an older omega; ancient even by omega standards who had lost their alpha even though their mate had been decades junior to themselves. As he instructed Viktor to pull back the shroud that was most likely covering a mutilated face, his father had whispered a prayer that started and ended in his mother’s name. When the sheet was pulled back to reveal what used to be a beautiful features, a sound dangerously close to a sob had left his sire's mouth before the older mage could gather himself together and comment snidely on the cruelty of omega longevity and how it was a waste on creatures so fragile.

The combination of looking at the body and thinking of his dam and Yuuri had made Viktor feel sick but even then he knew that those omegas weren’t dying because they were frail.

They were dying because House Nikiforov gave them a world with no options. If the only choices were to stay an isolated, lonely and forgotten widow, become a nun in a remote and desolate ayrie, or to have a continuous string of babies for the Nikiforov clan until you died, what would anyone realistically choose?
It was so brutal. He knew he couldn’t really comprehend as an alpha but the glimpses he could understand left him loathing what House Nikiforov did to its omegas. He hated it, had hated it way before his father sent him to study with Yakov.

Viktor whined, something he had not done since he was a very small child. Their rules left omegas on such lonely little precarious pedestals.

“Mama,” he whispered although he didn’t dare raise his head. He wished that she would just pinch the nape of his neck quickly so that he could stand up again and crush her into a hug, “I’m so sorry, Mamochka.”

His mother sank to his level and buried her face into his shirt as her cold arms came up to hug around his neck. Ice trailed after the fingertips grazing his nape.

“I don’t know what came over me.” Viktor tried to apologize. Viktoria pulled him tighter into her embrace. The air was salty again and her tears froze to his clothes.

“It doesn’t matter,” she sobbed against his shoulder, her fingers reaching and chilling him to the bone as she wrapped her arms around his shoulders, “No matter what I say or how much you apologize, you will still take him away.”

Viktor nodded because for a moment words were too hard. His mother pinched his nape, the frost on her fingertips making the action sting.

“Promise me, you must promise me, Vitya,” she whispered so close to his right ear that he could feel ice, “that when he comes back, he will as beautiful and soft as he was on the day I first laid eyes on him.”

When he found his voice, it was raw, tough and swollen with sentiment.

“I promise you, Mamochka, when he comes back, he will be the most beautiful creature you have ever seen.”

Viktor closed the door to his mother’s bower with a quiet click. He had stayed with her until she cried herself to sleep. He himself couldn’t wait to go to bed. He was exhausted, emotionally and physically.

“I didn’t bring Yuuri here for him to end up murdered like the rest of his family.”

Viktor jumped a little at the sudden sound of Minako’s voice when he expected the hallways to be clear at this time of night. Then, when he realized what she had said, he glared.

Nobody could even confirm what had happened to the Katsukis other than the whole main family went missing and the estate was left a pile of ashes. Why was everyone being so theatrical? Yuuri would be soaring and throwing a few spells, not throwing the windows open and screaming to the world that he was a Katsuki. Besides, what was with this murder business? Secrets were secrets, and he would keep Yuuri’s heritage a secret until the day he died. He was tired. He wanted a bed, not Minako hissing at him from the middle of the corridor and accusing him of getting Yuuri killed.

He answered her hissing with a growl of his own.
In retrospect, Viktor would recall this moment and wish that he had pushed Minako further into meatier details but at the time, the thing he wanted most was his toasty, warm bed.

“Minako,” he said wearily because he was already swaying on his feet and it was clear that the stand-off would not end unless he was the bigger person, “Am I not your lord?”

She nodded though her pinched expression said she was confused by the question.

“Good. Then, listen to your master and leave me alone.”

Well, he was almost the bigger person but could anyone really blame him?

“You had better know what you’re doing,” she spit before she retreated back towards her own bower down the hall.

Viktor continued to stumble his way out of the Sanctum.

There was absolutely nothing beautiful about the omega standing in front of him now. Yuuri looked like he had just rolled out of bed, into his clothes, and down the hallway to where Viktor stood.

“Yuuri, are you sure you’re ready?” Viktor asked, braiding a few of Yuuri’s wild black strands down into something more respectable.

The teen answered with a yawn as he raised a fist to rub sleep from the corner of his eye. The older mage had to stop himself from squealing over how cute it looked. Minako gave a baleful look at the noise that did escape Viktor. She was still not too happy with him.

But Viktor didn’t really care if she was happy. This was about Yuuri and if the younger man was happy then that was all that he needed.

Minako let go of her glowering in favor of fretting over her former charge as they walked (Yuuri staggered) down the halls of the Sanctum towards the front entrance.

When they arrived at his mother’s door, Yuuri’s scent soured. Viktor was not sure if it was from fright or nerves. The teen had probably sensed the magic last night; it was not as if the fight had been subtle.

Yuuri was just about to knock on the door when it whipped open with a bang and a flash of blue and silver. A large, blue Nikiforov dragon poured out of the doorway and wrapped itself around youth’s neck with an ear splitting screech. Yuuri’s hands came up in wonder. Viktor’s in panic. But then the dragon quieted.

“O beautiful one, let us give you a blessing,” it purred in a voice that sounded very much like Viktoria Nikiforova and slunk down around Yuuri into a blue scarf heavy with the scent of omega blood and silver strands of Nikiforov hair.

There was a laugh and suddenly his mother was throwing herself at Yuuri and nuzzling her tears into his cheek.

Viktor gaped. He didn't think omegas, even with their vast stores of magic, could have the control
to access the guardian, even for a blessing. When he turned to his mother to ask, she put a finger to her lip and winked.

“We have our ways,” was all she said, ice dancing in her eyes.

Her attention went back to Yuuri; Viktor forgotten entirely. She was probably still angry.

“Oh Yuuri, Yuura, sweetness, darling, dearest...” She went through so many nicknames that Yuuri's cheeks and ears turned red, “Oma is so proud of you!”

“Really?” The younger omega peered up at her through his lashes, his cheeks still tinged pink.

“Yes, you'll be so wonderful and beautiful and oh, Oma will make Vitya send a scry of every show.”

She said it so quickly and so surely, like she did not spend hours arguing with Viktor the night before. It made him want to laugh at the irony. He earned a glare for his insolence which ordinarily would not have fazed him but looking into his dam's gaze in that moment was like looking into the eyes of a basilisk.

It was like she was challenging Viktor, daring him to doubt that she would be happy for Yuuri, to doubt that she wouldn't tear the world apart for her foster son if he'd ask.

But Viktor didn't. He didn’t doubt it for a second.

Because watching her cheer on Yuuri like she meant it, like she didn't spend last night sobbing, like she didn't just try to freeze Viktor to death for what he's about to do, Viktor realized she would do it - even if that world was her own.

She wailed, of course. And when Viktor said it was time to go and she nearly frosted the entire hallway but Minako stepped in with her calming scent and Viktoria, after countless ‘I love you’s, goodbyes, and promises, let Yuuri go.

Her goodbye to her biological son was much colder and Viktor nearly swore when he felt ice creep up his back as he hugged his mother goodbye. He promised to let them know when he and Yuuri reached safe. Minako still had the presence of mind to respond. His mother did not.

Viktor draped an arm around Yuuri and pulled him away anyway because he promised Yuuri they would leave.

They trudged through the gardens, buildings, and hallways that Yuuri had only had glimpses of until they reached the courtyard where their transport waited. Makkachin and Vicchan were there already, barking in excitement from an open window.

Viktor instructed Yuuri on the customary moment of reflection before leaving. The younger man performed the action with tears streaming from his eyes.

For a second, Viktor hesitated. He considered taking the teen back and opened his mouth to do so when Yuuri gripped him by his hand so tightly that the delicate bones rubbed against one another. Viktor's mouth snapped shut.

“Let's leave together,” Yuuri said, his eyes sparkling as he gazed into a distance that he had never been allowed to cross.

“I'm ready now,” Viktor thought seeing determination and resolve so clearly written on the
omega’s face.

He smiled, looking at the same scenery as Yuuri and let his tensions blow away on a plume of exhaled breath. He squeezed the smaller hand in his grasp as his smile grew wide. Yuuri grinned back, a bright flame amongst a landscape of ice.

Hand in hand, they took Yuuri’s first steps into the outside world.
Vexingly (Edited 07/03/2019)

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, Viktor and Yuuri settle into their new life together and hit a few road bumps along the way.

Chapter Notes

The genderless pronoun xe is used in this story as mage children decide whether or not to be male or female upon coming of age. It works as follows:

Xe - He/She
Xem - Him/Her
Xyr - His/Her
Xyrs - His/Hers
Xemself - Himself/Herself

Credit to fanndists on Tumblr for terms "oma" and "apa"
Oma - Omega Mother
Apa - Alpha Father
Credit to fanndist for the concept of a legal alpha or alpha guardianship

Credit to Tongari Boushi no Atorie for the concept of ateliers, soar shoes, and magical placement tests.

CONTENT WARNING:
Mentions/References to sexual assault
Mentions/References to attempted sexual assault

Witnessing Yuuri learn how to adapt to modern life was an alternating dance of fascination and alarm. It was like watching him take his first steps all over again with how the teen stopped, and started, and stumbled throughout his new daily life. Sometimes, it was amusing. Sometimes it was cute. But, more often than not, it was full of Viktor berating himself for not being more equipped to take care of and guide Yuuri.

The omega had only been with him for three days and already things felt like they were falling apart. There was just so much work to do, work that Viktor had not even realized that he needed to prepare for. He could overlook some of the shoddy life skills because his own had been awful before he was sent to study with Yakov, but Yuuri was so innocent; so unsuspecting and unknowing of so many things that his behavior and actions kept Viktor’s alpha on an exhausting edge. His instincts were regularly be pulled at and he found himself constantly hovering, worrying, and guarding over the teen as much as he did when Yuuri was taking his first tentative footfalls as a toddler.
He wasn’t used to it and didn’t really like it - the loss of control. It grated at his need for perfection and the flawless alpha image he strived to maintain. Every little slip up had him wired, scared that that one day he might lose it entirely and just snap.

Like right now, Yuuri's latest mishap had Viktor's alpha dialed up to 1,000. One minute he was about to get a snack and the next, he was standing in his entrance way, shoving Yuuri behind him and growling at Chris like he could tear the other man’s throat out.

All his alpha brain would let him think about was neutralizing the potential threat to his omega. He was so lost in his instincts that he barely registered the soft "oof" Yuuri gave as he tripped over himself and landed on the hardwood floor.

“Do you really have to growl at me?” griped Chris in his native Phrancian, the language they normally used to communicate. He was smiling as he said it but the sour notes to his scent said otherwise.

Yuuri's worry, with its nose tickling and lemony scent, added to the unpleasant atmosphere. Viktor sneezed which startled him enough to snap him out of his aggressive state.

Apparently, he had developed an “allergy” to the scent of Yuuri’s anxiety. The omega guidebooks said it was a side effect of their childhood bond adjusting to the closer proximity and adult natures. The horror he had felt at learning it was a common occurrence even now amongst mages had been only second to the nausea that he felt when he read the symptoms could last of up to a year.

His face burned with embarrassment as he wiped at his nose. He must look like a joke growling and sneezing at his oldest friend. This wasn’t the Viktor Chris was used to seeing and the older man just knew from the twinkle in perchten’s eyes that his friend was going to have something witty to say about it.

His alpha was really the worst. Chris had called him last night and said that he would stop by to say hello while he was in Ost Pyotrsborg for a patronage meeting, but his inner self had just forced that information out of Viktor's head the minute Yuuri had run to open the door without considering who was behind it. With no knowledge of what was on the other side, the presence within him had just reacted when he smelt an unknown alpha scent near the unprotected omega.

He mumbled an apology to Chris and even though leaving his back open to other alpha made him want to snarl, Viktor still turned around and reached down to help Yuuri back up. After taking a few seconds to make sure the teen was not hurt, he returned to Chris with a sheepish look.

Lemon teased Viktor's senses and he sneezed again as Yuuri and his nervous scent came up close behind him. The fragrance grew cloying as the omega clung to the back of his shirt, on his tiptoes to stare at Chris from the cover of Viktor's shoulder. Chris stared back, his amused smile still painted on his face. Viktor was torn between wanting to comfort Yuuri so that he could stop sneezing and appeasing Chris so the perchten would stop smelling like the older mage had tried to kill him.

He decided on Yuuri because the omega was cuter, closer, and he really wanted to stop the annoying burning sensation in his nose. Just as he suspected, the scent disappeared as soon as he turned and wrapped the teen in his arms. However, unlike he expected, Viktor also found himself calming as he breathed in the younger man and smelt that he was safe.

“Yuuri, please don't open the front door without checking first,” he murmured into the mop of black hair just under his lips. As he fought to bring down his alpha, Viktor tried not blame Yuuri because the teen could not help his upbringing. “This isn't like the Sanctum where the entrances
are protected by blood magic.”

He felt Yuuri nod against him obediently and the action further soothed his battered nerves.

“Good boy.”

Yuuri preened just enough to turn his scent sweet and Viktor took it as a cue that it was finally safe enough to address Chris.

“Well that was a marvelous welcome,” the younger man quipped as he met Viktor's eyes with a small smirk.

The mage’s hand automatically went to rub at the back of his neck as he ducked his head in shame.

“I can’t help it. My instincts are a bit...ah out of control right now,” he grumbled, hoping against hope that the other thaumaturge would let it go and not tease him too much about his overreaction.

Chris's widening smile told him no and he inwardly groaned.

“I should be honored. It's not every day that the great Viktor Nikiforov loses his cool enough to actually growl like the rest of us lowly alphas.”

Viktor gave him a flat look. Sometimes, it was like the other man chose to be obtuse about the realities of being a public figure. They both knew that Viktor had a façade he needed to maintain – a certain level of gentility and decorum that Nikiforovs were expected to attain.

He also had no desire to growl and slobber like a stereotypical alpha.

“Do you want to come inside or should I just leave you out here to keep insulting me?” he snapped with a haughty turn of his head.

He loved Chris. He really did but he was already spread thin right now and if jokes were all the other alpha was going to give him, he had no qualms about just shutting the door in his guest’s face. Chris would understand. He was, after all, the one always begging for candidness in their relationship.

“It was you who growled at me, darling. I did not come to argue.” Chris answered back jovially. His eyes lit up in mischief at the sight of the younger mage who was still staring at him from behind Viktor's shoulder. “So, this is your omega, Yuuri?”

“He's not mine,” grouched Viktor. Chris was really trying to push his buttons today. The other man knew that he hated referring to omegas like they were property. Then he added,

“He doesn't speak Phrancian. You'll have to speak either good old Rhurshyan, Jiروh or Standard.”

“You shouldn't say it like that,” Chris sing-songed immediately in Standard. “You might give the poor thing a complex telling him he's not yours. Omegas like belonging to someone.”

Viktor grit his teeth but he didn’t know if it was because of Chris’s words (which he filed into his mental folder labeled "Dragonshit") or the younger alpha’s proximity to Yuuri. He felt a rumble stir in his chest as the other man reached out towards the teen. Chris paused, his eyes wide, and then tsked, actually tsked at Viktor like he was some wayward whelp.

“Easy, my friend. He won't learn to trust me enough to do my job if you're treating me like a perv.”

“You are a perv.” Viktor mumbled just slightly under his breath.
“Yes,” Chris agreed with a smirk that should be obscene and probably nowhere near Yuuri, “but I’m a mated perv who has little interest in his best friend’s betrothed. Now, please stop thinking with your knot and let me greet your new apprentice.”

Viktor stepped to the side with a few choice words, leaving Yuuri completely at Chris’s mercy.

“My little doe,” the younger alpha purred and Viktor was sure the effect was just to rile him up, ‘is your Maester training you right?’

Surprisingly, Yuuri was the one that bristled this time.

“Vitya is a great Maester!”

Chris threw his head back with a laugh. “I thought you might say that.”

“Who are you?” Yuuri questioned, sliding back to Viktor’s side which suggested that he was clearly done with Chris’s teasing.

The other man looked aghast at this and turned to Viktor with the air of someone who had been greatly betrayed.

“You didn’t tell him about me? Viktor, how negligent!”

Viktor smiled and was about to give a witty retort when Yuuri bounced from behind him to shove himself between the two of them with an unexpected amount of violence.

“Vitya’s not negligent,” he hissed, looking very much like an indignant kitten. It seemed like Viktor was not the only one affected by the odd intensities in their bond.

The scent of cinnamon slowly started to permeate the air sending Viktor into a panic when he realized what Yuuri intended. He had totally forgotten about the omega’s proprium scent. If Chris had even a modicum of awareness, he would recognize the smell of fire immediately. And, because he was possibly the nosiest person on Eorthe, the perchten would ask questions that Viktor wasn’t even sure he knew how to answer.

He felt his anxiety spike over how little he had actually thought Yuuri’s cover story through. The lie at home was he a ward, a distant Nikiforov with a bit of foreign blood. People believed it back there, but Viktor supposed you had to when the Head Alpha ordered you to comply.

Yuuri continued to hiss and the hair on the back of Viktor’s neck stood up in response to the gradual swelling of magic in the air. Chris gasped and Viktor knew had to step in now before Yuuri accidentally revealed himself.

“Yuura, Chris is a friend,” He said slowly, with his hands on Yuuri’s shoulders to ground him. He let out a puff of pheromones to cover Yuuri’s spell. “He’s a good friend actually...well...sometimes.”

The omega stopped posturing immediately. Viktor breathed a sigh of relief when the spiced scent disappeared just as quickly.

“More than just friend,” Chris piped in. “I’m Viktor’s Watchful Eye. Think of me as a doting fairy god-maester.”

“So he’s like Ms. Minako then?” Yuuri asked, his head tilted towards Viktor.
“I guess,” the older mage shrugged even though Chris did not possess even half of the decency nor dignity of Yuuri’s former governess.

The comparison changed something in the youth. He stared at Chris for a few more seconds before he came to a decision that made him hold out his hand in the customary omega greeting for strangers.

“May Araak bless this meeting,” Yuuri whispered shyly, the back of his hand stretched out for Chris to squeeze.

Chris blinked and Viktor sighed

“He doesn’t know what that means, Yuura. He’s not a mage and people don’t do that in the city.”

“Oh,” Yuuri dropped his hand and then with a pinched brow asked, “Is that why he looks so strange?” He gestured towards Chris’s horns and beard. “Because he is not a mage?”

“Perchta’s tits, Viktor” Chris cried, looking at the older man with a complete “what the fuck” expression on his face. “What are you teaching this kid?”

Viktor winced. He was back at 1000 but for a completely different reason now.

“Yuuri, you can’t just say things like that!” he scolded, feeling properly scandalized by the teen’s question as well. “Chris isn’t strange. He’s an alpha perchten,” he explained with six different kinds of embarrassment burning through him. “It’s normal for them to have a beard and horns.”

Now both of them were mortified. Yuuri flushed and turned to Chris with big, watery eyes. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be rude.”

And, began to sink towards the ground but Viktor grabbed the teen by the bicep before he could lower himself any further into a bow. That would only make things more awkward.

He blamed himself. He had never thought to introduce the younger mage to any other races and just assumed that it had been covered as part of his education. Now, the error of his ways was showing and in front of his oldest friend, too. Viktor wanted to crawl into a hole and die.

Chris laughed, cutting off Yuuri’s tears and through Viktor’s shame. “Mages have always been dragonshit at navigating race,” he chuckled and gave Viktor a knowing look. “You were absolutely awful, Viktor, before I got my hands on you. You actually tried to touch my horns the first time we met.”

“I’m still sorry about that, Chris,” Viktor mumbled, looking as chastised as Yuuri. He was going to pass out if his face got any redder.

Chris waved off the apology. “It’s all in the past, my friend, but really you should be teaching Yuuri better.”

Neither deigned to tell the youth that Chris had responded by calling Viktor an “inbred cousin-fucker” and that the fight that ensued had led to a month’s worth of toilet scrubbing duties before Yakov would even consider letting either of them on his aether.

Chris pinched one of Yuuri’s candy apple red cheeks and tutted. “A charmless thaumaturge will be a patronless thaumaturge.”

Watching Chris’s actions, Viktor nodded instead of growling like he thought he would. The Helven
wasn’t wrong. He may not be a Nikiforov but you did not become a champion level thaumaturge without learning how to navigate society deftly.

When he and Yuuri were alone again, Viktor was going to have to run the teen through a crash course on diversity; a detailed one at that because a thaumaturge couldn’t make the mistake the younger mage had just made on the international stage and expect to be respected by their peers. Mages were already eyed with distrust because of their “cultural practices”. There was no need for Yuuri to be the type of mage that confirmed their suspicions.

Seemingly satisfied with older man’s response, Chris looped his arm around Yuuri’s shoulders and started to drag him further into the apartment, towards the den.

“Don’t worry, Yuuri, “he soothed, “life is about learning from our mistakes.” He looked down at his new student. “Have you learned from today’s mistake?”

Yuuri nodded his head so earnestly that Chris gave him a small squeeze.

“Excellent,” he praised, walking them further down the corridor. “Now, Yuuri, have you ever heard of video games?” he asked. “My mate, Masumi, is very fond of them. I’ve brought one of his older systems with me. Why don’t I explain the things you should or shouldn’t say to people over a game or two?”

Yuuri looked to Viktor for permission and it took him a moment to comprehend why. But then, he remembered the constant chaperones, the rules, and restrictions the teen had been living with for the last 18 years and understood. He nodded and then padded off to the kitchen to find the long forgotten snacks while trying not to feel overwhelmed at the idea of there being yet another area in Yuuri’s life where the omega was completely ignorant.

He also tried not to let the small spark of jealousy developing within him grow any bigger. It was silly but watching how easily Chris worked through the situation sent a jolt of envy right into his gut. He knew the instant he felt it that he was being childish but he just wasn’t used to people being better than him when it came to things that he wanted.

Later, when Yuuri was engulfed in some racing game with colorful characters that liked to throw things at each other, Chris turned to Viktor with an unpleasantly serious look and said,

“Are you sure about this, Viktor? He is like a little lamb to the slaughter. I met with the Plisetsky omega and the difference is like night and day. Plistesky is a little beast, feral if you want to be unkind. He will do well on the aether, but Yuuri…Are you sure you can handle this?”

Viktor did not say anything. If only people could understand how dedicated to Yuuri he wanted to be. Abandoning Yuuri once had given Viktor enough guilt to last a lifetime. He did not think he could survive doing it twice.

Chris hesitated for a moment under the force of his silence, but pressed on eventually when he realized that Viktor wasn’t going to give him an answer. “Are you sure it was right to bring him to the city, to this life?”

“Yes,” Viktor lied. He was not sure at all. In fact, every day his doubts grew stronger, but he was never going to let Chris know that.

“Why?”

Why indeed Viktor thought to himself. He didn’t take his eyes off of Yuuri. Chris’s scent shifted into something citrusy, lying somewhere in between the spaces of worry and amusement. It burned
but it did not make Viktor sneeze like Yuuri’s distress would. He tried his best to keep his own scent from answering as he lost himself to thought.

He was at Yuuri’s coming of age. He remembered Yuuri as a baby, as a child. Yes, Yuuri has a long way to go but this Yuuri was not them. This Yuuri was grown, growing. He witnessed the evolution of it every day. This morning Yuuri would have answered the door without thought. Tomorrow, he would check first. A day ago, Yuuri would have thought horns and a beard were unnatural. Now, he knew that they were not. Even that little bit was a difference, a step forward in independence Viktor thought.

He watched as Yuuri grinned after winning his racing match. An hour ago, he didn’t even know what video games were. How could people see this and expect him to return his beloved back to the prison of stagnation that was the sanctum?

Viktor’s resolve to grant Yuuri’s wish hardened alongside the anger that was building in him.

Why was everyone already judging the teen before he had even made his debut? Not a single one of his doubters really knew Yuuri and what he was capable of. Anud’s Hells, Viktor did not even really know himself.

Was it not worth a chance to see? Was it not worth giving Yuuri the opportunity to bloom? It did not matter if Yuuri was an omega. It did not matter if Yuuri failed and wanted to go back to the Sanctum. Yuuri had asked and damn all society, Viktor felt compelled to reply. Viktor wanted to see. He wanted to see what Yuuri was capable of when he was allowed to fly with his wings fully spread.

He answered Chris,

“Because he asked.”

A mere three weeks and several tensions later, and it was becoming increasingly clear that Viktor was right about not knowing Yuuri.

Well. He knew the small things.

Like Yuuri’s favorite color was blue, his favorite food was katsudon, and that the teen’s most favorite person in the world was likely himself. But, other than his wish and a smattering of childhood memories, Viktor knew about as about his Yuuri as he did the other Yuri.

Which meant he knew zilch.

Even Yuuri’s personality was different from what he could remember.

There was reason his mother often called Yuuri his duckling. As a child, the omega had followed him everywhere and clung to him like a leech. There was hardly an independent bone in his body when Viktor was concerned. This new Yuuri was like night to child Yuuri’s day and tried so hard to be self-sufficient that it was adorable. Sometimes, Viktor’s fangs ached at the sweetness of it.

It was this sweetness that he had to remember on days like this because this new Yuuri was also stubborn like an ox and getting through to him when he had made up his mind was like fighting a seven headed dragon. But Viktor needed to get through to Yuuri because the current “issue” had kept the younger mage housebound for the past three weeks. The omega came with Viktor to see the world and spellcast but he couldn’t do either cooped up in Viktörs’s apartment.
The older man groaned and scrubbed a hand across his face. It was not like he wanted to keep Yuuri locked up. He would not have spent the last few months doing all that work to start a life with him if he was just going to reproduce the youth’s existence in the Sanctum.

The stairs creaked making Viktor wince in anticipation. Even before Yuuri stepped foot onto the first floor, he could smell him. The teen absolutely reeked of pheromones. It was worse than a heat. In fact, it felt worse than an omega house full of heat sick omegas. The older man blew his nose twice after it started to burn, irritated by the strong scent, before he gave up and stuffed some nearby tissues up his nose.

A look of hurt crossed Yuuri’s features when he spotted Viktor but it quickly turned into averted eyes and stiff shoulders as the younger mage made his way into the kitchen and began to open cupboards in preparation for his breakfast. As he reached for the cereal (which had become the teenager’s obsession since Chris introduced it to him), Viktor noticed that Yuuri’s eyes were red like he had been crying. Ordinarily, Viktor would care so much that it physically hurt but he couldn’t summon up his usual feelings in the wake of trying not to let his own eyes water.

A little bit of scent was not bad; it was how mages were able to tell primary gender. Cedar for alphas. Sandalwood for omegas. Lavender for betas. A whiff while you were standing close was fine. A little fragrance after getting sweaty? Okay. But Viktor could smell Yuuri from across the apartment and that was not going to work in the city. Omegas would get tetchy, betas nervous, and unsavory alphas would be clawing at each other to devour Yuuri in what they would see as an invitation. Anud’s Hells, even Viktor had to stop himself from growling like a mindless hound when the scent caught him off guard.

And, if he had to have one more fight about it (6 weeks ago, Xiv's teeth, he didn't even know if he could argue with Yuuri and survive it) he was going to personally shove the younger man into a shower and scrub him down until every inch of the teen was clean and smelling like one lone omega.

Yuuri passed by him on the way to the kitchen table and Viktor audibly choked on the cloud of scent that followed.

“Yuuri,” It sounded strange and high pitched with his nose blocked off from his attempts to not die from a pheromone overdose, “did you shower lately?”

Yuuri bristled, and without a word, grabbed his bowl of cereal and stormed upstairs. Viktor should not be happy to hear the slam of the other man’s door, but Yuuri’s room was scent proof with the door closed and so the minute the door shut, Viktor could breathe in relief. His happiness only lasted as long as it took him to look over at the wall calendar Yakov had sent and realize that he was at least a week behind schedule. They should have already started training or at the very least, getting Yuuri's documents together. Yakov was probably going to tear him apart when they finally did show up. With a sigh he turned his eyes towards the ceiling, and as he listened to Yuuri’s movements upstairs, he wondered what he should do.

He finally snapped when Yuuri’s pheromones got so thick and syrupy that he woke up from an afternoon nap with a raging hard-on and the terrifying symptoms of a pre-rut despite the fact that he took the highest grade suppressants. Under the thundering of his heart and the throbbing in his pants, he could feel his alpha clawing at him, howling and battering at the bars of his control.

The sound of glass shattering startled him. His eyes snapped up and landed on Yuuri who looked just as disgruntled as Viktor felt. The older man spared a moment to feel sorry for him. The teen had probably never smelled an alpha at their basest so it had to be making the omega’s senses go
They held each other’s gazes, the air growing thicker with tension until Yuuri moved, the action setting them down a dangerous course.

Viktor fought it but he could feel the switch as his humanity shifted towards the dark god of the hunt that all alphas supposedly took after. He growled at Yuuri, the alpha in him wanting the omega to stay put. As if his body understood the command, Yuri froze. He looked like a doe ready for the chase. For tearing apart. For being covered by Viktor's heavy body and claimed. The older man felt himself rise up slow from the couch in a smooth and sinuous movement like a snow leopard stalking its prey.

He heard something crunch under his feet and felt a brief flash of pain but his eyes didn’t leave Yuuri who was now shrieking at something or someone.

"-iktor, glass. You're...onna..hu-.” He could barely make out the sounds.

From a far away distance, he smelt vinegar and begonias. A dog barked. Another growled. He felt his arm stretch out towards something a thousand miles away.

Yuuri let out a bloodcurdling cry.

Screaming that never seemed to stop.

A hand stretching, reaching out towards him.

The memory snapped him back into control and with a snarl he threw his alpha back into the cage of his mind.

He was in the kitchen…

…but it was a mess. Glass and blood littered the floor. Makkachin and Vicchan were barking at him like he was a demon. Yuuri fluttered around his feet, panicking at all of the blood. When the younger mage looked up, Viktor saw tears. The sight stabbed like a dagger straight into his gut. He could have done anything to Yuuri and here the omega was more concerned over Viktor's feet than his own personal safety. He felt sick and that feeling was enough for him to act.

“Yuuri,” The younger man paused over his freak out to stare up at Viktor. The alpha could feel heat rising in his cheeks. “You can't keep smelling like this.”

Now, it was Yuuri's turn to blush and for split second, the pinched look on the teen's face made Viktor think he was going to run up to his room again. But, Yuuri surprised Viktor by gently pushing the alpha back and away from the glass without saying a word.

“Yuuri, silence won't make me go away.”

Yuuri just stared at the blood slowly flowing from Viktor's foot with a strange expression.

“This is stupid, Vitya” he said finally, his eyes still captured by the crimson spreading across the tiles.”You shouldn't get so angry over the way I smell.”

The way he smelled? Yuuri practically smelled like a 100 heat blown omegas. He could not be that insensate, that unaware. Surely, his mother and Minako would not be that careless? She wrote that she had trained him. If Viktor didn't have the pain in his foot to ground him who knows what awful thing could have happened?
“Yuuri, look...”

“Oma would scold you for ruining her floors.”

Viktor took a deep breath and immediately regretted it. He could feel the unwanted desire coiling in his body again.

“Oma isn't here, Yuuri. It's just me and you. I’m sure she talked about the... ah...the...attraction between alphas and omegas and what scent does,” his cheeks warmed to a dangerous degree but he continued, “which is why it's important that you don't smell so much. Not taking showers is dangerous when there are alphas near.”

Yuuri snapped his head up to glare at Viktor and hissed, “Stop saying that! I take showers all the time!”

Viktor almost staggered back from shock. Yuuri had never hissed at him before. The sound was like an arrow to his chest but he recovered quickly enough to call dragonshit on the teen’s claim.

“Yuura, I have a nose. You can't tell me that's the truth.”

“Fine, then I'll show you!” Yuuri gritted out, his eyes taking on the reddish tint of fire.

“Yuura, what?” Viktor's brain sputtered. Yuuri was going to do what!?

“Watch me shower, Vitya,” he responded calmly like he was not offering himself up on a silver platter. “Let me clean up your foot and I'll show you.”

Viktor was left gaping in the kitchen after Yuuri dashed off to get the first aid kit from the bathroom. He watched semi numb as his foot was carefully cleaned and bandaged without Yuuri giving any indication at all that he understood the type of invitation he just gave.

Inside, Viktor's alpha was howling. He firmly told it to shut up.

One flight of steps later, and the older mage was standing outside of his shower watching a stripped to his underwear Yuuri (Viktor demanded Yuuri go no further) demonstrate his bathing technique.

He supposed things could be weirder. If Chris were here, he would probably laugh and tell him to enjoy the show.

But he did not want to enjoy this show. He did not even want to be at this show because as he watched Yuuri only do a cursory swipe across his scent glands using only one out of the two bars of soap placed in the shower, he came to a realization that made him turn red in pretty much every spot that a mage had blood.

He thought back to his own childhood and adolescence. There were servants for anything and everything. Viktor did not even remember taking unattended showers until he stayed with Yakov and...

“Viktor Nikolayevich why do you smell like a den of alphas!? Go take a shower and scrub properly, boy!”

Yakov had nearly died of embarrassment when he realized what was wrong then just like Viktor was dying of embarrassment now.
Being head alpha had never felt like more of a burden.

He cleared his throat which caught Yuuri's attention and made the teen pause. Viktor was internally screaming. How could he put things delicately?

“Umm Yuura, how many soaps do you use when you wash?”

“One,” Yuuri looked at him like he had grown three heads.

In the end, some things just could not be put delicately so he ended up blurting his advice out in a string of word vomit.

“You're supposed to use two, Yuurochka. Scent soaps will only work if you use the two soaps together.”

They stood silent for a long moment all while Yuuri's skin crept into a full tomato red.

“Oh.”

Oh.

“And you’ve also got to ah... scrub a little at your....ah areas...Showers won't soak away scent like a bath back home does.”

Viktor spent the next half an hour wanting to crawl out of his skin but Yuuri learned to use both soaps, in the correct order, and in all the correct places with the correct techniques.

Later on the living room couch, the older mage pressed further, lecturing his new pupil on the basics of scent etiquette outside of the Nikiforov estate. Yuuri’s face was so red that he looked like a lobster and Viktor was not faring much better but he was the older one so he had to do it. When he finished, they both look like they wanted to be swallowed up into the deepest, darkest bellies of the Eorthe.

Eventually, Yuuri turned to him, his nose scrunch up so cutely that Viktor wanted to boop it once or twice.

“I'm sorry, Vitya.”

“For what?”

“For making you lose control.”

‘No no no no’ Viktor’s brain screeched. That was not the moral of this story and there was no way in Anud's Hells that he was going to allow Yuuri to think like that. That was dangerous thinking for an inexperienced omega and had the possibility and probability to lead to a whole slew of dangerous situations. Alphas were responsible for themselves. Viktor was responsible for himself. If Yuuri learned nothing else while being with him, this was the one thing he wanted him to know.

He told Yuuri so in such a tone that it made the younger man flinch. Viktor cursed and tried again.

“What I meant to say, Yuura, was that you shouldn't ever blame yourself over the behavior of an alpha.”

“Why?” Yuuri returned, confusion swirling in his eyes.

Viktor rested a gentle hand on the omega's shoulder. He didn't want Yuuri to look at him when he
said the next part. He didn't have the courage to see his beloved's expression when he told the youth the ugly truth. He looked at Yuuri, eyes shining with curiosity and blind trust like Viktor was not about to do the unspeakable earlier. A lump formed in his throat.

Yuuri went down without any resistance and let himself be guided to rest in his head in Viktor’s lap with a happy sigh. With no small amount of guilt, Viktor realized that Yuuri had probably been dying for physical contact. He knew that omegas were social, born to be at someone’s side whether it was a mate or a child, but it didn’t quite hit him until Yuuri was nuzzling and purring into his leg like a content kitten.

All of his past satisfaction at finally figuring out the mystery of Yuuri’s strong scent disappeared. Here was yet another area where he had failed Yuuri. He hated it; his alpha was urging him to fix it.

The lump in his throat grew bigger, more insistent.

He considered scenting him or releasing some calming pheromones but it felt too intimate and slightly counterproductive after the embarrassing day they had just had.

As he carded gentle fingers through Yuuri's shoulder length strands, Viktor's heart clenched for so many reasons. This was so hard. Yuuri didn’t come with instructions. Love didn’t come with instructions. Anud’s Hells, not even living together came with instructions.

What was he supposed to do? He was so used to being perfect what would he do if he failed?

He was scared. He could admit that much. He fought to keep the angst from seeping into his scent. He didn’t want to trouble Yuuri whose purring had drifted into the occasional soft snore. Coming back to himself, Viktor suddenly remembered that he had something to tell Yuuri.

“Yuura.”

Yuuri shifted, his eyes blinking slowly in sleepy recognition of his nickname. Viktor felt his heart impossibly swell and contract at the same time at the lazy, tired expression that stared back up at him. He meant to look away but he couldn’t tear his gaze from Yuuri’s brown eyes warm with sleep. He leaned down, brushing Yuuri’s messy bangs out of the way before laying a chaste kiss to the omega’s forehead. Yuuri sighed and sunk further into his lap. Viktor kept his lips there for much longer than he should have, his alpha reveling in the scent of orange blossoms that gently wafted through the room. His troubles started to fall away the longer he breathed in.

Yuuri was safe. Yuuri was happy. Wasn’t that good enough for now? His alpha purred its assent.

“Nevermind,” he whispered, leaning back.

Yuuri shut his eyes with a pleased hum.

One week later, after the soaps had fully kicked in and Viktor was certain that Yuuri’s scent was at a safe level, he scheduled Yuuri’s first step into regular society - the biometric ID card required by all citizens of Ost Pyotrsburg. Viktor rarely used his. No one in the city had ever had trouble identifying him so it mostly collected dust from its eternal spot on his dresser. If he had his way though, Yuuri would not need one either. It was a wild thought when he considered that he was actually the face for the campaign to increase identification numbers.
An ID card was going to make Yuuri traceable which added yet another worry for Viktor. He was tired that night and had reacted badly but he hadn’t entirely ignored Minako’s words. How and what events led to Yuuri’s arrival in the Nikiforov household were still a mystery that only Minako truly seemed to know.

He would never forget the wonder and fear he felt at the sight of the white, swirling lights and smoke that burst out of the Sanctum courtyard the day she appeared, blood running out her ears, eyes, and nose in rivulets thick as rivers as she begged his father to keep the bundle in her arms safe. It was horrifying then just like it was horrifying now to think that whatever caused that was still lurking around in wait. Sometimes, if he dwelled too much on it, it stressed him out enough to want to guard Yuuri.

He huffed a stray hair out of his face. At this point he was sure the stress was going to give him wrinkles. Still, come what may, if a palm-sized piece of plastic was what it took for Yuuri to be able to see the world like he wanted then it was worth it to Viktor.

So, here he was at six o’clock in the morning, after Yuuri had successfully overslept and ignored various alarms and all knockings, trying to drag the lump of sleeping omega out of his nest so they could make it to the Dynamics Center before the crowds would be out and able to see that Viktor Nikiforov had someone by his side.

But Yuuri did not seem the least bit interested in cooperating with his plan.

“Yuuuuuri”

He only received a groan and a wiggle of blankets for his trouble. Viktor waited exactly 5 minutes more before he kneeled down onto the top step leading into the nest and reached down the edge to tug a corner of blanket off of Yuuri the cabbage roll.

Reaching inside Yuuri’s nest without his permission drew a grumble from the omega but it had no heat.

“Come on, Yuuuuuura, we’ve got a very important appointment today,” Viktor sing-songed.

His tone piqued the interest of Vicchan who popped his little head out of the forest of blankets with a soft woof.

“See, Yuuri, even Vicchan is up.”

The omega responded by throwing the covers back over his dog with a mumbled, “Now, he's not.”

Viktor glanced at the clock. It was 6:30. People would be starting to head out to work and if they didn't get going, they would hit the beginnings of rush hour...

Yuuri wasn’t showing any signs of getting up any time soon and Viktor was getting a bit desperate but he wasn’t going to be rude enough to go entirely into Yuuri’s nest to wake the teen up. No sane alpha, short of an emergency, would dare risk the wrath of a disturbing an omega nest by physically entering it without permission. He blew another stray strand of hair from his face and tapped a finger to his mouth as he thought on what to do.

His lips quirked at the wonderful idea that came to him.

“Time to wake up, sleeping beauty.” He reached for the magic that would create a mini snowstorm. He let out a giggle as he yanked at the tendrils and turned Yuuri’s nest into a hurricane of snow.
Yuuri jumped up with a yelp as the cold flakes melted and soaked through his blankets. Half asleep and out of it, the teen flailed his arms around in outrage, instinctively pulling a heat that accidentally melted the rest of the snow into a sheet of heavy water.

“Vitya!” he spluttered, trying to throw off the wet covers. Vicchan yipped indignantly at his side and the pair looked so endearingly waterlogged and affronted that Viktor burst into laughter and threw his arms wide open.

“Good morning, Yuura.”

Yuuri scrambled into Viktor’s arms and buried his face in the alpha’s neck with a whine. “That was mean, Viktor.”

Viktor smiled feeling Yuuri’s pout against his skin. He let his own arms surround the younger man’s back to pull him from the chaos of his nest. The traditional Jiroh sleep clothes Yuuri wore to bed soaked through Viktor’s more modern loungewear.

“I’m sorry, Vuurochka,” He tried to sound contrite but laughter still sat on the edge of his voice. He breathed in Yuuri’s natural sandalwood now successfully tamed by the soap and with the lazy flick of his hand; dispelled the water from the sheets back into the atmosphere. “But, I did say you needed to wake up early today, didn’t I?”

“S’too early.”

“It’s not. Now get up and get ready for me, please. You’ve got to shower and then I’ve got to scent you before we go out.”

“What’s wrong with my scent?” Yuuri’s question was scented with just a pinch of anxiety.

“Nothing, Yuura,” the older mage immediately soothed. “It won’t be much, just enough to let other alphas know to stay away.”

“They should stay away on their own,” Yuuri grumbled and Viktor agreed with every fiber of his being but he was not going to take a chance. Life was coming at them fast and society was not always what he wished it to be. He didn’t have the time to explain this all to Yuuri so instead he crooned, held Yuuri a little closer, and with a small nuzzle, said,

“I know, Yuura, but it will keep you safe. Now, get up.”

Yuuri, perhaps still sleepy, gave a little sigh as he burrowed into Viktor’s arms.

“Carry me?” he whined.

Viktor pretended to be exasperated by the childish request but only just a little. At least Yuuri was not going to argue over the scenting. “Fine, but make sure your shower is quick.”

Thankfully, Yuuri listened and after putting on the clothes Viktor had laid out for him, was scented and ready to go.

It was 7:30.

They were about half an hour from peak time, Viktor thought with agitation. He grabbed a few granola bars and shoved them into Yuuri’s hands with a quick push out of the kitchen so that they could leave.
The younger man gave the bar a baleful look, more used to traditional foods and the cereal that Chris spoiled him with rather than the on-the-go snack. Pressed for time, Viktor ignored the omega’s nose scrunching up in displeasure as he swept Yuuri out of the apartment and into the walkway towards one of the two elevators that serviced the upscale building.

“Do you have your mask?” Viktor suddenly gasped as they were waiting for it to arrive. “And your hat and sunglasses?”

He wanted to slap himself. He had been in such a rush that he didn’t check beforehand.

Despite his desire to leave, this was something that he had no qualms about going back into the apartment for if he had to; keeping Yuuri hidden from the press for as long as possible could only be to the teen’s benefit. Navigating a new life was hard enough, doing it in front of dozens of cameras sounded like an absolute nightmare. Viktor had sworn it to himself when Yuuri first arrived and though he was falling short on many things, this was a promise he was determined to keep.

Yuuri patted his pockets until he found the aforementioned items. Relieved, Viktor slid his own pair of sunglasses on and said, “Good, Yuura, now put them on and once we get out of the elevator, don’t leave my grasp.”

“Is this for protection too, Vitya?,” Yuuri asked, the reluctance was plain on his face as he pulled the mask on.

“Yes,” Viktor replied as he adjusted Yuuri’s hat to cover most of his dark hair.

After making sure that everything that needed covering was covered, he tucked the younger man into his side as the elevator doors slid open.

“Good Morning, sir!” boomed a middle aged and pudgy doorman as they stepped into the lobby. Yuuri jumped from the unexpected noise and Viktor held the teen a bit tighter. He needed to be as relaxed as possible if they had to walk through a crowd.

“Sergei, how bad is it out there?” he asked, squinting as he looked through the tinted glass that made up the entranceway.

“None today, sir. Most of the crowd has been quiet since the funeral.”

That was good. He had a private car on standby but if there were no people that meant they could follow his original plan of taking the subway and giving Yuuri a lesson on how to get around the city. They pushed out of the front entrance and into the brisk, city air with Yuuri still tucked under Viktor’s arm.

The walk to the nearest station was short, a perk of living in one of the most expensive boroughs in the city. It normally only took Viktor 5 minutes but they ended up taking around 15 because Yuuri kept stopping to look at all of the shops they walked by. At first, he was content to let the omega wander but he eventually had to put his foot down after Yuuri broke away to run and look at the window display of a soar-shoe shop.

“Look, Vitya!” he cried, pressing his nose against the glass while Viktor tried his best not to scold him for breaking his promise less than 10 minutes after making it. “They have so many soar-shoes!”

Viktor nodded and then winced after he saw the time on his watch.
“Yuuri, we really need to go.” he warned, gently tugging Yuuri by the hand back to his side. 

Yuuri kept his eyes glued to the shop but followed Viktor without any resistance. He looked up as Viktor forced them into a brisker pace, his eyes bright, big and shining, and asked, 

“Can we go?” He pulled down the mask as he asked showing skin flushed by the cold air. “After we get the ID card, I mean…” 

Viktor felt his chest tighten at the look of pure hopefulness dancing on Yuuri’s face. He was going to go back anyway because Yuuri would need a few pairs before he could practice but with the teen looking like his life depended on returning to the shop; he definitely had to go back now. 

“Okay, Yuura,” he agreed as he pulled the omega’s mask back into place, “but we have to hurry.” 

Yuuri didn’t make any other detours after that, allowing Viktor to steer them down into the subway, show the teen how to put money on an IC card, and go through the turnstiles to the right train. The younger mage looked around in wonder as they descended the steps to reach the platform. He practically bounced in place while they waited for the train to arrive. 

“This is my first time on a train.” 

“I know,” Viktor tried to smile back as he guided the omega to stand in front of him. 

He was having second thoughts. He should have just hired a private car. One too many pairs of eyes kept sliding in their direction. If he was not careful, they might end up being tonight’s dinner time gossip news. 

Someone’s phone went off as they took a picture. Feeling edgy, he urged Yuuri deeper into the cradle of his arms. His alpha brain said it made sense. People would have a harder time of actually capturing a photo of Yuuri if Viktor was covering his body. Yuuri didn’t seem to notice or mind the overprotective position. He continued to bounce, his excited energy filling Viktor's nose with ginger. 

The energy did not stop even when Viktor had to yank him back when he leaned too close to the train rushing by. 

“Amazing!” he cried, using one of Viktor’s favorite catchwords as the train slowed to a stop. 

The doors opened to reveal a packed out train with few people getting off. Viktor stifled a groan. As he bustled Yuuri towards a relatively safe looking corner near the opposite doors, he prayed to Araak to give him the strength not to lose his shit. Then, he called for Ore once he realized the train was getting so full that everyone would be pressed together like sardines in a tin can. 

Viktor wasn’t sure how he was going to survive the train ride. He blamed the neediness on the alien instincts that had been invading his sense of peace for the last few weeks. 

An alpha standing next to them sniffed a little too close and he had to quickly swallow the growl that bubbled up his throat. He tried to cover it with a cough but it still came out loud enough to send a message to the offender and to earn him and Yuuri a few glares. As discreetly as he could, he released a little of his scent on the omega who had his nose nearly pressed up against the glass doors. Yuuri turned to him with a slight bristle of annoyance at the rub of Viktor’s cheek against his hair (Even Yuuri knew it was something too intimate to be doing in public) but the gleam of something exciting drew him away from his ire and back towards the window. 

Thankfully, they made it to their stop without anyone else testing the limits of his alpha’s patience.
With an exhale filled to the brim with utter relief, he directed Yuuri off the train and onto the platform. The omega beamed as they reached topside, asking Viktor if they could go back home on the train again.

Viktor finished hitting the confirm button on his preferred vehicle hire app and pretended to sound sorry about it as he told Yuuri with a completely straight face that he had already scheduled a car. The teen pouted but gave up the expression once Viktor explained to him that a hired car meant that they could get to the soar-shoe shop faster.

As Yuuri prattled on about the different types of shoes he had seen on his phone, Viktor wondered how beautiful the omega’s feet would look encased in gold.

The Dynamics Centre was a whirlwind of disaffected staff, unpleasant questions, lines, and service windows but after four long hours, Yuuri was an official resident of Ost Pyotsrborg.

Viktor wanted out of the building as soon as the ID card landed in Yuuri’s hands. He hated the Dynamics Centre and all the rigid bureaucracy that it stood for. In his opinion, gender should was a private matter. Scents told you what you needed to know so what need was there for a card and a registry? He did not even want to think about the media storm registering an omega would cause. The center’s only saving grace was that their pencil pushers were world renown for their ability to keep their mouths shut.

From the lobby, he was pleasantly surprised to see that the outside of the Dynamic Centre was devoid of people and paparazzi. It put him in a good mood. In fact, he was just about to suggest going home on public transportation after all when he realized that Yuuri had stopped several feet behind him.

He backtracked and came to stand next to the younger man only to find Yuuri peering at his new registration card with a pinched expression. Yuuri stared at the rectangle of plastic until Viktor felt awkward enough to ask him if he was alright. A strange look flit across the teen’s features but he gave Viktor a smile and said he was okay.

Viktor, who had seen hundreds of Yuuri’s smiles, immediately called dragonshit.

“Yuuuuuri,” he drew out the letters of the name as he settled his hands on the omega's shoulders, “tell me what's bothering you. I'm your alpha, aren't I?”

He meant it as a joke but Yuuri's expression froze into a grimace. His shoulders tensed, and his scent soured beyond the citrus of worry. His eyes flit everywhere but Viktor. Taking pity, the older man cut his teasing off, slung an arm over the teen’s shoulders, and started to walk the younger man out of the building.

They had just stepped outside of the revolving doors when Yuuri decided to talk.

“Are things separate here, too?”

Viktor stopped walking. There was a beat of silence before he turned to Yuuri.

“What do you mean?”

“This card that says I'm an omega. Is it so that people can treat me differently out here too?” Yuuri whispered as he turned the card over and over in his hand like it would have all of the answers. “And it says I belong to you. I thought omegas were free out here. In the videos I saw....” he trailed off.
Viktor stared at Yuuri in horror. Xiv’s teeth. And, he had just had to make that joke, too. He scrambled to apologize.

“Oh, Yuura, I didn’t mean anything by saying I was your alpha.” He bit his lip in nervousness before stepping as close as he dared to the younger mage. “You know I’d never mean it like that.”

“I know.” Yuuri snapped and stopped playing with the card. His hand tensed around it and for a second, Viktor thought he might snap it too.

He took the card from Yuuri’s hands and tilted the teen’s face up. “Do you want to talk about it?”

He knew from experience that it was never good to let Yuuri stew too long in his own thoughts. He had the tendency to work himself up and longer it went on, the greater the fall out. Though no one ever talked about it anymore, there were a few spots in the Sanctum garden that never recovered from Yuuri’s hidden wrath after they had had a particularly nasty (and entirely one-sided because Viktor didn’t even know it was happening) childhood fight.

The omega shifted his gaze to the side. “I don’t mind that part. Belonging to Vitya, I mean.” His hands fidgeted with the hem of his winter jacket. “Apa used to say I was yours even when you didn’t come visit me.”

Yuuri’s words punched the air out of Viktor’s lungs. Then, the guilt kicked in for good measure with a hit straight to his gut. Viktor had been dreading this. Yuuri had always just seemed so happy to see him that Viktor even through all of his shame, had naively hoped that Yuuri had forgiven him. He shifted to cup the omega’s face in both his hands and tried to keep his inner turmoil from showing in his expression.

Looking into Yuuri’s cherry brown eyes and seeing all of the teen’s vulnerability was daunting, heavy. He wanted to fall to his knees and grind his forehead into the ground until Yuuri granted him the clemency of a pinched nape.

“Yuura, I-“

“Don’t!” Yuuri cut him off by snatching his face out of Viktor’s hands and pulling away from the hold to wrap his arms around himself.

“I don’t care about that!” His face was turning steady redder. His eyes were wide, staring like he was keeping them open to stop the tears that would come if he closed them. “I-I just thought that this was a world where I could be your equal.”

“You are my equal, Yuura.”

“Really?” Yuuri finally let the tears fall. “Then why does the world have to know my dynamic? Or who I belong to? Isn’t it enough that I’m Yuuri?”

Viktor reached out to Yuuri but what could he say? He wanted the answer to be easy. There were the official reasons of course; that the cards were a valuable source of information in the case of an unexpected heat and that displaying the legal alpha guarded omegas from unsavory alphas and trafficking. But as he tried to explain that, the words tasted bitter, like ash pouring onto his tongue.

This world was unfair and unequal. And, it could be downright disgusting to omegas when it wanted to be. But, it also had hope. It was dynamic unlike like House Nikiforov and every day the laws and customs were changing for the betterment of omegas. There were omega doctors, lawyers, and superstars. And, the Yu(u)ris were going to be the first omegas to compete professionally in thaumaturgy. It was a new era that differed so much from the society Viktor had
entered into at 17.

Yuuri sniffled and looking at him, Viktor realized the words would be useless when Yuuri was stuck in the wrongness of the now.

The realization was scary.

No, it was downright terrifying because Yuuri would probably always be stuck in the now and would have every right to be. He struggled to find the right words to say. Only a fool would suggest a future of change to someone who constantly experienced how things hadn’t changed.

He felt stupid as he stood there watching Yuuri cry, paralyzed by his own inadequacies. He felt useless just like that time in the alley…

*Screaming that never seemed to stop.*

*A hand stretching, reaching out towards him.*

*An alpha's fangs gleaming with blood.*

*“The outside world is merciless, Vitya There was nothing you could have done to stop it.”*

He couldn't breathe. He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t-

*“Vitya?”*

Viktor came back to himself at the soft call of his name. It took a moment for his mind to adjust, to realize that he was standing in the sun, in the middle of the flower filled forecourt of the Dynamics Center and not outside of a dark alleyway reeking of distress and sex.

Viktor had to hug Yuuri suddenly, push his nose into Yuuri's neck and smell that the omega was alright. The younger man squeaked at the abrupt action but settled under Viktor’s arms with a burst of salty sandalwood. The older mage exhaled shakily, relief pushing out the vestiges of the bad memory.

He wanted to stay like this where it was safe and warm, easy; where he didn't have to answer Yuuri's question with a harsh truth but Yuuri pushed away; his scent souring as he searched Viktor's face.

“I said something wrong, didn’t I?” His lips quivered on the last word and his eyes looked ready to spill fresh tears.

Viktor shook his head no, and pulled Yuuri back into the embrace, still feeling needy. Viktor wanted to say the words that Yuuri wanted to hear. He wanted to reassure him that everyone was completely equal in the integrated realms.

“It’s not as bad as home.”

“That means it’s still bad.” Yuuri frowned and Viktor tried hard not to wince as he saw the omega clench his fists.

Not as bad was still bad and now Viktor looked like he was trying gaslight things.

“No! I mean yes. I mean...,” He was at a loss for words and making a mess of things. “It's hard for to explain, Yuura.”
“Is it something Chris can explain?”

Yuuri looked guileless as he said it. Chris often jumped in to answer the questions Viktor could not. But Viktor still bristled, the strange instinct in him discontent with the thought of another alpha being able to give Yuuri something he couldn’t. He narrowly bit down the growl creeping up his throat. The peppery scent was a bit harder to tamp down on.

Yuuri was staring at him wide eyed now, his expression flickering in a way that danced dangerously close to tears again.

Viktor panicked. Xiv's Teeth, this talk was going from bad to disaster. It was probably close to lunchtime and the alphas wandering by on their break were starting to drift a little closer as the scent of salt and sandalwood filled the air and caught their attention. One stepped in to ask if Yuuri was okay, eyeing up Viktor as if he were some sort of pervert. Not used to negative attention and the threat of a bawling Yuuri, Viktor felt like he was about twenty seconds away from a breakdown. So, in the effort to save his dignity and answer Yuuri's landmine of a question, he politely grabbed Yuuri’s hand, pushed past the nosy alpha, and squawked,

“Let's get something to eat,” (even though they had just had breakfast) and dragged them to the nearest establishment which turned out to be a quaint little ice cream parlor that boasted an array over 40 different flavors of the iced dessert.

Two sundaes and seven scoops later, Viktor felt his tension ease as he watched Yuuri puzzle over the mystery of unicorn poop ice cream. It made him feel brave enough to return to their earlier conversation.

“Yuura”

The teen looked up from his adventures in ice cream connoisseurship with a puckered brow. A bit of blue moon ice cream painted the corner of his mouth. Viktor chuckled as he dabbed a napkin at the offending spot. The action embarrassed Yuuri just enough to make his ears go pink which made the older man laugh in return and think that sometimes Yuuri was cuter than all of the world's poodles put together.

His smile weakened as he thought about how best to continue their conversation. He took a deep breath and then pushed ahead.

“Yuura,” he began, his gaze focused on the wood grain of the table so that he did not have meet the younger man’s eyes, “I won’t always be good at this. I’m not perfect.” He clenched his teeth over the wave of negativity that nearly overcame him. It almost physically hurt to admit this, to admit that as an alpha, Yuuri might have needs that he couldn’t meet. “Just like you, I’m still learning but I won’t lie to you. This world is far from perfect and there will be times when people will treat you differently because you’re an omega.”

Viktor risked a glance at his companion. Yuuri was silent, his eyes sparkling, dancing. Viktor went back to his ice cream, his experience and intuition telling him that he should give Yuuri time to think.

“Will you treat me differently?” the teen whispered after a minute, his voice so soft that Viktor barely heard it.

The question caught him halfway towards a spoonful of ice cream. He let in fall back into his cup with a soft plip. “What do you mean?”
Yuuri set his spoon on the table with a clink and looked at Viktor with passion burning in his eyes. For a moment, the older mage was worried that he had angered the omega but then Yuuri spoke again,

“Like I’m made of glass. Like I’m too weak to stand on my own.” he hissed as if just the thought alone was enough to make him angry. “I came to soar on the same aether as you so don’t treat me like that Vitya,” he added at the end as warning.

Viktor, who had never once entertained the thought of doing so, blinked in surprise and then reached to cover one of Yuuri’s hands with his own. Was this what had had Yuuri so upset? Not the order of things or Viktor’s abandonment but that Viktor might not take him seriously as a competitor? He almost laughed at his previous anxiety.

Viktor couldn’t guarantee he would be a consummate professional, Yuuri was still Yuuri but he could promise that he brought Yuuri with him to win gold. He was curious though. How was it that Yuuri wanted to be treated? He told himself the answer would help his coaching skills.

“And, how do you want me to treat you?” he asked, his voice pillow soft and cautious.

Yuuri gripped Viktor’s hand, the one that was still resting on the table and squeezed it. Viktor felt his heart leap and sent a prayer to the gods for allowing the conversation to continue without anyone crying.

“Like someone worthy of being on the aether, the same ice as you.” Yuuri murmured. His expression warred between his earlier vulnerability and the less expected fiery look. It made him look delectable.

The omega butted his forehead against Viktor’s, his warm brown eyes burning straight into Viktor’s blue. “If you can do that, I can bear the rest.”

This Yuuri had only really shown up once or twice before but Viktor found that it was the most alluring Yuuri. All of the Yuuris he had met so far - the shy Yuuri, the happy Yuuri, the anxious Yuuri - were dear to him but this one was the most beautiful - this Yuuri that looked as if the world couldn’t tell him a single thing.

He wanted to see more of it. More than anything, this was the Yuuri that he wanted to present to the world - an omega unbowed and unyielding in the face of what he wanted. He was already thinking of choreography for it; wanting to desperately capture the beauty of Yuuri’s determination.

“Ohay, Yuura,” he breathed as he imagined the teen soaring on the aether crowned in a halo of fire-red roses, “I won’t go easy on you.”

He wanted his student to win gold. His fangs twinged … no ached at the thought of Yuuri kissing his medal from the top of the podium. It would make a lovely display for any alpha.

Yuuri smiled as he pulled away from their intimate position, his eyes molten in their heat. The look made Viktor’s alpha thoughtless, impulsive. He ran his thumb against the bottom of Yuuri’s lip, where a smudge of ice cream still sat.

Then, he brought the appendage back to his own mouth and fixed Yuuri with his own potent gaze. The younger man flushed and Viktor – filled with a growing bubbly sort of delight- leaned forward, towards the omega and with a smile full of hearts purred, “That’s how I will show my love.”
Chapter Summary

In this chapter Yuuri finally gets to meet the rest of the gang.

Chapter Notes

AN: I made a mistake in the last chapter regarding Mila and Georgi being in the off season. It should have been a holiday.

Hi Everyone,
Thank you so much for your support! It's hard to believe that a little old story like mine could receive a 100 kudos!
Anyway, I apologise for the delay. I was trying to go for a slightly regular weekly posting schedule but I fell ill (yay chronic illness) and wasn't able to complete anything until today.

I am also considering taking scenario requests for Yuuri and/or Viktor as Yuuri experiences society more and more. They would have to fit within the story and their character development/arcs but I think it might be a fun idea. Please let me know what you think in the comments below.

The genderless pronoun xe is used in this story as mage children decide whether or nor to be male or female upon coming of age. It works as follows:

Xe - He/She
Xem - Him/Her
Xyr - His/Her
Xyrs - His/Hers
Xemself - Himself/Herself

Credit to fanndists on Tumblr for terms "oma" and "apa"
Oma - Omega Mother
Apa - Alpha Father

Prop-sucker - is a slur used on mage alphas that refers to their need to sometimes replenish their proprium magic by drinking the blood of a mage omega

Credit to Tongari Boushi no Atorie for the concept of ateliers, soar shoes, and magical placement tests.

CONTENT WARNING:
Mentions of infanticide
Viktor was half afraid that their first encounter with Yakov would be a disaster. After all, they were several weeks behind schedule and Viktor had not called his coach even once to explain. The last time he did something of this nature, Yakov had given him a bag soar practice so grueling that he had to check his “bags” just to make sure they were still there. So, given that track record, he did not think it was outside of the realm of believability to expect Yakov to explode with rage the moment they entered the rink.

What greeted them instead was a collected Yakov standing by the boards with a look that could actually be described as placid. Yakov was actually gentle as Yuuri came into his presence for the first time. GENTLE. Well, as gentle as person like Yakov could be which meant: a) he wasn’t scowling and b) he wasn’t yelling. Instead, the man was quiet as he appraised Yuuri - who was quaking like he was about to be devoured (maybe Viktor should not have told him so many Yakov horror stories) - with a small (for Yakov) frown. They eyed each other up until Yuuri's scent started to take on a note of tang.

“You can't do that on the aether, boy. Rein it in.”

Yuuri stiffened and his scent grew strong enough for Yakov's frown to deepen.

“I said rein it in,” the older thaumaturge snapped. “No one here is distressing you.”

Yuuri flinched at Yakov’s order and Viktor wanted to jump in to beg to differ because he had been plenty distressed by Yakov over the last ten years but then Yuuri’s scent cleared into the much more sneeze inducing scent of lemon nervousness and Viktor sneezed so much that it kept his mouth shut.

Yuuri squeaked but nothing sensible came out of him. Viktor, figuring that Yakov related terror might have gotten the best of his student, tried to help the teen out by introducing him through the breaks in his achoos but Yakov held a hand up.

“Let him introduce himself. He'll be performing by himself, won't he?”

The words died in Viktor's throat, well, more like his sneeze. Yakov turned back to Yuuri, his gaze expectant.

“So, are you going to show me that you have more manners than your coach?”

Viktor spluttered. Yuuri looked miffed for long enough that he thought the omega was going to give Yakov the same treatment as Chris but the expression passed and the younger mage stepped forward with the look of man walking to his execution. He stretched out his hand in the same way that failed with Chris, and said,

“I am Yuuri, a ward of House Nikiforov, sir. May Araak bless this meeting.”

Ever a traditionalist, Yakov's lips quirked at the old fashioned greeting. He took the proffered hand with a slight squeeze as was custom.

“May Araak bless this meeting, Yuuri Nikolayevich. Now, go warm up.”

“Yes, Maester Feltsman,” Yuuri yelped in surprise, mostly likely at being let on the aether so soon but he scrambled to a nearby bench and rummaged through his bag until he found his new soar-shoes (black even though Viktor had tried so hard to convince the teen that gold would have looked divine on the omega). They both watched as Yuuri pricked his finger and used the blood to draw on the soles of the shoes.
“Make sure that sigil is drawn correct!” Yakov barked. “Otherwise you'll end up upside down.”

Yuuri nodded but did not still his movements. Yakov’s brows raised a fraction above their usually furrowed place which was as close to impressed as the man would ever show. Viktor’s chest swelled with pride at the thought that the omega was already gaining the old man’s approval.

When Yuuri was finished, he held out the shoes for his coaches’ perusal.

“That’s passable,” Yakov grunted and Viktor beamed at the praise.

“That's perfect, Yuura!” he shouted.

As it should be. Yuuri might not have been allowed to perform most types of magic but a Nikiforov - even one as controlling as Nikolai Nikiforov- could never deny soaring. It was practically a part of their DNA, the same DNA that Yuuri shared through their blood bond and as soon as a Nikiforov could walk, they learned to soar. Even his mother soared and she was hardly a fan of anything more than convenient magic.

The pair watched as Yuuri ran to the aether and began soaring laps on its naked surface with a determination that seemed to satisfy Yakov.

“He will still need to pass the First Test and not die but at least his lines are good,” the man muttered to himself, lost in ultimate Maester mode. “If we can get him ready in time, he could possibly debut for the new upcoming season”

“His lines are beautiful!”

“Enough, Vitya before I get sick,” Yakov snapped and then with a scowl turned to Viktor. “He needs a coach on the aether not a love sick fool.”

“Can’t he have both?” Viktor said with a sigh and heart shaped grin because watching Yuuri soar on his aether was making him feel so many emotions.

He received a slap to the back of his head as an answer. It did not ruin his smile though. He had only promised Yuuri he wouldn’t go easy on him. That did not mean he couldn’t admire the teen’s good work.

Yakov looked at him with absolute disgust before starting into a rant. “My aether isn’t your courting field, Viktor. Be a real coach or this game is over.”

That sobered up Viktor quickly. It actually annoyed him a little. His smile dropped and he took his eyes away from Yuuri to look straight at his former Maester with a hard stare.

“This isn’t a game to me, Yakov.”

Yakov raised a brow. “Oh? Then, what is it? You don’t call. You don’t contact me. How am I to take a thaumaturge like that seriously?

Viktor flushed. He just knew Yakov was keeping his anger for later.

“Stop playing,” he said in a tone of voice that pierced straight into the athletic part of Viktor that would always love a challenge. “And show me what you have done to make me think you could be a real coach.”

“I thought you'd never ask.” Viktor smirked and pulled a hot pink binder full of his plans,
Yakov eviscerated him, absolutely tore apart his plans, and ripped it completely to shreds. Opposite to what it should have done, the savagery made Viktor want to work harder. The alpha in him wanted his student to only have the best: If it was not good enough for Yakov, then it was definitely not good enough for Yuuri.

Yakov looked up after they went through his plan for the third time. Viktor’s eyes followed his gaze. Yuuri had moved on from his warm up to into a lazy, but still elegant step sequence. Ice magic twirled idly from his fingers in short flickers, not enough for a competition but just enough to make the omega’s movements even more beautiful.

“His form alone would earn him at least Silver in Juniors, no?”

“I’m not worried about his kinetic ability,” Yakov responded after spending a few minutes taking in Yuuri’s abilities, “an omega would have that in spades. What I want to know is can he grasp an element?”

He pointed to Yuuri’s hands. “A few sparks won’t be enough. I need to know if he can be an omega that exceeds expectations and pulls on the magic with the same level of control as an alpha.”

Viktor wanted to say yes but he knew that on the aether the best to way to tell someone you could do something was to show them.

“Yuuri,” he called from across the rink, “Can you do triple axel with an ice swirl for me. Yakov wants to see.”

Yuuri nodded and went for it, entering into an axel that was in perfect form. His magic, however, was a different story and to everyone’s shock, he came out of the axel throwing blue flames instead of the expected ice. The fire swept across the entire circumference of the rink leaving little protection for Viktor and Yakov to duck behind as the magic came within hairbreadths of burning off their faces.

“I’m sorry,” Yuuri shrieked the minute he landed, nearly tripping upside down to rush towards them.

He was in front of them in an instant. Apologizing and wringing his hands with such intensity Viktor wasn’t sure how the teen hadn’t wretched off yet.

“I-I was nervous and I-I thought I was pulling on water magic to make ice,” he stammered, tears starting to form in his eyes. He threw puppy eyes at Viktor and seemed to shrink. “I honestly didn’t realize it was fire, Vitya.”

Viktor pressed the back of his hand to his head in disbelief. Not even a day at Yakov’s atelier and part of Yuuri’s secret was already out.

Yakov turned such an impressive shade of red that Viktor wondered if it was possible for blood to boil.

“Viktor! My office NOW!” the coach bellowed.

“Did I do something wrong?” Yuuri was starting to smell like a cleaning product from how nervous his scent was. Viktor tried with all his might not to sneeze.
“No!” Yakov barely paused, “get back on that aether and do figures but nothing else!”

“Don’t worry Yuurochka. He’s always like this!” Viktor gave Yuuri a wink and a short laugh to reassure the teen but inside his heart was pounding.

What in Anud’s Hells was that!? Was it a fluke? He knew Katsuki’s were prone and partial to fire, and Yuuri’s propium had never suggested otherwise but Yuuri had always been able to summon the ice when he soared at home. Why had things suddenly changed now? Surely nervousness couldn’t account for all that.

His thoughts got cut off by the echoing slam of Yakov’s door and the dangerous change in atmosphere as his former coach whirled on him.

“Viktor, what the hell was that?”

Viktor was tempted to say that he had asked himself the same exact question just 2 minutes ago but he refrained from doing so because Yakov was starting to look like an eggplant. He spared a moment to pray for the older mage’s blood vessels.

“Yuuri just got a little mixed up?” he guessed, a little unsettled by how his answer came out like a question.

“Mixed up? Don’t play coy with me.” Yakov went an even deeper shade of purple. “I’m old enough to know Katsuki fire when I see it.”

Viktor grimaced. Sometimes, he forgot how long Yakov had been in the thaumaturgical world. It would make sense that his maester would know what Katsuki fire looked like and it wouldn’t be out of the realm of possibility for his coach to have been to Ji Roh or for him to have personally met a Katsuki or two.

Viktor thought quickly. He decided to go with the lie his father had always used figuring if he stuck to it, he might convince the older man.

“You can’t tell anyone else but he's a Jih Roh- Nikiforov bastard. “

“Vitya if you're lying to me I swear on Ore’s bones I will wring your neck!”

“I’m not (He is). He’s only from a very small, very minor, nothing to notice family. And, he can do ice. He’s a Nikiforov so of course he can do ice… so, it’s still okay, right?”

Yakov brought his fist down onto the desk with a solid bang making the assistant maester jump. Viktor stared at the older man’s fist as he fought the disappointment that threatened to pull him down. He had promised Yuuri after all. A hidden identity shouldn’t hold someone back.

“Yakov, pleas-“

“Don’t dragonshit me, boy,” Yakov hissed, the action out of place in an alpha. “That kid’s a main Katsuki heir somehow. They can't do blue fire unless they are.”

He tried not to look too nervous or too curious over the older coach’s outburst. He didn’t know that Katsuki heirs had their own markers. Suddenly, all of the precautions and restrictions his father had imposed on Yuuri made more sense. They might have been found out ages ago if Yuuri had been allowed to freely display his unique magic. Viktor filed the information away, mentally classifying it as important so that his notoriously bad memory might hold onto it.
“Why are you High Houses always like this? Are you as a collective addicted to drama?” Yakov rubbed his temples so hard that Viktor worried that he would cave them in. “I need a drink.

Viktor slid a decanter towards Yakov, seeing the gesture as a sort of peace offering before his next question. “He can still spellcast though can’t he, Yakov?”

Yakov paused from his mission of pouring vodka into a cup to give Viktor an annoyed look. “Yes, but Viktor…”

Viktor’s face froze mid smile. Yakov knocked back his beverage all in one go and let out a sigh that sung the tale of a maester who had spent a half a century dealing with irritating students.

“I don’t believe you for a fucking second. And if I don’t believe you, there’s gonna be ten thousand other assholes out there that won’t believe you either. I don’t know what and I don’t want to know what twist of events lead to the Nikiforovs holding onto a Katsuki heir but you will have to act wisely, Vitya. One false move and who knows what could come out from under the ice?”

“So, be careful?” Viktor ventured wondering on exactly what his mentor meant. He was being nearly relentless with keeping Yuuri out of the media eye. So far, they had only gone places that were absolutely necessary and when they did go out it was in full incognito gear.

He was also sure that the mystery surrounding the death of Yuuri’s parents was a well kept secret. Or at least he assumed it was so. His mother never spoke on it. And, it would be easier to escape Xiv during one of his Divine Hunts than it would be to get any pre-Nikiforov information from Minako. That she had even spoken to Viktor about it in the Sanctum hallways would have been a much greater surprise if he had not been so sleep deprived and annoyed.

Yakov slammed another shot of vodka before addressing his former student. “Are you even capable of that?”

One Tiwesdaey morning, Viktor woke up feeling strange. A thought niggled in the back of his head, teasing him with the hint of some task that he couldn’t remember. It sat like a lead weight on his mind, and throughout his morning routine of getting himself and Yuuri ready, he felt like there was something important he was supposed to do.

It worried at him during the walk to Yakov's atelier, a change of clothes, and through all of Yuuri’s warm up. Even gliding on the aether to show his Maester a new move he was considering for Yuuri didn't give him clarity or peace of mind. The feeling ate away at him until the moment Yuri Plisetsky banged open the atelier’s door and pointed, shaking with barely concealed rage, straight at Viktor and screamed,

“You! You fucking knothead!”

“Ah?” Viktor stood rigid, smile frozen on his face in shock.

“Where the fuck were you? I waited at the airport for ages! Did you fucking forget to pick me up?”

Ah, so this was it. Viktor's eyes fell to the suitcase next to the teenager’s feet.

Oops.

Because, really, what could he say? You were so unimportant that I forgot you? Or, I focused so much on my one student that you slipped my mind? There was no way in Anud’s Hells that saying
anything like that would put him in a good standing with his newest student.

Somewhere, Yakov groaned. Viktor didn’t blame him. He had definitely messed up.

He was just gliding towards the rink entrance to placate the livid boy when Yuri noticed Yuuri. Remembering his own first meeting with the volatile teen, Viktor soared faster but before he could get off the aether and deactivate his soar shoes, the blond was in front of the brunette, crowding into the younger mage’s space so abruptly that Yuuri put his hands up in defense and tilted his head in submission. It didn’t work because Yuri only got closer and snarled,

“Who the fuck is this?”

Viktor was scrambling, half tripping over himself as he struggled to untie his laces and get his shoes off. Yuuri, bless his naïve heart, tried to diffuse the situation by introducing himself with a smile.

“I’m Yuuri.”

“Who cares!? Why the fuck are you here?

Yuuri’s smile faltered as his brows furrowed. A sharp citrusy scent filled the air as the omega’s easy mood began to fall. Viktor’s nose burned as he raced to reach them.

Yuuri’s answer was a question, heavily tinted by uncertainty. “I’m Vicchan’s new apprentice?”

“Haaahh!”

Yuri turned a shade of red that Viktor was sure only occurred in people about succumb to a rage stroke. He jammed a finger into Yuuri’s chest hard enough to send the younger omega stumbling back a few steps.

“Don’t fuck with me!”

Viktor felt himself start to growl but he swallowed it. This confrontation was entirely his fault; he was not going to make it worse by charging in with his own alpha theatrics. Obeying his own decision was taking all of his willpower though because Yuri was so up in Yuuri’s face that if the blond were taller, the pair would be nose to nose. The older omega even had his teeth bared, and even though the classic alpha fangs were missing, the threat in the gesture was clear enough that Yuuri – who never had to deal with this level of aggression – started to shake.

The older teen growled (a move that an omega should not even be able to make) and then in complete contrast, hissed, “There’s only room for one Yuri on the ice.”

The blond whipped around back to Viktor just as he was reaching the duo. “You’re fucking kidding me. This pig is my rink mate?”

“Rink mate?” Yuuri whispered, his voice soft and clearly shaken.

Dragonshit. There went the other thing Viktor forgot. He felt like the world’s worst alpha and coach.

“Yuuri, I’m sorry,” he said immediately, all his attention zeroing in on the younger man even though they were not alone. “I should have told you sooner...”

Several emotions swept across Yuuri’s face, each one more painful than the one before it until his
countenance fixed into something inaccessible and unreadable.

“It’s fine,” he murmured but everything in his voice told Viktor that it was not.

He had failed Yuuri again.

It was like a blow to the gut, right into his belly where there were no bones or hardness to protect him. His alpha screamed at him that he couldn’t leave Yuuri with that look; that he had to do something, anything to soothe his omega.

He reached his arms out towards Yuuri, intending to hold him close and press kisses into his hair until he had soothed away every single one his younger student’s worries. He didn’t care if it wasn’t very coach like. He didn’t care if Yakov scolded him for a thousand years. He didn’t even care that Yuri Plisetsky looked like he was going to blow a blood vessel. He didn’t care about anyone else at all…

Until the blond shoved Yuuri out of the way and snarled up into Viktor’s face, “Are you listening to me, you prop-sucker?”

Yuuri only stumbled a little to the side but it was enough for Viktor to see red. Before he even realized what he was doing, he had the blond’s jaw squeezed between his fingers and he was growling enough to sound like a small engine. Plisetsky’s eyes widened as he tried to pull away from the hold but Viktor’s alpha had no intention of letting go until it saw the threat cleared.

The younger man’s scent soured when he realized he couldn’t escape and with a voice full of panic, he shrieked, “Beka!”

The air shifted and Viktor had seconds to throw up an ice shield before a figure in black slammed against it. He let go of Yuri to see a man trying to burn his shield away with the telltale black flames of primordial magic.

‘Dragon’ his alpha snarled, hackles rising because the act was causing Yuuri’s magic to awaken. He was just about to send a spear of ice upwards, his alpha goading him on with a purr of pleasure when Yakov put a stop to everything with a shout.

“Enough!” Yakov’s voice reverberated around the atelier like a thunderclap.

Viktor dropped his shield in surprise and the dragon rushed to scoop Yuri up into its arms and out of danger. For a second, something like fear scented the air as Yakov stomped over to the group but it disappeared into a chili pepper scented cloud of elder alpha pheromones.

“This is not a battle arena,” the older mage bellowed, storming up right between the two groups.”If you want to fight, do it somewhere else where you can blow up each other and leave my atelier in one piece! ”

He hauled Yuuri – who had fallen during the scuffle- up by the arm and pushed him towards Viktor. Still keyed up, the assistant coach bared his teeth at the action but Yakov shut him down immediately.

“Show your teeth at me for a second longer, Nikiforov, and I’ll have you gobbling them from the back of your throat.”

Viktor snapped his mouth shut and focused on the more productive act of comforting Yuuri who was whimpering and clutching at his shirt so tightly that it threatened to stretch out of shape. He rubbed his hands along the teen’s back and released a cloud of calming pheromones to get the poor
thing to calm down enough to stop whining.

Satisfied that Viktor had been sufficiently cowed, Yakov turned to the other guilty party; his fury burning just as brightly at the newcomers.

“Pull some shit like that again; Yuri Nikolayevich and you’ll be out of this atelier faster than an alpha can cast a spell.”

Yuri actually looked shocked but then he bristled as the accusation hit him.

“He started it,” he scoffed, raising his hand to point at Viktor. Luckily, the dragon had enough sense to push the boy’s hand back down after it resulted in an answering growl from the other man.

Yakov went red. “You come in here screaming and threatening and you’re not at fault? Don’t make me laugh, boy.”

Yuri looked like he was actually going to launch himself at the older mage, but his companion’s arms tightened around where they were holding him.

“Yura,” he warned, locking the omega in place.

“Shut up, Otabek,” the blond snapped in retaliation as he pushed the taller man away. “Let go of me!”

“Vitya.”

Viktor perked up at the sound of his name. “Yes, Yakov?”

Yakov didn’t turn back to him.

“See to your new student (He doesn’t need to add the like you should have) Take him and his... friend to their lodgings and get him settled. It looks like he needs time to cool off from his boneheaded coach’s mistake.”

Both he and Yuri squawked at the Maester’s order; Yuri with a childish “no way” and Viktor with an even less dignified animal noise.

“What about Yuuri?” he asked because the way Yuuri was still lightly trembling had him not wanting to leave the omega but not wanting to take him either.

“What about Yuuri?” Yakov responded in a tone that just dared Viktor to cause a scene.

“Do I just leave him here?”

“You left the other Yuri waiting for you in an airport. What is one Yuri to another?”

There was a lesson in his words, Viktor knew that but he really didn’t like it or what it implied.

“But, Yakov...”

“The boy has practicing to do. Go see to your other student!”

“Yes, Yakov.”

He extradited himself from Yuuri who allowed it without a single fuss. Even his scent was normalizing, giving Viktor no excuse to try to hang around and avoid his other apprentice. He
sighed and approached the blond and his dragon.

“Are you calm enough to come with me?”

Yuri sneered at his outstretched hand but Otabek, nudged the brat forward with a quietly murmured, “Yes, he is.”

Viktor thanked himself for having the foresight to understand that after their initial meeting there was no way he could have Yuri Plisetsky in his home. Especially, right now, when he felt that there was no way on Araak’s good Eorthe that he could ever be comfortable enough with the volatile apprentice to leave Yuuri with him on his own. Just the thought of Plisetsky had him wanting to growl.

Luckily, finding Yuri accommodations would be simple, one of the many perks of Nikiforov wealth. As long as it was nowhere near his house, Viktor was willing to let his pupil take his pick from any one of the many choice properties that littered the city. Although, looking at the Otabek guy, Viktor needed to double check that the dwellings he was offering could actually hold two people.

As he escorted the still fuming blond towards the rink exit, Viktor could not help but look back to see how his Yuuri was taking things. He found the younger mage staring back, something foreign swimming in his dark brown eyes. It made him want to go back to the omega’s side immediately, and just cancel the other Yuri - Yakov be damned.

The teen only came back to life after Yakov yelled at him to get onto the aether. Yuuri looked just as torn as Viktor felt but ultimately followed his coach’s orders.

Two days later, Yuri Plisetsky slunk back into Yakov’s atelier with a mouth full of apologies and a bag full of pirozhkis. The atelier went silent, all eyes on the blond as he entered. He stomped over to Yuuri, and before Viktor could intervene, shoved the bag he was holding into the younger man’s chest, and with his head held low and his neck open and exposed, gave the ultimate form of adult omega apology.

Yuuri looked shaken at first but then gasped as he realized what the other omega was trying to do. He flushed and tried to gently push the gift away. “You don’t have to do this.”

“I do,” Yuri responded but did not move from his position. His voice sounded strained like he was barely holding onto whatever emotion was swimming within him.

Mila, a redheaded rusalka who had taken a strong liking to Yuuri, bounced up next to the pair and slung her arm around her rink mate’s shoulder with a smirk. Gossip traveled fast and it was very likely that every single thaumaturge in Yakov’s atelier knew exactly what Plisetsky had done.

“You could just leave him here, you know.”

Yuri let out a little growl and Viktor almost groaned as Mila’s smile grew positively wicked.

“Did you hear that? It doesn’t seem like he’s sorry at all,” she purred while playing with the ends of Yuuri’s hair. “He can’t move until you touch his neck. Maybe he needs more time to reflect.”

Yuuri’s eyes drifted until they met Viktor’s but the alpha just shrugged at the plea they sent. He would look like a knothead if he intervened. In all actuality, he should tell Mila to stop, too. She was an alpha even though all rusalki appeared as “women” so it was not right for her to be taking any concerns either. As stereotypical as it sounded, Plistesky’s gesture was omega business. From
the style and nature of the apology, everything shouted that it had to be Yuuri’s decision to make.

“Would that be the right thing to do?” Georgi’s question was soft but the expression on his face was torn. “Wouldn’t you just be bullying him too?”

The beta was usually very wary of these sorts of things considering his own treatment by mage society.

Mila snorted. “Georgi, really?”

“Well?” Yuuri cut in, stiff and still staring at the blond before him, “Please don’t be cruel to Georgi.”

Mila flushed and pouted. “It’s not because he’s a beta,” she murmured sliding her arms up and around Yuuri’s neck. “It’s because Georgi is trying to defend someone who has been cruel to our Yuura.”

Yuuri relaxed a little in her hold at the explanation. He had been taking Viktor’s teachings about society and discrimination very seriously and was very aware that betas often suffered a lifetime of shame and ridicule for being single sexed and nearly non magical. Viktor shivered as he remembered the look of horror on Yuuri’s face when he told him about how one of his grandfather’s siblings had been drowned at birth for being a beta. He did not tell Yuuri about how his grandfather had tearfully called it compassion or how the memory still haunted the man decades later. Yuuri did not need those details when just the story itself upset him so much that he cried himself sick.

He glanced at Yakov. The coach was studying the interaction but it was clear that he was losing patience.

“Georgi, Mila, get on the aether,” he barked once it looked like everyone was going to continue being distracted by the interaction. “I’m sure you’ve been slacking off during the holidays and I want to see how much work I have got to do.”

Mila let go of Yuri with a little laugh and skip to her step, the teasing nature of rusalki keeping her a generally jolly person. Georgi moved a little slower and took several looks back until Yakov bellowed,

“Georgi, if you look back one more time, I’ll have you doing bag drills until your legs fall off.”

The beta blanched under the threat and rushed the rest of the way to the rink leaving just Viktor and his two Yu(u)ris – though one he could really do without.

Yuuri looked at Viktor again, this time with a much stronger plea in his eyes. “Can I decide later?”

“He will have to stand there until you do,” Otabek replied, materializing next to Yuuri’s side in black, swirling waves of smoke. “I am told it is one of your traditions. His parents have demanded it of him as punishment for attacking a member of a higher house.”

“Only because you ratted me out, you fucking lizard,” hissed Yuri from his spot. “I’m not a dragon with second-sight. No one can tell he’s from House Nikiforov just by looking at him.”

“Hush,” the dragon commanded and strangely the blond did just that.

Viktor looked up at the clock. How long had they been standing here? He was surprised that Yuri was not shaking from the strain his position must be taking on his body.
Finally, Yuuri spoke again.

“You are very rude, Yuri Nikolayevich,” he said and then watched as the words made the other omega squirm. Viktor’s eyes widened as the brunet’s hand rose to pinch the skin at the nape of Yuri’s neck.

“But...” he murmured as he did so, his face scrunched up in distaste, “as Araak forgave the world for the death of her beloved one, so must I forgive you.”

“Thank you,” Yuri whispered. The blond’s shoulders shook and no one could miss the scent of salt that started to permeate the air as small wet drops darkened the floor beneath his head. “They were going to take it all away if you didn’t accept.”

“Oh,” Yuuri said unsure of what Yuri meant.

“Oh,” Viktor thought suddenly understanding a bit more of the angry Yuri puzzle.

Yakov was wrong. The Plisetskys were willing to spend anything to get their brat where the kid wanted to be with conditions. Judging from Yuri’s reaction to his forgiveness, they probably made a habit of keeping tabs on his interests and used them to blackmail their child into compliance. Things were most likely held over his head all the time. Viktor's own father used to do it and he wondered if any child of a High House was ever really and truly free.

Their lives were dictated from the moment of birth and if you were worth something like Viktor was as an heir, it was even worse. From education down to the toys in the playroom, everything was decided for you. What little choice or freedom you could get while growing up, you held onto within an inch of your life.

Yuuri brought him out of his morose thoughts with a tug of his sleeve.

“Can I start doing warm ups now?” he asked.

Viktor nodded and Yuuri, more than likely wanting to get away from the awkward atmosphere Yuri’s apology had left things in, ran straight to the aether despite Yakov’s bark to slow down. Yuri looked after him with such a lost feeling that Viktor felt some of his hostility towards the teen melt away. It was rough being a kid and it wasn’t like Viktor wasn’t a little shit when he was this age too.

By the time he was Yuri’s age, he had already pissed off his father enough to get banished.

He sighed. He guessed he should be the bigger mage and stretch out an olive branch.

“Get dressed and get on the aether, Plisetsky.”

The blond’s eyes were impossibly wide as they snapped towards him. Like this he looked younger than Yuuri, and way more vulnerable.

“Do you mean it?”

Of course Viktor meant it. He grit his teeth. Being understanding was one thing but he was not ready to feel pity for the brat. Not just yet.

“Don’t make me repeat myself.”

Yuri scrambled off to get his things. From the corner of his eye, Viktor swore he saw Yakov’s lips
Yuri didn't become nicer to Yuuri, not quite, but there was a softening around his edges when he was around the other omega. He still yelled, was still a foul mouthed little beast but the few insults he threw at his rink mate took on endearing lilt, almost like he was saying them more out of habit than any real heat.

Yuuri was rightfully cautious and distant at first but having never really held a grudge before, the younger mage slowly started to warm up to his new partner too. It was nothing like it was with Viktor or Chris, or even Mila and Georgi, but it was something. And if it meant that he could coach his two students without worrying that one might kill the other, Viktor could accept the strange sort of companionship that the omegas seemed to fall into naturally.

He did not expect the relationship to grow any more than that but then one day, Viktor was running late and he accidentally found himself eavesdropping as he stumbled into the locker room.

It reeked of tears - and thinking that they were his betrothed's- he was about to rush in, until he heard Yuuri’s voice, steady and most definitely not crying. The only two people he could smell were Yuuri and Yuri which meant...

“It’s okay to cry, Yuri Nikolayevich,” the younger mage soothed. “Anybody would if Yakov told them they soared as if they were made of lead.”

Plisetsky snorted, the sound coming out wet and slightly disgusting. “Maybe for you. You’re a crybaby anyway. And, stop calling me Yuri Nikolayevich, you weirdo. No one our age uses patronyms like that anymore.”

Viktor felt annoyed on Yuuri’s behalf. The younger omega was just trying to be polite. There was no need for Plisetsky to be rude about the other teen’s obviously good breeding.

“Vitya would want me to help you.”

There was another snort; this time more amused and less gross. “You can’t even pull magic solidly why the fuck do you think you can teach me anything?”

There was a beat of silence before Yuuri spoke again. His voice was barely audible from Viktor’s spot near the door.

“It’s what rink-mates do... I thought...” And, Viktor could just imagine the way Yuuri’s face heated up. “Vitya said t-that rink mates were usually friends”

Yuri snorted for a third time. “Can you have a complete thought on your own without it coming from that old geezer?”

There was a bitter laugh that had to have come from Yuri. “And, you and me friends? Not in your lifetime, piggy. I don’t do friends but we’re rink mates and omegas and that means more than any of that other stuff.”

Viktor tiptoed away when he heard the slam of a locker door.

A few weeks later, Viktor arrived late again, just in time to see Yuri trying to teach Yuuri his technique for steadying his magic pulls. The pair jumped away from each other at his approach. Yuri threw an insult to cover his tracks and Yuuri sped away red faced with the excuse of warming up to avoid his questions.
For his student’s sakes, Viktor went along with it and thus began the Yu(u)ris’ long game of pretending they weren’t friends.

Viktor couldn’t help it when the idea came to him. He had always been fond of nicknames and as he warmed up to his newest student; he couldn’t resist wanting to give him one too. Besides, it was almost a cultural pastime in Rhurshya. He himself had around three and Yuuri – thanks to his mother- had a limitless supply. It would be a shame not to include the newest member of their little pack in the well honored tradition.

He spent several days on it and when he was short of ideas, he went to Yuuri, who was hesitant at first.

Yuuri flushed and bit his lip after Viktor approached him for a suggestion. “You won’t call him, Yura, will you?”

It was too adorable to resist so Viktor took Yuuri’s arms - which for some strange reason the omega had wrapped around himself the minute Viktor asked his question - and pulled the blushing teen into his lap for a solid hug.

“Of course I won’t, Yuura. That’s your name.”

Yuuri rubbed the side of his head against the older man’s cheek. Viktor, grasping the subtle demand for affection; ran his wrists up and down the omega’s back.

“And you won’t call him Yuurochka?”

Viktor laughed.

“Never, he could never be cute enough for that.” Was Yuuri jealous? He had no need to be. “Only you are sweet enough for it, my little dove.”

Yuuri purred and snuggled a little closer. Viktor caught a whiff of fluster and orange blossom as the omega shifted and wrapped his arms around Viktor’s neck. Yuuri’s breath tickled his ear as the teen purred,

“Then, I guess I could help you.”

Between the two of them - but mostly with Yuuri’s input and knowledge of Ji Roh - they managed to come up with what Viktor was sure would be a great one.

He waited until they had a slow day, a day when Yakov was out of the atelier and wouldn’t be there to yell at them for wasting time. Both Yu(u)ris had been following him on the aether as he taught them a new technique and Viktor saw his opportunity the moment Yuri started to grumble that he was taking too long to teach them.

He stopped suddenly causing both Yu(u)ris to skid to a halt.

“Yuri.”

The blond flinched at his name, perhaps expecting to be scolded. Viktor grinned because he had something so much better in mind
“I’ve been thinking,” he said casually like he hadn’t spent the last ten days giddily waiting for this moment, “that you were right about having two people with the same name running around the atelier.”

The blond gave Yuuri a confused look. “What’s the old man on about now?”

Yuuri just shrugged. The younger omega already knew what Viktor had up his sleeves so to speak and wasn’t really good at lying.

“So, Yuri,” Viktor soared over to the blond and draped an arm – which Yuri immediately tried to push off – over the omega’s shoulder. “How do you feel about being called Yurio?”

“Yurio?” the teen screeched. “Why do I have to be Yurio?”

He rounded on Yuuri who could barely hide his giggles. “Oi, stop laughing, pig!”

Viktor paused, a finger pressed to his lip for a moment as if to think. His smile grew wider because really, there were few things in the world better than riling up Yuri Plisetsky. He gave the boy a heart shaped grin.

“Because I’ve used up all the cuter nicknames on Yuurochka here.”

Viktor didn't miss the vein that popped out of Yuri's forehead or the pink that dusted Yuuri's cheeks. His voice dropped a little lower, his teasing borderline devilish. He didn't want to give up his game just yet.

“If you don't like it, I guess I could call you Yurok, Yurchik, or Yurka...,” he said with a purr that made Yuri splutter in fury. “I think those names are still available. What do you say?”

“Yurio’s nice,” Mila shouted from her spot on the benches. “It’s just like the name of a mascot!”

Yuuri whipped around to her with a snarl. “Shut up, you old hag!”

“I don’t mind it,” came Otabek’s voice from beside the boards. His expression betrayed nothing. Viktor wasn’t sure if he was serious: Otabek did not seem like the type to joke.

But apparently he was because Yuri – or actually Yurio now – screamed, “Fuck off, Beka!” so loudly that it echoed off the walls.

It caused such a good laugh that no one noticed Yakov enter the rink.

“What’s this!?” he bellowed as he saw his students in various states of not practicing. “You think you can all slack off while the cat is away? I’ll make you do speed drills until you throw up.”

Everyone scrambled to look busy. Yurio soared off to the other side of the aether all while muttering about how everyone was a moron. Victor caught just the tiniest bouquet of happiness as he passed by. It sent him into a peal of laughter that ricocheted throughout the atelier.

“Vitya, get your head out of the clouds and into coaching,” Yakov barked as he stepped onto the aether. “If I see even one mistake from your students, coach or not- I’ll have you doing bag drills until you want to die.”

Even in the face of Yakov’s threat, he couldn’t hide his grin. “Yes, Yakov.”

If only being a coach was always this much fun.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, both Yu(u)ris take their first steps towards becoming full-fledged thaumaturges. Viktor learns a little more about what it means to really be a coach... and to live with a maturing Yuuri.

Chapter Notes

AN: I apologise for such a long chapter. I had promised myself to keep it to 10pgs/chapter but this one had a pattern and a build up that I didn't want to interrupt.

The genderless pronoun xe is used in this story as mage children decide whether or nor to be male or female upon coming of age. It works as follows:

Xe - He/She
Xem - Him/Her
Xyr - His/Her
Xyrs - His/Hers
Xemself - Himself/Herself

Credit to fanndists on Tumblr for terms "oma" and "apa"
Oma - Omega Mother
Apa - Alpha Father

Credit to Tongari Boushi no Atorie for the concept of ateliers, soar shoes, and magical placement tests.

CONTENT WARNING:
Mentions/References to sexual assault
Minor Non Consensual Acts

“Again!” Viktor shouted from his spot at the center of the aether.

Yurio, hunched over with his hands on his knees, looked up at a Viktor with a glare.

“How many more times do I have to do this, old man!” The teen grumbled while he tried to catch his breath. “No one needs a step sequence to get up a stupid mountain and pick a flower.”

Viktor smiled. Repetition was the Mother of Learning.

“Until you can do it beautifully,” he quipped sounding like a chipper version of Lilia. “The aether - and I sure Mt Arala - won't accept anything less.”

Yurio scowled but went back to his former drills without any further verbal complaint. Yurio hated when Viktor followed an order or a criticism with a grin. He likened it to 'shit only serial killers
do’ which the older man thought was very rude. The only thing Viktor was trying to kill were the bad habits and sloppy techniques holding both of his students back.

He smelt Yuuri - who had no reason to be hovering so close when the teen had his own work to do - and turned the same look on him. Yuuri squeaked, knowing he had been caught. Viktor made his smile brighter.

“Was there a reason why you've stopped doing your drills, Yuura?”

Yuuri gulped and then shook his head; eyes wide like a trapped snow hare.

He hadn’t pulled fire since that first day (Thank Araak!) but the teen was still having trouble spelling ice. Yakov chalked it up to nerves since Viktor swore Yuuri could do it, but judges didn't base their points on what Maesters swore their thaumaturges could do. Eventually, Yuuri would need to produce results – results that Viktor had promised Yakov he would deliver.

“Then, perhaps you should go back to them, no?” his voice came out light and airy as if it were on the verge of a giggle.

Yuuri squeaked again and rushed back to his drills with a quickness that would have made a speed soarer envious.

Viktor took in his two students, both with their own unique challenges, and sighed. They still had to survive the First Test (The idea of which sometimes kept him up at night), but in true perfectionist fashion, he was already worrying about whether they would be ready for the upcoming season.

It was Yakov’s call and if the more senior Maester didn’t think they would be able to perform at the level his atelier was known for, the old mage had already decided that they would be benched until they could.

All that work on their choreography, costumes and routines and they might not even be able to use any of it for another year. It pulled an even more dramatic sigh from him. Yuuri had looked so happy when Viktor had showed him the preliminary sketches, too...

“Vitya, stop daydreaming and coach your students.”

Ah, speak of the wolf and he appears at your door. Viktor looked down at the older man and back out on the aether where both the Yu(u)ris were diligenty practicing. For a little while, they just stood there watching.

“What do you think is wrong?” Yakov asked him after they spent a few moments in silence.

Viktor's eyes roamed over his pupils. Yakov was testing him but he already knew the answer.

“They're complete opposites.”

Yakov nodded, the small hint of something that could be mistaken for pride shining in his eyes. He turned to Viktor with an expectant gaze.

“Any how will you use that?”

Neither of them could tell a story with their body yet. He watched Yuuri flub a spell and Yurio land a jump with so little grace that it should be criminal. They looked disjointed; the crucial pieces needed to understand them were missing. Yuuri had beauty without magic and Yuri had magic with
no beauty. It was almost as if - with their thaumaturgy- they were playing out the dichotomy between alphas and omegas.

Viktor gasped as an idea; a crazy but brilliant idea unexpectedly came to him. Noticing the change, Yakov stopped studying the Yu(u)ris to look at him.

“What are you thinking?” His voice sounded wary, suspicious. He had every right to be. Viktor’s ideas were the kind of thing that led to docked points and near disqualifications on the regular.

“Something wonderful,” Viktor breathed; the sound giddy and stuffed full of glee. “Sometimes,” he smirked, “it is best to work with what you have.”

Through the lenses of his imagination, he pictured them. Yuuri, a dark haired and delicate Xiv, magic unnecessary as he powered through the physically demanding Hunt. He glanced at Yurio and saw a headstrong Ore- with a crown of blond hair and forest green eyes- full of magic but hesitant, almost awkward in their new body.

He laughed. The sound bounced around the nearly empty rink catching his apprentices’ attention.

“Back to work!” Yakov snapped. “At the rate you're both going, you'll fall off the mountain and disgrace my atelier.”

His mirth died down as reality crept back in. He would have to start from scratch. Redesign the costumes, the choreography - everything. It would take so much time, and he probably wouldn't be able to eat or sleep or even cuddle with Yuuri half as much as he wanted to. But, that was okay he thought with a delighted thrill because when he was finished with the two of them, not only would they be ready for the aether, but they would be ready to take gold.

The announcement for the First Test arrived on a rough day, just when they needed a pick me up.

Viktor was being relentless in his drive to get his students arena ready and it was taking its toll. Sometimes, Yuuri fell asleep at the dinner table. Other times, Otabek, had to piggyback an exhausted Yurio home. He knew they would thank him when they were both standing on the podium just like Viktor had always thanked Yakov no matter how hard the regimen had been on his body.

But even athletes had bad days and Viktor’s students were no exception. Yuuri had been flubbing his magic all morning and Yurio was hardly better with his graceless moves. Viktor was exasperated. He knew that he was choreographing a program to play to both their strengths but they had to bring some modicum of talent to the table in order for their performances to be work.

“Again!” he singsonged.

“Sadist...”

“What's that, Yurio? You want to try out a bag drill?”

Yurio shivered and from the corner of his eye, Viktor was sure he saw Yuuri wipe at a tear but they both went back to performing ice swirl drills - Yurio tasked with adding more grace and Yuuri with actually casting ice.

Yakov - after countless hours of comments and criticisms that didn't seem to improve a thing in either youth’s soaring - finally had Viktor yank them off the aether with a bark that their amateurish displays didn’t belong on his rink.
Yurio sent the older man a gesture so rude that he almost did end up doing a bag drill.

Yuuri, on the other hand, burst into tears so frustrated and violent that they sent his alpha into a tizzy. Nearly choking with the need to soothe, Viktor had to guide the omega into the locker room before the situation overpowered his wits. He barely had time to shut the door before the scent of Yuuri’s distress hit the air like a tidal wave. It burned at all of Viktor's senses and sent his already agitated alpha howling.

As soon as the door shut, he rushed to take the omega into his arms to calm him.

“I don't know why I'm crying.” Came a tiny voice from the depths of his slowly growing wetter shoulder. “Yurio didn't cry.”

“Yuura...” Viktor crooned while pushing the teen to the side of his neck, closest to a gland and releasing a burst of calming scent. “It's okay. We all have bad days.”

“I wanted to impress you,” Yuuri sobbed, his tears warm and wet against Viktor's neck.

“I’m already impressed, Yuurochka. From the minute you told me you wanted soar, I’ve been impressed.”

Yuuri’s breath hitched and the omega pulled Viktor in tighter, almost desperately; his arms flying up and down the alpha’s back in a scenting frenzy. The older mage allowed it (even though Yakov would most likely lose his shit once he caught the smell) figuring that the action gave the teen some extra reassurance.

It took another ten minutes to get him to calm down but Yuuri eventually stopped crying after a couple more hits of Viktor's pheromones and a few deep breaths. Unfortunately, no amount of cold water or tissue paper could hide the blotchy face and puffy eyes that showed that Yuuri had been crying.

Yakov was decent enough to say nothing. Yurio on the other hand...

“Hey, piggy, you alright?” Yurio called after Yuuri walked past him eyes averted and without a word.

The blond’s brow furrowed. “Oi, I was talking to you!” he shouted as Yuuri stormed up towards the benches.

“Leave him.” Viktor rested a hand on Yuri’s shoulder to shush him.

The younger mage shrugged off the hand. “Did I do something?”

His question was tinged with just a hint of nervousness. Viktor would have smiled if the situation had allowed it. They weren’t friends indeed. He flicked his eyes to Yuuri. The teen could be a prideful creature when he wanted to be, preferring to hide his shortcomings than admit them. Judging from his earlier comment in the locker room, the younger mage was probably too embarrassed by his outburst to face his rink mate right now.

Viktor answered Yurio with a shake of his head, his eyes still trailing after his other student. “Not that I know of...”

Mila, who was sitting on the same bench as the one Yuuri plopped down on, perked up at the exchange and slid a little closer to Yuuri, one arm stretched out as she leaned into his space.
“Ooooh, is this one of those fable omega rivalries?” she teased.

“N-no, of course not,” Yuuri spluttered. His expression once again teetering close to tears while his entire face went red. “W-w-we’re …friends, Mila. G-good rink mates don’t fight.”

“We’re… comrades,” Yuri corrected and then spat, “Who the fuck said we were rivals?”

Mila laughed and looped her arms around Yuuri as was her habit. “Didn’t you say there could only be one Yuri on ice? Sounds like a rivalry to me.”

The remark made Yuuri’s head snap up and the look he gave Viktor seemed to read as terror before it smoothed into something indecipherable. It made Viktor consider taking Yuuri back into the locker room to ask what it was about but Yakov interrupted his thought by saying,

“Vitya, take those two to your office. Make their brains work if their bodies won’t.”

Viktor decided the talk could wait until later and set them to reading theory. He passed out the thick tomes while trying his best to ignore the tension bouncing off his students in waves. He felt a little down too, but as a coach he knew that he shouldn’t show it.

They were still hunched together in Viktor’s makeshift office, which was little bigger than a utility closet, and in their second hour of instruction when Yakov opened the door. Both omegas looked up with surprise, and just the tiniest bit of hope shining in their eyes.

Yakov ignored them, handed Viktor a thick envelope, and said nothing else. They wilted once the door shut. Seeing the pouts almost made Viktor want to smile but playing the responsible coach, he ordered them to keep reading.

The white envelope was big; nearly the width of both of his hands and was made of the heavyweight linen paper favored by the IMU. His heartbeat started to pickup as he turned the envelope over. He tried to keep his scent neutral but eventually Yuuri’s head popped up as his nose no doubt caught the scent of ginger.

“Vitya?” he said with a small lilt, eyes swimming full of questions.

“Oi, old man, you're making it stink,” Yurio whined, his hand coming up to cover his nose as he sent Viktor a glare.

But his glower also morphed into a look of curiosity as he watched Viktor ease the blood ward of the heavy wax seal open with the edge of his pinkie finger. It released with a little sizzle and snap that stung Viktor's finger and left it wet with blood. He smeared it across the seal and then brought the sore digit to his mouth as he waited for the magic to react.

As expected, the envelope flew from his hands into the air and started to glow as it unfurled to reveal an official summons.

High House mages had nothing on the drama of the IMU so even Viktor felt a little in awe as beautiful gold lettering scrolled across the missive as if it was being written in real-time by a ghostly hand.

“You are being cordially invited,” it began in a voice that sounded like bells, wind chimes and a dozen other sweet eared things, “to participate in the Springan season of the Apprentice First Test to be held in late April. Please make all necessary preparations and arrangements, including funerary, as soon as possible.”
The letter went dim and fluttered to the floor.

Yuuri and Yurio greeted the parchment notice like they were 12 and not 18 and 19; with whoops and cries of joy that would surely have Yakov stomping up the stairs to yell at them. But, he didn’t have the heart to tell them off. They had been working so hard, day and night for the last month for this moment.

Viktor felt his eyes well up at the flood of emotions seeing their joy brought. Yurio scoffed at the tears but he just smiled and told the brat he would understand when he was a Maester himself.

“That will be in like another hundred years, old man!” the boy sneered but Viktor could tell from his puffed up chest, that the omega was pleased with the suggestion that his thaumaturge career would advance all the way to the top.

Viktor’s heart leapt when he locked eyes with Yuuri who looked like he had just heard the greatest news in his life. Who was smiling at Viktor so broadly and openly that the universe shrank down to just the omega’s face; to the pink of his quirked lips, to the lashings of red at the tips of his ears, to the fire that danced in his eyes.

He wore confidence so well. Viktor melted as his heart swelled even more with pride.

The teen picked up the letter and turned to hold the paper out to his coach like the sight of him with it didn’t make Viktor’s throat close with emotion. Never in all of his imaginings of their futures did he ever envision anything like this. He really could not describe how much he wanted to see Yuuri on that podium.

Both Yu(u)ris looked at him in expectation. Congratulate them the voice in his head screamed as he took the letter but he was too choked up - all Viktor could see was the image his students smiling from their place on top of world stage. He came to a very coach like determination as he looked at the paper that now only contained the names of both apprentices and a date. He was going to frame it and put it up on the wall where everyone could see it and Viktor was going to brag about it every day until his pupils replaced it with gold.

The room filled with the scent of orange blossom. It tickled Viktor’s nose. Two pairs of eyes were looking up to him - their omega natures demanding praise from their alpha - they were waiting for him to validate their world.

“Are you proud of me, Vitya?” Yuuri asked, putting a voice to the question that danced across both omega’s expressions. His eyes were so big and so hopeful. Yurio - in a move that was so uncharacteristic of the usually sullen boy - bounced by his side.

Viktor's mind raced. There was still so much work to do. Skills they had to practice and techniques they needed to learn. He still needed to redesign their outfits and find a seamster who could make robes beautiful enough do his Yu(u)ris justice.

Yuuri would need to go home for his heats.

His mind glossed over funeral arrangements and he pondered instead at which inn would have the best view of the Arala Mountains. Would Chris know? It was practically in his backyard…

“Vitya?”

His thoughts stopped racing once he realized that the duo were still patiently waiting for their compliment. He smiled and let the worries fall away.
“Of course, I’m proud,” he answered, thinking about how beautiful Yuuri would look with the Aralan snow decorating his hair. “How could I be anything else?”

It was just past the witching hour and Viktor was a jittery mess. Tomorrow, he would board a plane to Helpheshia and he was trying with all his might to fill his time and thoughts with anything that wasn’t the possibility of one or none of his students coming back alive.

Every thaumaturge knew the risks involved with taking one of the Tests. Viktor himself had been through three, but that had been before he was responsible for two very cute, very alive and very much adored omegas.

The stress had turned him into a nightmare of overprotectiveness and criticism.

Just the other day, he had made Yurio actually cry when his criticism over a small mistake had gone on just a little too long and little too harsh. Otabek looked like he wanted to rend him asunder, and after Viktor realized what he said, he thought the dragon had every right to.

He hadn’t actually meant to say that “Yurio was a fuck up waiting to happen” but the damage was done. At the time, he just needed to impress upon the headstrong Yurio that his mistakes weren’t something to be waved off or laughed at. On the aether, yes, he could get better but on top of a floating mountain? He might just become a Yurio shaped splatter and Viktor didn’t really feel much like he wanted to present Plisetsky back to his parents in an urn instead of with a gold medal.

Not even Yuuri was safe. As if things couldn’t get worse, he had snapped at Yuuri earlier in the night for trying to cuddle while he was cooking. In his defense, the pan was still hot and while surprises were great, what if something had spilled on Yuuri and given him an injury? They were only days before a life or death test. What kind of coach would Viktor be if he let Yuuri on the mountains with an injury?

Of course, he apologized to both omegas immediately afterwards but they still walked around him on eggshells. It made Viktor feel bad which in turn stressed him out more. It wasn’t their fault that their coach was turning into an emotional mess. His behavior was getting so bad that even Yakov had commented on it.

“Vitya, if I worried every time a student of mine took a Test,” the man said as calmly as snow fell on the ice, “I would be completely bald with stress instead of half bald.”

But, that didn’t soothe Viktor’s nerves at all. In fact, it made things worse because now in addition to being worried over the potential doom of his students, he was also worried that his worries over the potential doom of his students would cause the potential doom of his hair.

So, now the night before their departure, he was sitting on the edge his bed instead of sleeping in the middle of it, on his third attempt at refolding all of his socks and underwear, trying to calm down enough to at least get a few hours of sleep and not lose all of his precious hair.

It was not working.

He was so keyed up that the knock on the door nearly made his heart beat out of his chest. He had to put his palm over it and take a few deep breaths before he could answer.

The door cracked open just a fraction as Yuuri’s head popped into the room. “Can I come in?”

Viktor’s initial reaction was to say no and tell the teen go back to his own bower and get the sleep that his body would definitely need but he still felt guilty about his earlier actions and Yuuri looked
so adorable as he fidgeted outside of his doorway that he immediately gave in.

“Can’t sleep either?” he said, trying to play it casual like he hadn’t been folding and refolding the same sock for nearly twenty minutes.

Yuuri shook his head and then bit his lip. “It’s my first time on a plane. I’m a little scared.”

That made two of them. Viktor held out his arms in invitation.

Yuuri rushed into them. Feeling fondness well up with the scent and feel of the omega against him, Viktor nuzzled the top of the teen’s head and shifted so that Yuuri could cuddle a little deeper into his arms. His nose was full of the scent of content. It settled his nerves and his alpha purred that this was how it should always be- Yuuri in his arms, safe and sound in his den and sitting in just the ri-.

He quickly stopped the thought because it was too perverted for him to go any further with it and its ultimate conclusion with Yuuri sitting so innocently in his lap.

The omega in question lifted his head from where it rested on Viktor’s shoulder and the older man almost had to fight himself not to guide it back down. His apprentice’s eyes were soft, and happy. In response, Viktor’s chest rumbled with a purr. Yuuri startled and then went boneless against him, his full weight forcing Viktor to sink back down in the pillows.

Yuuri followed without any objection. He forced his head under Viktor’s chin and rubbed his hand up and down the alpha’s side, scenting him with languid strokes. Viktor returned the favor by running his hand through Yuuri’s coal black strands, glad at how long they had grown in such a short time. Shoulder length had looked good, but Yuuri with hair going down his back was painfully beautiful. He couldn’t wait to see the strands flowing behind Yuuri like ribbons of magic as he soared for the crowds.

“Can I sleep here, tonight?”

There were a thousand reasons why Viktor should say no but then he thought on how Yuuri could crash into the side of a mountain tomorrow, break his neck, and die. A thousand other equally as horrible and terrifying outcomes flashed through his head. He pushed his face back into Yuuri’s hair and inhaled to remind himself that Yuuri was safe and right here in his arms.

Breathing in Yuuri’s gently spiced scent; he thought would it really be so bad if he let it happen for just one night just in case it was…the last night. There was no one here to be scandalized by the impropriety. Not that there would be much to be improper about when they were already betrothed and adults. He supposed it was only he, himself, who was holding on to Yuuri’s innocence. His mother was already encouraging him to bite Yuuri and he was sure that the grigori expected to witness the birth of an heir within the next few years. However, little did they know but Viktor wholeheartedly planned to disappoint them.

He was so lost in his thoughts of spite that he didn’t notice that Yuuri’s hands had switched from scenting to drawing lazy circles on the older man’s chest until the teen’s fingers brushed a nipple. Swallowing a gasp, Viktor guided Yuuri’s hand back to the much safer place of his side and fought to control the response his body was having. He didn’t want it to get into his scent and cause Yuuri to start asking awkward questions. The omega’s ministrations paused when Viktor shifted his hand without giving an answer. He lifted his head, the air smelt like lemon as he did so.

“You don’t have to,”
Viktor sneezed.

Yuuri’s worried face coupled with the thought of him dying was almost more than Viktor could bear. He cupped the back of Yuuri’s head and gently pushed him back down. Before he realized what he was doing, he whispered, “Stay, please.”

Yuuri fell asleep within minutes but Viktor didn’t sleep a wink.

Viktor’s hands were shaking. He wanted to blame it on the freezing temperatures surrounding the base of the Floating Arala Mountains but he knew the fault lay solely with the deadweight’s worth of emotions warring in his chest. No matter how much he tried over the last two days, he couldn’t stop thinking of his Yuuri lying bloody and broken at the foot of the mountains.

Plisetsky had taken the test yesterday and Viktor had not felt a shred of worry or panic. If fact, he had been able to watch the omega soar through the mountains and clouds with a sense of expectations and pride.

Why couldn’t he do the same for his Yuuri?

Yakov had always managed to seem untouchable and unbreakable as he coached. How did the old man do it?

He was so stressed that he hardly slept at all the night before and now he was running late; the knowledge of which upset him so much he could cry. He had 20 minutes to make a 30 minute journey. As he finished the sigil on the bottom of his boots, he hoped the priests that tended to the mountain didn’t mind if he soared his way to the test’s location.

He arrived at the testing site with 5 minutes to spare. Yuuri waved when he noticed Viktor’s approach and then returned to talking with the assessors and his rink-mate like he wasn’t about to undergo a potentially life threatening ordeal. Huffing and red faced, Viktor hid the still shaking evidence of his worry deep within the pockets of his fur coat as he strode over to the group.

Once he was in Yuuri’s space, he busied his trembling hands with the task of straightening the fur collar around the omega’s caftan. He hoped Yuuri was warm enough. Any distractions, even something as small as a shiver, could mean death if Yuuri misplaced a step or suffered a magical rebound.

The assessor tapped on Yuuri’s shoulder signaling it was time to start. Viktor’s stomach dropped and he had to battle with himself not to let his scent turn sour. Yuuri said his goodbyes with a smile so gentle and sweet that it made Viktor want to wrap the younger mage up in his cloak and whisk him away from the upcoming danger.

He bent and cupped Yuuri’s face. Dressed all in red, the omega looked so beautiful painted in snow that Viktor wished that it wasn’t against the rules to give his student a blessing. Desperate to give Yuuri something, he settled on giving Yuuri the next best thing; a good luck charm. He just hoped it would be okay to do so without asking because he couldn’t bear to ask and be told no. So, just this once, he ignored all propriety and did something completely improper.

Yuuri’s cheeks were soft under his lips. He grazed each side with a pressure lighter than the flutter of a butterfly wing.

“It’s for good luck,” he whispered, pulling away with a small smile. “Though I hope you won’t need it.”
Yuuri touched the spot, his already ruddy cheeks becoming redder, more gorgeous as he looked at Viktor with wide eyes. Snow fell gently, continuously in the moments they spent staring at each other. Hints of cinnamon coated the air and Viktor stiffened as Yuuri stood on his tiptoes to return the gesture.

His was firmer; Viktor actually felt the heat of Yuuri’s mouth against his skin. As the teen pulled away, the older man tried to quiet the anxiety rampaging inside him. His fangs twinged and he pretended that the tear that slipped down his cheek was snow melting from the heat on his face. He started to turn away to take care of it, embarrassed by how much of a mess he was being. It was hardly Lord Nikiforov behavior. It was hardly behavior suited to lend strength to the omega.

Yuuri wiped the tear away.

“So even Vitya cries,” His smile was shy but oh so happy.

“Sorry,” Viktor said, not meaning a word of it because even though he should be, right now was a moment where he couldn’t be strong. He pulled Yuuri in for a quick, frantic hug. The younger man allowed it and even took the time to scent Viktor’s cloak.

“Believe in me?” he whispered as he pulled away. A few strands of hair had fallen from Yuuri’s braid into his face. Viktor tucked them behind his ear with a proud smile.

“Okay.”

He took a deep breath as Yuuri walked away to get into position. By the time he released it, the teen was already soaring through the air. His student jumped from mountain to mountain, his form perfect and sure and getting smaller by the second. Tension built in his chest as he watched Yuuri climb higher and higher into the clouds, away from his gaze, away from his protection. The maester stared after his apprentice until his neck hurt, hoping and praying to all the gods assembled that Yuuri would come back to him all in one piece.

He sighed. He promised he would believe. He breathed and prayed harder. The assessor handed him a mug of honeyed vodka, a specialty of the shrine. Viktor downed it without even tasting a drop. Yurio approached him and tried to talk, and Viktor tried to answer but his thoughts kept wandering to Yuuri. Eventually, the younger mage stomped off to go wait inside the shrine with his much more responsive dragon.

Viktor stayed outside, his worry making him insensate to cold of the snow that gently piled around him.

It felt like decades, centuries, and millennia had passed before the air shifted and Yuuri hit the snow with a dull thud. The teen stood up, checked the flower in his hand, and brushed the snow off of his clothes with a small grin.

“Yuura!” he cried as he nearly tripped over himself running towards the omega.

Yuuri looked up and started running as well.

They crashed together into an explosion of orange blossom scent. Yuuri was hearty and hale and only bleeding from one very non vital spot. Viktor so overwhelmed with relief and happiness, embarrassingly found himself crying again.

“I did it, Vitya,” Yuuri said, cradling the sign of Araak’s blessing, the Corylorsis blossom, tightly to his chest. With it he was officially allowed to become a thaumaturge.
“Yuura, my Yuura,” Viktor wept, uncaring of how possessive he sounded in the moment.

Yuuri sank further into him, smelling of snow and ice and cinnamon magic. “Yes, yours,” he purred.”Are you proud of me?”

“Always.”

That night, Yuuri asked to sleep in Viktor’s bed again, and still reeling from the emotions surrounding Yuuri’s First Test, Viktor didn’t have it in him to tell the teen no, even if the actions would look inappropriate to the rest of the hotel.

They were curled up in the center of the inn’s small bed, Viktor with one of the hundreds of coaching manuals he had recently purchased and Yuuri pressed up against him in enough of the right places for his alpha to purr with contentment. Yuuri, who seemed to love the sound, nuzzled deeper to soak up the sensation. They sat in silence, satisfied with just being in each other’s presence.

“Vitya?”

Viktor paused his reading to look down at Yuuri.

“Yes?” he said with the kind of indulgent smile he only gave his betrothed.

“Um…” Yuuri sat up and pulled at the sleeves of his oversized sweatshirt. “Alphas need blood, right?”

Viktor’s brain and smile screeched to a halt. His fangs threatened to shift down but he forced them back up with the pressure of his tongue.

“What? What? Yuura, where has this come from?” Is what he thought but …

“Did someone bite you?” was what his irrational alpha brain made him growl out.

“N-no,” Yuuri stammered and recoiled a little into the safety of his sweatshirt, which Viktor realized with a small jolt of pleasure was his. “It’s just that I’ve passed the First Test now… And, I hate how you smell when you drink from other omegas…And so I just thought that m-maybe…as a r-reward…you could…” he trailed off, clearly unable to finish the sentence.

Viktor raised a brow but stayed silent as he waited for Yuuri to continue. To be honest, he thought he had been exceedingly careful about how alphas kept their proprium levels replenished.

The omega flushed, a beautiful apple red, as he tried to press on, “Oma, she said-”

Viktor saw red. If it was Yuuri bumbling his own way into sexuality, then Viktor might have been a bit more accomodating. Not that he would put his fangs in Yuuri’s neck, but if the omega’s own desires were showing through, he might have been inclined to introduce the younger man to the more innocent action of neck kissing. However, if others were pushing him…

“It doesn't matter what Mother says,” Viktor snapped feeling completely on edge and infuriated that his dam would suggest something like this to Yuuri.

Yuuri flinched, forcing Viktor to soften his expression. He ran a hand through his hair in frustration. He was going to have to have a word with his dam. For Araak’s sake, how could she tell the teen to do something as serious as feeding when Yuuri was barely six months into his
adulthood and thought marshmallow cereal was the height of cuisine.

Viktor was ten years older – he could wait ten years more if need be.

“Do you not want to …” Yuuri shifted, and pulled his arms around himself. The action and the fragrance filling the room screamed rejection.

“I’m not rejecting you, Yuurochka,” he scrambled to bring the omega into his grasp. Yuuri sniffled wetly against his shoulder. “Look, Yuura, you’ve still got a lot of growing up to do. Those kind of things…like biting…”

Screaming that never seemed to stop.

A hand stretching, reaching out towards him.

An alpha's fangs gleaming with blood.

The outside world is merciless, Vitya.” The older man sighed. “This isn’t how I would have wanted to you learn that though.”

His father pulled him away from the entrance of the alley and pushed his son’s face into the comfort of his scent gland. Viktor didn’t like the way his father’s scent was always tinted with his mother’s blood but it was hells better than the stench of sex and distress. He sobbed. He didn’t think he would ever be able to get the image of the man attacking the omega out of his head. The monster was an alpha- the same gender as Viktor. Did that mean that Viktor was capable of doing the same dirty thing?

"Do you understand the stakes now, Vitya?" his sire asked like this had just been a simple school lesson and not Viktor stumbling onto something that had just shaken his entire worldview. “Do you finally understand what happens to “free” omegas? Do you now finally get why we lock Yuuri away to keep xem safe?”

He hated it but a little part of him did. He nodded and didn’t struggle as his father’s hand came to middle of his back and guided him away.

“Good, now perhaps, you’ll stop trying to convince me that xe should be let out.”

He pushed down the memory and swallowed, a lump of disgust and loathing sticking in his throat at the thought of pulling Yuuri into anything before he was mature enough for it. “Those kinds of things are serious, Yuura. You have to be ready for them.”

“I am ready, Vitya.” The omega pouted then grumbled, “Oma is not forcing me. I want to give you my blood.”

He pushed Yuuri a little ways from him to look into the teen’s downcast eyes. “If you can’t look me in the eyes to ask for it, then you are definitely not ready to ask for it.”

Yuuri squirmed and opened his mouth to say something else but Viktor pressed a finger to his lips.” No one else defines this relationship other than you and I. We set the pace. We go at our own speed. Is that clear?”

He kept his finger on Yuuri’s mouth until he got the response he wanted. Yuuri nodded but didn’t look any happier. Viktor snuggled him as consolation and just hoped they didn’t have to have this conversation anytime soon again.
The closing ceremony for the First Test was a riotous affair and Viktor was sure that a warship could be floated on top of the amount of alcohol he saw poured out tonight. He played responsible, sticking to a glass or two an hour because he was the adult in the group and somehow it was his job to ensure that his Yu(u)ris made it back to the inn in one piece.

The aforementioned pair was in front of him, quickly getting drunk and squabbling like siblings. Well, Yurio was squabbling. Yuuri was just downing alcohol as if his life depended on it. And Viktor let him because what good was a party to a Rhurshyan if you couldn’t have a drink? The younger mage had been withdrawn since their conversation the night before so Viktor felt a little relieved to see Yuuri partaking so easily in the merriment. Besides, Yuuri’s alcohol flush looked just like his real flush and why would Viktor ever skip out on the chance to see that?

Good judgment could come in the morning. If Yakov were here, he would definitely be yelling at them – Viktor included. In all truth, Viktor was glad for the absence of the curmudgeonly maester because there was no way on Araak’s good Eorthe that he was going to stop the drinking contest that Yurio had just challenged Yuuri to.

Yuuri was a Nikiforov – Viktor smirked - and Nikiforovs never lost. He gave an unalpha like giggle as servers rushed to line up a row of shots. Yurio was going to get obliterated. He knew he was supposed to be the voice of reason, but at the moment, Vikor couldn’t think of anything more amazing than watching the cocky Yurio get destroyed by the pure drinking powerhouse that lived in every Ost Pyotrsborg citizen.

His students had probably besmirched the Feltsman name forever.

Really, Viktor could just die of shame. He was definitely going to want to die of something when Yakov got to him. Not only did his students nearly drink themselves to death, but Yurio threw up on a shrine priest’s shoes and Yuuri tried to save the day (read: Yurio from further embarrassment) by swinging from one of the shrine pillars only receive the same (bloody) results as his last attempt.

Imagine getting your student through the First Test, only for them to off themselves by breaking their neck while trying to spin around on a sacred pole (Viktor snorted at the idea of a sacred pole but that was only because he was a teensy eensy weensy bit drunk, too). Viktor spared a moment to be annoyed at Yuuri, but then the omega he was piggybacking through the snow smelled so sweet and probably looked so cute with his face reddened by alcohol and the cold that it was not a feeling that he could hold onto for long.

He was just going to have to scold them both in the morning but for now he had to figure out how to get Yuuri back to his room without wiping out in the calf deep snow with a drunk and wriggling 18 yr old on his back. Thank Araak that Otabek had oh so graciously offered to bring the retching Yurio back. There was no way he could have managed two trashed omegas.

At least Yuuri was happy again. He could feel the omega’s purring straight through the thickness of his cloak and the multiple other layers of clothing he was wearing to guard against the Arala’s harsh temperatures. He let the sensation buoy him through the rest of the 30 minute journey back to the inn.

When they finally did reach Yuuri’s room, he dropped the teen into the nest as gently as he could. Yuuri flopped down with a soft noise but quickly got back up to stare at Viktor with a warm drunk smile. Viktor smiled back because it was getting harder and harder not to answer when Yuuri called.
The omega giggled at his response then ruined the cuteness with an alcohol belch that sounded like a foghorn. With that as his cue, Viktor figured he would call it a night but found himself trapped by a pair of arms winding around his waist.

Yuuri rubbed his face into his back—most likely in drunken attempt to scent him.

“Vityaaaaaa,” the teen slurred, “my lips itch doesn’t that mean I’m gonna k-kiss somebody soon?”

Viktor was pretty sure the itchiness thing only applied to palms and money and that Yuuri’s itchiness was more than likely the result of rubbing his lips against the hard wool of Viktor’s cloak, but he still gently tugged at Yuuri’s arms enough to turn around and…

Yuuri, somehow still adorned with the crown of red roses presented to him earlier in the afternoon, looked beautiful and petulant as he stared up at Viktor. His nose was scrunched, like it always was when he was thinking or displeased. Viktor, eyebrow twitching, wondered what could possibly be so displeasing about getting personally ferried back to your room after getting to drink your (outrageous) fill of alcohol. He was just about to act on his annoyance when Yuuri put his ponderings to rest.

“You still think I’m a baby,” he seethed, the gold flecks in his irises turning warmer as he looked up into Viktor’s eyes, “but one day I’m going to kiss you with a grown up kiss. I read about one in a book Yuuko snuck me once.”

At this, Yuuri leaned forward, completely into Viktor's space with narrowed eyes and hissed,

“It was scandalous. They used their tongues!”

It was one of the most precious things Viktor had ever heard. He nearly laughed at the seriousness of Yuuri’s expression but covered his gaffe with a polite cough and a “is that so?”.

Yuuri stared at him for a long minute before his eyes turned glassy.

“You're making fun of me.”

Viktor tucked a strand of hair behind the younger man’s ear, his voice nearly quivering with mirth and fondness.

“Never.”

“Really?” That Yuuri even took him at face value meant that the omega was too pure for this world.

“Yes, and when you're ready, when you're older, (He hoped much older) I'll give you a grown up kiss too.”

Yuuri was silent after that, his brows furrowed like he was trying to digest Viktor's words. Viktor watched and waited.

Yuuri turned rose red, but his brown eyes met the alpha's blue with a determined look.

“I think…,” Yuuri answered, his voice a squeak like the words were being squeezed out of him, “I'd like that.”

His cheeks still pink, his gaze slid to Viktor’s lips like he wanted Viktor to close the distance, to press his mouth to Yuuri’s but Viktor wouldn’t; not now when the other was drunk and probably
half senseless. When they did it, it would have to be special.

Instead, he put his hands on the younger man's shoulders and gently guided him down into the soft blankets of his makeshift nest. Yuuri went without protest or complaint and snuggled into a baby blue blanket the minute Viktor straightened up and away from him. He nuzzled into the soft material with a sleepy sigh.

“I like this blanket,” Yuuri purred, “because it smells like Vitya.”

Viktor's inner alpha preened at the omega's acceptance of the gift, a last minute airport purchase to calm Yuuri enough for their trip.

“I can give you more if you'd like,” he offered, hoping to all the gods of love and affection that Yuuri would say yes.

“Mmm,” the response came out slurred with Yuuri on the edges of slumber, “I'd like that.”

Viktor was left with silence and his thoughts as Yuuri lost his battle with sleep. Listening to the omega’s soft snores made Viktor’s rooms seem so lonely and so far away.

He wouldn’t dare get in Yuuri’s nest without permission but the pillowed steps that led into its frame looked soft and inviting under Yuuri’s messy piles of rejected bedding. Maybe he was still drunk because the idea of sleeping next to Yuuri’s nest suddenly didn’t sound bad at all. He sat down and curled up into the pile of Yuuri scented blankets with a groan of pleasure and within seconds, he was also asleep.

Viktor had never been one to worry about his life on the aether but the suspense of sitting in Yakov’s office and waiting for the man to make a decision on whether or not his students would compete in the upcoming season had him fidgeting in his seat like a troublesome schoolboy. The sound of his tapping foot was the only thing keeping him sane as Yakov reviewed Viktor’s recorded videos and notes from the past few months without saying a word.

Araak’s mercy, he hoped it was a yes because he didn’t really know what he would do if he got a no for either of them. His gut cramped at just the idea of having to give Yuuri bad news. Unable to take the silence and his own thoughts, Viktor decided to start a conversation as a distraction.

“I'm worried about Yuuri.”

Was the first thing that came out of his mouth when he meant to talk about the recently warming weather and he winced at the word vomit. There was no stopping it now. Viktor knew the rules of Yakov’s atelier better than anyone else (because he so often broke them). After nearly 5 decades of working with bone headed students, Yakov had tailored it to a science - No words = No arguments. If you spoke, prepare to get your feelings hurt.

“You're always worried about Yuuri.” Yakov pushed his reading glasses to a better position on his nose but didn’t look up from his papers.

“I'm being serious, Yakov. As his coach.”

The older mage took off his glasses with a huff and Viktor’s heart started to race. He really wished he had just shut up and waited for Yakov’s decision. The older man peered at Viktor, then tossed the stack of papers in his hand onto the desk and leaned back into his chair. He threaded his hands together as he gave Viktor the power of the “Feltsman Frown”. This was Yakov’s stance of ultimate annihilation. Viktor closed his eyes for the strike. The last time he had seen it in use, it had
sent an established (but disgustingly pervy) patron straight into resignation and out of public sight.

“Vitya, look at me.”

Viktor opened an eye.

“With both eyes, dammit!”

Viktor opened his other eye to see Yakov in the same position. He steeled himself when his former coach opened his mouth to speak and hoped that the other man was okay with seeing 28 year olds cry.

“Vitya, this atelier specializes in ice,” the older mage said softly, and it was so gentle that Viktor just wanted to bolt from the chair and go straight home to Yuuri and hide. But, by some miracle (most likely his alpha pride), he found the strength to sit there as Yakov continued. “It's the only event we compete in. Ice by its very nature is cold and unforgiving. If the kid can't cope then maybe this isn't the place for him and… if you can’t cope with that, then maybe this isn’t the place for you, either.”

With every fiber of his being wanting to defend Yuuri, Viktor fought himself for level-headedness. It was a lost cause and even though he knew the rules, knew he couldn’t get upset; the words came out of his mouth anyway.

“You don't believe in him…”

It came out as a whisper, harsh like an omega hiss.

Yakov to his credit didn’t react. He just slid his glasses back on his face and picked up a new handful of papers from one of the towering stacks on his desk and started to read.

“Are you going to debut Plisetsky this season?”

It was with pure, genuine curiosity that he asked. Yurio wasn't always his favorite person but he was still Viktor's apprentice. If neither of his students made it...Yakov glared at him. He must look absolutely surly right now.

BAM!

Victor jumped.

Yakov lifted his fist from the desk and with a growl tossed the pile of papers back onto his desk.

“Don't ask me about Plisetsky when we both know this is all about your omega, Viktor!”

Out of reflex, Viktor tried to catch some of the papers that flew away, bending over to do so and found Yakov looming over him, every bit the angry, foreboding alpha. For a tense moment, Viktor wondered if he had overstepped boundaries and pushed Yakov into thinking he was making a challenge.

Viktor submitted anyway- just to be safe because a fight was never his intention. He let the back of his neck stand open and bare. Just last month he was mocking Yurio for his act of penance and look at him now? Yakov swept past the display to pick up the rest of the papers from the floor.

“I should have never have said yes to you taking the Third Test,” the older man muttered while standing back up. “You’re a thousand years too soon for this.”
Now, Viktor was angry too. He felt caught out, raw. Of course, he favored Yuuri. This whole thing had always been about him. And yes, he'd made mistakes but he had also been trying to do his best by his other student, too. He might be flighty, and Anud's Hells, maybe even a little bit stupid but for Yakov to just insinuate that this whole thing had been a bad idea? That one hurt so much that Viktor didn't even feel ashamed when the room crept into the scent of pepper.

Yakov took off his glasses again, pinched the bridge of nose, and spat with a growl,

“I believe in what you've told me, Vitya, and the hints that I can see but that won't be enough for the judges and you know that.”

An answering growl rumbled in Viktor’s chest. So much for submitting.

“The aether is the only place for him, Yakov. I wouldn't have said yes if I thought he couldn't do it.”

Yakov pinched the bridge of his nose so hard that Viktor thought he might break it. His eyes were closed most likely to shut Viktor out. He took one, two, three deep steadying breathes before turning to his former student.

“Then, I need results, Vitya,” he said, his blue gray eyes a war of emotions. “Make me understand why it's worth worrying about him.”

Viktor’s eyes widened at the realization that Yakov was giving him another chance. They watered and he could feel his smile grow into a heart shape.

“Yakov…” he tried to thank the man but a lump was growing in his throat.

Yakov looked at him with barely concealed displeasure. “You have a week, Vitya. Now get out of my office so that I can actually do some work.”

The sound of pots clanging and dogs barking jolted Viktor straight out of his deep sleep. His exhausted brain only worked enough to tell him that it was probably robbers, and not that he had a housemate named Yuuri. After psyching himself up with a brief pep talk (He was definitely the biggest, baddest alpha on the block) and grabbing the bat he kept in his closet for this exact purpose, he ran into the kitchen with a chest beating, window shaking alpha roar.

Only to make Yuuri, who looked very charming in Viktor’s apron by the way, screech and drop the entire bowl of flour he was holding. They stared at each other for a second surrounded by white plumes while Vicchan and Makkachin barked like they were laughing themselves silly over their stupid owners’ antics.

When Viktor’s heart reached a rate in which he felt it wouldn’t sputter out, he spoke, “Yuura what are you doing?” he glanced at the clock, now lightly dusted with flour. “It’s 5 am and it’s an off day.”

The usual Yuuri would still be a pile of blankets and drool at this point.

“I made pancakes.” Yuuri twizzled for a few moments before looking up at Viktor through his lashes. “Yuri says he cooks all the time by himself so I wanted to try too.”

For a second, Viktor was about to coo at how endearing that was despite the fact that it was way too early to be cooking anything but then he remembered that Yuuri didn’t know how to cook at all and was suddenly very afraid.
“How?”

Yuuri beamed. “I found a recipe on the phone you gave me! Do you want to try some?”

A Viktor who valued his life would have said no. A Viktor that was intelligent would have politely declined and binned every item Yuuri cooked the minute the omega left the kitchen. Instead, Viktor said yes because he didn’t seem to be either of those things when it concerned the teen.

Yuuri ushered him to sit at the perfectly made, and spackled with flour, kitchen table. Despite the film of dust, it looked like something out of a homemaking magazine. There was even a flower sitting in a vase as a centerpiece and Viktor had to wonder if Yuuri had been practicing his homemaking skills while Viktor's been busy with coach work. He wouldn't put it pass the omega, Yuuri was surprisingly secretive when he wanted to be.

He chuckled as he remembered that it had taken his mother a solid two weeks for her find out that Yuuri had his own phone. Where Yuuri hid it Viktor could only guess but being able to hide anything at all from your dam was a skill to be admired.

Yuuri interrupted his musings by sliding a tall stack of pancakes right in front of him. He looked down and his brain and stomach started to riot.

The pancakes looked like they should be censored; they were that obscene. His stomach lurched and Viktor had to put his athletic abilities to good use to keep any of his stomach's contents from escaping. He started to cold sweat at the idea of putting even a tiny piece of what was on the plate anywhere near his mouth.

“Aren’t you going to eat?”

Xiv's Teeth, he didn't want to eat any of it but Yuuri was looking at him so earnestly while trying hard not fret with his apron that Viktor had to alpha up and do the deed. So, giving a prayer to Araak to survive this and to Anud for a swift rebirth if he didn’t, he took a small, tentative bite.

Pancakes weren't supposed to be crunchy. He casually cut a pancake with his fork and examined the insides. He wanted to puke. There were eggshells in, enough for him to see them clearly mixed in with the batter. A tear slipped down his cheek and Viktor was sure the internal pain he felt was his soul trying to leave his body.

“Are you okay, Vitya? You're turning green.”

“I'm fine,” he managed to croak out between the rolling waves of nausea. “Never better.”

“Is it good?”

Should Viktor tell him the truth? Yuuri was nearly vibrating with expectation, clearly ready and poised to be blessed with praise. Araak bless his omega heart but the only thing Viktor wanted to do with this food was throw it out.

The silence was Yuuri’s answer. Viktor never held back on praise or criticism so not saying anything must be a dead giveaway. His expression fell of course and Viktor couldn't say he wasn't expecting the wet sheen to the omegas eyes. He stood up to wipe up the few tears that did fall but Yuuri grabbed his hands and stopped him.

“If Yuri can do it, why can't I? We're the same age. I read the recipe,” he babbled, getting more and more worked up with every word.
“Yuri grew up completely different than you.” he said, trying to pacify Yuuri’s increasingly agitated state.

That was apparently the wrong thing to say because Yuuri looked as if he has been slapped.

“I know,” he whispered, his voice on the thin end of tears. “Don’t you think I know that!”

His voice echoed through the apartment. Viktor reached out his hands again but Yuuri flinched away. The omega’s face reddened and it seemed like he might just end up in a full on cry after all, but then the teen took a ragged breath and looked at Viktor like the very sight of him was painful before he turned and ran up the stairs so fast that he was almost a blur.

The slam of his bedroom door reverberated loud enough for the dogs to start barking. Viktor thought for a moment that he should go after the teen but after looking at the mess of the kitchen and knowing how prickly Yuuri’s moods could be, he thought he should give the omega a few hours to cool down before he tried to approach him again.

As he walked over to the sink to start on the dishes, he chalked the reaction down to teenage hormones and nerves and let the matter go. Yakov’s decision was looming closer and Viktor knew that it would have even the coolest heads (like his own) on the edge as they awaited the outcome.

Exactly one week after his argument with Yakov, Viktor brought Yuuri into the atelier under the guise of extra practice. He hated lying to Yuuri because the omega's life was already full of them but Viktor told himself that as Yuuri's coach sometimes it would have to be about doing what was best for his student rather than what was right.

It was still dark when they reached the atelier, with the sky only beginning to have the edgings of blue. No one else was about so Viktor had to turn on enough light to illuminate the rink. It looked like a stage. It was a stage Viktor supposed, the stage where he would show Yakov – who he could sense was hiding the shadows- just exactly what Yuuri could do.

Yuuri had to be on the aether this season. He couldn’t allow for any other outcome. He dreamt about it all the time now, had so many dreams with Yuuri bright and smiling at the top of the podium. His fangs ached with the idea of how beautiful the omega would be, flushed with happiness and decorated in gold. Waking up had been so hard these past few days because the morning always came with a gnawing, bestial desire for the taste and feeling of Yuuri's gold medal under his lips.

“What are we going to do? Drills? Figures?” Yuuri soared around him, light and eager like a little hummingbird.

Viktor smiled and grabbed Yuuri's hands to keep him still and close to him. He breathed in sandalwood and all the other notes of Yuuri's scent with a sigh.

“No, I just want you to soar. Just like you used to at home.”

“Like I used to at home?”

Viktor chuff ed at the scent of lemon filling his nose and filled the air with his own scent of calming cedar.

“Yes, just like you used to do on the lake. Do you remember it? You cried the first time I took you out there but by the end, you were begging me for your own pair of soar-shoes.”
Instead of smiling Yuuri frowned. He tugged at his hands. “That was different. Nobody else was there…”

“Nobody else is here now,” Viktor reminded.

“I can’t.” The teen shook his head, trying harder to pull out of the hold.

“Yuura…”

“I get too nervous,” Yuuri blurted out with a pull sharp enough to break Viktor’s grasp.

“I’m just an omega,” he wrapped his arms around himself with a bitter smile, “so you know it’s hard for me to read magic that isn’t my own. This place is so jumbled. The magic all roped together. On the lake it’s only one thing, only one kind of magic to focus on.”

One kind of magic…Viktor saw a lifeline and he grasped at it with the desperation of a drowning man.

“What is that magic like? What does it look like? Taste like?” he asked in quick succession.

“What does it smell like Yuura,” he husked knowing exactly every detail of the lake in question. He did build it after all.

Yuuri’s eyes snapped up and looked so big and wet and so cherry-brown that Viktor was drunk on just the sight of them. He swayed like he had just been through a tankard of wine and looking at Yuuri’s low lit gaze, he supposed he had.

“You,” Yuuri whispered and his cheeks burned bright even under the dim lighting. He licked his chapped lips and Viktor wished with every fiber of his being that he had packed his lip balm so that there was an excuse to touch them. “It smells like you, like cedar and pine with just a hint of spice and power, -so much power- and strength…”

Yuuri voice broke off into a whine, most likely overwhelmed by the surging energy of his inner omega. The teen gasped and Viktor felt an intense pulse of heat through the bond. He could practically taste Yuuri’s desire in the air.

It was unsettling and exhilarating at the same time. He was slammed face first into the evidence of Yuuri’s sexual desire, the omega’s desire for him. The rational side of him squirmed while his alpha stood at full attention, only too pleased to rise to the occasion.

He thought of Yakov sitting in the stands witnessing this, smelling this and fought a body deep snarl. He shook his head. Focus, Viktor, he told himself. He had to add with your head when another part of him began to stir.

He soared behind Yuuri and brought a hand up to cover the teen's eyes. The omega shivered as Viktor whispered into his very pink ears.

“Then, I want you to think of only that when you’re on the ice. Of me if it helps. If I am the ice, focus only on me. Forget about anything else and anyone else. Close your eyes if you need to.”

Spellbound by the scent pouring out Yuuri’s neck gland, he lifted his other hand up to just right under Yuuri's nose.

“It smells just like this right?”
Yuuri inhaled deeply and with a lovely little sigh, said, “Yes.”

The noise hit Viktor hard but he did his best to block the heat building in his lower region. Now was not the time.

Viktor curled his wrist inward and rubbed it across Yuuri's decolletage. The younger man gasped as the pheromones hit him and Viktor had to fight back his own groan as he scented the skin just under the neckline of the omega's shirt.

“Pretend we’re on the lake, Yuura,” he tried to say casually but his voice came out completely ragged. His body felt like it was spiraling completely and utterly out of his control. “Show me what you’ve learned.”

He swung himself around and brought Yuuri's hands close to his lips but didn’t kiss them. His mouth hovered over the younger man’s delicate limbs as he let his alpha appeal to Yuuri’s omega. “There's no one else. It's you me and the ice.”

“Vitya…I…” Yuuri’s flush grew deeper as the scent of sweet musk began to tickle at Viktor's sense.

Viktor pushed away to give Yuuri space and the center stage.

“Soar for me, please,” he whispered as his parting words, knowing exactly which side of Yuuri the request would hit. “Present yourself for your alpha.”

The words flipped a switch in the omega. Viktor could see it in how Yuuri stood taller, straighter and prettier for him. He smiled as their eyes locked. He hadn’t meant to say the last bit but oh well. If it helped his apprentice out in the long run he would happily deal with any of the consequences.

“If my alpha wishes it,” Yuuri said immediately, without pause or hesitation and soared to the centre of the aether with purpose.

Yuuri struck the first poses for Stammi Vicino and even though it was his own performance, Viktor’s chest tightened when Yuuri sank to his knees as if the weight of his loneliness was too much to bear.

They didn’t need the music. It was practically booming in the way Yuuri soared. In the way his arms were outstretched, reaching, begging towards someone who would love him. He stared in awe as Yuuri, gathered a massive amount of ice magic towards his lonely heart, and flung it into the air alongside his emotions. It burst into snow so delicate and soft that it melted the instant it touched Viktor's skin.

The omega formed the aether into tall archways all around him, and kept searching, and looking for the love that he knew was promised. He jumped and just like Viktor had during his performance became a whirling maelstrom of strong emotions. Every jump became a storm more violent, and more desperate than the one before it.

Yuuri raised his arms up and he pulled, and what he grasped came raining down as the delicate petals of roses. He arched and his arms came around and away from him with detailed furls of frosted ribbons. The magics swirled around him as if trying to be in a lover’s embrace. Viktor felt jealous. His body screamed to join Yuuri on the aether. Is this how Yuuri felt watching him at the GPF?

Yuuri spun and Viktor saw the invitation grow bigger and more fraught as Yuuri’s revolutions went faster and taller.
Stay close to me, don’t go away

I’m afraid of losing you

It was a love language. He heard the call, the cry for a lover in every single one of Yuuri's movements. It really made him want to answer, to jump on the aether to respond to Yuuri's call but Yakov was sitting in the stands and Viktor was sure the Maester would kill him if the alpha interrupted.

The omega ended in the final position, panting, arms raised with the magic whirling around him like a Nikiforov blessing.

It didn't look a thing like Viktor's program. Whereas he had ended his pose within a scene of their rose garden, Yuuri was the focal point, the key figure on a podium surrounded by nothing but abstract beauty. With his arms raised and folded, he was in supplication. Who was he praying to? Unlike Viktor’s dance, he wasn't fulfilled. He was still asking.

There was no way Yakov could say no to Yuuri now.

It took Yuuri fingertips on his face to make Viktor realize that he was crying. Caught up in emotion, he grabbed them and pressed what he was sure were nearly a hundred kisses onto the cold tips.

He held Yuuri's hand to his wet cheek, and then kissed the teen's palm. The scent of the omega was so close, oh so close that sandalwood drowned out his senses as Yuuri looked up at him with his cherry wood eyes and pink, glistening lips. The teen flushed and bit his lips as he looked away. Losing all of his common sense at the image Yuuri made, Viktor wanted to close the distance and for a minute his face lowered.

He raised a hand to pull Yuuri's bottom lip from his teeth and let his thumb caress the abused flesh in desire and wonder. So soft, he dipped his head lower, closer, tasting sugar and tea on Yuuri's breath. Just a little more and then the prize. He leaned down, Yuuri as if he finally understood arched his head upwards, his lips pursing into a pout that just wanted to be kissed away. Viktor obliged, moving forward and…

Clap.clap.clap.

Dragonshit. He forgot Yakov was here.

“That was passable.” the old mage said, acting like he hadn't just ruined a very heated moment.

“But the jumps were way too crude.”

He walked over and clapped Viktor’s shoulder. “I expect you to work on them, Vitya, so he will be good competition this season.”

And then, he strolled away probably to sneak coffee in his morning vodka. Viktor glared after him, slightly miffed that the old coach had ruined the “atmosphere”.

Yuuri interrupted his glaring by pulling on his shirt with a frown. “Was this a test?”

“A what?”

Yuuri huffed. Suddenly, all of their earlier magic was gone. “Were you testing me? To see if I could stay?”
Viktor’s brain fought to work his mouth. “N-no, Yuura it was nothing like that (but it actually was.) Yakov just wanted to see you skate.”

“Because I'm not usually good, right?” Yuuri said it so bitterly that it worried Viktor. He had never really heard that tone from the younger mage before.

Truly puzzled, he cupped Yuuri’s face in his hand and forced the omega to look up at him. “Yuura what's gotten into you?”

Yuuri bit his lip. Viktor reached to stop him but the omega flinched away from his touch.

“Did Yurio have to do this?” he said suddenly with his eyes downcast.

With the mention of Yurio’s name, a tension arose and all of a sudden the conversation seemed to be heading into a dangerous sort of territory. Viktor’s alpha perked up as Yuuri’s scent changed into something between a mix of anger and anxiety.

“For Yakov to say he's ready for the season? Yes.”

“Oh, so it's a test for a reason.”

“Yes.” All the tension that had been building disappeared as Yuuri who the moment before had been coiled tight and ready to spring, went lax. Viktor eyes went wide at the abrupt change. “A-are you jealous, Yuura?”

Yuuri bristled and his cheeks dusked with a delightful shade of pink.

“I'm not,” he muttered, his eyes averted and looking so adorably tsundere that Viktor had to crowd into his space and tilt the omega's head for a better look.

“Yuura,” Viktor whined. Yuuri’s cheeks puffed out into a full pout and Viktor shifted his hands from Yuuri's chin to squeeze them (gently) in order to keep himself from squealing. “Stop being so cute.”

He surprised himself with how aggrieved he sounded but then cute Yuuri was an unstoppable force, a weapon of mass destruction against Viktor's self control. It had already won countless battles in the last few months; a new game system, new soar shoes, and Viktor sneakily keeping Yuuri’s sugary cereals a secret from the atelier nutritionist.

“I’m not being cute. I'm just being Yuuri.” the teen responded with such a petulant sulk that Viktor's grin grew wide enough to make it a heart as he threw himself at the omega.

As he nuzzled the top of the younger man’s head with such fervor that it made Yuuri’s hair stick up in unruly strands, he thanked all the gods he knew of and a few of the ones he did not for dropping the treasure that was Yuuri into his life.

Yuuri grumbled and fusssed at his hair but did little to break out of his hold.

“It’s too early,” Yurio complained after a loud open mouthed yawn. “Isn’t this something that you could do at a more reasonable time of day at I don’t know…not the ass crack of dawn o’clock?”

Yuuri nodded beside his rink mate, looking similarly disgruntled. He rubbed sleep from his eyes and gave Viktor a look that was suspiciously close to a glare.

Viktor sighed and with his hands on his hips shook his head as if he were disappointed. “I guess
you two don’t want your surprise.”

He tried very hard to hide his grin but it was wiped off his face anyway by the blank looks his apprentices were giving him. Maybe he did wake them up too early…

“What surprise?” grumbled the blond from his half slumped position against the boards. His eyes started to close after the question but he shook himself alert with an angry little growl and elbowed the sleeping Yuuri awake for good measure.

Viktor smirked. He knew he could count on the blond’s cat like curiosity.

“Well, I heard through the grapevine that two little birdies will be competing in the upcoming season.”

Yurio stood up from his slouch all eyes suddenly on Viktor. Even Yuuri woke up enough to hang over the boards and blink slowly at his coach.

“Do you mean…?” The blond was nearly vibrating with excitement and Yuuri had somehow managed to pull his slump into a much more alert slouch.

Viktor hummed and gave them a big heart shaped smile. “Watch me carefully,” he soared towards the sound system and plugged in his phone, “and listen carefully, too.”

He raced into position as the first notes of a flute blared across the ice. He soared throwing out little bursts of magic like they were flower petals. Even as he went through the halting movements filled with magic he could feel both omegas eyes on him. Good. It felt great to still be able to create a performance that captured people’s attention. He soared high into his first jump and then another. He could feel himself becoming Ore as the light airy piano notes accompanied the flute in a playful dance.

He threw up a pillar of trees and wove in between them, darting away from mortal eyes and their lover’s heated gaze. He was running in a thrilling chase. It was small leaps, it was single turns, and stops and starts with an unholy – or should he say divine - level of magic that safely hid the fact that the skater lacked grace and musicality. He ended the program with his arms curved into himself, protected by an archway of delicate lattices of ice that spanned the whole rink.

“Amazing!” Yuuri shouted from across the rink in Standard.

Viktor smiled as he watched Yurio nudge the younger mage and bark at him, “to stop using the old geezer’s shitty catchphrases”. He could feel the warmth of Yuuri’s delight flow through the bond and he held onto to it as he transitioned into the next program.

Drums rolled out and with them so did Viktor. He was a thrashing of arms and movement as he danced his way across the ice. He didn’t use magic. No, the beginning was all his body as he displayed a series of step sequences that would make the audiences head spin. He built power into the performance with high jump after high jump. He was hunting Ore. He was Xiv showing to the world and his mate the full force of his physical prowess.

The magic didn’t even come in until he was two thirds of the way in, and then the strings burst through. He gave them short jolts of energy, quick pulls that were there more to accent than to build sculpture or life out of ice. When he finished there were no ice sculptures or swirlings of magic, just him posed in mid air, standing elegantly – a god above his forest.

He panted as he came down and had to rest his hands on his knees as he tried to catch his breath. He was still recovering when two pairs of soar-shoes came into his vision. He leaned his head back
with a grin.

“I take it you liked what you saw?”

“It was so pretty, Vitya.” Yuuri said shyly. He toed the aether, his face reddened with a beautiful blush.”I-I’m not sure I could soar l-like that.”

Araak’s mercy. It was just too delightful. Not the lack of confidence (Viktor would have to work on that) but the sight of Yuuri bashfully complimenting him sent his heart soaring.

Abandoning any sort of professional relationship, Viktor jumped up to throw his arms around Yuuri’s neck. With an orange blossom scented nuzzle, Yuuri responded back by rubbing his cheek against Viktor’s face and sighed, “Ah, seeing Viktor in real life is like a dream.”

“Oi, could you quit the lovey-dovey shit? People are trying to become actual thaumaturges here.”

Viktor huffed. Trust Yurio to wreck the moment but the kid was right though. He pulled away from Yuuri to look at his other student.

“I hope you can keep that same energy once I tell you which piece you’ll do.”

Yurio balked. “I’m not doing the second one?”

Viktor grinned his happiest coach grin. The one he knew freaked Yurio out the most. “You didn’t think you could decide yourself did you?”

His smile grew wider as he felt Yuuri stiffen. He loved excitement. “Surely you have more awareness than that. At this stage, you’re just some unknown and angry kitten to the rest of the world.”

The blond bristled and had the audacity to bear his teeth at Viktor. A bit wiser to Yurio’s antics now that he had worked with the brat for some time, the older mage answered with a flash and click of his own fangs. The younger man immediately backed down to clenched fists and a body quaking with irritation.

“Just get on with it,” he spat, keeping his eyes to the side in an obvious attempt to not challenge.

Viktor tried to hide his annoyance but he knew was failing by the tickling of lemon that leaked from Yuuri’s scent. He stepped away from the youngest omega to avoid a sneezing fit and shifted until he was an equal distance from both boys.

He pointed to Yurio first. “You’re the first program, Yurio. Ore and the Chase.”

He ignored the screech that erupted from the blond omega as he whipped to point to Yuuri. “And you, Yuura, are the second one. Xiv and the Hunt.”

“Eeeh?” The two omegas shrieked in unison.

Viktor scent went ginger. He laughed. “You have to do the opposite of what people expect. How else will you surprise them?”

“Bullshit!” Yurio barked.

His outburst made both Viktor and Yuuri jump. While he expected Yurio to react angrily, Viktor didn’t expect the look of hurt that flashed across the teen’s face
“I’m not – Omegas are not just delicate flowers,” Yurio growled and his face crumbled into something uncharacteristically vulnerable. “I know you’re an asshole but I thought you were different. You took me on when all of the other ateliers didn’t even want to give omegas a chance.”

His voice broke on the last word and he lowered his head. Viktor watched in horror as the omega’s expression hardened into clenched his teeth as he fought against whatever emotions were warring within him.

He shook as he spoke. “I’ve spent my whole life working for this, you prop sucking fuck.”

When Yurio met Viktor’s gaze again, it was pained, angry, and sitting on the line of betrayed.

“So, if you think I’ve done all this work just to end up some bullshit omega stereotype on ice,” he hissed, “you can go get fucked.”

Before Viktor could react, Yurio stomped off the aether and back into the locker room, swinging the door shut with an echoing slam.

The atelier stood in complete silence. Remnants of pepper and vinegar thickened the air until it burned in Viktor’s nose. He gaped after the blond; thoughts a whirlwind over what had just happened.

Yuuri looked at the door with a pinched expression. “I think you hurt his feelings, Vitya.”

That was an understatement. Viktor was lost but somehow he also felt like shit. He could tell that he had truly hurt Yurio and that hadn’t been his intention at all. He had only been trying to play to their strengths in a way that would surprise and delight the audience.

Weighed heavy with guilt, he left the aether with the intention to follow Yurio and explain his decision. But as he reached the door to the locker room, Otabek magically appeared.

"Don’t,” the dragon murmured as he blocked Viktor’s hand from the turning the handle. “He is too hurt to listen to you properly.”

Dark curls of magic swirled around his body in warning. Viktor let go of the handle and backed off without a fight. Otabek relaxed at that and turned to open the door himself. The scent of salt washed over the both of them as it cracked open. Otabek pushed it wider to enter but then turned face Viktor over his shoulder.

“It’s not your fault, Lord Nikiforov.” The formality made Viktor want to feel sick. “Yuri’s life as an omega has shaped him in many ways and he can’t always help how it makes him react.”

That did little to calm Viktor’s heart. Otabek gave a small, bitter smile. “I will talk to him. Like so many others, he is mistaken with his views on Ore. After all, it was Xiv who gave birth to their first child and Ore who guarded and stood watch. We dragons do not consider him the god of duels for nothing.”

The door clicked shut on Viktor and any further attempts to fix the problem.

He wasn’t thinking when he let Yuuri into his room that night. There was so much on his mind that when the omega had come to his door with big puppy eyes and complaining he couldn’t sleep, Viktor let him in without the usual internal struggle.

No questions. No reasons. He just went to his side of the bed (because they apparently had done
this so often they had “sides” now) and waited for Yuuri to follow him under the covers. The younger man slipped beside without a word and cuddled up close. Despite his better judgment, Viktor wrapped an arm around his bedmate and let his body relax under Yuuri’s freshly washed scent and impossibly soft Makkachin print pajamas.

He was drifting peacefully towards slumber, the warmth and scent of the omega lulling him to sleep like a lullaby when Yuuri poked his side.

“Vitya?”

“Hmm?” he hummed thinking it was going to be one of Yuuri’s drowsy, half asleep requests to cuddle closer but then the bond sparked with heat and Yuuri’s hand shifted from Viktor's waist to somewhere lower…

And with a quickness and a gentleness that Viktor wasn’t sure he possessed, he grabbed Yuuri’s hand before it could reach his crotch.

“Yuura?” His mind was going a thousand miles per hour. His heart felt like it was trying to join it too. Yuuri tugged on his wrist and still slightly dazed, Viktor let it go.

He rushed to turn on the lights when he realized he couldn’t see Yuuri’s face or his actions. Once he did, he was tempted to turn them off again because even though Yuuri looked absolutely hurt, his gaze was twisted with a frightening level of resolve.

Viktor had about two seconds to take it all in before Yuuri leapt towards him.

“Yuu-”

“No,” Yuuri hissed. “You’re supposed to be mine! I’ve tried to court you properly. I passed all your tests. I gave you my scent. I-I tried to make you proud. I’ve tried so hard…but you just keep...I want to make you mine.”

Next thing he knew, he was staring at the ceiling with a lap full of omega engulfing his vision.

“I know what I want and what I want is you. I want to make you feel good,” Yuuri’s eyes were molten gold as they sharpened into something Viktor had never seen in Yuuri before…

Seduction. Pure raw seduction and it was directed at him.

Viktor was sure he was going to have a heart attack. Was this a nightmare? Had he eaten something strange before going to sleep? The Yuuri he knew would never look at him like he wanted to devour his entire being. He would never grab Viktor’s chin and peer at him from under his lashes like he knew exactly how seductive he could be. His Yuuri blushed at romance novels, thought Ghaulysh kissing was a scandal, and that cuddles were the height of pre-mated life.

What had happened? He thought with rapidly rising panic. WHAT THE FUCK HAD HAPPENED TO HIS PURE AND INNOCENT YUURA?

“Vityaaa, look at me.”

The room narrowed down to just Yuuri and the way he leaned down towards Viktor's face. The air was sucked out of his lungs as the omega’s hair fell around them like a curtain. Their mouths were barely a breath apart.

Mint wafted over Viktor’s lips as Yuuri paused and then with no warning, pressed his mouth to
Viktor’s in a hard, frustrated kiss. It was absolutely amateur, completely inexperienced. It was also the hottest thing Viktor had ever experienced.

He growled, everything in his mind going blank as he sunk into the feeling of the teen’s lips on his own. Yuuri leaned back and licked his lips in a way that made Viktor release an embarrassingly needy whine (Viktor blamed his alpha).

Yuuri smirked at the noise and slowly, painfully began to unbutton his sleep-shirt. The action forced another inhuman, helpless noise from Viktor because really he should be putting an end to this but, on Xiv’s bones, what Yuuri was doing was absolutely wrecking him. He tried his best to grapple for control. He was the alpha. He was supposed to be the responsible one but as the omega shrugged off his top - and with his bottom lip stuck out in a pout - dragged his hand down to Viktor's rapidly beating heart; Viktor felt his mind short circuiting into his baser instincts.

Yuuri studied him for a long moment as he panted and fought for control -seemingly pleased at his reaction. The teen’s eyes darkened into an unfamiliar wine red.

“Vitya,” he purred, “please?”

The vibrations shot straight to Viktor’s groin.

A maelstrom of want swelled within him and he let out yet another piteous whine as his body reacted to Yuuri’s movements. He needed to end this game now before it consumed him and in turn, Yuuri. He leaned forward to push the omega off of him just as Yuuri leaned down. Their lips were so close they almost touched as Yuuri spoke.

“Won't you make me yours?”
Inappropriately

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we see the fallout from Yuuri's actions in the last chapter plus a nice and important flashback.

Chapter Notes

Hello Everyone!

I apologize for the delay. I was hitting several walls with the plot so I had to go back and do some heavy editing and plotting for awhile before I could put out this chapter. I would advise re-reading the previous chapters before you read this chapter because of the changes and some added new scenes. That said, I hope you enjoy this chapter and please let me know what you think in the comments below.

The genderless pronoun xe is used in this story as mage children decide whether or not to be male or female upon coming of age. It works as follows:

- Xe - He/She
- Xem - Him/Her
- Xyr - His/Her
- Xyrs - His/Hers
- Xemself - Himself/Herself

Credit to fanndists on Tumblr for terms "oma" and "apa"

- Oma - Omega Mother
- Apa - Alpha Father

Credit to Tongari Boushi no Atorie for the concept of ateliers, soar shoes, and magical placement tests.

CW : SLIGHT NONCON, SMUT, VOYEURISM, MENTIONS OF INFANTICIDE

Yuuri kissed him again; sloppily, showing that he had no experience or business trying to kiss Viktor so filthily.

‘You could teach him,’ his mind supplied. The thought sent a shiver down his body as it set his nerves alight. He could give in, slide his fangs into Yuuri’s soft neck and let his beast take over.

“Oh.” Yuuri gave the prettiest little blush as he lifted off Viktor with a small gasp of surprise. Viktor looked down.

Oh.

His skin grew impossibly hot as they both stared at his erection, twitching as it rose to stand at full...
attention. The omega’s eyes went dinner plate wide as he shifted to face the older man’s shame.

“It’s big. Just like in the videos…” he whispered with a note of genuine awe.

His fingers skimmed the slowing rising tip, jolting Viktor even further into a dangerous place. He felt like he was splitting in two as he warred with his body not to buck into the touch. He let out a hiss and scrambled up as Yuuri’s hand grew bolder and gripped him fully. Resisting the conflicting urge to smack the teen’s hand away, he fought himself for enough control to grip Yuuri’s wrist and pull his hand away from his body.

“No, Yuura,” he rasped, sounding more like an animal than an actual man. He was losing it and he needed to get Yuuri to stop before his consciousness was completely gone. He racked his brain and grasped at the first excuse his frazzled mind could find, “you could get pregnant.”

Yuuri smirked. “I won’t,” the younger man said with such certainty that Viktor’s haze cleared enough for him to be confused.

They had not seen any healers, not to mention an omega without a full year of heats had no chance of getting suppressants from a doctor.

“I haven’t prayed to Nenden to open my womb so it should be fine.”

The desire left him completely as he stared at Yuuri mouth agape. Surely, the teen had been given the Talk? His mother had said that she would teach Yuuri all that the omega needed to know and that was something that definitely should have been included. He didn’t want to believe that his dam was wicked enough to purposefully misinform her foster son but a part of him - the part that knew how badly House Nikiforov needed heirs - whispered that such a devious action wasn’t above her.

She had, after all, tricked Viktor into blood bonding Yuuri.

He was torn from his thoughts by Yuuri’s hand oh so unsubtly reaching for him again. He actually smacked it away this time and scooted towards the grounding coolness of his headboard as he growled,

“Yuuri, I said no, dammit. When I say no, I mean it!”

The omega looked as if he had been slapped but Viktor didn’t have the energy or the courage to try to get the look off of the teen’s face.

“Vitya, I…-“

“Go back to your nest now, Yuura.”

“No.”

Viktor considered himself a patient man, at least when his betrothed was concerned. He had given his blood-bond to him, been kicked out of his home for him, left his career and changed his whole life for him. He had waited for Yuuri to crawl, to walk, to talk, to go into heat. For over 18 years, on hands and knees, he waited. Couldn’t it stand to reason that Yuuri could be patient about this one single thing?

“You’re crying.” Yuuri’s hand brushed the older man’s ash blond bangs to the side as he stared at Viktor with a mix of horror and wonder.
A hot, white heat flared up within him at Yuuri’s words. Part of it was anger at Yuuri for being so careless with his feelings and part of it was directed at himself for his inability to gain control of the situation and his embarrassing reaction to that loss of control.

“I’m angry.”

Tears continued to run down his face. Why was he so emotional? This wasn’t what alphas did. He was 28 for Araak’s sake. Bedding Yuuri would one day be his duty, was already expected of him. Wasn’t it his main purpose as Lord Nikiforov to provide House Nikiforov with more heirs?

It was mortifying and completely out of alpha character, but as uncomfortable as the sensation felt, he couldn’t stop. He was angry, but he was also scared of the side of him that wanted things to continue. Though he tried to tell himself that he wasn’t like that alpha he had seen in the alley - that he wasn’t going to hurt Yuuri, to put his fangs in his neck and violate him until he screamed and plead and called out for help - it couldn’t stop the dark, traitorous depictions in his brain that taunted him with images of Yuuri ripped open and screaming.

So many things could have happened just now and could still happen if he wasn’t careful. He could still feel his alpha prowling just under his skin, stalking back and forth and waiting for even the smallest opportunity to burst forth. And, if he lost control? What then?

What if he did hurt Yuuri? Got him pregnant? Drank him dry?

All of these questions swam around in his head, threatening to pull him under their tide even though he was trying so desperately trying to get back to calm. He sucked in a breath as he fought for equilibrium, for control.

Yuuri’s wish would be ruined.

And, for what? For one night of stupid passion? Just because Viktor didn’t have the strength to stop things before they got out of hand?

He would have never forgiven himself.

Yuuri tried to reach out again but Viktor, still frightened of himself, slapped the teen’s hand away hard enough to make a sound. Yuuri whimpered but Viktor was too caught up in his fears to deal with the omega right now. The younger man moved near once more but this time quicker and even though Viktor fought and tried to push against it, he found himself with a lapful of the teen.

“Yuura!”

He tried to pull the omega off of him but Yuuri tightened his grip and reached one hand to push Viktor’s face into his neck gland. With his lungs burning at the intensity of Yuuri’s calming pheromones, the older mage’s hands went from pushing to pulling as he subconsciously buried himself into the scent.

“I’m sorry, Vicchan,” Yuuri whispered, his breath innocently tickling the side of Viktor’s ear, “I’ve done something wrong, haven’t I?”

He appreciated the apology but he was the one in the wrong. He was the older one, the one with more experience. He should have been able to put a stop to Yuuri’s shenanigans before they came this far.

The omega’s thin fingers curled around and through the hair along Viktor’s nape as he rubbed his cheek against the side of the alpha’s head in apology. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you cry. I
just wanted to make you feel good.”

Viktor shuddered. He smelt salt. Great. Now they were both crying. It was quiet for a moment before Yuuri spoke again.

“C-can I stay?”

Ordinarily, Viktor would say yes. He would cling to the teen, beg him to stay, reassure him with hugs and kisses until the omega purred at just how much he was loved. But tonight, he felt so drained, so wrought dry by Yuuri (well by both Yu(u)ris really) that he just shook his head and said,

“No, go back to your nest, Yuuri.”

He wanted to be alone. He didn’t chase or waver as Yuuri slid off his lap nor stare as the omega bashfully rebuttoned his shirt. He barely registered anything until Yuuri was kissing his cheek and murmuring good night.

The motion was too much, too reminiscent of his earlier trials. He snapped.

“I said get out.”

And with a smooth, mechanical motion he was up and Yuuri was up and he had the omega by his shoulders as he pushed him out of his room into the dark hallway. He closed the door gently, normally, but the sound of him locking it might as well have been a gunshot with how it seemed to ring throughout his room. He fell against the door with a thud and slid down.

He didn’t know what had gotten into Yuuri but that, that was frightening - absolutely terrifying and he wasn’t surprised to find out that his legs and arms were shaky as he stood up and tried to walk back to his bed.

In the end, he had to crawl back to his bed, and after a journey that seemed to burn and pull at every muscle in his body, he flopped back onto his pillows with a groan. Viktor hated crying. He hated what he had just done to Yuuri even more. His face felt sticky and his head full of cotton. He caught the faint scent of the younger man as he shifted under the covers and found himself curled towards the pillows on the omega’s “side”. If only Yuuri had just listened. If only he had just waited.

Tomorrow. His eyes drifted shut against his will, his body losing to the exhaustion that came after an adrenaline rush. Tomorrow, he would speak to Yuuri properly.

Tomorrow never came. And in the days following, Yuuri was nowhere to be found, or at least nowhere where Viktor could find him. He kept out of sight by leaving earlier than Viktor and coming home later than Viktor and the older man only really saw his betrothed on the aether. At home, the omega holed himself up in his room, sneaking around at Araak knows what hour and eating Araak knows what food. When Yuuri’s avoidance passed the three day mark, it became blatantly obvious to Viktor that his apprentice did not want to talk – much less be in his presence.

He tried to be patient because that was what he was when it came to Yuuri. He really did, but after a week had passed with no communication, he felt that he had the right to feel annoyed.

They were gearing up for the new season and they could barely work together as coach and student. What was Yuuri doing? Thinking?
Why was he being so childish?

“What did you expect?” Chris had asked when he complained to his Watchful Eye about it.

“Not this,” Viktor had snapped as he tried hard not to break his phone in irritation.

But Chris was annoyingly right. What did he expect? Yuuri was 18, just fresh out of his tunics and talismans. His few months in the real world were nothing compared to the decade Viktor held on the omega.

Chris also reminded him that he was the one who told Yuuri to leave.

“Which was in your rights because he hurt you, my little cabbage sprout, even if your alpha pride won’t accept that fact,” he added after his harsher first statement.

Viktor frowned, the phone suddenly feeling sticky and uncomfortable against his skin. Was that why he had cried…because he was…hurt? The notion seemed ridiculous. He was older, wiser, and not completely innocent either…

“I threw him out, Chris.”

“You said no, didn’t you, Viktor? And, he didn’t listen. It wasn’t wrong of you to throw him out for that. He can’t run roughshod on you just because he is younger than you or an omega.”

He licked his lips and shifted. He just couldn’t accept that the events of that night weren’t somehow his fault.

“I-I might have started this then. I’ve kissed him before without asking, on the cheek I mean…”

There was a sigh. “Then, perhaps, you both need to have a chat about consent.”

Though it caused an empty twisting in his chest, he listened as the younger alpha chided him to be patient, to wait out Yuuri’s tantrum. There would come an opportunity to talk the man soothed from over the phone. Viktor tried to believe in Chris’s words as the other man worked to reassure him with offerings of his own experiences with his mate, Masumi, but he just couldn’t ignore the little voice that told him Yuuri would hardly be so easy.

Still, he waited.

And he waited and waited until his own scent became tinged with distress but the chance did not or would not come. No matter how many glances of longing he threw or how many sighs of wistfulness he gave, Yuuri, his beloved, would not draw nearer.

What if Yuuri never forgave him? Despite Chris’s word there were some days when he fretted over this fear until his stomach felt raw and his guts like jelly.

On a particularly pathetic night, he found himself hovering outside of his love’s bedroom door, knuckle out and ready to knock. If the door opened he would apologize, get on his knees and beg until Yuuri came back to him. But then he caught himself. What would he even say?

Sorry, I didn’t want to sleep with you? Sorry, I got too scared to bang?

He would look ridiculous.

Viktor took himself to bed before he did something stupid and made things worse.
“He feels bad, y’know.”

Viktor looked up from untying his laces to see Yurio standing above him with a frown. He gaped for a moment because the blond hadn’t had a kind word for him since the reveal of his short program. His brain whirled as he sought the right words to say. There was Yuuri, yes, but he still owed the blonde an apology.

“I’m sorry.”

Yuri huffed and stuffed his hands into his hoodie pockets. He did nothing further but his posture screamed discomfort. “That isn’t what I came to talk to you about, you asshole.”

Otabek trailed behind him, his eyes and expression indecipherable. Neither of the two spoke as Viktor paused from taking off his shoes and forced his expression into something less pained. He didn’t want to talk about Yuuri.

“Still, I’m sorry. I-if you want me to change the choreography, I can.”

He held the words out as an olive branch and a distraction hoping against hope that the blond would take the offering. If it would give him something else to focus on other than pining over his omega, he would redo the whole thing if Yurio wanted. He wouldn’t eat, sleep, drink, or rest until he finished.

Yurio didn’t respond. Viktor, desperate to change the subject, rambled,

“...I-I didn’t realize the subject matter was so sensi-”

“It’s fine,” the omega grumbled. “Beka talked to me and told me a bit more about Ore.”

Losing himself for a second, Yurio smirked, looking every bit the Rhurshyan punk as he said, “The Ore I’m gonna show the world would make even Xiv tremble.”

“You’ll be magnificent.” It was sincere but also a way out.

The teen’s face pinked for second before it turned into a scowl. “Stop trying to change the subject!”

He turned to his forgotten skates and began to pack as quickly as he could. He really did not want to talk about Yuuri and the last person he wanted relationship advice from was Yuri Plisetsky.

“Practice is over, Yurio. I’m gonna lock up for the night.”

He rushed towards the exit, and left the omega and his dragon scrambling to get their things together. He didn’t even bother double checking to make sure everything was locked up. He just wanted out of the door, and away from the blond omega following closely on his heels.

Much to his misfortune, the teen didn’t seem to be going anywhere.

“You should talk to him,” Yurio said easily as if crossing the gulf that had grown between Viktor and Yuuri was as simple as stepping over a sidewalk crack.

“Go home. Yurio,” Viktor muttered in response, sending the boy into a rage of “fuck you”s and “I just trying to help”s that would do a rampaging troll proud.

“Yurachka.” The dragon’s voice floated across the night air and cut Yurio’s tirade short. It became a squabble as the blond turned his ire on his chaperone.
Viktor took the interruption as an opportunity for escape, and used the argument to slip into the peace and anonymity of the city crowd.

He wandered his way around Ost Pyotrsborg until he ended up drunk and heaving in the seediest bar he had ever seen in his life. Eventually, the bar staff refused to serve him and with a pout on his lips, he realized that he would have to go home.

He was still trashed when he reached his front door; the search for key alone took 20 minutes. Once he got the door unlocked, he stumbled through the doorway into darkness and silence.

Yuuri must be in bed. For a drunken minute, he thought of calling the omega to him but the way the younger mage was now, even shitfaced Viktor knew Yuuri wouldn’t answer. But, his drunk brain wanted to see his duckling. Against his better judgment, he crept towards the omega’s room, all the while trying to suppress his drunken giggles.

The hallway smelled sweet and tasted of something that Viktor had only fleetingly encountered before. His alpha roused in response to the fragrance that whispered to him despite his quite thorough inebriation. He took a deep breath and was surprised to feel himself stir. It smelt like…like sex.

But why would anywhere in the house – especially the space heading towards Yuuri’s room – smell like sex? His Yuuri wouldn’t do anything like that. He was too pure, too innocent (well at least in Viktor’s head the teen was). The smell had to be something else. It just had to, but the alpha’s nose told him that the scent was getting stronger the closer he got to Yuuri’s door.

It wasn’t closed which was the only reason Viktor could smell anything at all; which was out of place because Yuuri had been keeping himself on lock down, but even that wasn’t as strange as the noises coming from inside of the room. They sounded like…moans. Viktor paused. What in Anud’s Hells was Yuuri doing? Better yet, who was he doing?

Viktor’s alpha felt ready to kill someone at just the thought.

As he approached the opening, his gut screamed at him that he shouldn’t look, that he should at least make his presence known. It then dimly occured to him to question why Yuuri hadn’t acknowledged him yet. The omega should have smelled him by now.

Viktor’s curiosity took the best of him and before he could really think about what he was about to see or do, he was looking through the crack and pushing the door slightly ajar. It opened just a fraction but it was enough for the older man to see something that he thought he would never in Anud’s 12 Hells and Araak’s 13 Heavens ever witness.

Yuuri, his pure, good, virginal Yuuri…was jerking off with one of Viktor’s practice shirts crushed to his face. No wonder the omega didn’t smell him. He was busy inhaling eau de coach while wanking off. Though they really shouldn’t, Viktor’s eyes strayed down the rest of Yuuri’s body, to the pink flushed skin, the pert pretty nipples, and finally down to the hand that was furiously working the omega’s smaller but respectable cock.

Viktor, the sensible mage, was lost and Viktor, the insatiable alpha, burst forth. It had him walking towards the nest with a pleased rumbling.

Yuuri’s eyes that had been closed in what must have been ecstasy, snapped open to show pupils near blown with lust.

“Vitya?”
They shrank into pinpricks.

“Vitya!?”

This time Yuuri shrieked. Viktor froze; still half drunk, still halfway though being perv-walked by his alpha. Shame crept up on him until he was the personification of mortification. Yuuri looked like he was just as embarrassed too by the way his skin heated to an unpleasant red.

“What are you doing in here?”

Viktor scrambled to find words as Yuuri scrambled to find clothes, neither being very successful. Viktor had to settle for a high nervous noise while Yuuri had to accept that the only option available to him would be his rumpled sheets. He pulled them over his lap with such haste that they only managed to cover half of his vital spots.

“Vityaaa,” Xiv’s Teeth, Yuuri looked like he positively wanted to die from embarrassment, and the omega probably would if Viktor wasn’t sitting in his room being so confusing. “Why are you in my room?”

Viktor’s eyes snapped up from the cherry red nipples that he was definitely not ogling. Viktor still didn’t have an answer but he had (in the last ten seconds) had seven hundred thoughts on what Yuuri’s heat-milk must taste like. With the glare the younger man was sporting, Viktor was pretty sure that that wasn’t the kind of answer Yuuri would be looking for. He flinched under the look and the uncharacteristically rude direction his thoughts were taking him.

“I’m sorry. I think I’m drunk?” He said it with a bit of a helpless shrug as if the alcohol had dog-walked him into Yuuri’s nest at gunpoint.

The omega shifted showing a lovely sliver of muscled thigh. His eyes were averted to the side, his face a brilliant blush.

“How much did you see?”

Sober Viktor would have said nothing and flushed and stammered until he was out of the room and the temptatious danger that was Yuuri’s naked body. But drunken Viktor was a fool, an honest and communicative fool even when he wasn’t supposed to be. Drunk Viktor, through a blush that would do a rose proud and eyes that darted everywhere in an attempt to avoid the half hidden wonder of Yuuri’s partially exposed dick, blurted out,

“Enough to know what you were doing?”

Yuuri’s eyes went impossibly wide as they stared at each other. The strange sounds Viktor heard earlier continued to stream in the background and with no small amount of horror, the alpha realized that his duckling had been jacking off to a/o porn. Suffering through the repeated chants of “Alpha, knot me” and “I’m your omega whore”, Viktor vowed to murder whoever unlocked the child-safe feature from the teen’s phone.

A cry of “Alpha, you’re so big” caused Yuuri to shift uncomfortably further into his sheets and Viktor was flashed an eyeful of genitals as the mage struggled to cover his reacting body.

The sight broke Viktor’s brain. He was too drunk for this. It was time for bed and he should just go to sleep and forget all about Yuuri beating off to one of his favorite shirts. Yeah, that sounded like a good plan, a grade A plan. He would probably die if he was subjected to anymore of this.

Sense finally kicking in, he retreated backwards until he was out of Yuuri’s bedroom. After a
breathless good night, he half fell, half staggered his way back to his own room - to his own bed where he got himself off so hard that he passed out with his hand still fisting his cock

Of course the “incident” made everything worse. Now he barely even got glimpses of Yuuri, much less any contact. And when he did approach the omega, the poor thing went so red and tense that others at the atelier were beginning to think the worst of Viktor.

Mila was the first to give him notice. She played it cool by sliding up to him and throwing her arms around his neck like she did with all her comrades and Viktor was okay with it until it turned into a surprise chokehold.

“Viktor, what have you done to Yuura?” she purred but it was not the kind of purr that any man wanted to hear from a rusalka. “Was it something that requires a swim in my lake?”

He managed to croak out a feeble “no” but Mila only relented when Yurio shrieked that he needed his “knothead of a coach” at least until his senior debut.

Georgi was next and to be honest, Viktor would choose being strangled and drowned in an ice lake if it meant that he would never again have to go through the awkward dance that was Georgi Popovich delicately asking you if you were a sexual predator.

After Georgi, Viktor was hardly surprised to be pulled into Yakov’s office with a cold “Viktor Nikolayevich” and a stone hard look. He was, however, startled to see Lilia but then he realized that if he was a scumbag, the vela was always the better disciplinarian of the two.

After a very thorough and very embarrassing cross examination, he was let go with a warning and a lecture on alpha urges that was so detailed and so definitely not what he wanted to hear that he had to check to make sure that hearing the words “sex” and “desires” come from Yakov’s mouth hadn’t made his ears bleed.

The hex Lilia traced into his back was little better. Now, on top of Yuuri not talking to him, him discovering Yuuri was indeed a grown up, and his atelier mates thinking he was a depraved pervert, he was also subject to the knowledge that his hair might fall out if he even so much looked at Yuuri inappropriately.

Yakov nodded at him, the top of his bald head gleaming in the light as if to prove the power of his ex-wife’s magic. Even though he was completely innocent, Viktor hands flew to his beautiful hair after that bombshell with a violent, desperate cry. He begged Lilia to lift the curse but she only did so after being thoroughly traumatized by the sight of Viktor’s snotty, crying face.

Otabek’s attempt surprised him the most. The dragon usually kept to himself or his unruly charge, so when he suddenly appeared next to Viktor out of a cloud of writhing smoke, the mage greeted him with his hackles already raised.

“What do you want?”

Growling wouldn’t prove his innocence but honestly the last few days had worn all of his Nikiforov patience thin.

“To talk.”

Viktor inwardly groaned. Did people not realize he was a coach? He had things to do outside of
being accused of doing dastardly things to Yuuri.

“I don’t think you’ve done anything to Yuuri of House Nikiforov if that is why you think I am here.”

“Then, why are you here?” Viktor blurted out because even if he was not personally training Yuuri, there were a million and one things that needed doing and not enough hours in the day to do them.

“I’m just here to give you advice.”

“Advice on…” Really he was busy. If Otabek didn’t have a point he was going to cut things short.

“My master has asked me to share my knowledge ‘from one old fuck to another’ as he put it.”

Viktor just stared at the dragon, his mind going completely blank. Dragons were hardly known for their romantic abilities. Was he that sad of a mage that Yurio thought that even a dragon’s advice would do good? For Araak’s sake, dragons were so bad at wooing that there was reason for their low numbers.

Viktor let his face sink into his palms as he laughed in quiet disbelief. This was a new low even for him.

“I’m sorry. I’m really busy.”

It was not a lie. He did have places to be and they absolutely weren’t here.

A corner of Otabek’s mouth dipped into the minutest of frowns- a blink and Viktor would miss it. The dragon laid a hand on the mage’s shoulder and Viktor was acutely reminded of Yurio as he fought the desire to shake it off. The dark haired man’s eyes flickered with uncertainty before he asked,

“Are you sure? I have served the Plisetskys for millennia now. I am well versed on the mating habits of mages.”

If you had asked kid Viktor what he thought his life would be like at nearly 29, he would have told you that he wanted a million gold medals (which he kind of had), a really cute familiar (which he also had), and a dozen black haired, brown eyed babies with his beloved omega, Yuuri (This he did not have. He couldn’t even get the omega to talk to him much less bring himself towards the actions that would even lead to a baby). But never, in his wildest dreams, had he ever have imagined that any of that would involve a sex peptalk from a dragon whose race was actually dying out due to a lack of sex.

Viktor laughed again because if he didn’t he would cry.

“It takes two to perform a pas de deux,” Otabek murmured as Viktor attempted to cut the foolishness by brushing past him. Somehow, Viktor noticed that the other man’s eyes were elsewhere and against good judgment, he let his own follow their trail.

He landed on the sight of Yurio yelling at Mila with all of his kittenish might. Viktor shuddered. He was not going to unpack that. Nope, he was going straight home, straight to his bed because the world was cruel and full of shit like Yuuri avoiding him, Otabek peptalks, Lilia’s hexes, and 7 am fittings for his student’s costumes the next morning.

“Otabek, I’ll see you at the seamster’s address tomorrow morning.” And with that Viktor would
admit to anyone who asked, he pretty much ran away.

Viktor knew he was dreaming the minute his eyes landed on the mountain of a man that was his father.

“Apa.”

His voice though ruined with tears, came out high and sweet. It startled him and he looked down at his hands to see that they were birdlike and small. Too small for a grown man and he hadn’t used such an archaic title for his father since he turned eighteen.

Not a dream but a memory then. It was not unusual for a mage of his power level to relive them.

A red beam of light hung from his ring finger. Curious, he tugged on it but then cried out as the action caused a sharp pain to tear through him, like something was trying to rip the soul out of his body. The pain filled him with a deranged nostalgia – he had forgotten how much the bond had hurt at first.

His child self whined again; waterworks spilling fresh in fear over the magic that he had unwittingly committed to.

“There is no point in crying now, Vitya,” his father said. “What is done is done. Perhaps, next time you will listen when I tell you to guard your magic.”

Viktor looked up through a hazy veil of tears into blue eyes so like his own, but possessing warmth that was glacial at best. The long sleeve of his father’s caftan brushed against his face as the man inspected the magical bond that Viktor had just tearfully told him about.

The movement released the older man’s personal fragrance of cedar, frankincense, and jasmine. It intertwined with the heavier, nauseating smell of the incense the Lord Nikiforov used on his official duties. Victor hated the scent. He hated it even then. He hated it even now. He hated it even in this dreamscape memory where nothing was real.

He focused instead on the notes of his mother’s vanilla that always seemed to cling to his sire. Now that he was older, he understood that it was blood, perhaps even sex, and the knowledge made him want to shudder.

Even in his dreams he couldn’t escape the reminders of what he should be capable of doing.

“Who did you give it to?” His sire’s voice was calm, but Viktor could hear the frost - the disappointment and anger- creeping into it. His small body shrank back into itself with a well learned fear. His father could be vicious when he felt he had a lesson to teach.

“Vitya…”

“Yuuri.”

His younger self sniffled and tried hard not wipe his nose with the back of his sleeve.

“Did anyone convince you?”

He shook his head. Viktor remembered his mother swearing him to secrecy and even in the face of his father’s wrath, he couldn’t break that.

“Vityusha.”
A storm of melancholy welled up inside of Viktor at the nickname his father used to favor when they were alone. The older man sighed, and Viktor could feel the displeasure reverberate throughout his whole body.

”Ah, what kind of child have I raised to be stupid enough to be tricked into giving xyr blood away so freely?”

Viktor’s child self cried harder, and in the back of his mind, he remembered the days leading up to his second betrothal to have been awful in the way that only his father could have made things awful.

His sire ran a hand through his shoulder length hair perhaps to comfort his only child but all Viktor felt was misery and the insistent tugging on his body that made him want to scream. He sobbed and his father tutted at the sound.

“How many times have I told you to be careful of your blood and your intentions, Vitya? You are not an omega. You cannot give blood without something be formed or lost.”

He squeezed Viktor’s right hand, right where the string was connected making him shriek and writhe as he pulled Viktor out of his seat and out of the study.

“Now look at you; bonded to some omega foundling that we hardly know.”

“Apa, it hurts.”

Snot burst out of his nose as he spluttered and begged the older man to release his hand. His father ignored him, as he stomped through the house and out into the gardens, through the snow, and towards the white buildings of the Sanctum. Viktor struggled not to trip as he fought with the pain and the older mage’s longer stride.

They brushed through heavy Sanctum doors, his father’s aura so angry, that the magic prickled their skin in warning instead of its usual caress. The man did not stop until he had dragged the both of them to the front doors of his mother’s bower and blasted it open without even so much as a knock.

They were greeted by the sharp wail of a newborn as his mother threw up a wall of ice, only to have it shattered by the flick of her husband’s wrist.

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The room erupted in cacophony of omega hisses and infant screaming. Viktor barely took notice of the new omega, Minako, throwing herself to the floor as they approached. The pulling sensation inside Viktor eased with every step forward but in its place began a war of instincts. One told him to stay by his sire’s side. The other, much stronger one, demanded that he run and guard Yuuri.

The decision was ultimately made for him when his father dragged him towards his mother’s nest and nearly tossed him into its sunken center, right near the basket where his mother kept Yuuri. He recoiled as the heady fragrance of nesting pheromones almost overwhelmed his childish senses.

His sire smiled down at him, his blue eyes ice cold and unfriendly. “Do you mean to protect xem from me?”
Viktor answered with another squeak.

"Kolya, stop bullying my child," his mother hissed as she crouched over the pair and dared her husband to try to come closer. "This is my bower," she snarled; her face so twisted and feral that it made Viktor whine."My children. Go away."

His father growled, the sound so loud and powerful that it rang throughout the rooms and possibly down the halls. Footsteps thundered towards the room but the guards disappeared as soon as the Lord Nikiforov dismissed them with a roar of “Get out and stay away from this wing of the house”.

When they were gone, his father turned back to them and breaking every protocol Viktor had ever heard about dealing with omegas, reached past their guarding bodies into the basket and snatched a shrieking Yuuri out. Viktor's mother tried to follow but Nikolai stilled her with another wall shaking rumble.

The move made her freeze and she stood half kneeling over Viktor as she sobbed and stretched her hands out towards the crying bundle. The front of her gown was soaked with what smelled like milk. As Viktor looked up into her face, he couldn’t help but think that she looked like an animal.

His father turned his attention to Yuuri and let out a burst of calming pheromones. To Viktor’s surprise the baby quieted immediately.

"Why have you stopped crying?" the man crooned to the baby as he rocked him, an almost amused expression crossing his face as Yuuri let out a small but not nearly as displeased grunt."How do you know that I don’t mean you a place at the bottom of a lake?"

Viktor shivered. He had forgotten what lead him to turn that lake into a playground for Yuuri.

Minako, whose head had not left the floor since they entered the room, cried out,

"My lord, I beg for your understanding and mercy."

“Mercy?”

The lord's eyes narrowed as he walked over to her form and looked down on the prostrated woman before him. His porcelain features into something inhuman as he lowered himself into a crouch, the movement so fluid that it didn't even jostle the babe in his arms. "Did I not give you mercy when I allowed you and this child a place in my Sanctum to stay?"

The anger pouring out of his father was suffocating. Viktor knew better than to say anything but he still whimpered as the chili pepper odor burned his eyes, nose and throat. Yuuri gave a discontented mewl which his father shushed with a brush of scent straight from his wrist. Yuuri submitted, though xyr pinched face remained.

Minako whined, the pheromones probably hurting her twice as much since she was so close. She shuffled, shifting her hands from her position on the floor to a supplication above her head.

"Please, my lord, the child is the last heir and hope of the Katsuki family."

His father snarled. “So you have said and yet I have still heard of no birth announcement nor details of deaths.”

"My lord," Viktor's mother cut in, her hand drifting to her empty womb, "did you forget that the child was birthed during strained circumstances."
Nikolai scoffed, the sound ugly and jarring as it departed from his usually elegant ways. He looked at his mate as if he were scolding a child. ‘I know my own memory well enough, wife.”

He turned back to Minako with his eyes nearly sub zero in their coldness. The floor surrounding the pair of them filled with the crackling of permafrost.

“What I don’t understand is why you think you can make a fool out of me.” Minako let out a pained yelp as the ice started to crawl up her fingers and wrists.

"Is this how you repay me for giving you shelter when you appeared in my house half dead?” he seethed. "You cuckold my entire household and trick my only child into a blood-bond?”

He gripped Minako by the roots of her hair and forced her head up and into Viktor's direction. Viktor shivered, a cloud of mist bursting from his mouth as he let out a shaky exhale. He had never seen his father like this. He was a hard man - yes. But until today Viktor had never seen him put his hands on anybody, much less an omega.

"Look at my child, you wretch,” his sire growled, yanking the poor woman’s head up higher, pulling at her until she could look Viktor in the directly in the eye.”Look at xem weeping from the pain of foolish magic. Did you not hear your own charge howling?”

Minako's omega reacted to the words with a swirl of scent that smelt faintly of foreign spices."My lord, please..."

He shook her so roughly that she screamed." I told you to wait until we had word from the Katsukis and yet you have had the audacity to force my idiot child and this babe, into a bond without my, the Lord Alpha's, consent. I should kill you."

He let go of her head with a rough shove though several strands of hair came away with his fingers. Minako toppled to the floor.

"I will kill you."

"It was me!" His mother shrieked scrambling over and out of her nest. "It was me, Kolya!"

She sobbed.

With her hair hanging stringy and in clumps and the front of her dress ruined and soaked from her still leaking milk, she looked like a rusalka coming to shore as she dragged herself across the floor towards Viktor's father. She grasped onto the arm holding Yuuri as if she meant to pull the newborn out of her mate’s hold but she paused as her husband's hand came to tangle into her hair. He ran his fingers through it once, twice, combing out some of the wilder tangles. Then, his fingers circled her face in a caress before he settled a gentle hand on her jaw and lifted her face up.

"What have you done, wife?” his voice was gentle, much gentler than the one he had just been speaking with and much gentler than the voice he used with Viktor. "What foolish, stupid thing has my little omega done?”

His mother whined in response, lowering her head to show her neck."I didn't mean to hurt Vitya, Kolya, but you spoke of killing xem.

Nikolai lifted his wife’s face again." What have I told you about patience, dear dove? Was I not waiting to hear word? This household has no use for bastards. It would have been a mercy."

"Not to me!” His mother snapped, ripping her face from the grasp and causing the man's eyes to
His gaze went soft as he reached forward to slide the back of his fingers against her wet cheek. He smiled, the look fond as if he was indulging a particularly spoilt child. "Surely, my love, you must know this. You were taught well. A familyless omega is little better than a piece of meat. Even at an aerie, this miserable thing would only end up something to be abused and bred."

His mother let out a sound that made both Viktor and his father grit their teeth. Yuuri began to cry again as pain exploded inside Viktor’s head. He crouched down with a whine and covered his ears, nearly overwhelmed when it combined with the agony pulsing from his finger.

"Let me keep it, Kolya," his mother pleaded, her scent turning more cloying and disgusting with every moment that her mate kept her in distress. She opened her eyes and stretched out her hands with a whimper as she looked at Yuuri. "I have lost so many babies, Kolya, all of your babies but one. Please give the child your blessing and let me keep them. Your father would-.

"My father is dead. I am a Lord Nikiforov now and I will not have an unclaimed bastard. This child does not smell of Katsuki, no parent - omega nor alpha- has bestowed upon them a Blessing. The former lord has shamed our name enough with his actions. I will not bring it lower. If no claim is made on the child, then blood bond or no, it must go."

"My lord," Minako moved. Nikolai growled and it grew louder with every inch that she crawled forward and into his space. Viktor saw his father lift his free arm over Yuuri as a reflex and he wondered why the older mage’s instincts would have him protect Yuuri if in the end he meant the baby harm. "There is proof, my lord, please. You do not need the word of the Katsukis."

Minako grabbed at the ends of the lord's robes as she yanked a bottle connected to a necklace from under her gown. She struggled as she took it in one hand and held it up. "There wasn’t time…that night. But this, this is her blood. Let me say the words that would make up the Blessing."

For a second it seemed as though he was going to kick her off but he must have seen something in the eyes that were pleading with him because he paused.

Minako seized the moment to speak again.

"Humility, Fellowship, Morality. The Lord is Dead. Long Live the Lord."

As soon as she finished, Yuuri burst into flames. The air shifted with a loud pop before the flames gathered into the shape of a red, majestic fire dragon. Its roar nearly drowned out the newborns cries as it flew down towards Nikolai with its jaws open and its claws out. It lunged at the mage, nearly causing him to drop the baby as he stumbled backwards.

"Phichit," Minako snapped as it readied for another attack. "You were summoned only to bless your master. You have done your duty so now go back."

The dragon writhed at the command as if it were fighting it before it went ramrod straight and disappeared into plumes of black smoke.

Nikolai Nikiforov stared down at the child in his arms with eyes wide and mouth agape. In fact, everyone but Minako did. It was hard not to with the little one’s blue crown of fire burning so bright.

Panting from the exertion and her still healing wounds, Minako spoke, "My lord, please give me an audience and I will tell you all that you need to know."
His father hummed, seemingly captivated by the ring of glowing embers that still surrounded Yuuri’s head. “Are you sure that all of the head Katsuki branches died in the blast? Even your watchers?”

Minako grimaced as she probably remembered something horrible. “Yes, my lord, every single one of them. I believe that was…that was the attacker’s intentions.

"Then, the blood has spoken enough. It is the one thing in this world that cannot lie."

Viktor could literally see the transformation in his father. How his hold shifted Yuuri closer and his eyes moved back forth with calculations of how this new development would benefit his clan.

He smiled which to Viktor meant that what he had found had pleased him.

"The child may stay."

Minako and his mother let out an audible sigh of relief. Viktoria approached to take Yuuri from his father but he blocked her by once again bringing his sleeve up to cover the infant.

"There will be conditions," he said causing both of the omegas to look at him with gazes full of anxiety. "This child is mine- will live under my word, my laws, and my decisions. Xe will not leave here, the Sanctuary for anything other than what I see fit. The world will not know xem."

He paused meeting Minako’s eyes, "Nor, will xe ever carry nor take the Katsuki name."

She nodded; the movement slow and stiff. If that is what my lord wishes."

“Then, it will be our little secret.”

Satisfied, he turned to look back down at his wife. His expression was stern but soft. "Viktoria, you must understand that the Grigori will ask me to punish you for this. They have already begun the preparations for an omega from House Plisetsky and they will not appreciate what you have done to their plans."

“If it must be so, Kolya, then let it be so.” His mother did not even flinch. “But please, Kolya, let me raise xem.”

“You may have your little doll,” Nikolai gave an indulgent look but did not hand over the child, “but you will remember what I have said and who is the master of this house. Otherwise, there are plenty of other Nikiforov women ready to raise a child.”

He lowered Yuuri into her waiting grasp as though he had not been the cause of the last hour’s worth of her trauma. Then, he pushed Viktor into his mother’s arms as well.

“Come, the bond will hurt if you do not stay close until it settles,” He said as he stood back up. Viktor stared after him from the sanctuary of his mother’s hold.

He didn’t look pleased but he didn’t look angry either. Instead, he looked determined as if as he was imagining all the things he had to do.

“We must do this properly, wife,” he said after being silent for a long moment.” Despite how it may look, you will tell whoever asks that the child is a Nikiforov bastard with Jih Roh descent. Most will assume my father’s... eccentricities will have passed onto me and ask no further. ”

He turned to Minako. “And, you will give me the names of any Nikiforov you saw in the Katsuki
household or in Jih Roh. We are not hard to miss and there are plenty of Nikiforov alphas unscrupulous enough to not care where they lay their seed.”

“Yes, my lord.”

His father seemed to relax a bit, just enough to stretch out and let Yuuri grasp his finger. “We will use one of them as an excuse. The blood bond will cover the rest. As long as they smell Nikiforov that should be enough for the Grigori to watch xem and not ask questions.”

The air shifted as his father assumed his official demeanor again.

“Now, Viktoria, my dearest” he said, straightening his robes and slicking his hair back into its usual order. “If you must have this child, then you must follow tradition. I will summon the Grigori and if xe can survive the customary three days and three nights without suck, then, I will take xem into this household with a Blessing.”

Viktor perked up at his words, fear souring his belly. He knew that babies did the 3 Day Wait all the time. Even he did it. But those babies weren’t Yuuri. It compelled him to speak when he would have normally kept silent.

“Apa, you can’t do that. Yuuri is just a baby.”

“Vitya…”

“No!”

Nikolai’s expression softened but nowhere near enough for it to be a comfort. He kneeled down to his child’s height and moved Yuuri from his wife’s hold into Viktor’s arms. The baby was warm and heavy as it squirmed in his grasp. Viktor stared at the scrunched up face with pure awe. He had never had a chance to hold any of his siblings. He wormed a finger into the newborn’s grasp like he had seen his father do earlier and preened with happiness when the baby’s hand wrapped around it. The red beam pulsed and grew a little fainter.

“Vityusha, it is tradition and in this household, tradition is everything. We do not fight it. And, you cannot escape it. When you are older, Head Alpha, you will see this. Tradition grows our bravery. It solidifies our brotherhood, and ensures our purity. You must not forget this. And, if Yuuri is to live in this household, xe will learn this too.”

He rose to his feet and took Viktor’s hand in a bid to follow him. "Come now, Viten'ka, Let us see if your little Katsuki is strong enough to bear the Nikiforov name."

Viktor gripped the baby tighter nearly smushing a chubby cheek into his face as his eyes welled up. “I don’t want you to hurt him.”

"Not even a week old, and already has you wrapped around xyr finger." His father chuckled, a rare sound from the older mage. "Now come, be brave for xem and show your omega that you are worthy.”

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Viktor jerked awake with a gasp.

He lifted a shaking hand and a for a sleep muddled second, groped around for Yuuri until his brain reminded him that the omega had not been in his bed for over a week.

The sheets stuck to his sweat soaked skin so he ripped them off before he sat up and rubbed the
heels of hands into his blurry eyes. He could hear the sounds of movement coming from downstairs. Yuuri was already getting ready…

He glanced at his bedside clock.

4:30 am.

And, he was still trying to avoid Viktor who would probably let him…because he wasn’t brave enough to do anything else.

He definitely wasn’t worthy enough.

He grit his teeth and pushed his hands back into his eyes as he fought back a loud sob. He really and truly had messed up this time.

If Yuuri did not want to work with him, be near him, then Viktor had to do something. Forget Chris’s advice. This couldn’t go on any longer. He couldn’t go on much longer. Tomorrow would be today, and if he couldn’t repair things then he would just have to take responsibility and resign as Yuuri’s coach.
Rashly

Chapter Summary

In this chapter the angst continues but Viktor has an important revelation.

Chapter Notes

The genderless pronoun xe is used in this story as mage children decide whether or nor to be male or female upon coming of age. It works as follows:

Xe - He/She  
Xem - Him/Her  
Xyr - His/Her  
Xyrs - His/Hers  
Xemself - Himself/Herself

Credit to fanndists on Tumblr for terms "oma" and "apa"
Oma - Omega Mother  
Apa - Alpha Father

Credit to Tongari Boushi no Atorie for the concept of ateliers, soar shoes, and magical placement tests.

Credit also goes to Cossack's Lullaby by Mikhail Lermontov for the use of its lyrics and Mamalisa.com for the translation.  
If you would like to read about the full song and listen to it, it can be found here.

There's no CW warnings that I can think of for this chapter but I will say that this it is really emotionally intense one. Also going to apologize for the roughness of this chapter too. I just really wanted to get something out for Omegaverse Week.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bringing Xiv and Ore to life was probably one of the hardest things Viktor had ever done but when the costumes were finally revealed to him, he found all of the sleepless nights and stressful days completely justified as he stared at their final result.

Running his hand along the intricate detailing, the soft, curling feathers and brilliant lit crystals, his chest had ached with pride and excitement over how beautiful his pupils would look for the crowds. The costumes were to remain a secret from his students until the fitting, but he gushed so much about them to his other atelier mates that Mila and Georgi eventually only answered his ramblings with eye rolls and groans. In the end, in order to shut him up, Yakov had to threaten him with ripping the clothes apart if he had to hear one more word on how dreamy the organza was.

The uncertainty started to fill Viktor once he made the appointment for the final fittings. Things had been progressing so fast that the new coach felt whipped around in a whirlwind (when he
wasn’t lost in the misery of a Yuuri induced sulk) and as such, he hadn’t really gotten a chance to show his students his final designs.

It was an unfamiliar feeling. Doubt was not something that Viktor stewed in when it came to the aether and the crowd. For over a decade, he had manipulated both with such a finesse and ease that he hardly gave it much reflection beyond a program’s initial ideas. But Yurio’s outburst after his short program reveal had left Viktor more shaken than he would like to admit- and with everything that had been going on in his life with Yuuri – all of the evasion and silence - Viktor sat with his leg tap tapping a nervous beat onto the hardwood floor of the seamster’s atelier; the unveiling of his students’ costumes near drowning him with trepidation.

Viktor prayed that this reveal would go right and he was still asking Araak for favor when the seamster returned with Yuuri scuffling timidly behind her.

“Go on, Mage Yuuri. Show your coach what you look like,” The woman commanded as she stepped away for Viktor to get a good look. “He spent a lot of time designing it - much more than most coaches do,” she explained as she examined her client from the side, searching for any areas that needed further alteration.

Yuuri shuffled directly into his line of sight, a slight smile glossing the teen’s lips that was nearly as blinding as the twinkling crystal work that the omega donned. Everything just fit so right; from the deep V-neck that drew Viktor’s eyes to the shaping of Yuuri’s body to the sections of see-through mesh that teased at his alpha senses.

Though he loathe to admit it, after seeing Yuuri naked, he just knew that his initial more innocent sketches would have done the omega no justice. If Yuuri was going to be a hunter, The Hunter, then his student needed that to show in his body, in his movements, in the minutiae of his dress. The audience needed to feel like prey once the teen stepped on the aether.

And he wanted every single judge, competitor, maester and audience member to understand clearly just what gender (omega) was hunting them. He wasn’t going to hide what Yuuri was (Well, at least when it concerned his gender). His students, both of his students were omegas, and their outfits would scream this on the aether with materials made to cling to their softness and high collars intended to draw attention to and protect their necks.

Yuuri turned and the feathers that Viktor had designed to attach at the waist and shoulders fluttered like wings with the movement. Perhaps, a little nervous under his coach’s gaze, he fiddled with one of the silver chains that started from his high crystalline collar and hung across his chest. As his blue eyes flicked back up, the older mage nodded to himself in approval. Though completely unnecessary, his alpha let out a growl of endorsement, too.

Yuuri was the picture of omega perfection.

“I think we are almost done here, Mr. Nikiforov.” The seamster turned to the teen.” How is the fit, Mage Yuuri?”

Yuuri flushed as he thumbed the end of one of his crystal encrusted sleeves, “It fits well.”

“Oh, that’s good,” She smiled as she manhandled the youth towards her working station where her pins sat. “Now turn around for me so that I can make your final adjustments.”

When the seamster finished her pinning, she shoved Yuuri in front of Viktor again before making her way to Yurio’s appointment. The two stared at each other in silence. Viktor considering and Yuuri…well… Viktor didn’t know what the other mage could be thinking.
He stood up and walked towards the teen. The seamster had left the younger man in a spot filled with natural lighting giving the coach and would be designer a great view of his student’s face as he contemplated what to do about the youth’s makeup. He already knew that he would keep it dark, dramatic and full of red but the sight of Yuuri’s unruly long hair - flying away and curling around his shoulders even though he had pulled it back - made him tap a finger to his lip in thought. He was going to go with a braid but Xiv was supposed to be wild and unbridled: A braid would be too neat. He stood up and circled Yuuri, his concentration making it easy to block out his student’s anxious scent. He reached out his hand and brought a few strands into his palm.

“May I?” He didn’t look at Yuuri as he asked.

“Yes.” Yuuri didn’t seem to be looking at him either as he answered.

Carefully, slowly, he withdrew the band from Yuuri’s hair and let it fall into the youth’s face and down past his shoulders. Then, he gathered it up and held it high on the back of the omega’s head. Perfect. A high ponytail would have Yuuri’s hair flow behind him like an extension of his power. The roses he planned might have to go unfortunately, even though they had looked so lovely during the First Test ceremonies and had been the perfect nod to his own debut.

The older mage tapped his lips again with a hum. His student squirmed the longer he didn’t say anything.

“How does it look?”

It was the most Yuuri had said to him in days. Even at the atelier, Yakov had pretty much taken over Yuuri’s coaching. The teen turned more fully into the light and Viktor’s hands flew away from the omega’s hair to his mouth with a surprised cry.

The maester had spent a lot of time – days if you added all the hours up- trying to figure out how to bring Xiv’s sense of holiness to cloth. It had eaten him up until he chanced upon the idea of crystal work on the outer seams. As Yuuri blinked back in surprise at his coach’s shocked noise, Viktor finally saw that divinity in the way the edges of his student practically gleamed within the rays of sunlight that poured from the atelier’s window.

Yuuri’s scent soured just the slightest degree. Had he been staring too long? Viktor fumbled over his awe to answer as quickly as he could to avoid Yuuri forming his own probably wrong, possibly scandalized ideas about what his maester was thinking.

“It’s beautiful. You’re beautiful.”

He cringed as his feelings just slipped out. He hoped he hadn’t come on too strong but the words had left his mouth before he could think about them.

A blush turned the omega’s cheeks and ears into a lovely shade of pastel pink and for the first time in weeks, Viktor smelled orange blossoms coming from the younger man. It made his heart soar.

A part of him urged him to fill out the color more, to turn it into a proper rouge.

He obliged.

“No, really, Yuura, you look amazing.”

…because a Yuuri that blushed for him was a Yuuri that was reacting to him, and even something that small was like a lifeline to him after spending weeks locked out of the omega’s affections. It stoked an ember of hope within him. Maybe they could work things out if they could just talk. Buoyed by his feelings, he continued, his optimism growing larger with every word.
“You look like Lord Xiv come straight down from a Hunt. The audience will be in absolute love with you.”

At the last line, his student’s eyes grew darker and hungrier. With the outfit the younger mage was wearing, it quickly became a hunter’s look before he blinked and shook his head as if to sweep it away.

“And, you,” Yuuri whispered, gaze lowered to the side like he was already expecting an unfavorable answer. “Will you love me?”

Their eyes met as the youth looked up and Viktor gasped when he saw how much hurt and uncertainty swam in Yuuri’s burgundy gaze. Had he put it there? That lonely and injured look? The bit of hope grew smaller but Viktor fought to keep it glowing.

He cupped his hands around the plump cheeks of Yuuri’s face to ground himself, relishing in the way they reddened up under his touch. Even wearing a bitter expression, the omega looked so beautiful with his garnet eyes shining so brightly under the hood of his lashes that Viktor’s fangs throbbed. Yuuri surprisingly didn’t move away from his hold, so he took a moment to drink the omega in.

His alpha was pleased despite all his inner turmoil. So much so, that when he spoke to Yuuri again the words were curled within the rumblings of a purr.

“Yuura,” he brushed a thumb under the teen’s eye, catching a tear and wiping it away. “I don’t think I have done anything else since the day I met you.”

He expected Yuuri to sink into the words and for the omega to melt under his touch but instead the younger man stiffened, the look of uncertainty swirling in his eyes becoming a tempest.

“You can’t mean that.” His voice was thin and weak with emotion. “Not after what I’ve done…"

This was not the place he wanted to have this conversation but Viktor was getting used to the world not working in his favor when it came to Yuuri.

“Yuura, I-“

Another seamster came into the room as he spoke and Yuuri pushed away from Viktor to request a few more adjustments.

Viktor froze.

Didn’t Yuuri just tell the other seamster that the fit was fine?

Did Yuuri just lie? Was Yuuri lying…lying to get away from him?

Viktor felt like he was falling as the hope he had been fighting for fizzled out into a yawning abyss of despair and finality. He swallowed down the wave of emotion that threatened to overwhelm him and battled to rein in his scent. He could see Yuuri watching him from the seamster’s mirror, a tight, pinched look on his face like he desperately wanted to say something.

But, did he want to hear it?

‘That’s not fair,’ his conscious hissed at him while another voice grumbled that he was exhausted playing this game. In his head, floated Chris’s rebuke of “What did you expect?”.
It made him feel sick. It made him tired. It made him want to stop looking at Yuuri for just a little while.

It was good thing that he had two students then. He still needed to check on his other apprentice’s fitting and it wouldn’t be a distraction if it was something Viktor actually had to do.

“I’m going to see how Yurio is doing,” he said with a little laugh to conceal his sour feelings.

Yuuri tensed up at the mention but if the teen wanted to get away from Viktor enough lie to him, then Viktor thought he would grant the younger man’s wish and let Yuuri stew in the same feelings that he had been going through for the last few weeks. As he walked towards the door and away from Yuuri’s slowly panicking gaze, he told himself to think of it as a lesson in growing up.

Eventually, desperation led to Viktor telling a lie of his own.

They had gotten back from the fitting and his intentions had been pure and honest when he knocked on Yuuri’s door to tell the teen that he was heading out to do the weekly shop. He had gone through all the usual steps; checked for his keys and wallet, put Makkachin on his lead, and double checked his grocery list. His every intention had been on doing as he said, but about halfway through his walk a thought suddenly came to his head.

What would he come home to if he turned back now?

Though the younger man tried to be sneaky, Viktor was well aware that Yuuri snuck around the house when the youth thought the older man was gone. He had seen the evidence of it in half eaten meals, a cushion out of place here and there, and of course with the “incident”.

It would take him 15 minutes to get home; plenty of time for Yuuri to think he had the house to himself for a few hours. There stood a good chance that he might actually catch the omega… and if he could catch him, then he might actually be able to have the talk that had been plaguing his mind for the last several hours. Apprehension filled his chest at the thought but he fought it as he coaxed Makkachin back towards the house.

As he quietly opened the front door and ordered Makkachin to stay in the corridor, he knew his gamble had paid off. Strains of video game music poured out from the living room and Viktor used it to cover his steps as he tiptoed towards the sofa where Yuuri was sitting.

If this was a normal situation he would have covered Yuuri’s eyes and laughed as he said, “Guess who?”, but instead he stood behind the couch silent as he waited for Yuuri to catch his scent. However, it was Vicchan who noticed him first and gave him a happy little woof in greeting.

“Vicchan?”

Viktor steeled himself for the omega’s reaction as the teen slowly shifted around to investigate the cause of his dog’s bark.

“Vitya!?” the omega shrieked, nearly falling off the couch in surprise.

“I came home early,” He tried not to let the nervousness show on his face, “because I wanted to talk.”

“W-what about?” The air turned sour as Yuuri asked the question but he still moved over to give Viktor space on the couch to sit.
Viktor sighed as he sat down. Here went nothing. “About us.”

“What about us?” Yuuri shifted, his entire movements stiff with tension. “You’re not going to send me back are you?”

In some his darker hours, he had thought about it but he would never tell Yuuri that.

“No, Yuura. I’m not going to send you back.”

Yuuri relaxed a fraction.

“But…” He winced as the omega tensed again. “We need to talk about your…future.”

Yuuri frowned, his previously normal sitting position becoming a guarded one. Viktor wanted to reach out to the omega and reassure him but Yuuri’s narrowed eyes made him reconsider.

“What about my future?”

“Well don’t you want me in it, Yuura?”

The teen looked taken aback and his mouth gaped open for several seconds before he spoke. “What do you mean, Vitya? Of course, you’re in it! You’re my betrothed.”

His hands clenched and there was definitely heat in his eyes but for Viktor that would not be enough this time.

“No, Yuura, what I meant was do you want me in your future as a thaumaturge?”

“What—what? Vitya. I don’t understand…”

The air became acrid as the omega’s anxiety got the best of him. It tickled the older man’s nose but he battled against the irritating sensation. The moment was too serious to be broken by a sneeze.

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“I—I…” The teen’s eyes were wild as he fought to give an answer. His scent turned to distress and it filled Viktor with frustration that things had deteriorated so badly that they couldn’t even have a conversation without him stressing the omega. It made his decision sound more and more like it was the only way.

“This isn’t working, is it?” he whispeered, as he clasped his hands and stared at the floor. “We don’t talk. We don’t see each other. That isn’t a good relationship for a coach and student… so; I have been thinking that maybe things would be better if I resigned as your coach.

Yuuri’s controller clattered to the ground as he turned to Viktor with wild, stricken eyes. Out of the corner of his vision, Viktor saw the character that the teen had been playing careen off the side of a cliff.

He hoped to Araak’s Heavens that it wasn’t a premonition for the direction that their own relationship was going to take.

He spoke again, unable to look at Yuuri but he kept his voice as soft and gentle as he could. “I’ve already found a coach. His name is Celestino and he’s already working with some promising students. He’s a nice man, so I’m sure you—“

There was a sharp tug on his tie and he stared up at Yuuri with eyes wide as the omega gave him a
pained look. “Why are you doing this? Are you punishing me? I promise I won’t ignore you anymore.”

His last words came out in a whine so distraught it caused the dogs to whine back in sympathy. The alpha within Viktor nearly overrode his consciousness in an attempt to calm the teen. The older man was fighting to push it back as he answered with a growl,

“Punishing you? No, Yuura, listen. I just want what is best for you. I-“

Yuuri hissed back. “How can you know what’s best for me? Isn’t that only something I can know?”

Tears started to pour down his cheeks. On an ordinary day, Viktor would rush to wipe them away but the older mage was sure if he tried now his hands would be slapped away. Instead, he tried with words.

“I-“

“THAT’S SOMETHING ONLY I CAN KNOW!” The omega cut him off and then gripped so hard onto his tie that it became a noose.

He wasn’t really sure what came over him in the moment, but he ripped himself from Yuuri’s grasp with chest thundering rumble as the anger and pain that he had been holding back for the last few weeks burst through the barrier of his control and poured out of him.

“How can I know anything about you when you won’t even talk to me!?“

Yuuri curled into a ball in the face of the alpha’s rage. He looked so petulant and defiant that Viktor wanted to scream again. Chris said to be the adult but Chris wasn’t the one flying blind and seemingly getting things wrong at every turn. Viktor grasped the omega by the arms (gently) and locked pleading eyes with him.

“You don’t know me,” Yuuri whispered as his face twisted in agony. “You can’t see the real me because I’ll only ever be a baby to you.”

“Youura, I can’t coach you like this. At this point I know more about Yurio than I know about you.”

“Yurio?” the omega hissed again, his tone so bitter that it hit Viktor like a slap in the face “He’s the perfect fit you, isn’t he? He’s pretty. He can pull the magic. He’s nothing like an omega like me…” the younger mage tugged his arms out of the older man’s loose hold and wrapped them around his knees with a sob. “I should have stayed at the Sanctum like Oma said.”

That shocked Viktor out of whatever anger he had been feeling and straight into a panic.

“Youura... I didn’t mea-“

He shut up at the look Yuuri gave him. It bordered on hatred and the sight nearly took his breath away.

“An omega like me is only good for having babies and being kept in the house.”

The fire fizzled out of the youth after that and he buried his face into his knees. Vicchan came to paw at his master as the young man wept but Viktor brushed the dog aside to kneel in front of the crying teen.
“Yuura, look at me.”

“No,” answered the omega in a small voice without looking up at all. “Just send me back so Yurio can be your best student.”

Yuuri had never sounded like this before. The panic became terror as he struggled to physically pull the adolescent from his defeatist position.

“Yuura, come on. Don’t be like this. Let’s talk.”

“No,” Yuuri shrieked trying to tug his arms back and away. He kicked at Viktor. “You don’t want me anymore!”

Distress was pouring through the bond and into the air. Viktor felt like he was choking on it as he tried to dodge Yuuri’s kicks and get the obviously upset youth to calm down.

It came to a head when the light in Yuuri’s eyes started to fade and the air stank of cinnamon. Viktor had about one second before the arms of the couch burst into a brilliant blue inferno.

“Yuuri!” he barked, his voice flowing with alpha command. “Look at me!”

He knew the moment the younger man tensed that he was wrong for using the command. A ball of fire exploded in his face as the omega gave him one last kick and curled up into an impenetrable ball of misery and flames.

Viktor managed to wave it away with a tidal wave of water that drenched Yuuri and the couch. They both looked at each other in shock, chests heaving in and out as they fought to catch their breath. Yuuri moved and at first the older man thought the teen was going to make a break for his room but then the full weight of a teenaged omega crashed into him and they both collided to the floor into a sprawl.

They went down hard, Viktor’s head smacked against the hardwood floor with a thwack that hurt all the way down to the nerves of his teeth. Yuuri was speaking but it was incomprehensible nonsense to Viktor’s ringing ears.

Flames were starting to drift in the air, scorching wherever they touched. Viktor knew he had to act fast or risk the entire apartment catching fire.

He would never be sure how he managed to wiggle out from under the frantic grasp of the omega but somehow he managed to crush the hysterical boy to his chest. He thought that the sound of his heartbeat would calm the teen but in response, Yuuri let out a whine that threatened to send Viktor’s alpha on an internal rampage.

“I’m not rejecting you, Yuurochka. I’m not,” he whispered into the boy’s ear.

Yuuri sobbed.

“You don’t have to give me an answer now,” he tried. “And…and if you want to stay I promise you can.”

The words didn’t seem to penetrate at all. Yuuri keened and both the dogs howled in unison. Pain exploded in his chest, just as if it had come into contact with one of the flames.

“Yuura, please listen to me.”
It was like all of his organs were being torn up from the inside. Flames were burning holes into the floor. His vision started to go dark and out of desperation, he struggled to do the only thing that strangely made sense at a time like this.

He called Chris. The two seconds it took the man to answer felt like an eternity in the harshest level of Anud’s Hell.

“Hello?” Chris’s voice floated through the air in his usual sleazy tone. Viktor had never been gladder to hear it.

“Chris,” he gasped, fighting to get the words out through the pain razing through his torso. “I-I need h-help.”

“What’s wrong!?” the perchten asked, the seedy tone dropped in favor of alarm.

“Yuura….” He tried to breathe deep. His mind was fogging. “Outta control…n-need..h-help…”

“Outta control? You can’t mean…” The voice on the other line went quiet before it boomed back. “Scuff his neck!” The other man almost shouted. “For Perchta’s sake, Viktor, scuff his neck before it’s too late!”

The words took a moment to cut through the haze of pain and agony but Viktor found the strength to reach his arm up and grip the back of the writhing omega’s neck in a sure hold. Yuuri went lax immediately, releasing Viktor from the onslaught of defensive magic. His rambling calmed down too, shifting from the half-crazed raving into quieter weeping.

Viktor ran a hand through the teen’s hair to soothe as his other arm brought his beloved closer.

“That’s it Yuura. Come back to me,” he crooned as the boy pushed his tearful face into the alpha’s scent gland with a sharp cry. “I’m sorry I sent you to such a scary place.”

Chris’s voice floated in over the sobbing. “Viktor, what the hell did you do?”

“A drop,” His throat felt full of gravel. “I think… I think I nearly sent him into an omega drop.”

“What the fuck?”

What the fuck, indeed. Viktor tuned out the younger man’s lecture to focus on the distraught omega in his arms. Yuuri was a complete mess and it was probably all his fault. He pressed a kiss to the top of Yuuri’s head as he sat up and gathered the shaking youth into his arms.

“Sleep my beautiful good boy, Lullaby a-bye,” he sang softly as he began rocking Yuuri to a cradle song that had always calmed him when he was a colicky baby. “Quietly the moon is looking, Into your cradle, I will tell you fairy tales, And sing you little songs, But you must slumber, with your little eyes closed, Lullaby a-bye…”

Viktor woke up the next day, in his own bed, with a headache so intense that he was sure it could kill a human. Still half asleep, he reached out an arm towards Yuuri’s side and unsurprisingly, found it empty. He had forgotten that he had tucked Yuuri into his own nest once the omega fell into a deep enough sleep.

He yawned as he felt the vestiges of exhaustion try to reclaim him. What time was it? Maybe he could catch a few more hours of sleep.
It was still dark and he winced as he reopened his bleary eyes to the bright light of his alarm clock.

4:00 am.

All of his muscles protested as he shifted to sit up. Whatever pheromones Yuuri had hit him with during his drop last night were kicking his ass this morning. Dragonshit. It was worse than being hung over.

He let out another groan as he flopped back onto his bed and curled up into the omega’s former side wondering if it still held the younger man’s scent. Last night, Yuuri’s personal fragrance had turned absolutely divine after he had calmed down. Absentmindedly, Viktor buried his face into the pillow, sure that it still held Yuuri’s scent. He inhaled, and then choked when he was hit a pure lungful of omega need. The pillow went sailing and Viktor curled into himself with a whimper as his body reacted.

“Won’t you make me yours?”

The sound of panting filled the room as he struggled for control, causing him to grit his teeth as a wave of arousal slammed straight into him, breaking through the cloud of higher level suppressants that were supposed to be keeping his alpha reactions at bay. He cursed. If this was what happened when he was suppressed what would he be like during a rut? He would have to get the level readjusted the next time he visited the atelier healer. He couldn’t afford to fall into one now, especially not when Yuuri’s heat might answer.

‘What answer?’ the beast in his head growled in response. ‘You are sending mate away.’

That’s right… Yesterday… Viktor’s ardor cooled as the events from last night came rushing back to him. He nearly sent Yuuri into a drop.

He gripped his hair as he let out a small growl of frustration. Why did he think he could just spring something like that on the teen and things would work out fine?

Shame washed over him. He was a Nikiforov. He was the Living Legend. He was used to being perfect, always the correct Viktor Nikiforov for whatever the situation needed but why was he always, always tripped up when it came to Yuuri?

The sound of pots and pans and frustrated noises broke him out of his dark thoughts. His stomach grumbled at the idea of food but he ignored it.

He could go down and get breakfast but with what had happened last night, he wasn’t exactly sure how to proceed. If Yuuri, who as of late had been moving around quieter than a winter snowfall, was upset enough to be actually be consciously loud, then Viktor didn’t think it would be in his best interests to get in the omega’s way.

Yuuri, however, seemed to have other plans and when Viktor came downstairs, it was to the shocking sight of the omega waiting for him on the partially burnt couch.

“Good morning, Vitya,” the teen muttered, looking at his hands. “I-I thought maybe we could go to the atelier together…”

He trailed off and looked to the side, a blush blooming across his face as he turned away. The morning light made his pale skin look paler and highlighted the dark circles under his eyes. He looked soft and vulnerable and it ran Viktor through seven hundred different kinds of hells.

“Yuura, about last night…Are you okay?”
The teen’s back went ramrod straight as his face turned a brighter red. “I-I don’t want to talk about that right now.”

He looked at Yuuri sitting in front of him, his brows furrowed and his baby cheeks puffed out in such an adorably juvenile way that Viktor didn’t think he could ever be able to reconcile the image with the fact that Yuuri, his Yuuri, the Yuuri that used to give Viktor all of his deepest, darkest childish secrets to hold in safe keeping, was drifting to a place he couldn’t follow.

Viktor pursed his lips but kept quiet. He didn’t want to risk a repeat of last night but he couldn’t deny that the return to non-communication was frustrating. He sighed and began the rest of his prep for the day, coming back to the younger man once he was done.

“Are you ready?”

Yuuri surprised again him by gripping his hand and clinging to his arm like it was a lifeline. “I-I just need to be with you for a little while,” he stammered against the sleeve of Viktor’s coat. “At least until my omega calms down.”

Even if Yuuri didn’t elaborate further, Viktor could feel the tangle of emotions through the half formed bond.

“Okay,” he said and for the first time in weeks, they left through the front door together.

They walked into the atelier to a rush of gasps and hushed whispers. Yuuri’s ears burned red the entire time but he set to his warm up tasks as if it was an ordinary day. Or he would have, if Viktor hadn’t seen the way the omega’s hands shook as he tried to lace up his shoes.

“Yuuri?” The sight was troubling and a part of him wanted to argue that the omega shouldn’t be on the aether and using magic so soon after a drop.

“I’m fine.” The teen bit out, tying his soar shoes just a bit too tight. Viktor gently pushed his hands away and retied them to a suitable level as he opened his mouth again.

“I don-“

Yakov interrupted them with a shout. “Yuuri, the aether doesn’t have all day!”

Viktor gave the younger man another look as the teen pushed him away and stood up.

“I’m fine,” he hissed, low as if he didn’t want Yakov to hear their conversation.

He did seem to look a bit better than he did this morning so Viktor swallowed his worries and shrugged. “Okay, if you say so.”

And with that, he went to tend to his other student and stayed out of the younger mage’s path for most of the day. Working on Yurio’s choreography turned out to be an excellent distraction and before he knew it, he had gone an entire morning without talking to or fretting over Yuuri.

In fact, focusing on his other apprentice’s thaumaturgy skills had him in so deep, that he nearly had a heart attack when Yuuri surprised him with a shy poke to his side. Despite his best coach intentions, his attention shifted immediately to the omega beside him.

“D-did you want something?” he stuttered, nervousness drowning out nearly every other emotion.

A part of him was glad that Yuuri had approached him again but the way the omega pouted and
kept his eyes averted told him not to get his hopes up too high.

“Mila and Georgi wanted to know if you want to come out with us?”

The teen still didn’t meet his gaze, but Viktor could tell by his stiff body language what answer the younger man wanted. So, he gave it without hesitation.

“No, I don’t think I’ll go.”

He had to hide the hurt as he watched the omega visibly relax at his refusal. Wasn’t he just clinging to him this morning? What had happened between then and now?

He hid his words behind the small lie of a smile.”Yurio still needs more help.”

It wasn’t meant to be anything more than an explanation but he couldn’t miss the way Yuuri stiffened. He thought to ask the teen about it but then he was reminded of how well his questions had gone lately and decided to ignore the omega’s strained expression. “But you should go. You might make new friends.”

If he looked on the bright side, he could kill two birds with one stone. Yurio’s choreography was kicking his ass and it was clear that Yuuri didn’t want Viktor hanging out with him for whatever reason.

“Do you have money?” Yuuri’s frown didn’t move but he answered with a shake of his head.

Viktor turned to dig in his bag for his wallet. At least he could still provide for the omega in one way. The money was accepted with a blush as the teen realized the amount.

“Vitya, I don’t need this much…”

The omega peered up at him through the fan of his ever so dark lashes and Viktor felt an unwanted part of his body jump in response. He wanted to scream, to run away to the furthest ends of the earth where he could decide what he wanted without the pressure of Yuuri, the world, and his own heavy expectations. He wanted to take their fight back – all of their fighting- and his suggestion of another coach.

Instead, he asked a stupidly practical question.

“Have you got your key?” His eyes drifted to Yurio who was currently butchering his routine.

Yuuri nodded before pulling out the item. Viktor tried not smile at the ridiculously oversized Makkachin keychain that the teen had insisted on during a shopping trip. It was a nice reminder that there were times when they enjoyed each other’s company.

“Okay.” He nodded in return, his mind finding it easier to push him away from the dilemma that was the omega in front of him and towards the corrections Yurio was going to need after his run through. “Have fun.”

Yuuri hesitated, his face scrunched up like he wanted say something but didn’t really know how to say it. Viktor waited but then Georgi called out to the teen and the youth turned towards his atelier mate without giving the alpha another look.

Fine then. He watched them go with no small feeling of discontent.

It wasn’t like he had anything to be worried about. Both Georgi and Mila were responsible and
reliable and often helped with the care of younger apprentices. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Yurio pull off a triple axel that was technically perfect but might as well have been jumped by a corpse. He quickly returned to his previous task of yelling and criticism, letting go of the Yuuri puzzle so that he could actually be someone’s coach.

“It’s a feeling, Yurio!” he shouted from across the aether. “A feeling dammit!” He barked, finding himself turning more into Yakov with every frustrating moment that he spent watching Yurio soar like he was made of stone.

The boy was positively murdering his choreography. How was it going to make anyone tremble much less Xiv? What did he do to deserve this? Was this his divine punishment for being a little shit to Yakov for all those years? A tear actually slipped out of one of his eyes when Yurio did a camel spin so woodenly that he looked more like a weathervane than the beautiful demi-god he was supposed to embody.

“Point those toes, boy!” Yakov hollered from his spot by Viktor's side. He gave Viktor’s shoulder a small pat. “Coaching is rough, no?”

Viktor nodded in return, knowing that under normal circumstances this was about as comforting as the older man got.

"Chris called me last night. He wouldn't go into specifics but he said something serious happened,” Yakov didn’t turn towards him as he said it but Viktor could hear the hint of worry in his tone. “I won't pry if you think it's for the best but don't go around making rash decisions. If you act carelessly, you'll regret it in the end, Vitya."

If only Yakov knew the younger mage thought bitterly to himself. Out loud, he sighed. “I nearly sent Yuuri into a complete drop last night.”

“ARE YOU MAD?!”

He knew he would get yelled at but he wasn’t expecting the slap to the back of his head. Several students, including Yurio, looked in their direction at the outburst.

“You could have been killed, Vitya.” The older man grumbled after he shouted at the nosy onlookers to get back to work. “The outside world doesn’t have the containment magic of a Sanctum and you aren’t taking that boy’s blood.”

Viktor’s checks grew warm. Even though it had been under the duress of potential baldness, he suddenly wished that he hadn’t told his coach so much about his nonexistent love life during his interrogation. “I know that, Yakov. No one could be more shaken by it than me right now. Trust me.”

The old man eyed him. It felt like he was 18 years old again and meeting his maester for the very first time. Yakov shook his head and gripped him by a shoulder. “He might be your omega, boy, but that doesn't mean you can be a stupid brute. Omegas are much more powerful than we would like to give them credit for.”

With those ominous words, he walked off, most likely to his office where he would observe the happenings of the atelier through his windows like some displeased lord. Viktor was partially sure he went up there to drink, not that he could blame the man now that he was a coach himself.

He sighed, wishing that he could drown his sorrows away instead of battling with his two Yu(u)ris. He turned his attention back towards his hard headed student, who only listened half of the time.
Yurio was still technically perfect but emoting like dragonshit. It was clear that despite his bold words, he still wasn’t feeling the piece.

He briefly wondered if he should call in Lilia but then he remembered what she almost allowed to happen to his bangs (well, his whole head really) and reconsidered. He ran a hand through his hair and winced at the few strands that came away with it. His Yu(u)ris were making him go bald - he was sure of it.

“Yurio, come here!”

“That's not my name!” The brat screeched.

“Would you like to see how many sprints you can do across the rink before the nights out?” He said with a light smile. At least, Yurio was still fun.

The teen blanched, but soared towards the boards anyway. “Don’t get your old man panties in a twist because Yuuri isn’t speaking to you,” he grumbled under his breath as he reached.

Viktor’s eye twitched and suddenly the other omega wasn’t fun anymore.

“Yurio…”

The brat had the gall to wave him quiet. “Okay, okay. I get it. Sensitive topic. I’m sorry.”

He chose to let it go. There was no use in upsetting both of his students.

“Remember you're playing Ore. You should be delicate and unsure and…” he began, with Yurio learning against the boards half listening.

Two hours later, and his student was still unable to remotely do the piece any justice. Was it that hard for Yurio to connect with his inner vulnerability? Maybe he should send him to a temple or a waterfall so the kid could think on it more. It always used to help Viktor.

He sent Yurio home with orders to find “his inner Ore” and then he spent another hour and half taking notes and reviewing both Yu(u)ris’ practices. When he finally decided to finish for the day, it was dark outside and a bit chilly. He wrapped his coat around himself tighter wondering if Yuuri was wearing enough layers when he left earlier. He didn’t want the omega to catch a cold.

He returned home to darkness and silence, which at first, Viktor didn’t worry about. He had come home plenty of times to the house quiet and dark in the last few weeks. Yuuri was always awful about remembering to leave the lights on before he scuttled away to his room.

Besides, after such a long night and day all he really wanted to do was curl up with a good book. Now, that they were maybe talking, perhaps Viktor could convince Yuuri to curl up with him too. It would probably do some good after such a vicious drop. And maybe, just maybe – if the stars in Araak’s heaven aligned just right and the devils in all of Anud’s hells found ice water - then maybe, they could talk and try to sort things out.

He knocked on Yuuri’s door but got no response. Perhaps, he was just sleeping. The omega was notorious for sleeping like the dead when he was really tired. He turned to go back downstairs and start dinner when Vicchan ran up to him with a soft boof.

That was strange. The familiar usually accompanied Yuuri whenever he slept in his own bed. A prickling sensation at the back of his neck urged Viktor to open the door, privacy be damned. It
swung open to an empty room. A quick perusal throughout the rest of the apartment and several yellings of the omega’s name revealed that Viktor was in the house alone. He looked out the window at the dark sky. Darkness came late in summer, late enough for it to be dangerous for a young, unmated omega.

To say he was scared or even terrified seemed like an underestimation. He searched the bond, kicking himself mentally because he should have checked it first. It was strangely silent. Wherever Yuuri was, he was not hurt or distressed…yet.

Viktor’s fear level still jumped to 100.

He told himself to calm down and that the lack of negative emotion was a good thing. Maybe Yuuri was still out with Mila and Georgi. He dialed the number he had memorized by heart only for it to go straight to voicemail. That wasn’t necessarily strange either, the younger man was notoriously bad at checking his phone if he wasn’t actively using it. Checking it was often Viktor’s duty.

He tried Mila and Georgi next but they both responded that they had left Yuuri near the atelier station hours ago after he swore to them that he knew how to get home on his own. They both offered to help look but Viktor could barely hear them over the pounding of his heart.

His fear notched to 110 as he ran all the way to the station without even bothering to put on a coat. But the younger man wasn’t there. He wasn’t at any of the lesser known entrances or at Yakov’s atelier either. While he searched, he tried not to blame himself, Mila, or Georgi but he already knew that if anything happened, forgiveness would be off the table.

Desperate, he resorted to asking strangers if they had seen the omega. Most ignored him but some looked at the photo on his phone with such a hunger that it made his fists and stomach clench.

The longer he couldn’t find Yuuri the more he felt his worry was spinning out of the edges of his control. His anxious thoughts swirled into each other until they became a garbled mess of worst case scenarios.

Through the white noise of his growing distress, a kind soul suggested that he call the police. With tears threatening to stream down his face, he agreed that it was a good idea. His hands shook so badly as he tried to type the emergency number that he messed up the 3 digit number four times. As it began to ring, the stranger left with a nervous “good luck” and Viktor wanted scream after them that there was more to it than just mere “luck”. He needed Yuuri safe, by his side, in his arms. Anud’s Hell, he was so worried at this point that even if someone were to tell him that Yuuri was back at the Sanctum, he would jump for joy because at least then he’d know the omega was at least protected.

There were of course many reasons for the Sanctum’s existence - namely the possessiveness of Nikiforov alphas - but no one would ever deny that safety was the primary one. Omegas were precious commodities, rarely born and full of raw power. Their nicknames as godlings didn’t come about for no reason.

Mages, especially alphas with their limited stores of energy, used to fight over them, do awful, disgusting things to “possess” them and although it had been nearly 200 years since the last Nikiforov kidnapping, Viktor wasn’t naïve enough to think that people were above it.

Yuuri was innocent and gullible to a fault sometimes. He would be fresh meat out in the unscrupulous larger world. Viktor had to stop himself as memories of a dirty, stinking alley way haunted his thoughts.
He would not think about what a kidnapper could be doing to Yuuri (because if he did, he was definitely going to be sick). If the worst did come to pass, he would pay the ransom no questions asked as long as Yuuri was delivered in one piece. No negotiations. No authorities. A growl rumbled low in his throat. And then, he would use his powers as a Nikiforov to destroy them down to their last descendant.

His call to the emergency services was interrupted by an unknown number. Hoping it was good news, he cut to it immediately.

“Yuuri?” he nearly screamed into the phone. “Where are you? Are you hurt?”

“Vitya?” The omega’s voice came through the line soft and unsure; a sweet panacea after hours of endless worry.

“Yuura, are you safe? Where are you? Who are you with?” The questions kept pouring out of his mouth even though he knew he should pause for Yuuri to answer.

“I’m okay… I think. A nice lady is helping me. She lent me her phone.”

He could hear a woman’s voice in the background and Yuuri having a conversation with her. It did little to set him at ease. An alpha woman could just as easily harm Yuuri as a man. Viktor felt his chest vibrating with the beginnings of a growl. He would rip out their intestines and stuff them down their throats if they had hurt even a hair on Yuuri’s head.

“Hello?”

Viktor tried his best not to posture over the phone at the female voice that suddenly appeared but he did a poor job of it with his answering snarl. The voice on the other end went silent, and then tried again.

“Hello?”

Viktor tried to calm down but his voice still sounded gruff when he responded.

“Hello?” The tail end of it was nearly lost as it rumbled loudly in his throat. “Who is this?”

“This is Officer Anya Zhurova speaking. Your friend said he was lost and came to us.”

“My omega,” Viktor corrected, hackles raising the longer the conversation went without any sound from Yuuri. “Please tell me where he is.”

There was a sharp sound, and even through the phone, he could tell meant displeasure. It rankled more than it would if Viktor’s nerves were not in a state of being completely frayed.

“It is not good for an omega to be out alone at night,” she scolded, the words sounding harsh in Rhurshyan. She clicked her tongue in irritation before asking Viktor, “What is your name?”

“Viktor Nikiforov.”

Anya gasped which meant that she knew exactly who he was. Who wouldn’t in this city? Viktor could only hope that his fame would be a good thing in this case and that after things were settled that she kept quiet.

Rustling and a “let me see your ID” drifted through the phone before she returned to the line. It felt like a thousand years had passed, when she said, “We are outside the entrance to Ost Alezhandrya
Station. Come quickly. The poor thing has been out in the cold for far too long.”

The station was nearly an hour away but Viktor ran the distance in 30 minutes.

The light from within the small police box gave Viktor just enough vision to make out Yuuri waiting outside a small, square building next as he stood next to a tall woman - an alpha woman Viktor’s own inner self grumbled judging from her aura.

He was still a few feet away but even from his distance, he could tell from the hunch of the omega’s shoulders that the teen was minutes from tears. As he got closer, he could understand why.

The alpha woman was scolding him in Rhurshyan harsh enough to wet Viktor’s own eyes. Yuuri looked like he would break if Viktor took even a second longer.

“Youuri,” he shouted even though the distance was only a few meters. He wanted him away from the woman and her acid tongue. He needed him back into his arms where he would whisper sweet nothings and praises until the younger man’s pained look was gone.

Yuuri looked up, straight at him.

They say when Araak first laid eyes on her beloved son; she wept for forty days and forty nights and washed the world anew. As blasphemous as it was, Viktor thought she had nothing on him as he cried so hard that he choked. Suddenly, all the problems and all the issues they had been having in the last few weeks melted away, insignificant in the heat of the moment.

The world narrowed down to nothing but he and Yuuri and the teens’ name fell from his lips in a mantra as he ran up to him. Even when the boy was safe and real in his arms, he whispered his name like it was a sacred prayer as they touched flesh to flesh, his cheek rubbing against the top of the omega’s head and scenting his love so thoroughly that it was scandalous. He pressed a dozen kisses to Yuuri’s crown, inhaling the scent of shampoo and spiced sandalwood.

Yuuri, his Yuuri. His alpha purred in satisfaction.

His Yuuri. He didn't own him; it could never be something so crass as that. But he was Yuuri’s and Yuuri was his. He breathed in Yuuri’s sandalwood and felt the warmth of the teen in his arms and suddenly all the a/o nonsense he had been hearing all of his life started to make a bit more sense. He could feel it thrumming in his bond, how safe and kept Yuuri felt in this moment. Araak’s stars, he wanted to hold him like this forever.

Yuuri was just as emotional.

“I’m sorry,” he sobbed, his hands gripping the alpha so tightly that the fabric of Viktor’s clothes made a noise in protest. “I didn’t mean to get lost. I just wanted to think.”

Viktor ran his hands through Yuuri’s hair, up and down his back, anywhere to reassure himself that the omega was real and solid.

“It’s okay, Yuura.”

And, honestly, it was when Yuuri was safe and near like this. “We can talk when we get home.”

And for the first time, Yuuri nodded in assent.
“Don’t send me back home,” was the first thing Yuuri cried the moment they stepped foot into the apartment.

“I won’t, Yuura. I promise I won’t if that’s what you want,” Viktor answered as he struggled to reach the light with the omega clinging so tightly to his neck.

Yuuri snuggled impossibly closer as the alpha tried his best to get them to his den with neither of them tripping or falling. It was a battle but in the end, they both flopped down onto the bed triumphantly with nary a scratch, freshly showered and a cup of cocoa for each.

The omega drank his with one arm wrapped around Viktor’s waist and he tried not to think of how painful it would be in the teen spilled any of cocoa on his crotch.

He waited until Yuuri was finished, spending his time alternating between sipping his cocoa and finger combing the snarls of his betrothed’s hair. When Yuuri finally put down his mug, Viktor took that as his signal to start.

“Talk to me, Yuura,” he whispered, dusting the omega’s back with a stray of soothing pheromones. “Tell me what’s been going on in your head.”

The teen pouted and turned to bury his face in the older man’s stomach. Viktor tenderly but decisively guided him to sit up as he leaned back against his headboard with the youth in his arms.

"Talk to me, please,” he pleaded, letting Yuuri hide his face within the comfort of his neck. “I can’t work on any problems if I don’t know what’s wrong.”

“Do you promise you won’t hate me if I tell you?”

Viktor’s grip tightened at such an impossible thought. “I could never hate you, Yuurochka. No matter what you say, I promise it won’t ever come to that.”

“Ms Minako thought my temptation wish was very selfish,” he whispered, “because Vitya is a very busy and important person.”

The omega buried his face deeper and he heard the boy give a sharp and shuddering exhale.

“Go on, Yuura” Viktor coaxed. “You can tell me.”

“If she was here, she would tell me to be glad that Vicchan granted my wish, that he is letting me soar on the same aether as him. I know you gave up a lot to retire and become my coach so I should be grateful for whatever you give me, but...”

Viktor gasped as the arms looped around his shoulder tightened to a near painful level. His reaction was to release a burst of calming scent and hope that Yuuri understood that he would throw it all away again if it meant having the omega by his side, as he was - growing into his full, majestic glory.

"...but I-I’m not grateful right now. I'm not grateful at all! I just want more. I know it’s greedy and I know it’s wrong, but sometimes, I just want Vitya all to myself.”

The teen lifted his face to look at the older man. Tears swam in his eyes, ready to drop at the slightest provocation.

“Am I bad, Vicchan? For wanting your eyes only on me? Am I acting spoiled for wanting Yurio to disappear sometimes and for it to just be the two of us?”
And suddenly, everything snapped into place for Viktor. The hovering, the reluctance over Yurio’s nickname, the food, the desire for praise, and Yuuri’s other attempts at courtship.

Was Yuuri trying to claim him against what his instincts (or brain) told him was a rival?

“Yuurochka, are…are you jealous of Yurio?”

The arms tightened again and the air took on a vinegary scent.

There was his answer.

“I want you to be only mine.”

“Yuura, of course I’m yours—“

“Are you!?“

Viktor’s mouth snapped shut at the question. He must not have been showing it clearly enough if Yuuri felt so jealous and threatened. Perhaps, this was one of those situations that the guidebooks spoke about where he needed words over actions.

He pulled Yuuri in so tight that he swore he could feel the omega’s heartbeat thumping against his own. The youth sank deeply and trustingly further into his hold, giving Viktor a shot of courage. Turning his head, he whispered low into the teen’s pinkened ear,

“Doesn’t my blood flow in your veins, Yuura? Your body wouldn’t have accepted me if it thought I wasn’t suitable. If I didn't have any intention of taking care of you, you know that by the laws of magic it would have rebounded and killed me, right?”

Yuuri nodded against him.

“Even if you can't feel it right now, you're the only one I want. No matter who I teach, it would only be you who I wanted to marry, you that I want to lose my purity to, and you who I will give and receive children from.”

He shifted up and pushed Yuuri back into the soft mattress of the bed so that he could lean over him. “Of course, I want Yurio to win but the only gold medal I want to kiss is yours.”

“Really?” Yuuri looked up at him with tears streaming down the sides of his face and Viktor thought the younger man had never looked more beautiful. “Do you mean that?”

“Yes,” he purred. “Can I kiss you?”

Yuuri bit his lip and then released it as he nodded.

With a conscious as clear as glazed frost, he leaned down and finally, finally gave Yuuri’s reddened, half bitten lips the kiss that they deserved.

Chapter End Notes

That should be the end of angst city for now. In the next few chapters, we'll get back
into the magic and into the widening world of thaumaturgy. Keep your eyes peeled for more backstory too!

Also, please give the song a listen. It is really quite beautiful and I could totally see Viktor singing it.

Please let me know what you think! The comments really give me insight when I’m writing.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, Yuuri goes into heat and Viktor has a strange dream.

Chapter Notes

Hi All,

Sorry for the wait. As the story progresses I have to do more double checking and referencing to stay within the plot which makes writing a chapter take a bit more time than it used to. There's a bit more world building in this chapter and more backstory so I hope everyone enjoys it even if Yuuri and Viktor haven't made it to the world stage yet.

Also, I made a typo in Chapters 5 and 8. Yuuri is described as a Katsuki to Yakov and the rest of the Nikiforov family but it should actually be that they were told that he was a Nikiforov with Jih Roh heritage.

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The genderless pronoun xe is used in this story as mage children decide whether or nor to be male or female upon coming of age. It works as follows:

Xe - He/She
Xem - Him/Her
Xyr - His/Her
Xyrs - His/Hers
Xemself - Himself/Herself

Credit to fanndis on Tumblr for terms "oma", "apa", and "grandapa"
Oma - Omega Mother
Apa - Alpha Father
Grandapa - Alpha Grandfather

Credit to Tongari Boushi no Atorie for the concept of ateliers, soar shoes, and magical placement tests.

Credit to John 6:55 and Songs of Solomon for inspiring the scenting cloth spell.

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CONTENT WARNING: This chapter has a scene with quite a bit of gore and there is a non explicit scene dealing with drinking blood. The scene with gore will be clearly marked so that it can be skipped for those who are squeamish.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Viktor.”
He tried his best to ignore the voice but it was soon joined by a finger poking repeatedly into the tender part of his ribcage. With a groan, he swatted at his attacker and tried to pull the covers over his head to block out the voice, the finger, and the haunting (but at the moment annoying) notes of a distant Jih Roh flute. He was just about to drift back into oblivion when his duvet was rudely torn away from him and the same hand came back to slap irritatingly at his face.

“Viktor, wake up.”

He blinked slowly, but then jumped up with a shriek as he grasped that the plain features staring down at him belonged to none other than the very dead Mari Katsuki.

As his mind became more aware and took in his deceased former fiancé and the understated but clearly Jih Roh elements of the room, he realized he must be dreamwalking again. That was the only logical explanation for Mari (who had been dead for over 20 years), the minimalist Jih Roh finery surrounding them, and – he looked down in a minor panic – his small, childish body.

He sat up and tried to orientate himself, urged his mind to remember at what age this memory occurred. The coverlet fell away with the movement to reveal that he was dressed in rumpled robes of blue and silver silk. He thumbed at the cool stiffness with slight nostalgia. He hadn’t worn any Jih Roh clothing since he was eight.

After inspecting his garments, he looked up to visually explore the rest of the room. The dark wood paneling and unpretentious opulence stood in complete contrast to the baroque decadence of the Nikiforov estate. A scroll that hung opposite his bed confirmed his suspicions. Katsuki -the intricate combination of script would have been unreadable if he hadn’t spent his formative years staring at it so much. Now, he knew he was definitely in Jih Roh and most likely the main Katsuki compound.

“Oi, Eorthe to Viktor.”

Viktor jerked back to reality after xe pressed a lone finger just a little too harshly into his cheek.

“Mari?” he croaked back, feeling slightly stupid but he needed things confirmed.

The omega gave him a cocky grin in response. “The one and only.”

The smile fell off xyr face as xe leaned back onto xyr haunches. “Now, get up.”

He scrambled to follow xyr order, his small body tripping and tangling in the thick sheets spread out on the reed mat floor. Mari let him struggle until it became apparent that Viktor wasn’t going to be able to free himself anytime soon without xyr help. Looking well and thoroughly annoyed, xe wrenched him from out of the mess of sheets with a harsh tug that sent them both tumbling off of the sleeping platform and onto the thankfully soft floor.

The impact still knocked the wind out of him but before he could recover; Mari was pulling him up again and trying to beat his robes into submission.

“Look at you,” Xe grumbled as xe went about xyr work. “Your hair looks like a phoenix’s nest and your robes are crumpled nearly six ways to hell.”

Xe kept muttering as xe tried to smooth and pull out the wrinkles that dotted the beautiful painted silk. “I cannot believe you fell asleep in your ceremonial gear. What kind of alpha am I betrothed to? The Watchers are going to have a fit when they see you.”

Viktor tried to shrug out of the omega’s hold but his younger self was no match for the teenager’s
strength. Still, he gave a valiant effort by squirming and pushing at the persistent hand until the older mage gave up with a hiss.

“Fine, do what you want,” xe said, throwing xyr hands up with a burst of pepper, “but if you don’t hurry up, we will be late for the wedding dance.”

Viktor froze, his irritation rapidly shifting into bewilderment. He had never gone to a wedding with Mari and for the one Jih Roh wedding that he had attended…xe had already been dead for a year by the time it happened. This definitely had to be a dream and not a memory. Dreams could be recollections, impressions, or even just nonsense strung together. This had to be the latter.

He gave into his morbid (and one day certainly going to get him killed) curiosity by asking, “Whose dance?”

“Ours, stupid.” The reply was accompanied by a very dark and unimpressed look.

“Ehhhh?” he screeched back, his high and childish voice reaching dog whistle levels in his terror and confusion.

Mages might be a lot of things – dastardly and wicked included among them – but they generally did not do actual child marriages. His hands balled into fists as he tried his hardest to recall what age he could possibly be. In the end, he chose an arbitrary but believable number that hopefully would prove too young to carry out the task. “I’m only six!”

Mari rewarded his efforts by squishing his cheeks together between the palms of xyr hands. Viktor squawked in indignation and tried to pull his face from the embarrassing hold but the omega held tight and continued xyr torture with a laugh.

“You’re seven,” xe corrected as xe rubbed xyr hands around in a vicious circle. “And, seven is a perfectly normal age to perform the dance of Xiv and Ore’s wedding.”

Viktor sagged a bit in relief at the knowledge that it wasn’t a real wedding. Despite the fact that he was pretty sure this was all an illusion, there was no universe in which he actually wanted to get married to the older mage.

“What’s wrong with you today, Viktor? You’re even more airheaded than usual,” Mari grinned bringing him back to reality as xe stopped smushing his cheeks in favor pinching and stretching them. “Did you eat so many sweets at the banquet last night that it addled your brain?”

“Mawweee, wet go of mweee!”

“As you wish, young heirling,” xe answered with a snort and a condescending final pat on his abused cheek. “But, in all honesty, Viktor, we have to leave soon.”

“Who cares,” he snapped.

Ignoring the fact that he was a fully grown man who should have full grown man reactions, he turned his back to his companion to sulk as he rubbed his cheek and shot Mari a glare that didn’t even try to hide his bitterness. Maybe it was the childish body and memories guiding his emotions, but honestly, Mari was such a bully that even if his mind was that of an adult, it still upset him. He knew that xe didn’t ask for their bond and that the age difference greatly annoyed xem, but it wasn’t like Viktor had wanted it either.

He worked his jaw, annoyance pulsing through in waves that made him smell like mace. Still upset, he gave a squeaky rumble as Mari stepped into his field of vision and disregarded all of his
warning body language to lift up his chin.

He was prepared to glare xem into oblivion but his eyes widened to comical proportions when he saw the genuinely worried look in xyr gaze.

“Are you ill?” Xe pressed the back of xyr hand to his forehead while touching xyr own.

Viktor smacked the hand away and scrambled to get out of the too gentle touch. It made his skin crawl.

“I’m perfectly fine,” he mumbled, cheeks burning as he fumbled with his suddenly very interesting robes.

Mari’s kindness slipped into a more familiar glower. “Well then, how else could the perfect Viktor Nikiforov fall asleep and forget that we’re expected to perform this year’s wedding dance. You know, the one performed that is performed… I don’t know… every year at the end of Ellaleus and is the biggest most important dance of them all?”

Dragonshit.

Viktor stiffened. The last time he had performed the dance had been privately with Yuuri and that had been over ten years ago. High House a/o matches were harder to find and more quietly celebrated than they had been in the past so it wasn’t like he had seen any recently either. He looked at Mari suddenly feeling unwell for real. Was he really going to have to get on stage and perform a dance that he could barely remember?

Mari most likely spotting the tension in his body unexpectedly released a cloud of soothing pheromones.

“Where is your head,” Viktor?”

He wanted to say 20 odd years into the future but instead he stood there under the teenager’s appraising gaze. Xe looked at him with xyr brows drawn, before shaking xyr head, and stomping over to him.

“Come on, brat,” xe said as xe took his hand and dragged him towards the sliding door. “Otherwise, we’re going to be late.”

Xyr hold was tight but gentle like a big sibling guiding a wayward little one as xe pulled him stumbling and tripping down what felt like miles of sharp, winding turns and dark hallways. They only stopped once they reached a courtyard full of daises and brightly dressed people. The stop, too sudden for Viktor, sent him crashing into the omega. Xe turned but instead of the teasing he usually received from his betrothed, xyr face was a blank wall of duty and public persona as xe guided him to stand in front of xem and whispered,

“Your people are here. You have to go first.”

Viktor’s head snapped up to take a better look at the crowd that was a contrasting mix of soot black and silvered grey hair. Nikiforovs and Katsukis he had to assume from just looks alone. Some stared back without blinking. He shivered and moved his gaze on - they were most likely the grigori and watchers.

Mari nudged him forward towards the edge of the deck they were standing on and pointed to a pair of wooden fabric thronged sandals. Xyr voice was barely above a whisper. “Put your shoes on, Viktor. I can’t go before you.”
Moving on autopilot, he stepped into the sandals and wobbled a few paces forward until his dance training helped him find his balance. He looked back. Mari stood the customary 5 steps behind him. His stomach twisted, disturbed by the sight of the usually feisty omega looking demure and every bit the poster image of the respectful, deferring mate. A part of him wanted to turn back, to pull the omega forward and demand that xe be xyr true self but even if this was a dream, he knew it would be stupid, futile.

High House children were trained too well to ever break protocol when in public.

“Vityusha!”

Viktor spun towards the voice, his heart racing as he searched for its owner. There was only one person in Viktor’s life that cared so little for proper etiquette that he would call Viktor’s pet name during a ceremony…

“Vityusha, come here and stop making your omega crawl behind you,” his grandfather called from his seat next to an elegantly dressed woman. Viktor whipped around to gesture at Mari to hurry up before running up the platform and into the silver haired man’s arms.

“Grandapa,” he cried, rubbing his cheek against a face he hadn’t seen since his grandfather’s death decades ago.

“Ah, my Vityusha,” the man responded with a heart shaped smile, “Don’t you cut quite the figure in your Jih Roh clothing!”

His grandfather’s eyes sparkled electric blue in delight. With a chuckle, he turned with Viktor in his arms towards the woman next to him, who was seated on a cushion embroidered with the Katsuki crest.

“Lady Katsuki, doesn’t my Vitya just look splendid?”

The woman’s scent released gentle plumes of sandalwood and cloves as she shifted to look up. Viktor gasped as the sun caught the wine red highlights of her eyes in the same way they did Yuuri’s. He rarely of thought it, but looking at her now, Viktor could see how the omega was nearly the splitting image of his mother.

She smiled, her lips curving into the same gentle arc that Viktor had witnessed thousands of times on her son.

“The blue and silver suit xem well, Lord Nikiforov,” she answered quietly before she turned her gaze to her child with a knowing look. “Mari, have you been treating Viktor well? His cheeks look a little pink.”

Mari had the good sense to blush as his grandfather burst into explosive laughter and hoisted Viktor up higher. Ignoring all propriety, the Lord Nikiforov rubbed his cheek against his heir’s head until Viktor was thickly scented. “Ah, a little teasing does an alpha good. Puts us in our place while we are young and tamps down on that single mindedness that ruins a good alpha leader. Why my mate- she’s just about the same amount of years older than me than dear Mari here is to Viktor- she used to give me hell any time we’d meet for ceremonies and such.”

“But even so,” cut in a smooth, low voice. Viktor eyes shifted to the dark haired man sitting by Lady Katsuki’s side and holding over her a Jih Roh style parasol, “Jih Roh prides itself on its hospitality.”

Mari shifted nervously under the look the man gave xem. It made Viktor wonder why until xe
“Bepaaa."

Bepa? Wasn’t that for betas? Viktor searched his memory while his eyes roved over the man’s simple black attire that looked out of place amongst the sea of bright colors surrounding him. Discreetly, Viktor scented the air, coming away startled when he caught the faint hint of lavender. He glanced back at the man. The black veil that sat on top of his head rather than on his face sealed the deal.

From his memories, he knew that the Katsuki clan had been opening up under the leadership of the Lady Katsuki, but things like clothing and appearance were always some of the last things to really change. Though the Nikiforovs were less forceful with it (Perhaps because they drowned them…) everything from the man’s deferential posture to his subdued appearance screamed beta.

“Vitya,” his grandfather admonished, “close your mouth and stop staring. You’ve met Lord Katsuki before.”

Even as open minded as he was, the revelation took him by complete surprise. He let out a gasp that he tried to hide as a cough. An omega head and a beta consort? His memory had always been awful but this was one hell of a thing to forget.

He ransacked through his brain for more memories. If he was seeing Lord Katsuki in his dreamscape then he must have met him before…

“Viktor, our turn is coming up.”

An attendant was standing next to Mari, holding their bundle of props in one hand and Mari’s hand in the other. He nodded and wiggled down and out of his grandfather’s hold, his heart doing only a slight twinge as it did so. He had loved the man and even if it was only in a dream, he was glad to see him again.

Because xe had been given implicit permission by his grandfather’s actions, Mari did not wait for him this time and Viktor had to chase after xe as xe climbed down the stairs towards the red and white bedecked stage. Someone caught his sleeve as he made his way and he followed the origin of the hand until he landed on the icy blue eyes of his father.

The older man looked bored and stiff, the bright colors of Ellaleus doing nothing to conceal his true nature.

“Vitya,” his voice was low in an obvious attempt to keep others from hearing, “Remember you are a Nikiforov heir. Do not shame us.”

Viktor was just about to answer his father with a nod when his grandfather stormed down the aisle, ripped his father’s hand from his sleeve, and shooed Viktor along with a gentle push.

“Kolya, how many times do I have to tell you to let that child be? It’s only a little dance. Why are you always getting worked up for nothing?”

Viktor contemplated staying to see his father get berated but his good manners kicked in and demanded that he continue to follow after his betrothed who was waiting for him at the bottom of the stage steps.

The platform was set up under a row of flowering cherry blossom trees. A spring breeze lifted a few petals into the air and even Viktor had to find Mari beautiful as they tangled into xyr long
black hair while xe positioned xemself into the dance’s starting position and drew a circle of pushed out petals with xyr toes.

Viktor still couldn’t remember the piece but he silently hoped that with decades of training and by taking cues from Mari, he would do well enough to wing the steps. Besides, if Viktor was allowed to do the performance at the tender age of 7, there stood a good chance that a dance’s most dangerous element – magic- was very limited or nonexistent.

Magical ability didn’t solidify until around 8 and his affinity wouldn’t develop until he had reached at least 10. He spun his fingers in small circles just to be sure and was pleased and disappointed to see only a few flickers of light come out. The dance must be mostly physical he determined with a little sigh of relief.

The attendant handed Viktor a spear with long ombre blue ribbons attached to it. He grasped it with sweaty paws as Mari snapped open a pair of metal fans and lit the edges on fire.

Viktor’s sense of relief disappeared. There was magic - he looked around to see if anyone was expecting him to do anything but all eyes seemed to be locked on Mari – seeing that, he prayed that the attention would continue to stay off of him.

There was a call and Viktor turned towards it to see Lady Katsuki nod her head. The breathy notes of a flute drifted across the courtyard. It was followed by the sharp twanging of a string instrument, and then the rolling of drums.

Mari moved. Viktor mirrored xyr movements until xe looked at him with a frown. Realizing he must have made a mistake, he froze and didn’t do anything more than hold onto his spear. Mari gave him another confused look before jerking her head to the side to indicate where he should be.

He shuffled awkwardly to where he thought must be the right place only to be pushed into a different spot by an attendant who looked suspiciously like a much younger Minako. Whispers rippled throughout the audience as he was guided into place.

He shook his head to clear it of any doubt or fear. He was Viktor Nikiforov – The Living Legend of Rhurshya. He could do this, had done this -would do this.

He shifted the spear, letting the wisps of ribbon unfurl into an illusion of water. Mari whirled in his direction, xyr fire dancing at the edges of her fans. Unprepared, Viktor stepped back just as the fan passed under his nose and stumbled.

“Viktor,” Mari hissed, eyes wild with surprise and concern, “What are you doing? You’re supposed be spinning the ribbons.”

He grappled to do as xe ordered but in his haste, the spear slipped from his grasp just enough for the edges of its ribbons to catch the tips of Mari’s flames. It licked up the fabric so fast that he hardly had time to blink before half of it was engulfed in fire. He tried to pull water but at his age, only a trickle appeared.

The blaze spread up the pole and without the protection of fire magic or ability, he had to drop the hot metal before it burned his hands. It rolled away, its flaming ribbons setting the stage alight wherever they touched.

No matter how much Mari tried to manipulate it, the creeping inferno only burned brighter, higher, and hotter and it was like hell itself had opened up as the platform became a ring of fire. He heard screams but as he looked up hoping for some adult to extinguish the fire with magic, he saw the
former audience melt away into a sea of endless black.

**WARNING: GORE START**

A spark caught his sleeve. He shrieked and he tried to beat it down but it only grew stronger as it burned through his clothing. With a wail of agony, he fell to the ground writhing as the fire grew and ate up his skin. He screamed and screamed for what felt like forever until a cool hand touched his melting brow. Somehow, he was able to brush his pain aside long enough to look up and wish he hadn’t.

Mari stood over him, her face half burnt off. He screamed again and shrunk back from xyr touch only to be followed by the smoldering apparition. Skin blackened and split by fire, hair whipping around like snakes, xe reach out and snatched him by his robes.

“Viktor.”

He shut his eyes, sobbing as he felt hot liquid drop and sizzle on his face. He didn’t even want to know what it was.

“Viktor.”

His name burbled out of xyr destroyed lips and made him pray to any god that would listen to wake him up and get him out of this hellscape.

“Viktor.”

He smelt burnt meat, singed hair, and anger hotter than any fire he had ever known.

“Viktor…”

This time it was sorrowful, the tone and scent so sharp with omega distress that his alpha forced his eyes back open. Bile climbed up his throat and threatened to spill out as Mari fixed xyr gaze on him with a sole and ruined eye.

“Viktor…”

His heart stopped as the area around xyr mouth cracked and tore as the flames spread further up xyr body. The sorrowful expression never left xyr face even as the skin surrounding it burned and sloughed away. Tears poured down the remnants of xyr face even as xyr eyeballs began to boil. Viktor sat there motionless and sobbing as Mari burned until xe was only bones.

A skeletal hand stretched towards him. He slapped his palm over his mouth to keep himself from screaming. Mari ran xyr fingers down the side of his face in mimicry of the water still dripping down xyr own empty skull.

**WARNING: GORE END**

“How can you protect my brother if you couldn’t even protect me?”

“Vitya.”

Viktor woke up screaming and still trying to brush Mari’s skeletal hand from his face. They were on him - hot, burning to the touch. He slapped at them until they finally, finally went away and then scooted back until he hit the arm of the sofa.
He shrieked as the hands came back, but then he realized they were only warm this time; and, heavily scented with the intention to comfort. The rational side of his brain told him that a skeleton wouldn’t have glands to send out pheromones. But then, he thought with horror, a skeleton shouldn’t have been able to walk, touch him—or cry. He grabbed and tugged at the ha-

“Vitya, are you okay?”

It took him a moment to realize that someone was speaking and even longer to understand that the voice was Yuuri. The knowledge eased the fight or flight response wreaking havoc within him. With shaking, weak hands he reached up wanting to caress where he thought Yuuri’s face might be and touched skin softer than a peach. His pulling shifted to clutching as his hands slid down the omega’s face and drew him by the back of his neck towards Viktor. The alpha drew in deep breaths of the unique scent, its chemical makeup telling his animal brain that he was safe, that he was with his beloved.

He finally opened his eyes to find warm brown ones flitting across his face in worry. They shined so bright that it looked like they were seconds away from tears. Viktor felt so many emotions as he looked at Yuuri and every single one of them was making him a mess.

“Vitya—”

Ignoring his pride as an alpha, he threw himself at the younger mage, knocking the teen onto his back as he buried his face into the omega’s neck. Yuuri’s arms wound around his back to hold him tight as he surprisingly (and somewhat dangerously) craned his neck for Viktor to have better access to the gland there. His hands stroked up and down the older man’s back in a repetitive but soothing motion as he released a light, pleasant scent.

“It’s okay, Vitya. It was just a nightmare.”

Viktor shuddered and held Yuuri tighter. It had been a long time since he had dreamt one so bad. Tendrils of fear still crawled through his mind so he forced himself to focus on Yuuri’s hands and let the movements ground him; pull him away from the horror of his dream. He nuzzled Yuuri’s neck, and continued to take gulping breaths as he willed his heart to slow down and stop trying to beat a hole out of his chest.

He tried to center himself back in reality by focusing on his surroundings. He was in his house. In his living room. On his couch. With Yuuri. They were taking a nap to ease Yuuri through some of the symptoms of preheat… His eyes that had been drifting closed in growing content, snapped back open as he lifted himself up to look at the omega.

“I’m sorry.” Still haunted by the dream, his voice was shaky as he took in the hot, flushed skin of the teen. “You were supposed to be resting.”

He was should be making Yuuri comfortable but here he was stressing the younger man out over a bad dream. They stared at each other before Yuuri drew Viktor’s head back down to rest near his neck. The older mage tried to struggle but the grip the teen had on his nape tightened until Viktor went lax again.

“It’s fine, Vitya,” Yuuri answered as he stroked the back of Viktor’s neck. “No one is invincible—not even you.”

He wanted to deny it. To be perfect for Yuuri and say that as an alpha, he would never fall prey to such silly things. But how could he posture when he was sat there shaking in an omega’s arms? He burrowed his face further into the crook of the youth’s neck, giving into his weakness as he let his
mask fall.

“Is it foolish that I want to be?”

“No,” Yuuri combed his fingers through Viktor’s sweaty hair and pressed a kiss to his forehead. “But, I’m telling you that you don’t have to be.”

This time when Viktor woke up, it was to the creamy and thickened scent of an omega sliding into a full heat. It was still too immature to have the notes of arousal necessary to make his body react so Viktor sunk into the lovely aroma, letting it soothe and loosen his tense muscles. He shifted and Yuuri - still asleep underneath him - let out an incoherent grumble. He laughed a little at how cute it was before he decided it would probably be more comfortable if they switched positions.

He tucked his hands under the sleeping man’s arms and pulled him alongside him until their positions were reversed. Yuuri immediately snuggled in closer and Viktor savored the melody of his little snores.

He ran his hand up the line of Yuuri’s arms. The skin was so warmed with fever that cuddling with Yuuri felt like embracing a human furnace. Viktor eased a bit of ice magic into his fingertips to cool the skin and was rewarded by the omega curling deeper into him with a contented sigh. He continued his motions – up and down, up and down- as he let his mind wander.

Should he go back to sleep? He glanced up at the faint blue light peeping over the edge of the living room window’s blackout curtains. It was still early and they had the rest of the day before they needed to leave for home. He let his head fall back onto the cushions.

He didn’t know why he had dreamt of Mari like that. He hadn’t really thought of xyr since she died, much less of how she died. The bond had made him so ill when it happened that focus had mostly been on keeping him alive. During the year that it took him to recover, no one had said anything of importance to him much less the gruesome details of his fiancé’s death. By now, all that existed were rumors that Viktor knew from the bottom of his heart would be futile to chase.

It was a nightmare, just a regular nightmare he told himself. With the exception of a few people, none of the details matched up to make it a memory and no mage, even one as powerful as he, had ever possessed the ability to premonition.

Yuuri’s scent morphed from creaminess into a more inviting, more cloying spiced fragrance that turned Viktor’s attention away from his morbid thoughts towards the omega. Though it had grown strong enough to tease his alpha senses, it was still hardly enough for someone with his control and level of suppression to be lost to it. He survived those first few weeks before Yuuri learned to wash properly, so he was confident that he would be able to see Yuuri back home without going into a rut. As he breathed the bouquet of pheromones in, his dark musings drifted away, somewhere it into the back of his mind where he hoped they stayed lost forever.

Yuuri shifted and with a groan pushed his face farther into the sensitive skin of Viktor’s neck where the alpha could feel that the younger man was getting hotter. He collected ice across his palm and placed the hand on the teen’s brow, brushing a few strands of sweaty hair away from the large fever patch splayed across the omega’s forehead. His thumb smoothed across the plastic fabric feeling fire despite its supposed cooling properties.

The fever worried Viktor the most. The higher it went, the more likely Yuuri was to lose control. At home in the heavily fortified Sanctum or its drey, this would hardly matter but in his nice, new, and shiny apartment – it would leave it in ruins if he was lucky and obliterate the entire building if he was not.
"Ngghh, Bichya stop it. S'too cold," Yuuri grumbled, pushing away Viktor's hand and hiding his face in his shirt.

Viktor chuckled and rubbed the teen's back until he was purring.

"Yuura, I need to get up."

Yuuri didn't respond so Viktor took it as the omega sleeping and tried to slide out from under him. With octopus like strength and quickness Yuuri's arms slithered around the older man and tightened like a vice.

"Don't go. Stay with me." He mumbled, lips brushing Viktor's collar bone with each word he spoke.

Viktor responded by combing his fingers through his student’s tangled mane and scratching at the base of Yuuri’s skull, a technique that had always eased the teen in his childhood.

"You need a new fever patch, Yuurochka. Yours is worn out. It's just for a moment and then I promise I'll be right back."

Yuuri tilted his head up and cracked one bleary eye open for the alpha. “Are you feeling better?”

For a second, Viktor was confused by the question but then with a deep flush, he remembered his reaction to his dream. Embarrassed and not wanting Yuuri to worry, he tried to shut down the conversation.

“I’m fine.” It wasn’t technically a lie. He did feel okay. He smiled. “I promise.”

“Are you lying to me?” Yuuri pursed his lips. He looked hurt and the expression made Viktor feel slightly queasy.

He cupped Yuuri’s face, inwardly wincing at how hot it was and placed a chaste kiss on the teen’s burning lips. He pulled back, meeting the younger man’s eyes with an honest look of his own. “I’m okay, Yuura. If you don’t believe me, why don’t you check my scent?”

The teen’s eyes glinted red and in a flash of heat and omega, he struck.

“Yuuri!”

He pushed the younger man away from his neck, laughing at his apprentice’s cheekiness. He held Yuuri at bay with a hand over the teen’s face as the youth playfully fought against it. They jostled around onto the couch until Yuuri gave up and flopped onto Viktor with a very Makkachin like huff.

It was followed with very Makkachin like puppy eyes. “Ah Vityaaaa,” he whined, “I’m hot.”

Viktor smiled; he could feel the pout of Yuuri's lips against his neck. “A new fever patch would probably make you feel better.”

Yuuri turned his head to lay his chin right above Viktor’s heart. Their eyes met before the younger blushed and let his slide away. “I want a kiss.”

Viktor raised an eyebrow. The teen’s skin was already flushed so it couldn't go any redder but the fidgeting under his gaze told Viktor that his student got the message. It had been awkward but they had talked about it and they were both learning how to dance and balance each other’s needs.

"I want a kiss… please."
The correct words said, the older man shifted the youth up to grant his wish.

“If you sit up that can be arranged,” he grinned as he leaned down to comply with Yuuri's demand.

As he sunk into the kiss, he was surprised by how easily they had gotten into this level of intimacy. Kisses given as easily as hugs. Hugs given all the time. His mouth was starting to forget that there was a time before he knew the softness of Yuuri's lips.

Yuuri withdrew from the kiss with an even bigger pout. "And a popsicle. I want a popsicle, too."

That request was a little harder to indulge.

The closer Yuuri’s heat drew, the more he seemed to only want to eat popsicles. Viktor didn’t regret starting the practice because it kept the younger mage cool and hydrated during a period when most omegas started to refuse food, but they still had a diet plan that they were supposed to be strictly following. He could only lie to Yakov so much before the old man took a look at a rounding Yuuri and figured things out.

He didn’t know who would get in more trouble but he was pretty sure it would be him.

“Ok, but not one of the double ones. And, this is the last one.”

Yuuri, like most omegas, seemed to be prone to “softness”. Perhaps, it was his body preparing for maturity or the introduction of junk food into the teen's previously traditional life, but pudge had been clinging to the youth a little more tightly than it used to.

"I want a chocolate covered one then."

“No, the fruit ones are better. At least with them, you might gain a few vitamins.”

Yuuri’s pout grew so deep and sad that Viktor’s alpha howled like it was experiencing a tragedy. Viktor sighed unable to stay strong in a fight with such cuteness.

"Fine,” he growled, “but if you haven't lost the extra weight once your heat is done, then you will have to work it off with extra training."

Viktor's compromise earned a hiss for its efforts, not that it would make the coach change his mind. A slightly pudgy Yuuri at home on the lake had been okay. There were no heights or sustained suspensions in the air but in competitive thaumaturgy, things were different. The bar for thaumaturgical excellence was rising like an inferno and it would devour any unsuitable that dare crossed its path. Jumps were getting higher every year and the designs and figures grew more complicated with every season. He could indulge Yuuri every so often but soaring required a certain weight to be done safely at a competitive level. And as he evolved as a maester, Viktor was learning the importance of dealing with the less fun things, too. He would have never have thought it to be so, but sometimes you really did have to be cruel to be kind.

"I mean it, Yuura, I will add an extra set of repetitions to your work out and another kilometer to your run. All these popsicles are going to turn you into a piglet."

"..."

"Yuura?"

Yuuri glared at the floor for long enough that Viktor worried that he might have gone too far and was going to be a victim of Yuuri’s preheat mood. It turned out to be a false alarm when the teen
flung himself back into the couch with a dramatic sigh and cuddled into one of the cushions.

"You're so mean," he whined over the pillow, his expression turning into a heart flipping sulk. "I have the meanest coach alive," he grumbled as Viktor tried very hard (so hard) to keep the adoration out of his eyes and his mouth from curling into a heart.

"I am the meanest," he agreed with a wide grin. He ruffled Yuuri's hair unable to help himself with such a pretty expression staring up at him.

The cushion fell from Yuuri as he batted away at the attack with half coordinated movements that missed their mark most of the time. Viktor eventually gave up when he noticed how red Yuuri's skin was getting and let his fingering drift into petting.

"Is your pre-heat getting worse?"

Yuuri gave Makkachin's canine neediness a run for its money when he curled into Viktor's touch with a whine that shifted into a purr as Viktor lightly scratched at his scalp. He stretched slightly as he rested his hand just under his belly button.

"Just pre-heat cramps," he groaned as his fingers skimmed over the area. "Rub it for me?"

Viktor - all too familiar with the pain of rut cramps during his younger years - winced in sympathy. "When I come back."

He pressed a kiss to Yuuri's patched forehead as a promise. The teen flipped to his stomach as he held out a hand to pet Vicchan who had wandered over for his own cuddles. "When are we going home?"

"Tonight."

Yuuri made a face. "I don't want to go. I like it better here."

He could understand the reluctance. They had packed every single one of Yuuri's favorite blankets but even that probably wouldn't be enough to fight the cold, sigil covered stone walls that made up a drey.

He had only been in one during his first year of presentation ruts and between the hazy memories of iron, pain, and begging, it was not something he would ever want to experience again. He didn't think he had ever met a mage who enjoyed spending their cycle within a drey but they were a necessary evil, the only type of dwelling capable of withstanding the volatile magic of presentation cycles, mage omega heats, and unsuppressed synced pairs.

Viktor held back his sigh. They were leaving late as it was. He couldn't believe that he had let the younger mage's whining win him over.

"It will be the safest place for you when your full heat hits, Yuura. We've talked about this. You promised you'd go without fuss if I left it until as late as possible."

"I hate it. It's cold and always stinks of blood. I want to stay here." He looked up at Viktor with burgundy eyes full of hope.

"That's not how it works," Viktor had to shut the look down before it won and left him with a burned downed apartment, "and you know that."

He softened his gaze. "After the Grand Prix, after your final presentation heat, I promise we'll get
you on suppressants."

"That's another 3 months away..." Yuuri's eyes narrowed in displeasure as he continued to stroke an oblivious Vicchan. Viktor kneeled down and rubbed a hand across the teen's shoulders in apology. The omega purred at the movement and seeing an opportunity, threw Viktor another set of puppy dog eyes as he tried to persuade him again.

"Are you sure I can't stay here? Isn't your shower full of tile? That doesn't burn does it?"

"I can understand the sentiment, Yuura, really I do but there is no way that this apartment could withstand your heat magic. We’d end up sleeping in ashes if I let you stay."

Viktor meant it as a joke but Yuuri stiffened and shrugged off Viktor's hands. His face in a clear pout, he turned his back to the older man.

"I said I was sorry." He grumbled from the back of the couch, "and I said I'd repay you once I won my first competition."

Viktor ran a hand through the messy black strands tumbling down Yuuri's back. It was hardly about the Vitalyan leather shoes that Yuuri had accidentally incinerated the other day, and more about how one harsh word from Viktor had caused the omega to lose control enough to turn magic resistant shoes into charcoal.

"My shoes aren't the problem, Yuurochka. It's about what will keep you safe and ultimately happy."

He twisted an ebony lock around his finger and kissed it. "Besides what are a thousand pairs of shoes compared to having my sunshine?"

The omega's ears went pink at the nickname but his face still remained turned towards the back of the couch. It was hilarious that for however much the younger mage wanted to push their relationship ahead, Viktor’s more syrupy terms of endearment always flustered him.

"I want my popsicle."

Spoiled Yuuri was one of Viktor's favorite Yuuris and he treasured the moments when this personality trait appeared because catering to it made his alpha completely euphoric.

"Coming right up, moonbeam."

"Stop it!"

Viktor laughed to himself and then pressed a kiss to the crown of the omega's head before he got up to see about heat patches and popsicles.

Yuuri was in an absolute state by the time they reached Nikiforov lands. Through some miracle, they managed to make it to the estate just as the first wave of Yuuri’s heat struck, but as they pulled into the long driveway that led to the main manor, Viktor vowed to never again leave any future heat trips until the last minute.

Relief could hardly describe the feelings he felt when they arrived at the main coach gate. The trip had been pure hell. The seats had caught fire several times and no matter how many changes of clothes Viktor offered (including his own), they were soon sweated through or ruined by the pink hued stains of heat milk. Forcing water down Yuuri’s throat was an even bigger challenge, with the
omega fighting him at every single attempt and biting him the one time he became too insistent.

The second their means of transportation stopped, he threw open his door and took a deep inhale of air that didn’t smell of vomit, fire, or heat-blown omega.

A small noise came from the vehicle interrupting his revelry and redirecting his attention back to his travel companion.

“Yuura, we're here,” he crooned as he turned back to the teen. Yuuri barely responded.

He tried tapping the omega's face but all he received was a half aware moan. Alarmed, he scrambled out of the car and searched his surroundings for a servant.

“You!” He shouted at the footman preparing to attend to their arrival. “Get a Sanctum guard now!”

Viktor only watched long enough to see the man race inside of the great house before turning to the vehicle and climbing back in beside the younger mage.

"Vitya?" Yuuri sounded weak, delirious. He was probably on the very cusp of falling into a heat haze. "C-can't hold it in."

From the car window, Viktor watched as two porters rushed to put out the fire that erupted amongst the nearby topiary. He in turn rushed to soothe Yuuri in the hopes that no other architecture might suffer.

"I'm here, Yuura,” he said while stroking the younger man’s sweaty hair out of his face. “Just wait a little while longer. Help is coming."

The teen pushed his hand away and then clutched at his belly as he threw up on the floor. Viktor pulled him away from the mess as soon he was done, silently thanking their Gracious Lady for blessing him with enough money to be able to replace the rental. Yuuri leaned back into his arms letting out a whimper that broke down to a sob as his head lolled to the side.

"Huuuuuurts." He seized up and keened; the sound inhuman.

It made Viktors fangs protract and he had to fight the voice in his head that screamed he could end his beloved’s suffering with just a few bites.

His struggle ended the minute the backseat burst into flames. He pulled a handful of water to extinguish it and then hurried to pull Yuuri out.

Where were the guards?

Another set of nearby bushes met their fiery end while he waited making him realize that he couldn’t stay any longer. They would be better off in the Sanctum where the strong blood spells warded off most harmful magic. Adjusting Yuuri into his arms and he prayed that the omega could hold onto his control long enough to see them to the Sanctum. Once he was sure his grip was secure, he took off running at a speed that made everything a blur and managed to run a third of the way to his destination before he was met by Takeshi in the gardens.

The beta was red faced and panting. “I came as soon as I could, milord. The watch was in the middle of changing and there was some confusion.” He held out his hand. “If you prefer, I can take him now.”

Viktor's lips curled into a snarl at the suggestion, his alpha rudely letting him know that it would
not allow Takeshi to carry his heat struck omega. His inner self seemed to recognize and understand the rising heat in Yuuri even through the thick veil of suppressants, and it urged Viktor to stake out his claim against any potential threats.

“H-help me shift him onto my back,” he managed between the loud, beastly vocalizations that made the guard bare his throat in submission.” I don't think my alpha will let you do anything else.”

Takeshi nodded and without another word handled Yuuri just long enough to swing his limp body from his lord’s arms to the man’s back.

Yuuri moaned as he was settled into the new position. When Takeshi gave him the sign that all was safe, Viktor stood back up to full height and broke into run, hoping that the jostling didn't make the younger man sick enough to vomit.

He headed for his mother's bower. It was the nearest room and with the way Yuuri was trembling so fitfully against his back, the sooner they had the teen somewhere private, the better. His dam met him at the inner doors, a frenzy of maternal concern and omega instincts. She paused just long enough to brush the hair out of Yuuri's face, before snapping,

"He is nearly heat sick, Viktor. Why have you left things so late?"

The excuse was already sitting on his tongue and he fired it off without breaking stride.

"We came as soon as we could, Mama. It's been very busy for us at the atelier lately because we've only got a few more weeks until the new season starts."

Viktor would have thought that his dam would relax with her foster son back in her care, but she only grew more agitated with every step they took.

"He should not even be out there,” she seethed as she slowed to peel the fever patch off of Yuuri’s forehead. “What is this contraption?”

She waved it in the air like it was a dirty pair of lingerie. Then, she sniffed the air and must have caught a whiff of the teen’s earlier vomit.

“What did you do to him, Viktor Nikolayevich? Has his body has already started to void? Did you even give the poor thing a rest break?”

The questions were asked so rapidly that he didn’t even have time to answer. His mother came back up to his side, her face red with anger and hissed,

"I hope to Araak’s sweet heavens that you have not given that child any solid food.”

Viktor stopped and stared at his mother in horror. Even though his body strained under the weight and movements of Yuuri, he gawked at her as his conscience processed the information. The guide books mentioned light meals but hardly went into any detail. He had been worried because Yuuri was mostly living off of popsicles, water, and the occasional fruit for the last few days; so of course, he thought he was doing right when he managed to get the stubborn omega to eat some bread and cheese.

Had that been when the vomiting started? He tried to think back through the mess that had been the last three days…

His dam gaped at him and her scent turned spicy enough for him to feel the heat on his tongue.
"Viktor, how could you? It is going to wreak havoc on his body as the magic forces it out!"

"T-the books said light food was okay," he stuttered, trying not to let the guilt get the best of him.

“For you as an alpha,” she hissed back. “You fools practically run on empty during your rut so of course, food is not an issue, but, it is the opposite for an omega; their magic is filling them up.”

Oh.

He shook himself, stored the crucial information in his memory banks, and proceeded to keep walking. Right now, stressing over his mistake and wallowing wouldn't help Yuuri.

“Did you drink any of his blood? Your fangs are out.”

The question blindsided him, shocking him so much that he nearly dropped his charge. His mother rushed to open the doors to her room and ushered the pair in. His face heated up as he stammered out,

“M-mama, I'm not sure Yuuri would like us to talk about him like this when he is so out of it.”

Viktor set Yuuri down on one of the chaises in the sitting room figuring that it would be much easier to help the omega from there than it would be from within the depths of the room’s nest. His mother gave him of slight look approval for the decision before pushing him aside so that she could properly access her ward. She unbuttoned the soft linen shirt and gently eased off his knitted tank with a look of barely concealed disgust.

"He should have stayed here like a proper omega. Look at these bruises." She held a slightly mottled arm at Viktor’s line of sight. He vaguely remembered Yuuri using it to block a whip of backlash after an incorrect positioning but he also could have sworn he told Yuuri to put ointment on it.

Minako broke his chain of thoughts by slamming the door open as she rushed in with a basin of ice water. His mother continued grumbling as she stripped her foster son down to his shorts and socks. She gasped at the large blue bruise covering one side of the teen’s hip before whipping around to her son and pointing at the offense with a finger shaking with barely concealed rage.

“What is this, Viktor Nikolayevich? He never received any such marks here. What are you doing to him at that place?” She accused, her eyes so narrow that they resembled shards of sapphire.

Viktor winced recognizing the bloom as the result of nasty fall the week before. It was supposed to be treated with ointment too. He ran a hand through his hair knowing that whatever he said would be too little to assuage his keyed up dam.

"Mama, it was from soaring...,” he tried to explain. “He's learning new techniques and sometimes he falls or sometimes there is a magical backlash. It's par for the course for a thaumaturge. You know I would never let anything serious hurt him.”

"He should have stayed here!” His mother barked as she turned back to undressing Yuuri. "How? How can a few tricks on some foreign aether be worth all this? Would it not be better for him to be home, here safe and sound in the Sanctum? He is young but maybe if you bonded with him, spoke to him, he would forget all this thaumaturge nonsense...” His mother trailed off with hope.

Viktor growled. "Mama, this is what he wanted."

Always the wise one, Minako stepped in to redirect her mistress’s passion back to their heat
stricken charge by pressing a wet cloth into his mother's hand. "Milady, we should bring his fever down so the baths won't shock his system."

The Lady Nikiforova tutted as she removed her ward’s trousers and socks and wiped a wet cloth across the perspiration dripping down his chest.

"Look at all this sweat. You are soaking, Yuura." She dunked the cloth into the ice water and dabbed it at his sweaty brow. The omega leaned into it with a whimper. "Minako, are all the baths ready?"

The attendant paused from her task of wiping down Yuuri’s legs. "Yes milady. I’ve also prepared the salves and poultices needed for during his heat."

Yuuri roused just enough to give a weak, kitten like cry. The sound resonated deep within Viktor and it took nearly all his willpower to not knock the two women aside and drag Yuuri back into his arms where his alpha argued the omega would be safest.

His mother let out a croon and a puff of calming pheromone as she stroked her adopted child’s cheek.

"Yuura, can you hear me? We are going to remove your clothing so that you can go into the purification bath at once. Your magic has built up so fast that we do not have much time to cool you down first."

Yuuri moaned. “Hurts…”

"Oh, I know, sweetness. It is absolutely awful, isn’t it?" She patted at the sweat dripping off his chin and dunked her rag back in the water."Once some of the blood has been drained out of you, I promise you that you shall feel much better."

She ran the cloth across his brow again as she turned to Minako "Have the lancets and cups been set out? We will have to start as soon as he has had his bath."

The governess shook her head. "I will go have the staff prepare them now" she started to walk then returned to whisper in her lady’s ear."What should be done about the blood?"

"It has not been done yet, has it?" His mother pursed her lips, displeasure clear in the set of her mouth. Viktor’s gut twisted into knots as his brain pieced the meaning of her words together. Surely, it was too late to perform the Blessing of First Blood. This was Yuuri’s third cycle. Doing it now just wouldn’t make sense unless you did it for tradition’s sake…

Minako looked at Viktor, every inch of her stiff posture screaming discomfort as she shook her head again. “No.”

His mother paused from her task to risk a look at her son, too. "Then, he will have to bless Yuuri’s heatblood. Call the the grigori."

He stood under their dual gazes with his stomach twisting enough to make him want to vomit. Pushing back the nausea, he cursed his family and its obsession with rituals and tradition. Memories of the alpha in the alleyway started to flood his mind and his breath came quicker as he felt his own blood drain from his face.

He would have to drink Yuuri’s blood, actually have it in his mouth, on his tongue, in his veins when Yuuri’s magic was at its highest most intoxicating level.
Viktoria lowered her eyes back to Yuuri's feverish form and used her proven ace. “It will make Yuuri's heat a little easier. You know how painful the presentation cycles can be.”

Of course, he knew how painful they could be. How many cycles had he spent scratching and biting at himself so that he could feed the hunger that seemed to gnaw on his very soul. As he felt the weight of the two omega’s gazes, Viktor went to war with himself. He knew what he supposed to do which was to drink Yuuri’s blood and give him a Blessing of his own blood like any normal alpha might do. But… he also wanted to say no, to run away from this duty because he was afraid of the shape its aftermath might take. What if he couldn’t resist? What if it broke all of his carefully hidden control?

He didn’t want Yuuri to suffer but he didn’t want to become that monster in the alleyway either.

"Mama, I -,” he began, his voice full of denial and hesitation because the scared part of him always seemed to speak first.

His mother’s head snapped back up to him as she stood to her full height, his anxiety made her look vicious, menacing as she encroached into his space. Suddenly, he was back to the place he was in nearly a year ago with her eyes cold as permafrost and icicles sprouting around the hand snatching down his chin.

“You don’t get a say in this, Viktor,” She hissed, her breath coming out as a frosted gale as it swept over her son’s face. “You may be Lord Nikiforov but there are some traditions that need to be upheld. If even Yuura at 18 understands his duty, why can’t you at 28?”

He tried to straighten, to pull his face from her grasp so he could at least speak to her with some dignity but he was struggling. Her ice magic held him fast and for a second, as her eyes flashed impossibly ice blue; he had a glimpse into the depths of proprium that ran snowflakes throughout the room. As an alpha he was like a trickle compared to the waterfall that ran through her. He thought back to Yuuri’s drop and how it had nearly killed him.

Omegas were truly a terrifying lot.

“Are you still afraid? Even after all these years?”

He swallowed instead of answering because they both knew the response was yes.

His mother’s eyes had darkened in their blueness to something only found in the deepest parts of the ocean. He could read her look about as well as one could see through a sheet of clouded ice. She tsked as she addressed him.

“As usual, you have your head stuck in the past. Will you make him suffer 10 years for this, too?”

Unfair. Viktor thought her words cruel and so unwarranted that let her know so through a growl. His dam abandoned her anger and allowed her hand to warm up enough for Viktor to pull his face away without ripping skin. Water dripped from his chin but he brushed it away absentmindedly as his mother brushed his bangs back to look into his face.

“You will never be that alpha, Vitya.”

He closed his eyes as the words banished the annoyance and brought his previous set of emotions back. He knew. He knew but that knowledge did not protect his mind or his heart from all the what ifs.

“You will drink his blood.”
He felt dizzy as he tried to grasp control of the situation. His mother wasn’t supposed to be able to dictate his life like this anymore. “Mama, I am the lord of this household.”

“You will give him the Blessing,” she continued as if he had never said a word.”If you are any kind of decent alpha, you will see to his comfort.”

He was reluctant not cruel. And even though, he knew his mother was partially right, a part of him was angry (but not at Yuuri) that he had to ignore a part of himself just so that he lived up to everyone else’s expectations. It left a foul taste in his mouth and tightened his jaw and stomach.

“Vitya,” she pressed as the atmosphere turned volatile, “you must see the bigger picture here. You need his blood in order for your cycles to sync. Do you not want to make things easier for Yuuri? For yourself? Surely, your ruts alone must be painful and full of hunger?”

Warring against the urge to snort, he debated on whether or not to tell her that he was on suppressants and that he planned to put Yuuri on suppressants the moment his last presentation heat finished. While the blood might fortify him, with the suppressants taking care of the baseline of his alpha need, the ichors would hardly worth more than a tonic and would certainly not turn them into a breeding pair.

“Oma.”

They both turned Yuuri as his voice broke through the tension in the air.

“If he doesn’t want to do it…,” the younger man sobbed and Viktor selfishly hoped that it was because of his heat pain rather than his alpha’s reluctance, “t-then d-don’t make him do it.”

Yuuri’s unfocused brown wandered around the room until they found Viktor’s. He gave a tired - and not nearly as reassuring as it should have been - smile. “W-we move at our own pace, right Vitya?”

Anud’s Hells. Just when he felt that he couldn’t feel any guiltier, Yuuri’s interruption made him feel lower than a dog. His heart twisted as he watched as the omega fall back into his feverish state after coming to his rescue. It reminded him of how much Yuuri had comforted him in the aftermath of his nightmare. Of how even though he was suffering, he was still saw to the older man’s needs just like he was doing now.

Viktor couldn’t breathe as his heart was swelled up enough to burst. If their positions were reversed, would Yuuri drink his blood without question? His inner self growled that the answer was yes. He stepped towards his betrothed, his mind emptying the room of everyone except for the two of them.

‘Wasn’t he Yuuri’s coach?’ His mind reminded him. ‘Didn’t that mean sometimes doing unpleasant things?’

Yuuri didn’t respond as he grasped a clammy hand but Viktor still pulled it to his mouth and peppered it with kisses.

“I’ll do it,” he whispered suddenly remembering that there were others there with them.

“I will call for the grigori. Minako-”

“No.”

He didn’t have to look at her to know she was displeased. He could feel it in the chill in the air.
“This will not make them happy, Viktor. You have already disregarded them once before.”

He brushed a sweaty lock from Yuuri’s face before he stood up and faced his dam. If he couldn’t control whether he drank Yuuri’s blood, he would control how he drank it. For his own sake, he wanted it to be quiet and private. The prying, nearly unblinking eyes of the grigori would not give him that.

“I don’t care. They are not the Lord Nikiforov. I am. If they have any grievances, tell them to take it up with me.”

The next 24 hours went by in a mix of dread and anticipation. Although, Viktor knew from books and tutoring what an omega heat was supposed to be like, he was not around for Yuuri’s first heat and could not stay long enough for his second heat to know when to expect the omega’s heatblood. He had thought that he might be allowed to be by Yuuri’s side to perform the task but once his mother and Minako had the younger man undressed; they had kicked Viktor out of the Sanctum and banished him to the main house.

He would be lying if he said it didn’t annoy him a little, though he was quick to blame the feelings on his alpha. The one time he stayed and agreed to drink his future mate’s blood and he was being treated like a nuisance. He coped with it by moping about the house and begging updates any of Sanctum servants that happened to cross his path.

His moping was not allowed to last for long. Once word spread that the new Lord Nikiforov would be staying at the manor for a couple of days, he found himself inundated with all the estate management duties that had gone neglected in the wake of his father’s death.

It proved to be dull, specific work - just the right combination for him to divert his mind from brooding over the progression of Yuuri’s heat and his inevitable role with it. The time was going as pleasantly as it could have until a knock sounded on the door.

He looked at the closed door with a furrowed brow. Though he always admonished Yuuri for it, he chewed on his lip as his thoughts started to race at what the sound could mean. His anxiety got worse as the knocking continued and grew more insistent, and by the time he got to the door, he was so ruffled that he wrenched it open with enough force for it to bang against the wall as it swung to the side.

“Come in,” he cried, as it opened expecting to see a Sanctum servant holding precious cargo.

He was answered by the wide eyed stare of a short, silver haired man who blinked up at him with Plisetsky colored eyes. The stranger leaned to one side and revealed a silver belt that glinted in the sunlight streaming through the corridors.

“Lord Nikiforov?”

Viktor stood silent for a second, trying to regain his composure and calm his racing mind. Though he knew they were always about, he hadn’t been expecting to see any grigori after his order that he be left alone to provide Yuuri’s Blessing.

“Yes,” he answered, keeping his voice steady because even though the man’s appearance had thrown him off guard, a lord should be at ease in the presence of his advisors. “Is everything alright?”

The watcher frowned. “Well, I believe so. Why is something the matter?” Viktor hated how the man’s gaze switched from mild confusion to an intense hunger the instant he realized that
something might be wrong. "Is there something that needs to be witnessed?"

He did his best to close off all the expression in his face and shut down any tension in his body. He needed to become something that girgori’s sharp eyes couldn’t read.

“No,” he said, turning slightly away from the intense, viridescent stare that made him want to take Yuuri and to run all the way back to Ost Pyotrsborg, “Nothing at all.”

“May I come in?”

Viktor’s first instinct was to say no. He had given an order as Lord Nikiforov and for all purposes it should have been followed. Allowing the man in would send the message that it was okay to defy him - that it was okay to defy the Head Alpha of the family.

As if sensing his reluctance, the grigori made himself smaller, unassuming. “It will only be for a moment, milord. I only want to greet the Lord Nikiforov after missing him at the former lord’s send off.”

Against his better judgment, he allowed the man in. While he didn’t want them to be a part of his ceremony, he didn’t hold too much vendetta against them other than they were sometimes an uncomfortable presence and an inconvenience that all Lord Nikiforovs had to deal with.

“You may come in,” he answered as he turned from the door back to his desk, “but you must leave soon as I am expecting a guest.”

He was glad his desk was large because it put space between them without Viktor being overtly rude. He sat and with good breeding overriding his instincts for danger, raised a hand towards one of the chairs placed across from him and extended an invitation that not a single part of him wanted the watcher to accept. “Please have a seat, Grigori…?”

He played the same game that he had used with Evgenij Avgustinovich with much of the same results.

The way the man frowned made him want to laugh out loud but instead he turned his smile benevolent until it was sickly sweet like spoonful of honey.

He continued to keep his facial features pleasant but indecipherable as the man not only took a seat but stretched across the desk to pour himself a glass of water from a decanter. Suppressing a groan, he watched as his unwanted guest settled into back of the chair with a sigh that signaled to Viktor that he had lied and that this would indeed be a long conversation.

“I, Grigori Artem Maximovich, watch thee so that I may give account. Let my work be done in joy.” the man said proudly with all the pomp of a being who wanted to be important but really wasn’t.

Trying to distract himself from the other man’s heavy, expectant stare, Viktor reached for a stack of deeds that he had been previously reviewing. A polite and obviously fake cough startled him from the task.

“Milord,” the man answered, the air only slightly souring when Viktor gave him an empty look, “The greeting?”

Despite his efforts, the young lord’s cheeks grew warm as he stumbled over the words. “Oh yes… um… yes. My apologies… I will give you no grief, Grigori Artem Maximovich. May you watch my days until the end.”
The scent lifted as his visitor relaxed into a smile. “Your ring, Lord Nikiforov?”

Viktor winced over yet another slip in protocol. By the end of the night, he was sure that the grigori would be well aware of this meeting’s awkwardness. He held out his hand all while berating himself for losing focus.

Artem’s lips were warmer than Evgenij’s had been, but the touch still made the lord pull his hand away as quickly as possible. He caught himself before he absentmindedly tried to rub the kiss away.

“The Lord Nikiforov seems distracted.” His guest commented as he sat back up in his chair.

“It is nothing.”

The grigori stared at him, no doubt memorizing some aspect of this moment for later use or manipulation. It felt invasive and made his hackles rise.

“You have greeted me.” he reminded the man, hoping to shoo him away now that formalities had been made. “Surely, whatever else you need could be attended to by a servant? As I have said, I am expecting someone.”

In response to his question, his guest pushed his hand into one of his billowing sleeves and pulled out a tiny vial of red liquid. Without ceremony, he placed it on the desk right before Viktor and then rummaged through his clothing to place a second one right next to it.

“What is it this?”

Though the bottles were stopped with a cork, the smallest bit of scent – just a hint of cream, cloves and chamomile - did escape and made the alpha lord stiffen as all his senses jumped to high alert. Hunger that he thought he had under an iron wrought control threatened to overtake his rational side. His fangs shifted down with a loud click and he could feel the magic dancing in his eyes and at his fingertips as his mind lost its battle with the blood lust.

He pushed his tongue against his incisors, forcing them back up so he could speak without looking like an unrestrained animal.

“Is that…How did you get that?” He swallowed unable to continue as his mouth filled with saliva.

“Omega Yuuri’s heatblood?” The grigori chuckled, uncaring of the fact that his fangs stood on full display. “It is lovely, isn’t it?”

He pushed the vials closer and sat back with a pleased grin as the younger man’s eyes widened in surprise (but mostly panic). “It is the first blood of Omega Yuuri’s letting. I have been instructed by my betters to give it to you.”

Horror and anger replaced Viktor’s hunger as the words sank in. Alarm bells went off in his head only to be lost under the stress of trying to keep calm. He tried his best to keep the emotion out of his face and scent but unbeknownst to him, as he tried to regain his equilibrium, his fingers clutched so hard to the edge of his desk that his nails gouged into the hard oak wood.

“I said no grigori.” A dozen questions ran through his mind but namely what happened to the servant that his mother would have given the blood to. Unless, his mother was in on this…

“Is something the matter, Lord Nikiforov?” Artem’s eyes grew keen as he asked the question, telling Viktor that whatever he was doing was failing him. The man was drinking up his
apprehension as if it were kvas on a hot day.

He wanted to scream yes, to dash the bottles into the garbage and away from his hungry, waiting mouth. He wanted to smash the glass vials into the smug face sitting across from him but he had never heard of any Lord Nikiforov physically attacking a grigori before. His alpha reared up in reaction to his thoughts and shrieked at him that no blood from his omega should be thus wasted.

Viktor held a sleeve up to his nose, hoping that the fabric might give him enough reprieve to think on his next actions. If even just smelling the blood left him in this much turmoil, what would actually drinking it do? Would he always want it – need it – like his father? Would he attack Yuuri for it like that monster in the alleyway?"

“Lord Nikiforov?” A hand waved in front of his face making him jolt back into the fact that he was in the middle of an interaction. He cursed himself for the mini breakdown. Any crack in his demeanor could become grigori ammunition.

“My lord, will you not drink?”

Viktor ripped his gaze from the bottles and directed his eyes towards the much safer greenery lying outside of the study’s bay windows.

“I will. Later…and in private,” He murmured, adopting what he hoped came off as a cool and detached tone.

His guest tsked and rose to pick up a bottle and shake it until the sound and scent gobbled up all of Viktor’s attention.

“It seems milord is still affected by the attack he witnessed when he was young.” It was said derisively like the very notion of an alpha being troubled by anything was a great big joke. “Does he still have to be forced to drink blood?”

Having his trauma ripped apart so openly and mockingly was like having his soul torn wide and put on display for the world to see. He felt raw and strangely vulnerable as he scrambled to put back on his Nikiforov mask.

“Or perhaps, I just wish to do things in private,” he responded, feeling his mind slip away and the safety of media veneer click into place. He gave a little false laugh. “The new generation is frivolous like that.”

He could tell that Artem did not buy his act by the way he smirked back. “Some things must be watched, milord. It is tradition.”

The beginnings of a growl erupted as his composure slipped. “Am I not the lord? Who are you to tell me what to do?”

The man held his hands up in a parody of making peace. “It is true that I cannot tell, milord, what to do …but as council for the good of the family, I can make suggestions.”

Another snarl threatened the air. Viktor willed himself to cool down. He was not the type of person to be so riled up by just a conversation.

“Forgive me. The bond is still settling in.” he lied as he covered another rumble with a cough. He reached for the decanter, poured himself a glass of water, and downed it all in one go.

“It is alright,” the grigori nodded graciously, accepting the excuse as a valid apology. “Bonds take
time and yours has been made more difficult by the former lord’s choice to pair you with someone younger.”

Viktor didn’t really believe in the old wives’ tale that a younger mate ruined an alpha leader’s instincts but he played along.

“It is not so bad,” he gave a small smile as he filled his glass and offered to refill his guest’s glass too.”Yuuri is quite cute.”

“Really?” Artem’s eyes darkened into the color of forest green as he took the offered glass. He set it down and leaned forward, his face taking on an expression hungrier than a wolf in midwinter. “But isn’t that the problem? A creature that is immature and in need of protection requires a lot of attention – attention that a good Head Alpha cannot and should not always give.”

The grigori sat even more forward, obviously eager for his reaction. The younger mage decided that he wouldn’t give the watcher the satisfaction. He kept his voice sweet like syrup as he took a drink and fixed a narrowed gaze at the man who was now starting to feel more like of a dangerous intruder than a pesky annoyance.

“Are you trying to say something, Grigori Artem?” His tone was pleasant but the addition of the title would be enough to let his visitor know he was displeased.

Artem’s keen look disappeared as he waved a hand in front of him with a chortle. “The new Lord Nikiforov seems to greatly resemble his grandapa in his abruptness.”His look grew somber but was still colored with a hue of amusement. “Your year is not even up. We grigori cannot judge you until your official reign starts.”

He chuckled again. This time the smile was sharp and all knowing. “But we are displeased at what we are seeing. Milord is so young and already he is taking such unorthodox actions. The removal of the omega consort from the Sanctum without permission or consultation and now the banishment from the Blessing of First Blood…That the lord should think so lowly of us has given us much grief even though the young Lord Nikiforov has greeted us that he would do no such thing.”

“The latter grievance was my desire but the former was Yuuri’s enticement wish. As his Tempter and his alpha was I not in my right to grant it?” He took a sip of water and dared the other man to challenge him.

“It was,” the watcher conceded,” but milord must know that these actions have caused many in House Nikiforov concern. A leader who does not listen to his friends causes the family concern. Thaumaturgy is a dangerous sport and several grigori have expressed their worries that an injury might affect Omega Yuuri’s ability to have heirs. Your own mother has only bore you as an heir. Such low reserves leave House Nikiforov in a tenuous place. No one wishes to be like the Katsukis who must find their leaders from lower bred side stock.”

“It will not come to that but if in the off chance that it does, how convenient for House Nikiforov that I also possess a womb.”

He could tell from the slight widening of Artem’s eyes that he had caught the other man off guard. Good.

“Surely, the Lord Nikiforov cannot mean…”

It wasn’t that alphas couldn’t but more that they didn’t. A pregnancy was hard for them with their
lower levels of proprium.

“An alpha pregnancy would only bear this house an omega or a beta.” The man shuddered as he said it. “They are the only types that could survive without a constant supply of energy.”

Viktor smiled. Not that it mattered but he was sure that if he asked for it, Yuuri would give him enough proprium to carry an alpha. “If House Nikiforov wants heirs then surely they will take them any way and any how they come.”

He sat back and swirled the water in his glass, watching it whirl around with more interest than he wanted to give his current conversation. His gaze wandered back to the windows, this time to white buildings of the Sanctum. He wondered if Yuuri was alright. Other than the blood in front of him, no other news had come about the omega’s heat.

Artem cleared his throat to catch Viktor’s attention. The pregnancy comment must have really rattled him because Viktor could see patches of pink on his pale cheeks.

“Well…” he said with a bit of difficulty, “I am sure they will be strong heirs if the scent of Omega Yuuri’s blood is any indication. I can only pray that they will take after the Nikiforov strength and beauty.”

Viktor’s smile turned harsh as he bared just the edges of his incisors in warning.

“What are you saying, Grigori Artem? Don’t you know that my Yuuri is perhaps the most beautiful creature on this good Eorthe? I should be so lucky if my heirs were to be gifted with his features for I find them far prettier than my own ash blonde hair and ice blue eyes. It is his exquisite blood that makes me certain that any children that may result from our union will be gorgeous – regardless of if they possess the Nikiforov traits or not.”

He personally hoped that all of his children came out the womb with dark hair, dark eyes, and spitting fire but he was reaching his limit. The disrespect for his order, sexism, and now the racism were getting to be too much. He needed to end this visit before someone – namely Artem – lost a limb.

“Now, though I have tried to be polite, I am afraid that I am very busy. There is much to be done in the absence of my father.”

The grigori looked surprised to be asked to leave.

“Yes, yes, of course.”

He bumbled about, fixing his robes as he stood. He reached for the vials but Viktor blocked his hand.

“You may leave these here. The grigori may be rest assured that I will give my Yuuri the Blessing and the scenting cloth.”

The man’s green eyes twinkled as he shrugged off Viktor’s hand and plucked up one of the vials. “Now, now, Lord Nikiforov that just won’t do,” he ripped the cork off, “and you know this.”

Yuuri’s personal scent flooded the air and besieged all of his senses. This was Yuuri at his purest essence. The suppressant was able to tame his desire but not his hunger as his body readily accepted its biological need. He stood up with a growl as the watcher inhaled the scent with a dreamy sigh.
“His blood is truly lovely.”

“Grigori…what are you doing?” he warned, holding back every desire to smash his fist through the man’s face for having the audacity to get scent drunk off of his omega’s blood. His words were barely intelligible, spit through his lengthening fangs.

“As I have said before, there are things that must be witnessed.” Artem smirked though it was lost in the stupefying effect that strong heatblood had on alphas. “Did you think I forgot what I was sent here for?”

He tipped the vial towards Viktor uncaring as a small bit spilled out onto the office’s wooden floor. The splashing sound it made might as well have been thunder for how savagely it made Viktor’s alpha react. The room shook as he let out a growl so vicious and laden with magic that it set nearly everything including Artem’s arm in a fine covering of ice. He snatched the vial from the man with a roar.

The older mage stood before him composed with a look of amusement painted across his face. “Come now, milord, this behavior is hardly befitting for the Lord Nikiforov. The grigori are milord’s friends after all.”

Biting his thumb, he flicked his hand towards the other vial and shattered it in one blow. “Now, please drink the blood and let me take witness of your Blessing.”

The explosion of glass and blood splattered across Viktor’s face, and unable to help himself against his bloodlust, he licked away the crimson that dripped across his lips.

It was like dipping into the sweetest sin. Before he knew it, he was licking up his hand and arm and into all the little corners where red splotches rested. He panted and looked wild as he realized he was still holding the other bottle.

“Drink it, milord.” Artem urged and try as he might, Viktor could not ignore him.

He took the vial like a shot, downing it in one gulp. Magic exploded through and out of him as the sweet ichors slipped down his throat. It was like water after being lost in a desert. It was like land after being adrift at sea. A part of him slipped quietly into place at the taste of Yuuri’s blood and he was not surprised to see the blue lights of blessing glowing at his fingertips.

The grigori drew out a cloth, pure white- virginal. Viktor vaguely recognized it as the scenting cloth used during a heat or rut to soothe the mateless during their cycle. “Please say the words, milord.”

He meant to snatch it from the man and tell him to begone but blood drunk (because Yuuri was potent. No other omega had ever tasted like this.) and still reeling from the surge in power, he barely managed to snag the outstretched square of cloth much less scream anything coherent.

“Milord, the words.”

He staggered away, the power nearly painful as it pushed under his skin. Lady Katsuki was powerful but who the hell had the omega’s sire been to gift their child with this level of magic. No wonder soaring came so easily to the younger mage. His mother’s proprium seemed like drop in a bucket compared to this ocean that electrified through his veins.

He continued to stumble his way towards the closet. He would have his privacy one way or the other. The overflow of magic leaked out of him like an omega as ice spikes burst out of his arms as he opened the door. He fell into its depths with a sigh and even though it was a struggle to find
enough humanity to convey the words, he managed a very mangled, “get out” in Artem’s direction.

The man ignored him and shuffled closer, pulling the cloth from Viktor’s fumbling hands and kneeling before him with it held above his head in the perfect position of how it was done during the ceremony. Viktor let out a dark, drunk laugh as he realized that the watcher thought he would perform the rest of the ritual without a fight.

“Thy flesh is the true food. Thy blood the true drink.”

The words came out ugly and slurred, a perfect image of the emotions swimming within him at the moment. The material was cool, soothing the blistering power built painfully under Viktor’s skin the moment he touched it again. His magic flowed out and over the nearly invisible embroidery stitched strands of Nikiforov hair and through his haze, his instincts guided him enough to bite his own mouth and wait for the blood to pool and mix with Yuuri’s.

He grasped the cloth and brought it to his lips to leave a single blood-stained kiss.

“Milk and honey are just under my tongue. Let me kiss them with the kisses of my mouth: for this blood is better than wine. Let this mark be what sends them to the fields of Janham. Let this mark be what gives them rest.”

The fabric erupted into a storm of blue light that whipped about their hair and clothing and sent loose papers flying. Viktor fell against the back wall of the closet as the spike and drop in energy nearly overwhelmed him.

“Marvelous.” Artem said as he attempted to take the bloodied material out of his hand with a delighted look. “I have never seen a reaction so powerful.”

Still kneeling, he pulled Viktor’s trembling hand to his mouth and kissed the signet ring. “Bravery, Brotherhood, Purity. Long live the Lord.”

The words were whispered with such reverence and adoration that it made Viktor sick. He used the disgust and the flood of Yuuri’s magic to power his next action.

“I think you have witnessed enough,” he whispered as he watched the man sit back on his haunches and reach for his cloth again. Viktor had still not let go and would not let go.

Artem never saw it coming and if Viktor hadn’t have been so inebriated he might have laughed giving himself away. He planted his foot in the middle of the grigori’s chest and willing all of his ice magic there, kicked the man away with a block of ice that sent his unwanted guest flying, crashing through the desk and the door into the hallway where Araak knows where he landed.

Viktor hoped it was somewhere very pointy and painful.

He listened to the echoing screams of the man with a smile as he threw up a shield of ice around his broken doorway before passing out into a sated and satisfied post blood sleep.

He was woken up by the explosion of ice and a blast of powdered snow. Still half dazed, sitting up and lifting his head to stare at the intruder was like swimming through molasses. Opening his mouth to speak felt like it stretched his body through universes.

“Who’s there?”

He blinked to look up at his mother standing in his doorway covered in the red dresses of a heat
mate and looking like a vengeful Araak.

“What have you done?” she hissed, the whole room freezing over into a sheet of ice with her words. “What in all of Anud’s Hells have you done, Viktor?”

He blinked up at her wondering if he was still blood drunk. His mother was never in the main house but for ceremonies. He almost didn’t believe she was real until she proved her authenticity by raining hailstones down on his head.

“Viktor!”

“Why are you here, Mamochka?” he slurred still not comprehending her appearance. She should still be with Yuuri, attending to his heat. “Yuura? Is his heat done?”

She stomped over to him, ice jutting up from the ground in her wake. “I swear to Araak’s high heavens that I have not done anything so terrible to have a son as aggravating as you!”

Viktor shrunk back a little at her tone and realized he was holding something in his hand. He looked down and saw the scenting cloth.

Oh.

And then he held it out to his dam like a child offering a flower when they knew they had done wrong. She took the cloth much more gently than he expected but her eyes and her scent still screamed furious. He gagged as the spiciness clogged his throat.

His mother snatched him up by his bangs. “Why must you always be so difficult?” Her face looked so genuinely aggrieved that it reminded him of Yakov who often held the same expression when he dealt with his troublesome pupil. He tugged on her hand with a laugh as the image of the two melded into something awful and hilarious in his still power addled brain. “Mama, let go otherwise you will make me go bald.”

Her grip tightened, and Viktor suddenly felt his head wrenched back to look into blue as hard as midwinter ice. Even his father had never looked this harsh.

“They will punish you for this, Viktor,” she hissed, her breath coming out as a spray of flurries, “and by extension that means Yuuri.”

He sobered up quickly, all the fun and mirth gone as he came to reality. “I am the Lord Nikiforov.”

She rolled her eyes as she shook him. “So you have said a thousand times but that matters little when you have angered the grigori. Grigori Artem had to be taken to a healer and even though they hardly deign themselves to listen to the lowly opinions of an omega, Gregori Evgenij demanded an audience with me despite knowing that I was attending Yuuri’s heat.”

He didn’t regret his actions but he fixed his face to pretend he did. He had said what he had said and in his mind the grigori were in the wrong to not obey it.

His mother’s scent lightened as the lie formed his face. Her grip loosened just enough to make it feel like she wasn’t trying to pull out each individual follicle from his already big forehead. “Do you now realize what you have done? And your father, Anud rest his soul, isn’t here to smooth things over like the last time you greatly upset them.”

Being sent away from his home and family was hardly a slap on this wrist. He had been miserable for years living without life and love and had only held it together due to his burning desire to
surpass his tyrant father. He tore his head from her hold not caring if it caused him to lose a few
strands.

“I will deal with it. Let them come. ” He held his head high as he met her eyes.

“They will come, Viktor, make no mistake about that.” Her expression softened just a fraction as
she took in his disheveled appearance. “And, you will have no idea of what you are dealing with.
Was it worth it?”

He almost snorted. It definitely was. He hated the Nikiforov mask and all the restraints though he
tried his best to follow it. Just this rebellion had lighted something within him, something that
made his soul float a little lighter against the heavy weight of his family expectations. Was this the
fall of his princely self? He doubted it but it had felt good to make himself heard.

He had been stupid, cocky and most likely unleashed a monster of unknowns. His dam’s voice
faded into the background as several revelations hit him. Yes, he was probably underestimating
them but they had underestimated him too. He was not his father. If they needed to learn this, then
he would show them. He would not be their doll and anyone that dared to challenge this could get
blown six ways to Hell just like Artem.

If they wanted a war, he would give them all out hell if it came to it. You didn’t become a Living
Legend or a 5 time GPF champion by being something people would expect.

He spent the aftermath outside, too annoyed by the servant’s gossiping whispers to keep working
and too paranoid about the lack of information on Yuuri’s heat to focus on any paperwork. He was
sure he was the talk of the estate for his actions and not for good reasons but he shrugged them off.
He would win them back over. The annual Koyr (bribe) bonus he was planning would make sure
of that.

Hard labor rarely gave one time to think and with the work around the manor being rough, he was
sure that none of the soft skinned and probably work averse grigori would approach him if he was
sweaty and covered in dirt. His assumptions proved correct and he passed the next three days in a
tiring but quiet peace with only Makkachin and Vicchan to bother him with news about a squirrel
or some other harmless doggy thing.

His respite was cut short by the appearance of Minako on the fourth day.

Her face was subdued as she watched him split log after log wishing that it was Artem’s head. She
waited until he was done his task, had drunk deeply from her offered flask, and sat down under a
nearby tree with a meat pie.

He offered her a space on the blanket he had spread out for the familiars but she declined with a
slight shake of her head. Viktor munched on, content with the sounds of nature and the dogs’
barking.

“The cloth eased his heat considerably. Thank you.”

Viktor paused in his chewing, the delicious meat and cabbage filing suddenly tasting like ash as the
forced circumstances of the cloth came back to him. He worked it around his mouth too polite to
spit it out until he could find the ability to swallow.

“I’m glad,” he responded, the words tasted just as bitter as his previous mouthful. “Is Mother still
angry?”
He looked away into the greening distance as Minako rethought her earlier refusal and sat down next to him. From the corner of his eye, he could spot the little furrow in her normally placid brow. He discreetly scented the air but only smelt normal omega, pine, and freshly growing grass.

They sat in silence until she turned to him, her scent releasing the barest hint of anxiety. He was struck by how much her worried face resembled Yuuri’s. She bit her lip just like him too.

“Yes…,” she admitted looking nothing like the strong and sometimes strict governess that Viktor had always known. “but I think she is just… afraid. For you. For Yuuri. The grigori are made up of very powerful men.”

Viktor tried to digest the words but he couldn’t get them past the pain in his chest at the thought of his mother not supporting his cause. “What do you think?”

There was a pause and then,

“I think that what you did was very dangerous.”

“Everything in this House is dangerous, Ms Minako. This estate, this family, its *advisors.*” He spat the last word out like it was something rotten in his mouth. “Isn’t that why we starve newborns for 3 days and 3 nights to ensure that only the strong survive? It’s certainly why we hide our omegas or so my father told me.”

He laughed as he spoke his true feelings into words, completely uncaring of how dark and jaded it sounded. He was sure Minako, who was so full of secrets herself, would hardly be telling anyone about his lapse in good behavior.

His companion sighed. “Please do not speak so darkly, Vicchan,” she whispered as she looked at him like she was seeing a different person, “You sound too much like my Lady Katsuki just before she ki…just before she died.”

“Did she have run ins with the Katsuki version of the grigori?”

“Of a sorts…” He could almost feel Minako’s hesitation in the air, but then she surprised him, being an omega leader caused a lot of watcher feathers to be ruffled. Her life was hardly easy.”

Viktor whipped around to gawk at the omega. She hardly ever mentioned her pre Nikiforov life and spoke even less of the Lady Katsuki. The governess met his shock with a very rueful smile.

“She was a deeply unhappy person after the death of her first two children and husband.” Her eyes shifted to a spot on the grass. “Not even the promise of Yuuri’s upcoming birth could bring her out of that darkness.”

He gaped at the older mage, trying to work his brain to ask some questions while Minako was in a talkative mood. He remembered his nightmare –the details that he still didn’t know were fact or fiction.

“Was Mari’s father really a beta?”

“How do you know that?” Minako’s eyes narrowed and Viktor was sure that his ability to word vomit was going to get him killed one day. Her look softened as she realized that his face was full of genuine curiosity had no other ulterior designs.

“Yes, he was a beta,” she finally said.
The answer brought up even more questions but Minako held her hand up the minute he opened his mouth to ask another.

“And before you ask me, no, he was not Yuuri’s father. That man was dead years before Yuuri was born.”

She brushed her dress off and stood up; her eyes fixed decidedly on the distance and nowhere where she could meet her lord’s stare. “And, that is all I am going to tell you.”

He could demand that she tell him more. He had every right to as her lord but just as he had secrets he did not want revealed, he knew that she must have things she wanted to conceal too. He decided to leave it alone and switch the topic to something safer.

“How is Yuuri?”

She looked at him again. “His heat has just finished. I actually came here because he has been asking for you.”

“Was it alright? Was he alright? Is he alright?” He threw the questions at her in rapid succession.

Minako spared a tired chuckle. “He is fine if not a bit tired and sore from the bloodletting. His magic has settled and his wounds have closed enough for him to go back to his nest. Will you take him? He might feel better if you do.”

“Of course!” he chirped knowing that he wouldn’t give any other answer but yes.

Viktor entered the drey to find Yuuri was sitting up and resting listlessly against one of the ornate chaises that sat just within the first of its outer rooms. His mother was fussing over him, and by the look of the tray full of food, trying to get the younger omega to eat.

“Yuura, you must eat to build up your strength. You were bled a lot and you are about to go through the second bleeding soon,” she scolded as she held a spoonful of white liquid to her foster son’s lips. “Here, it’s milk soup. You usually like this.”

The teen pushed her hand away and burrowed further into his cocoon of blankets. The deep blue gown he wore did little to conceal the pallor of his skin as he huddled under the coverlet that Viktor usually scented. With only his face poking out, framed by still tousled black hair- he looked heart achingly vulnerable. Viktor almost couldn’t believe that in a few days time he would be back to pushing this same creature to his limit, demanding the most out of the same seemingly fragile body in order to win gold.

Yuuri reached his arms out as soon as he saw the alpha approach; his face growing more desperate with every second it took Viktor to get to him. Viktor walked slowly and gathered Yuuri up gently but it still felt as momentous as a cosmic collision as he sunk down into Yuuri’s soft arms and still slightly peaked scent.

He pulled back and lifted his hands to cradle Yuuri’s pale face, rubbing under the dark bruises that marred the teen’s countenance, and wishing childishly that they would come away like paint. “Hey Yuura,…”

Yuuri pushed into his arms with a small cry, his deep blue robe skewing almost indecently to the side as he did so. It left his body open for examination and Viktor scowled at the knees and elbows enveloped in thick, white bandages.
“I missed you. I want to go home, Vitya,” The omega’s voice was raspy as he nuzzled his face into the older man’s neck. “Please.”

Viktor turned to his dam and her servant with a highly annoyed look. “Why is he hoarse?”

They practically ran him out of town for the way he brought in Yuuri and now they were returning him hurt like nothing had happened…?

“Stop growling,” Minako huffed as she pulled Yuuri’s dress back into the right place. “It’s because he spent the last four days continuously calling out your name. We told him you were here. Even when we gave him your scent cloth, nothing could persuade him to stop”.

Yuuri shifted further in his hold, rubbing his head against Viktor’s cheek without a hint of embarrassment until it burned from the friction.

“Viktor,” Minako looked at the display neutrally, with barely the slightest flicker of emotion flitting through her gaze as Viktor met her eyes.”You should take him back to his rooms.”

His mother completely blanked him.

Viktor chose to ignore the insult, and the anger that simmered at the woman’s immaturity as he slipped his arms around Yuuri’s back and under his knees. The omega came to him with a whimper and Viktor adjusted his hold so that he wasn’t pressing on any tender spots. Somehow, Yuuri summoned just enough energy to wrap his arms around Viktor’s neck with a soft whine.

“Alpha?”

This time he didn’t shrink away from it. Deserving or not, Yuuri needed him right now and that was where he wanted to keep his focus.

“It’s okay, Yuura,” he crooned. “I’ve got you.”

In this whole rotten place, Yuuri was the only one that mattered and recent events only made this clearer to him. He rubbed his cheek against the mop of black hair that messily framed Yuuri’s face. “I’ve got you, starlight, you can let go.”

Yuuri was asleep by the time he stood up.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think! Especially about the plot or characterization. If there's something that doesn't make sense or something you want to ask, please feel free to do so. I'll do my best to answer any questions promptly and without spoiler.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, Viktor deals with aftereffects of Yuuri's heat, learns more about the grigori, and has a showdown with his mother.

Chapter Notes

Hello Everyone,

Wow! This story is nearly at 3,000 views!!!

Sorry for the long wait and the repost but the last chapter’s events were not sitting right with me so I had to read through the full story and decided to delete and rewrite most of this chapter and part of the last chapter (So even though it sucks that I’m asking this, please re-read the last half of Chapter 10 otherwise you won’t understand this chapter’s change in events). I apologize for all the editing but I really want to give you a good piece, so please bear with me.

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The genderless pronoun xe is used in this story as mage children decide whether or not to be male or female upon coming of age. It works as follows:

Xe - He/She
Xem - Him/Her
Xyr - His/Her
Xyrs - His/Hers
Xemself - Himself/Herself

Credit to fanndis on Tumblr for terms "oma", "apa", and "grandapa"

Oma - Omega Mother
Apa - Alpha Father
Grandapa - Alpha Grandfather

Credit to Tongari Boushi no Atorie for the concept of ateliers, soar shoes, and magical placement tests.

Credit to KJV Bible - Psalms for inspiration for Viktor’s prayer

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CW: I am not too sure where it falls but a parent does attack their adult child in this chapter. On a re-read, I think the line on between whether or not abuse has occurred has probably been toed quite closely throughout the story but I will add a warning tag just to be safe.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Viktor stood in awe of the personal shrine that Yuuri called his bower. Having never been within the inner chamber of the omega’s apartments, he just assumed that it would resemble the rather plain room that the teen kept in Ost Pyotrsborg. But that was not the case, and as he walked further in, he found himself in a space filled with wall to wall posters, a museum level collection of
figures, and enough Makkachin plushes to start a zoo.

Who had even bought all this he wondered as he stepped fully into the room. It wasn’t like Yuuri had the money or was allowed to do any online shopping while he had lived at the Sanctum. He also knew for certain that it wasn’t him either – well, at least not all of it. He could only recognize a handful of his purchases amongst the vast assortment of memorabilia.

Even the nest was an homage. He let out a little gasp as he looked at it and saw his face smiling back at him from the piles of photo pillows and throws.

“Vitya.”

Yuuri’s breath was hot on his neck, pulling his attention away from the gallery of objects and back to the man in his arms.

“Yuura?” The younger man hummed in response and nuzzled a little closer. He gripped the omega a little tighter as the youth rubbed his still warm cheek against the alpha’s scent gland. “I thought you were asleep.”

“I am,” Yuuri answered with no pause to his actions. His voice was still rough. “Can we go home now, please?”

The blood loss must still have him out of it Viktor thought fondly. They wouldn’t be able to go anywhere for at least another day or two.

“We can’t go home just yet, darling. We have to wait until you build up enough blood and magic for you make the journey back safely.”

Yuuri’s scent soured and his arms tightened until his face was buried in the older man’s neck. “I want to go home now.”

The omega nosed at the gland in his neck until Viktor let out a small burst of calming pheromones hoping it would quell the pout he could feel developing against his skin.

“We’ll go home in a few days, I promise.”

He smelt salt and felt a line of wetness roll down his throat. “I don’t want to come back. I hate it. I hate it. I hate it.” The words dissolved into a full on bout of tears.

Viktor stood a little speechless as the younger man cried. He didn’t doubt that the teen wanted go home he could smell and feel it from the slight whispers of distress in the youth’s scent and bond. The cause, however, could be a number of things from hormones to sleep deprivation. He thought it best to get Yuuri quickly into his nest so that the omega could sleep a little of what was ailing him off so that perhaps, when he woke, he might feel a little better.

Viktor rushed to comply with the thought feeling just the tiniest bit guilty that he had been having a staring contest with merchandise when he should have been putting his betrothed to bed. He crooned to Yuuri as they walked towards his king size nest. It took a bit of skill and careful maneuvering to make his way around the figurines and toys that lined the steps into the center but he managed to get to the last one without injuring a single soul, living or plastic.

Once he reached the edge of the nest, he bent down intending to lower his charge onto the pile of blankets and pillows but Yuuri clung to him so tightly as he tried to do so that he nearly toppled over.
“No, don’t leave me,” the omega whined and clutched at Viktor until his grip became suffocating. “Stay with me, Vitya,” he rasped, his voice barely above a whisper.

Viktor paused. That would mean going entirely into Yuuri’s nest, something he’d never done before. A part of him panicked because this was a huge step. The other side of him - the alpha part - was dancing with joy over the omega feeling secure enough to invite him into his safe space at a time when he must be feeling so vulnerable. He shushed it. He wasn’t going to refuse but he needed a minute to process things, process the moment.

Yes, they had been sharing his bed, but a den was different. Alphas didn’t possess the same compulsions about their sleeping spaces as omegas did. His father had explained it as an evolutionary quirk. The earliest mage alphas were supposed to be hunters who travelled in packs and followed animal migrations. It would have been difficult for them to have successful hunts if where, what, and who they slept with at night actually bothered them - which was probably why their reaction to sharing a sleeping area was the complete opposite to their omegan counterparts. For an alpha, an omega electing to sleep in your den was both literally and figuratively like a little piece of heaven had fallen into your lap. Getting invited into a nest was almost a holy experience.

Viktor adjusted himself to sit more comfortably on the nest’s steps as he continued to think. Yuuri had been an infant and Viktor barely at the age where he could have had his own rooms when they were last in a nest together. It had been expected then. Most mage children slept with their dam until they reached the double digits. Custom had put an end to sharing when Viktor turned 11 and was moved into a den of his own in the main house. And even though Yuuri had thrown tantrum after tantrum, and given his foster mother and governess many sleepless nights over the affair, outside of the occasional nap or babysitting session, the pair had not shared an actual nest for sleep in nearly 20 years.

And now, Yuuri was offering him one of the highest and most intimate of an alpha’s a/o experiences.

He stared at the expanse of bedding that bore his face and with a gulp said, “Yuura, may I enter your nest?”

Yuuri answered with a nod against Viktor’s neck, perhaps too shy or too tired to verbally do so. The older man took it as permission and shifted foot first to step into the soft bedding.

An invisible lash of power whipped out and sliced at the offending appendage and with a yelp he drew back, scrambling to keep hold of Yuuri and to rebalance himself so as not to fall completely into the bespelled nest. He took a moment to calm down and opened his senses to see what had happened.

Wards. Blood wards.

Yuuri’s inner chamber was overflowing with them and part of him was embarrassed that he had been so wrapped up in the decor that he hadn’t noticed sooner. Focused on them now, there were so many pricklings of warning and searching that it raised goose bumps all along his skin. They were strong too, strong enough to actually hurt rather than just warn or give an uncomfortable sensation.

He could feel how they were intended to keep out unwanted alphas, how it was poised –judging him- sitting ready to attack again. The spells were clearly designed to keep anyone other Yuuri at bay and with only a partial bond in place, Viktor didn’t possess the loophole of connection that came from being Yuuri’s child or mate. Though his 3 Blessings should have made him their master, and they should yield to his will, the intent behind them was so strong that he knew why
they didn’t obey. He could smell his father in the magic and it wouldn’t surprise him if the man had intended the protection against his unmated son as well.

Yuuri was young, virginal, and unbonded - the perfect combination for an unscrupulous alpha. When Viktor considered that, it made sense that his father would cast a high level of protection, though it was still staggering when Viktor compared it to the amount of safeguards he always felt in his mother’s rooms.

He looked down at Yuuri who had somehow managed to go back to sleep through the jostling and the backlash. He was loathed to wake him because he knew the omega was still weak and very tired but the nod wouldn’t be enough. Blood required blood, and unless that happened, there would be no way for Viktor to enter the younger mage’s nest unless Yuuri gave an offering to the room and told the magic that it was okay.

“Yuura?”

Yuuri continued to snore softly against his chest, completely unresponsive. He shook him a little.

“Yuura, come on. Wake up.”

The younger mage’s brows furrowed and Viktor was hit by the white pepper of annoyance. He sneezed and tried again, this time shaking his companion a little less gently.

“Yuura, please, I need your blood if you want me in your nest,” he pleaded when the omega tried to push him away with a groan.

He continued trying to wake the teen until the younger man opened his eyes enough to glare at him. It reminded him of all the times he had accidentally woken a newborn Yuuri from a nap. He would laugh and apologize then just like he did now.

“I’m sorry, Yuura,” he said, careful not to smile at the look of peak Yuuri grumpiness being directed at him, “but your nest is warded. You’ll need to offer it blood for it to let me in.”

The teen blinked at him sleepily as the words kicked in. Sitting up, he gently pushed Viktor away until he was perched on the step above. Then, still barely awake, he shoved his hand into his mouth and bit down on the web of skin between his thumb and forefinger until blood trickled down his lips.

It was only a few drops, but for Viktor’s nose it might as well have been an ocean. He could smell the remnants of heat within it. His mouth began to water as he remembered what it tasted like, what it felt like. He looked at Yuuri with his skin as pale as fresh snow and dark half moons sitting under his eyes - the perfect picture of frailty - and felt ashamed at how much he still wanted the omega’s blood - craved it even. He felt like an absolute animal as he held himself completely still, barely even daring to breathe as Yuuri flicked the blood towards the perimeter of the nest with a yawn and then mumbled,

“He has my permission, Apa. Let him enter in peace.”

They waited.

Viktor was just leaning forward to ask Yuuri to try again when he heard a small “pop” and felt all the malicious intentions get sucked past him into a whirling portal of magic hovering just above the nest. It was over in seconds. One moment the room was all murderous intent and the next, nothing. He watched as the spell flickered back into invisibility with a frown. With how strong it was, he thought that his father would have given it more pizzazz.
“Are you okay?”

The words were said around another yawn as Yuuri brought his bleeding hand to his mouth. A part of Viktor wanted to be the one to do it, to trace the wound with his tongue until his saliva had healed it. As quickly as the thought came, he pushed it away; releasing a colorful string of oaths in his mind as he did so.

He blamed Artem for the new feelings and if the other man was here, he would surely tear him apart for awakening something so potentially monstrous in him. His inner alpha snarled and asked him why he didn’t just rip out the man’s throat instead of kick him. For once, Viktor felt himself agreeing with his inner beast.

He still didn’t think he was wrong. Alphas were allowed to defend themselves from a threat and what could be more threatening than another alpha trying to force you. He thought back to how brazenly he had spoken to his mother regarding the grigori and how he meant to bring them to heel. He still meant it. He was the Lord Nikiforov and he would make them see this until they bared their necks and showed him that they understood properly.

How he would go about it still remained a question. It was clear that he would have to be smart though. Artem had walked into the situation with an upper hand. The question of how tore Viktor up in places that he hadn’t expected. How did Artem get the blood? How did he know about Viktor’s childhood trauma and how it still affected him? Who told him? He didn’t want to think that it was his mother but the more he thought on the incident the more it left him feeling unbalanced, and he didn’t know who in his childhood household to trust anymore.

He wouldn’t be surprised if the branches were already whispering about his insolence. While he didn’t quite know all how the grigori worked, he knew how Nikiforovs did. They were like the hungry carnivores that stalked the estate’s wildlife- always wanting, always desperate for any morsel to take down. His mother might be right and there was a good chance that his actions wouldn’t be seen as anything favorable. Grigoris were generally the heads of their families giving them a little more power and respect than an ordinary family member but if he could keep the family on his side, either through fame or beauty, he might be able to get the outer branches to overlook his insubordination. His musings turned dark as he remembered the last time he had rebelled like this…

He felt slightly chilled fingers flit over his jaw and released the thoughts with a sigh. He could focus on them later-the priority now was Yuuri.

“Are you okay?” He asked, gently clutching the hand to his face and willing the faint scent coming from its wrists to calm him. “Does your hand hurt?”

Yuuri shook his head, his other hand still stuck in his mouth as he waited for the bleeding to stop. He released it, removing his clean one from Viktor’s hold and using the back of it to wipe away the line of blood that had run down his mouth before he could fully stop the bleeding. Yuuri turned away from him, his hunched figure telling the world he was still very tired, and half gestured an arm towards a side table that had a bowl full of cloudy liquid and a cloth sitting on top of it.

“There’s scent killer over there…please…I d-don’t want to go to sleep smelling like blood. It reminds me of the drey,” he whispered, exhaustion coloring every word. His skin only turned slightly pink, most likely because he didn’t have enough blood in his body for a full blush.

Viktor scrambled up the steps towards the bowl, eager to comfort Yuuri but more eager to remove the temptation. There was a sigh as has he dragged the rag against the omega’s skin but he wasn’t sure of which mouth it came from. When he was finished with the teen’s hands, he focused on the
floor. With each pass of fabric, he felt the tension leave his body. He didn’t stop until the smell of blood was completely gone and his senses started to relax.

After he was done, he threw the cloth back in the bowl and turned to find Yuuri still waiting on the last step. The teen was so tired that he swayed from side to side as his body lost its battle with sleep. Viktor tutted,

“This won’t do at all,” And then he gathered the all too willing omega up.”Let’s get you settled into your nest. I think a good rest is definitely what you need.”

Yuuri’s arms slid up his torso and crept around his neck tight like ivy vines. He let out a little sob that dissolved into a shuddering breath. “I want my nest back home, Vicchan,” he whined against the alpha’s neck.

Viktor forestalled any further tears by releasing a deep croon. “Shhhh, it’s okay, Yuurochka. We’ll be going back in a few days. You’ve done well.”

He stood, omega and all, and dipped a toe over the last stair to check for wards. Nothing answered back, so figuring everything safe; he sank into the soft luxuriousness of the nest. It was heaven, even better than the one his mother kept. His alpha growled in appreciation as he made his way to the nest’s center where a pile of pillows and stuffed toys called invitingly towards him.

He lowered Yuuri into it gently, hoping that the guidebook was right about omegas being tactile and wanting to cuddle soft things after their presentation heats. Despite his earlier protestations, the teen released his hold on Viktor and burrowed into his collection of Makkachin plushies with a wriggle and a soft sigh. Then, he turned on his side and the older man watched in amusement as the youth rummaged drowsily through the jungle of his toys and pulled out a stuffed version of Viktor dressed in a perfect replica of his senior debut.

The older mage let out a little gasp. He hadn’t seen the item in nearly ten years and had no idea that Yuuri possessed it. It was limited edition after all, with only a few hundred made for his then fledgling fan club. It was faded in spots and covered with odd, ugly stitching, but from the familiar way Yuuri rubbed his cheek against it, Viktor could tell it had been loved very much.

He didn’t even try to keep his happiness from stinking up the place. He leaned down towards the omega wanting to (with permission of course) cover his betrothed’s face in a sea full of kisses.

“Yuura, oh Yuurochka, my darling dearest, can I kiss you?” he asked somehow falling into his mother’s habit of sprinkling the teen with an unnecessary amount of pet names.

Yuuri, eyes closed and now huddled around the plush, nodded. Viktor was sure his smile was curved into a perfect heart. He bent down only to have his lips greet fabric as Yuuri turned and shoved the toy into his mouth.

“But first, scent Vitka… and then me.” The omega’s voice was soft but commanding even as it trailed off whispering into the deeper edges of sleep.

Viktor chuckled at the demand as he raised his wrist to rub it against his mini-me until Yuuri purred in approval. Then, he ran his arm up and down the younger man’s side, grinning when the youth nearly quivered in pleasure.

Purring was a good thing. The vibrations would promote healing and help the omega recover from his heat faster. Once sated, Yuuri rolled into Viktor’s side- Vitka held tight to his chest - and pushed his body up against the silver haired man until they slotted together to the teen’s
satisfaction.

Viktor collected his kisses then, 2 for each exposed facial feature that he found adorable. Yuuri grumbled a bit as he kissed his ear but otherwise continued his rumbles of contentment under the alpha’s administrations until they turned into soft, breathy snores.

Viktor let the sound relax him, pull him full down into the bedding. He resumed his scenting of Yuuri, adding calming notes in an effort to keep his beloved student asleep for as long as the younger mage’s body needed rest. A few times his hand ran across the bandages wrapped around the teen’s arm.

He gave a mental wince. He still felt mildly terrible about overloading Yuuri’s system. As honest of a mistake as it had been, heats seemed torturous enough without him adding to it. The first year of presentation cycles were an awful time and Yuuri wouldn’t have been given any painkillers either because most mages, without anything to back it up, believed that medicine would destroy the developing organs. It was a stupid superstition but one that still made him shiver when he thought about it. If Yuuri’s were anything like his own, then it was no wonder that the younger man had gone hoarse with screaming.

Suppressants were still completely out of the question until after the Grand Prix Final. No healer would prescribe them to anyone, regardless of race or gender, who had not had a full year of cycles. He suspected that this rule was rooted in dragonshit too.

Nothing could describe the moment when he held his prescription for the first time and realized that he wouldn’t be faced with gut rending cramps, aching teeth, and an insatiable hunger. It was like being freed from a curse and when the time came, he would free Yuuri if that was what the omega wanted.

The teen shifted on to his back, interrupting Viktor’s scenting and his thoughts. As Yuuri starfished, Vitka rolled off of his chest and was left bereft by the dip of his underarm.

“Vitya…mmm…more cereal.”

Viktor bit his tongue to stop his laugh. Yuuri really was the cutest, even sleeping. He settled back against the teen’s smaller body, throwing an arm around the omega’s waist and pulling him a little closer. Content, he reveled in the quiet peacefulness and tasked himself with the pleasurable task of watching over Yuuri.

The sound of knocking woke him up though it took several minutes for it to penetrate through the haze of his dreams. He scrubbed a hand over his face in an attempt to rub away the disorienting heaviness that came when he napped too long. Yuuri snored quietly at his side, somehow having regained possession of the replica Viktor. In the dim light offered by the room’s burnt down lanterns, he still looked exhausted; his skin near glowing with paleness. Viktor thought about throwing some magic towards the jars but considered that a darker room probably mimicked the caves of their ancestors and left them alone thinking that the darkness was most likely restorative. The knocking continued and with a huff, he got up not wanting the noise to wake up the sleeping omega.

He swung it open, wincing as it made a loud groan of protest. He’d have to tell whoever was on the other side to get a servant to oil it so that it didn’t disturb Yuuri in the day or two it would take him to recover.

“The door needs some oil,” he said as Minako’s face appeared, her nose twitching as she scented
Recognizing the action for what it was, he stepped aside and with a gesture invited her to look in. “He’s fine. Just a bit tired so he’s sleeping.”

The governess’s eyes were surprisingly tender as she took in the Yuuri shaped lump that lay in the center of the nest. “Yuuri was so distraught when you were sent away,” she said, her face growing even softer and fonder, “that the former Lord Nikiforov spared no expense when he built these apartments. No magic was too much. No toy too expensive. Anything was worth it if it would get Yuuchan to stop crying.”

He was so shocked that he didn’t even feel the usual jolt of darkness that always accompanied any mention of his exile. He turned back to Minako with his face twisted in disbelief.

“My father bought Yuuri all these goods!?” he whispered, the words coming out like a hiss because he just could not see Nikolai Mikhailovich Nikiforov - the exiler of his own child, the former Lord Nikiforov, and Living Legend of Rhurshya - queuing up at a hobby shop to purchase the latest Viktor Nikiforov products.

“It was strange considering what type of man the former Lord Nikiforov was but whenever he returned from a trip, he brought back something for Yuuri,” Minako smiled as if she had read his thoughts before her look turned somber. “That child was so spoiled, you don’t even know. Yuuri is very lucky. Most orphaned omegas are not given such privileges.”

Viktor almost growled remembering Yuuri’s guilt over his jealousy and the things he told the alpha his caregiver had said. “He locked him up for 17 years and barely gave him any real world education. I don’t see how that could be considered lucky.”

Minako scowled, her earlier good mood completely gone. “Forgive me, my lord, but you don’t know what we escaped from. Living life within a gilded cage is a sight better than being dead or someone’s whore,” she snapped before she pushed the tray of food she holding into Viktor’s hands with a hiss. “Here, please give this to him when he wakes.”

She was gone before he could say anything else, the door shut miraculously quiet behind her even in her obvious annoyance. Viktor glanced down at the assortment of meat pies, pastries, gingerbreads, and cakes with a frown. It seemed even the food was going to antagonize him. One or two might be fine but Yuuri would be expected to be competition level when they returned to Ost Pyotrsborg in a few days time; this kind of junk would just figuratively and literally weigh him down.

Beet soup with some black bread would be better he thought to himself as he switched to coach mode. The soup would have more nutrients to replace the ones the omega had lost and the bread while stodgy and possibly full of carbohydrates would have far less fat and calories for the teen to work off. If Yuuri was still craving sweetness, he could allow for a side of sweet semolina porridge covered in dried fruits, nuts, and jam as a treat. He looked back at the still sleeping figure as he set the tray on a nearby table. If he left now, he could probably have someone in the Sanctum kitchens prepare the items before the omega woke back up. He gave one last check and thorough scenting before carefully and as quietly as he could, leaving the room and closing the door.

As he walked down the dark hallways and saw it empty of its usual bustle of servants, he realized it must be quite late in the night and that there might not be any servant about to help him. Viktor continued down the empty halls, nearly three decades’ worth of memories leading him to where he hoped was still the right place. He pushed through the set of heavy doors thinking he would greet a night cook, a scullery maid or perhaps even Yuuko. Instead, he found his mother pounding and
kneading dough as skillfully as any servant on the kitchen rosters.

He paused, door held half open. Should he go back? Or should he stay and face whatever bad mood his mother might still possibly be under? He thought of Yuuri gorging himself on the tray of goodies (and Viktor was 99.99% sure he would gorge if Viktor let him) and decided it would be in everyone’s best interests if he stayed. He was Yuuri’s coach after all and that meant doing unpleasant things.

His mother’s scent spiked the moment the doors closed behind him and grew more pungent the longer he stood in her presence. Despite this, she continued working as though he wasn’t there; the sounds of her breadmaking the only thing echoing throughout the room.

The silence stretched on for what could have been hours, minutes, days, weeks as he gathered ingredients and utensils and set up to cook. His mother finally spoke as while he was searching for fuel to fire up the stove.

“What did you come here for?”

He jumped at the sound of her voice, banging his head in the process as he struggled to remove himself from the cupboard he had been rummaging through and answer her question.

“What?” He rubbed at the sore spot in confusion all the while wishing his dam wouldn’t glare at him so darkly.

“Why are you not looking after Yuuri?”

The nerve of her to ask that question when she had spent their whole previous interaction pretending he wasn’t there made Viktor want to howl in irritation. But, being the better mage in most situations with his mother, he decided to be an adult and answer her simply.

“I am. The food you sent isn’t good for his diet so I came to make something else.”

His mother’s eyes narrowed. “What is wrong with the food? It has suited this House’s omegas just fine for centuries and Yuuri has never complained before. Is this yet another tradition you must break in your quest for contrariness, Viktor?”

He fought the urge to roll his eyes. “Mama, please…” he pleaded with a sigh, hoping that she would see reason and let go of her anger for just long enough to see him through this interaction.

He just wanted to make the soup and porridge as quickly as possible before Yuuri woke up. He didn’t know how omegas felt being left alone after their heat and he didn’t want to find out. He turned back around intent on going back to his task.

“You hate it, don’t you? This House? This family? Me?”

Viktor paused, his hand just about to close around the handle of a pot. It slipped out of his grasp and clattered to the ground in a crashing of bangs that did little to dispel the suddenly chilly atmosphere.

He turned around to see her staring at him like the wrong answer would make her jump away like a snow hare. “I don’t hate it, Mama.”

Her eyes flashed into ice white blue as she scoffed. “You do. You always have. Ever since you were a small child you have been this way.”
With a sigh, he bent to pick up the pot and set it on the countertop before he stood braced against it, mentally preparing himself for the dramatics he could smell rising in the air.

“What way, Mamochka?” He kept his tone gentle and affectionate hoping to forestall whatever emotion it was that was working her up

“Scornful. Bitter. Discontent with the ways mages are to live their lives.”

He shook his head at her words not feeling that he had ever been any of those things. “Mother, I do not hate this House.” he lied, the false words coming so easily to his lips that he almost felt sick.

His mother’s expression became niveous as energy crackled around her. “Then, why are you always trying to challenge everything? Wasn’t your father’s banishment enough? I think you would have learned by now.”

Viktor felt his lips curl into a snarl no matter how hard he fought to keep placid. Of course it was enough. Enough for him to assume the role of Lord Nikiforov even though doing so threatened to eat at his very soul. That his mother could stand there and talk to him as though his entire 28 years of existence hadn’t been a sacrifice to House Nikiforov and its legacy left him in a rage that he didn’t dare try to express in words.

Fists clenched so tightly he felt blood, he willed himself to calm down so that he could talk to her like a normal son instead of the angered creature that wanted to rush out.

“I suggest you leave, Viktor. If I get any angrier, I’ll spoil my dough.”

He wanted to laugh. She was the only one angry?

“No.”

He came to make something for Yuuri and he wouldn’t be deterred by her attitude or her treatment. The tension in the room rose higher at his refusal. If she was going to behave like a child then so was he.

Blue sparks zipped down the edges of her body as her magic leaked out. “There you go again being Mr Contrary. Is there a bone in your body that will listen?”

She turned from him back to her baking. Brushing aside the atmosphere, he shuffled back to the opposite island and began to take out the pots he needed for his task. He worked as quickly as possible, trying his best to ignore the room’s other occupant until the air became so thick with poorly hidden fury that it threatened to also spoil the food he was preparing.

“Mamochka...”

Her body language made it clear that she intended to shun Viktor until he left. She flipped the dough over and picked up a rolling pin. “If I stop, this bread will be ruined.”

Her game was so easy to see through and from previous experience he knew her behavior wouldn’t stop until he somehow made amends to her.

“Mama, I said I would deal with it.” He offered to her turned back. “So, there is no reason for you to get this upset.”

“You keep saying that as though you cannot fully grasp what wrong you have done. Was your education so lacking that you do not understand that you have put your hands on a grigori,” she
hissed, the sound so high and elongated that she sounded like the whistling of a tea kettle.

The spiced air turned into a chill. Viktor scowled as his breath started to come out in white plumes. “Honestly, Mama, I can understand that you are angry…”

“I am not angry, Viktor,” she snapped as she pounded on the dough with a flurry of strikes, “I am frightened for what they will do to you.”

The hairs on the back of Viktor’s neck stood up as her fist smashed through the center of the dough and grew a line of icicles with it. “I have to wonder if I raised you right; if all the whispers are true.”

He tried to come towards her to placate her but when she brought down her fists again; the outflow of magic was so strong that it forced him to take a step back. “What you have done to us with your stupid actions…”

BAM. The countertop she was working on became of glacier of stone and ice.

“They have always said that you would damn us.”

BAM. Frost crept from across the stone floors to tickle Viktor’s feet with its chill.

“That you would ruin us…”

His mother turned towards him with ice and snow swirling around her like a maelstrom. Her eyes had gone white with the intensity of her magic and to Viktor, she looked as foreign and dangerous as the fabled Jih Roh snow women that had often appeared in the picture books Yuuri had read as a child.

“I did not want to believe them until now. Viktor, my only blood son, what are you becoming?”

He had seconds to pull on lines of fire before her emotions exploded into a whirlwind of ice and hail. Their magic crashed together in a supersonic boom that sent ripples through the air and rattled every pan in the kitchen as they clashed into a visible wall of opposite magic. Viktor silently thanked the influx of Yuuri’s blood as he stood his ground against the attack. He could feel it fortifying him against the usual drain of using proprium to pull magic.

“Mama, calm down.”

Viktor grit his teeth as the words seemed to power her magic further. He scented the air, worried that somehow the conversation had sent her into a drop.

She pressed forward, her magic turning into peaks and valleys of ice with every step in Viktor’s direction she took. “You should have smiled and drank the blood. It is what any other Lord Nikiforov would have done.”

“Do you want me to apologize?” The words tasted foul on his tongue but he would say anything to stop the blizzard that was currently approaching. He half wished he had it in him to attack her instead of giving in to the deeply ingrained alpha notions of honor that kept him from ever really showing his hand to an omega.

Hailstones flowed up alongside his mother’s hair. They were not the graupel he had been expecting and as they froze and all pointed at him, he let out a gasp as he realized what she intended.

“Mama, please stop.” He grit his teeth as the ambush of magic bore down on him making him sink
to his knees as he fought to keep his own spell on a defensive path.

But he was too slow, too far away from the love of his volatile mother. He tried to pull fire, tried to pull ice but it was no match against the onslaught she sent. As stone after stone hit his body, he wondered what in Anud’s Hells the protection wards of the Sanctum were supposed to do.

He woke up with a splitting headache and his mother’s blood dripping from his lips. He spat what he could out and wiped at his lips until the pain burned away the flavor.

“I’m sorry.”

He struggled to lift his head up to look at his mother and winced as the movement sent a thousand tender spots screaming throughout his body. She crouched down, snowflakes falling with her gentle descent and her face a rictus of misery.

“Vitenka, I’m sorry. The fear and anger just overcame me.” She stretched out her hand and attempted to brush the back of it against his cheek…

But he pulled away, scrambled back into the doors of the cupboards even though it made his body protest in agony.

“Is this how we will speak of important things from now on, Mother?” he wheezed as his arm came to cradle what he was sure was a bruised rib. “By you attacking me like some out of control adolescent?”

She stopped her advance, leaving Viktor to slump further against the island as he tried to recover from the amount of strength he had needed to hold her back. Ice crunched under her foot as she stood up and back, and even though the pain still had him gasping for breath, Viktor forced his body into a position ready for magic just in case the reprieve didn’t last.

“Mama,” he said, still struggling to pull air into his lungs. “please…” he didn’t really know what he was asking for. His mind was still reeling at the idea that she had attacked him.

“Drink.”

A bloodied wrist was held out in front of his face but he pushed it away. He didn’t want it, not from her, not anymore. His mother stood by his side silent and watching, he could feel her blue eyes burning like frostbite into the back of his skull. He shifted and looked up again.

Water greeted him as icy tears slipped from her face to splash onto his. “All you had to do was drink it, Viktor. That’s all. Do you think you are the only person to have suffered humiliation at their hands?”

Viktor’s jaws tightened as he felt anger grow in his belly. His mother had just attacked him and now she had the audacity to cry over him? It snapped at the fragile cord of filial affection that kept him tethered to his dam. With its weakening, he could feel his mindset towards his mother changing; darkening into something colder than a winter’s night.

“If you ever use attack magic on me ever again, Mother, I swear upon Araak’s court and all of her celestial maidens that you will never see Yuuri or I ever again.”

“No,” His mother gasped and the snow fell once again. The air got colder but Viktor noticed his dam’s ice made no further movements towards him. “I said I was sorry.”
He looked into her face, hoping that she could see every line, wrinkle, and bruise and understand just how weary she was making him.

“That is no longer good enough, Mama.” He remembered Chris’s words about not letting Yuuri get away with everything just because he was an omega. He hardened his gaze until she shook with more tears. “And you know that, don’t you?”

He didn’t know why his words caused her to fly into his arms but he made no move to hold her. She sat in his lap and wept little beads of ice that tickled and soothed down the bruises of his neck and back. He let her cry until he remembered why he was in the kitchen in the first place.

“Yuuri,” he whispered and pushed at her shoulder hoping she would get the hint and stand. She clung tighter and caught him off guard as she said, voice raw and choked with tears;

“Viktor, do you know what the grigori are?”

Caught off guard by the change in subject and curious, he nodded - the lesson was well learnt at his father’s knees. “They are the remnants of Samyaza’s betrayal who turned their back from Araak’s blessings and took up with humans. Their sins gave us death, alphas their hunger, omegas their abundance, and ruined our dignity by giving us betas,” he recited as if he were standing in front of the man right now.

Even as he said it, he didn’t believe a word of it. He thought of Georgi who could soar even though mage society decreed that betas had no magic. Of the Nishigoris and the other beta guards and servants who protected the Sanctum even though they were regarded as the weakest gender. He thought of omegas who were put on pedestals and lived their lives under lock and key. He thought of himself as an alpha, the gender held as the highest and freest in the mage world, and how he stood at the apex of privilege and priority with fears and feelings he was barely allowed to express.

Looking at his mother, he could tell that she held the words true from the way her eyes became hard and glittering at the mention of the lore. He held his religion in the highest regard (‘To know Araak is a blessing’ he thought quietly to precede his thoughts of blasphemy) but it had always made him feel a little sick that there were just swathes of people within mage society who were being mistreated because of things that happened millennia ago between their ancestors and the gods.

“Yes, but what else?” his mother questioned redirecting his thoughts back to the conversation at hand, “What else do you know about them?”

Viktor searched his brain for the rest of the information. The last time he had been quizzed like this over mage history had been over a decade ago so it wasn’t as if the words were sitting on his tongue. He thought hard, rummaging the very back of his mind where he kept the important but generally useless knowledge that had been drilled into his head over the last 28 years. “They may be powerful but never hold power. They can lead but will never be leaders. They may sit with rulers but never rule. Thus it has been decreed by Araak?”

His mother nodded, seemingly pleased with his ability to remember but then her eyes narrowed into slits as she hissed,

“They are demons, Viktor - cursed to serve the Houses with the punishment of watching others receive Araak’s blessings.”

He frowned as Otabek flashed through his mind. “Like dragons?”
His mother made an impatient noise as she shook her head. “Dragons understand their sins and repent but the grigori do not. They are trickster gods in mortal flesh and are always waiting for an opening to topple their master.”

Viktor tried to recall all of his interactions with the grigori. As a very young child with his grandfather at the head, they had seemed like a nuisance; little better than mosquitoes. Under his father, they became more tolerated if not respected but were still people to be held at bay. He thought of motivations, ambitions, the covetousness swimming in Artem’s eyes and the slick avariciousness hinting in the corners of Evgenij’s smile.

“But a trickster god can be defeated.” How many stories had he read as a child where a mage did just that.

“Yes, I suppose…,” his mother’s eyes flicked up to Viktor’s with such a look of intensity that it made his stomach flip, “but are you strong or clever enough for that? Your grandfather was an exception not the rule. They are like starved wolves, Vitya. Always hungry for Araak’s affection, for any string of power and just like the creatures that haunt this forest, if they smell an opportunity, they will tear you a part for it.”

His interaction with Artem had left him figuring that much although he still couldn’t understand where his mother’s fear came from.

“Wolves, bears, and men can be killed easily enough.”

His dam shook her head as she bit her lip. “You still don’t understand it do you?”

“I can’t understand what you won’t tell me, Mother,” he huffed and then thought better of it as the action sent a jolt of pain.

His mother finally pushed away from him to sit back on her own haunches. He flinched as her hand came up to hold his chin but when he realized it accompanied no magic, he looked into her eyes swimming with secrets deeper than the underbelly of an iceberg and just as if he were at sea, he felt a shiver cross his spine as her eyes pulled him even further into their treacherous waters.

“You don’t think they won’t attack Yuuri to get to you? You think you can protect him if they chose to attack?” She laughed, the sound dark and wet. "We may be lowly creature but omega gossip reaches far. Why don’t you ask Lord Plisetsky - who when he was young had a temper that burned as bright and long as a matchstick - where his mate has gone? Or better yet, Lady Katsuki, may Anud quickly rebirth her soul, what happened to her husband and children when she thought she could stand against a millennia of tradition?"

“They are some of the most powerful men in this family, in any of the houses really. Some would even go as far as to say that they control the clan from the shadows,” she grit out before the mysteries in her eyes died into something quiet and sad. “He was always so scared of them, my Kolya -always so careful and trying to do things as they willed.” Her gaze drifted to somewhere far away, to some memory or realm where Viktor doubted he could reach her.

He was lost but the words sounded so ominous and full of dark meanings. Involving Yuuri? They were playing a dangerous game. Did they not know that he would give his life, wear himself down into death by magical exhaustion if it meant Yuuri was safe? Did they not understand that now that he had the power, he would tear this family, its name, and the whole clan apart if they caused the omega any serious harm?

“Maybe I should just let the grigori rule this cesspit of a family, Araak knows they are not far from
it.” At this point, they would probably be doing him a favor.

Her eyes snapped back towards him. “You know that they can’t Viktor. Besides, you wouldn't dare…this is your birthright.”

His mother didn’t know him very well if she thought he was going to stick around and play slave to a group that would put Yuuri’s life in danger.

"I will not sit and play games to keep a title I don’t want and I will most definitely not see Yuuri hurt to do so. I have an entire life that I have built outside of these walls - my own place, fame, and money - and if that is where things are safer, then that is where I will take Yuuri to live.

“But you promised you would bring him back…”

“I promised,” he bit back because he was growing weary of this conversation, “that when he returned he would be beautiful not that he would be stuck here in this hellhole again. He is not your plaything, Mama.”

“You really have learned nothing from your banishment.” Her face twisted into something feral and unmotherly as she stood up and looked down at him. “Do you remember how, against your father's orders, you were reckless just like you are being reckless now and took Yuuri out to some rundown peasant’s festival nearby? What did you do?”

He curled into himself as a wall of negative emotions slammed into him at the memory of his greatest shame. “Mama,” he whined not wanting to answer.

“What did you do, Viktor?” She pressed, her voice and tone unrelenting.

“I-I took him to a fayre because he had never been…” he choked on the words as memories of the incident threatened to close his throat.

His mother’s hand was surprisingly warm as she lifted his face. “You lost him for long enough that he nearly dropped to death. Do you think I don't remember what you looked like sniveling and bleeding as you tried to force a half dead Yuuri into your father's arms?”

Viktor felt ice grow around his form in the wood of the cupboards but his threat must have stuck because it did not touch him. A block of frozen emotion grew at and around his mother’s décolletage turning into spikes that jutted from her skin like weapons as she visibly fought to keep her magic within.

"Who do you think nursed him, Viktor, while you sat feverish in your own rooms? Who do you think wiped his brow and kept him comfortable during the week he spent in a coma while you stood outside and cried? Who do you think spoke to the grigori and sent you away from their ire?” she demanded as she removed her hand and Viktor stared up at her lost for words. “It wasn't you, Viktor. It was your father and I. You are acting big now, but it has always been others that must clean up your mess. If you go against the grigori, if you follow through with this foolish wish to leave the family, they will find you and destroy you, Vitya, in one way or another.”

She looked down at the frost growing across her hands. They were slightly shaking. “That is how they deal with things,” her hands tightened into fists that crushed the ice into powder, “that they do not like.”

He didn’t know how long he had been in the kitchen but Yuuri wasn’t asleep when he returned, and more importantly, he was crying.
“Yuura, I’m sorry for leaving;” he cried as he nearly dropped his tray in his rush to set it on the table and comfort the omega. Annoyance flared through him as he took in the tears and the rift with his mother grew deeper. “What’s the matter? Are you okay? Does something hurt? Have your second bleeding cramps come in?”

Yuuri shook his head, with a flush and a small laugh. “No,” he sniffled, “I think it was just hormones. I-I always feel really strange after a heat.”

“Are you sure?” the other man responded unconvinced as tears continued to cascade down the teen’s face. It was made all the worst when his worry mixed with the discord and pain that still swam throughout his body in the wake of the fight. “The guidebooks said it wasn’t unusual for an omega to feel sa—”

“Vitya!” the younger man barked then hiccuped once he realized what he had done.”They’ll go away on their own. I swear,” he whispered as he continued to wipe them away. “This happened the last two times too.”

He didn’t like the information but there was nothing he could do about the past. His instincts running high, he wanted to push the issue, his inner alpha screaming at him that he needed to see either by scent or by bond if Yuuri was actually fine.

“Are you sure it wasn’t because I wasn’t here when you woke up?”

Yuuri groaned and shook his head. “No, Vitya.”

“Please, Yuura,” he whined as he walked forward, his instincts still pushing him to check, “I need to make sure. Humor me? ”

Yuuri gave a small snort as the older mage approached his spot in the nest and pushed his face into the omega’s neck. “See?” the teen chuckled as his silver haired companion took deep pulls of his personal fragrance, “Perfectly fine.”

The bond gave Viktor nothing as well. He pulled at Yuuri’s collar and peered down at the younger man’s still slightly reddish gland. The scent coming from it held a tiny hint of heat pheromones, but was largely Yuuri’s normal spiced bouquet. Though he was still unsettled by the tears, his impulses calmed enough for him to turn back to the soup and the porridge that he had managed to prepare in what was left of the wreck that was formerly the kitchen.

“I brought something for you.”

Yuuri perked up at the mention of food, “What is it?” He wiped away another stray tear even as his eyes lit up at the sight of the meal.

Balancing the contents carefully so as not spill anything on the pristine sheets, Viktor shuffled back to Yuuri and placed the tray on the lap of the teen’s outstretched legs.

“It’s soup.”

“It’s …soup?” Disappointment dyed the teen’s tone as his scent that had been okay a moment before turned bitter. “Not cake?”

A few tears fell from his cheek for emphasis.

“Soup is good for you,” Viktor cried, images of his smug mother dancing in his head as he did so. She had warned him that this might be the reaction to the change in routine even as she stood
stirring the pot of soup on the stove. He scrambled to take a spoonful of the soup and hold it up to Yuuri’s lips. “It’s good. Try it. I made it with Mama,” he said hoping that it being Viktoria’s cooking would cajole the teen to try it.

But Yuuri wasn’t having it. His lip wobbled instead of opening. “But, I can smell the cake…” he trailed off sounding so pitiful it made Viktor’s pesky alpha rear its head again.”It’s what I usually have.”

Viktor pushed it back because while of course there were dangers (as his mother had just revealed to him), Yuuri’s desire for sweets was not one of them.

“If I promise to give you one, will you drink the soup?” he finally asked when it became apparent that he was not going to win this battle.

Yuuri tilted his head and then nodded like a king granting his servant a grand favor (which in the nature of their relationship wasn’t that far off). “Yes, but you can’t stop me from choosing whichever one I want.”

He said it so seriously that at first Viktor thought he was joking but when the expression didn’t lighten up or change after he laughed, Viktor realized with only a little bit of exasperation that the omega was completely serious.

“Fine,” he acquiesced and then focused his attention back on holding the spoon up to Yuuri’s lips. The teen backed away from it and grappled for the soup. “I can do it by myself,” he whined, his face going nearly crimson with a deep blush.

It made Viktor feel a little bit better to see that the omega had healed enough to bring the color to his face but he knew that he wouldn’t be fully satisfied until the soup he had made was sitting in the younger man’s belly. He maneuvered the spoon away from Yuuri’s grasping fingers until the youth gave up and then positioned the spoon again.

“Humor me one more time?” He turned on his best pout - the one that always got him his way with Yakov. “Pretty please?” he added for effect.

Yuuri reddened further. And Viktor could see the embarrassment turn into tsundere annoyance with how wide Yuuri’s cheeks puffed out. Gaze averted, he mumbled, “Fine, but” and took the mouthful of soup and swallowed, “I want two cakes then.”

The little brat didn’t even thank him for the food. Viktor smiled. “Yes, young master.”

Araak’s Grace, it felt so good to be with Yuuri and forget the larger problems in his life for a moment.

Yuuri puffed up. “I won’t eat it if you call me that,” he grumbled with a deeply embarrassed color.

“Yes, my lord.”

“Vitya!”

Viktor focused on teasing and feeding the omega until his fears faded into a quiet hum in the back of his mind. They were almost finished the bowl of beet soup when Yuuri pushed his hand away with a groan.

“I can’t eat anymore.”
“Just one more spoonful,” Viktor cajoled. Yuuri was nearly done the soup. Viktor and his alpha could live if his student didn’t make it to the sweets.

Yuuri turned his head away and kept it there until Viktor lowered his hand. Knowing that the teens’ stubbornness was limitless when he wanted it to be, the older man gave up and began to put away the dishes. Yuuri stretched out with a yawn as he did so and then fell back onto his pile of plushes with a moan as Viktor came back to him.

“I really wanted a cake,” he pouted up at the older mage.

And, Viktor really wanted to keep Yuuri safe. It seemed that they were both having troubles in their respective life departments.

“You can have it when you wake,” he quipped as he pushed his stuffed likeness into the teen’s arms with the hopes that it would cut off the complaining and lull the omega back to sleep.

Yuuri cuddled into it immediately and let go of his sulk to hold out a hand to the alpha. “Will you scent me again?”

Viktor, despite his protesting body, sank back down beside him in one fluid motion. “Of course.”

It took much longer for Yuuri to fall asleep this time but once he did, Viktor felt himself tracing the contours of the omega’s sleeping face with a fingertip. In slumber, Yuuri looked so much softer, and so much smaller than he actually was and the sight flared Viktor’s instincts in a way that made his heart ache.

He wanted to protect him…

…from everything.

It was nonsensical and the coach part of him reminded him that it was also unrealistic but it was all he could think about; all his mind could repeat back to him as he looked at the youth so obviously lost to his dreams.

There were so many dangers and unknowns: Yuuri’s secret heritage, his own desires, and now the grigori… If he thought too hard the list would be too numerous to count.

He knew one thing though and he was serious. Outside of the next heat, he wouldn’t bring Yuuri back here until he had neutralized the threat of his advisors. Even if his mother was here. Even if this is where he and Yuuri grew up. Even if this was where his duties lie. They only had one more, one more time where it was necessary to return for Yuuri’s safety.

If it was just him, he was sure that he could eventually figure out the grigori’s games well enough to survive them. As a High House heir, he had learned how carry out his own little rebellions. But Yuuri was different. He was never meant for any intrigue beyond Sanctum gossip and rumors; and thinking on how isolated his betrothed had been kept, Viktor wasn’t even sure the younger man could manage that. He would be such an easy target. Viktor shivered and hugged the sleeping man closer needing to feel the omega’s heat to banish the creeping fears away.

Of course, maybe Yuuri would prove him wrong. He, after all, didn’t actually know how far the omega’s abilities in chicanery went, but he wasn’t willing to find out. It was his job to see the youth safe. In the outside world, he felt he could do that, in this inner world filled with secrets and lies, he wasn’t so sure.

Despite what his mother said, he still thought about walking away from it all. If it was a step
towards keeping Yuuri safer, he would gladly be called a coward and would let anyone who dared, say it to his face. It might make his life hell seeing what the grigori had just done to him for daring to let Yuuri leave the Sanctum, but he didn’t think their power reached beyond the clan itself. Or at least, he hoped their power didn’t. They were much like Nikiforov omega in that respect - he had never met any in the larger world.

He sighed. It was a shame that he couldn’t talk to his ancestors like other races otherwise he might have asked his grandfather for advice.

He trailed a finger down the babyish curve of Yuuri’s full cheek, wonder and love sparking in every single one of his movements.

“Please Araak, My Lady and My Mistress, Creator of all the glorious things in the universe, you who have mercy for them that love you and obey your will, I beseech thee, listen to the prayer of your humble servant for my soul is plagued with troubles,” he whispered as he traced across Yuuri’s sleep slackened mouth and felt his heart flip. As much as Viktor believed, he wasn’t a man to pray. His own strength was usually enough to keep him from bothering the ears of his goddess but even horses stumbled though they had four legs and Viktor was terrified of what might happen if he were to fall.

The prayer was short, simple and explicit in its desire, “Please, My Lady, if you may will it at all, please grant me the strength to protect my beloved and as he is to me, please keep him as the apple of your eye and hide him within the shadow of your wings from the wicked who are out to destroy me, from my mortal enemies who surround me. Please, my lady, if it may please you, let me keep him out of the wolf’s mouth.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is definitely back to Ost Pyotrsborg and the start of the competition season!
Chapter Summary

It's the start of competition season! Viktor deals with his new worries while stretching his coaching legs, a few unexpected characters show up, and Yuuri performs in his very first competition ever!

Chapter Notes

Hello Everyone,

Thank you so much for the comments and kudos last chapter! This is probably my favorite chapter so far and I hope you enjoy it.

The genderless pronoun xe is used in this story as mage children decide whether or nor to be male or female upon coming of age. It works as follows:

- Xe - He/She
- Xem - Him/Her
- Xyr - His/Her
- Xyrs - His/Hers
- Xemself - Himself/Herself

Credit to fanndis on Tumblr for terms "oma", "apa", and "grandapa"

Oma - Omega Mother
Apa - Alpha Father
Grandapa - Alpha Grandfather

Credit to Tongari Boushi no Atorie for the concept of ateliers, soar shoes, and magical placement tests.

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CW: I think this chapter is pretty tame in relation to others but there is a scene with vomiting.

There was an old saying that went, "Visiting is nice, but home is better." and Viktor couldn't have agreed with the sentiment more than when he stepped foot back into his own apartment.

They arrived in Ost Pyotrsborg during the dead of night. Yuuri, after his first day of recovery, wouldn’t wait any longer and Viktor, who could hardly be said to hold any warm feelings for the Nikiforov estate after recent events, couldn’t find it in himself to be the voice of reason and disagree. His mother had tried to keep them back, alternatively whining and scolding that they should spend a few more days but her words had fallen on an unwilling audience. Minako had tried too but she was even less effective than her mistress.

Viktor ignored everything they said and even though Yuuri was still so exhausted that Viktor had
to carry him to the arranged transport, he put the omega in the vehicle and told it drive off even as his mother’s insults and warnings were still ringing in his ears.

Once they were safe and sound in the Ost Pyotrsborg apartment, Viktor gave himself exactly one afternoon at home to make sure Yuuri was fine before he returned to the atelier to face the mountain of work/procrastination he had left behind. In his heart of hearts, he knew he was only rushing towards it because it would be the perfect diversion from the other troubles going on in his life but bad habits were hard to quit and as awful as it felt to admit it to himself, he found it difficult to give up the practice that had gotten him through 10 years of not being able to face Yuuri. It was like a forbidden drug and he knew he would abuse it again and again if it meant that he could hide from his fears and use it to cope until something or someone forced him to face reality.

What started out as regular 8 hour days, extended to 10 and then 12 hour ones as the date for the Opening Ceremonies loomed closer. Yakov didn’t say much, grateful for the help when it was obvious that the atelier was being slammed in preparation for one of the year’s biggest events, but sometimes when the older man thought his former pupil wasn’t paying attention, Viktor caught the maester gazing at him with a deep frown.

“Something is bothering you, Vitya.”

It was a week before the Opening Ceremonies and instead of enjoying the fading days of summer like the rest of Feltsman atelier, Viktor had cooped himself up in Yakov’s toaster oven of an office under the guise of helping the older mage deal with a pile of registration paperwork so tall that it would make a bureaucrat cry.

"Why didn't we these get done sooner?" Viktor grumbled, reaching across the desk to grab a bottle of correction fluid. He shook it up a few times, glaring at his mistake instead of Yakov even though it was only going to set him back by a few minutes.

"It's got to be against some international convention to still be making ateliers do analog applications. Look, Yakov, just look at what all this paperwork has done to my hands.” he shoved his hand into the older coach's face for a fuller, more distracting effect.

"Don’t try to ignore me, boy," The older man snapped while smacking the offending appendage away. "What is it this time? Yuura? Your family?"

Contradicting feelings of warmth and jealousy ran through him at hearing Yuuri’s diminutive fall from the gruff coach’s lips. He swiped at his typo wishing he had a correction brush that he could use to sweep over the unwanted parts of his life.

“It’s nothing.” He blew on the spot of white liquid and picked up a pen to keep himself from sitting still enough to meet his mentor’s eyes.

“Vitya…” His name came with a low warning growl.

He felt annoyance swarm up within him but he pushed it back down. He breathed and told himself it was just his mind trying to make danger because it didn’t want to deal with Yakov’s whatever else. If he snapped, he would only end up baring his neck in shame. He told himself the urge to growl back was false. He could feel the thought supported in the way his alpha remained quiet.

“It’s nothing, Yakov. I promise.” He kept his face straight as he lied to the man who had practically raised him from the age of 18.

Yakov looked at him for a long time, long enough for Viktor to become uncomfortable and bury
his face back into the camouflage of applications.

“That’s dragonshit, boy,” he said so harshly that Viktor made the mistake of meeting his coach’s eyes over the rim of the older man’s precariously perched bifocals, “and we both know that.”

Viktor grit his teeth using the action as a blockade against the emotions Yakov’s questioning was threatening to pull out. He didn’t want to wrap yet another person into his problems. Worrying about Yuuri was bad enough. If he added another person to protect, he’d probably break.

“I’m fine,” it came like a hiss between his clenched teeth.

Yakov still stared at him for a little longer before he shook his head with a sigh.

“Fine. Just make sure that whatever it is, it doesn’t affect Yuuri. He’s got a good chance at gold this season but has the nerves of a colt. Don’t you ruin it with that High House drama of yours, you hear me boy?”

Viktor nodded, a bitter lump growing in his throat. He only had to make sure some shadowy group of power hungry assholes didn’t kill his beloved but okay.

“I won’t. I promise I won’t, Yakov.”

And then, they went back to their paperwork like nothing happened.

They took a private car to the airport, Viktor unwilling to navigate public transport for the hour it would take to get to the Ost Pyotrsborg airport. His nerves and alpha wouldn’t allow it. There were just too many people and too many opportunities for someone to take advantage of and make an attack. Yuuri slept most of the way while Viktor watched the city go by grateful for the privacy of the car’s tinted windows. He let the repeating scenery of old buildings and busy people let him zone out enough to recover from the stress of his harrowing morning.

Someone had leaked his flight details to the press and so instead of the quiet and easy start Viktor had been planning for the beginning of Yuuri’s first competition trip, the older man had been forced to give the poor half asleep omega a crash course on how to make it to a car when a veritable sea of people were trying to prevent you from doing so.

He thanked Araak’s stars that he had been worried enough about the morning chill to drape one of his lighter trench coats over the teen before they left the apartment. It had provided a lot of cover and coupled with their already steady practice of wearing hats, mask, and sunglasses, Viktor was relatively sure that they had prevented any identifying snaps.

Yakov was understandably furious and even though Viktor had made the call at close to 5am, the older man was up and already trying to root out the source of the leak. His phone pinged with a media alert but he tossed it aside after he read the title of “Viktor Nikiforov Seen Travelling with Mystery Companion”.

He scowled and looked back at the window hoping to get lost in the beauty of Ost Pyotrsborg’s architecture again. It didn’t work. While he had managed to calm down enough to convince himself that it most likely wasn’t the work of the grigori (For Araak’s sake, he hoped it was not. Breathe, Viktor, just breathe. They don’t leave the mage realm, remember?), his mind kept returning to the morning’s interaction.

“Who is with you?”
“Is this the person you retired for?”

“Is it true that you’re on your way to the Opening Ceremonies?”

“Is this your omega?”

That last question had almost made him freeze. It had definitely made Yuuri stop. The younger mage had just been about to lift off the edges of the coat when Viktor snapped out of his own surprise, pulled it back down, and half pushed and half guarded him the rest of the way to the car.

“Is this your omega?”

There was no doubt that they had smelled Yuuri. He almost wanted to slap himself for not going back for the scent blocking patches before he decided to face the crowd. Yakov had been good enough to not bring it up but Viktor was sure that once the older coach caught hold of him, he would be getting a lecture longer than the flow of time.

He groaned. Yakov would probably bring up the subject of Yuuri living on his own again, too. Deep down, Viktor saw the merit in it and he knew it was right to want to keep their betrothal hidden until Yuuri was a more established thaumaturge. Yuuri was very independent when he wanted to be and the older man was pretty sure the teen could manage if he had to, but no matter how reasonable the advice seemed, Viktor just never had the heart to bring it up to his student, worried that Yuuri might take it like so many other forms of his help as a rejection. Now, he had other more pressing reasons for wanting Yuuri to stay with him and he was already thinking of an excuse that his coach might buy that wouldn’t force him to give up the truth.

His phone pinged again and despite his annoyance at its earlier conveyance, he picked it up hoping that it wasn’t some other unlucky information like a flight delay or a hotel cancellation.

“Found the leak. Travel agent staff. Didn’t know about Yuuri. Keeping following our plan,” the message from Yakov read.

Viktor smiled bitterly. He’d try but obviously it wasn’t a good one if it only took a second for a loud mouth to out him. He shot off a text to Yakov requesting that the loose lipped staff member not be fired. He had a press reputation to maintain and though he was filled with fury over the damage that the careless action might cause, Viktor Nikiforov was known for being kind.

“Good Morning!”

Viktor slid his sunglasses off his face with a flick of his hair and gave the pair he was walking towards a dazzling smile. There was no doubt that after this morning’s news, the press was nearby, probably watching them from the shadows just waiting for the perfect moment to snap a photo. He let the smile go wider, happier as he coaxed a “still stunned by the cameras” Yuuri to keep pace with him.

“You look like dragonshit.”

His smile went a little plastic but honestly who could blame him when his wayward student couldn’t keep up the nice act for even one minute. It was like he and Yakov hadn’t done any PR prep with the little beast at all.

“Good morning to you too, Yurio.”

Yurio dipped his head in greeting and Viktor had to be satisfied that at least it wasn’t a middle
finger. He turned to Yuuri as an important thought hit him. They were in such a rush this morning because Yuuri as usual had overslept and in the chaos of earlier, he hadn’t had the presence of mind to do any final checks before they drove off.

“Have you got all your tickets and documents?”

He really should have asked Yuuri this question before they left but sleep deprivation and lateness had him just wanting to get to the airport.

“I think so,” Yuuri answered, and with a sleepy (but actually quite grumpy) frown rummaged through his bag until he pulled out a newly purchased (on Yuuri’s insistence) Makkachin themed travel wallet.

He handed it to Viktor who unzipped it only to have half of the documents fall out. He scrambled to catch them before they could hit the ground and scatter.

“Yuuuuura, I said to put everything in neatly, didn’t I?” He singsonged as he gave Yuuri a far from harmless smile.

Pink cheeked and eyes suddenly glued to what must be a very interesting floor, the omega nodded. He shuffled from side to side nervously as the older man thumbed through his documents which told Viktor he knew exactly what he had done wrong. It was cute, and in any other situation he probably would have laughed it off but he was tired, he was stressed, he was watching out for potential assassins, and he was supposed to be in coach mode.

“Those who fail to prepare, prepare to fail. Is that what you want to do, Yuura?”

“No!” Yuuri shook his head so furiously that he threatened to give himself whiplash. “I promise I will do it properly next time, Vitya.”

“Maester Viktor,” he corrected, as he reached the teen’s passport. Yuuri Nikiforovich Neizvestny. He looked over the given name with only a slight frown. He couldn’t wait for the day Neizvestny became Nikiforov but Yakov’s rules were as good as laws. He stared down at Yuuri who was fiddling with the zipper of his windbreaker instead of meeting his coach’s eyes. “Remember when we’re out competing Maester Yakov told us to use proper titles.”

His student nodded again, this time looking a little frazzled but he still answered, “Yes, Maester Viktor.”

Always on his worst behavior, Yurio snorted at the younger omega’s use of the term. “Maester Viktor? Are you kidding me, old man? I’m not calling you that!”

Ah, he could always count on Yurio for raising the bar when it came to annoyance.

Viktor grinned again and forgetting Yuuri’s travel papers for a moment, walked up into the blond’s space until his actions forced the younger man to step back. Viktor followed until their impromptu dance number had the 20 year old bumping against the wall. Mindful of the cameras, he leaned down further into his student’s personal space bubble until they were practically nose to nose.

Yurio cried, “What the fuck old man?” and tried to posture but Viktor could tell from the younger mage’s wide green eyes that he was getting his point across.

“Students who can’t listen don’t need to be on the aether and they definitely don’t need to be competing under my name.” He said pleasant as a summer day. “Should I have Otabek take you home?”
When Yurio didn’t respond, he turned his head to the man in question and asked, “What do you think, Otabek?”

The dragon shrugged, his face the perfect image of placidness as he stood unmoved by the dominance display. “Whatever my master wills.”

Viktor looked back down at the trapped man. He leaned back in a way that put his incisors on full display. “Well, what will it be, Yurio?”

A thousand emotions seem to flit across his apprentice’s reddening face before he finally spit out, “Fine!”

Ah, that wouldn’t do at all. “Fine, what?”

Yurio looked like he was going to blow a blood vessel. “Fine, Maester Viktor.”

“Now that wasn’t so bad, now was it?” he said with a little laugh before he went back to the all important task of checking through everyone’s travel documents.

He woke up bursting for a wee and dreading that he would have to rouse a sleepy Yuuri in order to get out of his seat to do so. Instead, he opened his eyes to find the omega nodding off as he attempted to scribble in a poodle shaped notebook. Viktor frowned. This wasn’t what he had instructed Yuuri to do.

The schedule since Yuuri’s heat had been hard and unrelenting on the younger man so Viktor had told him to make sure to sleep on the flight and to catch snippets wherever and whenever he could. He was about to go into a good and thorough session of scolding until his bladder reminded him that he had more urgent matters to attend to.

Yuuri barely looked up as he threw off his blankets and rushed out of his seat to take care of his needs. The omega was still at it when he returned less burdened.

“Yuura, what are you doing?” his words were slightly slurred as he slid back into his spot because his mind was still fogged despite the mad dash.

He blamed it on the time lag and several hours of international flight. Despite his orders, Viktor himself was running quite low on sleep too, caught between his worries over protecting Yuuri and the general and more innocent ones of a first time coach. He squinted at the seat display to read the white numbers in its top right corner.

“It’s like 2 in the morning. You should be asleep,” he said with a frown as concern woke his body up more fully.

Yuuri flushed, shook himself awake, and hunched over his notebook as if to hide it from the older man. “I can’t sleep because I’m writing.”

Oh. It was a bit odd but there wasn’t much for Viktor to say on it and from the way Yuuri wouldn’t meet his eyes, he guessed that his apprentice wanted it to stay that way. Still tired, Viktor eyes closed for a sleepy minute and he almost let the quiet scratching of pen lull him back to sleep, but he only had a few seconds of rest before his inner coach voice and his alpha voice combined into a mental screech of ‘make him go to sleep’ loud enough to jerk him back awake. He leaned up realizing slumber would be lost to him until he sorted his beloved out.

“What are you writing?” he asked, genuine curiosity coming through even if he was going to put a stop to it.
The teen’s brows furrowed as an answer and his scent took on a light peppery note of warning. It made Viktor even more interested and he leaned up onto his elbows to try to sneak a look. Yuuri bolted forward, his pink cheeks turning red as he threw half of his torso over his tray and notebook. Viktor had just enough time to get a glimpse of the cover before the omega fully concealed it.

“Don’t look, Vitya,” he whined with just a hint of scolding as Viktor lost himself to a teasing chuckle. “It’s a secret!”

Viktor grinned. “Are you writing a speech, Yuura?”

Yuuri squeaked and then said with a slight glare, “How did you know?”

The older man reached forward and tapped the notebook’s cover with his forefinger. “It says ‘My Speech’ right on the front,” he explained with only a small smirk.

Yuuri snatched the notebook to his chest and glared at Viktor. “It’s private,” he said with a hiss so venomous that it would give a snake pause, “so you can’t read it until I win the Juniors Debuts.”

“Okay, okay.” Viktor held up his hands in surrender though his eyebrow quirked up at the mention of their upcoming competition. “Mage’s honor, I won’t look or ask any further.”

He was curious but he didn’t want to actually antagonize Yuuri. He was a bit surprised though that the teen was serious enough to write a winner’s speech before he had even won but he should have known that unlike Yurio (who seemed to be determined to be a PR nightmare in the making) his youngest student would take his teachings like gospel.

Yuuri relaxed and Viktor took the opening to cuddle closer, figuring that the omega’s earlier standoffish behavior was related solely to his writing. He cupped the side of the teen’s face, his thumb rubbing at the dark bruises under Yuuri’s eyes which he didn’t like the sight of one bit.

He slid his hand to the back of Yuuri’s neck and rubbed what he hoped was a soothing pattern on the tense muscles. Yuuri melted into his touch with a sigh and Viktor was able to use his other hand to guide the younger man to lie back against the window seat.

“But, you look awfully sleepy, Yuura. Why don’t you give the writing a rest?”

“M’ not tired,” Yuura snapped back even as his eyes fluttered and fought to stay open.

“You are. Look at how easily you’re falling asleep under my hands.”

Viktor released a tiny amount of comforting scent as he continued his ministrations to his student’s nape. As if his body agreed with his coach’s words, Yuuri’s head slumped forward before he snapped it back up with a deep inhale.

“M’ tryna write a speech that Vitya will be proud of,” he slurred in explanation as if any speech would be important enough to Viktor that he would let his obviously tired student compromise his health.

“You can write at the hotel.”

Yuuri tried to shake his head but Viktor scratched a spot behind his ear that made him go limp with content.

“No, I-” Yuuri made a feeble attempt at pushing Viktor away and trying to sit back up.
“Yuura,” Viktor warned in a tone as warm as spring sunshine causing the younger man to pause and flinch, “I’m your coach, aren’t I?”

Yuuri nodded so slowly that for a moment Viktor thought that the younger mage had actually gone off to sleep but much to Viktor’s surprise (and amusement) the omega managed to lift his head and whisper a clear “yes”.

He soothed him back down. Yuuri was lax in his hands as he shifted him into a more comfortable position.

“Then, do as your coach says,” he whispered so sweetly that Yuuri didn’t even argue as Viktor reached to draw the blanket sitting on the omega’s lap up to his shoulders.

“That’s it,” he crooned as he adjusted Yuuri’s pillow into a position that wouldn’t hurt his apprentice’s neck. “Just let your coach take care of you so that you can win all the gold medals.”

“Why are you putting us in separate rooms?”

He looked down at the white sheet of paper feeling disbelief, irritation and the new sensation of paranoia. All that time spent doing paperwork and he was just now seeing this? Something whispered in his head that Yakov had planned things to happen this way.

“Vitya.”

He’d been expecting the gruff response when he voiced his complaint but hadn’t been expecting Yakov to pull him away from the rest of the group and go off to the side. Apprehension filled him, amplified by the paranoia and pushed out all the rest. Whatever it was had to be serious otherwise the older coach would have just answered with his usual bark or screaming shout.

He spared a glance at Yuuri who was talking and joking with his other rinkmates like any normal thaumaturge apprentice. He let his senses scan the area for any dangers before deeming Yuuri safe enough for Viktor to give into his present worries as he plied his coach for more information.

“Yakov, is something the matter?”

Yakov scratched the side of his face which after ten plus years with the man told Viktor that his former coach was deeply uncomfortable with what he was about to say. The older man tried to cover it up by looking grumpier than usual but Viktor could already feel his cheeks heating up in preparation for whatever embarrassing thing was going to come out of Yakov’s mouth.

“Look, Vitya, I know you and Yuura are in a relationship and that entails certain things…,”

Yakov rushed out but not fast enough for Viktor to not have to fight turning beet red.

Sometimes, he had to wonder what his coach really thought of him and this was one of those times.

“We’re…not…I’m not,” he choked on the words as his embarrassment grew to suffocating levels. “I swear on Araak’s grace I try to keep it above the waist, Yakov,” he squeaked, mentally screaming at the idea that this talk might be leading to another incidence of “sex advice Yakov” and just knowing from the depths of poor heart that he’d die of humiliation if it came to that.

“I don’t need to know about that!” the man snapped as he started to resemble a bottle of ketchup. “Xiv’s teeth, boy, there are things you can keep to yourself!”
Viktor felt the fear and tension drain out of his body at Yakov’s response. Rationality came back to him as he realized that the conversation was not to going into territory that might scar him for life.

“Why did you bring it up then?”

Yakov huffed and scratched his cheek again. Viktor didn’t fault him for not being able to meet his student’s eye. If he was in an opposite role and having this conversation with Yurio, he was sure a part of him would be alternating between gagging and wanting to die.

“Yakov?”

“It would look strange if I had you room together,” he finally spit out. He looked a little to the side again. “This was Lilia’s idea actually but she’s right about keeping up appearances.”

He held up a hand effectively cutting Viktor off from the colorful protest he was planning.

“You said that you want Yuuri to make his own way, yes?”

Viktor nodded. That was part of his “I won’t go easy on you” promise but Yakov didn’t give him time to verbally answer.

“That’s why we’re using a different last name and formal titles, yes? All so that Yuuri can be seen as a thaumaturge of his own and not the future mate of Viktor Nikiforov, yes?”

Viktor nodded again but still wasn’t given a chance to speak.

“Well, no matter how innocent your relationship actually is, that is going to be hard to do, Vitya, if you’re rooming together and…handsy over each other- which brings me to my next point…no pda. No handholding, kissing, obvious scenting, it’s all banned while we’re competing. This is coach’s orders, Vitya. Ost Pyotsborg might for the most part be able to keep its mouth shut out of loyalty to your family name but as we’ve seen today, even a little slip up can have repercussions. Footage of you two leaving the house was playing on repeat all morning with all kinds of wild speculation until I sent our press guys down to sort it out. You and I both know that if the press thinks you’re intimately connected, they’ll dig and with all the secrets you’ve got wrapped around that boy, I’m sure you don’t want any of them to come out.”

Viktor nodded for a third time.

“Good. Just keep your hands to yourself and give Yuura a little space and everything should go fine.”

Viktor considered it a great milestone in his maturity that he didn’t give into the whine that was threatening to break out. He couldn’t watch, guard, or keep Yuuri safe from another room. It ate at his alpha instincts so bad that he had a difficult time telling his inner self to be quiet.

Yakov was right though and as much as he hated it, he knew it was a sensible order. They would probably dig any way, especially if Yuuri started winning, but if Viktor could hold them off for even a second longer, he would consider it a success. He just had hope that they didn’t dig deep enough to learn about Yuuri’s Katsuki heritage.

He looked up at Yuuri again and tried not to let his scent sour. How was he going to explain it to the omega without things potentially becoming a disaster?

As if reading his mind, Yakov clapped a hand on his shoulder and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

“Leave Yuura to me. There will be less fight if I tell him but you’ll have to break the news to
Plisetsky that he’s not bunking with Otabek.”

Viktor groaned. He didn’t know which situation was worse. At least, with Yuuri, he had a chance to soothe with kisses, Viktor (but mostly Makkachin) goods, or a box of cereal.

“Being a coach is hard, no?”

Xiv’s teeth, he wished that Yakov would stop saying that phrase like it was some kind of joke.

Yuuri stood head tilted up, staring at the crowds and spectacle with a wide eyed look.

“There are so many people,” he whispered, each word breathless with awe.

“We’re going now,” Yakov barked from his spot in front of the group. “Anyone, and I mean anyone who messes this up,” his eyes slid over his atelier cold as a sheet of ice, “will be scrubbing toilets until the season ends.”

Viktor smirked, amused as the threat took hold. Some students stood straighter as others fixed their uniforms. A few made sure there was nothing on their face. He chanced a look at Yuuri and all his amusement dried up.

Yuuri’s nerves seemed to be back at a force strong enough to make the poor omega stiff as a board. He glanced at the blocking patch that peaked over the edge of Yuuri’s black collar sure that without it, the teen’s scent would be as bitter as a lemon. His eyes had gone wider and his hands were slightly shaking as he fidgeted with the straps and lapels of his cape.

Viktor ached to reassure him but Yakov’s no pda policy was still in place and even though it felt like every nerve and hair of his was being brushed in the wrong direction, the older man resisted the urge to drop everything and see to Yuuri in the ways that he usually did.

“Hey, piggy.” They both turned to look at Yurio who was staring straight ahead but had edged closer to Yuuri’s side. “You’ll be fine.”

The younger omega flushed and ducked his head. The blond turned to him more fully at the action, a scowl beginning to paint his face.

“Pigg-,” he began but was cut off by the voice of the Maester of Ceremonies.

“Presenting 8 thaumaturges this year and 2 debuts, announcing Atelier Feltsman. Established in 1870. Currently coached by Head Maester Yakov Feltsman with assistance from Maester Viktor Nikiforov.”

The crowd’s noise grew into a din at the mention of Viktor’s name. It made him bounce on his heels, his body made restless by the familiar rush of excitement and anticipation that occurred before he performed.

Yuuri turned to him looking slightly green.

“Vitya,” he said his eyes as wide as saucers and completely heedless of the way he was using his coach’s diminutive, “I don’t think I can do this…”

Viktor felt the air grow a bit warmer but with Yuuri’s patches, he couldn’t tell if it held the warning of cinnamon that usually came with the omega’s personal magic.

“We’re moving,” Yurio hissed as he walked forward.
Yuuri scrambled to lock in step with him just like they had practiced but his eyes were darting everywhere and Viktor could see that the shaking had grown to his shoulders. The small movements only became stronger as they walked in unison towards the bright white light of the outside. Sensing the growing distress through the bond, Viktor was just about to ignore all of Yakov’s warnings and pull Yuuri aside for reassurance and scenting when Yurio, completely out of character, reached out and grabbed the other omega’s hand. Viktor watched with no small amount of surprise on his own part as Yuuri’s head whipped to the side in shock.

Yurio’s cheeks where tinted slightly pink even though he kept his gaze straight ahead.

“Yurio…?” Yuuri’s voice was full of questions but at least it wasn’t as broken by fear as it had been earlier.

“You’re such a fucking baby,” the older omega griped instead of the inspirational words that most normal people would say. “We didn’t come all this way for these prop-sucking assholes to look down on us, did we?”

Yuuri shook his head the small amount that his pointed cap would allow. Viktor saw Yurio’s eyes flick to the side to catch the movement. His cheeks went pinker which in true Yuri style he tried to cover with bravado.

“Good. Now, once we get out there, smile and hold your head up high like you fucking mean it because from this day forward, we’ll be the omega bastards taking their gold.”

The younger mage stared at his companion until Yurio went entirely red in the face and began to sputter to hide his embarrassment. The actions made Yuuri smile and just as they hit the last few feet before the exit, Viktor saw a look of fierce determination stretch across the omega’s soft face. He nodded towards Yurio again - this time with confidence coloring his movements.

“Ok,” he said and then held his head high as he let the other omega’s hand go.

Viktor couldn’t tell if it was pride or love that he felt as he watched his previously frightened student stand tall enough to make any Maester cry. Honestly, it was just too beautiful and Viktor, a great appreciator of all things lovely, wiped a few tears away. Who knew Yurio had it in him to be so nice? He would have to give the little punk a cheat day as a reward.

Mila seemed to echo his thoughts.

“That was so cool, Yurio,” she cooed from her place right in front of the apprentice pair, “next time, I’m feeling troubled, you’ll hold my hand, won’t you?”

The blond immediately bristled and ground out a quiet but vicious, “Shut up, you old hag!”

Yakov yelled at them all to shut up and wave, and with a few more steps, they were outside into the sunlight and straight into the cacophony of the excitable crowds. Yuuri startled by the sight, paused at the gate before him but Yurio nudged him back into step as he made a gesture to younger mage to wave.

Yuuri’s movements started off tentative and shy, just a jerk of his wrist from side to side but as they reached the halfway point of the track, his hand rose higher and more freely in response to the cheering feedback from the crowds. By the time they had made it to their spot on the field, a small smile had even started to paint the omega’s face.

Viktor hooked a finger into the collar of Yurio's cape and yanked his student back before he could
reach the ornate doors that would lead them into the Opening Ceremonies banquet.

"What the fuck, Viktor?" Was all the thanks that was hissed as he righted the omega's crooked hat, rolled up his too long sleeves, and tried his best to beat the wrinkles out of the cloak that had probably had been balled up and thrown in a suitcase.

Viktor ignored the huffing and puffing as he went about his work only finishing after pulling the golden locks into a suitable ponytail.

"Finally," he slapped the hand that Yurio was reaching towards his hair away, "you look like someone's student and not one of those street punks just begging to get arrested."

The blond stopped shaking his sore hand long enough to give the finger. "Fuck off, old man, you're just jealous you can't pull off leopard print as well as I can."

Yurio threw him a smirk but Viktor merely shivered at the thought. "As if I'd ever."

"Piggy might look good in it tho-" the younger mage didn't get to finish because Viktor slapped a hand over his mouth with a smile that could kill.

"Yuura is impressionable." He shook his head as Yurio's face went red with heat and denial. "Aht aht," he tutted as he leaned forward with a slightly crazed look in his eye. "Don't think I've forgotten that you were the one who helped Yuura buy that blue tie."

"Hey," Yuuri puffed up from Viktor's side, " what's wrong with my tie?"

"A lot of things, Yuurochka," Viktor replied as he released his captive and wiped his palm on his cloak where Yurio (the brat) had used his coach's retreat to act like a five year old and lick the older mage's hand. "But at least you can dress yourself unlike our poor Yurchik here."

"Oi!"

"Now, remember boys, no booze," Viktor ignored the cry of indignation and reached for the golden handle of the door, "and best behavior or Yakov will have you scrubbing shit off of toilets until your hands fall off."

He laughed at the way his vulgarity made Yuuri choke and snuck a hand to the small of the teen's back to nudge him into the room.

They were bombarded by Mila and Georgi the minute they stepped in and were ushered towards a corner of the large and opulent hall where the rest of the team stood.

His curiosity piqued as he saw Yakov at the center of the group speaking passionately but not yelling.

He leaned toward Georgi " Is it the usual?"

"Yeah."

Viktor made a face.

"How many times and ways can he tell us not to fuck up before he gets tired?" He said with a sigh as Mila wrapped her arms around Yuuri and pulled him into Yakov's lecture.

"We probably wouldn't need to if someone wasn't constantly breaking his rules."
"I wasn't *that* bad," he waved off Georgi's skeptical look with a chuckle. "I just had some creative ways to get around him."

The beta shook his head as he grabbed two glasses of passing champagne and handed one off to Viktor.

"Here's to your students being well behaved."

Viktor scoffed as he clinked his glass against Georgi's. "Compared to me? I'm sure Yakov would say they were angels. Especially Yuuri."

He wasn't sure who had distracted Yakov enough to allow it but at some point of the night, hours after alcohol had been flowing for far longer than it should have, someone from the audience convinced the crowd that debut thaumaturges should give the other attendees a show.

He didn't think much of it. He had left the Yu(u)ris within the safety of the team and most of the debutantes were stiffer than Yurio and were hardly worth a second glance. He figured his time would be better spent on making powerhouses of his two students through the networking opportunities the banquet provided.

That was until someone pulled a slightly tipsy and very pink Yuuri onto the stage. Stripping off his outer caftan and cloak, the little wretch slipped into the Dance of a Thousand Stars with a delicacy that made a few of the men he was talking to stare up at the omega in silent awe.

It was gorgeous, absolutely marvellous but Yuuri was doing it with alcohol in his veins and in front of a crowd that was looking increasingly like they wanted to devour him the longer the dance went on. He just prayed that the brat had enough sobriety to keep his hips out of it otherwise - judging by the unrestrained lust beginning to spin in the air - Viktor might have a bloodbath on his hands.

He was going flay whoever enabled it alive after he got done scolding Yuuri to within an inch of his life. He had told both of the Yu(u)ri's not to drink tonight and look what happened the moment he turned his back? No wonder Yakov yelled so much. Viktor was starting to think he didn't yell enough.

Suddenly, Yakov's punishment of toilet scrubbing didn't seem like such a bad idea either. He had always used it as a joke but now it seemed very rational and appropriate and very much the punishment that was going to be given to a certain dancing student who didn't listen.

He was just on his way to storm the stage when a voice cut through the haze of annoyance, worry, and anger.

"His dancing is very beautiful."

Viktor turned to the accented voice to find a slim young man with some of the wildest hair he had ever seen at a formal event. The young man- mage alpha by the cedar scent of him - flushed when Viktor's stare went on too long and reached for the red bangs that stood out stark against the rest of his blond hair. He smiled giving them a tug.

"Little bit of rebellion," he said without prompting as if he was used to the unasked question."Though sometimes I regret it."

He gave a little laugh that would make anyone else feel like he was a down to earthe guy.

But Viktor wasn't anyone else and he knew that in quiet pools, devils dwelled. His gut (more like
his jealousy) told him to trust the other alpha about as much as he trusted Yuuri's cooking (which
was not at all if he wanted to make it to old age).

He still held out his hand as politeness dictated and gave his name even though he was sure the
other man already knew him.

"Minami Kenjiro," the mage replied with another disarming laugh," or Kenjiro Minami as you
Rhurshyans might say. May Araak bless this meeting."

"Yes," Viktor murmured, a shiver went up his arm as their hands touched."May Araak bless this
meeting."

He still had Yuuri to get off the stage but as he was turning to do so, he saw Georgi (what a hero)
guiding the omega back into his outer clothes and off the steps of the stage.

"Lord Katsuki?"

Katsuki? His attention shifted from his rescued charge to the new name. They couldn't be talking
about Yuuri. No one knew a thing about him other than what Yakov had let there be known. It had
to be somebody else. He knew the line had continued but there hadn't been much information on its
new (and expectedly) very male and very alpha head.

"Yes?"

Well...There hadn't been much information until Kenjiro - aka Lord Katsuki - turned with a smile
towards the voice and Viktor spotted an older man dressed in traditional Jih Roh robes
approaching them at a steady rate. His new acquaintance held out a hand to the newcomer and
made a happy, airy gesture in front of Viktor.

"Ah, just in time, Mr Morooka, have you met Mr Nikiforov, yet? He's a very famous thaumaturge,
you know."

Morooka held out his hand and Viktor took it trying hard not to shit bricks at the idea that he was
shaking hands next to the new Lord Katsuki in the same room as the true Lord Katsuki, only to
find himself staring into eyes with the same hunger as the grigori.

It was like shit filling in a shit dumpling. He must have done something awful in a past life.

"I was not old enough to meet him myself, but I have been told he was a quite frequent visitor of
the Katsuki family once upon a time."

Xiv's Bones. This was supposed to be impossible. Was he shaking hands with a watcher or
whatever the Katsukis called their version of the grigori in the middle of a competition banquet?
What if there were more? He quickly scanned the room but didn't sense any further pairs of eyes.
The knowledge was instantly calming but it seemed Morooka had still caught what ever expression
had crossed his face.

"You seemed surprised, Mr Nikiforov. Is something the matter?"

For a split second, Viktor swore he saw the image of the man before him merge with Artem's
grinning face. His repulsion grew with every pump of their hand and if the man did the standard
grigori greeting, Viktor was going to be sick. Not wanting to cause a scene, he refrained from
snatching his hand away and tried to continue their interaction as if nothing was wrong.

"No, nothing. I was just realizing that I need to send my apprentices off to bed." He gave a chuckle
that he hoped covered the way his hands shook as he put them in his pocket. "I'm a new coach, you see," he pushed another fake laugh out of his throat, "so I'm still learning how to be the responsible one."

"Oh yes! " cried Kenjiro with so much enthusiasm that it startled Viktor enough to jump. "Mr Nikiforov is the coach for one of the new omega debuts, Yuuri Neizvestny."

Morooka raised a brow but Viktor couldn't tell if it was from surprise or distaste. Either way he didn't care. To Viktor, whether they were grigori or a watcher mattered little: He just wanted to be as far away from them as possible.

"Was that the omega who was dancing just a little while ago?"

Viktor felt like all the air had been sucked out of the room and he was sure he would have passed out if not for the grounding hand Kenjiro placed on his shoulder.

"Yes, that's the one, Morooka! I thought his dance and his persons really quite lovely. What did you think?"

The other man's lips pursed as he thought, and unbeknownst to himself, Viktor tensed as he waited for the outcome.

"His face is hard to see from here, milord, but you are quite right in that his dancing is beautiful. It reminds me of the Okukawa school of dance, though I have heard that it has not been the same since it lost its most prized student. They used to say that watching Okukawa Minako perform was like being a guest in Araak's court."

There was another moment of no oxygen as Viktor processed the information. Surely, Morooka couldn't mean their Minako who barely tapped her foot outside of the dance lessons she gave Yuuri.

Morooka sighed like a teenager with a crush as an unlikely red overcame his face. "One of my greatest regrets was that I was too young to witness "Jih Roh's Celestial Maiden."

"Don't mind him, Mr Nikiforov," Kenjiro chuckled as he ruffled the man's hair. "All he does is watch people all day so it makes him say very strange things."

Viktor tried to not let his eyes pop out of his skull as he watched the man laugh at his lord's action. Things must be very different with the new generation of Katsukis because in all of his admittedly scant and patchy memories, he couldn't remember a single instance of Lady Katsuki reacting to her watchers at all, much less touching and laughing with them.

He, himself, couldn't imagine that level of familiarity with the grigori. Even his father, who was essentially their pet, treated them with a warmth that was glacial at best.

Viktor felt a bit jealous. Not that he wanted to make friends with the grigori. It made his skin crawl to even suggest the notion. At this point, he wouldn't even piss on one if they were on fire but he had to concede that things might be easier right now if he had a relationship like the one in front of him...

"Maester Viktor!"

Viktor didn't dare turn around to the voice that called him. It would invite Yuuri into the conversation and lobsters would whistle from mountaintops before he allowed that.
"Ah, my student is calling me. I must see to him." He excused himself with a polite quirk of his lips and a nod.

"It was nice meeting you, Mr Nikifo-," Kenjiro started but his voice cut out suddenly as his eyes landed behind Viktor making the silver haired man curse his fortune and wonder where his gods of luck were.

He needed to end this interaction now before Yuuri got any closer.

"Til we meet again," he said as he saw Kenjiro's eyes metamorphose from wide eyed surprise to the dark, liquid red that marked fire magic.

He smelt cinnamon and almost bared his fangs. It smelt like Katsuki magic but he would know the distinct cloying notes of lust from anywhere. He withheld the reaction his own scent demanded and pulled his lips into the cage of his teeth to keep them from turning into a snarl.

"Lord Katsuki, your scent is making Mr Nikiforov uncomfortable."

The Jih Roh mage jolted like someone had slapped him and flushed something awful as he brought a hand to rub at the back of his head.

"I'm sorry. I'm..." His smile was a bit weaker than before but maybe that was because Viktor had let the ice of his anger swirl into his eyes.

"Forgive him, Mr Nikiforov. He has only been an adult for a few years and sometimes thinks with the wrong brain," Morooka finished the rest for him.

"Accepted." Viktor wasn't going argue with that. He just wanted to make sure they stayed away from Yuuri. "Now, if you'll excuse me…"

Kenjiro flushed. "Oh yes, please go right ahead."

He heard whispers of "marriage", "courting", and "protocol" behind his back but ignored them in favour of catching Yuuri before he could come to him. The murmuring was meaningless. Yuuri didn't seem inclined to anyone other than Viktor and Viktor wanted to keep it that way.

He took Yuuri by the elbow as the younger man approached and directed him towards the exits. Most likely surprised by the contact, the omega let Viktor guide him out of the banquet room before he spoke up.

"Maester Viktor?"

"Vitya is fine right now, Yuura. I don't think anyone else is around us."

"Where are we going, Vitya?"

Viktor felt some of the tension leave his body as the familiar nickname flowed over him.

"Were going back to the hotel."

He hadn't even told Yakov goodbye but he wasn't going to change his course of action. Let the old coach yell at him tomorrow. It wasn't like a bit of screaming would make him melt. Besides, he'd take that over an evening spent worrying about what would happen if the obviously smitten Kenjiro and his unwanted sidekick met Yuuri.

"Ehhh so soon? But Mila said they'd have these nice desserts you could try and I've never had
Aelshore desserts before. Mila said they're really big and sweet here."

"We can order roomservice and I'll let you kiss me as much as you like."

He hoped his offer would be enough to entice the younger man. As much as it would destroy his nerves to stay at the banquet, he wouldn't force Yuuri back to the hotel.

"But Yakov said…"

Viktor fought the urge to roll his eyes. Yuuri now decides to listen? His student's sudden willingness to obey reminded Viktor that part of the reason he was running away from a room full of endorsements and contracts was because the younger mage didn't listen.

But he would deal with that later, tomorrow in fact, when Yuuri would beg for the sugariest cereal the hotel had to offer and Viktor as punishment would have to say no.

"What Yakov doesn't know won't hurt him."

Screw Yakov's rules. Yuuri was staying in his room tonight.

He ended up stopping the pre-competition practice early because no matter how hard he tried to convince himself that everything was okay, he couldn’t shake the feeling that someone was watching them.

Yakov called it paranoia and told him to stop finding things to stress about but Viktor would swear to anybody that asked (except for Yuuri) that he could feel a pair of eyes burning holes into his back.

"Yuura, Yurio, let's stop here for today."

Both students stopped their run throughs without fuss or drama and it had Viktor wondering if they too were feeling the strange atmosphere.

He handed them water bottles and towels robotically as he once again scanned the sparse group of competitors and coaches for any hidden threats.

"Was I good?"

Viktor snapped his attention back to Yuuri and the hint of citrus that was starting to hover in his scent.

"You did very well," he praised honestly and then turned to Yurio. "That was the best I've seen either of you soar this season."

In truth, despite his unease, he had never felt better over the pair's prospects. No falls. No backlashes. It looked like Yakov's grueling regime was paying off and one or both of them were likely to medal.

"Right," he said with a little clap once he was sure both men were thoroughly cooled down and watered."Hit the showers and then we can head back to the hotel and rest."

Well, more like he could go back to the hotel and rest. If he could see his metaphorical nerves they would probably be in tatters.

"Ehhhh?" Yuuri sputtered on his water. He wiped his mouth and then sent Viktor a pout." But I
want to go sightseeing…"

Viktor shook his head, sightseeing right before their first competition seemed like an awful idea. He was personally of the opinion that it was best to rest until the last minute.

"You can sightsee on Sunnandaey," he began until Yuuri crowded into his space with puppy dog eyes and an idol star's pout.

"No! The place I want to see is only open today while we're here. Please can we go, Vity- Maester Viktor?" He fluttered his eyelashes so prettily that Viktor nearly choked.

If Chris taught him this move, Viktor was going to strangle the perchten.

Yuuri clasped his hands together and shifted his face into a perfect copy of Viktor's nearly 100% successful stuff getting pout.

"Pretty please with sugar on top."

Yup, definitely Chris. Viktor hoped Masumi wouldn't mind being a widower.

Yurio gagged loud enough for the other competitors to look their way.

With a shake of his head and a toss of sweaty hair, he said, "Who the fuck keeps teaching you these lines? You're younger than me but somehow you keep managing to be just as cornball as the old man."

The younger omega ignored his rinkmate to keep batting his lashes at his increasingly flustered coach.

"You promised me, Vitya," he said in a tone so close to a sulk that it made the inescapable feeling of fondness well up within Viktor.

"Please." This time he added a whine and Viktor had to cover his face to hide the pink that he could feel spreading across it.

Inwardly and outwardly, he sighed. He did promise Yuuri…and being outside might help the claustrophobic feeling sitting in chest. It was harder to watch people in a crowd and the city was packed full of people attending the Opening Ceremonies. If he was strict, they would only be out for a little while…

"Alright," he grumbled, trying his best to look like he hadn't completely lost the battle."but only for a few hours."

Yuuri nearly jumped him for a hug but caught himself at the last minute. Viktor's body panged with disappointment. He was really starting to hate that rule.

"Thank you, Maester Viktor."

Yuuri's smile though made everything alright and if it were a source of fuel, Viktor was sure the one being directed at him could power the sun.

When he recovered, he shooed them off to the showers and kept a careful eye on the crowd during the wait.

“Vitya, this!” Yuuri cried tapping so hard on the glass that covered the menu that it vibrated
dangerously. “This is the thing I saw on my phone!”

He pressed his nose to the glass before turning back to Viktor with eyes shining with excitement. "Can I get it?"

Viktor peered over the omega’s shoulder to squint at the image of the rice dish filled with fried pork and egg. The Pork Cutlet Deluxe standing at 900 calories and full of grease and fat looked like it was going to have to be a no.

“That’s out of your diet plan, Yuura. Try something else.”

“Vityaaa..."

Who was teaching him these things. Honestly, if there was a Grand Prix for begging, Yuuri would easily take the gold.

“It’s way too heavy to have before a competition. It’s going to sit like a brick in your stomach.”

“C-can we come back after?” he sighed and gave a little sniffle that even Viktor thought was a bit dramatic.

Yurio scoffed. “What are you a kid? The geezer said no. What’s the point of pestering him like you’re five or some shit?”

Yuuri flushed, “It looks nice...” And then grumbled under his breath, “…don’t have to be such a jerk... ”

“You might as well join a fucking creche.”

“Language, Yurio.” Viktor jumped in before it escalated.

The last thing he needed was a fight between his apprentices the afternoon before a competition. Yakov would skin him alive.

“That’s not my fucking name,” snapped the blond.

“Language, Plisetsky.”

Viktor rubbed at his temple to soothe the tension the situation was causing. He really wondered how Yakov had managed to do this for decades. Why did he give into Yuuri’s request when they could have all been at the hotel watching trashy movies instead arguing in the streets over bowls of pork? He turned to Yuuri who still looked at the ad like it was Araak herself come to bless him.

“Yuura.”

The man in question looked up at him with eyes like he had kicked Vicchan. Viktor had to physically fight his reaction to flail over how pathetic and strangely endearing the expression looked as he put on his metaphoric coach hat.

“If you win, you can have it. As many bowls as you want.”

"Do you really mean that?"

The look Yuuri gave him had Viktor briefly wondering if he was about to create a monster but the thought went as soon as it came. The coaching guides said goals were good. If this became a motivator, then he didn't see anything wrong with using it as reinforcement to win.
"As many bowls as you want," he repeated, watching in secret delight as Yuuri's pretty brown eyes flashed red with determination.

Viktor barely managed to get the bin in front of Yuuri before the first bits of his lunch came up. It smelled awful but Viktor held his composure and continued to rub the omega’s back as he vomited.

“Is he pregnant?”

Viktor’s eyes narrowed at the alpha that came up to peer over his shoulder.

"Why would you think that?” he snapped, unthinking and agitated to have another alpha in his space when his omega was ill and vulnerable.

He forced the intruder back with a shrug of his shoulders and let out a low growl hoping the man wasn't a fan because right now would be the absolute worst time for that.

“Hey man, no need to get worked up,” the man griped back as he held up his hands and exposed his neck in submission, “I’m not trying to put the moves on him or anything. It's just that I heard he was an omega.”

“So?” Viktor couldn't see how that connected with the younger man gagging his guts out below him.

“Well they can get pregnant, right? Someone said he had an alpha so I mean…”

Viktor drew to his full height once he was sure Yuuri was okay enough to hold the can by himself. He almost snarled as he turned to the man and said, “So that was your first logical conclusion? Not that he was ill. Not that it might be a stomach bug or food poisoning? But that of course he’s omega so the only possibility is he’s knocked up? He’s here to compete. He’s not even 19.”

“Well, accidents do happen…”

Not on his watch. He hadn't gone through those weeks of awkwardness with Yuuri just to have some asshole insinuate that he would be careless enough to get Yuuri pregnant and let his betrothed endanger himself by allowing the omega to compete while he was carrying Viktor's child. The very of idea set his blood boiling.

“Get out,” he growled in a tone that couldn't be mistaken for anything other than a threat.

He even put his fangs on full display to let the knothead know he wouldn't hesitate to get physical. He might pay for the bad press later but Araak knows he’s spent the better part of a decade working on their goodwill so hopefully they would cut him some slack.

“This is the competitor’s locker room.”

Unfortunately, for the man Viktor was beyond caring.

“I said get out NOW!”

Once the door slammed shut, Viktor crouched back down to the omega's level.

He pulled a few tissues from his Makkachin tissue holder and tried to fix the damaged makeup running down Yuuri's face. He grimaced as he wiped. They'd probably have to wash it all off and just let him go barefaced.
"I-i'm sorry, Vitya."

Viktor paused from wiping at Yuuri's ruined makeup to take in the teen's sobbing, shaking body.

"Yuura, can you look at me?"

Yuuri shook his head as a shudder passed through him. "I can't."

"Okay...okay okay," Viktor mumbled helplessly as Yuuri started to weep in earnest. He racked his mind for what to do as he stood there useless while the omega cried his heart out beside him.

"I can't do this, Vitya. I'm sorry," the younger man keened. "You wasted all this time on me and..."

He moved without thinking, the tone of Yuuri’s voice forcing him to. None of this journey had been a waste and he wouldn't let Yuuri think that.

Before he really knew what he was doing, he was kneeling again trying to peer into Yuuri’s face and holding onto the omega’s hands like they were an anchor against the sea of the teen’s emotions.

"What do you need, Yuura?" he whispered. "Do you think you can tell me?"

When Yuuri looked up, his eyes were wild and searching as if they were running from the omega’s thoughts."I-i d-don't know," he whimpered and threw himself into Viktor's arms.

"I'm scared, Vitya," he whispered into the shoulder of Viktor's cloak.

Viktor's heart twisted. He couldn't smell it with the patches but the bond let him know that the youth was a cacophony of emotions.

"But you still want to do this right, Yuura?" He checked in because the bond's vague feelings were telling him the teen was so distraught that it might be better to stop. "Is this still your wish? To soar on the aether?"

"Y-y-yes." Yuuri nodded, tears still running down his face as he pulled back. "I w-want to soar."

He left out the gold medals. Even though he wanted him to win, even though his mouth swam with the desire to kiss the omega's gold medal, he ignored the feelings. Yuuri was under enough pressure to crack and he wasn't going to be the one to break him.

"Then as Araak wills it so I will grant it. But we have to see if we can get you calm first "

"But what about a gold medal? What if I-i c-can't win that?"

Fresh tears spilled out with the question, hinting to Viktor the potential source of the problem.

"It doesn't matter, Yuura," he crooned as he wiped at the fresh tracks and pushed a few loose strands of hair out of Yuuri's face. "I'm always so proud of you I could burst."

He swiped across the omega's nose encouraging him to blow. "In fact, I'm so proud of you that Yakov only gives me five minutes a day to gush over you. He calls it the "Idiot's Hour."

Yuuri laughed with a wet snort. "He shouldn't be so mean to you," he pouted after as his natural instinct to protect Viktor kicked in.
Seeing that what he was doing was working Viktor continued on with his distraction.

"Do you remember when you were very little and you first started to soar?"

Yuuri frowned at the memory and for a moment, the older man thought he had gone wrong. But then, Yuuri sniffled and nodded.

Viktor grinned and wiped at a stray tear. "You insisted on drawing the symbols yourself even though you couldn't read or write."

"I soared upside down for a few weeks," Yuuri mumbled with puffed up cheeks.

Viktor chuckled remembering how anxious and proud he had felt soaring with his hands held out behind the newly four year old Yuuri.

"But Father still threw you a party that included any kind of cake the chefs could think of. Do you remember how much Mother wept when you made up your first routine?"

Yuuri flushed. "It was just me posing around the lake and saying,"Ta da!" a bunch of times."

"She wept for nearly a week anytime she thought of it, Yuura, and I have to admit there were a few times I joined in too."

"Why?" The bitter, frightened look had returned to Yuuri's face. "Why were you happy for something as simple and stupid as that?"

He pulled Yuuri into his arms. If someone walked in it could always be explained away as a coach comforting his student. Tension left the teen and the bond as the younger mage sank into his hold.

"There wasn't anything stupid about it. We were proud of you."

"Why?"

"Because we love you."

"Even if I don't win gold?"

"Even if you never win a medal in your entire life."

"How do you feel?"

Yuuri yanked at his collar as red blossomed from his face down to his neck."Better."

"Well enough to soar?"

Viktor knew the tears had stopped but with the tangle of feelings and emotions that was Yuuri, he often had to double check to be sure.

"Yes."

The omega looked just as splendid as Viktor thought Yuuri would as they walked out of the locker room into the bright corridors that would lead to main rink. As they stepped out into the bright lights, the rhinestones in Yuuri’s costume came to life giving him a halo that made several of passerbys stop to gape and ogle. It proved to be such a focal point that no one made mention of Yuuri's makeup less face and red eyes. Viktor's alpha whined. His student shone so bright that he
was almost loathe to hand him the uniform cloak and only did so after his first set of refusals left his apprentice annoyed enough to pout and bite his lip in irritation.

“Aht aht.” Viktor pulled the lip the teen had been biting from under his teeth. “You’ll make them go chapped and I don’t have any chapstick…”

He slid the cape over Yuuri’s shoulders and fought the urge to kiss the omega as he did the article of clothing up. “You’re going to look beautiful out there,” he whispered as his hands slid over the row of buttons.

“Vitya?”

He looked up from his task thinking that Yuuri might need a little more reassurance and had praise and compliments already sitting on his tongue. But, Yuuri was smiling at him and as he stood up to his full height he could catch just a slight hint of the delicate scent of happiness escaping from the patch. He stood stock still as Yuuri grasped his hands and in mimicry of Viktor, brought them up to his rouged lips.

Fireworks exploded in his chest as the younger mage's soft mouth descended to press a kiss on the back of each hand. Yuuri’s eyes were awash in so much emotion as he looked at Viktor that the older man couldn’t even muster the thought to scold the omega over violating Yakov’s pda ban.

“Thank you.” His brown eyes turned mahogany as magic flit behind them. “I don’t think I’ve said it before but thank you, Vitya, for granting my wish. I will make you proud today.”

That night in the garden seemed like lifetimes ago and awe and pride filled him as he stood in front of Yuuri and saw just how far his beloved had come.

“Yuura…” The rest of the words caught in his throat with a hiccup that made Yuuri laugh at how much his coach wanted to cry. The teen grabbed his hands tighter as he stood on his tiptoes and bumped their foreheads together.

“If I get a gold medal, Vitya…,” he whispered across Viktor’s mouth in a mockery of a kiss. Just a few centimeters more and Viktor knew he could close the distance. Yuuri flicked his eyes up from Viktor’s lips and met the other man’s stare with a shy smile. “…you promise you’ll kiss it?”

Footsteps sounded.

Viktor’s mouth went dry as Yuuri pulled away and adjusted his cloak. They turned the corner to where a member of the arena was waiting for them with a scrunched brow that relaxed as they approached. She barked a few words into her headset before rushing towards them in a flurry of instructions and questions that flustered Yuuri and had Viktor jumping in to answer.

“You’re up next.”

Viktor checked for nervousness for the whole journey to the aether but with the scent patches blocking his student’s scent, he had to rely on the vague churning sensations of the bond and physical cues.

“You’ll be okay, Yuura,” he whispered as Yuuri handed off his cloak.

The teen offered him a small smile in return. “I want to win so I can eat a pork cutlet bowl with Vitya.”

Viktor pinched a slightly reddened cheek and then soothed over it with the pad of his thumb. As a
last minute thought, he rolled just the edge of his wrist against the sheer fabric covering Yuuri’s collarbones. “Remember, it’s just you and me. You and me, Yuura. Don’t think of anyone or anything else.”

Yuuri took a deep breath and then soared away from Viktor to the centre of the aether. He took up his initial pose, the lines of his body folding beautifully into it.

There was a collective gasp from the audience as the aether rippled into a solid sheet of ice. Viktor waved at the cameras that zoomed in to capture his reaction to Yuuri performing one of his signature moves and gave a thumbs up.

"Announcing Yuuri Neizvestny. Representing Atelier Feltsman."

Viktor didn't even need the drums, Yuuri's movements and the sound of his own pounding heart were enough of a beat. He watched in complete rapture as the omega took his thrashing movements and turned them into poetry, into one of the epics that all mage children grew up learning at their father's knees.

He saw Xiv tearing through underbrush and trees, running, jumping, stalking after elusive prey. He saw him weaving and winding through dangerous and tight spaces always ready, always keen for the chase.

Viktor felt haunted by the unknowingly erotic display. He felt hunted.

Yuuri transitioned into the step sequences and became a marvel of spinning, dizzying beauty, Viktor almost let out a visceral scream. He had never seen them done so tightly or cleanly in any of the previous run throughs.

Yuuri went for the jumps next and touched down during his final combination but saved himself in the last minute by coming up with an unexpected burst of ice magic that shot arrows into the sky and burst around him into a mock Nikiforov snowfall.

It was a nice save, a distraction that could possibly please the judges and Viktor found it was a good move as the strings led Yuuri into the final and hardest part of his routine.

He held his breath, his heart thundering in his ears as Yuuri reached and pulled for the first bits of magic. His initial movements came out sloppily in small little sparks of blue and ice that would impress no one. But as the teen continued, the magic got stronger, higher tighter until it was skirting the edges of the boards. Backlash whipped at Yuuri after a wrong movement but he redirected enough for it to only leave a thin line of blood across his hands and cheek rather than the grievous harm it originally threatened.

It was a powerful display of magic and control considering Yuuri was pulling on the opposite element of his natural magic. As Viktor watched it, he had to wonder once again just who was Yuuri's other parent.

As they agreed, Yuuri's magic stayed just power, little bursts to highlight his movement. Or at least it did until the very end when Yuuri broke from the choreography into a sit spin that became a whirling,building tower of ice.

Viktor watched in mild terror and awe as Yuuri spun himself into a throne fit only for the King of the Forest, the God of the Hunt, the Dark Lord of Water and Ice. As the music died down, Yuuri was left stood standing on a pillar instead of the originally planned levitation pose looking ten times grander the god than Viktor had ever imagined.
"First Place-Junior Debuts: Yuuri Neizvestny."

Yuuri had won gold and Viktor could not stop crying.

"Get ahold of yourself, Vitya!" barked Yakov from beside him but Viktor could see the wet sheen in the old man's eyes too.

"Yakov, you old lucky bastard," shouted a coach from a less lucky atelier a few steps down. "Try to give the rest of us a break, huh?" He gestured towards Viktor with a laugh, "We thought when that one retired we'd have a chance!"

"Hah," Yakov cried as completely out of character, he roared with laughter before getting up and pulling Viktor down the steps with him. "After ten years of this idiot I deserve a thousand years worth of gold medals!"

They laughed together before the coach turned to Viktor to shake his hand with a bear like grasp.

"Well done, Lord Nikiforov-"

"It's just Viktor…"

The man guffawed as he clasped his shoulder too. "Well, well done, Viktor. Two debuts on the podium and omegas too? Are you ever going to stop surprising us?"

Viktor saw Yakov grinning from the corner of his eye. The older man was right. Joy filled nearly every space within his body until he felt that it would burst his very soul.

"No, I don't think I will."

Viktor didn't know what to expect when he came into Yuuri's shared room to get him ready for the press conference but it definitely wasn't a soaking wet omega ransacking his hotel room.

"Yuura, what in Anud's Hells…"

Yuuri jerked up from the pile of clothes he was throwing about to look at him with a quivering lip.

"I can't find my speech!" Was all the warning the alpha received before Yuuri broke down with an animal wail.

Viktor closed the door and rushed towards the half naked and distraught omega.

"It's okay, Yuura," he tried to soothe as he gripped under the teen's arms and pulled him to stand.

"S'not," Yuuri pushed him away and stood crying into his hands. "I worked really hard on it and now I don't have anything cool to say."

He tearfully gazed up at Viktor looking more like a drowned rat than a first-time gold champion. "I'm not gonna have anything cool to say!"

Viktor thought over his options. He could help Yuuri and risk facing Yakov's ire for being late or he could force Yuuri into some clothes and down to the press conference while the omega was in a miserable state.
Yuuri whimpered and Viktor had his answer

He grabbed at the younger man's towel and began to dry him off. Ordinarily, he'd be embarrassed by the full nudity but the threat of Yakov's anger kept his mind utilitarian and out of the gutter.

"Let's get you dried and dressed first, Yuura, and then, let's see what we can do."

Yuuri nodded the picture of a crybaby making Viktor pray that they could find this damned speech.

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"Viktor, you were supposed to have him ready for the press conference nearly half an hour ago!"

Yuuri flushed red as Viktor struggled to calm an enraged Yakov down from his ready to explode state.

"Yuura lost his speech, Yakov," he tried to explain as he ruffled through the omega’s suitcase for the third time. It had to be somewhere he grumbled to himself before Yakov shoved the suitcase out of his hand and pointed to the door.

"After your little display out there - Don't even bother giving me that shocked look, Viktor. I saw you scent him on the Jumbotron.- the press are going to think you're doing more than looking for a speech if you don't show up soon."

"I tell you no pda and what do you do? You go and scent the boy on live camera. The gossip mags are having a field day," he rumbled as he gently but firmly guided Yuuri (who had thankfully stopped crying and only looked fretful now) to the door. "I swear you and this situation are going to take the rest of the hair off my head."

He ripped it open with a little bang and gave Yuuri, who risked a sole frightened glance towards Viktor, a push through. He turned back to his former student with a scowl that would do a horror movie monster proud. "Now, get out there, get in front of those microphones, and try not to ruin the reputation of my atelier."

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"In addition to winning this year’s junior debut competition, you’ve also been voted most popular out of this year’s list of debuting apprentices. How does that make you feel, Yuuri?"

"Good?" His cheeks were pink as he said the words releasing a collection of sighs across the room.

The omega’s eyes shifted to Viktor who was fighting his own battle not to run up on the stage and declare that the viewers were damn right about Yuuri being the most adorable. Despite having no plan, his star pupil was doing an excellent job of melting the crowd and Viktor could see Yakov’s eyes practically gleaming at the thought of turning all those sighs into sponsors.

"Um…is there anything else?" He said as he fidgeted with his fingers until Yurio gave him a not so gentle nudge to the elbow to stop it.

"What are your plans for the rest of the season?"

"Um…”
He was supposed to say something cliché like looking forward to winning more gold or competing against his peers. In fact, that was what it looked like Yuuri was going to say as he leant down towards the mic with an expression that radiated waves of determination and ambition. Viktor held his breath expecting some impassioned speech about taking all the gold with the help of his coach but instead, Yuuri, his eyes burning like he wanted to challenge the world, picked up the mic, pointed in Viktor’s direction, and practically shouted,

“To continue eating pork cutlet bowls with my coach, Viktor!”

“What the hel-heck, Yuuri?”

Yuuri turned to look down at Yurio who just gawked at the other omega like he had transgormed into a unicorn. He smiled soft and sweet making a face that would be in all the sports magazines and tabloids for the next few weeks.

“If you want, you can come too, Yurio.”

Somewhere to the side, Yakov made a strangled noise that would compete with any dying animal. Viktor found himself not very far from it but for different reasons as he held back a squeal and the urge to throw his arms around the omega and scent him until his cheek hurt.

“Don’t you dare, Viktor. I don’t need two idiots on stage.”

He slammed his arms back into his sides not aware that they had risen without his permission and straightened up. He slunk further into the shadows, his lips curling into an expression he hoped the cameras didn’t catch as he pressed the back of his hand to his forehead.

When he got Yuuri alone, he was going to kiss the sense out of him.

Viktor pounced on Yuuri the moment they got into Viktor's hotel room not caring about any roommates, rumors, or Yakov's angry ramblings. Instead, he focused on how many kisses it took to cover the omega’s face.

He hated that they would have to sleep in separate rooms for another night. Yuuri seemed to be in agreement with his sentiment because he held onto Viktor just as tightly too.

“Who (kiss) told you (kiss kiss) to be (kiss) that cute, huh, Yuura?” He finished his sentence with kisses on Yuuri’s brows, cheeks and forehead and on his gold medal until his betrothed grabbed at his face and pulled him into a proper one.

Utterly content, Viktor allowed Yuuri to take the lead, tasting the other man’s unique flavor and hints of the sauce from the two bowls of pork cutlet that the omega had enjoyed earlier. After he had had his fill, Yuuri broke away from the kiss and leaned his forehead on the older man’s shoulder.

“That was so tasty. I want to eat pork cutlet bowls forever.”

“Oh Yuurochka,” Viktor laughed and pulled the omega closer “You are such a cruel man. Here I am trying to cover you in kisses and all you have thoughts for is your belly?”

Yuuri poked him in the stomach in retaliation.
"Don’t be mean, Vitya,” he purred as he rubbed his nose against Viktor’s scent gland. “otherwise I won’t win you anymore gold medals.”

He let out a theatrical gasp. “Ah, my student is so cruel!”

He felt Yuuri’s joy pulsing through the bond and through the lips pressed into a smile against his neck.

Yuuri pulled away and grinned.“The cruelest.”

A rumble grew in Viktor's chest in response. “But hopefully, not too cruel for another kiss?”

Yuuri leaned into him, his lips already pursed and his face already seeking. He paused before he got to the other man’s mouth.

“No, I don’t think he’s too cruel for that,” Yuuri murmured as they shared a few beats of breathe. "In fact, I heard he's very nice."

Viktor dipped the omega towards the bed and crawled close until their lips we just barely a hair’s width apart.

"Is he now?"

"Yes. The nicest. Nicer than you could ever imagine."

Viktor opened his mouth for another retort but Yuuri surged forward, pulling Viktor into a kiss before he could say anything further. Viktor kissed back, hoping that Yuuri could feel every bit of the pride and love that colored his motions.

They pulled away gasping. Yuuri looked so rumpled, so ravished with his lips kiss swollen and eyes heavy with desire.

The love for Yuuri that Viktor felt in the moment was so great that he almost didn't know what to do with it…

But he did know what to say.

"Yuura, my moonbeam, my dearest, my starshine, my sun, my duckling supreme, have I ever, ever told you that you are the very best thing that has ever happened to me?”
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, no one has chill. Yuuri deals with his first loss, Viktor deals with some knuckleheads and Kenjiro just doesn’t give a damn.

Chapter Notes

Hello Everyone,
Thank you so much for the comments and kudos last chapter! This story is nearly at 100 comments and has already reached over 200 kudos! I was thinking of doing a one shot to celebrate such milestones and was wondering if there was anything sort of drabble readers might be interested in. If you have a request, let me know in the comments and I’ll gather them up into a hat and chose one!

That said, here’s the usual housekeeping:

The genderless pronoun xe is used in this story as mage children decide whether or nor to be male or female upon coming of age. It works as follows:
Xe - He/She
Xem - Him/Her
Xyr - His/Her
Xyrs - His/Hers
Xemself - Himself/Herself

Credit to fanndis on Tumblr for terms "oma" ,"apa", and "grandapa"
Oma - Omega Mother
Apa - Alpha Father
Grandapa - Alpha Grandfather

Credit to Tongari Boushi no Atorie for the concept of ateliers, soar shoes, and magical placement tests. Credit to King James Bible – Chapters Songs of Solomon and Hosea as references for vows and spells

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CW: I think this chapter is pretty tame in relation to others but there is a fight scene that features some blood. There’s also a lot more curse words than if former chapters but they seemed to fit.

"Pork Cutlet Prince?" Yuuri's brow wrinkled as he repeated the words of the journalist who had caught him on his way to the pre-competition practice session. "I don’t think I’ve heard that one before."

Yuuri bit his lip as he seemed to ponder over the title before he turned to Yurio (completely ignoring the correspondent) with worry bleeding into his expression.

“Have you heard of it, Yurio?”
It was an awkward move, something that he was sure Yakov would give a lecture about later but Yuuri was still getting used to the media, and no matter how much Viktor worked with him, there were times when he just wasn’t able to exude the same level of ease and confidence that came with Viktor’s natural charm.

"It’s a hashtag, Pi- ah-, Yuura. It’s like one of the top ten trending tags right now on Ynsta and Tweeter."

Yuuri’s confusion grew to scrunched brows.

"I don’t know those. I only use Yootoob and Yummy," he mumbled and then added under his breath straight after, "when Vitya lets me cook..."

Viktor prayed that the mic wasn’t sensitive enough to pick up the last part.

“Vit--" Viktor shot him a panicked look as the teen almost slipped up and used his diminutive.

"Maester Viktor…," Yuuri recovered quickly enough that Viktor hoped no one had caught the mistake.

He still shook his head though at the teen who had turned around to his direction and gestured wildly for Yuuri to go back to facing the reporter. He wasn’t even supposed to be here with the Yu(u)ris. Yakov’s order had grown to forbid what the man described as “hovering” and now he was supposed to be letting Yuuri go out and about without him as much as possible. And Viktor, despite all of his misgivings and reluctance over the order, was really trying to do his best but the need to protect had won this morning after catching a split second glimpse of Morooka while he waited for his students in the hotel lobby.

Trouble never came alone and where there was smoke there was probably fire. Viktor didn’t want to risk the chance of Yuuri meeting any of the Katsuki ilk—namely one Kenjiro Minami—on his own if he could avoid it.

Yuuri returned to the cameras with a pout that was no doubt caught on film and was probably going to be uploaded on all of his fan pages by the end of the night.

"So, how do you feel about the title, Mage Neizvestny?" The interviewer repeated once she had Yuuri’s attention again.

The omega scratched at his cheek and then tilted his head in a move that belonged more on Vicchan or Makkachin than on a professional athlete such as himself. Viktor could tell he was uncomfortable from the bond and had to fight the urge to step in and smooth things over for both parties. He also had to fight the voice telling him to cover Yuuri up, and hide him from the world. The teen’s hunched shoulders and slowly growing flush had no business being shared with the public. It made Yuuri look delectable and Viktor was sure some fan somewhere in the bowels of the internet was writing the filthiest stories to go along with it. (Not that he read them, mind you, but he was definitely aware of them thanks to a random text message from Chris that contained only a link and winky face).

Yurio spared them all from Yuuri’s cute but awkward display by jumping back into the conversation with,

“I doubt it’s a bad nickname, Pi- er... Yuura. Otherwise the old man over there,” Viktor squawked as Yurio without any concern for his situation, pointed to him, “wouldn’t have allowed the
question.”

The blond rolled his eyes. “He would stop even the rain from hitting you if he could so just answer
the lady’s question so we can get the fu-I mean- heck outta here.”

He was going to give Yurio the noogie of a lifetime as soon as the interview was over. Rub a bald
patch straight into the top of the punk’s head for not only blowing his cover but for potentially
revealing his and Yuuri’s relationship like it wouldn’t be all over the six clock news later tonight.

The interviewer’s eyes lit up with curiosity as she turned towards him. Inwardly, he was screaming
in exasperation but outwardly he kept his face cool and placid as the woman asked him if he was
“close” to Yuuri.

“I’m single,” Yuuri answered robotically, lying just the way Yakov had taught him.

Yurio snorted and Viktor jumped in before the punk could do anymore damage by pulling the brat
into his embrace and ruffling his hair until he was a screeching mess. Viktor smiled at the reporter
in a way that he knew made most people lose focus. “Both my Yu(u)ris are very precious to me.
Especially, Yurio here. He’s such a lively member of our team.”

“Yurio?”

“That’s not my na-.”

“It’s an atelier nickname since there are two Yu(u)ri’s,” he explained to the woman with a cat like
grin. “We use it all the time.”

If Yurio didn’t care enough not to expose him, well, Viktor didn’t care enough not to reveal this
little tidbit that would surely have the blond’s fangroup running wild with glee.

“Oh,” the woman (Viktor finally glanced at her press pass) named Tatianna cried, “I’m sure that
Yuri’s Angels will be glad to hear about that!”

They shared a laugh at the flustered omega’s expense before Tatianna seemed to suddenly
remember that she had been interviewing Yuuri too. She pointed her mic back towards Yuuri who
flinched as it swung back into his face.

“Ah yes, Mage Neizvestny, back to my earlier question, how do you feel about being called the
Pork Cutlet Prince?”

"Um…," Yuuri toed the floor with his soar shoes that had been gifted to him earlier in the week by
a new patron.” I don't really know about Pork Cutlet Princes but," Yuuri blushed into a shade that
probably had viewers at home screaming and smiled a shy smile that could launch a thousand
ships," but I’m happy to be supported so warmly by so many fans."

It was like he had taken a page right out of Viktor’s media persona. Araak’s mercy, it was perfect.
Absolutely perfect and the reporter’s cheeks went so pink that Viktor didn't blame her for
switching her attention to Yurio in order to get away from the aura of purity and wholesomeness
radiating off the dark haired omega in waves.

"So, Mage Plisetsky, how do you feel about being known as the Ice Fairy of Rhurshya?"

Yurio’s response was a very dignified animal shriek.”They’re calling me what?”

He whipped around to Viktor, his eyes dark with fury and not giving a single damn if the cameras
caught the volatile interaction between student and coach, “Did you put them up to this?”

While he would like to take credit for annoying the younger mage, this wasn’t his work. So, he held up his hands in surrender until Yurio realized he was telling the truth and turned back to the mic with a rumbling noise of frustration.

“IT’s Ice Tiger,” he corrected Tatianna as he glared at her, daring her to say something else, “and all of my true fans know that.”

Even though Viktor was fully aware that he would be smoothing ruffled feathers for the next few hours over Yurio’s words and demeanor, he had to give it to his apprentice that the last bit was a nice touch.

It seemed like the storm had passed and things would become just another quirky on camera moment of Yuri Plisetsky until Yuuri, poor innocent Yuuri, who sometimes didn’t know when to shut his mouth chimed in innocently with,

“IT’s better than the Rhurshyan Punk though, isn’t it?”

“Who’s calling me that?” Yurio whipped around to Yuuri so fast that the omega, realizing his mistake, took a step back.

“Uh… n-nobody?” Yuuri tried but Araak hadn’t seen fit to gift him with the talent of lying. “I think I just heard it somewhere or something…It was probably someone else, “he mumbled as he tried to step further away from Yuri’s growing ire and dared to look at Viktor as if to beg for protection.  

Yuri spun on Viktor next, startling him too with how quick his movements were and he just about caught the kid by the shoulders as Yurio tiptoed and pushed his face up to Viktor’s with a little growl.

“We’ll see who’s the punk when I take the gold from Piggy over there and break all of your stupid old records!”

He stomped off to Otabek who had been following the interaction from a few feet away. Viktor, as he watched the cameras pan over his surprised face; wished he had been smart enough to do the same. The dragon sent him a thumbs up for his troubles which had become their personal code for “Yurio’s not actually angry angry” but that hardly mattered when one of his outbursts had been caught on relatively live TV.

“That’s our Yurio,” He said weakly as he turned fully to the camera.

He hoped his smile would be powerful enough to distract. His mind was already swimming with how much damage control he was going to do in the next few hours.

Yakov was definitely going to kill him.

Yurio made good on his word and snatched the gold streak from Yuuri in a performance that left the audience roaring and Viktor’s Junior record smashed to smithereens. It was breathtaking and Viktor would be lying if he said seeing Yurio finally, finally come into his body didn’t leave him with a few tears in his eyes. The blond, who hardly seemed to want to have anything to do with being an omega at all, had come so beautifully into his role of Ore that Viktor was sure that the thaumaturgy world had just witnessed the birth of another legend.

Yuuri had real competition now and Viktor was sure that the two omegas’ race for gold was going
to be a story told for decades after his students had long retired. With three consecutive wins between the two of them, they were definitely upsetting the status quo but with wins came losses and Viktor was currently in the middle of helping Yuuri deal with his first one.

"You can't win everything, moonbeam," he said as he tried unsuccessfully to pull at the ball of misery that Yuuri had curled himself into, but even with yanking and tugging at different spots, the teen still wouldn't untuck himself from his sulk.

"Yuuraaa…"

He was trying to be patient with his student's disappointment but they had a press conference in less than 20 minutes and Yuuri with a face full of ruined makeup, sitting in his disheveled costume, and reeking of sweat would hardly be presentable.

"Everyone has to lose sometime, sunshine. I doesn't mean you won't win agai-.

"I know!" Yuuri snapped with a glare that if Yuuri wasn't so in control of himself would have definitely set the older mage on fire. He stared at Viktor for a few beats before going back to hiding within the cradle of his knees, "but it's hard, Vitya. I don't like it."

Viktor sighed completely understanding the feeling. Did anyone like losing? No, it definitely was up there on Viktor's list of 'The World's Worst Things' right alongside Yuuri's blue tie, people who didn't like dogs, and cheap face cream. But losing was part of the athlete experience and the sooner Yuuri learned that, the better off he would be.

He tried changing tactics. Maybe if he appealed to Yuuri's competitive side he might get somewhere.

"Yurio was a good sport when you won."

Yuuri snorted which was the first positive thing he'd done since he slunk into the locker room after his loss and began his tantrum.

"Not the first time. Yakov yelled at him for hours because he kicked a chair and threw a stuffed animal at a cameraman. Even you yelled at him and you never like to yell."

Yuuri had him there. Yurio had definitely been a little hellion when he lost the Debuts. Viktor sighed again.

"Well, what's going to make you feel better?"

"A gold medal."

Viktor huffed, amusement peeking out for a second amongst his feelings of annoyance and vexation. He had totally set himself up for that. He tried to rack his brain for a solution. Stubborn Yuuri and displeased Yuuri were always a tough combo to deal with and it seemed like soft Vitya wasn't going to do it this time.

"I thought you didn't want me to go easy on you?"

His detached tone and words made Yuuri snap his head up so fast that he nearly toppled from his perch on the locker room bench. He looked up at Viktor then back down with a frown, his lips still set in a firm pout.

"I don't want you to go easy on me," Yuuri grumbled looking down at the ground instead of up at
Viktor like the older man expected. "It's just... it's hard, Vitya."

Tears welled up in his eyes and he wiped them away, bitterness growing into his scent with his movements. He sniffled, the noise sounding wet and ugly as it echoed throughout the room.

"Now I'm crying," he groaned miserably as more water trickled down his face. He shot Viktor another glare, "I wish you just left me alone."

"Yuura, we have a press conference in less than twenty minutes. I can't just let you sit here and sulk. They are going to want to talk to the first omega silver medalist in the history of the Frinier Juniors Cup. You've still done something good. You've still done something great."

Yuuri responded by pushing his face back into his knees.

"Yuura"

A muffled "leave me alone" answered his efforts.

"Yuuri I'm giving you exactly one minute more to sulk and that's it. If you don't move, I will have to call Yakov and tell him that you are the reason we are running late. You don't want that, do you? Yakov can be pretty scary when he yells."

Usually the threat of Yakov would be frightening enough for most students to get moving. It certainly worked well enough for Yurio (and Viktor himself when he had been younger) but Yuuri didn't appear to have the same fears as most of his atelier mates because he gave no response to Viktor's warning.

He waited the minute, the ticking clock becoming a doomsday countdown as its long hand circled around and then called.

Yakov picked up on the second ring, the sound of heavy, angry breathing greeting him before words. "Where are you, Vitya? You should have been here by now."

"Yakov," he threw a glance at Yuuri who still hadn't moved from his spot. "I'm sorry but we're not going to make the press conference in time."

A breath - A very slow most likely filled with fury breath and then, "Why?"

"I...," Viktor paused. If he went through with his threat, then despite his earlier bravado, Yuuri would be put directly into Yakov's line of fire. He switched tactics. "It's taking a bit longer than we thought to get ready."

More breath, more anger, more possibility of yelling. Viktor winced for Yuuri even though he himself was the reason any of this was happening.

"He's still sulking." The growl was soft but still rumbled through the phone. Viktor marveled at how well the old man could read the situation despite hearing only a few words. "I'll be there in 5."

The line cut off before Viktor could say anything more, thereby sealing his student's fate. He let out a deep breath and looked to Yuuri again.

"This is your last chance, Yuuri." He saw the teen flinch at the dropped diminutive like he knew he would. "If you don't get moving soon you'll have to explain to Yakov exactly why you aren't ready, and you know that he's a lot harder than me."
He pursed his lips as Yuuri scrunched himself into a tighter ball of insolence. The silence felt stifling and unnatural like fingers pressing into Viktor's neck. He coughed and tried to make a joke, "Suit yourself. He's probably going to yell at you until your ears fall off."

And, he only got more silence for it. He was almost grateful when the locker room door creaked open and Yakov's hulking figure appeared. At least now, there was another person to cut the tense atmosphere.

"What's this, huh? A rebellion on a ship?"

Yakov spoke first before Viktor could explain anymore of the situation or, in guilt, try to soften the reaction that Yuuri's obstinacy was setting the omega up to get. Yakov's voice was low voice, void of anger but the softness scared Viktor even more.

"Yakov…"

The older man spared him a glance, scoffing as Viktor licked his lips and tried to explain. He held his hand up, cutting his former student off when had had enough.

"Stop growling, boy!" He rumbled back.

Caught off guard, Viktor snapped his mouth shut in surprise. He really had to stop doing that before it became some sort of problem. Yakov turned back to Yuuri. His form large and foreboding like the strictest of tutors which Viktor supposed he was.

"Now what's all this, Yuura? What is this your coach is telling me about you not wanting to come to the press conference? Is this how a thaumaturge behaves? Is this how Yakov Feltsman's apprentices carry themselves?"

Viktor saw Yuuri stiffen at the older man's words and then make the mistake of not answering. It was enough for Yakov to finally lose his cool.

"Answer when your Maester is talking to you!" he barked making Yuuri jump. The teen looked at Viktor with fear clearly swimming in his eyes but Yakov blocked his path. Yakov's voice had gone back to a normal speaking level but still held a dangerous note."Don't look at him. You didn't want to listen to him earlier so don't look to him now."

"Vitya…" Yuuri began but Yakov cut him off.

"Vitya, leave."

When Viktor didn't move, too worried about Yuuri to think his actions through, Yakov barked at him too.

"I said leave, Vitya. Tend to Plisetsky. He's all alone in the conference room and that's not good either."

"But, Yakov…"

"Vitya, you called me here to do what you couldn't do. Let me do my work in peace."

Yakov was right but Yuuri was looking at him like he was leaving him to the executioner and there wasn't a single part of him that could live with that.

"Yako-"
"I'm not going to hurt him, Vitya." Yakov grumbled as if he sensed Viktor's distress and maybe he did. They had known each other for a very long time. "Just a stern talking to to get his head right. I've been a coach for nearly 40 years, boy, I know what hand to use with my students and right now Yuuri here needs a tougher hand than yours."

Viktor still hesitated. The bond was in turmoil but peeling back some of vague layers; he read that although it was full of distress and a hint of fear it didn't possess any terror.

"Viktor trust me," the old man said after Viktor stood there too long, "I handled you after your first loss, didn't I? Trust me that I know how to handle Yuura too."

It had been so long since he had lost that the memory was hazy; just a snippet of Yakov being much gentler than Viktor had thought he would be after not making the podium for an important competition.

"I need to win, Yakov. I have to...," came the muffled and cracked reply from the safe cradle of his arms.

Yakov didn't understand. He needed to prove himself, to show his family, namely his father, that he could make them proud.

"I have to..." he squeezed his eyes shut as the disappointment threatened to overwhelm and consume him "I'm Viktor Nikiforov. I-I need to show them I am worthy."

"Don't be foolish, boy."

Yakov didn't yell at him, not this time. It felt oddly nice but strange because it wasn't what he expected. He almost wanted the loud voice. This one was too soft, too gentle for all the mistakes and errors he made. His father wouldn't have been this kind.

"No one - and I mean no one- not you, not your father, not even Ore themself the Deity of Duels - has won everything. Losing is a part of being an athlete. One lost competition isn't going to make you less to me."

Somehow, it was just what Viktor needed to hear and he cried and he cried until his throat was sore and his head hurt. Yakov sat awkwardly beside him through it all and when he was done, Viktor stood up with a dry face and went on to win straight gold for the next ten years.

He spared a look at Yuuri as the memory faded into the recesses of his mind. He would trust Yakov with his life, had trusted Yakov with his life. This was the man who had gotten Viktor his suppressants and taught him everything he knew about being a thaumaturge. The man who was guiding through his desire to be Yuuri’s coach. He really was more of a father than his own sire and for all his yelling, Viktor was still here; hale and whole unlike so many of his competitors. That had to speak for something in the man’s skill. So, Viktor let himself trust and just prayed that it didn’t backfire.

“Okay, Yakov.”

He did his best not to look back as he let the door shut behind him.

He told himself not to but he worried.

All through the press conference when Yuuri didn’t look his way and all through the journey back to the hotel when Yakov insisted that the Yu(u)ris head back with Mila and Georgi. The longer he
went without talking to Yuuri the more the anxiety grew until it was sitting like a thousand pound weight in his chest as he attempted to pull Yuuri aside during the celebratory banquet later that night.

He found him standing in a group of younger thamauturges that all looked around the same age. He was smiling quietly, just on the edge as he wanted to join in but wasn’t sure how best to. Yurio was standing to the right of him snickering at some crude joke that someone in the group had made while a young person who appeared to be a female stood at his left. He took in the darker skin and purple eyes and guessed them to be part of the LaBefana, or Vitalyan fairy folk. They touched Yuuri’s arm in a way that was almost too familiar to Viktor and he fought back a growl as he approached.

“Yuura,” he said and then nodded to his other student, “Yurio, I see you two made it to the banquet alright.”

“Of course we did, you old fart. We’re fucking adults.” Yurio scowled, the bridge of his nose growing pink. “Right, Piggy?”

Yuuri flushed at the nickname but still gave a hesitant nod. Viktor felt a little betrayed. He thought it was natural to worry after your students, to enquire after them.

“I was just checking,” he answered, back trying his best to hide the mope that was trying to sneak into his voice.

“I think it’s cute,” piped up the fairy who had previously been way too close to Yuuri. “Not everyone gets a maester as protective as Maester Nikiforov. It kinda reminds me a bit of my brother Mickey.”

Viktor perked up at that and threw Yurio a smug smile. “See, Yurchik, some students are grateful to their maesters for caring.”

Forgetting his earlier jealousy, he turned a much lovelier smile on the the LaBefana. “It’s nice to meet you…?”

“She offered her hand for a greeting.

“It’s nice to meet you, Sara,” he said genuinely and then looked to see if he could recognize any of the other members of the group. “Let thy beauty be whole for all of thy days,” he added the LaBefana greeting for extra effect.

After Viktor gave a light press of her hands, she turned to Yuuri, her eyes shining as she laid an excited and tight grip on his arms. “Yuuri, you didn’t tell me your coach was the Viktor Nikiforov!”

Yuuri flushed. “I thought everyone knew…” he trailed off obviously not feeling her excitement.

Viktor felt hurt again but covered it up with his media smile. He was just about to speak when a young brown haired LaBefana with same coloring as Sara came charging through the crowds at full speed.

“Sara,” they cried as they approached and Viktor connected the dots to assume that the new arrival might be Sara’s brother Mickey.
His suspicion proved correct when the young man forced his way to Sara’s side, knocking a puzzled Yuuri out of the way and getting very close into his sister’s space bubble.

“Why did you leave without me?” his voice came out in pained, harsh pants like he had been running for quite some distance. “I was looking all over for you at the hotel and panicked when I couldn’t find you.”

Sara rolled her eyes at the display. “Mickey, I told you I was leaving with friends.”

“But-“

“It’s not my fault if you didn’t listen,” she huffed and pushed her brother away as he tried to crowd further into her space. “Now stop that you’re embarrassing me in front of my friends.”

At her words, Mickey seemed to realize they were in a group and finally took note of the others. His first action was to growl “You’re standing too close” at Yuuri which immediately made Viktor’s alpha instincts force him to jump in.

It was perfect timing anyway. He was dying to talk to Yuuri after all of the events of the day and would take any opportunity he got.

“We were just leaving.” He tapped Yuuri on the shoulder and gestured from him to follow.

Yuuri sent him a reluctant look back but after a glance at the still bristling Mickey, decided to tag along. They walked with Viktor hovering just slightly behind Yuuri not close enough to touch, but close enough to tell everyone that the omega was under his protection. It wouldn’t look out of place for a coach and student and was just the right amount of contact to soothe the worry chewing on Viktor’s nerves.

He reached for a glass of compote and handed it over to Yuuri as a sort of peace offering. He watched worried as the younger man took the glass but only stared at it in silence. It made Viktor regret his decision to involve Yakov. Just because he was supposed to be not going easy on Yuuri didn’t mean he had to be a hardass.

"Did he yell at you a lot? Was he…was he mean?"

Not that he thought Yuuri would ever get it as bad as Viktor or even Mila or Georgi, but he still had to make sure. He trusted Yakov but he hadn’t stayed in the room and the idea of what had been said was eating him up alive.

"No," Yuuri shook his head. "Yakov was nice but strict. My punishment is polishing soar shoes and helping with his paperwork for the entirety of next week," he finished with a grimace that Viktor fought himself not to acknowledge.

"That’s not too bad," Viktor said honestly. He had had punishments 10X worse than that and had Yakov yell at him for so long that he’d actually fallen asleep.

The words didn’t seem to help Yuuri because he curled into himself with a sniffle and the air around them sunk into the heavy scent of salt. "I wanted to eat a pork cutlet bowl with you this time too…"

Ah, his heart squeezed until he thought it would pop. Yuuri really was too precious at times. There was no one around so he took the opportunity to kiss the crown of Yuuri’s head and release the smallest bit of a reassuring scent. He smiled as he briefly rubbed his cheek against the top of Yuuri’s head mimicking the gesture of scenting but releasing very little pheromone.
“There will be other times,” he said knowing that one day he’d have a force to be reckoned with on his hands.

"I'm sorry, Maester Viktor. I just… I didn't want you to think I was I was weak," he mumbled as Viktor stepped away to give Yuuri the appropriate amount of space.

"Weak? How on Eorthe would I find you weak, Yuura?"

Yuuri bit his lip and twisted his fingers instead of answering.

"Yuuuriiiiii?

“I promised you gold medals but I lost because I-i messed up and fell. I-i just got too nervous even though you scented me, even though you said all those nice things to me before my soar, I embarrassed you in front of the world.

His words came out so soft that Viktor had to strain to hear them but with his head bent towards Yuuri and concentrating, he gleaned the gist of what his student had said and a part of him felt nervous as he found himself in a direct reversal of the role he had been in with Yakov so long ago.

"No one - and I mean no one- not you, not your father, not even Ore themself the Deity of Duels - has won everything. Losing is a part of being an athlete. One lost competition isn't going to make you less to me."

He grasped Yuuri by the shoulders and frowned when the omega kept his eyes on the floor.

“Yuura, look at me,” he whispered as he reached a hand out to lift the teen’s face.

Yuuri’s eyes were wet, his expression about to crumble. Viktor wished he could pull him close but rules were rules and they were already in such a public place. He settled for wiping at Yuuri’s tears and smoothing his thumb across the omega’s cheek. Surely, some coaches did that and no one would think it anything of it.

“You soared and to me that’s all that matters.” He picked up a few loose strands of Yuuri’s tied back hair and kissed it willing to risk this much if he couldn’t kiss his betrothed properly.

“No one - and I mean no one- not even someone as wonderful and talented as you, Yuura,” he said, borrowing the words that Yakov had used on him, “can win everything. Even I’ve lost but you know this don’t you? Because you’ve watched almost all my videos, haven’t you?"

Yuuri nodded.

“One loss or even a thousand losses aren’t going to make you any less to me. I am here because I wanted to grant your Wish, Yuura. As Araak has willed it, so I will always grant it.”

As Yuuri began to cry in earnest, Viktor found that he was glad he had chosen an ignored corner very far from the crowd. It afforded the omega the chance to cry his heart out in privacy, under the warm grip of Viktor’s hands.

“I’m here,” he crooned, wondering how much of Yuuri’s grief came from the impossible Nikiforov expectations of self perfection, the demands of his omega, or how much actually came from the teen’s genuine desire to please him.”I’m here, Yuura, for as long as you need me.”

As he watched Yuuri cry as much as he had when he was a teen, he realized he’d never know, but he hoped that like Yakov, he would one day become a good enough mate and maester to deal with Yuuri in all the ways he needed.
What Viktor didn’t count on when Yakov first told him that Yuuri wouldn’t be sharing a room with him during competitions was how much his body missed the omega in his bed. It made him appreciate how wonderful his initial rule of giving the omega his own bower had really been because now it seemed like he couldn’t sleep unless he was wrapped up tight within Yuuri’s octopus like arms.

He gave up on sleep after a few hours of tossing and turning, and settled for listening to the quiet whistling snores coming from Otabek, the room’s other occupant. He wondered if Yuuri was sleeping well. This hotel didn’t have nests as omegas didn’t often travel alone in this part of Yeuropa and the guidebooks had said that omegas had trouble resting in foreign beds. Maybe Yuuri had made a makeshift nest with Yurio like Viktor had read omegas sometimes did with their peers. He had to bite down on the snicker the ideas caused. Plistesky seemed like the type who would rather have all of his proprium taken away than share a bed and cuddle up with a “rival”.

Still, Viktor bet it would be cute. He could just see them curled up like cats and the curious part of his brain urged him to go have a look, just a quick peek and then he would try to go back to sleep.

He paddled his way out of his room expecting to greet no one at this hour. It was 2am in the morning in a country that shut its bars at 12 so he didn’t think there would be even drunks haunting the place. Imagine his surprise then when he opened his door and looked towards the omegas’ room and found not one but two – what smelt like alphas- sniffing around the door. He took exactly one second to weigh his options as his alpha riled up enough to make the ends of his hair crackle with magic. It wasn’t often that a well controlled alpha lost hold of his magic but after witnessing what he was seeing; Viktor congratulated himself for not blasting the two men into a snowy oblivion and calling down the Nikiforov dragon to help finish the job.

As he walked towards the intruders, his body language radiating murderous intent, he mentally thanked Yakov for choosing a place that was scent proof and soundproof if only because whatever he did to the knotheads in front of him, they wouldn’t be found (and they would have just to hope that Viktor was feeling merciful enough to leave enough pieces to be found (Newsflash: He wasn’t.) until at least the first shift which probably didn’t start for several more hours of the morning.

He let his pheromones leak out, seasoned them with strong notes of anger and danger. Their backs turned away from him, he wanted them to smell him before they saw him.

He knew it had worked when one stiffened and swung around to look at him, his scent going sour with fright. He took in the man’s features and clothes and guessed them to be from Jih Roh which honestly he hoped the fuck not.

“What the fuck is this,” he growled, closing the door shut behind him and approaching the pair with ice crackling between his fingers. It closed with a click that echoed throughout the hallway and startled the men as if it were a gunshot.

The other man stood a little taller, and stepped in front of his more timid companion. He recognized the watchful greediness that he had missed in the other man’s scared eyes and growled even louder.

“What is this?” he demanded as he stalked up to the pair and froze the one who looked like he was about to flee in place.

“You are not supposed to give us any grief,” the older man said bravely even as Viktor made the hallway cold and wet with sleet.
Viktor gave him a wicked smile.

“I give no grief to those who give me no grief,” he answered nice and sweet like he was talking to one of his elderly neighbors.

The man’s eyes narrowed in response and Viktor’s suspicions were confirmed when his look turned hungrier and angrier. “Stop the posturing, my lord and let us have a civil conversation. You and I both know that if you lay a finger on us, it will be taken into account and could become an international issue.”

Viktor faltered for only a second but it was enough to make the man grow a little more confident. The man smirked. “A strike upon us is a strike against Jih Roh, you know. Is this really how the House of Nikiforov wants to be represented?”

Viktor thought about it for a second. Causing them bodily harm might soothe his alpha but if word leaked out as to what he had done, it was likely to become a large press incident. If the information got to his mother or worse – the grigori- what additional nuisances would he have to deal with? His plate was already so full…

The watcher used his moment of reflection to pull a small box from his sleeve and Viktor stiffened immediately, his brain throwing him back to the moment that Artem pulled out his glass vials. He bore his fangs as the man stepped forward and held it out towards him.

“This is from my Lord Katsuki for the omega under Lord Nikiforov’s care, Neizvestny. He instructed us to leave it on the hotel door but perhaps it would be better to give it directly to the lord.”

Was Kenjiro sending a… a courting gift to Yuuri? Without even talking to him first? What in all of Anud’s Hells was the other alpha thinking? In the old days and for those such as the Nikiforovs who practiced the old ways, this was an offense great enough to get an alpha killed. He almost couldn’t believe that anyone from Jih Roh, much less a Lord Katsuki, could do something so disrespectful.

Then he thought of himself and his “scandalous” fight with the grigori and wondered if all the High Houses were going through a generational shift or something. Plistesky didn’t look too promising as the level headed potential heir of his clan either.

Viktor eyed the gift wanting to shred it to pieces. His hands nearly ached with the need to do so but he held himself back enough to do nothing more than growl at the box. “Your lord is breaking protocol,” he rumbled, “he has not come to me formally with any intentions for gifts.”

When in doubt always use etiquette he thought to himself smugly as the man’s smile faded into something more of a grimace. “By all rights, if Lord Katsuki is trying to give the type of gift I think he is attempting to give, then I have the right to confront you for daring to trespass with the omegas under my care if you have not corresponded with me first.”

The other man made a short, choked sound. “I told you, didn’t I, Hisakazu? That leaving a gift without informing Mr Nikiforov first would be a bad idea.” he threw a palm to his face and shook his head, “Haven’t I said a thousand times that our lord is too rash in his desires? And yet, here you are indulging them and threatening the Lord Nikiforov on his behalf while according to the rules we are in the wrong.”

“Shut up, Hisaki,” the watcher named Hisakazu snapped. “And don’t use my name so informally. Just because you like the ridiculous Standard practice of using first names doesn’t mean I do. It’s
Mr Morooka to you just like with the others.”

Hisaki pursed his lips and made a wild gesture towards Viktor. “But then, we are both Mr. Morooka and that will be confusing to the Lord Nikiforov here. He may have spent a little time in Jih Roh but surely he is still ignorant of our ways.”

Viktor blinked at the exchange, his anger lessening in favor of confusion over what was happening.

“Excuse me?” he finally said as the pair began to bicker.

Both men broke from their glaring match to stare at him. He put back on his angry demeanor because he didn’t like the way either of the two of them looked at him.

“Forgive us, Lord Nikiforov.” Hisaki bowed low, onto his knees and touching the floor into what Viktor recognized was the highest form of apology in Jih Roh. Hisakazu only bowed to his waist which earned him a growl until he sunk himself into the same position as his partner.

“Forgive us, he chimed in, his voice holding not a hint of apology for his earlier actions. “It seems as if House Katsuki has caused slight which will not do under the eyes of the High Houses.”

Viktor looked down at the display a little in awe of it. He couldn’t imagine his own grigoris genuinely apologizing for their more dastardly actions and again he was puzzled by what sort of watchers the new Lord Katsuki’s generation had brought in.

“What do you propose to do about it then? According to the rules, you have performed a grievous one.”

“We will instruct our lord on the proper protocol and strive to get him to understand what it is expected and what is meant when he navigates the world as Lord Katsuki. He is still very young, you see. We all ar-”

“That is not enough!” he barked and he wasn’t surprised to hear his words bounce down the hall.

His anger returned. Kenjiro had dared to send two of his men into Viktor’s space to do Araak knows what to the omegas sleeping innocently just doors away and all the two knotoads in front of him could offer was their apologies and a word with their lord? Warnings be damned, he was ready to tear out throats again.

The watchers seemed to sense this as the Hisaki curled into himself and Hisakazu leaned back with a look of defiance.

“What else would you have us do, my lord? We cannot order our lord and wouldn’t dare to. Thus, the most we can do is make…suggestions.”

Viktor ignored how the words made him shiver as he thought about how Artem had used the term in the same way. “Tell him to leave Yuuri alone. He is off limits.”

“That won’t do milord.” Hisaki shook his head, making him now the least likeable to begin with) of the two. “I’m afraid that in Jih Roh society any unclaimed omega is up for pursuit. Especially one bred into a family as high as the Nikiforovs.”

“Yuuri is Rhurshyan. Nikiforov blood flows through his veins.”

“But he is also Jih Roh. Anyone can tell by just looking at him and thus he falls under our rules as
well.”

“If he is not spoken for… that is” Hisakazu intoned, his eyes widening with hunger as he beheld Viktor’s expression.

Viktor was left in a quandary. If he told them that Yuuri was bonded then he would most likely have to produce proof and if that proof lead back to himself, then the whole cover story of Yuuri as a distant relative and bastard of a Nikiforov alpha would fall apart post haste. The tabloids were already sniffing around which he knew was mostly his fault but should he really just rip the bandage off because of a pissing contest with another lord that was so inept that he sent men out when he barely knew the rules of etiquette (Not that Viktor knew all the rules but that hardly counted when the moment was about hating on Kenjiro).

Commonsense and the believable threat of Yakov stroking out from anger won in the end. But he didn’t like it and he made sure that was known as he growled at the pair for any movements they made.

“It doesn’t matter what his status is. I am the lord of his family. If I say he is off limits, then he is. It is really is just as simple as that.”

Hisaki scowled and groaned. It was the first dark expression Viktor had seen on the man other than fright, embarrassment, or exasperation. “Lord Katsuki will not listen to that.”

“He doesn’t have to,” Hisakazu joined in and then flicked his eyes up to Viktor’s and held them in defiance, “Even if the end result is a no, Lord Katsuki is allowed a period of up to three years, three months, and three days to vie for Omega Neizvestny’s hand.”

Viktor let the full extent of his fangs come down and let the magic that had been burning behind his eyes burst through. Hisaki gasped and he smirked as he saw Hisakazu’s sneer fall.

“Let him try it and we’ll see what happens.”

He hadn’t meant to go to sleep guarding Yuuri’s door but exhaustion must have caught up to him and he drifted off after he had sent the two Jih Roh watchers packing. Yurio was the one to wake him with a series of kicks for blocking the omega’s hotel door. Then, to add injury to his attack, the little wretch had gone and told Yakov who had come out of his room yelling loudly enough to wake up Yuuri who had shuffled out and looked mortified to see him outside the hotel door instead of in his own hotel room where the teen felt he belonged.

If he had more wits or adrenaline about him he would have stayed up and followed Yuuri down no matter but Yakov had all but shoved him into the bed and Yuuri’s pleading face had been too cute to resist. Besides, he couldn’t really tell either of them what happened - Yuuri because he didn’t want him to worry right before a competition. And Yakov, well Yakov was too angry at what he saw as foolish alpha instincts to listen to what Viktor had to say. He forbade Viktor from following and only the threat of his not being able to travel with Yuuri on any further competitions kept Viktor sitting on his bed.

His only recourse was Otabek who seemed to be the only one who had sympathy for him in this situation. Maybe he had heard or smelled something last night despite the proofed doors. It wouldn’t be out of the realm of possibility for a dragon’s heightened senses. Whatever it was, Viktor thanked his lucky stars that the dragon nodded when he asked him to watch over Yuuri during breakfast.
It was only that little peace of mind that allowed him to drift off to sleep though his intention had been to stay up just in case anything happened. He didn’t think the Katsukis would be stupid enough to act after he had sent a threat last night, but honestly with High Houses you just never knew.

He'd overslept.

Yakov was going to skin him alive and eat his heart but that would have to wait until Viktor had done it to himself first. Xiv’s bones, how did this even happen? He looked to his mobile and saw that it had been set to silent and he cursed whatever well meaning do-gooder had done it and left him in this mess. He switched the silent function off and scrambled out of bed. He rushed to get dressed and had barely started on his hair when his phone started blaring an obnoxious ringtone chosen by Yuuri during the drive to the hotel.

He saw "Yakov" flash across the screen and pressed the accept button with bated breath.

"You're late." Was all the older man said over the line in a normal, very quiet, very unYakov voice.

Dragonshit. Viktor broke into a sweat. Whatever telling off was coming was going to be legendary. He swore the last time Yakov had been like this; his words had peeled the paint off the walls.

"Yakov, I can explain…"

"How about you explain at the rink. Where your students are. Where you're supposed to be right now."

Viktor shuddered. "I'm on my way, Yakov."

He ran the 20 minute journey in 5 and burst through the rink doors only to stop and have to put his hands on his knees as he fought to regain his breath.

"I'm here,” he wheezed.

"Maester Viktor!" Yuuri called from across the arena.

And although his lungs still felt like they were caving in, Viktor stood up intending to go straight to the omega but his heart nearly stopped as he saw Yuuri standing next to a displeasing shock of blond and red hair. The oxygen he had been gulping seemed to run out and the leisurely pace he was going to use went out the window as he struggled to get through the sea of competitors to where Yuuri stood.

His eyes had to be shitting him. That could not be Kenjiro Minami after Viktor had just told his Watchers what he would do. He felt the gods really must have it out for him as he reached Yuuri and saw him stride towards him and gesture back towards the unwanted alpha.

“Maester Viktor, look! This is Kenjiro and he speaks Jih Roh too!” the omega beamed while Viktor did his best not to rip the other man apart.

He scanned the arena for Otabek who promised and got an apologetic shrug in return before Yurio who was working on the other side of the rink demanded the dragon’s attention. Well fuck. He couldn’t argue with master’s orders could he? Yurio would always be the foremost for Otabek to protect just as Yuuri would be the same for Viktor.

“Mr Nikiforov,” Kenjiro cried as he approached Yuuri’s side and acted like Viktor wasn’t trying to
kill him with looks alone. “How nice it is to see you again!”

“Ai..g..n?” Yuuri’s brows furrowed as he looked up to Viktor. “You mean you’ve met Kenjiro before and didn’t tell me?”

A pout came to the teen’s lips that made Kenjiro’s eyes light up in admiration and made Viktor wonder how much trouble he would get into if he just outright socked another lord in the face for looking.

He squashed Yuuri’s cheeks between his hands to stop the cute expression and hold whatever resulted from his actions as much to himself as he could.

“You were dancing or don’t you remember? That’s why I keep telling you not to drink at banquets,” he scolded as he rubbed Yuuri’s face into circles.

Maybe Mari was onto something when xe did this he thought as Yuuri’s face undulated between adorable and lethally endearing.

“Vi..t..yaaa,” Yuuri whined as Viktor smooshed his face a little more for good measure. “I said I was sowy.”

With a laugh, he let Yuuri go and then coughed as he realized that he had forgot that Kenjiro was still standing right there. He went into coach mode hoping to get Yuuri on the aether quickly and away from the alpha that seemed like he was only seconds from drooling all over himself and the floor.

“Have you done your run through, yet?”

Yuuri shook his head.

Perfect. Now he had a valid excuse to send him away.

“Well, do it now and ask Yakov to watch it,” he said as Yuuri bent to fix his shoes.

Viktor didn’t miss the way Kenjiro’s eyes traced the curves of Yuuri’s body as the omega crouched down and began to tighten his laces. It was hard to swallow the angry vocalization that wanted to burst out of his mouth. He waited until Yuuri was under the watchful eye of Yakov and far enough away that there were no chances of anything he said to Kenjiro being heard by the omega.

“You are very close to him, Mr Nikiforov.”

Viktor almost snorted. Close? He was practically married to Yuuri. Anud’s Hell, he still remembered his official betrothal vows. Yuuri was just old enough to say the words properly and Viktor’s gut had twisted for days because he was so worried that he would get something wrong and somehow doom their relationship before the gods.

“I betroth thee unto me forever. Yea, before My Lady of the Undying Loving-Kindness, I betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, in steadfast love and in mercies.”

Just a bit of blood and a few pretty words, and their union would be sealed, but Kenjiro or Lord Katsuki didn’t need to know that. He just needed to know that Viktor didn’t want the other man in the omega’s space at all.

He leaned on the boards and threw Minami a look the other man wasn’t even trying to meet. From
the way the man’s eyes danced, he could tell that the alpha was following his Yuuri. The jealous part of him hoped the show was magnificent because this was about as close to Yuuri’s soaring that Viktor would ever allow the other man to be.

A thought occurred to him. One he hadn’t given much notice of until he realized that this was around the third time he had seen Kenjiro at a thaumaturgy event.

“Why are you here?” The words flew out of his mouth before he could stop them. Figuring that he’d already opened the stable and let the horses out, he clarified his question with another one. “I mean, how is it that you are here at all these competitions?”

Kenjiro blinked and then smiled bright in a way that probably made other people smile back (but not Viktor and if he had anything to say about it – definitely not Yuuri). His smile turned unexpectedly sharp as Viktor stood up and looked up at him properly.

“Why, Mr Nikiforov,” he began, his smile turning more into a baring of teeth, “I compete, of course, but in fire.” He sighed, “Which is such a shame since Omega Yuuri competes on ice.”

His eyes went back to following Yuuri as just the tips of his fangs shifted down to glint on display. “I think he would look lovely covered in flames, don’t you think so, Mr Nikiforov?”

“I don’t,” Viktor said honestly. As much as he loved Yuuri any way he came, he had always thought the omega looked most natural on ice. “It doesn’t suit his Nikiforov blood.”

Kenjiro hummed. “Who are his parents again? Maybe Rhurshyans cannot tell Jih Roh features apart but I feel as though Yuuri has a quite distinct appearance. Maybe, he is from a noble bloodline. He looks well bred enough for it.”

Viktor wasn’t sure what kind of look sat on his face but there was no way it was a pleasant one. He could already smell the displeasure sinking into his scent.

“Does it matter?”

Kenjiro eyed him up before breaking into another smile.

“No, I suppose it doesn’t,” he said with a chuckle that was anything but light and merry, “but I guess I’ll have a chance to get to know at some point since we’ve been assigned to all the same competitions this year.”

He leaned in to Viktor’s space not as tall but still in a way meant to intimidate. “It’ll be my pleasure to welcome him to the JHK cup since as Lord Katsuki it is one of my primary duties. Perhaps, then I can ask Yuuri to dance for me.” He smiled sweetly. “I already have the piece and outfit planned for him. It will be very beautiful.”

He took a step back leaving Viktor shaking with anger and ready to ram his fist through the deceptively cherubic face. Red flames engulfed Kenjiro’s palms with his retreat and he looked up to Viktor with a toothy grin.

The younger alpha gave him a wink and then bit his thumb. “They said I must do things properly because you are a bit old fashioned.”

The magic swirled around Kenjiro but Viktor’s senses told him it was nothing like his own inherited powers and hardly enough to be even a Blessing. The clear proof that Kenjiro was an imposter filled Viktor with a sick glee until he realized just a second too late what the younger man intended to do. Viktor didn’t know if it was his panic or the fire sucking all the air from his lungs
but suddenly he couldn’t breathe.

No one was stupid enough to perform this kind of spell out in the open where the world could see. He could already picture the shit storm the display was going to cause and because the little shit was doing it in public, his hands were tied as to how he could react.

The engagement spell, or at least a request for one came to fruition rapidly and Viktor couldn’t work his jaw or his hands quickly enough to break the spell. The magic in Kenjiro’s hands expanded and contracted until it was a small ring of fire, just big enough to fit over someone’s finger.

The ring floated up from Kenjiro’s palm to drift in front of Viktor.

“No. no. no,” he muttered as he tried to react fast enough to draw his own blood. Without it, the blood spell would be near unbreakable, its backlash too great.

Kenjiro continued as if he wasn’t watching Viktor struggle.

“I charge thee, O Scion of Araak, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell them that I am sick for love. Many waters cannot quench it; neither can the floods drown it. Even if I were to give all the substance of mine house for love, it would be utterly contemned. So I say to thee, O Child of Ore and Xiv’s union, have mercy upon me and grant for me my beloved.”

He could feel the spell taking shape, his hands involuntarily coming up to cup the fire that was rapidly spinning itself into a solid, pulsing ring of magic. Three years, three months, and three days. He could see the countdown of numbers hovering right above it.

“Have I done the right thing now, Mr Nikiforov? With this, shouldn’t I have right to court Omega Yuuri?”

The smile of satisfaction that came to Kenjiro’s face made Viktor want to punch it right off. In fact, that’s exactly what he did the moment the spell was over. Fuck, the international relations and protocol. Screw Yakov’s anger and the media’s image of the perfect and princely Viktor Nikolayevich Nikiforov. Later he would blame protective alpha instincts but in the now, it felt so good to hear and feel the crunch of his fist connecting with Minami’s bones that he repeated it; over and over until his hand was wet.

Someone tried to pull him away but he shook them off. All he could think of was destroying the threat to his omega.

Kenjiro grinned from his spot on the floor and he kept smiling even as he wiped blood from his face.

“Why such a reaction, Mr Nikiforov?” He chuckled around a mouthful of blood. “I thought you were a respectable mage and yet here you are acting as if you are Omega Yuuri’s alpha when he has no mate.”

Viktor ripped the younger man up by his shirt, holding it tight to choke him a little for good measure.

“I said he was off limits,” he snarled letting ice build around him. “Didn’t you get the message from your minions?”

“Yes, I did...” Kenjiro laughed as if Viktor wasn’t trying to choke him into oblivion. He went on like this for a few moments before he challenged Viktor’s magic with a force of his own and met
Viktor’s eyes with fire, lust, and ambition. “…but I’ll admit that I didn’t care to listen.”

Viktor saw red and slammed a fist full of ice straight into the laughing alpha’s face.

He was going to kill the little bastard if it was the last thing he did.
In this chapter, everybody is mad at Viktor. Chairs get thrown, feelings get hurt, and Kenjiro once again ends up with a bloody face.

Hi All,

Some general housekeeping:

The genderless pronoun xe is used in this story as mage children decide whether or nor to be male or female upon coming of age. It works as follows:
- Xe - He/She
- Xem - Him/Her
- Xyr - His/Her
- Xyrs - His/Hers
- Xemself - Himself/Herself

Credit to fanndis on Tumblr for terms "oma", "apa", and "grandapa"
- Oma - Omega Mother
- Apa - Alpha Father
- Grandapa - Alpha Grandfather

Credit to Tongari Boushi no Atorie for the concept of ateliers, soar shoes, and magical placement tests.

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CW: Curse words and mentions of blood.

The ice pack Viktor held to his swollen eye wasn't cold enough to do a single thing. Georgi, who had somehow been roped into helping his atelier mate in the chaotic aftermath of the fight, shook his head as he prodded at the bruise.

With all the blood clogging his nose, Viktor couldn't pick up on enough of the beta's scent markers to tell what the other man was feeling but, judging from Georgi's pressed line of mouth and ungentle poking around his wounds, Viktor was pretty sure that it fell somewhere between the spectrum of furious to livid.

Georgi let out a low whistle as he tilted Viktor's head to make sure the worst of the nosebleed had stopped.

"He really got you good."
But not as good as Viktor had got him. Viktor wanted to laugh when he thought about how ragged the other alpha had looked being carried out off the rinkside for medical treatment (His punches had definitely wiped the smirk off of Minami's face) but his mouth still hurt too much to move.

"I can't believe you did that, Viktor. What were you thinki--"

The door slammed open with a bang that echoed throughout the room and left a dent in the wall. Yakov forced himself into the tiny space like an angry dragon ready to breathe fire while Georgi leapt away from Viktor and cowered into the nearest corner.

Yakov’s face was near purple with rage and the veins lining it bulged so much that they looked like they were going to burst at any moment. Viktor didn't think he'd ever seen the older mage so angry in his entire life.

"Look at you!" Yakov roared, flecks of foam flying as he spoke. "You look like a sarding piece of tenderised meat! What in Araak's blood were you thinking out there? Huh, boy?" he screamed not waiting for an answer. "Were you trying to kill, Mage Minami?"

The answer was actually yes and Viktor might have succeeded if staff hadn't interfered when Minami turned it into a magical brawl. Viktor wasn't stupid enough to smile but it was hard to hide the feeling of satisfaction that ran throughout his body.

Yakov went near apoplectic and sent a chair sailing into the wall with a bang that stung in Viktor's still tender ears.

"You had better fix your face, boy, before I fix it for you."

Viktor was sure that if the man wasn't such an established and experienced coach, he probably would have laid hands on him by this point.

"I'm of two minds to kick you out my atelier for shaming it like you have. A hundred years of unblemished history and you tear it apart in some pissing contest!"

"I'm sorry, Yakov…"

Yakov sneered. "Don't insult me, boy. You're about as sorry as a cat with cream. You might as well have pulled your dick out and had a fucking swordfight! I hope it was worth it - whatever was going through that thick skull of yours when you decided to throw your career to the wind."

Viktor looked up in shock though the movement caused his head and eyes to pound.

"Don't give me that look! What did you think would happen?" He got into Viktor's face and slammed his hand on the table next to him. "Huh, Viktor? Did you think you could just do as you like like you always do and nothing would happen?"

He stood up and glared down, his face an impenetrable wall of intense emotions and his scent hot enough to choke.

Tendrils of unease began to coil around Viktor making it suddenly harder to breathe.

"Well you're wrong this time, boy, dead wrong. You've been banned from this competition for the rest of your life and you better hope the IMU buys your flimsy "heat of passion" excuse otherwise you won't be joining Yuuri for any of the Grand Prix series either."

Viktor held the ice pack a little tighter to his eye, letting the sting distract from the sudden spike of
anxiety that Yakov's words sent through him. He hadn't thought that far—well, actually he had (that's why he let those watchers go with nothing more injurious than bruised egos) - but the desire to punch the living daylights out of Kenjiro had run over any of his usual logic.

"They'll buy it," he said, ignoring the ache radiating from his lips as he spoke. "Lord Katsuki violated protocol…"

He had to hope that they did otherwise he'd have to regret his actions and all the devils would have to leave Hell before he ever regretted sinking his fist into Lord Katsuki's face.

Yakov huffed, the anger slowly ebbing out of him. "I seriously doubt that, Viktor, but keeping thinking that the IMU lives for High House drama and see where that gets you."

"They'll probably summon you to the High Courts rather than the IMU," murmured Georgi as he moved from his hiding place and resumed checking Viktor's injuries, "You're both High House lords after all."

Everyone in the room grimaced. No mage enjoyed being in the High Courts. Viktor didn't know what curse or blessing had caused the mages who became its judges but standing in front of just one of them was akin to subjecting yourself to a gaze 100 times more intense than that of the grigori. Viktor shuddered and tried to change the subject to something a little less harrowing than the feeling of a 1,000 eyes burning into your skin.

"What about the press?"

They were probably going to be one of the bigger worries when it came to this situation. Kenjiro had done that spell in the open to grab attention.

"Paid off who we could," Yakov grumbled as he sat down on one of the other flimsy metal chairs that staff had provided when they cordoned Viktor off. Both he and the chair groaned as he settled his weight on it."But your bank account is going to hate you for a long while."

Viktor very much doubted that. He was a Nikiforov. Money was hardly an obstacle. He had funds (both his own and familial) stashed in places that even a coach as involved as Yakov didn't know about.

"That doesn't mean you're safe."

Both Viktor and Yakov eyed Georgi but no one spoke until the younger mage gave them the answer.

"Social media?" Georgi threw his hands up. "Almost everyone had their phones out and some people were taking video of Yuuri's reaction."

Dragonshit, well he definitely wasn't safe then. He knew he would have been recorded but hadn't really factored in on anything happening to Yuuri. He really should have been more careful, maybe dragged Kenjiro to a side room before he turned him into a human punching bag.

"How is he?"

He flinched as Georgi prodded too hard at the dark bruise on his cheek in order to check for broken bones. Now that his adrenaline was dwindling down, he was starting to feel each and every one of the acute aches and pains littering his body.

Yakov stood silent for too long, long enough for Viktor to taste a little bit of bile in the back of his
"How is Yuuri?" he repeated trying not to let any fear or uncertainty take hold of him. What he had done was done. He couldn't take it back. "Is he alright?"

It was a stupid question. The minute he focused on the bond, it screamed at him, telling him without uncertainty that Yuuri wasn't okay.

"Alright?" Yakov scowled until his face became so ugly that Viktor wouldn't be surprised if it turned him to stone. "He was inconsolable. His alpha just got into a fistfight and he doesn't know why. Cameras were pointed at him and he was nearly crushed under the onslaught of nosy bystanders. You're lucky Otabek jumped in and dragged him and Plisetsky away from there before things got really messy."

"He had a panic attack," Georgi said plainly, any hint of friendliness gone by the time he finished the words, "right in front of everyone."

"Georgi..."Yakov growled.

Viktor dropped the ice pack, his pain and bruises forgotten with the revelation.

"What do you mean?" He tried to launch out of his seat but a sharp stabbing in his ribs knocked the action out of him.

"Georgi..."

"No, Yakov," Georgi spit back, "He deserves to hear it if he going to pull stunts like this. What Viktor did doesn't just affect him, it affects the whole atelier. Myself, Yurio, Mila and Yuura," he glared at Viktor, "will all be wrapped up in this now. Yuura's a good kid. He doesn't deserve to be caught in drama like this."

Georgi's fists clenched and unclenched as he said it and Viktor understood his anger. The Yu(u)ris were like younger brothers to the older thaumaturges of the atelier and just like any big sibling, it was no surprise that Georgi might feel protective of the youngest member of their team.

"Georgi, get out."

"No, Yakov."

Viktor's mouth went dry as Georgi and Yakov had a standoff in the shoebox sized room. He felt bad that they were arguing but they weren't his most pressing concern now. He hadn't felt the sink of a Drop but he had been... occupied.

He licked his lips, tasting copper and broken skin and interrupted the tension by asking, "D-did he Drop?"

It disgusted him that the reveal of Yuuri's true proprium was his chief worry behind the question but with all the media, potential witnesses, and Katsuki trash floating about, Yuuri slipping into the fire element would have been a disaster.

Georgi broke from the staring competition to shake his head. "No, Plisetsky somehow managed to keep him out of one while they escaped."

"S-so he's okay..."
Both men stood silent again.

"Yakov, Georgi, he is okay, right?"

Georgi answered for them "It was a bad attack, Viktor. The atelier healer doesn't think he should compete tonight."

His heartbeat thundered in his ears. Not compete...? He had to be hearing wrong.

“I don't understand…"

"Actions have consequences, Viktor. How many times have I told you this? You always go about thinking you can do what you want..." Yakov ranted.

"But Yuuri, not competing…I don't…"

Georgi jumped in, his eyes lightened with ice even though betas weren't supposed to have that level of magic.

"It's what the atelier healer said, Viktor, why would we lie to you?"

It wasn't that he thought they were lying but that his mind just did not want to believe the information they provided him with. His alpha reared up, his insides twisting with the need to see Yuuri.

"Where is he? Can I see him?"

God's Above, what was he even going to say to him? Sorry? There was no way that would be enough. He would have to get on his knees at this point and bear his nape and just pray that Yuuri had it in him to forgive his actions.

"Do you think you deserve to?" Yakov rumbled.

Yakov's displeased face overlapped with a memory of his father, cold, hard, and unforgiving as he looked down on him.

"And, you think you deserve to, Vityusha? After what you have done?"

He was already on his knees but he pressed his face to the ground. Opening his neck, leaving it vulnerable for his father to take.

But his father didn't accept it. Viktor shivered knowing the chill he felt had less to do with the icy stone floor he knelt against and more to do with the glacial aura coming off his father.

"Apa, I know words are not enough...," he began, his forehead scraping against the rough hewn walkway to his father's office as he put his head down even farther.

He would push it into the dirt, into the cow shit lying in the fields if it meant he could see Yuuri again.

Soft booted feet stopped at the line of his fingertips, lighting a spark of hope in his chest. He risked looking up to beg for mercy from Lord Nikiforov, the Head Alpha, the judge and executioner of the family.

There was none.
The cool ice blue eyes came down heavy on him followed by an avalanche of quietly restrained anger.

"Get out of my sight, child, and only come when I call for you."

His sire bypassed him without another word.

And, sent him away two days later for a punishment heeded so well it lasted 10 years.

"I can't let it be like last time," he whispered as the memories continued to assault him. "I won't let it be like last time."

He wouldn't run away this time, nor listen to anybody else's words but Yuuri. He would apologize for his actions in person and suffer the consequences only from his beloved.

"Yakov...I need to...I need to see him."

Yakov grunted; anger disappearing completely as Viktor lay open his vulnerable side.

"Good luck getting past Plisetsky. He's guarding Yuura like a rabid dog."

The chaos of his actions truly hit Viktor when the organizers asked him to leave the venue. As he fulfilled their request and stepped out of the building into the sea of media crews camped outside, Viktor was filled with guilt.

It was a bloodbath. With cameras being swung in his direction and microphones being jammed in his face with every inch he moved forward, he could understand how Yuuri had been overwhelmed.

"Why did you attack Lord Katsuki, Lord Nikiforov?"

"Are those injuries from the fight?"

"Lord Nikiforov, any comments about the video released of today's fight?"

"Is it true you are Mage Neizvestny's alpha?"

Seasoned by years of it, Viktor remained unfazed as he ignored the onslaught of questions and statements thrown at him as he made his way to the private car waiting to take him back to the hotel.

"Is it true that Mage Neizvestny is in a relationship with Lord Katsuki?"

That one nearly made him pause, but he fought his foolish instincts and shoved himself forward and into the backseat of his escort. He had given the media enough drama to run with for a lifetime. For now, he wouldn't give them a crumb more.

---

"Piggy, just lay down, shut the fuck up, and rest like the healer told you to."
"I'm fine, Yurio."

"The hell you are! You almost fucking passed out back at the arena!"

"Well, I'm fine now so--"

"Mage Neizvestny, omegas are of a delicate constitution..."

"Oi, don't you go stereotyping us, you bastard. There's nothing delicate about me."

"I want to compete!"

"Mage Neizvestny, it really would be for the best if you rested. I've spoken with Maester Feltsman and we've agreed that this is the best course of action."

"Where's Vitya? I want Vitya. He's my coach."

"You're acting like a brat, Piggy. Just stay down and rest."

"No!"

"Piggy..."

"Vitya!"

It was comical how everyone froze the minute they realized Viktor was in the room. He stared at them and they stared at him.

As he took in the scene, he wondered if Kenjiro's blows had caused him to hallucinate because what he was seeing before him had to be impossible.

Yurio, before Viktor's very eyes, was actually nesting with Yuuri. He lay half on top and curled around the younger omega like a protective mother cat. The room even smelt like a bland, less sweet version of his mother's nesting scent.

Inside, Viktor was screaming. He honestly thought he'd be dead before he ever saw Yurio snuggled up to someone - much less Yuuri - but today was a strange day so he chose not to comment on their arrangement when he finally limped his way to the Yu(u)ri's bedside.

Yuuri moved first.

"Vitya, tell them to let me soar."

The healer moved next.

"Viktor, you know this is for the best..."

He came to the edge of the bed displacing both the healer and Otabek as he approached the pair sitting in its middle. It had been torn apart to form a makeshift nest and if it weren't for the current circumstances, looked exceedingly comfortable.

Yuuri tried to wriggle out of from underneath Yurio.

"Vitya!"

"Piggy, just lay down!"
"No, Yurio let me go. Vitya!"

Yuuri's emotions were like a churning sea within the bond and the sensation made Viktor feel nauseous. The teen struggled against Yurio's hold and managed to break out an arm which he then used to reach out towards the older mage.

His brown eyes shined with unshed tears.

"Yuura," Viktor ventured. "Are you alright?"

He leaned down to soothe the tension away from Yuuri's brow but his wrist was nearly crushed in a vice grip. Yurio hissed at him like the blond was part snake. "You have a lot of fucking nerve coming here, you knotless fucker."

Viktor didn't fight the insult nor let it make him angry. After all, it was a truth.

Yuuri's sea of emotions churned further.

"Yurio!" He whined as the older omega's grip tightened.

Viktor winced as the pain in his wrist grew and became unbearably cold.

"Stop it, Yurio. You're hurting him!"

"Do you hear that, you asshole!?" Yurio squeezed down until his pressure on Viktor’s bones threatened to make them snap. "You ruin his whole competition and he's still looking out for you."

"I'm sorry."

Yurio scowled and readjusted his grip on Yuuri to stop him from leaving his hold.

"Don't look so fucking sorry for yourself, you asshole! If you're going to start shit at least be alpha enough to own it."

"An apology isn't feeling sorry for myself," Viktor snapped as he tugged his hand back. His body ached. He was exhausted. He just wanted to hold Yuuri. "As a coach, I am aware that I shouldn't have done what I did today."

Yurio snorted and then released Yuuri who had halfway wriggled out of his grasp anyway by this point.

"All of your apologies belong to Piggy here. He's the one who you freaked out enough to faint on national TV."

Viktor winced. Yakov and Georgi didn't tell him that part.

"Yuura, I'm sorry. You shouldn't have had to go through that."

Yurio glared at Yuuri, "He'll probably forgive you because he's a fucking softie," and then glared at Viktor, "but I won't. If it was up to me, I'd tell you to get bent and ride Anud's dick all the way to Hell."

Viktor tried hard not to react to the bait but failed. "Classy, Yurio."

"Just about as classy as a coach who can't keep his hands to himself like some fucking mageling." Yurio spit back.
"I deserved that."

"Of course, you did, you prop sucking fuck. Alphas always think they're so mighty, so untouchable but you're all just dumpster fires with a bit of controllable magic and slightly bigger dicks."

"I'm sure Otabek would be happy to hear what you really think about his gender." Viktor sniped back.

It was childish but he didn't come here to argue with Plisetsky, and in classic fashion when dealing with the boy, get riled up.

"Leave Otabek out of this, you asshole! He's nowhere near as shitty of alpha as you. At least he doesn't leave his omega to the wolves so he can have a dick waving match."

Yuuri's scent started to peak as the tensions in the room rose. The acidic odor irritated Viktor's nose and all of his spirit.

"What do you want to me to say, Yurio? That I fucked up? I know I did," he rumbled, the sound low and full of warning as he spoke. "I've got a face full of bruises, Yakov's ranting, and a media frenzy to tell me that. I don't need the rantings of a 20 year old brat too."

Viktor knew he was wrong the minute the words came out of his mouth and he fought the urge to flinch as Yurio's expression turned dark, like he could just murder Viktor on the spot.

"I'm sorry, Yurio. I've just been under a lot of stre--."

"Fuck you, Viktor," Yurio hissed as he got up from the bed and shrugged Yuuri's searching hand off, "A good coach doesn't take his shit out on his students," he bellowed, having every right to feel angry. "Deal with this shit yourself."

He left the room with the door banging shut in his wake.

Otabek stood up and looked at Viktor radiating disapproval.

"That was uncalled for, Lord Nikiforov."

Great. At this rate, the entire atelier was going to be angry at him.

"Tell him I'm sorry."

Wisps of black magic uncurled around Otabek as he prepared to phase to wherever his master had run. His fangs showed just a little as he spoke,

"Tell him yourself."

And then he was gone.

Viktor sighed.

"That wasn't very nice, Vitya."

He grimaced. No, it wasn't but he would deal with it later. Right now, he wanted to focus on Yuuri.

"Are you okay?"

He tried to cup Yuuri's face but the omega shied away from his touch which Viktor semi expected;
He curled into himself with a bitter expression which Viktor did not.

"I should be asking you that. Your face is so bruised up."

"Don't worry about my face, Yuura. It'll heal."

"But…"

He turned to the healer.

"Why are you saying he can't soar? He looks fine to me."

(Despite the fact that his emotions were a swirling, turbulent mess…)

"He almost Dropped, Viktor. It wouldn't be safe for a mage omega to perform so soon after such a
close call. He could still lose control and be a danger to himself and others."

Viktor's chest panged with the memory of Yuuri's last battle with his control and how the magic
had felt like Yuuri was trying to rip his heart out.

"I'm okay, Vitya. I promise," Yuuri gripped onto the edge of his cloak and pulled looking more like
a toddler than his almost 19 year old self. His eyes were a contradiction of bold and pleading as he
looked up into Viktor's face, "so please let me soar."

Yuuri looked at him like he was holding the omega's life in his hands, and in this moment in time,
Viktor certainly felt that he was.

Yuuri's emotions through the bond were anything but okay. It put his heart and his head at odds.
He wanted Yuuri to soar as well but with the healer's information, knew it wouldn't be a good idea
unless he made the teen less of a danger by lowering his proprium levels...

His stomach twisted and his fangs clicked down as he realized the answer.

The alpha trump card against omega power.

"If I drank his blood, had him rest until the event, and kept him in calming pheromones would that
be enough?"

The healer gave the idea a few minutes of thought before he nodded his head slowly.

"The Draining might work to decrease his energy levels to something safe enough for him to
compete but if you drink too much from him, he might be too weak to soar."

Bile rose in Viktor's throat even as saliva flooded his mouth in anticipation. He would never go that
far. He had seen firsthand the awful ways in which Draining used.

In the olden days, it was why omegas had worn collars and it was one of the first practices Viktor's
grandfather outlawed when he came to power. It could only be done willingly and with explicit
permission now. Even his father, who had no problems overturning nearly every one of his
grandfather's decrees, hadn't touched it.

Viktor's mouth went dry as he looked at Yuuri. He had fucked up and now he needed to fix it no
matter how much he disliked the solution.

"Yuura, would you be okay with that? If I drank from your neck?"
His innards shivered and bunched at the words but his alpha howled in approval. The contrasting mixture of dread and excitement made him feel dizzy but it wouldn't stop him from doing what he needed to do if this was what Yuuri wanted.

Yuuri looked up at him in shock at the offer and then blushed down the roots of his hair as he took in what it meant.

Viktor had been avoiding the topic for so long Yuuri had probably thought it was off the table barring ceremony or necessary action.

"I thought you didn't want to…" Yuuri's eyes were so, so wide."I thought you didn't like it..."

He wasn't wrong but his reasons probably were. Viktor drew on his mother's words:

"You will never be that alpha, Vitya."

He would never be that alpha. He repeated the mantra in head until he almost believed it. He would need the strength if he was going to do this.

Viktor cupped Yuuri's face, relishing in the velvety smooth skin that he caressed with his thumbs.

"It's an alpha's job to fix their wrongs, Yuura. If this is what you want, I will do it."

"Yes, Vitya," Yuuri clung to his cloak like a lifeline and then to his hands, pressing them into his warming pink cheeks, "I'd be okay with anything if it meant I could soar."

Viktor nodded knowing that “yes” would be the answer. He asked the healer to leave and then gently, so gently like he was moving a baby bird, tilted Yuuri's neck up for better access.

Internally, he was shaking from head to toe and caught between wanting to throw up or pass out. His alpha roared at him to forget those things and open his mouth.

It helped that he had tasted Yuuri’s blood before and in the time since, hadn't lost control of his desire.

"You will never be that alpha, Vitya."

The omega shivered and closed his eyes as Viktor's hand shifted to the back of his head and cleared Yuuri's tousled hair from his neck into one grip.

"Tell me if anything hurts, Yuura."

He closed his mouth over Yuuri's pulse tasting sweat and soft skin. He bit down.

"Ah, Vitya…"

He drank until he thought he was going to throw up.

Through some cosmic miracle, Yuuri made it to the podium. It wasn't first- Yurio took that spot- but bronze was still worthy of a pork cutlet bowl considering the events of the day.

As he caught a glimpse of Yurio putting an arm around Yuuri to console him, the stakes of what he had to lose finally hit him.

He didn't want to stop being Yuuri's coach. In fact, he hoped his beloved never retired so that he
could continue to be the one beside Yuuri forever. Blood drunk from how much he had had to take from Yuuri, Viktor looked at the TV with tears of jealousy, fear, and pride threatening to run down his face as he watched his atelier celebrate the wins.

When Yuuri held a stuffed poodle up to the cameras and smiled, Viktor bawled.

It was one mistake. One momentary loss of control. He had spent most of his life being good and perfect. Wasn't he allowed to slip up every so often?

"Even without his coach, it looks like Mage Plisetsky is out to make history again."

"I'll say, Johannes, the Finlonti Trophy has never had an omega competitor much less someone who has broken the Juniors record that Viktor Nikiforov held for ten years."

"Speaking of which, did you see the headlines this morning? It seems like Vi--"

Viktor turned off the TV and slumped back into the headboard in a drunken heap. The room was spinning and he didn't know if it was from the jumble of his emotions or from the blood sloshing through his body but it was a disconcerting feeling all the same.

He let out little sparks of magic in the hopes to bring his proprium levels down. They came out so clumsy and unpretty - like the spells little Yuuri used to cast - that they made him laugh despite his tears.

Gods, he was drunk.

He wondered if Yuuri would give him a kiss when he came back. He hadn't been very happy to learn that Viktor was banned from the competition and for a few tense moments, it looked like Yuuri wouldn't compete after all. But Yurio, in his usual acidic manner, had saved the day by kicking the door in under the guise of wanting to grab his costume and dragged Yuuri away.

Knock. Knock.

Someone was at the door and in his drunken state, Viktor's mind supplied that it must be Yuuri. He wiped at his face, scrambled to answer the door, and then threw it wide open, ready to gather the omega up in his arms.

He gathered an armful of very disgruntled IMU messenger instead.

Dragonshit. He let go like the man was on fire and stumbled back as he tried to make himself look dignified.

"Lord Nikiforov?"

"Yes." He smoothed his hair back and straightened his blouse hoping no blood had managed to drop on it and cause him further embarrassment.

The man eyed him liked he looked anything but a lord and then with a deep frown, shoved a dark purple envelope into his hands.

"You are being summoned, Lord Nikiforov. To be judged under the eyes of those chosen by Araak."

Viktor fought the urge to groan. He knew it was a possibility but to have it actually come was the worst. His entire mood fell further as he turned the envelope over and used the sharp edge of the
paper to cut his hand and use the blood to open the seal.

It tore open with a usually loud bang that made even the messenger jump. Viktor blamed Yuuri’s blood and stood and squinted so he could hear the decree well enough (Xiv’s bones was he drunk).

Lord Viktor Nikolayevich Nikiforov,
Scion of House Nikiforov

Whereas complaint has been made before Us that Lord Nikiforov of House Nikiforov is suspected to have disturbed the peace of mage society by committing the offence of affray, it has been returned as a court summons for Lord Nikiforov to explain his actions and receive judgment before the High Courts.

Proclamation is hereby been made that Lord Viktor Nikolayevich Nikiforov of House Nikiforov is required to appear before the High Courts of Ilaireth City to answer the said complaint on the 23rd day of Aktyabr, Year 2019 of Our Lady Araak

Dated 12th day of Aktyabr, Year 2019 of Our Lady Araak

Righteousness, Justice, Impartiality

The High Courts of Judges

The missive fluttered to the floor without any fanfare and for the first time in his life Viktor wished his affinity was fire so that he could have the satisfaction of turning it to ash without any effort.

"Lord Nikiforov is expected to obey the summons in attendance with your grigori who have already been informed so that may come and bear witness."

Viktor itched to mock the snooty, nasally voice of the messenger but refrained because he was nearly 29 years old and an head alpha and high house lord, and that sort of thing didn't look good on anybody older than the age of 12.

He shut the door after the man’s retreat and fell against it with a barely concealed scream of rage. It was so hot; it burned through his drunkenness and turned him surprisingly sober.

A High Court petition? Really? Kenjiro Minami was turning out to be an absolute bastard and worth every punch Viktor gave to his face. He should have hit him harder and broke a couple of bones.

Viktor scrubbed a hand over his face. Katsuki thought he was smart but he had violated the rules too and there was no way in any of Anud's hells that he was going to let the weasel get away with it without a fight. He wouldn't have much time to send in a counter argument - two days tops and Yuuri would be coming back soon- but he would be damned if he didn’t.

At times like this, he usually relied on Yakov but Yakov was still furious at him. He didn't even speak a word to Viktor when he came to his door to collect the Yu(u)ris.

Viktor was just going to have to do it himself. He knew how to draft the spells and had spent countless hours learning the art as a child. Thankfully he also had at least 10 years of bending
Yakov's rules and a lifetime of good breeding to guide him.

It shouldn't be too hard.

He rummaged through the hotel's drawers hoping that enough mages stayed at it for them to carry the supplies and paper he needed. If he worked fast, he could be done in an hour or five.

Viktor was certain that he was going to have to kick Yuuri out of his den if he wanted to get any packing done. All the omega was doing was sighing and pouting though he had volunteered to help, and the sights and sounds were so guilt inducing that Viktor wished he had just packed things himself.

His eye twitched when Yuuri sighed for what had to be the hundredth time that night.

"Yuura, don't you have your own packing to do?"

"I'm finished."

"Really? Is it done neatly?"

Yuuri blushed. "Of course," he snapped. "I'm not a child…"

"That's true. You aren't," Viktor agreed as he threw in a couple of wooly socks into his suitcase as a precaution. "You'll be 19 soon. Have you thought of a gift yet?"

Ilaireth City was carved into the side of a mountain with the High Courts at its snowy peak. It never hurt to dress warmly whenever he went there.

"I want to come with you."

He paused to pinch one of Yuuri's puffed out cheeks. It wasn't as squishy as it used to be and the knowledge made Viktor a little sad.

"Think of something else, Yuura," he said with another squeeze and soothed the redness with a gentle pat.

Yuuri shoved his hand away. "That's what I want, Vitya." Then, he toyed with the loose strings of Viktor's duvet. "Can I really not come? Or, is it you don't want me to come?"

It was a mix of both but Yuuri didn't need to be privy to that. "Trust me, Yuura, you don't want to come. It's a very uncomfortable experience."

"But how would you know that? Maybe I would like it."

Viktor snorted. "No one - absolutely no one - enjoys standing before the Judges, Yuura."

Yuuri pouted and Viktor ruffled his hair.

"You'll have fun with Chris, I promise."

Yuuri grabbed a pillow and hugged it to him as he flopped onto the bed in his steadily becoming classic sulking pose. "It feels like I'm being babysat. I don't see why I can't stay here all alone. If worst comes to worst, I have Makkachin and Vicchan to protect me."

Viktor folded a few shirts and then added another just in case one got dirtied with blood. You just
never knew with Judges.

"My home, my rules and I'd feel better if you weren't alone," he supplied as he continued packing. "Besides, Chris could use your help with his training club for kids."

Yuuri scrunched into a tighter ball of displeasure.

"Is it because I'm an omega? I can take care of myself, you know." Spice followed the sentence. Viktor pinched the bridge of his nose. He really didn't want to get into a fight.

"Yuura, be reasonable."

"You promised to take me wherever you went!"

"That was before I knew I'd be before the Judges, moonbeam."

Yuuri flushed and then huffed and then turned his back to the alpha.

Viktor looked at him in fondness.

"Don't give me such a pout, Yuurotchka, " he fake whined as Yuuri's scent took on more heat. "You're independent, I know, but you've never been on your own for more than a day or so. You can't cook. Half the clothes come out ruined when you do the laundry. And, you're the only person I know that somehow leaves a place messier when they try to clean."

"I want to stay here if I can't come with you."

If he wasn't worried about the grigori, the Katsuki, and entire unsavory alpha population Ost Pyotrsborg, he might have said yes. But this was one of those instances where he was pretty sure his alpha was right and so, off with Chris his Yuuri would go.

Viktor shook his head even though Yuuri couldn't see it. "I would still worry, Yuura. Chris is probably the only person I'd trust you to stay with outside of Yakov."

"I don't want to stay with Yakov either. He wouldn't let me eat any of the good cereal or any pork cutlet bowls at the last competition even though I won."

Viktor laughed; the sound coming from deep within his belly.

"Don't laugh!" Yuuri cried as he gave up his sulk to whip back around with a glare."I hated it! You're my coach! You should have been there! But, you got into that stupid fight and now you can't come to my competitions or bring me where you're going. I ha-"

Viktor dropped the shirt he was folding to wrap Yuuri up into his arms- pillow and all. Yuuri buried his face into Viktor's shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Yuura." he crooned as he pushed Yuuri towards the gland on his neck."You've been under a lot of stress haven't you?"

Viktor felt a slight nod against his shirt and then smelt tears.

He couldn't attend any further competitions until the Judges and thus the IMU made a ruling. He had thought Yuuri was managing but it was becoming apparent that he was wrong.
"I'm so sorry, Yuura," He kept it simple as he whispered the words against Yuuri's ear," for how I behaved that day. It was a poor choice as a coach."

He released Yuuri to sink to his knees and let his head hang low. From Yuuri's gasp, he knew that the omega understood exactly what he was going to do.

"Can you forgive me?"

"Can you forgive me, Apa? You know I meant no harm."

He had spent hours kneeling before his father's door. His knees were bleeding from the rough stone and his lips were turning blue from winter's cold but still his sire would not give him the relief of forgiveness and pinch his nape.

His father's eyes barely scanned over him and left Viktor shivering after the frosted gale they left.

"What did I say, Viktor? Get out my sight."

"Apa, please!"

He was being driven to distraction. Nothing he did seemed to budge the impenetrable wall of his father's anger.

"They tell me xe is dying, Apa...," he sobbed knowing that sound would hardly move his father," Please... please... let me see xem, let me see Yuuri before it is too late."

He sounded pathetic but what could he do when this was the level his father's frigidity had brought him to. He cried harder as he heard the soft footfall of his father's shoes and felt leather once again brush the edges of his fingertips.

"Vitya..."

"Vitya," Yuuri hissed, pulling on the alpha's shirt but thinking better of it when Viktor gave an involuntary flinch."Vitya, get up."

"Forgive me, Yuura?"

Yuuri's face turned miserable."Of course! Of course, I forgive you, Vitya."

The omega's fingers skimmed the short hairs on the back of Viktor's neck before they much to the older man's surprise, bypassed his nape and turned into Yuuri's arms slipping around his neck as Yuuri shuffled off the bed and pressed himself into Viktor until the older man's arms came up in a tight, desperate hold.

"I'll always forgive you."

A lump formed in Viktor's throat as Yuuri added warm, soft notes of comfort to his scent. He tightened his arms around his beloved as he pressed a kiss to the side of the omega’s head. "I won't lose control like that again, Yuura. I'm so, so sorry."

"Why did you do it? Why did you hit him? Yurio said there was a spell ..."

The question that Viktor had been dreading for weeks was finally out in the open, and he wasn't sure how to answer it.

"It's complicated, Yuura. " He found himself saying as he rubbed his cheek against Yuuri's hair to
scent him. "I doubt I could really explain it."

Yuuri curled tighter into the crook of his neck.

"Is it because I made friends with him…?"

Trust Yuuri to go straight to self blame first. Viktor ran his hand through his hair as he let out a sigh.

"No, Yuura, it wasn't because of that." He pulled back look at Yuri and gauge his emotions.

He wasn't angry that Yuuri had made friends with Kenjiro. He was angry that Kenjiro had dared to make friends with Yuuri.

Yuuri looked down at the pillow he still had hugged to his chest and plucked at its seam. "Should I stop being friends with him? Sometimes, he texts me and I don't know what to do."

Well, this was new information -new infuriating information- and if Viktor didn't rip out Kenjiro's throat when he saw him, he would consider himself a saint.

He caught the growl before it could escape his mouth. Yuuri's eyes swam with too much vulnerability for him to display any aggression.

"Did you give him your number?"

Yuuri nodded; the movement barely noticeable with the pillow over half his face."Was I not supposed to? I-I thought it was what friends did."

"They do and that's fine," Viktor toed the line between advice and prying delicately, “but do you think of him as a friend?"

Lemon drifted through the air.

"I-I think so. He said we were.” Yuuri squeezed the pillow tight enough to bend it in half. "I thought it would be nice to be friends with someone who spoke Jih Roh."

He looked up at Viktor. "But you don't like him, do you? Is that why you punched him? I shouldn't have talked to him, should I?"

The beast inside him growled, "No you shouldn't have," but Viktor told it to shut up.

He didn't like Kenjiro. Araak's mercy, he didn't, but the ideal and progressive answer would be to tell Yuuri that Viktor's opinion didn't matter and that as Yuuri was his own person, these decisions were his and his alone to make. But, his alpha and tradition said otherwise and they were ready, neatly coiled on his tongue and prepared to tell the omega hard truths.

"Is he...is he a bad person?"

Viktor was tempted to lie. He could say yes. Kenjiro had done a lot of things wrong but none of them technically made him a "bad" person.

Still, things could be so easy if he just made something up...

"No."

Yuuri stiffened at the truth and on reflex his arms tightened even more around the pillow as he took
on a sharper, acid scent.

"Then, why?" His expression was genuinely puzzled. "Why did you hurt him like that? Why get in so much trouble?"

A thought occurred to Viktor as he realized Yuuri was on the opposite side of the rink.

"How much of the spell did you see?"

Yuuri shrugged. "I didn't see any of it. Yakov was making me do pulling drills and that took all of my concentration."

Viktor didn't know if what Yuuri had said was a blessing or a curse.

"Did Kenjiro say anything strange to you? Did he try to give you any gifts?"

"No, we just talked and exchanged mobile numbers. Isn't that normal? I saw Yurio do it with some of the other skaters."

So... Kenjiro hadn't told Yuuri about his intentions to court, Yuuri hadn't picked up on any courtship cues, and he hadn't seen the actual courtship spell.

Viktor was faced with a dilemma.

Did he tell Yuuri the truth about the courting or like so many other things, keep it a secret?

In his counter argument he had filed a complaint against Kenjiro's courting demands and if the Judges ruled in his favor, then all this courting nonsense would come to nothing. Would it be worth pulling Yuuri, who already worried himself so much, into something that could cause him further stress?

A darker part of Viktor snarled that Yuuri was his and he didn't want to share. Yuuri had always given him preference but what if that was only because he thought Viktor was the only way? Could Viktor bear it? Stand by the sidelines as the lesser alpha tried to grow closer to his Yuuri?

By the way his gut and heart twisted, the answer was no. But should he tell Yuuri any of this?

"Vitya? Is something wrong?"

Could Yuuri see it on his face? How much he wanted to lie again?

He wanted to so bad. Telling Yuuri the truth would make it real, would bring home the fact that Kenjiro could come into his life and steal Yuuri's time and attention away. At the very least, it would be a distraction at a time when Yuuri needed to focus most. The Grand Prix Final was not that far off and there wasn't any guarantee that Yuuri would take gold, especially with Yurio hot on his trail.

He would give a little truth -just enough to satisfy Yuuri but not enough to drag him in. If the Judges ruled against him, then he would tell Yuuri, but until that happened, he wouldn't give his beloved student any other cause to worry.

"I was jealous."

It wasn't a lie. Even now the green feelings burned in his belly any time he thought of the other alpha even getting remotely close to the omega.
Yuuri colored, shifting the atmosphere's tension into something lighter.

"Of what? Of me? You shouldn't be. I'm not that special."

Viktor stood up and leaned over Yuuri forcing him to fall back on the bed. He placed his arms on either side of the younger mage's head to trap him and knew the move had worked as he indulged in the sight of Yuuri's rapidly pinkening cheeks.

"But you're very special to me," he purred as he swung his legs on either side of Yuuri's body. "The most special if I have to be honest."

He wouldn't mind a bit of a break and if things went well enough, he might even be able to sidetrack Yuuri.

Yuuri hit him in the face with a pillow when he went in for the kiss. "Don't try to distract me, Vitya!" He pushed Viktor up and away. "I know you're usually not like that. What did he really do that was different from anybody else?"

Yuuri traced a finger along the fading yellowed bruise around his eye."Why were you really angry, Vitya?" He pouted using his own powers of persuasion. "Won't you tell me?"

"Jealousy, Yuuri," he lied again, tossing the pillow and gently pushing Yuuri back down. He kissed a line up Yuuri's neck just the way he knew the other man liked it.

"But…" Yuuri tried to hide the shiver as Viktor oh so gently mouthed at his pulse.

It was the omegas weak spot and had grown more so after Viktor had taken his blood during the Finlonti Trophy.

"I feel like taking a break," he whispered against Yuuri's now bright red ear. "Will you join me, Yuurochka?"

"Viktor…"

Viktor bit down lightly at the junction of Yuuri’s shoulders in the hopes of shutting things up and then dived in for a kiss. Yuuri's resistance faded the moment their lips touched and before Viktor knew it, Yuuri was clutching the back of his hair and demanding more.

He made it so that Yuuri didn't ask him anything further for the rest of the night.

Yuuri’s flight was late so of course so was Viktor's arrival in Ilaireth City. He barely had time to make it to his inn before his watch told him he needed to be at the High Courts.

Evgenij was there to meet him at the bottom of the steps and Viktor had to draw on every bit of his good breeding not to snarl as he saw the other man. The grigori inclined his head in acknowledgement as Viktor reached the last few steps of his approach.

"The Lord Nikiforov is well I presume?" he asked in salutation.

It was a pleasant greeting but Viktor could see how tension and possibly anger sat tight around the other man's eyes. Viktor didn't back down.

"He is well thanks to the support of House Nikiforov and its members."
Evgenij's lips quirked though no amusement showed in the rest of his visage. "It is good to see that the Lord Nikiforov still possesses some manners."

"We will be late if we don't move soon, Grigori Evgenij," Viktor chose to ignore the barb and focus instead on the 108 steps that lead to the High Courts' inner chambers. "And, I'm sure that House Nikiforov would like this trial to start on the right foot."

He started up a few steps and then turned to the still brooding grigori. He kept his face plain and pleasant. Nothing for Evgenij to take offense to. Nothing for the man's greedy eyes to read.

"Are you coming, Grigori Evgenij? To get up these steps we must make haste."

The grigori eyed him with displeasure but made his way forward.

"Lord Nikiforov has forgotten the lord's censer. Was the Lord Nikiforov in a hurry?"

Viktor fought the urge to flush at the call out. He did not and would not drink Yuuri's blood to the degree that he needed to cover it up with a perfume.

"I chose not to bring it."

Evgenij tried to hide it but Viktor heard the tsk shot in his direction.

"It is just as well," Evgenij sniffed with a look of displeasure. "The Lord Nikiforov seems to do many things as the lord pleases. Just like the young lord's grandfather."

They walked up the rest of the stairs without further words. Viktor was glad if not a little apprehensive of it. They were greeted by a guard as they stepped up towards the enormous wooden doors that guarded the Judges from the rest of the world.

When Viktor had first seen them as a child, he had asked his father if they were the gates to Heaven. In a break from his unusual character, his father had answered that they were more likely to be the gates to Hell.

Viktor didn't understand it then but as he was checked for weapons none too gently by the guards and felt the oppressive weight of the building's protection wards, he felt he understood better now. Electricity sparked across his hand when he accidentally made contact with the armor of the guard escorting them.

"Watch it," a high hollow voice answered out of the ornate garments of gems and precious metal. They reached a little too quickly and eagerly for the equally decorated hilt of their sword."These things aren't just for design, you know."

The other guard elbowed his companion and whispered, “Careful, Raffin, that is Lord Nikiforov you are threatening there."

There was a small spike of citrus as Raffin realized the gravity of what he had done.

"Forgive him, milord," The older guard turned to Viktor with an apologetic air to his stance. He's new and still learning not let the power get to his head."

"Think nothing of it," Viktor murmured graciously because there was no point in making enemies in the heart of the Judges' lair.

"We will take you to an antechamber where you will wait until the Judges summon you."
"It will be by myself right?"

The guard eyed him as if he had said something strange. "You will be with your grigori as is custom."

Great. Viktor hid his frown behind a cough. So, he had to face being stared at for hours on end.

Evgenij, his eyes wide like they were trying to drink in his discomfort, smiled.

"The time will pass quickly, Lord Nikiforov. I am sure of it."

It did pass quickly and before Viktor knew it, he was kneeling in front of the covered faces of the Judges and doing his best not lunge over the partition that separated him from Kenjiro Minami and give a reenactment of what had happened the last time they had met.

"What does the Lord Nikiforov have to say in defense? Lord Katsuki was caused considerable harm during the complaint's incident. How does House Nikiforov intend to make amends?"

It didn't but that wasn't something you told a Judge of the High Court.

Viktor chanced a look in the direction of the Judge he suspected had spoken, finding it a wonder that he could even understand what had been said when every word sounded like it came from a room full of people saying the same thing at different times and different pitches.

A head covered in red fabric and lines of neatly painted eyes nodded in his direction. Though he couldn't see a face, the movement and point blank address filled his body with heat and sent curls of smoke drifting up from his clothes.

It made him believe a little bit more in the lore that said the Judges were old, defeated gods. A human probably would have died from the weight of their gaze alone.

He discreetly willed ice into his body to protect against the formation of any burns and decided that looking at the carpet would be safer.

"Lord Nikiforov?"

The question was like nails on a chalkboard and made Viktor answer just to stop the agony of it ringing through his ear.

"House Nikiforov apologizes for causing such a base matter to be brought to the High Courts but there are no amends to be made for House Nikiforov was not wrong in its actions."

"Explain." The voice thundered through the room in a ball of such disparate sounds that even Kenjiro flinched.

Viktor wanted to smirk. He bet the little rat bastard was regretting his stunt with the Judges now.

"House Nikiforov submits its counter complaint that Lord Katsuki violated protocol several times by attempting to make contact with an omega under House Nikiforov's care without permission from nor discussion with the omega's guardian or House."

"Is this true, Lord Katsuki?"

"Yes," Kenjiro grit his teeth as he said it. "But House Katsuki still finds the actions of Lord Nikiforov to be unaccepta--"
"The High Courts will be the ones making the findings today, Lord Katsuki."

The admonishment and the din of voices that came with it made both lords wince. Sweat poured down Viktor's face as he forced his body to remain upright as the atmosphere undertook a massive change in pressure. Like Kenjiro, he grit his teeth. It was like he was at the bottom of the ocean and the pressure was trying to crush into nothing. He swayed and brushed against the side of Evgenij's cloak. Evgenij looked down, completely unruffled and unaffected. Viktor was filled with envy and disgust as he looked up and saw pleasure swimming within the man's unblinking eyes.

"My Judges, the Lord Nikiforov and Katsuki are struggling under the judgment. Please lower it if punishment is not the ultimate desire of the Court."

"I second this," came Morooka's equally as calm voice from Kenjiro's side.

The pressure ceased immediately and Viktor leaned back and took great gulps of air. Dealing with the Judges was an exercise in endurance and social delicacy. One wrong word or move and you were internally bleeding before they realized they were being too intense. Only the highest grigori and the High Court guards could withstand them. And as much as Viktor hated Evgenij's guts, he couldn't help but be grateful for the ability to sit up straight and take in oxygen with his usual ease.

"To not ask for permission or to act on an omega without leave is a grave trespass, Lord Katsuki. Why did House Katsuki not enter through the proper channels?"

"My Lord Katsuki was impatient."

The air became thick again. It was like breathing in molasses and made Viktor gag.

"This is not the space for the unblessed to give testimony, Watcher of House Katsuki."

Morooka bowed his head. "My deepest apologies, My Graces."

A guard stepped in quickly enough to spare Kenjiro the embarrassment of vomiting all over the High Court floor. When he finished, Kenjiro glared at Morooka and Viktor couldn't blame him. Speaking out of turn was like a death wish in this place and a watcher as old as Morooka should have known that much.

"Lord Katsuki?"

"I-I was impatient. The Lord Nikiforov is notoriously hard to contact so I thought I would take my chances."

"And Lord Katsuki expected no retaliation for this trespass?"

"Lord Nikiforov is known to break tradition…"

"That has no factor on this Court's decisions." The Judges said in unison.

Viktor thought his ears might bleed. Kenjiro and his lot were really the fucking amateur hour. Was there no one left in the family to know how to deal with things? Surely the explosion hadn't killed every Katsuki with a modicum of tact.

Viktor's skin felt like it was on fire as all five of the Judges' heads turned towards him.

"Lord Nikiforov, was this trespass the sole motivator in House Nikiforov's actions?"

"Yes."
Viktor tried not to shake as he raised his head and spoke. He wasn't sure of how much more of this he could take.

"But we did the right thing in the end and acted within Jih Roh law," Kenjiro cried like some snot nosed kid to xyr mother.

If the Judges didn't kill them, Viktor was going to wring Kenjiro's neck.

"That has been taken into account, Lord Katsuki. Now the Court wishes that all parties refrain from making any other interjections while it deliberates."

A Judge on the end turned to the guards. "The Court wishes to take council. Please return these guests back to the antechamber until a decision has been made."

Viktor didn't know what to feel. The judgment hadn't really ruled in either party's favor.

Viktor was off the hook for the fight and could return to attending competitions but Kenjiro now had an official and recognized right to court Yuuri.

That would happen over his dead body. Viktor decided to pull out his ace in the hole.

"If I may speak, My Graces?"

Five heads swiveled in his direction sending a force that almost crushed the air out of his lungs.

"Lord Nikiforov may."

"I am betrothed to the omega in question."

There was silence and then the scent of anger which Viktor assumed came from Kenjiro. He guessed right as the alpha stood up in rage and growled,

"You lie!"

Only to be slammed back down to the ground with a single look from the Judge closest to him.

"Was House Katsuki aware of this?" asked the same Judge like they hadn't just smacked a man’s head against the hard stone floor with the tilt of its head.

‘That was why you didn't fuck with Judges’ Viktor thought as he watched Kenjiro struggle to get back up and wipe at the blood pouring out of his nose. Viktor grinned internally at the swelling and bruising he saw as the other alpha tried to find dignity and class with his eye swelling shut.

"Lord Katsuki?"

Katsuki flinched. "N-no," he stuttered. "I didn't know."

Viktor doubted it would have mattered to Minami anyway considering he had ignored the advice of his watchers, but if the Judges ruled against Minami, then he would have to obey and leave Yuuri alone…

"Then the ruling stands. If House Nikiforov found no reason to alert House Katsuki as to its relationship with the omega in question, then the fault lies with House Nikiforov. A proposal made in absence of that knowledge will be considered legitimate by the High Court."
The Judges turned to the group of guards holding bowls of what looked like blood. Viktor stomach roiled. They were going to be blood bound. A part of him wanted to run but that would probably mean certain death. High Court rulings were final in every sense.

"Bring us the bowls for binding."

The guards stepped out of their corner and stood in front of each lord. Viktor kneeled and opened his mouth.

The drop of blood on his tongue tasted like fruit ripe to the point of spoiling. The line of blood painted on his forehead burned like a hot coal. He tried to keep his face as passive as possible even though his stomach was turning and his forehead throbbed in agony. Anything seen as ungrateful or resistant would mean a world of pain.

The Judges spoke in unison, the words as loud and disjointed as the wails of an entire city, and their gazes hotter than a thousand suns.

"No fault shall be found in House Nikiforov for its actions against House Katsuki and House Katsuki shall be allowed to, according to its law, court the omega in House Nikiforov's care. So it has been spoken. So it shall be heeded. So it shall be done."

Viktor wanted to scream as the spell sunk into his soul and skin.

Gods, what was he going to tell Yuuri. How was he going to tell Yuuri?

He looked over to Kenjiro. The bastard had the heart to smile even as his body shook in agony.

He hoped every moment felt like Hell.

Viktor sighed for what felt like the thousand time and stirred the sugar in his teacup absentmindedly. The world was so unfair.

His enemy had won. He had to break bad news to Yuuri. And, the High Courts insisted that he have some sort of post trauma recovery tea party with a man who was probably plotting a horrific retaliation against him.

"Sulking like that is unbecoming, milord. Surely the Lord Nikiforov was not foolish enough to think the Judges would rule completely in House Nikiforov's favor, was he?"

He ignored the grigori sitting across from across from him as the High Court guards finished serving them high tea. Viktor didn't care what a Lord Nikiforov was supposed to look like right now. Right now, he was trying to get control over his horror and anxiety to be able to focus enough to function.

Unbothered by his companion’s reticence, Evgenij spoke again. "There ways to work around the ruling, milord. There always are."

He picked up a scone and put it on his plate as if he hadn't just suggested circumventing divine law. Viktor looked around to see if anyone else had heard Evgenij's blasphemy and carefully and quietly whispered so fiercely it was almost a hiss,

"What do you mean?"

Evgenij took a sip of tea and smirked over his cup. Magic swirled in his eyes telling Viktor that the
"Omega Yuuri’s next heat is soon. It would be the perfect time for a mating, a proper one - one that produces a child. No House in their right mind would court an omega pregnant by someone else. Two to three pregnancies would easily eat up the Jih Roh courting period…"

Viktor recoiled. “Absolutely not. He's too young. He has a life, career, and choices. I won't take that away from him.”

He should have known better than to trust a grigori for even a second. Their only focus would always be heirs and family glory.

"As my lord wishes," Evgenij returned with a shrug. "Though I don't think Lord Katsuki will be extending the same consideration. Lord Katsuki may think it's just an infatuation but his Katsuki watchers are desperate for heirs with power. The current one, I hear, is little more than a figurehead."

"And, how do you know Yuuri has power?" Viktor growled loud enough for a guard to poke his head back into the room.

"It's nothing," he lied to get the man to go away.

After he left, Viktor asked again, this time in a more subdued tone. "How do you know, Grigori Evgenij?"

Kenjiro he could understand. Anyone who watched Yuuri soar knew the omega possessed a fair bit of power. But to Viktor's knowledge, none of grigori had ever watched him. So, how did they know?

The other man smiled. His expression reminded Viktor of a shark.

"Why because of Grigori Artem, of course," he purred as he soaked in Viktor's startled look. "It was terribly cruel of you to put him in the infirmary for just trying to take account. Fortunately, his injuries did not include his mouth and he was able to tell us all of what he had seen."

He sipped his tea and placed it back on the cup with a clink before he set a glowing gaze on Viktor. "The information will serve House Nikiforov well in the future."

Viktor sat back wide eyed as his mind ran through scenarios of how the grigori would use the knowledge. The same answers kept coming back.


"What are you intending to do with it?"

Evgenij beamed at him, the look innocent even though they both knew that the grigori was anything but.

"Do? Lord Nikiforov, we are your friends. We do not do. We only make suggestions and it is the duty of all grigori to help wherever and whenever we can."
Reward Fic Alert

Chapter Summary

Reward fic posted in When I Was A Child series.

Hi All,

Just a heads up that the second reward fic has been posted. If you are interested, it can be found here.

Will delete this at a later date.

End Notes

Please let me know what you think! I'm open to pretty much all types of feedback (short, long, constructive - it all works for me) and I promise I'm nice lol. I love hearing from readers! It lets me know if and how my writing is connecting with the audience.

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