Promised to Me

by DaughterOfTheRevolution

Summary

For his loyalty General Winter had promised Russia a mate; one who could stand beside him, not lay broken under him. But the old ghost was always so cruel. While keeping his promise he had never promised that said mate wouldn't fight back with a strength equal to Russia's. If it is meant to be then why does the promised one resist? Historical. RusAme. GerMerica.

Notes

This is a Historical APH fanfic which will surround the pairing of RusAme (Russia/America) foremost, and GerMerica (Germany/America) secondly.
All of these historical reference notes are true and if anyone has any issue with the uncensored history of their nations or other countries then do not read. This will cover light and darker times in history as well as trauma of said nations.
This is also written in a series of POV's and so a nation's thoughts can often be misleading in concordance with historical justice. For example, a nation could see themselves as righteous for stamping out a race/other nation while in fact it was wrong in the sense of morals. So, their thoughts aren't always what is right, keep that in mind.

Also, while this fanfiction will be held as close to Historical Accuracy as possible I am still taking the liberty to place in headcanons and change how a few events went, and how certain
nations reacted to these circumstances, but not by much. This is a fan's "fiction" and therefore, just a story.

Again if this story is not appealing to you in any way you have the freedom to stop reading and ignore.

Thank you for listening to my "Heads-up."

Now, please enjoy this story as much as the others have.

See the end of the work for more notes.
The Promise

Moscow, Russia. May 3rd 1607

The window shattered and in poured the raging blizzard once confined to the outside only, but Russia didn't care; in fact he welcomed the cold bitterness. With eyes ablaze with violent violet he grit his teeth and shouted at the howling wind made bitterly cold by the night's dark shield over the sun. It was officially Spring but still this blizzard raged on and on until Russia found himself tormented by something he had once claimed to be used to.

Weary, so weary now. Russia wanted to see the sun. He wanted to see the flowers; fields of Spring flowers. He wanted to see his people outside in their light dress. He wanted to see the little ones dancing in the streets, their parents drying their soaking sheets; the young lovers displaying public affection in the valley of dandelions and clovers.

"Why do you torment me for so long, General?" Russia nearly cried out into the dark night whishing by him and his home. "Your season is over and yet you linger over my land and destroy the souls of my people!"

The wind seemed to pitch in its howl but Russia did not cringe. He was no longer afraid of the deity that haunted his land and mind. He had grown accustomed to the ghostly being but that did not mean he grew welcome. Distain and hate was all he's ever felt for General Winter. He had been a great ally when needed but a terrible enemy when he had oft been too weak to shield himself against those icy hands.

So he revered him and remembered him in prayer and gave to him whatever he asked for; whether it be a hundred human lives to thousands of human lives, Russia complied if only to keep the General in good standings with him and his country. All he asked for was protection against his vast enemies and he would sacrifice whatever chilled bone he desired.

But now, as the Winter season shifted into that of Spring, Russia had felt betrayed. He had not dishonored him in any way. That year had gone by like any other year so why was he stabbing him so hard in the back?

General Winter's wrath was easy to invoke but Russia had ceased caring as the month of May came into view with white surrounding its expectant greenery. When he usually steered clear of the glass windows opening the world of the General before him now was met with a half full vodka bottle and there was plenty more where those came from.

"Have I not been your loyal subject?" Russia shouted out his question to the howling abyss outside that slowly began seeping into his home and freezing it blue. "Have I not exalted you high enough? Surely I am the only one who remembers you. So why, why do you feel the need to be rid of me?"

More times than oft the General never spoke, or perhaps he never had and, like the good doctors kept telling Russia, that it was all in his head. Even so he stared down the wintery hell from the broken shards of glass and without glove or coat welcomed the cold as if daring the ghost to come to be rid of the only one still remembering of his name.

Those icy hands seemed to wrap around Russia's throat, but never crushing. In odd surprise he felt the soft caresses of a usually harsh might on his skin and soon he was looking into the eyes of the man, the being whom he had assumed created him.
'Then what should you have of me for such quality faithfulness?' The levitating transparent being had asked him. General Winter never asked anything of anyone. Russia assumed he wanted remembrance, Russia assumed he wanted reverence, Russia assumed he wanted the sacrifices.

Skeptical, Russia narrowed his eyes. General Winter never gave. He always took. What could this deity give though? The nation's curiosity was peaked.

"What can you give me besides bitterness and coldness and ice and snow and darkness?" Russia asked, and as the General smiled the ice bit into him and it took everything he's learned to handle the pain to stop himself from crying. If there was anything the General hated more so than over lookers, it was weakness.

'I can free you of my presence for a season. You would like that, da? The sun, the green, the blossoms? I know you secretly worship them more and in so know that they shall not protect you as I do. Hm, shall I go?'

"You would only return more terrible than before. I know your games, General Winter. You mock me in saying I'd accept such folly trickery," Russia spoke. The years of his acquaintance had sharpened his mind to the General's tricks and Russia would not be fooled twice.

Again that smile bit into him, but if this was a test then Russia would prevail. He had proved to the General time and time again he was worthy of respect and so he would pass whatever inspection he was being put through now.

With a silent hush General Winter pressed close and Russia felt the ice form around his skin. His eyes followed the jagged pattern as it grew up his arm and onto his shoulder where the General touched and pressed his blue lips against his red ear.

'Love.' The whispered word echoed.

Russia gasped and cried out in pain as his heart leapt forward inside his chest. For so long he had thought his chest barren of any such human and pathetic organ but now it was pounding against his chest as if it wanted to break free and run from him. He fell to his knees and clutched at his chest.

"W-What have you done?!!" Russia gasped, his eyes wide and mouth agape as he felt his heart continuously throw itself up against his ribcage.

'That is it,' the General whispered knowingly as he floated around the nation whose limbs began to freeze and whose very heart violently banged against his chest for freedom from the icy grave threatening it. 'Love. Your soul, your mind, your heart longs for it. I should think you don't even know what it is.'

Russia hadn't really comprehended what General Winter was saying at the moment as a pain worse than black ice engulfed him.

'Feel it, Rossiya? You think yourself so mighty and tolerant to my affliction. No, you shall never stop feeling them, not as long as I exist in this world.'

As the General pulled himself away the cold settled back into Russia's chest and calmed his heart in a frozen vice. He was able to catch his breath. His wide eyes were able to glance up at the ghost of the land above him. His eyes were colder than his touch and his frown more painful than even his heart trying to burst from his chest.

'You desire something of me and yet remain quiet in my presence,' the man said as he gazed down at the country devoted to his worship. 'It is I that know what bleeds bright in your heart. So it is I who
shall decide your reward for you. I shall create for you a mate. One to tie your soul to, and one for your heart to flee to when your chest becomes too cold a carrier. You shall know the bond of nations and the power of alliance. They will be strong, and fair, and all yours.’

A vision of one such as that appeared before Russia's eyes. They were beautiful, so very beautiful. Inwardly he hoped his imagination to this promised one would be lacking when he finally set eyes on them. But he had never cared for such companionship before. Why now? Perhaps General Winter was right. Perhaps Russia had longed for this all along and hadn't realized it.

After struggling for centuries and even a millennia to strengthen himself and be recognized among his peers as a force to be reckoned with, Russia had thought he was content with such a status and now the General before him had pointed out a missing piece that he had not seen until now. So, as the General turned to leave out of the shattered window he entered, Russia reached out as if to touch him only to be met with the bite of frost upon his fingertips.

"Wait!" Russia inhaled a cold blast of wind and coughed. His lungs nearly collapsed upon themselves from the unbreathable air. "When, when will I see them? Show me their being, please."

"You shall know no vision of appearance nor shall I tell you of a time destined. But know this that I shall open your eyes to the one I have created for you," the General replied.

And just like that the deity was gone. Russia shook the bite of the frost from him and stood to his feet again. What he had been told was something that he'd never forget. But as his body began to warm itself slowly he felt his heart. It was beating and it was now so angry at him. It had been offered the warmth of a love it had longed for before its barer even realized it was there, and now it came to the realization it was going to have to wait for its other half.

Russia was usually a patient country, but now as this foretold promise weighed on him he became excited, he became hot, he became hopeful dare he say and never once in the back of his mind had he thought about the General's usual scheming ways.

General Winter wouldn't betray him, he had thought. Not after all he had offered and sacrificed to him.

Virginia, New World. May 4th 1607

There had been a frost early in the morning and the huntsman cursed it as he trudged back into town clinging to his wet cloak that would provide no warmth. It had been a horrible night for hunting anything. It had rained throughout the night and in the dawn hours the rain turned to ice and chattered every slumbering man's teeth until the chatter awoke them fully.

Oddly enough he was not greeted by the usual gatekeeper or fellow townsman whom he knew would be up from the chill. Instead he heard what he thought were whispers until a gasp echoed across the wooden homes; that gasp sounding like the captain. Breaking out into a jog he let the sudden curiosity spur his legs to run faster to warm the rest of his body. When he stopped his eyes widened.

"Look!" There was the rest of the town. All of the people crowded in a circle near the center. It looked as if they were looking at a dead horse. But they didn't have . . .

Pushing his way inside the circle he looked down at what everyone else was looking at.

It was a babe.

Golden hair, fair skin, an infant baptismal robe draped about him. Yes, it was a boy. But what was
he doing there?

In awe amazement the people watched as the frost that once covered the entire land that morning of a cold start of May started to melt from the child's body, as if his skin burned at the touch. Then everyone held their breath as those little rosy lips parted and the babe inhaled its first breath.

"He breathed!" the captain said with a grateful smile and just as the cheers of relief resounded it all went silent once more as the captain picked the boy up and held him close. "Feel him, he's warm," he motioned the others to lay their hands upon the still child.

"Tis a miracle."

"By the grace of God."

"So little."

Once again everyone held their breath as the boy shifted in the captain's arms and leaned even closer than comfortable. When the babe opened his eyes for the first time to reveal the most beautiful of blue eyes anyone had ever seen, sighs of relief were let go. Just seeing him like this made the people smiled. His life was a symbol of their success and now it was up to them to keep his health.

Since coming to that godforsaken land the people felt a genuine need to smile. The captain turned toward the ocean and with bright eyes and a triumphant smile declared, "When the ships return we must send word back to the King and him. He will be pleased there had been a child. Even more so that it's a son."

"Perhaps it'd be best to let the child go so as to see how he fairs in the upcoming years," the huntsman suggested. "Say he should die?"

"Then we shall perish," the captain said grimly as he looked down at the child in his arms, but as the child clung to him he could feel his strength and he knew right then that this child would survive. "He is strong, I can feel it. I will send word anyway. This babe needs their parent's approval and protection. Under his wing he will thrive."

They smiled as the little one cuddled close in the bosom of the captain. He was beautiful and they were all very anxious to show his parent that this colonization had worked and a child had come forth, albeit unexpectantly and in a mysterious way, but he was there and alive and he was going to survive.
St. Petersburg, Russia. November 1779

He was back again and this time Catherine the Great found it difficult to hide her laughter as did Russia who stood next to his marvelous Empress. The look on that country's face was near enough for Russia to call in the royal painter just to have him sketch and preserve that sad pitiful look.

There England stood before the Empress, his fingers tightened around the brim of his tricorn hat. His bottom lip was currently being chewed on and would no doubt swell red if he didn't stop. But more importantly noticed was that he wasn't looking at them with those cocky green eyes as per usual. No, this time he was looking down at the ground, as if paying close attention to the golden buckles neatly polished on his black shoes.

The little laugh from the Empress was caught by England's sharp ears and his once bright eyes full of conquest glanced up slowly before looking toward Russia whose smile was near identical with his Empress's.

"Do not look at me as if it is my fault for your fall-out with your colony, British Empire," Catherine said with a wave of her hand, an amused smile still on her lips.

"All I ask is assistance and you offer me nothing!" England bit out. He stammered about the bout, quickly caught his rise in tone before it cost him another ally.

Empress Catherine glanced over at her nation before tsking at England. "It's just a simple rebellion of a measly colony. It's not like it's a war between powerful nations like the Seven Years War," she said with a shake of her head. In her own way she was mocking the nation for his lack of control over his colony and she knew the country knew it and that is why she laughed as well as her own nation.

"You took pride in your little colony. The others had perished and failed in attempt but the British Empire had succeeded in siring a child. Such a proud parent who wouldn't even show him to us," Russia said as he offered a small clap of mock condolence. "You look more like a groveling beggar to me now."

"Tell us, England, what could you have done to make him hate you so much?" Catherine asked out a curiosity, though, in honesty, she could care less if she got an answer if only to see England's pitiful face.

England was silent. He was wrinkling the sides of his tricorn hat quite nicely and Catherine and Russia both wondered if he realized this.

"I am willing to offer you a chance to see him," England said, his eyes turning up toward the Empress and Russia. He licked his dry lips and paused as if searching for the right words to say. "The Russian Empire is strong and I know that even if you offered me a few troops then we can put an end to his childishness. If you would like we could open trade between you and him. I'll supervise everything of course, but he has a lot to offer—if I can get his temper problems under control."

Russia glanced toward his Empress and offered a knowing smile. Like the Navigation Acts kept any foreign nation away from that young boy. Did England even know what had transpired behind his back? Well, of course not. He was hardly with that child of his and so it was no surprise to any
leader or nation that the child lashed out at him and demanded freedom. The little colony had practically raised himself; England only being there to oversee trade and commerce. As if he cared for the child when he cried himself to sleep, or if he didn't know how to hold a pistol steady, or if he didn't know how to harvest properly. England was parent in name only, nothing more than a foreign shadow to the child.

"Any nation would choose you as their first ally," England once again said, trying to woo the Empress who played a good listener. "I am willing to commit my interests to your hand, Empress. All I ask is for a few troops and that you assist me of ridding those trying to sway him away from reason."

Russia frowned and looked at his Empress. She smiled under her fan and he knew she had no such thought of listening to him any further. She had never liked him or his monarchy and she most certainly wasn't going to start now.

So, she dismissed the country and decided to make him wait. After a few months she simply declined his offer and she and Russia shared a good laugh. It was very fun to watch from the sidelines as the grand "British Empire" was becoming frustrated and clearly embarrassed by their colony. Some countries loved it so much they decided to stand next to the boy and all out poke fun at England in declarations of war.

Empress Catherine was not a warmonger and so she slowly weighed her decisions before the option of neutrality arose. It was fun entertainment when one watched it from afar. Russia on the other hand eventually grew bored. Yes poking fun at the pathetic nation was amusing and all but when nothing but gossip and back-talk was all there was for Russia he simply excused himself and waited everything out in the confines of his room.

As the years passed he began feeling himself harden. Yes he still spoke well with his people, but being kept at the royal court was hardening his heart against the lowly peasant and townsfolk of his land and soon his nose was beginning to turn upward. He was becoming someone he didn't want to become, someone more akin to England and France and Spain. He hated that idea and so more often than not he'd excuse himself from the regal scene back to his quarters where he'd do away with that stiff formal wear and sit silently in the dark, watching the snow fall outside his windows.

He used to hate the Winter months, but now he wished for them to stay so that the General could see his glare in the blizzards at night and the light snowfall in the mornings. He wanted the ghost to see him, to know that he was tired of waiting and that he was becoming angry with him. Inwardly he threatened to forget the deity but it never came to pass. He told himself his patience was gone, but year after year he found himself still waiting.

Waiting for the one promised to him.

He chuckled to himself that night as he gazed out at the snowfall. It wasn't a blizzard this time like it had been the two nights previous but it didn't matter. Russia had figured it out.

Standing up Russia came closer toward the window where Jack Frost had left his mark. Tracing letters in the frost covered glass Russia had written a message to the General. The word being, "Betrayer". For all that Russia had offered him the man had spit in his face and it was time Russia had learned his lesson.

This time he would forget that senile deity. This time he would save his people from his wintery bite. This time he would close his eyes to him. This time he would close his ears to him. This time his heart would not escape.
Turning around he made to leave his room and head down into the kitchen to fetch another bottle of vodka. On his way there he passed by the main foyer for just a second, but in that second he had caught an odd sight. Tracing back his footsteps he turned his amethyst eyes to see the servants of the night greeting three guests.

Guests at this late hour? Russia wondered as he stood there and watched the servants dust the chilled newcomers off of the white powder gathered atop their hats and coats. One was a tall man while the other two looked to be mere boys. One with darker hair while the other . . .

Russia had briefly remembered the feel of a chill sweeping over his eyes as if a drowsiness had been erased and his half-lidded eyes widened awake to a realization, a revelation.

Golden hair.

Fair skin.

Sapphire eyes.

A young boy. A young nation. He was beautiful.

The lad had offered a pleasant smile of thanks to the servants for letting them in that late of night and helping them with their baggage. His teeth were milky white and his lips a colorful rosy peach. There was a youthful spark in his eyes that made it seem as if diamonds were trapped in the midst of the blue gems.

Without knowing it Russia's hand reached up to clench the fabric of his tunic. His heart was pounding against his chest and he knew why; it wanted to escape from his lifeless form and fall into the arms of this beauty.

When the pain became overbearing he made his escape into the kitchen's hall where he had intended to go in the first place, but he did not make his way toward the kitchen like previously planned, instead he hid in the hallway and tried to catch his breath.

'You shall know no vision of appearance nor shall I tell you of a time destined. But know this that I shall open your eyes to the one I have created for you.' That is what General Winter had said.

"A boy, so little," Russia gasped out, panting as if he'd just run all the way across Europe and back. He didn't know why he felt so out of breath but he placed the blame on his raging heart that begged for release. "He's the one . . . but why?"

"Sire?"

Russia straightened himself and noticed a messenger boy had come to him. The boy looked at him with concern before inclining his head and saying, "The Empress has been awoken to greet the guests and requests your presence. She would have you dress your finest. They are American."

American? Why had that sounded so familiar? Russia's mind was in a daze for the time being and he decided to focus his mental capacity to follow his Empress's command. He returned to his room guided only by subconscious routine and dressed himself before coming to the throne room where she had awaited him. As he took his stance next to Catherine the Great the guards ushered the guests in.

"The hour is late," the Empress informed and Russia, standing so close, could see the weary bags underneath her eyes. He was honestly surprised she got up to greet them.
"Apologies," the older man had said as he bowed before her. "We had not expected you to be as kind to personally greet us seeing as to the lateness of the hour."

"I must say I would have not if I had not been informed that he would make an appearance." The Empress's eyes sparkled as she looked upon the boy bearing golden locks. His stance mirrored that of the adult in his company and anyone could see from observing him that he was no mere boy. "You're the colony, aren't you?"

The boy stepped forward and Russia felt his throat constrict. He could barely breathe. He had never felt such a pull before and now he felt he'd die if the boy didn't look at him.

"Empress," the boy spoke as he bowed himself politely. The sound of his voice gave the Russian nation shivers and now he was cursing General Winter for opening his eyes at the worst moment, but he did not hate whom he had opened his eyes to.

"This is our country, the Thirteen American Colonies," the adult had said, his name had been a Mr. Dana.

Catherine smiled before her eyes glanced toward Russia whose own gaze had been transfixed on the boy.

"A pleasure to finally see you," she said, her eyes turning back toward the colony and examining him. "My, so tall for a colony so young."

"I have been fed and raised in good health," America had said with a pleasant smile. "I am thankful for your generous greeting."

"Of course," she said with a smile. "You have been the subject throughout Europe for some time and in fact I had been anxious to behold your face. England doesn't let many see you."

Russia and Catherine both caught America glance down at the mention of his parent-nation's name. Neither would press for reason because both assumed they already knew when in reality they may have not known.

"Well, now that my curiosity has been quenched, please, follow my servants to your designated rooms in my palace. We shall have breakfast together when we are all well rested and warmed from the cold," the Empress said as she stood and waved them away.

When the guests were being led out Russia remained standing by his Empress's side for a moment, his eyes lingering on the boy as the colony turned and looked at him. Their eyes met for a brief moment but in that time Russia felt a small sort of connection—whether the boy felt what he did was unclear but Russia had felt a weave and it needed to be knit in further. There were ways to accomplish that, but the boy was too young and more than likely did not know how nations unified.

So, with an offered kind smile Russia watched the young colony be ushered off with his party. He heard him speaking to the young boy with him asking, "Was that their country?" Good he knew how to sense a nation when in the presence of one. No doubt he'd been sheltered all his life and knew no one but England's aura or a few others. He had much to learn.

But Russia couldn't wait for him to learn all of those things because it took years, centuries to learn and Russia's patience was running out. Now that he knew what his mate looked like he had to run back to his room and lock himself inside. He was just a mere boy and he, himself, so very old. How cruel and unfair the General was. But that was like the ghost to play such tricks on him.

This year would definitely be one of remembrance as he finally met the American colony destined by
Chapter End Notes

Historical Notes:

As of right now the British Empire has come to the Russian Empire for the second time asking for help (this usually being an offer of some troops and monarchies promise to intervene on England's behalf in the royal courts of the kings and queens, especially to those rulers seeking to ally themselves with the rebellious American colonies). And, again they are denied help. Empress Catherine the Great of Russia just didn't like the British monarchy enough to get along with them very well.

The Navigation Acts mentioned were a series of laws that restricted the use of foreign ships for trade between Britain and its colonies. They began in 1651. But, of course the American Colonies did find ways around this and managed to trade with a few other countries like the bad child they were to the British Empire.

In 1781 was when the United States sent out ambassadors to Russia to ask for recognition as an independent country. Francis Dana was head of the representatives traveling to Russia with young John Quincy Adams by his side.

Also, some headcanons are–

In this fic England is America's father (as well as Australia's, New Zealand, and other such British colonies). Why? Because country-wise they are technically America's parent nation. So, yeah . . . America is England's baby (his oldest as well, so keep in mind to the emotional attachment there).

America is also a tad bit smaller than he looked in the Anime around this time. Why? Because in reality America was technically 174 (if you count his actual "birth" day as May 4th 1607), and he was only 13 states strong, the majority of his land didn't come until the mid 1800's and onwards so I see him looking possibly 14-15ish considering how he's "19" in the 1940's. So, I see him as at least the same height as England if not a little bit shorter, maybe by a hair.
St. Petersburg, Russia 1781

Breakfast had been easy and all seemed to get along just finely.

"So tell me your given name, Amerika. What did the ever prideful England name you?" Catherine had asked after she wiped her mouth clean of the pastries served that morning. She leaned closer and narrowed her eyes in anticipation. She had thought of many names she assumed the boy to be named but alas it was ever a mystery until stated.

"He named me Alfred Kirkland," America answered. The boy's young eyes glanced toward the tall hosting nation who had sat ever silent next to his ruler, but Russia's eyes held his form all morning as did the Empress's. "I was named after King Alfred, a great rul—"

"I know who the man was," Catherine said as she leaned back and placed her hands in her lap. She smiled at him like as a mother who gazed upon their own child. Before long she let out a sigh and a frown appeared across her rosy lips. "You are just a boy. I cannot imagine what possessed you to outright reject your reigning nation."

"With all due respect, ma'am, but if you lived under his rule you'd try to find a way out as quickly as possible," America said, and Russia and his ruler noticed how his grip upon his knife tightened.

"You have passion even after fighting for so long. You're one of the lucky," Catherine noted before she sighed once more. "Why are you here then? Surely your military forces need you by their side after coming this far."

"I don't intend to stay long," America admitted. "I only came to offer my support to these ambassadors my council has chosen. My commander said it would be good to let the other nations see my face so that they can see for themselves that I am real and that my strife and turmoil rumored and gossiped upon in the high courts is real."

"A sound and intelligent move on your part," Catherine acknowledged. "I can see your mind is sharp and will only develop for the better, especially if you win this war of yours."

"Would you and your country be willing to recognize me?" America asked, and it was then the two understood why he was really there. He was looking for recognition among other sovereign countries. No doubt England refuses to acknowledge him in such a way.

The child was really trying to push everyone off their fences.

"So early for such a major decision," Catherine remarked before getting up. "If you would give me time to speak to my nation on this matter."

After excusing themselves Catherine and Russia retreated to a private room, there she turned to him
and noticed his off-gaze.

"You haven't spoken a word since your head arose from your pillow," Catherine noted and it was then her nation looked at her. "Why, I did not think the boy would infatuate you that much."

"I had thought so as well, but the General has shown me otherwise," Russia confessed. He watched his Empress's brow furrow before her bright eyes widened. Her lips parted and she turned to look for a seat to sit herself in before she fainted.

"The General, are you sure?" she asked, quite serious.

All of his leaders knew of the spirit as did the lowly peasant, though the nobles were more inclined to speak often about him than the trembling sacrifices. Russia nodded and he heard Catherine inhale a deep breath.

"What a joke he's wrought," she said with a shake of her head. "He's not even an official nation, Russia. How can he be your destined mate promised to you by General Winter?"

"I don't know," Russia said as he rose his gloved fingers to his dark coat, pulling on the fabric, not caring if the golden seams and gem buttons pulled loose. "But it hurts, my Empress. My heart is within seconds from ripping out of me and falling into that child's arms."

Raising her fingers to count all of the things wrong with the selection, Catherine begins by saying, "He's only a child." She rose one finger to signify the offense. "He's not even a nation." A second finger rose. "He's England's boy." Another finger was risen. "Mary's virginity, he's not even European!" The Empress had grown tired of using up her fingers and threw her hands in the air.

"I must have him, my Empress. I must." Russia pressed, his body stiff and full of the stress of waiting for General Winter to open his eyes only to show him to a mere child.

"Silence!" Catherine hissed. "You shall refrain yourself from him. The General may have opened your eyes but he did not open young Amerika's. We are in a delicate position right now. He's asked for us to recognize him."

"I will," Russia hastily spoke but the glare from his ruler put him back in place and he stilled himself.

"We'd risk entering a war with England if we take the boy's side," Catherine explained. "Even so, I cannot risk losing him. I very much enjoy the bountiful resources he offers us in trade. I may need time to weigh my options."

Russia was smiling now and as his Empress looked to see the grin, the Russian opened his violet eyes and said, "Take your time. I'm certain he won't leave until he hears your decision."

The woman harkened to her nation and it was because of her slow decision that Russia was able to examine his destined mate more. He observed his interaction with the servants and with the nobles and with his own people. He seemed so out of place there in Europe. He was always on his best behavior around Russia's people but it was only when he was with the Americans that he watched the young colony ease himself and actually laugh and joke around. He had a beautiful laugh and very witty jokes. Russia was liking the boy ever more by the day.

But there was still the fact that he was still just a child, a British child at that. With such bad-blood running through his veins it was almost a turn-off. Oh, but Russia had fallen in love with his beauty. He was outstandingly more handsome than the nation who sired him. His personality was down common unlike his uptight parent country.
Russia had still yet to interact with him though and it disturbed him to think he, himself, was becoming "shy". Hadn't he outgrown his weak timid self centuries ago? What was stopping him from going out into the gardens to talk to the boy?

The little colony was all alone, idly sitting on the stone bench reading a novel. A scarf was wrapped tightly around his neck and a thick coat engulfed him. The year was now entering the month of March. The snow had stopped but the weather was still chilly, though that did not stop the American possible-nation-to-be from finding solitude in the gardens when the others stayed inside by the fireplace.

Russia smiled and walked up to the boy, finding the opportunity unable to pass up. He stood there for a minute or two and realized the boy didn't even know he was there. With another smile he leaned over and spoke quite close to his cold red ear.

"What are you reading?"

America jumped and pulled himself away a bit before letting his eyes settle on the form of Russia. He looked surprised to see him and Russia could understand why. For the past few months that the colony had stayed there Russia only looked and made his presence discreet. He was mostly by his Empress's side for representation and after business talks were finished Russia would excuse himself.

"Oh, I . . ." America seemed flustered, trying to catch his bearings and organize them together after the hosting nation finally spoke to him. Turning back to pick up the book that had fallen in his lap he smiled sheepishly and held it up for the older nation to view. "Common Sense. I read it every morning; reminds me of home."

Russia looked at the small book for a moment before looking back at America who was rubbing his hands together.

"Why don't you go inside where there is fire? I hear the winters in the American colonies are harsh but the bite here is particularly world-known." Russia offered a smile for speaking of General Winter. The old man should thank him that he hadn't forgotten him.

"It's fine," America admitted. "I have a lot on my mind and I know the gardens are empty. I just want to be alone sometimes, no matter the weather."

"I see," Russia said as he offered a bow. "Then I should leave you to your peace of mind."

"Wait!"

Russia smiled when he heard the boy call out for him to stop. Turning back around he shifted his facade to that of curiosity so not to frighten the boy with his smiles, which he had heard from various nations could frighten even the monsters hidden away under the beds. "Da?" Russia offered and noticed the little boy chewing on his bottom lip.

"I never really get to talk to other . . . nations," America admitted as he glanced up at the tall nation with beautiful and honest eyes.

"It is because you are not a nation yourself," Russia informed. The boy perked up and opened his lips in the shape of an "o". Bowing his head the boy looked slightly depressed.

"Is that it?" he had asked but it sounded as if he were whispering it to himself. He stood, and picked up his book before turning fully to Russia and surprising him with a polite bow and a brilliant smile that about melted Russia's very being. "Well then, I shall have to become a nation as soon as possible. Um, Russia?"
"Da?" Russia felt his breath catch from the boy's smile and when that smile faded he looked into the boy's eyes and saw his earnest heart. He was so young, so very innocent and so full of fire—unlike him. He was nothing but an icy fortress and Russia often wondered if the General had opened his eyes to the wrong person.

"Will you promise me you'll speak to me when I do?" America asked, lifting his eyes to meet Russia's ancient violet ones. He let the boy hold his gaze so he could see how strong Russia was, how old he was, how dark he was. He wanted him to see his fortresses, his history, his struggles as a child, and his triumph over the rest of the nations of powerful Europe.

The boy was overwhelmed and his gaze faltered. Glancing away he dared glance back up into Russia's eyes twice more before leaving his gaze down at his feet. With a small whisper, America parted himself with an, "Excuse me," and stepped away from Russia.

"Stay."

America stopped and turned back toward Russia who stood tall and haunting like some human spirit who had yet to find their light and fade away. America had never seen anyone like him before. He had met France, the Netherlands, as well as Spain and Prussia, but since meeting Russia he had been awed by him and his land and people. He didn't know what is was about him but the nation felt as if he were a familiar friend of some sorts—the sorts possibly dreamt of in dreams.

Russia turned his eyes upon him and held his gaze before saying, "Come, walk with me. I am in need of a companion to converse with."

There was a small smile, Russia had seen it. It tilted the corner of America's mouth and put a small skip into the colony's step as he made his way back to his side quicker than expected. Russia kept his smiles to himself and enjoyed the boy's company as they walked throughout the large expanse of the garden. He often wondered if the child knew he was the one speaking mostly. Russia had not said a word since he had suggested the walk and it amused him so.

The Thirteen American Colonies' vocals were so young he still sounded like a child, but Russia could hear the deepening pitch. It was a sign of maturity and it was odd being that the colony was so young. It was a little frightening to think what would become of him once he becomes inducted into nationhood—should that happen.

He was so full of energy, as any young one would be, but the fact that he was only over a century old disturbed Russia. He shouldn't be this grown; he should still be just a babe.

"Who's this?"

Russia came out of his thoughts as their walk brought them to the center of the vast garden where a fountain was positioned and in the center of the dried fountain was the high statue of his old ruler.

Russia smiled and said, "That is Ivan the Great. He was the first man to unite my people and I respected him greatly."

"Wow, so he's like George," America whispered as he hopped into the empty fountain and walked up to the granite statue to take a better look at the sculpted man. "I wonder if he'll be that to me."

Reaching out he touched the statue and marveled at its age. Russia flinched mentally and figured he should warn him of the hazard.

"I wouldn't be so close to that statue. It's quite old and ready brea—!"
Russia acted quick as the old thing finally toppled over like the gardeners predicted. America had just stood there not knowing what to do and instead of jump out of the way he was shielded by the large country who wrapped one arm around his waist and the other arm he held up and halted the statue's descent.

"Break," Russia finished, shaking his head at the boy who looked quite surprised and awed by his strength. The statue was huge and Russia was merely holding it up with one arm.

"Sorry," America offered as Russia pushed it back onto its stand and dusted the colony off.

"Unlike your buildings mine are much older than yourself," Russia explained after dusting his own hands off of the dirt collected from the statue. He was trying to explain to the boy to not touch but the colony's eyes were fixed on the statue behind him and Russia was about to snap his attention away with a clap of his palms had not the boy jumped behind him and pushed the statue back correctly before it wobbled over again.

With wide eyes Russia turned and watched America back away from the statue before deeming it safe and offering a big smile to Russia. "Mr. Ivan the Terrible was still wobbling after you pushed it back and it about nearly fell on you. So I pushed it back to where it won't fall now. Not any time soon at least."

Again, that statue was huge. How could such a small young boy push it back like it was made out of parchment? It had taken years upon centuries for Russia to build up his strength but this boy seemed to have been blessed with it since birth. Strength meant might, particularly military might and that was something America didn't have.

All of the other countries eventually broke under Russia. In his race to become recognized as a high European power he had become—dare he say—too strong. Because of this the others would not look at him for long. They would not stay and chat with him in the meeting rooms. They would not compete with him even in simple games of sport. So he became a recluse and was only sought out for alliances for his might—as England had done some years back.

But now, here was this boy who moved stone like he had. Here was this boy who stood actually amazed at his might, nor frightened away from his presence. General Winter had known what he was doing when he had chosen America for him.

He's perfect, General Winter, Russia inwardly praised and in that a cold gust of air whooshed past the two, making America curl in on himself for warmth in his coat but Russia welcomed the refreshment that let him know the General was watching and overseeing everything.

"Come, Amerika, let's return back inside to the fires of the hall," Russia said, offering his hand. He could see the boy trembling and the sound of his chattering teeth only grew louder. He was surprised once again as the boy reached out and took his hand. No other nation had dared touch him like this in centuries.

Taking the chance to test something for himself, Russia squeezed the boy's hand tighter than polite. In fact this grip would have popped a few fingers out of place but the boy seemed to notice this and so defended his own bones by returning the pressure to make the grasp more stiff. Nothing broke; no one said a thing and Russia pulled the boy out of the waterless fountain.

Russia didn't want to let go of the hand as he eased his grip but he did not want to frighten the child and so released and settled for having the American walk close next to him. It did his soul good to find someone so similar to him, at heart and strength.
From their first walk in the garden sprouted more. Now every morning the two would each sit side-by-side on a designated bench and begin their day with a chapter or two of a selected book. After which they'd walk in the garden and talk about nothing in general. Russia could see America pleased that he knew so much about agriculture, a subject America seemed most interested in.

"I thought you would be like most noble countries," America admitted as he gazed at the small buds on the otherwise barren branches of the bushes surrounding the garden. "You know, talk about commerce and royalty and wars and such."

"All of us still have to farm," Russia explained. "Even if they don't speak about it they do know about it."

"Tell that to France," America said with a chuckle. "All he cared about was war or fashionable clothing."

"Maybe you should have found pleasure conversations with the Netherlands then," Russia informed. "He is quite fond of farming."

"Really?" America asked. "But the man seemed so immersed in talks of trade that I didn't see any such thing similar to a farmer in him."

Russia merely rolled his shoulders as he observed America touch each young bug that he could see. A thought had come to his mind. He had known he had sought out other nations before him. The one that concerned him the most was France and by looking at the young beautiful boy he knew that not even that molester could hold himself back.

"Amerika," Russia spoke up. America turned toward him with a, "Hm?" and Russia spoke again. "What did you speak to the other nations about while you visited them?"

Something seemed to click inside the boy's mind and it was as if he went into official presentation mode. He straightened and said, "Mostly about my recognition. I would leave representatives in each country in hopes to sway them to my cause. So far I have France, Spain, the Netherlands, and Mysore. It's a start."

"If I do not recognize you, then what?" Russia inquired.

America pondered his thoughts for a while before looking sadly at him. "I'll have to leave. I'm sorry but I'm not allowed to wait any unnecessary time that could be used for my recognition into nationhood."

"I see," Russia said with a nod. "Do you realize what will happen if I do acknowledge you?"

America nodded with a smile. "I'll be one step closer to nationhood and you'll offer support and encouragement to my men back in the states."

"I'd have to throw myself into war," Russia explained. "Know you this that my Empress doesn't want to do that."

He saw America's face depress. His shoulders slumped rather quickly and his body stood still. He then looked at him curiously before the blond opened his mouth and asked, "Do you want to help me, Russia?"

America was addressing him as a person with his own conflictions and thoughts. Normally he was addressed as the whole entire country as he should be. This boy still had so much to learn.
Russia smiled before he shook his head.

"Nyet, Amerika. That is not how you converse with a nation."

America cocked his head to the side in confusion before he watched the nation move closer to him. "I am a whole, not one, as are you, as is France, as is Spain, as are the others. We are not human and are not to be addressed like such. Our thoughts are our leader's thoughts; our decisions are what they choose them to be."

"I don't believe that."

Silly boy.

"Why is that, Amerika?" Russia asked curiously.

"Because it is me who wants to break my ties with my fa—with the British Empire. Many of my people didn't want to and so they left me to defend myself," America admitted.

"You see, then that means those who are left make up your thoughts for you, those thoughts being to break away," Russia explained. "You are young, a babe in nation years and yet you are not a nation. It takes time to understand how one works and sometimes you'll wish you were so simple as the humans that dwell in your land."

"What do you mean?" America asked.

Russia peered down at him and then raised his hand and let the knuckle of his index finger brush against America's high cheekbone. The boy seemed taken aback, his eyes full of confusion.

"What are you feeling when I touch you like this?" Russia asked.

"I . . . I don't . . . why are you doing this?" America asked and it was then Russia watched another emotion besides confusion settle in the child's gaze.

When Russia pressed further by trailing his finger down the line of the boy's jaw partly for testing his reaction but mostly because he had wanted to touch him so intimately, the boy hit his hand away rather harshly. He had perhaps expected this but not the trembling fear threatening to leak out of the colony's eyes.

Instead of dwelling on it Russia straightened his form and took the role of informing mentor in a sense before the colony. "Nations may share the same mindset of their people but how they interact with other nations differ from normal human relationships. Perhaps I am in the same room as my enemy; we will eventually break out into a fight. Say I am in a crowd and a nation has hidden himself amongst the populace; I will find him because nations emit auras both powerful and weak, but national in the sense that it is an aura to be recognized. Say that I touch a nation I am infatuated with," Russia then glanced at America who looked to be having a hard time keeping up with Russia's explanation of the concept of Countries/Nations. "They will be able to tell if my touch is innocent, friendly, passionate, or lustful. Did you feel anything in my touch, Amerika?"

America seemed to go back to it but he shook his head and looked rather nervous. He didn't say anything, simply continued to stand there with his hands gripping the edges of his jacket.

"Were you ever touched by the others?" America looked up at Russia with surprisingly understanding eyes. He looked slightly offended when Russia asked him that, but it didn't matter, Russia's question did not falter under America's tense stare. He remained quiet and Russia continued to press him for an answer. "Are you untainted, Amerika?"
Once again America stayed quiet and instead of just standing there he actually turned and stormed off in an upset mood. Russia's fears began to settle in. Had the others touched him? He had thought about France the more. The thought upset him and he cursed the General.

_No, he is supposed to be mine alone. I am the one to taint him with my love. The others should not touch him. If they have, General, you had better pay me penance!_ Russia inwardly swore as he took off after the colony.

Russia had caught up with the boy even though America had been walking rather fast. The younger had entered into the palace without letting the servants dust him off and took his cloak and scarf with him through the halls, not caring to let the servants put the articles of clothing away. The moment America crossed the main hall Russia watched the boy run toward the other wall and throw himself against a pillar. His eyes caught his and he saw fear in them. Ever so curiously Russia walked slowly toward him with questioning glances before something caught his sight to his right.

Turning Russia watched his servants greeting a nation—the nation being none other than England himself.

"England, what a pleasant surprise you are here," Russia said, putting on his greeting smile, now realizing why America had jumped so quickly into the next hallway.

"Sorry to come so unannounced," England apologized as he took off his hat. "I was just in the vicinity and thought I'd come by to see how you were fairing."

"I'm glad you took the time to concern yourself for my wellbeing," Russia said with a smile that honestly hid no true feelings from the empire. "Just take a look at yourself. You seem to be the one not fairing well at all."

The bags under England's eyes, the dull color of hue in his irises, his slumped shoulders; all seemed to point toward his all-too-known struggle with his colony and from the current gossip, all wasn't going well for the British Empire's part. Already six years into that little rebellion and it's taking its toll. Russia smirked. It's hard wasn't it? When you were fighting all by yourself.

"Well, that's life, old chap," England said and Russia noticed that even his voice was drawn out and soft—weary.

There was a short silence before Russia let out a smile and grinned once more. "Well, we've said hello and I am fine and you are not. You can leave now."

Russia turned and waved his hand to issue the servants to escort England back outside. He didn't care for politeness at that moment. He didn't care about England, especially after how he had mistreated his young colony.

"W-Wait, Russia!" England called out.

Russia turned to him, looking rather uninterested and slightly annoyed but he thought he'd humor himself and see what the pathetic nation had to say—seeing how he's come such a long way and all. England glanced down and then back up to Russia. The man used to be the one looking down on everyone no matter their stature, now he's remembered his place as the small maggot that he was.

"All is not well in the war," England finally admitted with a heavy sigh. "At first I was having to deal with him but then he... he... he goes out abroad and bloody whores himself to the others, enticing them to join in the battle." Russia could see England's gloved fists shaking. His bared teeth were grinding together and Russia could see the shade of his face turning a slight red. He was angry.
So very angry with America. Either with him asking the others for help or the others trooping up against him.

With a shake of his head Russia crossed his arms. "That is not my problem to deal with, Britain. He is yours—well, not for long if the war continues in his favor."

"What do you want, Russia? !" England barked out, his dull eyes now sparking with frustration beyond count. "Do you want a piece of my empire? Fine! You can have Minorca. I'm not asking for your damned army this time. I just want someone on my side. I need someone to help me convince the others to stay out of this; to let me handle it alone, and to leave my colony's rebellion to me."

"Nothing but gossip and rumors reach my ears," Russia said. "I do not know entirely why the Thirteen are so upset with you. But even so, this is your fault. Whether it was a lack of parenting presence or an act of obsessive overprotection you have forced him away and into the arms of others. Why does it matter anyways? Why can't you colonize somewhere where you're wanted?"

"Because he's the first to survive!" England said and then inhaled a deep breath to steady himself as his outbursts revealed deep emotional ties that didn't need to be shared publically, especially with a nation he was trying to get to become his ally but always insulted him.

Russia decided not to make any rhetoric remark this time. It wouldn't be fair, not for England. He remembered that; it wasn't easy colonizing and England seemed to have one of the worst luck for it. His first child died quite young and it wasn't until some 23 years later that England tried for another, this resulted in Alfred.

Russia took a quick glance to his left where America still presided. He had wondered why he hadn't just left but he found the boy to be frozen. Was he that afraid of his parent country? If only he could see England's state then he'd realize that he was winning, he was beating an empire. That was quite a feat for something like a colony.

"He's growing fast, England," Russia spoke after the silence. England looked at him and then nodded.

"I know," the Brit said with a sad smile. "But he's still so young."

"Perhaps it is destiny," Russia suggested. "Even the Norwegians had to let go of their colonies."

Suddenly Russia watched a quick shift in England's mood just by mentioning the country.

"Well I'm not Norway," He spat, that arrogant prick returning in full force. Russia watched the man straighten his form and narrow his eyes. "The war isn't over yet and if I have to fight tooth and nail for him just to prove to him how important he is to me then I shall."

"Him or his resources?" Russia asked with a knowing smile. "You seem to forget the colony has a personification. He's not just a territory marked on a map."

"You seem to slide more toward his side," England said with a frown. "Have I lost my only ally to his wretched rebellion as well?"

"I was never your ally, England," Russia informed. "You're not a friendly nation, nor are you reliable."

England bit back a snarl while Russia looked down on him with condemning eyes.

"I ask so little of you!" England spat. "You're the unreliable one! If you're not for me then you're my
enemy."

England turned on his heel and made to leave.

"We'll see about that when you'll need my trade after losing your colony," Russia remarked and reveled in watching England's shoulders stiffen. It was true, if he lost America then he'd have to trade with him, ally or not. With a pleased smile he watched England storm out in an anger, nearly plowing through the servants as they tried to open the door for him.

"Heh, I'll have to tell Catherine about this. She does so love to gossip," Russia said before turning back toward America and noticing the boy had slunk down to the floor. With concern in his features Russia approached the colony. "Amerika?" he questioned but the boy would not look at him.

"I knew he'd hate me," America said as he fiddled with his stockings.

"Relationships between countries are never meant to be eternal," Russia admitted.

America let out a sigh and leaned his forehead against his knees. "He just . . . I did it because . . . because he wouldn't listen. Because I wanted him to know how much I hated him."

"You're still so young. You do not really know the hard chains of hate yet. It's best you forget that word entirely," Russia suggested, standing tall before him like a role model with which the younger should dress himself after.

When America looked at him Russia could see his blue eyes hard as if battle-worn and centuries tortured. He didn't know why he had that look or how it came to be but there was a definite hate in his those gems. The boy had not lied about feeling hate. He knows the feeling.

Feeling the need to kneel Russia does so and then leans closer toward the colony. America did not pull himself away this time. He simply stared Russia down like some power confronted before him. He was a curious child and Russia felt that if he could have him then and there then he could shape him into a powerful ally—something England could use.

His loss; Russia's gain.

"What horrors have you seen to make you think you can stare me down like that?" Russia asked, his own eyes boring down on the boy, trying to push him into submission but there was a blue fire in America's eyes and he almost seemed in some sort of trance. He held his ground good.

"I will win, Russia," America swore and if Russia wasn't such a realist then he'd come to hope for the future in expectation for victory, but until he saw it played out in real time then he'd hold his own opinion to himself. "I will."

Russia leaned back as America pressed himself upward and stood, leaving his presence. His walk was full of determination and Russia loved him more for his spirit.

That's it, keep fighting, Amerika, Russia thought. Once you're free, you're free to come right back into my arms.

Chapter End Notes

Historical Notes:
Empress Catherine the Great never officially came out for either side, partly because she didn't want to get involved in the war. But her want of trade with the Americans suggested she favored the Americans winning the Revolutionary War with Great Britain.

When America spoke about some of his people not wanting to fight against the British and just left instead, he was referring to the Loyalists: American people loyal to the crown (aka. Tories to the American populace). So, most of them either went with the British or just moved up to Canada to stay loyal.

Also, when America refers to Russia's Ivan the Great as Ivan the Terrible, yes it was a pun at what he's sometimes referred to seeing how a lot of people don't see him so "great".

Now England did indeed make a third attempt at friendship with Russia back in 1781. This time they didn't even ask for military support. They just flat out offered them a part of their empire, that part being the island of Minorca. All they wanted was for Russia to convince the other countries to stay out of the fight since England was being ganged up on. Russia did decline the bribery and what they did next was quite funny, but not so funny on the British Empire's part.

Lastly, but not least,

When it was mentioned that England lost a "child" that is a reference to the colony of Roanoke in North Carolina, also known as The Lost Colony. It was established in the late 1500's but was then lost some time later. No one knows what became of it except all of the people were gone. Still an unsolved mystery and in this story it is England's very first child that died (or vanished mysteriously, whatever you wish).
A few weeks later Russia and his Empress had declared themselves neutral in America's war. Russia in all honesty had wanted to help the boy personally but what his Empress said goes, such is the rules of a country. Looking over toward America and his ambassadors he saw his disappointed look but a small smile crept on his lips as he told him, "Well, at least you're not against me."

The boy was very forgiving in nature and Russia admired that about him. It was a shame he had to leave before he could tell him about England's horrified face when he posted his little "bribery" to France and Spain. That seemed to upset them to a new level of anger.

"You son of a bitch, Anglterre!" France shouted as he slammed the posted parchment down upon the table they had been sitting at in discussion. The blond had been so upset he knocked his chair out from under him, it already being a sturdy chair.

"That can be considered cheating in this game, mi amigo," Spain said with a shake of his head while they all stared down at England who looked as if he wanted to curl in on himself and disappear from the earth.

The little empire looked helpless and when he turned to look at Russia his eyes were wide with disbelief. His jaw hung loose and bobbed up and down as if he were trying to form a sentence to excuse his actions, but nothing was coming out of his mouth.

Russia smiled and that smile always invoked an anger to whoever it was directed at. This time it was England like it had been for a while now and that did the trick to get him to speak.

"He . . . he's lying!" England protested, pointing his finger accusingly toward Russia. "I would never —!"

"I have witnesses. The servants were near and heard every word you said to me," Russia explained.

"I have witnesses. The servants were near and heard every word you said to me," Russia explained.

"Bah! Servants obey their masters and if they tell them to lie then they will. Untrustworthy lot," England shot back.

"Then perhaps you'd like confirmation from your colony who heard it all as well." Russia smiled at England. Watching the smaller nation's eyes widen, the words were left short on his lips.

"America?" England whispered, his lips quivering with disbelief that his colony had been there and heard everything he said. "He was there?"

"He arrived a few weeks earlier with a couple of his ambassadors," Russia informed. "I assume he was on his way to visit everyone in asking to be recognized." When he glanced toward France and Spain he watched them nod their heads.

"Why?" Russia turned to see England, his eyes glistening with hurt and betrayal. "Why didn't you tell me he was with you?"

"Because he made it very clear that he hated you and I would assume one does not want to see the
object of their hate," Russia replied and watched England close his eyes tight before shaking his head. 

"That stupid boy," England muttered before turning back to the others. France looked the most upset by this, but then again, when England did something unspeakable he was always the most upset whether it was against him or not. Spain looked quite serious though kept to himself. 

"You are a pompous swine!" France once again spat. "It tis no wonder little Amérique wants to be free of you. You always think you're above the laws set out. Well that is why I'm helping him. No one deserves to be treated like that and if I find out my Mattie is being treated the same I shall fight alongside him for his independence as well."

The guilty stayed silent. England bowed his head before quietly excusing himself and leaving. When he left the room Russia felt a hand clap onto his shoulder. Turning he saw France with a soft smile—something very unbefitting of him. 

"Merci, Russie, for sharing that with us. I honestly didn't know but I wouldn't think anything less than that from him," France said. "Say, why did you claim neutrality? You could be a good ally for Amérique. He needs all the help he can get, and it's the perfect opportunity to stick your boot into Angleterre's cul." France wiggled his eyebrows with eager anticipation before chuckling darkly. Russia sighed inwardly. France might find it arousing to do that but Russia very much enjoyed watching it from afar—for now at least.

England, to him, was nothing more than a nuisance, a pest that he could swat with his hand if he wanted to. He was that acquaintance who claimed friendship but when your carriage's wheel comes off on your way to his home he doesn't send out servants to go and help, instead you just end up sitting there in the mud trying to fix the damn thing only to get pneumonia and die. That was how Russia explained his relationship with England and he knew a good many other nations who thought the same. 

So let him be alone. Let the others team up against him. It was just deserts and Russia couldn't help but laugh at it. He spared the losing empire no sympathy at all. 

Paris, France. September 1783

Russia smiled as the young boy glanced down at the parchment for the hundredth time. It was as if he couldn't believe what he was reading. The tips of his fingers curled inward, wrinkling the paper just to feel it in his palms. Pure relief washed over him and Russia could see it in his eyes that he was very pleased with the outcome.

"It is real and it has come to pass, Amerika," Russia assured but still the boy continued to read it again and again, often out loud. 

"It's over," the blond whispered, his hands shaking and it was then that Russia caught sight of glistening tears leaking out of the boy's eyes. "It's . . . done."

At first Russia caught a smile on the boy's lips before his eyes closed shut and he raised his arm to rub furiously at the tears that began to stain his face, leaving weak streaks everywhere and irritated red skin behind. Stilling himself he inhaled a deep breath before easing out a sigh and then uncovering his face. Due to his red eyes his blue hues shown brighter in contrast and Russia couldn't help but think the tears, the sadness or happiness—whatever it was—made him all the more beautiful. He honestly doubted there was anything in the world that could mar his beautiful image. 

"I wish you all the happiness in the world," Russia congratulated with an incline of his head as he
glanced toward his ambassadors who had come to visit France’s home to see the now free colony.

"My thanks, but there is still one thing that upsets me," America admitted.

Russia raised his brow and then narrowed his eyes. What could possibly be upsetting the young colony now? It was already irritable to see the boy cry so if he had to get into a war just to make who had done this pay then he might as well.

America's blue eyes glanced down, somewhat bashfully and Russia watched the boy clasp his calloused hands together, warn from fighting a war too soon for his kind, the thumbs twiddling slightly before he said, "You have . . . you've yet to acknowledge me."

Russia stared blankly at the lad before blinking in understanding. Oh. Yes, he was right. Now that he thought about it, Russia had yet to officially declare his nationhood.

France, Morocco, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, and now finally England; they had all acknowledged America's induction into nationhood. He knew the others would follow soon after them. He knew this boy would not stop until the entirety of the world saw him for the destined greatness he was.

With a smile Russia leaned closer toward the nation, something he enjoyed doing if only to be closer to the boy in a sense, though America had yet to understand such motions and gestures.

"Maybe later," Russia replied with a playful smile. "Prove yourself to me and I may reconsider. Do syvidanya, Amerika."

He forced himself to leave America's side when all he wanted to do was hold him in his arms and praise him for his accomplishment, as well as offer him a place at his home, but he doubted that the boy would want to live under someone else's house after escaping one. That was for another time and it was Russia's way to hopefully trick his mental frame to wait for the lad to grow. His patience had nearly run out and so he needed to be away from him. Away to his own thoughts and fantasies.

Chapter End Notes

Historical Notes:

Okay, so, see what Russia did? That is right, they published the "bribery" to Spain and France and I can't imagine they were too happy about that.

Also, in case I hadn't made myself clear. The reason why Russia dislikes England so much is because he was unreliable as an ally. Yep, apparently they backed out right in the middle of the Seven Years War where they made to leave the conflict and left Prussia (who happened to be allies with Russia at the time) all by themselves to get their butts handed to them. So this is just deserts all the way and Russia's loving it.

And in 1783 was when the Revolutionary War was officially over and England signed over the territory to the Americans and acknowledged their independence though begrudgingly seeing how the King swore to keep fighting and to never give up the 13 colonies. In the end they caved into the Americans.
It'd been twenty years since England had given up his colony. The boy'd been busy in those past two decades. He wasn't lying when he told Russia he'd make the rest of the world recognize him. Right now there were a good twenty nations recognizing the child and thusly inducting him into nationhood.

Though he had not seen young America since Paris, Russia made sure to keep tabs on his whereabouts and happenings. The two kept news updated through ambassadors but that still wasn't enough. So, Russia devised a way to get the busy little one back into his home.

Russia offered him a banquet in honor of the twentieth anniversary England let him become independent. The response was rather quick and it wasn't long until Russia was anticipating seeing the boy again.

"His ship is still on the sea, my lord," Russia's servant informed him that day. Even though Russia knew how long it would take to sail to his home and then cross Europe he still continued to ask his servant men every day where the boy was and they always gave their best estimated guess unless otherwise informed by message boys.

Russia was very expectant of this visit because he had planned everything out. He was going to give the working boy a gift that he knew he'd like and if he could help it . . . he'd find a way to keep him at his home a little longer than expected.

He was supposed to arrive late August so he could be in time for the banquet held on September 3rd signifying the anniversary of the official end of America's war for independence, but their ship had been delayed and instead the young colo—nation had arrived a month late still, with that ever apologetic smile on his face that Russia couldn't resist.

St. Petersburg, Russia. October 28th 1803

"Sorry about that, ran into a few storms on the way here and had to travel the long way 'round," America had said in apology with that innocent smile that was unknowingly seducing the Russian nation.

Russia smiled in kind and inclined his head. With a small chuckle he would make sure the American knew he was no idiot. "Even so, the hurricanes on the sea cannot delay you for near another month."

It was then Russia caught it, the slight shift in the American's eyes. They fell to the right before looking at him. "Actually," America started out. "You're right. The ships made it on time. We were traveling here as fast as possible but I . . . kinda . . . wanted to stop by Prussia's home and pay him a visit."

"Prussia?" Russia asked with a raised brow. He and the German had been on decent terms as of late but the fact that the boy, his destined mate, would linger in that man's house instead of coming to his palace was something to be upset over. He'd have to pay the albino a visit later after his guest had gone.
American bowed his head and clasped his hands together like he was to say some sort of prayer. "I'm very sorry. I meant to only stay for a day or two, but he insisted I stay longer and when I finally got the chance to glance at a calendar I realized I was late."

"You've missed the date and therefore the banquet with it. You've made me sad, Amerika," Russia said feigning a hurt look. In all honesty he was more angry than sad—particularly because he had rather been with Prussia than him who had been nothing but kind to him since he first came to him.

"Is there anything I can do to make it up to you?" America was sincere and Russia didn't doubt an instant that he'd do anything to repay his offensive mistake, though Russia could think of many things that could be paid for it, he doubted the American would be comfortable with them all.

With an exaggerated sigh Russia thought for one moment before smiling. "There is one thing, but it'll have to wait until a little later. Right now, I'll settle for you obeying to do my every demand."

Russia watched America sheepishly grin as he nervously played with his fingertips, his eyes not looking at him. "Isn't that... a little much, Russia? After all, I'm a free country now. Not too used to being told what to do."

Russia frowned. "I am giving you a chance to apologize in action and you refuse?"

"No, no! That's not what I'm saying at all," America dejected as he waved his hands before slumping his shoulders with a sigh of surrender. "Okay, I guess I can do this. But for how long?"

"As long as your stay," Russia said with a pleased smile. He was happy that the American agreed to it. He inwardly promised he wouldn't do anything too rude. "And your first order is to have dinner with me this evening. I had a present to give you had you arrived on time and it is at dinner we shall discuss whether you deserve it or not."

"Well, it's not up to the recipient to decide if he should get the present," America stated. "If you think I'm unbefitting then don't give it to me."

"You won't be saying that after you see what it is," Russia informed with a knowing smirk.

And he was right. That night as they sat in the private national dining room used only for Russia to treat his country guests, the American wouldn't let go of the present. In fact he refused to take his eyes away from it even as Russia laughed at him.

"It should come as no surprise to you, Amerika, you already have most of Europe seeing you for who you really are," Russia informed as he bit a piece of his dinner into his mouth.

At first it was a gaping shock and then Russia curiously watched as America's mouth began to upturn into a small smile before his lips pulled back taut against his pearly white teeth. When America's eyes narrowed Russia noticed the glistening in the candlelight. He raised his brow, curious if the American was crying.

"I've waited so long," America said and instantaneously Russia fell in love with that soft smile. It was his favorite to date. Even more so than that energetic bright one he usually gives to his men in show of his liberty. "Why now?"

"It would have been earlier had you arrived on the scheduled time," Russia informed and smiled as America's eyes widened and darted back to the signed paper of national recognition from Imperial Russia, complete with his and his Emperor's signature.

"If I had known," America whispered, shaking his head for his own folly. With that same smile, this
time the smile reaching up toward his eyes, the candlelight making them shine even more as they glistened. "I would have definitely skipped Prussia's house and headed straight here like I was supposed to."

"I'm glad the present is pleasing."

"So why?" America asked once more, this time his gaze held Russia's and it seemed he wouldn't detour from his question again. "Why after twenty years did you do it?"

Leaning back in his chair Russia eased himself and looked at the young nation for a small moment, taking his appearance in. In a way he decided he had done it because of his appearance before him now. Looking at him he could see the boy had thickened. His arms were thick with growing muscle. His bones stretching and hardening. The boy was now up to Russia's jaw where when before he had come up to his chest. He was growing up so fast and Russia often wondered when he'd stop.

"I realize you've proven yourself enough," Russia stated. "You've proven to me and my people that you are a nation and should be recognized as such."

"Thank you," America said with a smile. "I appreciate every country who sees me as one of their own. Even if you had been the only one I'm sure I wouldn't be happier."

"I assume you say this to every country," Russia said with a playful smile though inwardly he often wondered.

"I really mean it, Russia," America said quite seriously as he placed the prized parchment back down on the table before looking down at his half-finished meal. "Well, looks like I'm too excited to finish my meal. Sorry."

"It is fine," Russia said before offering him a mischievous smile. "You still owe me for past grievances."

"Well, what would you have me do?" America asked with a nervous chuckle. "It's all within reason, right?"

"Da," Russia assured as he crossed his fingers together. "Tell me, Amerika. Do you celebrate All Saints Day?"

There was a blank look in the American's eyes that answered Russia's question.

"Um, no, I don't think I do," America answered honestly.

"Ah, of course," Russia said with a nod, realizing that America was indeed too Protestant to understand what the day and observance was. But that didn't matter; he wasn't looking forward to that day in particular. "Well, do not worry; it is not that day that I have designated the ball on."

"Ball?" America stammered for a moment. Russia narrowed his eyes in curiosity.

"Are you even familiar with a Masquerade Ball, Amerika?"

Once again, the blank stare was enough of an answer for the Russian and the nation couldn't help but chuckle and clap his hands much to the American's frustration.

"Ease yourself, Amerika. I will take care of you. All you have to do is trust me, da?"

America's lips quirked up slightly for a short time before nodding his head and saying, "Da."
"Come out, Amerika. You cannot stay in there forever, it is not polite," Russia informed as he stood beside the changing room assigned to the young nation. The ball had already started and Russia had yet to go out beside his Emperor and greet their guests. That in itself was rude and a hosting nation should be among the first to greet the guests but he had decided to wait for the boy's finished costume.

"Are you sure it's alright that I wear this?" came America's voice from behind the door. He sounded uncertain and it was up to Russia to make him feel at ease and to coax him to come out and join the party.

"Da, now come out. I've invited friends of yours to this event," Russia replied knowing that the aspect of seeing friends and allies would prompt the American to come out and show himself.

"Really?" There was excitement and surprise in the boy's voice, the higher pitch Russia found cute and smiled at it. "I thought it was just a gathering for the royalty and nobility of your people."

"Nyet, it is a social gathering and the other nations are encouraged to attend. Now my parties may not be as grand as a nation like France's but it is decent and more than a few countries do attend, a few I'm sure you'll want to see," Russia informed.

That must have done it. He heard shuffling behind the door and faint words before the door opened and out came the dressers first. The two bowed to Russia before apologizing for the delay and then excusing themselves from his presence.

Turning and peeking inside the room Russia had been right when he knew he'd feel that pounding in his chest as he beheld the vision of the sun god, Apollo.

In Russian design of gold and fire the American was dressed in a fine masquerade outfit. The cuffs of the sleeves were loose and a tight white lace shirt lay underneath that hugged his wrists while the tails of the coat jutted out to give his form the shape of a "V". White lace stockings were given with golden shoes and diamond buckles. On the breast of the coat held numerous gems, mostly rubies and diamonds to signify the sparkle of the fiery light in the sky.

America presented a golden mask attached to a slim rod that he held in his hand and would move it away if he wanted to view someone face-to-face. The mask was designed like that of the sun with swaying spikes jutting out on every side and of course diamonds pinned around the eyes and mouth.

Indeed he came off as a Russian ready for their All Hallow's Eve Ball and that is what Russia had wanted.

Standing there in awe, and inwardly reminding himself to reward the dressers with a higher pay and to have them "mysteriously" lose America's clothing trunks so that they could replace them with Russian wear, Russia watched the American jot his head out of the mask's view. He smiled playfully before swaying the mask in his hand.

"How do I look?" He asked.

"Beautiful," Russia had wanted to say but he feared losing that smile to the confused frown America often wore and so said, "Like Apollo himself. I am certain you were once he in another life."

America waved off the flattery before touching the gems on his chest. "I still think the dressers
overdressed me."

_They did exactly what I commanded them to do_, Russia inwardly informed. "Nonsense," he eased. "This is typical Russian wear and I would have you wear no less."

"If you say so," America said with a roll of his shoulders. Russia watched his eyes glance toward his own costume, himself being dressed as the Black Death. Something he was certain America hadn't known what exactly it was.

With a majority of black adorning his frame Russia made sure that silver rods be placed around his chest to resemble and signify ribs and that his mask pinned onto his face looked similar to a skull made of silver with gems around the empty eyes. Most curious were the rubies pinned in a heart shape in the center of his chest where the silver rods for ribs overlaid them. All in all Russia's costume was horrifyingly haunting and would no doubt invoke ancient grievous memories from the European countries already in attendance to the ball.

"Shall we go and see the others?" Russia asked, holding out his arm in offering toward the boy.

America looked uncertain with what to do but Russia was patient and soon saw the boy understanding before reaching forward and taking his arm lightly, his fingers just brushing the sleeve of his coat. With the boy finally ready to join the others, Russia, as the host, escorted his partner out.

With masks at the ready none were the wiser that the handsome young man holding Russia’s arm as he was announced to the ball was the new country: the United States of America. Russia could see all of the countries and noticed that most invited had attended. He was glad because he wanted to show them all something.

"Amazing!" America gasped, letting go of Russia's arm as the people in costumes moved around them. Russia frowned from the lack of contact but let the boy venture out to see the other magnificent costumes.

Whilst the boy wandered off into the mass of the crowd Russia was engaged in frivolous chat with Austria who looked to be dressed as a champion horse of some sort. The costume mostly consisted of a royal violet and gold; interesting design though not as good as his own nor Ameri—where did that boy go?

Russia’s keen ears caught the sound of a gasp from the boy in question. Turning Russia saw the child nation just a few crowds away. It wasn’t hard to look for him since Russia had been a tall nation but he did frown upon seeing who the American was embracing.

It was Prussia. The German was dressed in dark green and violet. Perhaps he was trying to come off as some exotic bird but Russia found the costume lacking, especially that idiotic grin of his as he embraced the boy tight. The two looked like old friends as they clapped each other's backs and smiled fondly on.

He could even hear what they were speaking about.

"You came too?" America asked as his eyes brightened at the sight of the German state.

"Of course I did," Prussia exclaimed in that annoying accent of his. "I'm not on complete bad relations with Russia and who'd refuse a ball? But look at you! I didn't think I'd see you here in Europe so soon, and what's with that outfit?"

Russia narrowed his eyes as he watched Prussia grab a hold of America's hand and hold it high over his head to twirl him around to examine his costume. "You look so . . . Russian." Prussia had made it
sound bad but in the end it was a joke for the two to chuckle at.

"I got into some serious trouble with him you see," America explained as Prussia let go of the boy and crossed his arms to stand and listen. "So to apologize I agreed to do whatever he said while I stayed with him."

"Whatever?" Prussia asked, his scarlet eyes widening before shaking his head. "Alfred, Alfred," Prussia had wrapped his arm around the boy's neck and held him closer as if informing some younger sibling of his. Why was he on the first name basis with the new country? "You don't agree to things like that—especially not with Russia."

"Why?" America asked quite innocently as he playfully shoved the albino off of him and dusted off his costume from the dark green feathers that fell from Prussia's wear onto his own.

"We're European," Prussia said, holding up a gloved finger to him to make a statement. "We could . . . do impolite things."

"Oh," America nodded but Russia wasn't quite sure if he knew what Prussia was suggesting. And how dare that state sway the boy away from him? He would never command America to do things he was suggesting other European countries do. Never.

And then Russia turned his eyes once more, the babbling Austria never in the least noticing he wasn't following their conversation. Hadn't been for a good long time. There came another country to stand next to Prussia. He was young and dressed in robes of silks of white with gold lining the hems as it draped over his shoulders and arms like some Roman toga, though underneath the robe was shined silver armor with intricate designs lain across the breastplate and shoulders down toward the gauntlets. The mask, a white and gold face with slanted eyes, was held on a black rod in the boy's hand.

The odd thing about him was that Russia had never felt his aura before. He was new, or, considering his height and age, had yet to be introduced to the rest of the world.

"Ah! Ludwig, you're here!" Prussia exclaimed. Clapping his hands onto the boy's shoulder Russia observed a slight annoyance from the lad who stood just an inch or two shorter than America. "Alfred, this is mein youngest bruder, Ludwig. Ludwig, this is Alfred Jones, the United States of America."

After the introduction from the albino, Russia watched the mask fall away and suddenly he felt a familiarity about the boy. His hair was bright blond, a lighter shade than America's but darker than his own ashen color, and his eyes were a lightning blue—most unattractive Russia thought; like the rest of the German family. Despite the instant dislike Russia couldn't seem to shake the fact that he had seen this child before, a long time ago. Well there were a lot of countries that were born only to die and then another would be born that bared striking resemblance so it could be that. He decided not to dwell on that fathom too long.

America had seemed friendly as usual and the two offered a polite bow before America said, "It's nice to meet you, Ludwig. By the way, are you a country? You feel—"

"One day soon. Right, Ludwig?" Prussia spoke up with a promising smile as he looked down at his little brother whose gaze seemed transfixed on the nation he had been introduced to. "I hope that the two of you would become friends when he does."

"We can be friends now. I see nothing wrong with that, right, Ludwig?" America smiled at the boy who offered a small smile of his own before he silently nodded.
"Well, I'll leave you two youngin's to get acquaint—oh! Hey, is that Austria?" Prussia had his eyes set on the man talking to Russia and Russia had to avert his gaze away so the state didn't know he had been watching them. "I'm going over there to taunt him. See you, West."

With that Russia heard the noisy German making his way through the crowd with many "Excuse me's" and "Pardon me's". Russia rolled his eyes before the man pushed himself through the wall of people and poked himself next to Austria.

"Hey, what are you—a sick mule?" Prussia asked and that had snapped the Austrian out of his rambling conversation with Russia. But ever so polite the German smiled kindly at Russia before saying, "Excuse me, I have to take this."

"Go right ahead," Russia said with a short smile before turning and walking off though not without hearing Austria's annoyed tone of voice as he said, "And what are you? A rooster with his wattle cut off?" Russia had just heard Prussia's dumbfounded response of, "What?" before he was out of earshot and searching for his American.

Turning toward the food tables Russia found him. With his golden mask now under his arm securely the boy was currently stacking a held silver platter with various types of foods while standing next to the new German brother who seemed to be caught in a light conversation with him.

That just would not do.

Making his way toward the food tables Russia past by the composer of the orchestra and said a quick, "Get ready to play a song," before walking on toward the American. When he got closer he heard the two chuckling from something the American said and right after that he heard this Ludwig say, "You're very nice, America. I like you."

That did it.

Reaching out Russia grabbed a hold of America's arm and pulled him back and away from the boy who looked on with wide eyes. The platter in America's hands dropped to the ground and the food fell all over the polished floor.

"Ah! Russia!" America gasped but before he could exclaim about the food and the mess Russia had pulled him close and said, "Play with me." That sentence in itself America had come to understand as the reminder that he offered to do anything the Russian wanted and when Russia would say the phrase, 'Play with me,' then America had to do just that.

Suddenly the violin strings were struck and the symbols chimed. The crowd parted and in danced the hosting nation with a beauty in his arms. For a few seconds America hadn't known what to do or what was transpiring. When he realized they were in a dance—no less the first dance of the ball always offered to a lucky one by the hosting nation—he stammered and looked up at Russia with confused eyes.

"Sh-Shouldn't you have picked a lady?" America asked as he tried to remember where to put his hands if he were the led one in the dance instead of the one leading.

"I am the hosting country—I can pick whoever I want," Russia replied with a smile at the boy and in that Russia's heart jumped and twirled inside him upon seeing a light dust of pink on the boy's golden tan skin. Was it from embarrassment or something else? Whatever it was gave Russia's feet lighter steps and it wasn't long before he was gliding across the dance floor, spinning both of them around the borders of the encircling crowd.
That was right; he was showing the boy in his arms off. He was his partner for the evening. He was the one whom he had chosen for the first dance of the ball. He was the one selected to be adorned in fine silks and jewelry. He was the one Russia wanted to stand beside him.

When the song ended the two bowed to each other and Russia saw that innocent shy smile of America's and even the faint blush on his cheeks remained. Russia adored the look and wondered what other facial expressions he could squeeze out of him. Now he yearned to see them and more than once in a minute Russia had to calm himself and to remain proper—for both their sakes.

"Amérique, Is that you?"

Russia watched America quickly shoot his mask before his face as none other than France came up to them, a smile on his lips when his eyes met the boy. He was wearing something akin to an Indian-styled costume in colors of light blue. The turban on his head looked ridiculous and reminded Russia a little too much of that bastard to his south but any resemblance made by France he knew was unintentional, after all, this was a time to be someone or something you were not.

"Ah, it tis little Amérique! I had not known you came all this way to attend," France rambled as he touched America's shoulder and swatted the boy's mask away from his face only to see the new nation's frustrated and none-too-happy expression. France seemed to pay no mind as usual and it was then Russia realized that the boy had still been upset over their short little war that had supposedly ended only three years ago.

It was a funny thing how America's friends could turn so quickly into his enemies, but alas Russia had warned him. Though, those who seemed to stay true to him the boy stuck to like glue and made all sorts of treaties with that Russia wasn't too inclined to liking.

Wrapping his arm around the boy's neck France leaned against the sturdy country and continued his rambling. Russia frowned as America looked toward him, his eyes pleading for help. Russia about grabbed the Frenchman and threw him off a nearby balcony had not he said something to America that made the boy freeze.

"You know Anglettre is here," France said, his eyes shifting through the crowd before widening. "Oh, oh no, here he comes."

"Shit!" America cursed, pushing France off of him and pushing the mask to his face, trying to make his way through the crowd as he heard someone behind already doing the same.

"America!"

The boy froze. Russia had wanted to divert the child but it was not a good time. Most of the guests had stopped and parted way so that a line of sight could be met. Now all ears in the ballroom were on the two who had had harsh relations lately.

There he was, England, dressed in a red costume liken to a jester though his ivory mask held that of a frown, something representing turmoil for those who posed as the usually grinning jokester. Pulling his ivory mask and red cap off of his head, England pushed back his blond tresses to make sure no lock of bang strayed America from his vision. With green eyes wide and lips parted the Brit had actually made an attempt for a conversation.

"I . . . I saw you, with Russia that is. I didn't think that you'd . . . what are you doing here, lad?" England offered a light smile but America had yet to turn toward him or to drop his mask to show everyone in the ballroom his unpleasant frown.
Russia knew he should have interjected right then and there to stop the empire from pressing on still healing wounds, but Russia remained silent. He wanted to show America off to England the most. He had wanted the parent country to see his child in the arms of another nation, in clothes of non-English fashion, smiling and loving his freedom like he said he would. But it seemed America had not been ready—nor had England.

"You look . . . healthy. You've grown a few hands haven't you? I can already see you've passed me," England said and his smile quivered. All could see that he tried to hide the past sadness. How England hid it to himself ended up cutting something that Russia shouldn't have allowed cut. "I wanted you to know that you have a little brother."

Russia watched America's shoulders stiffen. Slowly, the boy turned, his mask still held tight against his face but at least he was now facing his ex-ruler.

"His name's Australia. Already fifteen years now," England said with a smile that seemed too forced. When America brought his mask down and revealed his displeased look England faltered but continued when he shouldn't have. "He's a little rowdy—much less polite than you were at his age, but he's a good lad."

There was nothing but silence from the American.

"I just . . . thought you'd want to know. I know you always hated being an only child," England said as if offering a smile for appeasement.

When America's eyes met England's gaze it was intense and daunting. Everyone witnessing the stare down leaned on their toes in anticipation as to what was to transpire next. Breaths were held and eyes strained. What happened next Russia had foreseen.

"Does he even know I exist?" America asked, his tone flat and demanding.

"What?" England blinked in confusion. Apparently he hadn't been prepared to answer that question.

"You inform me that I now officially have a younger sibling, but won't inform him he's not an only child? Figures." America's brows knit together from long frustration. "Don't want him getting any ideas? Don't want him following in his big brother's footsteps? Well keep his leash tight this time would you."

"Alfred," England said, reaching his hand out but America had been so upset that he threw his mask to the ground, the face cracking at the eyes and the gems pinned upon it slid across the floor hitting heels and buckles.

"It's the United States of America!" America corrected, his entire body shaking with unbridled anger. His eyes narrowed and fists clenched. "No more 'Alfred' and no more 'America'. You swore you'd recognize me as an equal, as free and yet here you are; talking to me like I'm still your child. I'm not Alfred Kirkland any longer. I'm Alfred Jones. Jones! And you . . . you're a sick control freak. You can't last more than a few years before going off and creating another colony just to have someone under your command. Well I feel sorry for this Australia now that he has to deal with you."

Without another word America turned on his heel and left. He pushed through the audience and headed out toward a close balcony; for fresh air no doubt. Russia turned toward England who had cast his face down in gloom. He had sworn he heard him whisper, "It's not like that, Alfred," but he couldn't be too sure and so he raised his hands and clapped.

"What a wonderful reunion," Russia said with that taunting smile. "I would say those weren't the
"Shut up, Russia," England bit back, his eyes narrowing at him. "I just wanted him to know about Australia. I hadn't meant it to sound the way it did."

"Then how did you mean for it to sound? Please, do tell, I am very curious," Russia pressed. "Because to everyone here it sounded like you've created a substitute for your lost colony."

"He's not a substitute," England shot back in defense of his newly born child. "I just wanted Alfred to know he's finally the big brother he always wanted to be. I wanted him to never forget where he came from, who his family are. But now, lately, it's all been one thing after another. He's changed his name, I'm not allowed to even speak to him in any sense like I used to. It's almost more than I can bear."

This is why children were a waste of time in Russia's eyes. They are born, you spend money and resource to keep them healthy—if you can—then you watch them grow until they're too big enough for even you. In the end they declare themselves a full-blooded country and demand that you see them like so even if they have to change their name and forget their parent nation for you to see them as such. He could tell England was upset but he honestly believed he needed to forget about the past losses and focus on raising his new little one. From what he heard it sounded like he had his hands full, so why bother hanging onto something that was no longer his?

Russia would never understand and he was grateful. England's gone through Hell and back and would continue to do so if he wouldn't forget. But he had no one to blame but himself and it was because of that fact that no one offered him any shoulder to cry on. It was survival of the fittest and if England wanted to cry then he could leave.

With his attention feigning from England, Russia realized America was still probably outside on the balcony where a chill began to creep into the air. With a lingering glance toward England who looked like he was preparing to leave the ball prematurely, Russia dismissed himself and sought out the former-colony.

There he was, on the balcony. Of course he hadn't been alone.

Russia narrowed his eyes at the new younger brother of Prussia. The boy had leaned against the railing next to the America and looked to be conversing with him in a comforting manner. In an angry motion, Russia ripped a coat out of one of an awaiting servant's hands and marched up to the two, draping the dark coat over America's shoulders the boy had been previously rubbing for warmth. The two turned to him and Russia found it very upsetting how the young German boy looked him in the eye like he was a force to be taken seriously.

"You can leave now, German," Russia stated, jutting his head back toward the ballroom. "I thank you for keeping Amerika company but your presence is no longer required now that I am here."

"Why don't you let Alfred decide who he wants to be with?" the boy suggested, crossing his arms and emitting a threatening aura off that made Russia want to laugh and puke in disgust at the same time.

"Oh, no, Russia, Ludwig wasn't stepping over any boundary. He was just being friendly, that's all," America defended, touching and tugging on Russia's black silver-lined sleeve.

"What's going on?"

Out came Prussia, and Russia had to refuse to let his body make an eye-rolling motion as the state
came into their presence.

"I can hear you all the way inside," Prussia said before looking at the two boys with a smile and then pushing them back into the ballroom. "Why don't you two get me some pastillas, lots of them. Those things are good!"

The two looked slightly confused before taking the chance to leave and head toward the tables of food.

"Wow, look at them. Can't believe Alfred's grown that big, and look, Ludwig is catching up. Did you know he's actually older tha—!

Russia had grabbed the vest of the Prussian and turned, slamming him against the railing of the balcony and nearly bending him in half over it.

"What the hell?!" Prussia's wide red eyes were full of shock and surprise.

"Keep your brother away from Amerika, do you hear me?" Russia threatened with a relatively harsh shake.

"W-What, why . . . are you courting him?" Prussia asked, though no more fear sweated out of his face this time the Prussian leaned closer in challenge and demand as if he were the threatening one.

"Da," Russia answered with another shake. "He is mine and has been promised to me by the General himself."

"The General?" Prussia asked before after a few seconds his eyes blinked in remembrance. "He what?!"

Russia pulled the Prussian off the balcony's ledge and dropped him. The albino was quick in recovery and despite the light snow on his outfit he neglected to wipe himself off as he stood his ground against the larger nation who had his back turned to him, watching the young boys gather pastries and fruit.

"What did that ghost do? He's got no more power," Prussia insisted.

"But he does," Russia said as he turned to him, his eyes traveling up into the forming snow clouds above head. "He'll be bringing a storm this night. I suggest you hurry home if you know what's best."

"You're delusional, you know that? You always have been!" Prussia spat, shaking his head at him before pointing back into the ballroom where the boys were. "That boy is not to be touched. If you touch him I swear to God I'll cut you in half."

"Is that a declaration of war?" Russia asked, narrowing his eyes at the albino who seemed unmoving.

"It could be," Prussia explained. "But for now, let's just call it a threat. That boy's been through a lot, more so than a child should go through. I swore when I was helping him learn how to stand in damn Georgian lines that I'd watch over him."

"He's not your little brother. There is no need to keep eyes on him," Russia said. "Free from his father he is free to the world—to trade, to touch, to wage war, whatever we want."

"He's too young," Prussia protested. "Less than half your age. You've mistaken your so-called 'promised one' for another. Keep your eyes away from Alfred."
"You keep your brother away from him then I might reconsider," Russia said, crossing his arms and standing his own ground. "Now, I have been a generous host. I've invited all of Europe to this event, enemy and all. I had not invited your brother though invitation was open but I can change my mind and decide to send the both of you on your way in the dead of the storm and see how you deal with the General this night."

"Hah, generous," Prussia mocked but he seemed to refuse himself from backing down from Russia. Turning back to him he stared him down before the snow began to fall at a steady pace. Glancing up Prussia shivered before glaring at Russia once more and then leaving the balcony to enter back into the ballroom.

"Here you go, Gilbert," America said with a welcoming smile as he offered the platter of pastries full of cream and fruits to the man. Just as asked.

"Thanks but it's getting late. We've got to go," Prussia said, taking his brother's arm, but the boy merely shook him off.

"Late?" Ludwig asked, eyeing his brother curiously before turning his eyes back out onto the dark balcony where a lone figure stood. "I don't want to return home now."

"Well that's too bad because it's past your bedtime," Prussia said as he took a hold of Ludwig's wrist and about dragged him to his side. "Sorry for all of this, Alfred. It really was good to see you again. Be sure to stop by again on your way home when you return."

"I will," America said while eyeing Prussia's strange behavior closely.

"Take care," Prussia said as he opened his arm and reached out to press the palm of his hand against the back of America's head to pull him into a close hug and then whisper to him, "Take the pistol out of my vest and keep it in yours. Do as I say. I don't trust the countries here."

America looked up at him with a raised brow before doing as he was told and when they pulled apart nothing looked out of place. Prussia smiled and ruffled the boy's hair before turning to his brother who pouted at their early departure and so he ruffled his straight locks as well and upset his brother enough for a few veins to burst on his forehead.

"Stop it with that face, we'll see him again. If you hadn't been out hunting earlier then you would have seen him when he stopped by last month," Prussia reasoned to the upset boy.

"Promise you'll stop by, Alfred." Ludwig looked expectant and Alfred only smiled and nodded. "I will, don't worry. It was a pleasure to meet you, Ludwig. It really was."

"And you as well," Ludwig said with a smile before the tug on his sleeve signaled his brother was leaving.

And so the Germans left and Alfred couldn't understand why before turning to glance out at the balcony and realize it had started snowing. He nodded and understood that they hadn't wanted to get caught up in the storm, though he knew Russia had plenty of room spare if they needed shelter for the night, so why . . . ?

"Russia? Don't you want to come inside?" America asked as he walked out on the balcony to see the Russian leaning against the railing and gazing out into the dark coldness. "You're going to become a snowman."

"Hm?" Russia turned to him with a sigh and America merely shook his head and made a place next to the larger country, staring out into the darkness with him. "Never mind," America said.
The two had stood there for time passed that no one kept track on. It was America who eventually broke the silence as he spoke, saying, "This is one reason why I don't attend these things. It's just too overwhelming." Leaning down on his arms, America let out a sad sigh and gazed out into the darkness, the snowfall turning the night blue and hauntingly beautiful.

"This is the world you fought so desperately to break into isn't it?" Russia asked, his own eyes only glancing once toward the boy next to him before gazing out into the night and often wondering if he spied the General floating around above, watching them, laughing at him.

"I didn't think it was," America said, shaking his head and wrapping the heavy coat around his shoulders tighter. "The world I fought to be free in was a world where the sun never set. The grass was always so green. The waters so clear. The skies endless and the clouds formed into fun shapes, perfect for sitting down and staring at. And then fields upon fields full of tall and bright sunflowers."

"Sunflowers?" Russia questioned. He had surely thought America might refer a different flower to his paradise, ones more common like the fragrant carnation or the beautiful rose.

"Yeah," America said with a nod and that bright smile was once again on his lips as he turned to Russia with even brighter eyes. "Have you seen one before? They are beautiful and remind me so much of the sunny days."

"Da," Russia replied. But he had never thought of them so homey before. He mostly used them for oil, especially during Lent. He never once had gotten the chance to see them in the beauty of bloom. He wondered if he'd like the sight as much as America apparently did. "Sunny days, hm?"

"What's your paradise, Russia?" America asked.

There he went again, asking him what he thought, as if he had a mind of his own.

Thinking about it though, Russia frowned. After coming to the realization that he had no concept of what a paradise was and therefore neglected in dreaming of one he felt . . . sad. Looking at America he saw the boy looking right through him.

"You've never . . . thought of one?" America asked, shock in his tone of voice as well as his gaze of eyes.

"Nyet," Russia admitted finding himself now to be the one to turn his gaze away as if he bore some shame. "I've been too busy to dream up some fantasy."

Russia felt his heart throw itself against his chest at the feel of America's hand touching his own that grasp tightly onto the balcony railing. In that moment he had wished he hadn't adorned black gloves so that he could feel the boy's skin which he imagined so soft for one so young.

"You're not now," America reminded and smiled sweetly up at the taller nation, gently nudging him to get his point across.

"Da, you are right," Russia said in knowing he wouldn't be able to deny that face if America kept looking at him like that. "Well if you wish me to imagine something I'm afraid my childhood years have ruined a good scene so if you would mind I stay a little in your paradise."

"Of course," America said, his smile widening and Russia felt the need to stroke his cheek and he did.

"Ah . . . Russia?" America blinked up at him in confusion while Russia felt his body move on its own as his hands raised and touched the American's jaw. He had been right, it was squaring nicely
and that baby fat was going away. He was growing up so fast—too fast.

"The costume is very befitting of you, Amerika. Just like your paradise of sun filled flower-valleys," Russia stated and it was then he could have sworn he saw that light-pink color dust America's cheeks again but it could be shadows from the lights from the ballroom inside. He was never sure. But his heart quickened nonetheless.

"You've said that before," America noted, offering a shy smile and oddly enough he didn't pull back. Did the boy not know? Could he not feel it? Was America so innocent to the vile thoughts of the nation with him? Could he not feel his want in those touches? Why wasn't he running away like he was supposed to? They always did. Every one of them.

If he didn't run away then Russia would want him to stay and then when he'd have to leave Russia would die.

"Are you cold?" Russia asked through his daze even though he saw no signs of the boy shivering. The question was unnecessary because as Russia pulled him close to his chest he could feel the heat radiating off of him, like the sun itself.

America was silent and still, his face turned up toward Russia and his eyes shining bright in its gaze that Russia couldn't place an emotion on. Because of the silence Russia held him tighter using the excuse of trying to warm the boy when in reality they both could just head back inside to the fires. Neither did, they both stayed out on the balcony bewitched by some kind of spell in the other's gaze and it was then Russia knew it was the General. He was giving him a chance to touch the boy so intimately and hold him against him.

Well, if that were the case then Russia wondered if the boy's heart was pounding rapidly underneath his ribs like his own was. So his hand slowly fell from America's jaw and down his neck before pressing against his chest and feeling –

Russia broke out of his daze and the moment he shoved his arm down the boy's golden vest America seemed to awake to the world around him as well.

"H-Hey!" America gasped. Before he could push Russia away the large nation pulled the pistol out and held it in his hand.

"I did not know you carry weapons to formal gatherings, Amerika." Russia tried to be lightly fair with the child to make sure he wouldn't notice his anger at the find but all of his playful tone was gone and his eyes narrowed into harsh glares. "How impolite."

"No, it's not meant to offend," America tried but he could sense how upset Russia was and so stepped back as the chilled winds picked up. Russia could tell he wanted to go back inside to the others but he stayed where he was to confront the problem. How grown-up of him to do so.

As Russia stared the boy down for answers America finally caved under his glare.

"Gilbert gave it to me," America admitted, looking downward.

"Prussia?" Russia might have known.

With trembling limbs Russia's fists clenched and he turned and threw the pistol over the balcony.

"Ah!" America gasped as he leaned over and watched the flying pistol descend into the darkness of the night, never to be seen again.
"Oops, looks like I dropped it," Russia joked bitterly. When he turned back to America he asked, "Why did he give it to you?"

"He... he said he didn't trust the others," America informed with slumped shoulders. "Look, Russia, I'm sorry about that. I didn't mean to offend or anything. I don't think Gilbert did either. You know I had issues with France previously, I think he was making sure he never touched me again."

Never touched him again. Russia inwardly chuckled. Hell, he would have just shot the damn frog if America asked him to. After touching America inappropriately and learning about the conflict America had started over the offense, Russia was ready to just march west to France's home and castrate him. He had been that upset.

But now, he was more so upset that Prussia of all had, 1. Brought a firearm to his masquerade ball when the things were prohibited and considered offensive if brought. 2. Leant it to the American for protection, and 3. Knowing that the Prussian meant protection against him. As if he were the one to threaten America the most!

Looking at America trying to defend the German state Russia realized that even the new country hadn't known which nation Prussia had been speaking of. Always the naïve one; that America.

"Perhaps you should return home, Amerika, since you clearly can't defend yourself from corrupt nations," Russia said as he turned his back toward the American.

"I can defend myself just fine!" America shot back. "He wasn't offering help but warning me as a friend."

"Friend?" Russia questioned as he turned toward America and leaned down a little to make it seem as if he were talking to a babe who didn't understand a thing about the world. "You do realize calling another nation by a human name is considered intimate and so therefore it is usually restricted to close allies, on the other hand equal partners."

"But we are," America explained. "We've both come to an agreement, Russia."

Russia was then to witness America's face growing red out of frustration as he turned and kicked over a potted fern sitting near. "Damn it, he was one of the first to recognize me! He helped me fight England. And after it was all over he didn't just abandon me to simple trading negotiations. He wanted to visit; he wanted me to be welcomed in his home, by his leaders and people. He treated me like a country and that is why I wanted to be close to him. And I swear I won't let even you push me away from him."

Well, Russia hadn't expected to get threatened by the boy. But he supposed he had it coming after learning of Prussia and America's bond. After a while Russia began realizing Prussia most likely saw the child liken to another little brother. The former Teutonic Knight was never one for romance or attraction.

"Well, then why don't you return to him?" Russia asked. He hated to give the American permission to go into the arms of another, but if the boy wanted it that bad then who was he to stop him?

"Because I came here at a friend's request," America said, once again coming closer as his courage gathered up. "I promised him I'd make it up to him for being late. I really am sorry for that, honestly. And if you would let me ask a question I'd like to know something that has been eating away at me since your recognition of me."

"What is it?" Russia nearly closed his ears to America's pointless questions but they only perked as
the boy asked,

"Why don't you call me by my name?"

"I assumed that was reserved for close friends," Russia said, gazing at the boy who was smiling at
him while shaking his head. Reaching out, America took Russia's hand, still clenched into a fist, into
his own. Slowly, he opened his palm to rub the cold fingers.

"I thought we had been just that for a long time," America reasoned and with that smile Russia found
himself smiling along with him.

"Da, Alfred." The name sounded good on his tongue and the happy smile he got from the boy made
him make sure he'd call him by that name more often.

America then glanced down and then back up to the Russian before glancing down again. Russia
had seen this before. He was trying to ask him something he was unsure of, so, Russia would sigh
and just force him to say it.

"What do you want to ask now, Alfred?" Russia asked and that same smile appeared as he used
America's human name.

"I was wondering, I don't mean to be offensive or anything, but . . . could I . . . will you . . . can I call
you by your human name?"

No one asks such a thing. The privilege is usually given when the nation decides their friend is close
enough in a manner they want and deserving of the title. But America was always full of questions
and he knew the child could take a "no" for the answer but he didn't feel like telling him that.
Instead, Russia smiled kindly and decided to ease himself with the different approach of confiscating
his name.

"Before you leave, I will give it to you," Russia announced as he grabbed America's hand in his own
and led him back inside. "Now come, return inside with me. I want to play some more."

Russia had always been good on his word. Sure enough he told the young nation right before he and
his men departed. It seemed that America had forgotten all about it as Russia leaned up on the step of
the carriage the boy was seated in and leaned against the window, pulling the boy's head close so
that his ear touched his lips.

"Ivan," Russia informed the name given to him by none other than the man who unified him and his
people. With that he pulled back and motioned for the driver to usher the carriage away. He smiled
as he watched America pop his head and shoulders out of the carriage window and stare back at him
in disbelief before he smiled and melted Russia's heart.

As the carriage vanished in the distance Russia wondered when he would inform the young nation of
his want to court. It is true he had already been doing it in secret. He was honestly surprised he
waited this long and now he was glad because the boy was growing into something that wouldn't
break under him but stand strong next to him.

"I shall sacrifice tens of thousands of lives to you, General Winter, if you would only bring him back
to me," Russia swore. His gaze holding in the direction where the carriage carrying away the love of
his life had faded from sight. "Promise me you'll watch over him when I cannot and to sway his heart
toward me when we are together. If you do I will give you everything."

Russia was always good on his word.
Historical Notes:

October 28th 1803 (twenty years after the official end of the American Revolution) the Russians finally recognize the ex-colonies as a nation.

When America was confused about Russia mentioning All Saint's Day it was because of America's Protestantism. Catholics and Protestants disliked each other so much that when a Holy Day [Holiday] came along the Protestants wouldn't observe it like the Catholics because they considered the day not really sacred but "catholic," so America wouldn't know too much about it, nor likely All Hallow's Eve (Halloween) seeing how he was a majority Protestant at the time. What do you expect when he was raised practically Puritan.

The reasons for the tensions between France and America in this chapter and current timeline is because of past grievances. There was the XYZ Affair (that was France touching America inappropriately) and because of that little rude gesture came the Quasi-War (1798-1800) with America and France. Later they signed treaties of peace but I think were still annoyed by that past issue.

America and England are on trading terms just not so much speaking terms. They are tense about this time [1803] even though the Jay Treaty is still in effect. This later escalates into the War of 1812 with the President of the United States refusing to renew the Jay Treaty in 1805 because of tension between the two counties.

The British Empire literally created another colony right after they lost the 13 Colonies. I guess they wanted one right away to the point that they put all the criminals together on some continent and called it a Colony. Yep, that's little Australia. Born in 1788, five years after losing America.

The reason for America defending Prussia is because the two were good friends at the time with their Treaty of Amity and Commerce officially on it's second run-through. A part of it also comes from the Prussian General, Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, who whipped the Continental Army into shape for official battle against the British Empire. So America has a lot to thank him for, that and relations never soured as quickly between the two like they did with England and France and the two continue with their friendship throughout the coming century.

[Le Gasp!] Russia doesn't love his Sunflowers yet? Well the Sunflowers are relatively new and were first discovered and domesticated in the Americas. The Europeans used them mostly for oil as did Russia at the time. So he didn't start thinking of the flower as a pretty decoration full of fragrance until later [possibly thanks to sunny America?].

And--

Yes, that's right! I made it to where Russia's paradise was originally America's. Partly because of his view on the sunflowers and close attachment to General Winter (Let's face it, if he lost that ghost then he'd probably get his butt conquered with no more blizzards to protect him) and then partly because I found it incredibly cute and sweet. :)
He wasn't too certain how it happened but he honestly didn't care for details. All Russia knew is that England and young America were once again at war. There were rumors going around Europe among nations and nobility alike, saying that England was trying to take back his former colony.

Of course the sheer thought of the rumor upset many a nation, especially Russia. Yet he had not the chance to ask England on this suspicious and impolite idea. The Brit had been away at sea for a while, combating America's small Navy which seemed to stand its own well against England's numerous fleets.

Either that boy was as skilled as he said he was in the ways of tactical warfare or he was just flat-out lucky. But he was Russia's to-be so he expected nothing less from the nation.

It was likely the Napoleonic Wars paved some sort of protection for the boy. Europe was in chaos and Russia in a dilemma. He wanted to see that face of sunshine again, but after years of turmoil between the nations he refused any visits. America had wanted to come and see his friends but Russia warned it too dangerous. France, on the other hand, had become someone completely different and it was hard for anyone to deal with.

Lately, since Russia had become an ally of England to put an end to France, Russia's heard word of America's support for France. Indirectly he supposed seeing how he had close trade with France. When England made it so that the young nation couldn't supply their enemy through the blockading of his own home that had been when America was forced to become violent.

Even the nation's fellow colony, Canada, suffered because of the Brit's ignorance. It was because of this America tried to coerce the other neighboring colony to break away from England's control and that had been when England became violent.

Paris, France. September 23rd 1814

After a long delay, England finally managed to make his way to Paris where Russia, Austria, and Prussia had already taken care of France and his "Emperor." He looked quite pleased as Russia held up the key to the city and when he took a seat Russia heard that relaxed sigh leave his lips.

"So glad you could finally join us," Russia said with a smile as he sat down in the chair opposite of England.

"I would have come sooner," England explained in an honest manner. "But the ships were all in a jumble. Had to straighten them out a bit."

Russia had received a letter. He knew exactly where England had been and what he had been doing.

"You have my deepest thanks for reining the responsibility of taking lead of the siege," England exalted as he looked toward Russia who hadn't exactly been making eye contact. "I heard France put up a fight."

"Da, he did," Russia. "But we crushed him without your help. By the way, I've been meaning to ask
you . . . ." Raising his hand Russia pointed under his own eye to signal England's state of appearance. "Where did you get that bruise?"

Sure enough England was sporting a lovely black eye. It was in the stages of healing but still quite noticeable and Russia was honestly surprised he came out in public like that. The Englishman was always so concerned about his appearance before the other nations.

Russia watched England raise his hand to let the tips of his fingers brush over the purple skin. He thought he saw England flinch, but perhaps it was just his imagination. England on the other hand seemed reluctant to speak of it.

"Just something fancy I picked up while in a scuffle with one of France's privateers," England gave.

"You were always the best at fighting those off," Russia offered his compliment though it was one of honest fakeness. "After these wars I should hope Europe to feel peace once again."

"What little we have is always nice," England said with a dreadfully pleasant smile.

"I hope the war has not reached the western hemisphere. Come to think of it, I haven't gotten too much trade from Amerika lately," Russia commented as if in thought before putting on his facading smile in font of the British Empire. "You've been there, da? Is everything well?"

"Uh, yes, everything is just fine," England said, looking away from the Russian and thusly letting him know his horrid tales were nothing but the lies he suspected them to be.

"How fairs little Australia? I heard he was getting big." Small talk was always most fun before landing down the truth in the lies.

"Yes, he is," England said with a sweet smile at the mention of his second child. "He's still taking his time in growing, which I don't mind. America grew up so fast that I hardly had time to enjoy his childhood. Australia, on the other hand, is set at a steady pace like I expected him to be. The boy does fancy snakes and lizards though; such ghastly things down there."

Russia humored England with chuckle in sync at the thought. "What of young Canada?" Russia asked knowing that if he mentioned that particular colony, the mention of the western hemisphere would disrupt England's thoughts.

Just as he expected England stammered. His eyes not meeting his.

"The boy's steady as well. He's been latching onto me lately, but that's quite alright," England explained.

"Is that so?" Russia asked before pulling out a letter from his pocket and setting it down on a small table next to him. "I heard that he was starving—that you were starving."

Russia watched in fun delight as England narrowed his eyes at the letter. He knew those sharp green eyes caught sight of the addressee. The moment those hues darkened and England's persona became more rigid was when Russia knew he caught him.

"Is that letter from America?" England asked. His back straightened and his limbs tensed. He looked ready for a fight and Russia found it humorous at the thought of official allies fighting. What would the nobility say?

"Da," Russia answered truthfully as he opened it and showed the man the handwriting that belonged to his former colony. No doubt it had been England who taught the boy to write like that; very nice
"I received this just two days ago. I had always been curious about why my trading ships were scarce and asked little Amerika for the reason in a letter. He finally wrote me back after two years of unanswered questions. And he told me everything. I like that about young nations—they're always so honest in the beginning."

"Did he tell you he was trying to get Canada to turn against me too?" England stated the question with a frown and sheer dislike for the nation's actions written all over his grim face. "Said he wants me out of the hemisphere."

"I can understand that," Russia said with a chuckle. "But does that give you an excuse to starve your own colony?"

"He's not my colony anymore," England snapped, turning his gaze toward the happenings outside the window nearest them.

"I wasn't referring to Amerika," Russia stated. When England's eyes widened and turned back to Russia the nation raised his brow. "He told me you wouldn't let him feed his brother. Over diplomatic and political issues? How cruel, England."

"He invaded!" England informed to make his point. While England began shifting uncomfortably in his seat, Russia began to wonder what other details he could squeeze out of the nation. It was simply amazing how one's anger could force them to spit out all sorts of tales and stories never before heard. "I told him to stay away from Canada, and he didn't listen, like usual. He said it was rightfully his land that he won back in his revolution. That is bullshit!"

"So to protect him, you starve him?" Russia asked.

"He's not your damn colony so you have no right to tell me what I can or cannot do to what is mine!" England stated with a final shake of his head.

"If you wish to smother the babe with his own pillow then be my guest. He is your colony. But I cannot have you do the same to little Amerika," Russia reasoned. "He is my close trading partner and I would wish you leave him alone."

"If you're so close then why don't you fight alongside him, hm?" England asked, raising his brow in wait. That snob persona had returned and Russia wondered when that had happened. He'd have to find a way to push him back down.

"I'm considering it," Russia said as he looked back down at the letter. "Especially after you burnt his home down. How upsetting. Where now shall he live?"

England gapped. Russia smiled. He guessed the man hadn't known he knew about that little detail.

"So impolite for a gentleman," Russia chided and it was then he watched England's face go red.

"He thinks it's some kind of a game!" England shouted. The Brit looked like he was tired of defending his actions against the new ambitious nation.

Even as Russia was stared down by the empire, Russia kept his smile. He was hard to break, especially when his hand was forced. That was right, England's forced his hand. Russia could feel the tears in that letter. The words seemed too hastily scribbled down, the ink bore smudges of palms and fingerprints belonging to the boy, the aroma of the paper itself smelt of charred plaster. It all bore the American's heart as he honestly explained to Russia what had happened and why.

"Apparently so do you in responding to his challenge," Russia said, his smile never faltering but it
had morphed into something more sinister than mischievous.

Leaning closer Russia opened his violet eyes and through sheer gaze offered the empire a challenge of his own.

"Since you're so fond of playing games, how about you and I play one of our own?"

It was more of a statement than a question and as Russia leaned back in his chair he reveled in England's look of upset anger.

St. Petersburg. May 19th 1815

"You want your damn compensation?" England quite quickly snatched his purse into his hands and just tossed it onto the table, the golden coins rolling out in every direction. "There!"

After that he stomped out of the room. Russia let out a sigh and turned his gaze toward the young ex-colony who had stood his ground against England's flare of anger of frustration. When the empire had officially left and one could no longer hear his boots stamping upon the floor outside America quietly took up the purse and began gathering the coins negotiated to him thanks to Russia.

Reaching out Russia took hold of America's wrist to stop him from a task that needn't be done at the moment.

"You can let the servants clean this up. Don't worry; they won't steal what's yours."

Just as soon as Russia finished his sentence he watched the boy flinch. Looking down Russia realized it was because of his grip on his wrist. He hadn't touched him too rough, in fact it was a mere brush of fingers he would say but the boy showed a sign of pain and because of that he pulled his hand back and looked down at the boy's shaking gloved fingers.

"Take off your gloves, Amerika," Russia commanded softly, but when the boy looked reluctant he narrowed his eyes and tried once more. "Alfred, listen to me. It is the least you can do after I arbitrated for you."

Still the blond was silent but Russia heard his sigh escape out through his nostrils before pulling at the fingers of his white gloves. One by one they came off before one hand was revealed while it worked on the other glove. Russia's eyes narrowed at the sight of burned flesh. When he watched America struggling with his second glove Russia stood and came to the boy. He stopped him and then silently offered his help.

Taking his hands in his, Russia tenderly took off the remaining glove while paying close attention to America's face for sign of discomfort. When his hands were barren of any covering Russia examined them and noticed how little they had seemed to have healed since he had heard about the burning of Washington D.C. He had thought that they'd . . .

"Why didn't you tell me about this?" Russia inquired as his thumbs softly skimmed over the blisters.

"Because it's nothing to worry about," America informed but Russia thought differently.

"You told me you watched him burn down your home from afar," Russia said, remembering the details of his letter written to him the previous year.

"I did," America answered honestly as he watched Russia's large fingers map the wounds on his hands that still stung to the slightest touch. "But that was after I escaped the building already set on fire."
"You're very foolish, you know that?" Russia reprimanded as he let go of the boy's hand and then turned back toward his desk only to take out a piece of parchment and begin to write something down.

"What are you doing?" America asked as he tried his best to look to see what Russia was writing only to realize his Russian wasn't as good as he thought.

"I'm sending an order to my royal physician," Russia replied as he curved the quill in a manner to let the American know he was signing his signature. "He's going to take a look at your hands and you're going to see him."

"I don't need that. I need to return home as soon as possible," America informed, shaking his head in refusal.

"Is this the only excuse you have now to come to Europe?" Russia asked. Looking at the boy, America honestly looked like he just wanted to leave. He may have been able to hide his wounds underneath fabric unlike England, but at least the empire would allow himself time to socialize with the rest of the nations, be them enemies or not.

"My capital was just burnt down, Ivan. My people need this money to help with the reconstruction," America insisted.

Russia knew that. But could anyone blame him for wanting to keep the boy for a little longer? He hadn't seen him since 1803 and he had worried that their relationship had grown too distant.

Russia let out a sigh and sat himself down at his desk. Weighing his options he knew he didn't have much to choose from. The aftermath of war was always so costly and time-consuming. He should know.

"Very well," Russia said, letting out a sad sigh. He wondered if America could feel his longing for him. "But promise me you'll see the physician. He is good."

"I can't stay long," America once again informed.

"Da, I know," Russia said. "I have business in Paris and would ask if you would accompany me. I will take you to port but am in need of company for the journey."

America smiled. Albeit it was a weary smile but he smiled kindly. It was a yes.

The carriage ride was pleasant and strangely quiet, but Russia didn't mind as long as the boy was in his presence. He slept a majority of the way which happened to be against Russia's side with his golden head on his shoulder. This offered a chance for Russia to examine those shiny locks and feel their texture as akin to silk. Often times Russia had to stop himself for fear of confusing the boy when he awoke. But he realized he could run his fingers through the child's hair for eternity if he was given that one sentence.

He slept soundly for the most part and Russia realized he had just been weary from his conflict with England. He was so young; it was no wonder he was so tired.

"Alfred, it's time to wake up," Russia cooed him as he lightly shook his shoulders. The boy stirred and groggily looked at him before closing his eyes in an attempt to sleep once more. Russia chuckled at the boy's reluctance to get up and so decided it was a fine opportune moment to chance holding him in his arms.

The boy was warm; always had been. As Russia held him close and walked up the board to the ship
he couldn't shake the feeling that his arms were tightening around the boy as if they did not want to let go. Perhaps they didn't. He knew he, himself, didn't want to let go so why not the very limbs attached to his being?

But a promise was a promise. He said he'd take America to port as he traveled to Paris. He tried to persuade him to accompany him to Paris first before the ships but the young nation insisted and Russia was never one to refuse him.

Laying him down in a hammock Russia took the boy's hands and decided to redress them. After gently fastening clean bandages on the boy's poor hands Russia offered both a kiss. He was certain America would be upset over not being able to bid him a proper farewell but Russia understood that he needed his rest.

With a sad sigh Russia turned and made to leave the cabin.

"Ivan."

Turning, Russia witnessed an ever weary nation, who looked like he could barely keep his eyes open, rise in his hammock only a little. The child hadn't even made an attempt to sit up in his hammock but he stared at him with eyes pleading he stay.

Russia could never deny the boy anything.

"Return to slumber, little Alfred," Russia coaxed, standing in the arc of the doorway.

"Am I leaving?" Alfred asked, his lids becoming heavy and attempting to close for a long time.

"Da," Russia answered. "I will see you some time later. Promise me?"

"Maybe . . . we can go fishing . . . sometime?" Alfred suggested though Russia often wondered if the boy was just dozing in and out of his dreams.

"Fishing?" Russia questioned.

"At . . . my home," Alfred muttered before light snores were heard. He was gone to the world and didn't manage to catch Russia's wide smile. The boy had just officially invited him over and Russia felt his heart doing flips inside his chest.

"Da, fishing with you sounds good," Russia whispered before leaving the ship that was to take the boy home. Now that he had an excuse to visit he would be sure to hurry and do just that as soon as possible. If his Tsar forbid he go, seeing European dilemmas more important than building relations with the young country, then Russia would just threaten him with General Winter.

Nothing was going to stop him from visiting America in his own home.

Oregon County, North America. June 30th 1834

"Ooooh! I got one!" America exclaimed as he yanked the salmon out of the waters and tried his best to hold onto the flailing thing. Just as it flung out of America's grip Russia reached over and caught hold of the fishing line still attached to its mouth and wrapped it securely around his thumb.

"Hold it like this this time, Alfred," Russia advised as he took the fish by the mouth and then handed it to the American who just laughed and did as told.

"Sorry," he apologized and then stuck the fish into a barrel. "Guess I got too excited. First catch of
Russia chuckled and turned toward the sun as it began its descent. He, himself, had already caught a
good six fish while the poor young nation still had nothing to show for it except now that decently
sized salmon. They had started their fishing day early morning and continued throughout the day
enjoying the others company. It was near a perfect day and Russia was finding it a shame it was
ending so soon.

"Hey, Ivan, can I ask you something?"

Russia turned and noticed the boy staring at him as if concentrating on something. Raising a brow
Russia allowed him to ask and it was then the older nation understood why the young country
looked at him like so. Pointing toward Russia, America looked him in the eye, like he often does
when asking any sort of question, and asked—

"Why are you wearing a winter scarf? Aren't you too hot?"

Russia smiled and touched the scarf wrapped around his neck. He was surprised the American hadn't
asked him sooner, but most of America's visits consisted of the late fall or winter seasons so it was
understandable.

"For the longest time I thought it was some sort of ascot," America admitted.

"This was a present from my sister," Russia answered as his gaze fell down to the line in the water
below the small dock they had sat themselves on.

"Your sister?" America questioned. "I didn't know you had any siblings."

Holding up two fingers Russia smiled and glanced back toward the boy. "I have two."

America's smile seemed to brighten. "Really?" he asked. "How come I've never met them before?"

Russia wasn't going to admit that it was because he forbade his sisters from seeing him. He was
certain that young America wouldn't understand just how odd his sisters were. Knowing little
Belarus, America would likely get chased by her. The sheer fright from that ordeal would turn the
boy against future visits to Russia and he just couldn't have that.

"They were always away when you visited," Russia lied and watched America's shoulders slump.

"Well that just won't do," America said as he crossed his arms. "I guess I'll just have to take a sizable
trip sometime so I could meet them. You'd introduce me, right?"

Russia was reluctant to answer the child. In all honesty he had no intention of introducing his sisters
to the boy or the boy to his sisters. He knew that'd spell a disaster and probably further strain his
relationship, with his sisters for being the cause of his affectionate leaving him. But America was
right; he would have to eventually meet them. Any courting partner should meet their significant
other's family. Those were the rules.

Then again, that was only after their courtship becomes official. Right now, Russia doubted the boy
even knew he was being secretly and discreetly courted. He wondered when he should inform the
boy of this ongoing status he's silently marked out to the other nations.

"I wish I could see my siblings," America muttered. When Russia turned to look at him he watched
the boy pull his knees up to his chin, his grip on his fishing pole loosened at the weary thoughts of
himself being a big brother in name only.
That was right; he had two little brothers now. It was a shame that he couldn't see them. The life of a nation was hard, especially a nation with siblings. Russia's known so many countries who've had to be separated from their sister or brother for centuries on end. But it was their fate and Russia knew America had to realize this as well.

"I'll take you one day to see them," Russia finally said. This time his statement held a promise. He hated seeing America saddened by the fact that he could not see his little brothers and so if the only way to lighten his mood on the subject of siblings was to show his own then Russia would do it, no matter the dangers. After all, as he's realized before, a soon-to-be mate needed to grow acquainted with their promised family. It was only fair.

"I'd very much like that," America said with a smile before his line was tugged—quite harshly. "Wah!"

And with a splash the boy had flown off the dock and into the waters below. It was late June. The waters were warm and so Russia felt no need to dive in to save him from an icy death.

Popping his head out of the waters America coughed and shook off the water from his locks of hair before looking up at Russia who simply sat where he was, looking as if nothing had happened.

"Thanks for catching me, Ivan!" America complained as he crossed his arms and narrowed his eyes at the Russian still dry on the docks.

Russia just smiled, rolling his shoulders and then casting the fishing line again. "Nothing is broken. You are fine," he simply stated before watching in amusement as America's face grew red and he reached down into the waters as if looking for something. Raising his brow Russia watched closely, curiously, before to his surprise the boy pulled up a fish, albeit a small one, and tossed it at him.

The small creature hit Russia right against the shoulder. Russia would have dodged it hadn't he been so surprised that America had caught the fish with his bare hands. Instead he opted to let it hit his coat. There was nothing wrong with getting the fabric a little wet. But the problem with that had been how Russia underestimated the velocity of the toss. America had thrown it harder than expected and so Russia had lost his balance and the wooden stool he sat on wobbled until it toppled over along with his frame.

SPLASH!

"Oh! Ivan I am so sorry. I didn't mean to . . . I didn't think . . ." America apologized all the way toward where the Russian had fallen into the waters. He waded over to him as the Russian stood up, his hair covering his eyes as water cascaded down onto his lips stretched out in a straight line—neither frowning nor smiling, but it was assumed it was border frowning.

"Would you look at that, you even held onto your fishing pole," America noted upon looking down to see the pole still intact in the Russian's grip. All America could offer was a weak chuckle while Russia moved his bangs out of his eyes and looked down at the him. America smiled apologetically up at him.

For some odd reason Russia had yet to find himself able to smile at his predicament.

"Such a rude host; do you want me to catch my death of cold?" Russia asked trying to make the boy feel sorry for him.

"Hey, it's almost July," America said with a smile and a wink as if that would excuse his accidental actions. "The sun's hot and the water's refreshing. Perfect combination."
"Da, it is," Russia said with a nod as he pushed the rest of his bangs away from his face. "Then why don't you cool yourself down?"

With that he pushed the American down under the waters. The smile was back on his lips and Russia couldn't help but feel odd. Normally he'd be drowning his enemies this way but now he was actually playing in the water, innocently dunking the boy and splashing at him when he surfaced. He'd normally strike back with war when someone like America challenged him and continued their little water-play, circling round and round, but he knew in his heart that this was innocent, this was a means to bond and Russia was enjoying himself.

He couldn't remember the last time he had done such a thing.

"Ah, ah! Watch it, that's pure cotton!" America cried out as Russia tossed the line and hook his way, the hook catching onto the boy's vest and pulling. Russia paid no mind and just reeled the nation in before lifting him up with one arm.

"Well, what a catch I have today. Looks like I win, Alfred. My prize is the best," Russia announced in a playful manner before wriggling the boy like some cod he caught.

"H-Hey! Put me down!" America cried out, his face growing red with frustration of not being able to break free sooner than he'd like. "I'm no one's prize!"

"Really?" Russia questioned as he spun around a little to disorient the boy playfully, but secretly trying to keep him still in his arms to perhaps obtain more information from him. "Then how would one win you?"

"They'd put me down for starters!" America groaned out from the dizziness invoked upon him.

Russia smiled and did as America wished. Chuckling in amusement as the young nation stumbled around trying to regain his footing. Shooting out a hand Russia steadied the blond and watched him blink before he set those blue eyes upon him. The fact that they were both still waist deep in the water was forgotten as they spoke.

"Anything else than placing you upon your feet?" Russia asked, quite curious what the American thought about this subject and even if he knew what he was talking about.

"Why does it matter?" America asked as he shook his head before looking up toward the sky, successfully shaking off his dizziness. "I've decided to remain in my own hemisphere. Shouldn't think anyone would want to court someone who doesn't leave the comfort of their home."

Ah, so the child did know what Russia was playing at.

"So you've received offers," Russia inquired. "What did I tell you, little Alfred? It wouldn't be long before the others flocked at your door with proclamations and offers."

America offered a soft smile before touching his wet sleeves and keeping his arms above the waters. "You were right, Ivan, like usual."

Ivan inclined his head at the praise but continued to play with him for more information. "Of course I'm sure they were all very saddened when you turned them down," Ivan said with a chuckle, but listened and watched closely if he was mistaken.

America nodded his head and glanced away bashfully it seemed. "I had to," he reasoned. "They were all just too old for me."
Russia frowned. Is that what America disliked?

"I shouldn't think you'd find anyone close to your age unless you wish to be with Canada," Russia said. He found himself amused at the dislike in America's face the moment his stepbrother was mentioned.

"Mattie?" America asked. "No thank-you. He's practically my sibling and that's just . . ."

"Odd." Both America and Russia had said it in unison. The boy laughed at the timing and Russia doubted he knew just how much he could relate to the shivering creepiness in those words.

The sound of a bell's chimes caught the two's attention. Turning they both frowned to see a ship sailing along the coast as if it were a personal search convoy. Though, it might as well have been seeing how it was a Russian schooner.

"It's your ship," America stated with a frown as the bells chimed once more to gain their attention. "Couldn't they have waited at port?"

Russia said nothing. He thought the same but knew that it must have been something important if the ship sailed around the coast in search for him instead of waiting at port with the destined time, which was tomorrow.

Turning Russia began trudging out of the water. He was the first back upon he docks and when he turned, simultaneously trying to dry off his shirt, he looked to see a defiant America with his arms crossed. He was still wading in the water.

"Come out or you'll catch a cold," Russia commanded in his elderly tone. But there was no sound of movement nor word from the boy. He was still not coming out.

"It's not fair," America pouted. "You were supposed to leave tomorrow."

"Timing is never our friend, Alfred," Russia stated with an apologetic sigh. "We can make one appointment and then the sands shift and change making sure we never see it." He leaned down and offered his hand. When the boy took it he offered an easy smile.

"When will I see you again?" America asked.

"Are you certain you want to be seen around with this old man?" Russia teased as he helped wring the boy's wet shirt.

America looked cute with his cheeks puffed up like that. The boy was always so emotionally open that it was endearing. Only him though. If any other country decided to act the way young America did then Russia feared he may try to kill them from sheer annoyance. With America, he could never grow tired of his gestures.

"You're different," America assured.

"Am I?" Russia asked with a raised brow.

"Yeah, like Prussia," America stated with a sure nod. He was lucky his eyes were closed because he missed Russia's frown in its entirety. "I had invited him over too but he's also been busy."

"Well, perhaps it's because I've been keeping you. I'll leave to let him have you to himself," Russia informed. Though he honestly didn't mean it, it was just his way of showing the child his silent dislike for his closeness with the German.
"I didn't mean it that way," America assured as he grabbed a hold of the Russian's arm and tugged. "I like you both very differently and I want to spend time with you separately."

"So is it fishing with me and hunting with him?" Russia asked.

"We don't always have to go fishing if you don't want to," America offered.

"I enjoy whatever you want to do," Russia stated.

"Then will you return in the future?" America asked expectantly.

"When would you like me back?" Russia asked, leaning closer to the American who noticed this and so leaned back. Odd, the boy usually stood his ground.

"How about tomorrow?" America asked with a chuckle but that sad smile returned. "I know . . . you have to leave now."

"When I can clear my schedule, I'll see what I can do," Russia informed.

"Don't make me wait too long," America insisted and this time his smile fell to a small frown. He looked quite sad at the aspect of waiting for another visit from Russia and it made the older nation very happy at that fact. But it still hurt to see the boy so upset over his departure and he cursed his people for coming early to receive him.

Just as Russia was to whisper goodbye in his tongue the boy came close and wrapped his arms around him. He was hugging him. He often wondered if he mistook him for Prussia. The boy was always hugging the albino and the gestures seemed akin to something brotherly, so . . .

"Farewell, Ivan," America whispered. He then pulled away before the Russian could say anything.

It was only polite to return a "goodbye" or "farewell" in kind but Russia hadn't and he didn't know why. It could have been because he didn't want to leave or he swore to himself that he'd return as soon as possible. In all honestly it was a mystery. Even as he stood aboard the deck of his ship amongst his men come to return him home due to important issues in the uprisings of his people over the monarchy he never said a word and only smiled longingly at the boy who stood with his people waving farewell down on the docks.

He had imagined that the country was looking at him with just as much longing and always wished that fantasy become a reality, but he was never certain. It could be because of his age compared to the little one but frankly he didn't want to think about differences that the American seemingly took to heart and concerned himself over. So, instead, Russia only took to waving back in gestures of goodbye and keeping his eyes on the boy until he was out of eyesight.

"Wait for me, Alfred, I will return. Even if my country is thrown into civil war I will return. This I promise," Russia swore to himself and placed his hand over his chest to soothe his aching heart.

Chapter End Notes

Historical Notes:

Time frame is: the Napoleonic Wars [1803-1815] and the War of 1812 [1812-1815]
In the Napoleonic Wars Russia, England, Prussia, Austria and others are allies against France and enemies which is why Russia and England talk to each other slightly easier.

Russia was frankly the one who took Paris during Napoleon's first defeat in his country and is so considered the hero in the war this time around.

When Russia talked about a game with England it was a reference to the Great Game; a rivalry between the Russian Empire and the British Empire over trade and territory, etc. which began around this time.

The British Empire was in fact more concerned with the Napoleonic Wars since it was happening in their own back yard than their skirmish with the U.S. But they still fought with them on the sea and eventually sent in troops to the Americas thus fighting on land. The British army was the last force to territorially invade the U.S.

Also, the U.S. was somewhat placed on the side of Napoleon albeit, sorta, indirectly simply because they continued trade with the French during a time when England wanted them to stop, seeing how they were in fact supplying their enemy. But, as you can see, America didn't give a hoot!

The mention of Canada starving was based on England's blockade on New England (America's east coast). Because of that blockade in 1814 the trade went way down and also Britain and Canada suffered because the British Empire was the major trader with America during that time soooo, it was kinda like starving Canada.

And yes, Canada is not America's brother/twin in this fanfic. Why? Because he's France's son since France colonized after England, which happened to be just a year after America's birth in 1607. Canada was born in 1608. [Yes, I'm going by the actual Canadian colonies and not Acadian because if that were the case then America could be considered older more so since the Spanish colonies preceded the 13 colonies and those territories were eventually absorbed into him.] There's ma logic. So Canada is England's adopted son who loves him to death and therefore America's stepbrother.

And, after the 1812 War America wanted money for damages and the return of their slaves. It just so happened that the Tsar of Russia, Alexander I, helped negotiate for America and so England ended up handing over the slaves and paying over a million bucks in damages. In the end, the British found their purses pretty light.

The United States' capital, Washington D.C. was burnt down in 1814 by the British trying to weaken the Americans morale and it was the President's house that America had been in when it was burned.

The fishing little date was actually a slight reference to the Russo-American Treaty of 1824 and partly the Ukase of 1821 where America and Russia agreed that Russian ships can fish near the Oregon County territory.

And if you're curious, America's 2nd little brother mentioned is New Zealand who was born in 1815.
Russia hated rumors. He found them quite useless because they were usually never true. He more so hated true rumors, especially when it involved evil deeds or deeds to be done upon him and his allies. He had remembered the one rumor floating around at nobility parties early the century; the one where it had been rumored England planned on taking back his colony. That was false of course and it had only been a matter of trade and treaty issues. He had made sure the empire had no plans in doing such a thing.

The current one going around Russia's palace was of equal debating concern. It was about America. Though small and only heard by perhaps only two people, there was rumor of a civil war. A civil war? This early on? Impossible. Or was it?

Russia had sat himself down and written the young nation a letter, to which he had never replied. It had been years since he had seen or heard from him. He was concerned and it was disheartening his sisters.

"Vanya, will you please eat your meal? You've passed three already in the last two days," Ukraine pleaded as she sat next to her brother and sister while they tried to enjoy an easy breakfast between each other.

Russia merely stabbed his knife into the pastries presented to him to eat. He had not been in the mood to indulge in things trivial like hunger; after all, he didn't need to eat as often as the humans serve him. He was a nation and he could go months if not years without nourishment if he needed to. He had not heard from America in years and just a few days ago his worn old letter returned with the seal still intact. The child hadn't even touched it much less read his concerning words paragraphed out explaining his need to know if he were well.

While Ukraine looked on in worry; always concerning herself with her younger sibling's health and eating habit, Belarus, Russia's little sister, looked quite annoyed and simply slapped her silverware down beside the porcelain plate.

"Is this about that little boy I always see you with?" She demanded it in a condescending tone with her fists clenched and all.

Russia rolled his eyes and found an annoyance instead of a fear for his overly obsessed little sister. Narrowing his eyes he looked at her and actually stood his ground.

"He is a very close friend, Natalia, of course I am concerned over his welfare," Russia stated. With his mood further more ruined by his sister's insensitive words, he stood and ignored the deadly glare from the girl.

"Perhaps little Alfred doesn't quite take a fancy to you like you do to him," she said with a mean chuckle and even harsher smile.

"How do you know his name?" Russia asked. He never told his sisters about the boy's human-given name. They didn't need to know. They didn't deserve to know.
"I hear it come out of your lips whilst you moan in your sleep," Belarus admitted, though obviously not ashamed that she informed her brother that she watched him sleep at nights. "Or were you sleeping?"

That knowing smile from the girl was daunting and Russia felt his blood boil. He would usually feel an embarrassment over his sister knowing about his nightly fantasies but he didn't this time. This time he just felt an anger. So to release said pent up tensed anger Russia took hold of the round breakfast table and flipped it.

"How dare you enter my wing and sneak into my chambers to watch me sleep!" Russia shouted, trying to intimidate his sister but she stood her ground well with her arms crossed, eyes narrowed, and jaw jutted outward.

While he had succeeded in startling his older sister, Ukraine, who was now trembling in her seat, Belarus remained unshaken.

"Because I will do whatever is necessary to avoid competition when I feel threatened," Belarus stated.

Russia hadn't even realized he rose his hand to strike his own sister until Ukraine had jumped in her seat and cried out, "Ivan, don't!"

Blinking back into reality with a halt, Russia turned toward his raised hand, looking at the limb in surprise, as if he hadn't known how it had gotten to that position. Pulling it back quickly to his side Russia looked down in shame and offered apologetic glances toward both startled sisters.

"Were you going to hit me?" Belarus asked in surprise before an anger arose in her that made Russia's arm and fingers twitch to repeat the occurrence. "Were you?"

The young girl jumped out of her chair and pressed herself close to her brother as if trying to force an answer out of him that he himself didn't know.

"Answer me!" Belarus demanded even against her older sister's begging that she stop and not try their brother any longer.

To avoid another incident Russia left quickly. He could hear Belarus attempting to follow him but when she shouted out complaints he knew that Ukraine had caught hold of her and held her back. He hadn't meant for his frustration to lash out in such a way as that. He didn't care if it affected his eating habit, but he did care if it affected his social life.

He would later apologize to his sisters for his impolite departure but now he needed to be alone. He realized after his letter had returned that he'd probably just have to ask the other countries if they had heard anything, particularly the nations America often traded with. He didn't want anyone thinking him too odd nor too obsessed, which was never good for socialization. If they realized his unhealthy want and need for the boy then they'd never talk to him and no one would fill his parties. Having other countries around to converse with was always much more fun and isolation was the last thing Russia wanted.

The once heard rumor was never brought up when Russia asked the other countries, but, as far as he found, America had yet to contact anyone else directly either.

Königsberg, Province of Prussia. February 1861

"No, we haven't heard anything much from him. He hasn't even visited since a few decades ago."
Russia narrowed his eyes and flattened his lips in a straight line as he looked down to see Prussia's little brother standing before him. He'd grown substantially since he last saw him—which was at the masquerade. Looking at him and noticing the fit physique and the building muscle, Russia wondered if this young child would become a state any time soon like his brothers—or worse, a country.

"I wasn't talking to you, otrod'ye," Russia stated with a forced smile, though the smile neglected to hide the threat that was heard in his tone.

"Step aside, West," Prussia commanded from where he had been lounging on a soft chair near the blond boy. Prussia's little brother seemed reluctant to step aside showing Russia the child's spirit but at least he listened to his brother and got out of the way of the Prussian's line of sight with the Slavic nation before Russia did something he wouldn't regret.

"Ja, we've heard nothing from him," Prussia said. "I admit I'm growing concerned, especially with that rumor going around."

"What rumor?" Russia played ignorant simply because he wanted to see if the Prussians were speaking of the same things the Russians were. He certainly hoped not and dreaded what Prussia was going to inform him.

Prussia opened his mouth to answer but stopped himself short, leaving an anticipating Russia to nearly topple over a cliff of disappointment. He watched the albino turn to his brother who looked like he was waiting for an answer as well. Before anything else Prussia pointed toward the door.

"Ludwig, could you please leave the room?" Prussia asked. It really was more like a demand.

"Why?" the young one asked. His blue eyes glanced up toward Russia and the older nation could have sworn he saw some sort of threat in that gaze before they turned back toward the boy's brother. "What's wrong?"

"This is nothing but political talk," Prussia informed with a nice smile. "I know how much you hate listening to it."

"No it's not; you were just going to tell him—"

"Ludwig, please, do as you're told," Prussia insisted, his tone harsher and his gaze intense.

Reluctant again, but he listened. Russia offered a smile for the Prussian who was finishing a sigh of frustration.

"What an obedient child," Russia complimented. Silently praising that the younger German was no longer in his presence.

"Ja, he's a good boy," Prussia agreed. "Just didn't want him to hear this and get any ideas. You know he quite likes Alfred? They play together all the time when he visits and he gets so upset when Alfred has to leave. Heh, he even proposed a courtship but I refused and told him he couldn't until he's become a nation like Alfred; it only being fair. He got so upset with me but he's striving toward that goal and he's making me proud."

Is that so? Russia bitterly thought inwardly. Well, Alfred, looks like someone your age had asked you. You'll have to explain to me why you declined.

"Da, how funny," Russia said with a smile, surprisingly he managed a pleasant tone. Now Prussia needed to tell him what their rumor was or else he was three seconds away from heading out where that little German child was and strangling him to death for having the gall to ask for Alfred's hand in
Prussia smiled along with Russia before sitting upright and entwining his fingers together on his lap. "So many rumors go around my courts that I throw out most like the shit they are, but when someone talks about this particular subject it tends to attract every nation's ear and get their devious minds a-ticking."

"What is it?" Russia asked with a look of concern. The concern was true, but he was more so annoyed with the delay of the answer than anything else and it took everything Russia had not to bite at the German to get him to tell him what the rumor he's heard was.

"There is a rumor about civil war in America," Prussia informed and from that Russia's heart dropped into his belly. That cold sweat cascading over him suffocated him.

"Civil war?" Russia asked with wide eyes. His fears had been confirmed but he had to put on a show for Prussia. The man always enjoyed being the first one to know, so Russia let him have the glory of it if he wanted it.

"Ja, I don't know if they are true, but it is what I've heard," Prussia informed with a shake of his head. "Have you heard anything on your side?"

"Nyet. This is the first time I've heard about this," Russia lied. "Well, I thank you for telling me this. I'll ask the others if they've heard anything."

"You tell me what you've heard," Prussia said. He was concerned, Russia knew but he just found him so unworthy to care. What would he do if it was found America was caught in a civil war? He didn't think the Prussian could do anything and so he would probably not tell him anything more if he discovered more rumors of said case.

Russia offered a goodbye in German before turning to leave. When he exited the door he had found Prussia's little brother close. He had been listening in. The boy looked up at him as he moved back and aside. Without offering an apology for snooping or anything he excuses himself from Russia's side and maneuvers around him to enter the room where his brother remained.

Russia could hear the boy shouting at his brother in their tongue. Russia knew German well enough to know the little one was shouting his upset over the fact that Prussia had neglected to tell him about the rumor of a possible unstablity in America's home. The sound of concern in the little German's tone upset Russia, especially after finding out about his proposal but he was just a child and therefore offered no competition, so Russia tried to pay him no mind.

So Russia was on his way and proceeded to ask other nations about rumors and such. To his dismay he had found the rumors to be true by England himself.

London, England. February 1861

Russia gasped in horror at the news. He was disturbed by it, especially by England's lack of concern. The nation simply sat there drinking his tea and scrolling over documents in regards to his trading and his younger sons' development.

"How could you be so calm about this?" Russia asked, his limbs shaking, trying earnestly to control his anxious trembles so to not let England see—wasn't like he was looking at him in the first place. "You know how horrifying a civil war can be!"

"Doesn't matter. It's not my problem to deal with," England stated, idly sipping his tea. "I've secured my trade in neutrality. He's not going to involve anyone else in this. This is his problem alone to deal
"He's your son," Russia reasoned.

As soon as he said that England stilled himself. He looked at him with sharp green eyes and then quietly sat his teacup down and then the parchments after evening them out on his knees. He crossed his legs and then leaned forward with his chin resting lightly on his knuckles. Offering Russia a smile, he said—

"Haven't I lost all rights to that title? Have not you, the others, and he forbidden me from calling him such? Yes? Then stop pointing your damn finger. I can no longer protect him. That is up to him, even if it's against himself."

With that England leaned back in his chair, took up a piece of paper and then his tea to drink once more. Russia wouldn't be able to talk to him any longer. He simply didn't care for reasons such as abandonment. So Russia left and contemplated what he'd do at his own home.

St. Petersburg, Russia. March 1861

"You need to calm down, Russia," Russia's current Tsar said as he rose his hand to halt the nation's pacing before his throne. "Your feelings for the nation can often misguide your actions. You need to think about what needs to be done and what can be left undone."

"I need to protect him; that's what needs to be done," Russia stated hastily.

His Tsar looked at him with a frown and contemplated his options. Russia, in truth, couldn't do anything his ruler didn't promote but there were ways of persuasion and if Russia had to call General Winter to . . .

"I know of your heart's longing, Russia, but for me to help there must be another reason besides emotional feelings toward another," His Tsar explained. "Could it be concerns with trade, would the conflict clash with treaty or territorial issues? Whatever you decide I will support."

Russia could choose any one of those, but he decided to put a truth in his move to help the boy. His Tsar was right; he couldn't just run off and abandon his people with the excuse of close affection even though most of his people now knew of his feelings toward the American nation. His people deserved more than that.

"After speaking with the other nations," Russia rationed. "I heard signs of possible threats to the United States of America. England is in favor of a split even though he hasn't officially stated it. France could pirate his defenseless cargo ships since his military ships are busy scuffling the other. I don't know what the Ottoman Empire would do once he finds out. And Spain . . . I don't want anyone to interfere. I know I must leave him to his own disputes but I want to make sure no one takes advantage of him in his fragile time. Please, let me go to him."

Russia's Tsar understood, he could see it in the man's eyes. So, no one stopped him from leaving with a flock of ships and sailing to the western lands unannounced to the government. It didn't matter, Russia was certain they were already too busy with the conflict and therefore wouldn't mind foreign friendly ships in their waters.

Washington D.C. USA. November 1861

When Russia and his ships had docked he was the first off the ship. The American people seemed surprised to see him and the ships, and by looking at their faces he could see their weariness.
"Where is your governor?" Russia asked the sailors and traders around but he hadn't had to look for long. The older man so titled as such rushed up to him and his men, and with wide eyes asked—

"Russian Empire? Why have you graced us with this sudden surprise?"

Pointing toward the ships and the Captain who traveled with Russia, the nation said, "I have heard about the turmoil in this land, and so has most of Europe. I have come to offer naval support in making sure the others don't attempt any foul play."

"You have?" the Governor looked surprised but a bright grateful smile appeared just as soon. "God bless you! We could use a little sense of security as of late."

"Where is he?" Russia asked quickly.

When the Governor frowned he cast his eyes down and then glanced inland. "He's this way, follow me."

Without another word Russia was led by the Americans to where they were keeping their country and when Russia set his eyes upon the young one his heart nearly broke at the sight.

He was near in a fetal position. His hands were wrapped around those golden locks of hair and looked as if they were trying to pull chunks of the strands out. His eyes shook, the gaze therein was not fixated on anything. His lips moved in mutters of incoherent words. And his limbs twitched in rhythmic trembles.

He looked pained.

"Alfred," Russia whispered as he drew closer. He barely paid mind to the humans who left him in alone silence. They didn't seem to mind a foreign nation approaching their distraught country. Good, they knew they were not enemies and they trusted him enough to leave him alone with their fragile minded nation.

Touching his trembling shoulders Russia pulled the nation over to see his face. His eyes never focused on him and his hands seemed to grip his head tighter. Russia briefly feared those powerful hands would crush his own skull. So his first mission was to pull those arms away, but America was strong.

"Let go," Russia tried coaxing but was finding it difficult to pull the limbs away from the danger they could create. His tone never deepened or resounded in threat. He stayed calm for him to his best ability because he knew what it was like to go through this state and he wanted to help America.

"Let go," he once again said and, slowly, he managed to pull the arms away and press them against his sides.

For a moment he thought the shaking had stopped, that perhaps America would look at him, but that was not the case. Instead the younger shook more violently, breaking free from Russia. He got up and began walking away, grasping his head, and crying.

"It hurts!" America cried out, shaking his head and opening his mouth wide from the pain. "Ah! It hurts so much!"

Russia came up to him and wrapped his arms around him in protection. He held him close and dealt with America shaking and pushing against him, crying to be released. Russia just held him there before he began to sit, bringing America with him.

"Still, still," Russia whispered as he pet his hair and held him tightly so he couldn't break free. "Let
me shield you. Let me do this."

But America continued to cry out from the pain. It hurt to hear those sounds. Russia was used to the laughter and pleasant voice of the young country, not these horrendous and torturous cries of agony. But it couldn't be helped, especially not in this state. So Russia held him and tried to let the boy feel his concern and know that he was there to help.

For months America trembled in his arms, and even though Russia had always wanted to do this; to hold him in his arms for months on end, Russia disliked this situation very much. Seeing his beloved like this was tearing him to pieces more so than he thought and he wondered if it had been a good idea to come and see him like this.

No other nation had interfered thus far. Russia was glad. He smiled and looked down at the American in his arms and pet his hair. "No one will harm you; I'll make sure of it, Alfred."

The U.S. was still trembling but it wasn't as bad as it was months before. Russia was surprised his men hadn't come to retrieve him since he had been locked up in this closed room with America since arriving at the boy's home. He wondered if the winter had already passed by; if the snow had melted and the buds were beginning to bloom. He knew how much America loved the spring season. Perhaps it was still too early for the sunflowers.

Russia smiled before his fingers skimmed over soft cheek and landed on the hard frame of a lens. He blinked before chuckling to himself for his own stupidity in not seeing it earlier. Glasses. America had glasses.

"These are new," Russia mused as he traced his fingertips over the frame, circling America's ear and then falling down to trace his jaw before pulling his chin up so he could get a better view of the lenses.

Russia wasn't sure if he liked them. On one hand, they covered America's already beautifully flawless face; on the other, it seemed to give an illusion of maturity. It reminded him of Austria and that wasn't the nation he'd like to have interesting dreams about. He contemplated on taking them off because they obstructed his path of no hindrance whilst caressing the boy's face but he decided against it.

"You've gotten very big, Alfred," Russia said as he wrapped his arms around America's waist and held him chest to chest to feel the beating of his heart. It was fast—like a frightened little thing. "I'm happy you are still growing. You know... the others don't like it, especially England. They want you to stop. But I don't care. Keep growing, keep reaching for the clouds and when you manage to reach Heaven, please ask Sviatoy Piter to let me be with you because I'm so afraid they'll never let me in to such a place. After all the bad things I've done you were the right one so please, you have to pull through this. Please."

Civil Wars could do a number of things to nations. One, they could completely reform them; tear them apart and make it as if they never existed in the light they once had before. Two, they could break them apart into pieces, their original self lost to history. Three, they could cease and the nation recover, but of course not without serious mental trauma. That is always the hardest to heal from.

Russia bent his head and kissed the top of America's scalp. He let his lips linger as he whispered to him, "Fight, Alfred. Come back to me."

There was a cry of pain that escaped America's lips and Russia bit his bottom lip. He pulled placing America's shaking head against his throat to cradle him. Closing his eyes, he thought for a moment that he might cry. Of course that was impossible because his tears had already been spent from a
childhood too drenched in horror and blood. But he thought . . .

"How will I love you if you're not you?" Russia felt his own limbs trembling and suddenly he felt a chill run through him. General Winter. There were no windows in the room America was kept in, just a small lantern often replaced by servants, so Russia had no way of telling if the man was hovering just outside, but the bastard had another thing coming to him.

*If you take him away from me in any way I swear I'll never forgive you!* Russia inwardly promised as his hold tightened around America. He didn't care if the General had defended his land and people for the past thousands of years, he would and will turn his back to the ghost if America vanished. He was promised to him after all and so that gave the god no right to do that, not after all Russia had sacrificed for this—for America.

Of course Russia knew he had been bidding his time. When a knock was heard on the door and the voice of his Captain resounded in his ears, though muffled as it was through the oak door, Russia heard him say that it was time to leave. He was a nation and couldn't be gone for long from his people so it was expected, but Russia didn't want to let go.

"Da," Russia answered back and then turned down to look at America. He was still trembling but alas he was in slumber. Russia smiled and pet his bangs before leaning down and kissing his forehead. "It is best to sleep through this, Alfred. It hurts less."

And so, reluctantly, Russia let go. On his way out he commanded the servants to place blankets over the boy and to not disturb his slumber. He stared behind him the entire way back to his home, and didn't care if the fellow sailors murmured about his jealous attachment to the young nation. Upon return he swore to his Tsar that he would quickly go back to the western lands. Russia was always good on his word.

*Washington D.C. USA. September 1863*

When the door opened Russia frowned. The younger nation looked worse than when he had left him just a year ago. His hair was in a ruffle, his eyes were red and bags were beginning to form under them. His clothes were near to shreds; no doubt he did it himself. Even his fingertips were bloodied from scratching the wooden floors beneath.

With concerned brows clashing together, Russia approached the ex-colony. He knelt down and picked up a tossed blanket and wrapped it around the blonde's trembling frame. The moment he touched him America lashed out. His elbow pushed back and about jabbed Russia in the nose had he not moved his head to the side. He caught the arm with his hand and held tightly before pulling it up behind America's back to stop him from moving.

"Easy," Russia coaxed as he reached down and wrapped the blanket around the tattered nation. "I promised you I'd return didn't I? Here I am."

Russia held him close and felt his limbs shake. It was so much worse than before and those blue eyes were so horrified. All the things that America had seen, all the things he had done—it will haunt him for the rest of his life. Russia continued to pray he'd recover in one piece if this turmoil was all settled inside him.

Russia gasped. His eyes widened. The sight and the feel of those tears . . .

"Alfred?" Russia let the tips of his fingers skim under those lenses and touch the warm streams. It continued to flow and the look in America's eyes . . . "Oh, Alfred."
America cried out in pain and agony, but those tears... Russia could hear the horrid sadness. So he held the boy's face and pulled him against his neck and held him still. The sobs, the sniffling; it was so tormenting that Russia's heart beat against his chest trying to break free and comfort his love. But how?

"You have to fight, you have to be strong. You have to come back to me," Russia whispered into the blonde's ear.

When the trembling became unbearable America pulled and pushed away. He cried out, shaking his head before his hands pushed his glasses off. They hit the floor hard—cracking. Russia observed how America slammed his head down against the floor over and over again, bloodying the side of his head as if he was trying to render himself unconscious.

"Stop it, Alfred!" Russia demanded while he moved toward the self-inflicting nation and grabbed a hold of his arms, pulling him back against his chest. "You'll damage yourself!"

Russia swore that if anyone ruined America's image, if anyone touched him, if they bruised, marrered his precious skin then he'd declare war. He'd murder those who had done it. But how could he harm the one doing this to his love when it was the boy himself? It hurt because Russia didn't know what to do. It hurt because Russia was being tormented at having to watch this.

He didn't have to if he didn't want to. Like the rest of the countries he could declare himself neutral and stay away. He could, he really could, but he didn't want to. He wanted to stand beside Alfred when no one else would.

He wanted to be his only. He wanted him to see that he was there. But he was so blinded with his self-infliction that he couldn't even feel his embrace. He couldn't see his ships. He couldn't see how worried he was for him!

When a chill swept over the Russian nation he wrapped his arms around the American and picked his trembling form up into his arms. Turning, he kicked the locked door open, startling the American servants waiting outside. They cried their disapproval and protested as Russia tore himself from their grabbing hands and walked throughout the mazes of halls of the house the nation was kept in until he shoved himself out one of the back doors and into the falling snow.

"My lord!" Russia could hear the servants' outraged cry. "Please return him! Please!"

They would probably get the guards, no doubt about that, but Russia didn't care. The snow was falling harder now, the flakes thicker. He doubted they would catch up to him anytime soon. So he continued to walk out into the back yards of the American's home passing by frozen trees and bushes. He continued to walk even as his violet eyes looked up and stared down the gray skies heavy with snowfall. Strange for this time of year. No doubt caused by him.

"You promised me!" Russia shouted. He could see his breath by now and the cover was rising. Visibility was near to none but Russia could see. He could see everything.

There he was, the ghost himself. Hovering around, over, and under. Taunting him. Looking at him with hollow eyes and lips too pale to offer a kind smile.

"Look at him!" Russia cried out and hugged the young nation in his arms even tighter. "He's falling into ruin and he's dragging me with him! You promised me him and now he's being taken away. Why are you so cruel to this faithful servant?!!"

Of course the General never spoke to him. He never did. Instead he seemed to float further away, the
Russia inhaled a shaking breath. The feel of his burning lungs from the cold air didn't hurt as much as when he looked down upon the nation in his arms. The boy, so young to go through this, was trembling against him. His eyes were closed and his lips moved as if he was saying something, but nothing was coherent. He was lost from the world for a time.

In mystic awe Russia watched the large flakes of snow fall upon the boy. Upon impact with his pale skin the snow melted. Touching the blonde's skin Russia found him extremely warm, almost burning. But as he remembered it always had been that way.

So when the General chilled him Russia simply pulled America close and absorbed his warmth. He closed his eyes and focused on the feel of the nation in his arms. This season was always so much more easier to bear with him.

He wanted to spend more winter seasons with him. He wanted to hold his warm hands. He wanted to see his beautiful smile. He wanted his skin shining again. He wanted his hair vibrant in hue like the petals of a sunflower.

Like a sunflower.

The sunflowers.

Russia couldn't remember the last time he cried. He was certain he'd remember this time. There, in the snow, with an ever ill America in his arms. Safe from harm. Safe from the world. If he would just stay still in Russia's arms then all would be well and Russia wouldn't have to hate his stinging eyes.

Taking America's hand Russia pressed the tips of his fingers against his cold cheeks where bitter sad tears streamed down over the rounds and fingertips.

"Do you feel what you do to me . . . Alfred?" Russia whispered with a sad smile. "I don't like it. I don't."

Kissing the palm of his hand Russia moved his lips against the smooth skin. "But . . . only you can make it stop hurting."

His heart hurt continuously. It hurt always more when America was forced from him. The guards and servants did find him. He expected a scolding, if they dare to say it to a sovereign nation, but the guards simply wished him to return their nation to the dark room. Solemnly, Russia did as asked.

When he placed the American down upon the tussled bed he felt as if it were he to put him in this ill place. If he were given to him to care for then Russia would make sure he would have brave men to look after him and to be beside him should he attempt to damage himself, not remain frightened, waiting for the storm to pass out in the halls. They locked him inside for his protection, yes, but it was really for a fear of him and Russia knew it. Any human witnessing such a mental break would be horrified to the grave.

He stayed for as long as he could but in the end he was summoned home once more. Russia leant down and pressed his forehead against America's heated skin.

"Press on, malyutka," Russia whispered before tearing himself away and pressing his hand against his chest so that his pounding heart not break free from the cage of his ribs. "I have to go now, but as
always, I promise to return. Stay the same for me."

Moscow, Russia. April 1865

Russia had kept close tabs on the nation. If the other countries asked he'd inform them with some information, just not the amount that he himself needed to know every day. No one seemed as concerned but then again he never concerned himself with their affairs so he really hadn't noticed any affection of the sort. But he had indeed heard news of a cease fire. The war was over and Russia was so very relieved.

He had sat down to ease himself after hearing the news. His hand rubbed his chest to calm his beating heart and assured it that it could rest in peace now.

"Hmph, shame, I wanted him to be torn to pieces."

Russia narrowed his eyes and turned to see his sister standing with her arms crossed. Their older sister was standing next to her with an apologetic smile.

"That is very mean, Natalia," Ukraine scolded. "Forgive her, Ivan. You know how she is."

"Da," Russia said but still didn't let his sister go free. "You will not be saying that, sestra, when it is you breaking apart in civil war. It is not a pleasant thing anyone would wish on any person. It is horrible to human and nation alike."

"Are you going to go and see him?" Ukraine asked, trying to route Russia away from their little sister who could be too rude for her own good. "I am certain you are concerned."

"Da, I will when—!" Russia's eyes widened just as soon as he finished the message sent to him by one of America's representatives. He knew that the boy was probably in no state to begin writing again. He knew he needed to heal and it had been very kind that his people wrote to him about the success of the war and the uniting of the states once again. This meant that America was still the same—or was he? From what he read at the very end Russia realized that the child might not be as well as he had hoped.

"What is it?" Ukraine moved closer to her brother and peered down at him from where he sat reading the letter. She began reading it herself before her own eyes widened and her lips parted. "Oh, oh no. I . . . I am so sorry."

Russia didn't say a word. He hastily stood up and walked out of the room.

"Where is he going now?" Belarus asked with a narrowed glare.

"Natalia, silence," Ukraine bid. "Young Amerika has lost his leader."

Springfield, Illinois. USA. May 4th 1865

So many people had shown up. Russia was surprised to see such a number when just a few months before the country had been gripped in war. But he could see they were all earnest and sad, so very sad.

Even amongst the weeping crowd Russia observed America. He stood straight, his limbs no longer shaking, his wounds healing nicely, his countenance mostly well-kept. Well-kept for one attending a funeral that is. But those eyes . . . they were so . . .

Haunted.
Russia often wondered if the young nation even knew he was there. Of course he knew he had much more on his mind than foreign guests.

When the day grew long and the sun began to set the mourners began vanishing one by one until only America was left. He stood there for a long time, so long that the stars began coming out and it wasn't long before the moon was to show itself. So, before that light grabbed America's attention toward the time, Russia approached him.

He said nothing and merely let his presence be known through the sound of his heavy footsteps coming to a halt right behind the blond. There was a silence yes, but not for long.

"You know what he said?" America suddenly spoke and Russia listened with care. "He said that 'we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.'" America then walked closer toward the mausoleum and placed his hands on the white stone. His fingers slowly curled in, taking pebbles underneath his nails. "He said that 'four score and seven—nine years ago my fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation—me, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.'"

Russia could hear the vocals quivering. He could see America's shaking shoulders as his head lowered and lowered before his forehead pressed against the cold stone of the mausoleum. The stone structure holding his deceased leader. America had loved that man very much.

"He said that we 'highly resolve that the dead shall not have died in vain—that I, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.' He said that . . . he believed in me . . . that I would get better . . . that I . . . oh God I'm the one who did it . . . I'm the one who killed him, damn it!"

When America threw his head against the stone building Russia rushed forward and pulled him into his embrace. The moment the boy was wrapped in his arms the tears threatening to rush out came. So much so that it wet Russia's jacket, but he could care less. He was more so concerned with that indent in the American's forehead now leaking red liquid from nothing short of self-loath and self-harm.

"He was a good leader," Russia assured, holding the boy closer. "He had done all he could for you and expected your immediate return of health. If it means that you leave his death behind you to heal properly then I am certain he'd want you to forget right away."

Trembling hands gripped Russia coat, one even taking a hold of his scarf and yanking his neck downward where Russia had to rest his cheek against the younger's head. He didn't mind. As the American wept in his embrace Russia's heart pounded in his chest and it hurt. It hurt so bad that he often wondered if the boy could feel it beating against his chest.

America's leader he had been close with. Russia had often heard how he was one of the only to visit America in his state of health during those four traumatic years. He hadn't heard of this much of an attachment to any human since his fathers. It was really something special between a nation and a human, whoever the influential being be.

Even as Russia said that America should forget him in order to heal, in truth he knew that the boy would likely never forget the attachment he had shared with the man. He knew that the death, the legacy would haunt the boy for centuries to come and sometimes it wasn't a bad thing, but more oft than not it most certainly was.

Raising his hands, Russia pressed his thumbs underneath the American's eyes where the spectacles didn't hinder his touch. Looking as softly as he could Russia made sure those blue eyes looked into
his own. It had been years since they had shared any eye contact and Russia would have been glad had not that gaze now peering up at him held so much ghostly emotions and sights that would no doubt change him for the better or worse.

Russia had assumed, since the Union had won that America had remained the same in body and mind. That was the usual case. But now he was searching. He was looking for that little boy he had met less than a few decades ago. That little boy so full of passion and want to be seen and heard and recognized.

Now look at him, the boy didn't want the world to see him despite their obvious curiosity. But Russia saw him even against his attempts to hide himself from the world stage. He was looking at him now and demanding he show himself to him. Demanding that he look at him.

*I love you so much, Alfred. Can't you see it in my eyes? Can't you feel it in my touch? Can't you observe it through my actions? I give you everything and all I want is for you to recognize me this time and know that I am here and that I am the only one here for you and always will be as long as you love me.*

Russia was baring himself before the country. Not verbally, never verbally. Why? Because if he did then he would have to speak it in his own language to actually mean it and to say it right. He knew America wasn't too good with the Russian language and so all Russia had were the gestures, the hints, and the glances.

But America's mind was clouded from previous war and so there was nothing.

"Ivan," America cried out with a shaky inhale. "I miss him."

Pulling him closer Russia placed the boy's head underneath his chin and nearly covered him with his larger frame. He swore he would hold him for as long as he could and he meant it.

"Da, I know, Alfred. I know," Russia said, offering comfort. Even though he wanted the boy to see it in his actions; how much he loved him since he couldn't verbally say it, right now it was fine with Russia if he didn't understand. Right now it was fine because the boy didn't need to recognize something like love. He needed to recognize an eternal friend and companion. He needed to recognize comfort and more importantly: healing.

He read the details of the war and had heard about the casualties. The victories. The defeats. He heard about them all. He knew what would damage a nation when he heard it and most certainly America was damaged. So Russia covered him with his frame and held him close.

"Rest your mind. Rest your heart. Rest your body. And rest your soul. Know that time will help in healing. But most importantly know that I am here and always will be. Even when no one else will be as courageous to confront you in a time such as this know that I will. Always, Alfred. Always," Russia promised and held the trembling sobbing boy close who cried his heart out onto the Russian for the love of his leader that he had so much cared for and so much hated.

Once more Russia realized there would have to be a wait. America was traumatized. He was in no position to be invited over to a place like Europe where ravenous wolves awaited prey like him to come and stumble. He most certainly was in no position to court. But Russia did not need to be a courting partner to be close to him in a time like this. Even if they were in a courting there could be no closer than this that Russia could get in his comforting.

Now he swore his visits would shorten in span. Instead of seeing the young nation after a few decades he would make it to free himself from his Tsar and affairs every three months if only to see
and comfort the boy. He knew it would be a long journey to recovery and he planned on being there when the dark clouds evaded out of America's blue skies.

Chapter End Notes

Historical Notes:

Yes, yes, and yes. Russia and America were VERY close during this century and especially during the American Civil War. Because of this bond Russia was the ONLY European power to offer support. Particularly for the Union.

England, like most nations during that time declared themselves neutral in America's civil war but were caught red-handed in constructing some ships for the Confederacy. Don't really know what that was all about so . . .

During the winter of 1861-1862 (the beginning of the Civil War) the Russian Empire sent two fleets to American waters as a protection from countries like France and Britain. Some even dropped anchor in Washington D.C.

Once again, a squadron of Russian ships stayed in American waters for seven months, this time in September 1863 to June 1864. A lot of ships in Russia's Imperial Navy were in fact American designed and carried American armament after the Americans encouraged the Russians to buff up their navy to compete with the British navy with whom they were then rivals with.

Alas one of America's greatest Presidents to date, Abraham Lincoln, had been assassinated on April 14th 1865 and passed away as a result on the morning of April 15th 1865. He was laid to rest on May 4th 1865 in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield, Illinois where many from all over the world attended his funeral.

And, a Headcanon note~

So, in this story, the time spans can really differ via country-wise. Being that they are near immortal they [the countries that is] don't really think a few decades like, say, 40 years is a long time before seeing someone. In fact it's probably almost like months to them. So, for Russia to suddenly begin visiting every couple of months that's like someone visiting every other day so to speak in nation terms. Because of this the next significant event will happen only two years after the end of the American Civil War.
Chapter Notes

Suggested ambient song: Find a Way by Safety Suit.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

1867

Over the years Russia would always find America at the grave of his fallen leader. Though the imperial nation knew he would probably make such a pilgrimage for numerous years to come he had to take the boy away and let his mind dwell on other things besides the death of his close leader.

"Alfred," Russia said as he approached the boy one day early that year. "I have come to invite you to one of my homes. It would please me if you would accept the offer."

The nation turned his weary and sad eyes away from the tomb. There was no more vibrancy and Russia frowned at its disappearance.

"I don't know," America muttered. His tone was low and less than polite. He wouldn't even hold a gaze with Russia any longer. Instead he opted to continually stare at the tomb of that dead man. "I've got so much to do. There's so much to . . . reconstruct."

"There will be no humans there," Russia assured. "Just you and me. It is a place I've already prepared for you. I know you will like it. The sun never sets there."

That had piqued his interest. There was a small flare of curiosity in those eyes and the promise of a place that never went dark seemed likable to the American. But all too soon America frowned and glanced down, saying darkly—

"There is no such place."

"Da, but there is," Russia affirmed. He then held out his hand in invitation. "If you decide to come with me I can show you and then you will know I speak the truth."

America looked at him, then at his hand and then toward the tomb. He was unsure but slowly and ever so hesitant he reached out and gently placed his hand upon Russia's. Russia smiled and did as he promised: he took him to a place where the sun never set.

Alaska, Russian America. Summer of 1867

America had slept a majority of the months there in Russia's American home. Russia hadn't minded, in fact he was glad that the adolescent was constantly slumbering. It meant he was getting the proper rest he needed and it also left Russia with time to himself to be productive. Besides, Russia liked the look of the slumbering American. He was always so peaceful and beautiful when in the throes of dreams.

Of course he'd make sure the boy didn't sleep all of the time he was there. That just wouldn't do. When it looked like that was to be the case Russia made the choice to wake him.
"Alfred," Russia whispered, gently shaking the boy's shoulders. He'd been sleeping soundly for three months and Russia deemed it time for him to wake. "Arise and behold the sun. It's shining just for you."

The blond moved and moaned. His hair was a mess and his bed clothing all wrinkled from the continuous months in wear. When he sat himself up his hand blindly reached over and patted the lampstand next to his assigned bed. Soon enough his fingers found the glasses he had been searching for it wasn't long before the spectacles were sitting on his nose and ears and those blue eyes so beautiful looking at Russia through frames of glass.

"What day is it?" America asked with a low groggy voice as he rubbed his red eyes.

"It is the fourth day of the month of July," Russia answered.

It wasn't long before America's eyes widened, all traces of sleep erased. His stiff limbs even rejuvenated fast as he swung himself out of bed and rushed toward the wardrobe where his clothing was kept hung and neatly folded.

"Seriously?!!" America gasped while hastily pulling out all of the nicer clothes he had brought with him. "Why didn't you wake me earlier?!"

After pulling on a nice dress shirt America had fumbled now with a black-lace tie that he cursed at for not tying right. In his shaking race to clothe himself in fine attire he nearly jumped out of his skin when a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder. Turning to look at Russia, the European simply offered a pleasant smile.

"Calm down," Russia advised. He then turned the boy toward him and reached out, pulling the tie off around his neck only leaving a very confused looking American. "Since your national birthday is here then it's going to be a comfortable one. I don't want you dressed up for presentation. Besides, you're not in your mainland. You're here, with me."

"But I've always . . ." America looked at the dress shirt he was half wearing at the moment. He had yet to button up or even place the gold cufflinks on. Russia no doubt knew that the boy—no matter the bitterness of the harsh year—would always dress in the clothes of a gentleman and appear perfect before his people to celebrate his independence. But not this year. He was all Russia's and Russia wanted none of that for the sake of his healing.

"You can go back to sleep if you wish," Russia informed. "I only woke you so you would know of your day, but if you want to do something today I've prepared some activities that consist of horse riding, fishing, and hiking."

America looked tired. There were still dark circles under those eyes and Russia often wondered when they'd disappear. He didn't think they looked at all good on the boy's face.

With a sigh America took off his dress shirt and offered Russia a soft but weary smile.

"Alright, you're right. This is your house after all. Whatever you say goes," America spoke and then pulled out a plaid shirt and trousers.

"Da," Russia whispered before he turned and left America to dress himself. He was quite pleased when the American came downstairs in his casual attire. He rarely got to see him in such clothing because of the formal wear the nation adorns himself whenever a foreign power visits. It was a pleasant sight and Russia couldn't help but like the outfit better than the ones he was accustomed to seeing the boy dressed in.
The pants were tighter and hugged his hips closer. Russia, in honesty, didn't think that brown leather belt needed to act as a pant-holder. His long sleeves had been rolled up and a few top buttons near the collar were left undone. The shirt itself looked a little small on him and Russia noted it was the muscle the American had formed in the past few decades. It was a very nice look. His neck was thicker and his collarbone sturdier. Russia could see the boy's flexor and extensor muscles from the revealed arm and those little ones revealed the constant rein-holding and heavy-lifting the boy had been doing since their last meeting.

He was thickening out and Russia continued to find himself amazed by his youth. It really was a wonder how a nation so young grew so fast. Russia considered the boy truly blessed in every sense. His civil war seemed to not have hindered his growth in the slightest and Russia continuously thought of how the child had been made just for him.

*He knew what he was doing when he constructed him,* Russia thought to himself as his thoughts drifted back to the day General Winter had promised him a mate as gift for his absolute loyalty. *He is taller than the others. His body-frame thicker. He will not break if I touch him, especially not now. I am so very happy.*

As they rode toward the lake where they were going to take up fishing Russia witnessed America's mastery with the horses. Firstly the American had easily reined, saddled, and mounted his appointed horse and when Russia's stallion became cranky the American was quick to his side to take up his reins and calm the beast down. Such a tamer. Even whilst still shouting out English commands the horses, though trained in the Russian language, somehow understood him and listened. Always with the amazements with him.

"You are very good with animals, Alfred," Russia complimented as they held their fishing rods against their sides and sat near the shore of the clear blue lake. "I didn't know what had gotten into my stallion and yet you knew exactly how to handle him. I was surprised, especially with him listening to you without the need for Russian words."

America smiled slightly and shrugged his shoulders. "Lately I've been trying to get to know horses better. They're pretty friendly when you get to know them. No matter if they're Spanish or Russian, a horse is a horse and respond to the same tone, you just gotta strike the right note."

"Oh, I see," Russia said with a smile before chuckling.

America rose his brow and then cocked his head to the side. "What is so amusing?"

"I just remember when you were so little. You and horses didn't necessarily get along," Russia mentioned with another laugh. "In fact you used to be quite frightened of them."

"W-Well I was little, what do you expect?" America defended with an embarrassed blush.

"It's a good change, Alfred," Russia said with a sure nod. "Make no mistake."

"Thanks." America smiled in return. But when Russia caught the sight of a frown from the corner of his eye he paid close attention to any unstable emotion that might show itself soon from the boy. "Hey . . . Ivan, can I ask you something?"

"Da, what is it?"

"Do you think I always change for the better?" America asked and looked at Russia with honest eyes wanting an honest answer.

Offering another smile Russia turned his gaze toward those eyes shining bright and beautiful like a
pair of December topazes. The day was nice like he expected it to be. The cool breeze and the clear skies signaled a perfect day for a special birthday of a very significant nation. Why did America always have to ruin such nice days with his insecurities?

"To the victors change is good," Russia stated as his violet eyes gazed down where his fishing line remained still, waiting for a bite. He had yet to catch anything, the same with America. "To those who lost it is not. So which view shall we describe change?" When Russia offered a glance toward the blond he observed the boy look at him with curious eyes and a willing spirit to learn. "According to your Union's victory you have thusly stayed the same; your states are united once more, your constitution upheld, and your territory expanding. I would say that is good while others would say it is bad. It depends on which approval you are looking for."

America nodded before his gaze fell down toward the line. The waters were still and the air around pleasant and refreshing, but even so Russia could feel the American's dark aura. He was still in a depression and would no doubt remain that way for a while.

"You cannot please everyone, Alfred," Russia informed. "Your right will always be someone else's wrong. It has been this way since the dawn of time."

He seemed to be taking every word to heart. Good. These lessons were better off informed first before discovered later by horrible incidents.

"I understand," America finally spoke, turning his gaze toward Russia where they met with amethyst and sapphires. "But . . . as long as I can find approval with my friends then I can be happy."

There was that smile. Russia hadn't seen it in decades. It was that American smile that was completely and only Alfred's. Russia really wanted to cry tears of joy from seeing it again and his heart threw itself against his chest for the love of that look. Russia wondered if he had done it or if the improvably positive thoughts of the boy had done it.

With a smile so contagious Russia couldn't help but smile himself. From the sheer happiness of seeing the boy smile again he could no longer hold the fishing rod properly. So, instead, he placed it down and then stood himself up.

"Well, it looks as if this lake will yield us no fish. How about we go for a short hike?" Russia asked, looking down at the boy.

He smiled that smile again and all too soon America tossed his pole and grabbed Russia's outstretched hand before following him along the trail marked out by ribbons on trees. Russia attempted to keep the walk lively with conversation but often found himself quieting because of the talks coming too close to the subject of recent civil conflict. So he tried to talk about anything beside the previous war which always disheartened the boy. It worked fine until a few hours passed and the time caught up with the boy.

"Where are we going, Ivan?" America asked in a glance around, trying to find familiarity in their surroundings. "We've been walking for hours. Shouldn't we be heading back to the horses? It's getting late."

"I know," Russia informed. "But we're not far now and the horses have water from the lake and the grass surrounding."

"If you say so," America pouted as he crossed his arms.

Before long they had reached their destination. "Here we are," Russia announced.
"Nice view," America commented on the overlook he found himself on. One could see everything from up there; from the surrounding area to the lake below to Russia's home in the distance.

"What do you think of all of it?" Russia asked, watching the American nation walk around to see the rest of the country around.

"It's very beautiful here," America offered in kind. "It's never too hot during the day. Tell me, what are the nights like?"

"Nights? What nights?" Russia asked as if he didn't even know the meaning of such a thing.

America's lips thinned out into a straight line.

"Why are you in such a jesting mood as of late?" America asked through muttering, turning toward the setting sun.

"You don't like it?" Russia asked with slight concern.

"Well, it's not that but . . ." America's attention waned. He had been watching the sun set for a good long while and it had yet to escape out of sight. His brow crashed together in confusion before he turned toward Russia. "Hey, Ivan. What is the hour?"

"I'd say past nine," Russia estimated.

"Past nine?!" America's eyes widened. He even had to blink a few times before looking at the sun just to make sure he wasn't dreaming. "Then why . . . hasn't it . . . set?"

"I told you that I'd take you to a place where the sun never set," Russia said with a smile as he walked closer to America and stood beside him to watch the sun still hang in the sky.

"Where the sun . . . never sets." America smiled and the glow of the dusk sun placed America in such a light Russia could have sworn he saw a glitter in the boy's eyes. Were those tears?

Perhaps they were since America later took off his glasses and began rubbing his eyes.

"Alfred, what is the matter?" Russia inquired once he saw the blond struggling with the sting in his eyes.

"Sorry," America apologized and shook his head. "I don't know what's come over me. This place, Russia . . . I really love it. Thank you so much for inviting me over."

"Da, of course," Russia said with a smile before he turned and walked over toward a small box that he had left close by the previous day. He opened it and then took out a match. When he turned he had once again caught the American off-guard with a small sparking rod in his hand.

"I-Ivan?" America was at a loss for words when Russia held two of them and then offered him one. Taking it up in his hands the sparks from the rod made the blonde's eyes sparkle but the liquid in them might have added to that effect even more.

"It is tradition to use these to celebrate your birthday, da?" Russia asked with a smile. "I do know that the night amplifies their brilliance but forgive me, the sun doesn't seem to want to set on such a perfect day."

There was a startle in the ex-colony when the sound of a crack exploded behind him. He turned and watched as rustic colored fire rockets burst in the sky. Russia was very pleased with the reaction.
"I had the servants arrive and set them off for you," Russia informed. "Just like home, da?"

America was still silent. Instead of responding he continually looked on in bewilderment. His wide blue eyes reflecting the lights from the fire rockets. The sparking rod in his hand had long since run out of spark but he had yet to drop it.

Scooting forward, Russia leaned a little just to see what America's reaction currently was. He had been silent for a while and Russia's concern was coming back. When he looked at his face America had also caught sight of him looking and so the blond quickly turned and tried to hide himself.

"Alfred?" Russia asked. He had seen tears. Full flowing tears. "Have I done something wrong?"

When he heard a muffled sob Russia was more concerned now. Then a few sobs escaped into the loud and Russia about took hold of the boy to turn him and confront the issue, but he never got the chance. Instead, America turned himself with a red face, puffy eyes, and runny nose. Completely bare with emotions but willingly revealing himself.

"Why do you continue to do this?" America asked, his tone intermixed with his whining sobs.

"Do you not like it?" Russia asked. He was confused. He had thought the American would like it; seeing how he was away from his own home on his extravagantly celebrated birthday.

"That's not the issue!" America said, shaking his head and then rubbing his eyes while in one hand he held onto his glasses. "You're always too nice to me when the others would just give up on me and my damn inexperience. Why? Why do you put up with me? I'm a baby compared to you. I've got nothing standing with me when beside you. I'm not supposed to even be able to look you in the eye because . . . because . . ."

"If you can't tell why I do this by now then I'm afraid I cannot help you," Russia stated with his shoulders slightly slumped. Could he really not tell after all of this?

America looked at him for a moment before closing his eyes and letting a new batch of tears fall down. With an inhale Russia reached out and rubbed his arm. "Stop crying, Alfred. I do not like the sight of your tears."

"I'm sorry," America apologized, rubbing his red face. "It's just all too much."

"Then I am contemplating whether or not I should give you your present," Russia muttered aloud.

"Present?" America inquired. He blinked away the rest of his tears and wiped his leaking nose on his sleeve, trying to compose himself before the older nation.

"Da," Russia said with a nod as he reached inside his vest and pulled out a document. "Forgive me. I have gotten it some time ago before your own approval, but I knew you'd like it so I will give it anyway."

When America took the paper into his hands he gasped. Looking back at Russia and then at the parchment he gapped.

"You . . . You . . . You're giving this to me?" America's hand was shaking now. His hard blue eyes were on Russia, but such a look of disbelief was not the look Russia had wanted.

"Da," Russia said with a nod. "Forgive me again for not informing you earlier, but I already talked with your Mr. Seward on it and we had reached a deal this past March. We wanted it to be a surprise for you on your upcoming birthday."
"But this is yours, your colony," America insisted. "If you give this to me then you wouldn't have any piece of the New World and I thought that everyone always wanted . . ."

"That's in the past now," Russia insisted as he rose his hand to calm the boy down. "Now it is I who am the guest in your home."

"You see? You always offer too much." Suddenly America was crying again. Russia frowned at the sight. He really didn't like to see him crying like this. He preferred smiles over that red wet face. But he assumed the American Civil War had damaged him to the point of loose emotional displays through turmoil.

"Aren't we friends?" Russia asked. He didn't want to get it into America's head that that was all he wanted to be titled as, but Russia was trying to ease him back into a stable state and anything other than suggested friendship might deter the boy from other emotions. "As your friend I want to give you these things."

"Friends don't do this. Least not to me," America said with a shake of his head. The boy had hard relationships. First with England, and then France, and then Spain. One after another his so-called friends turned against him—or was it he turning against them?

"This one does," Russia said as he pointed toward his own heart with a kind smile. He was glad that the American smiled back. "You will grow, da?"

America looked at him with confusion before Russia motioned a height growth with his rising hand.

"With more territory you grow?" Russia asked. "That is good. I want you as big as me one day. This will help, da?"

America blushed and Russia wondered if it was from embarrassment. "Y-Yeah," America responded, his eyes darting away from the empire. "But no one else likes it."

"I do," Russia said with a smile.

"Really?"

"Of course. Why else would I give you this? I want you to grow. I want you to get stronger," Russia said. "You've just been through a hard passage in your national life but with encouragement and nutrients you'll heal. I am a strong empire. I crush many underneath me, but you are becoming strong, little Alfred. Perhaps one day we could arm wrestle. How much fun it would be!"

He wasn't crying anymore. He was smiling. His eyes were beginning to sparkle once more and it was all because of Russia's words.

"Truly, I thank-you, Ivan," America said softly while holding the signed parchment of territorial exchange close to his chest. "I couldn't have asked for more."

"Make sure you brag about my present to the others when you see them again," Russia jested with a chuckle.

"I will," America said with a chuckle of his own before finally realizing his sparkling rod was cold and dim. "Hey, do you have more? The night's just begun!"

"Da," Russia said with a soft smile as he turned and lit more sparkling rods.

The "night" had been long and filled with playing with fire rockets and sparkling rods. The tears
were indeed gone and more smiles and laughs replaced them. That sparkle in America's eyes was returning, Russia could see it. He was so very happy he enjoyed his gift. He knew it would outshine anything else the young nation received from the others which is precisely why he had shown him the document of ownership on his birthday.

Since it was now officially America's home Russia noticed his prolonged stay. He could have gone back to his home in the mainland but the blond persisted in staying longer in the new land he had received and so many a day was spent on horseback or on trails exploring the new territory which Russia was all too glad to guide him through.

But sadly, and albeit oddly, America's smile did not last. Soon enough he was near to tears once more.

Sitka, Alaska. October 18th 1867

The transfer ceremony was a pleasant one, full of music, food and drink, and when the ships sounded off salutes through cannon fire it really got the American's heart to quicken. Standing next to America, Russia watched his smile brighten when American men came up to him and offered him his national flag.

"Come," Russia as he walked toward the flag pole on which his flag was flowing in the wind. Standing next to it he watched America, cradling his own star-spangled flag, come up and await the Russian's order.

Reaching up Russia began pulling his flag down and when unattached he allowed America to place his own flag upon it before they both pulled once more and hoisted the red, white, and blue flag overhead.

"There, now it is official," Russia said with a smile.

When he looked toward America the boy's eyes were wide and bright. His smile large and all white teeth were visible. He could practically hear his heart beating so fast. He was excited over the new territory and Russia wondered if it was because it was from him.

There were festivities all around. Russia had his people prepare food and drink for the upcoming Americans and they were all too happy to partake in them. Russia chuckled at the sight of a pouting America as a bottle of vodka was taken out of his hands just before it touched his lips.

"You're too young," Russia mentioned as he took a swing from the bottle of alcohol himself and just smirked at the blushing boy. But America had always been full of surprises so Russia really shouldn't have been so shocked that the boy was quick to snatch the bottle back and press it to his own lips and keep most of it down as he swallowed. He could see tears pricking at the corners of his blue eyes, but the boy kept the liquid down and his men shouted out in pride before patting his back.

Impressed, Russia simply inclined his head in astonishment. Perhaps he'd one day have a drinking partner.

After that fun incident Russia watched the boy make a bet with his men and even the Russians surrounding. On the wooden bar sat fourteen empty glass bottles. He was making a bet to hit them all. Russia took no part in it but observed and watched in impressment as something once heard in his courts was confirmed: America was the best sharpshooter in the world.

In a flash the boy brought out his two revolvers that had been nestled safely on his hips and began firing away. He used no more than fourteen bullets and shot each of the glasses with ease. With the
gun barrels smoking America twirled them on his fingers and blew the exhaust in Russia's direction. With a wink it was then Russia felt a burning in his own cheeks. If he hadn't known about the boy's naivety then he would assume he was being flirted with. Of course that was nothing he couldn't fix as he pulled his scarf over his nose and played aloofness about himself.

It did Russia's heart good to hear those laughs. To see those bright smiles forming on the boy's perfect plump lips. The shine in his skin was returning despite the oncoming winter weather. The sparkle in his eyes, why, it had returned since his birthday. He was near perfect again and Russia deemed his attempt at making it so a success.

He was very happy that his people supported his love for America. He didn't know what he'd do if they suddenly rejected his very heart. He frowned at such a thought and decided to push it from his mind as he focused on the festivities with the Americans. One of the games had been lifting bales of hay, each one becoming larger and heavier in size as the game played on. Russia decided to show the American men how to lift a bale and smirked at their dumbfound faces. Of course it was all fun until America himself decided to join.

"Ha! I can lift those with one arm!" America toted and he was right. Russia was impressed but more so happy that his strength was returning to him. But of course he would have to show the boy who was stronger and how it should be. Picking up a larger bale that really only could be lifted by a tractor, America gapped. With a look of determination the boy found the largest bale he could find but Russia attempted to warn him about the unbalance of the large object. Of course his warnings fell on deaf ears and before long America went tumbling into Russia, their bales falling on top of them with their men having no means with which to fish them out due to their human strength. It was well though, both popped out of the jumbled stack with laughs and poking jests at their appearance.

"Ha, ha, it's all in your hair!" America chuckled as he reached over and began pulling the hay out.

"Yours too, Alfred," Russia mentioned and watched the boy swat them all out of his hair.

Russia then watched in silent fun when the blond attempted to stand himself up only to lose his footing and tumble down the stack where he ended up on his back staring up at the skies above with an adorable laugh on his lips.

Russia managed to slide out easily and then stop next to him, leaning down to offer a hand of balance. America took it without another word and was whisked to his feet. Trying his best to wipe off the rest of the hay from his clothing he raised his arms to his men who raised theirs in return with shouts of triumph. Pleasing Americans was so simple.

Russia had caught a glance from his captain who gave him a look. With a frown Russia let out a sigh. Returning to the bar he took a bottle, poured a glass and gave it to the American. "Drink up," he said with one last pat on his shoulders. "Celebrate this day. This all is yours."

With that Russia walked off, his men falling in line behind him. He did not see the confused look on the American, nor his frown when he realized they were heading toward the ships. With no more word heard Russia and his men froze and jumped at the sound of gunfire. Russia jumped back, he could practically feel the ammunition fly past him. With wide eyes he watched as they hit their mark—the ship's sturdy rope ties were cut loose by sheer accuracy with a gun.

"What are you doing?!" Russia's captain exclaimed. He was quick to order his men to try and catch the rope and tie a new one to it before the ship drifted off to sea.

"What are you doing?!" America's shouting question was more directed toward the nation who stood in shock with the rest of his men. With guns against his shoulders Russia observed the boy's angry
red face. So quick to change colors. "Was that supposed to be a 'Farewell'? Don't mock me, Ivan!"

"The light dims," Russia explained. "I better head out with my men before our ships run off course. Besides, I did promise to pull my men from this land since it is yours now."

"You can't just leave on this day. I forbid it!" America said as he turned his revolver down and shot off a warning fire near Russia's boot. Russia refused to jump away and he could quite literally feel the heat from that shot but refused to acknowledge it in front of the demanding America. In truth he wanted to stay, forever if he could, but he was a nation and as a nation he had duties. He had visited America too much and no doubt his Tsar would keep him in court for a few decades before he was even given the chance at another visit.

"So demanding, but so is my Tsar. I wonder which presides over the other," Russia said. America needed to understand but the look on his face seemed that he didn't.

"Just tonight, please stay one more night," America begged as he walked closer, his guns still in his hands but at the unease of the Russian soldiers the boy noticed and so placed them back in their holsters. "Please, Ivan."

"I cannot," Russia informed and watched once more as the American bowed his head in sadness. He didn't like that look on him at all. "My Tsar made me swear to return today. I cannot remain away from my land any longer, Alfred. You too must return to your mainland as well. So many things happen in the human world and it is up to us keep record on all of it."

"It's not fair," America bitterly said, shaking his head and crossing his arms in distain. "I was having such a good time. You make my day and then ruin it. I hate it when you do that!" America turned hurt eyes toward Russia, but Russia had to refuse the clenching of his heart no matter how it hurt to see the distressed American like so. But he deemed the boy healed enough to take his early departure in proper stride.

"Stop being so selfish, Alfred. The world does not revolve around you."

"It's because I enjoy your company the most," America admitted, casting his eyes down. "After the line failed I became sad. Even so, words on a paper can't compare to you in the flesh."

Russia smiled softly at the boy's affectionate words. He only wished they went deeper than a dear companionship. Perhaps then he'd stay just a little longer.

"What will I do with you, Alfred?" Russia asked with a tsk and sigh. "What would ever happen when one day I am gone and you are all alone? You cannot rely on others for companionship all of the time. Even their lives become engrossed with the times as yours will be soon enough."

"Why would you leave me?" America asked with concern in his features. "Have I been a disliked friend?"

"Nyet, that is not what I am trying to say to you," Russia said. He looked at his captain with an apologetic smile for the time waste but he simply could not leave the young country in such a confused state. "I am saying that you cannot rely on others all of the time. There may come a day when the entire world is your enemy. The only way to face something so daunting like that is to grow and become stronger than them. Do you understand?"

America didn't nod and when Russia placed his hands upon the boy's slumped shoulders he looked up at him with determined eyes but that determination feigned the moment their eyes met. He blinked
a few times and Russia watched his face flush.

"I don't mind the world turning into my enemy. I do mind you turning into my enemy though," America admitted in a series of mutters. Russia had barely caught it and before the boy shifted uneasily on his feet he looked to be trying to meet his gaze but for some odd reason every time those blue eyes met his they darted away quickly and the boy's face became more so redder. "I would have very serious problems with something like that," America said as his eyes glanced down toward his pointed boot and stared at the dirt he began digging up to take his mind away from the situation. "Because I always thought that... well you were always there for me even when I wasn't myself... and you've proved to me over and over again how loyal you are... and I... I want to repay you. So-So I was wanting to ask if you would... if you would like to..."

"Are you trying to invite me into a courtship?" Russia asked. He kept his manner and held himself well. He wasn't sure if that is what America had been trying to say, but all the signs were there and it sure sounded just like an invitation albeit a poorly worded and phrased one. Russia's heart was rolling inside his chest and he almost regretted asking. The boy never asked for a courtship, others always asked the young nation. So Russia could have easily mistaken what the boy was trying to say. If so then his heart would no doubt need some time to heal from the disappointment crashing upon it.

America froze. His shoulders pointed upward and nearly touched his red ears. His eyes were wide and still had yet to look at Russia directly.

"I know that I'm young and... well you said yourself that I'm just a child compared to you... but I..."

"You are very young," Russia agreed. His eyes narrowed on the boy's entire being and he pressed, making sure the boy even knew what he was doing. "This is very uncommon particularly because of the age gap. You realize that, da?"

America thinned his lips shut tight and nodded his head quickly.

"There are others more close to your age," Russia informed. "More suitable for you I would think."

Russia watched the boy's shoulders slump. Was he sad?

"I know," America replied in a soft low tone. "But I don't want to... enter... a courtship with them."

Russia's eyes widened. America was indeed inviting him into a courtship. Was he dreaming? Was this even real? The pounding of his heart said yes and so did the chill in the air that made Russia shiver. After so much time wooing the young nation in anxious silence America was finally reciprocating his affection.

"I know I'm still unstable," America continued as if he needed to excuse his faults when there in fact were none in Russia's eyes. "Because of that I'm not quite ideal, right? But my men told me what you did. They told me how you protected me in my lost state. They told me how you held me back from hurting those close to me. I hadn't even asked for your help but you helped when the others threatened to hurt me... when they neglected me. If you could do all of that for me then I knew you would be the one to be the one to stand true beside me in the future to come. So I thought—!"

When America's eyes met Russia's the older nation could no longer hold himself back. His gloved hand reached out and pressed gently against the boy's neck to hold him still as he leaned down and pressed his lips against his. Oh how long he had waited just to taste him and he was so very glad he
His lips were so soft and tasted of innocence. No doubt it was his first kiss. Russia cared less for the unannounced gesture. He cared less for the politeness of time. The time was now and so he acted.

When Russia made to pull back his body throbbed at the feel of the American leaning toward him, coming in again for another kiss. So Russia didn't deny him and greeted the boy's wanting lips with another, this one more passionate as his tongue parted the boy's lips and tasted from the inside of his cavern.

Russia placed his other hand on the boy's cheek and held his face still while he kissed him. He could feel the American's strong hands holding onto his wrists for dear life. Russia was not mistaken when he felt the boy attempting to return the kiss. Inexperienced as he claimed to be that would all vanish in time as Russia, himself, took on the duty to teach him how to kiss properly, how to touch him, how to love him.

Pulling away for air this time Russia planted another kiss on the boy's swollen lips. When he looked upon the boy's face he saw that deep flush across his cheeks and those blue eyes darkened with half-closed lids hanging above. The attraction was evident now and Russia now wondered how long the boy had felt this way toward him, knowing it would have saved him so much tension from the wait.

"How long, Alfred?" Russia whispered against his lips and inhaled the very exhales of the boy pressed close to him. "Tell me."

America looked dazed and in another land but he registered the question and answered as asked. "Since the beginning of the Nineteenth Century."

Russia cringed. That long? How could he have not known? Why hadn't the boy told him sooner?

Chuckling inward, Russia figured it was a mistake on both their parts. Russia himself had been allusive to his feelings because of the other countries around. And now it seemed so had little America.

Looking into the boy's eyes a fire erupted and America's eyes slowly began to widen once he saw this heat in the Russian's gaze. No more was Russia hiding his feelings. He was baring them before America this very moment and if he couldn't handle them then he might as well start running now.

"Captain, let me stay tonight," Russia asked for the permission without breaking eye contact with the ex-colony. He needed the night with America. Fuck, he needed more than just one night. He needed millions, but one night would settle his trembling body. Just one.

"Nyet," the captain denied. "The Tsar has made it clear he wants you to return this day so you can arrive on his set schedule."

America's wanting eyes were killing Russia. The boy's hands were still on his wrists, holding tightly, informing him through body language that he wanted him to stay. Russia could hardly resist. He needed him now so very, very much.

Fine. If the Tsar so wished.

"I will return," Russia informed and watched the boy's eyes delve into his own gaze so to understand what he was saying. "When I do I will unite with you in every sense of the word. Only then will I declare our courtship official. My Tsar will be very pleased. He likes you very much."

America offered a smile but it was a sad one. Russia leaned down once more and kissed him
farewell. As he pulled away in slow Russia once again looked into the boy's dazed eyes and said, "If you do not want this then you had best blockade my return because nothing will stop me this time from holding myself back from you."

In pleasure Russia watched the boy's face become redder. Through his reactions Russia knew he understood his meanings. Good.

His fingertips were the last to leave the boy; caressing from his ear over his cheek before falling away to Russia's side. It hurt to leave. So very much. His hands nearly broke the railing from the deck of the ship he accompanied as he beheld the American upon departure.

America had clung himself to a post on the docks looking weak at the knees and Russia shivered knowing he made those knees weak. Knowing he was the one who made the boy blush like that. Who made his eyes dark with want and need. Knowing that the boy would soon open his legs to him. They would finally become one and America would know of his destiny to stand beside Russia. He would know.

"Bring me back to him soon, General, or else I will die," Russia gasped out as his fist clenched his vest and pulled, popping the buttons and ripping the seams. This time when a chilling windew rushed through him Russia smiled in acceptance. The old ghost was finally holding up on his end of the bargain.

He would return to his Tsar and inform him of America's proposal. That would hopefully cut a few decades of work from his presented schedule his Tsar would give him. In a way he was glad he was refused a night with the boy for he feared he'd never want to leave his side if that was all that was allowed to him.

His tension was high and finally America was ready to help in the relief. He's waited so long for this.

"Wait for me, Alfred. I'll return soon," Russia promised as his once North American territory vanished from his sight. He knew that America would take good care of his old home across the sea. It was there he would return to make love to him and he knew he'd be waiting.

Well, his waiting soul would wait no more.

Chapter End Notes

Historical Notes:

Midnight Sun is what it is called in Alaska and other countries where they have that effect. Around late June to early August the sun tends to never set, instead it hangs in the sky. Interesting effect which is why I had Russia take America there and show him the wonder that he's never seen before.

The Alaskan Purchase [Seward's Folly]. Russian America (Alaska) was purchased by the Americans on March 30th 1867 so yays for new territory for the U.S. The Russians had actually been wanting the Americans to buy it. They thought about selling it to the British but decided against it because they didn't want them hanging around the Pacific too much and so they offered it to their buddies, the Americans, whom they knew would give the British a hard time, hardy-har. And they did. After Alaska was America's they down right claimed that part of the sea and actually seized over 150
British ships for sailing in "their waters". The Americans thought it was an internal sea while the British said it was International. The British later were right much to the Americans' chagrin. The Russians of course had been ready to begin bids for the territory for the Americans but then a little thing called the American Civil War happened and put that on hold but right after it was announced that the civil war was over them Russians were back again with quick negotiations thus resulting in the purchase of the territory only 2 years after the war.

Yays for Cowboy! America :D Yes, them cowboys were excellent sharp shooters in accuracy. Have you seen those gun-totin' riders? Amazing, simply amazing. Watch a gunslinger on Youtube and you'll know what I mean.

There was a Transfer Ceremony in Sitka, Alaska on the 18th of October that same year. The Russians ceremonially took down their flag and flew the American one and then their military left while a lot of Russian Orthodox missionaries stayed and a few Russian colonists, though most left because of the intimidating Americans who looked at Alaska like another piece of territory waiting to be settled. Those pioneers.

Also, the failed line that America had mentioned was reference to the Russian-American telegraph line supposedly constructed from Seattle, Washington up British Columbia through Alaska and then to Siberia. It was an early attempt to link East-West operations in 1865. It never actually operated though.
Chapter Notes

Warning! Various character shifts in Point Of Views. Now it's the time to hear from everyone else's thoughts :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Nebraska Territory, United States of America. January 14th 1872

America chuckled and paid no attention to the Russian prince observing his reaction to the letter he had given him.

"I am sorry for not having delivered it earlier. It had slipped my mind over the rushed visit," the Russian prince, Grand Duke Alexei, explained his apology.

America hadn't really cared for the apology. As long as he finally got the letter and his eyes were able to skim over the letters of words that Russia had written himself for only his vision to behold. It wasn't a lengthy letter nor was it short but it was enough in explaining why he hadn't accompanied the Grand Duke and fulfilled his promise of visiting again. Though the thought of such a foretold visit would make the American nation's face turn a complete shade of red he composed himself well this time and smiled like a young swooned adolescent. And that he was.

'My dearest Alfred,

You must forgive my lack of presence with my young dashing Duke's entrance into your country. As Mary was a virgin upon Christ's birth so too had I packed all my belongings and readied to board the Bogalye when rumors of trouble in the Balkans arose. Now you know me, dearest Alfred; I wouldn't have cared if the whole world fell apart if only I could see you again. But my Tsar persisted I investigate and so with a heavy heart I watched the squadron meant to spirit me away into your arms leave my ports. I am very sad right now as I write to you, but it is well in my dreams.

Tonight I will dream of your borrowed paradise; the one where the sun never sets. The skies are always blue, and the sunflowers form row after row of unending golden oceans. There we are; you in my arms and I holding you tightly. We are both very warm and very happy. Especially you. No more do you look haunted, no more do you look malnourished, no more do you look sad.

Instead of pointing that beautiful face toward the ground it is pointed up and gazing at the sun. Just like the sunflowers surrounding. Come to think of it, you often remind me of those giants. Wouldn't you think so, Alfred? Moi padsOhukh, yes I like that very much. Confused by the phrase? Well then, why don't you learn a little Russian for me, padsOhukh? It would give me great pleasure hearing my native tongue come out of your mouth, so much pleasure.

Well, now that you know of my reason for prolonging my actual visit I shall excuse myself and assist my Tsar with his concerns. Know that I shall think about you, Alfred, and of the opportunity I have missed. I shall make sure to hear every detail from Alexei about his stay with you. But know for certain that when I find the time where my presence isn't as strongly needed in my courts and territories I will slip away from my people and come to you, whether night or day matters not, but in our fated meeting I will take your hand and hold you close and kiss you with all my passion, only
then will we come to bed where I will make love to you and our bodies shall become one. It is I who will show you the wonders of national unity.

Wait for me, moi padsOlnukh. Keep your head up toward the sun and continue to grow. I expect a fully bloomed bud by the time I arrive.

With love that knows no end,

Ivan Braginsky'

There was a faint blush on America's cheeks and he had to steady his horse as it trotted down a hill with a few boulders around to disrupt an easy walk. Placing the letter to his lips he caught ear of something. Turning he noticed the Grand Duke to his left smiling away. He probably knew about Russia and his upcoming announcement of courtship. But it wasn't the Grand Duke who had caught his attention. America's eyes scanned just a little ways behind the royal to see one of his men scribbling away with a small pencil and paper in hand. At first one might think he was writing about his experiences in the West but America's eyes were sharp even without Texas and he knew immediately that the pencil wasn't making any such jot markings, but more along the ways of curved lines and etched reality.

He was sketching him.

"Hey!" America gasped. His face was now full blown red as he turned the reins of his horse and lightly prodded his steed with the tips of his spurs to urge the horse to trot over to the little hotshot Russian artist.

"Ah, that now belongs to Russia," Grand Duke Alexei informed, purposely moving his own stallion in front of America to hinder his trek toward the artist riding near the Russian prince. "He asked for this artist to capture a sketch of you to show him upon our return. He wants to see your current state and stature."

"I'll pose for him when we get back to the fort, just don't show him that picture!" America protested, once again trying to maneuver around the prince who was still shoving his horse in his line of securing an embarrassing portrait for the Russian Empire to see.

"I am certain he'll want to see this one. It captures your unguarded moment when reading his letter of declared love," Alexei said.

"You!" America's blush burned his ears as he stuffed the letter into his heavy coat while a cold gust of wintry wind rushed past the caravan as they hauled their persons and cargo consisting of numerous buffalo kills back to one of his forts secured in his territory. "Since when did Ivan tell you?"

"A majority of the royal family already know about his reservations for you," Alexei informed. "My father is very anxious for the official announcement of the courtship."

"Yeah, well why won't he allow Ivan to visit then?" America asked, muttering in disdain.

"Are you ready for him?" Alexei inquired, his eyes looking quite serious than his usual playful demeanor just moments earlier.

"I . . ."

"Have you prepared yourself for his unification on a national level?"
"Uh . . ."

"When he arrives he has discussed no concerns of conversing with your leaders nor exploring your newly acquired territories. He means to become one and then share of the experience with the world."

"I know, alright!" America nearly shouted, startling a few of his men riding close to him. His shoulders raised to his ears and he opted to pull his scarf up closer around his nose but no matter how hard he tried to hide himself, and no matter if his men ignored their nation's discomfort with a subject regarding such intimate matters, the Russian prince continued to look at him and continued to see right through him.

"You are a young nation, Amerika," Alexei said with a smile signaling understanding. "No doubt untouched by any other country, besides your parenting nation."

"Yeah," America muttered, turning his gaze toward the prairie before them and on the far-off sight of the fort in the distance.

"Then it is understandable to be nervous," Alexei said, this time trying to make it sound as if America's uncertainty was right among his national standing. "But you have nothing to be afraid of. Ivan likes you very much. He will take great care of you."

America said nothing. He didn't look at the Grand Duke, nor his men. He kept his words as little as possible when they entered the fort and dismounted and unloaded all of their belongings.

"Here, Bill." America offered his saddle for his partner to take away. After wiping his hands from the dirt he took off his gloves and shoved the leather articles under his arm. He stood straight when the Grand Duke and his personnel walked away from their steeds. When the Grand Duke expected to walk past the country in silence America spoke up.

"Would you be willing to deliver Ivan a letter personally?"

Grand Duke Alexei turned and nodded. "Of course I will," The Russian said.

America said no more and simply inclined his head before excusing himself and heading back into the fort to no doubt write a personal message that the Grand Duke found himself very curious about and hoped that in no way the American had suddenly decided to change his mind about their upcoming officiating courtship.

He suspected the boy was of course young and therefore not used to letting the world know about relationships whether they be friend or lover. In fact most royal humans knew about the complexity of national relationships and the sheer and strict no privacy it had on the rest of the world. Nothing stayed a secret for long and when Russia and America finally consummated their relationship then the world would know, and know every single detail at that.

They'll find out how long Russia had been attracted to the young ex-colony, and vice versa. They'll find out who offered the courtship. They'll find out where it was consummated. They'll find out everything and in the end they'll begin to make bets on how long it would last. And, worst case scenario, if there be a few jealous nations—Grand Duke Alexei could name a certain sister nation right off the top of his head in that moment—who found themselves in disagreement with the coupling they could either start a war, create an isolation, or fight for one or the other nation to have for themselves.

It really was a cruel life for nations. Alexei knew this and he wondered if America did too. The boy
was just so young and inexperienced. He feared for his high expectations. But more importantly he feared for his own nation's sanity. Did Russia even know what he was getting himself into?

What would happen once the courtship was made official and all too soon a challenge was brought up? Alexei could guess his nation not to be too happy. He's known for Russia's long time affection for the boy nation. Alexei highly doubted he'd let a competitor tear him away or America away any time soon. But the worst thought came to the Grand Duke after he had left the high plains with America's letter in hand, sealed for authenticity. He became concerned with what was written in the letter.

He did not want to return to his home only to give his love-struck nation a letter from a nervous little child who frankly couldn't handle the pressure of a world-known courtship. Russia would be heartbroken and when he was he . . . became . . .

Alexei decided to think more optimistically. But the entire journey home nearly weighed his heart into his stomach, especially when he came face to face with his nation.

St. Petersburg, Russia. December 1872

Russia couldn't help but let his smile reach his eyes. The picture was perfect. It captured the very unbridled affection the boy so claimed to have had for him. The pencil sketch really did no justice to the American's image though and he had wished he had been there in person to see it, but the light marks on the boy's cheeks made by the artist were indicated to be the subtle tint of a blush.

Beautiful, it really was.

"So you said he was taller, da?" Russia inquired of his journey-worn prince who nodded in reply as he lounged in a satin chair near his brothers and father who gathered to hear his tale.

The Grand Duke let out a weary sigh and nodded again. "Da," he answered and then raised his hand. " Came up to here to me."

"Good, good," Russia nodded and continued to trace the sketched features of the boy who looked to be pressing his written letter to his lips.

"Oh, and, he wanted me to give you this." Grand Duke Alexei stood up and with unsure steps handed over the sealed letter to his nation. His father and brothers watched closely as Russia broke the seal and began reading it.

Alexei had thought he had been the only one holding his breath but when he looked toward his brothers and father who looked quite nervous as well he realized he was mistaken. If this all ended horribly he would blame his father. It was he who kept Russia's pending sealing visit from the American nation longer than necessary. He had a chance to come with him on his journey, he really did, but his father always became too nervous when Russia left for any length of time. He always grew concerned with rumors of unsettle and war.

His breath rightly caught in his throat as he watched Russia still himself. He no longer cared for looking toward his siblings and father because he knew they were possibly just as pale as he.

"Ivan, is . . . everything well with the young Amerika . . . on national terms?" Tsar Alexander quietly asked, leaning forward in his seat.

When a smile appeared on Russia's face everyone let out long held-in sighs of relief. Many had hoped for an eventual chance at some sort of an alliance with the rising power in the western hemisphere. If it meant courtship then so be it. The closer the relationship the better.
"Why, Alexei. You had failed to inform me of the song my little Alfred had written for me," Russia said. When turned the parchment to show the letter that offered a side note of smaller written words signifying the lyrics of some tune, everyone understood his meaning.

"He had?" Alexei asked as he stood up and came closer to read the words before he smiled. "Oh, yes! That song. It was a very lovely one, one of my favorites. He sings very well."

"Such a shame, I wish to have heard it myself," Russia mentioned before offering a glare toward his Tsar who merely rubbed his sweating hands on his pants.

"I had no idea it was for you," Alexei said with a smile and now found himself glad in knowing that the boy's love for their nation was true. Even though young and pure he was certain it would become hard as stone and tough to wear down.

"He promises to sing it for me when I come," Russia said. He then turned to his Tsar. "You would grant me that trip one day, da?"

"Da," His Tsar said but then reminded him of the turmoil in Europe. "Only after disputes have settled down. I still can't believe you agreed with that young German child becoming a nation. Absurd. Absurd I say!"

"Oh, you mean the unification of the German states?" Russia asked after remembering what had happened just a little over a year ago, almost two years. "Germany is young and inexperienced. He still has his big brother tossing him around on strings. I only said I agreed to make him feel better. I will keep an eye on him, no doubt. But I cannot keep my eyes on him for long if I am to look on my beloved, whom I will see soon, da?"

With every pressing question Russia's gaze darkened at his Tsar, letting him know just how badly he needed America and if he wasn't relieved of the stress and tension soon then the people would pay for it.

New York City, New York, USA. 1882

"Ludwig, Gilbert?!!" America couldn't believe his eyes. One moment he was standing behind the registration counter numbering the immigrants and the next moment he was looking over to see how far the line stretched when up came his old friends.

Jumping over the desks America was too quick to run right into Prussia's arms. He had nearly toppled the older state over from his speed and sheer size. He was nearing his height if not just that.

"Mein gott, you've grown, Alfred!" Prussia exclaimed in surprise as he pet his head with a wide grin. "You're becoming a giant!"

"Thanks," Alfred said with a chuckle before he felt the white-haired nation touch his glasses.

"These are new," Prussia observed with a smile before taking them off and squint his eyes to look through it. "Since when do you wear spectacles? Modeling after Austria much?"

"No, I'm modeling after myself," America complained as he snatched the glasses away and hugged them close to his chest. He didn't like when anyone messed with Texas. It was just plain rude.

"Verzeihen sie mir, verzeihen sie mir, Alfred," Prussia excused himself before his smile brightened and his ruby eyes turned to his right. "But look! Ludwig's grown just as much!"

Alfred's blue eyes landed on the boy's form. Prussia's little brother was a boy no more.
"Wow!" Alfred gasped as he took in the younger German's form; High black boots shining, golden cufflinks and lace, white satin draped around him. He looked more formal than Prussia who was garbed in simple blacks and silvers.

The little boy he had met back at Russia's masquerade in the early Nineteenth Century was now grown up and . . . was he his size? His jaw now squared, his arms and thighs thick with muscle, and his chest obviously much more broader than America's.

"I'm glad that you approve, Alfred," Ludwig said with a much more confident smile. If America remembered correctly every time he'd compliment him about anything—whether it be his stature or the way he rode a horse—his cheeks would fade a little pink and he'd excuse the compliment like he never had said it. America liked this surety in him so much better.

"Sorry for not keeping in touch too well, but I've been busy these past few decades," America admitted but only watched as Prussia grinned in pride and slid his elbow across Ludwig's arm.

"Nothing too much happened on our end, except little Luddy here becoming an official nation," Prussia announced. Just as soon as he had, his little brother's face turned red, more likely out of frustration over his brother's nickname of him.

"What?!" Alfred's eyes popped and his glasses slid down the bridge of his nose to rest upon his nostrils. When his eyes met Ludwig's the blond nodded and offered a satisfied smile. "That is AMAZING!"

In the blink of an eye America had his arms wrapped around the boy's thick neck and squeezed until no air could get through. After hearing the blond choke America had enough sense to pull away, though of course not far. His face was still close and his eyes sparkling as he beamed with pride at this new nation before him.

"What is your name? What is your national name?" America wanted to know. The becoming of a nation was always so exciting and America always feared he had been born too late in the world to witness such historical astonishments.

"The German Reich, or, as you would call It, the Empire of Germany," Ludwig informed with a proud smile. His shoulders spreading and his jaw rising a little more upward as his body notably filled with the pride of it all.

"So, Germany it is," America said as he pulled back and began trying the name on his own tongue. "Germany . . . Germany. How does it sound?"

"From you? It sounds perfect," Ludwig, no, Germany said with a sure nod. "But you can still call me by my human-given name."

"But it's really cool when someone calls you by your national name. It's the recognition, the glory, the honor. It's just amazing. Right, Germany?" America had failed to notice the light pink dusting the new nation's cheeks when he quickly turned toward the sound of Prussia's voice.

"Ja, ja, it feels wonderful," Prussia agreed and pulled America along before pushing him into a room nearby barren of any person. "Now wait in there a little while."

"Wha—?" The door was closed before America could protest or settle his confusion to protest for that matter. He hadn't understood why Prussia would do this to him but then again he hadn't had the opportunity to see Prussia turn to his brother after he had shut him in the room.

"Alright, you've held up your end of the bargain now I'll hold up mine," Prussia informed with a
wink to his baby brother. "I'll recognize your courtship and it will become official to the world. Now go and tell him."

"But, what if he doesn't understand?" Germany asked, his cheeks pinker by the second. "The last time I asked for his hand he didn't seem to understand what I was wanting of him."

"He was young, of course he wouldn't," Prussia assured. "You can see he's grown some. He's more mature than all those years ago. Just try, you'll see."

No matter what, Germany protested after having the late case of uncertain self-consciousness rise up in him at the last moment as Prussia pushed him toward the room and quickly shoved him inside before closing the door again.

"Your brother's odd," America stated, making Germany turn toward him to notice the boy was standing near the door, leaning against the wall with his arms crossed over his chest.

"Ja, I know," Germany said as he cleared his throat. "But he means well."

"I guess." America shrugged his shoulders before looking at the German curiously. "Is there something you want to speak to me about?"

"Perhaps," Germany said, his eyes turning from America. Again with the uncertainty even after he'd beaten the odds and become an official nation.

"Perhaps?" America chuckled. "Don't tell me you and Gilbert sailed hundreds of miles here just to take a look and then leave."

"Nein," Germany said, raising his hand to halt the boy's chuckles. It was more than just a visit, at least which was what Germany wished. "Firstly, it was to inform you of my . . . accomplishments. To accompany my people whose desire was to immigrate here and to give your promised opportunity a try I found it useful and opportune for that informing, and, ja, it was an excuse to come and see you."

"And the surprise visit was a pleasure, believe me," America said with that beautiful smile of his. "So how long is your stay? Have a set schedule yet? If not I've got lots of activities in mind, like—"

"Secondly, it was in honesty to ask you something. Something I had asked once before but never had the qualifications of accomplishing such a task."

America looked at him quizzically. The young German nation came closer to America. His form straightened and he looked the ex-colony in the eye. There was a small silence and America glanced down at the feel of the light brush of fingers touching his own. It was Germany. He was reaching out and ghostly taking a hold of his left hand before his other hand took up the other.

"Some decades ago a very little boy was beguiled by a young aspiring child. This child was so very smart, so very strong, so very free. So free I was afraid I wouldn't be able to catch him."

"Why would you want to catch someone who is free?" America asked softly. The sound of his voice and choice of words signaled to the other blond that he in fact knew the subject of Germany's little story and its hinted meaning. "Bondage is never good."

"Ja, but he was such a pretty thing. Something worth locking away and showing off to the rest of the world," Germany explained with a light smile. "So I often wondered if he would be free like that by my side."
Oh no.

America's eyes shined in understanding before his brows crashed together. He looked down and knew his frown would not make the German any happier. Pulling his hands away was hard but it was necessary.

"Forgive me, but I'm afraid I must decline your offer, Germany," America said as formal and polite as possible. Rejection from someone so longing; it was never a good thing.

"What, why?" Germany asked. He looked startled. Confused at most. It was as if the concept of a rejection hadn't been thoroughly thought through. It was as if he had never been denied anything in his known existence and so the mere coming of the setback was baffling if not more of a mysterious anomaly to the German. "I have done what my brother has asked. He said in order to properly court another nation I had to become one myself. I have and I have become strong. I can protect you, I can trade with you, I can give you everything. Why am I not good enough?"

When America looked up at him he smiled apologetically, sadly, almost shamefully and rubbed his dry hands together.

"I'm already taken." Germany's eyes widened in shock at America's reply.

"When, and who?" He asked. Knowing that no one knew; it was understandable to realize why the German nation was so confused the announcement. But it was the truth.

"I'm sorry," was all America offered. His phrases were blunt and his sentences to the point. He had no flowery speech to offer Germany or any explanations as to why he had not accepted him and why he had accepted another. It was as it was and there was nothing America could do about it. And he most certainly wasn't one to betray his promised. Never.

Germany looked upset. Very upset. But it was a sad upset, not an angry upset. America remembered his first proposal. He had been visiting Prussia, staying at his home and playing with Ludwi—Germany, it had been one of his numerous visits, and Germany, after supper, had invited him into the study and there he had taken his hand and asked for his permission to court him. America wasn't stupid. He knew what the boy had been asking but he had just been so caught off guard and dumbfounded that someone had asked him that he couldn't speak. Prussia apparently had been near, as he usually always was when Ludwig was seeking time alone with America, and had heard what his brother had asked in his intended privacy with the ex-colony. Privacy interrupted, Prussia was quick to come into the study and proceeded in separating to the two boys, afterwards speaking with his brother about the matter and apologizing to America.

So now he had been asked again by Germany. It was unexpected, and like America had informed earlier: too late. Throughout the years America had been asked by many nations for his hand in courtship. This occurrence caused him to grow a need for understanding the term and meaning. But after coming to fully understand its meaning on national and intimacy terms and levels it hadn't been long before he realized he had actually wanted a certain nation to ask this of him. It never came and he never dreamt of the situation forcing himself to do the asking and in all swelling heart his realized desire had accepted. America couldn't be more happy. He knew he'd probably hurt if he had been rejected and so his heart truly went out to Germany.

"Who is it?" Germany asked once more. He was demanding and America was uncertain if it was necessary to provide the name. But what he knew for certain was that Russia had said it wasn't yet "official" and so he figured he might just want to wait until . . . until . . . until Russia himself announces it.
"You'll know when he announces it," America said. He subconsciously rubbed his arm uncomfortably, finding the air around them now awkward and too silent and thick.

Germany nodded, his eyes glancing down, unreadable. After a moment he fixed his form. He held himself high and offered a bow in polite-kind. "Then if you would excuse me. It has been a pleasure to see you again, America. It does my soul good to see your growth and continuous health. Farewell."

"Eh, Ludwig, wait!" America cried out as he ran after the German who had turned to leave the room. His hand had just turned the doorknob when America caught a hold of him by his sleeve and for once more caught his gaze. "Don't tell me you sailed hundreds of miles just to ask me . . . it couldn't be just that."

Ludwig gently pulled his sleeve away without further offense and stared into America's eyes. "Ja, it was."

Before America could spit out more excuses to keep his unexpected guest still, the German had pressed onward and left the room. Upon exiting the door Prussia approached them with a proud smile but it faded upon the sight of his brother's face and that of America's desperate distress and discomfort. When his ruby eyes glanced toward America the young boy had to avert his gaze and when Prussia looked down at his brother he caught hold of his shoulder and began conversing with him in their native tongue. America's German wasn't that good and so he caught only a few words, but if he had understood he would have heard Prussia ask—

"What happened?"

"Nothing," Germany said, turning his gaze away from his older brother. "Really? Then what's with that face? What happened?" Prussia persisted.

"Nothing!" Germany shouted. He didn't seem to care that America was watching and was startled by the sudden escalade of vocal volume, especially between close siblings. "He said he's already been taken!"

Prussia was silenced by the news. His eyes glanced toward America, who looked like he was concerned with their shouting at each other. With his lack of knowing what words they were yelling at the other Prussia sighed for the young adolescent nation. Then Prussia turned back to his brother and offered him a sorry frown.

"Did he tell you who?" He asked.

"Nein!" Germany shouted. "But this wouldn't have happened if you hadn't held me back from courting him!"

Germany then stomped off in anger more gravitating toward his brother's past hindrance of a promising suitable relationship. Prussia called for Germany to stay but he didn't listen. He turned toward America who looked at him with concern.

"I am sorry for all of this, Alfred," Prussia apologized. "But he . . . he really liked you."

America nodded his head downward. He knew but he had thought that it had waned. He thought that it was nothing more than a childish crush. They were both so young anyways.

Cut from his train of thoughts by a sudden, "Farewell," by Prussia, America's eyes widened and his
mouth gapped as he watched the nation chase his little brother toward the docking area.

"Wait, you can't leave! Not when you just arrived!" America called out, watching his old friends walk away as if they hadn't been there mere minutes ago. "Please!"

America chased after them and managed to catch them just as Prussia hopped onboard a ship to catch a hold of his brother's shoulders and pull him into a tight embrace. Germany was red-faced now. There was a slight glimmer in his eyes; they looked to be the forming of tears.

He was shouting again, pushing at his big brother, but Prussia held fast and didn't let him go.

"We're not going to leave, you hear?" Prussia whispered to his baby brother. "I know you want to but it isn't polite. We've traveled all this way. You'll insult Alfred if you leave. Think of his honor."

"What about my honor?!" Germany finally succeeded in pulling away from his brother, staring him in the eye defiantly. "Rejection? After I shamelessly defeated France? After I was even recognized by the Russian Empire? How can someone like me recognize this concept of rejection? I can't, and I can't be near him now. He doesn't want me here."

Prussia narrowed his eyes. His lips drawn out in a thin line before he nodded. "Fine," he said. "Since you're so accomplished then you can sail home by yourself. It's not like you need me, right?"

Germany narrowed his eyes before those blue eyes glanced toward America's form who waited patiently on the docks looking anxious and concerned more than most. Turning his gaze away quickly Germany stuttered and finally turned from his brother. "Ja, I don't," he said.

Prussia said no more. He rose his hands in surrender and offered a polite bow before leaving the ship and joining America back on the docks.

"You're leaving?" America asked with concern and hurt in his eyes.

"Ludwig is," Prussia informed with a sigh. "I'm sorry about this. Just let him go."

America glanced down and Prussia was startled when he saw a glisten in the boy's eyes.

"Eh, are you going to cry, Alfred?" Prussia asked as he put his hands on the boy's shoulders.

"I really messed up," America whined as he blinked rapidly to hide his hurt expression. "I'm a bad host. I always have been!"

"Nein, nein, nein, Alfred!" Prussia gasped, pressing closer and rubbing the boy's back. "That's just . . . you know what Ludwig is like. He's always had this temper. This is just one of the times you've seen it. It's hard to handle is all."

America nodded but he knew it wasn't just the temper. He really didn't want Germany to leave but he did and so the visit consisted mostly of himself and Prussia. It was a pleasant visit but without Germany their conversations were short and their visitations dull. Prussia had already seen most of his sites before, especially on the east coast and there wasn't enough time to travel to the west coast and so it had become less adventurous and dare he say awkward, especially when Prussia had begun asking about his secret courtship.

In the end Prussia had left without a name and no more clues as to who it was than Germany had. So America became afraid what the rest of the world would think and the insecurity ate away at him. He wanted to express his concerns to Russia via letters but he became afraid to even let him know about it. He was afraid to let him know he was . . . scared.
But even through the fear of known insecurities, the first chance America had to go himself to see Russia he took it, even if other countries would be there.

Tientsin, China. June 26th 1900

Tired and worn, yes, but still America felt he was obliged with cleaning his marines' guns after all the hard work they had done. So there he stood, placing the pieces of his men's guns down on the ammunition crates before him and skillfully cleaning out the necessary compartments. He had just taken up another rag and dipped it into oil when something had knocked into him from behind thusly causing the rag to escape his fingers and his elbow to bump into the cup of oil and leave it spilling over the side of the crate.

Now America's first reaction would be to elbow the being behind him and hope to hit either gut or nose. He'd had enough with the damn Boxers lately and he wasn't willing to let his men down by being the one who was snuck up from behind and ambushed, but America declined those first thoughts when the being behind him had leaned down, bending their body over him, and offering a chaste kiss just under his ear. America closed his eyes and took in the moment and the feeling therein. A smile was quick to appear and suddenly his energy returned to him as he turned around and wrapped his arms around that scarfed Russian neck.

"You startled me, Ivan," America informed with a pout that didn't seem to coax any guilt into the nation holding him close. "What if I had thought you were a Boxer come to take me out?"

"No mere mortal can extinguish the United States of Amerika," Russia praised as he lowered his head and once more kissed the American on the neck.

America smiled and leaned into the touch of lips against his skin. When Russia pulled back America revealed his soft-based emotions before the nation when before he couldn't look at him like this, at least not in front of the others. His eyes darkened in color as had the Russian's violet gaze and it wasn't long before the few seconds of eye intake got to the both of them and left the result in the clashing of their teeth and tongues.

America's nostrils flared as he tried his best to take all of the air needed through nose only. He didn't want to pull away from Russia and he was most certain that Russia didn't want to pull away from him.

The Russian never had gotten the opportunity to leave Europe, but conflicts in Asia had moved him closer toward the east and it has moved America closer as well. Despite knowing that many other European powers would be there in Asia as well, America did not skip the chance to board a ship, take a few marines with him, and head toward China where he finally got to see Russia again. Of course the presence of the other countries, especially England's presence, had swayed the two apart for appearance's sake it had not, however, stopped their internal longing.

After England's proposed Seymour Expedition, Russia and America had agreed to follow. Everything was professional and polite. Those few glances caught by America or Russia offered a promise of embrace. It never came from the disastrous expedition and because of so it left them both frustrated with the British Empire and the lack of time for private matters.

Now that they had finally sent out help and said relief arrived they were able to return to the city and recuperate. Everyone looked forward to it but it seemed Russia couldn't wait upon return to the city or for an invitation to the American. It was an unexpected visit by the nation but America welcomed him nonetheless knowing that the two wouldn't get this sort of a chance upon the march back.

Despite America's best try in attempting to breathe through his nostrils he had to pull back and suck
in larger amounts of oxygen. With his eyes closed, his mouth hanging, and a pleasantly burning flush etching across his cheeks and down his neck, America wondered what the Russian thought of his physical display. He thought he might have laughed at his vulnerable state or something akin to the jokes he'd normally get but it wasn't anything or the sort. Instead he felt the Russian press his lips against his own again, taking all of the breath he had managed to secure earlier.

America felt Russia pressing closer and he was to the point he was bending him in half over the crate. That's wasn't too pleasant on his back and so he reached down and pushed until his body found the support to lift itself upon the crate and cradle Russia. With knees pressing against the Russian's hips they were all too inviting and America felt Russia's hands caress his hips before deepening their kiss and raising his body temperature.

"Oh! Uh, sorry, mates. Didn't mean to disturb ya."

America's face was more red and burning all the greater than it had when displaying heated affection for the Russian over top him. He quickly pulled his lips away and his arms pushed Russia away just fast enough for his knees to pull back and smack together.

"Ah! England, what are you—?!” America stopped in his startling embarrassing rant after thinking his previous parent nation had caught him with his secret lover. Why? Because it hadn't been England at all. The accent had thrown him off. He had thought that it had been the Brit but after looking at the interrupter he realized it had been nothing of the sort. It was a young man with brunette hair and England's eyes.

America had seen the adolescent before but frankly paid no mind to him. He was close to England when they marched, when they fought, when they retreated. He had possibly thought him to be some prodigy youth general, but that was impossible. Though now as he looked at him he realized something else . . .

He was a colony.

"Hey, wait!" America shouted just as the blushing boy turned to vanish from the ammunitions entrance. He stopped and turned back to them. His eyes averted from embarrassment of what he had witnessed. He looked like he wanted to leave and if America had thought him to be some mere British trooper then he would have despite his command, but he was staying and America realized it had been because he had seniority as a nation.

Walking closer America took in the boy's appearance. His uniform was slightly different than the typical British attire. He also seemed thicker than England and America had no doubt he'd continue to grow.

"What's your name?" America asked.

"I'm the British Colony of Australia," He answered, his green eyes finally coming up to look into his own as America stared down at him.

Australia. Suddenly, America was taken back nearly a hundred years to that Russian masquerade ball where England had informed him as his new status as "big brother." This kid right here . . . he was the one who had changed his standing as only child to an older sibling. This was England's second son.

"Australia." America smiled and nodded. He was quick to reach out his hand and offer it to the boy. It was slightly humorous to see those green eyes widen at the sight of the held-out hand inviting his own to take. When he looked back up America saw confusion in those eyes, so he offered once
more a, "It's nice to meet you. I'm the United States of America, a pleasure."

Uncertainly Australia took the hand and left America to initiate the shake. After so Australia looked up at him quizzically.

"No other country's ever shaken my hand before," he informed the blond nation who happened to be his older brother unbeknownst to him. "Much less looked at me like you do," the brunette added.

When before, America would have gotten upset at the thought of it, he understood with a nod of his head. Being a child of England, well, the empire made sure that no other nation could so much as glance at you without the threat of a war or seclusion. That was just how England parented. He wanted his children's chastity secure and their imaginations limited. What he saw, they saw. What he believed in, they believed in. Simple as that.

America was so glad he had broken free when he had the chance.

"Amerika has the reputation of looking at everyone, nation or territory, with equal respect," Russia added where he leaned against a crate with his arms crossed and a pleased smile on his lips. "That's just the way he is."

"And proud of it," America said with a wink and a thumbs-up. It was cute watching the boy blush once more. He looked enthralled of the growing nation before him. The blush was back and his eyes sparkled at America's radiance.

"So what did you need in here?" America asked knowing that was why the boy had walked this way.

"Oh, uh, um. I was—I was told to collect some cartridges," Australia informed as America patiently waited out his stuttering. America nodded and reached out toward Russia who offered a few from a crate. "Here you go," America said as he handed them to the boy.

"Thanks," Australia said with a smile. He turned but as he walked back the way he had come he continued to look behind him where America stood, waving him off.

"He likes you," Russia observed as he approached America and wrapped his arms around him from behind his chest.

"I'm glad," America said with a fond smile. "That's the last thing I want for my little brother to hate me."

"That is right. He's England's son," Russia nodded with a smile. "Do you think he knows?"

"Probably not," America said with a downcast gaze. Russia had frowned before turning the American around in his arms and tilting his chin up with his fingers. "I forbid you from frowning in my presence, Alfred. I can't stand the sight of them."

America offered a quick smile for him before those fingers on his chin pulled and lips pressed to his mouth once more.

The trek back to the city had been interesting enough. All of the nations offered to carry a wounded soldier and this gave America a clear view of England in the lead, carrying his own wounded with his son walking beside him. He watched the Brit glance behind him and America made no attempt to hide the fact that he was gazing at Australia. When England followed his gaze to the boy marching next to him America watched England push Australia forward and tell him to march ahead with the scouts.
America frowned again.

Once back in the city the wounded and sick were taken to the doctors while the rest of the men just dropped their belongings and were given food and tea. America was pleased that his men were finally relieved. He offered them all words of encouragement and praised them for their acts of valor. When he found they had been taken care of he made to attend himself and his own weariness.

After laying his guns and packs down he groaned and rolled his stiff shoulder. He took off his hat and then proceeded with unbuttoning his jacket but found it quite difficult. It seemed his shoulder was much too stiff for that and so he decided to just leave his jacket on.

"Alfred." America turned and smiled as he watched Russia approach him with two cups of steaming hot tea. "Here," Russia offered. America nodded in thanks as he reached out and took up the offered cup.

"Just what I need," America admitted with a chuckle as he took the cup but all too soon his weakened fingers let the porcelain object slip from his grasp and down it fell, crashing and shattering on the ground. "Uh, sorry. Butter fingers, you know?" Once again America had offered a smile and a joke but the Russian seemed unamused as he set his cup down on a nearby merchant stand and then looked at him darkly before thrusting his palm out and hitting America square in the chest.

America stumbled back before Russia hit him again and again before he had pushed him out of the sight of human and nation eyes alike and slammed him against the wall of the city.

"Ah! What the hell, Ivan?!" America gasped out when Russia twisted him around and pressed him against the wall.

"You've been lying, dear Alfred," Russia said lowly as he pulled on the American's jacket hard enough to rip it off of his shoulder. Afterwards he proceeded in ripping America's shirt until bare skin was seen and the red that was covering it.

Russia finally saw what he had suspected and so as he inspected the wound he noticed something unusual. Taking off his glove with his teeth Russia touched the wound with his bare hand and pressed his finger in.

"Ah! The bullet's still in, alright!" America cried out, hissing from the pain. His face became red from the embarrassment that his secret lover had found out. He didn't want anyone to know simply for the morale of his men. If they had known their country had been hit then they might have become afraid and upset over coming to China. He didn't want that, not when he got to finally see Russia after all this time, or even Australia for that matter.

"Tupoy," Russia whispered with disdain and scolded the boy who had been too careless.

The moment America felt the Russian ease his hold he was off of him in an instant. With wide eyes America turned to see that Russia had in fact been pulled off of him forcefully and not on his own accord.

"You bastard!" England had landed a good blow against Russia's jaw that left the taller nation fazed. America certainly hadn't foreseen that and he certainly hadn't expected England of all nations to jump in front of him as if he was guarding him from an enemy.

Stance-firm and fists shaking with battle-readiness, England stood between America and Russia and all America could do was gape as he reined in his mental bearings, and as Russia shook the haze from his eyes.
"I adore the way you treat your allies, Angliya," Russia commented while moving his jaw to feel for any major damage with his hand.

"Ally my arse!" England spat. "What the bloody hell were you trying to do to America? Don't think I didn't see it!"

Russia then pointed toward America who had been standing with his back against the city wall looking ever dumbfounded by all that had suddenly transpired before his very eyes. "He had been hiding a wound and I was just confronting him about it."

"What wound?" England turned and his green gaze widened at the look of it. America's face flushed out of embarrassment. He was quick to try to piece his tattered shirt back together to cover the shameful wound. When he looked back toward England he saw that the man looked hurt, which is what surprised America the most. "You've been . . . hurt?"

"Da," Russia said as he straightened his form and prided himself with knowing firstly about the American's condition. "If you would have paid more attention to those you led to their deaths then you might have known your ally had been hurt in the cross fire of the retreat."

"You were hurt in the departure?" England asked.

America nodded and then glared at Russia. "You didn't have to tell him."

"No, no," England said, shaking his head and then coming closer toward America and examining the wound. "By God, why didn't you tell me?"

"Didn't want the men to know," America admitted. "Besides, it doesn't hurt that bad. I can still move my arm to a certain extent."

"You stupid boy," England muttered and America this time had caught the high pitch in his words. He saw those trembling lips and a sheen of glistening moisture coated England's eyes for but a moment before he shook his head and took hold of America's arm rather harshly and pulled him along with him.

"Ah! Watch it!" America cried out, his face turning red once more as he was dragged out from the shadows of the city wall and to everyone around, nation and human alike. His shirt was hanging off of him in tatters, his former parent-nation dragging him toward the infirmary like some naughty child due for a spanking, and his wound bare before his men and the other curious onlookers. Hell, even Australia caught a glance at him.

It had been so embarrassing that he had flat out refused Russia's visit to his hospital room after night overcame the city. The older nation just didn't know when to stop teasing him and finally enough was enough. All of the other nations who wished to visit like France, Italy, Prussia, they could but he straight forwardly denied Russia.

As he laid in bed inside the infirmary that night he smiled to himself knowing Russia was probably drinking his upset away. Oh how he relished the mental image of a pouting Russia. The creaking of the door let America know someone had entered and so he closed his eyes. If it was that nagging nurse again come in to check to see if he was asleep then he'd play he was. He was nation; he didn't need sleep every day like a human did, but then again when he did need sleep he could hibernate for months on end. Still, she just wouldn't understand no matter how many times America insisted.

He heard the sound of a bowl getting placed down on the counter in the corner of the room and then someone had pulled a chair up to his bed and sat themselves down. When the sound of unraveling
fabric caught in America's ears he opened one eye. Just as he had though he found hands upon his shoulder and that resulted in him jumping up.

"What are you do—ing . . . England?" America stared blankly at the nation in front of him who held in his hands new gauze. He had come in to change his bandages.

"Stay still, lad. I don't mean you harm. I just wanted to change your bandages myself. Is that a crime?" England asked with a sad smile before his gently pushing hands coaxed America back down onto the mattress. "Come on, on your side." America nodded and silently did as told.

Watching as England soundlessly did as he said he'd come to do, America couldn't help but watch him closely. Sure relations between the both of them hadn't been at the peak of souring like they usually got to every other decade or so but England really hadn't been at all present during embassy visits and such. It was just strange to be this close to him after what felt like centuries. Come to think of it, America probably hadn't particularly stood (or lain, in his present case) this close to him since 1812.

But even so America let him touch him. He let him come closer with metal scissors and cut off the stained whites to clean and then wrap him up once more. When England clipped the gauze securely his hand stayed a little longer than comfortable. America didn't feel the pressure on his wound was that hard but when England began to tremble America looked up at him in unexpected startle.

"I'm so sorry, America. I truly am," England said as he covered his face with his hand and let the sound of muffled sobs echo throughout the dark room. "It was my entire fault that you're hurt. Mine alone."

America felt concern swell his throat up, or had that been his rising heart? It didn't matter. What did was England, the nation who had borne him into the world was crying in front of him. It was something America had never seen. Ever. Well . . . not since then.

Jumping up into a sitting position America reached out lightly touching England's shoulder. "Hey, you didn't know it would happen. No one did. Besides it was just a stray bullet. You can't control where those things fly."

"That's not the point," England insisted while simultaneously inhaling a breath meant to steady his state, but when he looked at the young nation America only realized that England had indeed been crying. "I almost killed you both. Because of my damn recklessness I almost killed you both!"

The both of them? America's heart silently sank when he realized England had been referring to Australia and him. England still had a heart for him as his child and so counted him next to Australia in a matter of harm. If America remembered correctly, Australia had taken shrapnel to his ankle and England had been quick to patch him up personally. That had been before America realized who he had been. Now that he understood he comprehended as to why England had kept the boy close, why he had him stay behind him when they charged, why he had gotten on his hands and knees to take care of a minor wound for the boy.

America wasn't England's child anymore. Officially? No. Historically? Yes. He wasn't a parent nation. He didn't know what England was going through, but he couldn't imagine it felt too good by the looks of England's deteriorated state.

"We're still here," America stated. "To live to fight another day. You're not getting rid of us any time soon, old man."

England looked at him. His mouth agape and his eyes shining. No one could resist America's smile.
"I'll follow you again, but this time, mind your supplies," America said with a playful wink, though inside he felt right on edge. He didn't like seeing England like this. He didn't know when he had felt this way when he specifically remembered before he could have cared less to see the snobbish empire on his knees and in tears.

It had been a hundred and twenty-five years since England had embraced him. America had been caught off guard and half expected his body to subconsciously push away, especially after the last time England had hugged him. But he didn't. He stayed still as England pressed him close, wrapping his long arms around him and pressing America's head against his neck where his fingers combed lovingly through wheat-hued locks of hair.

"I do still love you, Alfred," England whispered.

He wasn't lying. America could feel the beating of his heart. It was calm and on pace. As had been his words.

America blinked because his eyes stung. America pulled away because he couldn't breathe. America pushed England away because his heart hurt from the crowded space.

"America?" England looked confused by the sudden action. There was hurt in his eyes from the possibility of a rejection but America couldn't find it in himself to look at him, not when he was about to break apart himself.

"Thank-you for changing my bandages," America offered the polite acknowledgment of deed. He didn't say anymore. He didn't need to. England understood when he was wanted to leave.

England nodded and stood up. After collecting the trash and bowl he took one last glance toward America who had turned from him and covered his face so not to reveal what undusted emotions rising up inside him were doing to his nose and eyes.

Like the gentleman he was, England left when wished. Upon quietly shutting the door behind him England looked up to see Australia standing there. His green eyes were wide and his jaw hanging. Just how long had he been there?

"Son? What are you doing here at this hour?"

"Is he really . . ." Australia had stopped himself in his form of a stutter but picked up from where he left off just as quickly. "France had told me that . . . is the United States of America really your son?"

England frowned sadly before continuing his way to dispose of the dirtied water and used gauze. "I thought I told you to stay clear of the other nations."

Australia turned and followed his parent, close on his heels even for having a limp. "That doesn't matter. Is it really true?"

"No," England answered as he turned toward his second child after placing the porcelain bowl down in a sink. "Now can we please quit this subject and you return to your cot where you should be resting?"

England began walking again this time Australia noted in the direction of the exit. He was no doubt leading him back toward their rooms in the barracks.

"But Canada told me he was France's son," Australia continued even against his father's insistence
that they stop. "I know me and New Zealand are yours but France told me you had a child in the New World. Why would he lie about that?"

England stopped and turned toward Australia. He crossed his arms and narrowed his eyes. "What if he was? Say America was my son and in kind your big brother. What would you say? What would you do?"

Australia didn't say a word. He looked conflicted and confused as to how to answer the questions.

England let out a sigh and turned once more toward the barracks. "It's in the past now, son. I have you and your brother to look after. Even Mathew needs my attention. America's shown me a long time ago that he can take care of himself. All chicks leave the nest eventually; some just sprout wings quicker than the others."

England had, in a way, answered Australia and it had perturbed the boy why it had been so hard to simply say "yes" given that in the end of their conversation Australia had concluded that the amazingly strong and optimistic United States of America was indeed his older brother; England's oldest. Later he realized why his parent-nation had been so reluctant to tell him and his brother about their once-thought-nonexistent older sibling. He had heard his conversation with the younger nation and he had heard him tell him that he loved him. England didn't love anyone besides his own children, and, apparently, even if they had so violently pulled away from him.

Now Australia wasn't sure if he could ever look or speak to America the same again. In fact, one would think the mere thought of such a sibling doing that to a parent would deter Australia to stay away from America which is what it seemed to be hinted at whenever England would bid him do a task when he found the two speaking, but Australia was drawn to the growing country and soon enough America became his role model.

Manchuria, China. September 1900

Russia really had wished America had stayed home. Sending some troops would have sufficed, but accompanying them? No, that just wasn't desirable at all.

Russia would have to be near the boy if just to see him. He'd have to make sure he was well. He'd have to make sure he was fed properly by the others, treated with respect, and given a fair share in interests. He wanted him back in Alaska, waiting for him anxiously. Not here. Because if he was there then Russia would have to behave.

And he most certainly didn't want to be doing something so boring as behaving.

"AH!" China cried out as Russia stomped his boot onto his broken arm again. Russia grinned at the sound of crunching shards of bone. The nation's arm was definitely broken but he couldn't help but stomp again. He cried so well.

"Did you have fun, Kitay?" Russia asked when he leaned down to grab a hold of the small nation by the neck and lift him up off the ground. He was gagging but his eyes still shown a light of defiance. "Oh, you want more punishment?"

"European qín shòu!" China shouted and spat at the Russian.

Bad luck for the ancient nation; America wasn't there to keep the Russian good. So Russia slammed the Asian back onto the ground where burning embers were fluttering loosely and punched him in the jaw. He slammed his fist down onto him once more and Russia smiled in pride as he watched the man's left eye begin to swell. He might as well have his other match and so Russia once again beat
Russia turned and watched little Japan come running up, rifle clutched in his hands tightly with his sword slapping against his thigh. He looked upset and Russia couldn't for the life of him depict why. Oh wait, yes he could. Looking back down at China who was crying out from the pain afflicted by the Russian Empire, Russia chuckled. Despite Japan coming into their alliance to stop China's uprising he still had emotional ties to his older brother.

"I do not need your help, Asian nation," Russia said as he stood up but kept a close eye on China underneath him. If he so much as tried to move away he'd just have to break the next limbs, his legs.

"We're here to stop a rebellion, not eradicate a people," Japan stated as he knelt down and took in his older brother's condition.

"I am here to make sure a rebellion never happens again," Russia informed with a frown at the Japanese man below him. He didn't like him one bit. He was too arrogant and proud and too . . . just too Asian.

Despite his dislike for Japan, Russia had to settle their tense dispute later. Right now, as he looked around and considered his conquest of Manchuria secured he decided to leave the rest of the burning and slaughter to his men as they saw fit. Right now he had to head to Taku to see an already in trouble nation. He knew the American nation. He wouldn't leave without a proper goodbye and in that his leader was upset with his delayed return to his mainland. So Russia left and made sure his men kept him informed on Japan and his troops just in case he threatened territory like he had in the past.

Upon entering the city and then the docking area toward a familiar looking steamboat, Russia smiled at the sight of the boy. He was sitting on the bow of his ship, kicking his legs back and forth looking quite bored. He witnessed his captain approach him and ask him how long they should wait. America offered him another day but knowing him when the captain returned the next day he'd ask for another and another and another. Stubborn boy, but that was how Russia liked him.

"I should hope there's nothing important happening back home. If so I wouldn't think your return too pleasant," Russia called out and smiled as America's head jerked toward him and the brightest most beautiful smile erupted across his features.

Without word in rhetoric, America grabbed hold of the railing and jumped off of the boat in a single leap before rushing toward Russia and throwing his arms around him. England and the others were nowhere near so America hadn't thought it unnecessary to display affections if it was just a hug or touch.

"I told you I was busy, zvyozdochka," Russia cooed as he dove into those soft sapphire pools looking up at him with so much affection that he was drowning in ecstasy. "You should have returned home already."

America shook his head like an upset child. "I told the others that I wanted to see you one more time and that was final."

Russia chuckled and ran his fingers through the boy's hair before tugging him along. "Come then, let us send you off with a drink."

The two headed to a local bar and downed in humorous manner the local alcohol. They talked about
a few things, reminisced about recent battles and conflicts waged in the rebellion but when America inquired of where Russia had been earlier the older nation just responded by saying that he was securing his interests. After getting no more out of the conversation Russia then proceeded in walking America back to his ship.

It had been a beautiful early September night and Russia had decided to walk in silence and just inhale the other's presence. They had both enjoyed it but as they walked toward the docking area Russia had suddenly taken hold of America's wrist and dragged him toward a lumber shed close to America's docked ship. No one had been there and Russia had been wanting to know something and required it before the American left.

"I had been meaning to personally thank you for the extravagant welcoming tour you gave my Grand Duke Alexei. He had enjoyed that very much and I had greatly enjoyed your letter," Russia informed with a smile.

"Sure thing," America said with a smile. "It was my pleasure to show him around. Really did want you to come with him."

"I know, as did I," Russia replied as he raised his hand and let his knuckles brush against America's cheek and it did his heart good to see him lean into the touch so unafraid. "But more than anything I was curious about that song you sang to my prince."

"What song?"

Russia frowned and leaned back to straighten and peer down at America like a child in the wrong. When he crossed his arms he watched the American glance to their right and then to their left before his eyes looked up at him and then down again.

"There were lots of songs and music," America explained, but the nervously drumming fingers informed Russia that he knew which one he was speaking of.

"Da, he said there was. But he also said there was one song you sang for him. In fact you wrote the lyrics of it in this letter." Russia pulled out the parchment and handed it to America for proof. Even though the American stuck the paper in front of his face Russia could still see the top of his forehead changing color as well as his two ears, all red. When he was handed back the letter the American was just about waving it in front of him.

"Okay, I know the song, now here, take it!" America said as he turned his red face away from Russia and stood still, wishing for the burn to fade. "Yeah, so what if I sang it for him. Stop teasing!"

"I am not teasing," Russia defended as he pressed his hands upon the boy's shoulders and turned him toward him so that he may see his adorable face. "But I am jealous. I should have wished to have heard it myself." If America didn't understand that as an invitation to sing it to him then and there whilst no one was around then Russia would have to downright ask for the song sung.

The blush was fading as America smiled and looked up at him with a short nod before glancing around the shed. He poked his head inside before rummaging through a crate and returning back outside. In his hand was a can and with a smile America slapped the metallic object in rhythm of a beat and opened his lips and tuned his words.

"In a house, in a square, in a quadrant
In a street, in a lane, in a road
Turn to the left, on the right hand
You see there my true love's abode
I go there a courting and cooing
To my love, like a dove
And swearing on my bended knee
If ever I cease to love
May sheep heads grow on apple trees.

If ever I cease to love
If ever I cease to love
May the moon be turned into green cheese
If ever I cease to love."

There was more to the song and Russia knew it, but with that beautiful angelic voice and that face
Russia couldn't help himself from cutting the long-wanted-heard song short as he grabbed a hold of
America's square jaw and pulled him close. The can in his hands forgotten now as he pressed close
to his secret lover and returned the kiss with just as much passion as the older nation.

Russia was very glad that he didn't need to lean over too far for America. After Alaska the young
nation had grown like he expected and the height was much more accommodating but even America
had banged the back of his head against the shed's entrance as Russia pressed him inside for more
privacy.

There the two stumbled until America had lost his footing and dragged Russia down on top of him
where his knees pressed against the Russian's hips and Russia himself drove his knee between
America's thighs. America pulled away with a gasp and a heated flush appeared on his face. Russia
grinned, kissing him once more as he rubbed his leg against him, enticing an arousal.

"Please, not here," America moaned, turning his face away, closing his eyes tightly and swallowing
hard as Russia kissed his neck tenderly.

Russia understood even though the American wasn't willing to say it aloud. He wasn't ready. Well,
possibly not here. With a nod Russia reached out and took hold of America's chin, pulling his face
back to look at him.

"Alaska," Russia stated and nodded in silent agreement. America nodded as well as Russia leaned
down and kissed him tenderly.

After that America had lain in Russia's embrace for a few moments before they both felt it time to
depart. Russia waited upon the docks until America's ship vanished from sight with America
standing on the aft waving goodbye and lastly blowing him a kiss.

Russia let out a frustrated sigh when he turned and headed back into the city. How long would he
have to wait to have the boy? Conflict after conflict arose at every opportune moment and it annoyed
the hell out of the Russian who sought only to claim a lover.

Because of the tension he had taken to beating servants, particularly national servants. When wars
arose he decimated the enemy. He'd received a cruel recognition for it but he didn't care. He could
ease himself with sex but he wanted to save himself for the time when he would become one with
America. Since the boy was virgin he thought it only fair to refrain from sexual activities until then.

But by God was he hurting from lack of union. So he felt the need to return to the Chinese and at
least watch the executions if not carry some out himself. Perhaps after he's had America's body it
would ease the tension in his own body. Maybe then the others wouldn't call him a monster. Perhaps.
Perhaps.
While focusing on his much needed tension release Russia hadn't even sensed a nearby nation. In fact he had even walked right by him when he and America had left the lumber shed. And once again he had passed him.

Germany had been on his way to ask when America was going to depart when he found the boy with the Russian Empire, a nation he hadn't been too fond of lately. He had stayed near waiting for a time when Russia would leave but he hadn't and instead Germany had witnessed their raw affection toward the other through their passionate kisses and needy touches.

Germany had been surprised and frozen in spot. It was more of a mystery that Russia hadn't seen him; he hadn't been too hidden in his frozen state of shock. Even when America was gone and Russia had passed by Germany couldn't shake the shock of realizing that the one who had taken America away from him was none other than Russia, a nation far older than him and even more so than America.

*Why Russia?* That had been Germany's main questionable thought as he sat at a local bar inhaling drinks not to his liking if only to get himself drunk. Was it his stature, his age, his territory? What? That nation had one of the darkest histories and yet a young beautiful nearly untainted nation like America had fallen in love with him. Why? What did Russia have that Germany didn't?

"Ludwig? Ludwig!"

That was the sound of his brother, but Germany paid no mind. He simply took in another drink but in mid gulp the bottle was taken from him and the liquid spilled all over his jacket. He would have complained but his tongue was tied and the room was beginning to spin.

"Hey, what do you think you're doing?!" Prussia asked as he shook his baby brother before offering a few smacks to his face to get those wandering blue eyes to look at him. "What's wrong with you?"

"Everything!" Germany cried out as he pulled himself from his brother thusly losing his balance and crashing to the floor in a pitiful state. "Everything, damn it!"

Prussia just grabbed a hold of his arm and didn't even help him to balance and stand; instead he simply dragged him out of the bar and took him toward a wash room. There he shoved his face into a bucket of water and held him there until Germany choked for air. When he pulled him up he coughed and wheezed but would still not look at Prussia and so Prussia pushed him back into the water. He held him there longer this time and when Germany was pulled back he was on the cusp of unconsciousness.

"Look at me!" Prussia demanded.

Germany's eyes fluttered open and even through drunken haze he met his brother's scarlet gaze. Prussia looked upset and insulted by his brother's state. That must have been the reason why he slapped him.

"Get a hold of yourself!" Prussia ordered. He let go of his growing brother who had stood his ground and leaned against the mirrors. "You're nothing but an embarrassment like this. Now tell me what's forced you to degrade yourself like this, now!"

"A-A, America. I saw . . . who it was."

"What are you talking about?" Prussia had probably thought it to be a drunken ramble but suddenly he was back two decades and remembered Germany's hurt from rejection and the young ex-colony
so many of their people immigrated to saying he had another dear to his heart. "Who?" Prussia wanted to know just as much.

Germany gasped, still trying to catch his breath as the water trickled down his face and off his golden locks. He clenched his fists and then struck the closest mirror next to him. "Russia!" Germany shouted out the name like a curse and then bowed his head in defeat.

Prussia's eyes widened. "What?" he asked as he came closer to his brother. "You said it was him? Are you certain?"

"Of course I am!" Germany spat as he pushed his brother away. He needed space for his angered discovery. "I saw them . . . they both . . . damn it!"

"Calm down," Prussia said, trying to ease his brother's temper even though he was becoming upset himself over America's poor selection in lovers.

"I had failed him," Germany cried out, looking in distress at the recent memory. "Alfred and I . . . I failed to support him in the attack and I left him alone and defenseless on the wall. Russia and England, they saved him but I . . . I was hurt because I was weak!"

This time it was the tiles next to the shattered mirrors and Prussia was wondering if the next thing would be the entirety of the wall to fall to his brother's strength.

"Stop blaming yourself," Prussia said.

"What else am I supposed to do?" Germany asked, looking at his brother in desperation. "Nothing else but failed comparison suffices and even then I am worthless to him. Haven't I become strong? If so then why am I not strong enough for him?"

Germany was still in love. Prussia had managed to patch ties between them and America and avoid all awkward confrontations but he couldn't heal his brother's heart. He wanted his brother happy but he wanted America, who had become a brother to him as well, to be happy. Granted he didn't like America's choice in companionship and knew it wasn't for the wiser that he chose Russia of all nations to be with, but if he was happy then he wouldn't oppose it.

Still, Germany's happiness came before America's and frankly it didn't take long for the ex-colony to get over something trivial like a failed relationship.

So, decided, Prussia approached his brother, took hold of his head and held it high and began pushing his hair out of his face. He held his head steady as he did this and then held his frame as he attempted to stumble to the floor below.

"There are things a nation could do when confronted with unions in disapproval. Either reject it, or ignore it. But if it is perceived as a challenge for affection then one can fight," Prussia informed after pushing all of Germany's hair back. He looked him in the eyes and continued. "It can be done either two ways, subtle or violent. I wouldn't agree with either one, too many have died as a result of either or, but remember that the great questions of the time will not be resolved by speeches and majority decisions—that was the great mistake of 1848 and 1849—but by iron and blood."

Germany looked dazed as he took in and comprehended everything that Prussia had said and everything that he had suggested. When the haze cleared from Germany's gaze he narrowed his eyes and turned his eyes upon his brother.

"How long until I should act?"
"Don't give him any more than two decades."

And Germany didn't. He gave Russia seventeen years.

Chapter End Notes

Historical Notes:

Russia's Grand Duke Alexei did indeed have a wonderful visit to the United States of America. The Americans welcomed him with exuberant excitement and eagerly showed him all over their territories. General George Armstrong Custer and Buffalo Bill personally escorted him on the Buffalo hunt mentioned above. He loved the visit and Russia thanked the U.S. for taking care of their Prince later.

"If Ever I Cease to Love" was a song written the year Grand Duke Alexei visited and sung to him numerous times in various states. He rightly said it had been his favorite song and so I opted to put it as Russia's favorite as well. It is a very cute song (you can look it up on Youtube) and to me depicts America's child-like innocent love for his lover and thusly is how the lyrics were written. Very cute.

Germany became an official country in January 1871 with the uniting of the German states with Prussia at the head.

In 1882 was when America received their highest number of German immigrants in a single year. The numbers rose over 250,630. This is now the highest number of American ancestry as well.

Boxer Rebellion [1899-1901] This also gives us the Eight-Nation Alliance consisting of: United Kingdom, Russia, Japan, France, the United States, Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary. This is actually the first time the U.S. took part in a fight alongside other countries/European Powers since the American Revolutionary War.

The failed expedition mentioned under England is the Seymour Expedition consisting mostly of British, American, and Russian troops who were pounded and ambushed and then forced to retreat while getting attacked in the fallback. Apparently many ran out of ammunition except the Americans who had come prepared with extra ammunition. But due to luck they found an ammunitions fort and stocked up on supplies and again, were attacked but easily repelled the Boxers until allied troops came to save them and escort them back to the city.

Yays, Australia was introduced. Why? Because there were Australians fighting alongside the Brits in the Boxer Rebellion. And the US and Australia do end up growing quite attached to each other despite the United Kingdom not liking the bad Americans' influence on the spunky young nation.

America and England were trying to better their relationship around this time. Their relationship healing is known as the "Great Rapprochement" a time span ranging from 1895-1915.

In the Boxer Rebellion the Russians were specifically known for brutal fighting. Rape, mutilation, etc. Though, to be fair, the Chinese were particularly mean to their settled
colonies (so it was sorta pay back). None too pretty and a few Americans had seen the brutality and were disturbed.

The underlying tensions between Russia and Japan are hinting toward a certain war coming on (cough, cough, Russo-Japanese War, cough).

When Germany mentioned failing on the Wall he was referring to the Tartar Wall where the Germans and the Americans were set to defend. The Chinese forced the Germans from the wall after an assault in early July. Now, granted, this was the most crucial of all defensive positions. So with only the American Marines left alone to defend the wall their commanding officer, Capt. John T. Myers informed his men that it was either do or die, retreat or force the Chinese from the wall the Germans had failed to protect. So early July 2nd, Myers led an assault consisting of 56 British, Russian, and American soldiers. All in all they forced the Chinese from the wall and they never attacked again.

Prussia quoted a piece of the speech from Otto von Bismarck, a Prussian chancellor whose speech was titled, "Iron and Blood" where he pretty much states that the German Empire won't sit idle, and that they'd fight for nationhood if threatened.

And, Headcanon~

America is about 18 years old here and will be turning 19 in the 20th century as agreement with his age in the 1940's.
War on The Heart

Chapter Notes

Had to split my Historical Notes up because there's so much :/
So, here's part of the Historical Notes of this Chapter-

Time frame: Wold War I [28 July 1914 – 11 November 1918]

The Treaty of Versailles wasn't too popular with the Americans and so they opted to sign a separate treaty of their own with Germany which was: United States–Germany Peace Treaty.

When France says, "America is far away, protected by the ocean. Not even Napoleon himself could touch England. You are both sheltered; we are not," to America that was actually a quote from The French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau to President Woodrow Wilson after the American's had explained there upset with France's treaty thinking it too harsh on the Germans.

Prussia no longer controlling Germany or being allowed to speak to him much is reference to the removal of the German Empire's Kaiser, Wilhelm II who was forced from his throne as the Empire was disbanded. He was of Prussian descent as were the other Emperors of the German Empire and so that is why Prussia was head because his kings were Germany's kings.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Versailles, France. June 28th 1919

It didn't hurt. It really didn't. Germany learned best how to steel himself from France's strikes a long time ago. But the humiliation was there, especially with the other countries observing France's retaliation.

There was no doubt a red sting visible on his pale cheek but Germany had no choice but to stand there and take it. France once again reeled his arm back and attempted to strike him once more. He was upset, of course he was, he lost the most in the war so no one attempted to excuse his fuming behavior, nor his violence toward the German nation. But what France failed to see, as well as everyone else, was that Germany had lost much too and now he had to deal with overburdening repercussions.

With shoulders tense, in preparation for another strike seeing how France had pulled his hand away again and aimed it toward the younger nation, Germany braced himself and clenched his fists tight, standing there and taking it. But the calculation of timing was off. There was no sting, no jerk of the head. No contact.

Turning his eyes Germany gapped at the sight of America holding France's arm in mid-air, the palm of the nation's hand looked ready for another impact with the German's skin. The young nation had stopped France from coming in for another humiliating blow.

"That's enough, France," America stated and applied just enough pressure in a squeeze to cause
some sort of discomfort for the Frenchman.

France sneered before pulling his arm away from America's grasp. He glared at him with disdain before looking back toward Germany who stood alone before the other nations, his big brother nowhere in sight—nowhere to help him.

"America is far away, protected by the ocean. Not even Napoleon himself could touch England. You are both sheltered; we are not," France responded before turning back toward America and offering a small glance toward England who stood nearby watching for any tensions about to raise their heads. With that France turned on his heel and ordered his men to bring Germany into the board room.

Germany refused to be touched by the Frenchmen and instead shook their hands off of his arms and walked into the room himself. England had prepared himself to enter as well but noticed a lack of companionship into the room where the treaty was set to be signed. Turning he looked to see America standing unmoving in the waiting room, the boy was looking toward the exiting door like it was the one thing he wanted most.

"America? Are you coming?" England asked.

"I can't find myself to agree with either one of you," America admitted and slumped his shoulders before he reached out and took hold of the knob on the exit.

"Wait, you can't just simply leave," England insisted. "We're about to sign."

"And this is one signature you're not going to get," America said as he turned toward England. The look in his eyes was stern and England found himself surprised to be gazing into a nation claimed so young but now looked so mature like that of a thousand-year-old country. "Sorry." With that America opened the door and left.

He stopped. Outside, in the hall sat a lone albino. He offered no threat despite the French guards standing near and America felt his heart go out to him. Walking up toward him he gave the French humans a glare to remove themselves from his national presence as soon as possible, the men did and now Prussia looked up to him.

"Is Ludwig alright?" Prussia asked, his hands rolling his overcoat in his lap to wrinkles. He was concerned for his little brother, as he should be. America wanted to offer comforting words but after all that had happened between him and the German brothers a hate began building up inside him like a sickening bile. He didn't want to feel it, but it was what his people felt and he couldn't just simply ignore it no matter how hard he tried.

"No," America answered truthfully. "I tried talking to France but he won't relent. He and England blame him the most."

"That's not fair!" Prussia spat as he stood up and gazed into the American's serious blue eyes. They were the same height. Prussia stood even with him now, if not just a little lower due to America's status as victor. "They've all fought in countless wars before. They know the causes. France is just getting recompense from the Franco-Prussian war isn't he? Why won't he take it out on me? Not Ludwig."

"They already did," America informed with a heavy sigh. "You've already been removed from any power you once held over your brother."

"Is that enough?" Prussia asked. "Now they torture me with tormenting my baby bruder. It's not fair and you know it!"
"Then it was fair to attack me despite my claims for neutrality?" America asked. That had stopped the Prussian's rant.

Prussia stood there with his jaw hanging. His eyes scanned his thoughts for anything to say in response to America's statement but how could one negate the truth? So Prussia closed his eyes and sat himself down in defeat.

"Ja, I am sorry about that, Alfred," Prussia said lowly. His scarlet gaze flickered down at his black scuffed shoes. How could he tell America why it had happened? How could he tell him that it had been the German General Staff who had secretly convinced their Chancellor to lean toward unrestricted submarine warfare just so they could starve England? After England's blockade the Germans could no longer continue with trade with America. What else could they have done? Even so Germany hadn't wanted it knowing that America would likely enter the war but Prussia pressed for it in an attempt to defeat England. Of course nothing ever went as planned and an angry America came faster than expected.

Would America really believe all of that despite it being true? He could see it; Prussia could see how upset America was. He felt it in his fury when he entered the war and marched with his men on the frontlines. They had all wanted the war over with as soon as possible and Germany above all hadn't wanted America to enter, but now look at them.

America was right and Prussia was all to blame.

"War is war," Prussia stated with a shrug. It was all he could offer for an explanation close enough to reason.

"The hell it is!" America growled as he reached down and took up Prussia by the collar of his shirt, pulling him close to let the older German state see just how writhing he was. "I lost over a hundred thousand men, you son of a bitch, and you're telling me that, 'war is war,' like it's something fucking normal?!

That was right; this had been the first time America had been in a grand scale war since possibly his revolution. The horrors he had seen this time around.

"I saw what you krauts did to Belgium; I saw what you did to France! Now you're trying to do the same damn thing to Russia!"

Prussia's back hit the wall behind him roughly and as his legs bumped into the bench underneath him his form fell and he was once again sitting, staring up at a red-faired blurry-eyed U.S. The boy's fists were shaking beside his hips and his shoulders were up and tense. He'd never seen him this upset since . . .

"Now I would let France and the others have their ways with you if it didn't go against my morals," America said as he began taking deeper breaths of air in to calm his form and ease the redness in his complexion. "And I will swear to you that I will sign another treaty with you."

"You . . . would?" Prussia sat there amazed with America's restraint. He hadn't been directly harmed from the war like France and the others, but his anger because of it was still there. It was expected but Prussia had never seen such willingness to forgive despite sudden tension between nations. It was either maturity or naivety but Prussia would not disregard it nonetheless.

America nodded. He turned and said, "We'll talk about it after they're done with your brother."

Prussia could hear the hurt in America's voice but he couldn't possibly tell him. If he did then he
would doubt any morale code of the American or his people would save him and his brother from the bitter resentment from the blond.

The bombing of his cargo ships; there was no choice. Purposely invading Belgium and ignoring the convention; again, no choice. But with Russia . . . Prussia wanted to say it was to get their men out of the Eastern Front but in reality he and Germany had plotted his downfall for good and the reason for such an act just so happened to be standing before him right now.

Hurt. Of course America was hurt. But he'd come to feel just how horrible it felt when a heart breaks after Russia was through. Prussia did it for his baby brother's continuous affection.

Even throughout all of this Prussia was certain Germany's love for America wouldn't fade. If only America would show more bitterness then it would force his love-struck brother away from the ex-colony, but he didn't. Time after time America offered the restoration of trust when neither were deserving. This only enticed Germany closer and it was because of this Prussia couldn't sit idle.

As an older brother he had a duty to give to his little brother whatever he wanted and if he wanted the world then he had it, on a silver platter—no, gold. If he wanted the affection of the young United States of America then it was first and foremost important to be rid of the nation's supposed lover at once and that is what they had done. They removed Russia; from the war, from the spoils, from America's heart.

From what he had heard the American shout in anger Prussia realized he might have heard rumors about the Germans' involvement in Russia's revolution. He was certain the boy thought them only as rumors and acted on such an anger just to vent his frustration. He would forget whatever he heard later.

So Prussia remained silent. It was all for Germany. He was doing this because of him and only him.

Now that they had taken him away from him he felt useless as a big brother. He was meant to protect him and now the guilt of that and the guilt of seeing that hurt in America's eyes was getting to him and he could hardly hold himself back from the confession if only just to get it out of him and lift the weighing weight off his shoulders.

"Whenever you want," Prussia said. "Look, I know I no longer have any say over Ludwig, but please, when you talk to him . . . please treat him with respect." Looking up at America, Prussia knew the boy had a right to reject the offer. After all, no one ever negotiated with losers; it was the winners who the losers negotiated with. But Prussia knew America was different. He was fair. He understood when others let anger cloud their judgment and just beat other nations into dust when they felt like it.

"When we talk," America offered before turning and walking away.

"Wha—? Alfred, where are you going?" Prussia asked as he stood up again and watched the boy walk hastily down the hall toward the exits.

America stopped and turned toward Prussia. Those blue eyes of his looked more hurt than ever before. Forget the sunk cargo ships, forget the military losses, it was Russia that was in America's concerning thoughts. Prussia could see it and he knew, he knew that the boy was going to him. Despite the situation there America was going. It was not a good idea and Prussia knew it, but who was he to say no?

Prussia would just let him figure it out by himself that Russia was different and that he didn't view the young America in the same light anymore. So, after America let the old nation go then Prussia
would escort him back to Germany for a promising and more stronger courtship when he was ready.

Moscow, Russia. July 1919

"Open up, you bastards!"

America once again propelled himself against the large wooden door but with little effect like the previous times he's thrust himself against it. It had to end, all of this. This revolution. This disruption of allies. These Bolsheviks. These communist-minded hell spawn.

If this continued then America knew, he just knew it would change Russia. For the worst more than likely. The thought of it made him sick to his stomach. His heart wouldn't fall back into his chest and simply remained in his throat, choking him out of the words he had to say to his men to keep them fighting, to say to himself to ease his being to think Russia would be fine.

Russia was much older than him and no doubt had been through worse than something as trivial like a revolution. If that were the case then why was America so afraid? Why did he push himself with so much force against Russia's Moscow home?

Well, he did so because he was afraid. Afraid of losing him. Of losing Russia.

He was afraid of Russia no longer speaking to him. No longer smiling at him. No longer looking at him. No longer listening to him when he cried to him to turn toward him again.

But time was still of the essence and Russia did hear America's pleas to turn to him and ever he begged to his new leader to let him go.

"Please!" Russia cried out as he pulled himself against the chains this new self-proclaimed leader of his had placed him in. "Don't lock me away when he is crying for me!"

Russia could hear the boy nation. He could hear him even through the layers of the cellar he was locked under. He could hear him screaming for him. The desperation in his voice made his gut churn until Russia about vomited on himself.

"This is why you are locked away," The human said with a smile. He and his men looked on with expectations at the contained nation readied to undergo a transformation. "Westerners are not allowed here any longer. Nor affections for said western nations."

"Po'shyol 'na hui!" Russia spat but the butt of a gun didn't feel too pleasant on his scalp. Dazed, Russia felt himself slump over and the biting chains wrapped around him worsened their hold as he hung there.

"Very rude of you to say that to your own ruler," the human said as he crossed his arms and then turned toward a man to his right, nodding toward Russia. "Stalin."

The dark-haired man nodded and approached Russia. Reaching up he unhooked the chains from their holds on the ceiling, leaving Russia to collapse to the floor where the bald man approached and knelt down. Taking a hold of Russia's scarf he pulled close and smiled in the effect of choking the nation.

"You will stop resisting us. Our ideals are now your ideals. What is so hard about that? Is it that boy up there? Hm, that is it, isn't it?"

Letting go the man stood up and looked down at his pitiful nation that had once exiled him. "Imperial Russia is no more!"
"Nyet!" Russia shouted his defiance for the sake of those cries he continued to hear and the hurting twists his heart was doing inside his chest as it hurled itself against his ribcage with each heave America was throwing himself into against the door to try to break into the tattered home.

"You are now Soviet Russia!" the man stated, his gaze intense but Russia refused to look at him and only shook his head to brush the prompting words from entering his mind.

"Nyet!" Russia cried out, closing his eyes shut tightly and bearing his teeth as he felt it—the happenings of a revolution. It was more like a civil war though because of the inner turmoil and the murder and the resistance. It hurt so much and Russia felt for certain he'd be torn apart.

"You will yield to the Bolsheviks!"

"Nyet!"

Russia was taken by the scarf once more and when he stared into the eyes of Lenin he swore they had glown a demonic red. "You do not love any western nation, much less the United States of Amerika!"

"N-Nyet, you're wrong!" Russia shouted and felt a fire digging its way out of him as this would-be leader of his insulted his long-held love for the boy who had always offered his support and affection in return. "The General had made him for me! I was the only one, the ONLY one who stayed true and he gave him to me because of it!"

The man's smile was sadistic and he looked at him as if an adult looking at a brainwashed nonsense child. "The General was simply mistaken. He's shown you the wrong nation."

Russia's eyes widened. How could this man say that? How could this human assume to know General Winter as well as Russia had? It was insulting and that smug look on his face . . .

"Never," Russia muttered. "He'd never misguide me . . . not after all I've done."

"He's always loved fucking with you," the bald man said simply. "You were ever his favorite play thing."

General Winter . . . fucking with him? Never. Why would he when Russia's always remained loyal? It was him who had opened Russia's eyes to the boy nation when he first laid eyes upon him. It was he who whisked the young nation into his arms encouraging Russia to take the opportunity to love him. It was he who suggested giving America his colony in the New World as an extravagant present shadowed by all else the American would receive. Now this human was telling him that the General had lied to him for nearly two fucking centuries?!

"You're undeserving of any companionship," the man stated with a frown and disappointed shake of his head. "Besides, you hadn't even fucked him yet. So it matters not if you break ties."

Russia's eyes stung and now he wished they'd unbind his wrists so he could rub the sting away. His heart hurt from the words they were saying. They weren't true, any one of them. General Winter had shown him America as his promised mate. Russia did love America and America did love Russia.

"All I ask is that you isolate yourself from the Western world. Why? Because they don't like you. I seem to get that, but you, comrade, do not." The man by the name of Lenin sat himself in a skinny chair seated near the entrance of the cellar. "You're never an ally for long. One day you're shaking their hand, the next day you're squeezing their throat, or the other way around. It is rather unhealthy; shouldn't you think so, Ivan?"
"Don't call me by my name!" Russia snapped. "You are not official! I will never accept you!"

"True," Lenin nodded as he rubbed his knees. "But you put up a good front, especially with him around."

Lenin and the others glanced upward when they heard the sound of the giant door cracking in half and the shouting of the Bolshevik troops who confronted the American on the first level of the floor. Gun shots were heard, cries of pain, bodies meeting their end as they broke in two against walls and columns after being flung by the strong nation on his way toward the cellar.

"Ivan!" Russia could hear his lover calling out to him and he choked as his heart thrust itself against his chest over and over. "Ivan, where are you?"

He sounded desperate and despite the obstacles throwing themselves in front of the American, Russia could hear how he easily took care of the men of the Red Army and continued his way to him. Russia smiled. America would never give up on him and with that confidence he glared at the men surrounding him.

"Your ruler-ship over me will remain poddelka," Russia stated with a chuckle. "I'll forget this entire revolution happened once you all pay for what you've done to my monarchy!"

"You think I don't know what happens to a nation in revolutions?" Lenin asked. Once again he looked at Russia like he was a negligent child. "It is true. You do forget. You forget those who lost. But remember, dear Ivan, we will be the ones who will win and it will be you who will forget . . . him."

Lenin turned and stood. The men with him lined the door and it wasn't long before the metal rectangle dented. The sound echoing throughout the stony walls and reverberating inside Russia's chest when he realized it was America.

"Ivan!" America shouted. "I'm coming for you. I'm coming!"

"Alfred," Russia whispered through cracked lips and a dry throat. That sting was there again. His eyes hurt and so he closed them. He was so grateful that America was so strong. They always could rely on each other.

Ka-chink.

Russia's violet eyes snapped open. With wide horror he watched the men ready their guns. They meant to shoot America once he was through the door.

"Nyet! Alfred!" Russia cried out to deter the American from entering the room but the sound of his voice had encouraged instead of discouraged and in a flash of gun works America had bent the door in half and jumped through, raising his arms to shield himself from the bullets flying toward him.

Dunking low America had swung his leg out to trip three of them and when their heads collided with the stone floor America jumped upon them and jammed his forearm into their throats, effectively breaking their necks in a second. He turned and moved onto the others firing upon him.

Russia flinched when he witnessed a bullet rip itself through America's arm. He watched as it jostled around inside the nation's arm before making a sloppy exit out of the backside and coincidentally hitting a man behind America, striking him dead. The left arm now hung uselessly but America dealt with it quite well. With just the use of one arm America was able to break a few more necks and nozzles of guns.
The excitement shook Russia's bones so much that his limbs became taut and pulled and pulled until something crunched and something cracked. His chains. He'd broken free and—!

Russia let out a gasp and collapsed to the floor. America had just thrown a light-haired man against the wall, breaking his body in half, when he turned to see Russia had fallen over. "Ivan!" America made his way toward the nation but stopped as a man stepped in front of him, blocking him from Russia. He seemed older than the rest of the men there and he was balding as well, but his eyes, they held such conniving ideals that America seemed daunted.

Taken aback as he might have been by this man, America knew he was just a human. But human or not, when America looked to see what he was holding in his hand his heart nearly stopped. With wide eyes America watched as the organ in the human's hand expanded and then deflated over and over. A beating heart.

It was Russia's beating heart.

There was a flash of light and America's eyes caught sight of a small knife. The moment he realized what was going to happen it was too late. "NO!" America cried out, lunging forward to try to grab the organ.

The fragile thing was stabbed and its white covering soon bled red, the blood now coating it in a color more fitting of the substance it carried. America froze and watched in horror as the heart changed in color and signified the success and the failure of everything.

"No. No, no, no!" America cried out. "What have you done?!" He turned to see Russia shaking on the floor, convulsing and crying out in agony. America decided to forget any attempt to save the damned heart and instead scurried to Russia's side and placed his hand upon his pale cheek. "Ivan? Ivan stay with me. You'll make it through this. Keep fighting, damn it!"

"It's too late, young ambitious Amerika," Lenin said while he turned and tossed the bleeding heart carelessly to the floor, its impact making a sickening squelsh sound. "You might want to think about returning from where you've come from."

"It's never too late, you sick ba—!" America was cut off mid curse when he had turned to glare daggers at the leader of the revolution. His breath was knocked out of him and his throat nearly collapsed as he was lifted off of his knees and then his back hit the floor. "I—van!" America gasped out as the weight pressed down upon him with both hands squeezing his throat. "St-Stop!"

America only had one good arm to defend himself with and that wasn't useful at all when a nation bore down on him and threatened to squeeze the very life out of him. With just one hand America held onto Russia's wrist, pulling and pulling to no use.

"Ivan!" America gasped out one last time before nothing more could come out of his mouth and he grit his teeth and closed his eyes tight.

"Russia is ours, Capitalist," Lenin spoke, coming to stand next to his country who was currently choking the younger underneath him. "You are no longer welcome here. Leave now or else I shall have dear Ivan here kill the one he claimed to have once held so much affection towards."

Once? So did that mean Ivan no longer loved him? The very thought disrupted America's emotions and they tossed and turned inside him. So he simply let go. His hold on Russia's wrist left and he laid himself out defenseless with his life solely in Russia's hands.

The chokehold tightened and America felt his face becoming colder from the lack of blood flow. No
doubt his skin color was turning a shade more akin to a blueberry. But he still refused to fight. Looking up at Russia who bore down upon him he managed a smile. It was sad and regretful but there was no hate in his blue eyes. Nothing but the love he also proclaimed to have for the Russian.

If Russia had his doubts then all he had to do was look into America's eyes and see for himself. He was loved. America would not fight someone he cared so much for.

"Kill the westerner," Lenin ordered, leaning over Russia and watching as America halted all movement and simply looked up at Russia.

Then in an instant the chokehold retreated. Russia's hands were still wrapped around the American's throat but no more pressure was being applied. Why? The sight of a tear sliding down America's cheek broke him out of his trance and now he was horrified.

"Alfred?" Russia questioned before pulling away. "What have I done? What have you made me do?!" When Russia's glare met Lenin the man pointed down toward the heart slowly beating and bleeding on the cold stone floor. America was lying near it, unmoving.

"You had tried to kill him because he tried to kill you," Lenin offered the lie and Russia trembled with the misconceived revelation.

"Why?" Russia asked. "You said you loved me, Alfred!"

When the American nation pushed himself up he couldn't speak. No doubt the Russian had damaged his vocals for the time being. He opened his mouth as if to protest but of course nothing he said came out. He looked distressed and attempted to come toward Russia but once again Lenin stepped in the way.

"You've hurt my nation enough with your whorish seduction," Lenin said. "Leave now. You're no longer welcomed here."

America bit his lip. He looked like he was going to cry, but save for that one small tear that had halted Russia's assault on him, America kept his eyes dry. Standing up he looked on longingly toward Russia who had curled in on himself and trembled in split. With the men threatening more violence America had no other choice and so, left.

But he tried staying as long as he could.

Russia. September 14th 1919

"Shouldn't you be returning home, America?"

The boy nation turned toward his ambassador whom he was going to escort to the docks before leaving to join up with the last of his army in Siberia. His throat had healed substantially and he was back to speaking again, but about certain subjects was a matter of willingness to share.

"I will," America offered as he watched his ambassador lock the doors to the U.S. Embassy, the one he had established over a hundred years ago. Now it was all for naught. "Just gonna join up with the boys and make sure there's a scheduled time for them to come home before heading to Willy."

"If you say so."

"What, you don't think I should?" America asked as he thrust his fists on his hips in a look of disapproval at the ambassador's suggestion.
"It's not that. The men love seeing you," the ambassador said. "It's just . . ." the dark-haired man turned to look at the now empty run-down building that the very country of Russia once upon a time would frequently visit for news of America. "This place, you know? It's making you sick. I can see it, and so can the others. You need to leave, America."

Just as the ambassador thought, his nation was dancing around that feeling and right when mentioned his true colors were shown. America’s shoulders slumped and his eyes darkened in dismay.

"You should leave," the ambassador said once more as he hopped onto the truck meant to carry him and a good number of Americans out of the Russian country since the people had made it very clear that they were no longer welcome.

Those three words resonated throughout America’s mind and he’s brought back just months earlier when he had been so close to Russia but that man had stopped him. He’d stopped everyone.

America knew he should but he had a mission to see his boys in Siberia where England had moved himself to. The two hadn’t talked much and the oddities were witnessed by Japan who also had been stationed there. Both were readying to leave too.

His ambassador was right. The place, the country was making him sick and so after visiting his men and arranging passage he left. He told himself he wouldn't look back but during the entire sail home America had watched the mass of land, Russia's birthplace, his home, vanish. Even gone America stared east and wondered if he could have done something more.

His men didn't need to see him down, and they most certainly didn't need to see him cry so he braved up and held his head high with his President placing visions and tales of him being the savior of the Great War into his head which he gladly soaked up like a sponge to clog out the other useless emotions threatening to spill out at inopportune times.

Making himself busy with work helped as well. One of his last run-arounds in Europe happened to be at Germany’s house, sitting down and signing a few papers that compiled into an official treaty.

    Berlin, Germany. August 25th 1921

"Thank you again, Alfred," Prussia said with a smile as America gathered up the signed papers. "Forgive Ludwig for not staying after he signed but he has caught a slight cold and doesn't wish to give it to you."

"I can tell," America offered after recalling Germany's raspy voice when greeting.

Without another word America made to leave.

"Eh, wait, what's the rush? I know Berlin isn't something to look at anymore but don't insult us as hosts by just up and leaving," Prussia insisted as he approached the American and placed his hands on his shoulders.

America turned to Prussia and the older found it amazing how dead America's eyes were becoming. He knew he had visited Russia and he knew what had become of the visit but he hadn't known it'd take this much life from him.

"Is everything alright, Alfred?" Prussia asked, trying to ease the tension between their countries.

"My people want you to address me as America from now on," America informed quite monotonously. Very unbefitting of his normal personality.
Prussia frowned but nodded. "Very well, I understand. But won't you stay a little? We both could use a little company—well, company that's not hostile that is." With a weak chuckle offered by Prussia the American seemed unconvincing. He looked down at the papers in his hands for a long while as if the words on the pages would suddenly dance to life off of them.

"I really need to return home," America stated. When his brows crashed together Prussia felt alerted. "I don't feel good," America admitted and who was Prussia to deny someone safe passage when they were under the weather? Not he. So with a downcast smile he waved America off and feared for his health.

As he watched him get into a truck and drive away Prussia felt Germany enter the room.

"Ja, he's gone you know," Prussia said as his brother joined him next to the window to watch the American convoy leave over hill.

Germany was quiet as his weary blue eyes watched on longingly. Prussia felt his heart clench at the sight, especially at seeing his brother so restricted. When they had first started out, when Germany had become an official country, Prussia sought to give him everything. Recognition, colonies, money, everything. But companionship? It was easier said than done.

Prussia had never been good at getting those kinds of things. There had been this one nation who had a serious case of identity crisis but Prussia had been stricken with them and even to that day he still felt the tings of his heart strings pulling whenever he saw said country. He was a coward and couldn't win them over no matter how many battles he fought with them or how many enemies he took down for them. Nothing was good enough and because of that when Germany found himself in love with the American nation Prussia swore that he'd never have to feel what he had felt, what he's still feeling now.

But to his foolishness he had thought to officially court someone you'd have to be able to provide alliance, and military might, and possibly a few colonies as presents of affection. Germany had been prepared for all until America rejected his invitation. Prussia honestly had not predicted that kind of an outcome.

The two had seemed perfect for each other. They were both young, both strong, both healthy, and both growing fast. Why had the union failed? Prussia and Germany had seen it as a gesture of affection too late given on their part.

Now Germany's become like him—looking on at something he knows he can't have and possibly never can. Prussia hated seeing that sadness in his brother and after he had fallen ill from financial crisis there was also the fact that he was still lovesick. But then again, apparently, so was America.

Prussia had seen it in America's eyes, noticed it in his step. Russia had been changed in the October Revolution and his leader's new policy was to cut ties with the westerners, which meant America too. He wasn't quite sure what transpired there in Russia but he had heard enough to piece together what little he knew and what probably happened.

Tales of the massacre of the monarchy, the overthrowing of the imperialist government, and then there was the shutting down of the U.S. Embassy. They were no longer on speaking terms and Prussia wondered how it all had transpired. He remembered how Russia had longed for the boy and how disturbed he, himself, had been because of it. He wouldn't be lying when he said he was happy over the split even though he was pretty sure only he and Germany had known about the secret courtship, but still . . . America was too young to look like that, as was Germany.

"You will wait for him," Prussia ordered when he turned and placed his hand upon his brother's
wide shoulder in encouragement. "He and Russia are no more. When you are better and when he is better you will go to him and woo him over. You hear?"

"He's angry with me," Germany insisted, bowing his head in defeat.

"How many times must I tell you it wasn't your fault?" Prussia asked with a frown. "War is war. Treaties are made and alliances are forged. What were you to do when Austria insisted?"

"Honor alliances," Germany recited and then let out a sigh and covered his mouth to hide a cough.

"Ja," Prussia nodded. "America may be upset but less so than the others. Still, you will wait a few decades before you approach him, you hear?"

"How?" Germany asked. "I can't even leave home."

"Once the debts are paid then you're free to go," Prussia reminded once more, trying to keep at his best and be the optimistic for his depressed brother.

"What if he's seeing someone else again?" Germany asked when he finally looked his brother in the eye only to stare at him with concerning unforetold fear.

Prussia frowned and took his brother's jaw in his hand before giving his skull a firm shake to get a thought into his head. "He won't be," Prussia assured. "He's hurt. Very much so. He won't be seeking companionship for a long time, and when he does you'll be there with arms open for him to run into. Got it?"

Germany nodded slowly before Prussia shook his head to force him to verbally answer.

"Ja," Germany answered and then Prussia let go before patting him on the back. "Good boy, now I must be going. You know the others; if they see me in your house they'll throw a fit. I'll visit every few months to check on your health. You rest and then get to work to repay them. I'll do my best to help. Later, West."

Germany watched silently as his brother, the one who had lived with him (or the one whom he had lived with) until the end of the Great War, left; forced into separation through France's treaty. He was upset and sick, a horrible combination and he silently fumed over his losses.

But even so he couldn't help but smile at the outcome of his and his brother's plan to separate Russia and America. It had worked and now all it took was a little time until Germany would once again ask for America's hand for the third time.

Washington D. C. United States of America. September 1921

"Here is the treaty, sir," America said with a bright smile and a thumbs-up. "I told you I would get them to sign it via the heroic way."

His President smiled kindly and looked at the papers. America wanted to chuckle seeing how those bushy eyebrows of his President's reminded him so much of England but he didn't, because he didn't feel like chuckling, and he didn't want to think about England. He didn't want to think about any European for that matter.

"Everything looks good, Alfred," President Harding said with a smile. But when he had looked up toward the nation standing before him he had seemed to have caught him in a moment when his guard was down. There America stood; shoulders slumped and eyes dark with depressing thoughts. "Alfred?" His President's call pulled America out of his own thoughts and he was quick to widen his
eyes and straighten his shoulders while putting on a smile. "Is everything alright, son?"

"Of course," America answered with a chuckle. "I just got Germany to sign our long-negotiated treaty. I'm finally out of Europe and back home. Our economy is booming. Life is just great!"

"Spare me the fake optimism," Harding said as he clasped his hands together and looked at America quite seriously. "I know what happened back there. Wilson told me everything."

"Yeah, war is hell, huh?" America said with a chuckle, offering another smile to his President. "Anyways, enough with grievous pasts, anything you want me to do, Commander?"

"No," Harding simply said as he sat back in his chair and observed the nation closely. "Why don't you relax? You've earned it." He saw through the boy's ploy; make oneself busy enough to not think about the hurtful past, it was foolproof. Or so America had thought. But the President insisted the boy stop letting it eat him from the inside out. It wasn't healthy and this was the 20's now, a new decade, a prosperous one at that despite having just come out of a war.

"Nothing?" America asked. "Nothing at all?"

"Nothing," Harding concluded.

"Okay," America said. That smile still pulling his lips taut and his teeth shining in the light of the lamps.

Harding watched closely despite the strange silence floating around them. He was watching closer and closer, looking for any signs of discomfort in the America nation but so far the teenaged nation had hid himself well and that smile was now just becoming disheartening to the President.

"Vacation it is!" America cheered as he turned himself around and threw his arms in the air. He froze for a moment and Harding's throat tightened in wonder if it was the final moment. Turning back around with a curious look on his face had certainly thrown the President off and he wondered if what the preceding President had told him had been but a lie.

"Where do you think I should go? Name a place would ya, Warry?" America asked with an attractive wink.

"How about your home?"

"Huh, why? How boring," America pouted and the President blinked. Since when had his nation begun to act like this? It was strange and somewhat unsettling.

"You need to relax," Harding said. "You've done us good, Alfred. Now it's your turn to settle down."

"What if I don't want to?"

"You need to, son. If you don't I may just order it upon you. My, imagine the day when people refuse actual vacation days," Harding muttered and chuckled while he placed the papers on his desk in a folder before turning in his seat back toward America. What he saw caused him to jump out of his chair and take cautious steps out from behind his desk toward the country.

There stood America. In the same position as before. His arms were down by his sides and his smile still present but next to his lips were lines of clear liquid. The source? His eyes. He was crying and it looked like he didn't even know it.
"Alfred?" Harding questioned. He stepped closer to the boy and reached out a hand to touch him but before any contact was made America spoke. He didn't make eye contact, he didn't even turn his head toward the man as he spoke, saying—

"If I don't do something . . . then I'll think about it . . . I don't want to think about it . . . because it hurts . . . it hurts so bad!"

The smile feigned and suddenly his lips were trembling before America closed his eyes and out came those heavy, heavy tears. With shoulders shaking and fists clenched tight America stood there sobbing.

Harding came close and pulled the boy to him who leaned his head on the human's shoulder and stood there trembling.

"It's alright to let it all out every once in a while," Harding said as he rubbed his country's back in a show of comfort. He knew it would be a long time before America ever recovered from the break up knowing their extensive history and their secret courtship, but Harding had faith that through relaxation he could ease himself down and come to terms with the issue better.

America's face was now red as he pulled away to cover his appearance from his leader but after a harsh sob escaped his mouth America's knees buckled and he met the floor. Harding gasped and knelt down to hold him. Wrapping his arms around him was all he could do to help. The grief of a nation was just as devastating as that of a human's and ran far longer than theirs ever could.

It was hard on the President to hear such cries from his nation. To see him like this. If the other nations saw him then there could be a possible risk they might attack. He was officially in a weakened state and Harding just wouldn't have that.

Letting the boy go, the President got up and dashed over toward a cart where various beverages were offered. He took up a bottle and glass and ran back over toward the weeping America before pouring the contents into the cup.

"Drink this, Alfred. It'll soothe the ache," Harding insisted and assisted the teen in holding the drink in his trembling hands before pressing it to his lips. America barely managed to down it with his sobs but even what he did he spit back up, the child just wasn't as used to alcohol yet.

Harding didn't give up, he needed the boy to remain strong at least for appearance's sake and the strong drink tended to fool everyone. So he poured more and offered it to the nation. America had looked at it like he didn't want it, but with pressing concern from his President, his leader and commander, America did as told and drank and drank and drank until he could feel and remember no more.

Russia. January 1922

Russia deserved this.

Russia deserved this.

He deserved it all.

This was all his fault.

Covering his ears, Russia could hear the agonizing screams of his people as they died in the streets, in the fields, in their beds knowing they wouldn't be able to live another day. So many were dying and it was all because of Russia.
He shouldn't have conformed to the Bolsheviks. He should have never let the Red Army win. He should have never . . . to America . . . he had been choking him . . . trying to kill him!

"N-Nyet!" Russia cried out. He could no longer take in the cries of his people and simple stood himself up off the floor and ran out into the wintery white raging around. He wasn't dressed for the weather but it didn't matter, anyone would die no matter if one was. But Russia ran and ran with his hands squeezing his skull but the cries became louder and louder until the pain of his dying people surged through his body and he collapsed upon the icy ground in the midst of the wilderness.

The heavy snow fell upon Russia's form and nearly covered his being if it hadn't been for the biting wind sweeping down and chilling his frame.

"Make them stop . . . General Winter, make them stop!" Russia cried out as he trembled. The cries were so loud that Russia could barely even hear the wind howling around him much less the sound of a growling animal.

When he had heard the threatening sound Russia looked up and saw the creature. Its teeth were bare and the fur on the nape of its neck stood on end. It was a beautiful creature, pure white, like the snow surrounding, but it offered so much danger and threat as it circled Russia.

'You can't run from them. They are you, and you are they. They die, you die. Is fun circle of lives.'

"What have I done?" Russia cried out. "How have I angered you? You! You wanted this!"

The wolf seemed to chuckle at him as its jaw moved up and down almost as if it were speaking for the General. Maybe it was, or maybe Russia was just as insane as the others say.

'I have left you alone in relative peace for the past two centuries and you dare accuse me of wrong? If anyone then it is you. Your decisions led to this; your alliances, and your tie-cuts.'

"Tie-cuts?" Russia questioned. "Alfred?"

The wolf shook itself before scrapping up some snow with its hind legs and once again continuing its circulation of Russia.

'Ah, yes, what a pretty little thing. I'm so glad you enjoyed staring at him through a glass wall. He had been there for you to touch as you please, but you decided I had lied to you about his creation.'

"Had you?!" Russia cried out, recalling how Lenin had informed him that it had not been America that the General had crafted for him as a mate.

'How dare you question me? The white wolf growled and bore its red gums once more with a growl. Russia felt the pressing chill upon him again, biting into his bare skin. 'I am not inclined to answer you, but you amuse me with your pathetic attempts to understand things you never will.'

The wolf approached him and suddenly a form appeared from it, it was the ghost of the General. The spirit whom Russia had known since the day of his birth. Kneeling down the General placed his hands upon Russia's cold cheeks and Russia cried out when ice began caking over his skin and crawling up toward his eyes and down his neck where no scarf could protect and warm.

'He is my death,' The General stated with a frown. 'He was the warmth in my coldness. The sunshine in my night. The softness toward my bitterness. He lives; I die. He dies; I live. You choose him, or you choose me.'

What was he saying? Why was the General saying this to him?
'I am your protection and he is your undoing,' the old ghost said as he caressed Russia's cheek, numbing the nerves imbedded into the nation's skin.

"Nyet!" Russia gasped, pulling his face away and sitting up with his knees digging into the cold wet snow. "Why would you create him and tell me he was mine to hold when you didn't wish it yourself?! Why would you be so cruel to your faithful servant?"

'More than lenient I have been to you. I even stooped so low into giving you your heart's desire. He is there and it was up to you to take him. But know now this that if you do then you will surely die. Without my presence you have nothing.'

"You're a bastard!" Russia shouted to the howling wind whirling around him. "Why, why make me suffer like this? Is this what you wanted? Did you want me to kill him? Did you want me to isolate myself in your domain? Answer me!"

'Da,' The General answered with a chuckle. 'I knew you would choose me because I am your god and you are my faithful worshiper.'

"I'll forget you, I swear it!" Russia spat as he covered his ears to the noise around and closed his eyes tightly to block any vision of the spirit before him.

The General chuckled and floated down closer to Russia. He reached out his hand and placed it upon Russia's head, watching as the ice crystals froze the strands of hair. 'You are a very hopeless fool, slave. You wish to see the one who you so foolishly place your love upon? Da, so be it.'

Russia's eyes shot open at the sight the General generated in his mind. There America was, laying on a couch, his body trembling and his hands shaking as he laid his head upon his President's lap and cried. The human looked to be trying to comfort him with gentle pats through those golden locks but America's lips just parted and out came the cries. Russia couldn't hear them, but he could feel them and he ached so much.

'You wanted me to make the cries of your people stop, da? So be it. Hear his instead.'

Russia curled in on himself, his hands slamming against his ears as America's cries were vocalized. They were loud, full of so much hurt and agony. They were worse than the cries of his people because they cried out from death's chase. America was crying for a love lost, from the torment and ache of a broken heart. And Russia had caused those cries. It was his fault. His entire fault!

"Stop it!" Russia cried out as he rolled himself away and fell face-first into the snow as if one dead. There he laid and waited for death to take him. If so then America wouldn't have to cry any longer. He would know that the one who caused him so much heartache was gone and he could smile again. That's what he wanted, right?

'Your people have chosen me, Rossiya. You have chosen me. In time you will forget your love—'

"Nyet!"

'—and you will offer me sacrifice—'

"Nyet!"

'—and you will become strong once more. Much stronger than when swooned by that death of mine.'

"Nyet!" Russia cried out once more and glared up at the General with hate-filled eyes. "I hope he
The General chuckled once more.

'Me? I am a god!' He then bent his frame and stared at Russia with hollow eyes. Russia attempted to stand his ground but as he gazed into those empty pits Russia's eyes widened in horror at what he saw. 'You see? I have lived many lifetimes, and each time the world destroys itself over and over I am there. I thrive and I will once it is destroyed again. I have seen millions of nations rise and fall. Some I have guided some have strayed from me. But I am! You were there and so was he. Different names, but the same forms. You hadn't listened to me that time either and you both perished. I am curious as to how this end shall play. Now rest, rest and forget. Let your mind be tortured by murder and your body by famine. I will rebuild you and I will make you strong.'

"Then let me have him," Russia whispered as the General placed his hand upon his eyes and eased the lids closed.

The General smiled and nodded. 'Da, the same way you had killed him previously. If you run to him then I will cease and so will you. If you take him for yourself then he will cease . . . and so will you. Is a fun game; one that always repeats.'

Looking down the General beheld that his Russian slave had fallen into slumber. General Winter smiled as his form began dispersing with the wind around. Russia's men would find him. They would heal him. He would become something new, but his old self would never disappear. It never did. No matter how many times he was reborn.

Even though the cycle seemed to be on near repetition, the General never grew old of seeing the nation prove himself faithful time and time again by taking his death, that young boy, and defiling him until he was frozen over and dead. Some things would never change but the General's death was also his servant's death as well. It was something he would never tell him, or at least something he'd never remember. After that boy's mind, soul, and body was destroyed then Russia's heart would give out and thus the process would start over all again with the winter spirit as the spectator.

Some things would just never change and the General would make sure they stayed that way. So he kept close to Russia as his men found him and carried him back to his home where they warmed him with fires and vodka and tales to dominate the Westerners, especially a young upcoming power. And Russia did nothing but listen and let those words change his heart.

Chapter End Notes

Historical Notes:

Believe it or not, but the Germans had a major role to play in Russia's Revolution, particularly because they shipped Vladimir Lenin (who is the same man torturing and shaping Russia) back to Russia to start revolts and encourage riots and overthrow the Tsar and then murder them [Romanov Massacre July 17th 1918]. Yay for revolutions! So, while the Germans were like puppeteers their main mission was to get Russia out of the war so they could focus on the western front and move their troops out of the eastern front they had been holding against Russia. It worked and Russia up and left the war because of said reasons above. Manacle plotting for ya.
Also, the Germans apparently didn't want to get the U.S.A. involved in the war since they already had their plate full but, they honestly had no choice. The English blockaded them from any supplies being traded with the Americans so the Americans could really only trade with the allies. That wasn't good so the Germans had tried to "starve" England by sinking U.S. ships carrying cargo thus pissing off the Americans thus forcing congress to declare war. Honestly, what else did they expect to happen?

The Russian Revolution/or Russian Civil War had created two separate armies. The White Army which were for imperialism and then the Red Army which were for communism and socialism. When Lenin stabs Russia's heart it is white to represent the resisting imperialist White Army but then bleeds red in color as sign that the communist Red Army eventually triumphed. Simple visual symbolics :)

Around that time we see the Polar Bear Expedition and the American Expeditionary Force Siberia of which a couple thousand American soldiers were sent to Russia along with other allied garrisons to put a stop to the uprising and fight the growing Red Army. But in the end it was a failure and the Americans, though they knew they were losing a good ally, didn't want the Russian people to see them as an invading empire and so withdrew their men.

Following the Bolshevik Revolution, President Woodrow Wilson instructed U.S. diplomats to withhold official and unofficial recognition of the new Bolshevik Government. U.S. Ambassador David Francis remained in Russia until November 1918, but was never replaced. On September 14, 1919, the U.S. Embassy in Russia closed its doors.

Also, if any of you lovely readers could tell, America is becoming, well America. With his, "I'm the hero!" gig and whatnot. But it begins to appear here for reasons. One, it was to hide his hurt heart and, two, it was this little bit right here: After the Versailles conference President Woodrow Wilson claimed that, "at last the world knows America as the savior of the world!" There you have it! That's where his hero complex really begins to kick in! I mean it was somewhat there before but he was mostly isolating it until Mr. Wilson goes and says that and lets it soak into America's brain.

America is now entering the "Roaring Twenties" which is infamous for rich people and booze and smoking and gambling and all that jazz. So America will be doing a lot of that to get his mind off of his breakup, that is until the hangover comes (cough, cough, the Great Depression, cough).

1921-1923: Great Famine in Russia. Widespread famine in Russia, exacerbated by war and political upheaval, took the lives of over seven million people from 1921-1923. Despite the absence of official relations between the United States and Russia, the U.S. Government extended considerable relief to the Russian people. I would have had America take a chance at coming with relief himself but he's still heartbroken and crying his eyes out and drowning his soul in alcohol as you could see.

General Winter is touching on some sensitive ground here and is suggesting that the world has been redone over and over with civilization after civilization. Possibly? Maybe. Don't know, but the concept is underlined. If that is the case then is this outcome going to be any different? General Winter seems to know all, huh? Well, we'll find out as history progresses.

And finally, Russia's become the Russia we know!
1922: Establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics The Bolsheviks ultimately triumphed over the "Whites" and began to centralize power in the hands of the more powerful Bolsheviks in Moscow. By 1922, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Transcaucasia (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) joined to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Uzbekistan, Turkestan, Tadzhik, Kazakhstan, and Kirghiz joined the Union in later years.

Yay for Soviet Russia!
Love is a Battlefield

Chapter Notes

Thank you all so much for the lovely comments. They all made my day, and I'm very happy everyone is enjoying the story so far!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tunisia. March 1943

If Japan hadn't been an ally, and at that a strong ally, Germany might have gone against their pact because of their hasty imperial needs.

Setting down on his cot, Germany let his gun drop to his feet and release his aching hands that continued to clutch in the same position as if they still had a gun in their grasp. Finally being able to stretch his fingers felt good but the overbearing heat did not. Taking off his jacket and tossing it across his room he sighed and cradled his head in his arms.

He had won, yes, but he was exhausted from the heat and the realization that the enemy was growing quicker than he'd like thanks to his own "friend."

"Veeee~, Germany, what's the matter? You look beat."

Yet again Germany's exhaustion hit him like a freight train and he grumbled while looking up at his ally. The idiotic nation was smiling at him with his eyes closed, as usual, and all Germany wanted to do was to punch him just to see if he could get that expression to change.

"Cheer up, sour kitty, we won the battle!" Italy cheered with an enthusiastic fist pump.

"Ja," Germany grumbled along but couldn't help but let the long drawn-out sigh leave his lips. It wasn't like Italy would know why he was so upset. That fool couldn't read a nation no matter what they looked like. Besides, he often felt he was the only one who saw things into perspective and on the grander scale.

Save America for last; that had been Germany's internal motto up until December of 1941. He supposed it would have been wise for him to share this tidbit of information with the Japanese Empire. Too late for that, what's done was done and as Germany looked down at his calloused hands he couldn't help the fact that he had held a gun and pointed it at the young nation who was now fighting alongside England. He had shot at him, as were the orders, and he had watched him flee with England. That was that. America was his enemy and Germany doubted he'd receive any amount of reconciliation.

After the war was over he'd . . . what would he do? Remembrance of the First World War came to mind and the image of America's face and how angry he'd been at him and his people. This time he heard of the American's anger toward the Japanese or anyone with slanted eyes for that matter. Germany knew America had some kind of control over his people's hate. That wasn't to say it didn't affect him, but Germany had witnessed over and over how America would place it away and hide it despite facing Japan or facing Germany. He was a smart boy, knowing that anger could lead him down to trip up during something as important as a battle. So Germany hoped for the best and didn't
wish to see those angry eyes glaring toward him.

He would rather have them look toward Japan with menace than himself. If Japan was nothing more than a scapegoat then he's served his purpose well, for the time being. Ally was an ally and enemy was an enemy—at least until the war was over.

"Until the war is over," Germany verbally echoed, letting out a sigh as he wiped the sweat off of his face.

"It will be soon by how strong we are!" Oh, that was right; Italy was still present and was looking at Germany with admiration. "Say, Germany?"

"Ja?"

"What do you want to do after the war is over?" Italy asked curiously as he took a seat next to him on his cot without permission, like anyone could stop the Italian if they tried.

After the war? The heat from battle and the exhaustion of the stress of having to deal with an added ally to the opposing "Allies," and a powerful one at that, Germany rarely had time to think on these things. To imagine the world after the war, one shaped by himself. It was a much better world where Russia was stripped of any might that could seem threatening and was forced to centuries and centuries of house arrest; where Poland was nothing but an annoying memory to those who felt the need to remember the imbecile; where Asia was put on a leash and substantial trade was freely allowed to the Germans via the rule of the Japanese; where the Western Hemisphere was evenly divided amongst the Axis, Japan gaining the islands and pacific in its entirety, where Italy has taken the Catholic ruled South America and Germany, because he persisted, has taken North America.

He would be teaching both Canada and America to speak his native language, America always having an easier time thanks to all that German blood already coursing through his veins. Just the thought of the beautiful country speaking to him in his own tongue aroused a pleasure in Germany and he had decided that he would spend a majority of his time at the younger nation's house, or America would be spending a lot of time at his own home, never letting the American out of his presence. Showing off what was his and had been his for a long time to the world that could do nothing about it.

"Why would you want to catch someone who is free?" Suddenly America's voice had rung throughout Germany's head and he remembered his words all those decades ago when he had told him how he wanted to keep him close and boastfully show him off. America hadn't liked the idea and probably wouldn't like a world of Germany's future. Now the German wondered if said nation would still infatuate him when his wings were clipped. Was it the freedom that attracted Germany to him? Or something else?

Germany decided to just dwell on the boy's good looks as a possibility for his attraction so nothing short of hindrance in plan got in his way. He had to keep his mind clear and on his goal. He liked his future and he would take good care of America when the time came. All the young nation had to do was give him a chance. He hadn't before and Germany would make sure he regretted it in understanding how good of a lover Germany could be to him.

War was an easy excuse to never take "no" for an answer. So if Germany had to decimate America in the war just to keep him from resisting him then he would and in the end America would understand that it was out of love for him and that Germany didn't want him in the war and would do whatever need be to coerce him to leave.

After all, everyone believed this World War to be one of the worst. Many a nation would lose much,
many a nation would gain much. Scars would be received. Territories handed over. Growth and
deterioration.

There were to emerge a Superpower from this and Germany swore it to be him despite Japan's rise in
challenge. When he became one, something so akin to the Roman Empire of old, then Germany
could protect his assets better and America would never have to fight for himself again when
Germany would fight in his stead once his armies were destroyed.

Soviet Embassy, Tehran, Iran. November 28th 1943

Russia didn't like the Germans. He hadn't for thousands of years and doubted that any such alliance
or treaty could persuade his mind from otherwise supporting their kind. He had tried to warn his
leader that the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was full of lies but he didn't listen. Of course he didn't and
now look at them. They were currently on assault against Germany and his sworn allies. Russia
deemed this all avoidable if his leader would have taken notice of their past grievances with the
Germans and read the pattern, but he'd been a fool and now said leader has invited circumstance-
allies to their embassy if only to have them laugh in his face at his failure and glare at him with
underlined threats.

Well, Russia had only transformed a few decades ago so of course his leader would be weary of his
own opinion. After all, he's constantly reminded day by day that he doesn't have his own opinion
and that "Comrade Stalin's way is the only way."

Well Russia could say he was somewhat excited about the upcoming meeting. People were calling it
the gathering of the "Big Three" and it was interesting how the world saw those certain selected
leaders as the top dogs. Of course Stalin, as well as Russia, wanted him to be the top of the tops and
with hopes of pushing his weight around in the meeting anxiously awaited the arrival of next
country.

He had assumed it to be England, that country was quick to make himself known when a war,
especially a world war, took place. He was always in everyone's houses, meeting with diplomats,
councils, leaders, etcetera. Priding himself for being on time Russia mulled over the fact he'd be
seeing him soon. While Russia didn't have too many recent grievances with him his company was
undesirable. He tended to get upset so easily if things didn't go his way like the princess he was. Well
he was in his territory now so he'd just have to sit and wait his turn to talk like a good little boy and
the thought of that made Russia quite eager to get the meeting attended if only to see that upset
feature on England's ugly face over his lack of control.

But . . . in all honesty, Russia felt slightly sick what with the way his heart kept hitting his ribcage. At
first it started as an unpredictable occurrence but then it became regular with each meeting Russia
attended with his leader who expressed his desire to meet the other powerful countries and indeed
one of those countries happened to be an ex. The breakup, as Stalin had as well known, had been
messy, with cuts from allegations and promises of refusal of recognition. Ever since then the two had
been at odds and it had all been because of the bitter departure.

Russia opted not to think about how it had happened. His memory always fogged and the tight pain
in his chest could become quite unbearable that even thirty bottles of vodka wouldn't heal the
symptom of. It was a hassle just to get himself out of such a delirious mood and it annoyed his leader
to no end so he didn't dwell on the ideas and images of that time, as per Stalin's orders. But even now
Russia could feel the slight indications of said familiar pain when informed that the United States of
America would be attending the meeting in tow with his leader.

After being an avid supplier Stalin had been grateful for his willingness to help, as had Russia, but he
had never thought he'd be seeing him so soon especially in a war that he had claimed neutrality in.
But then again, this reminded him of a previous situation so very similar. Perhaps in another war when...ah, it hurt just trying to dig up old memories so Russia pushed it aside and waited by the embassy roadway, watching for the vehicles carrying said countries and leaders.

Maybe just a glimpse would ease his discomfort.

Putting on that smile Stalin told him to always keep when in front of their current "friends" Russia watched as a squad of vehicles pulled up and then...it seemed like his annoying heart had stopped beating all together.

There he was. He hadn't seen him in, oh, God, it's been decades. A small image of his last encounter with the nation had appeared in Russia's vision and the image held a younger version of the form he beheld now. This time, those sad blue eyes held determination, and those frowning lips were pulled straight in focus as he helped his leader into his wheelchair and then pushed him toward the building himself, ignoring the offered help from the delegates.

Alfred F. Jones. Russia had read his human-given name in a file Stalin had handed him to read and memorize, but after some jogging on his mental state he realized he hadn't needed the file his leader insisted he take. He had known this nation for a long, long time.

Russia suddenly found his smiling façade slipping as the American and his weary leader approached. He had rehearsed his meeting with the both of them. Smile and shake their hands in greeting. Stalin wanted no less. But there he was, looking at the young nation with no smile, not offering any hand. He simply stared and stared until the younger nation looked away and said himself—

"Thank-you very much for meeting with us, Soviet Russia," America said, albeit without meeting gaze. It had been a rude response because of lack of eye contact and his leader scolded him for it but Russia had met his eyes for a moment and it seemed the American didn't quite like looking at him.

"Oh, da, you are very welcome. I am astonished that even Mr. Roosevelt himself chose to attend. What a pleasantry. My leader will be very honored by your delicate arrival," Russia said, offering that smile for the leader but when he offered it to the country he watched the boy's gaze avert once more. He felt a slight offense because of it but then again there was an understanding that Russia himself wondered if he truly understood. "If you would follow me."

It had been the first time their leaders had met and Russia and America stood away to watch them get acquainted.

"Where is England?" America asked, still not turning to look at Russia, instead he kept his gaze on the two leaders who shook hands and exchanged welcoming greetings.

"You've always been such a daddy's boy," Russia remarked with a chuckle. "Whenever there's a conflict or war you're always first to slide to his side. Such a faithful child."

He could tell America wasn't up for the teasing or the jokes. He watched the tension of the boy's square jaw tighten in reaction to the way Russia was talking to him. Even his gaze zoned in on the leaders if just to block the Russian out of his vision. How rude. He didn't remember him being like such.

If fact, he remembered a different boy entirely. Yes, that was right...Russia still remembered even after the transformation and the years spent isolated from each other. The memory was hazy, yes, but if Russia really focused his attention in digging through the sludge of his dark mind then he'd come up with the remembrance of a young and bright child nation who was always smiling, always saying optimistic things, especially to him.
Yes, he remembered that once upon a time America had loved him, but he couldn't handle the demands of Russia's people and that love vanished as seen now in America's frown while he watched their leaders.

Russia had honestly wanted to start some sort of conversation with him. The silence was demanding and not at all pleasant. It was upsetting that the western nation still strained to look and talk to him while his leader seemed more than willing.

Well, if Russia wanted a conversation then he'd have to strike one himself that America was inclined to engage. So he opened his mouth and about began talking but that chance never came as England and his leader came and interrupted his opportunity.

"America, Russia," England called as he approached the nations while his leader left to join the other conversing two leaders.

Russia smiled that smile again and watched out of the corner of his eye as America offered his own smile for the presenting Brit. It was more or less a genuine smile and Russia had understood it to be because the two nations had been partners in the war since their inauguration into the conflict.

"Glad you could make it," England said toward America. "How is his health?"

"Not that great, but he persisted," America said, the two leaving Russia out of the conversation as they spoke about the health of America's leader.

"This is why I wished to meet elsewhere," England complained with a sad sigh before turning a strained gaze up toward Russia. "But you insisted we meet here. You do realize that Mr. Roosevelt's health is deteriorating and that he and America had flown over seven thousand miles just to attend?"

"Da," Russia said with a nod. "But my leader would not sway by my words either. I thought you knew that, England."

England simply rolled his eyes and crossed his arms. The greeting was pleasant but the demands were something else entirely. Stalin had nothing but demands and Churchill and Roosevelt could do nothing but listen with the possibility of accepting every term he set out. The upset was evident in both of them while America kept more quiet than England, especially at the dinner.

"This is rather insulting, Russia. I hope you know that," England stated as he dug into the steak served to them. The nations were given a separate room joined to the main dining room where their leaders were discussing more matters and enjoying their own meal. It was a delight to steal themselves away from their human masters and companions because at times they could relate and discuss things their leaders would never understand, and the company was always more pleasing than a short-lived human no matter it an enemy nation.

"I cannot help it if my leader deems those subjects to discuss important, nor can I help the fact that my armies continue to win against Germany," Russia stated as he took a sip of the wine served before placing the glass down gently and staring at the two nations. England was currently sawing into his meat without a glance toward anyone besides the plate in front of him and America, well, the boy hadn't said much and by the look on his face as he monotonously poked at the dinner he'd barely eaten he looked like he didn't want to be there.

"Yes, well, you're not fighting him in Africa, now are you?" England said as he tore his gaze away from his food to look at Russia once. "America and I are."

"Da, and a wonderful job you're doing at that from what I hear from my scouts," Russia said with a
chuckle. He glanced toward America again and noticed he had placed his silverware down and laid his hands in his lap, keeping his silence. "Is the meal not to your liking, Amerika? I apologize if my cooks didn't know how to create hamburgers and hotdogs, but they found the protein to be lacking and so made this instead." Russia had said it as an intended joke to get some sort of reaction out of the strangely quiet nation. Even if it was taken as an insult Russia didn't mind, as long as he'd look at him or say some kind of remark. But nothing. He said nothing.

"Will you let him rest, Russia?" England asked with a sigh as he wiped his mouth with the napkin cloth and then placed it in his lap. "He's just traveled back to his land to personally escort his leader here. You know he's exhausted and deftly not in the mood to take your retorts."

"If that is the case then why don't you retire yourself for the evening?" Russia suggested as he leaned back in his chair, looking toward the American who had eventually met his gaze. When America said nothing Russia offered a smile. "Da?"

Finally with a nod America muttered a quiet pardon before getting up and leaving the servants to dispose of his full plate. As he left England sighed. "He didn't want to come back here, you know?"

Russia quietly listened as England spoke.

"I . . . we needed him to enter. So after Japan attacked him . . . I honestly saw it as a blessing," England admitted shamefully. "Don't tell him I told you this but it's been eating away at me ever since he joined and I felt the need to get it off my chest."

"Da, I'm just surprised you feel at ease telling me this," Russia said, knowing that he and England never really saw eye-to-eye.

"Don't get any ideas. You just happen to be the only other country with me at the present," England clarified. "But realize that he's fighting two fronts. It's hard on him."

"Da, I know the feeling," Russia said with a nod. He was fighting Japan with China as well as Germany and Prussia. He knew how America felt with two fronts, but it was all the more better to get the enemy strained with the stress of two fronts, which is why the three were having this meeting.

Convenience ally or not Russia felt the need to ease America's discomfort. After his leader informed him of talks going their way Russia felt he needn't press the decision making with his presence and so he roamed the embassy halls when he had entered a wing where he was certain the American company had been appointed rooms.

Passing by he chanced a glimpse inside one of the rooms where the door was set ajar. Russia had noticed it to be America's leader's room and inside is where the nation was, laying his unhealthy leader down in bed and making sure he had everything he needed before he turned off the lights. After exiting the President's room Russia hid himself behind the corner of the hall and quietly observed America.

Ever so quiet America strode toward his room like a chore for him to do and when he entered he had neglected to shut his door and Russia had realized it was for the purpose of gathering his belongings and heading toward the showers down the hall. When he had exited his room with his soap and clothes rolled up in his arms and a bath robe wrapped around his waist he had noticed the Russian.

"Is there something wrong?" America asked with a look of concern, one of the first emotions Russia's seen him emit since arriving to his embassy.

"Nyet," Russia said. "I was just strolling around and ended up here. I didn't mean to disturb you."
"Just getting ready for bed," America admitted with a shrug and proceeded to continue his set path toward the showers. But Russia's gawk had been felt just when America had turned his back to him. When America turned back around to see Russia's observing eyes he knew he had been looking at it.

"Japan?" Russia asked as his violet gaze roamed over the ugly scar marring the boy's broad and muscled back. He watched America reach around and touch it lightly before removing his hand entirely. "Does it hurt you still?"

"I heal fast, if you recall," America said, his blue gaze taking a quick glance toward Russia before offering him his back.

Russia let out a chuckle that caught the American's attention to turn toward him curiously. "It's been decades since we last had relations, Amerika, and I don't know if you know but it had been a harrowing time for me. I hadn't been so focused on you as much as the current state of my government and people."

"Is that what really happened?" America asked, his eyes narrowing. "You really don't remember anything?"

"I'm a new creature, Amerika," Russia said, more like recited. Lenin and the others had taught him to keep smiling, to always remember he was different and to never forget that he was changed. But of course that did not mean he didn't remember. Of course he remembered . . . it just took extra effort on his part to search through those dark cellars he called his mind and that was effort he wasn't willing to exhaust.

Glancing down Russia watched America let out a long sigh. He looked upset but was composing himself well.

"Do you . . . remember what we were supposed to do . . . when we met again? Where we were supposed to meet?" When America looked up at Russia the older nation was surprised to see a gentler look in America's baby blue eyes.

Why was America bringing that up, especially now? How could he? How dare he make him feel like this?

Russia moved his arms behind his frame to hide the fact that his fists were trembling tight. The memory always put a strain on him and when jogged it hurt to think back simply because Russia, as himself, missed the way he used to be. He missed his monarchy, he missed his imperial empire, and more importantly . . . he missed his lover whom he was forced to give up after the uprising.

"I'm certain there are things in your civil war that escape your mind," Russia offered as an excuse to keep his sanity and poise in front of the young and beautiful American. Perhaps one day he would tell the American nation he remembered when his leaders weren't near, listening to him, watching him—perhaps, possibly before he really did forget.

Was that hurt in America's features?

Russia watched the American part his lips. There would have been a sigh but America caught his breath. When he looked up at Russia his brow lowered and his eyes focused on the older nation in front of him.

"Yeah? Too bad for you."

What? Did Russia hear that right? Since when did America suddenly start insulting something as traumatizing as a civil war transformation when he had been on the brink of one himself? It wasn't a
pleasant process and therefore something the other nations stay clear of when selecting to be rude about.

America's eyes scanned Russia's as if waiting for an answer, looking for some kind of reaction to his comment. "Did you hear me?"

Letting out a hard sigh Russia felt his gut harden and then came the upset. How could little America talk to him like that? Apparently he needed a lesson in manners and one of the best ways right now was to shun him.

"Da," Russia said as he narrowed his eyes at America and then turned to leave without a proper farewell. When he turned the corner to leave he glanced one last time back at the American and then he noticed something strange. America had his eyes glanced down and the frown on his lips looked quite . . . sad. Russia observed him before watching the America turn and head back toward the showers.

He guessed their strained relationship would possibly be like this for a while. Russia wondered if there was any hope at reconciliation, though he doubted it with his leaders' disapproval of the young country. Even so, his heart continued to pound against his chest every time he saw the boy and he found the only remedy was to turn his eyes away, to shut his ears off from the sound of his voice and to guide his thoughts away from those of their once loving past.

Stalin had thought this a good idea, and so Russia agreed with him.

Brisbane, Australia. December 1943

"How did the talks go, America?"

Raising his head from the desk America fixed his glasses and focused on the form in front of him. With a sigh he leaned up and then back into his chair. He honestly didn't feel like getting into too much detail with his little brother, but Australia was persistent and likely wouldn't leave him alone until he heard everything.

"Not mine or England's way if that's what you want to know," America said with an exasperated sigh as he rolled his eyes closed. He came to his brother's hometo rest for a little while before seeing to his Generals in the Pacific Theatre and then heading back to England to help out in Africa and then onwards to Europe. He didn't need Australia to harp on him like the others.

With keen ears America observed Australia's continuous presence in the room. Opening one eye he noticed the younger still standing there. He looked uneasy and opened his mouth multiple times without uttering a single word. Frustrated, America rose a brow and looked at him expectantly, waiting for his question to voice itself, whatever it was.

"How was . . . Russia?" Australia finally managed to ask.

That was right; Australia was the only other country who had known about his relationship with the nation. It was because of this he seemed to confide in him in a way, though America was quiet about the dissolved relationship even to his leaders. Australia though could see that the past break-up continued to stress his older brother and felt he needed to bring up the subject over emotional distress issues.

"He was the same as usual," America said with a sigh as he leaned his elbows on the desk and let his gaze roam around, reminiscing in memories.

"That's not what I mean and ya know that," Australia pointed out, looking sincerely concerned for
his brother's attitude toward the visit. "Look, ya've been down ever since ya arrived here. I know you're going back to Africa soon but you're no good to anyone if your mind isn't in the right place."

America offered his little brother a smile. The kid was becoming smart and strong. After the potential threat of Japan invading his home had settled and the fright waned America knew it was safe to leave for longer periods of time and let the country defend himself alongside his Generals. These past couple of years had forced them together for necessities in strongholds and of course protection which America gladly gave. Despite some spats he and Australia have become closer than before and now all the brunette did was read him like an open book despite their bonding of only a couple of years.

"The Russia I had seen wasn't the Russia I hear about now from dad," Australia stated as his green eyes gazed hard into America's own, standing his ground to speak on the same level. "The Russia that ya were in love with isn't the same Russia today. I'm not stupid, America."

America frowned. Did he always wear his heart on his sleeve? This was a time for war not for reflecting on broken and regrettable relationships. Didn't Australia see that? What was he trying to accomplish by bringing this issue up? America was already tired of thinking about it, especially about their last meeting.

"I tried talking to him but the results proved unfruitful," America stated, glancing away from the younger country who was all ears.

Australia looked disheartened. Honestly it should be more so America than him yet every time he inquired about the situation with the Allies and America's relations with them, whenever it got to Russia America would become quiet and that was that.

"Nothing at all?" Australia asked with a sad smile. He had known it was highly unlikely that Russia had stayed the same after the civil war, but he had hoped for America's happiness he had been wrong. His hopes always seemed to be dashed. All he ever wanted was to see America smile again, truly smile, like he used to when he and Russia had been courting.

"He doesn't remember. He told me."

Australia now frowned before an idea came to mind and he asked, "Did you—?" But America beat him to it.

With a nod, America said, "I tried."

"Even in his own language?" Australia asked.

"Yeah, but I don't think he understood me. He's gone," America said with a sad smile. "Thanks for supporting me though. You don't have to expect anymore."

"I'm really sorry," Australia apologized as he glanced down at his shoes sadly. "I had thought that if he heard you say it in his own tongue then maybe he'd remember."

"His boss had his reins tight," America said before standing up and turning around to look out of the window to see a harbor baring multiple American ships as well as some of Australia's. "Mine couldn't get a word in, nor could England's. I don't think he likes me too much, and in turn neither does Russia."

"Then there's no chance of reconciliation?" Australia inquired. He knew that if there were such a chance then America would definitely be the happiest country on earth. He had seen his love for the other. He had witnessed even Russia's affection for America. Now, all of that love seemingly the
world couldn't even hold was gone? That just didn't sound right to Australia. Couldn't be.

"Not as long as he's controlled by people like those," America said remembering the image of Russia's leader, remembering his demands, and remembering him especially all those years ago when he had attacked America after trying to save Russia from the Red Army.

"Then fight them."

America blinked. He turned toward Australia who seemed intent to save the hopeless. America had accepted it a long time ago. Sure he attempted Australia's suggestions in getting the Russian to remember or at least think about how the two had been, but after the failure in Tehran, America had become depressed once more and it wasn't good for him to feel this way as he was heading back into the war to fight next to countries like France and England, and the others. Fight them? No, America was never one to get involved in other country's business . . . not with internal affairs.

"If Russia wants them then——"

"There had been a civil war; ya know he didn't want it. So why do ya accept it? Why didn't ya fight back?" Australia asked. "I don't like seeing ya like this. I don't."

"Because I didn't want to be seen as the 'bad guy'," America stated after remembering the reason for pulling his soldiers out of Russia's home when those communistic men took over the country and transformed his Ivan into something else he's never seen before and could never cooperate with.

"But ya already are for quitting," Australia persisted. "Maybe that's why Russia's given up on ya, because ya gave up on him."

America gapped at Australia. Since when did he talk to him like this? Before he had been so optimistic and promising about attempting some relationship mending, but now he was biting America's head off. Why did he even care about America's relationships anyways? No one else did.

Given up on Russia? Ha! Did Australia even know the heartache of a breakup? America had cried his eyes out for years when he found himself forgetting his daily glass of whiskey or bourbon. The parties, the smoke-filled casinos, all to get his mind away from Russia but then came the crash and even those time-consuming things weren't enough. Nothing but reflecting on his failures and the biggest one was himself for not fighting against the backlash and hate of the people of Russia. Australia was right; he should have fought tooth and nail for Russia. He had loved him with all his heart and when things got gruesome and interests were no longer "interesting" then he left. What kind of a partner was he if he just gave up like that?

Australia was right so much that it was awakening a hurt in America that he didn't want. Perhaps Russia did indeed remember and because of so didn't want such a quitter. America wouldn't blame him. But even after nearly two decades of separation, it still hurt to think about it. Now that they had officially met as the United States of America and the Soviet Union it was worse. He looked the same, but just thought differently as he assumed. Standing near, but not being able to stand closer hurt America after memories of how intimate caresses used to be exchanged because of the need to touch came flooding back. Where gentle glances were once held now careless and dare he say cold glares were shot his way.

When the meeting at Tehran was over with America had gotten out as fast as possible. He had thought he was over it all, maybe he was, but the heartache still lingered.

But who was to blame for the break? America or Russia? Maybe it was America. Maybe it was Russia. Maybe it was a little bit of both. Maybe it just wasn't meant to be. America had thought about
that aspect and on that thought he was comforted, thinking that his youth-ridden mind had clouded his judgment and thrust himself into something too early for his adolescent form. So in the end he saw the break as a blessing—at least in his logic deducing mind—but his heart tended to be a different matter despite his people's feelings now toward the potentially threatening nation.

"Maybe you're right," America said to Australia while he kept his gaze out the window toward the harbor and his fleet, a thing of pride now. "Or maybe I was too young to understand what the hell I was doing. I'm better off on my own. Why? Because someone once told me national relationships never last."

"True, but if ya continue to feed them then they won't wane," Australia said. "I won't be leaving your side for a long time, America. I promise ya this."

America turned and offered a thankful smile to his brother. He inclined his head in acknowledgement to that bold statement. "I'll take your word for that," America said before letting out a sigh and said, "We'll probably be meeting again one more time. Once we enter Europe I'm certain we'll cross paths more than once."

"Just promise me you'll take care of yourself," Australia spoke up with concern that flattered America. It felt nice to have a relative actually concern themselves for your wellbeing and Australia genuinely cared. "We still got Japan to see to. I can't take him on by myself."

"I know," America said, frowning at the other front he'd have to thrust himself into after the war in Europe was fought and hopefully won soon. "But I'm working on something to end this war quickly. Just wait for me, okay?" When he looked back at Australia the teen nodded and saluted him. America smiled in kind and returned the salute before excusing himself and preparing to leave.

Eastern Front. December 16th 1944

Prussia rubbed his hands together but it was no use. No amount of friction heated his cold skin so he brought his numb fingers toward his mouth and breathed as hot of air as his aching lungs would allow. It helped a little but Prussia still refused to remove his wet gloves. Clothing was clothing after all. He'd take anything to keep him remotely warm on the Eastern Front.

Honestly, he wanted to be with Germany. He knew he'd been getting forced back lately, ever since the Allies managed to get a foothold in France's home, but Prussia promised he'd always have his younger brother's back so he had no other choice but to stand and stay to face Russia. He'd been pounding their lines and it was nothing but a tug-of-war between the two of them. Other than that Prussia was exhausted and all he wanted to do was return home, crawl into bed, and sleep for a few decades. But Europe isn't a place to sleep. Never was and he doubted it'd ever be.

Even from the separation Prussia kept in touch with Germany via telecoms. Every day they'd talk and make sure the other was doing alright, but lately the receivers were as quiet as the static buzzing out of them. Prussia was worried. He knew his brother was strong, much stronger than even him, but as the oldest he always worried and no word was ever good in Prussia's battle-worn mind.

The albino jumped when the high pitched crack screeched into the air signaling the telecom was receiving an incoming message. Scurrying over to the device as fast as he could through the high snow, Prussia snatched up the receiver and pressed it close to his ear.

"Ludwig?" Prussia could hear it coming in and out. He calmed the fast pace of his heart when Germany's deep voice echoed across the other end.

"Gilbert," the western country spoke. "I need you to come here."
"Why, what's wrong?" Prussia's heart jumped right back into his throat.

"Just come here," Germany said. "I want to show you something." With that came the silence of static. Germany's words and tone of voice helped ease Prussia's upset conscious a little but Prussia was confused as to why Germany was calling him away from the Eastern Front. His men needed him there. What was more important than the protection of Germany's back? Confusing as it was, it was an excuse to go and see his brother in the flesh. He doubted he'd pass the opportunity.

He didn't. Prussia gave the command to a faithful General and came as fast as possible to Germany's side. It had taken about a day to arrive. He had been driving up to the designated place near Luxemburg's home when he slammed the breaks at the sound of machine gunfire. Prussia and his entourage jumped out of the vehicle to take cover but after overlaying the land Prussia chuckled to himself at his scare. They were in German territory so it was probably nothing but friendly warm-up rounds. They were close to where Germany was.

But as Prussia assured the humans around that the sound was of their own machines and coaxed them back into the car his heart nearly stopped when the sound died down and a high-pitched, "NO!" was heard.

Prussia knew that voice. He knew the sound of distress and he knew the outcome if said stress wasn't relieved.

"America!" Prussia gasped before stepping on the gas and ramming his car through the forest's clearing. Skidding to a halt Prussia leapt out of the vehicle and beheld the scene.

There, in the snow, lay dozens of bodies now turning the white surrounding red. It was a massacre.

"You bastard! How could you?!

Prussia zipped his head around and gapped at the sight of America. He had been captured with the men now dead. They had been his soldiers.

He watched in shock as the American country struggled against Germany's men holding him. Prussia knew it wasn't wise to hold that certain nation down and for good reasons; England could vouch for his thinking.

"Stop!" Prussia cried out in fright as he watched one of Germany's men put a stop to the struggling from the country with a bullet to the shin. America fell to the ground and the men around laughed. "Stop I said!" Prussia shouted as he ran toward them. Prussia made it to them just as Germany bent down and picked up the bleeding American himself.

"Gilbert, glad you could join us. Though, you are a bit late, look what I just so happened to catch." Germany held America up by his arm and showed him off like a prized trout.

In another circumstance Prussia would have pat Germany on the back and gave a, "good job," compliment but not this time. After witnessing the carnage and hearing America's desperate hurt the feeling in his gut churned until he about threw up. That feeling however worsened and now it was up to Prussia to show Germany if he didn't yet feel it.

"What have you done?!" Germany didn't seem to like Prussia's demanding tone as he pulled America closer toward himself and narrowed his eyes at his brother.

"I beat the Americans and in so their country who happened to be with them during the assault," Germany stated.
"You didn't have to slaughter!" Prussia continued his shouts of outrage which only confused and more so upset his little brother.

Prussia's red eyes turned toward America who had just pulled his arm from Germany's grasp and reached to his left toward a close German officer. He was trying to snatch a gun. But to Prussia's surprise again he watched Germany turn at an inhuman speed and shoot America's wrist before he had the chance of securing a weapon. America flinched back and grasped his second wound, grinding his teeth from the pain.

"Ludwig!" Prussia gasped. Since when had his brother ever wished harm on the nation of his affection?

"You'd have him shoot me, or you?" Germany hissed as he pressed close to Prussia who suddenly felt the onslaught of his younger brother's dominating aura.

"But it's Alfred," Prussia reasoned, offering a smile to ease the tense air in-between them.

There it was . . . the soft gaze of Germany when mentioning the nation's name. Prussia wanted Germany to see America as the little Alfred he had met back at the Russian masquerade. That way, maybe he'd remember how much gentle affection he still held despite being on the opposite sides of a war.

But to Prussia's surprise Germany's face was quick to harden again and he simply turned and took hold of the wounded country before pushing him to the ground and ordering his men to hold him down.

"What are you planning to do with him?" Prussia asked, his eyes narrowing in suspicion of intent. Observing the look in Germany's eyes as he gazed down at the struggling and cursing American disturbed Prussia. Why? Because he'd seen that look before, not in Germany's eyes, but in other power-hungry countries and it worried the albino.

"I'm going to make sure he never attacks me again," Germany stated without taking a single eye off of America who was being limb stretched by the soldiers' hold on him. When he reached down and unbuckled his belt Prussia nearly choked on his spit from swallowing too hard.

"What are you doing?!!" Prussia knew what Germany was attempting but he asked quickly to try to get his brother to think about what he was actually trying to do himself.

"Our Führer said it was the only way to keep him out of the war," Germany informed. "I never wanted him in the war, but because of Japan . . . I just want him out."

"Then find another way!" Prussia begged.

"There isn't," Germany said and looked back down at the struggling American nation who had been stilled when the German officers hit his wounds.

"Ludwig, stop!" Prussia didn't care if Germany wanted this, he did not. As he jumped on his brother and attempted to pull him away from his descent on the American country Germany had turned upon him and landed a hit against his left eye. Prussia was pushed back, dazed and seeing two of everything for a moment before he turned back to his brother. Germany had hit him. He actually hit him.

"This is the last time you get in my way!" Germany shouted, and then Prussia saw it, he saw that anger he had once shown him decades back in the American harbor. It was still just as frightening and full of deadly potential.
Without another word Prussia watched in horror as Germany bent down and covered America. He watched America begin to struggle again, demanding Germany get off of him but he could do little with how Germany's men held him by the wrists and ankles. When Germany reached forward and took hold of the blonde's shirt he pulled violently and the buttons attached flew off in every direction, one managing to hit Prussia in the shoulder.

If America hadn't understood Germany's intentions before due to lack of translation, he did now.

"No," Prussia gasped out as he watched America still. Those young blue eyes widening and pupils dilated in what Prussia recognized as fear.

The horror only continued as Germany's men circled around, offering cheers for their fatherland as he defiled the American nation.

"Stop it . . . stop it!" Prussia demanded as he pushed against the humans toward Germany.

There were other ways to get America out of the war. Prussia knew it. Germany knew it. What Germany was doing was the ultimate act of national dominance.

Where use of arms and signed restrictions failed this act did not. It was so degrading to a country that said country would never be the same again. They'd surrender their arms, their warriors, their rulers, and their land in submission to this.

Raping a nation was always the last resort.

"Hold him back!" Germany spat, turning in annoyance to see his brother trying to break through the soldiers to stop his deed.

"Don't do this, Ludvig! Stop!" Prussia cried out in desperation as he struggled against the soldiers now turned to push and stop his path. He had failed to get his brother to think rationally and he didn't have enough time to explain the reasons why he felt it necessary for Germany not to do this finalizing deed. So he continued pushing aside the humans to break the circle.

"Ludwig, don't!" Prussia had just managed to break through in time to see his powerful brother take hold of America's belt and yank the buckle loose. He saw how America shook, he saw the horror in his eyes and he saw the expected retaliation that Germany had ignored. America lashed back, his injured wrist ignored as he balled his fists and ripped his arm out of the soldier's hold along with the soldier, who was tossed from the clearing and into a truck. Germany's men could hold him down no longer as he swung forward and smashed his fist against Germany's jaw, effectively shattering the joint and heaving the Empire off of him.

"Ludwig!" Prussia cried as he slid to his brother and shoved himself between he and America. "Alfred, Alfred, wait!" Prussia held out his hand to stay the boy. America was standing on shaking legs, his belt hung loosely on his pants and his tattered shirt bore his defined chest to the harsh cold air surrounding but it was clear he didn't care for these minor details with the way his fists shook and his eyes glistened.

"We're sorry," Prussia bade, praying some kind of word in the boy's language would get through to his traumatized mind. "I'm sorry. This won't happen again, I promise. You won. You won."

America wasn't moving, he wasn't attacking and so Prussia took the opportunity to order the men back. As they took off Prussia wrapped Germany's arm around his neck and pulled him to his feet while holding his injured jaw together with his other hand. He dragged his stupid brother to his car and laid him in the back seat. He needed medical attention right away and by the looks of it, wouldn't
be able to use his jaw for a while. America had broken it immensely.

With a hard sigh Prussia knew this marked a major downward spiral for the Germans. If Germany couldn't communicate properly with his troops then they couldn't advance and there'd be nothing but retreating from here on out. Prussia could try to lead but it was Germany who the troops listened to and now he had nothing more to say.

The sound of the engine muffled Germany's cry of agony from the backseat and as Prussia turned to see what America was currently doing as the Germans pulled out he watched him change. At first he continued to stand on trembling legs with fists a-shaking until Prussia watched his shoulders slack and then came the tears. America began to cry. His head leant back and his eyes closed from the stinging hot tears as he cried and wailed in bitter sadness.

Some of those tears were definitely for the dead men scattered around him in the red snow, but Prussia knew most were for the mentally scarring ordeal Germany had just put him through.

Prussia felt his heart clench at the sight. in that he was blasted back to the eighteenth century when America had shown him these vulnerable tears. This time Prussia couldn't pull him close and hold him in his arms like the little brother he always had seen him as. He couldn't wipe away those tears with his own fingers or massage those tense trembles away.

War often pushed friends away and enemies closer. But because of this Prussia wondered how far it'd push America away from he and Germany.

Yalta, Crimea. February 4th 1945.

Russia had been feeling extremely pleased with himself lately and for good reasons. His army was only forty miles away from Berlin and he had Prussia on the run. After hearing about Germany's sustained injury at the hands of America, Russia's boss saw to it right away that Russia bombard the Eastern Front until they've pushed them back into their home. It worked and now Russia had given his leader the opportunity to have his way with the meeting of the Big Three once again.

The race of the war was almost finished and Russia was going to be the first to cross that finish line and receive all of the spoils of war.

The last war he had lost more than anything else; his territory, his monarchy, a large number of his people, his health, and his lover. This time he'd walk away with the most.

One of the best feelings besides defeating the German brothers was seeing England squirm. Russia knew his power was failing and it wouldn't be long before the mere thought of him being a threat to Russia's dominancy would prove laughable, but America . . . ever since the American had arrived at Russia's resort he had seen a difference in him. Blaming the war at first Russia dismissed it until he also saw something devious in the boy's leader.

He didn't know what it was but from the looks of it, Russia could see that America's leader was even threatening England's rule and therefore butting heads with Russia's leadership. This was something completely different since Tehran. Russia could blame it on the sickly and delusional leadership, but he suspected something else. No nation threatened unless they were backing their words and Russia was curious as to what Mr. Roosevelt was backing his words with.

Nevertheless America had resigned himself from his leader's side and opted to his room as a retreat for their stay in Yalta. Russia had been on his way to receive the youngest nation of the three as order by his leader when he had halted his arrival at the sound of someone else in America's room.
It was England.

"You sure you're alright, lad? You haven't spoken much since you got here."

"Not required to speak. Just here to represent." America sounded tired and Russia inwardly chuckled to himself. If he recalled the last war the nation had entered near the end, but this time he had gotten a few years in on the war and now he was seeing just how damaging it could be to a country. It served his inexperienced self right.

"But you seemed upset by Stalin," England mentioned and Russia's ears keened. That was right. He remembered America leaving the room when Stalin began boasting on their imminent approach to Berlin and Russia's over all victory in the war. "Don't you mind him. He likes to play his own drums."

There was silence for a moment.

"If it makes you feel any better I personally acknowledge your accomplishments, America. I know what you did to halt the western advance," England said.

"Yeah, yeah." Russia could tell that America hadn't wanted to continue speaking as if just uttering words would exhaust him. Something completely different than his usually chatty self.

"How are you holding up after that entire ordeal?" England asked and Russia heard his pitch drop and his tone became more of a gentle concerning parent than a boasting comrade in arms.

"I'm fine," came America's quick reply.

"You're certain?"

England was always one to press even when it got past the amount of annoyance one could maintain.

"It was wrong what he did . . . what he tried to do," England continued and Russia often wondered if the Empire was talking about America's run-in with Germany. He had heard about the attack and its repulsion but other than that the details escaped him. From what he was hearing it sounded like Germany had done something to America that the boy refused to mention or let England reminisce on for that matter.

"War is war. Shit happens on and off the battlefield; there is really no rules during it. You of all people should know, England, so why do you care what the hell happened to me?"

There was a silence and Russia wondered if the American had actually managed to shut the Brit up.

"Besides . . . it's not like it hadn't happened to me before . . ."

The words died in a mumble and that was that. The conversation seemed to end so Russia found it his chance to enter. He offered a gentle knock before opening the door to see England standing near America who had been lying on his bed with his arm covering his eyes.

"Oh, forgive me. I didn't know you two were having a moment. It seems it is gone, da? Good. My leader requires your presence. He persists you stand next to your leaders for the photograph."

"Right-o then," England said, straightening out his jacket and heightening his form. "Then I'll leave America to wash up."
England left and possibly expected Russia to follow, but the older nation didn't. Instead he remained in America's doorway and watched him closely. America wasn't moving at first and when he raised his arm a curious blue eye stared back at him.

"A picture lasts longer you know," America remarked, which made the Russian chuckle.  

"Stalin does not like to be kept waiting," Russia informed.  

"You're the strangest host," America complained, letting his arm fall back over his eyes. "Making such demands on the guests is so rude."

"My territory, my rules," Russia announced and watched with his trademark smile as America took hold of the bedframe with both hands and sat himself up. He seemed sore if any indication to those groans whilst sitting up meant anything, but when the frame crunched under the pressure from his hands America found himself falling along with the furniture.  

Russia's eyes widened and gasped, quickly jumping forward to bend down to help the American up.  

"Sorry, man," America offered as Russia pulled him to his feet. America looked down at his hands in concern before wiggling his fingers and then massaging his palms carefully. "Don't know what came over me."

Russia had known America as one of the few nations to be blessed with abnormal strength, but after what he just witnessed he grew concerned. When had America become so out of touch with his inhuman ability? It wasn't like him to break things anymore. Something was off and Russia knew it.  

"I hope you expect to pay for that," Russia said and when America turned to him with disbelief he chuckled. "I am joking. It was an accident, da? I was here to witness it."

America nodded before glancing down. Russia had seen this vulnerability and so pressed on it.  

"What is wrong, Amerika? You look quite upset." And he did, which is one of the reasons why Russia asked. Despite Stalin's attitude toward America, Russia still held a care for him and seeing him frown did not give him the pleasure his leader had wished it would. "We are friends, da? You can tell me."

The mere mention of the word "friends" seemed to upset the American since his frown deepened and his eyes darkened in his glare up at the Russian.  

"For now," America said as he turned from the older nation and opened his wardrobe to pull out his ceremony uniform.  

With his back turned America didn't see Russia frown in dismay over his response. His heart threatened to burst out of his chest again and so he quietly excused himself. He should have taken America's response as an insult, Stalin would have wanted him to, but in the end Russia found himself with the familiar emotion of hurt sadness over the fact that America began to see him as an enemy.

They could have been such good friends, well, if America accepted his ways of social Communism. If he did then they could possibly be lovers again. Russia had liked that thought very much and he was certain America would too, but America was too stubborn and refused any sway from the way of life. No, he simply stood tall and proud behind his leader as they took the photograph commemorating that the Big Three leaders were there and the day became historical.  

Russia and America's smiles were obviously fake and their forms were too unevenly apart, America
having shifted closer to England on his left than stand so close to Russia on his right. Russia didn't like that his presence pushed America back into that ugly Brit's arms. The past centuries it had always been the other way around but now Russia was finding it was him and him alone that was forcing the creation of a bond between the British country and the American nation. Russia didn't like that at all and so he blew his frustration through the form of fighting the Germans to demolish their capital.

Berlin, Germany. Summer of 1945

Prussia let out a cry when his arm was pulled back to the point where he could physically feel his joints crunching together. Anymore pressure and his arm might come right off, but he didn't care about the pain right now. All he cared about was the safety of his brother.

"America!" The nation standing near Prussia's younger brother turned his eyes to him and looked at him. His attention held for the moment. "Please, please take care of him!" Prussia pleaded out as he blinked away the stinging in his eyes to his best ability. "Please!"

They had lost. He and Germany had fought hard and lost. The war was over. The sequel to the Great War came and went. Well, at least for them.

Prussia knew Japan still had his holdings in the pacific but he knew it wouldn't be long before he too caved, especially under America. There was something different about the American country now. His eyes seemed slightly darker, he stood taller than when Prussia had last seen him, and his aura. . . Prussia could feel it radiating off of him from where he stood and he had no doubts that those who stood closest to him could feel it in full. Prussia hadn't felt such a powerful dominating national aura like that in at least two millennia. It felt a lot like his aura and it was daunting to think that such a young nation had gained it so quickly.

America had the aura of a powerful empire despite his decline to the title. He'd become a Superpower.

Prussia let out another hiss as his arm was pulled back again, pulling him back into reality. He looked back at the smiling nation looming over him. Such a menace he was and always will be. But he was thankful that he had picked Prussia instead of Germany to take.

"Ah!" With a boot between his shoulders Prussia's face met the ruble of Berlin. Russia still held his arm in his vice-like grip and so the strain on his shoulder worsened. But that still didn't stop him from pleading to the others to look after his broken brother.

Prussia remembered how sick Germany had gotten after the first Great War and he never wanted to see him like that again. He glared at France and England especially, those two had been the largest contributors in Germany's sickness, but when his eyes turned back toward America his gaze softened. He saw the young nation as his last hope.

"Alfred!" There he went again, using the boy's name as if he were a close friend allowed such luxuries. It worked, America's eyes lightened a little and his almost uncaring glare became gentle to the sensitive situation facing the two German brothers. "Please, Alfred, watch over mein bruder. Watch over Ludwig."

When Germany looked at him, Prussia's heart broke into pieces. He saw those wet tears in those sad blue eyes. He saw just how heartbroken Germany was as well, especially because he couldn't offer a formal verbal goodbye. The gauze wrapped around his jaw and head showed the others that any attempt of speaking had been taken from him.
Prussia decided to forget about regret and pain as he pulled away from Russia, breaking his wrist and dislocating his arm in the process. The action surprised everyone and Prussia could see England pull out his gun as Prussia ran toward them, but he wasn't planning on a final attack. No, he merely slid to his knees and wrapped his still functioning arm around his brother and pulled him close.

"Ich liebe dich, Ludwig!" Prussia declared as he cried and held his brother one last time. He choked out a sob when he felt Germany cling to him like he was his last life line. He could feel Germany's wet hot tears dripping down his neck and mixing with the grime covering him. He felt him shaking and knew that he was hurting from not being able to speak to him one last time.

What a pathetic state the Awesome Prussia's found himself in. He could see all of their eyes on him, but he didn't want their pity. He wanted them to save it for Germany.

The sound of heavy footsteps rung in Prussia's ears when he felt someone grip his broken arm and pull. He gritted his teeth from the pain but nothing, and he meant nothing, could or had ever felt so bad as the moment he was ripped from Germany's arms.

"Ludwig!" Prussia cried out, his good arm reaching out and taking a hold of the blonde's jacket before he had been violently ripped away. "Gott, Ludwig!"

The butt of a gun met Prussia's scalp and he had fallen. The daze became overwhelming and the last sight he saw was that of his brother's horrified face.

"Germans; they never listen," Russia stated lightly like it was some kind of a joke. No one laughed though. When Russia looked down at Germany his gaze became more menacing. "Especially this one." Russia raised his gun to offer a club to his head as well but America dared to step between them. With a frown Russia sneered at the action. "You always were a German lover, shlyukha."

America only stood his ground and bumped his chest with Russia, something he's never before done. Such a gesture could start a war.

"He's mine, Russia," America stated before taking up his own gun and surprising the powerful Communist by shooting the ground near his foot. Russia wasn't one to retreat but from the situation he took a step back as America emptied his cartridge with a lovely line of bullets in the dusty debris ridden ground. "You cross this line and I will not hesitate to fight you," America swore as he once again met Russia's gaze.

Sweet and innocent America was no more. It was a little sad but also somewhat exciting. Russia found himself grinning at the boy's display of power. He had never been one to push might around as much as this. Russia was quite curious when this change happened. Well, if America was wanting to play . . .

Russia held back a chuckle but not his smile as he leaned over the set line and pressed his face close to America's. The western nation did not move, Russia did not cross the line per say so he had no right to strike back. How fun to see America thinking he could challenge the great Russia.

"You don't think I can feel it, Fredka?" Russia teased the boy with the silly nickname if only to see that frown deepen. His eyes glanced back and forth to England, France, and the other countries there. "I know they can but it is impolite to ask. So I will find your secret, Amerika, and when I do then maybe you could come and live with me for a little while, da?"

Russia was impressed to see America's eyes darken at the dominating threat and that aura he felt emit from him since they had met last heightened. It was intoxicating and it surged with dominance. But so did Russia and he wouldn't stop until the whole world was his and if America decided to stand in
the way like the stupid little boy he'd been known as throughout history then Russia would have no choice but to discipline the rude country, and he's saved a special kind of punishment for him. A punishment befitting of a betrayer like him.

Gone were the days when Russia longed only to see America smile and hear him laugh. His heart might still long for such pleasantries but in time he'd forget, so in the meantime Russia would ignore his aching heart and chase after it every time it fell out of his chest, attempting to escape into Alfred's arms. That had almost happened one time and Russia had caught it just in time.

So, bending down, Russia took up the unconscious Prussia before turning east.

"It was fun playing war with you, Amerika," Russia said, loud enough for everyone to hear. "Sadly I missed the opportunity to do it last time. Remember I am here if you are too weak to handle Japan. I should hope you let me fight him, after all I have an old score to settle."

Turning back toward America and the others, Russia offered his trademark smile. America was unfazed and stood his ground despite the other countries unease. What a resilient boy.

Russia made sure to keep his eyes on him closely from now on. He's become something akin to an empire, a superpower so to say, and Russia was going to find out how it happened and he was going to make sure to find a way to staunch his growth. After all, little chicks shouldn't be hopping out of the nest before their wings were fully developed. If Russia had to then he'd push America. He was curious if he could fly.

Tokyo, Japan. Autumn of 1945

America had walked Japan beside the desolated ruble for the sole purpose to try to make him understand that what had happened was brought about by his lack of surrender, but no matter what the dissolved Empire remained proud and wouldn't even look at the destroyed cities. He blamed America, as did the rest of the world. After all it was he who had dropped the bombs.

So Japan was placed upon house arrest and he spoke no more. America didn't necessarily want to be stationed on the island, he wanted to go home and rest, but he knew that was now an impossibility. England's Empire was on the brink of crumbling—America gave it a few more years until it wore its welcome—Germany was being divided between the Allies; his schedule now consisting of triple custody, America had new territories to manage and now he's come out of the war with a title others, by right, had a chance to fight for.

They were calling him a Superpower. England had told him that the title was usually given to the strongest country in the world. Now, after his attack on Japan's home, the title was given to him.

The strongest nation in the world. In the world.

America had a lot on his plate and so the mere thought of falling on his bed back home and closing his eyes became a simple fantasy. He doubted he'd ever get to some good rest in a long while thanks to his current status, but it was too late to revoke it. He definitely wasn't giving it up without a fight either.

It was still almost surreal . . . being the strongest, some even equating him to the Roman Empire of old. America never knew the guy, but one thing was for certain was that he would never let the title and status get to him. He was not an Empire, didn't want to be. But despite his reassurance the world still looked at him with the possibility of that fear. England looked at him with immature pity while France in envy. China's eyes glew green with jealousy when he saw him and Russia . . .
America could tell that if anyone were to challenge him for his title then it would be Russia. It was funny because only a hundred years ago Russia had competed for such a title with England and America had supported Russia by giving him ships and arms. Now look... the game's changed and it is America whose back Russia is watching and waiting for the most opportune moment to stab.

America wasn't even two hundred years old yet and already it seems like he's bitten off more than he can chew. Perhaps, perhaps not. He'd show the world he was worthy and he'd show Russia.

"Agh!" Australia's cry shot America out of his dreadful thoughts. He keened his ears, curious as to what the younger sibling had gotten himself into this time, but after hearing, "Get 'im off me!" America bolted out of his designated office located close to Japan's main home. Upon racing outside America saw the crowd forming and his men struggling to get the assailant off of Australia who was on the ground trying to prevent a knife from getting shoved into his throat.

Without a word America raced toward the scene and broke through the crowd before taking a hold of the cloaked attacker and throwing them off of his brother. The person hit the side of a building and America frowned at the force of the action. The attacker might be dead from the impact all because America hadn't properly handled his newly acquired strength. He had always had unnatural strength for a nation so young but this was something else even for America.

He had even yanked Australia to his feet quicker than expected and the poor boy's feet left the ground before America realized it and set him down.

"What happened?" America asked, reaching out and touching the cuts on Australia's neck, one was quite deep but none life threatening.

"He snuck out of Japan's place," Australia explained as he looked toward where the attacker had fallen. "I thought it was Japan at first trying to escape but then they attacked me. Thought I was dad. Japan don't make those identity mistakes."

No, he does not. Japan knew his countries. So America turned and approached the assailant that his men had surrounded. By the sound of heavy breathing the person had survived.

Whoever they were was going on trial. No one hurt America's little brother and got away with it. Not Japan and certainly not this person.

Once their cloak was ripped off America gapped. His blue eyes wide in disbelief.

It was a woman.

She had survived the impact though not without sustaining injury. Her shoulder was hurt, indicated by the way she was holding it. Of course the fact that she was a woman and had survived the hard slamming toss wasn't what surprised America the most.

"What's your name?" America asked as he examined the long-haired beauty before him. Her brown eyes looked at him and held his gaze for a moment before America knew for sure.

"Seondeok Im."

"That's not a regular Japanese name," Australia noted from where he stood behind America along with the rest of the Marines.

"That's because it's not a Japanese name," America said as he leaned down and settled on his haunches, patiently waiting for the woman. "What's your real name?"
She looked reluctant and untrusting before she let her gaze fall in defeat. "Korea," she announced.

"She's a country?" Australia asked with wide eyes.

"If you'd stop and take her in then you'd realize she's no mere human," America said like a mentor informing his student to Australia who apparently had yet to master the national sense to aura emitting. "What are you doing here?" America's attitude shifted from hostile to compassionate.

"I asked myself that every day," Korea said as she glanced down in a shameful way. "Then when Japan was weak enough I tried to flee . . . well, until the white men enslave me too."

America frowned. "I'm not here to enslave anyone."

"That is always their excuse in the beginning," Korea stated, looking at America with stern eyes.

With a sigh America stood himself up and rubbed the tense muscles on his neck. Pacing around a bit he didn't seemed fazed at all by the woman's hard glare.

"Attacking my brother is a serious crime, just so you know," America spoke as he continued his pace with the raven-haired woman watching.

"Then what are you going to do with me?" Korea asked as she narrowed her eyes with distrust.

"Throw me away to rot in a cellar or am I to warm your bed like Japan's?"

Despite her revealing her reason for being in Japan's home America offered no frown during the revelation. Instead he stopped and turned to her fully with a smile on his face.

"He thought you were Japan, you thought he was someone else; clearly a case of mistaken identity on both parts so there's really only one thing to do."

Korea blinked in surprise as a hand was offered to her. She looked at the appendage like it was something alien to her which made the men around wonder just how she had been treated by Japan. As she looked up toward America that smile of his coaxed her into believing she could trust him for the time being and so she slowly reached out and took his hand. This time America made sure to keep his heightened strength in check as he gently pulled her to her feet.

"I can only see returning you home as the best punishment for the situation," America said in a light manner. She gapped at him and took in his form. It was like she had not received such kindness in her life which America's heart went out to. When she finally offered a small smile in return she flinched and groaned in pain. It was her shoulder. "Ah, but first, let's get you to the infirmary," America offered, and personally escorted the woman toward the med bay.

Seoul, Korea. Winter of 1945

Russia stood at the docks in surprise. There was an American ship depositing something he'd been looking for since Japan's surrender. America himself was there, holding the hand of a delicate small woman who was careful not to slip off of the ramp as they walked down onto the dock.

"Privet, Amerika," Russia offered and noticed how that gentle smile saved for the lady had vanished into a frown upon notice of the Russian country. "It looks like you've found what was missing."

"Japan had taken her for . . . reasons," America said before he let go of the woman's hand now that she got her standing right.

Russia said nothing. He examined the woman. She looked young, but he could tell she was older.
than she seemed. No doubt she was around the same age as Japan if not a little older. She kept her figure well, but as for her might—why, Russia often wondered how these ancient Asian countries managed to survive for so long.

"Gamsahabnida, America-ssi," Korea thanked, offering a genuine smile to America who inclined his head in kind.

"Well, now that my job has been made easier, you would excuse us, Amerika," Russia said before he reached out and took the female country by the arm to press the time. "We have a few things to discuss."

America looked reluctant to let her go but he really had no choice.

"You can go back to punishing Japan," Russia said, trying to bid the boy off. America frowned but then took off his jacket and placed it upon Korea's shoulders to shield her from the cold wind of the winter. "Here," he said softly. "Keep warm."

When he turned to leave and his shoes clacked against the ramp up to his ship Korea had taken a step forward. "America!" The younger nation stopped and turned to look at her, completely ignoring the Russian's presence much to Russia's annoyance. "Will I see you sometime soon?"

With a fun smile America crossed his arms and leaned against the ramp's railing. "I'm a busy man, Seondeok. I'll have to check my schedule."

"As long as you spare a few days out of the year for this shameful woman's time, then I'd be content," Korea said with a sweet smile and bright eyes reserved for the young and strong American.

America chuckled but his eyes softened and his smile broadened. "Just name the number and I'll spend that amount with you."

Korea beamed at the western nation before he offered a salute to depart his presence. When Russia's voice resounded Korea hadn't even realized she had been trapped in thoughts of the blond nation.

"You two seem quite close, I find myself jealous."

Korea turned to see Russia, his smile in place and his stance tall. She offered a bow before she said, "You must be the Soviet Union. I offer my greetings."

"I had feared you perished," Russia said, though now after seeing her with America he felt that he wished it had been the case.

"As you can see I am alive and well. After Japan had enslaved me and forced my young men to join his war I had thought of myself as nothing but a broken little girl, but America . . . he said there was a chance for repair. I hope to work close to you western nations to prove him right."

"Da," Russia said with a nod. "But just so we clarify things . . ." Reaching up Russia ripped America's jacket from Korea's shoulders and tossed it to the ground to gather dirt and ice. "When you are with me you won't even mention that country unless I ask you. Second, I am not working for your benefit, you are working for mine. If I see any resistance I won't think twice to stamp it out. And if you don't like my demands then, well . . . there are other ways of persuasion." Russia's gloved fingers brushed the woman's cheek before falling down her neck dangerously close to her breasts. She flinched back and nodded her head.

"I understand," she quickly replied.
"Good, I'm so glad we could see eye-to-eye," Russia said with that smile of his.

"Is there anything else you wish to know of me?" Korea asked, her gaze down and her shoulders tense when in front of Russia whom she now realized was another dominating power not too different than Japan.

"Da," Russia said as he pressed her face upward so she would look at him. "Tell me about your time with Amerika. I want to hear every little detail."

**Chapter End Notes**

**Historical Notes:**

Yep, Stalin pretty much owned negotiations in the Tehran and Yalta meetings and poor Roosevelt and Churchill were like, "Shit!"

December 16th 1944 through January 25th 1945 was known as the Battle of the Bulge and it was pretty much the German's last assault. They gave a good run but in the end failed. It also happened to be the United States' bloodiest battle in the war because they were the majority of the armies attacked. Also in this battle came the Malmedy Massacre in which SS German soldiers opened fired on American prisoners and killed a majority of them. Gotta love the war crimes, and that thoroughly pissed the Americans off which actually resulted in some American brigades massacring a couple German platoons, which were wrongly never tried. So, yes, I equivaleted that to attempted rape.

Germany formally surrendered May 7th 1945 and was split up between the U.S., Britian, France, and the Soviets. Thus the separation of Prussia and Germany.

Japan formally surrendered September 2nd 1945.

The United States became the first nuclear power as well as an official Superpower after dropping two atomic bombs on Japan and getting the Soviet Union's attention.

Australia and America became super tight during this time partly because Australia needed someone to defend it from the threat of Japan. Call in the U.S.! The Australian Government, lacking confidence in Australia's capability to defend itself, had expressed its willingness to accept a supreme commander in the south-west Pacific - initially - from either Great Britain or the United States. In the end they chose America's General Douglas MacArthur. America's Navy headquarters actually was at Brisbane, Australia for a while during the war and there were thousands if not close to a million U.S. troops stationed there. Even after the war Australia and America remained really close through the ANZUS Treaty (Australia, New Zealand, and the United States) though due to New Zealand being "meh :/" with America the treaties are more like "AUS" and "ANZ" than all three together. And, Australia is the only country to have served alongside The United States in every major conflict since World War II. Yup, brotherly love.

And I based Korea in here after the female version originally designed for the country by Hima just in case you're wanting to know what she looked like. She was in Japan’s house as...well...a sex slave. The Japanese took thousands of Korean women for this "comfort" as well as inducted thousands of Korean men into the Japanese army. I also named her after her first reigning female monarchy in case you're curious.
And! Korea was split mostly between the Soviet Union and the United States.
Pyongyang, Korea. 1947

Russia narrowed his eyes at the Asian. She had done it again and caught herself a little too late. When Russia inquired on America's doings he wanted the number of ships in her harbor, the number of soldiers occupying her towns and cities, time of visits from the delegates, etc. He did not need the details of America's moods or the sweet nothings he says to Korea, nor of their walks along her beaches, of the gifts he presents her and she him. Russia didn't want her to tell him these things because he didn't like them. America was not hers to take and to hold and, all business aside, Russia felt the need to strangle that small neck of hers. He doubted it'd take long before the bones snapped from how tightly he'd press if he ever was allowed to wrap his straining hands around her.

Russia refrained from the physical violence. If his boss found out that he did something like what his imagination craved for then it'd be back to the Kremlin with him, seated alone in a cold dark room where they'd ask him numerous questions until he caved under their scrutinizing gazes and told them the truth. Stalin would torture Russia if he found out about his still lingering feelings for America. That torture likely consisting of forcing Russia to declare war against the Western nation.

"Ah, forgive me, Soviet Union. I have been caught rambling again," Korea apologized with a bow of her head.

Russia smiled and set his pen and paper down. Since Korea felt the need to say things to Russia dubbed not record worthy then so would Russia.

"You and Amerika must be close since you seem to not be able to keep from speaking about endearing events the two of you have shared. Tell me, have you finally moved on from Japan and become his whore instead?"

Russia's smile was in place and held despite his need to frown. Korea, on the other hand, looked away politely and kept her head bowed in submission.

"Once again, I ask for your forgiveness," she said. "I promise you I shall not to speak of him in such a carefree manner again."

"You've made that promise before," Russia reminded. "I suppose it is only natural for a wench to revert back to her old ways."

"Please, he does not treat me like that. He respects me and I respect him."

"And yet where is my respect?" Russia asked, crossing his arms. "I offer you safe visitation in return for detail on the Americans, yet you bout useless information to me. Should I now command you stay away from the nation?" Russia was tempted to see if his orders transcended boundaries. To his surprise Korea looked up at him with hard brown eyes.

"With all due respect, Russia, you have no say on what I do when I'm with him," she said. Russia figured she deserved applause for her bravery but he didn't offer it.

"Da, but I'm sure Amerika is a busy nation. You cannot be so selfish as to take up his time," Russia added with another awfully fake smile.
"He makes time for me," Korea replied. "I know he is busy and so I do not press it. What little time we are granted I view as a gift. His words, his smiles . . . he makes me happy. And I have not been such in so long."

There it was again . . . trailing off into a field of roses. It made Russia sick and the frown forced his smile down.

"You can't hope to make him happy, woman," Russia stated. He hoped to hide his disapproving tone but it slipped out with a few words. "You can't offer a thing to him that he doesn't already have." It was true. The world has dubbed America the power and with that everything and anything would be given to him on golden platters.

"I offer him love," Korea defended. Her hand patting over her heart. In her bold statement she suddenly slackened and her eyes became clouded with a far-off sadness. "I doubt you know nor care, but he's a very lonely man, so what I can give him he takes and cherishes because no one else is willing to give it."

The silence enveloping them afterwards was a mistake on Russia's part. He should have come back with a retort or at least told her to shut her mouth. But he was silent and let her win because she had given him a detail about America he hadn't known. The boy was lonely? After the war he made plenty of friends, and enemies at that. Lonely? You don't offer love to the lonely. You offer companionship and friendship. Love? Why would America appreciate Korea's love? Did she feel she knew how to give it? A whore like her was undeserving of America's attention and yet from what Korea had told him, he visited her and took the time to grow close to her. Why her?

America was a stupid boy who'd place his heart in anyone's hands as long as they were tender. If he wasn't careful then he'd end up broken like back in . . . 1919 . . . when . . . he was eternally stupid and if Russia had to show that to him to make him see then he would.

Quietly, Russia dismissed Korea though when she left he knew he was sending her into the arms of . . . no, she couldn't, America needed to be held in powerful muscular arms not her frail weak limbs. She wasn't right for him and she could not have him.

Russia simply wouldn't allow it.

Moscow, Russia. August 15th 1948

Russia's first reaction was to laugh at it. The letter was like the funniest joke he's ever read. But after so long his laughter died and a deep disapproving frown appeared as he crumpled the parchment and tossed it to the ground. His boss had caught sight of his fit and rose a brow.

"What was on that letter?" Stalin asked, well, demanded. He never put up with Russia's behavior.

Russia was reluctant to reply but had no other choice. "Amerika has invited me to view his new child."

"Child?" Stalin's eyes were now aglow with the possibility of new territory.

"Da," Russia said with a nod through his clenched teeth. "He and Korea have produced offspring together."

"Go then," Stalin ordered.

"You want me to see American territory?" Russia asked. He refused to go and offer his congratulations.
"Da," Stalin insisted. "I may want the child."

Well Russia didn't. It was Korean and that was enough to disgust him. But his boss ordered him and he had no power to say nyet.

That bitch.

Seoul, Korea. Late August 1948

It was hideous, just as Russia thought. The hair was too dark, the skin too yellow, and its eyes were the ugliest brown he's ever seen. No, the child should have inherited locks of gold and eyes like the brightest December topazes. That was beauty. This, what he was looking at, was not.

"He looks so much like Seondeok," came America's voice throughout the room as he entertained his guests at the showing. "He really is a pretty thing, just like his mother."

"How is she, Al?" Canada spoke up in question.

Russia could care less about their conversation and so he kept his attention on the child in the cradle. Reaching out he touched the little one's hand and upon contact the child moved away from him as if he knew Russia was dangerous.

"The birth was hard on her," America explained, his tone full of worry for that woman. "She's bedridden right now but she's still able to nurse Yong Soo."

"Yong Soo; that's a nice name," Canada complimented.

"I let her name him," America admitted. "Since he was born in her land and shares so many traits with her I felt it appropriate."

"Of course. God only knows what you'd have named him," England perked up.

"Hey!" America whined. "I'll have you know I would have named him something cool. Even so, Seondeok came up with an awesome name too. She told me it means brave and great. Isn't that super?"

"Right," England groaned.

Once again Yong Soo pulled his hands away from Russia's fingers. After having to do this so many times the little boy grew teary eyed and opened his toothless mouth to cry in distress. All turned toward Russia at the sound of the cries. He didn't need to turn around toward the others in the room to know they were all glaring at him.

"Man, sorry," America said in apology while he maneuvered around Russia and picked up the crying baby. "He's still not used to all the new faces."

Despite what the child was wearing the thing was quite big for a child born a mere week ago. The size of the child meant health and stability as well as the possibility for strength. Russia simply saw it as the one trait it inherited from its father. Russia had a feeling it would become a nation, but a nation of what? There was no new land and even if there was it would be claimed and absorbed into another country so the child's appearance in the world was baffling. It wasn't common for a nation to be born of two parent countries. It has happened before, yes, but not in a long time.

"You know what? He's probably hungry," America realized after his rocking proved useless in easing the child to stop crying. So, with a quick turn he excused himself for a moment and made his
way down the hall, no doubt to hand the child to the mother.

"So, what do ya think of the little bloke?" Australia asked. "He's a cute li'l joey he is."

"He is," Canada agreed with a nod.

"Hmph, he's a disgrace to the Easterners," China spoke up.

America certainly was excited to show the child off if he invited nations he currently had tensions with. Those countries being Russia and China. But the others reasoned that America had just been honoring their partnership in WWII. No other excuse was valid as to why the two were there otherwise.

"Yeah? Well I think you're just jealous, China," England said in that cocky tone of his. "His birth just proves that the East can meet the West."

China huffed until he became so upset that he excused himself from the gathering and left without saying goodbye to the host. The others could care less. His presence had become increasingly annoying, especially with their failing interests in the East.

"Hey, guys, sorry about the wait," came America, jogging back into the lounge room. "Oh . . . where's China?"

"He left," England stated blandly. "You know him these days."

America looked disappointed at the departure but he was quick to pull out his bright smile again and say, "Well, you guys are still here. What more can I ask for?"

"Actually, I am thinking about taking China's lead and leaving myself," Russia added as he stood from his seat in preparation to leave.

"But you just got here," America complained and that complaint alone blasted Russia back to 1867 where America had too been reluctant to see Russia leave and, as persuasion, threw his arms around him and pressed sweet lips against his own. Russia doubted the nation would initiate such ways today.

"Let him go," England said, showing a frown toward Russia who simply smiled back. "Can't expect damn Communists to hold an event."

Russia would have frowned at the rude comment had he not been used to them by now. He learned to hide his menace through innocent smiles; in situations like this. He had come to see the child like America and his boss had wanted, now he had nothing more keeping him there save for America, but Russia doubted the country wished to entertain him in private.

It was interesting how America's features changed at the mention of Russia's social system. The blonde's eyes turned away from him and a frown vanquished his smile.

"Yeah, you're right," America muttered in agreement with England's statement.

There was no need to play their petty games and bite back a retort. It would prove to be a waste of breath for Russia. So, without another word he just left. He doubted America would ever invite him to another gathering again, but Russia knew he'd see the boy again very soon.

Siberian Wilderness, Russia. August 29th 1949
Russia wasn't fond of traveling deep into the wilderness so early in the morning but he knew better than to overstep his boss. That man didn't give a damn if Russia was larger, older, or near immortal. The man could do things to the country without even touching him and after proving his point through his purges, Russia swore never again to question the man.

"Do you know why I've brought you here, Russia?" Stalin asked as the two stood on a tall outpost while trooper trucks drove around underneath and soldiers marched back and forth in formation of the drill.

"I am certain I will find out soon," Russia answered with that smile of his. A smile used to fake out his commissaries, as well as his leader.

"Da," Stalin assured with a nod, looking out into the desolate land with expectant pride swelling inside him. "As of this day we will no longer live in fear of a war with the United States of Amerika we cannot win."

Russia rose his brow in confusion and became more than a little leery from the look on his boss's face.

"If I wish to invade that place then I can do so while staring their ignorant leader in the eyes. Matching him twitch for tap," Stalin looked toward Russia and continued, "Today you will be given the title of Superpower."

Russia's curiosity was struck. Even his boss kept secrets from him, but if he had been working on a project without Russia's knowing . . . Before Russia had the chance to offer a question a bright light flashed throughout the land. Russia was blinded for a moment. Upon blinking the stars away from his vision the sight of something seen before only in television erupted before him. With wide eyes Russia felt the rumble and watched the cloud drift up into the atmosphere, shaping just like a mushroom. His bones shook from the aftershocks of the explosion and Russia felt his heart race and his smile broaden darkly.

He had it. He finally had the ultimate weapon. The atomic bomb.

The power was intoxicating as it raced within him. His grip on the metal railing of the post tightened and tightened until it snapped and caved under his strength. Looking down at the ruined railing and then toward Stalin for silent permission. The man nodded and gave Russia leave to do whatever he wanted to test his newly acquired ability. Turning, Russia made his way toward the metal door behind them and plunged his fingers through the material of it before gripping it and ripping it off of the bolted hinges. He then turned and proceeded to toss it as far as he possibly could and the distance astounded him.

Looking down at his hands Russia curled them into fists before unfolding his fingers. They felt tingly and slightly numb, as if he hadn't felt the pressure of the door at all. Russia could had done that before; picked up a door and tossed it, but not as far and as quickly as he had just now. The surge of the power coursing through him left him in a high and his head spun with visions of world conquest, of the world underneath him, of America . . .

"How does it feel, Russia?" Stalin asked, calling Russia out of his dazing daydream.

"Overwhelming, but in a good way," Russia replied as he leaned his head back and closed his eyes to the feel of his body strengthening from the transformation.

"How—" When Russia finally looked back at his leader he had to ask, "How did you—?"
"The Americans are too trusting," Stalin explained. "While they lay drunk with power those loyal to you had learned the formula and now Amerika's secret is a secret no more. You now have the power to fight him, to destroy him."

Russia smiled for Stalin because it was what he wanted to see but inwardly he frowned. No matter if Stalin was his leader, his boss, his current god; he would not command him to destroy his promised mate. Russia's arms were meant to take America into his embrace and hold him there until the end of time, not break his body in two. He knew his boss was smart and that he knew a war was not in the best interest for the both of their countries, but if he ever suggested the idea be put to action, well, then Russia would put himself to action as well.

Stalin made him strong. Strong enough to kill him if the human dared threaten his priceless belonging. The fear was gone because of the power. Russia would not tell him, but he'd let him continue to assume he still had him under his control until old age either took him or . . . something else.

So he'd just keep smiling until he was free of this man and another was put in place, one Russia could easily manipulate. Stalin was too witty and saw vastly into the future, or so most assumed, but Russia doubted his successor would and that was what Russia was hoping for.

Pyongyang, Korea. 1949

Russia knew it. The child was not meant to be born.

There Korea sat before him. She looked pale and the dark circles underneath her eyes gave proof that she was quite ill.

"Forgive me," she said once again, trying to straighten her posture but failing to stay sitting upright for too long. "I have not been well lately."

"Since that móguǐ was born." China took the words right out of Russia's mouth. With a smile Russia leaned back in his chair and decided to let the Asian countries settle the upset between themselves. Korea looked appalled by China's hate for her son and despite her fragile condition she steeled herself to the Ancient.

"Don't speak about my son like that," Korea demanded. "He was born in my land and so has rights to his Asian heritage."

"A half-blood never can," China insisted as he inhaled the essences smoking out of his pipe. "I would have you rather born Japan a bastard."

"I am happy to have born Yong Soo to America," Korea said despite China's disgusted facial expressions.

Russia was impressed at her boldness but he assumed it to be brought on from a mother's pride; a strong force to reckon with.

"America has been nothing but kind to me and he loves our son," Korea assured with a confident smile that gave Russia a bad taste in his mouth.

"What happens when you vanish?" China asked. "I'm sure he's waiting for that. After you're gone your dear son will remember you no more. America will wipe everything eastern of him away. He'll turn him into Little America like he no doubt planned from the start."

"You're wrong," Korea accused with a jut of her jaw.
"Am I?" China asked sternly. "You are growing weaker by the day. You are dying and it's because of your child."

"What do you know?" Korea spat out in anger and fear. "You are childless. How dare you preach to me on this matter?"

China's brown eyes held Korea's form as he wrapped his lips around his bong and inhaled. Blowing out the smoke, clouding the room in a mist. "I have had many children over the millennia," the Ancient informed.

"But I don't recall . . ."

"You either live long enough to produce a child in your land, or short enough to be run through with a weapon. All nations die and sooner or later a child comes along to bring about our destruction. If born in our land then we die. There cannot be a parent nation and a child in coexistence. I realized that a long time ago." Taking another inhale of the opium, China closed his eyes and let the smoke seep out of his nostrils. When he opened his eyes he looked toward Korea. "How do you think I've lived for so long?"

Korea's eyes widened in horror. Had China just implied . . . and that he killed . . . just to live? How could a parent nation do that?

"I will heal, I will," Korea assured, though it sounded directed more to herself. She looked afraid and the fear came from the truth.

"Of course," China agreed with a knowing smile. "Once the one who drains it is no more."

"Yong Soo is not killing me!" Korea insisted, her limbs shaking with anger but Russia and China believed it to also be fear that shook the female nation's frame.

After a final puff of smoke excited out of China's mouth the Ancient leaned forward and offered Korea a kind and understanding smile, almost too soft for the old Asian country's face. "No nation wishes to die, Seondeok," he said as he reached out to touch her small wrist that trembled on her knees. "So we do what we must to survive. Kill the child and live."

Korea pulled her wrist away from China's touch. Her eyes held his gaze for a moment before she glanced away. She said no more words and left in deep troubled thought. Russia grinned and felt a victory coming along. If she bade China's advice then her love she held for America would be broken. The U.S. would no longer give the affections she once boasted over. He'd come to realize she wasn't worth loving and Russia's empire would grow. Thanks to an alliance with China his influence in the East was gaining ground and once his silent conquest was over then he'd move West.

"Do you think she'll do it?" Russia asked.

China tapped his pipe against his thigh in thought before leaning back in his chair. "Some parent nations willingly give up their lives for the next generation. I don't believe she is one of them. I have known her for a long time and I believe her desire to survive will outweigh that of the love she has for that thing."

"Da, but she swoons over Amerika. Do you think she'd risk their relationship over her only option of survival?" Russia questioned curiously since China seemed to know the girl well enough to predict actions. I do hope she does.

China frowned. Russia knew that he knew of her proclaimed love for the United States of America.
Their child was physical proof.

"He is western," China once again complained. "A mongrel compared to us more ancient countries. She is blinded. Fooled by his fakeness. If he cared for her then he'd kill that thing but Westerners only care for two things: themselves and turning the whole damn world Western!"

"She is conflicted," Russia reasoned to calm China's temper. "Why don't you offer your support so that her fear of doing what is right can be eased away?"

"I still have my own matters to deal with," China said after long thought. "And you'd risk me getting into a war with America. Why don't you?"

_Oh, I can't possibly do that. If I did we could destroy the world, Amerika and I. I simply won't have my empire consist of nothing but crumbling ash_, Russia thought as his smile splayed across his lips. When he reached out to touch China's neck and then his jaw the older nation looked at him. He didn't like convincing nations via wooing but his boss demanded this of him if words didn't work so well.

"You are Asian, I am not. I am sure she would more gladly appreciate a fellow brother than a white man," Russia reasoned until he saw China smirk. Playing with the races always egged China on.

He didn't say a thing but as the Asian rose and refilled his pipe he took a deep inhale and exhaled the smoke to mask his form in a mystical mist.

"There will be a war, Èluósì," China informed and Russia smiled at China's implied agreement but more so at the vision of America's broken relationship.

A war is exactly what Russia wanted.

Seoul, Korea. June 24th 1950

"Say daddy. Say daddy," America bade as he held Yong Soo in his arms and bounced him lightly, making sure the boy's eyes met his in an attempt to make the toddler concentrate on him. The child had gotten big in the two years since his birth into the world. It amazed the world but mostly his mother. Of course she was reassured that his quick growth meant the child was very healthy and strong, and that his father's own quick growth was likely to blame into genetics.

Yong Soo looked to be that of a two-year-old. Just about his actual age. He was even learning to speak, having called Korea, "eomma," already. Now his ever busy father, who had heard about his child's developing vocals, made time in his clogged schedule to come and hear for himself and was now trying to coax the boy into saying the English word.

"Come on, Yong Soo. Da—" America opened his mouth wide to punctuate the sound. The brown-eyed boy opened his own lips in mirror. "Da—" America said again and soon Yong Soo was making the same sound as his parent nation. "Good boy, good boy. Now, da-ddy. Come on, Yong Soo, you can do it. Da-ddy, —ddy."

The little boy mimicked like America wanted. "Da— . . . ze—"

America chuckled and slumped his shoulders. Glancing toward Korea who sat on their bed and observed the two with happiness the woman offered him a quick nod to continue. Soon, America was back at it.

"Daddy."
"Da— ze—"

"Da-ddy."

"Da-ze."

"Eh, I guess that's close enough," America said in surrender before turning back toward Korea whom he caught with a frown on her face. "What's wrong, Seondeok?"

"Oh, I was just thinking," she excused her behavior. "You know, about my stay with Russia." It wasn't a complete lie.

"He didn't touch you, did he?" America asked and suddenly that dangerous frown offering so much threat appeared. Korea knew it wasn't directed toward her but she still didn't like seeing it. But if she listened to China then America would no doubt look at her like that. Why would she want something so horrible?

"No," Korea answered, bowing her head. When she felt a gentle hand pull her chin up her eyes fell in love all over again at the sight of those gem-like blue eyes.

"I know something's wrong," America pressed with concern now lacing his features. "You know you can tell me."

Korea wanted to tell him, she did, but she knew he wouldn't understand what it felt like to be drained of everything you had by . . . by . . .

Korea's eyes turned to her son who had been placed down on the floor and was now carelessly playing with his toys, his western toys. Even the clothes he was wearing right now was gifted by his father's tailors. And America was encouraging him to speak English, not Korean, the language of his people.

When Korea laid down to sleep she thought about these things, so much so that it kept her awake. But the feel of America's strong arms wrapping around her gave her a small comfort and her heart swelled with love. Turning in his arms, Korea observed the slumbering nation. He was so young, so beautiful, so full of life. Reaching out, Korea ran her fingers through those golden fields. She smiled sadly because she knew a time was coming soon to where she couldn't do this; where she couldn't run her fingers through his hair, stare into those beautiful blue eyes, kiss those warm accepting lips. A time was coming soon where she would not be able to feel the swell of love as America caressed her skin and kissed her hands.

No more sun-filled picnics.

No more long walks along the shores.

No more passionate nights of limbs entwined and breaths intermingled in pleasure.

No more. Korea would have no more of those things.

The cries of the one responsible for her torment turned her dark thoughts away from the sadness of the upcoming future. The cries also woke America as well. He groaned from the disrupted sleep.

"What time is it?" America groaned out as he reached over for the watch laying on the night stand next to the bed. If he would look he could see the early signs of the rising sun through the window curtains.
"At ease, my love," Korea said as she took her hands and pressed the man back down to lay and relax. "I'll tend to him."

America drowsily nodded and closed his squinting eyes. Smiling affectionately, Korea leaned down and kissed her lover sweetly. She had not expected a response but soon found the young nation kissing back. When Korea forced herself away she found passionate eyes looking back at her with the promise of pleasure in them. She smiled with delight and pressed a quick peck to America's lips before maneuvering her way out of the bed and heading toward the crib to pick up her son.

"It seems he is in need of a bath," Korea informed after smelling him. "I'll give him one."

"I'll be waiting," America said with that attractive smile of his, bordering childish and seductive at once. A smile only he could make.

Korea blushed at the nation's deeper tone before turning down the hall toward the bathing room.

Her son had calmed when he was sitting there, soaking in the tub. Now wide awake, the little boy nation-to-be gleefully played with the floating toys around him. Korea rubbed his skin of the grime collected and slowly she began falling back into the darkness of her thoughts, especially at seeing her son pick up a floating toy crafted to resemble a warship, the likes constantly congesting her shores, rivers, and harbors.

What would Yong Soo be when he became the nation of Korea? A warmonger like Russia . . . like America?

The Westerners were trying to turn the East into their likeness starting with the little ones. It wouldn't be Yong Soo's fault. He was just a babe and wouldn't know that he'd forgotten his ancestors, the land inherited to him through death. He couldn't begin to comprehend right now what his father was trying to do. If Korea was allowed to live then she could resist. She would never forget because her memory was clearer than that of a young child.

Let it be her to take the pain. Let it be her to be continually loved by America.

Korea smiled at her smiling little boy as he squealed and splashed his toy boat into the warm waters. When she took his hands in hers so that he didn't constantly splash into the liquid so much she placed them against her cheek and kissed both. His little fingers wrapped tightly around her fingers. He had a strong grip, just like his father.

"Eommaga seomgunure gul ddareo gamyeon," Korea began to sing the words, forming a tune around them into a lullaby she felt right in her heart for her poor, poor child. "Agiga honja nama jibeul bodaga. Badaga bulreo juneun jajang norae e. Phalbego seureureureu jami deumnida . . ."

Yong Soo didn't know. He could never understand without his mother.

"Agineun jameul gonhi jago itjiman," Korea continued as she washed her son's palms and then each of his tiny fingers. "Galmaegi ureum sori mami seolre eo. Da motchan gulbaguni meorie igo." She rose her hands to press against the back of his skull as she leaned him back in the waters to rinse his shampooed hair but she neglected to hold his nose shut. "Eommaneun moraetgireul dalryeo omnida . . ." Korea felt heavy tears leak out of her eyes and fall suddenly into the tub waters where the element rippled with their contact and that of Yong Soo's twitching and shaking.

Korea loved her son very much. She knew he wouldn't understand this but it was for his own good. She didn't want him to see those wars, to get conquered, to be treated like a slave; beat, starved, raped. No, not her son. So Korea decided that she would save him before it came to that. Instead, she
swore to take his place and endure where she was certain he wouldn't.

"SEONDEOK!"

The female nation found herself pushed so hard away that her body flew and hit the wall near the sink. Her arms still dripped wet with the tub's waters but the most feeling her body recognized was the aching in her spine.

A loud splash alerted Korea's attention toward the tub where she watched America pull out a red-faced crying Yong Soo. He was having a hard time crying with all of that water in his lungs. America pulled him flush against his chest and began patting his back to get him to spit all of the liquid up, not caring if his nightshirt had been soaked to his skin.

His eyes, America's eyes were wide in shock, but mostly horror as he looked at her. "What were you trying to do to him?"

For a second hate flashed through America's fear-glazed eyes and it was directed at her. Korea felt her heart break all over again as the love of her life stared at her the way he did Russia or China.

"Please," Korea begged as her tears became more constant, falling down her face quickly. "I have to."

"To what? Kill your own son? My son?!" America shook his head in disbelief.

"I am dying because of him," Korea explained. "Let me save my life but also spare him from a life as a nation. I am giving him mercy."

"No!" America refused to listen and then noticed how Korea had attempted to crawl closer to him; instead he took a large step back. Yong Soo was still crying and coughing. "You, stay away! Don't you dare touch me!"

Korea flinched at the harsh tone. The broken shards of her heart felt as if someone was stepping on what was left of them, grinding them to dust. A sob ripped out of her throat and her body felt weak with emotional distraught.

"Was it him?"

When Korea looked back up toward America she noticed his gaze darkened and his hold on the sniffling Yong Soo was tighter, more protective as he turned at an angle as to hide the toddler from his murderous mother's sight.

"Did Russia put these thoughts in your head?!" Korea made to answer but America continued in his fit of rage, as if refusing to let her speak. "He did, didn't he? That fucking Communist! I'll fucking kill him!"

America turned on his heel so fast that when Korea blinked he was gone from the bathing room. Regaining what strength she could to manage the pain in her back, Korea stood up on her feet and followed the strong nation back to their bedroom where she watched the westerner being gathering his things like he normally did when he made to return to his land. Yong Soo was still in one of his arms, crying for attention. Korea had then caught the sound of America's rambling mutters.

"He can't fucking do this. This is my territory. He's got no right. If he wants a fucking war, then he's got it!"

No, America couldn't go to war with Russia. Korea feared for the safety of the world. What if
America lost? Russia would surely kill him, and her son . . . Korea didn't want to think what Russia would do to her child. No, she refused to let Yong Soo be tortured. It was better he died by his mother's hand than by that monster.

"It wasn't him, it was me," Korea begged America to accept her false statement, but the blond was too paranoid to listen.

"You're a fucking liar!" America bit back and Korea reeled backwards with a gasp at the sight of his glistening eyes. She had hurt him. She'd hurt his trust as well as his heart.

"Alfred," Korea tried once more, stepping closer toward the young nation and showing her own tears to him but the man simply backed away again, turning his gaze away from her in shame.

"Don't—" he began and then swallowed hard. "Get away from me. Get out of my sight."

The rejection broke Korea's resolve more and she threw her face into her hands, weeping bitterly. The sound of her sobs brought America's eyes back to her and then his own tears fell.

"You too?" America asked softly, his voice cracking from the sadness of the betrayal. "Am I that undeserving of any love?"

Korea looked up at America's blurry form. His eyes held sincere sadness and hurt as he looked at her for the answers to her horrific actions.

"No," Korea answered as she shook her head. "You are caring, compassionate, honest, everything to me. It is I whose love I feel is not good enough for you."

Yong Soo made another whine, drawing his father's attention down to him. "Da-ze—" he hiccupped out, clutching onto America's wet night shirt tightly. America lifted him up his chest and pressed the boy's head against his neck in a manner to comfort as well as shield. Glancing away, America said—

"If this is how you love me then I don't want it."

It looked like it had been hard for America to say those twelve words because soon after Korea witnessed the nation's lips begin trembling and his brow furrowing. Then he turned his back to her with nothing more to say.

Nothing else Korea could say would change America's stance. So she turned and fled north.

Pyongyang, Korea. June 25th 1950

Russia could not help his smile. The sight of Korea weeping pathetically from a relationship broken because of her own actions gave Russia so much pleasure. So, to act as if some concern had overcome him, the Slavic nation eased his presence out of the room, leaving China to comfort their newest ally because God knew Russia didn't have a single ounce of care in him for the female nation.

"You did what you had to do," China said as he held the weeping country in his arms. "It is just a shame you didn't finish the child while you had the chance."

"What am I to do now?" Korea asked, looking up at China through red eyes. "Am I to die here as my child grows and drains me?"

"Of course not," China chided like the very thought was silly. "We will make sure it never grows. You will have your land back. You will have your life back."
"But I will never have America back . . . will I?" Korea's eyes almost looked dead as her thoughts turned to the Superpower.

A love lost is a terrible thing that can torment the mind and degrade the body. Russia felt no pity at the sight of her. He was glad now that she was feeling the pain like he had all those decades ago.

"Forget about that Capitalist," China ordered. "What good has he ever done but try to turn the world like him? You need to save your child before he's turned Western. Now that my civil war is over and won I swear to help you."

Korea nodded slowly but was quiet to China's proclamation of allegiance.

"You want to survive, right?" China pressed to get her to respond more openly. He was determined to become the dominant country in Asia. Russia knew he wanted to be respected again and to regain territory lost to him by Japan. Russia wouldn't stop him so long as he didn't try to threaten him. If so then the interests invested in nurturing that Asian country's social system would become worthless and Russia would have no choice but to show the Ancient just who really had the power and influence in the East and soon to be the rest of the world.

"Then you will fight," China demanded. "Force America from your shores. Let him have Japan, he can torment him until the end of time; I could care less about him and you could as well. Be the one to run him out of Asia."

"Very well," Korea replied, though, both China and Russia could see the reluctance in her posture. They knew that no matter her previous feelings she would carry out this war that she had started and try her best to finish it. "But . . ." With her eyes hard on China in demand she said, "It will be my hand that smothers my child. You will not touch him."

"As long as you finish it," China agreed.

And just like that Russia would sit back and watch this war unfold while America no doubt threw himself in it like the hero he assumed himself to be.

Seoul, Korea. September 5th 1951

The desk toppled over before it was flung into the wall that Canada just so happened to be standing close to.

"EEh!" He squeaked before his violet eyes widened at the sight of his close call with death. "Al!" Canada bellowed as he turned toward his brother in arms. "You almost hit me!"

The loud crash of the desk and Canada's unusual loud tone stressed the air around enough to bring the young child seated in his playpen in the room to wails of upset. Canada watched America groan and press the palms of his hands to his skull as if trying to crush it.

"Now look what you've done," Canada complained as he made his way over toward the crying young nation.

"No!" America spoke up as his eyes locked onto Canada's form. "Don't you touch him!"

"What has gotten into you, Al?" Canada questioned with concern. "You scared him and now you won't let me comfort him?"

"He won't stop crying," America muttered as he stood up and walked over to the playpen where the little new country stood, clinging to the wooden bars and crying up at his father.
"Da-ze, da-ze!" South Korea cried as he reached out his hands to the nation standing before him.

"He won't stop crying because his people are dying. Comfort him? How? I can't even win this war fast enough. She's with China and there's just so many of them," America said just as South Korea managed to catch a hold of the fabric of America's khaki pant leg.

Canada watched as sadness seeped out of America's eyes, affecting the rest of his facial features to shift from frustrated to grief-stricken.

"How could Seondeok do this to me . . . to him?" There was now a present anger in America's gaze, Canada saw it clearly. "I know it was Russia who poisoned her against me. He's been nothing but a bastard since . . ."

Bending down to rest on his haunches, America pressed his forehead against the wooden bars of the playpen where Yong Soo reached out and pulled at the western nation's golden locks.

"He's not growing, Matt," America informed as his eyes scanned his son's poor state of health. He was too young to be going through something like this, much too young. "Before, he used to grow as fast as a human child but ever since that day when she . . . he's not growing and he won't stop crying. Who do I blame more? Myself or her? No, it's Russia. He wants to see me miserable. He wants to see South Korea dead."

Alfred's grip on the wooden bars snapped a few in half. He looked down at the broken pieces in his hands before he stood and turned to Canada.

"What do I do, Mattie?" Canada had never seen America so hurt and desperate since the American Revolution. "He needs his mother, but if I give him to her then she'll kill him and Russia will win."

Canada had no words to comfort the tormented Superpower. The weight on his shoulders seemed so heavy that Canada couldn't imagine the pain of it. So he offered him support in the war and prayed it ease his demons if only a little bit.

Moscow, Russia. April 1953

Russia felt no sorrow whatsoever over his leader's death. Not a tear came to his eye as he stared at the man's final resting place, in that mausoleum with that man he had once claimed to hate, now they were buried together. Side by side.

Oddly enough, Russia was a little unsettled. Whether sealed within that coffin and confined to gates and guards, Russia wondered if it'd be enough to keep him in the tomb. Deep inside he held scars from the man, the largest being his ever present fear of him even in death. The thought of him faking his death tormented Russia's already tormented mind. Even if he was truly dead and gone he knew his ghost would return to haunt him—as if Russia didn't have a ghost currently doing that.

There was still respect for the man; he had brought Russia to the near top of the world in might and influence but it was also this man that dragged him away from his love, whispering lies in his ear about the western aggression and then informed him the solution: to have the most devastating weapons and largest armies, the most advanced technology and the fittest of physique. In all Russia's life as a country he had never been as strong as he was now and it was thanks to that dead man.

Still . . . Russia had thought he couldn't have died quicker. The change of control made Russia grin. He'd seen Stalin's successor and, my, what a disappointment he'd have been if Stalin saw him now, but Russia felt him to be perfect . . . the perfect little puppet. Despite his people wishing Russia to defend himself from possible outside threats the nation was too busy plotting to concern himself with
defenses because he hadn't felt threatened at all. He was surrounded by his territory conquered by
craftiness and fear. Western influence was far from him.

The death of a founding leader was always the best time for an enemy to strike. An adversary of
Russia's could easily attempt a war while no settled and securely strong leadership was about but
Russia knew there was only one competitor strong enough to strike and attempt to beat him down
and Russia knew that America wouldn't dare. With Stalin gone, Mother Russia was the next most
frightening figure in the land. So once his new leader settled into his overwhelming office and Russia
allowed the illusion of comfort to set upon him, then he'd come to him and show him who the real
master was.

And that was what he did. Russia took Mr. Malenkov into a private room and made his demands
very clear.

"You think you are Stalin incarnate? Heh, don't make me laugh," Russia said as he circled the
unnerved man who looked pleasantly pale. "You are a pathetic excuse as a leader and you know
everyone sees it. They already plot to overthrow you and I will not lift a finger if they should do such
a thing."

"But I am your leader, Russia," the man protested but Russia's hand on his shoulder silenced him.

"Da, for now," Russia agreed with a nod as he leaned down on his shoulders and smiled at him. "I
may help you stay in office for a little while if you should listen to me."

"If I haven't any possible power then why try to make demands of me?" Mr. Malenkov asked with a
worried look.

"Because if you do this for me, carry out my plans, then I will get you influence. I am Mother
Russia. If I show my devotion to you—even if it is fake—the people's hearts will change to you,"
Russia replied.

"What do you want of me?" Russia smiled. Good, he was a willing listener.

Rising, Russia began pacing around the man before ever so slowly stopping in front of him to stare
into him and show him his dominance. "My past leaders have shaped me into their near images, so I
will not make too many demands you disagree with. I want the world, da. Everyone, in time, will
become one with Russia. My house is big enough for everyone. My crops will feed every nation's
mouth. My economy will provide them all with work. I have plenty of clothes to keep them warm
and covered. I even have beds for them to lay their weary heads on."

It seemed like Russia was rambling on his dream of world domination to his new leader but he was
getting to a point, and this was it. With narrowed eyes and his lips falling from a smile and bordering
a demanding frown, Russia said—

"My room is spacious and laden with expensive tapestry and skilled furnish. My bed is big . . . big
even for even the United States of Amerika."

Just as Russia foresaw his new boss' face shifted from confusion to reluctance. He shook his head
and rubbed his sweating neck. "You aim high, Russia," the human said. He understood what
Russia's figurative demand meant. "I haven't the power for that, nor the lifetime."

"You will leave that to me," Russia reassured. "Just do not speak back to me and obey only me and
you will have this land's heart in your hands. Da, I am strong. Who is there to stop me?"

"Him," Russia's boss stated, referring to America.
Russia frowned. "My scientists make bigger bombs, my machinery runs faster, my soldiers are strong. They all prove I am strongest. I will have what I want," Russia demanded. The least his new boss could do if he didn't agree with him was stay silent.

"What you want needs wars," his boss said, shaking his head. "This is a delicate time, Russia. It will take time before the government is secured."

"I am a patient man," Russia stated.

"When the wars do come, do you know who will fight them? Amerika," Mr. Malenkov informed.

"Da, but the number of my missiles will bring him to his knees," Russia said with a smile at the vision of America throwing his arms into the air in surrender, in submission to him. "I do not want him entirely destroyed as my previous bosses did. He was promised to me by General Winter himself and I want my due. Go ahead, hate him. All I ask is that you say nothing to him sharing my room, with me. I do not care about clashing ideals. When I am sole world power his ideals will not be of concern any longer. He will be one with me and only me. I have sought this dream to become a reality for centuries and you, my comrade, are to help me."

Leaning in closer Russia watched with glee as his boss attempted to pull away, but the chair stopped him and soon Russia was a mere daunting few inches away from his face. "One by one I will take the world, America's influence will disappear and when he's thrown himself into isolation I will come and stamp down his defenses and take him to live with me in my land—in my room—in my bed."

"It will take time," Russia's boss said once more. "A long time."

"I have already waited centuries for him, I can wait more. Just, when you die and leave your throne—whether that be sooner or later—pass down my criteria to your successors." That was Russia's final demand as he backed away from the human. Straightening himself Russia walked toward the door and opened it to leave. Before he left his presence completely, Russia turned his head back toward him. "Da?"

The man nodded slowly. "Da."

With a pleased grin, Russia left. It was good to be in control once again. Lenin and Stalin had stripped him of every role in his land save for servant and soldier. He influenced no decision and when they wanted a country as an ally then they'd demand Russia go and do whatever means to comply to their demands. Now he was the master, no longer the puppet.

The one problem though was his people's great upset with the weak new leader. It would prove hard to gain their admiration for that man. Even he could see the uselessness and the ferocity of the competition. Still, Russia would play with him until his time's run out and when the next boss stood up then Russia would make sure not to give him an ounce of power like he had with Lenin and Stalin.

"Mr. Russia, sir, this is for you."

Russia was pulled from his thoughts as Lithuania came up to him with a letter on a tray. Looking down at it Russia smiled. It was from China.

"Oh, it's from China. I wonder what his response was," Russia said as he merely opened the letter and read it. After a while he frowned and out of the corner of his eye he could see Lithuania begin to scoot away from him.
Crumpling the letter Russia tossed it back onto the tray the brunette held. "Go and grab me paper and a pen. China thinks he's the boss of the East. How funny. When I tell him to end the war in Korea he will listen to me."

"You . . . want the war over with?" Lithuania asked in surprise before he caught himself for speaking without permission. Russia didn't seem to mind though.

"Da," Russia said with a nod. "If I say to start a war then China will listen, if I say to end it then he will listen. Now get me a pen and paper." Besides, the war had already accomplished what Russia wanted: the breakup of Korea and America.

"R-Right away, sir!" Lithuania answered, darting off to find a piece of paper and a pen to write with.

Russia let out a sigh and wondered how far China would go in attempting to assert his dominance. Russia was going to dominate the world, not China. That old nation was spent and didn't know a thing about governing. Besides, he wouldn't be able to care for the nations living with him if he took the world over. He especially wouldn't treat America fairly; he knew China particularly despised the Western nations, especially the golden boy. No, America was his.

He enticed China to urge a war of western cleansing with Korea just to break their relationship. Russia would entice more wars if anyone dared come close to America again, even if it was his ally China.

Korea. October 1953

Was China's embrace warmer than his? His arms stronger in hold and words sweeter? It could be because he was Asian and America, well; he was just a foreign white man every slanted-eyed person wanted out of their continent.

The fact that she had chosen separation over America's open-door policy added in the young nation's fill of resentment as he glared at the two countries who were out and about collecting their fallen like he was. They had already signed the armistice months ago. There had been some little quarrels here and there and the war was never "officially" declared over but all in all there was peace—if one would call the silence and turn of heads peace.

Oddly enough it had been Russia who pressed for China to end the war sooner than the Asian wanted. In a sense America was grateful for Russia's intervention fearing that China would have continued to push until America and his men fell into the ocean. Though, of course, he'd never admit this out loud.

America didn't turn his gaze from them in their silent task. He glared and glared and purposely got in both their way as he hauled his fallen men over his shoulders to carry back to the trucks. His boys had fought so hard to stop the North Koreans and Chinese. They did America proud and he'd make sure to give them a proper burial once they were home. But he still couldn't help the fact that he felt their deaths could have been prevented.

He shouldn't have given Korea—North Korea—so much freedom. He had thought her to be a strong-willed woman who was kind and full of love and passion. That was what he fell in love with, not this . . . whatever she was now.

She tried to kill her own child and America could never forgive her for that. The thought of Yong Soo—South Korea—made him sad and his concern grew. He prayed the boy grew as fast as he had when he was his age. Because the threat of his mother to the north was constant and America couldn't always be there to protect him though he swore to God he'd try.
Traveling back to Seoul, America returned to the home that had once belonged to North Korea. She had arranged the rooms to add him to the living in her home because of so many times he vacationed with her. They had even constructed South Korea's room when she was expecting him. They had done so much to the home together that every time America would enter it he'd be reminded of her and it hurt because his son continued to cry for his mother now gone.

"How many today, lad?" England asked as they sat in the dining room eating and drinking and relaxing after a taxing day.

"A hundred and six," America answered with an emotionless sigh, numbering the count of his dead he collected that day.

He heard England set his teacup down on the plate and sigh. "God, I'm glad this is over. How are you feeling?"

America hardly shrugged his shoulders before saying, "I'm more concerned with South Korea. Where's France?"

"Right there," Australia said as he pointed over toward the kitchen counters where France and Canada were prepping some desert.

America looked confused at his presence before he narrowed his eyes. "France?"

"Yes, mon cher?" France said as he turned around and smiled that pretty smile of his at America.

"Why aren't you watching South Korea?" America asked as his limbs shook to stand and go to check on the boy to make sure he was safe.

"Eh..." France rubbed his stubble before noticing America's clenching fists. Holding up his hand he defended himself. "W-Wait! Now, before you go and accuse me of being negligent I'll have you know he's being cared for."

"You shouldn't have let him watch the boy," England chided in, still harboring an upset from earlier that day over the fact that America had entrusted France to watch over South Korea instead of the boy's own grandfather. "There's no telling how many diseases the frog's contracted."

France glared back at England for a moment before turning back toward America and explaining himself. "He is a handful, I know that, and I brought a friend to help settle him down."

To prove himself and to save his ass from America's wrath France escorted him back into the nursery where the others followed quietly, curiously. When looking inside America's eyes met the sight of an Asian woman bouncing a quiet South Korea on her lap. It was good to see the boy settled for a little while, but everyone was more so surprised at the woman who had gotten him to settle down in his post-war state.

She was a country.

"Ah, I knew if anyone could shut his screaming pie hole it'd be you, Vietnam," France swooned over to her and placed his hands atop her shoulders while beaming with brilliant pride.

The female nation smiled politely up at France and then looked to the others viewing the scene and offered them a pleasant smile as well.

"You let an Asian woman care for South Korea without watching her? !" America seemed thoroughly pissed. France had tried to make him happy after the frustrating war with getting an Asian
friend of his to care for the child but it seemed he may have taken it too far with this.

Marching over to Vietnam, America ripped South Korea out of her arms and just as soon as he had the little boy began crying, but his cries fell on deaf ears.

"Don't touch him, Asian!" America demanded. He'd had enough of them lately, especially their women.

Vietnam jumped up to her feet at the startling turn of events and narrowed her eyes at the screams coming from the toddler. "Look what you have done, you stupid man. Treat him gentler then he wouldn't need a woman to calm him."

"Yeah?" America questioned with a frown, not backing down to Vietnam's accusing statement. "The last time I allowed a woman to care for him she tried to kill him!"

"Fine, then you try to calm him," Vietnam motioned as she crossed her arms and waited for his move.

America looked at her deadpanned. Had he not expected her challenge? After all he was a Superpower; surely a small country like Vietnam couldn't hope to offer any kind of challenge to him. But she did and America was at a loss because he knew the truth, and the truth was that he never took the time to learn how to calm the screaming boy. That's not to say he didn't try but to his embarrassment he was losing this battle under the scrutinizing gaze of that woman.

With a roll of her eyes, Vietnam did something no other country dared to: she snatched South Korea out of America's arms.

Standing there dumbfounded, America watched Vietnam coo the little child in her native tongue before speaking Korean to the boy. That seemed to settle him down. His wails now shifting into sniffles and his teary eyes dropping fewer tears. Perhaps America should broaden his Korean vocabulary.

"You see, I told you, mon cher," France said as he came close to America after it was obvious his anger had cooled. "The touch of a woman soothes the crying babes."

America said nothing more and excused his presence from the room. Heading toward his office he attempted to complete some work and try and not worry about the young nation in that woman's arms. After all the paper work was signed and he was nursing another headache America looked at the late hour and decided to go and see if South Korea was slumbering. He knew for certain Vietnam wouldn't be able to get him to sleep, woman or not, the child hadn't slept peacefully for a good two minutes since the war had started and even after the fighting had stopped he still woke up in tears every five minutes.

The others had already headed back to their hotel rooms and Vietnam likely joined them. It was odd enough though that America had yet to hear the tell-tale signs of South Korea's cries. Peeking his head inside the dimly lit room he gapped in surprise to see Vietnam still present, alone with South Korea. But the boy was sleeping with her sitting next to him and her hand atop his back in gentle massaging circles.

When she looked up she was surprised herself to see America standing in the doorway. Letting out a sigh she turned her gaze back down to South Korea and whispered softly, "Everything is fine now. You don't have to worry."

"How long has he been . . .?"
Vietnam offered America a smile. The look in her eyes told America that she understood the child's disrupted sleeping habit. "For a good half hour," she informed much to America's relieved surprise.

Closing his eyes America took off his glasses and rubbed his weary eyelids before sliding the lenses back on his face and looking at the female country. "Can I speak to you for a moment?" No matter what, his questions were secret demands to other countries. Whether he knew it or not was a subject of debate, but even the third world countries knew to never say no to the United States of America.

Vietnam nodded and was escorted out of the room. The two took their walk outside. The air was chilly in the night and Vietnam, being from a more humid and warmer climate was chilled the bone. Being improperly dressed when traveling north wasn't her wisest decision.

Her eyes widened and her lips parted to let out a surprised soft gasp. The feeling of heavy material being draped over her shoulders took her by surprise but more so that it had been America placing his own jacket on her.

"I wanted to thank you for caring for Yong Soo," America said with a soft and serenely grateful smile. "And to apologize for my behavior earlier. That was wrong of me to place you in a caste with the rest of your relatives."

"It is alright," Vietnam said as she touched the sleeve of the jacket around her and blushed. Right now she was inwardly wondering if the powerful nation realized how handsome he was, especially in the light of the moon. She felt France to be quite handsome as well and adored his presence in her home, but America... he was such a gentleman and quick to apologize for his brash behavior. It was something nearly unheard of with younger countries, but made them highly desirable.

"It's just I was betrayed by his mother. She wanted me to choose between her life and his. I chose his and so she fought," America explained. "But I suppose that sounds like another excuse, huh?"

"No, not at all," Vietnam said, shaking her head and surprising America with her ability to understand his troubles. "I understand completely," she assured. "France told me all about what happened. I understand struggles. Every nation has them, and I suppose you most of all."

America smiled earnestly at her and the weariness shown. "Thank-you for that, Vietnam."

"Please, call me Lien," Vietnam insisted. She usually wasn't this quick to trust Western nations. It took years before she gave France her human name. Perhaps it was America's good looks; the devil. He could rule the world just by smiling so attractively like that if he wanted to. She was sure of it.

America blinked in surprise at the given name. Vietnam felt her cheeks burn and she quickly rubbed them with her knuckles, blaming the cold weather for their change of color. When she stole a glance back at America she felt her heart beat nearly stop at the sight of him standing next to her, his hands in his pant pockets, and his beautiful deep blue eyes softened while a gentle smile pulling on his frown-laden lips.

"Alright," he said in agreement with her request. "Lien."

The way he said her name brought Vietnam's heart back to life but the pace was too fast for comfort and unsettled her stomach with numerous flutters traveling up her spine like electricity.

She should have stayed home when France took his leave to travel to Korea's land to see his allies because now she was uncomfortable in America's presence and she'd inwardly resent France for introducing her to him. She hadn't felt so troubled over these silly feelings in a long time and blushed at the fact that the nation making her feel like this was just a child compared to her.
And what unnerved her the most was that she didn't care.

Chapter End Notes

DaughterOfTheRevolution: Just so you readers know; North Korea was not meant to be a likable-ish character because, let's face it, who likes that country today? America hooking up with female Korea was meant to show the "split" of the North and South with the North turning out to be a woman he once knew and now continually has tensions with. Also, Vietnam was introduced, yes, as another love interest for America. This is simply adding to more drama in the younger nation's life that you all know where it'll lead to.

Now, Vietnam, herself, is a curious country (at least in this fanfic, because it's still just that, a fanfic). Despite her people getting upset with the French and the rest of the "white men" she's curious and she likes their different fashion, and she finds their culture fascinating, and she thinks they're handsome boys (as I had her comment about France and America's good looks). And once again the country today does not share this opinion (though they are coming around to the U.S. again, ironically), but their culture does have tell-tale signs of French influence still to this day. So she's acting more so like Russia had in the previous chapters; still harboring feelings for America while her people harp on her to get rid of her relationship. Which you all know what happens in the end. I would say she is representing South Vietnam who had fought alongside the Americans to stop the North Vietnamese from unifying the country under communism, just as America represented the Union instead of the Confederacy in his Civil War.

Historical Notes:

Timeline: Cold War Era, and, Korean War

South Korea was officially formed/born on August 15th 1948 by the United States. The reason why he is America's baby is for that reason alone. You could say I could have done a North Korea as Russia's child buuut, I decided that a North Korea who is indeed the mother of little South Korea would make for more drama and angst D:

[North] Korea was dying because South Korea was born on her land. I see it as like Mama Greece and Mama Egypt who passed on to give way to their sons who inherited their land. South Korea was the same in here but his mother fought him and managed to remain alive by not accepting his existence which I don't think the North Koreans do :/

On August 29th 1949 the Soviet Union successfully tested their first atomic bomb that the American's nicknamed Joe 1 after Joseph Stalin :D Yay, Russia's now a nuclear power. No one expected them to be until mid 1950's, well surprise, world!

China speaks about unrest in his land because of the Chinese Civil War [1945-1949] where the Communists reigned triumphant and later helped the North Koreans in their attempt to reunify Korea.

And yes, as America attempts to get little Yong Soo to say, "daddy," he instead says, "da-ze." That is a reference to APH South Korea who says that often in the manga. I did
The lullaby that Korea sings to Yong Soo is called "Island Baby" or "Baby on an Island" it's an old traditional Korean lullaby that was written in 1950 (or earlier) I believe. It's pretty much about a mother leaving her son one day for the day's work and then returning to find he's been washed away by the tide and so she goes off looking for him. (Or something along those lines :/) Look it up on Youtube. It's a sweet lullaby :)

On June 25th 1950 at dawn the North Koreans crossed the 38th parallel and opened fired, beginning the Korean War.

March 5th 1953 months before the end of the Korean War, Joseph Stalin died and Georgy Malenkov took his place, the latter being seen as incompetent by the other parties and is soon to be removed.

Because of Stalin's death the Russians pushed for the Korean War to end, but Chinese leader, Mao Zedong, didn't want to listen. Despite this, on June 27th 1953 the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed to end the fighting, but there was really no peace treaty signed so by all accounts the war wasn't officially over, but the North Koreans said they won anyways ;)

Ever since China's civil war the country's been kicking up their game. Continually they're seen throughout the Cold War, not just America and Russia, so you'll be seeing a lot of China, especially in Asia where he goes on to assert his dominance.
Geneva, Switzerland. July 18th 1955

Russia held that smile of his throughout the Geneva Summit while the other three countries and their bosses were present. He adored watching the uneasy shifts from the other countries and their leaders under his gaze. If his smile could make them all so nervous then he wondered what his frown could do if allowed to make such a facial expression toward them in public.

Of course his smirk was genuinely true when he looked at America. The boy wouldn't even look at him, even for a little bit. It was a little upsetting but Russia knew the reason for the nation's dislike for him. He was glad that he was to blame for the turmoil in Indochina, giving him so much credit for those uprisings was an honor indeed. Did America and the others really think so highly of his intelligence? Why, Russia was flattered.

He knew the young Superpower was upset with everything happening and, well, Russia felt it served the nation right. How dare he go off and court those two whores and act as if he cared for them. That didn't sit well with Russia at all so of course he had called in China to help persuade his relatives' minds. Now, Vietnam wasn't sure if she wanted to continue loving America or to shoot his brains out. The conflict made Russia giddy, and sitting back and watching it all was his favorite part.

"You see, Amerika? They will only continue to hurt you, but not Mother Russia. I would never do such a thing. If only you'd see that then we could stop this silly little game of cat and mouse you call a Cold War, Russia thought to himself as he watched America's face contort at the mention of the chaos in Asia. America always had such lovely facial expressions, even in his upset. Of course Russia missed his smiles the most but knew it would be a very long time before he ever saw those again.

But Russia could wait. Well, until he knew for certain that America had no means of fighting back.

"So that is him, Russia?" Russia's new leader had leaned over to him and asked him this in their native tongue as he spied the youngest nation in the room sitting next to his own leader, quietly listening to the man speak to the others.

"Da," Russia answered back. It had been a shame his old leader had been ousted so soon, but he had warned him. It was all well, though, his new leader, while still not akin to the country of America and his people, found the idea of conquering the nation fascinating and had no qualms with Russia's wish in having America come live with him and share his bed. He felt that the young nation needed conquering to settle that pompous attitude of his.

Russia agreed. He knew it would not only change his attitude, but make him more desirable to be around. A submissive America was very pleasing to the mind and body. So Russia planned only making sure that the boy would slowly bow to him because Russia was strongest, and the strongest always got what they wanted.

"Isn't he beautiful? I think he'd make the best decoration for my home," Russia replied back while his leader chuckled.

At the exact same time, America's President and America himself turned their eyes on the two. They
didn't like anyone speaking something they couldn't understand. It reminded Russia so much of England where the nation had been so powerful that he demanded everyone in his presence speak English. Now, America was no different.

"Is there something important you wish to share, Mr. Khrushchev?" President Eisenhower asked, his brow furrowed along with the tension from America's glare.

"Nyet," the man said with another chuckle, not even concerning himself with the other glares being directed toward him. He simply sat back in his chair and stared America's boss down much to the other's upset. Russia liked his new leader very much.

The meeting went on from there. They spoke about many things, all concerning world peace. Russia chuckled, England snickered, France snorted, and America sighed. All of the countries knew that simply was not going to happen in the near future.

When the talks were done with and all business aside Russia's boss impressed him by approaching America. The tall country looked surprised at the action but acknowledged his presence nonetheless.

"I have seen you on television, but never in person. It is a pleasure to meet you, Amerika." Khrushchev offered his hand and despite America's reluctance he reached out and shook it.

"The pleasure is mine, though I never met Russia's previous boss before you," America said.

"You wouldn't have liked him, so it matters not," Khrushchev said. There was a long silence afterwards with the Russian leader simply staring at America's traits and making the boy uneasy. "You're a very beautiful country, Amerika," he finally said and made the boy even more uncomfortable. America's eyes continued to dart back toward England and France who were engaged in talks with his boss.

"T-Thanks," America said. Anyone could tell he looked for a way to excuse himself as soon as possible.

"It's no wonder he wants you," Khrushchev said with a wide grin before he turned and left America in confusion.

Russia observed his boss's confrontation. His previous leader would have never stood up to the country himself, and Stalin . . . the man wouldn't even acknowledge the blonde's presence. More and more Russia was finding himself devoted to Mr. Khrushchev and now he wondered how far he'd raise him in his and America's little arms race.

America was uncomfortably flustered by the time Russia's leader left him to his own thoughts and his and Russia's eyes met once before America turned and looked toward France to converse with. Russia smiled and watched as America attempted to strike a conversation with the Frenchman. He was babbling on about useless things, like normal.

Turning back toward his boss, Russia watched as the man approached America's boss who had been speaking with England's boss. The man didn't look too pleased with the interruption but followed Russia's boss anyways. Russia didn't have to spy on them to know what they were going to be talking about so he minded his own business for now and attempted to speak with other delegates.

"I am very grateful that you and your country had decided to attend this summit," Eisenhower said with a formal smile.

"Da, but you and I both know these talks will get us nowhere," Khrushchev put simply and watched as America's President's smile downed and his eyes narrowed in the distrust he knew he harbored.
"Are you telling me that you had come here with full knowledge that you intended to sit idle and ignore the world's pleas, Mr. Khrushchev?" the President asked.

"In a way, da," the man said with a smug look and nod of his head. "But, let's be honest, we know that it is not the world's pleas for peace, it is yours and your country. You know why I think? I think it's because you're afraid. Afraid of me. My people. My country."

"Well, why don't you test that out, Mr. Khrushchev, since you seem so sure?" America's boss seemed to push his own weight just as much and if he was unnerved, well, he hid it well.

The Russian smiled and let out a loud laugh. "I could, Mr. Eisenhower, know that we very well could. But, you see . . ." He turned, glancing toward the countries who were still conversing with each other, well, most except for Russia who no one seemed to want to talk to. "My country wouldn't be too happy about that. Well, he'd be extremely happy that your government was destroyed along with all of your assets and allies and influence in the world, but I'm afraid he'd be very angry with me if I was to put one scratch on your country's skin."

The President narrowed his eyes in confusion and furrowed his brow.

"He is infatuated with him and, well, as strong as he is now, it's only a matter of time before he gets what he wants," Khrushchev informed.

"Are you threatening an invasion?" America's boss asked, his eyes widening at the Russian leader's meaningful words.

"There are other ways of conquering a nation without invasion," Khrushchev informed as he hooked his hands together behind his back.

The two again turned to their countries and this time noticed Russia had managed to strike a conversation up with America. The younger country looked reluctant to talk to him or even look at him for that matter, but the Russian continued speaking as if the other were listening closely and returning speech back. Mr. Khrushchev saw how the President of the U.S. looked at America, as some protective father over their child. It was understandable, after all the nation looked to be a mere nineteen years of age unlike the other countries present.

"I won't allow you to lay a finger on him, and neither would his people. They'd all rather die than hand him over," Eisenhower stated with a shake of his fist.

"Then you'd better find a better defense for yourself and him, because your offense is very lacking and completely unintimidating," Khrushchev replied.

That seemed to upset the President so much that he left the Russian and marched up to his country. Grabbing him by the arm he pulled America further away from the Russian nation.

"I don't even want you looking at him, Russia!" Eisenhower threatened in a quick second before turning and pulling America away with him. "Come, America, we're leaving."

"What?" America looked confused and as he turned back he noticed the others' confusion as well, well, except for Russia who just smiled that creepy smile of his and his boss who seemed to be smiling the same.

Dragging out toward their car his President motioned for him to get in first. America looked at him quizzically and then noticed England had rushed out of the building as well. America just put on a smile for him and waved him off. "Hey, don't worry, England, just gotta head off to do hero business."
"Is everything alright, sir?" England asked, looking at America's boss.

The human seemed reluctant to tell England, or America for that matter. He sighed and shook his head. "No, not really," he answered and then turned to America and said grimly, "Get in the car, son."

America nodded slowly and did as told, hoping that his boss would tell him what was wrong. But he didn't. He stayed quiet. That is, until he knew for sure what he needed to tell America and how to say it.

It took him two years to tell America about what had frightened him so much.

Moscow, Russia. October 23rd 1956

"Gott, Elizabeta." Prussia shook at the sight of her. He had tried to warn her not to do it, but she had always been such a stubborn girl, always thinking she was on the same level as the men, but she wasn't and she just didn't listen.

"Do not worry, she's learned her lesson," Russia said as he looked down at the female nation lain beaten on the bed she had been tossed upon. Turning toward everyone he had gathered in the room to witness her state Russia smiled. "Because of her example I am certain no one will defy me again, da?"

"Da," they all said in unison.

"Good, now, if you excuse me, I have more important matters to attend to than step on another rebellion." With that Russia left and immediately Prussia was at Hungary's side. She hardly looked recognizable and he wondered how the hell a nation could do this to another nation, a female nation at that.

"Liz, Liz!" Prussia cried out and took her hand in his. She hissed at the pain and as he looked down he saw that both her wrists were broken. He pulled his hands away and laid one down softly on her cheek. It was swollen purple along with her bottom lip. Her eye was closed shut, bleeding red and the rest of her limbs . . . Prussia was so glad Russia hadn't taken to chopping off body parts or else Hungary would be in worse condition than she already was.

"If you'd let me take care of her, I can help." Prussia turned to see Ukraine. She looked concerned and sincerely earnest in her request to help but Prussia was angry. So very angry with them.

"Get the fuck away!" Prussia shouted, startling the woman. "You're just like him! You don't care! You want to be here! What kind of sick and twisted country are you anyways? No, no, you're just like him; you're his sister so you're like him!"

"You're wrong," Ukraine said but Prussia continued to spit in her face.

"How?" Prussia asked. "You raised him! He's like this because of YOU!"

"You're wrong!" Ukraine finally snapped back in her own defense. The others there, the other countries, merely watched on in silence. "He was taken from me when he was still very young. Yes, I had gotten to see him, but not for too long and my influence in him was minimal. I don't . . . I don't know how he came to be this way. I don't. I am sorry for all the pain you've been put through and to show it I wish to help her. Please, let me."

"I just want you to leave," Prussia said, his vocals trembling as he shook his head and forced himself between Hungary and the others as if to shield her from danger. "Please, just leave us alone."
The others said nothing as they left. The sight of her was sickening as is and they were glad to leave the room. Ukraine, however was reluctant to leave and if it hadn't been for the voice of her sister then maybe she would have stayed.

"Let them suffer," Belarus spoke up in the doorway. "You've offered so take it back. If they don't want your help then forget them."

Ukraine looked hurt from the rejection but heeded Prussia's wish and left them alone. When the door was shut Prussia let his tears slip. He offered a smile for Hungary even though she couldn't see him, even though she couldn't hear him.

"They're gone, Liz, you don't have to be afraid anymore," Prussia said as he brushed his fingers through his old friend's hair.

Inhaling a sniff Prussia ran his hand through his own hair before looking around the room for something to clean her with. He found a basin and got to work with filling it with warm water. He knew she wouldn't take too kindly for undressing her, but she needed to be cleansed of the blood and grime and to be settled into new clothes.

He's fought thousands of battles and hundreds of wars, if there was one thing Prussia knew how to do, it was how to dress wounds. He expertly wrapped her up and propped what broken limb needed to be propped. When he lifted her arm in a sling overhead he heard her cry out.

"No, no, Liz, calm down, I have to," Prussia explained, shushing her as he pet her head gently.

She cried again as Prussia tied the knot and Prussia cried as well. He cried until his face was red and his fist slammed against the mattress of the worn bed.

"Why the fuck did you do that, Hungary? Why?!" The tears running down Hungary's swollen eyes tore Prussia's heart. He'd seen the others get beaten and he knew that Hungary had seen him beaten by Russia as well, though nothing as bad as this. Hungary had been a good girl and minded her own business, or so Prussia had thought.

He had been taken by surprise by her revolt and in the blink of an eye Russia had stopped her. She tried to escape but he caught her, he found her quicker than she had thought and beat her, he beat her until she was unrecognizable and that's what horrified Prussia. He'd tried to remain calm when the Russian dragged her back into the house but the sight of her made him sick and to keep himself in line he had to turn away as he dragged her up the stairs toward their rooms.

It wasn't until Russia called every nation he controlled into the room to make an example of her that Prussia looked at her fully. Now, he couldn't stop crying. But he was happy, so very happy that he was here and not his brother. The horrors he'd seen, the horrors he'd taken, he knew his brother was strong, but he knew he'd break much faster than him and so Prussia was glad it had been him Russia took.

He hadn't seen his little brother since the end of the Second World War and wondered how he was faring. From information he could scavenge he's heard of Germany's economic boom and he was very glad for him. Knowing that Germany wasn't starving and sick made him brim with pride at how fast he'd recovered after the war. Prussia? Not so much.

He was managing, that was all he could say to anyone who asked, to anyone who cared. It's not like he could honestly tell them he was living in hell, getting beaten when the Russian felt like asserting his dominance, going weeks, sometimes months without food, and then there was watching his friends get abused before his very eyes and he was forced to watch or else receive the same
punishment. What would anyone do if they found out? Hell, they probably already knew. It's not like they could do anything for him. No one could, not even America.

With the way America was "helping" Asia, yeah, Prussia wouldn't be getting out of Russia's house in a loooong time.

But now that Hungary had gotten this hurt, Prussia could feel his anger welling up inside him. Some of it was for Russia beating her to this point, more was for Hungary being so stupid and trying to defy the Superpower, but most of his anger was directed toward himself for not standing up for Hungary and protecting her. No, he should be the one beaten to near death, not her, not his old friend.

"Why, Liz, why'd you do it?" Prussia asked, rubbing his scarlet eyes now even more red with his stinging tears. "You knew he'd catch you, you knew what he'd do to you. Yet you still did it. What's wrong with you?"

Prussia pressed his forehead against the mattress and huffed out a sob before he heard her say something. It was faint, but he caught it.

"I . . . had to . . . try."

Prussia's head shot up and he looked at her. Her eye, the right one that hadn't been too badly swollen to shut for long, was open and tears were leaking down bitterly as she stared up at the ceiling. Her swollen lips trembled but they parted to let her words speak.

"I . . . can't . . . take it . . . Gilbert . . . I hate . . . here . . . I hate . . . him."

Prussia watched Hungary slip into bitter sadness and begin crying horribly. How was he supposed to comfort that? No one could. This was the price they paid for losing the war.

"One day, Liz, one day we'll make it out of here, together, okay," Prussia said, softly touching her hand again.

"Liar." It hurt to hear that from Hungary, but Prussia had no other words to negate her accusation. "We'll never . . . never leave here. Never."

Prussia felt the sink in his gut. It felt like what she said was true. That, no matter what, they'd be there forever, and ever.

Washington D.C. November 7th 1956

"What . . . did you say?" America asked, his eyes widening and his jaw loosening. He had thought he heard his boss wrong but he knew he hadn't.

Eisenhower sighed and entwined his fingers. He didn't look America in the eyes for this one and his statement actually came out in a mumble. "I said we're beginning work on fallout shelters, mostly for you, America."

"I'm not running!" America bit back with upset, his eyes narrowing dangerously.

"I will not have him take you," Eisenhower informed with a slam of his hand on his desk to silence the boy nation. "We're falling behind, Alfred, too far behind. Before long, what's to stop that . . . nation from coming here and taking you away from us? At the summit his leader told me he wanted you. You, Alfred, you. What else do you think that damn well means? No, I won't let them win. You'll be on our top priority list."
"That isn't fair," America said, his fists clenched tight. "I'm the hero, and heroes don't run. It was just a stupid threat, nothing more. Liars, all of them."

When America noticed his unresponsive leader he narrowed his eyes and shook his head. "Do you think me so incapable in defending myself?"

"Against him?" Eisenhower asked as he turned back to look at America. "Yes."

That hurt America. He hadn't been that upset with a boss of his in a long time. He inhaled a quick breath and held it, puffing his chest and stamping his foot down before walking into a pace. "You . . . you . . . so that's why the Strategic Air Command began their 24/7 alert. Don't tell me you're spooked from Sputnik."

"Damn it, Alfred, don't you dare act like you're not!" Eisenhower pointed. "You were close to McCarthy and all of his paranoia is on you now. What are you thinking? Are you thinking I'm Communist like everyone else you pointed out and swore your life on that they were? You think I'm trying to hand you over to Russia? Well I'm sure he'd like that very much. Damn it, boy, I'm not your enemy. I am concerned for you and I only want to protect you."

"There's no way you could hide me," America said, shaking his head slightly. "Not when I'm this involved in the world. The Middle East is on the brink of civil wars, and Asia . . . it's almost gone. I'm not going to even give credit to Russia for that. That was all China." There was silence of thought before America cast his eyes down and smiled. It was a sad smile and his boss rose a curious brow at that. "Why does it feel like I'm the only one fighting them? I know England's trying to be a friend but . . . I just don't care what he has to say sometimes . . . you don't think I think about what will happen to me if Russia invaded? Heh, I think about it all the time, so much so that I can see him everywhere and it frustrates me." America turned his eyes back toward his boss sitting at his desk and frowned. "If I hide he'll think he's won. If you lock me up somewhere underground how will I defend myself when he does come, as you say? You've gotta let me grow stronger. You've gotta let me race him."

Once upon a time Russia told him to face his enemies and to continue to grow and strengthen to do so and so America was going to follow through with his advice. It would help if he had a leader who believed in him. But, the look his President was carrying, it was starting to frighten America and after those wars, he didn't frighten easily.

"But I am afraid, America," his President admitted with a long sigh. America wouldn't give up. He couldn't. There was more he could do and he knew it. If his current President didn't believe so then he'd wait for the next one and make sure he'd believe.

Eight days later it was America standing in front of the television unmoving as he watched Russia's boss gloat about their missile superiority. America's lips twitched more down as the camera's angle then focused close to Russia who was sitting next to his boss looking like the proud dictator he was.

"Da, if everyone thinks I'm lying then I dare Amerika to have a shooting match. It would be fun, da, Amerika?" Russia was looking at the camera as if he were looking at America. The sick fuck knew he was watching. He knew he was listening, and he knew he was afraid.

America bit out a bark as he slammed his fist into the glass and demolished the screen of the television. He didn't care about the wires sizzling his skin black or the smoke hefting upward out of the box and into his nostrils. America was upset and afraid. He swore to himself that he believed Russia was bluffing, that he was holding the wrong cards, but deep down his gut sunk and sunk until his heart clenched and his stomach churned.
Covering his mouth America about puked from the fright boiling up inside him. Instead he gagged and then leaned back and fell against his bed. A cold sweat prickled him everywhere and now all he could think of was that he needed a shower. So, getting up, he did just that. He spent four hours in the shower, not caring if the water had run cold.

America really felt like he was fighting this Cold War all by himself. Russia wasn't looking at England when he exploded another nuclear bomb. He wasn't smiling for China's cameras as his army expanded as well as his territory. He wasn't addressing any of the others, no, it was America. Why? What had America ever done to him?

Why did Russia have to be so evil? Why, when he used to be in his pleasant dreams, was he turning up in his nightmares? America hated it and he wanted to stay away from Russia. He hated even visiting Alaska because of how close Russia was, and now the issues arising in the Middle East jumbled his brain enough to twist and turn into an image of Russia.

Russia.

Russia.

Soviet Union.

Communists.

USSR.

Communism.

Red.

Red.

Ivan . . .

"Ivan," America sighed out as he pulled himself from the shower and ran his fingers through his wet hair. "Just let me go."

That was all America wanted. He wanted his freedom, but this type was so very hard to fight for.

Moscow, Russia. June 1960

"How are things progressing in Asia, China?" Russia had been ever so kind to invite the Ancient to dinner. His boss wanted closer relations and he dreaded what he wanted after dinner. Yes, he very much liked his new boss, but he was so demanding. Almost as bad as Stalin, he was certain the two were related souls.

"What does it matter? I'm handling it," China said as he stabbed at his food with his fork. He wouldn't even look at Russia which perturbed the large nation.

"It matters because I am curious," Russia said, his tone more demanding as he politely set his silverware down next to his plate and left his half-eaten meal alone. "You will tell me, da?"

"You don't care!" China accused and suddenly Russia watched the nation snap at him. The country slammed his silverware down hard, hitting the side of his plate and leaving a loud echo to ring throughout the quiet room. "Who is the one talking to these countries to make them revolt against the Westerners? Me! Who is the one offering alliances and aid and men? Me! Whose people are dying to
help them pull free of the Western world? Mine! You do nothing, Russia. Yet all I hear about is yours and America's struggles. Where is mine? Why doesn't anyone see that it is me fighting, not you?"

"I offer help enough," Russia said with a thin frown as he straightened his form in his chair. "Arms, intelligence, tanks, ammunition. So you want my dead as well?"

"Why not?" China asked, crossing his arms. "I'm the one who's always losing, not you. My men die, more so if the revolt fails, but you, all you do is lose a little money. It's not fair."

Russia hadn't meant to smile so sinister, but apparently it came out like that as China's eyes widened and his brow arched. "But, China, you have so many to spare." It wasn't the best choice of words for Russia to use but he felt it was true, and China knew it as well.

"Niǎo rén!" China shouted as he jumped over the table and took a hold of Russia's scarf and shook him; well, to his best attempt.

Russia smiled at his honest attempt to strangle him; China's gotten stronger since his civil war, but not as strong as Mother Russia. Russia took a hold of the Chinese man's torso and slammed him down on the table. China groaned at the toss but as he looked up at Russia he glared hate-filled silent curses at him.

"Come now, we're friends, da? We should stop fighting right away," Russia said, pulling out his smile as he leaned over China and then reached up to stroke his cheek. China quickly slapped his caressing hand away and scooted away from Russia to get out from underneath him.

"I know you, Russia. You don't care what happens to me. You don't care how many men I lose, how much land I have to cede to the conquerors, how I'm treated by my bosses . . ." China's face was going red with rage and the small thing's entire body shook in upset.

"That is not true, we are allies," Russia assured.

"My people hate you! I had to get on my knees and beg my boss to accept your terms and the only reason he did was because we were alone," China spat out. "I should have known you'd betray me. You already had from the start."

"You are upsetting me," Russia almost sing-songed through his smiling lips. He never took well to threats, especially from so-called allies. He could tell by China's stance that the country was challenging him and it took all Russia had to not laugh at the poor display of attempted dominance.

"That's the first emotion I've evoked out of you," China stated with a hard stare. "Well I shall just reciprocate your concern for your state—which is none! I am the power in Asia. It is me who's spreading Communism, and it is me defeating America!"

Russia opened his eyes and frowned. America, be defeated by a pathetic nation like China? There was no chance in hell. America was losing because of Russia's intelligence, because of Russia's generals who gave the damned Chinese battle plans, because of Russia's spies in the U.S.A. Because of Russia who confronted the nation and frightened him into submission. That was why China was "winning" and it was all Russia. No one could tell him otherwise.

"What would you do all by yourself, China?" Russia asked, his anger rising in his tone. "You'd be nothing without me, nothing! Use your own technology, use your own agents for intelligence gathering, go ahead. Use everything Chinese. You know you'd be using nothing but fucking sticks and stones."
China gapped at Russia's insult. Even so, that didn't get him to back down like Russia had wanted and if he didn't stop soon then Russia would have to get physical.

China chuckled and then smirked as if he knew something Russia didn't. Russia narrowed his eyes at him as China pointed to him and said, "You play tough but you're nothing. When was the last time you committed actual troops to a war? What's this? Is it because you don't want to get into a war with little America? Why? Who gives a shit if you do? Blow the whole world up is it? That's a fucking pathetic excuse and we all know it!"

Russia ground his teeth together tightly by the sway of his jaw. How had China's attitude toward him and his people gone unnoticed for so long? Russia's given the nation everything to rise to the top ranks of nations and this is how he was repayed?

"I know why you'll talk but not play, it's because you're sick. You're fucking obsessed with him!" China accused and Russia's nostrils flared in an attempt to calm his temper as it rose with the more China poked at him. "I saw your eyes on him all the time in the second World War. You wouldn't look at anyone else. The only time you even looked at me was when America did as well. What he wanted, you wanted just so he couldn't have it. Whatever he was for, you were against. You were like some damn child begging for attention through brutality.

"You'd whisper his name in your sleep while you held me. You couldn't even get hard for me without medication! You didn't want me, you never did. You wanted him. How long? I don't give a damn. But you've wanted him for a long time and so the very second he goes and attaches himself to a country you send me, ME, to break them up via revolt. You don't like it because he refuses to look at you because he hates you. Stop playing games, Ivan, and just go and rape him. That's what you want, right? Then stop acting like you have some sense of moral when it comes to him and go do what you have to for your ideals, for your people!"

Russia's fists were shaking tightly against his sides as he stood there and took China's accusations. Not all of them were true, but a majority . . . there was no way China knew Russia as well as he thought. Not a chance.

When China smirked at the state he put Russia in the Asian chuckled and laxed his form just slightly. "Alright," he said with a nod. "Well, if you're content with watching then be my guest. I'm sure you'll enjoy it as I conquer Asia, as I bring America to his knees, strip him bare, and fuck him raw."

Russia's eyes flashed dark with sudden rage. He inhaled a deep breath and realized he had let go of his restraint long ago.

"Amerika is mine, you little shit!" Russia spat which upset him seeing how China narrowed his eyes and smiled even wider, like he had wanted this reaction.

"So I was right," China said with a nod. "Of course I was." With a deepening frown China turned to leave. Before leaving fully he turned back to Russia and offered him an easy smile as if his statement would assure him of no harm done. "Don't worry, old friend, if you want I won't force him. I'm certain you wouldn't like that. No, I'll wait until he's out of all that money he gloats over and then . . ." China held his finger ups to his lips as if in brilliant thought. "Then when he comes to me begging for funds I'll be gracious and give him enough to sustain him and his economy, but of course I'll require his services for the offer. Yes, that's a nice thought; he'll willingly give himself to me because of what I can offer him, because he needs me. And you'll still be you . . . just watching . . . pathetic."

China left. Russia shouldn't have let the Asian say that to him. He should have said something in return. He was the Soviet Union. He had started Communism and he had spread it. How DARE China think him to be better in any way? If it wasn't for Russia then China would be a slave again to
England and France, as well as America.

"GAH!" Russia cried out as he flipped over the large oak dining table. It had crashed into the wall and shattered a few lamps as well as splitting the thing in half. He didn't care how expensive that piece of furniture was, he'd destroy more things if he wanted to.

He was upset over China's words and insults but more so at himself for not standing up for himself. Since when had he become such a pushover? First North Korea had given him a piece of her mind and now China? Who did these countries think they were?

Russia was tired of standing still. If all it took China to fear him was for him to face him in a war then he could. Russia chuckled. He supposed China had already entered a war with him; a war once dueled between him and America.

"Welcome to the Cold War, China. I hope you can keep up," Russia said as he looked out a window and up toward the shining stars and then toward that round, round moon.

Washington D. C. May 25th 1961

"We're going for the moon this time, Alfred. All the way."

America turned toward his new leader, a leader he was very fond of since his election this year. He was outgoing and not afraid to let America race, just the man he'd been praying for. There was only slight surprise on America's face before he busted out in a wide grin.

"Seriously, dude? You're the best!" America said as he ran up to the man and embraced him tightly. The President chuckled before he patted for America to let go so he wasn't crunched in two in the next second. "Sorry," America apologized as he let go. "So the moon, huh?"

"That's right," Kennedy said with a nod as they stared up at the glowing orb in the night sky. "But this is just between you and me, alright, Alfred?"

America smirked. "Let Russia find out. There's no way he'll be able to catch me. Not this time. You're loosening the leash and I'm going to run at full speed."

"Good, that's what I wanted," America's boss said with a wink before turning back to the moon. "God . . . I can't wait to see it. I know you won't disappoint me."

"I'll tape the entire thing," America said. "We'll broadcast it throughout the world. Hey, can I claim the moon as my territory?"

Kennedy chuckled. "Now slow down, kid. I don't know how that would blow over seeing how you can't just keep it from the world if you want to. We all need the moon."

"So," America said, puffing his cheeks and crossing his arms. "Not gonna stop me from claiming it."

There was another chuckle and then a silence. America was about to spark up another conversation because his boss always enjoyed talking to him, but this time he spoke up first.

"America," he addressed, using his country name meant something serious was about to come afoot. America paid close attention to his President's tone of voices, sway of body, and gestures and motions. "There's something I want you to do for me."

"What is it, boss man?" America asked with a bright smile that his new boss loved seeing. While his older one had thought about hiding America from the world his new one continuously showed him
off in pride and made sure the entire planet knew the exact contour of his face.

"I want you to go to Europe for me to check on things," Kennedy said. "Preferably Germany."

America frowned at the thought of the country. He was doing well as of late, but America had been so busy in Asia and with helping South Korea grow a little more that he had all but neglected Germany. England and France watched over him closely and they kept him updated on the man's status. Nothing new so he didn't understand why his boss wanted him to go there. The crisis's were over without America's need to appear so, honestly, his presence really wasn't required.

"I'm going to Vienna this week . . . I'm meeting with Mr. Khrushchev," Kennedy informed.

"What?" America took a step forward. "Then . . . then let me come with you. Let me stand firm beside you so he can see me, just like you've wanted."

"No," Kennedy persisted as he turned to his nation and eyed him sternly. "You will do as you're told and go to Germany's home."

"But . . . Russia will be there. I'm sure of it!" America exclaimed.

"Yes, he probably will," Kennedy said. "He'll be there because he'll think you'll be there. I won't give him the satisfaction in threatening you again."

"So you want to hide me too," America mumbled as he cast his eyes down in disappointment.

"You're wrong." America looked back up to his boss who offered him an encouraging smile before letting out a sigh and frowning. "I'm sending you to Germany because the Russians are building a wall."

"A wall?" America questioned. "Where?"

"Straight through Berlin," Kennedy informed.

"What?!" America bit his lip to keep himself from shouting all of the things he wanted to say about the Communists. Without further explanation America nodded in understanding.

"Keep things safe," Kennedy ordered.

"Yes, sir," America said with a salute before leaving with a heavy mind.

Vienna, Austria. June 4th 1961

"Where is that handsome country of yours, Mr. Kennedy?" Khrushchev asked with an easy smile as he leaned back in his seat while America's new President continued to sit upright, just like Khrushchev's country next to him.

"Thank-you for that compliment, Mr. Khrushchev. We try to keep him as well-groomed as possible. The television demands it these days," Kennedy joked.

"Da, it does," Khrushchev said with his own offered laugh but it was ended too quickly. Kennedy knew he wanted his question answered, he could see it in his too quickened frown.

"I had him run some errands. He's a good boy, always does what he's told," Kennedy once again bragged as if America were his own child. This time there was no laughter, a smile here and there maybe but other than that it was quiet.
Kennedy hadn't wanted America there so he could check on the status of that wall. He didn't think they'd begun building it yet, but he knew they were in preparation to so America could map out the width and expanse of the project in peace without worrying about Russia's whereabouts. Kennedy was looking at the country who smiled at him through fake grins. At least he was there with them and not seeking out America.

From what the previous President had told him, the country had some sort of obsession with his nation to the point where the Russian leader had threatened Mr. Eisenhower over taking America away from his own people. Who had the nerve to do that? Who? Kennedy certainly wouldn't back down like Eisenhower did. Kennedy would fight for his country.

"Well, it's a shame," Russia suddenly spoke up and Kennedy found himself in awe at the deep baritone voice of the nation despite his child-like grin. That grin quickly faded and Kennedy watched as the nation shifted from deceiving innocence to battle-experienced tyrant right before his very eyes, his threatening glare matching that of his leader's. "A nation amongst mere humans is no fun at all. What a waste of time."

Russia got up, excused himself from the summit, and left. Kennedy wished he had stayed. He wanted to keep him entertained and away from seeking out America who was now closer to home. He knew he would do just that when he left and so sighed in defeat at his failed attempt to keep the nation occupied in conversation. At least he verified Eisenhower's accusations of the nation's interests and it terrified Kennedy.

He didn't know why a country like Russia would even care for a country like his, especially a country in a silent war with his. He felt Eisenhower didn't fully understand either. Well, like Khrushchev, Kennedy wanted to take the country aside in private and speak to him but Kennedy feared he didn't have enough wits ends for that. He had so many questions so perhaps he could get a chance to speak to Khrushchev about this and find a way to weasel out answers.

Berlin, Germany. Mid October 1961

"Feel good to get your hands dirty again, huh, Germany?" America noted as he leaned over the Volkswagen that the German nation was currently working on, with his elbows deep in the engine of the vehicle. The nation didn't respond to America but the Superpower continued, "Work always helps ease the troubles of life away, am I right?"

Again, Germany remained quiet and unresponsive. America frowned at the behavior and so did what he usually did to get someone's attention: he shoved his face into their line of sight. Leaning over, America looked into Germany's face, their eyes met for a brief moment before Germany turned away and walked over toward his tool chest on a work bench near the car.

"Hey, come on, man, I'm trying to be friendly," America complained as he stalked the blond. "I just wanted to see how you were doing. The least you could say is, 'Recovering fine, America,' or, 'Work is plentiful thanks to the boomin' economy, America!' Stop giving me the cold shoulder."

But that is what America got. The younger didn't want to feel threatening and so he didn't press for Germany to answer. With an aggravated sigh America threw his arms in the air in defeat. He could at least tell the others he tried since they insisted he go and talk to the silent robot.

Before America left the garage he turned back to Germany and sighed softer, his shoulders slumping and his eyes glancing away for a moment before focusing back on the German's form. "I know you're jaw's healed. You can talk if you want to." Germany remained still, sifting through his tool box, his back still turned to America. "I'm upset that you won't talk to me, but, hey... I guess I'm used to it by now."
America left without caring to glance back to see Germany turning toward him and watching his departure. It wasn't like it was just America he wouldn't talk to. He hadn't spoken a word to anyone, not to England, not to France . . . not even to his own people. He communicated through letters but that was about it. America didn't know why he remained silent and he couldn't help but think it was the war, what else could it be?

Walking by the construction of the wall day by day didn't help. America didn't like the sight of the ugly thing. The noise also upset Germany as far as he could tell. Germany wouldn't leave his garage as long as they worked on it, when it was silent then he would come out and return to his Berlin home. America usually waited for the workers to leave the wall and then would follow Germany home, trying and trying to coax him into a conversation.

Germany did not refuse him entrance into his home nor would he refuse him food or something to drink but the silence was getting to America. So much so that he enjoyed the sound of the construction. They were almost done now and when they finished America would return home because the silence would drive him crazy. German's silence that is.

Returning back to the embassy, America met England and France.

"Still not talking?" England asked as he placed his teacup down on the plate and looked up at the American.

America opened his mouth to say something but instead closed his lips and simply shook his head in answer.

"Just leave him alone," France bade from his lounge couch. "He was like this before, but as long as he's working then he won't be starting any more wars."

"The least he could do is say something to me after all I've done for him," America muttered as he shrugged off his coat and hung it up on a rack.

"I'm sorry to say this, lad, but Germany did this all on his own," England informed. "By all rights he doesn't have to offer a, 'thank-you,' of any kind."

"I protect him from Russia," America reminded, his tone straining as England flat out accused him of doing nothing to help Germany and his people.

"Oui, we all do," France corrected.

"No, you don't," America said and his retort surprised the two. He had been solemn and quiet for the most part of his stay in Berlin except when it came to trying to get Germany to speak, but when speaking to France and England he was polite and of course obnoxious. This time, his tone was harsh and accusing. "I'm the one who's facing Russia in the East and his damn partners. I'm the one shoving back against his antics in the Middle East. I'm the one who's racing him to the stars. Me, and me alone. You two asses are just sitting there watching it all. Sure you'll accept my missiles but what if I told you to shoot them? What if I told you to bomb Moscow? Could I even count on you to go through with it? You're my friends, aren't you? Well why the hell don't I feel like you have my back?!"

"Calm down, America," England said, looking rather upset with America's accusations and tone of voice. "This is not the appropriate time nor the place to talk about things like these."

"No time is ever 'appropriate,' England. You guys shake at the thought of a nuclear war. You're fucking cowards," America said, pointing at both of them who stared at him like wide-eyed parents.
"I say bring it on. I've got the goods and I sure as hell can deliver. So what, screw humanity. We've all gotta go eventually."

"What has gotten into you?" England asked, gapping like a fish wiggling for air. "In all my years—you'd never treat someone like how you're treating me and France."

"Well, maybe if you two start acting like friends then I wouldn't feel so frustrated!" America said and then looked outside. He could see the wall from where he stood. Pointing back, America snickered. "Germany hates that wall, ya know. Hell, I love it." He heard both of them gasp but ignored their concerning gazes anyway. "Keeps the Commies out and it's easy to defend. I just wished I had been the one to think of it sooner."

"You don't . . . really mean that, do you?" England inquired with concern. "You realize Germany's upset because now he can never see his brother—not so much as a glance."

"You don't think I already know that?" America asked, his attitude waning, it had run its steam off already. And with America's bipolar attitude as of late it was disturbing to his allies. With a heavy sigh America's shoulders slumped and he glanced down. France and England had now seen America like they had never before—tired. "What else am I supposed to do? What, start a war with Russia just so Germany and Prussia can be united again? They lost. That's their price to pay."

"Now I understand why Germany won't talk to you," France noted with a sad sigh.

"What did you say, French Fry?" America growled, raising his fists. France rose his hand in apology but by his facial expression he hadn't been sorry for saying that. He simply shook his head and sighed once more.

"My point proven," France said. "You are insensitive, mon cher. When was the last time you cared, truly cared, about what happened to another country besides yourself?"

"Oh, so my involvement in the Korean War and, and—what's next, Vietnam's war?—the Middle East, Taiwan," America rose a finger for every subject, "What was that? Nothing? Did I not care?"

"Did you care about saving them from their miseries or just beating Russia?" France asked, being oddly insightful that usually fell to England.

America darted back as if he was struck. He opened his mouth to say something and then closed it. He tried once more and then closed his lips before he looked toward England. "Are you going to let him treat me like some warmonger?"

England shrugged his shoulders. "Shouldn't offend you if you're not," he reasoned.

America was clearly offended. His teeth grit and his fists shook. He thought Germany's company was horrible. These two; they were the worst.

Pointing at the both of them, America said, "What . . . are you on his side now?"

"Now none of us ever said tha——"

"Shut up, England!" America spat before continuing, "He's doing this on purpose, I know he is. He's . . . he's taking away everyone I ever cared for and turning them against me like . . . like I'm the bad guy! He's even doing it to you two!"

"Oh, come off it," England broke in and wove America off. "You're far too paranoid. You know that?"
"I wouldn't have to be if I wasn't a damn Superpower with no one on my side!" America bit back.

Like the experienced parents they were both England and France remained quiet to let America cool his temper by throwing his hysterical tantrum. With his shoulders slumped both knew he was eventually coming down from his paranoia driven anger only to replace it with what looked like depression.

"Am I so bad?" America asked, and France and England wondered if he were asking them or himself. "Korea wishes we had never met... Vietnam... God she can hardly write to me but what she does send out are letters explaining how she's being beaten by her bosses because of their hate for me and for her affections toward... Yong Soo... it'll be a miracle if he even stays close to me with how dangerous it is around his home, and now Germany won't even talk to me." America looked down as if his heart had been broken all over again.

Now France and England knew his troubled heart. He hadn't meant a word he had said previously but it had been the only way to release his frustrations. It had been wrong of him and it had made him seem like a selfish brat but after his forced maturity it was understandable. Not acceptable but understandable.

After a little while of watching America pity himself England finally couldn't take it anymore and deemed it safe to approach him. Coming close he reached out and managed to lay his hand on America's shoulder, near his neck. America looked at him and stared at him with sad confused eyes.

All England could do was offer him words of advice.

"It isn't easy ruling the world, Alfred. You'll always have more enemies than friends—a majority of them being proclaimed allied friends. You have no other choice but to press on and lock your heart away so you can never get hurt."

America bit his lip and shook his head in understanding. He looked like a confused and albeit reluctant child. England had never wished this fate on his oldest simply because he knew of the struggles and especially the heartbreak.

"What did I ever do to him, England?" America asked, looking at England in desperation for the answer.

England truly pitied him with a sad sigh. America had a lot to learn about being the leader of the world. Did England believe he could do it? Hell no. England wanted America to put a few more centuries on, at least a millennium would do him good. He was a baby compared to the world; much too young to be taken seriously, but he was the only nation left besides Russia with enough strength to fight for the title. Even though England didn't wish it he knew as well as France, Germany, Denmark, and the rest that America needed to be on the top because if he wasn't then Russia... England would rather not think about a world under Russia's rule.

"Press on, lad," England encouraged. "Know that nothing Russia could say or do would set me against you."

Surprising to both France and England, America let out a chuckle. Baffled, England pressed for the reason of its occurrence.

"Sorry," America offered, a smile making its way to his lips. "But it really wouldn't matter if you did turn against me. I can still kick your ass from London to Tokyo and back."

"Why you ungrateful conceded prick!" England spat and then proceeded to name all of the times
he'd helped the young nation, from telling him how to brush his teeth to how he aided him in battle countless times. America just laughed it off but France cringed at the sound of it. It was a cover for America's turmoil and England was too upset to catch it.

France honestly wished he could do more for the boy but he had no power in him. America would have to mature quickly to face all of those challenges flying his way. If not then France would see it happen to him like countless others . . . America would be destroyed, and destroyed until there was no trace of his existence left.

Many a powerful nation met their demise this way and France didn't wish it upon America, but Russia . . . France knew the nation would wipe him off the face of the earth. Why he hadn't yet was beyond France and he knew that in time he would come to understand why Russia hadn't when before the large nation wouldn't hesitate to decimate the competition. It was curious yet a frightening thing all together.

The sounds of shouting stopped England and America's arguing fit. Immediately the three recognized it to be the guards. America was the first to race outside toward the wall where the East German guards had stopped one of his delegates.

"Hey!" America called out, pushing himself closer to the wall in defense of his diplomat. "What the hell's going on here?"

His man told him the issue of the problem at hand and when America turned to the guards he narrowed his eyes. "He's got a pass, so let him pass."

The guards were unnerved by America's presence and aura but something else more frightening kept them in spot. America saw this and nodded.

"Fine, fine, you want to play it that way?" America turned and hopped into his diplomat's car before taking control of the steering wheel and driving off.

"What's he up to now?" England asked.

"It cannot be good," France replied and sure enough the Frenchman was right.

America returned, this time with ten tanks and an array of troops, all well-equipped if a battle broke out.

"America!" England gasped as the tanks rolled by. "What are you doing?!

But England's cry was unheard. France hadn't even bothered and so turned to England and offered their chance to escape. England scoffed at his cowardice and shook his head. "I'm not leaving him when he's like this!" With that England ran off after America and his tank squadron.

The shouting and noise from the trucks and tanks disrupted Germany's thoughts more so than the construction noise from the wall. He was quick to come out of his garage with a gun in hand. The moment he was spotted by his men they came and told him all that had happened. He nodded in understanding before motioning them to spread out and take positions in case the situation took a turn for the worst.

Jogging up closer Germany came up to France. The man turned to look at him before he looked down at the gun in his hand. France threw his hands up in the air and turned on his heel to leave. He had wanted no part of this beginning of World War Three. So Germany walked closer and this time he came next to England.
"That damn boy's going to start a war," England bit out with his arms crossed as he observed the scene before him but Germany did notice the gun tucked close to his side so he at least would back America up if things really did get out of hand.

"Now, all Mr. Lightner wanted to do was see one of your measly little operas," America said as he leaned down on the barrel of the tank pointed at the wall where the guards stood mortified. America's smile was turning into something like Russia's and Germany and England were uncertain with what to think of it. "He's got tickets and everything," America continued. "Right, Mr. Lightner?"

The American diplomat looked pale at the scene before him and simply nodded quickly, agreeing with whatever his country said. America let out a sigh and turned back to the human guards who looked about ready to piss themselves.

"Now, can't you let a guy enjoy a play?" America asked all too sweetly.

The men said nothing.

America's eyes narrowed in anger and his smile vanished instantly as he slammed his hand against the armor of his tank. "I'm tired of no one speaking back to me! What's the matter with you guys? Can't speak fucking English?!"

The men had the gall, the audacity to shake their heads. America chuckled. He let out a loud chuckle and about keeled over in a fit of laughter that increasingly disturbed England and Germany as well as his men. But, all too quickly America had jumped down off of the tank and was upon the guards in the blink of an eye with the barrel of his gun pressing forcefully against the closest one's forehead. The man turned paler than he already was and from the darkening of his pants it was safe to say the man's resolve was gone.

"Then why the fuck are you patrol guards?!" America muttered lowly and pressed his pistol harder against the man's skull. He smirked at the others pointing their guns at him. Please, as if guns from a human would hurt him. Not now, especially not now.

"It's because they speak very good Russian."

America froze as well as everyone else. The voice floated through the air with ease before weighing down on those who knew the familiarity of its tone.

"Dammit, no," England gasped, frozen in spot while Germany quickly moved himself closer to America's side. He had made it to the front of America's tank before turning to his right to see a group of Soviet tanks come barreling down the road and pointing their nozzles at them.

His lightning blue eyes turned quickly to watch as Russia himself stepped through the passage of the wall. Behind him came a decent amount of soldiers with guns held high and all pointing at America.

"It is good to see you again, Amerika," Russia said with that smile of his.

America remained still for a moment before pulling his gun away and flipping it back into its holster before shoving the human back toward Russia. "Your guards are fucking piss-pants."

Russia dodged the man and allowed his men to catch him. With a playful grin he looked back toward America. "Da, then I shall have them removed."

America let out a sigh before turning around and walking back to his tank and then turning back to lean against the breast of it, Germany was only a foot away from his side. "Are you going to let my guy in or what?"
"I'm afraid I don't even know what the problem is," Russia replied innocently as he motioned to their two tank squadrons.

America sucked in a breath through his teeth to calm his anger and his trembling nerves before he met Russia's gaze and held it for as long as he could. To everyone's surprise America was the first to break contact and everyone wondered if it was because Russia was more frightening or if America just refused to look at him.

"They wouldn't let my diplomat into East Germany. He's got a pass and all he wants to do is see a play. Now you're stupid guards didn't understand him and wouldn't let him pass," America stated with a downward glare through his glasses lenses.

"Is that all?" Russia asked. He then observed the scene before them again. With a smile he looked at America and chuckled. "Why must we always point guns at each other, Fredka?" The cute little nickname always antagonized a humorous reaction out of the boy nation and so Russia would use it as often as he'd like.

The American's dark blond brows knit together before lowering. His vibrant blue eyes took a shade for the darker and, dare Russia say, threatening.

"I don't know," America quipped up sarcastically. "Why do you always have to be a jackass?"

Russia responded with his infamous smile. "My territory, my rules."

"My man doesn't mean any harm," America protested.

"Why would I take a Capitalist's word?" Russia asked with an easy shrug of his shoulders.

America scoffed, crossing his arms and turning his gaze away from the nation to settle the boil in his blood and the twitch in his trigger finger. He wasn't holding his weapon and neither was Russia but their men were and if they so thought it a command of fire could be ordered and a fight, no, a war could break out.

"Come on, Russia, you know me," America said, this time his tone was softer and his approaching using the means of memory to prove his point.

Russia inwardly sighed. He knew America wanted no harm but his boss had given him strict orders to remain dominant—at least in public. Grinding his teeth together in thought, Russia turned to his men and waved them down. Turning back he watched as a look of relief washed over America's features. He hadn't wanted a struggle either but Russia would have to tell his people otherwise so he wouldn't look weak and compromising to the likes of him in front of them.

In an instant America's mood changed. "Thanks a million, Russia." Turning he waved his own men down and even Germany who was still standing close to America lowered his gun.

Hopping off the tank America approached Russia as his men escorted America's diplomat through the wall. All this for a play; damn, that'd better be a good opera. "If you don't mind, I'd like to see him through," America said.

Russia said nothing and his silence meant approval apparently as America took his stand next to his man to walk through the gate. Before he even moved he felt a tug on his sleeve. Turning America looked to see Germany, his fingers wrapped gently around his elbow in cautious warning. Russia had caught sight of it as well and narrowed his eyes at the German.

"Oh," America was surprised Germany was looking at him, much less touching him. Still, he
became business and pulled out a smile and a thumbs-up. "Hey, it'll be okay, Germany. Plus, Russia's not going to do anything. I trust him." It was a lie, both listening countries knew it but America made it sure sound convincing. "Right, Russia?" America turned back to Russia with a bright smile that the larger nation knew for a fact was as fake as it could get, just like his own.

Before Russia responded his and Germany's gazes met and the USSR became annoyed at the threatening look in the defeated nation's gaze. As if he could offer such a threat to him. It was insulting.

"Da," Russia offered through a frown as he turned and followed the diplomat through. He heard America mutter a, "Wait for me." No doubt to the silent German before his footfall fell behind Russia to catch up.

Upon walking through the wall and blocking the West's view Russia turned and pushed America up against the thick concrete wall where he and his men surrounded the nation, his men having raised their weapons in threat. America seemed surprised for a moment before narrowing his gaze at the men and their pointed guns, his aura began radiating off of him to the point the Russian soldiers wavered, even amongst their nation.

"Leave," Russia commanded, not taking his eyes off of the upset Westerener who was pinned against the wall and Russia's large frame.

Russia's men didn't question him and did as they were told. When they left, Russia's smile broadened as he leaned in close and America leaned back as much as the wall would let him. Huh, Russia remembered a time when the boy would do the opposite.

"I missed you at the summit, huh, Fredka," Russia said softly in that child-like voice of his as he reached up and let the knuckle of his index finger caress the side of America's pretty face. America didn't seem to like the touch and so jerked away. With a frown Russia said, "Don't think I don't know what you're doing." It came out normally, the Russian not fearing for anyone overhearing over the wall because of the sound of jeep engines and tank tracks. One thing Russia did know though, was that the German nation had good ears and Russia just didn't feel like facing him if he came leaping over the wall to America's aide. Though he inwardly dared him. He'd defeated him before and he could do so effortlessly again. "Trying to turn Europe into Little Amerika will not settle. I will not have it," Russia informed in a light tone though his own aura was anything but light as it clashed with America's.

"I told you before, Russia, that I don't intend to do that," America informed as he stretched his neck out and upped his chin in show of dominance, something Russia longed to break. "Besides, why do you care? You get East, we get West."

Russia chuckled before leaning in closer than he already was. America could not pull himself away this time and that uneasy look in his eyes aroused Russia.

"You should know by now, padsOlnukh, that I can't settle for just the East." Pressing his lips to the shell of America's ear, Russia breathed out hotly. "I want it all."

America remained silent as Russia leaned over him, pulling his head back to grin at him dangerously with glowing amethyst eyes. When a gloved hand reached up to gently press against America's cheek Russia watched and felt the younger flinch away once again but his hand only followed and then his other joined, cradling the boy's head, tilting it up to look at him.

"Everything," Russia whispered while his fingers subconsciously played with the ends of America's golden locks behind his ears. "My house is finally big enough to house all of the nations. I will give
everyone food, clothing, warmth, beds to lay their heads on. All I ask in return is the world's worship."

Russia had thought America would voice his thoughtful opinions by now. He usually always did so, but he was ever quiet, glaring at him with a dangerous look that Russia felt the need to replace.

"The invitation extends to you as well, Fredka," Russia said as he leaned closer and rubbed the tip of his nose against Alfred's cheek. The boy wiggled in his grasp at the gesture but Russia's hold simply tightened to restrict his movement further. He could tell America was trying to be polite about it. Russia knew he could give him a run for his money and struggle to be freed but he was still for a majority as if letting Russia have his way with him and be done with it.

"There is even a place for a capitalist pig in my home," Russia informed, meeting the Western nation's gaze. "In my bed, warming me as I sleep, and as I seek your body's warmth." Pressing an opened-mouthed kiss to America's jaw turned the American nation rigid. "I would make you my mate if only you'd conform to me," Russia continued and this time he leaned down, pressing a drawn-out kiss to America's neck. He could feel his pounding pulse beat against his lips and Russia smiled. "My boss will agree to whatever I say, though I can tell he doesn't like you and your ideals, neither does my people," Russia stated as he leaned up and this time pressed a kiss to the underside of America's chin. "But I will give you mercy and spare you from destruction if only you'd return my kindness, accept my ways, lay under me."

Quiet as ever, Russia took this as a sign to continue. His gloved fingers danced across America's flawless face, skimming annoyingly over the glasses before touching underneath those beautiful eyes and then down his cheek before Russia's thumb rubbed just underneath America's bottom lip, easing his jaw slack and parting his lips just slightly, but it was enough.

Leaning down once again, this time Russia pressed his lips against America's. While his first priority was the seduction to Communism, when their lips met, the memories of their once love erupted into Russia's mind. Images long forgotten, that hurt just to remember, were dancing before Russia's eyes. There they were, the two of them . . . in Sitka . . . in Tientsin . . . in Peking. Their touches, their kisses, their passion—Russian longed to rekindle that flame even if he transformed America into something he no longer was. He wanted him to be beside him. He needed to hold him . . . to make love to him.

Russia could no longer control his body as it pressed closer, shoving America into the wall as his tongue pressed past unmoving lips and tasted him again after nearly sixty years. This wasn't like how he seduced China, North Korea, or Syria. No, this was the opposite. America was seducing him and Russia knew he had to pull away before it was too late.

If this was some game America was playing then Russia would meet it with equal challenge. His pounding heart threw itself over and over against his chest and Russia blamed America, his sunflower. He wasn't even moving and yet he was affecting Russia like this. What a pig . . . just like a Capitalist.

Just as an early November wind chilled its way to their heat Russia darted his head back. Lips parted in shock as his eyes narrowed down at the blood on his leather gloves when he brought them away from his mouth.

America had bitten him.

Hard violet eyes turned back to America who had his teeth bared like the snarl of an animal. Russia's very blood dripped down his chin and Russia saw red. The jealously of his boss, of his people . . . it all rushed into the nation and he struck the blond. Knocked him to the ground.
Instead of his hands holding his sunflower flush against his body they were now wrapped around his slender neck, nails digging in deep, and the crunching sound of Alfred's vertebras music to Russia's ears.

After all Russia had offered to him he was rejected. Protection, a place by his side . . . America didn't want it. He was offered more than anyone else and yet Russia wasn't good enough for him. He never was, was he? America had even stopped them from consummating their relationship back then. Now Russia understood why.

"You think you can resist me, Amerika?" Russia looked at the nation. The younger could barely stand on his own feet because of how weak his knees were. Those eyes were closed tight and the sound of his choking wheezed through his grit teeth while his hands pulled at Russia's unmoving hands around his throat. "I am a Superpower. More powerful than even you!" Russia wrung America with a harsh shake, watching as his eyes struggled to open to meet gazes. "Look at me!" Russia demanded, squeezing harder. It worked. America's trembling eyes met Russia's dominating gaze.

If someone would have told Russia a hundred years ago that he'd be doing this to America; strangling the life out of him, then he would have laughed if not possibly killed the one who dared accuse him of doing such a thing to the one he loved with all his heart.

"I have won," Russia informed and then he laughed, like a madman, just like America. "I have the most devastating weapon. It has been a fun game, but I am victor, Amerika."

He knew America could feel his strength. The pathetic nation couldn't even pull his hands from around his throat he was that weak. His gaze even left his and turned to the left . . . where the west side was . . . where Germany was. No, America could not call out to him. Russia was stronger. If America needed protection then he'd look to him, beg for him only.

"Look what you do to me, Amerika!" Russia squeezed again, causing America's wide gaze to return to him like it should always be. "Look at me!"

America closed his eyes, his jaw prying open to attempt to take in air. Russia saw his chance. Leaning down he pressed his tongue inside America's mouth again and let him drink him—drink the blood he spilt. Russia was risking a terrible war and he knew it, but he would win if it came to that and he knew it.

Pulling back, Russia watched the nation choke on his blood like it was a poison.

"Say something, Amerika," Russia bade and wondered how long it would take for the nation to faint. "This is your fault. What else am I to do? My people hate you and in so they hate my affection for you. Say something to me!"

Russia needed to know America felt the same. That his love hadn't faded. He needed reassurance to quell the fear of his people's hate of him. He loved America. Always.

That flawless skin, those beautiful eyes, that luscious hair, it was all seducing Russia away from the Red and what horrified yet satisfied Russia the most was that he wanted to escape from the Red, from his bosses, his people.

America opened his eyes. His blue standing in contrast to the red in his eyes as vessels popped and painted the white sclera. He opened his mouth and moved his lips. Russia's heart stopped beating as the nation somehow managed to speak despite the strangulation.
"Yeah... too bad for you."

A weight crushed Russia's spirit and without knowing he had let go of America, the smaller falling to the ground and coughing for breath. Without another word Russia turned and left, his body dragging him away from the feel of the sharp shattering pieces of his heart. He didn't even look back to see the tears in the American's eyes, the ones falling down for the same reason as his own.

Reaching up, Russia looked at the moisture on his gloves. He can't remember the last time he had cried. Would this time be the last? How many times could his broken heart break? How could America be so cruel to him?

It didn't matter. All that did was the distance Russia needed to place between himself and America. As far as it could be.

Just like that, Russia was gone. America inhaled a shaking breath and attempted to stand to his feet. His knees buckled after several attempts before America forced himself up, leaning against the wall. Inhaling a cold bitter November wind America buttoned up his jacket, covering his bruised neck. His fingers shook as he struggled to slip the buttons through the loops but eventually his collar snug tightly against his neck.

America turned and stood there for a moment to regain the strength in his legs as well as to let his nerves stop shaking. He held his trembling hands and stood there in the shadow of the wall, waiting for his very being to calm.

Inhaling another breath America heard the tremble of his voice so he inhaled again. It was still there. So again he inhaled, this time it was worse. Touching his lips Alfred brought his gloves away to find they were wet. He then realized he was crying.

"No," America hissed out harshly. "No, no, no... no..." Turning America looked toward the direction Russia had left. He inhaled a shaking breath and gasped as a sob escaped. He slapped his hand to his mouth and cursed himself for being so weak, for continuously trying only to be rejected.

He knew he'd have to face everyone eventually and it was either now or never. America had stood by the wall for a good twenty minutes before he came out and waved at his men. He didn't say anything and just offered a smile. After relief set in England came up to him with his arms crossed.

"You know you gave all of us a scare, right?" England's gaze refused to meet him before he glanced at him shortly and glanced away again. "I'll... I'll go put on some tea." With that England turned quickly and left.

America let out the breath he'd been holding. He had been afraid England would fully look at him and notice his state. Sometimes America was glad England was easily flustered. As America turned to head back with his men, following the tanks back to their garages, he was grabbed by the arm and turned abruptly.

His jacket was opened violently and wide surprised, yet suspecting, eyes looked at him. America frowned and pulled himself from Germany's hold, wrapping his jacket back around him to hide the bruises.

"What?" America asked and cringed at how horrible his voice sounded. "It's not like you have anything to say."

America glanced shortly at Germany to see a deep concern in his face, especially in his eyes. It was odd to see Germany suddenly care when before he'd been nothing but cold to him on his visit.
Again, America was surprised as Germany took a hold of his wrist, the nation had grown quite strong again, and pulled him back to his home.

Inside he pushed America down on a chair before raking through his cabinets. America sat there, wanting only to leave. He was tired. The emotional stress wrought on him by Russia took everything out of him and all America wanted to do was sleep.

But he humored Germany, whatever he wanted to do. When the nation returned to him he noticed that in his hand was a case of ointment. He uncapped it and sat it on the counter next to him before leaning forward slowly, cautiously. America watched as Germany kept a close eye on his motions but America remained still as Germany pulled open his jacket and then gently unbuttoned his shirt and pulled it down his shoulders.

If Germany wanted to give him medical ointment then he could just get it over with, not treat him like some China doll. America didn't like being treated like this because he felt that he just didn't deserve this much attention, not after all that's happened to him.

Digging fingers into the ointment Germany returned, silent as ever, and rubbed it against the bruises. They looked horrible, America could tell by Germany's contorting face. He was glad he couldn't see them. He didn't want to know how close he'd comet to getting his neck snapped in two by Russia.

"Don't tell the others," America ordered Germany who was now rubbing the other side of his neck and then up under his jaw where it hurt the most. America hissed but felt Germany touch him softer. The touch eventually rising up to rub his cheekbone. America gasped at the touch and about jerked back had he not realized Germany was rubbing ointment there too. That was right; Russia had struck him there as well. How'd England not catch that one?

Germany noticed America's discomfort and so was quick to pull his hand away from the younger's cheek. After everything had been taken care of Germany tightened the lid on the case and then got up to return it to its holding place. Again, America hated the silence.

"Don't you dare think anything less of me, Germany," America spoke up. The German turned to him and noticed the gleam in America's blue eyes and the slight trembles of his bottom lip. "I could have fought him if I wanted to . . . I just . . ."

Germany's eyes held nothing but pity for the American nation. He was too young for the status of Superpower and look at him, his life had almost been snuffed by the one he had once so love . . . by the one Germany suspected he might still hold feelings for. Watching America rub those ugly bruises, all Germany wanted to do was wrap his arms around him but America was hurt and he needed space.

"Don't tell a soul. No one," America demanded again as a few tears slipped down his cheeks and onto Germany's hardwood floor. Germany had been silent since the end of the war but still knowing this America persisted he keep quiet.

Germany approached America slowly as the nation leaned over and rubbed his face, taking his glasses off before rubbing his eyes on his sleeve. Again, Germany wanted to touch him, to hold him, to tell him that he needed to distance himself from the Russian nation. That all Russia wanted to do was destroy him, and any hope that America might have of rekindling their dead love is faux and full of lies. Russia and America were no more. Germany could see this, anyone could. Germany also knew there was no way, even if Russia might still care, that their people would ever let them court again. They were enemies and as rightly Germany knew Russia would be.

America had been so young and isolated that he had yet to see the cold heart of Russia's. He was a
monster, a murder, a lunatic, and a liar. Germany knew this, but America had been too blind. Now he's gone and hurt himself all over again and Germany couldn't say a thing. Well, he could, but now wasn't the time.

America reached out and took hold of Germany's pant leg, clinging onto it like a sobbing child would. That was all he did. He didn't pull nor did he push away. He just clung and cried and tried his best to suck all of his tears back into himself, and he had failed miserably.

Germany stood there in silence and let his presence comfort America. He knew it wasn't enough, but as of right then it would have to do. America needed a silent friend, not a passionate lover, and whatever America wanted then Germany would give to him if only to make him stop crying and see that smile again. That smile he hadn't seen since before the war. All of these others were fake and the most beautiful he'd ever seen the boy smile was not directed toward him but toward Russia as he left China after the Boxer Rebellion had been staunch. If Germany could see that smile, whether it was directed toward him or someone else then at least he knew America was happy. That was all he wanted.

Being a Superpower ensured America would not smile. Not as long as he had competition and those seeking to destroy him. No, Germany believed in America when he knew the others didn't. He had helped him in his time of need and he took care of him when he didn't have to. It wasn't easy standing up to Russia, Germany knew, he had done it once upon a time. But America did it and he'd have to do it again.

He just wished he'd stop hurting himself. Because when he hurt, so did the others. Germany hurt at the sight of America's tears, he knew for a fact that England would die if he saw him like this. Australia, that kid loved America so much that if he saw him like this he'd be devastated. Canada would throw a fit for America being so careless when around the enemy, but that was America. You either hated or loved him. There was no in-between with him and Germany was glad for that because loving him was the best thing that had ever happened to him and it helped him get out of his depression quicker.

If a man like that simply vanished, so would most of the world's smiles, Germany was sure of it. He knew, in his heart, that America was happiness incarnate and so when he cried so did the world. Right now, it was raining. So fitting.

Moscow, Russia. March 1962

"How are you feeling today, Liz?" Prussia asked as he came in with a vase full of tulips. "I brought your favorite flowers today." He set them down on the windowsill near where the woman sat in a rocking chair, not saying much these days. "So, did you ever finish that book I loaned ya?" Looking down on her lap Prussia noticed the book and sighed. "No? Well, that's fine because the awesome me can wait until you're done reading it."

Unresponsive, as normal. Prussia sighed and sat himself on the edge of her bed. Nothing he said or did seemed to work. She just wasn't the same since ... since Russia ... After sitting in silence for a good two hours Prussia pulled at his hair and jumped to his feet. "Liz, you've gotta pull yourself out of this state. If we're here for the long run then we might as well make the most of it. Living like ... like zombies won't help time fly by faster."

Nothing, again. It seemed these days as of late Prussia would get into this same argument with her. It was getting tiresome.

"How is she today?" Prussia turned to see Latvia enter timidly. "Ms. Hungary, are you well?" If she
wouldn't talk to Prussia then she wouldn't speak to the rest of Russia's subordinates.

"Nein, she's not," Prussia replied. "But I'm sure in the future she'll appreciate the visit."

The little boy offered a smile before he turned to see Lithuania enter. "Oh, I thought I'd find you here, Prussia. Here you go." The older Baltic nation leaned over and handed the German a sheet of paper that was the map to the house. Certain rooms were colored and Prussia rose his brow at it.

"Oh, there are broken lamps. Mr. Russia wants them fixed," Lithuania informed. "One is in his office, please, be careful. He's been in a foul mood lately."

"Right," Prussia sighed. He had thought that Tsar Bomba of his would make the Russian beam with pride but it hadn't. After the historical event he simply locked himself in his room and drank until he passed out. Prussia had felt sorry for Lithuania who had been doomed with waking him, the poor nation returned with a broken wrist to nurse.

"I-If you would like, I can watch her," Latvia offered.

"Thanks, kid," Prussia nodded with approval before getting up and finding his tools.

Now Prussia knew Russian, he wasn't the best at it and enjoyed speaking German more, obviously, but who else there spoke German besides him? Still, he refused to speak it unless absolutely necessary; as in Russia pointing a gun at his head if he didn't answer him with, "da," instead of, "ja." He could understand it perfectly well and so found himself horrified after listening to a quiet conversation of Russia's boss with a few of his cabinet members.

"Even after all of this he's still unpersuaded," Russia's boss had said and Prussia knew they were talking about the country of the land. He did like his gossip but in a place like this, if Russia caught you spreading rumors, even if they were true, oh, he'd make you take a bath in chemical waste. Yep, Prussia, guilty as charged. But he just couldn't keep his ears from listening carefully as Russia's boss continued.

"You heard what happened at the wall?" Russia's boss asked the others. "He hadn't told me at first and I only discovered it through his drunken slurs but Russia had confronted Amerika there."

"Amerika? So soon?"

"Da. He had been disappointed in his lack of presence at the summit and went looking for him. Months later he found him in Berlin," Russia's leader said. "Something went terribly wrong. Russia had apparently made a proposal to Amerika."

"Ba, it's too soon for that! That nation still has too much influence and too many powerful allies."

"I know, I know," Khrushchev agreed. "Let you know I scolded him too. But he told me he had been rejected. He looked pathetic. You should have seen him."

"What does it matter, that nation isn't worth Russia's concern or effort to woo," another cabinet member said.

"He will not take anyone else," Khrushchev said with a sigh. "China, god, don't even get me started with him. Russia's lack of care forced him away."

"Apparently an over amount of care can force one away as well."

"Da, seems so," Khrushchev agreed. "Well, Russia had been lucky the next world war hadn't started
over what he did. He said he hurt him physically and to the extent I don't know. But you know Russia."

"Da. Da."

"But his problem is that he won't let go," Khrushchev reasoned. "I had supported him in conquering and taking him, but now after this much trouble I would rather he move his affections to someone else. It's a burden; Russia honestly doesn't know what to feel."

"So I have heard throughout history."

"He won't listen to me though," Russia's boss said, shaking his head. "He still wants Amerika. Says that he won't let anyone else have him because he was promised to him. But then he was upset over the rejection, so I told him the next time he sees him to rape him. Simple as that, a lay would get Russia's mind off of him."

Prussia dropped his screwdriver at that. When the humans looked at him they frowned.

"Did you break anything?" Khrushchev asked, demanding to know as his eyes narrowed at the German state.

Despite Prussia knowing now that Russia had the old man on a string—to an extent—he, however, was very determined to insert his dominance on the subordinate nations.

"Nie—I mean, nyet. Just lost my grip, sorry."

"Hurry up, you damn German!"

"Yes sir." Prussia was quick to finish his work and move on to the other rooms. When he stood just outside Russia's office he froze. He knew Russia and America had been butting heads for a good thirty years now and Prussia was proud that America was doing a damn good job at keeping up with Russia, but now . . . he knew that if a real official war broke out then Russia might kill America. Prussia believed in the boy and his ideals but he didn't think he'd last long against Russia's might, especially not after Tsar Bomba.

But now, after hearing Russia, himself, has no intention of destroying America like previously thought Prussia became unsettled. It wasn't like he had any say in the matter but after seeing what Russia did to Hungary . . . He knew America would fair far worse if that insane nation's affections were placed on him.

So Prussia walked on eggshells when he walked into the office. To his surprise Russia was at his desk, filling out paperwork. He didn't say anything to Prussia. He simply pointed him to the broken wall light and Prussia went to work.

It was too quiet in there. Prussia could hear the clock hands ticking like it was his own heartbeat. Every now and then he'd hear Russia sift through file papers or adjust himself in his seat. He couldn't concentrate and ended up cutting the wrong wire. With a sigh, Prussia pulled out a new one from his pack.

He kept thinking about little America's smiling face and how he'd never smile again if Russia was allowed to have his way with him. There had been one time he thought he'd never see the kid smile again. It was his war for independence. Prussia remembered that face and was so relieved that the bitterness faded from his young features and he learned to smile again.

Glancing over toward Russia, Prussia found he hadn't moved. He was signing a few documents now
but other than that he hadn't changed. Just who did he think he was anyways? America had done nothing to him and yet Russia wants this of him? Isn't he satisfied enough with everyone he has now? America was protecting the West and if he fell then Germany . . . Prussia shook his head. After knowing what Russia could very well do to the New World country in the possible near feature, Prussia didn't want to think what would happen to Germany if he fell under Russia's power as well.

The images of the world—of Russia's world danced in Prussia's head; one where Russia's house overflowed with mourning nations, each in their own chains. Germany . . . Prussia had envisioned him mostly in the dungeons because of Russia's hate for him . . . starving . . . naked . . . tortured. And then there was America. The boy nation who had tried his hardest to stop Russia's world domination was broken, his attractive freedom striped, tears running down his face in suicide sadness as he was dragged off to Russia's room where . . . no . . . America couldn't be in a world like that. He just wasn't born for submission and Russia couldn't see that.

"You can't do it!"

Had Prussia said that? Russia was now looking at him with slight surprise but it quickly shifted into annoyance and when Russia was annoyed then Prussia and the rest of the household were tortured. Prussia gulped and opened his mouth to let out an apology and say he was just talking to himself but something was directing his words and before he knew it he was clenching his screwdriver tight and yelling in demand at Russia . . . at Russia.

"Not Alfred. You can't take him!"

Russia rose his brow in understanding. Leaning back in his chair he let off an amused aura and smiled lightly. "Are you trying to order me around, Prussia? How stupid of you." Taking out a bottle of vodka Russia politely poured himself a glass instead of taking the bottle straight to his lips. When the vodka came out . . .

"You have us—you have the East. Leave the West alone!" Prussia begged.

"Ah, you must have caught conversation with my leaders. How sneaky of you." Russia chuckled before taking the shot of alcohol and then pouring himself another. After his third drink Russia frowned. "I am a very powerful nation now. What else am I to do with all this power if not aim for the entire planet?" Russia scanned the albino for a moment before saying, "If you're concerned for you weak defenseless baby brother then you shouldn't fear. I have no interest in him and will leave him at peace when he comes to live here so long as he doesn't fight back. But dear Amerika? Why, his well-being should not concern you. He's not your family."

"He was practically adopted in the nineteenth century," Prussia explained. "He's as much German as me or Germany."

"That's too bad," Russia said with a sneer as his eyes turned to his shot glass. He took it up and twirled it in his fingers before tossing it aside and pressing the bottle to his lips. "Such an ugly race, but don't worry, your bad blood hasn't made Amerika any less beautiful."

"You're sick, you know that!" Prussia knew he was asking for a beating but he couldn't care at the moment. He needed to be heard and he needed Russia to understand where Germany didn't. "None of you understand that Alfred will die if he's not free."

Russia's frown deepened. "Are you calling me incapable of caring for him?"

"No," Prussia said firmly and with conviction. "I'm saying you will kill him if you defeat him."
Russia stood up from his chair and walked around his desk. He stopped before Prussia and leaned over him menacingly.

"I am getting upset with others telling me what I can or cannot do with my promised one," Russia growled darkly, narrowing his frightening eyes. "He is mine. All my years of waiting for him would be in vain if I, myself, killed him. You don't know me too well. I am capable of loving Alfred and when he comes to live here you will see."

"He won't submit," Prussia pressed when he knew he shouldn't. He wasn't a power anymore and to bump chests with Russia was a death sentence.

"Then I will make him."

Prussia cringed. Rape . . . just like Germany had tried.

"You can't make him do anything," Prussia bade. "England had tried."

Russia chuckled with a nod. Crossing his arms he stepped back to lean against his desk. "That fool didn't try harder."

"He did," Prussia said slowly but Russia refused to accept his words.

"Eight years is too soon to give up," Russia said, recalling the American Revolution.

"He raped him!" Prussia spat. He watched Russia's eyes widen a fraction and his lips part just slightly. He was surprised, as he should be. America never told anyone, England never told anyone. Prussia suspected France knew but even Canada, as close as he was to America, didn't know. Prussia, himself, wouldn't have known unless he had been with America when his emotions became too much.

Prussia still remembered those bitter tears and the hate in America's voice as he sat in a tent with Prussia congratulating America on his first victory against England since Prussia's vigorous training.

"Hey, ease up, Alfred, you won! Why don't you go celebrate with the men?" Prussia asked, observing the young boy who was cleaning his musket and then proceeding to fill his powder sacks.

"That was just one battle. The war's not over yet, there will be more," America said as he held up his musket and examined it after the finished polish.

"Sheesh, I didn't think my training would turn you into a battle-hardened warrior over-night," Prussia joked, but his laughter died down as he watched America continue.

"Are the official uniforms on the way?" Alfred asked.

"Yeah . . ." Prussia said before standing up and placing his hand on America's shoulder. "Look, what's the rush? You're doing good so far."

There was a silence before America pushed Prussia's hand from his shoulder. "My father . . . England . . . he used to always be there for me. Sure, not in person at times, but I knew he was out there trying to make the world a safer place for me to live in—at least that's what he always told me. He always held my hand when I wanted him to, listened to my troubles, and held me close when I was frightened. Never once had he said anything bad to me . . ."

Prussia watched America glance down. His shoulders slumped. "He . . . struck me the first time in 1770. After that . . . it all went downhill."
"Believe me when I say rumors spread rapidly in Europe," Prussia added on a lighter note. "We all heard about England's trouble with his precious little colony. It was funny because of how upset he was with you. It was unheard of; a colony breaking away from their parent nation. I knew England was a greedy bastard but was it really the taxes that drove you over the edge? I mean, come on, you've got vast resources all around you and your trade is very desirable around the other countries."

Prussia quieted, waiting for a response, but America was ever silent. Looking down he noticed America's knuckles turning white by how hard he was gripping his gun. Soon Prussia gasped, seeing the barrel give way under the boy's unnatural strength.

"Ah, Alfred?" Prussia tried to warn him about the condition of the gun but was silenced by the boy shaking his head.

"He stopped being my father in 1775!"

America grit his teeth before the barrel of the musket snapped. America still hadn't noticed the damage though and Prussia gapped at the sight of tears building up in America's eyes as his face began turning red with bitter anger. Prussia had never seen a nation so young look like this and he became disturbed by the sight.

"No father does that to their own child! None!"

"What did he—?" Prussia watched as America bent his neck, bowing his head as his brows crashed together to show his distress. The emotions were getting out of control and Prussia found himself witnessing America's unstable side.

"I can take him leaving me . . . I can take his stupid taxes . . . I can steel myself against his strikes, but I can't . . . what he did to me . . ."

Prussia's body reacted fast as he jumped to America's side when the sob broke out of the boy's throat. America covered his mouth after the tears began falling, after which more sobs resounded. Looking up at Prussia the older nation watched the colony open his eyes at him and what he saw in America's blue, blue eyes was horror.

"He killed them!" America cried out, dropping his gun and clinging to Prussia's coat desperately. The albino could hear seams ripping but he wasn't the least bit concerned for the fabric as much as for America's mental well-being.

"He took me right there . . . on the green . . . among the dead!" America cried out in a multitude of emotions: rage, hurt, betrayal, sadness. "He said it was the last resort to put me back under his control!"

Mein Gott! Prussia inwardly gasped as America's chopped sentences clarified. England raped his own son!

Without another word Prussia wrapped his arms around America and held him close. He let those tears wet his uniform, he let America wrap his own arms around him and cling so tightly he could feel his spine bending. Prussia had a little brother so he knew a thing or two about comforting the little ones, but what surprised him the most was America's capability to strike back even after something so demeaning and decimating should have rendered him immobile. No nation has strength to fight against a nation that raped them . . . unless . . .

"Hey, hey, it's alright. Calm down. It won't happen again, you hear?" Prussia took America's face in
his hands and began wiping away those tears. "You're something special, America. Not many nations can carry on after... that... but you did. You're strong and the world's going to see it soon. Good! Show then your strength; beat them to a bloody pulp if you have to so that they never ever think of doing that to you again." Prussia insisted the blond in nodding his head. "Your big brother Gilbert will stand beside you and be a friend amongst the wolves for a long time. You can count on it!"

When Prussia let go of the boy's face America sniffled and then learnt his head down on Prussia's chest. "Please, don't tell anyone."

"I won't, you have my promise," Prussia said, rubbing the boy's back to ease his hiccups.

"Thank-you," America muttered and it was sweet. The young colony's defenses were down and he leaned on Prussia like he would a close friend. A close friend? Yeah, Prussia liked the idea of that, but first he needed to speak to his king about setting up some guards for the scarred boy.

Prussia had been pulled from the past and he blinked, recalling he was standing up to Russia. Alfred, I'm sorry. I told him, but what else would you have had me do right now? They have to understand what you are. Prussia had almost told Germany but it had been too late.

"He's like Carthage," Prussia informed slowly. "He would not yield under Rome so he was killed. You know these nations cannot be ruled. They are either killed quickly or fade away in captivity; they die. They retaliate to conquest violently... just like he had on England... just like he had on Germany." Prussia bit his tongue. He should not have said that. But he felt he needed to rekindle Russia's memory of the boy's brute force in retaliation after a rape or from an attempted one.

"Germany?" Russia's narrowed eyes grew dark and before Prussia knew it he was grabbed by the collar of his shirt and suspended in the air. "What did your brother do to him?!" A violent shake tore out a gasp from Prussia and he choked on his words. Russia waited to hear and offered him no ground to stand on.

"Nothing, I swear it!" Prussia choked out. "I tried to stop him... to get him to listen... just like you, but... but America snapped... he's the one who broke—who broke Ludwig's jaw!"

"When did this occur?" Another harsh shake and Prussia was struggling to breathe.

"De-December of 1944!" Prussia answered and just like that he was dropped. As Prussia lay there coughing he hadn't noticed Russia's revealing face.

The Russian finally understood everything.

Back in 1781... when I touched... he struck me away. And then there was fear on his face when England visited. That bastard! He was mine first. Disgusting, filthy, witch! He will pay for that! Russia didn't care if it had been centuries since the horrible crime, England would pay for taking America's virginity. That had belonged to Russia as promised by General Winter. Looking down at the sniveling German made Russia think of Germany, especially after what Prussia had said he attempted to do to Russia's betrothed.

Shifting through the memories of the war and the few times he had seen the young nation. Suddenly he remembered about Germany's desperate attack and the tremendous losses America had sustained. He had thought that the boy was merely traumatized. It had been the first time he was so involved in a major conflict so it seemed reasonable. But after remembering listening to his and England's conversation, Russia realized England had been referring to the attempted rape. How long had England known and not Russia? How dare that Brit try to coax a comfort in the boy when he had
scarred him as well?

Russia felt his blood boil and his fists clenched so tightly that the leather fabric of his gloves began emitting a soft crunching sound. Looking down at Prussia who had just caught his breath he knew the albino was right. He knew that nations like America could not sustain life without freedom or rule. America would fight his inevitable capture, Russia knew it, and possibly die from the capture.

"Get out," Russia commanded as he sat himself back down at his desk with a grim expression washing over his features.

"Promise me you'll leave him alone," Prussia begged.

Russia narrowed his eyes at his subordinate. "You would rather I substitute your brother in Amerika's place?" Russia had no intention of doing such a thing, but he enjoyed the sight of Prussia's face paling more than regular. "I will make no such promises. Now get out of my sight!"

Prussia held his tongue like a good boy and left. The damn light hadn't even been fixed. Russia sighed out in frustration before swinging his arms across his desk's surface and knocking everything to the ground.

How had Russia not known about America's predisposition? Even at a young age he revealed it. He was destined for either death or power. Unlike Russia and many other countries they had survived in captivity. Some thrived but even when they did not they still prided themselves in surviving. Russia had been through so much and had made it to the top. He knew if he failed he could rise back again. That was how he was as a nation.

So now the major question: did Russia risk conquering America and enslaving him to see if his life slipped from him in captivity, or kill him and put him as well as himself out of misery?

Perhaps Prussia was mistaken. Perhaps America could suffer and survive. Other nations had, why not him?

Russia chuckled like a madman. He should have known. After all, General Winter never told him if his promised one would have the strength and attitude to resist him, and he most certainly did.

Russia hated to be fucked with and the old ghost would pay for causing this rift between he and his beloved, in due time of course, after Russia figured out a way to keep America from dying. Because he would if Russia conquered the world as he swore to his boss and his people. But Russia had no plans of scrapping that goal at all.

Chapter End Notes

Historical Notes:

In 1956 the Hungarians revolted against the Soviet dominated government, but were sadly crushed.

In 1957, November 7: The final report from a special committee called by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to review the nation's defense readiness indicates that the United States is falling far behind the Soviets in missile capabilities, and urges a vigorous campaign to build fallout shelters to protect American citizens. And eight days later on
November 15 the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev claims that the Soviet Union has missile superiority over the United States and challenges America to a missile "shooting match" to prove his assertion.

Also, America's still reeling from McCarthyism, so his personality is quite chaotic due to his paranoia.

In June, 1960 we have the Sino-Soviet split: The Chinese leadership, angered at being treated as the "junior partner" to the Soviet Union, declares its version of Communism superior and begin to compete with the Soviets for influence, thus adding a third dimension to the Cold War. RoChu no more. China is kicking up there, as I stated before, so his attitude's changing slightly as well with the more powerful he gets, hence why he wasn't afraid to insult Russia or America.

In 1961 May 25th, John F. Kennedy announces the US intention to put a man on the moon - kickstarting the Apollo program.

And now it has come, August 13 1961 The Berlin Wall is built by the Soviets following the breakdown in talks to decide the future of Germany.

Germany had an economic boom in the 1950's partly from the Marshal Plan but a majority of their success comes from their Wirtschaftswunder that was overseen by German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and his Minister of Economics, Ludwig Erhard, who went down in history as the "father of the German economic miracle."

And now the goods, we have the Stand-off between Soviet and U.S. tanks in October 1961. The issue took place at "Checkpoint Charlie" the title given to the transition of East Berlin and West Berlin. Soon after the construction of the Berlin Wall, a standoff occurred between U.S. and Soviet tanks on either side of Checkpoint Charlie. It began on 22 October as a dispute over whether East German guards were authorized to examine the travel documents of a U.S. diplomat named Allan Lightner passing through to East Berlin to see the opera. By October 27, 10 Soviet and an equal number of American tanks stood 100 metres apart on either side of the checkpoint. The standoff ended peacefully on October 28 following a U.S.-Soviet understanding to withdraw tanks.

Then, again in 1961 (eventful year, huh!) on October 31st the Soviet Union detonates the Tsar Bomba, the most powerful thermonuclear weapon ever tested, with an explosive yield of some 50 megatons.

And, oh, bet ya didn't expect a flashback in here. Well, surprise. When America mentioned being hit for the first time by England in 1770 he was referring to the Boston Massacre. Then, when America mentions his rape he was referring to the fateful April 19th morning in Lexington, Massachusetts 1775, where the Revolutionary War began, all due to America's retaliation which took England by surprise and revealed what kind of a country he'd mature to become.
Washington D.C. USA. October 16th 1962

America's face paled. He wouldn't. Russia wouldn't dare. Would he?

"What did you say?" America gapped at his boss whose face was just as pale as his own.

"The reports are there if you want to take a look at them," Kennedy said as he nudged the folder laid flat on his desk a little and continued to try to keep his calm about the situation.

America quickly snatched them up and looked through the report, his eyes widening in horror at the images printed out. Looking back at his leader he noticed the man not willingly looking him in the eye. With a snarling frown America tossed the folder back onto his President's desk, scattering the other knickknacks on top of it as well.

"Those are damn nukes!" America shouted, slamming his hands down on the desk to get his boss to look at him, but his eyes remained avert for an unknown reason.

"I know," America's boss said softly.

"Are you calm about this?" America asked, narrowing his eyes. "Cuba's ninety miles away from me!"

"I know," Kennedy once again answered.

"Then why the hell are you just sitting there?!" America's tone was desperate. He looked to his bosses for answers and if they couldn't come up with anything then it was left on his shoulders to mantle the responsibility of decision making and sometimes America didn't make the right choices.

"Do you think I'm incompetent, Alfred?" America blinked in confusion at his boss's question. Why was he asking this? Shouldn't he be more concerned with this heavily pressing matter at hand?

When America didn't answer Kennedy looked at the boy and let out a sigh. "They're doing this because they think I'm weak." By "they" America assumed his boss was referring to the Russians.

"Then prove you're not!" America demanded with another slap on the desk. Kennedy finally looked at him. "I'll invade. I swear to God I will."

"No," Kennedy ordered, shaking his head. "We can't use force."

"Really? Because Cuba sure as hell is trying!" America defended his option.

"What would England think?" Kennedy inquired, looking at America.

"I don't give a damn what he thinks!" America spat back.

"How about France, Canada, Germany? When you're too busy shooting Cubans what's to stop Russia from taking over West Berlin?" The questions stunned America. He had been too upset to think about the possible repercussions. His boss had thought about every possibility ever since being informed. "Clearly you don't stop to think without your fists, Alfred," Kennedy reprimanded. "You
have few enough friends as is and you're willing to turn them off by butting heads with Cuba?"

"No, not Cuba, Russia," America stated. "You know he's doing this."

"Then what would you do, hm?" Kennedy leaned back in his chair and narrowed his eyes at his young country. "Conquer Cuba? Make him your state? Then what of the Western Bloc? I'm certain if Russia sees what you're doing he might as well try his luck in territory domination as well."

"We're not the same and you know that!" America bit back. How dare his President, his Commander and Chief, equate him with the Commie scum.

"In your head, maybe, but to the world? You're both just greedy warmongers," Kennedy said without a sliver of care for his country's feelings in the matter.

"I'm trying to defend myself!" America shouted, his tone high and demanding. His shaking fists now being the objects of his boss's gaze. "I can't . . . I won't let another country dominate me. Not again. I won't let anyone around me have that much power. I won't!"

The President could see how unsettled America was. McCarthyism had already shaken his resolve in the previous decade and he was afraid it'd return now thanks to this crisis on their hands. Being a world power was hard, especially on one so young and one so self-centered. But America had to be or else he'd be trampled—to death likely. Kennedy hadn't been there when the boy first took up a gun to defend himself back in the Eighteenth Century but he knew that this young nation standing before him would never let go of his security. He'd tasted fear before. He'd tasted near domination, he knew that. He knew America was afraid of it happening again and so was he, but he needed to remain calm before him just like his forefathers had when they helped shape his thinking all those centuries ago.

"How cruel are you willing to be if only to save your dignity?" Kennedy sighed and glanced down at his folded hands. Leaning forward he scooted closer to his desk and settled his elbows to rest on the wooden frame.

"I'll get Brazil to back me up, hell, Argentina will too. Venezuela, Columbia, I'll make them help me," America swore darkly.

Kennedy lowered his brow. "Those are Cuba's siblings."

"I know," America informed, his countenance disturbing his boss. "If they have to act as shields then so be it. Let's see if 'Big Brother Cuba' would dare attack his little siblings. God, I hope he does. I'll invade his ass faster than those damn countries are struck."

"Quiet," Kennedy ordered and successfully dissolved a part of America's dark aura as his thoughts turned gruesome with self-preservation. Drumming his fingers on his desk in thought Kennedy sighed and then looked America in the eyes. He tried to ignore the dark ill hue but the look in them disturbed him. "I'm going to be holding a meeting soon. Let me handle what plan of action we'll take. Trust me, it won't take long. Let your people defend you. We've been here for you since the beginning and we're not giving up on you now."

Suddenly America was blasted back to 1775 where his people had said the same thing. Where they had pulled his crushed body off of the green and covered his shame. Where they had placed a gun in his trembling hands and forced his legs to move. Forced him to defend himself and his hewn honor. He used to rely on his people whole-heartedly back then. When did he stop trusting them? Was it McCarthy who had gotten into his brain and dissolved that once close trust in his people? Was it when his previous President told him that they were lagging behind with Russia and therefore
America blamed his scientists for being complete imbeciles?

No, it shouldn't be that way. America should trust his people, just like his boss told him. This crisis though, it was so close to him. He's never liked Cuba much but he knew that damn Marxist wouldn't think twice to strike at him. Russia would probably stand beside Cuba as he lit those missiles and watch as they impacted with him.

Millions would die. Millions of humans; those that made up America. He didn't want any more of his people to die. He couldn't stand the thought of losing a single one, immigrant or not.

Sure his methods for self-preservation disturbed his boss and other advisors but they didn't understand the fear like he did. His people back in his colonial days did and so turned their eyes away from America's cruel retaliation. They willingly let him loose and let him do what was necessary to save himself from domination. If his boss came back to him with plans America disliked then the country would proceed on his own and carry out what he felt was the only way to stop an attack on himself. He may start a war, but he sure as hell would fight tooth and nail for his freedom just like he had before.

"I want you to do something for me, Alfred," Kennedy's voice dragged America out of his dark thoughts. The two shared a quiet stare before Kennedy stood up and took up the file of photos. He approached America and then slapped the documents against his chest. "I want you to publicize this. Make sure the entire world knows, and corner that damn Russian nation with the truth."

America looked at the undeniable images and felt a small sense of dread about his appointed mission. The entire world would know. He personally wanted to keep his matters with Russia private. He didn't want to seem like he was struggling with him in any way because if the world knew then they'd see him as weak and who else would the world crawl to in desperation if not America? He had to be their Hero. He had to reassure them that he could and will defend them if necessary. But right now, all America wanted to do was to forget the world and defend himself. Why wouldn't anyone concern themselves with his wellbeing? That's right, it's because they were all fucking weak. America was alone and always will be.

"We're going to make him admit his violation of our doctrine," Kennedy swore to reassure America. "Prepare yourself, Alfred. Things are going to become turbulent very fast and I want you to have a steady head on your shoulders."

America was quiet but nodded. He'd try his best.

West Berlin, Germany. Late October 1962

England rather ungentlemanly spit out his tea and sprayed it all over Germany.

"WHAT?!" England's fingers had long since dropped the tea cup and was now holding on tightly, crumbling the newsletter. "T-That's a declaration of war!"

The Brit was too caught up in the American's announcement that he failed to see an upset Germany whose nice white dress shirt had been ruined by the coloring of the heavy tea. Instead the German simply closed his eyes and allowed his temper to wane as he calmly got up and went to rinse himself off with some water in the washroom.

"Oui, I had thought it was fake at first because, well, you know how overdramatic dear little Alfred can get, but . . . the proof's undeniable," France spoke up from where he sat, also looking at the paper.
"Why would Alfred lie about a thing like this?" England asked as he shoved the picture of the aerial shot in the Frenchman's face. "For fuck's sake, Francis, it's right next to his home!"

"I know that, Arthur!" France groaned as he shoved the paper out of his face and glared at the Brit. "Which is why I've offered my full support for him."

"You—You have?" England looked surprised and France simply rolled his eyes and nodded.

"Oui, of course I did. But if it were you the Russians were pointing their missiles at, I wouldn't be so inclined to help."

England's face turned red and his fists shook. "Why, you damn frog! I knew I should never count on you! Not once have you offered me help."

"Because you never asked," France replied.

"You little—!" England's rant was cut short the moment he caught sound of someone rushing up to the Embassy doors. Without a polite knock the intruder barged in, his face looking more than distressed.

"Alright! Where is he?!"

"Turkey?" England blinked in surprise at seeing the Middle Eastern country so far from his home. "What are you doing here?"

The older nation turned his head toward England and France, the scowl on his face ever present as he marched up to them. Taking a hold of the British Isle he gave him a firm shake, almost coming off more as threatening than unsettled. "America. Where is that damn boy?!"

"He's not here, so put the midget down," France commanded with a sigh and wave of his hand. He refused to look at the scene or England's glare directed toward him.

Once England was set back on his feet he straightened out his jacket and then looked toward Turkey with honest worry. "Care to tell what's wrong?"

"That!" Turkey spat as he pointed toward the paper on the coffee table. The picture of the missiles in Cuba displayed on the front page with bold words reading "CRISIS."

"Yes, we're all shaken up by it as well," England informed. "France and I have already offered him support. Have you done the same?"

"Him support?" Turkey asked with a mock chuckle. "How about my support? That damn kid's talking about removing his missiles from my home!"

"He what?" England gapped again. Granted it was still early on in the announcement of this crisis and so England was certain there were a few details he had yet to learn, but even now Turkey's heard about the rumors to remove the missiles keeping him safe from a Soviet invasion. "Why would he . . .?"

"That's what the hell I want to know!" Turkey shouted, his fists shaking. "I thought for sure he'd be here with you two. Tch, must be back home avoiding me. Dammit."

"Well, I'm certain there's a reason why he's home. If you haven't read he's got a major problem on his hands," England defended.
Turkey simply glared at him. "You're always defending that brat! Oh, sure, let's let him handle this on his own. Oh, of course let's let him put and take missiles where he goddamn well pleases! But Russia can't? No, of course he can't!"

"Calm down, Turkey," England tried but the old country was in hysterics and by his unsettled state he wouldn't be calming down any time soon.

The sound of another nation entering the room turned everyone toward Germany. He had changed shirts and was currently drying his wet one on his arm. The mere sight of him was enough for Turkey to slide over to him and take him by the collar like he had England.

"Hey, Turkey!" England called, but the nation wouldn't heed anything he had to say.

"You saw him last, didn't you, sour kraut?" Turkey gave Germany a shake as well, but the German nation simply stared him down, not saying a word.

"That's enough, let him go," England said, stepping to their side and placing his hands on the Turk. "He won't talk, especially to you, so stop this right now."

"You call him right now!" Turkey insisted, staring the German down. "I want him here. He can't do this to me!"

"I said let go!" England demanded and finally managed to pull Turkey off of Germany who simply stood there unfazed.

Turkey continued to look distressed. When he turned to England he shook his head. "Fine, you call him England. He's your kid, he'll listen to you."

"I won't call him," England stated. "Especially not to see you when you're in this state. Get a hold of yourself, Turkey. You need to calm down."

"I can't," the older nation said and now his frantic tone lessened more and more to sound like a whine. His shoulders slumped and he slid himself down on the sofa next to France. With his head in his hands the Turk looked absolutely pathetic. "How else am I to defend myself?"

"You talked about some removal of missiles. What missiles?" England inquired.

Turkey looked up at England and then sighed. "Shit," he muttered before rubbing his hands. "You weren't supposed to know, though I doubt America wanted it much a secret. Yeah, the kid's given me some of his missiles."

"But wouldn't Russia—?"

"Of course," Turkey replied, already knowing what England was to ask. "Why else do you think the bastard started giving Cuba his own?"

"So then...this is all just...payback?" England hadn't known about the missiles and now that he thought about it he was certain Russia had known for a long time and that said Russian wasn't happy at all. Turkey lived right next to Russia and with missiles in his home, why, if America gave the word then it would easily hit Moscow. Now, with Cuba living so close to America, if Russia gave the world then...

"It's funny, non, how close we are to World War Three, or the Nuclear War as you would like to call it," France spoke up with a chuckle full of irony. "Well, I guess I should have expected the peace to die so quickly, what with the main Superpowers being Amérique—a too-young boy nation full of
naivety—and Russie, well, you all know him. He hasn't changed much since he became the USSR.”

What France said made sense, but they had already sworn their support for America. It's not like they would for Russia any time soon. It was a large gamble. If a war did arise then it would indeed be a nuclear one, of which every nation would suffer great losses, especially after Russia's announcement that he was superior in missiles last year. It was safe to say that Europe was unnerved and England knew for a fact that so was America.

The silence following France's foreboding words churned everyone's guts. Every nation simply wanted to return home and blockade themselves in their rooms, but they refused to look upset or mentally disturbed in public, especially among their kind.

England looked over toward Germany who was as quiet as ever. Even his stance was relaxed, not a shred of worry as he reached inside his jacket and pulled out a pen. Now everyone was watching as Germany wrote a few words down on the newsletter before pulling the pen away, popping the cap back on, and then placing it back inside his jacket where he straightened himself with assurance.

Leaning forward, all three nations read Germany's writing. It read: 'I stand with America.'

Turkey scowled out a scoff. "You won't be saying that when he leaves your sorry ass to Russia."

"America! AMERICA!"

Once more the embassy door flew open and slammed against the wall, now certainly hanging off its hinges. The panicked nation rushed inside and scanned the room, looking at every nation sitting in the lounging area before turning on his heel and rushing upstairs.

"America? America!" the nation continued to all-out chant as he was heard in the upper wing of the building opening and slamming doors in search for the western nation. The remaining nations downstairs just sat still, waiting it out, knowing the frantic nation would come to his senses and realize America wasn't in the building.

"A-MER-I-CA!" The nation was now jumping back down the stairs and without so much as a glance began his retreat out of the Embassy.

"Ah! Hold up, Italy!" England called out before the younger country left them entirely.

He watched the redhead poke his body back into the doorway, tears evident in his frightened eyes. He then rushed forward and slid himself before everyone, most notably Germany.

"Germany, England, France, Turkey, have you seen America? I need to talk to him! Please!" Italy cried out as he grabbed a hold of Germany's jacket and began wailing into his shirt.

"Calm down, lad, what's wrong?" England asked, though he had a feeling it had to do with America's Cuban Missile Crisis.

"I don't care about his missiles, he can move them, but he can't get into a war with Russia!" Italy cried out, his entire body shaking. "I'll mean no peace and with no peace then people will get hurt and when they get hurt they die and when they die so do nations and when that happens there will be no one left!"

Italy had talked so fast that everyone present hardly understood a word he said, but they could understand his urgency to speak with America. Everyone had something to say to America but at least everyone knew it would have to wait until he's settled his dispute with Russia, whenever or however that would be; whether it be in a war where these countries would have to throw
themselves at America's side, or down the road through diplomatic resolutions. They all prayed it to be the latter.

"Germany," Italy sniffled as he looked up at his old friend with watery amber eyes. "Do you know where America is?"

The German said nothing though he looked troubled by his friend's distraught state of mind and appearance. Instead, Germany looked back toward the newsletter where the image captured by America's spy plane resigned. Italy nodded in understanding before letting out a sob.

"Wait!" Italy backed away and then looked even more worried. "If I can't talk to America then I'll talk to Russia." With that the Italian turned heel and ran out of the Embassy.

"Italy!" England gasped. Was that boy really thinking about talking to Russia of all people? No, that's not possible, he was deathly afraid of him, especially now. "Italy, come back!" England and the others rushed out of the Embassy and tried to catch Italy but after seeing his form in the distance they realized they had no chance in catching up to him. "Damn it!" England cursed. "That boy's going to get himself hurt."

"He isn't very bright but he's not as stupid as you feel he is," France said after assessing everything. "Italy's sincere, and will no doubt send some form of message to Russie. Don't worry; I doubt it will be anything threatening."

"But still, it's best we let the both of them, America and Russia that is, settle this issue between themselves. We're here for conflict support, nothing more," England said. "Italy should know better." Turning to Germany, England said, "Perhaps you could try talking to him—oh, right . . ." England let out a sigh and prayed to whatever God there was up there, if there was any, that Italy not be stupid about his approach and that America and Russia settle this via peaceful terms. But that was expecting a lot, especially from those two.

Moscow, Russia. October 24th 1962

Russia had read Italy's message multiple times. He liked it. He wasn't so sure about his boss however.

Looking over toward the man Russia noticed him reading it over as well and frowning. The man simply slapped the telegram down and mulled over his own thoughts. Russia decided to remain quiet and to let his boss decide for himself on what to do. After all, it was his idea to supply Cuba with the missiles.

Russia had been reluctant to do anything as of late. When his scientists showed him a larger bomb he was unimpressed, when his astronauts journeyed into the space beyond earth he was unimpressed, when his boss decided to challenge the Americans in missile superiority Russia . . . Russia just wanted some time to himself. He honestly didn't feel like thinking about the younger nation so entwined in this competition of theirs.

His mood and attitude toward the past year had upset his boss considerably but just like that Russia didn't care. He'd set to focusing on his territory, his economics, his people, etc. His boss apparently set to focusing on the provocation of the United States of America. That was an interesting move. There could be a war arising because of this decision to help Cuba.

Russia certainly remembered the Monroe Doctrine. He'd been one of the first countries to support it and in so America had supported him in his treaties and doctrines, back when they . . . Times have changed of course, so Russia assumed it was only a matter of time before his influence moved into
the Western Hemisphere. He hadn't expected it so soon and when confronting his boss about it the man just smiled at him and told him what he wanted to hear.

"I'm not so certain our people are ready for war, sir," Russia offered a few words of advice to his leader.

The man just turned and offered a smile. "Well, Russia, isn't this what you've wanted? Cuba can be a considerable ally, and at that our chance to move into the Western Hemisphere. There we could take little Amerika and you could have him all to yourself."

Russia remembered speaking to his boss about this. Though, he was certain they both had expressed their knowledge that it would take years to do this, and of course they both had agreed to discreetly follow through with their plans. This was, by far, the boldest thing Russia's ever seen and of course he'd take the blame, they were his missiles weren't they?

"You . . ." Russia looked his leader dead in the eyes, something he hasn't done for over a year. "Are very stupid."

Ignoring his boss Russia had posted Italy's plea to his people to see their reaction. To his pleasure he found his people thinking over Italy's words instead of discarding them. When even America allowed Italy to speak to his own people Russia began to see an intervention, one that the little Italian nation might have just saved the planet with.

New York, USA. October 25th 1962

"God, Italy, you're such a . . . pacifist." Still, America found himself smiling fondly at Italy's earnest plea. The Italian nation could be a pansy most of the time, but he was a self-sacrificial pansy that America was glad to be friends with. He had some guts when the world teetered on the edge of an all-out nuclear war. He was probably just doing this to save his own skin . . . just like they all were.

America frowned at the thought and placed away the parchment sent to him by his boss containing Italy's plea to he and Russia that they not get into a war over this crisis. Well, that just wasn't up to Italy to decide and right now, America was about to show the world just how dastardly Russia was once and for all. No more calling him a liar or telling him he was flat out paranoid. He had photos that were legit proof.

Everyone was going to be at the council. America invited everyone; England, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Nordics, Turkey, Greece, and of course, Russia. As he entered the room he played serious the entire meeting. He refused to show his surprise to Russia's appearance at the meeting, America had honestly thought the nation would ditch the meeting like most of the time, since, you know, he was busy installing fucking ballistic missiles in Cuba's home.

The pictures were enlarged and placed on a pedestal so that everyone could see them. Russia didn't so much as flinch at America's accusing glare. No, he just smiled that creepy ass grin of his and remained quieter than even Germany through the entire event.

Italy seemed the most disturbed and it was because of him that the meeting had been cut short. The poor nation began bawling at the sight of the pictures and exclaiming that there were no missiles and that they just needed to disappear off the face of the planet. Japan and Germany took to trying to comfort their old friend while England and France got into a fight and Turkey, well he was about to begin arguing with America when Greece added some snide remark about him and so the two began shouting at the other leaving America to his own thoughts.

Despite the fights erupting throughout the meeting America continued to glare at Russia. The nation
simply ignored him and instead took to reading something in his files. After a good five minutes of complete chaos America watched the Russian quietly excuse himself, pack up his belongings, and leave the room. America would have none of that.

Ignoring his councilors' warnings America left the room and took off after Russia. He caught up to him fairly quick and pulled at his flowing scarf to stop him. Turning him around America shoved the taller nation into the hall wall, Russia putting on a surprised look. After a few moments of shock the Russian recognized his halter and smiled at him.

"Why, Amerika, if you wanted to speak with me in private you could have just come to my room," Ivan said, his accent thicker than normal.

"Cut the bullshit, you fucker!" America spat, bumping chests with him. "You saw those pictures. I know they're your missiles."

"Then why are you telling me?" Russia asked calmly, looking down at the red-faced angry American nation.

"Because I want you to acknowledge their existence," America demanded. "They're yours and you better say it!"

Russia was silent. America was pissed.

"Admit it right now, you son of a bitch!" America demanded once more, this time grabbing a hold of Ivan's scarf and tugging on it threateningly, as if he were trying to choke the Russian nation.

"My sister gave this to me, I would like you to let go," Russia said through straight lips.

America gave one last tug before adhering to Russia's request and letting go. He even took a step back to give Russia some space from his overbearing aura, not that Russia was frightened in the least.

"Why are you doing this to me?" Russia looked down to see America had cast his eyes down to his shoes and balled his fists. When the American looked up at him he could still see his anger but the confusion was there as well. "Why? I've done nothing to you."

"Neither has Cuba," Russia informed with a smirk which seemed to tick the American off more.

America raised his fist as if to strike Russia but an invisible force stopped the decent of the attack so the fist shook in midair. Russia raised a brow at the sight of it. "Are you going to strike me, Amerika? Will it be you to begin our impending war?"

That had been the major question throughout their entire "Cold War"; who would strike first? Because whoever struck first would be deemed the "bad guy" in history, right? America certainly didn't want to soil his reputation, at least as far as Russia knew. And Russia certainly found it fun to watch the boy's trigger finger itch over the detonator. It was a dangerous game the two played and more than once their knives slid too close to jugulars.

Slowly, America lowered his fist. Now his entire being seemed to tremble before Russia and the nation knew it was not from fear. It was from anger and the need to fight. A need to fight for his survival.

"I'm not the bad guy," America said to him, though Russia wondered if it was more to himself. "I'm not."
"If you keep saying it maybe you'll believe it," Russia offered with that not-so-innocent smile of his. America's glare had gotten harsher over the years. Back at the Berlin Wall he didn't so much as glare at him like this. Well, Russia assumed because now it was a matter of his national security. Oh well, join the club.

"It's alright to be afraid, little Amerika," Russia said with an air as if he cared. Maybe he did, maybe he didn't, that was up for America to decide. "I too was afraid when someone placed nuclear missiles within shooting range of my home."

There it was; the widening of America's blue eyes, the loosening of his jaw, and the sharp jaggedness in his shoulders. He's been caught in his victim game. The American nation opened his mouth to say something but nothing came out and so he shut his lips in his embarrassment.

Glancing away again America looked around them. He was scanning the area to make sure they were still alone. From the muffled shouting behind the meeting room doors it was safe to say the other countries were still preoccupied with their own quarrels and distress to not notice the two Superpowers had left.

Turning back to Russia, America looked up at him and leaned forward slightly, lowering his tone he whispered, "If I remove them will you remove yours?"

Russia smiled again. "Remove what?"

America growled. "Your damn missiles." His tone was no longer as soft as a whisper.

"From where?"

"Cuba's home."

"Cuba's home?"

"Yes, Cuba's home!"

"Whoever said I had missiles there?"

"I have fucking pictures, you damn Commie!" America's face was completely red again, veins popping, his nostrils flared, and his fists balled and shaking.

Again Russia was silent and just smiled. America rose his hands in a strangling motion and just shouted out in anger before flapping his hands back to his side and turning on his heel to leave. Obviously he was getting nowhere with talking to Russia. He didn't know why he tried in the first place.

"I am free tomorrow around 1:00 P.M. We'll have lunch, da?"

America turned back and looked at Russia quizzically. What did he just say—or ask?

"Come again?" America must have been hearing things. Russia's stupid accent just got in the way so many damn times.

"I will see you then. It's a date." Without further explanation Russia waved at America and turned to walk off. He ignored the blonde's shouting demands that he explain himself and simply left the building. He was a little surprised the boy hadn't followed him again, but then again he wasn't. The young nation had been so shaken during the meeting and even when confronting him that Russia
could see he couldn't hold himself properly.

Tomorrow would be fun, especially if America cared to join him. Russia was certain he would. The boy was cautiously curious. Besides, the date was for his own good.

New York, USA. October 26th 1962

The entire morning seemed to drag on as if it would never end. America had woken up early, around 3:00 A.M. to be exact and he could not get to sleep since. So he stayed awake, looking over his files and then moving on to clean his gun that he always carried with him. He had done these things over and over until the hour rolled over to 5:00 in the morning.

America could feel his weariness. He was tired. He could feel it in his step, under his eyes. He was a nation, yes, and didn't need too much sleep, but lately the boy's been wanting to lay in bed for days, maybe even weeks. He was that exhausted.

Ruling the world was tiring him and over and over America asked himself why the hell he took on the assignment. Well, it was too late to back out now and by God he'd make the entire world know who was strongest, even if he had to conquer and kill Cuba, he'd do it. So help him he'd do it.

Looking back over at the clock the red letters read, 5:04 A.M. America rolled his eyes and sighed. He hadn't told his boss about Russia's invitation and, dammit, he didn't know if he wanted to go. After all, it could be a trap. Knowing Russia it probably was . . . knowing Russia, in honesty, it probably wasn't.

After some thought processing America realized he didn't even know where to meet Russia. What was he supposed to do? Come up to his room and wait for him like a boyfriend does his preppy girlfriend? Fuck. America just wasn't ready for this.

Looking back over at the clock the numbers read, 5:04 A.M. A minute hadn't even passed; the time was dragging on that slowly. God.

A soft knock rapped against his door and America's ears perked. Lifting his head he glared at his hotel room door warily. It was too early for room service and he certainly hadn't ordered anything. So he quietly got up and held his gun close to his chest. Reaching out he pulled the door open and popped his gun barrel against the would-be-assassin's forehead.

"Ah! I'm so sorry! Please don't kill me!"

America let out the breath he'd been holding and closed his eyes in relief. Pulling his gun away he looked at the trembling Italian nation apologetically. "Man, I'm sorry. I thought you were someone else. Why are you here so early?"

"I couldn't sleep," Italy admitted. "I am afraid, America, about the world."

"You and me both, buddy," America said with a sigh as he rubbed the back of his neck. Flicking his head back the nation turned. "Come on in, I'm awake, you can talk to me if you want."

"Grazie." Italy walked inside and then America shut the door while quietly locking it for security. The redhead took a seat on the bed and looked quite nervous with how his gaze settled on his entwined hands with fumbling fingers.

"This is about the crisis, right?" America asked. He crossed his arms and settled for standing near the foot of the bed where Italy had sat himself.
The Italian nodded his head and remained ever quiet.

"Hey." America watched those amber eyes open and look up at him. "I've got some something to tell ya. Now I haven't told anyone else because I don't want them to know, but even so I don't know what to do about it."

Taking a deep breath America began, "I confronted Russia about the missiles yesterday when everyone was in a scuffle." America observed as Italy grew afraid, the nation now looked as if he wanted to say something but America halted him and continued. "I tried to get him to admit that it was his missiles that he's been giving Cuba . . . but . . . he didn't say anything. I know he knows and he knows I know he knows. But he didn't say a word."

"It's sometimes best not to," Italy finally spoke softly, rubbing his hands together. "One wrong word could easily disrupt the peace."

"Yeah?" America chuckled. "I'm sure I said all the wrong words to him then. If you were there you might have had a heart attack with what I said to him. I was just so upset and he just wouldn't fess up. Anyways, he invited me to lunch today, around 1:00."

"He did?" Italy looked surprised though his surprise was easier to handle than his paranoid fear. "Maybe he's finally willing to talk. That is good!"

"I'm not so sure if I want to go," America admitted and finally took a seat next to the Italian.

"What, why?" America turned his gaze to Italy and saw that worry. Hell, he should be the one looking like that. It's not like Italy was in danger of his life—of getting conquered.

Letting out a sigh, America said, "After doing this so long you realize it's all just a game, Italy. You make your move and wait for them to make theirs. You're not supposed to ask them what they're thinking; you're supposed to let them be afraid to guess your thoughts. If I don't play my cards right then Russia will come out victor. I can't have that. I simply won't allow it."

"To hell with your pride."

America gaped at the Italian's language and his tone with him. With wide blue eyes America gazed in shock at Italy who had just, right before him, grown some sort of balls. With his fist held up in a clench and his lips pressed into a straight line Italy narrowed his eyes and glared at America like he was some child.

"You can't play the fate of humanity like a game," Italy scolded. "None of us give a damn who comes out on top. We give a damn about the future of our people and their children and their children's children. Pride is one of the deadliest sins, America, and you reek with it."

America's shock slowly waned as his offense settled in. "You . . . You don't know anything!"

Jumping back to his feet America balled his fists and stood his ground before this pathetic nation. "You've no idea what it's like to live in fear that the nation just next door to you could shoot at you and murder millions of your people!"

"I've seen my fair share of war and have been conquered more than once," Italy returned, his brow lowering to give his amber eyes a darker gleam. "Now you are the world power, right?" America blinked at Italy, again stumped by his attitude toward him. "Start acting like the mature country you claim to be and settle this through diplomatic pursuits. This is the Twentieth Century, America, a time when everything can be settled through negations. I'm certain you're too arrogant to learn Russian, but I know Russia knows English. If he's willing to talk then go to him."
"I don't know if he wants to talk, that's why I'm conflicted!" America exclaimed, waving his hands around.

"He's in your land, what else could he do?" Italy reasoned.

He had a point and America knew it, but if he admitted that then he'd be admitting his fear of meeting Russia was stupid and America certainly hated looking like the foolish idiot. It seemed though Italy could see his confliction as the nation jumped up and then touched America's shirt sleeve. "I know why you're upset; you just don't know what to wear. Don't worry, America, I can pick your wardrobe for you."

With that the Italian began digging through America's closet and pulling out coats and matching their fabric and color to shirts he deemed suitable. America felt the urge to tell him to "fuck off" but he couldn't bring himself to do it. After all, Italy was trying to help. Hell, he'd even spoken to Russia so America gave him props.

He knew Italy was right and all he needed to do was just to try to talk this crisis out, but talking's never been his best attribute. Ever since he was young he felt actions spoke louder than words and they were a lot more straightforward than them as well, and resulted in quicker outcomes. Negotiations were a dread to America. Even more so was wondering just what the hell lunch was going to be like with Russia.

12:52 P.M.

"No, no, NO! Get the hell out! What are you trying to make me look like!?!"

A red-faced American wasn't too gentle when he shoved Italy out of his room. The nation slammed against the other side of the hallway's wall before stopping. Rubbing his aching forehead he turned and groaned. He had just been fixing America's appearance, what was so wrong with that? His wardrobe had been lacking so he offered some of his clothes. Of course he knew America wouldn't fit them but he knew a tailor in New York City that designed in Italian fashion so it wasn't hard to shimmy over to his place and give him America's measurements. The two had went to work right away for a nice article of clothing for the nation, but when Italy returned with it and tried it on him America had about taken it off. Of course Italy had thought it was because he was upset with his hairstyle and unkempt skin care—which completely didn't match his expensive suite—so Italy tried fixing that up as well.

The moment America got to seeing himself in a mirror he freaked out. Even more so when he looked at the time. That was about when America shoved Italy out of his hotel suite. He honestly didn't see the problem, when meeting someone for a meal you should always look your best, especially if it's for diplomatic reasons. So why America was so upset was beyond Italy. He had gotten him ready on time, hadn't he?

Italy was dazed as he pushed himself off the hallway wall. He was going to walk back into that room and make sure America didn't change into those tacky khakis or that old bomber jacket. It wasn't the 40's anymore after all.

His walk was a little off from the double he was seeing, but it would eventually fade and one way or another he'd manage to hit America's door. Of course a couple stumbling steps backwards would have landed him right on his rearend had not he managed to find another wall to lean against. Actually, that wasn't a wall at all.

"Oh, careful, Italy, Amerika's hits can cause mental damage later on."
Italy whipped his head around and gasped, pulling himself away and throwing his body against the wall. "Oh, R-R-Russia, I didn't expect to see you here."

"Da, I had realized I never informed Amerika on where to meet for lunch, so silly me, I thought I'd just come by and escort him to the meeting place myself. You will not mind if take him off your hands for a few hours, will you?" Russia replied with that smile of his that would eternally traumatize Italy.

"Of course not." Italy tried offering his own smile but proved to be of poor excuse for failing to produce one. He had been very passionate in writing, but not when face-to-face with the USSR. America, Italy felt, he had some ground to face being that he was younger than he was and well, Italy didn't fear him as much as the others, and they both liked pasta and pizza, so they were close to being kindred spirits.

Slowly but surely Italy was making his way away from Russia and down the hall toward the exit. He felt America was a big boy and that he could handle the Russian on his own. He didn't need someone like Italy to back him up, well, because Italy couldn't, fair and square. Even still, Italy felt worried for their private meeting and so spoke up softly saying—

"Please, be kind."

"I always am," Russia replied back. "The worst that could happen is a war to break out, da?"

Russia saw the tears welling up in the Italian's eyes and that was that. Italy was gone and now it was Russia staring at the door to the American's hotel suite. Walking up he tapped on the door. He didn't hear anything so he tried again.

". . . I've changed my mind, Russia, I'm not going."

Russia grinned. So the nation had been planning on attending their meal date. Hm, he must have cameras out in the hallway with monitors in his room. There really wasn't anyway else he would have known it was him and not Italy standing outside. Paranoid much? Especially in his own home. Why, what kind of a person would not feel safe in their own home? A mentally unstable one, Russia figured, but that was fine. He knew how to deal with those.

"But you must," Russia insisted softly. "I've already made reservations."

"If the restaurant's not good enough for this outfit then fuck your reservations." Suddenly the door swung wide open and America propped himself against the door post, his current state in the early stages of being de-italianed. America looked nice.

The upset look on his face did nothing to deter Russia from inhaling the expensive yet pleasant smelling cologne that he was certain the boy's never worn before in his life. The suit was nice, sharp and black. The dress shirt poking out of the jacket was of a light crème color and the tie, now loosely undone along with the collar of the dress shirt, was of a candle white color. Russia spied golden cufflinks and a . . . was that a ring on America's pinky? Even America's hair had been trimmed ever so slightly and slicked back with expert ease in a style befitting of the suit, of course the slight ruffle signaled to Russia that America had been in the works to undo his do.

All in all it didn't take long for Russia to realize Italy had been in the boy's wardrobe. The Italian had nice tastes, always had, but seeing America dressed like such was . . . unexpected.

Russia was torn between laughing at the sight of America's discomfort in such attire and continuing to gawk and marvel at how Italy managed to get such a ruffian like America into that outfit.
"Ah, I had picked the restaurant to place an embarrassment on you, seeing how you never dress for proper occasions, even a simple dinner date, but it looks like sweet little Italy was more clever than me and saw through my plans," Russia said with that smile of his. He watched America narrow his eyes before taking in Russia's own attire. He was dressed nice as well, not as spiffy as the Italian-designed suit America was clad in but in good clothing. With a sigh Russia watched America quietly lace his tie back together and fix his collar. He looked quite uncomfortable and Russia wondered if it was because of the expensive suit he had on or the fact that he was with Russia. He felt it may be the latter reason.

In silence Russia led the American nation away and towards the restaurant he'd picked. True to Russia's word it was a nice restaurant, one where you would likely bring your girlfriend to bend down on one knee and propose marriage to. It didn't seem like a lunch place at all, dinner, yes, but not lunch.

This time, America played the silent partner. Continuing to glare at Russia from across the table wasn't very polite at all and if Russia wasn't such a patient country, with exceptional patience for this particular one, then he wouldn't have thought twice about jamming his pipe into his throat and crushing his vocals. It was Russia who had to order their drinks. It was Russia who had to order the appetizers and it was Russia now ordering both their main entrees.

"You prefer sandwiches for lunch, am I right, Amerika?" Russia glanced up over his menu to see that the younger was still glaring at him as he sat back in his chair, arms continually crossed. His response was silent as ever and Russia sighed. Turning to the waiter he smiled and gave him the menus. "We'll take two runzas. That will be all for now." The waiter nodded and left them. Turning his gaze toward America, Russia smiled once more. He could be just as silent as him if he wanted to.

The sound of multiple chatter and the clicks and clacks of silverware and plates distorted everything around them and soon it became too much. America sighed and moved his eyes away from Russia's meeting glare.

"Why am I here, Russia?"

Russia simply put on an amused smile. "Why is anyone here at a restaurant? To eat of course."

America snapped. Swiping his hand out he hit his glass of water and it went flying into the wall nearest them, almost hitting a couple some tables down and a waiter attending to them. The eyes were on them now and all Russia did was smile against America's frown.

"Such an attention glutton," Russia noted with a tsk.

"Why. Am. I. Here?" America pressed once more and now Russia could hear it, the loudening sounds of their wooden table snapping under the crushing pressure of America's gripping hands.

Russia let a silence pass over them before swimming along the edge of America's sanity. He could see it in his eyes. He could see how close he was to attacking him. But would he? Whoever attacked first would prove to be the antagonist in the upcoming war and neither had made a move because neither wanted to be that character.

Finally, Russia spoke. "Because I want you to calm down."

America chuckled and settled back into his seat. "What? I don't come off as calm?"

"War seems about to break out," Russia said, watching as his words shift America's façade into that paranoid panic he'd seen before.
"Yeah, and what do you care? You're starting it," America muttered as he crossed his arms again.

"I think history will say it was Cuba, da?" Russia chuckled while America glared.

"I'll know it was you," America snarled dangerously.

"Just like I know it is your missiles in Turkey and the Italys' home," Russia replied just as straightforward as America had.

Two plates were set down before the nations by a wary-eyed waiter. Russia brought out his smile for the shaken human. "Ah, spasibo." When the waiter was gone again Russia turned toward America who was looking down at his plate and taking in the odd appearance of the sandwich. "It's called ranza, a Russian dish."

America let out another chuckle before he moved the plate aside. "You fucking order me Russian food?"

"We are at a Russian restaurant," Russia reasoned. "You would have known if you weren't occupied with glaring at me."

"Oh, you want me to stop glaring? Fine, fine." America stood up. "I'm sick of staring at you anyways." He turned to leave but just as soon as he had he heard Russia speak up.

"Be sure you tell your boss that I was willing to talk and you were not, that is, if you'll speak the truth."

America turned and glared at Russia once more. He was about to say something but blinked at the sight of Russia raising his hand and motioning him closer. Italy was right; Russia wouldn't try attacking him, not when he was in his country, not when there were so many people around.

America walked up to Russia and waited until the larger country rose. America refused to move out of fear because he wasn't afraid of him. No, it was Cuba he was afr—no, he'd never be afraid of Cuba. He could kick his ass if he wanted to, so it was the missiles. Yeah, just the missiles.

America even steeled himself as Russia reached out and pinched the lapels of his collar. If he was going to strike him then he'd look like the bad guy, not America. But Russia didn't hurt him, instead he looked as if he was fixing his jacket, well looked. When he pulled his hand back he held up a small device that made America's eyes widen.

Lips parting in a gasp, America watched as Russia brought the black gadget to his lips and smiled at America.

"This is the USSR. Privet, Mr. President and all who are listening," Russia began, his eyes looked knowingly at the cunning American. "It would be a very good idea for the both of us if we reach a sort of diplomatic solution. I will speak with my boss and arrange for a way that will make our countries settle down peacefully. You want the missiles gone from Cuba's home? Well, I want your missiles gone from my neighbors' home too. You can let the UN know, I do not care, but I will not move unless you move. It is up to you to make the first step." With that Russia clicked the device and tossed it back to America. "Right next to your gun, Amerika," He said with a smile before he turned and sat himself back down to enjoy the meal he had so ordered. Russia did not expect America to stay and he was right. After the message the western nation quickly turned and walked off without so much as a farewell. With a sigh Russia pushed his plate aside. He'd lost his appetite.

1:14 P.M.
"What on earth could possibly be concerning him?" England inquired while he sat and dined with a few other countries. "I've never seen him so upset. He hasn't even touched his pasta." And Italy not touching his pasta meant something amiss was in the air. Not good.

"He's just wetting his pants over the crisis," Romano spoke up rather indignantly. England chuckled before taking a sip from his tea; he really didn't like American tea too much but he was in New York and it was tea time. What else was he supposed to do? "Really? I heard you were quite upset yourself with the possibility of America retaking his missiles he left in your house."

Romano scoffed and crossed his arms. Despite his crude comment about his little brother he had yet to touch his food as well. All there could tell he was just as nervous about the impending situation.

"America does what he wants," Romano explained. "It's not like we have any other say in the matter. The bastard would shove all of us in front of him to save himself from enemy fire. You know that."

England let out a sigh and placed his cup down. Looking around his table he saw an upset Romano, an oddly quiet and concerned Italy, next to him sat Germany, quiet as ever, writing something down and then there was France who looked as if he were attempting to mind his own innocent business by shoving his face into the Times Call. Thinking back on the meeting just the other day England had never seen America so upset since . . .

England cut his brooding thoughts off abruptly. There was no need dwelling on mistakes he made a hundred and eighty-seven years ago. The past was past. He and America were close again and England swore that he'd be damned if he ruin their relationship once more. No, he was there for him for everything, supporting him a hundred percent even though England knew the others were right; that America was turning into something terrifying.

"Huh? Oh, grazie, Germany, but I am fine," Italy spoke up after reading the note Germany had slid in front of him.

"Congratulations, potato bastard, you got him to talk," Romano remarked though everyone knew that he was truly glad Italy began speaking again.

Italy hadn't said a word since they saw him and offered him a meal. Germany and he were always so close and even if Germany refused to vocally speak the blond always managed to get the Italian to chat up a storm.

"Look, Italy, we're all trying to help this situation get better," England spoke up, catching gazes with the younger Italian. "It's why we're here."

"I just want them to be able to talk," Italy said, referring to America and Russia. Everyone knew the two powerful nations were at nothing but each other's throats as of late. "I came to America earlier and he admitted to me that he wasn't sure if he wanted to try negotiating with Russia."

"Yep, that's like him," Romano spoke up with a roll of his eyes and sigh from his lips.

"But he went, he really did," Italy informed.

"Went where?" England inquired.

"To lunch with Russia," Italy replied.

"Lunch . . . with Russia?!" England looked horrified and surprised all at once. After seeing how
upset America had been just the other day he hadn't even thought in the slightest that he'd think about dining with the Russian nation.

"Si." Italy nodded. "He was hesitant but I helped dress him up so he wouldn't be so unconfident."

"You dressed him?" England's face seemed to pale a little more, even Romano shot a concerned look.

"Si, and then he threw me out," Italy said with a sad look, glancing down at his cold plate.

"Do you know where they went?" England asked, shooting out of his chair.

"The next avenue, right beside the cathedral," Italy informed.

"Right, come on, France!" England commanded as he wrapped his hand around the Frenchman's elbow and yanked him out of his chair.

"Ah! What are you doing, Angleterre?!" France gasped once the paper in his hands floated away and his coffee spilt over.

"We have to make sure those two don't get into a war," England insisted.

"Non." France pulled his arm away from England and straightened himself. "Amérique is a big boy. He's said it time and time again. I for one am willing to let him try and prove himself. Perhaps it's time you do the same." Looking down France sighed at the stain planted upon his nice dress shirt by his spilt beverage after England had hauled him to his feet. "If you excuse me I am in need of another shirt. I cannot be seen in public in this state." With a turn of his heel he left.

England scoffed and then threw his hands in the air. "Fine! I'll do it by myself." And off England went to spy on America and make sure he didn't do anything too out of line, not that he could stop him if he did.

Romano rolled his eyes and stood up. "I'm keeping out of this completely. If they ask me where I was around this time I'll tell 'em, and so will you, Feli, that I was in my room minding my own damn business."

Despite the hustle and bustle of the city a silence overcame the table and Italy could hardly stand it. Turning toward Germany who was surprisingly still there he frowned. "Aren't you going to leave too, Germany?"

The German simply drank a sip of his beer before looking at the worried nation. He shook his head. That was all he offered him in an answer to his question.

"Aren't you worried too?" Italy once again asked.

Germany sighed and placed his glass down. He was worried, just as much as every other nation but he believed in what France had said. He believed that America could make the right decision, but in concern akin to the other countries' concern he knew that America could make the wrong decision as well.

There was nothing he could do to make things any better or worse than they are now. So he sat still and continued to remain at Italy's side. After witnessing his depressed mood the younger nation looked like he could use some company.

"What do you think would happen... if it happens?" Germany turned to Italy and noticed the boy's
eyes open and dark, darker than he's ever seen since the last weeks before he lost the war. The blond knew what he was talking about. Every nation was. World War III was something everyone knew was coming, but on how soon? No one knew. One thing they all knew was that it would be deadly and catastrophic.

A Nuclear War to destroy the world.

Germany was currently in the process of writing down words to ease the Italian and to insist he stop thinking such dark thoughts when Italy spoke up again, saying, "Would you be with him? With America?"

Germany froze in his writing and looked at Italy. The nation wasn't looking at him. His gaze was down, looking at his clasped hands and twiddling fingers. "I know that you care for him . . . I knew back during the war. You'll throw yourself into war because you care for him, won't you?"

Yes, of course he would. Even though everyone claimed Italy to lack most intelligence the Italian nation was highly observational. Germany was not surprised that Italy had figured out his affections though they had been deeply hidden, especially during the Second World War but he had nothing to say, not for some decades.

Italy would likely claim neutrality in the third World War. Germany, however, refused to. He would stand beside America this time. Italy knew this as did Germany's people. This time, Germany would not regret his allegiances.

Sliding a piece of paper in front of Italy's view Germany offered the younger a smile. Italy picked up the paper and read its message, 'There will be no war.'

It was one thing for Germany to say it when the entire world awaited America and Russia to say that exact announcement to settle their quivering nerves. Italy was not set at ease despite Germany's faithful assurance.

New York, USA. The evening of October 27th 1962

Russia remained calm when the American agents came to him. Their faces grim and their stances tense. They looked quite upset. Russia knew why. He had already received news about the destruction of the American plane. He even knew whose fault it was.

"Please, come with us, Mr. Russia," the humans said. They were of no threat to a nation like Russia, but he was a good guest. As long as he stayed in America's home then he would be polite. He actually doubted he'd be leaving to return to his own home anytime soon. He was certain America's banned his passport in his airports so as to keep an eye and ear on him.

It was a selfish move. Russia needed to return to his people and leaders. He needed to reason with them and to make sure they were not trying to cause the next world war. He could name a few of his people who would be all too happy to. Russia's lived long enough to know when and where to start a war and now was not the time, especially not here. The reasons weren't right and the result would prove no victor rise in the end.

But Russia was a polite guest and listened as the men ushered him into the car and drove him away. He wished to speak to America about this matter and assure him that he had nothing to do with it, but in a way he was glad America was nowhere to be seen. He'd no doubt offer him a black eye or split lip, however, Russia wished his face to be in perfect condition when he returned home.

In honesty he hadn't expected his sincere visit to America's home at the boy's request to turn out like
this. He was practically a prisoner now. Very rude of the host nation to do such a thing to him, but what more could Russia do? If he resisted then America would no doubt come and raise his hand against him. Russia could fight him, he could escape back to his land if he wanted to, but he wanted to assure America and his people that he was not there to fight. If he was then he wouldn't even be there in the first place. He'd be back in his territory giving his generals battle plans and approval to open fire. He had no intention of either. It just perturbed him that he was seen as such a liar in this country.

The ride was quiet and the two agents seated next to and across Russia had nothing to say. Not that he did either. He kept his eyes to the passing roads outside and noticed quite instantly that the trek to the hotel, where Russia assumed he'd be put under house arrest, had changed. They'd reached a different city.

It was America's capital.

Russia doubted they had taken him here for sight-seeing and he was right. After the car came to a halt and the agents let him out he noticed they paid great attention to their surroundings, making sure no one saw him. It seemed scandalous in a way that made Russia want to giggle, but he refrained and continued to allow these American humans to guide him to a small quiet room where someone was waiting for him.

The man smiled and stood to his feet. He reached out, offering his hands to shake. "I am glad you could show up, Mr. Russia."

"As if I had any sort of choice," Russia responded and decided to be rude for once by not taking the offered hand. He frowned at the human to let him know he was tired of being pushed around, especially by a rival people.

"If you would, please sit," the man said, offering him a chair at the table, but once again Russia declined.

"I have been sitting in a car for nearly four hours. I shall stand," Russia replied as he clasped his hands together behind his back and straightened his form. "Am I so bold to ask why I have been ushered to your capital?"

"You have every right to wonder," the man said. "I am sorry for the urgency, but I am certain you know about what has come afoot recently."

"Da, truly I am sorry for your loss," Russia said sincerely and noticed the man narrowing his eyes at him before the human sighed.

"Now, if only you could convince the others that same sincerity," the man said with a shake of his head.

"It would not be wise for me to see any of your cabinet," Russia assured.

"No, you're right," the man agreed. "Time presses for an answer, Mr. Russia. At least by tomorrow. We could have a war."

"Da, I know," Russia said with a nod. "I came here out of an earnest request by Amerika. Now I find myself trapped here, unable to leave, unable to control this mess that has suddenly arose without my knowledge."

"But you are the country, are you not?" the man asked quizzically. "Are you not in control of everything?"
"Is your country?" Russia asked in return. He watched the human frown and with that he smiled. "We are powerful, da, we are near immortal, da, but influence? Sometimes it slides. Tell me, is it Amerika wanting to enter into an invasion or is it he who wishes to continue negotiations?" Russia knew which opinion was America's, as well as the American sitting before him. "We have leaders and rulers to act as an accountability partner and when we are not all there—" Russia tapped his skull. "Then it is they who have the ultimate say. But, again, I am certain you know this by now."

The human folded his hands and nodded. He looked to be in thought. "I congratulate you for putting our government in turmoil without even trying, Russia, but I must ask . . ." His eyes met Russia's. Not many humans looked Russia in the eye like this one did and this was not even America's boss. "What do you feel for America?"

Russia had been prepared to answer or decline a political and diplomatic question. This question was neither.

"From our opposite and tense governments I probably need to not ask this, but as you said, sometimes you do not have the final say in what you, yourself, wish and think," the human said. "Do you think him too young?"

Of course.

"Do you think him too ambitious?"

Does he need to remain within his own hemisphere? Da.

"Do you think him mentally incompetent?"

My, need you ask? After all that spying he's become quite clever. Most fun I've had in decades playing mind games with another nation.

"Are you afraid of him?"

Nyet. I am rather upset that he is so terrified of me. Now I know it is the likes of you to blame for that; using your capitalist scare tactics on an already frightened nation. I would never harm him. Never. Not willingly at least after Russia recalled a few accounts of the times he's physically hurt the boy, but he was a strong nation and so Russia had no doubt that he healed quickly from those incursions.

The human then smiled, almost slyly. "Should I take your silence as agreement to my claims?"

Russia offered his own smile. How funny. "Perhaps you would be so kind to ask Amerika's allies these things. See how truthful they are to you."

"Are you any less than they?" the man asked.

"Nothing seems to deter you from your confirmed thoughts," Russia said with a sigh. "You have wasted my time yet again."

"You would think." The human stood and motioned him toward a door behind him. "If I can be so bold to ask one more favor of you, Mr. Russia?"

Russia's patience was waning and his annoyance rising. He had humored the American humans long enough. They have wasted his time; time best spent attempting to return to his home and hopefully settle this dispute before a war erupted that would likely destroy the entire world.
"I will put my job, as well as my life on the line that you are telling the truth," the human said with an honest smile tugging at the corner of his lips, but the look in his eyes looked grim, almost as if all his hope had dissipated. "I am willing to clear your passport and send you wherever you need to go, back to your land, to Cuba, if only you convince one last person."

The human diplomat turned and opened the door, motioning for Russia to enter. Russia frowned. He was tired of being polite and led around by the tongue. In his land this would not happen, but considering such delicate circumstances, he was willing to please the Americans if only to show he did not want this situation escalating the way it was any more than they did.

Russia commended the human for his attempt to mend ties between their nations, but he was a fool for tricking his own country to meet with Russia, again.

America sat in the room with another human diplomat who had been conversing with him to wait in said room. Once Russia strode into the room America was quick to turn to him, his eyes wide with surprise, but soon those blue irises were filling with an unbridled anger that would have frightened the other countries if they had seen it.

"YOU!" Before anyone knew it America was out of his chair, charging toward Russia with such speed that he was in the taller nation's space before anyone could bat an eyelash. With fist raised the American diplomats paled at the sight of their nation ready to strike the USSR and in such starting the war.

Russia allowed America to strike him once. It was only because he felt he deserved it for his lack of authority over the situation and it was quite funny to see how deathly scared the humans were at what their nation had done. This was not a call to war at all; this was just a temper tantrum, the cause of miscommunication.

America grabbed a hold of Russia's scarf and pulled him close, shaking him. "It was Russian! The missile was Russian! Anderson's dead because of you!" America clenched his fist and retracted it once more, but Russia would not allow him to strike him twice.

Once again the humans in the room were gaping like fish as Russia caught their nation's wrist and squeezed tightly, forcing him to let go of his scarf. America tried swinging his other arm but Russia caught that one as well, now all Russia saw was the panic in the blonde's features as he pulled and tried to pry himself away as if he were poison to the touch.

"No, no!" America's wide eyes turned to the diplomats in the room, his gaze settling on the both of them. "You . . . what have you done? You betrayed me! To him!"

America was afraid now after having met brawn with brawn with Russia; the older nation could feel it in his aura as well as see it in his face. Tugging on the younger forced the American nation to turn back to Russia.

"They called me here to help," Russia stated, but America looked unconvinced.

"Help? Help?!" America was struggling to break free and slowly Russia watched as his anger faded to panic. Soon Russia was witnessing the brink of something dangerous, something he's shown England, as well as Germany. "Let me go, dammit! Let me go right now!"

Russia opened his palms and away America stumbled. He landed against the table he had once been seated at, his glasses now askew on his face. His face was red, either with embarrassment or anger, it didn't matter.
"Traitors," America choked out as he loosened his tie now too tightly wrapped around his neck. His eyes glanced toward his people in the room before holding Russia's concerned gaze. "All of you . . . I'll put every one of you in jail for this. Every one!"

"What a spoiled brat." Just as America turned to leave in refusal to be in the same room as the Russian he heard this. He stopped and turned to Russia who looked quite upset. "You used to never be like this. Never," Russia stated with a displeased frown at his childish behavior.

"Yeah? And you know me so well?" America spat back.

"Da . . . once upon a time," Russia sighed out. Surprisingly the statement had placed a short calm over the American nation. Russia could see his men let out relieved sighs and ease their tense frames while he knew better. He knew that the boy could easily snap back into his idiotic reluctant ways again.

America inhaled a shaky breath before pointing at Russia, as if accusing the false witness. "You did this though . . . it's all your fault. You've been trying to . . . to hurt me since the early 1900's. You're doing this on purpose. You're trying to scare me, to make me back down. I'm not weak, I'm not!"

After the downed U-2F America had become nearly unreasonable to talk to. The day before he had been easier, still just as rude, but safer to talk to. Russia just couldn't believe the paranoia he fed.

"Do you want a war, Amerika?" Russia asked, demanding an answer.

America looked at him. His gaze held his for a moment before America frowned and averted his eyes downward.

"Let me help you, Amerika," Russia once more said as sincerely as he ever had in their cold war. America needed to listen to Russia. He needed to believe that he could settle this dispute if he was released. He needed to believe in him.

So, in the end, was it America who wanted to invade or was it America who wanted to negotiate? The mature one would choose the latter and from his display earlier, America had far to go yet to such a growth, but this time Russia allowed himself to believe in him despite how hurt he had been by him before. His moods could turn and bite so bitterly that Russia just wanted to leave and watch as World War Three arose, but it wasn't right, nothing of it was.

Russia had never been so surprised that day, but what made it to the highest pedestal of his surprise was the way America looked at him when their gaze met once more. The look in America's eyes, why, he hadn't seen that look since the 1860's, since America was caught in the turmoil of his civil war. He looked helpless, unsure of what to do, and in need of desperate help and guidance. And he was looking toward Russia for the answers as if he were a close ally who could grant him security.

Russia didn't believe in miracles anymore, but he could not name it anything short of that as he boarded a plane and left America's home. He would have made way to head right back to Moscow, but he felt it more important that he remain closer to America in assurance that he would not let this horrible mistake come about like he had promised back in America's capital and so he turned the plane south.

He needed to pay Cuba a visit.

Havana, Cuba. Early Morning October 28th 1962

Cuba winced as another bone broke. He felt sorry for the human even if he wasn't his own. Russia did know that humans could not take the same beatings as nations, didn't he? They were frailer and
their life easy to escape them.

"H-Hey, Russia, you can stop. Do you want to kill him?" Cuba spoke up. He was concerned with Russia's attention turning to him at that moment, but he had to do something or else the Soviet officer would be no more and he was certain Russia was going to take him back to the Kremlin to place him on trial, they could kill him then if they wanted to, but not here, not now, not in his home.

When Russia turned his dark violet eyes toward the smaller country he tensed. Russia stepped over the nearly unconscious man—well, he might have been unconscious now, if he was even still alive—and walked up to Cuba. He stopped only inches away from him and then pulled out a letter from his coat and hung it before his eyes.

"Am I not the country? The people? Its government? I am in control, or am I?" Russia's questions disturbed Cuba, more so did the letter swaying in his vision. He knew this letter very well. "You are country too, da? Then you too would be very upset when one of your commanders acts on his own accord and forwardly disobeys set orders. It is embarrassing as it was when Amerika and his people looked at me for answers as to why one of MY men shot down HIS plane." Russia pointed up into the clear night sky forcefully. "I like telling people what to do, not the other way around which is why I bring this—up." Russia shook the paper violently in front of Cuba before leaning back and glaring at him. "You want me to attack first? You want me to waste my missiles and have the world look at me as an enemy?"

"They already do, so why not strike first before they even have a chance?" Cuba reasoned.

Russia chuckled but it was strained and by the way his fists were clenching Cuba could tell his body was more than stressed. "I do not think you understand me correctly." Setting hard and dominant eyes on the small isle nation Russia sneered. "I am the one giving the orders. I am the one gracing you with weapons. I am the one in control. Not you. You are nothing in this grand scheme of things. If war breaks out, and thanks to him," Russia turned toward the unmoving Soviet officer lying on the ground, bloodied and broke, "and it looks like it very well may as of today, then you will be the first to go. Amerika will destroy you, and this island of dirt and rock will be so uninhabitable you'll cease to exist. You may manage to shoot these missiles at Amerika, but he will survive and when he does he'll shoot me next, as will the other countries."

Cuba was frightened by Russia's dominating aura, something he wished he possessed, but more so upset at the nation's insult. They had been on good terms with their mutual hate for America and all things capitalistic but now this was getting out of hand, they were creating a rift. It was America, that boy was too conniving and Russia was falling for it. Why didn't he see this? He had him eating out of the palm of his hand, putting pressure on Russia with threats of violence and destruction just like that boy did to Cuba's brothers and sisters. He was a damn control freak and now he was controlling Russia.

"You're afraid," Cuba insisted. "You're afraid he'll hurt you. Why? You've got more firepower than him any day!"

Once again Russia chuckled. "If only you knew."

"What's that supposed to mean, huh?" Cuba's upset was overriding his self-preservation in front of Russia. He really needed to shut his mouth right about now.

Russia huffed out a sigh and stuffed the letter back into his coat before ordering to his men to contain the commander he'd beaten to a pulp. Turning, he pushed Cuba aside. "Tell your men to patch me through to Moscow."
Cuba had no other choice in the matter. He did as he was told. So Russia sat in a room, communication device pressed to his ear. He didn't care how early it was he needed to speak to his leader right now.

"Good, you are awake," Russia spoke. "Have you made a decision?" He paused to let the man answer before smiling. "Nyet? Good because I will make this decision."

"You are not here," his boss said back to him. "You need to be present and address it to the people."

"Nyet, I do not," Russia insisted. "That is why I have you and you will listen to what I have to say."

"The situation is not good. Either way I will look like the fool," Russia's boss said in reply.

"Da, as it should be after you failed to stop our dear commander from shooting down that U-2F. Perhaps it is you whom I should have let Amerika strike."

"He struck you?" Russia's boss's voice sounded unsettled. "He shouldn't have done that. You shouldn't have let him touch you."

"I can handle myself," Russia proclaimed. "But it seems you cannot. You will agree to whatever Amerika's boss wants, do you hear? Let the world and their leaders see you as a fool, it is your punishment for not coming to me about this situation."

"You told me you wanted me to isolate him! Have I not done just that? He's so afraid Cuba will attack his land that he's not even looking at Europe or the Middle East or even Asia. It's the perfect time to—"

"Now is not the time for that," Russia pressed, his anger deepening his tone. "Not when he is this strong."

The human laughed. "Strong? He is afraid of Cuba, of our missiles, of your missiles. He wouldn't dare move against you, not when the gap is so wide."

"Da, the gap is wide, but not in our favor," Russia informed. How could his boss be so arrogantly careless?

"What are you saying? Have you seen the count?"

"Nyet, but my spies have," Russia informed. He could practically hear the scoff on the other end. "Da, you keep things from me and I keep things from you."

"That information is important; you need to share it with me."

"As you needed to share with me of giving Cuba missiles," Russia stated.

"... how many?"

Russia paused himself. Even a nation like him was intimidated by the number and it was because this number was in favor of a nation so young, so unstable, and so afraid of the world.

"Ten times more," Russia informed. He didn't need to give the exact number because the exact number was close enough to his answer. He trusted his spies. They weren't lying.

He could practically feel his boss turning white and trembling. Now he shared in his regret over this situation.
"How long have you known this?"

"A long time," Russia informed.

"Then why... why did you let me... on national television you let me proclaim that we were superior. You let me challenge him! You even agreed!"

"Da, it was a fun game. Amerika and I play these often, is something countries like to do and humans can't quite understand," Russia informed with a long sigh. "But the fun is over and if he is to continue thinking I am superior in arms then you will take the blame and we will take our missiles and leave."

Russia's boss would have to make sacrifices, and so would Russia.

Washington D.C. Morning of October 28th 1962

America didn't know how he managed to fall asleep. He hadn't even known he'd been asleep until his eyes opened to take in a new day. It was strange, for the past thirteen days of this crisis he hadn't slept at all. It wasn't like he needed it; he was a nation after all, but the concept of sleep signified ease of mind and body. He scoffed at the thought.

He had never been so tense before in his life, there was no possible way he'd been that relaxed to sleep. But he slept, there was no denying it and all that America could think of for a possible explanation was of one nation informing him with so much sincerity and assurance that he would settle this that America found himself at ease. When was the last time he felt this way? Well, it was certainly before the war. Perhaps the '20s? No, couldn't have been. No, it had to have been before both of the wars, back when Russia...

Russia...

America slept with ease because of the Union of Soviet Socialistic Republics told him he'd make everything better. Like a parent informing their child that a kiss to their "boo boo" would make the pain go away. America was not a child anymore, he could handle anything on his own even this threat to his home security but he could not deny how good it felt to place the paranoia burden on someone else; to pass the load onto another's shoulders.

It felt like old times somehow. America couldn't explain it if asked, not that he'd tell anyone of course, but it's how he felt and that was that. Even if this new day brought on problems raising DEFCON to its highest number America was glad to have been released of the tension if just for a few hours.

Reality hadn't hit him yet until he got up off the couch he had zonked out on and headed into the oval office only to be tackled by a crying Italy. He was almost forced off balance but he steadied himself and patted the redheaded nation.

"You did it! Grazie, grazie, grazie!" Italy was about bawling in America's arms much to the confusion of the blond, but as he looked up to see the relief on his boss's face from where he sat at his desk and then noticed the presence of the other countries in the room—when had they arrived in D.C.? Only then did America come to the conclusion that everything was finally over.

Russia had come through.

"It's finally over, Alfred," England said with a smile as he came up to him and took his hand in his, shaking it in gratitude.
America glanced over toward France who was seated on the sofa looking pleased and unreasonably relieved while Germany offered a nod of acknowledgement and—was that the hint of a smile he saw? Couldn't be. Canada was there too. He walked up to America and patted his shoulder.

"You look better. That's good," his brother said with a relieved smile. He had been worried, not only for the fear of war escalation, but for his sibling as well. That was Canada for you.

"What are you going to do now?" Italy asked after finally letting go of America and pulling away.

"I'm gonna make sure those missiles are gone," he informed with a sure nod. "I won't trust Russia until I see for myself that they're back in his home."

"No, you will not."

Everyone turned to see America's boss stand up and come around the desk to stand in front of his nation.

"What do you mean?" America asked. "Why not?"

"Because you're hereby ordered to go on vacation," the President said with a smile for his country. "Trust your people, Alfred, we'll make sure the job's done for you."

A smile twitched at the corner of America's lips and before he knew it Canada's hands were pulling at his shoulders.

"I know!" the northern nation said. "You could spend your vacation at my house!"

"What? No way, dude, your place is freaking freezing this time of year," America complained.

"But that's the best part," Canada defended. "We can have hot chocolate by the fireside and ski. You'd have fun, come on."

"That sounds like fun, right, Germany. Can we come too, Canada? Pretty please," Italy poked in, clapping his hands together as if in prayer. Germany sighed while England smiled

"If Al doesn't mind," Canada explained.

"I don't," America said with a sigh and chuckle. "You were all there for me during this and there's no way I can deny any presence. I thank you all, truly."

"How did you manage it?" England spoke up, the wisp in his voice sounding as if he still couldn't believe it was all over. "How did you manage to settle everything without resorting to violence? I know you, you're ninety-nine percent brute and the rest a mystery."

"Hey!" America complained.

"He talked," Italy spoke up as if to answer for America. "Right?" He turned and smiled at the strong nation. America smiled back and nodded. It was the simplest reply and one that the world wouldn't question. They didn't need to know the full details nor of what Russia had done for him. They had both been so desperate to settle this peacefully. He couldn't remember the last time the two of them had been so passionate about something so similar.

America supposed he should thank Russia for being so cooperative and for going out of his way to help. That was the polite thing to do. No, he couldn't. He knew the game. Now he needed to stay away from him as much as possible to shun and make the world think that he was the bad guy
because he was, right?

Moscow, Russia. Late December 1962

After months of absence and anxious awaiting the ruler of the house finally returned. It had been during the evening when supper had just been finished and Ukraine had been putting away the dishes. She heard the door open and close with a heavy thud. She knew no one had gone out that night, especially not with the start of the snowfall and so her heart jumped and she quickly set down the dishware and ran into the foyer to find her baby brother leaning against the front door looking terribly exhausted.

"Vanya," Ukraine sighed out, moving forward to wrap her arms around him but stopped herself upon noticing his mood visually sprawling across his facial features. "Is everything alright, Vanya?"

When the younger nation finally opened his eyes and looked at her, his sister finally saw just how red his eyes were and the darkening circles lingering underneath.

"I am tired," was all the taller nation said before pushing himself off of the door, leaving behind his luggage for the others to put away, and heading up the stairs.

Ukraine's worried gaze watched him as he reached his room. She observed him open the door before closing it quickly. He let out a sigh before turning down the hall, taking his heavy coat off in the process. That was all she saw of her brother as he disappeared into one of the guest rooms. Curiously she walked up to Russia's room. She opened the door only to find her little sister laying in Russia's bed.

"Natalia!" Ukraine complained. The younger nation opened her eyes and looked at her older sister in annoyance after being disturbed from her sleep.

"What?" Belarus asked, poking her head up from the pillows.

"You have your own room, please sleep there."

"Nyet," Belarus refused. "Brother's not using it and this is the only room that comforts me in his absence."

"But he needs it," Ukraine explained.

"Not when he's gone playing war with that whore," Belarus replied, crossing her arms.

"Natalia," Ukraine gasped at her little sister's mouth. She thought she had raised her better. "Please don't say such mean things about Amerika, and I'll have you know brother's returned."

Belarus's eyes widened and she immediately jumped to her feet. "He has? Where is he?!"

"In one of the guest rooms, sleeping," Ukraine informed. "He would have rested here if you weren't occupying it."

"But he can sleep beside me," Belarus offered.

"Nyet. You know how uncomfortable you make him feel and that is the last thing I want him feeling after coming home. You followed the crisis with us. You know where he's been the past few months and how exhausted he is from everything."

"I can make it up to him," Belarus reasoned. "I can go to him and give him a prese—"

Begrudgingly Belarus listened. Ukraine however set to informing the others of Russia's return and his state. After which she took it upon herself to tend to her brother. She made him breakfast and a hot cup of coffee and carried the items on a tray up to where he resided.

"Vanya?" Ukraine rapped against the door before pushing it open. "Vanya, I have breakfast."

She came in and set the tray down beside the bed where Russia was sleeping. Usually she'd let him sleep but knowing him he hadn't had a proper meal since his departure so she gently shook him awake to feed.

"Vanya, please, eat," she urged with her motherly smile.

Pleased, she watched Russia sit up and rub his stiff face before looking down at the tray offered. It never ceased to amaze Ukraine how her little, malnourished, scrawny, penniless brother grew up to become so big and strong. She'd like to take the praise in raising him to such a stature, but in truth she hadn't been there for him as much as she needed to have been. So with sheer will and determination her little Ivan grew himself up and the result of doing such was sitting right in front of her.

"Here, coffee." Ukraine picked up the cup and offered it to her brother.

Russia mumbled a, "Spasi," and drank the black liquid. Ukraine felt content just by watching him drink and warm himself. There was no other feeling in the world than watching your younger sibling eat, drink, and thrive. It wasn't easy for countries to survive, a lot more died than remembered, and they just so happened to be among the lucky.

"Go on, eat," Ukraine bade but just as soon as she had her brother frowned. He turned and placed the coffee mug down and remained as quiet as ever. "What is wrong, Vanya?"

Then Russia laid back down once again with his back to his sister. "I am tired," he replied and that was it.

"You'll feel better once you eat," Ukraine explained with a kind smile as she touched his broad shoulder and leaned over him to look at his face. He hadn't closed his eyes again but they held a far-off look in them. Ukraine feared him lost in his thoughts; he's been like this as of late.

"Nyet, I won't," Russia assured.

Ukraine frowned with worry. She rubbed his arm in comfort like she used to when he was little. "What is wrong, Vanya? Tell me. I will listen."

"I'm tired," he said once more. Ukraine knew he was saying this to get her to leave him but as his older sister she refused to leave until she discovered the real problem and came up with a plausible solution.

"You took care of everything, da?" Ukraine began, referring to the recent crisis. "Then you should not be so upset." Ukraine sighed. She remembered just last year where they had a similar crisis at the wall in Berlin. Russia came home in almost the same mood and when Ukraine pressed for a reason she had a vodka bottle thrown near her head. She hoped the same outcome would not happen today but she was not afraid. She found out why her brother was depressed back then and she will now, preferably from the horse's mouth. He needed to talk. Talking helped relieve stress and by touching him Ukraine felt him stiff with it.
"Did Amerika hurt you again?" She asked. She knew of her brother's feelings for him. She knew that even after his revolution he held onto those deep passionate pulls turning him to look at the young western nation with eyes full of want and longing despite his bosses' hatred for him. She couldn't stand to see her brother hurt like this and from hearing all that had happened in the past she feared little America's own feelings, once stated to be so intimate for her brother, might have faded. After all it's been nearly half a century since Russia was forced to cut ties with his secret lover.

Ukraine had never seen him so heartbroken and that look, forever ingrained in her memory, would always show up when he was near the boy. She disliked it greatly and if she could do something about it then she would. She knew Russia assumed to be holding his countenance well. He could with his bosses and people and the other countries around, but never from his sister—even Belarus could see this.

"Nyet," came Russia's quiet reply. "He couldn't if he tried. His endless array of missiles are useless."

"Not—" Ukraine leaned over her brother again and pressed her fingers to his chest, touching his slowly beating heart. "If they strike here."

Russia looked up at her, turning slightly. Ukraine smiled softly, sadly. "Didn't I tell you not to go? They could have settled this without you. You know he'd accuse you the moment you set foot in his land."

"I had to go," Russia explained. "Because Khrushchev never told me about giving missiles to Cuba. That was a stupid move on his part. When he had me remove the missiles I removed more so this issue would never have a chance to appear in the future. He didn't like it nor did Cuba. That was why I was late returning home. Izvinite."

"Don't be," Ukraine said. "I am glad you are standing up to your bosses." She bowed her head sadly in remembrance to some of Russia's first bosses after the civil war and how hard they had been on him. "Maybe if you were in those years you wouldn't have lost them . . . and him." The royal family and young America; the two most important things in Russia's life at the time, maybe still even today.

Russia sighed, regretting remembering that time when he fought for those things and lost . . . lost everything. So he decided to let his mind dwell on more recent affairs. That didn't help any.

"He'd been so angry with me, Katyusha."

Ukraine's ears keened, motioning for her brother to continue. "Did you tell him you didn't know about the missiles?"

Russia chuckled before sitting back up. "You don't say those things in the game. If I told him that I have been unaware of a few of my missiles going missing from my bunkers and then turning up in Cuba's home who lived right next-door to Amerika then he would believe I have no control of my operations. Nyet, that would not turn well for me."

Ukraine understood, well, to an extent. She's heard her brother speak about this "game" before. Usually, before, she was certain he had been playing one with England and now it seems the challenger is America. She could listen all she wanted to Russia's problems but when he spoke about the strategies of this game of theirs she just didn't quite understand it and felt she never would.

All she knew was that Russia and America's game was dangerous with only everyone else but them on the losing end. But she knew it was necessary for the both of them to remain on top.

"Then—how did you settle everything?" Ukraine asked. She's heard about America's violent temper
from many a nation and the end results were never good.

There it was, a smile of remembrance. Ukraine watched her brother's lips turn into this and now she was confused.

"He asked me for help," Russia answered, that weariness on his face faded just a little from the lighter mood. "Not verbally, but he looked at me and asked me in silence for assistance. I wonder if he even knew he did this. He had been with his people when it happened after all. But, when I left he did not stop me, and he withheld the command for the invasion."

"Then . . . does that mean he trusts you again?" Ukraine found that behavior odd especially after the strain of their last encounter.

Russia simply chuckled as if what she said was outrageously funny. He said nothing, just simply shook his head. Slowly his tired eyes turned toward the window, painted white with heavy snow. "But I saw him, Katyusha . . . I saw the boy who used to trust me. In that moment he did. That one moment he put everything on me and I swore not to let him down. Heh, what would Stalin think of me now. I'd be labeled as a traitor for bowing to Amerika's wishes."

Ukraine wished Russia would forget about that dark man. He had caused nothing but hurt to Russia, both mentally and physically. She had been there to watch it and she was ashamed of herself. As his older sister she should have been able to help him, but no one could, Stalin had been too powerful, even for Russia.

But after hearing Russia speak of America like this and what he had seen in the boy she smiled and beamed with a reviving hope. Maybe, just maybe America was still the same deep inside, in mind, in feeling. Maybe his feelings were still there, lingering in the wake of tragedy like Russia's. Unlike Belarus, Ukraine had known about Russia's and America's secret courting. She remembered being so anxious for her brother to officially announce it to the world because she wanted her brother to have the best. With little America by his side she knew that, at least, the world would feel a jealousy for Russia and all the blessings he had for once.

Still, she wanted this for him, but with so many clashing ideals it was proving more difficult especially if one or both refused to cooperate with one another.

Placing her hand on his knee, Ukraine smiled optimistically. Someone had to be in this household. "Brother, once everything is settled down, you should try opening a line with Amerika and his people." It was a good idea. Plus, it would be much safer to have the two have available instant communication when misunderstandings happened, and they happened a lot between those two.

"Nyet," Russia dejected. "You do not understand his temper. When he is upset with someone he will remain so for decades, perhaps centuries."

This was no good. Ukraine could see the weariness in her brother returning. Having so much power looked so hard, and so lonely. Even though Russia had so many living with him in his house she could see the loneliness in his movements and eyes.

What was a big sister to do? She couldn't go on seeing her brother like that. So, she left him alone and let him rest. Backing away she realized that if her brother wasn't going to try then she would. She wasn't good at this "game" of theirs but she was good at sticking to a belief and she believed it was a good thing for her brother and America to finally settle on communication terms. And she was certain she'd be able to convince the diplomats of this importance as well. To them they'd see a safer security between the nations' intentions and operations; to her she sees it as a way for her brother and America to finally begin talking again, if they'd cooperate that is.
"Sestra, what are those?" Russia knew exactly what they were and he especially knew they were not of his make and model, but he wanted his sister to explain herself.

"This, dear brother, is your hotline with Amerika," Ukraine informed as she motioned to the four machines being ushered in by movers. They were teleprinters, American teletype machines. Ukraine had actually accomplished what she had wanted: a means for Russia and America to speak.

Russia was not against the idea of a hotline, many of his people were though, he had just not thought America would accept the notion and so he never brought it up. When had his sister . . . ?

"Do forgive me, brother, but I had contacted Amerika's diplomat before everyone met in Geneva. I urged him to talk to your representative of whom I spoke with too before he departed to Switzerland's home. They brought it up during their stay and everyone agreed to urge them to condone. So they signed and here we are setting up the teletypes. Isn't this nice?"

Ukraine was smiling despite having gone around her brother. He had not said she could not do this, but he hadn't given her permission for it either. Russia just didn't know what to think of it, partly because he felt he was still slumbering up in his room. Had America's representative really approved? He had assumed the entire populace of the United States were less inclined more so to the Russians—to him. Perhaps it had been America himself who agreed—no, couldn't be. He was still just as upset and that temper of his could blind him for decades even to political musts.

"These are from Amerika?" Russia and Ukraine turned to see their little sister poking at the type board. "Trash," she sneered just like that she slammed the machine down out of the mover's hands, its hulk crashing against the floor.

"Natalia!" Ukraine gasped and ran over to the machine as if it were a fallen soldier. She fell to her knees and examined the teleprinter. She knew it was broken, pieces were hanging off, and for that she nearly cried. Looking up at her brother and sister she really did look troubled. "What will I say?" she asked quite helpless, as if some punishment would befall on her for not taking proper care of the foreign machine. "What will the Americans think when they find out we broke one?"

Russia sighed at the pathetic display from his sister; even Belarus had crossed her arms and averted her gaze from the hopeless sight of their older sibling. Ukraine could look so lost at times it was pointless, like right now. So, after growing annoyed of seeing his sister mourn over the contraption he held out his hands and said, "Give it me. I will fix it."

Gingerly she picked it up and gave the machine to her brother. Russia took it in his arms and examined it, pinpointing what had snapped loose. Pushing the pieces back together they popped securely in place and that was that. He handed it back to his sister, the machine hardly looking damaged at all after its tumble to the floor.

"Good as new," Russia assured his paranoid sister. "Now take it to sit with the others."

"Spasibo, Vanya!" Ukraine praised, throwing her arm around Russia and nearly squashing his face in her br—bosom.
"Enough!" Russia gasped, pulling away when he had the chance. "Away."

Russia knew why Ukraine had done this, he knew she desired for better relations to awaken between he and America again. Despite her weakness as a country she was very strong-willed and if she set her mind to something it would happen whether sooner or later, she was that persistent. Sometimes Russia wished he had that strong of a heart because heavens knew he could use one after all the bruises and attempts at its life it's been through. Still, with the way Ukraine was acting it almost seemed she, herself, had been the one anxious to speak directly with the American nation. He doubted it, but it just looked that way.

He had seen the way her eyes lit up when they tested out the machines and had nearly been choked to death in her br—bosom again when a message successfully ran through from the capital of America. She had been the one to pick it up and to translate it before showing her brother and the others there, watching this landmark in history.

"Look, look, it worked!" she exclaimed, showing Russia. "Do you think Amerika wrote this? I don't really get it too much, but do you think he wrote it?"

Russia took the piece of paper and read it to himself, 'The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog's back 1234567890.' Russia understood why his sister was confused. This message wasn't meant to make sense, after all it was a test and so the Americans were testing out their keys.

"Nyet, this is no doubt their communication department just testing out their keys," Russia replied to his sister's question and noticed right away her disappointment. She'd never had any sort of contact with the western nation, partly because Russia had been reluctant to introduce him to his sister. He was going to in time but his time ran out and so America and his sisters have yet to make a formal introduction.

Russia, however, did not have any doubt that America was with his communications experts right now, watching, waiting for their reply to declare the hotline a success.

"Now we have to send them something," Ukraine said, looking toward her brother. "What do you want to say?"

Russia thought of many things to say but couldn't decide.

"Go on, sit, sit," Ukraine urged as she pushed her brother to sit in front of one of the teletype machines and write something. "Say something to them—to him."

Say something to America? Very well.

Washington D.C. USA. August 30th 1963

Was it a crime that America had wanted the darn thing to fail? After all there were still quite a few of his people who disliked the idea of a hotline with his sworn enemy. They believed it should have gone to a proven ally and he agreed, but his representative was right; having a secure and clear transmission connection with the USSR was safe just in case any more "crisis's" happened.

So there he was, standing over his men as they typed up a message to send to Moscow and transmitted it. He wanted to hear no reply because that meant they didn't receive their message and that meant it failed. Why? Because he just wasn't up for talking to Russia. Verbally, no, and in text, no. He needed time to get his bearings against him after what transpired just last year, but no, his men thought it wise to set this up as soon as possible. Fine, if they wanted it then they could run it through, but if it failed then he wouldn't lift a finger to help, that's what he mentally decided the
moment he walked into the room to witness the moment of truth.

The creaking and whizzing of the machine gave proof to America's misfortune. The message popped out and was received. Damn.

One of his men took it up, but before he translated it he smiled and handed the letter and translation book over to him. "Here," he said. "Why don't you do the honors, America."

America didn't want to, but if they insisted. He translated it slowly before rereading it in clearer understanding. It was some sort of poem, something about a sunset in Moscow.

'The sun, red, glistening ever still.
I see it now, right here, from this window sill.
The beauty in it as it descends over Moscow.
Oh, my capital, which rises to the heavens above.
It reaches to the sun but he sinks down, away.
The buildings, once aglow, now bend with the shadows of dismay.
The beauty is gone.
The city alone.
Now the darkness lingers.
Wrapping around man, woman, and child with chilling fingers.
But, oh Moscow, do not be sad.
Straighten up and be glad.
Never forget, never cease
To love the one you miss
Because if you should ever cease to love
Then forget, forget you will, my dove
That the sun will return on the morrow
To wipe away the tears of all the past sorrow.'

"What does it say, America?" Suddenly, the nation had realized he'd been standing there rereading the message to himself for a good few minutes, neglecting to tell the others in anxious waiting.

"Oh, just something about Moscow's setting sun, pretty lame," America replied as he folded the piece of paper and stuffed it into his jacket pocket. "So, it worked. Congrats, gentleman. I guess I'll go tell the boss man. Carry on."

America had never felt so uncomfortable in a room before and he wondered if it was all the eyes staring expectantly at him or the message from Russia. That was right; he knew it had been from him. He was surprised that he had been the one to personally respond back to their test transmission
and in honesty America had thought about sending something back, but decided against it. That was why he had a communications team, so he didn't have to put up with Russia's bullshit and that letter pressing against his chest inside his jacket was just that and nothing more.

Moscow, Russia. August 30th 1963

"What did you send them, brother?" Ukraine asked.

Russia smiled. "Something only one person in that room will understand. The machine types well. They will be useful, thank-you for getting them, Katyusha."

This reminded Russia of a time when America had tried to set a line straight up through Alaska and then through Siberia. The line had failed for reasons unknown. Russia had been quite disappointed and America terribly sad. He didn't know why they hadn't pursued trying again.

It was a shame that the first successful line connecting the two countries was brought about by political tension and forced solution, but his sister was right, this would help clear communications much faster and now Russia was no longer required to take any more trips to America's home in person. If he had any issue with him he had the connection of which to contact him by.

After everyone had settled down they began leaving the room one by one, feeling content that the line had worked. Russia opted to stay and stare at the machines. He pressed down a few more keys on the keypad before rapping his fingers against the bulk of it.

Turning to the other three machines Russia came up with an idea. He stood up and unplugged the machine in front of him and took it in his arms. They already had three, what was the need of one more? He decided that his office would suit the machine much better.

Washington D.C. November 25th 1963

He really should have gone home. Everyone had been telling him this; said it was good for him to get away from the politics and the media every once in a while. They were probably right, but there America was, tie loose, suit jacket laying on the floor, a glass of bourbon in his hand, sitting in the communications room in the white house. Why? Partly because it was the first room he stumbled into after snatching the bottle of liquor, but mostly because no one would look for him there. The entire wing was empty; he was alone for halls away.

It was funny, really, the room was always so noisy with the machines running and beeping and creaking out transmissions, but now they were dead silent. Still, America could hear them in his mind a-groaning and screeching, spitting out messages that would be handed to him and he'd race down the hall to give said message to his boss, Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. Kennedy . . .

The name made America frown and he promised himself that with every frown he'd take a drink. So he pressed the glass to his lips and let the burning liquid slide down his throat. With a smack of his lips America examined his cup, it was empty. Turning around in his chair he reached for the bottle of alcohol to replenish his comfort drink, it sitting on one of the desks, next to one of the four teleprinters.

As his arm reached across the desk the teletype machine closest to him started up. America watched it curiously and wondered if it was malfunctioning for a short moment. It would not surprise him since, after all, it was commie technology.

Everything seemed to run fine though as the machine beeped and vibrated out a message.
America didn't move for a while. He stared at the small note bearing only a few words on it like it wasn't there, like what he had just witnessed was a figment of his imagination, that it was the drink. Of course the nation knew for a fact he had not drunken near enough to begin influencing his sight. With a sigh America ripped off the message and snatched up the Cyrillic translator book. It didn't take him long to match the words with an English one and soon America was repeating the message translated in his head.

'I am sorry for your loss.'

America read it three more times before he chuckled. Soon he was bursting with laughter because so many of his people blamed the Soviets, said they were the ones who assassinated Kennedy. No one was certain if that were really true, but it was easy to blame them. So when America read the message phrased like that of a comforting friend he couldn't help but laugh. Oh, if the media got a hold of this.

It didn't take long before America's cheeks hurt from the smiles of his laughter, so a frown was eminent and the sneer expected. With a snarl America crumbled the message, tossed the translator book, and swept his arms across the desks sitting next to each other and toppled all of the communist machines, knocking them over to the floor and destroying their frames to non operational. He didn't care if his people needed those machines, what they had to say was unimportant and therefore their desk occupation a waste of space.

Kennedy hadn't been the first since Lincoln to get murdered, but he had been the first since where his presence and guidance had been greatly needed. America felt lost without him because he was so angry and Kennedy had kept his anger in check, perfectly balanced him off and now with his new boss, why the man was letting America do as he pleased because he thought he needed the space in this time of mourning.

The last of his Presidents murdered was McKinley but he had a strong Vice-President who stepped into the oval office and filled his shoes even better than he previously had. Teddy had been great and America had been close to him, especially after how quickly the man had gotten him back on his feet after McKinley’s death. Lynden? The man was trying but he just didn't understand what America needed. He didn't need words of condolence he needed orders. Something, anything to keep his mind off of the loss.

So, of course Mr. Johnson wouldn't care for the damage America had wrought. Yeah, he could be the one to explain to the Soviet bastards what happened to their given machines. America was through conversing with them.

Just then, one of the machines creaked and groaned. It had been the same one that had given the resent message. What surprised America was that it was still working after being tossed to the ground with its brothers and sisters and that it was functioning even with the cord having been ripped out in its descent to the floor. It disturbed America to an extent but his curiosity pulled him to it and forced his hand to rip the newly transmitted message out.

This one was slightly longer than the previous, letting America know that it wasn't a copy of the one before. Glancing over toward the disheveled book that lay across the room America had a decision to make: either ignore the message and pound the malfunctioning teleprinter into dust so it could transmit and receive no more, after all its messages weren't of importance, or he could get up, take up the book and translate the letter to quell his curiosity.

America chose the latter.

With a sigh he got up, walked across the room, and picked up the book before returning to the
miracle machine and sitting himself down on the floor. Planting the machine upright again America took the message and opened the translator book. After a while the strange alphabet became clearer to America.

'He was a good leader. It is a shame America didn't inherit any of his level-headedness. That would certainly make his attitude more appeasing.'

America reread that insert more times than the previous one, thinking he had mistranslated. But he hadn't.

America gapped. At a time like this the USSR—Russia—was sending him some sort of joke? The hell?!

It would have been a rather silly sight if anyone had seen it but no one was around and so America felt no shame in shooting the teleprinter in front of him the bird.

"Fine, you wanna play with me? I'm game," America muttered as he typed out a message of his own.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

'They blame you.'

Russia chuckled. He had expected as much, but what he hadn't expected was his message getting a reply, a reply from the American nation himself. If it had been a human who read it they would have not understood the word play between nations and so the response let Russia know his intended recipient had indeed received the transmission meant for him if he had so happened to read it—he had.

Russia had not directly spoke with America since the crisis of last year and, while it was good to keep the world happy, neither were willing to converse often publically, which is why Russia hid himself from his boss because sometimes the wants of the nation differed from the expectations of the people.

Pulling the paper bearing the message on it over a lighter Russia lit the parchment aflame and then placed the ashes in a plate to gather and discard it later. He would rather not deal with the scolding of his boss for conversing with America without a political cause of need if he found out. There had been things his boss kept from him and so there will be things Russia will keep from him . . . like this conversation.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

'Do you blame me?'

America's finger paused over the letters typed out on the paper saved for the translation. He frowned and placed the book down. He went to quietly type out a message in response but stopped himself before sending it. He reread his reply and for some strange reason, all of the accusations and insults littered in the response didn't sit right with the young country . . . like he missed church on Sunday. Since when did any sort of guilt build up when he came to diss Russia?

With a sigh, America scrapped the original message and instead wrote something else.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

Russia finally decided to put out the eating flame after much internal struggle with the need to reread
the message for the fifteenth time. Setting it down before him Russia's fingers wiped across every word, every letter with gentle carefulness.

'I thought we have no say in what to do or even speak. That the will of the people is our own.'

Russia couldn't believe what he was reading. He had no doubt he had been conversing with America up to this point because of this note.

Hundreds of years ago he and America—he had been so little back then—spoke about this after the young country had asked him for his opinion. One not of and by the people, but his own. And Russia had responded with this phrase as he read now on the matter. Now that Russia thought about it he had just placed America in the same position to answer like such.

Russia very much liked that memory; just the two of them, speaking to each other face to face with no transgression against the other, only the hope to grow closer. That was an innocent time. A time when America used to look up to Russia. He missed those days. They didn't last as long as he wished. The good days never do.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

America greedily snatched up the message the moment the machine spit it out. With the translation book in his lap he glanced back and forth from the article.

'What happened to your individualism?'

America laughed and the next message he typed flowed out of him easier.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

'I'm a nation. I suppose I don't really have that luxury, but I'll fight to make sure my people do.'

Of course America would say that. Every opinion of his was worth fighting and dying for. Violence where it wasn't needed.

Russia set the message aflame over the plate and typed out another letter.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

America was in the midst of shredding the letters to unrecognition when the teleprinter shook and released another message. Immediately he stopped what he was doing and sat himself down to take and read the Russian's message.

'Always a fighter. Don't you grow weary?'

America snickered. What kind of a question was that?

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

'Heroes don't have time for that.'

Russia had never burned a message any quicker than that one. For the past century he's wondered where that boy took up to calling himself such. It annoyed everyone and was completely overused. Russia felt this very strongly.

Leaning back in his chair Russia pondered his response. He didn't feel like answering back with a playful quirk, not too much at least seeing how it seemed the American nation would only talk to him
if the conversation wasn't too serious and the threats coming off as playful jests to fool the world to their deadly intentions.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

America glared at the message spitting out of the machine. This one took longer to come than the others and America hated waiting for anything . . . apparently even for Soviet letters.

"Thank-you," America sassed the machine as he took up the message and began translating it.

'What would you do if there was nothing more to fight for?'

America blinked in confusion. Was that an honest question or a retort? With a shrug America decided to answer it with a sincere answer of his own and if it had been asked to poke fun at his productiveness then Russia would turn out to look like the jerk instead of America.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

'That sounds like a means to retire. Just me, the dog, the cat, back woods, log cabin, porch sitting, swimming hole fishing, catch up on some ball hitting bat.'

It would have been a confusing response if Russia hadn't understood America so well, not that he figured America knew.

So that was the western nation's paradise. Funny how much it had changed since the last time America had told him. America never typed in a question in his response to ask Russia of his view of paradise so Russia didn't respond and inform him of the paradise he borrowed. It had not changed one bit and if America asked Russia would have replied in kind, 'A summer's day surrounded by tall stalks of sunflowers, laying in their cool shadows over cast, gazing up at the endless blue skies above, counting clouds with you in my arms.'

Once upon a time America had dreamt the same.

Russia leaned back in his chair and sighed. His violet eyes drifted over to the window in his office. The snow had picked up and he could already see General Winter staring at him, taunting him as he pressed his hand against the glass and frosted it over. The old ghost enjoyed seeing Russia's agonized torment. It seemed it was the only reaction that pleased him in any way. Couldn't expect any less from one so cold.

Russia really should stop talking to America. He knew this. Even though the boy may be unaware but his change in thought and interest affected Russia enticing reactions the General laughed at and mocked. It certainly did not comfort his hurting heart inside his chest.

Russia rubbed his chest at the thought of the organ. It would begin to start hurting again he knew it. After the incident at the checkpoint Russia had felt what the unbearable damage had wrought on the surprisingly frail organ. He knew it was the General making it ache like so to arouse his body to action, but Russia resisted any dark thought knowing the outcome would bring no relief to stop the pain in his heart. These were the games he played with General Winter, much different and far more deadly than the games he played with little America.

But, After Prussia's revelation Russia realized just how broken America really was. The façade of some strong and super-gifted hero warrior was just that; a façade; to put up against those he deemed a threat to his safety, because he was scared, frightened that what happened to him so long ago would find its way into repetition and from it he feared he would die. No nation wished to die so America built his walls high and armed them with a multitude of weapons.
What hurt the most was knowing America viewed him as one of those with the potential to harm him, to break him in the most cruel way. Russia would love to correct him, to show him that his arms could hold him with the strength of protection, not the crush of destruction; that his touch was gentle, not harsh and calloused; that he could utter words of love, not lies of hate; that he could kiss just as gentle as America's previous lovers if not more loving; that he could look into his eyes and reveal to him his innermost desires; that he could let him into his heart.

But, Russia, himself, had a façade to keep up. Since his heart still longed for America, a nation much younger, more naïve, carrying different ideals, then Russia's people could not know. Long ago he was free to tell his people of the desires of his heart and they had listened and accepted and even looked forward to his and America's union, but again that was years ago and those understanding people are long gone . . . long dead.

Russia had been ready to stop pursuing America, after Checkpoint Charlie he'd been hurt enough. He had accepted their differences, those obvious dislikes for the other and that he'd die as he watched him from afar, but Prussia's information sparked his dead hope back to life. The hope that there was still something there in common of the other.

Their brokenness.

Would it be so wrong for two broken nations to find comfort in the other despite their straining tensions? Russia didn't think so but America apparently had other ideas. It was like starting all over again with him. If Russia could even claim their relationship to be "starting over."

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

America honestly had no idea why he felt so disappointed when the machine remained quiet and unproductive. He checked the thing over multiple times and found nothing wrong with it, aside from the already stated abnormalities. The operational light was still on, so he assumed it was still working.

Yet, there were no more letters.

America thought back on what he said and assumed he left a means to end the conversation. What was he expecting? Have a friendly chat with Russia like it was the 1800's when they . . . when they were so close . . .

The thought depressed America bitterly. The thought of a friendship lost and of a love not yet arriving to full bloom hurt too much to wish to linger thoughts upon. So America accepted the end. It had been a surprise and dare he say pleasant occurrence to speak with Russia privately—well, America was alone, he wasn't so certain about Russia, though deep down inside, in truth, America felt that Russia was just as alone as he. As alone as he.

Shaking the thoughts from his head America stood up and took his jacket up from off the floor. Walking over to the desks he picked up his cup and drink and turned off the single lamp in the room that had been left on. He glanced back into the room and couldn't shake the feeling that he felt sad . . . so very similar to 1919 when he finally left Russia's land after all hope . . . was lost. To humans that was generations ago, to America, it was yesterday and he felt like he was reliving it today no matter how much he regretted getting himself so worked up and open to feel those things once again.

No. No, he would not let his feelings control him. Time and time again his bosses as well as friends continued to tell him to start thinking more logically. They were right because logic was never wrong and therefore would never hurt you.
America closed the door to the communications room with a soft click and turned to the dark hallway before him. He dreaded returning to his home in D.C. because he knew it involved drinking and wallowing and those were two things he hated the most.

America took three steps before he stopped. Sharp ears caught the sound of that damn teleprinter and immediately America found himself turning, bursting back into the communications room, tossing his held items on the desks and skidding to a halt in front of the machine that looked very pleasing with its newly printed message.

America eagerly took up the translator book and began deciphering the letter.

'Am I a threat to your paradise?'

America sighed and sat himself back down in front of the teletype machine.

'Yes,' he wanted to type out but knew he was unable to for so many reasons. 'Because you keep dragging me back to those sunflower fields.' That was America's honest true-to-heart reply but he knew if he told Russia this he would likely not understand. America understood, the Russia nation had more important things on his mind than to remember something so trivial that long ago. Something that's never coming back.

Little did he know that the two were nothing but ships in the night.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

'Yes.'

Russia expected as much. He was used to being the blame of people's troubles, and strife of their cries of hunger and cries for work. He knew very well what it was like to wear the label of, "bad guy." Today's media, especially the U.S.'s media made sure to spread it continuously and everywhere.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

"If I cared for your happiness I should think I should make myself vanish from the face of the earth.'

America smiled. It was funny because there really was no one who cared for America that much to do that. No one loved a superpower. He knew Russia could second that comment.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

'Then it's a good thing you don't care.'

Russia was confused by the reply. Was America applauding his stated lack of concern or was he saying that he . . .? No, it couldn't be that. Even Russia sometimes couldn't figure what America was thinking despite being his greatest rival because at times, and everyone knew this, the boy said things that had no sense in them whatsoever.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

'You are a mystery at times.'

America clicked his tongue and beamed with self-pride.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963
'Got to keep you Soviets on your toes.'

Russia chuckled. He knew America was smart, smarter than he let on to the rest of the world. His mask of ignorance didn't fool Russia in the slightest which is why he had yet to succumb to the boy's powerful and wide-reaching influence.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

'If last remembered you were on your toes too when we butted heads.'

America frowned. He knew he hadn't handled the Cuban Missile Crisis well but did Russia have to hold it over his head like it was a battle he had won? Hell, if a real war broke out they'd both be the losers.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

'My people were scared. What else was I supposed to do?'

Russia had enough of their play of words. They were nations and should speak in such terms.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

'You mean you were afraid.'

America sighed as he shredded the note and thought back on his reactions in those dangerous times. He'd been close. So very close to doing it.

Moscow, Russia, November 25th 1963

'You were in my land when it happened. I'm certain you decided for yourself how I felt through observation.'

Russia remembered seeing the fear in America's eyes but also the desperation for Russia to cooperate with him and stop the crisis himself. Russia just wished he'd look at him more like that, like he wanted his help, like he needed his help. Because with all the power Russia had felt that if he could not help his people or friends with it then it was useless.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

'You boast so often that you have so much power and threaten its use on enemy and friend alike and yet you were so quick to come undone when threatened yourself that it makes me, as well as everyone else, wonder if you are just boasting.'

Oh, America had the power as well as the trigger finger. In the end it won't be him sending bombs to destroy. Russia could not say anything against him when he is the same.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

'You boasted just as much back in '57 when you dared me to a shooting match.'

America certainly keeps track on his transgressions and those who have transgressed against him.

"What a child," Russia sighed.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963
'What a fun game it was. I especially enjoyed hearing your boss come unnerved and the details about the construction of the bunkers. Tell me; was that your fear or your people's?'

America felt his blood boil. A game. Everything was a game to Russia. Nothing but underlined meanings and code words and promising threats with backs turned, arms crossed, and eyes looking the other way.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

'I'll have you know I'm not afraid of you or your sausage missiles.'

Russia smiled and leaned back in his chair. Just like the rest he set a fire to the message and watched the paper crisp and blacken to ashes, collecting on the piling mound on the plate before him.

His boss would not be happy about what Russia was about to do but this was a talk between personified countries not their political leaders, and as long as America didn't tell then word wouldn't reach Mr. Khrushchev's ears.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

America eyed the message warily and reread it once more.

'As you shouldn't be, seeing how you are not lying when you claim you are in the lead.'

"What the hell?" America was frantically typing out a reply. He needed answers to quell his confusion giving way to his paranoia.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

'What are you referring to? Tell me the TRUTH.'

Wow, America punctuated the word "truth" with capitals, that must word his persistence and pressure. America wanted the truth? Fine, so be it. Russia leaned forward and began typing out his reply and wondered what America would do once he knew. It could be bad for Russia and his people, but then again, if he knew America as well as he assumed he did . . .

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

"3,000. I suspect your number is higher in your paranoia.'

America dropped the letter and covered his gaping mouth. "He lied . . . he was playing a ga—you fucking tricked me!" America shouted at the teletype machine as if the bulky thing was Russia himself.

Missiles, Russia was talking about missiles. His missiles. America hadn't thought he would, after all that's not how the game was played. But Russia actually revealed to him his number and America knew deep inside that he wasn't lying, that what he said before was true, that his dare was nothing but verbal chicken and Russia had the best poker faces. He had easily fooled everyone! America's boss had even announced their belief in Russia's bluff to everyone.

In America's shocked state another message revealed itself.

'My count may be many times fewer than yours but right now I can name three thousand of your cities and towns that would suffer devastation if provoked.'

No, Russia wouldn't want to look weak so of course he'd issue a threat for a "just in case." The
subtle threat was the least of America's worries. He then wondered. America wondered what he would have been like had he known how far he was ahead of Russia. Would he have built those bunkers in the mountains? Would he have suffered from long-term McCarthyism? How would he have treated Russia? Would they have possibly gotten along better or worse?

America felt a headache coming on but that did not stop him from slowly typing out a response.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

'We're not friends, Russia. We shouldn't be conversing outside of public affairs.'

Russia smiled sadly. It had been fun while it lasted, this conversation of theirs. It did his near-dead heart good, it really did. But Russia had been waiting to receive this message from America and he predicted he would right after he had revealed to him his count. America was no doubt in shock with only few words to respond to something like that and so it made sense he wanted to end their private talk.


'Yes, but perhaps some time in the future, when we are, we can pick up again. I enjoyed our chat.'

America found himself smiling fondly at the letter, his imagination swelled with visions of a hopeful future, where he and Russia had put down their guns always pointed at the other and declared a friendship. With that same smile in place America typed out his response.

'I enjoyed this as well—' America stopped. He couldn't say that to Russia. That's just not how he talked to him . . . not in a long time.

Deleting that America wrote something else instead.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

Russia breathed out hot air into his cold hands, rubbing them together as America's letter scrolled out of the machine. Picking it up he read it in time as he set a fire to it.

'You live in a delusional fantasy.' Russia chuckled and was quick to write a comeback. He guessed their conversation was still quite open.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

'And you live in a negative one, comrade.'

America laughed and sighed as he leaned back. "Whatever." Why was he even still talking to Russia?

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

'Fine, when you become capitalist I will admit I was wrong and dub us best buds.'

America really should open a show with all that sarcasm of his. Still there were just some things America would never learn and if that were the case then maybe America was right; maybe they would live forever as enemies. Even this hotline of theirs was not a means to better relations, just a simple way to inform the other of their intentions when invading another country, moving their ships close to their territories, etc.

The only way for the two to grow close again was for Russia to become a capitalist or America to
become a communist. And both held onto their ideals like a religion.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

'No, capitalism does not bring together like communism does. You are the one who has to change to communism so that we can all live together under the same roof.'

"God are you brainwashed," America complained with a shake of his head.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

'I enjoy the liberty of being able to choose for oneself on where one wants to live. I know for a fact that not all of your roommates wish to live in that bland house of yours. Stop trying to change me. I've been like this for 187 years and I'm afraid if I change there would even be things you wouldn't like about me.'

So that was his reasoning was it? Russia remained still as he watched the letter burn. He knew what to say in response but on how to type it conflicted inside him.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

'No country remains completely the same for nearly two decades. The changes are subtle but they are there. It is a shame you cannot see these flaws.'

"Flaws? Ha! At least they're not as major as yours," America muttered to the teleprinter. He was in the process of typing out a mean reply when the machine cranked out another letter. America sighed with a roll of his eyes. Couldn't Russia just type all of his messages in one letter? He was starting to run low on paper and he honestly didn't feel like getting up and replenishing it.

Tearing the letter away America began translating it until it became comprehensible to him.

'Even rare gems have a multitude of flaws yet still maintain their beauty. In the hands of a cutter are they shaped to reveal their true brilliance. So I will wait until you wish to place yourself in the hands of a carver. I can shape you to shine your brightest.'

America sat there deadpanned. Was that supposed to be a communistic version of flattery or something? What an ass.

Moscow, Russia. November 25th 1963

'No means no. This is the end of the conversation.'

Russia really hadn't meant the previous message to be offensive in any way. If anything he was trying his hand at invitational poetry, like France uses. Well, he's not France for one and, two, America's stance is firm on where he stands in the world. But he wanted the boy to know his offer still stood and that he'd always welcome him with open arms should he decide to change his mind. After all, America was his promised so Russia knew he'd have him eventually. When? He didn't know. He hoped it was sometime in the near future. He could try using force to get him but after discovering America's hidden scars and the number of his missiles he knew that approach would prove futile.

So Russia took to reminding America of his invitation and making sure there was no one else America could call his beloved. He knew there would be periods of anger and silence but this conversation only proved to Russia that America wasn't as silent as everyone thought, especially in private. That was when it seemed his voice to be the loudest.
Feeling pleased with the outcome of attempted conversation with the younger nation, Russia stood up and took his plate of cinder. He left his room quietly to dispose of the ashes.

Washington D.C. USA. November 25th 1963

"Oh, Alfred, you haven't gone home yet?" America's boss looked at the nation who was making his way out of the Whitehouse with a teletype machine in his arms. The President looked at the machine curiously. "Is there something wrong with the machine, Alfred?"

America sighed. He hadn't really wanted a confrontation with his new boss.

"Yeah, I'm gonna need you to contact some mechanics or Moscow and ask for some more machines," America said. He watched his President nod. He understood well what his country had done.

"Is that one broken as well?" America's boss asked, pointing toward the machine in the blonde's arms.

"Yeah," America lied, or was it a lie? It wasn't working "properly" so . . . "I'm taking it home to tinker with it. Maybe if I get it working I can fix the others."

That was America's lie and his new boss had no other choice but to accept it. America never tampered with the machine and never returned to fix the others. Instead he kept the machine at his home in Virginia, keeping it plugged in and functional just in case a certain Slavic nation decided to transmit a few letters in which America would read in secluded privacy away from his judging leaders and pressing media, and especially from those who called themselves his allies.

The night of November 25th was not the last night America received letters, and much to his surprise by his own actions he responded in kind and in doing so created an ongoing secret conversation with Russia that he had no idea where it was leading to and continually wondered why he didn't stop himself. But, after a while of contemplating the reason America came to assume he'd been deprived of conversation with Russia for five decades and he missed their talks. Granted these weren't quite the same texts they exchanged previous World War One he at least was able to talk to Russia.

It gave America a shadow of the memory and it made him feel just a little bit better. But it certainly didn't sate his loneliness, and, from reading Russia's letters America realized that he wasn't as alone in this isolated feeling. Perhaps it was the life of a Superpower, or just him and Russia.

It sure seemed like it was just the two of them in this room with no doors, no windows, no one.

Chapter End Notes

Historical Notes:

Timeframe: Well, the 60's but as you can see I barely got past a year in the stupid long chapter, so really it's majority just about the Cuban Missile Crisis. :/

So, in here, since Nations can have different interests than their people and leaders at times I had Russia's boss, Mr. Nikita Khrushchev, as the one who gave the go-ahead for Cuba to have the missiles. Now, granted this doesn't happen often but in this case
Russia was none-the-wiser, partly because he had still been "off" since Checkpoint Charlie and taken aback from Prussia telling him about America's secrets. He needed time to think, ok!

And, yes, the Americans for some reason were flat-out dead set on invading Cuba and conquering the country (give them a reason, right?). Talking to the Russians was at the back of his minds, but in the end the President persisted they speak but of course there was just so many mistranslation obstacles it was insane.

America always referring to Cuba's "siblings" was in reference of how many South American countries were on the U.S.'s side (more likely forced I believe). The U.S. would give letters to said nations and have them give the messages to Cuba. The letters were just sweet innocent notes informing Cuba that the Americans wouldn't invade if they listen to their demands.

So, yep, the Americans showed the other countries the spy plane pictures of the photographed missiles and were like, "Look what the Russians are doing!" Most countries sided with them because who else would they side with? France was leery at first, but after being shown the pics they sided with the Americans.

Turkey was quite upset when the Americans decided to remove their missiles from said country in agreement with the Russian's demands. Very. More so than the Italians.

Italy being the one concerned the most in this is reference to Pope John XXIII who sent a message to the Russians and then to the Americans asking they not start a war that would likely destroy the entire populace of the world.

Lol, I snuck in a RusAme date XD Sorta. That was actually reference to John A. Scali who had lunch with Soviet spy, Aleksandr Fomin, the man telling him he'd try to help settle this dispute for their countries.

Russia and America's second meeting was in reference to Scali being asked to meet with Fomin again in which the American explodes on the Russian, calling him names, saying they were out to get the U.S., etc. The Russians, however continually tried to explain to the panicked Americans that they were cooperating to their best ability. The USSR had been very willing to work this out where as the U.S. was like, "Screw it! We're invading!" Yep.

The Cubans were really pressing the USSR to attack first, but the Soviets refused.

So, despite the Russians having the biggest bomb (Tsar Bomba) it appears the Americans had more. The USA holds the far-off lead with 27,000 missiles with Russia having only 3,600. The Soviets said they had been cranking out missiles like sausages previously and had the Americans in a nail-biting fright.

In 1963 on June 20th The United States agrees to set up a hotline with the USSR, thus making direct communication possible. The message the Americans sent was real transmitted response to test out all of the keys and the Russians are said to have sent back a poetic message talking about Moscow's sunset. I, of course, tweaked it like many things in this horribly long chapter.
Play Nice, Part 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Vancouver, Canada. September of 1972

It's been a decade. Ten years since the world almost turned over and gave its last breath. World War III hadn't arrived and now, as the year drew into its later seasons, the nations were finally calming down and the world leaders were letting out relaxed sighs of relief.

As troubling as the thought of the most devastating war for mankind to behold was, right now, everyone feared they had misplaced one of the countries assumed to be in the all-out war of extinction. Perhaps it wasn't going to be the United States of America versus the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, but Canada versus Russia.

"Brutal." It was the only word America could think of as he watched his northern neighbor skate with his players back into their box after the grim practice. Canada's own people, fellow Canadians actually booed him and his team. What kind of patriotism is that?

Sure, Canada and his team had been an utter embarrassment for the past couple of games, especially when they were played in his own territory, but that didn't mean the people should feel obliged to boo them. Totally harsh.

"It's expected," England piped up as he rubbed his hands together, his eyes glued to Canada's disheartened form in his seat. "After Matthew's own passion for this sport I shouldn't think his people any different on the matter." He then turned to America with a fatherly smile, as if remembering good times past. "It's just like you with your baseball."

America still frowned. He wasn't so sure about that. Canada was OBSESSED with hockey. It could be because that was the only sport he was good at, but still, America didn't think his people would be this harsh on him if he were to, say, lose a baseball tournament to Japan, or worse, Cuba.

It was just hard to see the Canadian so down. He won the second game, but then he went and tied the third and that counted as a loss to the Canadians. This game; there was just no love for Team Canada.

America had come to support his stepbrother, as well as his boys whom a couple he employed in his national hockey teams. And he wasn't the only one. England came, so had France, and so had some of the Canada's other "siblings" like Australia, New Zealand, heck, even Sealand showed up.

A good hockey game would get his mind off of his country-life troubles, or so America thought. He knew his boss really hadn't liked the idea that he go and cheer Canada on, not because he didn't like said Canadian nation or anything, no, it was his opponent. The Soviets were in town in Canada, too close for America's boss to like and he, as well as the rest of the world, saw it fit to keep the Americans and the Soviets as far from interaction as possible, say a couple of hundreds of miles.

America pushed past that thought though and came anyways. Besides, he wasn't that far from his own home and if things got a little hairy—which he highly doubted they would from lack of interaction—then he could just hop across the border if that's what his people and boss wanted. God, sometimes they were such paranoia freakin' maniacs.

Aside from all that America felt he should have just stayed home. He hated seeing his bro like this.
Very upsetting.

It only got worse when the teams skated out on the ice and the crowd cheered for the Soviets. That was right. The crowd, consisting of mostly Canadians, freaking cheered for the Russians more so than their own team which they had booed earlier.

America's sight was good thanks to Texas. He could see Canada's upset at the crowd's reaction. And he only looked worse when he slapped sticks with Russia.

Man, America had not expected that Communist to be so good at ice hockey. He could see that smirk on his face. He was just soaking up every win against the so-called best team in the world. Well, if Canada didn't shape him and his boys up then Russia would have the best hockey team in the world and that just didn't sit right with America and he hoped that the upset wouldn't sit right with Canada either and so would whip him into shape to kick some serious Commie ass.

Stay neutral his boss said. Yeah right. How could he stay neutral when his brother was in the downs and no one else was cheering for him? Shit, man, that just wasn't right.

"Don't let him intimidate you, Mattie! Kick his Ruskie ass!" America shouted amidst the booing crowd.

The reaction was simultaneous; Canada and Russia turned their heads toward America in the stands. While America hoped to see some smile appear on his brother's lips the hope for it was cut too soon as Russia slammed his shoulder into the Canadian and pushed around him with the puck in his control.

America hissed back into his seat. He felt his little brother give him a jab to his ribs.

"Maybe ya should just stay quiet for now, mate," Australia suggested in an apologetic shrug.

"Just trying to offer support," America muttered out and then motioned to the harsh crowd around. "They're not offering it."

"Give 'im a chance to prove himself," Australia said.

Of course that never came. Canada lost the game and the Russians all cheered with their arms up in the air. The last game Canada was to host and he lost. How terrible.

America had never seen Canada so defeated nor the crowd disperse so quickly in disappointment. He wouldn't leave though. Jogging down the steps America reached the box and tapped against the plastic frame.

"Mattie, Mattie, come on, man, say something to me," America said, trying to coax the Canadian to look at him.

Canada had been busy picking up the equipment and apparently ignoring America.

"Stop sulking, you didn't do that bad. A tie and a win already under your belt," America reminded. Maybe he shouldn't have.

Canada dropped the equipment quite carelessly and turned to America. The Superpower had never seen the Canadian so upset in his life.

"You heard the crowd, Al! They fucking hated it—hated us. We bit the ice, alright." Canada sighed and glanced down with slumped shoulders.
America wanted to hug him, or at least give him a pat on the back. It wasn't the end of the world. There was still four more games. If Canada could win those then maybe . . .

The slushing sound of shaving ice turned both of their blond heads toward the rink where Russia had been skating from his men and close toward the Canadians' box. He glided past them with a confident smile on his face.

"It's pointless cheering for the lost and defeated. You should be cheering for me, Amerika," Russia taunted as he looped around the rink once more and slid back toward his box.

"Asshole," Canada bit out while America shot up a bird so that the Russian could see before he exited with his team.

After he had disappeared with the others America and Canada's hard glares were turned off and a softer concern painted itself across America's gaze as he turned to his brother only to see his disappointed face again.

"You've still got a chance," America said. "You'll play him at his place."

"The home is where you're your best, Al," Canada said with a defeated sigh. "If I couldn't defend myself here where else can I?"

Before America could say anymore words of encouragement Canada skated off. He just circled the scuffed ice in silence.

"My poor Mattieu," America had heard France say as he and the others came down the steps to stand next to him and solemnly watch Canada skate his troubles away. "Maybe better luck next time."

"Yeah," England agreed. "Don't look so down, chaps, we'll head to Moscow and cheer for him there. He's not out of the woods yet and we certainly won't let him down."

"Of course!" Sealand cheered. "But I do blame his poor game on his British side."

"What?! You're British too, you little prick!" England spat at the small natio—countr—whatever Sealand was.

"Non, I'm afraid Sealand might be right," France piped up.

"You would, wouldn't you, you damn frog!" England spat back at his old nemesis.

America sighed, their bickering never failed, but he was glad their rivalry was reduced to bickering like an old married couple instead of wars. Those caused more headaches—and heartaches—than anything else.

"Well, you guys be sure to keep me up to date on what's happening," America said as he turned to them. "Give the crowd in Moscow some good ole American spirit for me!"

"Wait, you're not coming with us?" Australia looked confused.

"Wouldn't want to risk anything," England explained to his younger son, but he still looked quite confused.

"It's Russia," New Zealand said with a sigh. "You know the world's biting their nails off if they so much as stand in the same room together."

"But the détente—" Australia started, but the others stopped him short because they all knew that the
détente didn't mean shit.

"Hey, it's okay, besides, the boss would lose his head if I went over there," America said, raising his hands to halt France and England trying to explain to the Australian nation about the bendable rules and shaky ties of a détente.

That night it was horribly quiet. Canada housed all of them nicely and the hotel staff was more than kind to all of them, even Russia and his team. America, however, hadn't slept in his room that night. He wasn't tired, instead he decided to crash in Canada's room for an all-nighter.

"Dude, stop kicking yourself in the ass over the loss. You'll get 'im back in his own turf. Payback. It'll be perfect," America said after taking a large spoonful of ice-cream in his mouth. He had provided Canada with a large carton as well but he just sat staring at it, digging his spoon into it, but not eating it.

Okay, Canada was usually quiet as is, but not—repeat, not—when it came to his favorite sport. America was trying to strike up a confidant conversation with him about said ice sport, but Canada wasn't saying a word. America sighed. He knew why.

"Look, man, don't let what your people did get you down," America offered. "I do shit my people don't like either. It sometimes happens."

"Never to me," Canada whispered. America leaned forward to catch what he said. When Canada scooted the carton away and pulled his knees up to his chin he became the incarnate image of a moper. "That hurt, Al. How can you deal with it?"

"It's not easy," America said with a shrug before chuckling. "But, man, if my people started cheering for Russia that's when the guns come out."

"You're ridiculous," Canada muttered and turned his gaze away from his stepbrother.

"But ya love me anyways," America said, reaching over and batting his brother on the knee with his spoon. Canada grumbled and rubbed his kneecap, mumbling something about he needed that under his breath. "So, plans, when you get to Moscow you make sure to send me a telegram every hour. I want to know how you're doing."

When Canada smiled at America he was surprised. He would have smiled in return had Canada not said, "Alright, Mr. Spy."

America frowned. "Hey, that's not why I'm asking that, you little punk!" That did it; America pushed the carton out of the way and tackled Canada. He wrestled him flat but the Canadian just laughed at him from underneath him and clapped his shoulder.

"Alright, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Now let me up, I can't breathe under you!" Canada wheezed.

"You callin' me fat now?" America asked, raising a brow and deliberately pressing more weight onto his Canadian neighbor.

"No, no!" Canada gasped out. "Get off!"

"Nah, I don't think I will," America hummed out. "It's about time I feel what it's like to be on top."

Oh yeah, a geographical joke at its corniest. But, hey, it made Canada roll his eyes and that is what America was looking for. After a minute he let up and pulled away.
"Seriously, though, Al, you've put on some pounds," Canada said after catching his breath and sitting back up.

"That's all muscle mass, baby," America said as he flexed his arms outward and kissed his biceps.

"That was just about as bad as Russia sitting on me," Canada moaned, remembering those couple of times when the Russian nation had sat on him during the Second World War.

"Hey, don't equate me with that Commie," America groaned. "But, make sure to pay him back for that." America would have himself had not getting into a fight with Russia bring up with the possibility of the next world war. "Seriously, you should totally sit on his ass ‘accidentally’ in the rink. And make sure you take lots of pictures. I want to see that!"

Canada rolled his eyes. "You hope for too much, Al."

"That's what a fan's for," America said with a big thumbs-up and optimistic wink.

Canada smiled at the gestures. "Thanks. It's too bad your boss won't let you leave the Western Hemisphere. I'd really like you to be there for me."

"Me too, Mattie," America said with a nod. "But it's cool. I've got lotsa things on my plate back home that I'm sure the big man wants me to tackle."

America sighed. Heading over to Canada's for a stay was nice because he didn't have to worry about the woes of his status. It was just him amongst family enjoying a game. Not even Russia's presence dampened the mood to his and everyone else's surprise.

A soft rapping on the door alerted the two's attention. America's smile widened and he jumped to his feet. "Oh man! Pizza's here!"

"Pizza?" Canada questioned.

"You know, to celebrate the completion of the first half of the series!" America cheered, pumping his fist up in the air as he opened the door.

Despite the fact that Canada had lost twice and tied on—lost three times, America still wanted to celebrate on a job well done. How typical. Canada couldn't help but smile at him, but he wouldn't let him off the hook this much.

"If we're going to celebrate then why pizza? You know I don't like it as much as pancakes," Canada complained but after seeing the bellboy hand America a few parchments of paper he leaned curiously. What was he holding?

America turned, a disappointed look on his face for the lack of pizza goodness, but he tossed the envelope with Canada's name on it to him. "From Russia," he informed.

Canada turned it over curiously before opening it and seeing the pass to Moscow. He sighed. Looking back toward America he waved up the parchment. "Just my pass. Officially OKed from Russia himself."

The Canadian stopped in his rant when he noticed America had received a letter as well and was now holding the contents inside. It just so happened to be a pass as well.

"You got one too?" Canada asked curiously. He stood up and came to America, taking up the letter to make sure the addressed was correct. Yep, said: To the United States of America. Canada then
noticed the small note attached to the pass. It read: Because a family should stick together.

"This is a joke, right?" Canada turned to look at America's face. He didn't look too pleased. "I can't go to Moscow."

"Why not?" Canada asked. Now that he thought about it, it would be nice to have the American nation there cheering him on and beating up those who booed him. That'd be great! "You said so yourself that you would accompany me if you could. Now you have a chance. Russia's letting you into his home."

"But—my boss, my people," America began his long list of reasons why this was not a good idea at all.

"But you just said you do things your people don't like. What's one more transgression?" Canada asked. "Come on, Al, please?"

"It's not safe, Mattie," America said, shaking his head. Canada just didn't understand.

"I'll sit on him if you come, I don't care if I get penalized for it. I'll do it for you to see," Canada said, trying to push his brother into agreeing.

America smiled begrudgingly and looked Canada in the eyes. "I haven't been to Moscow in fifty-three years."

Moscow, Russia. Late September 1972

"Welcome to the USSR," Lithuania said as he greeted the guests at the front door. "I can take your bags for you if you'd like."

"This is rather disturbing. Um, say, Lithuania, why aren't we booked into a hotel of some sort?" England asked as he watched other servants come out and take their luggage, though the Brit was keeping a tight hold of his suitcase because frankly he didn't want to room there.

"Oh, Mr. Russia wanted you all to have the best commendations... and... well... if he thinks they're at his home then he wants you to room there," Lithuania said. The Baltic nation had known, absolutely known the Canadian's relatives wouldn't like being roomed in Russia's home along with the rest of the Eastern Bloc.

"Bloody hell, I'm not doing it," England said, taking a step backwards and shaking his head. When a servant approached him to take his suitcase he flinched away and pressed the brown case to his chest. "Nuh-uh, I want a bloody hotel room. France, call up the closest motel and book us a few rooms."

"But that is very rude, Angleterre," France reasoned, but everyone could tell even he was disturbed by their choice at hand. "After all, he is offering."

"Well I don't want to room 'ere!" Sealand complained, shaking his head.

"This is worse than when I thought I'd have to live at Japan's house," Australia whined.

"Oh, you're a bunch of big babies!" Canada complained as he pushed forward and shoved his luggage into the waiting servants' hands. "Just show me to my room and then point me to the rink. I need to practice with the boys."

Lithuania was surprised by the Canadian's lack of care. He completely understood their unease about
rooming in Russia's house. After all, they'd be sleeping under the same roof the USSR was. Twas a frightening thing for those of the Western Bloc.

"Oh, yes, right away. I—America?" Lithuania paled a little at the sight of the superpower. What was he doing there?

"'Sup, Toris?" America offered a quick smile before letting the servants take his own luggage. "So, this is the only place we can have?"

"Uh, y-yes, Mr. Russia would be very upset with us if we allowed you to have less quality rooms." Lithuania was just telling them what Russia told him and the others. You just didn't say no to Russia.

"Tch, figures." America sighed. He stood there with his hands in his pockets looking around. There was a look of nostalgia on his face for a moment that sparked curiosity in the others before he turned to them and motioned them to enter. "Well? Don't just stand there. Follow Canada."

If the United States said so.

The house wasn't so bad. It seemed well kept and busy with servants running to and fro. Now that they got a good look at the place they realized Russia hadn't been exaggerating when he said his house was big enough for the entire world. There were so MANY rooms.

The hall they were led down and given rooms in was overlain in rooms. It was almost like they were in some hotel.

"Not as great as Buckingham Palace, but it'll do I suppose," England said with a shrug as he examined his room. "Just as long as Russia sleeps on the opposite side of the home."

"Oh, no, haven't you heard? That nation never sleeps. He stays awake all night plotting ways to ensnare the rest of the world in global communism~" America came up with a ghostly voice and wiggling fingers.

"He's kidding, right?" New Zealand turned to his big brother, Australia. He knew the Aussie knew their eldest brother better and did very much hope that America was just playing around with him.

Australia simply laughed with America while New Zealand groaned from no answer. All fun and games aside they turned to see Canada leave his room with his unpacked gear in hand. He turned to Lithuania.

"Is it too much to ask for you to escort me to the Luzhniki Ice Palace? I'd like to get to know the rink," Canada explained.

"No, not at all. Please, follow me," Lithuania said as he turned and motioned him to come.

"Would you like us to come with you?" France asked, looking at his son who had been quite to-the-point as of late since they arrived in Russia.

"No, you can get some rest," Canada said. "I won't be long."

"What? No way, I'm gonna come too. Just let me grab my camera!" America said before darting into his room and tossing his suitcases open to try to find it.

"You stay too, Al," Canada called back as he was led away by Lithuania. "Stay out of trouble."

Of course America hadn't listened and instead ran out of his room with his camera around his neck.
"Where'd he go?" He looked toward Sealand who pointed in the direction the Canadian had last been seen.

With that lead in mind America rushed down the hall. Taking a few turns would have definitely lost a novice nation and America was surprised he hadn't gotten himself lost yet—or so he thought. As his hand pushed against the walls of the halls and then slid down the stair railing his legs moved slower with uncertainty. He was beginning to realize he just might have taken the wrong turn.

It was a frustrating bother and when he reached the base of the staircase he placed his fists on his hips and looked around. He had thought he headed out toward the foyer but somehow he managed to find himself looking into the backyard. How did that happen?

America turned to head back the way he came but when he looked up at the top of the staircase he froze. His eyes widened and his jaw slacked.

"Alfred?"

The voice was quieter than normal. The tone too soft and so very uncharacteristic for a once remembered boisterous nation.

"Gilbert," America whispered back. He hadn't seen the Prussian since '45, hadn't heard from him at all because Russia wouldn't allow it. "Gilbert!"

America hopped steps until he was crushing the German in an embrace. Before he would have thought twice to hug him, not from what he did in WWII but ever since his and Germany's reconciliation America felt it was fine to reconcile with Prussia as well, though he couldn't do it face-to-face. He was still a past friend and it was good to be back to that status again.

So giddy America had been that he let go quickly and slapped the albino's shoulder a little harder than he thought he had. Prussia lurched forward from the gesture but it went unnoticed in America's excitement at seeing his old friend.

"I didn't think I'd see you. Well, I didn't think I'd be rooming in Russia's creepy house, but what a pleasant surprise. God, it's been decades." America then snapped his fingers. "I know! Let me take a picture of you so I can give Ludwig something to show of our trip here!" America took up his camera laid around his neck and about flashed a picture of the Prussian, but the older was quick to shove the camera down.

"Nein, nein, please . . . please don't show Ludwig," Prussia begged.

America looked at him in confusion. He didn't understand what the big deal was. Germany would love a picture of his brother. The last one he had was terribly outdated.

Then, suddenly, too late America had realized why Prussia had been so reluctant to show himself to his brother. America finally stepped back and took in Prussia's appearance. He didn't look so well.

He was slimmer than the last he had seen him. His posture wasn't as tall as America remembered. His aura had even changed.

America remembered Prussia always being the proud awesome general from his youth. Now, the slump in his shoulders, the bags under his eyes, the defeated frown on his lips, it was so un-Prussia like. He was the epitome of a conquered nation.

It was such a sad sight to see that America now was uncertain himself if Germany would even want to see his brother like this. God, now that America remembered it Prussia had felt so light, so frail in
his embrace when he hugged him. What had Russia done to him?

"I knew it," America said as he grit his teeth, his hands trembling and threatening to crunch in the camera in his hands. "That bastard can't take care of a damn thing."

Prussia's eyes widened and he was quick to place his cold hands on America's trembling hands to steady him. "Nein, forget about him, Alfred. Why are you here? You shouldn't be." Prussia looked around cautiously before looking closer at the younger nation before him.

"Mattie," America managed to get out through his boiling blood as he tried to begin his explanation on his visit. He blinked and furrowed his brow. "Damn it, Gilbert, how can you live like this?"

"Rather me than Ludwig," Prussia stated. He then felt it safe to smile softly. "How is Ludwig? Are you treating him fairly?"

"Of course," America swore. "His economy is doing great. He's not sick anymore."

Prussia closed his eyes and bowed his head with a sigh of relief. "Thank Gott." After a while he opened his eyes and looked at America again. "That's all?"

America looked hesitant to tell him the other issue he and the rest of Europe were having with Germany and Prussia caught onto this quickly.

"What's wrong?" Prussia inquired.

"Well," America started before meeting gazes. "He hasn't said a word to anyone since the end of the war."

Prussia looked devastated at the news. Bowing his head he nodded in understanding. "Ja, I suppose he would do something like that."

Despite the initial shock America tried again to attempt taking a picture. "Come on, for Ludwig. Just one picture."

Again, Gilbert pushed the camera down. He smiled sadly. No, he didn't want his brother to see him like this just yet.

"If you must give him something, then give him this." America watched Gilbert pull out a hidden cross necklace. He held out America's hand and put the pendant on his palm. Patting his fingers to curl he looked at America bitter sweetly. "It's all I can give right now. Be sure to get it to him soon."

"It's going to have to wait until after Mattie's game with Russia," America informed. He didn't understand why Prussia was so persistent he leave. It's not like he couldn't hold his own against Russia, even if he did come all by himself with no word to his people or President—oh man, was his ass going to get it when he returned home.

"Shouldn't you be heading to the garage about now, Prussia?"

America and Prussia darted their gazes up toward the top of the staircase to see none other than Russia himself. That smile still in place. Slowly he came down the steps toward them and with each descent America could feel the unease in his Prussian friend. He could see him slowly back away out of the corner of his eyes.

Finally Russia was standing on the same leveled flooring as them. His smile sickly sweet for America and to Prussia before he said through smiling lips, "Do as you're told."
Prussia went to move at first, but something inside him hesitated. His red eyes looked from America then to Russia. America could see his concern. He knew why. He'd seen it in England, in France, in many other countries who feared leaving him and Russia alone would result in catastrophe.

"Hey, I get it, you're busy. Was nice seeing you again," America offered a wave of departure and now Prussia could do no more than head out back, stealing one last glance at the two before disappearing from sight.

"I thought I had been dreaming when Toris informed me of your arrival with the others," Russia spoke up. America hadn't looked at him. In fact he persisted their gaze not meet. Quite a rude thing toward the hosting nation. "I am impressed you took up my invitation."

"It's not because I want to see you," America said, letting their gaze meet once. "I promised my brother I'd be there to cheer him on."

"Then by all means don't let me stand in your way," Russia said with that smile on his face. "But I must ask why I've found you here in this wing of my home? While I am not against a tour of the estate I am thinking you might be lost, da?"

America wouldn't admit it to Russia that he was. This wasn't Empress Catherine's palace in St. Petersburg after all. This place was completely new to him.

"I just thought I'd head out back," America said, picking up some excuse at the top of his head and since he realized he was staring out at the backyard, well, might as well use it. "I don't know, might be a quicker way to get to the hockey rink."

"Actually, it would be much easier to head out front," Russia suggested, pointing back the way America had come. "If you are in need of an escort I am available. I can take you to your brother."

America groaned, silently of course. He looked up at Russia and forced out a smile like the one Russia was forcing. "Why thank-you," he said through his teeth. He was completely helpless there in Russia's home. He had no idea where he was or where anything else was for that matter so he had no choice but to accept Russia's hospitality. Oh joy.

He was glad England and the others were busy unpacking their belongings in their rooms to see him head out with Russia—to see the damn communist hold open the door for America to get into—to see America actually get into the same car as Russia—to see said Russian drive off with just the two of them in that too small, and too expensive pretty little car that would be such a shame if it came to ruin from a possible outbreak of a fight from said two.

The ride to the ice rink was quiet and America scanned the city around, taking in everything. Russia noticed this and could not help but say something about it. "Beautiful city, da?"

"Tch, not like D.C.," America dejected.

"The splendor's seem to have caught your attention," Russia observed. "Unless you're just trying to make out its entirety for a battle map."

"I'm not always trying to fight you, Russia," America said, looking toward the Russian with annoyance.

"Da, and this city's not always threatening. The sunsets are really beautiful. I believe I told you this once." Russia had been referring to the telegram he had sent, the one with the corny poetry about
Moscow's sunset—the one with that secret message hidden in it that America didn't know what to think of.

There was a silence after that. America sat still in his seat, seatbelt strapped around him securely and arms crossed tightly. Luckily for them they wouldn't have to endure the awkward silence for long when they pulled up into the parking lot of the ice palace.

"Ah, here we are," Ivan announced and rolled into a park. He unbuckled himself and managed to beat America to open his door before he had a chance to do it for himself. The western nation didn't look too pleased over the chivalry but Russia ignored it and excused his use of the adequate as his right as host nation.

"Thanks," America mumbled and immediately stuck his hands in his pockets while he waited for Russia to take the lead. It's not like he wanted to be following him but America had no other choice. He'd wind up lost without him and he'd rather be shadowing Mr. Commie than deal with the embarrassment of getting lost like an idiot.

"Follow me," Russia bade, waving America to come.

America rolled his eyes and did as told. Finally he was looking at the rink and peering down to see Canada and the rest of the team skating around, examining the rink and practicing shots. Damn, the rink was huge.

For a moment America forgot Russia was standing by his side and watched his brother lead his men around the practice routines. It was nice to see him on the rink again. He looked determined and America prayed he'd show Russia a thing or two on ice.

Wait a moment. Wasn't their game today? Tonight? Hours away?

Glancing over back at Russia, America cleared his throat. "Uh, shouldn't—shouldn't you be practicing too?"

"I already have this morning," Russia said, his own gaze watching Canada and his team. "I will crush them, Amerika." He then turned to the younger country and smirked with pride. "We will bury Team Canada in Moscow."

America literally shivered at that. He's seen Canada crazy about hockey but Russia was a creep. Ice nuts; that's all they were. That night was going to be crazy, America just knew it, but he wasn't going to be intimidated. That just wasn't heroic at all. He was going to root for his brother and cheer him on.

"Give me some good shots, Mattie. I'll be right here to take them," America whispered and held up his camera to take pictures of the Canadian's practice like he said he would.

The moment America was returned back to Russia's house the Slavic nation disappeared in preparation for the game. America and the others were later escorted in style to the rink where Canada had been since his practice. All were eager to see him again but after the stands began filling they all felt more than a little out of place.

This was just a hockey game, right? Because it sure as hell looked like Russia's entire army attended the game.

"Man, now I feel underdressed," America complained as he pulled his hat down over his eyes so to hide his appearance from most of the dressed up Russians in the stadium. God only knew what would happen if they found out he was attending. He had no doubt Russia knew—wherever he was
—but as for his boss and people? America would rather they not know. He for one knew Russia even kept secrets from them, one of them he so shared with the Russian.

"Just stay where you are," England commanded as he shifted in his seat next to him. The crowd even surprised him, but he was at least glad to see a good score of Canadians in the crowd—hopefully there to cheer their country on this time. "If you'd dress any better you'd draw too much attention. You don't want that here, especially not now since you've decided to come all alone."

"Mattie wanted me to come and the boss didn't," America muttered out. "What else was I supposed to do? I couldn't tell my boss I was going. He'd make a big deal of it and in the end I wouldn't be able to go so I had to come unannounced and alone 'kay?"

"I know," England said. "You've always been too risky. I really shouldn't be surprised."

America felt the young urge to stick his tongue out at his parent nation, but he refrained and instead watched the opening ceremony. He was so very happy and relieved to see the couple thousand Canadian civilians in attendance finally cheering their team on as Canada and the boys marched out onto the ice for introductions and gifts.

America made sure to get some good shots. He hated to say it, but one of his best ones was of Canada slipping on a carnation stem after it had fallen from the bouquet given to him and his team. He landed right on his back and America held in his laughter if only to make sure his brother hadn't injured himself in the fall. He hadn't and actually took it quite well, laughing it off, and so America laughed as well.

"Man, I'm so going to show Mattie these shots!" America laughed and nudged Australia who had been sitting next to him, also snickering at the funny action.

"Send me copies, I want to see them all," Australia said before his green eyes turned back to the event. "Hey, who do you suppose those two are?"

America furrowed his brow and looked where Australia had pointed. He spied Russia, ready and dressed in his hockey gear. He was standing away from his men, not yet skating out on the ice. Next to him America was certain was his boss, decked out in military attire and tons of medals, but America realized Australia had been pointing to the two females close to Russia.

Australia was still young and getting used to being around other countries apart from his parent nation, but that didn't mean he couldn't sense national auras. America had taught him how to do this and so the younger no doubt sensed these different distinctions in the two females standing near Russia. Those two were in fact nations themselves.

America remembered a time when Russia had informed him of two very special ladies in life. Sisters, they were Russia's sisters.

America pressed the camera to his eyes and zoomed in on the two. He'd never seem them before despite knowing for sure who they were and decided to examine them through a few pictures. Both were very lovely, with the older sending off a more gentle beauty and the younger sending off a wilder sense of attraction.

Both were dressed up as nicely as the rest of the Soviets in the building and both looked quite excited to see their brother off. The older one was fixing her brother's jersey in place like a mother of sorts, hm, Russia had said he had an older sister so that must be her. The younger one was actually standing a little ways back. She looked upset, with her arms crossed and brow furrowed and it wasn't until America looked through the camera lens that he realized she'd been fixated there by a wary
glare from Russia. Odd.

After observing for a little while America noticed the rest of the Soviet household in the benches just behind. There were the Baltics, Prussia, Hungary, and a lot of other eastern countries that America was no longer allowed to talk to. They all looked presentable, though not many looked as if they wanted to be there. America figured it was mostly out of representation more than anything else.

He snapped a few pictures of them and then pulled his camera away to wait for the beginning period, and was it a start for Canada. The North American country had managed to wipe the ice with the Soviets for the first two periods, scoring a total of three shots. America jumped out of his seat and cheered with the rest of his family after the second period passed.

"Ce est mon garcon!" France cheered while England clapped as loudly as his children seated close to him.

"He's giving Russia one hell of an entry game," England noted with over-mounting pride. "Serves the bastard right for underestimating him."

Everyone agreed and enjoyed the pride they felt for the Canadian relative. America swelled with pride for his neighbor. He was happy to see the Canadians going nuts over the lead, especially to see Canada in a lighter mood. Of course he could see him in the box telling his men not to get too cocky, but that smile on his lips showed America he was more than ready to get back onto the ice and finish what he started, and that was to destroy the Soviet team.

It was a good game all and all and everyone was good sports about it. But of course the grueling loss so far was not looking good for Russia. America could see the nation pacing with his players. Some he even grabbed by the collar and shook. He was upset and America had no doubt it was because of the look on his boss's face. That man did not look happy one bit.

Finally, during the third period, Russia managed to strike a shot for their first goal. America didn't know why but he was happy the Russian scored something. Still, after observing Russia offer a quick glance to his boss the man would not smile. Harsh, but those were bosses for you—at least the man wasn't Stalin.

The victory for their first goal was short lived however. Canada scored his fourth goal and the Soviets seemed daunted. America could see the impending doom of the humiliation in losing in their homeland. Well tough luck, Canada had been humiliated in his own territory so it was only fair for Russia to feel his pain in such.

Still, America couldn't help but inwardly want Russia to score more goals if only to lift the pressure he was receiving from his demanding boss and people. After he scored another goal America had wanted him to score again. He did. To America's dread his fists shook in glee after Russia had scored his team's third goal.

What was he doing? Why was he wanting Russia to score more goals? Did he want him to beat Canada even after coming all that way to root for his Canadian stepbrother?

America swallowed hard after watching the puck fly into the goal to tie the both of them. He could see his brother's surprise and then he watched him struggle to keep Russia and his team from scoring the final goal to win the game. America saw Canada's mistake in switching to defensive. He was never good in that prose, he needed to attack, but the crowd, the place, Russia, they all got to Canada and his face paled when the Soviets shot in the final goal to win the game.

Canada looked absolutely devastated. America's heart went out to him, it really did, and he decided
against pictures. He didn't want to waste the film on images of cheering Soviets or disheartened Canadians.

"So close," France snapped. "You know what this means. Dear little Canada will have to win the final three games if he even has a chance at winning this competition."

"The pressure, I can't take it!" Australia whined as he pulled his face down with a groan and bowed his head.

"I thought for sure he'd win," New Zealand spoke up. "He was giving it his all."

"Russia's just a big jerk is all," Sealand spoke up as he puffed his cheeks. "But Canada will win the rest, I'm sure of it!"

Everyone else groaned in agreement though deep down they were all quite uncertain. When they stood up to head down to see Canada they were amazed to see the thousands of Canadian fans singing their national anthem. They all watched Canada perk his head and look at his people in surprise. Hell, even Russia looked confused by the display of patriotism from the Canadians present.

There it was, a smile on Canada's face as he slid into his box with his players. Maybe this time he wouldn't be so down. He didn't need a weighing spirit for the next game, not when he needed to play his best and beyond to win against all odds.

"We should all take Mattie out, just to celebrate," America suggested. "He played a good game and deserves appreciation for it."

"That's not a bad idea if we weren't in Moscow. I wouldn't have the faintest idea on where to start to look for a pub. Haven't been here in decades," England said. He was certain that none of his sons knew either. As for his eldest? That was questionable. "How about you, America?"

The American shrugged. He would not tell his parent nation that he had gotten lost just trying to follow Canada to his practices. "Same here," America admitted with a defeated shrug. Then, there was France.

The Frenchman raised his hands. "Not since Napoleon," he admitted.

Well, there went that idea.

So the night ended solemnly with a quiet ride back to Russia's home. The group had gotten back with the Baltics who had revealed to them an empty house. The rest were no doubt out celebrating how Russians celebrated.

Each congratulated Canada optimistically and suggested a short little party of their own after invading Russia's pantries, but Canada announced himself exhausted and quietly asked to be left to rest. They all understood and so retreated to their rooms as well. The next day, however, they were all awoken to servants informing them that Russia was indeed home and wishing they all attend him and the rest of his household for breakfast.

"I should have stayed in bed," England moaned quietly to himself, but it was still loud enough for France to hear and if he could hear it then he had no doubt Russia could. So said Frenchman elbowed the Brit in the ribs and urged him to eat the breakfast graciously laid out before them by their Russian host.

"Be rude anywhere else but here, Arthur," France warily whispered to him.
"But, Francis," England groaned out his complaint as his eyes traveled around the long rectangular table.

The seats seemed designated to an extent; Russia and his sisters sat at the head, Ukraine to his right, and Belarus to his left, the other nations living in his household quietly sat in their seats, but they had sat in ones near and around England, France, and the others so to not alienate them in the group, mingling them. Australia was eating over by Estonia, New Zealand over by Albania, Sealand next to Lithuania and Latvia, Canada sat closest to Russia and his sisters while America was seated a little further away—probably because he picked the seat himself despite the servants trying to inform him Russia had designated a seat close to him and his sisters like he had Canada, instead America opted to sit next to Prussia and Hungary. If Russia was displeased with this he didn't show it.

"He's trying to absorb us into his Soviet 'family'," England said through his teeth. He knew France could see it as well. And by that he was disturbed. Both had no doubt that if Russia were to ever take over the world and have the countries live in his home, breakfasts' would probably look like this.

Other than England and France mumbling to each other the dining room was mostly quiet. The sound of silverware clinking against plates echoed around the room. Gazes were mostly fixated on their meal before them. Indeed it was a very uncomfortable meal and the Western nations all wondered if Russia would insist they take every meal of the day together.

Russia smiled and wiped his mouth. He leaned back in his chair and took up a glass of milk and sipped lightly. "So, how are you enjoying your meal, guests?"

"It's quite delicious," England said politely, though, if one were to examine his plate they would notice how the Brit barely touched the food.

"I really like these skinny pancake things!" Sealand spoke up, holding one up before popping it into his mouth.

"Oh, the blinis? Good, I'm glad," Russia said. "Please, eat up; we have plenty of blinis and oladushki. Our breakfasts consist of a lot of porridge but in honor of Canada's stay I wanted to serve foods he's more accustomed to."

Canada didn't say anything as he drowned his oladushki's in honey—he really wished he had maple syrup but apparently Russia hadn't stocked up on it. Oh well, it'll have to do. His mind was still on preparation for the upcoming match which really wasn't in a few days, but it's all he could think of. Three, he'd have to win the last three matches to win and by God he wanted to win.

"Coulda done with some eggs and maybe some bacon," America spoke up, stabbing into the oladushki.

Tension immediately rose into the air around, making the atmosphere so thick that many of the countries could feel the weight of its downward press. Now they remembered the reason why America and Russia hadn't met face-to-face in over a decade. Even when America was at Canada's place he was made sure to be kept in different rooms from Russia at all times.

Russia finished his glass of milk and set the cup down. He stared at America before the nation finally looked up at him and connected gazes. "I wanted a healthy breakfast, but if you wish to dine like a pig I can fix your meals like so."

America smiled at him and those close to him could see the fork in his hand bending at the curl of his fingers. England would usually speak up to halt a confrontation, but he was still too disturbed with dinning at Russia's table amongst the other countries under his rule. Surprisingly enough it was one
of Russia's own that dared speak up and stop a possible fight.

"I have heard your breakfasts are large, Amerika. The protein no doubt has given you your large frame," Ukraine spoke up, placing her silverware down and looking at the younger nation. Everyone could see how nervous she was in speaking to him, probably because her brother had forbidden her from conversing with the nation; he'd forbidden both his sisters.

America looked shocked the woman had even known how to speak, but the moment his attention was taken away from Russia his mood changed completely. His smile wasn't a daring threat, but welcoming and pleasant.

"Oh, so you've noticed," America chirped and then proceeded to flex his muscular arms before the lady. "Yeah, despite popular belief, American breakfasts are fashioned with muscle gain in mind. As you can see."

Ukraine giggled and then chanced a glanced toward her brother. It only took half a second shift of her gaze to see that frown on his face and his disapproving glare at her. She should have silenced herself, she knew it, but it would be rude to end the conversation like that and so she had no choice but to continue, and she had been wanting to speak to America for a long time anyways.

"Wow, what large muscles," Ukraine praised in politeness to her guest's boasting. "It is funny because I remember Vanya telling me how skinny you used to be."

America coughed a little and scratched his cheek sheepishly. "Yeah? That was ages ago. Different man now. I attract all kind of attention." Which not all was good. "So, you must be the elder sister —?"

"Oh, I'm Ukraine," she said with a smile. She could feel her brother's aura now, demanding she silence herself, but for once in her life she wanted to disobey him. She had known about Russia's passionate affection for the young nation and always wanted to get to know him. She would have once Russia had consummated their relationship and declared it to the world, but that chance had been lost, so now was her chance to finally speak to him like she had waited so long to do.

"It's an honor to meet you," America said, inclining his head in respect. "You can call me Alfred if you'd like."

The use of a country's name was intimate, usually reserved for lovers or very close friends. America never ceased to amaze with how quickly he came to make friends. Ukraine blushed at America's wink and wondered if the boy was flirting with her. She doubted it. She reasoned that this was just his American charm which probably were the reasons that landed her brother in numerous fits of jealousy.

"How kind of you to let me call you by your given name. You can call me Katyusha in return if you'd like," Ukraine said and immediately she felt the weight of her brother's hand on the armrest of her chair. She'd only have so much time before he verbally stopped her and she hoped he did it politely because she wanted to keep talking to America and would until her brother's temper had risen.

"Kat? Cool," America nodded in thanks. "It's a shame we haven't met until now. You're really cool. How about your sister there?" America's eyes turned to Belarus but the girl didn't so much as look at him.

Katyusha smiled nervously and shrugged. "She doesn't speak much," she offered as an excuse. Well, to others besides her siblings, Ukraine mentally added.
"Shame," America frowned. "I would like to get to know the both of you."

"Da, that sounds wonderful," Ukraine said. She felt her heart pick up pace in its beat because Russia's hand on the armrest was squeezing, subtly crunching the wood under his grip. "I have been greatly wanting to sit down and properly exchange introductions since Vanya had met you. All of my hopes were dashed however due to the revolution, and he had to give up so many things. The hardest one being you."

After she had said that the room went utterly quiet. Not even the sound of clinking glasses echoed around. America sat there frozen, his eyes wide in horror before they were oddly enough turned to Russia who looked disturbed himself. Both knew about what Ukraine was referring to and both knew she had just inconspicuously announced what once was and never came to be to the entire room, and both especially knew that France and England were quick-witted and would no doubt have caught that.

Well, possibly if England hadn't been wallowing in his own grief on attending the meal and France mumbling to him about being polite. The silence however caught both's attention and they turned toward everyone with a curious gaze.

"What's wrong?" England asked, suddenly aware of the dead silence.

America was gapping, Russia's splintering grip on Ukraine's chair was now audibly heard, Canada looked baffled, but those narrowing eyes of his as his blinis overflowed with honey signaled he had caught something that was said. New Zealand looked equally confused but oblivious, while Sealand continued munching on the rest of his food.

It was Australia who shared in America and Russia's horrified looks. His face paling before he took action.

Horribly preformed, Australia smacked his glass of milk off of the table. He gasped in fake shock and pointed down to the spilt cup. He inwardly enjoyed the sound of glass shattering against the floor, the noise cut through the silence and finally everyone was looking at him.

"Aw, sorry, mate. Just slipped right off," he excused as he got up and wiped what milk had spilt on him. He bent down to pick up the mess he deliberately made but Russia rose his hand.

"Nyet, the servants will clean it," the hosting nation said. He let out a sigh before standing himself up. "Please, enjoy the rest of your meal. I am going to excuse myself for now, and I would like it if my sisters join me." Russia glanced at both his sisters with smiles before walking off.

The two immediately stood up and made to follow their brother. Ukraine hesitated for a moment but turned around one final time before leaving the room completely and offered a smile for America.

"This is farewell for now; I hope we get the chance to speak again soon."

"Same here, Kat," America said, waving her off knowing that he might not see her again during his stay. He saw Russia. He didn't look pleased that she was talking to him. After they were out of the room America sighed and then laughed louder than necessary but did it anyways. "Did you see Russia, dudes? He looked pissed. But, ya'll are still here so I guess that means you guys can still talk to us, eh, right, Gil?" America leaned over and elbowed the albino in the arm.

Prussia offered a quick smile as did the others. If they were going to be quiet then America would just have to start chatting.

"So, who's up for a tour?" America asked, raising his hand. "Baltics? Care to show me around? Oh,
and make sure you let me see the torture room. I know he's got one here." America threw his head back and laughed loud and obnoxious like usual. His brash attitude seemed to lighten everyone's spirits a little and at least they all got up and gave them a tour of the house.

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"When I say to do something it is wise you do it," Russia bit out through grit teeth as he looked toward his older sister who was looking down at her shuffling feet. "I informed you both not to speak to the Capitalist nation and yet you did it anyway. Natalia is the only one who listened."

"It's because I'm more loyal," Belarus spoke up with a proud smile.

Russia sighed and waited for Ukraine to respond. He loved his sisters, even with their abnormalities, but there were times when they just needed to keep their mouths shut.

"Forgive me, brother, but I really wanted to speak to him," Ukraine spoke up. She looked at her brother with glistening eyes. "It is not fair. I have never met him, only seen pictures of him, never spoken to him, but heard countless things about him. I want to get to know him too, Vanya. Isn't that why you invited him here, to be close to him as well?"

"I invited him here to give him an opportunity to be with his family," Russia informed. "This has nothing to do with me wanting him here."

"You're a liar," Ukraine accused, and she wasn't afraid to say it, even when Russia's jaw loosened at the accusation. "The revolution may have reshaped you and you say your heart as well, but you lie to yourself and to the others. There are layers of the heart and the deepest part is hidden away in a secret place where no revolution or dictator can tarnish. There your innermost feelings are kept and every now and then they are shown. I know you still love him, Vanya, so why won't you try to—?"

"Nyet, you will be quiet!" Russia's tone rose and he slammed his fist against the armrest of the chair he was seated on. Ukraine startled but the look on her face wasn't fright at all, but pity. "You don't understand, Katyusha," Russia said as he sighed out in frustration. Why won't she just stay silenced?

"But I do," Ukraine said even knowing her brother wanted her to quiet herself. "I understand you're lonely even with the house as full as it's been in centuries, I understand that you're stressed with this new power. You've been waiting near a millennia for this but now it's nothing more than a burden to you because all you want to do is to be at peace. You want everyone to stop fighting. You want them to lay side by side; to smile, to laugh. You want to do the same, but you can't. No, there is no peace for the peace-makers." Ukraine then smiled softly. "But I have seen such a peace in you. I know you write to him in secret, and I know that he writes back. You char his letters so that no one will see them, but I have passed by your private office in the late nights and seen you up, seen you writing." She then took a step forward, looking concerned. "If writing to him brings you peace then how much more peace will come if you speak to him, if you hold him, if you—?"

"I said enough!" Russia stood from his chair and loomed over his sister, his fists shaking at his sides and his eyes wide. Belarus was in the room. She had heard and comprehended everything.

"You write to that pig?" Belarus spoke up, her glare narrowing and stance accusing. "Why have you kept this a secret?"

Russia tried his best to ignore the younger, his eyes fixated on his older sister's form, but no matter how dark his aura got she did not back down. She never did when it came to matters of the heart. She had been like this back during the revolution and had not backed down, no, not even to her stronger sibling. It had been Stalin to frighten the woman into submission.
"I did not give you permission to walk down my wing in the night," Russia said. How could he have not noticed her watching him? Had he been that wrapped up in writing to America that he grew careless? He knew Ukraine would not tell his boss, but he didn't want anyone to know—not even his own sisters. "How many times will you defy me?"

"How many times will you deny yourself?" Ukraine asked. "He is here this very moment and yet all you do is hide away and look from afar. It's as if it's the 18th century all over again!"

"We are ENEMIES, Katyusha!" Russia blankly stated. "It would not be wise that we are near each other too often."

Ukraine sighed softly. She had tried to make her brother see to reason but he was always so stubborn. She looked down and flattened the wrinkles in her dress before nodding in understanding. Fine, if that was Russia's excuse then she would just accept it.

"He's a beautiful country, Vanya," Ukraine spoke up softly, her eyes not meeting Russia's. "Much too beautiful to keep suitors at bay for long. You once believed he was promised to you. Promised or not it will not be long before he gives his heart to another because the one he was offering it to was too blind to see it." With one final curtsey in respect she left Russia's presence.

Russia was fuming by then. He had turned and faced the window in his study. He could see the courtyard from there and outside were a couple of his subordinates. They looked to be giving their guests a tour of some sort. He could see America and that stupid look on his face, no doubt laughing that stupid laugh of his, with those beautiful bright blue eyes beamed that made Russia's heart want to stop beating all together if they weren't on him.

"Big brother . . . is it true?"

Oh yes, he forgot Belarus was still in the room. She usually never left unless dismissed and even then she usually never left.

"Are you really writing to him in secret?"

"I am strong, Natalia," Russia said, keeping his gaze down on the happenings in the courtyard only to see the small England look-alike dash off seemingly wanting to play a game of tag. "I do whatever I want. No one will question me." He didn't have to answer her directly, he'd gotten good at responses like this, and so had America. He wonders if the New World nation's been caught writing to him and of what excuses he'd use.

"If the boss were to find out, you—"

Russia felt Belarus take a step closer to him. "Go see that Katyusha minds herself."

"But, brother—" Belarus began to complain as usual.

"Go," Russia demanded, turning slightly to look at his little sister from the corner of his eye. He wasn't satisfied until he heard the girl huff, turn, and then shut the door behind. He sighed once more in frustration and turned back to the window he stood before.

Russia's gaze focused on America, watching as he rolled around with his brothers when they tackled him to the ground. His laughter could almost be heard even through the window, and that smile on his face looked so light-hearted.

"You think he still cares for me, Katyusha? You are wrong. You have not heard the things he's said to me," Russia whispered out sadly, recalling all of the times, every single time he tried to show
America that he still cared for him even after Lenin and Stalin had taken him away from him. But every time America rejected him; said no to his offered love. America did not offer his heart to him. Just his guns and bombs.

Secretly they were friends in written letter; never saying a hurtful word to another. Their subjects steered from wars, politics, and territorial disputes. No, they spoke about movies they fancied, taste in music, favorite styles of dances, and referred books. Russia smiled at that thought, he knew for a fact that America was reading a novel titled Watership Down right now.

Even through his upset over his sister's accusations he was more so upset that she was right. The only time he ever had peace was late in the night, sitting in his private office with a dimly lit lamp, typing out telegrams to America and reading his messages in response. He wanted to be close to America again, but as he stated before they are enemies and anything seen as remotely close was just for show.

America had told him time and time again how he hadn't cared what had happened to Russia or how he felt about their broken relationship. He understood completely that he'd fallen out of love with him. So Russia in turn looked just as heartless even though it was a façade.

"No matter, Fredka," Russia said with a sad smile as he watched America bounce back to his feet and then lead everyone back inside. "I will still love you when you no longer can."

Russia could not give his heart to anyone else even if he tried. While he was glad he and America were on speaking terms again—albeit secret speaking terms only through late-night telegrams—it was not the closure he wanted. Yes, of course he wanted to be able to speak face-to-face with America again without any underlining tension, to touch him without worry the boy try to break his wrist, to hold him in protection not to crush, and to . . .

Ukraine was right; it was like the 18th century all over again.

Well, that left him with two options to two possible outcomes. One, play it with caution like he had been doing for the past decade and let their relationship keep where it was with it neither progressing or digressing. Or, two, see it as if it were the 18th century again and therefore start over with America possibly rejecting him—again—or ignoring him. Hm, they both sounded promising.

Russia felt a headache coming along. He did not invite America over for more drama, but it seemed to follow anyways. Oh well, he had medicine in the cabinet.

…

That night America had suggested a campfire out in the backyard. The Soviets were not disappointing in their hospitality, but America had insisted they try his version of entertainment and after convincing them through persistent measures he taught them all how to make s'mores. It reminded Russia of his times spent with the others in their Ally alliance during WWII.

Even though he didn't like the fact that America thought he could suggest or do whatever he wanted while housing with him Russia didn't mind this activity. His presence seemed to calm his trembling subordinates, even the ones who had never officially met the young nation. He was a crowd-pleaser and always a pleasantry to be around. Yes, indeed he was the missing piece in Russia's household—the one to calm everyone's paranoid fears.

In that household America wouldn't have to worry about being the strongest so others wouldn't hurt him. No, he'd be protected in Russia's strong arms. The only thing expected of him was to make everyone smile—like he was now. If he could do that then Russia would worry about the brutality
needed to keep dominance in the world.

One day. One day.

The small little event carried on into the night and slowly, one by one, the nations retreated back to their rooms. Canada had been the first to retire for the evening. After all he had a game with Russia tomorrow so he needed his rest. Sealand had fallen asleep and New Zealand had made it his duty to put him back in his room while France joined them to return to their rooms. Australia had fallen asleep with a half-eaten s'more hanging out of his mouth. The boy had been leaning against England when he dozed off and startled the tired Brit by slumping over more and landing in his lap. England was quick to smile and comb his fingers through his second son's unruly locks before his eyes closed and his head nodded from dozing again.

Russia's underlings had left, knowing full well that they could not push past their curfew even with Russia apart of the fire and s'more event. His sisters had not joined because Russia didn't want them to. America had inquired about them, but the USSR knew that the Capitalist nation secretly understood.

Russia knew he should get rest as well, but his mind was troubled. His gaze fixated on the dancing flames of the small but warming fire. The crisp autumn chill was setting in and he wondered why America hadn't yet turned in for the night. He usually was a baby to colder temperatures.

Tearing his gaze away from the flames and mind from darker thoughts Russia beheld America. He was seated on the opposite side of the fire closer to England and Australia. But he was staring up, his eyes glued to the celestial heavens above. For the first time in a long time Russia beheld a sort of calm about the boy. What a curious thing.

"Have you ever been to the Grand Canyon, Russia?" The Slavic nation blinked in surprise. Was America addressing him?

Russia stared at the nation across the fire for a moment in time before shaking his head. "Nyet, I have not."

"Shame," America whispered, his thoughts floating up above there in the Milky Way. "The stars are so bright there—so clear—much like here." Then America leaned his head down, looked toward Russia, and surprised the older nation once more with a soft smile. "Your skies are very nice."

Russia had almost forgotten that astronomy bubbled up a tender fondness inside America. As it did him. Glancing up toward the round near-full moon Russia smiled. "What did it feel like to stand up there?" He missed the confused look from America as he turned his eyes upon him.

"I wrote it all out in the message," America reminded, raising his brow. Why was Russia asking again?

"Da, I know, I want to hear it from you," Russia informed. Letters on a parchment was not like seeing the sparkle of excitement in someone's eyes and hearing the pitch change in their tone as the subject scraped close to their heart-felt desires.

America understood and soon dozens of stars shot out of his blue gaze and those irises just seemed to glow. "It was the coolest thing, Russia! I was literally floating. I mean I was still walking in steps, but I was so light!" America had jumped up from his seat and proceeded in reenacting the motion of moon walking. His smile was so bright and mood so light that he hadn't even realized he was talking like this in front of Russia—face-to-face—with England and Australia half-snoozing next to him.
Yes, this was much better than the telegram message America had sent him. It was one letter Russia hadn’t burned. He kept it close to another letter America had written him long ago. It was definitely a favorite because of the detail America had taken to put into it. He could already envision America sitting down, staring at the blue planet which birthed their kind. Amazing, it truly was and Russia now wished his boss would let him make such trips.

He hadn’t known America had gone with his men, but he understood why it was kept secret. Now Russia wouldn’t deny the jealousy he felt, especially now as America told him with enthusiasm what it was like up there.

"I want to go up there again, I really, really, really do!" America exclaimed, though he made sure to keep his tone with England lightly slumbering next to him. But he still never took his eyes away from the stars and he reached up as if to take hold of the moon and hold it in his palms.

After the weighing press of reality began to sink in Russia watched his shoulders slump and his stance even slouch. He turned back to Russia with a smile still on his face, though it was saddening.

"The boss said I can probably only travel there once though," America informed downhearted. He shrugged his shoulders and then bent his knees to sit back down upon the cool grass and poke at the fire just to hear it cackle its cruel laugh at him.

"Why's that?" Russia asked.

"Isn't it obvious?" America glanced up at Russia and shrugged again, jamming his stick into the belly of the flames. "The shit down here needs chaperoned. Wars—politics—foreign relations; all that jazz."

"Well then, when the world's settled down then you can go back up there," Russia simply said, leaning back on his arms and looking up toward the moon.

"Tchyeah, in my dreams," America muttered.

"What? Too big a dream even for an American?" Russia mocked a gasp and smiled as America frowned and puffed his cheeks.

"Of course not! But that dream might just take some time, a really, really, really, really long time," America said. "Maybe I'll grow out of it and not care about going up there again."

"I doubt that," Russia assured. "In time I too plan to go up there."

"Well, I still beat you to the moon, and I made sure you'll damn well know it. Planted my flag on it and everything," America stated with a sure nod.

Russia sighed. Of course America had even told him about that detail in the letter as well. It annoyed him, but it was something America thought historical and significant and purposely did so no one would forget it—so no one would forget him. Fine.

But this was nice. Somehow they actually managed a civil conversation without the need for underlined threats and pressing auras. It must be a subject issue.

So, Russia tried another subject.

"What would you say if I win this tournament, Amerika?" Russia asked. He hoped sports weren’t an issue with him, especially the sport of hockey; he knew America was more akin to the likes of baseball than anything else.
"I'd say I wasted a trip here," America said flatly. "I came to cheer for my brother and to see a miracle on ice."

Russia chuckled. "It is his team who are world renowned so if my team wins it will be a 'miracle on ice' not the other way around." Why did America always see him as the antagonist? Always one perspective with him.

"Well you sure are swinging him for a loop, and I'm not going to lie, it's exciting to see him working so hard for something," America muttered with a chuckle like it was a joke of some sorts. "It's a David versus Goliath thing."

Russia smiled that fake smile of his so not to show his frustrating upset. "I hope you are not referring to me as Goliath," he said through grit teeth. How many times until he saw that his team was the underdog? Those were the types of stories America liked, right? While Russia wanted to be number one he knew the fact was that Canada and his boys were better. Hopefully not for long which in turn would give his country great pride and there was nothing better than feeling his people's pride for him.

"Whatever, man," America said with a sigh as he stood up. "Better catch some z's, but, honestly, Russia, your house is haunted or something. It's hard to even take a nap in my room. Should probably check that out."

Russia looked at America in confusion. Haunted? As in seeing ghosts? Impossible. This house was brand new. Not much history to it.

Russia watched America turn and touch England, gently shaking him awake. The Brit snorted in a breath and opened his eyes wide. "What, what, where are we?"

"Still at Russia's, but it's late, we should probably rest up so we can get our cheer on for Mattie tomorrow," America said and England nodded in agreement.

England gently shook his younger son awake and soon they were standing, picking up their belongings and turning to head inside.

"Amerika, might I inquire one last thing of you," Russia spoke up, catching the Western nation before he turned to head back inside with England and Australia.

"What is it?" America asked.

"This haunting is some ghost, da? Where does it usually appear?" Russia asked, narrowing his eyes in suspicion.

"The window," America answered and then motioned his hand as if pressing against a window. "He does this and then makes the room freakin' freezing." America afterwards chuckled and pushed his index finger under his nose. "He's even got a funny mustache."

"What on earth are you rambling on about, America? Come on, let's head back to our rooms," England called while dragging a half-asleep Australia by the collar.

Russia gasped. His eyes widened and jaw loosened. America was seeing a ghost in his window? A cold ghost? A ghost with a . . .

General Winter.

This early? Why was he there? No . . . could it be because of America's presence?
That thought didn't sit well with Russia and he opted to stay out later than he should have in search for the old ghost. The fire had long since faded and the winds chilled ever so slightly. The season was autumn, not winter, but Russia knew that even the General would come to dominate the precursor season.

The hour was late and he waited. Now that he understood of the ghost's want to destroy the younger nation he realized his mistake in inviting America to his home. Firstly, he hadn't thought the General would appear during this time of year, and secondly, if he was so appearing what would he do? What could he do?

He surveyed his home, especially the section America and the others were rooming in but he felt nothing. Perhaps the Western nation had been lying. But the detailed description was uncanny.

Russia sighed. The hour was late so he needed to retire for the game coming soon. Still, even as he laid his head down to rest on his bed his thoughts were disturbed of the General's ghost.

Russia didn’t mind his torment upon him because that meant it spared others from his icy grasp. He would not however stand him for tormenting his guests. It was quite rude and Russia did not need America returning to his own home with dreadful expressions of his house.

Russia had built his current house to chase away the ghosts and demons of his past. While they still had some issues with plumbing and electrical components it was a new house. Built big enough to house the rest of the countries of the world comfortably. There was a large study, entertainment rooms, a musical room for Austria and the others who enjoyed it, even a pool for the island countries who loved water; in the courtyard the fields stretched out and offered all sorts of sports courts, such as rugby for England, soccer for the Italians, even a field easily conformed to play baseball in for America.

It was a perfect home and Russia would not have it any other way. So as for General Winter showing and frightening his residents, it was not acceptable.

Russia let out an annoyed sigh before finally being able to get some shut-eye. This frustrating reason alone was why he had over ten heaters in his room; to combat that old man's coldness. And, his planned place for America when he eventually became a permanent resident in his household was there in his room. Russia smiled at the thought of knowing even when General Winter would try to freeze the both of them their heat combined would undoubtedly be enough to chase the angry spirit away.

One day.

Ivan might have blamed his troubled thoughts set on General Winter for his team's loss. He might have hadn't the reality that they lost in Mother Russia been so disheartening. He could see Canada being crushed by his teammates in celebration only for England, France, America, and the others to come toward the benches and embrace him in ecstatic glee.

"You did it, you did it!" America exclaimed all too loudly as he nearly crushed his stepbrother in his embrace.

"That was amazing, Matt!" Australia praised.

"Yeah, that makes it two more wins and the series is yours," New Zealand said with a proud smile.

"I wanna hold the trophy when you get it," Sealand piped up. Canada just smiled at the young boy. He then turned toward England who had raised him as his own and then to France who was his
"You can do it, bro, we believe in you," America said as he fist-bumped the northern country. "But before we get all worked up, let's head out and par-tay!"

"And just where, might I add, are we to go for celebration?" England asked as he crossed his arms and raised a brow at his eldest.

"I dunno, downtown somewhere. I'm sure there's bars all over the place," America assured. "Besides, look at Mattie, he's trembling with the need to go out and scream how bad he wiped Russia's ass on the ice. I know you wanna go, bro."

The Canadian blushed and nodded his head. So they all left in search for a place to party while Russia tried his best to coax his men out of their disappointment. They had lost a few games against Canada and his team, but losing in their homeland had been hard. Russia, however, assured them that if they could win one more game then Canada, even if he won the last, would not succeed in becoming champion of the series.

But the loss saw more attention to Russia and more attention meant more prodding questions.

"Have you been ill, Ivan?"

Russia turned to see his boss staring at him with a look of disproval. Unlike his last boss, this one was more stern and well collected. He wanted Russia to look strong in front of other countries, even if they were far lesser than himself.

"Nyet, Mr. Brezhnev," Russia assured.

"Then tell me why you lost today?" Brezhnev asked.

"Because Canada bested me," that's what Russia wanted to say, but he couldn't before his boss because he knew his boss did not want that answer. Waving his players to leave Russia looked at his boss. "It was my mistake, it will not happen again," he assured.

"Nyet, it better not," the man said with his frown deepening before he left.

But it had. Russia had lost the next game as well.

"Bud' proklyata eta!" Russia shouted as he threw his hockey stick down and watched with distain as the routine from Canada's previous win repeated. America and the others were embracing the Canadian and jumping up and down in celebration.

"What is happening, big brother?" Belarus asked as she and Ukraine stood near as Russia took off his helmet and gloves. "You should be destroying them!"

Russia remained silent, his gaze fixated on Canada and the others. There would be nothing like that for him and his loss.

"Natalia, at ease, Ivan is trying," Ukraine assured. "All he has to do is win the next game and the championship goes to him."

"So too with that Canadian," Belarus pointed toward the fair-haired nation who was skating around his men and high-fiving them all. "This is an embarrassment. No one should disrespect my brother. No one!"
"And what would you do?" Ukraine asked, taking the stance of a mother with her fists on her hips and a look of authority in her gaze. "Are you going to play against Mr. Canada? You cannot skate, Natalia. Please, have faith in our brother."

"I never doubt him," Belarus assured. "Canada has to be cheating. He has to be! And I will bet it is that damn Amerika who is encouraging him."

Ukraine sighed. She looked toward her younger brother and said, "You did great today, Vanya. You will win the next. Now, I believe I need to escort our sister back home before she attempts to hurt anyone."

Russia had contemplated on letting Belarus have her way and sabotage the Canadian—at least he wouldn't stand a chance against him on their final match and Russia wouldn't risk disappointing his leader and people, but that was below him. So he watched his sisters leave and he stayed with his boys to hopefully get them into shape to win the final game.

It was doubtful that anyone slept the night of the 27th because when the day of September 28th arrived they all rose at the crack of dawn. Their meals were eaten in silence and tension and when they were not obliged to sit and eat they were away. Russia was practicing with his players and Canada with his as America and the others watched on silently.

"God I can't wait for the game," England spoke up with a smirk on his face. "If Matthew wins that'll put a damper on Russia for sure. Heh, serves the bastard right for humiliating Matthew in his own home."

"I have no doubt my little Mattieu can win this," France said, flicking his hair back haughtily. "You win this series for the glory of the French Empire, for papa."

"French Empire? Hell no, he's been a part of my empire for far longer, frog-face!" England spoke up, bumping chests with the taller and older country.

"Oui, but he was always a true Frenchman deep inside," France said with elegance that made England want to barf at.

"They're at it again," New Zealand said with a sigh.

"You're just lucky you didn't exist during the French and Indian war," America muttered as both he and Canada remembered the utter annoyance of the two fighting over the both of them.

It was exciting to see Canada so strongly engrossed into something. As America sees him he's nothing but a maple-loving, laid back nation that resides just north of his place. To see him being a leader was new to him.

Sure, Canada had surprised America during the War of 1812, but he had been more so focused on England during that time. But now that he thought back on it Canada was pretty badass back then. The younger nation was full of surprises and America was glad they were buds now.

But even so this did not save him from Russia during the final game.

America bit his lips as he watched Russia aggressively score the first hit. Canada followed closely, eventually matching. Every time Russia scored Canada would shoot one and tie the both of them.

The crowds around went crazy but America and the others sat on the edges of their seats watching the two nations go at it. Glancing over toward Russia's box where his fellow Soviets nations sat near, as well as his boss, he noticed Russia's sisters. They looked nervous as well, that younger one looked
America watched after every score Canada struck her deathly glare would follow him. America wouldn't mind playing bodyguard for the Canadian if he so happened to win because he was sure she'd try to make a pass at him—he's seen murderous glares before and shit did she have one.

Ukraine, however, glanced across the rink and their gazes met. She smiled and waved at him. Man, was she cool.

America frowned seeing the younger sister notice this and quickly jabbed her skinny elbow into her sister's side. Ukraine looked hurt but quickly went to scolding the girl who simply turned her murderous intentioned glare upon him. America's been met with those glares before and so glared back. He smiled as he watched the younger nation eventually have to look away—play with the big boys, little girl, and get hurt.

He had nothing against Belarus, really it was the first time he's met Russia's sisters. It was too early to say what he felt of them. Before, he had been eagerly excited about meeting them. He knew that when he and Russia . . . when they would have grown closer so long ago, that he would have met Russia's sisters that he had mentioned once he had. Sort of like meeting the family.

Maybe one day when his and Russia's relations weren't so strained. Or when Ukraine and Belarus broke free of him. America sighed, such a thought seemed so distant and unrealistic in the current time and era.

When cheers erupted around him, not the cheers of the crowd, but of England and France and the others America was shaken from his depressing thoughts and turned his gaze back to the rink. Canada had just scored two more goals; he was one away from tying with Russia and two away from taking the lead.

Then he noticed something completely wrong. Russia had switched to defensive. He was trying to keep his score, but Canada on the offensive was a beast unleashed.

Another goal in the net and Canada was tied. America was excited for him, he really was but then why was his heart sinking and his eyes on Russia and his team? Why was he finding himself frowning when seeing Russia struggling just to block Canada and his team from making another goal—from beating him.

America saw it, the numerous glances toward Russia's boss who was sitting next to Belarus and Ukraine. He looked pissed. America hadn't seen Russia unnerved by a boss in a long time, no his new boss didn't trouble him or hold his leash as tightly as someone like Stalin did but this Mr. Brezhnev was full of surprises and when his expectations were dashed by his own country, oh, it shown on his face and America saw how much Russia hated to disappoint.

It was close, so close. They were pushing, blocking, almost punching it was that tense.

Then, it happened. With thirty-four seconds left Canada struck the winning shot into the goal. America's fingers automatically pressed against his camera to take the picture but his mind was blank as his relatives around jumped up from their seats and cried out in praise.

"He did it! He did it!" Australia said as he bounced Sealand up and down on his shoulders while pulling his younger brother, New Zealand, around in praise.

"That's my boy!" Both England and France exclaimed in their respective languages, but England caught the French term and was quickly on the Frenchman.
"I said he's a part of my empire, frog!" England spat as he grabbed France by his ascot and shook him.

"Non, your empire is history as is his ties with you," France retorted. "I am his papa and that's something you can't take away from me."

While the two scuffled and the other three marched around in a train of victorious chants America stood there looking quite stoic. It was unusual but the others had yet to notice. While he was very happy for Canada he was quite shocked with how the game turned out.

He had started in this tournament cheering and betting on his stepbrother. He had been persuaded to come to hostile Moscow so he could continue said cheering and support. Now though . . . he was at a loss on his conflicting feelings.

What the hell was wrong with him?

He had snapped the historic picture. He had sided with Canada. Yet now . . .

"He . . . lost," America whispered and watched Russia's disappointment settle into the crowd.

He hadn't thrown a fit like many would think. No, instead he solemnly told his men of their appreciated hard work and ushered them away. Russia wouldn't even look back at Canada as he was hoisted up onto the shoulders of his team. Instead America watched as he looked up toward his boss who subsequently turned away from him, refusing to look at him. Harsh.

"We have to celebrate! We have to celebrate!" England exclaimed quickly as he shook America out of his daze. Huh, since when had he finished tearing out France's throat?

America was good at shifting personalities to hide secrets. He quickly put on a smile, turned and held up his camera. "Say, 'Go Canada!'"

"GO CANADA!" All five nations exclaimed and smiled their biggest in the pictures.

"Okay, so, go grab Mattie, I'll meet you at the bar," America said and quickly they separated.

All of them partied hard, were probably the only ones in Moscow celebrating the end of the series. The others around them muttered and grumbled. They weren't too happy but the victors weren't really inclined to care.

"Can I hold it, Canada, pretty please?" Sealand asked, reaching out his hands toward the nice trophy the Canadian had been reluctant to let anyone touch.

Canada smiled and nodded. He gave the cup to Sealand whose eyes brightened and held it close. If he dropped it and caused one dent he'd pay, Canada didn't care if he was a little boy or not.


"Yeah, I'll be sure to send you all copies," America announced.

"I feel a tad bit sorry for poor Russie," France admitted. "I hear that loss is death in Soviet Russia, non?"

They all laughed and gloated on the win. They probably would have stayed up the entire night had not they had a few younger countries with them who tended to automatically fall into slumber at a certain hour.
"Well, I best be getting him to bed," England said as he took up Sealand. He tried prying Canada's trophy from his grasp but the little boy refused to let it go. England chuckled and offered Canada an apologetic smile before taking the boy up.

Canada had opted to leave with them, probably to make sure nothing befell his hard-fought prize. Australia was next to doze and before New Zealand took him back to his room America had France accompany them for security.

"What about you, Amérique? Aren't you coming?" France questioned before he left the bar with the England's two younger sons.

"I'll be right behind ya. Just gonna finish this," America said, raising his bottle of liquor.

France nodded and escorted the two younger nations back to their rooms. America stayed for a little while longer, seems finishing the drink was taking more time than he had previously thought. Even when he had finished it he ordered one more drink just because he was craving one.

When the bartender sat the class of alcohol in front of him he picked it up. He swirled the liquid around and gazed at it for a moment. Pulling it close he stopped when he heard a familiar voice.

"A-Ah, Mr. America!" America turned to see Lithuania dashing into the bar. He looked frantic. Oh God, what now?

When the Baltic finally managed to stand before him with his lips parted and hands shaking, ready to tell him some ghastly news—America was certain of it—America held up his finger to stop him. He gulped down the shot real fast and let the drink burn his insides and send a buzz into his mind. At least he'd be partially numb when receiving whatever news Lithuania had for him.

"What is it, Toris?" America finally asked after letting the drink shake through his whole body. After taking in the Lithuanian's appearance America frowned. The poor nation looked paler than he had seen him when he first entered the bar. That struck a nerve with America as he stood up from his stool and stepped closer to the brunette. "What's wrong?"

Lithuania blinked and then his eyes darted around. He wasn't saying anything, in fact America thought he looked just like him during his Red Scare. Ha, how paranoid was he.

"Is it Russia?" America asked. He wasn't stupid, he knew that despite Russia's want to house the entire world so they could be one happy family that nation could be known for brutally beating his subordinates. Something America's wondered if was always a part of Russia—even when he was imperialist.

Still Lithuania hadn't said a word. In fact his knees were knocking together and the nation looked ready to faint. Poor guy. America was sad he had to give him up all those years ago. They were quick to hit it off and to see him in worse conditions than when he was at his place tore America up inside. But there really was nothing he could do at the moment—Russia was just too strong to combat to try and free the other nations, even Lithuania.

"You okay, man? You look faint," America said in concern. "Oh, I know, how 'bout a drink? On me!"

America ordered another round but as soon as the drink was poured and slid Lithuania jumped away from the offered cup. What was his problem?

Honestly, America loved Lithuania, the Baltic was a great guy, but even he wasn't too short of getting annoyed with him. With a frown America pushed the glass out of the way and shrugged his
shoulders. "What a waste," he said with a sigh. Then something dawned on him. "Oh, oh I get it; you've come to tell me Mr. Russia wants us all back at his place. Past curfew, huh?"

Nothing, again. So, America went with his previously thought scenario.

"Well, you can tell him to shove it," America stated. "I don't live in his house and if he gets upset I can always room at an inn. Simple as that."

"You should leave." America blinked. Finally, the Baltic said something.

"As I said before, I'll leave this bar when I'm ready," America said, his tone uncaring. "Russia's not my boss. I'm free, baby."

"No, you should leave this country, please," Lithuania urged, pressing closer to America in desperation. Man, was it clear as day on him.

"Cool your jets, I will soon enough," America said as he tried prying the Lithuanian country off of him. "What's the rush though?"

Lithuania went silent for a moment, his gaze falling. "It's just not safe here. You shouldn't have come here in the first place, so please. Please, you must leave this very night."

"Not safe? I know," America said with an optimist smile and wink. "But I'm the hero and heroes are strong and courageous. I don't back down from no threat, especially not Russia."

"It's not Russia," Lithuania said.

"Who then?" America asked. He could play the guessing game too, he was quite good at it. "Is it his wacky sister? Or maybe his boss, tch, go figure. Yeah, I'm sure every single Russian wants me dead. Well, won't happen 'cause I'm not really here."

"America, please," Lithuania pressed again.

Suddenly the Baltic was taken aback by America's soft change in attitude. His smile was less cocky and more tender and his gaze now twinkling dimly. It was like when he used to live with him. America used to smile at him like that and Lithuania thought he'd never see such a smile before—especially in this Cold War.

"Relax, Toris," America said as he placed his hands on the trembling man's shoulders. "I'm fine. I promised Canada that I wouldn't draw attention and get myself into trouble. As far as anyone knows I'm just a traveling tourist. There's no need to worry. I know when to shut my trap."

Lithuania was now trembling with frustration at not being able to make America see. The Baltic had his fists clenched and teeth grit as America turned and paid the bartender before taking up his coat and putting it on for the cool night. He turned and began to head out before Lithuania knew it.

"Ah, America?"

America turned and smiled. "Go back to the house. I'll catch up with you later."

Later? "Then where are you going?" Lithuania asked.

America turned his gaze back around to the city alight around him. "I'm in Moscow, probably the only time I'll ever be here. I'm gonna map it out for the hell of it, and maybe do some sight-seeing."

And that was the last Lithuania had seen of America.
True to his word America traveled around the city, not causing anyone harm and keeping to himself. His pace was slow, slower still when he hopped aboard a train in the dead of the night and relaxed into his seat. The train ride wasn't too bad, the seats were comfy, the food pretty good, and the people sitting just across from him were pleasant as well.

It was a man and a woman, probably in their early twenties. A couple, and an affectionate one at that. The two were giggling with each other, holding hands, rubbing noses, and sometimes sneaking a few kisses in between the two of them every now and then.

They both blushed quite cutely when they finally noticed America had been watching them with mature fondness.

"Oh, prosti nas za nenuzhnyye displayev," they had said to America with bashful glances at him. Both unaware that the being sitting near them was indeed the nation they were taught to hate because of their own country's rivalry for him.

America shrugged and smiled. He didn't mind their affectionate displays. Who was he to tell lovebirds to quit being in love? Russian or not.

"Nyet, eto normal'no. Eto ne bespokoit menya," America responded kindly. The two simply nodded and then leaned against the other, closing their eyes and simply enjoying the other's presence.

It was getting late and no doubt the others were fast asleep. America simply stared out of the window from the box car and sighed. He didn't know why he was doing this, but felt he should. He knew that if the others found out they would probably kick his ass, but they didn't need to know. He'd be back before they woke up. He was certain of it.

Knowing England he'd wake up with a hangover the next morning—scratch that—the next afternoon, so America had plenty of time to go where he wanted and then come back before they . . .

America rolled his head as a wave of nausea hit him. He didn't know if it was because of his brooding thoughts or . . . wait . . . Placing a hand on his stomach America frowned. He didn't feel good. He thought maybe he'd eaten something wrong but if that were the case he'd just puke it right up to get it out of his system, but he didn't feel like he needed to hurl.

No, this sickness was different. The young nation looked down and observed his hands. He stretched out his fingers and then curled them into a fist to test his grip. It was weakening. He could feel something—he wasn't quite sure what it was—creep throughout his body. It was subtle, but he could feel it.

As the train ride progressed he could feel its spread lengthen and now his legs felt a little weaker. He was a nation, yes, and it took a lot more than food poisoning to get him sick so he was a little nervous as to what was happening. His mind immediately went to his homeland and his people. No, he knew in his heart they were fine. So what was it?

Finally, when his destination was reached and everyone was getting up to leave he sat there. He sat there because he was short on breath. Because his legs wouldn't move. Because he knew what the likely cause of his illness was.

But he would not panic. Heroes don't panic.

Right before the doors closed and the train left the station America forced himself up and out of the transportation. He would not fall in that train. God only knew what would happen if the Russian police found him lying there on the floor.
The weakness was now changing stages. A burn in his muscles started up and the more he walked the more it hurt. He wasn't like humans, he could take a great amount of pain and still persevere but this was pushing it. It really was.

Even when he should have turned around and tried to make it back to England and the others he didn't. He rode hours to this place and wouldn't stop until he's seen it. So he tried not to draw attention to himself by his movement. He kept his pace even as much as possible but by the time he reached the place's gates he was grasping onto its bars for dear life, bending the metal in his grasp.

He stayed there for a few moments to try and catch his breath and hold in a few moans of pain. His eyes stung with tears and when he closed them they felt so hot, his entire skull felt like a volcano ready to explode. But, no, he had to move on.

It was too late at night for much guard to be around the place and by the look of the state it was in . . . it wasn't worth defending much.

America frowned at the palace. The first place he had been housed in Russia's lands. It had belonged to Empress Catherine—he had liked her; she had been very wise for a female ruler. Just looking at it again brought a fond smile to America's face, but it was all too quick to fade upon noticing the ruin it lay in.

America didn't doubt that it had been Prussia who laid waste to the palace. There looked to be some work done on it, but there was still much to be desired. A shame, really. Those damn Soviets just couldn't take care of things.

With a huff America lurched himself over the gate. He landed on his feet fine, but his balance was shot and he leaned forward too far to fall against the ground. Picking himself up was harder than he thought and when he had he had to remain still to catch his breath again.

Finally he walked into the dark palace. He was so glad there weren't guards around. He picked the right hour to come.

Walking down the halls his legs eventually took him upstairs and down the halls that had once been filled with guest rooms. When he opened one such room he managed a smile through his pain-stricken face. He'd been given this room a long time ago.

He entered the room and took in its condition. So many things were missing from it that he had remembered being there. The dresser was gone, as well as the mirrors, the night stands and writing desk. Only one thing remained and it was the beaten up bed.

America could see it. He could see the rich red and gold fabrics of the now torn, tattered, and faded sheets. He could see the dark oak of the bedframe and those fluffy feather pillows piled near the top of the canopy. All were nearly gone now.

It figures.

America sat himself down on the bed and let out a sigh. He shuttered and swallowed a pain that attacked his nerves. He would not let this illness ruin his reminiscence.

Just like so many things taken and torn from him in this country so too had all the places been treated of his memories of his time spent there. It really wasn't a bright idea in coming there but America felt he needed to get it off his chest. The idea to come really hadn't dawned on him until he had some time to himself in the bar after everyone else had left.

The notion of this visit was mentally shot down at first but after hours of staring at his drink he made
up his mind and if he was taught anything in his youth it was to stick to his decision and to do it as soon as he could. So he did, and now he found himself on the verge of a horrifying sickness that would no doubt leave him vulnerable.

But he took heart in knowing that he was all alone. There would be no guard, no KGB, no politician, hell, not even a civilian would chance upon him. The place was desolate and empty. Good.

America nearly rolled over onto the dusty bed and laid there until the rest of his illness enveloped him, but there was still one more thing he wanted to see. So he forced his body up, back outside, down the hall, down the stairs, out the back, and into the gardens.

The weeds had overrun the beautiful scenery and the statues, most of them where demolished from either neglect or war. Sad, this courtyard was his favorite part of the palace. Walking into the maze of hedges he smiled. He remembered racing little Quincy around those tall bushes and Mr. Dana would get so mad at the both of them.

America reached out to touch the withered brush and felt the dry skeletal frame of the plant. It would take a miracle to revive it. So, with a frown and a sharp intake of breath from the pain worsening, America marched on.

He tried to make it deeper into the center of the garden but didn't reach it like he had wanted to. The pain to his dismay was tearing his skull open and his limbs were beginning to lock to try to still movement and tremble in the agony the illness was wringing through the body.

America let out a small cry and bit his lip until it bled. His eyes closed and the tears fell. He felt so dizzy, and the fire inside him was threatening to consume him even as the air around him became chilly and the wind began picking up.

Finally his knees buckled and he collapsed, his torso collided against a stone fountain side. It was empty, both his hands splayed out into the bowl of the fountain, dry, but aching. Looking up America managed to make out a figure. He smiled one last time in seeing a familiar face, dare he say a familiar friend.

"Hello, Ivan," he said up at the statue through quick pained breaths. "You mind watching over me . . . for a little . . . while?"

America was glad the statue hadn't been damaged. It still looked just like he had last seen it—old and weathered. He was surprised the thing hadn't toppled over when Prussia tore through the place. Amazing indeed.

America then cringed as he felt the illness seep into his very bones and try to tear his marrow apart from sinew. He gasped out, holding his gut before lurching over and spewing out acidic bile that burned as it came out. The contents of his stomach wasn't the only thing that lay at America's side. Clear as ever he could make out blood and when he touched his mouth and nose he found the substance leaking from him.

He'd been poisoned.

Chapter End Notes
Historical Notes:

The event focused on now is the Summit Series of '72 between the Soviet Union and Canada. Pretty cool series of hockey games, all I'm saying is look it up or give it a watch. Pretty cool.

And near the end of the chapter America had gone back to Catherine's palace. It's not the Winter Palace, but her own. This was the first place America was housed in Russia during the 18th century so he has some sort of sentimental attachment to it. It's a very nice palace but had been ruined in WWII. The Russians eventually began to fix it up, but it just took some time.

Wow, shortest history information ever. Of course there's references to other historical events in this chapter like the Moon Landing of '69 and the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I) détente of May 26th 1972.
Play Nice, Part 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Moscow, Russia. Early Morning of September 29th 1972

It was an old habit that never really died. Every few hours or so England—if he wasn't drunk—would wake up and check in on his children. He reasoned it had been because he had once been such a large empire and cared for so many children that it was natural now. The ones now independent of him never liked him doing this and it was a little hard to anyways with each of them living in different houses, but to a select few he knew they would never mind.

His blood offspring were the only ones who didn't seem to mind—except for America of course. Canada, even knowing he wasn't his, found this instinct endearing. So England woke in the middle of the night and did this.

Opening Canada's door he found the nation slumbering like the champion he was. In his arms was the trophy he had won. England smiled at the sight of him and then quietly shut the door and moved on to the next room.

Even though Sealand had his own room he was always found in either New Zealand or Australia's room. It was New Zealand this time. The two were cuddled close and England moved to the next room. Australia was found lying on the floor in a pile of sheets. He'd somehow fallen off of his bed in the night.

With a sigh England shook his head and entered into his second son's room. He pulled the covers away from him and then attempted to pick up the Aussie.

Good God! Why was a majority of his sons so thick-boned?! Where on earth had they inherited that from?

England's face was red with exertion as he tried to lift Australia's frame up and back onto the bed by hooking his hands under his arms and pulling him up by the torso. The boy hardly budged and if anything England only managed to slump him over onto the side of the bed. Hail the Queen, he remembered a time when he could pick him up entirely and distribute him onto the bed properly.

This might take a while.

England was glad Australia was a heavy sleeper. After struggling for a couple of minutes in different angles England finally managed to get Australia back onto the bed. Now he was out of breath. Covering the brunette, England finally left the room with a heavy gasp.

New Zealand and Sealand had taken more after him, his two older sons—he wasn't quite sure. The only relative of his he could think of who was just as thick-framed was Scotland and he'd rather not think of him at the moment. There's no telling what that redhead would say if he found out his two older nephews inherited his build. England would never hear the end of it.

Moving on toward America's room, England peeked inside. It was quite clean, which surprised England. He knew how much of a packrat America could be, but unlike his storage closet his home as well as rooms he stayed in were unreasonably clean and organized. Yes, he gets that from his dear ol' dad.
Even so, it wasn't the cleanliness of the room that surprised England but the lack of the nation's presence in the room.

"America?" England called out quietly. "Alfred?" He stepped into the room and looked around for a moment before turning the light on. No, he wasn't there.

The hour was late. He couldn't still be at the bar could he?

England didn't have to worry himself over the nation because America always told him not to. The boy'd been through countless wars without him and England didn't in the slightest worry.

No, no that was a lie, of course he worried. America was his eldest. Had been his only child for over a century. He had been the one to help heal the pain of losing his previous child. Of course there was a sentiment connection with him even if America felt nothing in kind.

"France, France, do you know where America is?" The Frenchman moaned in his sleep and opened his eyes to glare up at the Englishman who was shaking him awake none too gently. He groaned as he turned in his bed and then looked at the time.

"Do you know the hour, Angleterre?" France hissed out in annoyance. "And how do I know where he is? What does it matter?" America was old enough and strong enough to be out on his own hence his victory in separating from England.

"It matters because we're in Soviet territory," England reasoned and he could tell as France mulled this thought over the Frenchman was slowly coming to his reason for being concerned.

"He was last at the bar," France said as he sat up in his bed and threw his legs over the side to rub his weary face. He would get England back for cutting his beauty sleep.

"Should I go and see?" England asked. He didn't want to come off as stalker-ish.

"If it makes you feel any better," France sighed out.

So England did and quickly after he had he was rushing back into France's room. The Frenchman surprisingly hadn't dismissed his worry for nothing and gone back to sleep. Instead, England found him fully dressed, putting on his boots, ready to go searching if England returned empty-handed, which he had.

"He wasn't there?" France asked.

England looked dreadfully worried. He shook his head. "The bartender said he had left some time ago. If not here then where could he have gone?"

"This house is big you know," France suggested. "Perhaps he is just wandering the halls, searching for bugs."

Yeah, that sounded like something America would do. So the two took to a casual midnight stroll—at least it looked casual until they both determined that America might not be anywhere within the confines of the building. France was better reserved than England and the Brit scowled at his cool demeanor. It wasn't like the Romance nation could understand what it was like to worry over a child. Canada was perfect, but his, God his were something else.

Australia was prone to snakes and spiders and he's had more than a few bite scars to show off much to his old man's poor heart. New Zealand was more mellow than Australia but seemed more isolated being so out of the way and England sometimes wondered for his sanity. He found him talking to a
multitude of sheep a few times—of course he blamed that particular inherited disease on his uncle Scotland. America, however, England always worried the most for him.

He was always biting off more things than he could chew and now he'd claimed the title of World Power. What a stupid boy he was. Didn't he know how many challengers he'd have for said title?

Now he was alone, without guards or a squad, in a hostile country full of hostile people. This country being one of his challengers, and a violent one at that. England did not doubt he could stand his own, but not for long and especially not if he was drunk—oh God, he came from the bar. What if that blasted idiot got himself drunk?

England's actually never seen him once tipsy. He'd heard rumors about his tolerance to the strong drink during the Roaring 20's but other than that England could only remember drinking with him once during the war which ended in England sporting a lovely splitting headache and he was certain he said a few things to America that he hadn't meant.

"He can't be out, he shouldn't be out," England began, his tone hitching in panic. He turned to France with wide eyes. "He said he'd be good. He said he wouldn't cause trouble here, Francis. God, what if the people find out he's the United States? What if they find out he's all alone? What if—!?"

"What's wrong with Al?"

England nearly jumped out of his skin as he turned around with France to see Canada standing right behind them. "How long have you been there?"

"Since you and papa began searching for Al," Canada said. England gaped but wouldn't admit that he didn't notice the boy or anything because he . . . well he didn't. "We've searched nearly the entire house. I don't think he's here."

"Then wake up the boys, we're going to head out to find him," England insisted.

"At this hour?" France asked. "Non, we three will go looking for him. The city can be quite dangerous in the twilight hour."

"America's gone missing?" came New Zealand's voice.

"What are you three doing up?!" England asked, his eyes wide. They had been so deep in sleep just earlier, how—?

"We could hear ya guys from our room," Australia said. "Ya two were so loud ya even disturbed Russia."

"Russia?" England questioned. When had Russia come into the subject at hand?

"Da." England and the others jumped to see Russia appear and stand just behind Australia, New Zealand, and Sealand. He didn't look the least bit tired nor did it look like he had been dressed for bed. "I was in the study when I heard the usual France and England bickering, but I was curious and listened to what you had to say. I heard little Amerika hasn't returned to his room. Is there a reason why everyone is so worried? He is strong, da? Then he can take care of himself."

"Listen, you red Soviet, if he is harmed in your country I will swear I will personally start the third world war!" England threatened, sliding around his younger sons and bumping chests with Russia, something he hasn't done in a couple centuries. He would likely regret acting so rashly to Russia, after all he was very strong, but his child was possibly in danger. God, for all he knew he was being held gagged underground in a far-off bunker by the KGB.
Russia just smiled. He looked thoroughly amused. Well, that wasn't as bad a reaction as England had been ready for.

Then Russia leaned in close to England, making the smaller nation's knees threaten to knock. His aura was menacing and everyone close had backed away into France's arms. England was on his own, even his children had left him to fend for himself. After all he had technically challenged Russia.

"You are allies with Amerika because he is strong. He is not allies with you because you are strong," Russia corrected. "He pities you, England. Your glory is gone. I am reminding you peacefully this time. Be sure not to forget it 'less I remind you another way."

England gulped. He really did miss his former days when he could stand against Russia, but he couldn't. He simply couldn't compete right now.

Russia frowned before looking over toward France who was holding the younger boys in his arms like a protective parent. Canada was standing to his side, a look of wariness in his eyes. That nation may be able to beat him on the ice, but off it? Now that was an entirely different story. One that would never change.

"You are concerned that my people will discover who he is, da? Have no fear, I have told no one of his stay here. Not my boss, not my guards, not my people. As long as he is smart and keeps his mouth shut then they will not know," Russia assured. "But if you are so concerned I offer my help."

Now the room was encased in more silence than it had been previously.

"I am just as good as a staff of KGB agents, but better," Russia said with that smile of his. "Before you go off blindly looking for Fredka you first need to find the one who had last seen him."

"The bartender was the last to have seen him and I already talked to him," England informed.

"Nyet, I do not believe that," Russia said.

Sure enough he didn't because he woke up all of his subordinates, sisters as well, and interrogated each and every one of them.

"This is getting out of hand," England whispered over toward France as they stared on in horror as Russia lined the nations up and walked down the line of at-attention countries with his arms behind his back.

"You were the one asking for his help," France replied.

"I did not!" England swore. "He pushed it upon us and now look . . . oh God, I can't stand to watch this!"

"As you all know, the United States of Amerika has been an honored guest in this home to be with his family for the Summit Series," Russia began as he walked past each of his subordinates' trembling forms. "He is not welcome here in the slightest, my leader despises him, my people distrust him, my government abhors him. But—" Russia stood forward before them and stared them down, even offering them a creepy smile. "I had invited him. I and I alone. Now, it seems he hasn't returned when he properly should. This isn't like him. So I would like to know which of you were the last to see him."

"What do you mean he hasn't returned?" Prussia spoke up, his eyes narrowing even as Russia frowned at his demanding tone with him. Then his red eyes turned toward England and the others.
"You don't know where he is?"

England shook his head. "It's not that I have a say on where he goes, but he promised he'd return, and he hasn't despite the hour being late."

So many things could go wrong with the nation of the U.S. wandering in the slums of Moscow. Everyone knew it. Even the lowest trembling Soviet subordinate.

Prussia's upset seemed to worsen in his worry along with them. "You've searched the house?"

"Oui," France nodded.

"Did you search his room?" Prussia asked, pointing to Russia with an accusing finger. Russia didn't seem to like that too much.

"They are free to check my room to settle any mistrust, but I assure you they will find no American within its confines," Russia said and then pressed close to Prussia. "But by the way you so adamantly speak I would think you might have something to say about Amerika's disappearance." Russia's famed metal pipe slapped against Prussia's pale neck, slowly applying more pressure as the Russian nation loomed over the German. "No? Then keep the mouth shut."

Russia could tell when someone had something to hide. He scanned each and every one of his subordinates and the one who trembled the most happened to be . . .

"Now, Lithuania, my favorite, you seem shaken up over Fredka's disappearance," Russia observed and immediately noticed the nation stiffen.

"Russia, please, we can find him another way," England objected. "They obviously have no idea where he is. We're wasting time. We should be out in the city sear—"

Russia raised his hand to silence the Brit. He kept his gaze on the Lithuanian who would not meet his eyes. When addressed he usually did out of respect. But now he was trembling, hm, he looked like little Latvia now. So unlike Lithuania.

"When did you last see him, Lithy?" Russia asked with a kind scary smile.

"A-At the rink," the nation answered.

"You are lying~" Russia said as he let his pipe slide against the nation's smooth cheek. It'd be a shame to ruin that pretty little face of his, but if Russia would risk a swollen lip and black eye with America then he wouldn't think twice about giving his underlings worse.

Lithuania was so shaken up against the touch of the pipe that he couldn't think straight. Eventually his eyes gave him away. They darted toward one nation and then away, to the ground. Russia caught it and when his sight turned toward his dear little sister he could see she had been given away.

Belarus hissed and glared evil toward the brunette nation but her death glare was interrupted as Russia's large frame stopped before her. Immediately she put on a front and smiled at him, batting her pretty eyelashes. But Russia offered no smile, his frown only deepening.

"I am going to politely ask my guests to leave the room, and for my comrades except my dear sister and Lithuanu to return back to their own rooms," Russia demanded, turning toward the Western nations with a kind smile.

They didn't ask questions. The only one who looked hesitant and whose eyes met Prussia's was
Canada. But he quickly followed after his relatives.

"May I stay, Vanya?" Ukraine asked. She pleaded really. She knew that Russia could hurt their younger sister. He never has, but she knew he could.

"You will not want to," Russia replied.

Ukraine cringed and nodded before taking her leave quickly with her head bowed in submission.

There Russia stood, looking down at his little sister with a very unpleased look on his face and when she realized no smile or eye-bat could work she frowned herself and crossed her arms.

"Why do you never smile at me?" she asked as her eyes turned from him in upset.

"Because you never give me reason to," Russia answered, leaning in closer to her. "What have you done, Natalia?"

"Nothing," she insisted, turning from him and refusing to look at him, but Russia simply grasped her shoulder and jerked her back around. This action surprised her, more so with his tightening grip on her arm. Her eyes widened in shock that her sweet big brother would do this to his innocent little sister. "You are hurting me!" she demanded and immediately began trying to jerk away from him, but he would not let go.

When she would not straightly answer him Russia turned to Lithuania. "What did she do?"

"You tell him and I'll slit your throat!" Belarus spat toward Lithuania. So now it came down to who he was afraid of more.

"Silence!" Russia raised his tone and stared his sister into submission for but a moment before looking back at Lithuania who was becoming pale with fright. "Answer me now or else you will go to the gulag."

Lithuania’s eyes widened and he struggled to look at Russia because when he did he was met with Belarus' murderous glare. "She . . . she was there . . ."

"Baltyjški šliucha!" Belarus spat. She was now trying to pulling out of her brother's grasp as he walked over toward Lithuania, dragging her along with him.

"Where?" Russia inquired.

"At the bar," Lithuania said.

"The one he was last seen at?" Russia asked. "Were you the last to see him?"

Lithuania nodded quickly and swallowed.

"Did she confront him?" Russia asked, pulling his sister close but not close enough to where she could take a swipe at Lithuania with her knife.

Lithuania shook his head.

"Then what harm has she done to him?" Russia asked. He highly doubted she could inflict any wound on the American. She wasn't strong enough and he was smarter than she thought so she would likely not be able to match wits with him.

Lithuania raised his trembling hands and curled his fingers like he was holding a glass. "She put pois
—poison in his drink."

Russia blinked. It took him a while to comprehend what Lithuania had told him. Yes, that sounded like something Belarus would do.

"I did not, he is lying!" Belarus swore.

"Be quiet!" Russia demanded, giving her a shake. Lithuania never lied to him. "And you watched her do this?"

"I tried to stop him from consuming it," Lithuania swore, knowing that he very well could receive punishment for not trying to prevent this. "He stopped me. He held me off while he drank it. I am so sorry, Mr. Russia. I tried!"

Russia had no doubt the Baltic had tried, but that left no excuse for America. Why hadn't he caught onto Belarus' threat? He was smarter than that.

"Do you know where he went?" Russia asked.

"I don't," Lithuania informed. "He told me he was going to see the sights. I tried to stop him, I did, but he moved too quickly that I couldn't."

Russia shook his head, sifting through his thoughts to try to find a place the American would likely go. There was one place in mind, but it was so out of the way that . . . maybe he had . . .

"Return to your room, Toris," Russia ordered and quickly the Baltic left them.

There was a short silence before Russia decided on what he was to do. With a frustrated growl he pulled his sister. She was crying, demanding he let her go. Kicking the doors open he stomped past England and the others who had wide eyes. They even had never seen him this harsh on his sister.

Russia marched up the stairs and pulled Belarus along. She tried to grab hold of anything to pull herself away, but whenever she did he would violently rip her away and whatever she was holding onto would either crack, rip, or shatter. He didn't care what damage she made on the house, it was the damage she caused on the guests that upset him.

Opening her room he shoved her inside. She was quick to press back against him, intense anger in her eyes.

"What are you doing?" She asked quickly.

"You are hereby going to be locked in your room until I so release you," Russia said and moved to shut her door, but she pressed close again, clinging to him desperately.

"Nyet, nyet! You cannot do this to me! I am your sister!"

"And he is my guest!" Russia spat. "It is humiliation if ill befalls a guest and a guest in MY land, under MY roof is not to be touched."

"He is the United States of Amerika!" she said as if giving an excuse to mistreat said guest. "You are to tell me you invited him here with no intention of taking advantage of him?"

"Nyet, I am not as low as you," Russia growled as he moved away and slammed the door in her face, locking it securely.

He could hear her demands to release her. He could hear as she banged against the door but he
ignored her. With a stoic face he walked down the stairs to the lobby where the rest of his guests were, all looking concerned.

"Does she know where he is?" England asked.

"Nyet," Russia said.

"Then why did—?"

"I ask in humble meekness that you forgive me for letting her too close to him," Russia said, politely inclining his head. "Now, Lithuania has told me that Amerika went out to see the sights. Perhaps he is still in Moscow, perhaps not. I suggest we split away to search for him and we might want to find him soon."

"Why?" Canada asked. "What did she do?" Everyone's thoughts turned dark with possibilities, but none were brave enough to press on for more information.

"Nothing we can't fix," Russia said with a smile.

So they did as Russia suggested. He had taken his underlings and paired them off to split up through Moscow. England, and France took off to the south side. Canada and Australia took off to the east. Sealand and New Zealand took to the north. Russia would not enlist the help of his officers because if they knew who they were looking for then they would no doubt inform his boss and he did not want that.

He would have searched the city as well but decided to wait a little while. He mulled over a thought about what Lithuania had told him America had said before his disappearance. He wondered if the nation would dare. He wondered if he would go even though it was so far away.

Willing to risk it Russia went. He traveled north to Pushkin. He hadn't been in said town since World War II but that didn't stop his movement from taking in the state of the town. No, he went straight for the palace, the place he had lived in when he first met America.

While he entered the ruined palace he felt it an absurd idea that America be here. It would be too sentimental and America certainly didn't have any more sentiment to this place, to lands Russia owned. If anything Russia believed this would be the last place America would be, yet there he was, rushing through the halls, opening doors, looking underneath cabinets, everything.

Nothing but sad ghosts lived in these halls and Russia hated returning to them. It was only him in the place. He had been stupid to come.

He stepped outside and made his way back. It was best to try scouring Moscow.

A chilling wind swept his mind clear of searching that city. The wind chilled his cheeks and burned his lungs. He could feel the old ghost in its bite and when he turned he realized it had swept through the creaking palace as well, up and over it, and toward the back courtyard.

Russia's eyes widened. Immediately he darted back into the house, and then out into the back. He passed by statues broken and brush skeletal frames with weeds overgrown. He couldn't see anyone out in the large garden.

But he knew, he knew he had to be there. Why else was the wind so deathly cold? Why else was General Winter there?

His eyes still searching while his legs moved Russia walked with determination. Finally he stopped
in his tracks. His feet had taken him toward the center of the garden, where a clever maze of bushes once laid. In its center lay a fountain and the statue thereon was still in place.

Its waters dried up long ago, but inside the fountain bowl lay a body.

"Amerika!" Russia ran to him. He was to the figure's side in less than a second, picking him up into his arms. Yes, it was America. Russia had found him.

He was pale. More pale than his natural tan form. There was blood running down his lips and nostrils and his skin was unbearably hot to the touch.

His limbs were in pain with ongoing tremors and they hung like heavy weights. His head was even rolled back with his neck not strong enough to support his own skull. What kind of poison had Belarus given him to make him this weak? America was strong, not many things could make him this vulnerable.

'I have given him to you.'

Russia looked up and narrowed his eyes. Finally the General had materialized before him. His tattered cloak flying in the wind. His black eyes staring down at him, smiling that smirk—like he'd won a long fought battle.

'He cannot resist,' General Winter said as he hovered over and around the two forms trembling in his chilling winds, bringing the early bite of winter with it. 'Take him now. Before me let me behold his death.'

Russia looked back down at America. It would be so easy. For any nation seeking to dominate—to harm him, they could.

Why now? Why was General Winter asking this of him? What would happen if he did? What would happen to the both of them?

Russia sucked in a sharp breath. His heart hurled itself against his chest and he choked. When he looked up again he could see that knowing smile on the General's face.

'Do it,' the ghost commanded once more and immediately Russia felt his cold grasp wrapping around him, chilling him from the outside in.

He shivered violently and so pushed close to America and his fever-heated skin. The warmth soothed his trembling bones, but even America was affected. The younger nation was trembling from the fever already and now the chill around him made visible his breath and he began to sweat.

Russia wondered if the America even knew who was holding him.

Russia had made up his mind a long time ago when dealing with his relation with America. He would not force himself upon him. He would not have the young boy see him as another England.

Standing up Russia pulled America close and darted inside the broken palace. He could hear the General's cries for him to return, for him to obey his demands. He could feel his frown in the pressing chill of the temperature. But he did not stop. He ran upstairs, through numerous halls before locking himself into his old bedchamber.

There were a few scattered pieces of furniture like a chair and a table. The tapestry had all fallen, tattered and worn from long term neglect and war. The vibrant colors already lost, but the fabrics found themselves useful still.
Ivan took the tattered tapestry and laid it down upon the dirty floor. He then placed America down beside the fireplace of the room. Poking his head into the chute he realized that if he lit a fire the room would smoke.

Turning around he could see the chill creeping out along the hallway and throughout the rooms. The General was trying to freeze the both of them, to force Russia to take America's warmth. He would not yield; he would not do what he wanted. So he broke the chair and table apart and shoved the shattered wooden pieces into the fireplace. He struck up a fire quickly and now waited for the warmth of the flames to chase away the cold bite of that mad ghost.

It was hard. There was simply not enough wood to burn throughout the night. He dared not risk an escape into the night because of the General's presence.

There was no telling what the ghost could do to the both of them. He could possibly summon an ice storm in attempt to freeze them still. There was no knowing what sort of thoughts he could encourage in Russia's already tainted mind. No, he needed to stay away from him and so Russia locked himself in the palace, trying to keep himself and America away from the spirit.

By dawn General Winter would be gone because the sun's warm rays would douse his chill while the winter season was still at bay by autumn. It would be safer when the old man's spirit was gone from them.

Russia frowned when another thought came to mind. If he so refused to leave into the night whilst his people slumbered and his boss was unaware he knew that when dawn arose he would have no other choice but to take America out into the visible sunlight and return to Moscow for better treatment, but in doing so his people would see him and they would see the nation he carried. What else could he do?

The sound of America hacking pulled him from his thoughts. Returning to America, Russia sat down beside him. Taking off his glove he touched his knuckles to America's cheeks. The touch was hot, the temperature heightening and the coloring was red as well inasmuch his forehead and nose.

Russia could see the blood sprayed over his chin from his gagging and coughs. No matter how many times he wiped his skin clear of the red liquid America would turn his head and choke out more blood. So Russia rolled him onto his side and pulled a blanket close to America's mouth to stop him from soiling any other sheet needed to cover him to keep his warmth secured when the flames from the fire began dying down.

The state of the younger nation looked wretched. Russia had never seen him so ill since . . . a very long time ago. Reaching down he stuck a finger past the blond's wheezing lips before retracting it and then bringing it to his own mouth. Russia needed to taste the poison America had consumed to know what treatment to set up once they returned to his home in Moscow.

After one taste Russia turned his head and spat out the substance. He had tasted only a little of it, but it was strong. He could tell by the breakdown in America's blood that Belarus had applied a heavy dose of the poison; no doubt the substance could kill a few hundred humans.

America choked out another hack, his face burying into the fabric Russia had pressed against his red face. His body was shaking so bad that Russia felt one of his limbs would fall right off. When America turned his head he sucked in trembling breaths, the air hissing through his teeth in shivers. He was shaking, the heat of the fever burning his insides but not giving him the warmth he needed to warm his skin and bones in the coldness of the night.

Tilting America's head Russia rubbed his weak neck. Then he gasped lightly. Those eyes opened,
barely, but they opened. He had taken a glance at Russia.

"Amerika?" Russia questioned, pressing his touch harder so that it could register to the American nation. He needed to see recollection in that gaze instead of the illness of fever.

There was no sparkle in those irises. They were bland of sheen and his pupils were horribly dilated, but he was looking at Russia, meeting his gaze. And Russia let America see his concern because he was concerned.

"Alfred?" Russia used the boy's human name, hoping to evoke some kind reaction, a better one than those slow and slurred movements. Didn't America understand how stupid he was? Didn't he realize what Russia could do to him if he so wished it? The vulnerability was too tempting for one so young and naïve and who had so much to lose.

Slowly, those heavy lids dropped over his eyes and the brows knit together in pain. America laid his head against Russia's shoulder and shivered. His body racked with chill and pain.

It would be so easy, so very, very easy to take him right then and there. Russia knew there would never arise again another opportunity. America would never visit his home again willingly.

"You are to tell me you invited him here with no intention of taking advantage of him?"

'He cannot resist. Take him now. Before me let me behold his death.'

The voices of his sister and the General rung in his ears, embedding into his brain and darkening his thoughts. Oh how very right they were.

The pressing hands then caressed America's sick and trembling form. What it would be like to touch him, skin to skin. To let his hands roam where they may, mapping, memorizing.

To hold him close, closer than he's had in years. Closer. To kiss him. He would not resist. He would not bite him. He would not fight back for he couldn't.

The thoughts were enticing. Russia would not harm him. No, no he wouldn't be so brutish. He would take care of him, with tenderness and love. He would see to it that America felt no pain, but only the pleasure Russia had longed to give him for centuries.

Yes, yes, it was perfect.

Russia's fingers lightly skimmed over America's red feverish facial features before his thumb rubbed under his lip. They looked dry, but still plump enough to be enticing. Russia leaned down slowly, his nose brushing against America's and stilling when he felt the younger's warm breath on his lips.

Russia inhaled his exhales and closed his eyes. A heat was rising inside him, with a voice near as strong as Belarus' and General Winter's. Should he try to . . . ?

Russia flinched back when America coughed out some more blood. The liquid spewed against Russia's lips and chin and he leaned back to wipe it off. When he looked at America again all previous thoughts born in ill-manner vanished.

Yes, it hurt to remember, even more so when he saw how frail America looked; reminding him so much of the time when Russia had seen him in such a state during his civil war. He looked pitiful, and Russia's heart threw itself against his chest, aching his entire body.

It was not good for an enemy to see their enemy like this. Not good at all. They could hurt their foe.
They could do unspeakable things.

Russia bowed his head. He felt ashamed for thinking to stoop so low. Had he no honor anymore? No, of course not—his Imperialist age was gone. He was nothing America could recognize as honorable.

"I am sorry for being the one to have found you," Russia said as he pressed his palm against America's sweaty brow. "You would not be too happy if you knew."

Their bosses, their governments, their peoples have deemed them rival sworn enemies. They were to turn their backs toward the other. They were to laugh at their mistakes and frown at their accomplishments. They were to spit at their name. They were to never acknowledge the other's presence.

It was so very hard to be a nation when you were so very in love with the one your people so hated.

"Forgive me," Russia whispered as he leaned his head against America's skull. "But I must warm you so that he does not freeze you. I cannot let him take my sun and warmth from me."

Gently and cautiously Russia dismantled America from his jacket. He pushed it down his limp arms and off to the side. Then he took hold of his shirt and began unbuttoning the buttons, each time he slipped one out of its loop he'd pause for a reaction possibly unexpected from the nation who was always so full of surprises, but he didn't move except to shake his head to and fro, coughing and wheezing.

Soon Ivan had stripped his chest bare. The only thing lain against it were the dog tags around his neck. Russia picked up the small metal pieces and read the description on them. He chuckled at the sight of the stamped letters dating his birth year as well as month and day. The other held his name, his full name.

'Alfred Freedom Jones.' Russia chuckled again. Of course that was what his middle initial stood for. Even he hadn't known since he had taken on the middle name during the First World War.

Russia looked down to see America's arms crossing over his chest, trembling as he shivered. Looking back over to the fire Russia tossed more splinters into the hearth, hoping to stoke it once more. If America was experiencing anything similar to a human fever—and it looked like he was—then he needed to sweat this out and stay warm. That is until Russia could get him properly treated without the fear of General Winter looming just outside.

Russia pressed down against him, chest to chest. He knew he wasn't the warmest nation on the planet but he knew he provided some form of heat to share with a sick country. He couldn't let America grow cold. That's what the mad ghost wanted.

Russia pulled back from America and took off his own coat. He then proceeded in stripping off his shirt, but left his scarf on. Laying himself down Russia pressed his chest against America's back and pulled him close, offering any warmth he could in body heat.

America continued to shiver however and his legs twitched and jerked as his nerves were attacked by the poison. Russia then pulled himself away and touched the belt and its silver buckle. He was his most careful with this. He kept his eyes on America as he unbuckled his belt and then pulled the leather article from the pant loops.

America did nothing. He was truly out of consciousness. But Russia was still careful when he pulled his pants from his body and laid the clothing near the piling mound of American attire.
Russia pulled America closer again and wrapped his arms around his chest and laid his head against his. Pressing skin to skin enticed a heavier heat that the tapestry wrapped around them could not provide. He didn't know if it would be enough, but he hoped it would be because it was all he had.

"I know I am not a generally warm country, Amerika, but take what heat you can," Russia said, tightening his embrace as his heart hammered against his chest at the intense feel of America naked in his arms and the sounds of the General's moans hovering just outside the barged room.

For so long Russia had wanted to hold America as he was, with him in his arms, bare, hiding nothing from him, unafraid. This wasn't exactly how he imagined that image to come to pass, but fate never gave one every piece to picture the puzzle set before them.

The thoughts of how he had been shamed by his sister ran rampant through his head in the following hours of the dying flame before him. His reputation as a host skewered thanks to what she did to America and so he was trying everything to make it right again. Even baring himself before the sick rival nation.

Looking down at America, Russia kept note of his state. Now he was no longer coughing. The next hour he was no longer trembling. The one after that he was slumbering, limp and the light wheezing from his convulsing lungs sounded similar to snores if he hadn't been so ill.

Not once did Russia loosen his grip on him throughout the night. In fact he had been left to his thoughts while America slept to fight off the poison in his system. In the early hours of the morning Russia found himself smiling at the irony.

There were countless times Russia could have taken America into his arms, and the few times he had it always ended disastrously. He could hold him, no doubt, but he could not keep him. He was reminded this constantly by the reality of their lives.

Looking down Russia examined the large scar on America's back, the one he had seen back in Tehran, the one America had gotten from Japan's sharp katana. Russia had been given a scar too by the Asian nation. It was on his arm, the nation had almost chopped his arm off in their war.

That is what happened when you reached for the stars; the searing burn of their tails would burn you and create scars. If only America would have stayed quiet like he had been before the great wars. Then Russia would be the only one to bare the numerous scars. He was hideous enough to bare them, but not America, not such a beautiful, beautiful country.

After finding out what Belarus had done to America, Russia had regretted inviting him to his home. He knew he should have known better and come sunup he would have to face tense strains when he returned to Moscow. But now, in that moment, with America pressed so close to him he didn't regret a thing or fear anyone.

It was nice how America chased away his anxiety. But of course this was only when the boy nation was with him. The dark thoughts, the dampening failures of his past would return to weigh Russia down when America left his side. So he had to have him there always.

If he dominated America there then he would submit to him. Then Russia could command him to come and to live with him, by his side. Where he belonged.

But Russia would not have America see him as England. He refused it. He had remembered the hate he had carried for the Brit and how long it had lasted. Russia was certain he still had some sort of resentment for what he had done to him, but it was buried deep and actively forgotten.
Russia didn't want that. If America was going to hate him then it would be because of trade, because of played wars, because of territory disputes, alliance clashes, nuclear arms count, and space races. Those were easier to forgive when their cold race was over.

America may see him as a tyrant, but he will never see him as a defiler. No matter what the General said, Russia refused. So it was best this way; that America stay away from his home and land, that he continue to hate him because where Russia lived, so too did the General and he hated the young nation; the one whom had created America all for Russia to have as his own.

Moscow, Russia. September 29th 1972

"How can he still be missing when we've searched everywhere in the city?" Australia moaned. He was tired. His feet hurt and he was hungry.

The sun was rising now, a new morning. It was time to return to Russia's house. He hoped the others had some luck or else they'd all have to go with Plan B: wait for America to return on his own time. Which Australia hoped was soon because he didn't want to be in Soviet Russia any longer than his company.

"It's because he's not here," Canada stated as the two got into the car that had taxied them there. The drive back was frustrating because they had found nothing.

"Are ya sure?" Australia questioned. "We only searched one side of the city. Maybe the others found him."

"No, he's not in the city," Canada assured.

"How do ya know?" Australia inquired. "Ya psychic or somethin'?"

"No, I just know," Canada said. "We both are close to him; we know his mannerisms more so than England."

"Ya might more than me," Australia stated. "Since ya live just north of 'im."

Canada nodded, he was quiet for a moment in thought. "Do you know when America was last here—in Russia's home that is?"

Australia shrugged. "Maybe during the war?"

"Two?" Canada questioned. "No, he was busy in Europe. How about the first one?"

Australia tensed. He knew, he just wasn't sure on how to explain to Canada his time spent in the Russia's territory during the First World War.

"Yeah, he was. I think he was trying to stop the Bolsheviks or something along those lines."

Australia hoped that was enough information. "Ya think he might have gone to cities he was once stationed at?" Australia thought back on the two America had told him he was at during the Polar Bear Expedition but he just couldn't pronounce the names correctly.

"He tried to stop the Bolsheviks—like Lenin and them?" Canada questioned.

"Well, yeah, America said it was the Germans trying to tear apart an ally," Australia said, referring to what had happened to Russia in the October Revolution.

Finally they reached Russia's house. When the two got out of the car Australia was surprised to find
Canada had pulled him aside, refusing to let him enter the building to see if anyone else had found traces of the superpower—and by the looks of two more cars they hadn't.

"What's America's relationship to Russia?" Canada asked, his eyes narrowed and grip secure to let Australia know he would not be letting him escape from his much-needed-answered questions.

Australia's lips quirked up slightly. He was nervous.

"Natural enemies, what else?" Australia asked. Did he need to remind Canada of the Cuban Missile Crisis?

"What about before Russia's fall to communism?" Canada asked. "Did Al know him?" Canada wouldn't know because he was still under England's rule back then. England hadn't wanted him to leave the Western Hemisphere too much or speak to other countries so his range of relationships consisted mostly of family.

"I dunno, maybe," Australia said with a shrug. He was avoiding questions which meant he knew.

"Don't play stupid with me," Canada warned. His grip was now loose but he resorted to pinching a patch of skin on Australia's arm and twisting it painfully. He'd grown up with him so he knew exactly how to bully when he needed to.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow!" Australia whined, turning with the twist to try to alleviate the stinging pain shooting up his arm.

"I saw the way he looked at Al in the rink. I saw the way they acted at the table. I heard what Ukraine said, now give me a straight answer," Canada demanded, pinching harder.

"No one was supposed to know!" Australia whined, trying to pull his arm away only to evoke more pain across his sensitive nerves.

"Why?"

"Because nothing ever came of it, alright!"

Just like that Canada released Australia. His eyes were a little wide as his mind tried registering what Australia had said.

"Were they . . . courting?" Canada questioned. That would actually make a lot of sense now that he thought about it.

Australia was whining and rubbing his red arm before he bowed his head and nodded. "It was never made official, but secretly, yeah."

Even though some mysteries were beginning to make sense in Canada's mind he still couldn't shake off the shock of it all. He hadn't remembered anyone, ANYONE, America had been interested in. He thought he was asexual or something. But with Russia? America was—?

"They never . . . ?" Canada blushed a little. How could he word this without getting too embarrassed? "They never . . . uh . . . ?"

The reddening face gave away his intended question and Australia quickly shook his head. "Oh, God no, the only thing I ever saw was the two of them getting hot and heavy. No, I don't think America ever consummated the relationship. I know he planned to, but . . . ya know."
Canada nodded in understanding. He was a little glad that America and Russia hadn't consummated their relationship. That would make everything less awkward for the two.

Past lovers are different than past crushes. The connection would always remain, or so Canada’s been told. It was something very intimate between nations, he believed more so than humans.

Now Canada was feeling a little upset that America had confided in Australia this turmoil but not him. And he lived right next door.

He remembered hearing from England on what had happened to Russia after WWI but now that he discovered America had been courting the older nation he saw the subtly hidden heartache. He knew America wasn't a nation who loved many, but when he did he would never cease. He wondered if he still cared for Russia and . . .

Oh God, Canada practically forced him into coming to Russia's place. How was he supposed to know he was pushing him into his ex's arms?

How uncomfortable America must have felt. Russia probably feels the same. But then again, should they now that they are mortal enemies? No, they shouldn't care what they were in the past, but they do. They should want to layer the other's body with nuclear waste, but they don't.

It was a conundrum of conundrums. And even so what could anyone do about it? It's not like Canada had the power to turn back time to when his brother and Russia were again courting partners. But it would be nice . . . if only to see America smile again, actually smile.

"Did you two find anything?"

Canada and Australia turned to see New Zealand rushing down the stairs and out onto the driveway. He looked hopeful, but worried all at once.

"Nothing," Canada said with a sad sigh. "The others back?"

"Yeah, a few," New Zealand said as he motioned them back inside. "They reached dead ends too."

In time the others returned. Each empty-handed with no other clue as to where America was. Breakfast had been delayed for convenience but when the meal was served the dining room hadn't been as quiet since they all first sat down together.

No one really ate. Maybe a few bites here or there, but the food was growing quite cold. The only movement that took place was that of forks stabbing into the breakfast dishes. Everything else was solemn.

"No." The sound of silverware clinking loudly against porcelain echoed throughout the quiet room. "No, I can't do this!" No one turned their eyes to look at England who was rubbing his face and shaking his head. They knew he was frustrated and they knew they couldn't do a thing to help ease him. "Is Russia not even back? Where the hell is he?!!"

"I believe he's still searching," Ukraine spoke up timidly. When her eyes met England's he stared her down into submission with his high-rising frustrated-anger.

"Or he's taking his time hiding his body," England spat out in distrust.

"Please," Ukraine spoke up again. She looked quite sad with that stereotypical depiction of her brother. "He would never do that . . . not to Amerika."
"Yeah? Well clearly you don't own a televi or even read the paper, this is the Twentieth Century, Missy, the slightest opportunity to get the upper hand and they will!" England stated harshly as he slammed his hands on the table and stood himself up. Pulling his jacket from the back of the chair he swung it around his shoulders.

"Where are you going now?" France called out, everyone turning to see England dashing toward the front door.

"To look for him, and protect him if I can," England shouted back as he ripped the front door open and exited the home.

"Seigneur, aie pitié," France muttered to himself before getting up from the table as well and taking up his jacket to follow England, not to look for America, but to make sure the Brit didn't walk himself into trouble like he was known for doing.

"You're leaving?" Ukraine asked as she stood up. France turned to her and offered her an apologetic shrug.

"You know, Angleterre," France stated with a bland sigh. "He's quite stubborn."

"ALFRED! !"

Everyone started at England's shout. Many darted out toward the foyer to head outside, but Ukraine and a few others had turned around and peeked out of the dining room window to see what had happened out on the front patio.

Ukraine's eyes widened at the sight of numerous vehicles parked just outside the front gate, scores of people—the media—pressing themselves against the recently closed gate doors. Then she saw something that worried her more. It was Russia's boss.

He and his entourage were standing near their vehicles. The look at that man's face could make the devil's knees shake at the amount of upset in his facial features, and he was baring all of his shameful looks to Russia who had just gotten out of a vehicle of his own, in his arms was a body, a blanket draped over to conceal whoever it was but Ukraine recognized the jean pant legs, the sleeves from the jacket—it was America.

She gasped and quickly darted outside with the others. She stopped in the doorway and covered her mouth at the full sight. She could hear the sounds of various camera clicks and shouts from their reporters demanding Russia turn to answer their questions with explanations.

Now the entirety of the Soviet Union knew of America's secret stay. This wasn't good at all.

The worst of it all had to be the look on the Western countries' faces. They all looked so very upset seeing America limp in Russia's arms. Russia had pushed his way into the foyer before England and the others blocked him from further descending into the home.

Russia looked frustrated enough as it was, but Ukraine watched him place America's frame into England's arm. To everyone's surprise the smaller nation held the superpower.

"What did you do to him?!!" England cried out in horror as he ripped the blanket off of America only to see he was unconscious and covered in grime, and . . . was that dried blood under his nostrils and at the corners of his mouth? If Russia did then then there would be hell to pa—

"He's been poisoned," Russia explained quickly. Everyone could see how tense he was with the situation. His guest had just been found poisoned and now his people knew of his stay, as well as his
boss and the man's demanding stare was controlling the older nation.

"Poisoned?!" France gasped. Then everyone watched the Frenchman get just as ghastly angry as England. "What have you done to him this time?"

"My sister," Russia said. He looked regretful of the situation, but his attention was quickly pulled by the internal demands of his boss. "She's not too kind to anyone, especially an official enemy of mine. I am sorry. Please, allow me to treat him. He's sick."

"No!" England denied, holding America close like a parent would their child who had ran off and was finally found again. "I don't want anymore help from you! Look what you did to him!" England looked on the verge of tears as he ran his fingers through America's dirtied hair. He looked like he'd been through the trenches and back. "Send us home right now, you hear me! I want out of your goddamn country!"

France was usually the opposite of England. If he was angry then he was calm, if the Brit was snide and calm then France was concerned and antsy. But this time he was just as upset as England and agreeing wholeheartedly.

But anger and upset usually never saw to reason.

"Enough!" Canada had caught everyone's attention and hoped he'd make his upset family members see that what they were saying would help no one. "Al's sick. Look at him. We're here, we can watch how they treat him, but please, you know if we try to leave he'll get worse. Why not just treat him here while we have the means to heal him?"

"Because that monster did this to him!" England spat, looking at Canada harshly—reminding the Canadian of that one time he had seen him this upset during the 1812 war—and pointing toward Russia with a trembling accusing finger.

After what Australia had told him, everything was in a new light now. Canada looked toward Russia who did indeed look ashamed that this had happened. But more so he looked concerned and out of breath. Where had he found America? Why did he risk returning in the day time when he knew his people would see America, discovering his presence in the country and in part scold Russia for inviting the capitalist over?

Now Canada couldn't properly get mad because he believed Russia didn't hurt America purposely. Because he believed that the nation might still possibly care for his stepbrother.

"You said it was your sister?" Canada questioned. He wasn't asking and confirming it for himself, but for his papa, and for England and the others who didn't believe Communists because they were scared of them. "Belarus."

Russia didn't say a word to defend himself earlier so it was no wonder the other Western nations outright blamed him for America's condition. Russia nodded and said, "I took care of her earlier. She will not interfere again. But it is my fault entirely. I shall take full responsibility for this circumstance. I truly ask for your forgiveness."

Canada could see he was so subtle in his plea that no doubt everyone thought he felt bad at being an irresponsible host, but if you knew the right information and looked closely enough, watching his facial features and listening to his pitching tone, then you'd be able to see and to hear the concern and the plead that they stay so that America be taken care of as fast as possible.

Canada was honestly blown away. Is this what Australia saw? Turning toward the Land Down
Under, Canada realized he lacked observational abilities. In fact, so did England, New Zealand, Sealand—all of England's children. Even America did! It was no wonder that he and Russia kept stepping on each other's toes. It must be the French in Canada that made him so aware of these oblivious things.

Sadly, his voice was too quiet to word these thoughts and he ended up keeping quiet about this. But on a positive note, the others did take his reasoning that America should stay into consideration. This was his chance to give them that final deciding push.

"For Al," Canada said. There was a shine in his eyes because he too was afraid for America's health. He knew he was a strong nation, but even so the more he was ill the more dangerous it was for the rest of them. America's enemies—their enemies could find out and act out any aggression without being met with brawn.

Russia was one such enemy, in fact; the major one that could do serious damage if a nation like America was out of the race. But he wasn't going to because he was offering his help, and he was sincere.

England inhaled a sniff as he looked down at his eldest in his arms. There were tears in his eyes; it wouldn't be long before one or two fell down his cheek. "Oh, Francis, look what they did to him . . . look."

France pressed closer to let England know he was there and supporting his decision, whichever he decided.

"I had warned him, Francis, I told him it was a bad idea, but no, no he wanted to see Matthew . . . he wanted to—," England pulled America closer, letting his face press against his neck. Finally he looked up at Russia, his eyes red with ever present anger. "You! You fix him, you hear? If you so much as try to kill him I'll kill you myself!" It was a threat, but at least he agreed to stay.

"Thank-you," Russia said with a sigh that sounded like a breath he had been holding.

Standing up straighter Russia glanced behind him where the screaming reporters and his boss awaited. He frowned at the sight of them. Once more he turned back toward his household and the guests all flocked around America's unmoving and fevered frame.

"Please, take him to my room, I will send for doctors," Russia pressed and gave no room for arguments as he turned and headed outside.

Ukraine had peeked outside to see her baby brother approach his boss. She was too far away to make out what he was saying, but when he motioned toward his car she realized Russia had to leave. She watched Russia nod obediently before following behind his leader and entering the vehicle. When they drove off and left the gates to shut for the crowd to flock around again, the guards made sure to keep the crowds outside of the property.

"He left?"

Ukraine turned to see Prussia standing behind her, watching as well. Even though he disliked her brother she could see that he was upset that Russia had left. He was, after all, their main source for protection should the crowds overwhelm the guards.

"Da," Ukraine said as she turned. "I'm sure he and Mr. Brezhnev have lots to talk about, da?"

With that the elder Kiev sibling left to see to it that America was taken care of before the doctors arrived. Prussia simply stood back at the front door, watching the crowd thicken as the news spread.
of America's presence in the country, especially the detail that he was alone.

"They're going to want to eat him alive," Prussia muttered to himself. "But it's for the 'Motherland', right?" Prussia scoffed at the old saying and then shut the door. Bolting it just in case.

The doctors arrived shortly after. They looked quite nervous entering Russia's room where America had been cleansed, changed into clean clothes, and laid on the large bed. The nations present weren't sure if it was because they were nervous on working on a personified country or that they had been reluctant to care for the United States of America and Russia himself possibly threatened them. Whatever the case was the two doctors were quick in deducing what poison had paralyzed his system and what to give him for it.

They had to give him multiple shots before they deemed it enough to leave. Before departure the doctors informed the nations that America would now have to recover on his own and on when that would happen they were uncertain.

They were thanked and left. Ukraine was busy offering drinks and treats she had whipped up in the kitchen and catered upstairs to them. She didn't have to, but she was very humble and very hospitable to everyone, even her fellow housemates.

Perhaps what had surprised the guests the most was that Russia offered his room to his sick enemy. By far Russia had the best room in the entire house. It was a large and expansive room. There was a fireplace off to the side with two small couches and a chair around it, like a small little living room.

There was an office as well. Bookcases aligned the desk that held some knickknacks on it and one notable object had to be the teletype machine. It certainly looked like the ones America's people designed so why did Russia have only one there in his personal living space and not in the communication room?

Moving on there was an adjoined washroom. They had cleaned America up in there, rinsing him in warm water before drying him off and wrapping him in a bathrobe as they set him on the large canopy bed. The tub was a size larger than expected, and cabinets full of toiletry and towels as well as two sinks lay inside the bathroom.

Spick and span, everything was clean and near shining everyone's eyes blind. Curiouser were the pictures mounted on the oak walls around the bed, near the desk, and over the fireplace. When all the Western nations expected to see slogans of the communistic country or their founding fathers so to say it was not the case. There were pleasant pictures of seaside sunsets, meadows of gold, even a copy of Vincent van Gogh's sunflowers.

The portrait over the fireplace is what surprised everyone the most. There was no Stalin, no Lenin, no hammer and sickle. It was the Russian royal family—the Romanovs. The last so monarchy Russia had ever had.

This room was something they could all see Russia living in, but perhaps from another time, another place. Not the current Soviet Russia now. Then it was a question if Russia's bosses had ever been in the room. What would they think?

The design and décor questions aside all eyes were on America as he lay there, sweating, moaning, sounding as if he was gasping for air.

"The drugs the doctors gave him should be working, right?" England asked, taking one glance away from America to look toward the others for confirmation.
"Give him time," France calmed. "He's a strong boy, Arthur."

England nodded, but the words did not settle his rigid and tense form. He sat there beside America, watching his every movement. He was waiting for something, anything bad to happen and if it did then he'd . . . he'd . . . what? What would England do? What could he do? He was no longer his parent anymore. He was not allowed to fight away the monsters under the bed or in the closet, or kiss scraped knees and elbows. This required prayer and time, none of which England cared for too greatly.

The day passed without incident and all were relieved to see the young superpower silently slumbering in the night. They all hoped for him to awaken the next morning, but he hadn't. He was even still asleep when Russia had returned home later the evening of the 30th.

Ukraine had just been ready to bring England up some hot water for his tea and drinks for the others when she heard the door unlock and open. From mid-stair she watched her weary-worn and always quiet brother enter the home. She said nothing as he silently took off his coat without so much as turning on the light in the foyer.

As he headed upstairs he looked up and saw her. He said nothing as he stopped just behind her, motioning her to continue. The silence was uncomfortable for the older nation who had so many questions whirling in her head—mostly wondering if any would be answered at all.

She entered into her brother's room with him on her heels. She continued toward England who was lightly dozing by the bedside and gently shook him for him to take the cup. He offered her a "thank-you" before she offered more drinks to the other Western nations standing in the room.

Canada was the first to turn to see Russia standing in the doorway, observing all of them. He said nothing though as he drank his tea. France was the first to say something.

"You have returned, Russie?" France said it to announce his arrival. Everyone who hadn't noticed at first then turned.

Russia was silent for a moment but inclined his head to them. "I am told you all must leave this night."

There was many a frown. They all knew it was Russia's boss who had ordered him to do this no doubt.

"That is fine," England said as he stood up and straightened his form before Russia. "America is fairing much better now. A trip shouldn't do him harm."

"That is good to hear," Russia replied, his eyes falling upon America's peacefully sleeping form though unaware that a certain Canadian was reading the pleased relief in his gaze. After a while he turned to leave. "I am sorry but I cannot convince my boss to allow him to stay longer. Fair traveling."

"Wait," England spoke up and Russia turned back to them before leaving. "I . . . what I mean to say is . . . hhh, thank-you kindly for doing this. I know you have gotten in trouble because of all of this, but I still want you to know your actions were honorable, and it reminded me of the good ole days when you were . . . well anyway, thank-you again. I'll be sure to get America to send his regards as well. He owes you, as do we."

Russia offered a quick smile and nodded his head. "Da, do svidaniya for now, my guests. I was honored to host your presence in my country."
With that Russia came to them no more. He left the house altogether. He didn't even see them off on their plane trip back. He did however return after they had left and had been the one to release Belarus from her room.

"It's about time," Belarus complained as she moved out of her room and crossed her arms. After a moment she took a glance toward her brother who was making his way back toward his own room. "Does that mean you've forgiven me? Of course, da? I am your sister."

"Natalia, not now," Ukraine spoke up as she stood in Belarus’ way to chase after Russia's retreating form.

"What, that pig still here? Does brother not want him to hear me? To hear the truth?"

"They are gone," Ukraine explained. They were supposed to stay a little longer but because of everyone finding out about America the outrage of it all forced Russia to schedule their return flights sooner. She was disappointed in that because it had been nice seeing her brother and the younger country together again.

Ukraine knew they were strained when around the others, but when they were alone—she heard about America's car ride with Russia from the stationed guards who had caught sight of it, and seen out her window how the two spoke during the campfire—they spoke like close friends. She knew relationships took time to heal and more so when one was currently at odds with the other.

But time spent together, working out problems and breaking down walls, is what healed. How could the two do that if they were always separated? The letters they wrote to the other? Now Ukraine feared America's upset and neglect in writing them again. She wanted them to stay in touch personally not politically.

"Good," Belarus said with a snort. "I hope he never comes back."

"He possibly never will," Ukraine said with a sad sigh. After a ruined visit she didn't doubt America would stay far from Russia's home for a long time and Russia most likely knew this as well.

Above Europe. October 1st 1972

It was the early hours of the morning but the day started on a delightful note because America opened his eyes.

"He's awake! By God he's awake!" England declared and immediately the others unfastened their seatbelts and jumped over toward where England sat next to America who was lain down on a stretcher strapped down to the floor.

"Alfred, how are you feeling, mon cher?" France asked as he wiped the boy's bangs out of his half-lidded eyes.

America blinked a few times and then looked around. His brow furrowed and lips frowned. "Where . . . where . . . ?"

"We're on a plane," Australia spoke up. "Heading back to Matt's place, well, we're stopping at dad's first, but you'll be home soon, mate."

"We're not at . . . Russia's anymore?" America inquired. His voice was soft and scratchy; it was almost hard to understand him.

"No, we had to go," England said softly.
America didn't even ask who had poisoned him or why they had to leave so early. He likely guessed on the latter and the first he could easily find out if he wanted to know. But he didn't, at least not right now.

"So where did you run off to, lad?" England pulled America out of his quiet thoughts. "Russia never told us where he found you."

"He... found me?" America would have looked more surprised had he been feeling a little better. But the weakness and slow reaction in his movements and facial features proved a good way to hide vulnerable feelings.

"He did, and got into quite a bit of trouble with his boss," England made sure to add. "Listen, I know this may seem a little hard, but I would like for you to thank him when you get better. He could have easily caused havoc with you missing and ill, but he didn't. In fact he insisted you stay a little while, in his own room even, and have his doctors care for you.

"He went above and beyond for us—for you. It's not something I expected from him. I suppose he was just being a good host. But still, you be sure to remember what he did and pay him a kind of respect in a thank-you note or even a gift. It's the right thing to do."

The right thing to do... right. So Russia had found America near statue Ivan, huh? Guess his memory wasn't as shot as the young superpower had thought.

After a quick stop at England's house the Brit insisted America be checked by his own doctors. They found nothing wrong with him and so were in the air again. After what felt like an eternity they finally touched down back at Canada's place with a new month rolling in.

"Can you walk?" Canada asked as he helped America out of the terminal, Australia just behind them holding his luggage for him. When America finally pulled away Canada was concerned he'd fall over, but he held his balance and walked slow—something so uncharacteristic of his stepbrother.

"I'll be fine, Mattie, thanks by the way," he said as he took up his bags from his little brother and then approached the Canadian for a final farewell. His voice was still soft from weak vocals but he was recovering quicker than any had expected. It wouldn't be long before he was back to a hundred percent, but with him leaving back to his place now they didn't doubt that his boss would know what had happened and where he had been.

"Sorry I ruined your after-game celebration," America said with an apologetic smile. "Didn't mean to make you all worry."

Canada nodded his head in acceptance of his brother's apology. Inwardly he was debating on whether or not he should confront America on issues concerning Russia and he. He felt they should talk about it since clearly it was affecting the two to this day, but he didn't want to impose.

"Hey, Al," Canada spoke up and this time America heard him.

"Hm, what is it?"

Canada then connected gazes to make sure America was looking at him when he said this, "You know you can talk to me about anything, right?"

America blinked for a second before a bigger smile replaced his smaller weaker one and Canada frowned at it. It was the same smile America used on those he didn't want to deal with at the moment and apparently Canada was one of them.
"Of course I know," America said with a chuckle and wave of his hand. "You live right upstairs, bro. You're like my little complain buddy." America reached over and punched Canada in the shoulder. "But no complaints today, bro, you won. I think your people want to congratulate you." He nodded toward the large crowd waiting just outside the doors for their triumphant nation.

Canada wore his frown as America waved him off and slowly walked down toward another terminal to catch his own flight home. He really wanted to accompany him. He was still passing that poison from his body after all. But who was he to tell the United States of America what to do?

America had his own worries of course on his plane trip home. He knew his boss was going to kick his ass for leaving unannounced and lying to him on where he was at. It's not like he hadn't lied to him before. Really was a second habit at this point.

Reaching into his pocket he pulled out the one thing he took back from Russia's that wasn't his. It was Prussia's iron cross necklace that he sent as a token of his health for his brother. America smiled at the black cross, it was in better condition than Prussia was and he wasn't so sure he wanted Germany to know about that.

Germany . . . he hadn't seen that nation since the Olympics of that year. Probably wouldn't be seeing him any time soon either after his boss gets a hold of him.

His trip to Russia wasn't a complete disaster. No, it didn't turn out like he planned, but at least he got it out of his system. He wanted to see the old palace and Ivan one last time. It was like a final goodbye.

A goodbye because America now realized there was nothing he could do to help. The 1800's weren't coming back, and the Cold War wasn't warming. Russia could have the East and America would have to be happy with the West. At least there they weren't trying to poison him to death.

America sighed and rubbed the back of his neck as he settled into his seat. He was trying to figure out what to occupy himself with once he got back home so his chest didn't constrict so much. Because busy-bodies didn't have the time for feelings, and he was America, he didn't have time for anyone.

Not anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Ambient song for America: I Dreamed a Dream from the play/movie Les Miserables
New York City, USA. July 4th 1976

America's smile had been so big as he stood next to his boss aboard the USS Wainwright observing all of the international ships positioned before them, their crews each offering a salute in congratulation of his birthday. And here he thought he was being escorted to Lady Liberty to see some fireworks. Good one, his boss got him good.

"Yoohoo! America~!" Italy called out, waving from his dark ship, leaning a little too far over the railing. "Happy birthday, amico!"

"Get back over, stupido. You want to fall over?" There was Romano of course, pulling his younger brother back over the railing before he slipped into the harbor waters.

Near the Italians' ship laid one of Japan's. The small nation shifted from salute to formal traditional bow. Even Germany had come. Still silent as ever, but outwardly polite with his strict salute. But really, he didn't think it was as bad as Sweden's.

After the ships had docked and allowed the public to board and examine the magnificent beauties the countries and their people disembarked to the docks where the celebration began to start.

America had been quick to jump off of the ship he had been standing on with his boss and nearly tackle all of the nations to the ground. Wrapping his arms around Japan and Norway's necks nearly toppled both nations into the rest of the group had not the larger personifications became pillars to steady their balance.

"I can't believe you're all here!" America exclaimed out in excitement. "Thank you all so much!"

"There's no need to thank us just yet," Denmark spoke up. "The party's just begun!"

And it had. The day had been so eventful that America was certain he'd remember it for centuries to come. Of course spending time with his friends and family was all good, but the presents were definitely the best part. Why? Because he loved getting them.

"Oh, wow, Mattie, where'd you find these pictures, dude?" America held up the scrapbook comprised of his and Canada's younger and even recent pictures together. Many of them were even when America had still been England's so—colony.

"It wasn't hard," Canada admitted with a timid shrug. "I happen to keep my pictures and other intimate possessions neatly organized in a—?" Just like that Canada had been forgotten as America put the book down and turned to Italy and Spain who were now presenting their own gifts. Well, Canada should be used to this by now he supposed.

America's birthdays were always so over-the-top ridiculous, but it made him happy and Canada could see it was a genuine happiness. With a sigh Canada turned over to see England hiding himself away. The British nation had always been present among the other nations during America's birthdays, but never outwardly approached the superpower.

Shame, Canada had thought that maybe after two hundred years he could finally participate in his
birthday celebrations. Maybe one day.

"Dude, no way! Yong Soo!"

Canada turned to see America meet a growing South Korea who had also ran to him after leaving his delegates and representatives. America's smile had been the biggest yet as he swung the preteen around before setting him down on his feet and examining his form.

"God, you've grown!" America admired, placing his hand on top the boy's head to measure his full height. Yep, he'd inherited his daddy's stature.

"You're getting bigger too, da-ze," South Korea said with a chuckle as he hopped up and patted America's head to signify the height difference.

"It's been decades," America muttered but too quickly slung his arm around the child. "It's good to see you hangin' in there. Come to celebrate with me?"

"Yeah," South Korea said with a nod. "I came to congratulate an aging old man."

"Hey," America warned, applying teasing pressure around South Korea's neck. "I just turned two hundred. I'm still young!"

"Let's bet!" South Korea dared with a fist-pump. "We'll play a game that originated in my country to test the mind, body, and soul."

"I don't wanna play no Asian game," America complained, sticking his hands in his pockets and pursing his lips in a pout. "All you guys ever play is socc—"

"Who's up for a game of baseball?" South Korea turned to the other countries in hopes to create a team to play said game.

"Hey! I invented baseball, you little snot!" America scoffed but smiled anyways and agreed wholeheartedly to a game—or two—or three. Of course with America playing he made sure to see to it that everyone else participated as well. Not every country was good at the sport but if America insisted then they really had no choice in the matter.

Since South Korea suggested it he was positioned as the pitcher while the others took to the bases and in and out field and batting. Even though some weren't too familiar with the game they weren't too bad at the sport and managed to catch a few bases, but certain countries did however excel in said game much to everyone's surprise and somewhat horror.

"I'm ready, eh. Pitch it to me," Canada said softly as he swung the bat back and forth before settling it on his shoulder and waiting for the pitch to be thrown.

South Korea shrugged and threw him a curve ball which the Canadian hit. South Korea gapped as did Canada.

"I hit it?" Canada asked. Wait, of course he did. America wasn't pitching which meant he could actually get a chance to hit the ball with his bat without the ball hitting him. Perfect!

Tossing the bat down Canada ran for first base. He slid on his belly to touch the base but didn't quite make it to the base. Italy had been guarding said plate. The Italian had caught the ball after Norway threw it to him, but when he went to touch Canada to tag him out he fumbled the round object which gave Canada the chance to shimmy over toward the base to save himself.
"Safe!"

Finally the next batter came up. Romano looked quite annoyed to even be holding a bat and more so when he was up to the plate. When South Korea pitched the first throw it was dubbed a strike.

"I wasn't ready, ya bastard!" Romano shouted to both the umpire and South Korea before mumbling under his breath and trying to hit the pitch once again.

"Strike!"

Romano growled and about turned around to beat the umpire and catcher. Italy had run all the way from first base to slide in between the bat and victims before anything got out of hand.

"Aren't you supposed to be guarding first base? Get back to it, stupido!" Romano commanded to his poor younger brother who nodded and skipped back toward first base.

Finally Romano was ready for the third pitch.

"Strike!"

"God damn it!" Romano cursed, tossing his bat to the ground and then taking off his helmet to toss at the umpire as well.

He marched off back toward the benches they deemed as their dugout and sat still, arms crossed, and frown in place. With a pat on his back and a promise of a better go next bat America left Romano's side and took up his own bat. Here comes the king.

With a smile and a pop from his bubble gum America swung the bat around a few times and then readied his stance, his blue eyes wide and sparkling with anticipation. His smile down into a smirk, daring South Korea to throw his fastest and most complicated pitch at him.

The first one was a ball which America caught quickly and stepped away from the base. The next one was it. He smacked it out. It almost reached out of the park for a homerun, but he went easier than he could have and instead let the catchers in the outfield catch the ball and throw it toward the bases.

America made it to first base in no time and Canada made it to second easily. Now it was up to the next batter to possibly take them home.

South Korea gulped when he saw Japan step up to home plate. The older nation looked so serious and calculated that even America shivered at the sight. Ever since he had introduced baseball to Japan so long ago the nation practiced at the game like it was kendo or something. It wasn't just a game to Japan and his people, nor was it something as poetic as art; it was a way of life and damn was Japan engrossed in it.

South Korea, who had been pitching good up until now, looked quite nervous to even throw at Japan who had his bat ready as if it were an unsheathed katana ready to slice with deadly precision. But since South Korea suggested the game he had to pitch and if it was Japan batting then he'd just have to throw his best. And he did, but Japan was just too skilled.

The very first pitch the Japanese country batted it into the outfield. Everyone thought of a homerun, but it bounced into the grass before reaching out of bounds. So while the catchers were scrambling to pick the ball up and toss it back into the infield to strike out the runners, Japan was already making his way to first base.
America had never seen Japan so dead-set on something in years. But right now the Asian was focused solely on making it to the base and—and to the second! He hit the first base and kept running to second, so America had to run to third. Only problem of course Canada seemed like he had planted himself on the plate.

Japan wasn't stopping so America had to keep moving and in order for America to keep moving then Canada had to keep moving.

"Keep going!" America cried out as his form crashed into Canada's relaxed frame. The Canadian stumbled forward, looking disoriented. Had he not seen America coming? Did he not see Japan closing in on them?

Suddenly America was pushed from behind. The delay in lapse created enough time for Japan to catch up with them to third base and the Japanese man was quickly pushing America to go who was in turn pushing Canada.

Now both America and Japan were pushing Canada to run home. Canada was nearly trampled over by the two baseball-loving nations in order to reach home base and score those points. They couldn't score those points however if it wasn't touched in order so they were both pushing Canada who was trying to run as fast as he could but he just . . . he wasn't that fast on ground—but get him on the ice and—

"Run, RUN!" America cheered with a loud laugh as Japan pushed into him and he pushed into Canada who looked quite unsettled with chancing this many scores at once.

The Canadian practically face-planted into the base while America fell on top of him and then Japan on top of him.

"SAFE!"

"Oh yeah!" America exclaimed as he jumped up and threw his hands up in triumph. "You did great, guys, we totally kicked ass."

"Next time we'll have to split you and Japan," Turkey spoke up. What had they been thinking to pair the two most sport-fanatic countries in a game of baseball?

"Yeah," South Korea agreed with a nod after sadly slumping over to them.

While the losing team was sore at failing to win, America had been having the time of his life. He was surrounded by fellow nations. The presents he had received rocked his socks off. The events for the day were so extravagant it would be burned into his memory for ages to come.

He had been so busy with his friends and people and the activities dispersed everywhere that he felt as if Vietnam's war and his previous embarrassing scandals were just a figment of his imagination. Like they never happened. At least they were a distant memory giving way for joyous new memories for his heart to dwell on.

Life was just great.

But, his day hadn't been complete just yet. At the end of the day America had returned to his home after housing the stationing nations who decided to stay a little longer to celebrate the week-long bicentennial celebration. Inside he loosened his tie, unbuttoned and tossed his formal jacket, took off his shiny shoes, gold cufflinks, and settled down into a state of relax.

He hadn't bothered turning on any light. He didn't need any of them at all because he was headed
upstairs to his room. After grabbing a few cookies and a carton of milk America headed upstairs and sat down at his desk. He flicked the lamp on and frowned after discovering no message.

It was his birthday. Why hadn't he received anything?

Popping a cookie into his mouth America decided he'd have to initiate the first move. Reaching forward he typed out three words that would hopefully entice the recipient to respond.

Moscow, Russia. July 4th 1976

Russia had been quite busy in the '70's. He'd grown too, quite powerful. In fact he believed he had reached his peak. He had never been this strong and of course he had his iron-fisted boss to thank for that. But even that man dared attempt to control him.

After he had found out about America, whom Russia had invited some years back, he had made sure to keep the nation occupied with numerous acts of duty so he couldn't slip out any other invitation again. Not that Russia would. He wouldn't risk anything ill befalling America again. He had been lucky the American's boss hadn't thrown a declaration of war at them.

The prices Russia pays for attempts at reconciliation.

He had once tried to sit down at his desk and write to America, explaining his sorries for all of the things that had befallen the younger nation during his stay in his home but he had been so upset with his sister, angry over General Winter's early appearance, and exhausted over his boss's appointed duties that no letter was ever sent. He hadn't received anything from the American nation, as he thought he shouldn't. He felt he was upset, and he wouldn't blame him for feeling that way.

Russia had accepted a long time ago that the time of their writing letters had come to an end.

That fact made Russia more so upset, particularly with himself. He should have been more in control. If he was then all of this wouldn't have happened.

He was tired of getting pushed around by everyone. His sisters did not control him. His boss did not control him. General Winter did not control him. He was Russia; he was the strongest nation in the world. He had worked his way to the top by himself because he was strong, smart, steadfast.

So the one thing he couldn't understand was why things never went as he planned. He was in control, or at least he wanted to be. If the world was run his way then it would be a better place, but all of this shit just wouldn't stop throwing itself at him.

Russia wanted relations between he and America to ease. He knew politics. He knew how to play games. He knew how to fake humans.

He didn't care if outward appearances seemed strained; as long as secret personal affairs were eased and relaxed then the world could go on believing that World War Three was just around the corner. It wasn't because he and America had connected through letters once more. They spoke easily again about matters unimportant to their bosses but fascinating to the other nation.

While they usually left politics out of their conversation they did however bring it up when necessary. It was a subject quite serious to the both of them in private but in public not so much in their game titled the Cold War. In this they could understand the reasons behind decisions and moves from the other nation and so react quicker as well as inform the other on how they honestly felt about it instead of smiling in front of the cameras and begrudgingly congratulating or forcibly denouncing.

Russia couldn't even have that now thanks to the consequences he had to pay for losing control over
his invite. The prices he's always had to pay. It seemed unending.

Now he stood there, looking for a good book to read. He found one but just stared at the title for long hours, leaning against his desk that sat the teletype machine on it that he still continued to keep secret from his boss even. He had read the book in hand over a hundred times. It ended tragically and he hated it, but he always reread it eventually hoping that he had read the ending wrong, hoping that it had somehow changed to his liking.

If the endings of books did not conform to the USSR then neither would the world. Things slipped so quickly out of his grasp that he wondered if he was ever meant to control anything or anyone at all. He felt it better because Mother Russia knows best out of any country in the world.

He knew what it would be like to lose control; death, famine, cold. The General would take control if not Russia and he could not have that, simply wouldn't. He would rather his boss yank him around by a leash than let that old mad ghost loose. After all, it was he who wished for America's demise. And Russia could not have that, never.

So of course in Russia's self-loathing moment he was surprised when the machine shook and creaked out a letter. He knew of only one person who would write to him personally. It couldn't be.

The book and all its tragedies slipped from his fingers, now left carelessly dropped to the floor as Russia turned on his heel and ripped the letter out of the machine and read it.

'It's my birthday.'

That was right. Today was July the 4th. Not only that but Russia believed America was now celebrating his 200th year of independence. Well, congratulations. Russia was certain England had stayed home sick as usual much to the rest of Europe's humor.

Russia had been there to celebrate with America on his first year of independence. Sadly he had been away for his 100th year, but he did send his regards and plenty of presents and love notes on that day seeing how they had already agreed to secretly court just a few years prior. That had been a pleasant celebration despite Russia's absence.

Russia wondered what it would have been like had their relationship not soured through revolution and ideological tragedies. He wondered what kind of parties America was throwing in each state. What kind of presents the other countries had given him. He wondered how big and bright those fireworks would look like as they were shot up above and into American skies, illuminating that blue-eyed-blond nation so beautifully.

Russia could inquire as to what had partaken that day, but he wouldn't. He very much liked his thoughts with a world where he and America had never been forced apart and were indeed celebrating it together. So, instead he replied back to the note and wondered if he'd receive anymore.

Taking the note America read it to himself. He didn't need the translator book any longer. Previous the Summit Series, America and Russia had written to each other so often—sometimes a few times every day—that America had memorized Cyrillic. He could now read the funny looking letters with
ease, of course he wouldn't tell Russia that because he liked to keep him in the dark about a few things, and it was great to use against others who thought him too oblivious or stubborn to learn another language when he indeed was not.

'You have come a long way since the first year you celebrated your independence. Congratulations,' the letter read. America chuckled and twirled in his seat while contemplating everything the letter had brought up, the suggestions as well as memories. "Yeah, tell me about it."

America was surprised Russia had responded so quickly, more so that he responded at all. After their little fiasco at the Summit Series in the Soviet's home he hadn't sent a single letter. America hadn't either, not even one informing him that he was well.

What would he write in the first place? 'Oh, hey, I'm feeling much better after that god-awful poisoning, just thought I'd let you know and all'? Hell no. Talk about awkward and a headache to boot. Russia's home was dangerous territory, never going there again. But America was glad he at least got to see Catherine's Palace one last time. It really did him good after he was back home and could think straight for himself again.

Still, Russia hadn't even written him a letter of apology or anything. But then again America was strangely understanding. It would be strange of Russia to do so.

It was weird; how America knew Russia so well even through their dubious relationship in this time.

Even so, America had not felt safe in Russia's home. He hardly ever slept during the nights because it was so cold and that figure, that frightening figure outside his window stared at him as if he wanted him dead. What horrified America the most was that Russia knew about it and yet did nothing.

There was once a time America had felt safe in Russia's country. He had felt secure just by the fact Russia was slumbering in the same home he resided in with young Quincy and bold Mr. Dana. France's house, Netherland's house, Spain's house, even Prussia's house, they were all so old and daunting to America that he was unnerved when he visited in his younger years when he was seeking recognition. Russia had been the only nation to make him feel safe.

It could be because of the way he treated England in his surprise visit, but America felt for a moment that Russia had cared about his wellbeing, not just his goods and trade and blow to England's pride. For a moment in time America truly felt that Russia was looking at him as a person with concern for his mental state, and health, and maturity. It was something unexpected and America was certain that that is what caused him to fall deeply in love with the much older nation.

That was the past now. No god above or force below could turn back the hands of time. No one was that powerful, even a superpower.

So what was America expecting now writing to Russia? A gift? No, soviets did not give gifts to capitalists. He had gotten his congratulations but it was not the same if not in person and America of all people knew Russia could not say that to him in person. He knew better.

America laughed. He leaned back in his chair, looking back at the teletype machine and laughed at the irony. Their damn Cold War's even taken away their secret letters.

To hell it has!

America leaned forward and typed out something just to spite awkward tensions.

Moscow, Russia. July 4th 1976
Russia raised a brow as the machine spit out another message. He had kept the previous note intact in thinking it would be America's last letter to him, but it wasn't so it was set to the flame as he reached forward and read the one just given.

'So many nations showed up and gave me amazing presents. So, HA in your accusing me of having no real friends.'

Russia chuckled. Good, America still had that annoying habit to hold onto past meaningless offenses even when he shouldn't. So the conversations started.

'I am certain they came out of obligation. Wouldn't want to offend such a trigger-happy country.'

'Trigger-happy? Excuse me, Mr. I've-got-the-biggest-bomb.'

'Oh, so you knew about that.'

'Of course, in which you knew about my missile count, bastard.'

'All is fair in love and war, yes?'

'Is this even a war? There's no declaration.'

'No, but the others are calling it a Cold War. The word 'War' is in it.'

'True.' 'Let's not talk about that right now, it's my birthday and I want to brag about the festivities!' The two never brought up the Summit Series. Never even talked about hockey as a sport when the subject arose. If anything it was forgotten just as the two began transmitting letters once again like they used to.

Because America at least wanted to be friends. His goal was to befriend the entire world. That would be awesome.

And Russia . . . he just wanted to start over for the umpteenth time. He really didn't deserve all these chances, but when life was cruel to him it was also kind. This time, though, he'd be careful and watch and wait for when it turned on him again. This time he would punish its cruelty with anguish in return. No longer would he be the puppet on life's strings. He was in control again and would stay this way as long as he could be.

USA. March 8th 1983

The '80's were something else entirely. Everything changed in this decade. America hadn't thought anything would. After all, nothing had for near a half century. Apparently Russia had thought the same from reading his concerned letters.

Oh, how wrong they were.

The end of the '70's was great. The two got back to writing each other, a new détente was signed. Of course it had been broken just before the turn of the new decade. Russia had told America he was forced by his boss and of course he knew how pushy they could be, especially Soviet bosses. This wasn't Russia's fault, no, never. Maybe, possibly . . . probably.

At least, that's what Mr. Reagan kept saying.

Right now, that very moment, Reagan was calling the Soviet Union, Russia, an "Evil Empire." America should have realized a long time ago how aggressive his new boss was. The Iran Hostage
Crisis ended just twenty minutes after the new President was sworn in. America had thought it a blessing firstly and a coincidence secondly.

Then Caribbean Basin Initiative was put into effect. Why? Could America not feel safe in his own hemisphere? Had he not enough control of it?

The crackdowns were uncanny and swift. So quickly America found himself jailing a Soviet spy. He knew they were out there but after trying to get rid of his nasty McCarthyism he tried not to think about them.

Of course the most aggressive move Mr. Reagan had ever done was to sign the P.L. 97-157. America didn't understand why he, himself, hadn't taken it as serious as he should have. He should have, he really should have because as he watched his boss sign that back in '82 he found himself now pulled back behind a line drawn out in solidifying concrete before him to separate because his boss, and in so he, had just denounced the government of the Soviet Union.

Was this the 1920's again? Were they no longer going to speak again? No trade, no attempt at understanding the other?

Before, he and Russia had been called rivals. Rival was fine; it was a step under enemy and had ways to be reasoned with. Now they were declared enemies . . . again.

Just fifteen days after declaring Russia an evil empire his boss goes ahead and begins his "Star Wars" proposition. He was securing his country and subtly threatening Russia with a daring challenge.

Aggressive? America's new boss had just put fire to their Cold War again in an attempt to burn the Soviets to the ground.

It was mid-December when America finally got back from Grenada. He was exhausted. He hadn't expected Reagan to order him to take part in the invasion with his troops, but he had and finally they had accomplished what they set out to do. No more communism, no more Cubans, no more Soviet machinery. One island down.

God, America was exhausted.

He took a long hot bath after returning home to a lovely snow-fall. He just wanted to soak, to soak away the violence, the tension, the strain, the worry, the fear, the frustration, everything. Sure, it wasn't another world war, but, hell, it was in his own hemisphere, he shouldn't have to worry about this shit anymore.

After he had cleaned himself up, trimmed his hair, rubbed ointment on his cuts and bruises, he dressed in his night attire and felt his bed call his name. Reaching his room upstairs he turned on his light to find everything in the order he had left it in. He smiled. There was nothing as good as coming home.

He was about ready to flop onto his bed when he noticed a pile of letters on his desk. They had been spit out by the teletype. He walked over to the pile and took up the parchments. He began sifting through the letters and what he found disturbed him.

It was Russia asking him so many questions. Many about his new boss, the subject in politics and the new aggressions devised against him. The peace movements had been promising but after the downed Korean Air Lines Flight 007 the Cold War had been heated once more. America's people were furious and Russia's people were on edge on what they were going to do.

So, it was to completely dominate his own hemisphere first and then deal with the other, that's what
Mr. Reagan wanted and America was frustrated.

The two superpower nations had been ready; both had been ready to call an end to their fake war. Hell, they’d even sign documents of surrender if that was what it took to show their people they were tired of fighting, tired of playing this deadly game with the other. If the flames rose above any more then they might very well have a war on their hands.

But their new bosses said no to peace. So, hopes were dashed and explanations desperately asked for, but both countries knew neither leader could return an answer properly. Life has dubbed them enemies once more and would not let them rid those titles so easily.

It seemed there just could not be more than one superpower in the world.

"To hell with this shit!" America cursed as he tossed the letters down and sat himself down to type up something, anything to tell Russia that he didn't want this but what he got in response was something the both of them knew was true.

'The people are you, and you are your people.'

America knew its meaning after reading it over a few times. He didn't need to give it thought. He could already feel it. His people were angry, in part making him angry.

Even after some letters himself Russia had never explained what happened with the flight. He hadn't even given him a straight answer after inquiring for the black box. He knew Russia was upset too; the frustration was evident in the couple of weeks of silence from the Slavic nation. But he didn't have to be such a . . . such a . . .

"God!" America spat as he crumbled the paper and tossed it across the room. He moaned his frustrations into his hands and rubbed his face furiously before pulling his glasses off and setting them down on his desk.

America hadn't been this frustrated since the '60's. He hated this. He really did.

He was the United States of America; the embodiment of liberty, truth, and justice and yet he felt so many times that he had no voice in anything that was done. He wanted peace when his people wanted war and then wanted war when his people wanted peace, what was this? Why was he so bipolar?

Being a nation was hard, so very hard. It meant he could never have an eternal relationship. It meant he could never have a true friend. It meant all of his enemies would forever try to find a way to kill him. It meant that he would not grow old and die on a death bed in peace—no, he'd die in battle with a shuddering gasp of agony. He'd fade violently and the world would give way to a new power and he'd be forgotten like so many other countries.

He didn't want that at all.

America wanted his log cabin, his pets, his fishing hole, his baseball field, his . . . no, he wanted his endless rows of sunflowers, he wanted his blue skies, his fluffy clouds formed in shapes of animals to depict, his green, green grass to lay on forever. There was room for every country in his paradise. No one would hate it; it was a place everyone would love.

An end; to war, to politics, to disease, to famine, to cold, to scorch, to drought, to pain, to death. Paradise.

"Are we born only to come to realize that paradise is a faux dream?" America muttered to himself
and chuckled at the irony. No, he was America. He would never stop dreaming for as long as he existed. Someone had to.

America then typed out six words that were as personal and true as could be. He didn't know if Russia would believe him. He typed them out more so to convince himself.

'I, Alfred F. Jones, want peace.'

Yes, America believed he did. He knew his people were angry, but in time he knew their anger would recede and soon another peace movement would come about. All that needed to happen was for Russia to have his own peace movements.

To meet in the middle, it was the only way. Maybe then they could call themselves friends. To be a friend, was that at all threatening?

Of course before America sent the letter he heard a knock on his door. With a sigh he got up, shut his bedroom door and headed downstairs. The hour was late so as to who it was kindled a curiosity in him.

He opened the front door only to behold his boss. He wasn't alone either. America peaked outside to see the secret service and . . . yeah, that looked like CIA agents.

Maybe America should have stopped by the White House to let ol' Ronny know he had returned. He had arrived so late back in the mainland that he hadn't thought the man to be up so he just proceeded in ushering himself to his old home to rest there for the night and sign in to the presidential mansion the following morning. Guess Mr. Reagan was anxious to see him.

"Hey, Ronny," America said, putting on a smile for his leader. He was exhausted and just wished that whatever he had to say could wait for the next day. "What are you doing here this late?"

"Can I come in, son?" The President asked.

America nodded. How was he supposed to deny his boss?

So he came in, as did the others and suddenly America felt his old case of McCarthyism slowly began to creep out. He hated it showing its ugly head because this was his boss, his leader, his Commander and Chief, and the others they were his people. He should NOT have any doubts about their intentions at all. Never.

"It's good to have you home, Alfred. There's always a sense of calm whenever you return to your land and people. It's a nice thing to feel in these days. How was your return trip?" the President asked after seating himself across from America on the sofa.

"Was fine," America answered with a shrug. He then offered a smile. "We did what you wanted us to do. We stopped them." Maybe that's what Mr. Reagan couldn't wait to hear. He was a man who wanted questions answered fast and progress quick.

"That's good, but I'm afraid there's so many more things to do before we can even relax," he said.

America's shoulders slumped. He figured as much. Perhaps back in the day he would have been ecstatic about a president like Reagan, one who wouldn't just turn a blind eye to the Soviet Union, but would turn and punch them right in the balls, but it's the '80's. The war in Asia was over, the Middle East was a little hazy, sure, but it was getting better. War was supposed to be fading, not becoming so enticing that he'd be jumping into it again.
"No disrespect, sir, but couldn't this have waited until tomorrow?" America asked. It was time to be honest and flat out state what he wanted. "I'm jetlagged and just want to hit the hay."

"I understand your exhaustion, Alfred, but I'm afraid this can't," Mr. Reagan said. "We've detained more possible spies. Now, I don't want to raise an alarm, but due to the unnerving count I would like it if you would move into the White House."

America's eyes widened. He only moved into the White House during times of war for safety measures. Were spies really that dangerous to him? Please, they wouldn't even know where to find him in his old home. So then why was his boss freaking out so much—

"Hey!" America gasped when he watched the CIA move throughout his home and gather up the belongings they felt he'd want with him during his stay in the White House. They were in the kitchen taking up his food, his plates, his cups—those were very old, he wished they wouldn't—they were in his living room taking up his electronics, records, and radio.

And worst of all, they were heading upstairs toward his room.

"No! Stop!" America exclaimed as he jumped to his feet and raced upstairs toward them.

"Alfred?" America could hear his boss calling from the bottom of the staircase as he pushed his people away from his room. "What's gotten into you?"

It was too late. Three agents had already opened his door and entered his room. They weren't in there for long before he pushed them out, but they had seen it. God, they had seen it and now they were rushing down the stairs and whispering their find in his boss's ear.

America's President was frowning. He was looking at America like a disappointed father would their child and America just stood there frozen in spot. He couldn't do anything else as the rest of the agents pushed past him and stormed his room, examining everything inside and taking out drawers of his clothing, his cases of guns, even a few memorabilia that he'd never taken out of his old home—it was like they expected him to stay long in the White House and as his boss stared him down to bring about an unexpected feel of shame it looked like he may.

After they had taken what they could like investigators from a crime scene Mr. Reagan came upstairs. He stopped beside America for a moment, giving him a concerned and strangely knowing look before entering his room and looking at the teletype machine as well as the pile of messages that America had yet to dispose of.

"Alfred," the President called to get the boy's attention.

America turned but did not look at the man. He felt the disappointment in his glare as well as the disapproving glances from the men around. Did they have to look at him like he was some goddamn KGB spy? He was their country for the love of God.

"It's this . . . this right here," Reagan said, pointing to the machine and messages. He turned to America, his frown still intact. He looked near furious. "This is the reason why I want you to move into the White House. I have denounced their government, Alfred, and here you are talking to him."

"We can't just cut relations," America excused.

"But we cannot conform to them," the President said as he took a step closer to America. He was standing before him now. America could feel the hot air exhausting from his flared nostrils, the man was that close. "We have nothing in common, nothing. I understand that the people want peace, that you also long for it, but dammit, Alfred, every time we—you—get hopes risen they are dashed time
and time again. Can't you see it's because he's going to betray you? Can't you see he doesn't want peace?"

"He does too," America found himself defending. This time he looked his boss in the eye and what he found was furious outrage.

"Then what about Afghanistan, Poland, or Flight 007?" As if America needed reminded of those incidents. "There will be no peace as long as Communism lingers in the world. It's up to you to get rid of it, America. You alone."

Once upon a time America believed he could do it. He believed that it was his sole purpose in life; to free those enslaved, and Communism, Nazism, all of those were structures meant to enslave the free-willed. Patton, MacArthur, Roosevelt; with all of them he felt he could take it on, one-on-one. Now, after near half a century it was looking daunting and less appeasing.

America had spent a good twenty years on edge about anything resembling "Red" and then the next twenty years after trying to start a relationship from scratch again. It wasn't easy, especially after tip-toeing around ancient history—history that he had cherished with all his heart. It wasn't easy to look past it, but for the sake of rebuilding relations he had to.

Now, now when he believed he could talk to Russia about anything their bosses nearly start wars again with each other. It was like a rollercoaster. Up and down, up and down. Never ending.

After this boss then what? Would the next one cool things down between their countries again? Or, would he be even more aggressive?

America could feel himself growing stronger. He had been leveling out his growth since ending Vietnam's war. He had thought that maybe he could relax, that he could just settle down a little and get back to strengthening his ties with his family and friends, not rearming his armament and buffing up his military personnel.

Times were changing along with the hearts of his people, his own heart. It was the 1980's not the 1880's. Now issues between other countries were settled through diplomacy. At least that's what America wanted.

His boss, however, was dead-set on picking up the pace and completing what America's previous bosses "failed" to accomplish. And that was bringing him to the top. Stamping out all threats. Getting rid of debt. Stretching out territory. Open-trade. Capitalism. Americanism. Americanization.

America's boss wanted him sole in absolute global hegemony.

"I can't do this by myself!" America just about exploded at his boss as his frustration pushed for him to rip his hair out of his scalp. While in front of the world he prided himself with being all-mighty strong, able to take on anyone or anything even if it was by himself, but he knew it was a lie, especially now—especially with so many enemies. Frustration or not he wanted to be honest with his President. "I'm just one country and what you want will take CENTURIES!"

Mr. Reagan was surprisingly quiet as he listened to America's outburst. When America was finished he nodded and then turned back to the machine. There was a frown on his face. He was contemplating on his next move and America knew, he just knew it would not be one for better relations. It was beyond that point already.

"That might be true, Alfred," Reagan spoke up as he walked up to the machine and then picked up a few papers, reading some messages in silence before sighing and placing them back down as he
turned back toward his young country. "But then it might not. You are strong. You are the United States of America. If you have your people's support then there's nothing you can't do. So trust us."

America wanted to, but it's been so long since he's been completely open with his people. It was sad for a personified country to think like so, but it was true. America couldn't remember the last time he had been openly honest with his people, his boss. His old home was now just a hiding spot to get away from them.

His old home was his private quarters. His solemn quiet. His peace of mind.

Back then it used to be next to his boss, like George or Abraham. Back then his peace of mind came from fishing with his sailors. Back then his privacy was within his mainland amongst his people and in his own hemisphere.

He used to get so many visitors in his old home. He still had guest rooms set up for such occasions. He hadn't touched the rooms in, oh, close to sixty years now he'd say. It was a shame. All of it.

So, maybe, maybe his boss was right. He should move into the White House. He should be with him 24/7. He should speak to his people, be amongst them. To learn to trust again was hard, but he was willing to try it.

"You need to look to the future, Alfred," Mr. Reagan spoke up, pulling America from his thoughts.

So, did this mean he would no longer be able to send secret messages? He had quite enjoyed his and Russia's conversations and the uncensored-ness they allowed with the other. It was time America supposed. Time to give it all up.

Besides, he had never wanted a friendship with Russia anyway.

America's boss then proceeded to walk out of the room, past America. "And if these things are hindering you from embracing the new century then it's time to get rid of them."

America expected it, but that didn't mean it hurt any less to watch as the CIA agents tossed the machine to the ground and stamped it out until it was unrecognizable. They then took up the letters and set a fire to them. The ash flittered down to the floor and scattered abroad like autumn leaves bleeding over a colorless field.

He hoped Russia didn't mind the sudden stop in transmissions.

America pulled himself from his thoughts in a flash upon hearing the click of a door lock opening. He turned, his eyes wide, and his mouth agape in horror. No.

Darting past the agents and the men downstairs America ran toward the hall holding the passageway to his storage closet. They weren't doing what he thought they were? God, no!

"No, no, no, NO! What are you doing?!!" His people or not, America was not afraid to land a couple of his knuckles against a number of jaws. His boss, and the agents, they were in his storage unit ripping out everything . . . everything he had received from Russia throughout history. Everything!

No one touched the belongings in his storage closet without his say so. An anger built up in America, his fists shaking as he marched toward the men hauling the belongings out of the room, but he was stopped. The other agents seemed to know the impending danger and so quickly held him at bay with wary glares.

"Everything, Alfred. Everything needs to go," came his boss's voice. America turned to him to see
him motioning the men outside to distribute the memorabilia on the ground.

No, that just wasn't true. America—Alfred F. Jones didn't believe that.

Bursting out of the agents hold America didn't care for their chase after him. He couldn't let them take away those things. Anything but those.

He had nearly ripped the door off of its hinges as he ran outside only to find his boss standing aside, watching as the rest of the agents set a fire to the pile of gifts.

"NO!" America cried and once again he was blocked by his own men.

No, they were burning—everything was burning. His eyes widened and face paled in horror. He could see everything, everything that he had cherished more than anything in the world rise up in smoke. They had been his most beloved possessions because those belongings held nothing but good memories and those objects kept the memories alive.

Books, the ones Russia had given to America after he personally translated them into English for him to read; they had been first editions and he had given them to him. America had immediately read every one, Anna Karenina, War and Peace, Crime and Punishment, and many others. They were burning, their covers cracking and their pages curling into mangled black.

Matryoshka dolls, portraits of the Russian royal family, that fishing pole Russia had said to keep for him so they could go fishing in Oregon again. They were all burning, their material shooting up in flame and crumbling into ash.

America's throat constricted when he watched a large chest catch aflame. Inside had been a bountiful amount of clothing—Russian clothing—Russia had given to him during his masquerade ball after America's own clothing chests had vanished into thin air. Atop the chest had laid the masquerade outfit he had worn to the ball. The one he had been adorned in as he danced with the older nation.

The golden fabric lit faster than anything else in the fire. The gems glistened brightly in the light of the fires but too gave way to the heat and dissipated into blackened char.

Every one of them. Every one of those belongings America had gotten before Russia's October Revolution. Every one held a special memory, both endearing and heart-felt.

America had never meant to get rid of anything of those belongings. When he had tried to clean out his storage closet those few times he had thrown out a few things he dubbed garbage. The ones he had wanted to get rid of the most were that of things reminding him of his time with England, but these, the ones reminding him of his time with Russia, no, he had completely decided to keep. They had been the only belongings he had actually organized and set to a particular spot to keep tidy.

It hadn't been hard for the agents or his boss to locate the Russian belongings aside from their design. But they were gone now. Gone, and the place they once occupied in his storage closet was bare and empty. Nothing now but cobwebs and crawling spiders.

America stood there looking at the empty space in the dark closet. He stood there quiet in that cluttered room because he couldn't stand to watch it all burn outside. He had understood, he KNEW the past wasn't coming back. But what was so wrong with holding onto things that reminded him of the good times?

When Russia had been taken from him it hurt to even look at those belongings but after a few decades of realizing that he may never be the same nation America had once known, once admired, once loved with all his heart, the younger enjoyed digging through the Russian items. It was because
each held an intimate memory. Not a thing from said Slavic nation bore ill thought.

It was all gone now. No more could he sift through the items to locate a certain object to bring about the pleasant memories attached to it. He wondered . . . would he forget then? Probably not, he had a good memory, but the more that the reminders faded from him the more he wouldn't dwell on the thoughts and in time it would be like he wouldn't remember any of those close memories at all. With nothing to initiate nostalgia then he might as well say he'd forget.

"We've taken the rest of your belongings to the White House. You can linger here a little longer, but it's best you come as soon as possible," that's what America's boss had said to him before he left with the others. America was glad he was so understanding. He was glad his boss cared so much for him to invade his private home, tear his most precious belongings from him and burn them before his very eyes to get a point through—the point being to forget.

He was right, America knew it. Not many of his people were even alive that remembered a time when the Soviet Union was in fact Imperial Russia which had been such a close ally for so long—and would have been more too if . . .

He is his people and they are him.

If that were the case then why was America's eyes stinging so badly as he dug his hands through the piles of blackened char? Why was he inhaling every horrible sound that wanted to escape through his throat? Why was his body trembling as his knees hit the ground outside and ruined his clothing and recently washed skin with the ashes of the past?

Taking hold of the frame of the chest America's heart clenched when it crumbled under his grasp. That trunk had been a hundred and eighty years old. America had kept it and the clothing and other trinkets inside in top condition, but one little spark was enough to burn through a hundred and eighty years of history.

He was angry, so very upset, but more so sad at the small shapes of what once were presents, every one given to him by an acquaintance, an ally, a best friend, a lover. He could hardly tell what was what anymore they were that cindered.

Maybe this was for the best. Like his people, like his boss thought. They were right anyways. Their relationship was not going to change and even the prospect of being friends was a far-fetched idea.

He was the United States of America. He could dream. But when his dreams turned into nightmares, he'd rather not fall asleep and even try to rest peacefully.

No more now. No more dreams. Not when the memory items were gone.

Finally his hand swiped over something that didn't crumble under slight pressure. It had been inside the chest. Pulling it out from the crumbled remains of the chest and burnt fabric America pulled it up and began wiping it off.

It was a metal box. Rubbing it more America's fingers slid across a few engraved indents. With a gasp America wondered if this was what he thought it had been.

Had it really, had it really survived the fire?

Taking his sleeve he didn't care if it blackened the rest of his clothes, he had to know. He had to feel some small hope that this might have survived. Wiping off the cinder the best he could America beheld the letters engraved on the tin box.
He would have grown a little annoyed of the liquid falling on the letters and smearing the char over the engravings more to blur if he wasn't so concerned with taking in deep breaths to ease the pain in his chest. Reaching up to wipe his stinging eyes America opened the box and coughed out a relieved sighing sob at finding the contents inside it remained untouched.

America quickly closed the small box and then pulled it close to his chest. He was smiling. Smiling so big that it hurt, especially when his lips quivered and eyes stung so bad that his eyes could not open.

Just when he had thought it had all been destroyed these had been saved. He had cherished each gift from Russia the same but this little box, this little box held a different story and invoked so many different emotions that were both sad and happy. Its time and place and the memories it brought forth was something America had wanted to forget but remember all at once so of course this had to be the one thing to survive. Of course.

Inhaling a shaking breath America finally forced himself to move. He knew that if he took too long in going to the White House then no doubt the agents would come to check in on him. He didn't want them to see this.

Getting up America walked back inside and decided to hide this last piece of his and Russia's history he had before the Slavic nation's fall to communism. He hid it among his old British belongings. He knew no one would look for it there and there was a high chance he too would forget where he had put the object in time, but he was certain he'd eventually find it again when he returned to this home, and when he decided to try to organize and clean these pieces of his history.

He would then find this box amongst his old colonial belongings and immediately know what it was to him. Now, to keep it safe he had to leave. He had to heed his boss's demands and listen to his people's voice.

Now, he had to race Russia once more.


"How is your stay fairing, Mr. Kohl?" The President of the United States of America inquired to a good friend of his, the German Chancellor.

"It has been well," Mr. Kohl said. "The start of a new year is upon us as well as the beginning of a promising decade. You have come a long way since being elected; I congratulate you, Mr. Reagan."

"There's still a lot of work to do, I'm afraid," Mr. Reagan said. But those were the duties of a national leader.

"Ja, but you can at least relax as the New Year rings in," Mr. Kohl said as he leaned back in his chair. He had a nice smile until a small frown appeared a moment later. "I am starting to think that maybe your progressive attitude is rubbing off on your young country."

Reagan frowned at the mention of his nation. Ever since the President had urged the young man to move into the White House for the good of everything he hadn't spoken much lately. During conferences he was polite and would boldly announce his speeches and answer any questions asked of him. With the press he would smile for the cameras and give the people the image of a young, vibrant, energetic, and strong country they had wanted portrayed to the public. But when he returned back to the Presidential mansion he'd excuse himself and quietly retreat to his room.

Reagan would sometimes check in on him only to see him shed of formal attire, laying down, always
looking so exhausted. Reagan blamed the mood he had put himself in lately. Ever since pulling him from his old home young America had been doused with slight depression.

He knew the boy had emotional ties to the old home, and probably many of the things residing inside it, but that had been one of the reasons he had the agents take up a lot of the memorabilia so that America could have a few pieces of said home to remind him to remain relaxed and at ease. Mr. Reagan assured himself that his nation had not been down over the destruction of those old Russian things. After all, they were Russian, their value in America meant nothing—at least they shouldn't.

Truth was, despite the President's daily assurance that his nation had NOT been attached to those silly things, he knew better. As America's boss he knew of the history and a few secrets the American nation had wanted to keep away from even his own leaders. The one secret about the private transmissions Reagan had not known about—America had faked him out quite extensively there—but he knew about the past, and he knew about such relationships America had had with other countries.

He knew about his ties with the USSR before the country was called such. He knew what they had once been to the other.

But Mr. Reagan saw a single problem with his own country, it was that young America had a hard time forgetting and in so moving away from past grievances. The boy would hold onto grudges for far longer than necessary, hell, he'd even laugh at jokes that were outdated in this time and age. Worse of all he'd hold onto an ancient hope that love would never die.

Reagan didn't know if America was stupid enough to hold onto the false hope himself or that he was being supplied with the illusions of fantasies in encouragement by another. Whatever it was, it was unhealthy for a nation who still needed shaped.

America was becoming a young man now. His teenage years nationally were receding him. Mr. Reagan wanted a strong adult with a level head raised by the time he stepped out of office. At least then he wouldn't have to worry about him any longer.

And a nation still doting over a sociopathic country that's no longer what it used to be was the utmost epitome of unhealthy standings. It was all for the best; what Reagan had done, and he hoped one day America could see that.

"I had seen him a little while ago," Mr. Kohl spoke up, pulling the President from his thoughts. "He was kept to himself, so unusual from such a boisterous nation."

Reagan nodded. "He's just adjusting to living here 24/7 is all."

"I sense he might have been reluctant to do so."

Reagan nodded again at his friend's observance. "He had, but he's a good boy and always obeys for the most part. I just had to give him a reason to give up his old home."

The German Chancellor chuckled. "Inform him that it's been infested with termites?"

"No," Reagan said with a chuckle of his own. "No, America keeps good care of that old house. You should see his storage closet. Things dating back hundreds of years ago are piled inside it but they are so well-kept that even an old pilgrim's hat is in near brand new condition once you wipe off the dust."

There was a sigh that left the President's lips as he leaned forward, placing his elbows on his knees and folding his hands. "He just . . . needs to learn to let go of useless garbage."
Mr. Kohl was always so observant and nodded his head in understanding. He especially knew the importance of having to let go of the ugly past and try one's hardest to move forward.

"Sometimes you can get rid of the objects but the memories of them still linger," Mr. Kohl said. "Germany had a hard time doing this. Now, getting rid of old belongings was easy. Everything with a swastika had to go, of course, but the memories, he's got such a sharp mind that it's hard for him to forget what he's done, and many still remember what happened forty years ago. I'm afraid it might take centuries until a nation can let go of sentimental ties."

"I know this," Reagan said with a nod. "It's why I keep him busy; it seems to have helped your nation out quite a bit."

Mr. Kohl nodded in agreement. He had been so blessed that Germany had been able to find work and busy himself right after the war. If not he was afraid he might have slipped into a depression like the previous war.

"Yes, but even so the nations will have time to themselves once in a while and if young America's anything like Germany he'll somehow see something, hear something, perhaps even do something that will remind him of ages long ago."

It was a nation thing, both leaders knew this.

"Might I ask what has the young nation so down?" Mr. Kohl was certain the young superpower's done many a thing he wasn't proud of to mention to the public, but these moods of his as with any other nation usually came from personal turmoil.

The President opened his mouth but a sigh only escaped as he sadly shook his head. "I believe it is this Cold War we are having with the Russian nation. It's taking its toll on dear America. And rightly so, after all, he'd been in love with Russia for such a long time."

Mr. Kohl was quiet after learning this. While the man hadn't known such information until the President of America had so informed him he was quick to piece all of the clues and obvious signs together. Now the outcomes of interactions and reactions in the recent past made more sense.

"So that is it," Mr. Kohl whispered to himself, tapping his chin. His eyes then turned toward the President and after fixing his glasses on the bridge of his nose a little better he leaned forward in his chair, his attention fully caught in the conversation that revealed new revelations the longer they spoke of this subject. "Does he still . . . love him . . . even after all that's transpired?"

Mr. Reagan didn't want to believe. But he feared his constant assurance that America loved no one was false and that the young nation held onto foolish hope of a reunion of affections.

With a frown the President said, "I'm not sure. It could be, it could not be. He might just be upset that I forced him to extinguish his old trinkets he had received from Russia so long ago." With a shrug Reagan turned his gaze toward the clock. It was almost the New Year. "We are declared enemies with the USSR now and I don't want him reminiscing on anything that would suggest we could ever better relations. The Cold War is very much a war and I want him to see that. I plan to win it. If we can't keep our country safe from their ideals then I fear it won't be long before that nation's reach extends further into the Western Hemisphere and a time like that would spell the end for America. He needs room to spread his wings and fly around. Communism won't let him do that so he needs to be the dominant one. It's just hard to convince him this is all for his own good." There was a chuckle almost full of irony. "I suspect he had thought we'd come to peaceful agreements with the turn of the new decade. No, he needs to be on his guard more than ever. Russia's just recently reached his peak and America needs to catch up. I'm not quite sure what he sees, but as far as I see it, Russia does not
want to settle for two shared powers in the world. He means to be the only and will not allow the freedom that America would if he were the dominating force."

"It is understandable why America thought this after the past couple of decades," Mr. Kohl said as he crossed his fingers together. "Nations can be a hard thing to manage, especially when you're close to them and understand their intentions and hearts. Carrying old feelings is a hard thing for a nation, especially a nation who had been greatly affected by these intimate feelings. Tell me, had they ever consummated their relationship?"

"No," Reagan said with a firm shake of his head. "And thank God for that. America has had a bad deal of relationships lately. There was North Korea—and then Vietnam . . . I can't tell you how glad I was when he broke ties with the two. He's better off alone. He gets attached too easily."

Mr. Kohl was once again nodding his head in understanding. "I am not saying I disagree with you, I too see better reasoning in America remaining celibate, but granted this is only brought up because of his tragic relationships. He is a young and very handsome country; the ideal bachelor for any nation looking to court. While the heart is the ultimate factor in deciding who to care for I do think it wise to subtly push the boy toward a better relationship. Being alone makes him dwell on the past too often. Staying busy with work might make him more lonely after the exhaustion gives him time to himself. He needs a partner."

"It's been near a decade since Vietnam," Reagan brought up. "I doubt he's ready for another relationship."

"Ja, but if it were one guided by both national parties and encouraged by both peoples then I believe it to be healthier and the right thing to do for him," Mr. Kohl suggested. "Now, the future does hold many uncertainties but still there are plenty of countries proclaiming long-lasting loyalty. You have plenty to pick from for him. And believe me when I say this that there are many looking at him with longing and great desire."

Whilst the President pondered all that the Chancellor had said to him the German took the pondering silence to speak once more. He opened his mouth and rubbed his knees with uncertainty as he revealed a secret of his own.

"Germany . . . is one such country," he informed. Mr. Reagan was looking at him now. He looked to want to say something, but Mr. Kohl didn't give him a chance. "Since the beginning of the Nineteenth Century he's been in love with him. He's such a quiet nation that he rarely shows any signs too noticeable." Mr. Kohl chuckled nervously wondering how the President would take this information. "It was these feelings of his that caused him many troubles in the wars, and after certain things that he did to America during the conflict, well . . . he regrets them deeply. I believe this to be one of the numerous unspoken reasons why he has not uttered a word since '45."

"Does he still care about America this way?" Mr. Reagan inquired.

Mr. Kohl nodded. "I believe he still does."

Once again Mr. Reagan was in deep thought. His fingers drummed against the armrests of his chair before he met gazes with the German Chancellor. "America is hard to forget anything."

Mr. Kohl then smiled with an encouraging mood. "Then let us give him some better memories."

Washington D.C. USA. November 15th 1988

It's been five years since America had been inclined to move into the White House with his boss.
Whether it was for surveillance, better protection, or on the urge he appear before his people more often, each had their own suspicious conspiracies. Still, America could not believe all that had happened in just half a decade.

Since his new boss' arrival he'd been on his toes more so than the past couple of decades combined. His economy was booming, his people happier than ever, for once in a long time they felt safer as the tabloids continually showed pictures of America's growth. He was growing again, becoming taller, his frame thicker, and he was continually encouraged by his boss, people, even other fellow countries to keep growing. He couldn't help but chuckle at that. Back in the Nineteenth Century he could name quite a few of those very same countries who had been the ones harassing him about growing so fast—changed their mind much?

Aside from Cuba and a few other trouble-makers, America completely dominated his hemisphere. Those opposing him were too poor, too small to even put up a challenge.

His international relations were tightening as well. His boss as well as Germany and England's bosses were quite close and so would often invite the two of them over to their countries. America had managed to encourage France to grow some balls with his Operation Epervier. Now, finally America wasn't feeling as much overwhelmed as he had in the beginning of the decade. His friends were turning out to be true friends and offering their help and encouragement for world order.

Of course, he couldn't say the same for Russia.

America hadn't heard from him since the destruction of his private teletype machine. In '86 Mr. Reagan decided to switch over to fax machines instead of those tricky Soviet teleprinters. He assumed it was much easier to keep track of that way, and Mr. Reagan made sure to have a count for each one by the end of the day.

But even so America had seen him. He'd seen Russia on television standing loyally next to his new boss whenever they were sworn in—the nation's already gone through three by now. The politics in the USSR have been rough as of late and America could see it taking its toll on Russia.

After the failed talks between their bosses in '85 about the five month unilateral moratorium the embarrassment to Reagan's refusal took a blow to Russia's boss and it seemed to Russia himself. After that he was rarely seen next to his boss and with the Chernobyl disaster the following year, well that put Russia in a major strain.

Ukraine, God, that poor woman, she had become so deathly sick that Russia had refused to leave her side for whatever reason, no doubt blaming himself for her misfortune. America hadn't been there, but he had been told by his boss who had attended the Reykjavik Summit and been informed by Russia's boss on his and his sister's conditions. That crisis had pushed Russia down the most and from then on he had hardly been seen at all.

The following year, in '87 had been the first time America had actually seen Russia. It was during a visit to Germany's place where his boss just so happened to tell Russia's boss off. He had seen him, he wasn't in particular standing near Mr. Gorbachev but America had seen him.

Russia was dressed in his military attire, as had America and Germany been, but the look on his face—he looked upset, but more so he looked tired. America saw the weariness in his step and the underlying dark spots under his eyes. For the first time in decades Russia looked unwell.

It had been just a glance and Russia had only spared one small one himself as he looked down from
the wall he sat upon, looking at the two of them, America and Germany. America had only had time to glance up for a moment and catch the Russian's frown before the nation turned and leapt off the wall and out of view.

Then, just seven months later America believed the Cold War to have ended. His boss came home and showed him the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and to his surprise he had seen Russia's own signature next to his boss's. Was this really the end?

The very next year Russia's men began withdrawing from Afghanistan and now America's boss as well as Russia's boss were on better speaking terms. He never thought he'd see the day. Ever.

With all of the copious amount of good news a peace began to subtly make its way throughout America's land and into his people's hearts. It felt warm and hopeful. He hadn't felt such a strong hope since near the beginning of the decade and now with better relations between their bosses America hoped it would not be long before he and Russia could meet and declare the same relational ease between themselves.

That was if his boss let him travel to Soviet territory. Ever since his move into the White House Mr. Reagan refused to let America go into Soviet lands. If the human was taking a trip to Moscow, then he was to go alone. America couldn't even go with him to meet Russia's boss for concern of Russia himself being there. Mr. Reagan insisted the two not meet. He informed America that he believed the long-term continuance that they not see each other was what was easing their peoples and leaders and that there was a possible chance that a fight could break out if they were to meet again.

America hadn't told his boss about seeing Russia at the Wall during their stay with Germany at Berlin. He would have told him that meeting with Russia would not cause any conflict, but he doubted that his boss would believe him. He wouldn't even believe peace coming from Communists so if America even said the word peace with the word Communism he'd easily be shot down.

But America could see it. He could see peace on the horizon, yet his boss continually told him to keep his guard. To never trust but simply verify firstly.

It would be nice to speak to Russia again and ask him about his thoughts and feelings on the recent happenings, but he couldn't. No, only his own people were allowed the converse with him as well as national friends.

One problem though was a certain "friend" just wouldn't speak, but still Mr. Reagan persisted he strike up a conversation with him.

"Go on, show him around," Mr. Reagan said encouragingly as he pushed America toward the German nation like a parent wanting their child to run off and make new friends on the playground.

America nodded and came up to Germany who was standing next to his boss, simply looking around at the dedicated garden hailed in his and America's honor.

"What do you think of it?" America asked, pulling out his bright smile. Germany looked toward him. He offered no smile but simply stood there looking ever business-like. There was a slight nod of his head as he let his gaze wander around the garden and all of the indigenous planted plants borne from their two lands.

Chancellor Kohl moved next to Germany and nodded his head. "He likes it, America. It is a very nice present, ja, Germany?" The lighter blond nation turned to his leader and nodded his head.

"I think it's pretty cool," America said with a thumbs-up. In fact, his boss hadn't even told him about
the project until it came time to dedicate it, so his shocked face mirrored Germany's as they stood next to their bosses at the ceremony. America was just better at acting as if he knew about it all along.

Stepping forward America pulled Germany's arm. "Come on; let's go take a look around." America had wanted to venture around it and would look completely unhospitable if he was walking around by himself so Germany had no choice but to come.

It wasn't hard to pull the sturdy nation along; after all, America had gotten quite strong the past couple of years. He had no doubt he could toss Germany clear across the park if he wanted to, the added strength did help to push people around when he wanted to.

So there they went, wandering off with approving smiles from both their bosses. The two countries walked around the garden and smiled at the plants and monuments put up around it.

"Should have dedicated it earlier," America said, placing his fists on his hips. "Then the flowers would be in full bloom." November was definitely not a time for brightly hued petals and green grass. "Am I right, Germany?" America turned to the nation who simply stood there looking as stiff as ever. Uptight much?

America supposed the giddiness came from the calm sense that the Cold War may indeed be over but he wasn't so sure if Germany knew what to do with it. He found himself giggling more often at his own corny jokes and wishing to just run and frolic through the fields and climb atop the monuments. God, was he just that happy.

After one such display America had returned from scouting the rest of the garden only to see Germany reading an engraved writing on the side of a monument. America came next to him and read it. It was explaining their long-lasting friendship and congratulating their tricentennial mark. Wow, America couldn't believe it's been that long.

He then noticed Germany's finger skidding across the engraved words "300 Years." America smiled at the German after realizing why he had been stuck on that particular word.

"That's right, Germany, three hundred," America stated. "Our peoples have been a part of each other's lives for that long and kept good relations."

Germany then looked at him with a disapproving frown. America beat him to it as he crossed his arms and said, "No, not counting the World Wars. Those were just a farce or somethin' or the other. We're friends. No past grievances can take that away. And you've been one of my longest friends, Germany. Thanks for that."

America turned and sat himself on the bench placed near the monument and then took in the sunny November afternoon. There was a chill in the air and he was glad he was wearing a light coat, but the sunshine was bright and warm so the day was near perfect and he was glad. Dedication events should always be this nice.

America heard and felt Germany sit next to him and when he opened an eye to peak at him he frowned seeing the nation sit a little further away from him than he needed to. The man even looked rigid. Couldn't he relax? In fact, now that America's thought about it, he hasn't see said nation in any form of relaxation in a long time. Perhaps not even before the wars.

But there was a problem in that because America had only seen Germany this way before him. It was like every time he was around Germany felt the need to keep busy, to serve the best he could, to stand next to him in military drills at his bases embedded in the German's land, to continuously give
him reports on stocks and the values and such. It was annoying this far, especially when all the two of them were supposed to do was enjoy a damned garden.

America's seen him with Italy and with Japan, the German's two old friends, he's almost the same with them but in actuality he's more calm, more relaxed. Of course that could be because Italy has a way of forcing those around him to have a good time even one as stubborn as Germany.

Well, America can be just as forceful as Italy if not more.

With a sigh America leaned forward and placed his hands in his pockets. He was about to say something hadn't he felt something in one of his pockets. Curiously he pulled it out and noticed the black iron cross Prussia had given to him all those years ago. He had completely forgotten about this thing! After getting sick most of his priorities had been shot.

"Hey . . . Germany?" America didn't need to look at the nation to know he was looking at him and offering his full attention. He was always so polite like that while America had the tendency to turn his attention to someone or something else despite speaking to another. "You promise not to get mad at me, 'kay?" Germany, get mad? That nation hadn't blown a gasket in forever. Since his non-speaking self America's never seen him lose his cool.

With a sigh, America turned to Germany, holding the necklace in his hand, not yet revealing it to him.

"I'm sure you know about my trip to Russia's place during Canada's hockey matches with him." America was certain everyone knew about that thanks to his boss's chew-out. "Well, bet you didn't know we had been sorta forced to room at Russia's own home. He even had us and his Soviet countries all eat together."

Germany's eyes widened just a tad. He knew where America was going with this.

"Your brother was there," America said softly. He knew he couldn't offer Germany too much information that Prussia didn't want him to know, out of respect for the older German's wishes of course. "He was doing well, and, you see, he actually told me to give you something for him. But, silly me, it slipped my mind." America tapped his knuckles against his skull as a light-hearted gesture before opening his palm and showing Germany the cross—his brother's cross. "Here, this is rightfully yours."

America watched closely as Germany's eyes grew and grew at the sight of the cross. His lips had even parted to gape in shock. He then watched the German lean over, reaching out to take up the pendant but before he even touched it he seemed to freeze.

Nothing like a little extra push and so America pressed the gift into Germany's hand and curled his fingers around it. With an approving nod he leaned back and took in the sun again. He'd let Germany have time with the gift himself, he would not interfere in his time of reminiscence.

America knew the importance of having a keepsake. It was a precious thing. He of all should know.

America had closed his eyes to soak in the sun and to act as if he weren't there to let Germany have some sort of privacy with the reunion of the belonging so he hadn't seen how Germany's hand trembled just holding the object or how his lips quivered ever so slightly. America hadn't even seen Germany look toward him as if ready to speak—to say something.

"Hey, Germany," America spoke once more. He still had his eyes closed for a moment as visions of bright hope danced before his covered eyes. "You heard about the INF Treaty signed just a few
months ago, right?” America opened his eyes and peered up at the cloudless blue skies above. He couldn't help but let that hopeful smile show. He knew it may be shot down like many had before, but the optimistic tugs on his lips were always a pleasantry to show even if he'd regret it later from some unforeseen—and many foreseen—event. "They're saying the Cold War's over . . . that means you'll see him soon."

America turned toward Germany and offered a soft smile full of all the hope that Germany had lost. "You'll see him soon."

America closed his eyes again and took in the warm rays of the sun above. This time he was for sure his hope wasn't misplaced and he hoped to spread some sort of contagiousness to Germany as well. God knew the nation could use some optimism.

The day had been perfectly temperatured and the calmness about the garden and companionship had eased America into a light slumber. He couldn't remember feeling this relaxed in decades. It felt nice.

Germany had still been gazing at the black pendant in his hands when America had teetered over toward him, the temple of his skull bumping against his broad shoulder. It pulled Germany from hazy thoughts and he turned to the young country. The German hadn't remembered the last time he'd seen America so at peace. Perhaps it really was the end of the long struggle, perhaps his hope was right this time.

Germany's cheeks hurt after looking down at America. He hadn't understood why. So, when his hand came up to touch the tips of his mouth he found the corners upturned. He was smiling.

Holding out his hand Germany looked at the pendant that his brother had entrusted to America. Certainly it had been given a decade plus late but it had been given to him so that Germany could have a piece of his brother with him. Germany had so many questions to ask America about Prussia but of course his tongue would not move so he remained quiet and just . . . smiled.

What a friend he had in America. A friend to ignore the times when they were utterly and horrifyingly at war to say they had not broken friendship in centuries. To overlook the times when Germany did the unspeakable to him and others. To erect a monument in honor of their survived friendship. To promise to stand beside him for centuries to come. And to assure him that even he could begin to hope again.

Germany saw the reasons why Italy and Japan still were able to converse with him casually. England and France were still skeptical of him, of course, taking more so to ordering him around like a servant, which Germany hadn't minded since he felt he deserved being such. But America, he always tried to help him, never once tried to seem like a ruler to him but a partner, a companion to share frustration and success with.

Every time Germany had tried to push America away with silence it hadn't worked. He had gotten some frustration out of the New World country but that was all. He was always back, asking him how his day had gone, asking how he was feeling.

That was the thing about America that Germany found so attractive; the nation never asked how one as a country was doing, but as a person, like he was a separate entity from his people. He wondered if he did that to the others as well, but Germany liked it, it was very considerate of America and a very unique way-of-thinking.

This garden was really beautiful and Germany had been surprised by its dedication to their friendship. Surely America had a better friendship with, say, England, or Canada, or even Australia, yet there this was, a place forever immortalized as the German-American Friendship Garden. It
would show both their peoples how precious the two countries thought of each other and how they
longed to remain like so for ages to come.

By all rights Germany should be the one fighting to gain his brother back. But he hadn't the strength
and instead this friend of his, this very true and loyal friend, was doing it for him, swearing to him
that he'd see his brother again, that he'd be reunified in time, in time soon.

Germany inhaled a shaking breath as he clutched the pendant tightly and pressed his fist to his chest
above his beating heart that was beginning to ache. Closing his eyes he tried to offer his disrupted
organ a logical excuse as to why the hurt suddenly appeared again after forty-three years. Of course
there was nothing logical beside the fact that he was beginning to hope.

After Prussia had been taken from him Germany had never held any ounce of the optimistic emotion.
He was certain he'd never see him again for as long as he—or as long as Prussia—existed. Now,
America's told him that he's seen his brother, that the dubious war known as the Cold War was
coming to a close. It was too good to be true and a nation like Germany was too level-headed to
believe anything spawned by hopeful rumors.

Yet, there he was, hoping with all hopes that what America had said to him would one day come to
pass. If that did, if Germany saw his brother again then . . . then he'd . . .

He'd owe America one very big thankful kiss.

Chapter End Notes

Historical Notes:

Okay, so the '80's was pretty much the reign of the Reagan Administration. This
President was aggressive as all get out. Don't believe me? Look up all the things he
pushed for and accomplished. That man was a busy man, and went head first against the
Soviet Union whereas his predecessors failed to do so during their terms.

Like, for instance,

In 1982, February 24: President Ronald Reagan announces the "Caribbean Basin
Initiative" to prevent the overthrow of governments in the region by the forces of
communism. That man wanted communism OUT of the Western Hemisphere as much
as possible, sorry Cubans.

Also in 1982, March 22: President Ronald Reagan signs P.L. 97-157 denouncing the
government of the Soviet Union that it should cease its abuses of the basic human rights
of its citizens. Seriously, when a country does not recognize a government it puts them
on relations nearing plausible war.

In 1983, March 8: In speech to the National Association of Evangelicals, Reagan labels
the Soviet Union an "evil empire".

Also in 1983, March 23: Ronald Reagan proposes the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI,
or "Star Wars").

And, September 1: Civilian Korean Air Lines Flight 007, with 269 passengers,
including U.S. Congressman Larry McDonald, is shot down by Soviet interceptor aircraft. This had pissed off the American public so bad, especially when the Russians refused to help them locate the black box which would in fact tell them how the plane went down. The Russians did have the black box, turns out, they just don't tell that to the Americans until waay later.

It's sad a little because during the early '80's there is a lot of peace movements going on (which I in part make more so a part of America than the pushiness of his boss at the time) and after the Air Lines goes down the peace movements become less and less.

In concordance to the Caribbean Basin Initiative in 1983, on October 25: U.S. forces invade the Caribbean island of Grenada in an attempt to overthrow the Marxist military government, expel Cuban troops, and abort the construction of a Soviet-funded airstrip. The Americans return home successful around December 15th.

Yep, Mr. Reagan definitely wasn't messing around and instead of new Soviet leaders being the ones to push their weight around Ronald Reagan now took that lead and did so himself. Like, for instance, in 1985 August 6: Coinciding with the 40th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Soviet Union begins what it has announced is a 5-month unilateral moratorium on the testing of nuclear weapons. The Reagan administration dismisses the dramatic move as nothing more than propaganda and refuses to follow suit. Gorbachev declares several extensions, but the United States fails to reciprocate, and the moratorium comes to an end on February 5, 1987. Well, the Soviets tried to be friendly.

All in all I think President Reagan had been the pushiest to get Mr. Gorbachev to sign the INF Treaty of '88. Previous year, 1987, on December 8th: The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty is signed in Washington, D.C. by U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Some later claim this was the official end of the Cold War. Gorbachev agrees to START I treaty. I mean, come on, you see how pushy he was at the Berlin Wall in '87? He's practically like, "Tear down that damn wall, you no-good Commies!" Of course his speech was classier than that ;)

And, of course we have in 1986 April 26th: Chernobyl disaster: A Soviet nuclear power plant in the Ukraine explodes, resulting in the worst nuclear power plant accident in history. Yeah, that was mentioned too and for good reasons. This incident will effect Russia greatly seeing how much it hurt his older sister :( In as much he wasn't seen much during the progression of the latter part of the '80's because he would not leave her side out of regret over what happened to her.

Wow, lots of important marks and new growths happened in the '80's. The United States of America had pushed back dramatically in that decade to combat the USSR who had reached its full potential in the previous decade, the '70's.

One such thing that took place in the '80's was the construction of the German-American Friendship Garden. This garden is located on the direct line of sight between the White House and the Washington Monument, celebrates 300 years of friendship between the United States and Germany. It was established in 1983 and first dedicated by US President Ronald Reagan and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl on November 15th 1988. And October 6th is the celebrated German-American Day in America.
Humans were so very incompetent.

They are born into this world in a flash and fade away just as quickly. Yet in that millisecond they call a life they strive to leave some mark, some impression for others to know they had existed. It could be good. It could be bad.

Most of the time it was bad.

Countless wars and genocides were proof of this reasoning. Yes, atrocities were always more memorable. The pains of death. The churn of hunger. The bite of the cold. The scorch of the heat.

Humans indefinitely remembered evil above even greater good. Yet these points in times, these clusters of lifeforms, all of them, merged together to create yet another life source. A thinking, moving, and feeling being.

Personifications of a place, a territory, of multiple beating hearts, of ideals thought in kind, of kindred spirits. They breathed, they bled, they hungered, they tired. So close to humans that many a time the lower lifeforms mistakenly treated them as such.

But these higher beings remembered better than those they were compiled of. Their intellect level undoubtedly rising above even the most brilliant on the planet. Their strength, while similar next to that of humans, promises higher expectations, especially if their people are strong in unity. And their lives? Everlasting . . . if the humans can tend to them correctly.

Their words spoken hold wisdom and ages of understanding, but more oft than not they are silenced, by their kings and queens, by their newest generations. The sounds of the crowds drowned out their reasoning and in that there was the mistake.

Long ago the humans used to look to these beings for guidance and enlightenment. But that was back when the peoples of the earth understood how little they knew in the reality of life. Now they believed in the lie of the world in that they were always in the right and never in the wrong. So they neglected their formed unities for their own mindless reasoning and, because of this, nations fell and kingdoms were burnt asunder.

Dissolution and atrophy.

Because the humans believed they were the wiser when they were, in truth, nothing but mindless animals digging their own graves.

Moscow, Russia. 1989

He could hear his boss just outside, fighting with the guards that he threatened to make sure they kept everyone out, even his hailed leader. Russia didn't care. He honestly didn't give a damn about
anything at the moment, especially anything about his damn boss or his damn constricting government or his damn crumbling economy. He didn't give a damn.

Why should he? They never once, never ONCE gave a damn about him.

He was tired of them. He was tired of it all. So he rested his head against the mattress and just closed his eyes, later wishing he could turn off his hearing as well.

Something must have happened because the shouting volumes grew higher and soon the door slammed open. It had hit the wall next to it and bounced, the frame of the wooden door could be heard shaking, it had been slammed against the wall that hard.

Russia immediately pulled away from the bed and turned his angry eyes at his boss and delegates. How dare they come to him? Now of all times.

"Get out!" Russia demanded, his eyes narrowing at the men.

"Do you not see what is happening?" His boss said, furious and in disarray. "They're leaving!"

"You think yourselves the gods, then fix the problems yourselves!" Russia spat. He was tired of their ungratefulness. He offered his wisdom, his strength, but they thought themselves the wiser. Now, he was through offering.

"You fool! It is YOU who will crumble if this comes to pass!" the humans shouted.

"GET OUT!" Russia turned to them again, his eyes wide and snarl in place. He looked murderous and the thought to slaughter them all crossed his mind more than once in that moment. They had better leave before he put action to grueling ideas.

No matter if he was weakening. No matter if his aura wasn't as dominating as it used to be, it was still more powerful and frightening to the humans. They trembled at his stature, at his gaze, at the ghosts all around him.

Without another word they retreated. Russia let out a weary sigh, falling back down to his knees next to the bed. He was weakening, he could feel it, but he didn't need his leader and the others to see it. He was glad they were gone, because now he could rest, he could catch his breath, he could monitor.

When he felt a frail hand touch his own Russia started. He straightened and leaned closer over the bed to the being lying upon it. His eyes met those of his elder sister's. She was frowning, looking ever concerned like the mother figure she always was to him.

"You're growing . . . so . . . weak . . . Vanya," Ukraine said through slow steady breaths. She then shook her head and looked near to tears. "You . . . shouldn't have."

Russia understood what she was saying. He understood completely because she hadn't been the only one to tell him this. No, the others have been yelling at him these things for years.

"I don't care," Russia said, closing his eyes and clasping her hand in his own. "I will not leave you."

And it was because of that, because there had not been a dominant nation to reign over the subordinates that many took chances, they ran, they ran so fast. And so Russia's world fell apart.

West Berlin, West Germany. November 9th 1989

Germany walked down the entire expanse of it. His jaw loose and his eyes wide and surveying. His
neck hurt from craning too often, and the sound of his heart beating pounded inside his ears so loudly he felt he'd go deaf.

His people were all out. They were all watching this. The press was recording everything.

The wait was unbearable and all too soon his people began to cry, to scream for it to happen, for the dream to become a reality.

The others were there as well, England, France, and America. They were all waiting in anticipation just as much as he. France and England looked amazed that something like this was even happening, but America . . . even though he shared his own shock; he looked more calm than the other two. His smile was that of a very happy and contently satisfied country, as if he had foreseen something like this.

Never. Never in his wildest dreams did Germany ever believe that . . .

Germany stopped. There they were. They were jumping. His people were catching them and they were crying and laughing and screaming. Germany had never seen human beings so overly happy and joyous in his entire existence. His heart leapt at the sight and the tears stinging his eyes wouldn't relent.

He had to keep strong though because a piece of that damn wall was collapsing and scores upon scores of people were flowing in. Germans. Fellow Germans. Descended from those taken by the Soviets, forced to conform, to stay away from their brothers and sisters.

Germany could hear the other countries calling out to him, but for once in decades he was going to ignore them, act as if they didn't exist, because in that time and moment they didn't. His legs jogged faster through the crowds and now, for the first time in twenty-eight years, he was stepping into East Germany. For the first time in nearly three decades he was unhindered and freely looking for his brother.

He didn't get far from the influx of people pouring through the passageway to be greeted with open arms by relatives they had nearly forgotten they had. He hadn't wanted to raise his hopes but it had happened on its own and now they were lowering because he only spied humans surrounding. Not so much as a white-haired scarlet-eyed being anywhere.

Again, he heard the call of the others.

"Germany, I'd suggest you stay over here. There's still guards around. Wouldn't want them to get any ideas," came England's voice over the wailing cries of the people around.

England was right and so Germany reluctantly retreated. He came back to the countries but his attention still remained on the humans coming forward.

"This is amazing," England said, a light smile on his face after beholding the humans embracing each other and crying out in joy.

"Oui," France agreed. He then elbowed America next to him. "End of an era, right, Amérique?"

America smiled back at him and nodded. He supposed it was a right time to brag about how it was all him who succeeded in breaking this wall down, in bringing the USSR to their knees, in ruining Russia to nonexistence, but America remained silent and observing because now wasn't the time for such speeches and laughter. This was Germany's time. All his.

America turned to see Germany reach into his pocket and pull out something small. It wasn't seen but
America knew it was Prussia's cross. He had seen an identical one on Germany's neck. The brothers shared the broach formation.

It was nice to see siblings so close. But even America was wondering where Prussia was. Sure, he hadn't seen him since the early '70's but he believed he was around. It took more than enslavement to get rid of that man.

Suddenly the influx of emigration lessened. Germany had noticed as did America who had been watching Germany's reaction to this all. Soon Germany was leaving again.

"Oi, Germany, don't go over there!" England said. He hadn't meant to sound commanding, but warning. They hadn't heard from Russia or seen him in years. There was no telling where he lurked. And, state of bankruptcy or not, they still believed Russia could easily bring someone like Germany down to his grave if he so much as wanted to.

Germany only went so far to peer inside, beyond the wall. Nothing. He felt and saw nothing.

Everyone could see the frustration ebbing at the German and see how tight he was clutching that pendant to his chest as he raced back and down from the wall, looking for any more openings, for anyone crawling through the smaller holes, hopping over the top. Nothing. Nobody but late humans.

Suddenly, amidst the cries and sobs of joy, there erupted cheers and shouts. Everyone turned to see someone being lowered down into the extremely happy crowd. The nations froze. They had definitely caught sight of ivory locks before the being disappeared in the waves of the crowd.

Germany didn't hesitate a second. He rushed down the wall toward where he had seen it, where he heard the people crying and seen them pushing closer together. He pushed himself into them, squeezing his way through, but all too soon they simply gave way to him and parted to reveal what they wept over, and why they were smiling so brightly.

They had survived the Iron Curtain, and in such so had he.

Germany just stood there. He had thought he would never . . . After all this time he wanted to . . . He had planned that if he ever got the chance to see him again he'd . . .

Germany couldn't move. He couldn't do a single thing because his thoughts were mixing together so much that his body stood there frozen, not knowing which command to follow. He wanted to run, but he wanted to embrace. He wanted to lift up a few humans just from excitement and parade around with their smiling forms on his shoulders.

After forty-four years Germany was finally seeing him again. He was finally looking on the actual living face of his older brother.

"Sorry for not getting out soon, bruder." He looked a little skinnier and his skin slightly paler than normal, but where Germany had expected to see dull surrender in those scarlet eyes was misplaced. They were bright and as wide as his own. The smile was small but it was growing along with the beads of tears in both their eyes.

It was probably Germany who had met Prussia and embraced him tightly. Still, Germany would believe they met halfway. He would not believe that Prussia felt like a feather in his embrace, that his arms felt as if they could wrap around the ivory-haired German twice, that his older brother's arms were not weakly holding on to him.

Prussia was strong. Prussia had not changed from Germany's awesome heroic idol as a child. Germany would always look up to him no matter how much he outgrew him, no matter how much
Prussia weakened.

Both were crying, holding each other so tight so that no air escaped between them. With Prussia's form it looked like Germany was swallowing him whole as he leaned over and crushed him into his torso.

"Heh, you look like a sissy," Prussia said, his voice cracking as tears and snot ran down his face while he pulled back just a little to look at his brother's state. Placing his hands on Germany's face Prussia pulled him closer to get a better look at him, after all, his eyesight hadn't been the best these past few decades. "Hey, why don't you say somethin', West?"

Germany inhaled a sharp breath at the nickname. He hated it, absolutely hated it now that it meant something so tragic. With shoulders shaking he bowed his head against his brother's chest and wept, refusing to ever let him go again.

The two held each other and cried for hours upon hours. Their people pressed close and embraced them, finally content in reunion.

"I can't believe I'm saying this, but I'm glad he's well," England said after observing Prussia. The last the Brit had seen him was at Russia's house, but he hadn't gotten a chance to speak to him much and he still felt some sort of resentment toward him from the war. But, after all the hell he's been put through England felt sorry for him and decided to put past grievances behind him. It was good to see the brothers united again.

"I have never seen Germany smile like that in decades," France said as he crossed his arms and offered a content smile of his own. His eyes then glanced toward the camera crews and nodded. "This will be remembered for a long time, and if anyone forgets it then they can go back to the records and watch this historical miracle themselves."

"Yeah," America agreed. Finally. After hard work, prayer, and a little luck, the brothers were reunited.

They had all tried so hard to get Germany to speak, to get him to smile, to laugh, to relax. Why, none of them could understand what it was like to lose a sibling like that, so of course he wouldn't cave under their urging. No more, Germany would have to mourn no more.

"Thank-you, Alfred." America turned his eyes toward England whose own gaze was kept calmly on the loving brothers and their eternal embrace. "You kept dreaming this. When everyone gave up hope you didn't. Thank-you."

America had been teetering close to giving up, just as much as France or England, or the others. After Russia had become so powerful in the '70's he considered leaving the dream of seeing those two together again. But then he was reminded he was the United States of America, a land that would never stop dreaming. So he kept dreaming and praying if anything for poor Germany because he looked so down-hearted and defeated that America feared he'd forget what his brother looked like or sounded like. That in itself was a tragedy America just couldn't accept.

Not anymore. There was a lot the two had to catch up on, and America was certain Germany could clear his busy schedule for Prussia's usual endless chatter. It would be nice. So very nice for the both of them.

While he was happy for Germany and Prussia, America couldn't help but let his thoughts wander toward that of Russia and his own state. Nothing's been heard of him, and he couldn't help but think he looked something similar to this wall—broken, crumbling, in ruin.
The tragedies of the fall of a nation rose above a level of grief beyond compare, no matter how they were perceived by other countries.

Out of the corner of America's gaze he caught movement from the two Germans. He turned to see Germany pull himself from Prussia. He watched as he pressed that necklace of his into the older's hand before turning and jogging away from him.

He, England, and France all blinked in confusion at this move. They all had thought that Germany and Prussia would be attached to the hip from here on out and now they were watching Germany dart back toward them, pushing himself out of the crowd and rushing toward them.

"What is he doing?" England questioned right before the nation closed in on the three of them.

Suddenly Germany threw out his arms and reached his hands forward, grasping America's face, catching the young nation off guard as he pulled him forward and pressed their lips together.

Eyes went wide and jaws dropped, especially after the kiss held for a good five seconds.

When Germany pulled away he was smiling. Tears streaming down his red face, but he was smiling.

"Ich danke ihnen sehr, Alfred!" Germany cried out as he pulled the young country close and tightened his arms securely around him.

America was too shocked to even have the time to flush. The confusion beat the embarrassment first.

With a nervous smile, America's eyes darted toward the gawking England and France before turning back toward an overly grateful—and suddenly speaking again—Germany. "Uuuhh, you just said 'thanks' right? I think I heard a 'dan—'!

Once more Germany surprised everyone by pulling America close and kissing him. This time the younger country's entire face turned beet red, and he did nothing but stand there in rigid shock. Oh God, the camera men were zooming in on them!

Germany offered America one last squeezing hug before leaving him behind and attaching himself to his brother again.

"What the hell was that?" England asked, he would be fine if he believed that to be just a common show of gratitude from Germans, but he knew better. Now, the jealous parent was creeping its way into him as he looked toward America who was still frozen where he stood and then toward Germany who looked as carefree as ever, like there was absolutely no offense in what he just did.

"He was just happy," France spoke up, trying to excuse Germany's behavior and action toward America.

"Happy, eh? Then why the hell didn't he offer a whopping one for us, huh?" England asked, trying to show the older nation he wasn't an imbecile and completely incompetent to others' cultures and traditions. No one got away with kissing his son unannounced like that. It was beyond rude and England would have none of that.

"Well, if you wanted a kiss so much, cheri, then I can just give you one, honhonhon," France suggested with a waggle of his eyebrows and a daring smirk.

"Don't you come near me, you damn cheese-eating-monkey!" England shrieked when the Frenchman slid close and wrapped his arms around him. "No, no!"
France had successfully gotten the Brit's mind away from what had just happened and the two were now in a scuffle, but America simply stood there dumbfounded. He had stood there like that for a while before touching his lips. He could have thought more about it, he usually did, but seeing Germany and Prussia so close, smiling, hugging, well, he could forget about what just happened to him. After all, Germany was just showing how happy he was.

Right?

Moscow, Russia. November 9th 1989

She was smiling. His older sister was smiling as she watched the wall fall down, the wall that represented his domination in Europe. She was smiling at its destruction.

"Turn that off and get some sleep," Russia said as he sat a tray down upon Ukraine's bed and then took a seat next to her, keeping his gaze away from the television and all of the faces shown thereon.

Ukraine spared one glance toward her brother but turned her gaze back toward the set when it showed Prussia embracing his brother. Actually, Germany was the one holding him mostly, Prussia just looked so weak and frail to hold onto anything much.

"Look at him," Ukraine whispered out hoarsely. She pressed her weak hand to her beating heart after seeing the recorded image of the two brothers. "He's . . . happy."

Yes, they are. Everyone was happy.

Was Russia so bad to them? He took care of them. He fed them, clothed them, provided work for them, a place to sleep. Was he so wrong in ruling them like so?

Russia hadn't thought so. So then why did they leave him so quickly when his government was run to the ground and he left with nothing? Why didn't they remain loyal? Why didn't they stand beside him through this decline?

Traitors. All of them were traitors.

Russia was glad they were gone. He hated them. They offered him nothing. They were useless to him and it had proven pointless in all he had done for them.

A waste. A complete waste of resource on all of them.

"Do not . . . hate."

Russia was brought out of his thoughts and turned his gaze to Ukraine. Before, he had ignored her advice. Before, he had belittled her because he was the boss, because he was the strongest. Now, after nearly losing her, Russia couldn't stop listening to her. He couldn't stop pleading she say something, anything to him. That she look at him. That she eat. That she sleep. That she recover.

It was almost like when they were younger. When she had been his role model. When all he wanted to do was lie in her lap and have her comb her fingers through her hair while she sung him songs and recited him poems.

He missed that. He really did. But he feared those times were gone. That they would never come back.

Ukraine noticed her brother's swayed thoughts and so said once more, "This is their choice . . . let them choose."
Russia frowned and pulled his scarf over his nose. "You are happy they have left me. You wanted this."

Ukraine looked hurt. She still had trouble with speaking but after some warm tea she was better. "Cannot make . . . friends. Can . . . gain."

"There are no friends for Mother Russia," Russia whispered, shaking his head, trying to drown out the sound of the excited Germans cheering their reunion on the television. "But this is what he wanted."

Ukraine frowned again. She knew who Russia was referring to. It wasn't easy speaking with him like this; when he was so shut off from the world and she still so weak.

"You've done this yourself, Ivan!"

Russia was startled. For the first time in years he's heard her speak clearly with a volume higher than a whisper. Gapping, he turned toward his sister and looked at her. He caught her rubbing her throat, but her frown remained strong while she looked at her younger brother like he was the most unintelligent person she knew.

"You . . . are . . . cruel," Ukraine rasped out between a couple of coughs. She had always been so quiet in her brother's presence and very mindful of subjects. But he was weakening as was his resolve so she felt that it would be easier to tell him these things—these things that have been on her heart for so long. "You beat . . . frightened . . . pressured . . . drove so many . . . mad with panic."

Russia frowned, shaking off his ill sister's outburst. His eyes narrowed. If his sister wanted to play this game then he might as well play along. "You say I am evil, sestra? Must you choose to forget what he's done? What he's said about me?"

"Stop," she gasped out, leaning back down on her bed after exhausting herself through forced higher tones. "Stop." She took in a few breaths and exhaled to steady herself. When she finally composed herself she took note of her brother's upset but rightly ignored it. "Is over . . . so stop."

The Cold War. Was it really over? Hm, well, it had to be. Russia had no more pieces to throw at America and the other had all of the board. He'd won. America had beaten him.

Of course that was because Russia let him. If he had really wanted to then he . . .

Ukraine gasped. Russia turned to her to see her gapping at the screen. Turning he looked to see what she had seen to shock her so.

Oh.

"Turn it off," Russia repeated once more, turning his gaze away from the sight of Germany grabbing a hold of America, wrapping his arms around that lithe body, and kissing those ever soft and innocent lips.

Ukraine turned back toward her brother, a look of concern on her face. "He is . . . happy . . . da?"

Yes, America and Germany certainly looked happy, didn't they?

There was obviously no excuse for this. Ukraine hadn't known about Germany's affection for young America. She had known about other suitors from Russia's informing all those centuries ago, but she had thought that after the two began secretly courting that those beckoning the boy country had noticed his reproach and backed away from him.
Did this mean that it was truly over? That Russia had no more chances with . . .

No, Ukraine had seen America's shock over the move. Watching closely she watched Germany kiss America again. It was cute how America's face turned bright red, but she could see his unease with his locked limbs.

She let out a sigh of relief when Germany finally let go of America. Turning back toward her brother she offered as an encouraging smile as she could but frowned once more upon seeing him seated away, turned from the television.

It was so sad. She'd never seen her brother so defeated since the October Revolution. It was as if he didn't even care, even about America. His America.

"Vanya," Ukraine spoke up, reaching out to touch her brother's arm but jumped when he pulled away. He had been gentle with her in her frail state but now he was upset and so pulled away and attempted to ignore her, to ignore the world. "Please . . . you mustn't . . . give up."

"It is too late," Russia muttered, gazing into the darkness of the room surrounding. The only light was that of the television, the one showing him his end. "I was simply mistaken, Katyusha . . . simply mistaken."

Ukraine turned her gaze back toward the television. It was now showing Germany and Prussia again, but off in the distance she spotted England, France, and . . . America.

She believed in mistakes, but she did not believe this one and she continually told Russia this, even into the next few years. Even when her people came to take her away.

It was August of '91 and she still was quite weak. She could speak much better, but her conversations with her brother were short. So it was only a matter of time before they were cut. Until the two spoke no longer.

Ukraine reached over and pressed her hand atop her brother's head as he lay against the side of her bed, his arms and head lain out, resting. She looked on in concern. Her eyes even darted toward their sister who was seated in the corner of the room, visiting her for once since she had become ill.

The girl looked uninterested in her sister's care, but more so worried for her brother's state if health who looked to be worsening. Ukraine slumped her shoulders and then pressed the back of her hand against her brother's paling skin. He felt cooler than normal and the toll was weighing him down, she could physically see him weakening and it frightened her.

"Look," she said with a sad chuckle that made her eyes sting and lips quiver. "You are so worried for me . . . and yet look at you . . . you can barely stand."

The Soviet coup attempt that ended just three days before ensured Russia's weakening state. Both sisters knew he should have been there. That he should have shown himself to his people, to bring down his iron fist, to crush those in doubt of him. But still, he refused to leave Ukraine's side.

This is what happened when nothing but humans were left in charge of a ruled people. They knew nothing.

"You are a fool, Vanya!" Belarus cried out. The youngest looked near to tears after what had happened, after what was still happening. She enjoyed living with Russia the most. She enjoyed his government the most, his policies, his people, his everything. The Soviet Union had been her paradise and now it was going up in flame. "You've brought us to ruin. Just like before!"
"Natalia, stay your tongue," Ukraine begged. Her heart clenched inside her chest as she leaned over her brother's weak and unmoving form like a mother trying to block insults and weapons hurled at their child. "Can you not see he is weary? He is worn." The tears then fell and Ukraine hiccupped her sobs back in to try to hold some sort of composure before her younger siblings.

"Then I will blame you!" Belarus cried, turning now upon her eldest sibling. "If you wouldn't have gotten sick then he wouldn't be here catering to you like a damn slave! He would have been out there stopping everyone from leaving! Stopping his damn bosses from running this government into the ground! It's your fault, it's his fault! I'm the youngest. You're supposed to care for me . . . but you've ruined yourselves!" Belarus was crying now. Ukraine wondered if the girl even knew she was. She knew how much Belarus hated looking weak in front of her big siblings. She knew how much she hated letting her emotions show, and the tears were showing, they were showing. "What will I do now? What will I do?"

Belarus' knees buckled and she fell back into the chair she had been sitting in. Her hand covered her mouth and she wept as well. Both of the sisters wept while their brother remained quiet. While their strong brother fell into ruin.

In times like this it really was every nation for themselves. Their peoples were in such disarray that they became blinded to the ancient beings they had comprised. The servants were gone, even the guards. They had been left alone while the rest of the people went mad with disorder.

The fall of kingdoms and countries were always a horrible thing to behold, but they had been through this many a time. They had always been together to mourn the losses, then watch with expectant hope as the new policies appeared. They were the Kievan Rus siblings; they had seen wars waged, felt famine's hunger, seen the General's fury, and yet persevered. They would do so again, they always did.

But if there was one thing that was unbearable for any of them, it was the weeping of the sisters. Their brother hated their tears.

"Do not cry for me," Russia spoke up as he pulled his form from Ukraine so that she did not have to lean and weep over him like a mother who had lost their child. When he turned toward Belarus the nation tried halting her sobs, she tried to be strong under her brother's gaze. "I do not like tears. I do not."

Ukraine could hear her sister trying to repress her cries but she did not bother herself. She let her tears fall despite her brother's hate for the sight of them. Shaking her head she watched as her brother rose his fist and pressed it against his chest.

"I am still strong," he tried to assure, to get their fear away from him. "Do not cry for me."

"Stop lying," Ukraine said as she inhaled a sob and once again reached out to wrap her arms around her brother, pulling him close to her bosom. "It is you who is hurt the most."

Ukraine was right. Russia was crumbling. He hated being weak. He had strived for so long since a very early age to rise to the top of the world. He had been close to reaching it when he was Imperial, and had just about achieved it when he was Soviet. What was left for him now?

"If I were a boy, Vanya, then maybe I would have the strength to protect you," Ukraine whispered. She had never once regretted her given gender. Not until now.

Male nations were destined by fate to become more aggressive, to fight until they destroyed or were either destroyed themselves. Females were the lesser of them, but they flourished and accepted peace
much easier. There were a select few females that tried their hand against the more dominant nations but their end was always met with disaster.

Even brother nations were often put to slice each other's throats. Ukraine had been so glad that she had been born a female, and that Belarus had been given the fairer gender as well. But when Russia was born she had foreseen his future. She had seen him conquered, she had seen his violence, his struggle against the other violently strong countries, and then his horrid fall.

So many nations rose and fell. So many forgotten. She didn't want that of her brother. Never.

But, sadly, it was always the fate of a male nation.

There was some hope still. The world was quieting down for the first time in centuries. Since World War II Europe became docile. The end of the '70's marked the end of national wars in Asia. Africa was cooling down too, the Middle East was even on the cusp of calming—at least she had hoped.

This meant no one would seek to conquer. This meant that when a nation fell the murderers and defilers would not come to decimate and destroy.

This meant Russia would survive.

They would get through this, all of them. This time Ukraine believed it would be much easier than it was before, back over a thousand years ago.

Without a knock or warning the door to Ukraine's room opened. Inside came people. They were not guards, they were not politicians, they were not Russian.

Ukraine blinked in confusion. They were Ukrainian, they were her people. "What is wrong?" she asked softly. They were looking at her strangely and she felt a slight sliver of worry from her own people. "What is the matter?"

"We are leaving," they said to her.

She gasped. She knew what that meant. What that meant for Russia, what that meant for Belarus. What that meant for her.

"S-So soon?" she asked, holding onto her brother tighter. She didn't want to let go, and now she could feel him clinging to her as if he were that same little boy she had proclaimed her brother when she found him buried in the snow so long ago.

"Da," they confirmed.

Her heart jumped into her throat and she trembled when they neared her. They maneuvered around Russia who had remained kneeling by her bedside and took hold of her and pulled.

"Nyet, nyet!" Belarus cried out, jumping out of her chair and coming to her sister's bed. She grabbed a hold of her and pulled her back but it hadn't been long before Ukraine's people split to pull her and then to take Belarus off of her. "Ivan! Stop them! Stop them!" she cried out, kicking and flailing as they pulled her away from her big sister.

Ukraine was pulled away. She had been too weak to hold onto her siblings, too weak to resist her people for long. She was crying as they picked her weak form up in their arms. She cried seeing Belarus struggling against her people, reaching out to her. She cried seeing Russia's too weak image, slumping down against the side of her bed, looking on with hopelessness in knowing he no longer could do anything to stop them—to stop the people from declaring independence—to stop the people
from taking his sister away.

"I love you, Natalia!" Ukraine cried out, reaching out to them just as soon as they cried and as her people took her away from her baby brother and sister. "I love you, Ivan! I always will, always!"

Suddenly, she was gone, and with her, her people. Ukraine, their big sister. The one who found them, the one who nursed them, who knit clothes to cover them, who taught them how to milk cows, how to till the earth, how to plant, how to speak to people, how to pray, to praise, to curtsey, to bow, to smile. She was gone. Taken by her own people.

Then the sobs began again.

For one so solely set on the attention of Russia and anything he did therein, Belarus certainly cried quite a bit for a sister she intended to neglect. The older of the two didn't need to turn to see she had hunched over and wept pathetically and bitterly over the departure of their sister. He didn't need to see that because the sounds created a wretched image in his mind and a horrible ache in his chest.

Reaching up, Russia clenched his chest. It was a strange feel. His chest cavity felt so hallow and yet it hurt. He could only ever feel his heart throw itself against his ribcage for one country, but now . . . now he felt like a fake matryoshka doll. Nothing. There was nothing inside him.

"This is your fault!" Even Belarus' words hurt. "How could you? How could you let them take her?"

The younger let out another sob that cut into Russia and he felt himself pulling at the fabric of his shirt more and more, the seams beginning to snap and rip. "You let them take our sister away. How could you?"

She then ran. Belarus ran out of the room and the last Russia had seen of his sister was the back of her retreating form, her hand over her mouth and shoulders trembling. She left him the next day and now Russia was alone once again.

So he just sat there in the darkness of the emptiness of Ukraine's room. He couldn't bring himself to stand and leave, for where would he go?

The world had no place for him and has left him barren. But it did torture him with the memories of his sisters and their smiling faces. When would he see those again?

Pulling at the scarf his sister had given to him so long ago Russia bowed his head. He had never felt so utterly useless in his existence before.


"Oh, sweet! I found another pres—ow!" America just so happened to bump his head against the Christmas Tree as he pulled the smaller present out from under it and down it came crashing, star flying off who knows where, the ornaments popping under the pressure and the lights heaving off and across the floor.

America cringed at the sight and made to turn to his new boss to offer a sheepish and sorry grin to excuse the calamity but was surprised to find the man not looking at him. In fact, he'd been as stiff as a statue behind his desk in the oval office. He was practically clutching that phone in a death grip he looked that unstable.

America furrowed his brow in slight worry and cocked his head in confusion. He was going to ask what was wrong but before he even had the chance he watched his President politely speak a farewell into the receiver and then place the object down to end the call. He wasn't looking at him at first, but it wasn't long before his gaze met his.
Then he smiled. "It's over, Alfred."

America blinked in confusion as he had proceeded to tear into the present titled to him.

"The Cold War, it's over. The USSR is dissolved," Mr. Bush said with a sigh of relief.

America's jaw loosened and the present in his clutches slipped from his grasp, completely forgotten.

Could it be . . . could what his President just told him really be true? No, not possible. It wasn't something thought plausible. Not when . . . when just last decade . . . could it be?

After sixty-nine years could that damn Union of Soviet Socialist Republics really just vanish from the face of the earth? Wait, if that were the case then what of . . . ?

"Russia," America found himself whispering during his boss's speech to his nation and those listening. No one had heard him. They were too engrossed in the President's speech.

America didn't know what it was like to collapse upon one's self. He wondered what it felt like. He couldn't imagine anything too good of it.

After the speech he heard everyone cheering. He felt his entire people crying out in victorious song, praising God above that it was over, that his plight to the top was reached, and that America was sole power now.

So then . . . why wasn't he as excited as they were?

Yes, America was glad that damn Cold War of his and Russia's was finally over, it had caused him more headache, heartache, and fright than anyone gave credit to, but what of Russia and his people? America knew the others living with Russia had left, even his own sisters—damn, just how was Russia feeling?

"I'm certain it's not easy for him, but he'll recover, and perhaps we can create ties again," America's boss had said once he OKed it for America to take up his belongings and finally move out of the White House.

So, America dwelt on these things as he drove back toward his old home. His brooding thoughts of concern for the ruined nation was cut short once he parked into his old driveway and took in the state of his estate. Gapping, America got out of his car and looked on in horror at the weeds, the hedges, the leaves, everything. The place was in ruin.

"You've GOT to be kidding me," America complained as he slammed his car door and walked up to the porch only to view all of the dirt and mulch collected on the entirety of it and the porch swing and the chairs. Man.

The least his boss could have done after forcing him to leave his home was to hire some sort of house sitter or caretaker.

Nope, didn't happen.

With a sigh America rolled up his sleeves. He had a lot of work to catch up to and might as well get started now. Outside first, inside second.

America managed to get a majority of the yard back into shape before dusk. The rest was too iced over to do anything much but at least it looked better than when he had first beheld it. Upon entering his home he took in the place. Definitely hadn't been touched since he left and the collected dust
looked to rise a couple of inches above all of the things it covered, but that was fine, he was feeling productive and so he figured he'd tackle cleaning the home that night.

It was around noon on the next day when he completed that task. Stepping back, America smiled with satisfaction. Home sweet home finally looked the way it used to.

If there was anything he liked to keep timeless it was his old home. Sure, he'd put in a few electronics but other than that it's been kept the same since colonial times.

His storage closet, however, continued to fill with useless items, and so, still feeling the highs of his cleaning spree, America found himself inside the room cleaning a few things out and moving others in order.

It really was a mess in there. America had already swept up three dustpans full of dust, dirt, and cobwebs as well as squashed about a bazillion spiders. Yep, this room needed detailed attention.

The day was passing all too quickly and more and more America felt there'd never be an end to cleaning out the compartment. With a huffing sigh, America threw his hands in the air in defeat and let the broom clutter to the floor. He surrendered.

"I give up," America stated, shaking his head. "The first free time I get in years and I spend it cleaning? What am I now England? Nope, not happening."

America turned to leave the room as is. He'd worked on it, a lot more than he had in decades, so he could leave it like that for a few more decades.

Just as he made his way out he stumbled slightly. Looking down he noticed something shiny and pointy staring up at him. After a few seconds his mind recollected it and he quickly bent down to pick it up.

"Oh, hey! My bayonet!" He gasped in surprise at seeing it there. "Wait a sec, where's your partner?"

America glanced around until spotting the rifle. It was leaning against the wall next to a chest turned over and spewing out red coated toy soldiers.

Making his way over toward the gun he picked it up. He examined it for a moment and smiled fondly at it. As if being given orders to "Present Arms" by General Washington himself America straightened. Expertly placing the bayonet on the nozzle of the weapon he then flipped it against his shoulders at the exact angle Washington wanted it.

America chuckled. He still had it.

With a softer sigh America brought the gun into view again. His nostalgia smile faded into a frown when he saw the slash on the side of the frame. The one England had made when he charged and . . .

America really hated his colonial items as much as his Civil War belongings. Both were times when he was torn between loyalty and rebellion. And the decision to decide which was more righteous was always the hardest part.

Eventually America placed the gun back where he had found it. To his annoyance, when he placed the rifle back against the wall it teetered over and slid onto the box, knocking more stupid childish toys out of it and all over the floor America had just swept.

America frowned and groaned in frustration. With a final sigh he leaned down to clean the mess up.
He would have just left the junk there hadn't he worried about meeting his end on one of those soldiers after tripping over them.

Taking up the box America simply tossed the wooden figurines in but the usual 'ca-clunk' didn't resound in his ears. Instead, America caught the sound of a metallic 'ta-tink'. Confused, America peeked into the soldier box to see what else it kept in its width other than wooden toys.

America froze. His eyes widened as he quickly snatched out the tin box. He had been so caught up in his cleaning task that he forgot he had put that object there. Well, more like hid it there.

Shoving the wooden box aside America opened the metallic container and smiled at seeing the insides. Everything was still there. It had survived even a dose of his forgetfulness. Who could blame him? He'd been busy the past decade or so and right when he got back to this place it was in a desperate need for cleaning.

Sitting back, America sat the box on his lap and sifted through the contents inside. He let out a sigh after realizing this last piece of his and Russia's history before the Great War wasn't much at all.

In fact . . . it technically wasn't even his.

Moscow, Russia. December 31st, New Year's Eve, 1991

It was colder this time around. Even with all the heaters turned on in the entire mansion Russia could feel the General's chilling breath. Well, that could be because the heat from a multitude of bodies had dwindled to one mere occupant. That was fine. The fire dancing in the hearth kept him warm.

Times like this reminded Russia of when he was younger, before he had Tsars, and Empresses. When his sisters were gone and away with their people. When nothing but the General sung him to sleep with dark lullabies and that friendly yak curled next to him, keeping him warm, keeping him alive.

Russia smiled at the old memory. That was thousands of years ago. Long before many a country today existed. But even with a much larger span of nations there was still a great lack of care in the world. There were still those who watched on as others suffered, who laughed at ones dismay. No, the world seems to have not changed one bit in millenniums.

It was the end of the year and never before had the New Year looked so daunting to Russia. He was used to overthrows, to conquerings. This was something else entirely. He had not been so prepared for this.

They'd given up. His boss, his government, his people. Nothing more to it.

Russia hadn't felt so weak and helpless in a long time, but he was slightly comforted in the thought that he would be isolated. That no one would dare attack him. He'd be left alone to his ruin.

Even though Russia had hated his soviet state for taking him away from his imperialistic state he wished it would return because what else did he have at the moment? Nothing. He had nothing.

With the house being as empty as the day it was constructed Russia felt it overwhelming him. Its empty halls moaned out wordless whispers. Its interior groaned out ghastly noises. The floors squeaked as if someone walked above it, and its empty spaces hummed with echo.

It was a home fit for ghosts. Russia chuckled at the thought. A perfect home for him indeed.

His boss—his ex-boss had stopped by earlier that morning and had given him a few things. Old
trinkets from the Soviet Union like the flag, cases of medals, and documents. He figured Russia to just store it away.

No, you didn't store away items in Mother Russia, you burnt them, you eradicated them. Just like in his October Revolution. Just like the purges.

So there Russia was, smiling to himself as he watched the flag burn, as well as old documents written by Lenin and Stalin themselves. What a shame. He was certain they'd be rolling in their graves if they could see him now.

None of this was new however, nothing was ever meant to last—not even a constitution of a government.

Russia sighed and tossed in a few medals. He enjoyed watching their golds and silvers melt. He loved the ruination.

Next in line. Russia took up a few items set next to him. They looked to be mail, many dated back when he had isolated himself with his sister. He didn't care. Whatever was in them was unimportant now and so in the fires they went.

He would be sad when he ran out of things to burn, but as he glanced over to the pile next to him he deemed that wouldn't be in a long while. Picking up the next item Russia about just tossed it into the fire hadn't he noticed the date on it, and that of the sender.

It was a recent package and the one who sent it was . . .

Russia's eyes gradually widened and a chill ran through his body at the thought that he had nearly tossed it into the fires without so much as a glance or care. The package, the one he was holding in his hand, it was from America. Why, he hadn't received anything from him in years—not since '83. That last letter of his still resided in his coat pocket because it had been the last.

Sitting the package in his lap Russia opened it slowly. Inside was a metallic box. Laying atop it was a letter taped and folded.

Russia pulled the parchment from it and opened the paper.

'Hey, Russia,

So, I heard the news and now I assume it's safe to send you things again. I'm sorry about the sudden abrupt stop in the letters—it's a long story—but I thought I'd try my luck in sending you this. If it gets to you, great, if not, then it looks like my boss still doesn't trust me. Well, anyways, if you're reading this I just wanted you to know that I was cleaning my storage out a little while ago and I ran into this. I couldn't get it to you back then but I'm confident it will reach you this time. It's yours, rightfully so, and it won't do me any good sitting around collecting dust in my closet. Take care, okay, the world's not ending any time soon, mine or yours.

-Amercia.'

Flipping the note over Russia read, 'P.S. Happy New Year! If it gets to you in time. If not, Happy Fall of Communism! You're free now!'

Russia frowned and crumbled up the note, tossing it aside. He took the metal box out of the package and then set it on his lap and the package he simply tossed into the fire. As it glew brighter with something new to burn Russia opened the box. With a gasp he froze.
Russia stared at the contents for a little while before his hand subconsciously reached inside and took up one of the articles. The fire's light illuminated the old picture and Russia felt his heart come to life at the sight of it.

It was a picture of the both of them—he and America. It was when they were in China's home during the Boxer Rebellion. Russia had almost forgotten they had taken a picture together during that affair. Flipping the picture over Russia noted America's handwriting, reading: 'Ha ha, you look so stiff, Ivan!'

Russia smiled at the message. That was right, he had asked America for copies of the pictures taken by his men when the rebellion had been settled and the other countries had taken to relax a little. It had been such a long time since America had mentioned him by his human given name. Such a long time.

Behind it were a few more pictures. Russia's heart sped at knowing which ones. He remembered—he remembered what they were of and before he even picked them up and gazed at them he was blasted back in time, back before the Great War when America had ushered in one of his men with camera in hand and the two nations offered poses to take.

The second one . . . Russia pressed the tips of his fingers to his lips as if to get them to stop its smile. God, the second one was of America leaning down next to where Russia had been seated—America stood, and Russia sat in a chair next to him—and planting a charming kiss on his cheek. The next picture was sweet; it caught the younger nation's adorable facial features in the midst of his laugh while Russia brooded underneath his scarf.

The fourth picture was Russia's favorite. It had been taken after he had snatched the boy over to him and pulled him on his lap, embracing him and giving him a searing kiss to be bashful about. But the next picture after that proved neither grew ashamed from the action. The next picture won Russia's heart in showing how America wrapped his arms around his neck and clung close to him, offering his entire form to him and kissing him back in surrender.

Russia's fingers skimmed across the picture, upon their faces. They had been so close. Yet now . . . everything's gone.

What was America playing at showing him these? Why didn't he destroy everything like he had? Why didn't he forget every damn good thing they had?

What was he playing at?! Russia felt anger boil in him after realizing America had sent him these pictures for torture. He was laughing at him, taunting him, telling him that he was glad everything they once had so long ago was gone.

That bastard!

Russia snarled and tossed the box with all his might against the wall right next to the fireplace. He delighted in hearing the crunch from the metal container. But gapped in confusion when the dented box spewed out contents he had been too blinded by upset to see.

Letters, enveloped letters fluttered to the ground like leaves from an autumn tree. Standing up, Russia walked over toward them. Looking down he noticed how worn they had looked.

Bending down he picked one up. He noticed the numerous return stamps littered across it. These letters had been sent multiple times only to come back to the sender. That sender being America.
It was addressed to him. They all were, and if memory served Russia right these letters looked to be the exact same size and signature of the ones he had received during the Great War.

It couldn't be.

Russia quickly gathered them all up and returned back to the fireplace where the only light in the room laid. Right away he noticed numbering on the sides of the envelopes. They appeared to have been dated in order; it seemed America had done so to keep track of them.

So, Russia opened the first letter.

'Dear Ivan,

I want to let you know I'm praying for you. I know you're smart and strong and you'll do what you can for your people. After all, I don't think they're all for those bolshe—whatever you called them. It's nothing but a little skirmish. You'll get over it. My boss and people are watching and waiting for you guys. You have our support. Man, I bet you England and France are throwing tantrums since you left, but don't worry, sometimes you have to clean up your own mess to tackle other ones.

Stay safe, stay strong,

Love, Alfred.'

Russia then scanned his memories the best he could. It was a little easier to remember now that he had time to himself, now that everything was just gone. From what he could remember he had just informed America about his departure from World War I after finding Lenin encouraging riots and threatening his monarchy. Russia had been in the process of rallying the White Army to get and rescue the captured royal family, but he had been caught and since he had no longer been present among the army they faltered and things went to hell.

Russia should have known America would have still sent letters even in his imprisonment. Of course it made sense that they returned to said boy after not reaching the recipient.

So, Russia opened the second letter.

'Dear Ivan,

I hadn't gotten a response from the previous letter I wrote. I hope you got it and you're well. Just thought I would let you know that I'm in Europe now. Yeah, you weren't kidding when you said the trenches were shitholes. God, I just want to get out of these things. Lucky me; I'm mostly with France than England. I wouldn't be able to stand it if he goes on and tries to boss me. You know me. Even so, they're going to have me charge tomorrow morning. Keep me in your prayers. When this is all over I promise to head over to your home right away and help you out.

Love, Alfred.'

The third was ripped open as quickly as the other two.

'Dear Ivan,

I happened to get my first letter back. I am betting I'll get the second letter I sent returned to me too. That's fine, I'll just keep trying to send them, okay? I'll mark the corners with numbers so you'll know which one was sent first. Okay, now that issue was dealt with I want you to know how the charge went . . . it was disastrous. I lost so many good boys. It hurt, Ivan, it really did. I suppose it was my fault for not being quick enough, right? Well, I need to go collect their tags and write a couple
hundred letters. I'll write you later when I can.'

Love, Alfred.'

Russia frowned. He too had lost many a good man in the trenches. It wasn't easy and now he saw how hard even America had when placed into situations like that. War in Europe was like nothing else in the world. One always lost the most blood within its borders.

Russia opened the fourth letter.

'Dear Ivan,

I had a dream about you last night. It was the only good thing there is in this wretched place. It's cold, muddy, and wet all the time, but in my dream we were out on the prairie, you, me, riding our steeds in the warm sun. It was real nice, Ivan. Remind me to go do that when this war's over. It'll be fun. But things are looking slightly better on my side. Managed to take one of Germany's trenches and can I tell you theirs is SO much nicer, still wet though. How are you holding up? Got my other letter today and decided to try to send it back along with this one.

Here's to hoping you get them this time.

Love, Alfred.'

One by one Russia read them and watched as America's words began to change.

Letter number twenty-seven read:

'Dear Ivan,

I worried. Every one . . . every letter returns and no matter how many times I try sending them again they're returned. I envisioned one dreary night that it was you sending them back because you were upset with me. Did I do something or say something you didn't like? I'm very sorry if I did. I just want to hear from you. I can't stand not knowing how you are. I need you, Ivan, so very much. Please, respond.

Always yours, Alfred.'

The next one was even more heart-wrenching.

'Dear Ivan,

This war would be easy with encouraging words from the one I love. It lifts the spirits, you know. The boys always smile when they get their sweethearts' notes. I'm jealous. But I am faithful and I will keep on writing until you say yourself you don't want me to. I am sad, Ivan, so many of my men have died and I've had to write so many letters to their families. I can feel their sadness, I can feel their mourning. It hurts, it really does, more so than ever as the counts rise. I've never lost so many promising youths before and now I'm questioning why I even came here. Well, one of the reasons I came I suppose was because I wanted to see you, but it doesn't seem like I will any time soon and I'm sad at that. I just want it to end. I just want to hear from you. If you won't read my letters than please feel my heart. I had hoped we've created some sort of connection—France talked to me about it once. I wasn't quite sure what it was about but maybe it means the one I love can feel my love for him. Can you, Ivan? Because I am sending it along with this letter.

May one reach you.
I love you always, Alfred.'

Russia didn't know how he continued reading but the pain in his chest was ignored as he did. The letters following the one he had just read changed tone gradually until the intimacy of the words leapt off the pages.

'My beloved Ivan,

I can't wait until this war is over. We've almost won, I know it. I just want you to know that I've decided not to let the returned letters get me down. I figured that you probably have your hands full and maybe those villains sabotaged the postal stations. Make sure you make them pay for me!'

Russia chuckled and nodded his head. Oh, how right America had been in his assumption. Right then, according to the date of the letter, Russia was certain he had just recently been moved to Moscow and placed in that dark cellar. He had been surveyed 24/7 and his guards tripled after two attempted escapes. The first had been after failing to secure him properly and the second time he had tricked a guard into shooting his own friend if only to cause a panic and make a run for it.

The second attempt he had actually made it to the train station, but he never boarded the transportation. Russia had remembered trying to make it to Ukraine's home, but nothing ever came of it. He had underestimated the wit of Lenin. That man had seemed to know exactly where he would go and how he planned to get there.

Reading on, Russia continued to letter.

'Anyways, I wanted to tell you I had another dream about us. Can you guess where we were this time? It was Alaska, back at your old home.' Russia's breath caught. Alaska . . . that place had so much meaning to the both of them—as well as a long-held intimate promise. 'It was nice, just the two of us, holding each other, and then you kissed me. You said something to me that I couldn't understand but did all together. It was so strange, but dreams are like that, right? After that you take my hand and you guide me to the master bedroom and then tell me you love me. We lay on the bed together when you tell me that you wish to make love to me. I've never made love before and so the dream ends in inexperienced fantasy. How fitting, right? After pondering that dream I inquired certain things from France. After gathering some information I was informed that we indeed do not have any sort of bond or connection because of just that . . . we've not made love. France told me that when nations become one it's magical and special and personal and intimate and etcetera. He said that for a long time, perhaps an eternity, you'll share a bond, something about souls mating and such. But what amazed me the most was that he said you'd be able to feel the other no matter how far away they were and if they were hurt and if they were lost you could find them. That was really cool and . . . and . . . and I want that, Ivan. I want that with you. I've wanted it for a while but I just couldn't figure out how to word what I wanted. When this war is through and when you settle everything in your home come to Alaska. I'll be waiting for you. I'm ready.

Always and forever yours, Alfred.'

Russia's heart nearly stopped beating after reading that letter. He smiled. If he had been able to receive these letters while in captivity he was certain he wouldn't have given up as quickly as he had. He was sure he would have been rejuvenated in spirit and body.

America, his little Alfred, had spoken about their forthcoming intimate relationship. He hadn't before. He had always been so nervous about it, and rightly so after what England had done to him. Russia frowned at the thought and wondered what problems he would have encountered when he had made to become one with the teen.
Those dampening thoughts were pressed aside when he read the letters following and then noticed a large skip in time. This must have been when America realized Russia had been taken captive by the Bolsheviks. But there was one last letter after it and when Russia opened it and read it he was surprised by its existence.

'Ivan,

I'm sorry I couldn't do anything. I'm sorry I wasn't strong enough. I'm sorry I couldn't convince my boss to keep trying. I'm sorry your people didn't like me. I'm sorry. Tens of thousands of times I'm sorry. I can't stop saying this and asking for your forgiveness. I would have kept fighting until the end of time but . . . I'm just one person. I'm sorry. All I can do now is hope and pray you continue to fight him, that what he did to you won't have long term lasting effects. I love you so much, Ivan, that I can't stop feeling like a complete failure to you. You deserve better than me, one more reliable, but you loved me, I know you did. This will probably be my last letter to you and I'll probably be seeing it again, huh? I'm sorry for not having a spiritual connection with you so that you can know how sorry I am. It would be much better than letters, I know. But truly, I hope you do read this one day and understand that I'll never give up on you, never in a million life times. I've loved you then, I'll love you now. I'll love you when you're sick, when you're weak, when you're wounded, when you're leader says not to, when my leader urges me not to. I'll love you when you come out of this darkness of yours because I promised I would. I'm still waiting, Ivan. In Alaska.

With love eternal, Alfred.'

Russia's hand shook and soon his fingers curled before they crumbled the letter. His eyes stung and his throat constricted while his chest heaved just to take in breaths it all too quickly let out. Now he knew why America had given him these letters. It was a message to him, an unspoken message that he was letting go of the past—that he was letting go of all the promises within these letters.

What a liar America's turned out to be. He always prided himself with not changing. Ha! Don't make Russia laugh. Then what was North Korea or Vietnam? And now what of Germany? Faithful? ha!

Russia dropped the letter and let the rest fall to the ground before turning and returning back to his chair where he sat and closed his eyes. A new decade was underway and a new millennia approaching. There would be changes, yes, but among relations? Russia doubted it.

He could never have that again, could he? Russia opened his eyes and glanced down at the pictures still lain about on the floor. Russia had loved those pictures but now he hated them. Perhaps that was how America felt as well so he ridded himself of them.

Russia might as well follow his lead.

Into the fires they went and Russia watched them burn. His heart protested but he shook it so it would quiet itself as it thundered against his chest, crying out to him that he stop.

"No more," Russia demanded through his teeth as he clutched his chest at the pain. "You've caused be enough grief this year and I will have no more."

Was he speaking to his heart or America? Maybe both. Whichever, Russia was swearing this: no more. He wanted his curse gone, and more importantly, he wanted the world to leave him alone.

To leave him alone to his grief.

To leave him alone to his loneliness.

To leave him alone to his coldness.
To leave him alone to his emptiness.

To leave him alone to his broken promises.

Chapter End Notes

Historical Notes:

November 9: 1989 Revolutions of Eastern Europe: Soviet reforms and their state of bankruptcy have allowed Eastern Europe to rise up against the Communist governments there. The Berlin Wall is breached when Politburo spokesman, Günter Schabowski, not fully informed of the technicalities or procedures of the newly agreed lifting of travel restrictions, mistakenly announces at a news conference in East Berlin that the borders have been opened. So, earlier than expected, but down the wall went and Germany and Prussia are soon reunited on October 3rd 1990.

August 19 1991: Soviet coup attempt of 1991. The August coup occurs in response to a new union treaty to be signed on August 20. It was settled but it seriously marked the end of the Soviet Union.

August 24th 1991: Ukraine declared independance. Yep, she gone. Taken from her sick bed and everything :( At first it's the German siblings seperation now it's the Slavic siblings seperation.

The following day, on the August 25th, Belarus left as well, but eventually comes back . . . she always does o.e

On December 25, Chistmas Day: US President George H. W. Bush, after receiving a phone call from Boris Yeltsin, delivers a Christmas Day speech acknowledging the end of the Cold War. Aslo on the same day, Mikhail Gorbachev resigns as President of the USSR. The hammer and sickle is lowered for the last time over the Kremlin.

The day after, December 26: The Council of Republics of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR recognizes the dissolution of the Soviet Union and decides to dissolve itself.

Then, on New Year's Eve, December 31: All Soviet institutions cease operations. So the New Year is rung in with no more Soviet Union and Russia is left without a proper government or constitution which they have issues with the following year.

Oh! Also, someone had mentioned that the old pictures Russia had been looking at of him and America could not have come out like so in such a short amount of time. This being because photographs back then took forever to dry and one slightest movement would likely mess the image up, so the participants in the pictures were encouraged to remain as still as possible. I understand that, yes, but around that time an American by the name of Francis Edgar Stanley created what is known as dry plates. These revolutionized photographs and made them print out a picture way faster than the older models. So, this is how we have back-to-back pictures of a moment in America and Russia's intimate time.
Berlin, Germany. Late 1993

"Nein, no more. Alfred, get him to stop, please!" Prussia begged, trying his best to hide behind the younger country as his brother came to him with yet another plate full of sausages. "I can't eat another wurst!"

"Ha, you're sick of them already?" America asked with a chuckle while casually taking one up and popped it into his mouth. "Didn't you eat nothing but borsch at Russia's. I'd think you'd want to eat sausages for the next hundred years after that bland diet."

"Ja, sure," Prussia admitted. "But at least give me time to recover. Do you want me to explode?!" Turning, he pointed accusingly at his younger brother who was wiping his hands on the small apron he had tied around his waist.

"You need to gain pounds, bruder," Germany insisted. He then looked at his watch and brought out a notepad, marking off something. "And you're already behind schedule in weight gain."

"You see what he's doing to me? It's the worst, most traumatizing, torture I've ever been put through in my known existence!" Prussia exasperated.

"Well, Germany's right," America agreed with a nod after swallowing the sausage he jammed into his mouth. "You still look anemic to me."

"But I have a beer every few hours," Prussia assured.

"Nein, you need sustenance, this is why I am forcing you to regulate your feeding," Germany said. Prussia only rolled his eyes. "What are you, my mother? Come on, cut me some slack, West. I can't eat anymore."

Germany looked to contemplate whether to actually force the rest of the links into his brother's mouth or not. He eventually gave in with a sigh. "Fine," Germany said with a shake of his head. "But then it's off to the gym."

"What? B-But the game," Prussia pointed to the tv set where his reclining chair sat with his three bottles of beer that were calling out to him.

"Gym!" Germany demanded, pointing out of the room toward the training center.

Prussia groaned. He chuckled and then winked at America and Germany. "If I had your two's youth and energy then I'd be back into shape in no time. Gettin' old here."

"Wow, can't believe 'ze awesome Prussia' just admitted that," America said, blinking in disbelief as he and Germany watched the older nation exit the dining room as instructed to do so.

Germany simply shook his head and began cleaning up the table, looking at all of the leftovers Prussia had neglected to eat. Well, there was always the dogs that enjoy the links.

"You really should lighten up on him," America suggested after quietly observing Germany split the
sausages into the dog bowls as the animals trotted into the kitchen at the sound of the meat sliding into their eating dishes. "Recovery is a long process. Hell, his stomach probably just shrunk. God knows how much he was allowed to eat over there."

"I just want him back to normal soon," Germany said with a sigh as he sunk the cleared plate into the dish water. "A steady and persistent diet and exercise program should put his deteriorating form back into prime shape."

"Man, am I glad I'm not Prussia," America sighed, shaking his head. He stood himself from the table and pushed his chair in, readying to leave.

"Leaving so soon?" Germany questioned.

"Yeah," America answered with a nod, fixing his suit with a few pats to the new wrinkles. "Was passing through and decided to stop by to check in on you guys."

"Where are you headed?" Germany asked.

Sometimes, America wished Germany would revert back to his non-speaking time. At least then he didn't ask questions. God, first it was Canada diligently asking him why he was leaving home, and then England after finding out he was headed to Europe, and then there was France, and now Germany. He supposed Poland was next to ask for his business, huh.

"The boss is sending me on errands," America said. It wasn't completely a lie, though in fact it really wasn't his boss he was referring to. "Deadline's coming up and I need to tie up the remaining loose ends."

Germany nodded. "Well then, perhaps when you have some free time on your hands you would like to go hunting with me and Prussia."

America gapped. Hunting with the German brothers? He hasn't done that since the Nineteenth Century. Wow, talk about blast from the past.

"Y-Yeah, yes, that sounds awesome," America said with a wide grin on his face. "Where were you thinking about going?"

"You remember that one forest you had lost your steed?" Germany smiled at the old memory of a younger America looking so upset over having fallen off his horse and lost the animal because that meant he'd have to walk all the way back to Prussia's mansion.

"Man, do I! I was freakin' chased by a bear for miles before your sorry ass decided to help a bro out," America complained, his cheeks puffing up the exact same way it did on that day after Germany teased him about the chase and his "manly" scream. It was so strange, the nation could handle his own animals, but when it came to foreign animals he acted like a complete novice. Strange, but a funny trait with the American nation.

Germany laughed along with him. "I suggested it in hopes bruder will join us. Get his mind off of the time spent behind that damn wall."

"Yeah, that sounds great," America said with a nod of approval. "The road to recovery is always easier with pals alongside ya, plus it gives me an excuse to pull away from work and come and visit."

"Our home is always open to you, America," Germany said, his smile softening tenderly. "Don't always think you need an excuse just to come and visit."
America nodded in understanding. He knew that the two Germans enjoyed his company, but he honestly needed an excuse these days just to vacation. Just like his reasonings to excuse himself through Europe to make his way to Russian territory.

Moscow, Russia. Late 1993

So it was the holiday season which meant a time of good feelings and peace on earth and present-giving, etcetera. Entering into former enemy territory shouldn't be so hard this time of year. Bearing an offering of goodwill will surely sway any violence to swoon.

America had bought a gift, and even graced a little girl with a nice fifty dollar bill for a bouquet of decently-sized sunflowers. The snow was reaching to the hip so finding a little girl who even sold damn flowers that didn't look choked to death deserved that price. So now there he stood, in front of the looming home that looked worse for wear the last he had seen it all those decades ago.

It seems like the home was too big for even Russia to properly manage by himself.

Man, if America's old home ever degraded to this condition he'd rip out all of his hair. Just looking at the poor place put a sympathy inside America's chest. His limbs ached to go and nail in some shutters, paint on a fresh coat, anything to make the crumbling home look more presentable. Did Russia really still live in this place?

Once upon a time America remembered linings of gold, embroidered tapestries of silk, and gems glittering and jingling on the breasts of the nobles. Russia had been so handsome in those epaulettes, and sashes, and knee-high polished boots. Looked every bit royal, but now . . . this isn't what America had foreseen becoming of the nation whom worshiped their nobility like gods.

Well, America was certain Russia's had time to reflect on the very same dampening thoughts, which is why he came. America to the rescue.

Stepping onto the porch, America concerned himself with rotten wood and the likes of it, making sure not to get his foot jammed into one of the holes. He rose his hand and knocked on the front door. His heart sped a bit after his mind pushed aside the poor condition of the estate surrounding by the excitement that this would be his first time seeing Russia since the fall of Communism, since the fall of that ideology that man set up to separate Russia from the rest of the world.

His heart beat so hard against his chest that it knocked against the present pressed safely inside his jacket. That was when doubt began to set in. Slowly at first, but increasingly it grew daunting and dreadful.

What was America doing?

Looking in his right hand America beheld a bouquet of sunflowers—Russia's favorite flower. His left hand rose to press against his chest to feel the present nestled safely against his breast. It was new insulated leather gloves; because one can never go wrong with warm clothing in such a cold place. He was giving Russia a present. Why? What's he given him beforehand?

Dear God, it was like America was trying to woo Russia back into a courtship with offerings of flowers and expensive gifts.

America couldn't see it but he could feel his face heat up to the point he had to pull at the collar of his jacket. The sub degree temperatures suddenly became too hot to bear and panic began setting in with his insecurities.

Shit, shit, shit! America quickly skidded off of the porch and looked around for a place, a place to
bury the evidence. Off to the side America made the rash decision to shove the bouquet of sunflowers into the snow, and sweep the heavy ice overtop of them so it made it look as if they never existed. Then America took out the present from inside his jacket and chucked it into a tree. Got caught up in the branches, perfect, no one but the birds would ever find that thing.

"Amerika?"

America's heart jumped into his throat as he turned around only to see Russia himself, standing on the rotting porch, observing him with weary but surprised eyes.

"Oh, hey, Russia, long time no see, huh?" America chuckled nervously to try to hide how he attempted to swallow down the rest of his heart back into his chest. His situation didn't help seeing how he had been caught with his hands bright red from digging and shoving snow around, as well as his pant legs soaking up to the thighs from the ice. But America was a quick thinker. Russia didn't need to inquire the younger on what he was doing in his frozen front yard. "Ah, perfect snow for a snow angel!" The American nation then fell backwards and swished his way out of trouble.

He had just completed the most perfect snow angel in the world when he heard the front door to Russia's house slam shut. Jumping up America had noticed that Russia had retreated back into his home. He frowned at the action. Quite rude, after all the way America's come, but then again his plan to cover himself had worked—Russia wasn't the wiser of how much of a fool America would have looked like if he was caught shoving flowers into the Russian's arms like England had once tried to do with Germany.

Wiping the snow from his clothing the best he could America shook off the ice and walked back up to the door and knocked on it.

"It is unlocked," was the only response.

America didn't quite like coming into homes without the host opening the door themselves, especially a host the likes of Russia, but he understood and so let himself in. Unfortunately the inside of the home was just as cold as the outside.

"Damn, Russia, you really need to think about getting heaters installed in this home," America spoke up, rubbing his arms as he walked into the foyer, peeking around to try to find Russia. When he couldn't find him he went searching for him until he felt a heat. A heat that led him to the main room where a fire was going, and right next to it sat Russia tossing a few things into the fire. America paled. "W-What are you doing?"

"Staying warm, what does it look like?" Russia tossed another piece of mail into the flames before taking a drink of what America presumed was vodka. "Why are you here, Amerika?"

America hadn't said anything. Instead he looked quite shocked just watching Russia toss in mail like it was completely natural. He slowly made his way over toward the pile set next to where Russia was seated and picked up a piece. "You're just going to burn them . . . without opening them?" America had sent that package to Russia some years back. It was never returned so he was exuberant in believing it had finally reached its intended destination, but now that he knew what Russia did with his mail . . . oh God, no . . .

"Da," Russia said, snatching the letter in America's grasp and throwing it into the fires without a second glance. "Now if you have come to sift through my mail then you may take your leave."

"But . . . we sent you letters, your boss sent you letters. Don't you know what's going on?" America asked. There was that issue with recent treaties and plans of course, but then again the image of the
package he had sent to Russia near the end of '91 came to mind and numerous scenarios played out in America's head on what happened to it. He shouldn't be concerned, after all it was Russia's to do with what he willed, but . . . he wouldn't . . . not those.

"Doesn't matter," Russia simply replied after another swig from the bottle. "As long as I can keep warm."

"Doesn't matter?" America repeated. An anger rose inside him at the worry of what happened to his own package. Yes, the belongings had rightly belonged to Russia as it had been addressed to him so long ago, but that had been all, ALL America had of anything of theirs. His own copies of said images or Russia's returned written letters during WWI were burned without the protection of a sealed box along with the rest of the belongings he held in ties to Russia. So the last of those belongings, the pictures and the letters, held sentimental value to America and he wanted Russia to care about them just as much as he had—still did, if they even existed anymore, and he prayed they did for the sake of his own heart. "These letters hold documents proposing economic resolutions and nuclear deals. We're trying to help you and your people get back on your feet, but it really won't work if the damn country himself continues isolating himself in his rotting home, moping around all the damn time."

Russia spared one glance toward the upset American. It was a short meet of glances before Russia turned his gaze back to the fire and took another chug of his alcohol.

"If they are addressed to you then they are important," America scolded.

"Important?" Russia questioned, his mind wandering off to another time, another place. "Then why do they burn so easily?"

America felt as if he'd been stabbed in the heart. Russia hadn't just suggested the obvious outcome for his old package had he? No, no, America wouldn't let this get to him. He hadn't come here for that.

Glancing down at the pile America noticed many dating back some months, the pile was just that big. So, without asking for permission he simply dug his hands into the pile and began searching for something that had been sent to Russia a few months back. It connected with what he was going to ask him on his current visit. To his surprise Russia hadn't stopped him. He looked annoyed that he was digging through his mail, but, hell, if Russia didn't care too much for the packages and letters then what's wrong with someone snooping through it? Clearly it was that unimportant to the bastard.

"Aha!" America cheered as he held up the letter and waved it in Russia's face. "This was meant for you to read, and so since you clearly lack the skills needed to read simple lettering on a piece of paper I'll be the hero and read it for you myself."

America ignored the annoyed look Russia was giving him and simply sat himself on the armrest of the man's chair. The past resent years had invoked a boldness in the younger nation. He was clearly invading personal space and obviously annoying a much older, much larger nation—a nation who had once been, and possibly still is, his sworn enemy. No doubt America trusted in his recent declaration for sole world power to protect him should Russia provide threat to his stay.

"Okay, 'Dear Russia, in the light of the signing of the Agreement Concerning Cooperation in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space between both President Boris Yeltsin and President George H. W. Bush, we would like to invite you on an opportunity for science as well as a chance to provide media with the coverage of peaceful relations. NASA would be honored to offer you a reserved seat in the first joint mission space flight since the Apollo–Soyuz Test Project. The scheduled flight will be held in early February at the Kennedy Space Center. The mission will include a conduction of an
eight day coarse Wake Shield Facility experiment. All accommodations will be paid for and assistance provided should an agreement come to term. We look forward to hearing from you and working with you." America looked toward Russia and shook the letter again. "Still think these letters unimportant?" Hopping off the armrest America stepped back and let the excitement settle into his bones, he was already rocking back and forth on his heels. "To space, Russia. They're giving us a chance to go up there!"

"You plan on going as well?" Russia asked. He didn't look the least bit excited which perturbed America seeing how he assumed Russia enjoyed the outreaches of space and the unknown as much as he did. Maybe he'd been lying to him all those years and amusing him with astronomy.

"Of course!" America exclaimed. "Haven't gone up there in nearly thirty years. But that's beside the cool part. The awesome part is that NASA wants you to come with, man. What do you say?"

What better way to cheer a Russian up than offer him a free ticket to outer-freakin'-space?

Still, America was growing unnerved at the sight of Russia. He didn't look the least bit interested, didn't even look all together there as his eyes gazed into the dancing flames of the fire before them, looking all too amused in watching the mail burn to black ash.

"Nyet."

That meant "no" in Russian.

America gapped. Did Russia just give up the opportunity to go into outer space?

"What?" America shook his head as if he'd heard wrong. "What do you mean no?"

"I will not be used for your media's propaganda," Russia stated after casually reaching over and taking up the letter in America's still grasp and then tossing it into the flames. Just like that.

"No . . . no, no, no, that's not what this is all about," America swore, shaking his head and then digging into his jacket for the layout blueprint of the mission. Pulling out the document he opened it and showed Russia the schematics of it all. "No more propaganda, just space. Don't you want to go up there again?"

"So you can show the world we're on peaceful terms again?" Russia questioned with a bitter smile. "I think not. You may have won our little game, Amerika, but that does not mean you can control me. No one can."

"I don't want to control you, I want to fly into space with you!" America bit out, his tone raised with his frustration over not convincing Russia getting to him.

"No more games, Amerika. I am tired," Russia said. He sighed and kept his eyes upon the eating flames. His hands grasped the armrests of the chair he sat in so tightly but America had yet to catch this.

"I know," America said softly. "Recessions suck. But it has to get worse before it can get better. Best way to not think about it is to busy yourself with something, and I thought you'd like to busy yourself with a joint project since I figured . . . you liked space travel as much as me."

"Always about yourself," Russia muttered out the chuckle. "You wouldn't be so inclined to offer companionship if it was something only I preferred and you shared no interest in."

"That's . . . not true," America bit out. "Is there something else you wanted to do? I'm all ea—"
"Don't flatter yourself." Russia chuckled, trying his best to keep his eyes and ears away from the American and everything that was him. "Just go . . . go up there . . . have fun."

America wanted to go up into space again. He had for a long time. Especially if it were a chance to walk on the moon again. Well, they weren't going to the moon or anything of the likes, but it was still up there—no gravity, no ground, no nations, no denominations, no politics, no bosses, no worries. He wondered if Russia felt like that when he went up into space, and from intelligence he knew he had back in the 70's, that Ruskie was more busy than him blasting off in that decade.

But, in reality, the point of the mission was to show the world that the Cold War had indeed ended. To finalize those nonbelievers with a healthy dose of the truth. If Russia didn't come then it'd be another usual liftoff. Nothing special about it. Nothing at all.

"I won't go if you won't," America stated in definite.

Now he looked at him. Russia turned. His eyes were slightly wide with astonishment before America caught sight of a small sneer in the corner of his lips as he turned back to the flames again.

"Using childish tactics won't get me to go," Russia said. "Your tantrum will not work on me like it does the world."

"I'm serious."

"Da, I'm certain you are, well, that is until time comes to blast off into space. You will go. You always do." Russia buried his chin into his scarf. His hands itched to grab another piece of mail and toss it into the fires but he dared not move, he dared not give America any excuse to continue this useless banter.

"You know, I'm sick and tired of offering my hand out to you only to get it smacked away," America said, slamming the outlined document on a nearby lampstand and clenching his fists.

"Then stop offering," Russia reasoned.

America gapped at the Russian nation's response. If Russia were looking at him he would see how shocked he look at the harsh suggestive statement and then how his shocked features morphed into something more akin to the emotion of hurt.

Russia caught the sound of a sigh and then strangely a muttered, "I promised I wouldn't," before the sound of America turning and walking off resounded in the empty room. Russia straightened and turned just in time to catch America push himself out the front entrance and slam the door behind him.

Russia let out a sigh of his own as he laid back against his chair, his gaze returning to the fires. He should pat himself on the back for successfully running America off without so much as raising a fist. But he didn't because he felt sick to his stomach.

For so long he'd been trying to coax America closer and then, right when he was practically knocking on his front door, Russia goes and shoos him away. How uncharacteristic of him. But he was upset with his arrival.

What had America really been doing in his home? He's made it very clear that he had no desire to return and yet he had quite quickly after Russia's collapse. Perhaps it was still nothing but propaganda as he assumed it always had been. Look good in front of the cameras. Be the Good Samaritan he believed himself to be and offer help to the poor, wretched, and diseased. Because Russia was all the things above in the American public's eyes.
So what was America doing here? Russia had nothing to give him, nothing of worth that is. What was he playing at? Their game was over. Russia wanted no more part in it.

That nation was such a child. So immature. So untrustworthy.

What did he expect? Did he expect Russia to wholeheartedly offer himself to him in support of this "supposed" peace mission? No, Russia wasn't so gullible now-a-days. He wanted to be left alone. Away from other nations, away from his boss, his people, from the media, from the cameras . . . from America.

Everything America had suggested looked quite enticing. Too good to be true. But that young nation needed to realize that one simply can't go out and make friends with once-enemy nations just because they were in no position to resist. Russia wasn't in any sort of position to deny the United States of America anything but that wouldn't stop him from doing so. The child needed to be taught a lesson and rejection was something matured in, and America had many decades of learning such a phrase and reaction.

But even so, this hadn't stopped Russia from following the shuttle missions. The news broadcast it everywhere and each time, to his own surprise, he never once saw America journey up with his team. Every time the cameras would zoom in proudly to their nation he would be in communications and tech, speaking into the comlinks and giving the astronauts an encouraging speech before they left the hemisphere.

America hadn't been lying.

There had been two shuttle missions near the end of the year and both times America had not been a part of it himself. Both times Russia had observed on national television the American nation standing by and watching the shuttle and its crew leave without him. And each time he looked sad.

Russia could see his longing to go into space and he honestly didn't know what was stopping him. Unless he was putting on a front. Knowing Russia was watching him after swearing what he did to him.

Unless . . .

Unless maybe he meant it. Unless perhaps America was telling the truth.

Why the sudden honesty? Why now of all the rotten times would he go and do that? Was it his way of trying to weasel into Russia's heart, create some sort of hoax sincerity to base an obscure friendship on?

The United States of America only had one agenda in forethought always, and that was himself. "What can you do for me?" "How can you contribute to Uncle Sam?" "You scratch my back, I scratch yours." All American sayings, each one reflecting the younger nation's personality perfectly.

Once upon a time that child was pure and innocent. His eyes had seen little of the war of life save for the one he fought for his freedom. His skin was unmarred, his eyes even sparkled brighter. Come to think of it Russia had never seen America's eyes sparkle like they used to centuries ago save for one event . . . and that was space travel.

It had been tricky, but after some espionage Russia had gotten the tapes of the first moon landing, and it was in those tapes he beheld how excited America was, like his pioneer spirit was brought to life and he was standing on a new, vast, and untamed frontier. He heard he never went back into space after that and so the sparkle was never seen again.
Oh, what it would be like to behold it live and up close.

Russia chuckled to himself after finding himself opening his mail instead of tossing it into the fireplace where the fires had already died from lack of things to burn. He had continued to receive many offers for the mission that was coming up quite soon. America just wouldn't give up.

Russia knew he was asking for trouble. After all, it's been only over two years since he lost everything, since he'd last seen his sisters. It was too soon to come out of isolation, to face the cameras—to face American cameras.

But . . . against better judgment, Russia's heart longed to see that sparkle once more.

So he shoved all of the mail into the fireplace and delighted one last time in watching it all burn. He left it in such a state, not caring whatsoever if the flames overwhelmed the hearth and escalated into the spacious room and ate the rest of the crumbling home. Russia had been meaning to begin some remodeling anyways.

Kennedy Space Center, Florida, USA. February 3rd 1994

"Alright, boys, ready to get the show on the road?" America looked at the technicians surrounding who nodded and readied everything needed to monitor the liftoff. With their assurance he pulled the microphone close to his lips and smiled. "Crew of Shuttle Discovery, how is everyone feeling today?" Nothing but static greeted him. With a frown America looked toward his technicians. One of which held up his hand for an explanation.

"They're not onboard yet," the man said after receiving word.

"Why not? We're running behind schedule as is," America complained. All he wanted was to get his people up into the air, was that too much to ask?

"It seems Mr. Krikalev is having a suit malfunction," another informed their nation.

America rolled his eyes and then rubbed his face. "What? Do Russians not know how to work a spacesuit? Sheesh. Did the others help him?"

"Negative, they're having trouble handling it themselves."

America groaned. He looked down at his watch and then at the Space Shuttle that had his name written all over it. He was supposed to be onboard, right about now he was supposed to be blasting off with the others . . . but he swore he wouldn't if he couldn't have the one companion he longed to journey with to the stars.

Smacking his lips he straightened. "If you want something done right . . ."

Off America stormed into the changing wing. There he met his astronauts who looked to be having trouble with Mr. Krikalev, the poor man looked as if his helmet was jammed. When he approached the American astronauts immediately parted and let America have a look at it. Yep, looked slightly jammed. Well, with his super strength this shouldn't take long.

America pulled. He had second thoughts on breaking it, these helmets were expensive and he'd rather not have the Russian redress, that just took so many procedures and he didn't have time for this. So he pulled gently, still, to no avail. His brow twitched in annoyance before he about twisted the man's head off.

"Would you just . . . would you just lean down, you beanstalk!?" America whined, pulling the man's
head down. God, was every Russian so freakin' huge? It was hard to pull at the helmet with the man's stature and so America found himself yanking on the thing a little harder than necessary.

America had all his concentration pinpointed on pulling the damn thing off. He didn't want to break it, but he just might if he got that much more fed up with the jammed lock. Of course since he was so indulged into the task at hand he had not noticed the man reach up and simply unhinge the lock himself. The helmet slipped off and away America flew, landing on the floor, skidding a few ways with the round helmet in his hands.

He let out a surprised blink, looking at the helmet in his grasp before examining it slightly. The lock looked perfectly fine. It hadn't been jammed at all.

Narrowing his eyes he was about to chew his men and their visitor out for playing such a teasing trick on him with time ticking away like it was, but he stopped, his tongue caught in his mouth and his eyes widened like saucers.

"The helmet lock works very well, spasibo, Amerika."

There he was, that damn no-good who didn't have the decency to tell America he had changed his mind and was on his way and was dressing up and was greeting the rest of the crew and . . . gaaah!

America was on his feet and to Russia in a second. He grabbed a hold of the front of his suit and shook him. "You . . . you . . . why didn't you tell me?!"

"Thought it would be funny. It is, da," Russia said with a teasing smile of his own. America's face was bright red. Russia enjoyed ruffling his feathers. It was nice to know he still remembered which buttons to press.

"Then . . . then where's Krikalev?" America asked, looking around.

"I am here," the man said, stepping out from a corner hall. He was smiling, quite pleased his country decided to accompany him.

America laughed. His shoulders shook before he threw his head back and laughed. He laughed for a good while, holding onto his belly before pulling off his glasses and wiping his eyes. "That was a good one," he said with a chuckle. His features then softened. Russia hadn't seen him look like that in a long time. "I'm happy you decided to come, Russia."

"I do not have high expectations for this mission because Americans are flawed, but I will oversee it nonetheless," Russia said, looking like his old former self as he straightened his back, clasped his hands behind his back and paced before the crew like a drill sergeant.

"You're an asshole, ya know," America stated, shaking his head.

"The only asshole I see is the one keeping shuttle from taking off, da?" Russia turned to America who looked at him with confusion. In fact he looked ready to retort something back, something nasty for sure but before any words came out of that foul mouth of his he caught himself and suddenly everything clicked.

"You mean . . . ?" America noticed everyone wearing the same exact smile Russia was—well, except his was a hundred times creepier like usual of course.

"We're waiting for you, sir," one of America's astronauts said.

"If you're still willing to come," another said, a slight concern for his country and his coming
decision.

If America was still willing to come? Fuck yeah!

America had never gotten dressed in a full-fledged space suit that fast in his life. He had been so excited that he was trembling. He was going up again. He was going up in space! And better yet, Russia was coming!

The two countries on earth who loved astronomy the most were finally flying up there together! This was definitely going down in the history books.

America was practically skipping out onto the launch pad he had been that happy. In fact, it was no doubt his big mouth that tipped every newscast in Florida that he was heading up into space again after years of absence in the field and that the nation of Russia was joining the mission.

Russia was frowning at all of the cameras and the flashes and the reporters. He wanted them kept back, but obviously America wanted everything documented. He could see the younger waving to the people. His thumbs-up and bright smiles ignited cheers from the populace and it wasn't long before said nation's arm was slung around his neck, turning him for the pictures.

Russia humored the boy for a little while before he pulled away. "We are late, da? Let us be off."

America shrugged and proceeded toward the docking area. Once inside it was a matter of getting strapped in and then waiting for the blastoff. The static over the comlinks echoed before voices clarified. They had proceeded in counting off.

"You're gonna love the lift off, nice and smooth," America spoke up, looking toward his right where Russia was seated securely. "Space Shuttles were designed specifically for that."

Russia said nothing. He kept his eyes forward. America just shrugged it off and replied to the commands from the center. "Ready on this end," he replied.

America really couldn't stop shaking from excitement as the force of liftoff pressed against him. The speed with which they blasted off never ceased to amaze him and they were in the sky within seconds. The rumble from the engines and the pressure from gravity usually forced everyone still in their seats, but America was strong enough to move a little if he wanted to. He did, he turned his head and looked toward Russia.

Strangely he was watching as the man balled his fists, closed his eyes, and bit his bottom lip. He looked nervous. America didn't understand why. He had assured him that his Space Shuttles were some of the best spacecraft with which to travel by. But then again, the Russian nation never usually took his word as of late, perhaps that's what it was.

Or, maybe . . . perhaps he was nervous. Perhaps the concept of leaving the planet unnerved him. It had America in the beginning as well, but Russia had left earth before, so why was he so afraid? Perhaps there were some countries that would never grow accustomed to leaving their birthplace.

Russia seemed like one of said countries.

America couldn't stand the sight of misplaced fear. He reached out, struggled to do so as their surroundings shook, and then placed his hand on Russia's clenched fist. Everyone needed a gesture of reassurance every now and then.

He caught Russia open his eyes and glance over toward him for a split second before moving his hand away from his touch. Fine, if that's how Russia wanted it. It's not like America wasn't used to
rejection from that nation anyways.

After finally leaving the stratosphere and leveling out America readied to take off his security belt.

"Do you not wait for protocol?" America looked over to see Russia giving him a look akin to that of an adult beholding an immature child.

"Why are you such a party-pooper?" America retorted back. "Cut me some slack, it's been years since I've been up here."

"So then the memory of God-blessed America does fade," Russia teased with a chuckle of his own. He didn't need to see America's glare when it was already felt.

Finally the command from headquarters came for ease and the go-ahead to stretch out their limbs in zero-gravity.

"I'll never grow tired of this, yeah!" America cheered as he floated around and pulled himself from latch to latch over the expanse of the cockpit.

"It is so nice to see the crew willing to focus on the job while their nation plays around like little baby," came Russia's voice after he took off his helmet and unstrapped himself along with his cosmonaut and the rest of the astronauts.

They were making their way out of the cockpit and toward the lab when America clambered behind them. "I'm not 'playing around' I'm getting the feel of it all again, and I'm going to work too. Who do you think wrote a majority of these experiments in, huh?"

And while it started out with uncertainty many retorts following the two nations managed to conceal their differences and work on the experiments for the day. Again, it seemed that at every opportunity America got the urge to joke around. After all it had been him who not-so-innocently " mishandled" a crystal where the thing went sailing toward Russia in his work station with his cosmonaut. The nation had sensed it coming and easily dodged it and continued his work.

America pouted. He would try something like that on his own team but it just wasn't as fun like poking a Russian. Though, their reactions may have been better than Russia. That nation all out just ignored him the remainder of the day. Whether it was out of subtly telling him to get back to work and pay attention to his own projects, or that he was simply ignoring his existence—which he has done multiple times throughout the recent decades—and trying to get on his nerves; America didn't know, and frankly he shouldn't care. But as the day wound down and the sleep period came about America found himself unable to sleep.

The light snores resounded in America's mind as he lay there, staring up at the bunk above his own. Turning over he looked over toward the Russian sector. Russia's cosmonaut was slumbering as soundly as America's own astronauts. But Russia?

America craned his neck to peer above into the top bunk. He groaned after bumping his noggin' against the bunk above him—honestly, why had he resorted to the bottom bunk anyways? Nothing, he hadn't seen Russia slumbering in the bunk above Mr. Krikalev. America mused on where he might be.

He wasn't concerned said Russian nation was trying to sabotage their shuttle or anything, that thought was years behind America, but that assurance still didn't stop America from getting out of his bunk and floating around to look for him. They were nations anyways, they didn't need to the rest like their humans did, but . . . being away from that big blue planet was still draining to an extent and
no doubt the next day both he and Russia would be sleeping like newborn nations in their bunks.

It was a strange feeling that America equated with Mother Earth. They were all her children after all and so it made sense how they, the personifications of nations, would need her nutrients and nourishment the most.

America checked the mess cabinet, the med bay, the lab, he even peeked a little outside to make sure Russia hadn't gone on a late-night stroll around the shuttle. Nope, didn't see anything of the likes and so that left only one place. America propelled himself through the air and caught onto the latch held out before entering the cockpit. There he was, seated in the pilot's chair, still and unresponsive.

America wondered if he was perhaps asleep. He couldn't see from where he was and so he pushed inside. Grabbing a hold of the seat next to Russia, America leaned up only to catch the older nation take a quick glance his way and then turn back to the view before them, the view of Earth.

"Oh, you're up," America muttered. "Sorry, didn't mean to disturb ya, just was curious as to where you were."

Russia didn't say anything and America sighed. He was going to turn and leave him to his peace of mind since he had clearly expressed his annoyance with America only a couple of hours beforehand on this mission, but he stopped, his gaze too caught by the beautiful sight of their native planet.

"She's so pretty, isn't she?" America whispered out, more likely to himself, but it wouldn't hurt to strike up a conversation with Russia if he wanted to join.

Russia didn't move. Didn't even make a sound in agreement. America didn't know what propelled him to take a seat in the one next to Russia but he did. Leaning back he stared at the planet in silence. Taking in all of her like he did the day he sat down on the moon and memorized her every curve and color.

"It's sobering just to look at her," America said. He had a fond smile on his face as his blue eyes reflected the hue of the beautiful planet's glow. "I remember when I first saw her. I was sitting sort of like this. I had turned around, looking out through one of the back windows and there she was, so round, so blue. I had expected the sight, but all at once I hadn't. Then . . . I saw me. It was strange. So strange even still, but amazing nonetheless." America's eyes then examined which rotation the planet had leaned itself in and on which continent it was showing to them. "Oh, look, there's you. Isn't it cool?"

America caught that snicker. He turned his gaze toward Russia whose eyes were transfixed on the form of his land, on the borders of his country.

"Do you see what covers me, Amerika. Can you see it?" America blinked in confusion. He glanced over toward Russia before turning back toward the sight of the planet and of the landmass it bore before them. America wasn't quite sure what Russia was talking about but watched silently as the nation seated next to him reached his hand out as if to run his fingers through the white clouds overlaying the land of the nation of Russia. "You never stop feeling it, but up here, it's numbing. It makes you wish less and less to return. To feel those icy fingers around your throat."

America turned once more toward the planet and noticed the white swirling clouds hovering over Russia's land. The season was winter. It was snowing.

It sometimes seemed it was always snowing in Russia. "Yeah, I once had a hurricane damage a major portion of me, but I was up here, didn't feel it as much as I usually do. It's nice isn't it? To stay warm."
Russia nodded. He was glad he came on this mission. He would have had to spend another week with General Winter tapping at his windows and seeping through the crumbling cracks of his home.

"Da," Russia answered. It was barely above a whisper, but America heard it and was glad.

If Russia would have turned to America he would have noticed the sudden frown on the younger at the mention of the season, of the feel of it on earth, and the memories evoked therein.

Furrowing his brow, America asked, "You speak about winter as if it is a being. In fact, a long time ago I remember Prussia telling me you referred to your winters as some sort of a commander, a general. Why?"

Russia chuckled. He decided it was time to move his eyes away from the space-view of the deity and look toward America. He had so much to learn about the being whose death he had been born as.

"Because he is, I have seen him," Russia answered. "My sisters have as well as many other countries who tried to conquer my boundaries. It is a great mistake to meet him without sacrifice."

"Sacrifice?" America questioned, that frown still in place.

"Da, many humans. For his services he requires many human lives, and for special requests he desires even more. It is the way he is," Russia answered.

"Controlling a season? That sounds far-fetched, don't you think?" America chuckled himself though the change in subject was unnerving him slightly, especially with the way Russia spoke of the season, like it was a living, breathing, thinking being. Impossible. Simply impossible.

"Control? Nyet, never control," Russia said, leaning back in his chair with a heavy sigh. He didn't realize he was gripping the armrests of the seat, but America had and so looked at the other curiously. "One can simply hope to please him or they die. He has helped me far more than any other."

"What 'cause of the 'sacrifices'?" America joked but cringed when Russia offered him that creepy smile of his and nodded.

"Da," Russia answered. "I am faithful to him and he protects me from my enemies. For much longer than anyone else I worshipped him."

"Sorta reminds me of England and his weird fairy things. Maybe it's just older nations or something," America mentioned, tapping his finger against his cheek in thought.

Russia then gave him a dirty look. "Do not equate me with that half-pint. The things he sees are hallucinations. The General? You can feel him, see him, touch him. He's real, Amerika, but I would suggest you never meet him."

"And why is that?"

"He hates warmth and sunshine," Russia replied, offering a single glance toward America before looking back toward the earth, back toward the white swirls that was the General embodiment. "It is the end of him."

"Honestly, he sounds like he needs a vacation," America said, rocking up in his seat and floating up into the air before gliding over to block Russia's view of the earth. "And so do you, which is why I invited you on this expedition. So, stop sulking about the winters back home and relax. We're in space, nothing's going to get you out here."
Then America pushed him. Russia wasn't particularly strapped into his seat so a little nudge was all it took to push him off balance and have him floating just slightly off the cushions. Immediately he grabbed a hold of the latches and frowned.

"What are you doing?" He asked but America only smiled and pushed him again, this time he succeeding in prying the older nation away from the latches.

"Since you're obviously not tired, and neither am I, let's do something productive, let's go back to the lab or somethin'," America suggested with that bright white smile of his as he pulled Russia and then pushed his frame back toward the entrance of the cockpit. He giggled from just watching Russia twirl around. He looked so stiff and out of control that that uncomfortable frown was ever present in his dilemma.

America used the seat to push himself off of and glide over toward Russia's flailing form. He reached out and hooked elbow's with the man and helped him straighten himself as they floated over toward the lab. America just offered him an encouraging smile, it widened when he realized Russia hadn't pulled away like he thought he would and instead allowed America to guide him toward the lab where they got to work on their representative projects. In due time, however, America's input was struck into Russia's work and Russia's suggestions were taken to consideration in America's projects. Finally, they settled with cooperating together on a single project and when the crew awoke they found their nations already immersed in the selected tests.

The humans said nothing upon finding the two working together. It amazed all of them, especially how efficiently they cooperated together. They worked so well together that neither believed that just a few years ago they had been declared enemies.

It wasn't natural. Neither human believed it was possible for enemies to work so fluently together, to know what the other was thinking before they voiced their opinion. Entrenched in their dubious work the humans watched the two complete the other's sentences and each one wondered if the two nations knew what they were doing, what they looked like.

From afar, and if one was ignorant on who these two beings were, then they might have assumed them very close friends. It was astounding, simply perplexing that the astronauts and cosmonaut kept to themselves and never mentioned to their respected country out of concern to break this close cycle.

The two had been so eccentric they ran circles around their human counterparts. For longer than anyone expected they stayed awake for fours days straight—a feat for a personified nations so far from their birth planet—and spoke more easier. They were either seen in the lab or in the cockpit, conversing with the other and staring up at the stars and the image of their planet.

The humans really could feel it. They could feel the tensions of the Cold War slipping, fading into a memory soon to be forgotten. That was one of the missions of this expedition: to ease tension between the two. And it was working.

On the fifth day, when the humans awoke to their morning they found the two nations in the cockpit, both slumbering. They chuckled at the sight and both made bets on who had fallen to sleep first. They laughed about it all the way back to the bunker where they settled their nations into their beds. But they gave them privacy and let them sleep to their needed amount.

They slept for an entire day, and probably would have for longer had not America felt the distress and annoyance in his people as they tried to conduct the Wake Shield Facility test but to no avail without some problem arising. He was still quite groggy as he unstrapped himself from his bed and pushed himself out of the slumbering chambers. He had surprised the others by his appearance when he inquired as to what was wrong.
The astronauts immediately pointed out the issues they had been having the past couple of days and with another groan America turned himself to the calendar. He sighed. They were nearing the end of their time to get the tests done.

So America suggested that the grapple wasn't working properly. He suited up against the others trying to convince him that there was just something wrong with the signal lights. America promised them he would be quick. But the astronauts and even Russia's cosmonaut saw how weary the country was becoming from being away from Earth for so long.

He was in no shape to go out onto the exterior of the ship, but he did it anyways.

"He is foolish," Krikalev said, shaking his head while he and the Americans watched America inch his way out toward the device with nothing but a lone safety line attached to his suit.

"You know, the links are open, Krikalev. I can hear you," America's voice came over the communications. He sounded unamused and of course slightly annoyed with the doubt by the Russian cosmonaut.

"I really wish you would have waited until we checked to see if it was the signal lights," came the commander's worried voice. He leaned over, trying to peer outside to see if he could see how far his country had made it. He was just starting to push himself out on the grappling arm, but of course the safety line was a tad bit too short. "No, America, just come on back. Don't try pushing it."

"I'm already out this far," America complained and to everyone's horror they watched him foolishly detach himself from the line and continue his way. "I'm doin' it."

Groans and curses resounded in America's comlink. He figured he'd get such worried and annoyed responses. And there was the occasional, "On durak," by dear ole Mr. Krikalev which indeed translated into "He is a fool" or something along those lines. But America was polite and decided not to share his fluency in said language if only to keep the cosmonaut guessing, as well as Russia. He simply chuckled at them and hauled himself out toward the round device and checked everything.

"You know, I think you guys were right. Must be the signal lights. Why don't you run it once more," America suggested and heard his team shuffle around quickly. He could tell they wanted him back inside and out of harm's way, but come on, he walked on the moon. He knew what he was doing. He knew his way around shuttles in and out of space.

After receiving confirmation that what they suspected to be interrupting the signals were just faulty communication lights America made his way back. He wrapped his foot around the dip of the WSF and made to swing around but of course nothing ever worked perfectly for the lucky America. He swung, yes, but his foot didn't seem to want to come with him and if he dared yank it out of the hold it had caught itself in he'd risk damaging the device and that cost money, that and his boss would chew his ass out if he found out any space instrument was damaged. He did not want any of that and so quietly attempted to slip his foot free.

"Are you on your way, America? We've already detected the problem." That was the commander. America sighed. He knew they could hear him and so he tried to keep his breathing to a minimum to let the others know he was not panicking, and certainly had everything under control.

"Yeah, just give me a minute. It's not easy moving around out here," America responded back. But he wasn't moving, not even making progress. They didn't need to know that, though. If there was anything he hated it was seeing his people in a panic.

"We can see you right now, America. What's wrong?"
"Nothing, okay," America replied. His agitation was seeping out into his tone and he knew for a fact his people caught it. "I said I'm on my way."

He pulled his foot a little harder this time. He froze. He thought he heard the groan of a bend and a possible metallic snap. No, no, no, he did not just break this thing. Leaning down he pressed against the device, making sure nothing was loose or moveable. No, still seemed sturdy so no damage done, but he was still stuck.

There was no doubt he needed someone to come out and help him out. But he was the United States of America; he didn't call for help. That was completely unheroic. But this just so happened to be the case.

"America?" There was the commander's voice again and America found himself chuckling nervously.

"Heh, he-hey, Charlie, could you . . . could you possibly suit up and come out here?" America tried to make everything sound casual and discreet. First order of business was to make sure no one panicked and second was to get someone out as calmly and quietly as possible without anything else getting out of hand.

"What's wrong?" Always with the "What's wrong?" America rolled his eyes. "Nothing," he said. "I just need you to come out here."

"You didn't break anything did you?"

America gapped. Why was everyone so intent on treating him like a child? He was old enough to be everyone's great-great-great-great-and so forth grandfather! He knew what the hell he was doing!

"No! My foot's just stuck! Now get your ass out here!" America ordered. He did not just come off as a hormonal tantruming teenager had he? Yep, probably did.

He could hear more clamor over the communications. He rolled his eyes again. Geez, just sound the alarm why don't they?

"You guys settle down, will you?" America spoke back, trying to get some sense of calm into his people. "I'm fine. I mean, I can easily break out of this hold and skip back toward the doors but then I just might break this thing. Don't want that ya know. And don't you dare tell Russia about this. I don't want him teasing me any more than he—?!!"

A sharp intake a air was heard quite clearly over communications and if America had tried his hardest not to panic his astronauts then his best just wasn't cutting it. The idiot he was had tried to readjust his grasp on the side of the device when his fingers misjudged the distance and he slipped. With no security belt he would have definitely been floating around in space for quite some time, but his foot was luckily quite stuck and now there he was, dangling by just his foot.

"Oh, shit, shit, shit!" Perhaps America shouldn't have used those exact words and perhaps he shouldn't have lost his cool in that moment. But he was startled and a cold sweat washed over him, sobering him to wide awake and after that he realized his mistake in letting his astronauts hear his panic.

He could hear them now. He could hear the pilot rushing their commander to the suiting chamber. And then he heard Davis' soothing voice, telling him to remain calm and that Bolden was on his way.

And here America was the one supposed to be reassuring his crew that everything was fine, that he
had everything under control when, sadly, he didn't. He had no one else to blame but himself and he knew it. Why couldn't one simple look-over go right for him? Why him? Why?

At least his ankle wouldn't strain with extra weight. That was a plus side. But the downside was waiting, and waiting, and waiting. It did take a while to put on a full-fledged space suit.

In his wait America just contented himself with listening through his headset. He could catch a few conversations passing between his astronauts, mostly concerning suit-up and an update on his own status, which they kindly responded in, "he's still dangling there." How fun.

What perturbed America was Mr. Krikalev. He could tell that as the tension rose he'd slip into his native language and some of the things he said were downright rude. America crossed his arms at some of the things he said and he could think right now of a few phrases that would get the cosmonaut to shut his trap but he refrained himself. Being rude was easy, but unnecessary right now.

The worst thing that actually happened in the wait was hearing a chorus of two arguing in Russian. There really was one other besides Mr. Krikalev that held the language as a native tongue. Damn it. Russia woke up.

"That you, Russia?" America figured he might as well strike up a conversation in his wait. Russia was less likely to be as panicked as the humans so he'd humor him until the commander finished suitting up and come out to assist him.

"Da," came the voice on the other end of the receiver.

"Did they make a ruckus and disrupt your beauty sleep?" America smirked. He enjoyed poking the other nation and a little later his smirk turned into a softer smile. It really was much nicer now that their tension had dissipated from concealed and dangerous threats of war. Those were all behind him and America looked toward the day they could easily talk about anything again. This mission he had prayed would make substantial progress and, so far, he felt that it was slowly steadily reaching to that point.

"Actually, it was you," Russia answered across the line. "You have big mouth. Could hear your distress all over shuttle."

"You fat liar." America frowned. He was not that loud. He knew he slipped a louder tone earlier, but Russia had been just as dead asleep as he had. The only thing that woke America was the frustration of his people. Perhaps Krikalev had felt the same levels of unease and that is what woke Russia. Sheesh, didn't mean to make even the Russian cosmonaut worry. America was flattered he cared.

America perked up at the sight of the commander coming out of the latch, a safety belt wrapped around him. "Eh, doesn't matter. Nothing to worry about here. I'll be back inside in no time."

The younger nation heard the older chuckle, that chuckle turned into a screeching static for a split second before he heard Russia say, "I can see you from here. You are dangling. One wrong move and you'll float off into space. Now, while this sight may have been a dream come true some decades back it is unideal of this day and age." America rolled his eyes and watched as Bolden skipped across the grapple and then bent down. "Now, Amerika, lean up and take my hand."

America blinked. At first he was looking up at Bolden, watching him closely and nervously as he made his way out onto the ledge like he had, then he was listening to Russia, thinking of some sort of comeback to any witty remark he may have said when his words and movements moved in alignment with Bolden only to show America that Bolden wasn't Bolden at all, but Russia.
The light glared across the helmet's visor for a second before it faded and now America had a good look at Russia's annoyed, but relieved face.

"Where's Bolden?" America questioned, of course before doing as the nation asked of him.

Russia rolled his eyes and reached down, taking hold of America's foot and shaking him loose. "I ordered him to stand down while I took his place," Russia informed and smiled in triumph as he pulled the American nation free and up, wrapping an arm around his leg. "If you want something done right then best to do it yourself, da?" Russia offered America that child-like smile of his before pulling him along, back across the grapple.

"Since when does he take orders from you?" America asked. "He's an American and by no right does he—hey, hey, what are you doing? Come on, man, don't hold me like that!"

"I told you to take my hand, but you refused and so I will drag you around by your leg for not listening when you should have," Russia simply said as he maneuvered his way from off the grapple.

"Hey, watch it!" America whined, flailing his arms to grab a hold of something, but with the lack of gravity and with the way Russia had bent his knee over his shoulder and simply drug him back to the ship, America could find nothing to grab onto. "What if my leg pops out of socket?"

Russia simply scoffed and offered one short glance back at the nation he was carrying around like a sack of potatoes—oh the embarrassment. What would America's crew think of him. The younger nation knew for a fact they were watching it all.

When they entered the shuttle again Russia promptly let go of America and it wasn't long before the younger straightened himself and clutched onto a latch giving Russia a dirty look before his crew came to him with worried and relieved faces. Quickly he put on a smile. "Told you guys I'd be fine," America said, waving their worry away. "You all owe Russia, here, a big thank-you."

"I get none from you?" America turned and frowned at Russia. He really didn't feel like kissing ass at the moment. He knew the Russian's ploy; save the American so he'd owe him. Well, America wouldn't stand for that one bit.

"Thanks, and that's all you'll get," America said, shaking his finger at the older as Russia casually stripped himself from the suit he had put on in a haste to reach America first. "I don't owe you anything else, and I could have gotten out of that on my own . . . just . . . didn't want to break the machine. And, and Bolden could have done the job just as good as you, ya know."

Russia simply shrugged and pushed himself out of the room out toward the mess compartment. The rest of the day was a strange one. Mostly business, not much talking. America tried to strike up a conversation with his crew but it was so strange, especially when Russia and his cosmonaut began speaking amongst themselves in their own language and after listening to a few phrases America found they were not talking behind their backs at all, they were just talking about their project and the progress therein.

A casual day.

That evening America was exhausted. He was feeling the effects of distancing himself from Mother Earth and he was glad they'd be returning soon. He was ready to head to bed with the rest of the crew but the absence of the other nation sparked a curiosity in him. Of course he found Russia back in the cockpit, looking at Earth.

America just about gave into his weariness and left him there but ever since his short little scare
something had been eating at him, and he had to get it off his back. Like he did the first four days out in space he glided over toward Russia's side and grabbed a hold of the chair next to him and sat himself down.

"So, what is it?" America finally asked. He rubbed his hands together nervously. He didn't like owing anyone anything because he was afraid of what they'd ask of him. And with Russia . . . his mind told him it was never good to owe anything to the ex-communist—because once a communist always a communist—. . . but his heart told him differently; told him to calm himself; told him things it had been telling him for centuries. "You want something from me, right? A simple thank-you will never suit you. You want more. What is it?"

Russia was silent though. Hadn't so much as glanced toward him. America had actually sat in silence for a good five minutes before Russia even uttered a word.

"How long do you think you can last away from Mother Earth?" Russia asked, keeping his violet gaze on the blue planet before them and the blackness surrounding.

America was thrown off by the sudden change in subject, but if Russia didn't want to talk about a supposed nonexistent debt then America was fine with that. "I dunno, maybe a few weeks, months. A year? I'd say that's pushing it."

"So under a year." America watched Russia nod his head, his hands even clutched the latches on the seat slightly tighter. "We would not have been able to even advance enough technology to track the outer limits of space or evolve a working shuttle to catch you had you slipped and flown off into space." Now Russia was looking at him. He looked quite upset, as if this entire mission was his and America was the rookie who had screwed it up. Well it wasn't, this was America's idea, so Russia had no right to get agitated with him.

"Sorry," America muttered, he rolled his shoulders to offer a small shrug. "I guess I'm just a little clumsy." Of course he wouldn't tell Russia about how he let his excitement get to him on the moon landing and from that he face-planted right on that round mound. Nope, didn't need to know that at all.

Russia's upset seemed to heighten over America's excuse and so the younger bit his tongue and examined his other ideas of which to use as an excuse to get those accusing eyes off of him. "Clumsy?" Russia scoffed at the excuse. "We're in space, Amerika, we can't afford any misstep. I agreed to come on this mission provided there were experienced astronauts who could care and house myself and my cosmonaut. I felt that you coming as well would steady this mission's flow since your reputation in space precedes you, but now I know my reports were true . . . you haven't been in space since the moon-landing have you?"

"Of course I haven't," America said, glancing down and shoving his back into his seat. He frowned. He hated getting scolded like he was a little incompetent child . . . especially from Russia. "A lot of things happened inside and outside my territory after that landing, so of course I couldn't go back up there. I saw every liftoff though. I made sure my crews were as safe as could be. I know my ships. I built them, and I trained the astronauts in them. I know what I'm doing . . . I'm just not used to this atmosphere."

There was a silence and when America glanced over toward Russia he saw that frown still present on his features. He was still upset with him. God, what a sour ass.

"Are you always so uptight in space?" America asked. "You know, when I first pushed up here it was to see if I could, to see outer space, to land on the moon. I'm a pioneer at heart, so new frontiers excite me, always has. What about you? You know, my old bosses convinced me that you were
trying to put missiles on the moon and up in the satellites. They said that's all you wanted in space for. And guess what? I defended your sorry ass. I excused you of wanting to explore as much as I did. So were my bosses right or what? 'Cause you've been a real downer since we started this mission."

Then America watched it. He watched that frown slowly fade and Russia finally relaxed if only a little bit.

"You have the power to portray my thought on space however you want, Amerika," Russia said, leaning his head back and closing his eyes. "So it's up to you to decide on which you think suits me better."

America frowned at Russia's response. There was nothing wrong with fighting for the truth if one lied against your character, that is what America believed and he wanted Russia to fight, to voice his own thoughts, to come out of his shell. He hadn't since the late '80's and all America's strived for was to get him to say a simple "yes" or a simple "no" but nothing was ever easy with Russia or his personality. Never was.

So America surprised Russia with a smile. He too leaned back in his seat and looked toward earth. His eyes sparkled with fascination, the same he believed Russia's eyes sparkled with when he looked at the stars and the planets and the moons around them. "I'm going to say a bit of my pioneer spirit rubbed off on you," America stated with a sure nod. He smiled and glanced over toward Russia quickly at hearing the nation snicker. When he did he found Russia looking at him, a laughter on his lips as he shook his head with a sigh.

"Always about you, Amerika," Russia said after letting out a chuckle.

"Of course," America said with that big, straight, white and bright grin of his.

There, the upset was over. Who knew talking out one's troubles could lighten a load so easily?

The two nations were quiet again. Back into their routine of gazing at the earth and admiring the moon rotating around it and laughing at the swirling visible cold over Russia's land that he couldn't feel so far away.

"But if this mission strikes unpopularity in the public I'm going to blame you," America spoke up. "I'll just tell 'em the Russians weren't cooperating."

The two laughed and the rest of their trip brought up no more troubles for the two countries or their crew members. Nothing ever went according to schedule and they had lost a few hours of sunlight for data collecting, but a majority of their experiments were finished and when they landed down on the planet Russia even let America hold his hand.

America had noticed how the older nation trembled more so than the others. He now had come to the realization that it could be because Russia was afraid of leaving the ground, or that he was afraid of returning to the cold waiting for him. America wasn't the best at comfort among other nations—most thought him a nuisance and annoyance—but he felt some sort of pride in knowing Russia's clenched fist stopped trembling when he placed his hand onto it.

When they exited the shuttle America wasn't at all surprised to see Russia's annoyance with the news reporters and their onslaught of questions and cameras. He seemed more at ease when the station staff came for them and asked them details about the flight and experiments. Russia always seemed to answer better for business questions.
"Da, we had a little difficulty with the equipment but the crew worked together quite well and made progress," Russia answered. But ask America? Oh he'd talk your ear off. He'd talk about how beautiful the earth looked, about how bright the stars were, about how amazing it was floating around.

But even as America handled the reporters wishing to hear about the grandeur of outer space and Russia the questions needed for further science he had heard the director of the staff inquire about another possible joint mission in the near future. America's answers became quieter and soon he had silenced himself to hear the one question he'd been waiting to hear from Russia, the one that would let him know how Russia truly felt about their joint-mission.

If Russia agreed to more then he liked America's expedition. If he declined anymore then America had failed. Then he had failed to show the world, to show Russia, that all past grievances were indeed forgotten and a new start was on the horizon.

"I do not think I want to go through that again," Russia replied. He did not see it because he was facing the staff and committee while America was turned and facing the reporters and their cameras, but America's shoulders had slumped just a fraction to show that he was disappointed, notably in himself. "The takeoffs and landings are very bumpy. The experiments were very cramped as well." Then Russia smiled. "Which is why I suggest the next mission be at my space station Mir."

Again, since Russia was turned from America he could not see his reactions. Like right then, he did not see America turn around quickly, his eyes wide and jaw loose. But Russia certainly felt the younger nation bump into him and sling his arm around his neck.

"Did you just invite me to your space station?!!" America asked quickly. Russia frowned and pulled away to straighten his back. "Da, there you can be as clumsy as you like. Much safer than American shuttle." He then smiled that teasing smile at America, but the younger didn't care. He threw his arms up in the air like some victory had just been announced and he turned back to the reporters.

"Another one! Guys, I'm going up into space again!" America was smiling so big that Russia's teasing smile softened. America really did love space and everything about. Being up there took a toll on them both, but that wouldn't stop them continuing their exploring.

Space really did get Russia's mind off of his recession and he was so very glad America had went out of his way to invite him on the mission despite their resent spat. Perhaps he was right. Perhaps it was time to show the media that the Cold War had fizzled out and that Russians and Americans could get along once again.

It's been seventy-seven years since they could say their two nations could look on each other without hostility—especially out in the open. But as long as the people were willing, and the bosses calm, then America and Russia could pursue a friendship they had once had long ago, and after that has proved itself a success or failure then they would decide on whether or not to progress the relationship further, and both had such high hopes.

Hopes that started in the stars where dreamers live.

Chapter End Notes
Historical Notes:

So, Russia hasn't been too active in the world as of the '90's, but his boss certainly has been with the countries of the United States and Russia signing an Agreement Concerning Cooperation in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes on June 17th 1992. And then, when U.S. President George H. W. Bush and Russian President Boris Yeltsin sign the START II treaty in Moscow on January 3rd 1993. And of course lots of aid worth billions of dollars in trying to get Russia and the other republics back on their feet after the fall.

Now, about this time joint space missions were talked about by both countries. Apparently both were worried that the directors just wouldn't get along through this. But, it actually went well. February 3rd 1994 brought the first joint U.S.-Russian Space Shuttle mission. This was one of the first missions in the Shuttle-Mir program. This was also the first time a Russian flew aboard a Space Shuttle. After this mission the two nations pressed for more joint projects which eventually led to the first American boarding Russian space station Mir the next year in May of 1995 through to July.

The '90's was definitely space-defined with a total of 83 flights into space from America (63 space flights) and Russia (20 space flights) combined. The previous decades really couldn't compare nor the following decade after.
Chapter Notes

Suggested ambient songs: Taking Chances by Celine Dion (for the GerMerica) and You Are My Sunshine by Patrick Dansereau (for Russia)

Have to put some Historical Notes at the beginning since there's quite a bit . . .

Headcanon~
Since it's the 21st Century I'm gonna say America looks about 20 years of age now. Yep, and he's grown. He's now the height of Germany and will probably continue growing until he's staunched by someone or something.

The Expo of 2000 was held in Germany, pretty cool with lots of nations building neat pavilions and exhibits. Lasted June 1st through to October 31st.

And, Belarus referring to herself as Russia's wife is reference to Russia and Belarus' union state. Originally, the Commonwealth of Belarus and Russia was formed on April 2, 1996. The basis of the union was strengthened on April 2, 1997, with the signing of the "Treaty on the Union between Belarus and Russia" at which time its name was changed to the Union of Belarus and Russia. Several further agreements were signed on December 25, 1998, with the intention of providing greater political, economic, and social integration. So, yep, they're "sorta" married, lol. Poor Russia.

Expedition 3 carried Astronaut, Frank Culbertson, and two Cosmonauts, Mikhail Tyurin and Vladimir Dezhurov to maintain the International Space Station. Culbertson was actually the only American not on the planet when the World Trade Center was struck. They filmed and photographed the entire incident from space.

On September 11th 2001, often referred to as 9/11, the World Trade Center, or Twin Towers, in New York City were struck by two airline planes hijacked by terrorists. This resulted in the deaths of 2,996 deaths, almost near the same as the count of deaths in the Pearl Harbor attacks.

The 90's simply were the best. Well, considering most decades, America felt that the 90's was a time of relaxing, reaching knew horizons, and making better relations with the world. The best part about that decade had to definitely be NASA's Space Shuttle Program. Every opportunity America had the choice to travel up into space. He did so at least once or twice, sometimes three times, every year. It was exciting, especially when he managed to convince other countries to join. Japan came, France, Canada, heck he even managed to get Germany into space but the poor nation didn't seem well equipped for flying that far away from earth because he always tended to lose his lunch after takeoffs and then after landings.

But, by far, the best country to travel into space with had to be Russia. He knew what he was doing. Had been the most experienced nation concerning space besides America himself. But other than the technicalities and ups of traveling with an experienced companion America enjoyed his company for other reasons. One such reason was there was never a dull moment for them. Always a witty remark here, a teasing jester there. They both strove to perturb the other and in a way bring out the others'
best ability to work in such climates.

Not that America didn't enjoy the other countries; Japan was always so techni-handly up there and Germany was too if his stomach wasn't continually flipping around in the anti-gravity. But with Russia, America felt he was at his best. They had once been rivals in space development and travel. Both had so much experience under their belt that it made perfect sense that the two collaborate and use their knowledge for furthering science. They got a lot done together and from the success of their missions they scheduled more flights.

The 1990's really was a time of good-feelings and America hoped the same atmosphere would follow into the next decade and new millennia.

German Wilderness, Germany. April of 2000

Prussia was getting old. He could feel it in his bones, noticed it by the later hours he awoke and the earlier hours he fell into slumber. Of course he wouldn't tell this to the others, no, no, he was still "The Awesome Prussia" and would go to his grave titled as such.

After World War Two he had begun to feel his decline, but after the fall of the wall he was feeling better, not at his best, probably never could gain that strength again, but his spirits were up. Never before had he thought he'd delight to just sit down in a lawn chair and enjoy the sun while the younger kids ran off chasing game birds and deer. Yeah, he promised he'd come along on the hunt, but he never promised he'd participate in it. He had his gun at his side just in case he felt the urge to go into the woods and catch him a prize, but so far the only urge he had was to soak in some warm spring sunrays and enjoy an ice cold beer.

Hearing the gunfire alerted Prussia that his brother and America had found some game. He smiled and reclined back further in his seat and hummed lightly to himself. It really was a great day, not a cloud in sight, the skies so blue. Prussia never thought he'd be a country to want to relax and stare up and admire the color of the sky above. He chuckled. What would Fredrick think of him now?

He wondered what the others thought of him. Most remembered him in heightened glory. Were they scoffing at him now? Secretly laughing because all the power he once boasted upon was gone, stripped away?

He knew that they all could see through his ruse. They weren't stupid. He wasn't stupid.

Germany was more like a mother to him than anything else, but then again, he was the only German brother who still had any amount of power. The others? Recluses, which Prussia might as well be soon enough. He no longer had a place in the world and as to why he was still existing, he didn't know. Perhaps God was cruel to him and decided that his torture wasn't grave enough, perhaps the Big Man was keeping him alive long enough to see the end of days and all its catastrophe most envisioned it'd be. Heh, figures.

Well, being away from world affairs didn't sound so bad. Maybe he'd have more time to go bug Austria, or Romania, or . . . Hungary. Prussia frowned in concentration when he thought about her. He had waited, had made sure she was back on her own feet, that she had ripped her government back into her own hands after Russia's hold on them had weakened and they fled. That was why he had taken a little longer to cross the wall into Germany's arms. He was making sure she had been well because out of all of them, she had it so hard.

Yeah, he should pay her a visit. All of his commie-roomies. It'd be like old times, except freer. God, Romania just killed his communist leader after the fall so Prussia wasn't so sure he wanted to evoke old Soviet memories in that one, but he was sure he'd be one hell of a drinker. Yeah, Prussia
mentally wrote that fun get-together down.

Prussia was startled out of his thoughts when a shot rang into the air, this one was closer. He frowned upon realizing they hadn't caught anything yet and were still hunting. He was disappointed. He thought those boys would have wrangled in a young buck right about now.

Another shot rose up in the air and this time Prussia was leaning up in his seat. His hand subconsciously reached out and touched the barrel of his gun. He wasn't in the mood to get shot today, nor gutted. He hoped they'd hurry and catch whatever they were chasing.

This time, there wasn't another gunshot. Why? Because they were too close to camp, that's why!

"Gilbert! He's headed your way!"

Prussia was rigid now. The gun next to him now pressed against his chest. His eyes were wide and looking everywhere. Slowly, he stood and carefully aimed his gun at anything that moved in the brush.

He didn't want to hit Germany or America of course. What if they came out first? They'd be so mad at him if he accidentally shot them. But then again . . . what if they'd cornered a boar and it was coming toward him? What if it came out of the brush first? Damn it, what should he do?!

Prussia didn't even have time to aim, that thing bounded out of the brush so fast. With two hops the large buck was already right in front of him, leaping over him, knocking his chin back and his entire form with just the impact of its knees.

Prussia let out the most unmanliest, unawesomest screeches as he fell backwards. Lucky for him his trigger finger reacted and shot the animal right when it was on top of him. Now, the large stag lay above him, crushing him with its weight.

"Hey! He got it, Ludwig!" That was Alfred. "Gilbert got it!" Prussia could hear the nation running up to him and shortly after he heard another pair of boots march up. "Wow! Look at the size of this thing! I'm so mounting it on my wall!"

"Nein, the carcass wouldn't be able to last the trip back to your home. It will stay here. Good meat." That was Germany. Why were they just standing there, starring at it? Didn't they know he was underneath the animal?

Well, if they didn't then Prussia would just have to make himself known. When he was younger he would have been able to lift this large animal with ease. He'd done so with Spain's bull and France's horse. Man, it sucked getting old. Prussia wondered if this is what all nations felt as they aged and slowly lost any standing power.

"Get it off me!" Prussia cried out the best he could from underneath the creature.

"Oh my god, he's underneath it!" No duh! Prussia then heard more shuffling around and when he felt the carcass twitch he realized that someone had made to pick it up. "Stand back Germany, I got this."

"I can help too," Germany dejected.

"It's cool, really, I got this," came America's persisting voice.

Finally Prussia was free. He coughed and found himself pulled out and now staring up into the briefly concerned eyes of his baby brother. Prussia offered a smile and an "OK" hand signal before
Germany rolled his eyes and shook his head as he straightened himself.

"I don't understand how calamity always follows you" Germany muttered in their language, making Prussia frown.

"Follows me?" Prussia stood up and about bumped chests with his brother had he not remembered he was still holding onto his gun. Turning around he noticed his destroyed lawn chair and all of the spilt beer. What a waste. "You two practically chased him to me!"

"Dudes, what are you fighting about?" America spoke up after he finished measuring the animal. His eyes sparkled and a smile permanently plastered his face with excitement. "We got a freakin' whopper!"

"West is blaming me for everything, like usual," Prussia said, turning to America and offering him a pout to get the younger nation on his side. Germany, behind him, simply rolled his eyes again. "Said that this wouldn't have happened if I had come with you two."

"Well, I agree," America said with a shrug as he set his gun down and began tying up the animal. Prussia gapped. "What? Why?"

"Well, for one, the buck wouldn't have ran over you in your chair 'cause you wouldn't have been in it," America teased. He then sighed and wiped his hands after finishing the ties. He looked at Prussia and smiled softly. "I used to love hunting with you. You really are getting old and worn, aren't you?"

Prussia sighed. He looked down at the gun still in his hands. It was actually heavy. And here these weapons were much lighter than broad swords. Prussia wondered if he could even pick up his old sword of awesomeness again. The outcome seemed doubtful.

Prussia wouldn't have any depression. Not now, not that day. It was a great day. Spring was in the air and they just caught their first catch, which Prussia would brag about being the one to bring it down because he did no matter the circumstance of its capture.

"Yeah, well so what. I can still shoot the pants off Hess, right, Alfred?" That was quick to get the American nation back into a cheerier mood. The young blond beamed and he pumped his fist.

"Fuck yeah! You remember that one time when we caught him and England having breakfast in the fields? Or, or, when Hess was drunk off his ass? Ha!" America and Prussia faded back into nostalgia while Germany was left out of the loop.

"Did you know he still has that scar on his pinky?" Prussia asked, holding up his hand and wiggling his pinky finger to emphasize it.

"You mean the one where I—?"

"Ja!" Prussia nodded enthusiastically which resulted in he and America throwing their heads back and laughing at the events in their shared history.

Germany wouldn't state he was jealous that Prussia and America had a connection he could never hope to accomplish. Not out loud at least. So, while the two reminisced together he simply began cleaning camp, minding his own business. He had just been about finished after securing the buck into the truck when Prussia had turned to him with teary eyes from hard laughter.

"Ja, and, and West had thrown a tantrum when I finally came home. You remember that, Ludwig?" Prussia asked.
"Ja, but that's all. Now, can you two please get in the truck? I'd rather not wait for the carcass to begin decomposing while you two take a trip down memory lane," Germany said, getting into the driver's seat.

"Sour ass," Prussia mumbled and then turned back toward America with a teasing grin and a thumb shot in Germany's direction. "Kid never got out much back then, very upset. In fact, I think the first time I actually took him out was at Russia's masquerade ball. You know, the one where the two of you first met!"

America smiled fondly. Yeah, he had seen Germany for the first time at that ball. But that was a time when he had stayed at Russia's, growing closer to him. During that time he remembered having fallen in love with him and feeling so hopeless from his age and weak standing to the imperial empire. But that time was good and in the end it turned out both he and Russia had been dancing around each other only to end up . . . apart. Never mind, America would just forget remembering those times and stick to the better ones that ended positively. Like his friendship with Prussia and Germany.

The sound of loud beeps rung into the air and Prussia looked toward Germany who only poked his head out of the truck window to look back at them curiously. America even looked confused before he blinked in recognition and began patting himself. He then pulled at the beeper on his belt and looked at it. Immediately his eyes widened.

"Oh my god! I'm late!" America gasped.

Prussia rose an eyebrow. "Late for what?" The older then watched as America hurried back to the truck and secured his firearms into the case he had brought with him.

"Blast off," America said. Both German brothers saw that smile on America's face, but it didn't help their frowns when they realized that America would be leaving sooner than planned.

"You're going back into space, America?" Germany questioned after watching America get into the passenger seat. Why would America schedule something so close to their hunting outing? That just wasn't fair.

"Of course," America chirped cheerfully. "I thought we wouldn't be out this long and so I never changed the schedule for take off, but having a good time always makes one lose track of time, huh?" America playfully elbowed Germany across from him and winked at him, but Germany remained stoic and frowning.

Prussia had just gotten into the back and shut the door when he sighed loud enough to turn America's attention toward him. "We were supposed to handle the buck home together, Alfred," the white-haired ex-power said. "You'll be gone."

"Sorry, but gotta do what an astronaut's gotta do," America said and then turned to Germany. The nation hadn't even started the engine. Wasn't doing anything but gripping the steering wheel and gazing out into the forest surrounding them. America patted his knees impatiently. "What are you waiting for, Germany? Let's hurry back. Gotta pack my things. Gotta go."

Again, Germany didn't say anything. He simply started up the engine and drove off. The ride home was silent on his end. Prussia hadn't been too talkative either. Both enjoyed America's stay immensely but to get pushed aside for another event upset them both. But, at least Prussia was polite in asking America more about the mission like how long he'd be up in space or what their objective was, and other such things.
"You didn't go on the last one," Prussia noted. "Why the sudden change of mind with this one? Is it important?"

"Well, we're gonna resupply the International Space Station and probably work on its degrees a little. I really wasn't going to be attending this flight at first, but at the last second Russia decides to join and I can't just let him fly up there with my team by himself. Gotta babysit him, ya know," America said with a chuckle and another nudge to Germany's side who remained unresponsive.

Prussia frowned at the mention of the other nation. While Russia had been easing himself out this past decade, what with him joining Partnership for Peace back in '94, and then him joining the NATO led Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in '97 and then, later that year, Russia joined the G8 as well. He was getting more involved in the world since the fall of the wall but Prussia couldn't say he was glad to see him. This sort of made him glad he was no longer a nation, Germany had a better temper concerning Russia anyway so he could deal with him and those boring meetings.

But still. Prussia wasn't the only one who noticed how much Russia was stealing America's time from the rest of the world. If Russia wanted to talk then America would excuse himself from others, important or not, and talk to him. If Russia visited D.C. then America would be there to escort him around. If Russia decided at the last moment that on a whim he wanted to go up into space then America would quickly schedule a flight and be on it himself.

Russia wasn't as strong as he used to be nor as dangerous yet his presence constantly called America's attention. Prussia didn't like it and by glancing over at his quiet brother, Germany didn't like it either. Prussia sighed. It wasn't easy to keep the American superpower by one's side these days.

"Hey, Alfred," Prussia spoke up. His voice was lower. No more humor in its tone. America turned and looked at him. He was smiling, that youthful twinkle constantly in his eyes to show his excitement . . . his excitement for his journey into space with Russia. "Don't forget us up there, alright?"

America furrowed his brow in confusion and twisted in his seat to look at Prussia straighter. "What are you talking about? How can I ever forget you guys?"

Prussia said nothing to entice any sort of argument. It was best not to. Besides, he was certain America possibly didn't understand what he was doing himself. So, Prussia turned the subject around and pulled out a smile.

"We should do this again sometimes soon. Do you have any more plans later this year? We could catch some boars, ja?" Prussia leaned forward and caught America's observing gaze, he was analyzing his behavior, no doubt trying to figure out why he had changed tone and attitude recently.

"Yeah, yeah I'd like that," America answered with a nod. "I'll check my schedule of course." Prussia frowned. No, of course he and Germany had to move aside for America's scheduling while Russia, America made his schedule around him. Completely unfair and upsetting for both the Germans and no doubt other countries. "But I promise we'll do this again this year."

Well, if the United States of America so promised, then they so held him accountable for fulfilling said promise.

America had packed quickly and was as he said "out of their hair" shortly. The home seemed empty without America's loud laughter and brash antics. It was dare say lonely after an hour even.

"Hey, West, got some beer. You want one?" Prussia poked his head into Germany's room with
offerings of peace but was surprised to find his brother hard at work in books. Prussia furrowed his brow when Germany turned to look at him.

"Ja, just put it there," Germany said, pointing to a lampstand before turning back and burying his nose into a thick book.

Prussia nodded and did so. After a while of standing there, watching Germany flip through a few pages and read the next paragraphs diligently his curiosity got the best of him. Walking forward he came over to his brother sitting at his desk now overburden with thick volumes of books and paperwork.

"What are you reading, Luddy?" Prussia asked, cocking his head to try to see the title of the book. Maybe it was one he's read before.

Nope, definitely not the case. Prussia's eyes widened a fraction after realizing the younger was reading about the science of space travel and all its functions. "Don't you know most of this stuff?" Prussia questioned. Was Germany seriously going to read all of those book?

Germany didn't answer him.

"You're brain's going to explode," Prussia flatly stated after taking a sip from his beer.

"Don't you see America is only interested in things he enjoys?" Finally Germany said something. He even turned to look at Prussia with serious eyes, but Prussia could see the frustration in his stern features, by the way his eyes scanned for mental answers to the way he bit his bottom lip. "If we can be interesting then he won't leave us as much as he does. He likes space and so I want to know all there is about it. I want to speak with him on a level he enjoys and thinks important. I'm tired of him coming over just to greet and then leave to give his time and attention to others."

"To others?" Prussia questioned. "You mean to Russia." There it was. He watched his baby brother's shoulder's stiffen at the mention of that nation.

"The only thing he has in common with America is his fascination with outer space," Germany said, turning his gaze back to the books. "Without that he isn't worth his time. He's got nothing else."

"Then why do you feel threatened?" Prussia asked. He hadn't seen Germany this upset or him going through such measures to gain attention like this in a very long time. "America is not always journeying into space and so when he doesn't we'll pine for his attention. He likes hunting. He likes military drills. He likes science. You've got more to talk to him about than just space and shuttles, West."

Germany sighed. "Then why is that all he's interested in right now?" he asked. When he turned to Prussia he watched as his older brother shook his head.

"You don't even like it up there," Prussia reminded. He then pointed toward the books. "No amount of reading will make you enjoy the topic. You get sick too often."

Germany could fly planes, blimps, jets, even stand the velocity of fast cars but for some odd reason he could not take space flight. It just didn't make sense to him and the younger German was determined to get it out of his system and to train himself to be resilient to the motion of the low gravity. Because America loved spending time up there and Germany enjoyed spending time with America, so if he wouldn't spend time with him here on earth then he would in space, that is if Germany could manage to hold his stomach up there. That was his reasoning.

"You're brain's still going to explode," Prussia teased before leaving Germany to whatever mess he
was getting himself into. He didn’t doubt Germany would do what he said he would, but he was still concerned for his brother. After all, he always got quite sick going up there. Even Japan held his meals better than him. Quite embarrassing on Germany’s part especially when America was constantly having to tend to him.

Prussia about choked on his drink before he remembered the year. He darted back into Germany’s room and said, "Put those books down! You've got an Expo to prepare for!"

Germany's eyes widened. He'd almost forgot all about that in his upset.

Kennedy Space Center, Florida, USA. May 29th 2000

America sat in his seat, waiting for the signal to go off and inform him and the crew it was time to unload. He caught a couple of glances over toward Russia who kept his eyes on him. America didn't understand why. He didn't cause any problems on this mission, in fact, he figured he exceeded above and beyond. What was Russia's deal?

Glancing over again this time America caught him smiling at him. Quirking an eyebrow America finally sighed and turned to him. "What? What is it? You keep staring at me the whole goddamn time like something happened. What?"

Russia decided to tease and remain quiet for a moment as he relaxed his form in his seat—he'd come a long way in take offs and landings since he and America had began their space program together. "You're humming my song," Russia finally stated.

America blinked a few times in confusion. Humming his song? What was he talking abou—oh, that was right. America rolled his eyes and turned back away from Russia to look back out to see if the docking crew had finished securing them outside.

"That's only because it was catchy," America reluctantly admitted, crossing his arms like a pouting child. "And I can't get it out of my head."

"You like my songs," Russia teased.

"Do not," America rejected and remained stiff.

"Da, has been a long time since you've liked anything Russian," Russia continued.

"Shut up," America groaned. He immediately hopped up first when it came time to unload. He was also the first to exit the shuttle while Russia remained one of the last, simply chuckling and humming a tune of one of America's song picked for waking the crew onboard up. He liked America's songs as much as America had taken a liking to his, but he wasn't afraid to admit it. America had good tastes.

On the landing strip they walked for a little, trying to get feeling back into their legs. Of course this wasn't without America leaning down and kissing the ground. "Ah, babe, I missed ya," America said in reference to Mother Earth. It was funny because America loved going up into space and yet loved landing and feeling the planet under his feet again. Russia felt the same but America was just so ecstatic all of the time.

In that moment an agent ran up to the two of them. The man held a cellphone in his hand securely and quickly handed it to America. The nation took it up and answered politely.

"Oh, hey, Germany. Yeah . . . yeah I just landed." America turned to Russia and held up a finger to signal him to give him a moment as he walked away a bit. But Russia could still hear him. "Of
course I know what day it is, dude, it's May . . ." Russia chuckled to see the America scrounge around for his calendar booklet he kept in his pocket. Always having his head in the clouds made sure he forgot the dates on earth quite a bit. "May 29th. What of it?" It wasn't long after that was said that America stiffened and he turned and ran up to Russia, his face pale. He grabbed a hold of his suit and nearly shook him out of it. "Dude, Russia, the Expo!" America gasped, holding the cellphone against his neck to muffle his cry of panic. "It's in two days! Shit, what am I gonna do? I completely forgot!"

As quick as ever America pulled away and pressed the phone to his ear. "Yeah, I'll be there. I promised I would. What was that? Nah, don't worry about it. No, no I'm not going to miss this. I had this thing marked on my calendar for years." Russia watched in humor as America wrote the expo down in his calendar just then. Silly little nation, always so forgetful. "Okay, yeah, bye, ba-bye."

After the call had ended America handed the device back to the agent and thanked him for giving it to him. When that was over and said he turned back to Russia and immediately the older nation noticed his distress.

"Thanks for being a part of the mission, Russia, but I gotta go. I've got a lot of things on my mind and I gotta pack, and, oh God I hope the boss sent a crew there to construct my pavilion . . ."
America sighed. He then smiled toward Russia. "Are you going too?"

"To where?" Russia asked.

"To the Expo 2000, Germany's hosting it. It'll be amazing," America sounded off.

"Da, perhaps," Russia said with a nod. "I have just returned to earth so we will see."

"Come on," America begged, always the one to push to get his way even if he sounded like a two-year-old. "I'm going and I just got back to the planet too. You should go. It'll be fun."

Of course Russia planned on going, but if he went then so would his sister and he wasn't keen on being seen with her anywhere.

Hanover, Germany. June 1st 2000

"Natalia, release my arm, please," Russia begged. It was his last resort. He tried pulling away but the girl only tightened her hold on his arm. Even his begs seemed to make her react the same. Why couldn't she have just stayed at the house?

"Nyet," she replied, tightening her hold on his arm. Then and there Russia felt the limb would drop off from lack of blood flow. "As your wife I will remain dutifully by your side."

Russia cringed. "You are not my wife," he muttered through clenched teeth.

"Da, I am," she said with a sparkling smile up at her big brother. "I have been since '97." Belarus was now cooing and rubbing her cheek against Russia's arm.

Russia groaned. He had told his boss that it was a bad idea. He told him she'd take it the wrong way and now look! She is practically living at his home, trying to get into his room, always wanting to know where he goes. He enjoyed journeying into space for the fact that he would be far, far, far away from her.

It's not that Russia didn't love his sister. He did. But only as a sister. Speaking of sisters . . . Russia scanned the other countries attending and sighed when he realized Ukraine was nowhere in sight. The last time he had seen her was when she had been taken away. He missed her.
Russia would gladly take Belarus' fawning if Ukraine was present as well. But she wasn't and so Russia didn't have to put up with the younger sister.

"I am hungry, Natalia. Can you find me something to eat?" Russia then tried.

"I thought you ate before we came?" Belarus asked, narrowing her eyes.

"I am hungry again," Russia said with a pat of his belly.

Belarus stood there for a moment, interrogating Russia with her eyes. Russia willed himself not to sweat before her. It was his only way out of this situation.

With a sigh, Belarus finally gave in. "Da, I will go find something good. Only the best for my husband."

"Da," Russia said. He had to hold in his sigh of relief when she let go. He watched her walk off, scanning her surroundings for a place to eat. Once she was lost from sight Russia made his escape.

He hid inside Netherland's pavilion for a long time, among the lovely flowers. Belarus hadn't thought to search for him in there. Well, she had, but not in the field of flowers. Russia chuckled in glee as he watched the girl throw her hands in the air in frustration after searching the complex and leaving in surrender.

"She is gone, comrades," Russia said, looking down at the little yellow flowers that reminded him of his favorite flower. He liked this patch. He decided to remain here a little while longer.

In his moment in the field of flowers he caught sound of a familiar voice.

"Cool! Onto Netherland's block!" That was definitely America.

Russia's head perked up and he watched as the nation entered the pavilion along with a couple of others. There was England, Japan, Prussia, France, Italy, Germany, and . . . what was the name of that other one? The one that lived next-door to America.

"This is my exhibit, it's based on wind power," Netherlands said as he showed them around.

"Dude, I saw wind turbines up top. You gotta show us!" America said, jumping up and down like a kid in a candy store.

"This way." Netherlands turned and guided them upstairs. They left for a while and Russia thought about surprising them with his presence but with America surrounded by all of those countries, suddenly Russia didn't feel like mingling with them. So he stayed where he was and watched as they eventually made their way out of it.

"Who's next?" America asked, turning around. "Guys, let's go see Norway's! That huge-ass waterfall looked sweet!"

Everyone nodded. Whatever America wanted.

They all made their way out. Russia let them go without making himself known. He felt disappointed in himself. Since when was he intimidated by so many nations?

With a sigh Russia looked down at his fellow soldiers. All dressed so nicely in bright uniforms and standing at attention. "If I go after them I risk Natalia finding me. What should I do, comrades?"

"Wait . . . wait!" the sound of footsteps and then heavy panting came to Russia's ears. He looked up
and saw . . . what was his name again? Oh! It was Canada. Of course. How could Russia forget?

He was left behind. Probably hadn't been paying attention when the others had left, or they hadn't paid attention to leaving him behind. Probably the latter.

While Canada was catching his breath something had made him turn his head and he looked at Russia. He stared for a moment before he slowly came closer. "Russia?"

"Da," Russia answered, watching Canada come closer until he was standing before him in the flowers. "Greetings, Canada, how is your day so far?"

"It's fine," Canada said warily. "But what are you doing here?"

"Hiding from sister," Russia answered truthfully.

"Oh," Canada nodded. He could understand that. He had even seen her around, running through the main square looking for something—it was a missing brother. "Why don't you come with me? I'm with the others walking around to see the other pavilions."

Russia simply shrugged. "I thought about it but then decided against it."

"You're just going to stay here with Netherland's flowers?" Canada asked, motioning toward the yellow blossoms.

"They are a fine company," Russia answered with a fond smile toward the blooms.

"Seriously, come with me," Canada said, holding his hand out to him. "America's already here."

Saying something like that, and to Russia? What was Canada thinking. Everyone knew the Cold War was over, but everyone still believed there to be underlying tensions between America and Russia. There were in a sense, but one didn't outright ask Russia to join a gathering because the U.S. was there, that simply wasn't how it was worded, and yet Canada said it this way. It was like he knew. Like he knew that . . .

"You should actually be lucky that I remembered to come back for your sorry ass, bro. This place is so big you would have been lost for days and crying home back to pa . . . pa . . ."

There was America, returned to find his brother. He had turned to see Canada but of course when he saw the northern nation he saw the one the younger was talking to. "Russia?"

Russia smiled and waved his hand, just like he had when Canada had seen him. "Greetings, Amerika, how is your day so far?"

"Dude, were you here the whole time?" America was to them in a second, hands in his pockets, staring down at where Russia sat with Canada leaning over him. "Funny, didn't even see you when we walked on by."

Russia decided to roll his shoulders. "Just resting amongst the flowers. They are a peaceful companions."

"Yeah, you would say that," America chuckled, rubbing the tip of his shoe against a few flowers to watch them sway. Pulling out an even brighter smile he reached down and tugged Russia to his feet. "You can't just sit in here though. You've got to see the rest. Come on, we're going to go see Venezuela's. It looks pretty tight." America tugged again but the resistance turned him back toward Russia and he could see his reluctance. The American looked confused before turning to his brother
who surprisingly offered him an explanation.

"His sister, you know Belarus, is out and about looking for him," Canada explained.

America then opened his mouth and laughed. He looked at Russia with near tears in his eyes, holding his belly. "Your sister? Man, calm down. She's just a sibling."

"If she was your sister then you would not be saying that," Russia muttered, burying his nose into his scarf.

"Chillax, if you're so nervous just stick close. I can fend her off for ya if you want," America said, straightening himself and pointing to himself as the ideal man for the job.

"I'm not asking you to be my bodyguard, nor to harm my sister," Russia said.

"But I'm a great guardian," America said with a million dollar grin. "Plus, I don't hit chicks. It's against my moral code. So if I see her I won't touch her. I promise. Now, can we go meet up with the others?"

Russia really hadn't seen the others outside of business. He wasn't sure how he would handle them or how they would handle him. But he'd try.

Russia agreed and followed America and Canada. He watched the others look directly at him when America trotted up to them with his stepbrother and said Russian nation in tow. They immediately stopped smiling, but he smiled, if only to make them a little happy. They also seemed slightly less talkative too unless he was staggering behind some distance and they felt it safer to lean over to the other and speak amongst themselves.

But of course, when one strayed too far from the herd it was at risk from getting attacked by predators.

"I found you!"

"AH!" Russia gasped when he felt sharp nails and constricting arms wrap around his left arm. He tried pulling away immediately but his little sister simply followed where he pulled. "Natalia, nyet, off, off."

"How could you leave me like that?" the younger pouted even while her brother tried in vain to shake her off of him. "You'd rather be in the company of former enemies than your dear wife."

"You're not my wife," Russia groaned. He knew it was useless to shake her off and so halted his struggle. He turned, seeing the others continuing their walk to the other exhibits. Completely forgotten. He figured as much.

"You see, they do not care about you. They will leave you, always, but not me," Belarus cooed as she rubbed her cheek against her brother's arm making the larger shiver.

Russia sighed. He knew his sister was right but that did not mean she had to cling to him like a leech. So what if the others didn't enjoy his company, he enjoyed theirs and that was all that mattered. He hated being cooped up in isolation and now, due to his crazy sister, that was becoming his reality once more.

Russia stilled himself and contemplated on what to do next. He was still brilliant, he could easily think of a way to get himself out of this mess. He thought and thought about his next move but his best one was to wait until the opportune moment to catch her in a relaxed state and try pulling
himself from her. A minute later he tried this attempt and failed. He could literally feel his arm turning blue. What was he to do now? He was all out of moves.

"EEEEEEHHHH!"

The high pitched squeal echoed out of his sister's esophagus nearly deafened Russia but he sighed in relief when her squeeze relinquished its hold on his arm. He turned in time to see America picking the girl up by the waist. He wasn't hurting her from the look of that playful smile plastered on his mouth but Russia could see his move had caught her off-guard so much she didn't know what else to do but flail around like a fish out of water.

"B-B-Brother!" Belarus hadn't known what to say in that moment. Her eyes were so wide. Her mouth gapping in utter shock that the feel of her very feet had left the ground. So she cried out to her big brother, the only thing she could do.

Sooner than later she was planted on her feet with America hunched over before her, his eyes catching hers in a playful yet intimidating hold. "I was told you were here too, Belarus. Why don't you stop keeping your brother here and come with us?"

Russia watched his sister's cheeks flush. The way her fingers played with her dress, constantly flattening out nonexistent wrinkles. That was actually sort of cute. And for Russia to say something like that, well . . . let's just say it's been a long time since he could consider his sister such.

Belarus didn't say anything. She looked too embarrassed to do anything. She kept trying to avert her eyes, trying to look around America toward her brother for silent help but wherever her eyes moved America would follow so her attention could only remain on him. Leaving Russia out of it all.

"Awww, now I remember, you're shy," America teased and then straightened. He took her hand firmly in his and tugged her along. "Come on, I'll guide you." When he turned toward Russia who looked completely taken aback that he had done something like that they met gazes and Russia caught that wink. He didn't know how but America had accomplished what he said he'd do without violence: he kept Belarus at bay from him.

Amazing. Utterly amazing.

Russia smiled and walked after them, following and ignoring his sister's stuttering voice calling out to him in their native tongue. Russia could see her struggling in America's hold and he even caught sound of her complaining that America was holding her hand too tightly. He snickered at that. Just deserts, dear sister.

Belarus' presence unnerved the others just as much as Russia's presence but as long as America had a hold on her then the other countries felt it safer to relax around her. Throughout the entire day America had not let go of Belarus' hand and the girl turned bright red in embarrassment. Especially when she had calmed down and stopped struggling unbeknownst to herself.

She was still Russia's sister and so he made sure America was treating her respectively. He remained close, quiet. Watching the two of them as America guided her through the pavilions and exhibits. One such exhibit showed the evolution of the media and that seemed to interest Belarus quite a bit.

She was leaning over, watching short clips of old movies, some from the very beginning and then some from the recent years. She had her eyes trained on the beautiful women in the pictures. On their high cheekbones, plump lips and the color the lipstick turned it to. Their bright eyes, elegant dresses, and glamorous shoes.
"Pretty aren't they?" America spoke up, he too had noticed her fascination with his actress stars.

Belarus blushed and looked away, trying to show she was uninterested. America decided not to tease and instead watched the clips play back again. "Those are women of class. You're one too, Belarus, that's why you're attracted to them. You like their dresses, right? I bet you do."

Belarus simply blushed and America caught her eyes glance back toward the women for a second before darting away.

"You know, I've got plenty of their dresses they can't fit in anymore. I'd say you could. You can have them, if you like," America offered and motioned down to her own dress. "You like dresses, right?"

Belarus' face reddened but she nodded. America smiled. He turned toward Russia who was behind him, passing through the videos himself. The younger offered him a thumbs-up and a twinkle of a smile to show he was making progress with the youngest Kievan Rus sibling. Russia was impressed. America was always full of surprises.

"Are you talking about this actress? Why this one's mine." America frowned and turned toward England who looked quite prideful that such a gorgeous beauty had come from his usually stated "unattractive" country. "No, England, she wasn't looking at her." America pointed to another woman, one born in his lands.

England frowned. "You sure? I thought—"

"Nope, she was looking at her," America said again with more emphasis, showing one of his own born actresses and her beautiful dress she twirled around in.

"They are both lovely beauties, but cannot compare to mine," France chimed in.

"Oh yeah? Well, it's too bad they're not mentioned here," England started up. Here we go.

"That's because you've taught little Amérique that bad taste of only preferring the English language," France said, crossing his arms in disdain. "To think, all of the talent he's over-looked because of you."

"Me?" England scoffed. "Why is this always my fault?! I only raised him for less than two centuries and now I'm suddenly at fault for all his personality flaws?"

"Personality flaws?" America didn't understand when the argument turned into making fun of him. "What's wrong with my personality?"

"Should I give you the compressed list or the entire thing?" England said, crossing his arms and looking toward his eldest child who was growing red in the face, the grip on Belarus' hand was even tightening but she didn't speak up a word against it.

"Why you—!"

"I think Amerika's actresses are beautiful," Belarus surprisingly chimed in.

That stopped the petty argument immediately. All turned to Belarus, eyes wide in surprise, surprise that she spoke up and voiced her opinion.

Then, of course America grinned in victory and turned to France and England, pointing at them. "Ha! In your faces! She likes mine the best!"
"Fine," England groaned. "But mine are still better than France's."

"Have you even watched my movies, caterpillar-eyes?" France asked, grinding his teeth.

"Don't bother, can't understand a single damn word they say," England muttered.

"Oh ho, well you certainly seemed to know my language very well back when William was king of your people. I think it must be something in the British Isles that erodes the memory," France teased, deciding to use their deeply tangled history instead of leaning on his frustration.

"What did you say, you frog?!" England turned to him fully, bumping chests with the taller country. "I'll have you know my memory is spick and polish! It's you who can't remember the previous week, you fils de salope!"

Not just France's eyes widened, but Canada's as well, and so did the others. They were simply surprised to even hear a French phrase pop out of Englishman and to those who knew the language they were more surprised by how fluent it was.

"Well, keep going," Russia decided to speak up and smile that smile of his. "I want to see fight. It is not a normal day unless France and England give us traditional fight."

"I'd rather that not happen," Germany spoke up, turning everyone's attention. "Especially not in my home. There are still plenty more exhibits to see. Please, let's continue with schedule."

Everyone agreed and carefully maneuvered around Russia to follow Germany.

"Dude, chill, we've got plenty of time to see the sights," America said as he dragged Belarus behind him and followed Germany along with the others.

And they did. To everyone's surprise they revealed their bosses had granted them all vacation time to view the expo in all its glory. Germany had been gracious to house them all and did over and above work to cater to them. He even invited them to his personal home on many occasions for get-togethers consisting of quieter parties and events just between nations, away from humans and bosses; where the countries could relax.

"This is the life," England sighed out as he relaxed in the chair offered for him while they all settled outside with a bonfire going. "Like old times, eh?" He reached over and elbowed America in the ribs which actually startled the boy who had been focused on eating his s'more. He dropped the thing right into his lap and groaned. Turning toward England he muttered, "Thanks a lot, England."

"Oh, I'm sorry," England apologized and made to stand up. "I didn't notice and, well, I can clean it up for you if you'd like."

"No, no, I'll do it myself," America said, waving England away and getting up to return back inside. Upon entering he came into the kitchen where Germany was fixing a few bottles of beer on a tray, readying to bring it out to the others. He turned and noticed America and the way he was holding his shirt.

"Accident?" Germany questioned.

"England," America answered. "It's not like this shirt was fifty bucks or anything." While he mumbled sarcastically to himself he made to wet a rag and dry himself off.

"You'll smear it if you do it that way," Germany advised.
"It's not like it matters. The shirt's ruined anyways," America said back.

Germany sighed and set the tray down. "You give up too quickly." He then came and took the rag out of America's hand and decided to give the stain a try himself. To America's surprise he managed to get most of it out and no doubt with a little bleach and a pass in the washing-machine the shirt would be good as new. And here America was ready to toss it in the trash.

"Nice, good job, Germany," America said, looking at the spot himself. "You know, you'll make a great wife one day."

Germany's lips pressed into a straight line. He didn't look too pleased by the teasing compliment.

"Ha, just kidding," America chided. "You need to learn how to laugh once and a while, you know."

Germany simply turned back and took up his catering tray once more. "Perhaps I would when you offer me real laughter of your own as well."

"What?" America looked confused but Germany only ignored his confusion and walked out of the kitchen. America wouldn't have anyone ignore him and so he followed Germany on his way out back. "Hey, what do you mean I don't really laugh? I do too."

Germany turned to push open the back screen door but before he applied anymore pressure to push himself out back to serve the other countries he stopped and looked at America and took in his furrowed confusion shown round across his face.

"Are you really happy that it's all over?" Germany questioned.

"That what's all over?"

"All of the tension. The rivalry. You're the top, America, the Cold War is over but you don't seem happy to me," Germany said.

"I'm as happy as can be," America assured.

"We've been friends for a long time, ja?" Germany asked.

"Of course," America nodded.

"I remember when you were younger. Did you know you were happiest then?" Germany remembered his smiles were wider, his eyes glew brighter, his stance straighter, his walk lighter. He remembered seeing utter and complete and satisfied happiness in the young nation all those years ago.

"I was easily pleased back then, so of course it seemed I was happier," America excused even though he knew Germany was right. He knew in his heart he had been happier and for good reasons. His people were happy and adventurous, his economy was thriving, his bosses the best, and he had just been accepted by the love of his life so of course his life couldn't have been any better, of course the times back then were better than now. "Right now, with little going on in the world, I'm happy. Just to be around you guys I'm happy."

"What about space?" Germany questioned quickly. America was too easily readable, especially to those whom knew his unspoken secrets. "I thought you were most happy up there."

"Well . . . both . . ." America sighed and frowned. "You're a real downer, Germany. Why the sudden onslaught of questions?"
"I'm just trying to figure out how to make someone like you smile like you used to," Germany answered straightly. America's jaw loosened and his facial features eased at what Germany had said in honest truth. "Because I miss the old you more so than I like the current you."

America gapped at that but Germany didn't give him a chance to offer any retort when he pushed himself out back and left to the others. America felt upset rising in him. More than anything he hated people not liking him, especially ally countries. He knew he couldn't please everyone, but Germany? He had thought that after all they had been through he'd come out as one of his closest friends, like Japan has. What did America do to deserve such an attitude from Germany?

What did he know anyway? It's not like Germany knew the strain of maintaining world order or peace. Or the frustration of having to commit your troops half way around the world because of interests and weaker-than-anything allies that he personally should have no right being friends with. America sighed. He knew Germany wouldn't stop being his friend but if he stopped talking to him again then . . . well . . . America just might as well get a headache all over again.

With this attitude in mind America returned back outside to join the others. He was oddly quiet while the others reminisced about old times and expressed their enjoyment of the peaceful new millennium. The night felt beautiful anyway. So America leaned his head back and gazed up at the stars, they were all so bright and brilliant; his only escape.

"Why so quiet, America?" Italy spoke up after he realized America wasn't quite making himself known in the conversations passing around like he usually would. "Are you feeling okay?"

"Of course," America said, offering his Italian friend a smile and leaning up in his chair. "Just enjoying the relaxation."

"Relaxation? Who needs that?" Prussia spoke up. "That's for old nilly countries. You're all young, why not play a game?"

"No, Gilbert, just sit down before you make a fool of yourself," Germany reprimanded.

"Ah, shut up, West," Prussia waved off. "I caught a hold of this one game Americans like to play," he said while twirling his empty bottle in his hands and then slamming it down on the ground in the midst of the lounging nations.

America gulped. "Hell, no, Gilbert, we're not playing 'Spin the Bottle'," America stated with final.

"What's that?" Prussia questioned curiously. "I thought it was called 'Truth or Dare'?"

America offered a sigh of relief after realizing the Prussian didn't know what the other game was, which did indeed involve an empty bottle to spin. He must have gotten the games mixed up but he wasn't one to correct him.

"Okay, I go first. Whoever the neck lands on I have the right to ask them a Truth or a Dare they have no choice but to obey," Prussia informed.

"I don't want to play. It sounds idiotic," England spoke up. He then turned toward America. "Is that really how the game goes?"

America just shrugged. "Sure."

England rolled his eyes and before he knew it Prussia had already spun the bottle and it had landed on none other than him. "Damn it."
"England, huh? Okay, Truth or Dare?" Prussia grinned at him and everyone knew he had already thought of the perfect dare for him.

But England smiled just as devious back at him. "I have a choice, eh? Okay, I choose Truth."

"What? Nein, you're supposed to pick Dare," Prussia complained.

"You asked me and so I assumed I had a choice. Do I or not?" England asked, frowning at the Prussian.

"You do," America confirmed. "Just ask him a question, Gil, he can't lie about it."

"Fine," Prussia moaned out with a huff. He tapped his chin and then snapped his fingers. "What is your favorite kind of food?"

England smiled, crossed his legs and leaned back in his chair. "Why, my food, obviously." He looked a little too proud to be gloating over such bland food.

"Angleterre, you have to be truthful," France spoke up. He eyed England who glared back at him.

"I am," he assured.

"You've tried other cuisines, oui?" France said, pushing for the truth.

"Of course I have," England said, straightening in his chair.

"Then which food was your favorite?" France questioned. "For me, I do enjoy my food, but I believe Italie to be an amazing cook."

"Really?" Italy perked up. "You like my food, Francia?"

"Of course, mon ami," France said with a wink and a kiss blown toward the blushing Italian.

England groaned. "Well, I like Italy's food as well," he admitted, leaning forward with his elbow resting on his knee and his cheek resting on his fist.

"See, was that so hard?" France asked, leaning over to pat him on the back. "I had no idea the truth was so hard for you."

"But . . . you're food's better." The murmur came out just like a mumble and barely comprehensible.

"Excusez-moi?" France asked. Was he the only one who thought he had heard things?

A flush darkened England's cheeks and he shook France's hand off his back. "I said I like your food the best." The tone was higher but still not loud enough for everyone to hear.

France grinned. "Mon cher, I do not believe the others heard what you said. Why don't you say it louder?" France was leaning in closer to England who was growling like a rabid dog.

Finally he sat up straight and shook his fist at the Frenchman. "I said your bloody food's my favorite! You happy now?!"

France pressed his hand against his heart and made to fall over as if he had fainted. "Be still my beating heart!" France sighed. England only sat by growling.

"Really?" America asked, Canada even leaned a little closer next to America. "Then why didn't you
allow France to cook for me and Canada?"

"Because I would have ate all the damn food, now shut your mouths," England spat back and crossed his arms, his brows falling over his eyes almost entirely in his upset manner.

America turned to glance back at Canada and both of them sucked in their lips while trying to contain their giggles. The game moved on and the one sitting next to Prussia happened to be Italy. The nation rubbed his hands together and eagerly spun the bottle.

"This is going to be fun!" He chirped and smiled when the bottle landed on Japan. "Oh, uh, Japan. Well . . . I guess I will do Truth." Italy figured that the older nation wouldn't want to embark on something that could possibly make him look like a fool.

"Italy-san, I will request that you give me a Dare," Japan said. His posture was straight and perfect, like a soldier ready for battle. No one had expected Japan to be so bold because . . . because it was Japan playing a Western game for the first time. Did he know what Dares could enfold?

"Oh . . . oh, okay." Italy hummed in thought before smiling. "I know! I Dare you to go into Germany's refrigerator and drink all of his beer."

"Italy!" Germany complained. Not the beer.

"It is fine, Germany-san, I will do it," Japan said as he stood up and marched toward the house. All watched in silence as he entered the home and made to finish his Dare.

Most were quiet for some minutes after until America chuckled nervously. "Eh-heh, dudes, should-should someone maybe go in and check to see if the man's okay?"

"Since I dared him I will go," Italy said after getting up and jogging into the home.

"Heh, who wants to bet he's wasted?" Prussia chuckled to everyone.

"Don't underestimate him," England spoke up. "I've drunk with him before and I was the first to go. He can be quite resilient."

"Really?" America questioned. "Man, he was a drunk mess when I usually visit. It's so funny though."

Right then Italy came out with Japan. The older nation was holding his mouth and belly. Had he done it? Had he?

Italy turned and gave them a thumps-up and everyone cheered. America jumped to his feet when the two came near and patted Japan's back. "That's ma man! You rock, Kiku!"

Japan groaned and Italy was quick to shoo America away. "Please don't touch him too hard. He's dizzy," Italy said as he guided the Asian back to his seat and kept an eye on him just in case anything happened.

"Who's next?" Prussia asked, looking toward the one sitting next to Italy who so happened to be Russia.

"Ah, my turn? How fun." Russia reached forward and spun the bottle. It twirled and twirled until landing on an uneasy Canada who just so happened couldn't get out of this game because Russia was looking right at him, not at all forgotten. "Canada, huh? Truth or Dare?"
Canada about said Truth but when he turned to his brother who was pressuring him with his gaze he knew he couldn't look like a pansy in front of him and so boldly declared, "Dare."

"Ah," Russia smiled and then looked around before nodding and turning back to Canada. He giggled and pointed behind them. "I dare you to jump into pond behind us."

"What?" Canada gapped. "But it's so late and . . ."

"Is not cold, not to you. Now do it," Russia demanded. Even if Canada refused the younger nation had no doubt that the Russia would simply pick him up and toss him in himself.

"Do it, do it, do it," America began chanting, pounding his fists against the armrests of his chair.

Soon Prussia had joined in and then Italy for the fun of it and now Canada had a chorus to urge him to proceed. His face heated up and he quickly stood to his feet. "Fine!" he shouted and ran off to do it. Everyone stood up from their chairs and watched and waited. They all cheered and clapped for him when they heard the audible SPLASH and when the Canadian returned soaking wet and sat himself by the fire everyone came over to pat him on the back in congratulations.

"Here you go, comrade, will keep you warm," Russia said, offering Canada a case of vodka which England quickly swiped away from the younger's hands.

"He doesn't need that, the fire's plenty," England cut in.

"Alright, alright, next, next," Prussia spoke up.

Germany had been gathering up some trash when he managed to squeeze himself between Russia and Canada so that made him next in line for the game. He looked at his brother who goaded him on and sighed. He reached down and quickly twirled it before it landed on none other than the daredevil himself, America.

"Alright!" America fist-pumped. "I'm ready for this. Dare. You gotta give me a good one, Germany. Anything."

"Truth," Germany stated.

America looked taken aback. He frowned after a little while of glancing toward the others. "I'm supposed to pick you know." Germany still stood unmoving. Weird. "What's the matter? Can't think of a good Dare for me? I said I'd do anythi—"

"I cannot conjure the thought of a plausible Dare so I want Truth, America. Unless you don't wish to play the game," Germany said after setting the tray of trash down and crossing his arms. The entire camp site drew quiet, waiting for America to respond.

America sighed and rolled his eyes. That wasn't exactly how the game went but whatever. "Fine, what do you want to know? Spit it out and get it over with so someone can spin on me and be a real man and give me a good Dare."

"Who do you like spending your time with the most?" Germany's question was simple and it didn't take a lot to offer an outright answer but America froze. He looked at Germany with a loose jaw. They held gazes for a while before he looked at the others around, all eagerly waiting for his answer.

"Well, that's an obvious answer, it's me of course," England spoke up, looking ever smug again.

"You like to dream, Angleterre," France spoke up. "Always have."
"The hell's that supposed to mean, Frenchie?" England spoke up, shooting an evil glare his arch rival's way.

"Is it me, America, is it me?" Italy spoke up, bouncing in his seat, looking excited for the answer.

Prussia was oddly quiet at first. He was looking at Germany curiously before he turned toward America who looked uncomfortable where he sat. "Tell us, America." He probably knew the answer but he wanted to hear it from America's lips, no more politics, just a fun game that could bring out real truth.

"Are you giving up? What's so hard with a simple question?" Canada asked, turning around from the fire he was sitting close to and looking at his brother curiously. However, concern struck him when he noticed his discomfort. "Al? What's wrong?"

"I can't... I can't answer that, Germany," America admitted. "It's not right that I do."

"You can't or you wont?" Germany questioned. "I've never known you to be a quitter, America."

"I'm not a quitter!" America snapped in defense. "I enjoy hanging out with each and every one of you. So what if I spend more time with one over the other. It doesn't mean I care any less. I don't want to fight about this, so, please, just pass me."

Germany had expected such an answer. He nodded in understanding before touching Canada on the shoulder. "It is your turn, Canada." He then took up the trash and went back inside the home to finish cleaning inside as well.

Canada sighed. Germany's question and America's reluctance to answer had soured the mood but that wouldn't dampen him. Not at all. He twirled the bottle and it landed on Prussia.

"What do you have for me, blondie?" Prussia asked, rubbing his hands together in anticipation. "I choose Dare."

"I dare you to go onto the roof and surprise Germany by sneaking down the fireplace," Canada said.

Prussia shrugged. "Haven't done that in centuries, but it'll be fun."

The others giggled the entire way through Prussia's show. It took him a little while but in time he did it. He slipped his body right down the chimney and everyone keened their ears to hear any kind of reaction. It wasn't long at all before they heard—

"AH! GILBERT! WHAT ARE YOU—WHY ARE YOU COVERED IN SOOT?! YOU'RE GETTING CINDER ALL OVER THE KITCHEN! GET OUT, GET OUT, GET OUT!
"

The back door slammed open and out burst Prussia with an upset Germany on his tail, throwing a rag at him. Prussia laughed so hard he fell over right next to his chair. Covered in black he could care less.

"Man, you all should have seen the look on his face. Ha, ha, I wish I had my camera for that one! Good one, Canada."

"It's my turn, dudes!" America spoke up and immediately spun the bottle. Of course it had to land on Russia. With a sigh, America asked, "Truth or Dare, my man?"

"I am not afraid of the Truth like you, Amerika, so I choose that one," Russia spoke up with a creeping smile etching wider as he leaned back and folded his hands together on his lap.
America's brow twitched. His grin looked more devilish than ever. Challenge accepted. "Really? Alright, then tell me this, what did you do to my package I sent you on the eve of New Years day after your union's collapse?" America knew which questions to ask to make the Russian uncomfortable too. "Not afraid" his ass.

To America's surprise as well as everyone else who felt these "Truthes" were getting too personal with information both meaningful and sensitive Russia said, "I burnt it."

So, America's suspicions had been right. He felt his heart sink but at the same time he was overcome with anger. He hadn't been angry with Russia in a long time. "Everything?"

"Da," Russia answered as if he felt no sympathy for what he had done whatsoever. He just hadn't cared had he?

"Did you even see what was inside it?" America asked.

"Is asking more than one question allowed? Whatever. If Amerika wants to cheat then he will look like fool. I do not mind telling the truth," Russia said. "Da, I did open it. The pictures and the letters I burned."

"Why?" America asked. It was almost as if he had forgotten there were others around, watching, listening.

"I do not see why you care so much." Russia's playful smile was gone. This topic was upsetting him too. "It was mine to do with as I wished like you said and besides you have copies. You can reminisce by yourself."

"They were all burned, damn it!" America spat. He hopped out of his seat, his fists shaking and teeth grinding as if he'd just caught Russia in this unforgivable act. He had suspected it for so long, but now, after finding out, he just lost it. "Reagan wanted everything gone—everything! That box, it survived. I gave it to you hoping you'd keep it safe and . . . and damn it they go to the flames too!"

The light from the fire shown the glisten in America's eyes. His emotions were getting the best of him but none could hope to understand why. They caught that he and Russia had had something that both had destroyed but as to what exactly it was and why it held such important value to the two was a mystery. Now, America was near to tears. He looked hurt, and Russia . . . Russia's eyes had never been seen so wide and surprised.

Russia remained silent. Unable to do anything else as America shook his head and looked back at the campfire like it was the very same flames that ate up everything he had loved. Everything really was gone. Nonexistent. Now, how would America recall anything? How would he make himself believe that he once had something with Russia? Did Russia even care for that fact anymore? He guessed not.

"You should have taken a Dare, Russia," America muttered, taking off his glasses and rubbing his eyes for a moment before placing the lenses back on his face and pulling out a straight face to hide it all. "I had a good one."

That was the end of the game. Without America present and after his departure Russia was soon to part ways too, it just wasn't the same. Prussia frowned and crossed his arms.

"Sorry, guys, didn't mean for this to get out of control like it had," he apologized.

"Maybe we should have just kept it at Dares," France spoke up with a sigh as he tossed a stick into the fire.
The new millennium underway was a good one. If it was anything like the '90's then all of the countries hoped it to be a good one. For the first time in a long time they could relax. They could catch up on needlework, on newly discovered recipes, on hiking trails, reading a couple of good books, visiting friends more often. It was nice and rejuvenating for the soul.

America had settled down some as well, everyone could see. Why? Because he was the top now. Unchallenged, and of course he made sure to keep it that way. He was calmer now but none doubted he could show his assertive side should anything arise to upset him. But as of right then he was easier to talk to.

It was simply an issue between he and Russia. The Cold War was over, yes, yet the other nations didn't understand quite fully why those two were constantly at odds with each other so much still. Yes, they often disagreed on certain subjects but when it came to one they both agreed on then they could be caught giggling and squealing about it like little children on Christmas day.

The countries didn't understand why the two couldn't just forget whatever past issues they had and leave it at that. There seemed to hold some sort of sentiment attached to the old memories. None ever mentioned anything about them out of fear something might trigger in the two but it was a curious thing as it was annoying.

It was good to confront one and get said issues resolved but no one suggested it. All feared what could possibly happen if those two tried something like that. America had looked quite ready to dock Russia's lights out at the campfire. And a hit like that from America today could seriously damage Russia and, no matter if Russia was no longer a superpower, having him as an enemy again could not be good for America or the rest of the world.

The world was mostly at peace for the first time in decades. And most prayed it would stay that way. They could handle little spats here and there but long periods of no communication could lead to alienation and from that embargos could fail and other such treaties and then wars could be started. No one was ready for another war and so Germany invited everyone to a Halloween party to commemorate the end of the Expo of 2000 and to offer everyone a chance to leave with better feelings, all tension behind.

America had been ready to leave, had the chance to head up into space again in September, along with Russia, but the two remained in Germany's borders, overseeing the Expo and keeping a fair distance. When Germany announced the party both informed their expected attendance in politeness. The party was a nice one. One with just the nations like Germany's get-together's before hand.

Gone were the days of intricate and hand-sewn costumes filled with silk, golden linings, and gems. Now the costumes were more modest in a sense of cloth but not so much with how revealing they were allowed. The party brought about a nostalgia in many, especially after having so many countries gathered together after a time of separation. It brought on good feelings so long as there was none to dampen the high.

"Kiku, your kimonos are always amazing," America complimented after the Japanese nation had given him one that fit him and his structure.

"Actually, America-san, that is a hakama. What I am wearing is a kimono," Japan corrected. He stood next to America fixing his mask and after settling the depiction of a cat on himself he looked up to see America having the same problem with his own mask. "Lean down and I will help you." America did so and Japan fixed the fox mask on the nation and then patted his shoulder. "I will take lots of pictures, the costumes are very nice."

"Man, you should have been around during the 18th Century. Talk about extravagant," America
said, waving off the modern costume party for an amateur's gathering.

"Hai, a shame, but it is still interesting," Japan said and America agreed.

"Want to play a game?" America offered the smaller nation.

"Is it safe?"

America gapped, looking down at Japan. "When have I ever played a game that wasn't safe?"

America really couldn't tell with Japan's mask in place but he knew, he just knew the Asian nation was opening his mouth to say something so he rose his hands and stopped him first. "Ah! I don't want to hear it. Trust me, this game isn't gonna cause bodily harm in any way. I just wanted to make a bet. Whoever can guess a higher amount of people to whoever's hiding under these masks correctly wins. What do you say, bud?"

Japan was silent for a moment. He was looking out into the crowd of countries around. Some of them had masks on and some were quite easy to distinguish who they were.

"Deal."

"Alright, bet starts now, let's go!" America said with one last punch to Japan's arm and then darted off in excitement.

So off America and Japan went on their secret game. Of course this bet of theirs would take a while since walking up to a nation required subtlety. One just couldn't pull off their mask and then move on to the next. They needed to engage in conversation and guess by the mannerisms and voices. Well, at least that had been the unspoken rules the two had assumed though America did come quite close to pulling off a few masks for a few out of want to move on to the next.

America had about bounced on the balls of his heels he was that impatient to move on to another masked country. But he refrained. It was quite a rude gesture after all and he didn't want to offend. So he glanced over toward the other side of the room and America cursed Japan's smoothness in handling conversations and excusing himself to another. They locked eyes once and Japan outstretched his fingers to signal how many people he'd guessed correctly. Five, Japan had five already while America only had two successful guesses. He was working on the third and well, he could lie and say he had more but that wasn't polite either and knowing Japan, he'd know if America was lying about the guesstimate count.

Finally, after guessing that who he was talking to was indeed Denmark he politely excused himself and turned. It seemed he turned too quickly and with the low visibility the noh mask offered it was a wonder why he hadn't bumped into someone sooner.

"Sorry, man," America would have said hadn't he recognized the taller country quickly on. So, instead, he said, "Oh. Thought you would have headed back home by now."

"I had thought the same, Amerika," the red-draped devil had said in response. Russia was quick to take in America's costume and immediately the younger could see the distaste for it in that disapproving turn in the corner of his mouth that almost appeared to be a frown. "As I recall, you wouldn't have been caught dead wearing that back in World War Two."

"Well, it's not the 40's, Russia, get with the times," America retorted back. He frankly wasn't in the mood to squabble with the nation he'd been avoiding for good reasons. The fun in his and Japan's game was just ruined by Russia's appearance and remarks. America felt a foul taste in his mouth and knew he needed to remove himself to the bar to wash it down. So he did just that. He pushed himself
past Russia but of course not without a leaving word, "And you need to stop wearing gloomy costumes." First that skeletal black figure from the 19th Century and now a demon in the 21st Century. America hadn't even glanced back to catch Russia's surprised features in the younger even referencing old memories that was, in truth, both sentimental to the two.

America pulled off his mask and sat down at the bar with a heavy sigh. He didn't feel like the mask was suffocating him in any way, he loved Japan's masks, but he felt that it was possibly the room. Maybe after one drink he'd ditch the scene. Too stuffy.

"And here I thought you'd be the life of the party. First at the bar, that isn't like you, America."

America turned. Russia really had killed the mood, but seeing such a retro costume and on this nation no less, well, it successfully made him smile.

Turning more toward the one igniting a conversation with him America grinned. "Well, I didn't think Zorro thought so highly of me. I'm flattered." America playfully batted his eyelashes at the masked hero. This nation was easy enough to tell; lightning blue eyes, a square jaw, the tell-tale signs of blond hair under that black wide-brimmed hat. Yep, a quick point for America in his and Japan's game.

"Zorro" chuckled. He took a seat next to him and ordered his own self a beer. "I was hoping you'd have a little more fun here. After all, you like Halloween a lot, ja?"

"Of course," America said with a nod. "But I think I've just overstayed my welcome."

"I see no mob coming to run you out with fires and pitchforks," "Zorro" said. America smiled. He enjoyed the playfulness in this masked nation. Maybe he was more confident to break out of his stern shell under the cover of a mask, that must be it.

"True to that," America agreed with a nod, now taking to playing with his glass of liquor instead of indulging in it. He looked back at the party. He smiled seeing how Japan was still making his way through the crowd. They caught glances and the smaller nation motioned eight, he'd guessed eight already. America's competitiveness broiled inside him but when his eyes turned toward that nation dressed as a red devil he frowned, his chest heaved and he just wanted to fade away, like the trick Canada could do. Maybe he should ask him for his secret.

"It doesn't take an observant nation to notice how upset you are," "Zorro" said with a slight frown. "I hope you realize that when you're uneasy so are many around you."

America turned his eyes away from the others and gazed at "Zorro." He sighed and shook his head. "Sorry, hero, don't think you can save this damsel in distress."

"Of course I can't," "Zorro" said. "Because you're not a damsel. You're a hero, and heroes can get themselves out of anything on their own if they want to."

America liked his smiles. He should try wearing them around more often. A lot more attractive than straight frowns and pinched brows.

"You really think so?" America asked. Their gazes met and for a moment it was just the two of them, studying each other. America silently hoping this masked hero would give him the right answer, the sure one without a sliver of doubt, and "Zorro" . . . the masked vigilante was supporting him, was showing America that he was his most faithful believer. Possibly had been all along when America was too blind to see it. Of course.

"Smile for them, America, that's all you need to do," "Zorro" said as he slid off the bar stool and
fixed his cape. He turned to look at the other countries mingling around the room. "It doesn't have to be a big, bright, and sure one. Something small and sincere is just fine. Trust me, that's all we need. I would enjoy one myself." "Zorro" turned to America and the corner of his lips turned up into a smile. It was nice to see this nation's softer side and America wondered if it had been there all along and he'd missed these moments with him. It was pleasant, very much so.

America hadn't even noticed his own smile, but "Zorro" had and he pointed toward it. "Like that one," he said. "That's a real one."

Wearing his heart on his sleeve; since when had America begun to do that? And when had this nation before him become such an emotional support group for him? Hm, probably started back in the '50s. Yeah, that seemed about right.

Right then an upbeat song played across the room and the nations who wished to took to the dance floor to dance away their troubles. "Zorro" seemed to have liked that idea and motioned for he and America to do the same.

"Care to accompany another hero?" "Zorro" was smiling more confident now. He was such a friend that America felt he just didn't deserve. Not after all the times he had honestly ignored him when he shouldn't have.

America slid off his stool and nodded. He liked the song anyway. Slowly, the sparkle in his eyes began to return and in that moment he didn't care that a pair of violet eyes watched from the side of the room as he pulled "Zorro" closer and clung to him as the song's beat quickened its pace. Then, shifting he reached up, tugging that black cloth mask down and smiling.

"Ah, there's the real identity of the hero," America spoke. It was interesting to look Germany in the eyes now. They were the same height now and America knew he'd continue to grow, probably far taller than Germany one day, and the German seemed to understand that as well, but he took no offense in looking at him eye-level. In fact, he looked ever encouraging that he look at him like that. It sort of reminded America of a time when a tall nation had wanted the same . . . had wanted him to grow and grow and not give a damn what the world thought about it. "Thanks for the lift, Germany," America said, his arm resting against Germany's shoulder tightened before America pulled himself away and caught the sight of a cunning little Japanese nation. "But that makes four and I've got a game to win."

Germany chuckled and watched America leave him after the song was over. At least he was confident again. He was glad he could be of help. He didn't mind America leaving his side for once as he excused himself to mingle with the rest of the countries because the German's heart was ready to burst out of his chest.

Germany's hosted expo had stood on shaky legs with America making or breaking the turnout, but now, at the end, with All Hallow's Eve to send it off, Germany felt that everything was good again.

Kennedy Space Center, Florida. USA. August 10th 2001

"You don't have to force yourself if you don't want to." America really didn't want Germany to push himself. He was already looking a little green and all he had done was strap him into the seat. The more he secured him the worse he got and so America struggled with the decision on placing the last strap on him. "Seriously, you don't look so good."

Germany didn't feel so good either. He had tried and trained for so long. But the simulation just wasn't like sitting in an actual shuttle getting ready to actually fly up into space.
"I'm getting you out of here," America stated after the final decision was made. He quickly began unstrapping Germany and was about to grab a hold of him to help him outside. The German looked ready to clean out his stomach in a minute.

"You wouldn't want him to ruin that suit," came Russia's patronizing voice. America groaned and rolled his eyes. He turned back to the country who was already ready to go. "He is delaying the lift off."

"Just give us a minute, will ya?" America didn't know why he put up with Russia, he really didn't. He decided not to let what happened a year ago get to him. He and Russia say shit to each other all the time, nothing new. Shouldn't emotionally hurt him. Shouldn't.

America helped Germany back outside and the moment the German country's feet touched ground his knees buckled and he slid down, quickly taking his helmet off and inhaling the air around him.

"I am sorry, I tried," Germany said.

"It's cool, don't worry about it," America said, rubbing circles around Germany's back to help him ease his nausea. "At least you had the guts to go through the motions."

"But, what about the equipment?" Germany asked. He had made it himself and was going to be installing it into the space station.

"Just radio it to me," America said, tapping his ears. "Step-by-step. I won't ruin anything, I promise."

Germany cursed his stomach because it made him stay behind. Because of his weak hold on his body he had gotten so upset with America when he guided him through the setup via intercommunications. He was just frustrated because America liked space, but space didn't like Germany. The only other country the outer reaches pardoned was Russia and so Germany cursed himself again for leaving America alone with such bad company. And he could hear the two of them fighting over the comlinks. He wondered why they even agreed to partner travel into space again. They'd been having issues for a year now and it just hadn't settled down between the two.

First, Russia had taken a break from space travel and then when he decided to start up again America vacationed from him. It was an accident really, this was the first time the two had flown up together since the previous year. During suit-ups they said nothing to the other, they didn't even make eye contact and America tended to himself and Germany mostly, excluding Russia from all attention.

So, when Germany had shown signs of visible sickness America disheartened. It was like he'd be up there in the dark twinkling twilight all alone. He and Russia were just not on good enough terms to get along.

When America tried following Germany's lead through communications he messed up a few times and had to restart everything over. Russia apparently had been near and had gotten so upset over America having to start over for the fifth time that he butted in and tried to help him, albeit harshly. America had pushed Russia away, physically he had shoved him against a wall. This agitated Russia and he began calling out all sorts of names which America responded back just as rudely.

The two countries gave their crew on earth an earful and Germany seemed to be the only one to stand through every single slur and retort. He might have gone deaf by the end of it. But finally . . . finally, in the following month, already a week into September the two calmed down.

America had been pulling himself through the hall. He had just raided the mess hall and currently had a half-eaten apple in his mouth. After finally making his way to the lab he carried on with his
work. Pulling out a sample he made to extract it and the usual when someone joined him in the room.

"Amerika."

The blond nation sighed and spit the apple out of his mouth. He frowned and didn't turn to the other who had called out to him. Instead he grabbed a hold of the red fruit and took another bite out of it. Maybe if the other saw he was busy eating and attending his work then he'd leave him alone without incident.

"Amerika, may I talk to you?" Russia had come closer, but America still refused to turn to him.

"Am I gonna get chewed out again?" America asked, finally turning to Russia and showing the frown he'd been wearing the entire time they'd been at the space station. "'Cause I'm not really in the mood."

"Nyet, it is not that," Russia assured and tried to make their eyes meet, but America simply closed his eyes and continued munching on his apple coming off as uncaring and rude as possible, trying to shoo the annoyance away with annoyance. "Nothing is getting done."

"No shit," America muttered.

"It is because of us both," Russia concluded.

"Go figure."

"I am sorry."

America paused in his chewing. Slowly he opened his eyes and looked at Russia curiously. Had he been hearing things or had Russia just apologized for something? No, couldn't be.

"Come again?" America rose his brow and swallowed the rest of the apple bits in his mouth down.

"I am sorry if it is me," Russia said. "Accept apology so we can return to compatible companions."

America chuckled. "You can't just order someone to forgive you, ya know." He took another bite out of his apple.

Russia sighed. If there had been gravity America was certain he'd see Russia's arms weigh his shoulders down in a slump. "We fight for no reason."

"Oh, no, there's reasons," America assured with a thoughtful nod. He could think of quite a few right now.

Russia frowned and huffed out a heavy sigh. "Cold War is over. You cling to the past too much."

"You know, unlike you, I've actually had a pretty good past so of course I tend to get a little 'clingy' or nostalgic. It's part of who I am and there's nothing wrong with it," America stated as he crossed his arms.

"It is when you constantly strain our relationship because of these so-called 'goody' feelings," Russia said, narrowing his eyes.

"'Im straining our relationship?" America looked insulted and feigning shock.

"Da," Russia answered before America dished out any response to the claim.
"No, it's *you,*" America proclaimed, pointing to the larger nation floating just before him. America's face was turning redder and the way his chin jutted out, why, he was getting quite angry. "If you stopped bossing me around all the damn time then maybe we could cooperate. You think you know it all. We both began working in the astral fields at the same time, so we're equal!"

"I was trying to help," Russia insisted. His tone was calmer than America's but was quickly escalating higher the more America raised his voice, so the Russian upped to match pitches. "You looked to be having trouble."

"Of course!" America said, throwing his hands up. "Germany was supposed to be here. He was supposed to be installing it in. He was supposed keep me from strangling you myself! Ugh!"

Russia crossed his arms and sighed in a slight sarcastic tone. "Da, I am so very sorry you have no friend aboard. How difficult it must be."

"Just shut the hell up," America ordered. He turned to push the experiments back into their cases. No use getting any work done, he wouldn't be focused. Too upset. Russia could always ruin a good mood. "I'm sick of all this."

Right when he made to push himself out of the lab he heard Russia say, "I said I was sorry." That just ticked a nerve so severe in America that he swiftly turned only to find Russia on the verge of stalking him out of the room. Didn't matter, America still met eyes and held the nation still by just that.

"For what, huh?" America inquired. "You can't just go off saying, 'I'm sorry,' 'I'm sorry,' and not know what for. It just doesn't work like that."

"For last year." America froze. Was Russia talking about . . . ? Russia sighed and nodded his head. "That was very insensitive, what I said. I am sorry for that. I could see you got upset. I should have had some respect for your package."

America chuckled and shook his head. The grudge was still thriving in his tone. "It's a little too late for that, now isn't it?"

There was a short silence. The two left gazes and turned slightly. "I did not know about the pictures," Russia muttered lowly. "I did not realize they were the last."

America said nothing. A sigh left him. Finally, he looked at Russia again. "It's all in the past now. The past that's best moving on from, right? You're right. I tend to wear my heart on my sleeve a lot when I shouldn't. I've been told by so many and yet I still . . . just can't seem to grow up." America chuckled to himself sadly. He shook his head and offered a short smile. "Hey, at least we're past threatening wars to get over petty arguments."

Russia nodded. The tension had lessened. Confrontation always worked wonders but it wasn't as delved into as the other thought he would try to. America had skipped around it, not wanting to talk about the loss of his own items at the hand of his boss, which Russia was quite curious in knowing. Had everything been burned? *Everything?*

Russia could remember scores of items given. Priceless belongings gifted to the younger nation.

"Amerika, may you dine with me?" Russia asked.

America turned around and rubbed his belly. He shrugged and then nodded. "Had breakfast already but I'll grab a few more snacks."
The two ate quietly together. America was munching on another apple while Russia dug into a platter meal. Had they really had nothing to talk about? Especially in space?

"Some debris struck the left wing last night," Russia spoke up, chewing on his meal slowly. "I was thinking about suiting up and checking on it later today."

America hummed in response. He was looking at the red apple. He'd hardly taken a bite out of it.

"Also, Dezhurov informed me some signal lights were acting up earlier this morning. Could you check them?"

America looked at Russia. Nothing was readable. Nothing but blank thoughts as far as Russia could tell from gazing into the usual beautiful eyes of the younger nation.

"Unless you'd like to check the left wing yourself and I look into the signal lights," Russia again offered but reverse roles.

America nodded slowly. Russia frowned in concern.

"Is this it?" Russia asked, talking to no one in particular but if America wanted to respond to him that would be fine as well. "Is this our last flight together? Have we nothing more to say about the expanse and vast nothingness around us?" Then Russia met America's gaze. The older smiled sadly. "You seemed to have lost interest in outer space."

A light flashed across America's near-dead gaze. He let go of his apple and folded his arms on the table he sat at. Russia watched his brow furrow in thought.

"No," America said, shaking his head. "Well . . . I hope it isn't."

"Was it me then?" America looked up at Russia in confusion and blinked in surprise to see a smile on those pale lips. "Was it me whom you enjoyed spending the most time with?"

America finally smiled. "I still do enjoy spending time with you . . . as long as you're not an asshole of course."

Russia chuckled. There was the old America he knew and loved. All spitfire. "I should feel honored," Russia laughed back.

"Maybe you seem to handle travel better," America said, rolling his shoulders and laying his chin down on his folded arms. "Poor Germany."

Russia frowned. "You wish him here?"

"Yeah," America nodded. "He's good company." America sighed and smiled softly. He had closed his eyes to embrace the tender feeling and hadn't caught Russia's disapproving frown at his reaction. "It's funny because he walks around like there's a stick stuck up his ass, but it's not true. Not if you know him like I do."

"I do not care for him, nor do I believe his presence is needed up here," Russia answered honestly and then motioned to the space station surrounding them. "We are the most experienced nations equipped for this station's maintenance. We can run it fine by ourselves."

"Can't be here all the time," America muttered. Often times the world had other ideas and would not make room for adored hobbies of nations.
"We are at peace right now."

"For now," America forewarned.

"Do not concern yourself with the worries of the world, we are in space, next to the moon, amongst the planet and the stars. We can leave Mother Earth and her worries for a little while," Russia said. Russia had just finished his meal when he turned up to look at America. He hadn't made a comment on his statement like he usually would. After taking a look at him, now Russia understood why. "Amerika?"

America sat there at the table. His eyes were wide, his arms locked and fists clenched and shaking. Something was wrong. When Russia slowly rose his oncoming worry surged forward when America jerked and coughed out blood.

"Amerika!" Russia pushed himself to the younger's side.

The red liquid floated up into the air and was soon joined by more. America let out an agonized cry and coughed once more. His body lurched forward and his chest slammed against the table. His hands, shaking, had taken a hold of the piece of furniture and the sounds of the metal bending and crunching rose in the air.

Russia pressed close and pulled America's hands away from damaging the table further, but the moment he touched him America's eyes closed and he cried out again. Russia tried to think rationally. He tried to search in his vast knowledge to discover what had happened and what was wrong with the younger country but just seeing him like this, crying out, shaking, looking so shocked and scared, why it frightened Russia and he panicked.

"Culbertson!" Russia called out. "CULBERTSON! !"

The astronaut had come with Russia's two cosmonauts on his tail. They had heard the distress in their nation and came quickly to find out why he had summoned the American so hastily. What they saw even stunned them. The nation of the United States of America was hurt. He was convulsing and Russia was trembling just as much as he held him to his chest, his eyes swimming with panic.

Once Russia saw the American astronaut enter the room he didn't even give him a chance to properly take in what was happening. "What is wrong?!" Russia quickly demanded. "What is wrong with him?!"

Culbertson looked shocked and a panic arose in him just as much as the nation of Russia. He didn't know. He couldn't even comprehend what was wrong much less move or think. He opened his mouth, his lips moved but no word came out.

"Look at him!" Russia's arms tightened around the America who was bleeding—BLEEDING. "Look at him and tell me what is wrong!" America's people should know. They were he and he was them. America right now was in no condition to speak, the blood leaking out of his mouth would not let him form any word.

But the American astronaut couldn't explain it. He was just as frightened as America and now the entire station was thrown into a panic.

"Contact NASA right now and ask them if there is anything happening in the states!" Russia ordered as he straightened himself. The three humans were still for a while, just watching Russia with gawks and stares. He growled at their inability to act quickly. "Go!"

They turned and quickly made their way to the communication room. Russia however was making
his way to the medbay. He ripped open the firstaid packets and placed a cloth against America's mouth but then, something happened that frightened him to near death.

Russia's eyes widened as America arched violently and shook his head, his mouth falling away from the red-stained cloth as he cried out again. He cried as if he was tied to a stake and burning alive. Russia's heard this wretched sound many a time and could distinguish it from that particular torture. But how and why . . . ?

Russia gasped. There, on America's dark blue shirt grew a blotch. It was darker than the navy blue cotton covering. It grew and grew until it began to slip out of the shirt and show Russia just what it was. Blood, more blood.

Russia pulled America's shirt up and his eyes froze at the sight. A wound. Deep and large. It was burning into his skin right above his heart, the burns were melting away muscle and sinew and now the arteries were exposed and soon they too began to burn.

"AAAHHH! !" America's cries rung out throughout the entire station. The tears flowing down his eyes even floated out into the space around them. Blood and tears everywhere.

Russia didn't know what to do. He didn't know what was happening to America. This was no poisoning. He could only think of one thing but he wouldn't think anyone would dare—not when America was away from his territory.

Suddenly one of Russia's cosmonauts came in. He looked distressed. He looked horrified, seeing America shaking in Russia's arms, more so at the revealed burning and bleeding wound on his chest.

Russia's heart stopped at the look on his cosmonaut's face. He was pale. Something was terribly wrong.

"Amerika . . . he's been attacked," the human had said in clear Russian. Even so, Russia wasn't sure if he heard him correctly. He had thought that it possibly was . . . but he hadn't thought that someone would . . . it wasn't right . . . didn't make sense . . . and yet . . .

Russia looked down at America. The nation had risen his arms, covered his eyes and cried. He was screaming. Seeing things from the eyes of his people. Feeling so many of their lives vanish in the blink of an eye. He was in suffering.

No amount of firstaid could fix him. Russia needed to get him back to the planet. Right. Now.

As quickly as he could he suited America up. He hated it. Now the space suit was dying red. America was losing so much blood.

The cosmonauts and astronaut left behind he had given orders to maintain the station in their absence and the three sent words of Godspeed. Russia had been quick to radio in headquarters and inform them on the quick and unexpected landing he was making. He had never flown back to earth so fast.

The cries next to him. Russia would constantly turn to check on America strapped in the seat beside him. He was not getting any better.

Russia kept communications on the entire time. He knew it was hard, but he let the concerned Americans hear their nation. Hear him as he cried and screamed.

They were quiet on the other end except for when Russia asked them to confirm what his cosmonaut had told him.
"Yes," they replied back to him. "The World Trade center. They've been struck. Two planes. They're burning."

They're burning.

People are screaming.

Dust everywhere.

They're falling!

Falling!

Russia didn't care for protocol in that moment. When they landed and the aircraft came to a halt he tore off his helmet and unstrapped himself. He was quick in doing so to America.

Taking the younger up into his arms he kicked the door open and jumped out. He didn't even wait for the landing crew to come with ramps and security. He could see them rushing toward him from afar.

The nausea of being away from the planet had just washed over him and he felt his knees buckle. He couldn't catch himself, not when he was holding onto America. So he collapsed to the ground and felt the weight of everything around him. Gravity. Air. The ground underneath. America in his arms.

Russia could now hear the sirens. Looking up he could see the landing crew nearly upon them. They were so slow and America, he was so hurt.

Russia looked down and took in America's appearance. The gravity of the earth made the blood leaking past his lips and out of his nostrils run down his face and neck. The stain on his chest was seeping down his abdomen and even down his arms. The tips of his gloves dripped out blood and the earth was quick to stain with it; American blood.

Just as the sirens overwhelmed Russia's senses and the humans surrounded them he noticed how quiet America had become. They had actually met gazes. America looked Russia in the eyes before the older nation watched a tear slip out, mixed in blood and then the sobs came.

America was taken from Russia's arms faster than he remembered even holding him. And he was left there, fallen to the ground, trying to catch his breath. He was finding it hard. Much too hard.

He was suffering a panic attack. He couldn't understand why. He had not suffered the fatal attack America had. His people were safe and sound.

It was seeing America fall. Hearing him cry. America, the United States of America, the most powerful country in the world. America had frightened the entire world.

In times of fright and uncertainty America's people take him to Washington D.C. and hide him away there. Russia had been escorted there as well. He required minimal medical treatment, just some pills to calm his nerves.

Russia's hands had finally stopped shaking. The medicine numbed his senses nearly completely and now he was able to look up and watch the news on the television in the private hospital America had been rushed to. Russia was sitting outside the U.S.'s room, his ears trained on anything being said in the room.

America had been put to sleep and the doctors were now conversing with America's boss on how
long they should keep him in the induced coma. Russia didn't like the idea to keep him unaware, make him believe that what was happening to his people—to him—was just a bad dream. God knows what would happen when the reality of the situation set into the younger's consciousness.

"I'm telling you they put him to sleep. No, no, dad, no I don't know when they'll wake him up . . . no, dad the planes have all stopped. You can't come now so just . . . dad, please, just stay there for a little while."

Russia's eyes turned from the gruesome news footage toward Australia. The boy had been in America's capitol with his own visiting boss so, as of right then, they were the only countries besides America himself that were allowed to be near him. The borders were closed. The plane flights canceled and diverted.

The younger brother of the United States was emotionally distressed. Russia observed him quietly, phoning England. The Brit was so loud Russia could hear him over the other line. His own panic disturbed his younger son and Australia was crying. He was pulling his hair and crying as he paced back and forth from outside America's room in the hallway. Every now and then he'd glance inside the opened door where the doctors were speaking to America's President, and when Australia's eyes landed on America's limp form his bottom lip would quiver and he'd have to cover his mouth from the sobs threatening to escape.

Russia's hearing had been heightened. The private hospital was quiet all around except for the whispering nurses and doctors. Russia could hear England. He could hear him constantly ask Australia for an update on America's status to which the poor distraught nation replied through trembling sobs near incoherent responses that had the British nation asking again and again until Russia could hear it, until he could hear England crying from over the phone. He hadn't heard that nation cry in a very long time.

There was a light tap to Russia's shoulder. He almost hadn't felt it because of the medication that he seriously considered sharing with Australia. He turned and saw a young nurse. She tried offering him a polite smile as she handed him a phone and said, "It's your leader, Mr. Russia."

Ah, Putin. Russia was wondering when the man would find a way to get a hold of him.

With a nod Russia took up the phone and walked away. Australia didn't need to hear him speak to his boss. He was busy informing England every minute on America and his condition. He had a job to do and Russia was in no way one to distract him from it.

"Da?"

"Russia. You need to return," came his boss's voice.

Russia chuckled to himself. "I cannot. The Americans have locked down their country . . ." Russia paced off and then glanced back down the hall where America's room lay. "To keep him safe."

No matter what, his boss spouted out the reasons why he needed to return that instant. Perhaps he expected Russia to dive into the pacific and swim back home himself. Or, sneak out of the borders, ask Canada to escort him to the Alaskan border and then island hop back over to Siberia. None of that mattered of course because Russia pressed that he could not leave and then, when the borders were opened again and wide-eyed worried nations came flooding into the hospital where America was kept sealed and secured, Russia simply would not leave.

England had made it there first. He quickly dropped his suitcase and jacket onto the hallway's floor and ran up to embrace Australia. The younger nation had rubbed his teary-eyed, snot-nosed face into
"You did good, lad," England whispered against his son's head and gave him a comforting kiss before his green eyes darted up and looked into America's room. The President had ordered the doctors to bring America out of the medically induced coma the day after the attack and so he'd been awake for an entire day now, aware of everything. "America," England whispered. He gave Australia one last squeezing hug before letting him go.

He walked slowly toward the room before a trot broke out and now he was jogging, rushing as quickly as he could. He left all the politeness of a gentleman behind at the airport and right when England was by America's bedside he reached out and pulled the nation to his chest. The wires wrapped and attached to America snapped as his thick strong arms flung out, not to push away like many thought, but to pull close, squeezing England until he couldn't breathe.

"My God I'm here, America," England gasped out. Tears quickly streaming down his eyes. One arm was wrapped around America's broad shoulders while the other wrapped around his neck, cradling his head in his hands. His fingers rubbed the younger's scalp in a gesture of affection and comfort.

Russia had never seen the two hold each other so close.

"Alfred." Russia blinked and watched for the first time as England called America by his human given name, the one he had named him. He hadn't been allowed to do so in a long time, not even to reprimand him or to offer jokes.

England then pulled back to look into America's eyes. There were tears running down his cheeks like endless streams. England ran his thumbs underneath each to try to dam the floods, but they only rushed over his fingernails and down his own knuckles. "God, why hadn't it been me?" England cried out, his shoulders shaking at the sight of his eldest. "Why not me? Not you . . . not my boy."

Australia even seemed taken aback at the display. Russia watched in awe as America let go. He clung to England like a child would their parent, asking nothing but for them to hold them in their strong arms and protect them from the dangers around.

"Dad!" America cried and pulled England against him even tighter. America had not referred, much less called, England his father in centuries.

The two cried like that for hours until America had fallen back to sleep. In England's arms he had stilled and the smaller nation laid him back down, pulling the bed sheet over him and running his fingers through his hair gently. When England finally pulled away and walked out of the room he shown that of a high-held, composed, and serious country.

Wiping the remainder of his tears England straightened himself. "I will fight alongside him," he said sternly through cracked vocals weakened by hours of sobbing previously. "Whoever did this to him will pay. I swear to God they'll pay for what they did to my son."

With that England took up his belongings and walked away. Russia had no doubt he was on his way to meet with America's boss. Australia had even seemed taken aback by England's show of determination. The younger looked conflicted on whether to follow his father or stay and watch over his brother. He eventually chose the latter and was there to escort the other nations that quickly came, one right after the other.

"Forgive me for not coming quicker," Germany said. He was leaning over America. Russia had watched the Germanic nation fight with himself on whether or not to reach out and place his hand on America's head. He did so and Russia disapproved. America, however, said nothing about it. He was
so weary and worn from the trauma and the high doses of medication that all he could really do was utter a few words, the rest of his responses came out in nods and shakes of his head.

Prussia was standing behind Germany. Russia was in a way surprised to see him outside of the home. Prussia wasn't usually allowed too much outside, but all at once Russia wasn't as surprised. He knew of Prussia's love for the younger nation. He was always too much of a big brother even if those he deemed his younger siblings weren't biological.

"I picked these out for you, Alfred," Prussia said as he came close and held up the bouquet basket full of red, white, and blue roses. "They are your favorite flowers, ja? Here, I'll put them right here." Prussia sat the basket down on the counter next to the bed. He looked so sad seeing America like that; so unresponsive was very unbefitting of the United States.

While Prussia began talking to America, Germany had left his side. Russia was surprised to see the nation stopping in front of him. Russia looked up from where he sat—where he had been sitting for the past few days—and beheld Germany. His jaw moved but he had yet to open his mouth to say anything.

"You wish to know something?" Russia questioned. He sighed and leaned back down on his arms. "Then say something."

"Up there," Germany began. "What was it like?"

Russia didn't have to inquire on what Germany was speaking about. He had half a mind to tell him not to bring it up because he, himself, didn't want to remember. He frowned, his eyes glanced down.

"It caught me by surprise," Russia replied. "I did not know what it was, but it didn't take long until I did." Russia's hands squeezed against each other, nearly popping knuckles out of place. "I got him out of the station as quickly as I could."

"Ja, I was contacted just as soon as you sent the distress," Germany said. "I'd been monitoring the expedition from home and . . . I wished I stayed with NASA."

Russia glanced up. He observed Germany for a little while. The both of them. They loved America so much and both found it hard expressing such feelings in the public—especially to the recipient of their affections.

Germany's shoulders were shaking and Russia caught the subtle sight of glisten in those blue eyes of his.

"Whoever did this will pay."

Russia glanced back up toward Germany. The usually stoic and controlled nation was emitting a dangerous aura, one felt similar to England's. The anger of a nation was a frightening thing, especially when these nations were quite strong.

"I will support America," Germany said. He then looked down at Russia. "Will you?"

Russia blinked. He had sat there days, watching nations come in and out of America's room offering him gifts, condolences, tears, touches of comfort, and then their armies. Russia had yet to make up his mind.

Or, his boss that is.

Russia knew what he, himself, wanted; where he stood. He could feel it in is bones. The way his
fists clenched, his shoulders tensed, the way his mind always went back to the sight of his sunflower nearly ripped to shreds. Never again. Never did he want to see that. Ever.

It was the beginning of October. Russia had upset his boss further with staying in America's home longer than necessary. But it was his presence that goaded America to come to him after he had risen from bed.

Russia frowned at the bandages wrapped around the boy's chest, nothing but a jacket hung on the younger's shoulders while the two sat outside taking in the sun for the first time since America had been emitted into the hospital.

"Afghanistan," America said, looking up into the blue sky. His eyes looked haunted, glazed over by innocent blood. Not a smile was present on his face, far from it. "I'm going after him."

"You certain it was him?" Russia questioned. The two sat side by side, but didn't meet gazes, not so much as a side glance out of the corner of one's eye. It was a serious subject, one quite delicate to the other's opinion.

There was a silence. America had not answered Russia.

"England is coming with me. So is Germany," America said instead of the straight answer Russia had asked for. "France, Canada, Australia . . . many others."

"I wish you luck," Russia said. "He has always been quite a handful." Russia remembered having issues with him during the '70's.

"Will you come with me?" America asked.

There was another long stretch of silence. All too easily the hope was given up.

America scoffed. "Of course you won't."

That simply wasn't true. Russia would gladly hunt down anyone who ever did America harm and personally chop them up himself. Only for America, always for America. But how could he defy his boss?

"Sorry, but I'm going to have to pull out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty," America said. Russia finally looked at him. He looked quite serious and Russia knew he meant to do it.

Russia chuckled. "The world silenced themselves and lit candles in mourning for you. You would give them another thing to weep about?" What was America thinking going into war after just barely recovering from an attack like that? He was a fool. A brash-headed young fool. That aspect never seemed to change, no matter how old America got.

"Go home, Russia," America said, standing up. Russia watched him groan and place a hand gently over the wound above his heart. It had been the closest attack since Pearl Harbor to hit so close to the vital organ. No doubt it'd leave another ugly scar on America's beautiful body.

Russia closed his eyes and smiled in irony. "Of course the United States of Amerika cares not for the Russian Federation's opinion. I've wasted my time staying here."

America said nothing as Russia left. The years went by and slowly they stopped talking to the other all together. It wasn't that which Russia wanted.

Russia had tried to contact the younger but he never responded. Why? Because he was off waging
wars, wars brought on by his blind anger. And Russia heard things, many things America had done in his rage and it wasn't long before America's paranoia determined that Iraq had been conspiring against him as well. And of course America, being the dominant country in the world, had to put the threat down like the empire he secretly was.

Washington D.C. USA. March 19th 2003

"So you're just going to quit on me? Is that it?!"

Germany flinched at America's tone. He'd gotten quite mean in the past years since . . . the attack. But he was not afraid of being harmed by America. After all, they were allies, and even friends disagreed on certain standards.

If he could just explain himself then perhaps America could see the reasoning in his decision. "There is no need to do it," Germany said. "Hasn't Afghanistan suffered enough? Now you wish the same on Iraq."

"It's because I know they did it," America said. His gaze was darkening as was his aura. Germany could see it as clear as day and it reminded him of Russia's aura. Except of a dark violet this was a deep blue.

"Do you really?" Germany questioned. He crossed his arms at the table he and America had been sitting at to discuss terms. "I know for a fact that I am not the only country to deny you troops for this invasion."

America frowned. "You said you were my ally. Now you're a traitor. You're abandoning me."

"I am not," Germany denied, shaking his head. "I'm just seeing to reason like many others. England is only backing you because he's just as upset as you and Australia follows you around like a lost puppy. You'll lead him to his death one day."

America slammed his fist down on the table and Germany could hear the metal bolts and hooks rattling from the strike. He was surprised the table even stood after that hit from the powerful nation before him.

"Don't you ever say that again!" America threatened. Germany supposed that threat was fair, after all, he had just insulted his family.

"Look at you, America," Germany said, motioning to the jittery, angry, upset, and paranoid nation seated in front of him. "You are the epitome of distressed and mentally unstable. Where's your spirit of freedom? Of peace? Of optimism? You've slid a far way from your glory."

"I'm still the United States of America," America swore. "And I fight for my people to have those spirits. But you . . . you'd let them overrun you."

Germany sighed and shook his head. Any other nation and they would have lashed back at America, giving the younger superpower a reason to knock them right across the jaw. By the look of America's clenching and unclenching fists he wanted to do that to him right then.

Germany felt no anger toward the younger nation. No, only pity.

"You carry too many's burdens," Germany noted. He smiled sadly, apologetically. Such was the fate of the World Power. "You're too young. It should have been passed to another. But it had to be you, huh?"
America quieted. He glanced down, placed his hands in his lap and just waited . . . waited for Germany to leave, like the others.

"When will you learn to trust others?" Germany questioned. His tone was soft. He was always gentle with America, too caring, too understanding when he should just get offended right then and there and leave . . . just like the others.


"I am your ally, America, you can trust me too," Germany assured.

"Then why?" America looked at Germany, his eyes begging. "Why you of all people? Why won't you fight with me?"

Germany sighed again. "The war in Afghanistan isn't even over and yet you're splitting yourself to invade Iraq too. It's too much, America. You're tiring yourself out and you have not recovered from the . . . you've not recovered properly."

Just at the mere suggested mention Germany watched America grimace in pain, his hand reached up and rubbed the scar above his heart. Germany wondered what it looked like. He couldn't imagine it too charming. And America had quite a well-defined chest last he remembered from a beach party he once hosted. It was a shame, a regretful shame that Germany wished he could turn back time and change with all his heart. But he hadn't the technology or mind for that.

"I heal quickly," was America's excuse.

Germany sighed once more. He stood from his chair and walked over toward America. Reaching out he pressed his hand on the hand touching the hidden scar. America flinched and quickly backed away, shielding his chest and looking at Germany in sudden fright.

"You haven't healed, America," Germany reasoned. He hated the way America was looking at him. "Please, do not look at me like I am the enemy. I will never harm you. Never."

"You already have," America said, turning his face away. "By defying me."

"I want to help you, America, but I cannot when you are like this," Germany explained. He felt a little frustrated but caught himself and calmed his rising temper. "I am not your subordinate and neither are the others."

"I never said you were."

"Then stop treating us like such," Germany insisted. He reached out again and took hold of America's chair, he turned so that the younger would have no choice but to look at him. "I would gladly fight beside you, as your partner. But I will not be put through what you have put me through in Afghanistan. You have it in you, the ability to mature. I will be waiting in my land when you come to realize that."

"Leave," America turned his face away again.

"You give up so quickly," Germany said with a sad sigh. He leaned back up and straightened. "What's become of my good friend?"

"I could ask the same," America muttered, crossing his arms. "With or without your approval I'm going. Japan and Italy already approve. At least can I get that?"
"Nein," Germany said. "I am saying this in what I believe is best for you. Don't do it, America, please."

"What is best for me? What the hell do you know what's best for me?" America asked, his eyes narrowing as he leaned forward in his chair, looking at Germany like he were some fiend. "You don't understand, Germany. The world wants my head on a platter because I'm so strong. The threats I receive daily are enough to fill up my office to the moon. Don't you patronize me. You know nothing!"

"I do not want your head on a platter and if I caught anyone so trying to I wouldn't think twice before destroying them," Germany swore, his own eyes narrowing. "You have my heart, America."

There was that soft smile again and suddenly Germany felt vulnerable under America's surprised gap. Germany inclined his head and fluttered his eyes shut. He shifted on one foot then the other nervously. "I had hoped the war would be over and that you . . . you'd return to the way you were. You were just beginning to smile again and I . . . I miss those smiles. Even if it wasn't for me I would like to see them again." Germany then looked at America again and offered a sad smile. "I wished to request a courtship once the war had ended, but it looks like I may never see that. Now you can see why I am so upset with you starting another."

"Why . . . would you . . . ?"

Germany cleared his throat and straightened his suit jacket. He straightened his posture and offered a formal smile. "Maybe after your wars, ja?"

America then snickered. Germany was confused and would seem offended if he hadn't seen the sad look in America's own features. America glanced down and smiled sadly.

"You wouldn't want to court this monster . . . not courtship material anymore I'm afraid," America said softly.

Germany felt his heart sink. Not at the thought of getting rejected—again—but at how America now saw himself as. A monster? No, no, far from it. He was just sick and needed time to heal. That was all.

"Even heroes need to hang their capes up once and a while," Germany said. "You're not a monster, America. I'm afraid I would seem like that to you after I . . . back when I tried to . . ."

America looked up at him. Surprised to see Germany now dash himself against the stones of self-doubt. "No," came America's voice. "No, no . . . Germany, that's history. I've forgiven you for that."

Germany's heart leapt in his chest and he immediately turned once again to America. He hadn't even asked for it because of his shame, but America, why he'd already gone and forgiven him for what he had almost done to him. Germany could not love him any more.

"It's me," America reasoned. He shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. That same sad smile still on his lips. "I am not good with relationships. I tend to ruin them. Always me."

"It's because you try to take every problem yourself," Germany said. "A courtship is a partnership. Both parties taking on burdens together, confiding in the other, offering help and companionship in times of joy and grief alike. Even so, I would gladly take all of your burdens if you'd so let me prove myself to you."

America smiled softly at Germany. His heart was touched by the offer.

After America said no more Germany nodded. "That's, after the war, of course," Germany reasoned.
"I will wait."

"It might take a long time," America said. He didn't know how long this war would last, or perhaps the ones following in the possible future.

"I will wait. I have for a while," Germany promised. And Germany was good on his promises.

So, in the end, Germany disagreed with America and they went their separate ways. America waged war with what nations would fight alongside him and many of his allies kept in touch through letters and reviewing the news, keeping track of his wars.

It would be years until America could even settle down to attend the likes of that of a simple world meeting.

Deauville, Basse-Normandie, France. May 26th 2011

"Amérique, is that you, mon cher?" France looked utterly startled to see the nation again. It's been years really and he was so excited that he ran up to him and embraced him, kissing him on both cheeks twice.

"Okay, okay, enough with the kissing," America groaned, pulling himself away and rubbing his cheeks.

"Why did you not tell me you were coming?" France questioned. "I thought that you would still be resting after finishing that war of yours."

America sighed and shrugged his shoulders. "Boss said it'd be best to mingle with the world again. So, here I am."

"Well, to be honest, you are the first to arrive. The others are on their way," France said, motioning America to follow him.

"Really? Well that's a first," America muttered to himself.

"Did you say something, hm?" France turned.

"Oh, uh, I said that's usual." America offered a snide laugh for France before being led into the meeting room. He was given a seat next to the hosting country and waited for the others to begin pouring in.

The nation to arrive after him just so happened to be Russia. Go figure.

France escorted him into the room and offered him his designated seat. Russia settled in and the moment he noticed America he blinked. "Oh, I did not see you there. It is a pleasant surprise seeing you here."

"Pleasant surprise for me too," America said with a sigh. He was tired and just wanted to return home and sleep for a few months. Was that too much to ask for?

"You have a lot of catching up to do, Amerika," Russia teased. "While you were off playing war the rest of the world actually grouped together, spoke about important things, and settled disputes. Maybe it will all be too much for you."

"Not now, Russia," America groaned. He folded his arms on the table and laid his head face-down. Hopefully if he remained this way the others would think to leave him alone. No such luck.
"I raised you better than that. Up straight, sit up." America felt his chair pull out and someone nudge his shins. He looked up and there stood England, tapping his shoulders, pulling them back to get America to sit up. He smiled at him and America smiled back. "It's good to see you here, America," England said softly. America nodded.

"America?" Once again America was bombarded by cheek-kisses. He flinched back and pushed his attacker off of him the best he could. "It is so nice to see you, America!"

"I get it, I get it, Italy!" America gasped and rubbed his flushed cheeks. Japan was there too, offering America a formal bow and following him was Germany who surprisingly offered America a smile that the others caught. It was rare to get him to smile at all.

Worse still could possibly be the person following behind Germany.

"'Sup, losers."

England rolled his eyes. "God, Germany, what is Prussia doing here? This is nations only."

"Babysitting," was Germany's only response. He took a seat politely while Prussia drug the chair out and sat in it backwards.

"Babysitting? Psssh, I may just want to join this thing one day," Prussia noted with a chuckle.

"Then I'll resign," England groaned out.

"Alright, that is enough, everyone take their seats," France motioned. "Now, I believe Canada is the first to take the floor. Canada?" Nothing. "Canada?"

"I said I am here."

France jumped and held onto his beating heart when the nation suddenly appeared next to the board. He sighed and muttered something under his breath before motioning Canada to continue with his presentation.

The meeting was going smoothly, until America shouted out, "Booooring!" and then got reprimanded by England who then was teased by Russia who then was spat at by America again who asked Japan to back him up who in turn said that he agreed with America. France then began crying that this was his hosting meeting and he got absolutely no respect, which then prompted England to explain why said French nation deserved no such respect. In the end Germany had no choice but to shout at everyone to shut up and demand for a recess.

"Ha, ha, good ole meetings," America chuckled as he munched on one of his burgers he had hidden in his briefcase much to his brother's disgust.

"How old is that thing, Al?" Canada questioned which America responded with a simple shrug that made the Canadian shiver.

"Hey! Alfred, Matthew!" The two Northern American nations were jolted forward when someone lunged at them and hooked elbows around their necks. It was Prussia. "What are the two of you up to these days?"

"Nothing much," Canada replied. "Al's been resting, right, Al?"

"Sure," America replied.
"That's good to hear. West and I have been anxious for that silly war of yours to end anyways," Prussia said with a chuckle.

"It's not 'silly'," America said, pulling Prussia's arm off of him and frowning.

"Sheesh, didn't mean it like that," Prussia said. "I'm just glad you're finally home. We missed you."

"Yeah, don't get used to seeing me around," America said. "I've got a lot to cover back at my place."

"That never stopped you from visiting before," Prussia pouted. "We need to go hunting again."

"I'd rather not be near any guns at the moment," Canada suggested, but of course no one paid him mind.

"Hell, why don't we ditch Francey's and head to the forests now? I've got the beer and the guns in the truck. That's all we need, am I right?" Prussia chuckled.

"Some time later," America politely excused. He stuffed the rest of his burger in his jacket and then walked back inside.

"What's eatin' him?" Prussia questioned.

Canada sighed. "It takes him a while to unwind after returning home from war. He's always been like this."

America really was just tired. That and frustrated. He was in debt up to his eyeballs and coming home to that after fighting terrorists wasn't fun at all. Not with how his boss pushed him to get back into his office again without proper recuperation.

America reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. He frowned at all the text messages from his boss. He was at the meeting, why couldn't he just leave him alone? He was doing what he wanted him to do.

"You look tired."

America looked up to see Germany. He was sitting in the hall at a bench just sipping on a cup of black coffee.

"Is it so obvious?" America joked.

"Ja," Germany nodded seriously. "Couldn't you have asked your boss to let you skip this meeting?"

"He wouldn't listen," America said with a sigh and then slid himself down to sit next to Germany. He groaned and rubbed his aching knuckles. Germany took note.

"They hurt when you fight for so many years."

America chuckled softly. "It's not like I don't know." He remembered how long he fought for Vietnam. Nearly just as long.

"You know, you can always call it a day and go home. The way this meeting's going, nothing's going to get done," Germany said with a shrug.

"I'll just get chewed out by the boss. Don't want that," America muttered. "You know, even though all I want to do is fall asleep for a few years, it's nice to be around the others . . . all of us."
Germany smiled and nodded in agreement. "Ja."

"I mean, Gilbert's even here to annoy the hell out of everyone," America joked.

Germany chuckled. "No wonder where you got it."

"H-Hey!" America reached out and punched Germany in the arm. The German groaned and rubbed his arm. America simply laughed and apologized.

A silence passed over them and they sat in peace, enjoying the quiet calm. It was about five minutes before the doors opened to go back into the circus. Germany finished his coffee relatively fast and settled with holding the warm cup on his thigh.

"It's really nice to have you back, America," he mentioned with a fond small smile.

"Yeah, and you're here waiting. Count down the days?" America couldn't help but playfully tease. It was fun because Germany was usually so uptight, unless you knew him like those few close to him. America was proud to be part of those few.

"Ja," Germany replied and the two chuckled. With a sigh, Germany calmed the mood and nodded. "Just rest for now. Don't go back into wars."

"Can't tell the future," America said. He'd make no promises.

"It's these," Germany said as he set his cup down, reached over and took America's calloused hands in his own, his thumbs rubbing over the aching and scabbed knuckles. "They're meant to hold papers and pens, not knives and guns. They're kept young that way. Plus, I'm growing tired of waiting for you to come home."

Germany's eyes met America and he smiled kindly when he watched the younger glance away. His heart flipping in his chest when he watched a flush spread across his cheeks. It was a light blush, but it was a start and Germany would love to see it darken. The color reflected beautifully on his skin.

"Veee~ Germany?"

There went Germany's summersaulting heart, right up in his throat as he jumped and turned to see Italy, Canada, and Prussia returning to the meeting room only to see the two of them, Germany caught red-handed holding onto both of America's hands, sitting out in the hall next to the meeting room together.

Germany opened his mouth to say something. He could think of plenty of logical explanations. But he couldn't say anything. He couldn't move and his face was growing hot.

"Al?" Canada questioned.

"What's this, West?" Prussia questioned, his eyes flicking down to their held hands.

Germany really should have moved, or at least let go of America's hands, hell, if America would have pulled away then this confrontation wouldn't have worsened with the rest of the countries walking down the hall to see them. But Germany remained nervously still and America had not pulled away.

"And that's why you're drunk all the time, you damn frog—what the hell is this?!" England quickly ignored his previous conversation with France as the two walked up only to see the scene that had caught the three other personified attentions. Roughly, he pushed himself to the front of the gathering
crowd. "What do you think you're doing, Germany?!" No one hit on his child without his consent. No one!

"Oh hon hon, I had suspected you felt this way for a while, Germany. It is about time you finally let go of those nervous butterflies and confessed," France said, sauntering up and patting Germany on his stiff shoulders.

"Confess? Vee~ is Germany and America together now?" Italy asked. His smile widening.

Germany went rigid. His face entirely red. The nation couldn't take public confrontation, that was for certain. "It's not what it looks like," he finally said.

"Really?" Italy frowned, disheartened, just as Japan showed up to stand next to him holding his camera in hand. "Then you haven't asked to court America?"

"Nein," Germany quickly shot down. But he wasn't a liar. "Well, I mean, ja, but not right now—"

"You have?" France leaned against Germany. "And what was little Amérique's answer?"

Now the tables were turned and America flushed with all the eyes looking at him. He still had yet to pull away from Germany's holding hands.

For once in his life he hadn't felt too embarrassed about the situation. He didn't know why, perhaps it was Germany's embarrassment that outweighed his own, whatever it was America felt a little calmer near him. It was nice.

The big nations. They were all there, looking at them. America could even see Russia looking on curiously in the back. He had just showed up and didn't seem to quite fully understand the situation in which the others had caught he and Germany in.

America sighed. Maybe it was the weariness after years of war that relaxed him in this kind of pressure. Nothing was for certain, but what was is that he liked the way Germany held his hands. They were strong, without the worry of him bending a finger back and breaking it.

So America wanted him to hold his hands for a long time and to encourage him to do so was to squeeze his hands back. Germany was startled by the pressure in grip and turned to America, looking at him curiously. He was caught off-guard by America's soft smile and even more so when the American nation leaned forward and planted a chaste kiss on his lips right there before everyone to see.

When he pulled back Germany had quite a cute flush spread across his cheeks and down his neck. His heart looked ready to fall right out of his chest, and the giggles and gasps from the crowd gathered did nothing to help.

"Is that a good enough answer for you, Germany?" America asked.

Germany's jaw hung loose and before he could even say anything Prussia burst out in a victorious pitch. "Hey! England, we're in-law's now!"

"We are no such thing!" England denied, shaking his head. He was looking at his eldest with disbelief. A German? He was wanting to court a German? Oh, where had England gone wrong? What rebellion was this?

"Congratulations to you both," Japan spoke up with small claps.
"This is so romantic," Italy swooned.

Canada looked quite confused and in fact he was the only one to turn around and looked for Russia. By the time he turned around he noticed the large Slavic nation had distanced himself from the crowd. Russia was near a water fountain, simply leaning against it, looking what Canada could only see as horrified.

So, Canada turned once again toward the crowd and slunk himself through to see Germany finally let go of America's hands and stand up, looking at him with disbelief.

"You are accepting my courtship?" Germany had to know so he had to ask straightforwardly.

America nodded his head and smiled. "Yes, yes I am."

Everyone was so used to seeing Germany composed and collected but what they were beholding right now was both new and endearing. Germany reached forward and swept America up into his arms, spinning him around before holding him close. It was an adorable moment that made everyone's heart melt . . . well, except for England who looked quite disapprovingly at the new couple.

"Cheer up, at least it's not Russia, heh," Prussia joked, elbowing England in the side.

"Don't even joke around like that," England moaned, physically shivering at the thought of his boy with that older nation. Germany was the lesser of two evils in his mind, and, well, like Prussia said, at least it wasn't Russia.

The meeting was held off for the rest of that day. The announcement brought a spring in everyone's step and a celebration was in order. France invited all of them to his home and prepared dishes himself.

"And to the new couple, bon appetit," France said as he set the oval dish down in front of the two, offering them two forks to use on the shared meal.

"I don't think I'll get used to this," Germany said honestly.

"Ah, you'll get used to it," America assured with a shrug, already digging into the fine looking dish. "You're dating the United States of America, be prepared to have all rights to your privacy relinquished."

Germany groaned but smiled anyways. If it was the United States of America then he'd gladly accept that lifestyle.

"Now, as it goes you two must share how you met and fell in love," France spoke up after making a round of pouring everyone a glass of rich wine.

Germany groaned again. He had a sense of privacy, but these nations all looking at the two of them, well, they did not.

"Nein, nein, I got this," Prussia spoke up, practically standing on the table with cup of wine in hand. "Now, as you all know, before Germany was even considered a nation he was mostly cooped up at my place."

"Wow, what a reverse of roles to this day, canny, don't you think," came England's monotonous retort. He frankly could care less how the two met. He did care, however, if they had relational issues and wished to call it off. He wouldn't mind that at all.
Prussia frowned at England and decided to ignore him. "Anyways, don't interrupt this awesome story. So there I was, getting my awesome costume ready for Russia's masquerade ball and poor Luddy practically begged me to take him with me . . ."

And the rest was history. Everyone listened to Prussia ramble, all taking mental notes to ask America and Germany themselves for a clearer and logical explanation of the story. Canada was happy that his brother had finally found someone again. He was confused at first, of course, because of his past relationships and his habit of clinging onto old partners, especially the first one. First loves were hard to get over and yet there America was, sitting close to Germany and giggling as he fed the nation some of their shared dish with his own fork. And to make matters more confusing was that Russia was even there.

Canada was surprised to even see the old nation attending. He had thought for certain he wouldn't show, but then again it was almost mandatory. There weren't too many nations at this meeting and so if he was absent it would not go unnoticed.

He kept to himself. Not thinking anyone would pay him mind. But Canada could see the way he bent every silverware offered to him. He could see Russia taking quick glances at Germany and America. Canada could see the disgust in his gaze when he looked at Germany and the utter anger when those violet eyes met America's form, but in an instant it faded to sad regret. He looked hurt. Canada's never seen him like this.

Before, America would become moody just by having Russia in the same room as him, now, now America's eyes were only on Germany. He was completely ignoring Russia and in so he was happy. Canada saw those real smiles. Saw the way he leaned his head down and rest it against Germany's broad shoulder in contentment. For once in years America was happy again.

The attacks and wars made America a paranoid cautious mess again. He wanted things under control, under his control. Now he was letting go. He was taking chances again.

America's relationships always ended in disaster, but Canada firmly believed Germany would never let his step-brother down. He was excited to see where the two would end up in the years to come. But he could not shake how down his heart felt . . . for Russia.

From Australia, Canada had been informed that America had been in love with the older country for centuries, and for America to care for him, even in the midst of that ugly Cold War, why, Canada just couldn't believe America to just let go already. It didn't make sense.

It was a mystery for another time, one that really didn't hurt anyone save for Russia. But, at least America was happy again. That's all Canada wanted.

No one really ever cared for Russia's happiness. That was just irrelevant.

Moscow, Russia. May 30th 2011

That had been, hands down, the worst G8 meeting Russia's ever attended. First of all, nothing was accomplished, and second of all everyone was so quick to congratulate America and Germany on getting together. America . . . so quick to cling himself to another.

Russia sighed. He gave his report to his boss and then retired himself to his home. Still as empty as ever. He was glad Belarus was out at the moment. The peace and quiet were both welcomed friends.

He sat out on his porch. The night was nice enough. Clear, and bright, Russia spent most of his night stargazing and examining the moon. The vodka tasted better when the little lights twinkled brightly
and the tell-tale signs of satellites and shuttles buzzed overhead, tricking people below into thinking they were shooting stars.

The sound of the home phone rung across his ears. He let it go but not three minutes later it rang again. Russia let it go two more times before he sighed and decided against better judgment to answer it.

"Da?"

"Ivan."

Just the sound of her voice caused his heart to ache. He held his breath, hoping that would stop the stinging in his eyes from evolving into something more.

"I heard," came the voice of his big sister. He hadn't talked to her in years. Hearing her again was a delight if not for the situation on why she suddenly called. "How are you feeling, Vanya?"

She was always the one to encourage his pursuit in courtship with young America. The only one.

"Not good," Russia finally said, letting out a breath that lost control of the sting in his eyes and now he was crying. Well, at least she couldn't see how pathetic he looked right then, but she was his big sister. She may not see him, but she could hear his hurt and sense his heartbreak. "Not good at all."

Chapter End Notes

Historical Notes Continuance:

Even though the 9/11 attacks were devastating how the world reacted to it was quite sentimental:

Canada: Operation Yellow Ribbon was commenced by Transport Canada and Nav Canada in response to the first plane hitting the first World Trade Center, allowing all commercial flights entering the U.S. to land at Canadian airports and remain there.

Australia: Australian Prime Minister John Howard was in Washington D.C on the morning of the attacks and invoked the ANZUS Treaty, saying it demonstrated "Australia's steadfast commitment to work with the United States."

France: The French newspaper of record, Le Monde, ran a front-page headline reading "Nous sommes tous Américains", or "We are all Americans". Following the attacks, French president Jacques Chirac released a statement: "It is with great emotion that France has learned of these monstrous attacks—there is no other word—that have recently hit the United States of America. And in these appalling circumstances, the whole French people—I want to say here—is beside the American people. France expresses its friendship and solidarity in this tragedy. Of course, I assure President George Bush of my total support. France, you know, has always condemned and unreservedly condemns terrorism, and considers that we must fight against terrorism by all means."

Germany: In Germany, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder described the attacks as "a declaration of war against the civilized world." Authorities urged Frankfurt, the
country's financial capital, to close all its major skyscrapers. In Berlin, 200,000 Germans marched to show their solidarity with America.

New Zealand: New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark stated "It's the sort of thing the worst movie scenario wouldn't dream up," and a New Zealand Herald DigiPoll revealed that after the attacks 2/3 of New Zealanders supported a NZ pledge of troops to Afghanistan

United Kingdom: British security forces across the world were placed on maximum alert. Prime Minister Tony Blair pledged that Britain would stand "full square alongside the U.S." in the battle against terrorism, later in which the President of the United States said that America has no greater friend than the United Kingdom. Queen Elizabeth expressed "growing disbelief and total shock." In London, the U.S. national anthem was played at the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace under orders from Her Majesty, and traffic on The Mall came to a halt during the tribute. A Service of Remembrance was held at St. Paul's Cathedral attended by the Queen, the Prince of Wales, Prime Minister Tony Blair, U.S. Ambassador William Farish, and a congregation of thousands inside and outside the cathedral.

Japan: Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi expressed "great anger" and said that "these acts of terrorism should not be forgiven." Special security precautions were ordered at all United States military installations. Shit's about to get real when Japan expresses "great anger" peoples!

Russia: Russian troops were put on alert in response to the attacks. President Vladimir Putin held an emergency meeting of security officials and said he supported a tough response to these "barbaric acts". He also informed Condoleezza Rice by telephone that any and all pre-existing hostility between the two countries would be put aside while America dealt with the tragedy. In Moscow, women who spoke no English and had never been to America were captured on film sobbing in front of a makeshift tribute on a sidewalk. In addition, television and radio stations went silent to commemorate the dead.

Ukraine: As a nation, Ukraine immediately declared solidarity with the United States, and offered moral, technical and military support to the extent of their infrastructure. The Ukrainian parliament passed three resolutions all in favor of assisting the United States following the attacks. Congressman Bob Schaffer expressed gratitude towards Ukraine and its stance on terrorism, saying "Ukraine's condemnation of international terrorism, its much-appreciated support in the war on terrorism, its tough newly enacted laws to combat terrorism, and its commitment to fight at the side of the United States and its allies for civil society and democracy demonstrates the role Ukraine and her people intend to play in the emerging democracy."

Russia actually gave the U.S. a monument for the attack as had Israel, though their monument is in their own country.

Then, not nearly a month later the U.S. and its allies go to war in Afghanistan in what is known as Operation Enduring Freedom. The war lasts 13 years but to some it is still presumably going on. In 2003 the U.S. invades Iraq as well in so thrusting themselves into another war that lasts over a decade.
Two Hearts, One Beat

Chapter Notes

Suggested ambient songs: My Obsession by Cinema Bizarre, and, I Know You by Skylar Grey

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sochi, Russia. February 7th 2014

Most eyes were on America. Whether it was surprise for him showing up at the sporting games or the deadpanned look on his face when the ring representing his hemisphere faltered. He sighed. The others should know by now from experience that the Olympics brought tradition with its appearance, tradition in the sense to stop wars and tension.

So what if he and Russia were having some issues, it was the Olympics and he planned on having fun. Though, while he sat and beheld the opening ceremony he felt slightly isolated—funny, coming from him—but sitting next to Canada, Mexico, Brazil, and the other American nations made him feel out of place and alone. He looked over toward Europe's grouping. There was England, swatting France's hand that not too subtly snuck on his shoulder, the Italy brothers looking ever fascinated by the lighting, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands and his two siblings, and then there was Germany and Prussia . . . Germany.

America sighed. He'd been looking at him the entire time but the German hadn't so much as glanced over toward him. It was like he didn't know he was there. America's never felt that invisible before and usually wouldn't mind it and blow it off as something like the noise of the ceremony keeping everyone's attention away from him. He could take that, but this was the fact that this was his boyfriend who wasn't paying attention to him.

In fact, it was the first time they've even physically seen each other that year. Ever since the mass surveillance scandal the previous year Germany hadn't talked to America so much. He deserved it. Rightly so.

Part of said reason for no communication was probably because if they spoke then he'd have to offer some sort of apology when America couldn't. He didn't know what to. How could he when it was his fault? When he was still a complete and utter paranoid mess?

He missed Germany. He wanted to see him smile, to have him hold his hands and tell him how attractive he was. No one else would and America was feeling self-conscious because of it. It was almost like his personality was shifting and he hated it.

Issues with Russia; that was simply a smaller matter in America's mind, which is why he had no trouble with putting himself on that plane trip to Russia's home and accompanying his teammates. He hoped sports would help ease his troubled mind and the tournament give him an excuse to get close to Germany again.

America got his first gold medal the next day in snowboarding. He was surprised to see Prussia and Germany approach him and the other medal winners after his national anthem was wrung over the speakers.
"You did good, as always, Alfred," Prussia spoke up, clapping his hands. "Let me see, let me see!" He reached out, curling his fingers. When America hopped off the podium he allowed the older German to close in and take a hold of the medal draped around his neck. "Oh, nice. There will be more to come," Prussia assured with an optimistic wink.

Prussia always made America smile but he could easily tell the albino was trying to make up conversation for both he and Germany who remained at a distance, silent, but observing. Usually America was one to humor this kind of situation but that would involve dancing around the other which he didn't quite prefer right now.

"When is your game, Germany?" Finally, the younger of the Germans looked at him.

Strict as ever; his shoulders squared and he took out his neatly organized schedule book. "Tomorrow I have luge," Germany answered before snapping the little black book shut and sliding it back into his jacket pocket. His eyes beheld the gold on America's breast for a moment. "I had a feeling you would win. You were never one for skiing."

America smiled. Then, Germany smiled. It was a start.

"I'm not horrible at skiing," America said, he then stepped on his board, popping it up, and held it up against his arm. "But I like snowboarding much better. That's why I'm so good at it, right, Mattie?" America turned and looked back at the podium. He could have sworn Canada had been standing right next to him a moment ago.

"You're decent," came Canada's unexpected voice. America startled and turned to his right to see the nation there. Had he been there the entire time? "God, Mattie, scare me half to death. And what do you mean I'm 'decent'? Who's wearing the gold, huh?" He swung the medal around right near Canada's face.

The Canadian frowned and pushed away. "For now," he chided.

America frowned, determined to make his stepbrother eat those words. When they made their way off stage America trotted up next to Germany. He didn't say anything and so America kept quiet as well. He even knew he could go off and ruin moments with his big fat mouth.

He knew Germany was a more private nation compared to America and so America made sure it was subtle, what he did. Prussia, Canada, and Norway were walking a little faster than them. America had slowed his pace down to keep next to Germany's side and wondered if it was him or that Germany felt as if he was slowing down just slightly as well.

Reaching out, America quietly touched Germany's gloved hand with his pinky and ring finger. It was a feather-light touch, almost nonexistent. America caught himself smiling faintly just at sneaking a touch. Well, it wasn't sneaking much if the other knew you were doing it.

Suddenly, Germany stopped. America had been caught off guard and had been continuing on his way when he stopped and turned. Germany was looking at him, still as silent as ever.

"We're going to get left behind," America said, motioning toward Prussia and the others distancing themselves, completely oblivious to the other two who had fallen behind.

Germany let out a sigh and closed his eyes. He then rose his hand and curled his fingers toward himself to motion America to come closer. America did so obediently and followed Germany off to the side of the walkway so not to get in anyone's way as they passed by.

America was quiet standing before Germany, almost like a child in stance before a scolding. When
Germany reached out and cupped the heavy medal hanging around America's neck he relaxed a little.

"I am very proud of you for winning your first gold," Germany said, his tone almost that of a mutter. Both nations watched him rub the medal, both contemplating long and deep thoughts. Finally, Germany let go and looked up at America who met his gaze a little while later. "It is good to see you again."

America offered a smile.

"It's tournaments like this that get us away from the politics and worries of the world," Germany continued.

Yeah, no politics, that sounded nice, especially to America.

"It is nice, ja?" When Germany smiled America's heart melted and he quickly nodded his head, reaching out to take Germany's hands in his own, feeling his heart flutter when he felt the older squeeze. Good, they were past dancing around each other.

Now, all America wanted to do was kiss his boyfriend. It took some chilly moments before the heat crept up on Germany's face and bent the gravity around the two. America's eyes lidded and Germany's lips parted ever so slightly. They leaned in and finally America closed his eyes while Germany tilted his head.

"Amerika!"

The younger nation barely had time to gasp as his eyes shot open only to blur at the sight of a bosom. He felt the air in his throat leave him from something constricting around his throat. When he made to feel his way out of the wall he'd suddenly been pushed against his palms pressed against something soft and warm.

Oh, those were breasts.

"I finally caught up to you, yay! I saw you, you did wonderful, Alfred!" That muffled voice booming against the chest America was shoved face-first into definitely sounded like Ukraine. He hasn't seen that woman in a while.

He finally had the chance to take a deep breath in when she pulled him away to take a look at his medal. "Oh, wow! Look at it!" She reached out and skimmed her hand over it before taking in America's appearance. He looked winded and his knees knocked from lack of air. He was about ready to collapse. "Are you feeling well?" the older Kiev sibling reached out and pressed her palm to America's forehead.

"In a minute," America answered, holding up his finger, taking steady breaths of air before straightening his form and offering Ukraine the polite smile he'd been too caught off guard to give. "Hey, didn't expect to see you here, Ukraine."

"Neither did I," she replied. "But I am so happy I took this trip. I have not seen my baby siblings in years. It was good to see them again." She closed her eyes and placed her hands over her heart, a tender feature passed over her facial expression to let America know she was thinking of the memory she finally got to see the two again.

"Yeah, that's what's great about the Olympics. No politics or wars. Brings countries together again."

Ukraine opened her eyes and smiled. She watched America turn and offer Germany a wink at which the older country flushed. She had not seen Germany flush since he was a little thing. It was quite
cute, but still she could not shake the feeling of her heart dampening at the sight and fighting off that urge to frown at the display.

"Oh, Germany. When will you be entering the games?" It was rude to speak with only one nation despite her approach mainly to see America.

Germany looked toward her and opened his mouth to respond, but America beat him to it. "Tomorrow," he said. Ukraine giggled. She could see Germany groan. In the midst America's eyes sparkled. "I have an idea, how about you come with? We're heading out to celebrate my gold win."

Ukraine smiled. She looked ready to jump into America's arms and ask, "Where to?" but a quick frown erased all excitement and she backed away. "Nyet, I am sorry, but I promised Ivan and Natalia to spend the evening with them."

"Oh, that's cool," America said with a nod, completely understanding. He always was so. "Maybe next time then. Or, how about when you win a gold yourself?"

Ukraine blushed and waved the American off with a little laugh. "You think too highly of me."

"I believe in you," America swore. He grinned. "Seriously, when you win a gold we'll party. How's that sound? Also, I suggested it so that means if Russia and Belarus want to celebrate they're just gonna have to come."

Ukraine giggled again. "Da, very well."

"Sweet." America then made to turn with Germany. He waved farewell. "We'll see you around. I'll be watching."

"Me as well," she called back and watched the two disappear. She smiled at the sight of Germany taking the lead while America focused on waving her goodbye until they were out of the walkway. When he noticed his boyfriend was leaving him behind he turned swiftly and Ukraine caught at the last second before the two turned round the corner America reach out and take Germany's hand in his.

They were a lovely couple. But a couple that didn't make her heart swoon like the other countries. She sighed and turned around, making her way back to her siblings.

"Where have you been, Katyusha?" came Belarus' annoyed voice. She was the baby of the family and felt that the eldest sibling should always be by her side, tending to her, which Ukraine would not mind doing if not for the sake that her people needed her presence a majority of the time.

"I was congratulating Amerika on his win," she explained with a light smile. "He won gold, isn't that exciting?"

Belarus simply scoffed and crossed her arms. Russia, however, said nothing.

"He is going to celebrate with the friends, but, listen to this, he even said he believed I would win a gold. Isn't that nice, da?"

Belarus simply rolled her eyes and then leaned over toward her big brother. "Big brother will win all of the gold, isn't that right?"

Ukraine pouted. Was it so much to have her siblings encourage her? She expected this much from Belarus but when she turned to look for approval from her baby brother she found his mind elsewhere. She frowned in understanding.
It was the winter season. Her brother was always so different during this time of year. Always so reserved. So haunted.

It was best to keep him warm during times like this.

"Let's go inside where there is warm food and drink, da?" Ukraine suggested, coaxing her siblings to listen and follow her.

Belarus immediately agreed and it was her who began pulling Russia along. Despite the season belonging to the General, Ukraine was truly happy that she was once again reunited with her siblings. America was right; the Olympics held off every tension or strain any country had with each other. It was a good feeling that she hoped would play around for the remainder of the games.

The next day, at the luge competition Ukraine stood up and clapped loudly for her brother who had won a silver medal in the men's singles. Belarus wasn't inclined to do so which made Ukraine a little upset. She wondered how the girl would react even if their brother had won a gold.

But her good-feelings hadn't lasted long seeing how it had been Germany to win the gold. Now, she was happy for him, to see the pride in his stance as the German national anthem played across the speakers—she even spied Russia trying to hide his distaste, Ukraine giggled quietly at that—but what made her heart leap was when the anthem was finished and the crowd cheered once more only for America to rush up to the podium and snatch Germany off the top giving him a deep congratulating kiss before the entire crowd, and the other two wining nations which just so happened to be a swooning Italy . . . and her brother.

"No respect," Ukraine heard Belarus mutter next to her. She glanced down at her little sister to see her visible distaste for the couple. Of course Russia hid his displeasure better for the sake of the cameras flashing and gravitating toward the United States and his partner he had wrapped in his arms and almost bent in half.

It didn't take Germany long before he caught himself and surprised America by kissing back, thusly bending him into a dip before pulling away and smiling so big at him. America grinned in approval and the two straightened. America took Germany's hand and held it up in victory while Germany showed off his medal to the photographers.

Big sisters would always be able to tell when their baby sibling was in distress, and Ukraine could see that Russia was. She could feel his unhappiness from there in the stands. It was a shame, a real shame. She remembered one time when Russia expressed how he and America had been so close they could almost feel the other's emotions. Now, looking at America with Germany, she could see he was blinded to the hurt so close to him.

But even so America was happy. She could see it. She understood that he and Germany had a slight issue the previous year but they were close again, shoulder to shoulder, arm wrapped around arm, fingers entwined. She could practically feel their affection for the other emitting off of them. It was no wonder the nations around cooed and swooned at the sight. America was a pleasantry to see so carefree and honest in happiness, while it was something new to see Germany mirror those emotions, of course nothing but shadows compared to America's young and pure affection.

So, Ukraine wondered if this picture set before her was what Russia and America would have looked like had their courtship succeeded and made it out into the public of the world. She wondered if the other nations would have been so inclined to congratulate them, to say they looked happy and whole-heartedly in love together. She wondered if her brother would have smiled just like Germany. He was a lucky nation, very lucky.
Ukraine remained polite and acknowledged the two's relationship like the others. But, in her heart of hearts she could not help but pray that America be chased from Germany's arms, back into her brother's. She knew that their national relation status left much to be desired but here, in Sochi, for sixteen days she hoped—she prayed for a miracle.

Even if that miracle had to rip apart another relationship.


It had been freezing when America woke up. It was probably around four in the morning and he figured his a/c busted or something. But, it was too early to do anything and so he cocooned himself in his blankets and managed to snuggle into his own warmth. He almost slept in and missed the competition that day, but he made it in time.

Despite waking up on the wrong side of the bed that morning—literally—he was feeling very optimistic about the day. It was the day of love in his calendar and, in another country or not, he so planned a romantic evening for him and his boyfriend. There was a slight problem though, there had been a decent amount of snowfall the previous night and he could barely even get out of the hotel.

But of course, optimistic America, this would not dampen his plans in the slightest. Mother Nature worked for him, not the other way around.

He was out on the town most of the day, making reservations, picking out some presents; the usual. When he finally got back to the hotel the day had almost set. He raced back to his room, took a shower, changed into something a little more nice—he knew Germany wouldn't mind what he was wearing, but America wanted to look nice for him and to show what a classy boyfriend he was.

Everything was almost in place when he noticed the lay of his room. What a mess. Contrary to popular belief he wasn't as messy as they believed him to be. He figured it was a knack he picked up from his old man, but he'd never admit that out loud. So he cleaned up everything and set it in place, better now than later—there was no telling when he'd get back to his room.

It was still freaking freezing though. He rubbed his hands and blew out some hot air. He could see his breath, that's how cold it was. With a groan he walked up to the thermostat. He glared at it menacingly. It said it was 76 degrees but it certainly did not feel like that. Well, he'd complain to Russia later, as of right then he had better plans for the evening.

America reached for his jacket and slung it on. He about headed out the door when he felt something against his chest. Patting himself he furrowed his brow. When he reached into his pocket he found an envelope full of money.

He was drawing a blank. Wait, now he remembered. He tapped the envelope against his temple and decided to get this task out of the way first. It shouldn't take him long.

He made his way out of his room and toward the other wing of the hotel where the Asian countries were roomed. On his way there he ran into Japan who was proudly sporting a superb gold medal around his neck.

"Kiku, looking badass with that thing!" America praised. Japan had turned to him and smiled. He offered a formal bow in which America politely returned with a chuckle.

"Greetings America-san, you look very nice this evening. Going out on the town?" Kiku asked.

"Yup," America answered with a nod. "Gonna go grab Germany and me and him are gonna hit a nice restaurant I reserved a table at. Gonna be a private evening for the both of us."
"I wish you well then," Japan said before noticing the envelope in America's hand. "What is that for?"

America sighed and waved the envelope around slightly. "Gotta pay China a visit." He caught Japan's frown. He knew Japan and he had been having disagreements and with America practically owing China his home and everything in it, well, Japan was sitting on a rather uncomfortable seat so to say.

Japan kept to himself though. If he had a serious issue then he'd tell him. America knew him that well and Japan was close enough to confide in him.

Slowly, Japan moved out of America's way and offered him a word of warning. America just smiled it away and waved Japan goodbye, telling him to go out with South Korea to celebrate. America wasn't afraid of China like the rest of Asia. He actually didn't know what to think about at the moment and he wouldn't let the reminder of a little debt get him down, not when he was at the 2014 Winter Olympics, and especially not when it was Valentine's Day.

"Come in." That was China's voice America caught after knocking on the designated room. America did so and offered the country his American grin.

"Hey, how's it going China, ma man?" China was currently lounging, looking at his two gold medals previously won. He was caught out of his daze when America's voice rung out across the room.

"Ah, Měiguó, how nice to see you." China leaned up, his two gold medals clinking loudly across the silent room against his breast.

"Came to bring you this," America said. He held up the envelope and then made his way to a nearby chair. He sat down and pulled the money out of the envelope and began counting it in front of China. It was sad to say this has become a routine. After he finished counting he stacked the bills together and handed it to China who chuckled when he took up the green dollars.

"You couldn't have converted this into yuan? Would have been much easier," China explained as he fanned through the money one last time before turning and setting it on the lampstand next to him.

America frowned. "Didn't know you wanted me to. I can if you want."

"Bié, bié." China waved America off. There was no need anymore. "Are you not going to compete in the remaining games today?"

"Nah, got something planned for me and Germany," America said with a smile, jabbing his thumb behind him to signal he needed to go.

"Ah, that is right, it is your romance day," China noted with a nod.

"Yeah, doing something special. To make up for me being a shitty partner," America muttered with a sad sigh. "You got some games you're participating in tomorrow?"

"I do," China nodded. "How about yourself? I should hope you are feeling up to it." China seemed more observing as of late. His ancient eyes trying to peer right through America's guise.

"I believe I will," America said with a shrug. "Worst case is I'll be dead on my feet, ya know. Hopefully we'll get back to the hotel at a decent hour."

China nodded. He glanced down, his eyes seemed fixated on the shiny medals. "How many do you have, Měiguó?"
"Hm?" America noticed he was talking about the medals. "Oh, I think I'm on twenty-seven now."

"I mean gold." China grinned at his medals. Winning them, and beating the others was the best. He'd never felt such pride, especially with the Winter Olympics where he had a huge disadvantage compared to the Summer Olympics where he usually won the most.

"Oh, um, about nine," America replied.

China let out a small frown. He only had two gold. Gold was all that mattered. The other two were a waste, and it was countries like America that opted to count them together as a whole. Must be a Western thing.

"Do you think you will win more?" China was looking at America now. The nation seemed anxious to leave. It wasn't out of nervousness, no, China can hardly think of anyone who made America nervous for one country, but that was decades ago. No, America was wanting to leave but he knew him, he was polite enough to stay until China so dismissed him in a manner.

America shrugged. "Possibly. That's up to my team." America smiled, proud of every single one of them. So many were first-timers. Seven of the gold medals won were by such athletes and America couldn't be more proud of them.

"I know I will," China assured and stood up. He maneuvered around his room and made himself some tea. "Would you like some?" He motioned the pot to America. He caught that almost silent sigh. America wanted to leave.

"Sure," America replied.

China ignored the rude gesture and prepared him some tea. When he handed it to him he noted the coldness of the younger's hands. Usually America was a warm country, warmer than most.

"Why so cold, Měiguó?" China questioned.

"Ah, a/c broke," America mentioned with a distained frown. "Gonna talk to the staff about it tomorrow."

China nodded and turned around to peer out his balcony window at the wintery wonderland. It had started to snow again. China clicked his tongue. "Painting white again. When one thinks about Russia that's all that's imagined: snow."

America frowned under his teacup. That wasn't so true for himself.

"Have you spoken with him much?" China inquired.

"No, I haven't," America answered honestly, setting his cup down. He didn't understand why China was prolonging his visit. He had his money. All America wanted to do now was leave and retrieve his date. "He's been kept to himself most of the time. Heh, even when he wins gold he's get off the podium immediately after his national anthem's played and disappears. Weird for a host country."

"I heard he is spending most of his time with his sisters," China said. "He has nine too."

America honestly couldn't care about Russia's medal count, much less his gold. "Yeah, well they haven't seen each other in a while. Not all three of them that is. So it's expected."

"Still, he's quite a rude host country, wouldn't you say?" China turned to America who sighed and shrugged his shoulders.
"He's just not the type to go all out for his guests," America excused. "Every country's different."

China frowned. He still disliked Russia. The country always thought himself better than him even though China was a superpower himself. Russia was waning and he didn't want to admit it. Lately he knew Russia was trying to strengthen up again and China disliked it greatly.

Russia had his chance at world power and failed. China, however, would not. He would win just as he said he would and Russia . . . that conceded nation would be bowing to him. Learning his language, using his money, and seeing his lovers underneath him . . . China turned. He looked toward America. He grinned and took a heavy gulp of tea, finishing his drink.

Setting the cup down on the counter China took up the money America had given him. He fanned it before rolling the bills against his palm. "You know . . ." he sat himself down on the armrest of the couch near America. His amber eyes gazed at the blond country who looked up at him with curious sky blue irises. "You do not have to spend the next hundred years repaying me if you would . . ." China set the bundle on money on his thigh and leaned ever so slightly closer to the American nation. "Sleep with me."

America's eyes fluttered before they widened. He stiffened, his posture straightening at China's suggestion.

"I . . . uh . . . China, I have a boyfriend," America slowly got out; just to make sure China understood him.

China's confidence did not waver. He rolled his shoulders indifferently. "I am certain he would support your decision in accepting my offer," China reasoned. "He does not want to see you in debt any longer than your people."

America gawked. His mouth parted, jaw bobbing to form a word and China couldn't help but think that mouth could be put to better use than trying to spit out silly American words. He could see America contemplating his offer, placing Germany in the equation. While China wasn't too keen on keeping track of their relationship he knew Germany cared for the boy, knew that he wanted him out of debt as quickly as his boss.

China was offering an easy way out, a faster way too. He was good on his word. He would relinquish all debt if America did this one thing.

Again, China leaned forward. He was standing. His hand reached out and touched America's cheek. Piercing blue eyes darted up to him and China's never beheld such uncertainty before in his life. China had money. Anyone would throw themself in his bed for him. Why was America so unsure and . . . frightened?

"You are beautiful, Měiguó," China serenaded. He could feel the slight trembles under his palm. The high levels of uncertainty was frightening America and China mentally smirked: He was a virgin. Germany had yet to touch him. Oh, Russia, what you have missed, old friend. "The most beautiful of any Western nation," China admitted. It was true. Perhaps it was America's purity that stood him apart from the others.

Then, America stood up. China had expected him to sit gaping at him like a fish. Now he was standing up, making China look up at him. China inwardly chuckled. America had grasped the hand caressing his cheek and held it still, just a touch away from the skin. China could feel the pressure, but he was not afraid. No, he could tell it
was America who was afraid of the very thought of intercourse.

What a pretty little virgin.

China pulled his hand from America's grip and then cupped his face. Such a hard face to read at times. "You don't have to be afraid, méili, I will take care." China let his fingers slowly dance under America's strong jawline and then close to his ears. One even glided down his neck, rubbing the backs of his knuckles against the tan skin there—funny, China hated tan skin, found it utterly unattractive, but he could not deny America was beautiful in it. "I will be gentle."

China could see him contemplating. He could see it by the way he bit his bottom lip and took one quick glance toward the money left on the armrest. America always liked taking the easy way out anyways so this was ideal for him was it not?

Still, China wanted to take him. Right there and then, in that very place. He had to. Then he would tell Russia. To have America underneath him, to be inside him, to place his scent all over him . . . oh, what would Russia think?

China mentally smirked. He knew what that old fool would think and he wanted to see his face when his foretold domination of America came to pass. He honestly didn't understand why no one's touched the boy until now. He was an ideal bedmate.

When America looked away China grabbed his face again. He needed to him to keep his eyes on him. More uncertainty would come if he looked away.

"Just once," China continued to goad. "Just once. That's all I ask." China was leaning closer. Pulling America's neck down. Their foreheads were close to touching. "Just one night. Leave all pride behind just tonight. Lay underneath me. Spread your legs for me. Just this one night."

America's brows were knit. The conflict was building inside him. All China needed to do was press it closer to him.

"Do it for your people," China whispered. His hand had snaked around America's neck, rubbing the nape and the smaller golden hairs poking out. Slowly, subtly, he was pressing down, pushing America's face ever closer toward his. "Do it for Germany."

China could feel America's warm breath on his lips. He inhaled the moisture and it left him intoxicated. Had he only promised one night with him? Gods above if he tasted better than when inhaled he should have him every night.

Finally China's lips rubbed against America's. Just light touches, swaying back and forth before he applied a little pressure. Slowly, carefully, he pressed harder until the touch could be deemed as a kiss.

China would have America. He would have him that very night in Russia's home, moaning for him, begging for only him. China would be his first. China would have beat them all to those tight walls. All too quickly his hopes for a passionate night faded when America pulled back. The younger nation turned his head and pressed his hand against his mouth.

"No," he said quickly, shaking himself out of China's hold. China could have fought to hold him, but he let him go albeit reluctantly. "No, I—I can't." Then, America took a quick glance at China and then toward the stack of money again. "I will just pay you."

China sighed. America had to grow rebellious right then. Stepping back China leaned against the
armrest and took up the money. "I am offering you an easier way." America wouldn't look at him now. "You are stubborn."

"I don't care how long it takes," America said. "I will pay my debt off to you."

China frowned and crossed his arms. "The offer still stands." America turned from him. "I will leave my door unlocked. I'll wait for you."

America said nothing as he left. He left the wing in a hurry, even passing by a concerned Japan whose eyes then narrowed back toward China's room. If the Asian country wanted to confront America's debt collector then he could, America felt sick to his stomach and had to leave. He came to the lobby and remained there for a while, trying to clear his head. But there was still a problem; too many nations buzzing around and he being the United States of America ensured that someone would approach him.

He needed to clear his head and so he slunk out of the hotel and moved to the snow-laden spacious patio in the back. The sun was setting. He stood there in the snowfall watching it set.

The darker the day got the thicker the snowfall and now the city lights dimmed in the dreary weather. America wondered if he'd even be able to get to the restaurant he paid good money to reserve a table for. Hm, probably not. But that was fine; traveling right now in this kind of weather seemed daunting.

He was usually the one to freeze his balls off but right then America hadn't felt the slightest bit of chill. He hadn't even zipped up his jacket properly and the snow continued to blanket everywhere—except him. Just as the light of the sun faded America glanced down at his hands. They'd been red holding onto the railing but now as the larger snowflakes fell they just seemed to melt against his skin.

The patio lights flickered on but it offered little visibility. He really should head back inside but his head still wasn't clear. He had plans that evening and now all he wanted to do was isolate himself for the rest of the night—outside if that is what it took to get away from the other nations.

It was still strange, how he didn't feel cold at all.

America really couldn't see a thing out there. The lights from the city even blurred no matter how close they were. He could, however, see something else.

At first he thought that it was just the way the snow gusted around him, but the sharp bite from the chilling wind felt almost like a . . . touch. America was not cold, but he felt it. It was strange, very strange.

It circled round him. Then up it went, around the dim lamps and up into the sky. America felt that he had gone insane and couldn't do anything but accept what he had already suspected.

Neck arched back it rose and its form enlarged. America was not afraid. Perhaps he'd have been awestruck if he wasn't so inwardly tormented with the daily reminder of his debt and growth of his enemies, but now . . . now he just felt numb and . . . he wasn't cold at all. The snow melted the moment it touched his skin, he hadn't felt a thing. But this shadow before him, it cowered not but looked at him—was probably the only one who knew where America was.

America chuckled. He remembered '72, he remembered Russia talking about this man. "The General," is what Russia had called him if America remembered correctly. Looks like he's stayed too long and gone just as insane as Russia.
America was not afraid of him. He had been before, when he first saw him outside his window all those decades ago. He thought he was a ghost, America was unsettled by ghosts, but the way Russia described him was something else entirely. Nothing but a tyrant and America hated tyrants so he silently dared him—silently asked him to try to destroy him, just like all his enemies had tried and failed to do. Maybe this deity would have some luck.

America could hear his voice in the howling whistling wind. Or maybe he felt it, he didn't know. He was urging him to lay down, to let the cold and ice cover him. For him to close his eyes and succumb to the numbing darkness. That sounded nice; to just surrender it all.

After all, he was just a nation. From his amount of enemies; no one would miss him.

"Go away. Go away, you bitter spirit. Go away from him."

America felt sick. He couldn't think straight, he couldn't hear properly, he was hallucinating and he was freezing to death unawares. He swore he could hear someone saying something and he wondered if it was directed toward him. Must be, he was the only one out on the patio, or so he thought.

"Away! Away!"

America felt so tired. The cold was suddenly creeping in. He could feel his warmth slip from him as if someone was stealing it, taking everything he had, everything he was made of.

"Alfred, take my hand. Do not listen to him. Do not fall asleep."

But he wanted to. What was the harm in it?

"Come, let us leave."

America nodded. Whoever took his hand had a strong grip. There was a gentleness in it as well and once inside the strange trance-like state he had been in began to fade the more the heat generated from the hotel's conditioning began to rejuvenate him.

"You're so wet." The voice was clearing. A towel wrapped over his head and rubbed his hair. "You should not be out at this hour and in such a storm." America felt himself chuckle at their concern. How nice of them, whoever they were. "That's what he wants. He wants you to fall asleep so he can wake up. Don't you let that happen."

Now America felt them pull his jacket off. They sat him down and now he was looking at them. She looked so worried.

"Ukraine?"

She smiled. "You are awake now, good." She sighed in relief and rubbed the rest of his wet face. "The snow didn't stick, da?" She let out a chuckle to lighten the mood but the more America's mind cleared the more he could see how uneasy she was as she tended to him.

"Why are you here?" America had thought she'd be with her sister and brother.

"I am roomed here too," she replied. "Natalia insisted on rooming with Ivan at his home not too far from here, but I wanted to stay with everyone. I like it here. Is good, that way I can keep an eye on you so you don't wander off into the cold, da?"

America felt disturbed by her words and wondered how she grew. He wondered if every nation born
like this spoke about icy deathly grip so grimly casually.

Ukraine sighed. The towels helped soak up the wet settled into America's hair and on his skin, but his clothing really was soaked. She noted that America soon took notice of the uncomfortable feel.

"I am sorry," she apologized. "But it looks like your nice clothing is too wet."

America sighed. His dress shirt had been sticking to his chest in a line where it had been uncovered from the unzipped jacket. The thighs on his pant legs were wet as well as his dress shoes and socks on up to his calves. It was almost like the snow he had dredged in melted all around him the moment he came into contact with it. It was strange to say the least but the sudden shiver running through his body unsettled him.

"I know, you go and take a shower and I will get you new clothes, da?" America questioned the suggestion but after some time he took in where he was. He was in a room, no doubt Ukraine's.

He really should just head back to his room and get the task over with himself but that was down another wing, one full of flights of stairs and elevator stops. He would never be able to get back to his room without running into another nation and he did not want a confrontation in the slightest. Plus, his room was cold and being wet as is he didn't feel like catching a cold.

Slowly, his senses still coming out of the buzzing numbness from the unexpected trance he had been placed in, America nodded his head and reached into his pant pocket, pulling out his card key.

"Here." Even America's voice sounded groggy, like he had just woken up from an hours-long nap.

"I will go and get you nice clothing. I will not touch anything else," Ukraine assured. America nodded again. He still looked dazed and she wondered if it was from that frightful encounter or something previous. He looked troubled. She didn't like seeing him like this.

She reached out and touched his arm. "Go ahead. Take a nice long hot shower," she goaded. America met her gaze. In a minute he nodded and slowly stood up from the chair she had plopped him in after bringing him to her room.

Ukraine gently pushed him toward the bathroom and once the door was shut she turned and made her way to the American section of the hotel. Entering into America's room she noted how cold it was. She frowned seeing General Winter peeking through the window. She averted her gaze, setting herself solely on the task at hand which was to go through America's clothing to find a change for him to wear.

She ignored the old ghost and his scheming ways. She was upset with him trying to attack America like that. Always such a violent spirit. Ukraine hated him, more so she hated her brother's worship of him.

She understood why her little brother clung to him. He was his only defender from those she could not fend against. Had been for a long time, so Russia felt he owed him his life as well as his loyalty.

He had told her that the spirit had created him a mate, that mate supposedly being America. If so then why does the General seem to hate that golden ball of sunshine so much? She didn't understand. But she would not have him harm him in any way, no matter if he wasn't as close to her or her siblings as of late.

In silence she gathered up new clothing and other hygienic items before making her way back to her room. Upon entering her room she found America had yet to come out of the shower. She waited. He remained in the bathing room for two more hours.
She frowned, wondering if she should go in and check on him. Surely the water had gone cold. She didn't want him ill.

Before she made to do just that she heard the water silence. Later, America opened the door looking for her. She stood immediately and handed him his clothing.

"Thanks," he offered to her after dressing and coming out of the bathroom.

"I can help finish your grooming, da," Ukraine said, coming close with a comb and cologne. America's mind still seemed elsewhere but he sat on the edge of the bed and allowed her to groom him like the big sister he never had.

"There, you look spiffy," she informed with a smile. She turned to the tall mirror on the side of the hall and encouraged him to stand to inspect himself. He offered a quick smile. But she saw his upset in simply looking at himself, as if he couldn't stand the sight of his own image. What a shame. He was such a beautiful thing.

A knock rapped against Ukraine's room door.

"Excuse me." Ukraine pulled herself away from America's side and answered the call. She smiled at seeing her little sister but she did not offer any sweet expression in return. One problem was that Ukraine had the door cracked a little too far apart, enough for the younger nation to see the other occupant inside her room.

"Why is he in your room, sister?" Belarus hissed at America, narrowing her eyes to glare at him. The superpower caught sound of her voice and turned.

"Oh, I—" Ukraine turned to make up an excuse and possibly tell the truth, after all, her siblings would understand the issues with the General and his constant threat on other nations.

"She was just helping me out," came America's annoyed reply. He sat himself down, putting on dry new socks and slipping on his medium dried dress shoes. "I'll be out of your hair in no time."

Belarus pushed past her sister and entered her room, frowning at the American she hadn't been too fond of lately. She made to stand before her sister as if she were some sentinel set to guard her from the big bad USA. America rolled his eyes at the idea.

"Where is brother?" Ukraine asked. Though she was glad he hadn't accompanied Belarus to retrieve her for their evening, she, in a way, wished he would have come if only to see America. The two hadn't so much as made eye contact since the Olympics began.

"He went out for a little while. He said he would return soon," Belarus stated.

"Does that mean we can get into the city?" America asked. He hadn't checked yet to see if he could hail a taxi to get out. He had all of his presents ready, yes, well, save for one. After that he could proceed with his scheduled evening.

"Da," Belarus muttered, almost completely ignoring America. "You should leave."

"Natalia, please, don't be like that," Ukraine complained. He was a guest in her room as of right then. She could hardly imagine what her little sister would have been like had he and their brother began courting. Goodness, maybe this route in destiny was for the best.

"It's cool, I'm going. I know when I've overstayed my welcome," America admitted, gathering up his wet clothing and making to head out.
"Oh, I can get those cleaned for you," Ukraine said as she reached out and took up the dirty clothes from America's grasp. She enjoyed being of service. "But in no way do I wish to see you leave so soon. You are well, da?"

"I'm warm," America offered. He leaned forward and offered the older nation a kiss on the cheek. "Thanks for knocking some sense into me, Katyusha."

Ukraine's cheeks tinted a faint pink. Her fingertips touching where America had kissed her. He was warm indeed, even with the feel of his lips gone from her skin the heat lingered. It was a pleasant and calm feeling. One Ukraine was familiar with. What a pleasant youth.

"Don't touch my sister," Belarus spoke up. She was grinding her teeth and glaring daggers at America as he maneuvered around the ladies to get to the door.

America turned to look at her. He surprised the both of them with a sudden playfulness that came out of nowhere. He grinned mischievously. "Oh, I didn't mean to make you jealous, Belarus." America then leaned forward and kissed the younger of the women on the cheek as well. "There, now you got one too."

Belarus' face heat beet red. America darted out of the room before he could discover if it was embarrassment or anger. He felt it was the latter and swore he felt and heard the swish of a dagger fly past him. Wouldn't surprise him.

Those girls were sweet—Belarus in her own way—and Ukraine all around. He was grateful for her having found him out there. He made sure to zip up when he headed outside and called a taxi to him. The snow hadn't lightened up, but at least the roads were being worked on.

He really didn't know what had gotten into him. Why he had felt like that when the snow began to fall. He guessed he was just troubled by China's offer and had too much to think of.

He hadn't even remembered Ukraine bringing him to her room and drying him off. The long hot shower gave him some time to think without the fear of freezing to death and seeing imaginary beings floating in the sky. He'd have to remind himself to give her a gift for her generosity.

Now, after his mind finally cleared to a certain extent, he decided to try his hardest and use what was left of the evening to carry out his plans. Looking at his watch he noted he had a short amount of time to pick up what he needed, head back to the hotel, pick up Germany, and head over to the restaurant. He hoped Germany was ready, well, he hadn't told him he was doing anything because America wanted it to be a surprise so he hoped the German was presentable—wait, it was Germany; of course that nation always looked his best.

America caught a chuckle rise in his throat at the thought of that. Yep, that was his man alright, always prepared.

"Mr. Boyscout," America chuckled to himself after looking at a particularly enticing bouquet of cornflowers. Usually, especially for St. V's day, one would grab a dozen or two of red, red roses, but he knew Germany pretty well. Roses were loved by every nation, but Germany's absolute favorite flower was cornflowers and so America picked up the bouquet and made to make it his to give.

They even smelled great. But the there was a stronger scent overriding them and America turned. He smiled. There were vases full of sunflowers. He'd never seen some so good-looking this time of year and smelt so ripe and strong.

America adored roses, of course, but sunflowers; they held a special place in his heart, reminded him
of his childhood, of a time so innocent and full of dreams. America leaned down to smell some stronger scented ones but backed away when it moved, the cluster being pulled along with the vase into the arms of another.

"I didn't think I'd see you here, Amerika." America turned, looking at Russia who was examining the price tag of the vase of sunflowers he had just picked up. He caught Russia take one glance at him, a majority of the sweep looming over the bouquet of flowers already in hand. "Are those for your lover?"

"Oh, yeah," America nodded.

"Not roses?" Russia would not meet gazes. In fact, he seemed pure business while he moved to look over at another bouquet, this one carrying many flax flowers. He picked up the best looking one.

"Oh, no," America replied. "He likes these the most, so I'm sure he'll appreciate it."

Russia said nothing. Instead he just turned, walked away to the florist. "Can you combine these two?" The female nodded and took both from Russia's hands. "I'll pay for them now."

"Those for your sisters?" America questioned, standing behind the larger nation, waiting his turn to pay.

"Da," Russia nodded. "Is Valentine's Day. I am taking them out and giving them gifts."

"What a nice brother you are," America teased. He even let his elbow jut out and poke Russia's arm. Just slightly of course, didn't want to cause a war or anything. "Where are you taking them?"

"Out," Russia simply replied. America puffed his cheeks in a pout.

"Sheesh, don't have to be all sour, Mr. Grumpypants," America muttered. "Just askin'. I'm taking Germany out to a nice restaurant. I've already reserved seats. I think he'll like it."

"I never asked, therefore I do not care," Russia replied when the florist returned and handed him the vase full of sunflowers and flax. He paid and simply made to leave.

"H-Hey, wait!" America quickly slapped down a bill and just told the cashier to keep the change. He darted back outside to catch the nation. He was making large strides to the curb, probably going to hail a taxi himself.

The snow was steadying out, but of course the moment he stepped outside a large gust of wind nearly knocked America back into the store. He quickly shielded the delicate flowers from the harsh element and continued his way. Finally, he caught up to Russia.

"Never got the chance to talk to you since the opening ceremony," he spoke out, his eyes fluttering from the heavy snowflakes falling on his face. "How have you been holding up?"

"I am wining," Russia stated. "That is all."

"Not talkative much, huh?" America chuckled. "This how you and your sisters talk?"

"Nyet, just you and I," Russia replied.

America frowned. "You saying I make for lousy conversations?"

Russia sighed, his breath coming out in a cloud. "Just useless chatter."
"Useless?" America's frown deepened. "Look, I'm trying to be friendly. It's the Olympics. We don't have to bite each other's heads off here. We already do on a daily basis."

"We have nothing in common," Russia stated. America didn't know why but he felt hurt when the older nation said that. The taxi came and America stood frozen giving Russia the chance to leave him there in the snow. "It is pointless talking even if we are not fighting at the moment."

Just like that, he left. America didn't know how long he stood there but luckily the flowers didn't wear too much. He sighed. Perhaps he should stop trying.

After all, this evening wasn't about Russia. It was about Germany.

Later that Valentine's Day evening.

"America... are you well?"

America jolted out of his thoughts and turned to his date. Germany had already finished half his meal while America—looking down he had yet to touch it. The food was getting cold by now and there was nothing more that American hated than a cold slab of steak.

"You seem distracted," Germany added a moment later after wiping his mouth and setting the cloth napkin down. "Is there something that's upsetting you today?"

America sighed after a little while. His eyes darted toward Germany and the older nation took note in the weariness in them.

"I came here to get away from it all," America spoke. "We all did. So why do some countries have to bring up our strained daily lives?"

Germany nodded in understanding. So that was what was eating the boy. America... likes to play the big boy but still has the sensitivity of a child. Germany smiled. He hadn't changed. It just meant he had a tender heart.

"Just ignore those countries," Germany gave thought. He mentally wondered if it was Russia.

Just recently he and America had been straining themselves from the other. America used to not concern himself with the old nation—not since Germany and he began dating—but lately, America's been upset around him. It could be because Germany hadn't been close to America as of late and without a partner to hold onto America tends to lash out violently, of course that meant he'd poke the biggest, strongest country besides himself. Unfortunately that happened to be Russia.

"They are just pining for attention," Germany replied. "And if being a nuisance to you will gain them such then they'll do it."

America sighed. "Yeah, you're right." Then he smiled. It was small, but at least a smile. "Like usual."

Germany offered a smile in return. More so when he watched America dig into his meal. In mid bite America smacked his lips and sat back.

"Oh, that's right!" He turned to the bag sitting next to his chair and pulled something out.

Germany certainly hoped America had wiped his fingers before touching what he was grabbing—the younger had the habit of leaving messy food fingerprints everywhere that was instantly becoming a pet peeve of Germany's.
America held the box against his chest for a teasing moment before his eyes flickered a playful glint. Finally he handed it over to his boyfriend. "Here ya go, big guy."

Germany took the present and opened it. Inside the rectangular white box was a pair of very nice formal shoes. The whiff of brand new leather nearly overwhelmed Germany.

"Was hard to find your size for some odd reason," America said with a shrug. He took another bite of his steak, and, of course, with no reason for table manners spoke with his mouth full. "And I want to see you wearing those at the next world meetings." He smiled at Germany, pieces of food falling past his lips and onto his plate which he later snatched up with his fingers and shoved back into his mouth.

Germany sighed but smiled anyways. "Ja, I will do that." He set the box down next to his chair. "I thank you for all of these gifts, America."

"Alfred, it's Alfred," America pressed. Germany had been doing good calling him by his human name in the beginning but after their little issue last year why he went right back to calling him by his formal national name.

Germany chuckled. "Ja, Alfred." Now Germany glanced down at his half eaten meal. He wasn't feeling hungry anymore for certain reasons. Setting his silverware down politely he looked at his boyfriend. A frown on his face. "I must admit that I was focused on tomorrow's games and did not think to get you anything for tonight."

"That's fine," America waved off after wiping his face clean of food. "Kinda figured. Plus, I wanted to catch you off-guard, all the more fun to present you with gifts." America smiled at the memory of Germany's face after he had given him the bouquet of cornflowers when he came to his room.

Germany flushed slightly at that. He sighed and folded his hands. "I don't like it to be one-sided," he said.

America understood him and smiled knowingly at him. His eyes softening. "It's not. Don't worry."

There hadn't been much to do in the city save dine out, and with the snow continuing to fall why it was a surprise the couple managed to make it out and back to the hotel safely. The night was late but America had brought a movie with him and insisted they watch it.

"Transformers?" Germany questioned. "Hardly a romantic movie."

"Aww, come on, they blow stuff up, we gotta watch it together," America begged.

Germany could not say no to America of course and the two sat on the couch in his room and watched the entire movie. After it was over Germany looked at the clock. Already 12:00 A.M. they really should be getting to bed. But, of course . . .

"I have another movie!" America cheered, holding up yet another action movie.

Germany sighed. He could not say no to him.

"We should really be getting to bed," Germany suggested after the end credits of the second watched movie rolled. He was surprised America hadn't fallen asleep, he looked so weary earlier, but now he was wide awake.

"Wait, wait, there's something at the end," America said, patting Germany's shoulder he was leaning against.
Germany sighed. "Nein, I mean for the games."

"Sure, sure, just wait." That nation's eyes were glued to the screen and when the surprise ending ended he clapped his hands together. "Up for another one?"

"Another?" Germany looked at the new movie the American was holding up. Where had he hid them all? "Just how many did you bring?!"

"Figured I'd get bored sometime while here so I came prepared. We don't have to watch it if you don't want to." America frowned. Germany worried; had he upset him again? All thoughts of that went straight through the ceiling when he caught that mischievous sparkle in America's eyes as they glanced over toward him out of the corners. "Or, maybe you want to do something else?"

The suggestion rolled over in Germany's mind. Sleep was definitely on the top of his list, but as he ran down the mental outline America had surprised him by maneuvering swiftly and twisting to where he was sitting on his lap. Germany was surprised by the action but did not protest, especially when the nation leaned down and pressed his lips to his.

America opened his mouth first, his fingers stretching out to trace along Germany's strong jaw and up his high cheekbones. Germany followed America's lead, opening his mouth as well, but took the first initiative to press his tongue inside the younger's eager and awaiting mouth. When America's eyes fluttered shut and he let out a rumbling moan Germany lost it.

His arm wrapped around his waist and twisted the both of them, now firmly pressing the superpower into the cushions of the couch. Their kiss broke and America opened his eyes, looking up at Germany with a dark playful gaze. He bit his lip and smiled before leaning back up and, pressing his hand against the back of Germany's neck to pull him down into another kiss.

Tongues and teeth with America even pulling Germany's bottom lip into his mouth and sucking. Germany moaned. On instinct his pelvis groaned into America's. Now both moaned in unison, America letting go of the lip he teased to swell.

Germany had missed this; being so close to America, getting to hold him, to touch him, to kiss him. Since the surveillance scandal of last year Germany and America had parted for a little while. He knew America just wanted him next to him, but Germany's boss insisted he stand his ground and show his upset through separation. How he had ached to do this with America again.

It was true, the Olympics held all tension and wars off for games. And Germany wanted to play with America all night long, the early games in the morning be damned.

Bending his neck, Germany pressed a kiss to America's jaw. The nation turned his head and pressed into that mouth which Germany took advantage of. Downward he pressed his lips against America's pulse. His hands even had a mind of their own, rubbing America's arms before slipping inward to tease his chest, one hand, the right, reached down, rubbing just underneath his bellybutton.

That got a pleasant reaction out of the younger. America's knees jerked upward, colliding with Germany's before they struggled out from underneath his body and poked against his hips.

"Ah, Germany, slow-slow down there, bud," America muttered out. Germany could feel one of America's hands reaching in between them to push his rubbing right hand away from his lower regions.

"Relax," Germany simply said. He opened his eyes and could see the uneasiness in America. So, he cupped his face and brought him close, kissing him deeply again.
There, his troubled blue eyes closed again. Good. Germany's hands didn't travel down further this time, instead he rubbed up and down America's sides, coaxing him to calm himself.

When he felt America sigh into his mouth Germany pressed on. He pulled his lips away from that addicting mouth and peppered down America's face and then began sucking on his neck. He left two marks on him and observed his work for a moment. One was coloring red while the other dipped closer to purple.

He could feel America's legs moving against his hips. Germany thought that they were caressing him but came to understand that they were just moving out of nervousness. America was still tense.

Well, he started this, and Germany certainly wanted to finish. He was getting gold tonight.

Germany leaned in for another kiss which America opened his mouth and submitted to his tongue. Pressing closer Germany slunk one hand up America's shirt, feeling his bare side.

"Mm, mm, Ludwig." America was trying to pull his mouth away but Germany made sure that every time he tried to pull away he distracted the younger with fiery kisses and pressuring touches.

Germany rolled his hips into America's again. He moaned but America still tried to pull his mouth away.

"Ludwig, I—" America had opened his eyes again, but Germany wanted them closed in ecstasy.

"Shhh." Germany patted America's lips with his finger. Pulling the digit away he kissed those plump lips. "Everything is alright. I will take care of you."

Germany's wanted this for a long time. Now that America was officially his to call his own he ached for the day they would become of one flesh. And by God he wanted that day to be today.

"No, you don't understand, I—" Germany silenced America again with another kiss. More and more he could feel the younger closing his mouth, their kisses shallowing to mere lips against lips. So, Germany tried to get him to open his mouth again with gasps and moans.

The hand underneath his shirt traced up and up until the padding of his thumb felt the softer patch of skin that signified a nipple. He swiped across it and waited for America's reaction. It was a negative one however. The blonde's arm clamped down against his side and locked against Germany's hand.

Germany frowned. He opened his eyes and pulled his head away from America. The younger underneath him was gritting his teeth, his eyes squeezed shut and nervous flush reddening his face.

How many times would Germany have to assure America he would not harm him?

"Relax," Germany whispered out and leaned down. He retreated his hand and let his fingers play with the buttons on America's dress shirt before slowly slipping them out of their loops. Subtly, one by one he popped them out giving Germany access to the developed chest underneath. His kisses meeting bare skin. "Relax," he continued to urge.

He finally parted the shirt and rubbed his palms down America's ribs before cupping the curve of his back and pulling him flush against him. "Look at me." America's eyes were still closed tightly. "Alfred, look at me." Finally, those blue eyes opened. Germany hated to see the fright in them. He didn't understand why. He was not going to hurt him.

Then, Germany suddenly remembered the winter of '44. His heart sunk at the memory and then at the current sight of America. He had done this to him. He'd traumatized him to the point he was afraid of any intimacy. No, he'd make up for that, that would all change. He would show America
that he's changed.

"I will never harm you, Alfred. Please, trust me." Germany leaned in again for another kiss. One was offered be it small, but the feel of America's heated body pressed so close to his, the way it felt just to hold him in his arms, it was intoxicating.

Germany's free hand came up to caress America's face before traveling down his cheek to his jaw, down his neck to his collarbone. Light touches down his bared chest then down to rub against his belt buckle.

"Mm, no, Ludwig, please," America once again persisted, but still, Germany silenced him with a breathtaking kiss while his fingers bent and unhooked the buckle, pulling it apart. Before he touched the zipper of the pants he reached down further and rubbed America's crotch, urging him to harden.

America gasped, pulling away. His eyes opened again, the fright clear. "No, Ludwig—" When Germany tried to silence him with another kiss America turned his head. "Stop, right now." His tone was growing louder, more demanding.

"I won't harm you," Germany assured, he pressed his palm harder against America's crotch wanting to arouse him.

"But I will! Stop!" America nearly shouted. His hand quickly reached between the two of them and gripped Germany's wrist, squeezing so tightly that the older nation had no choice but to let go and back off. All thoughts of a pleasant night vanished when America scrambled out from under him, continuing to hold his wrist in a vice-like grip, twisting, nearly breaking. "Why do you guys only care about sex? I'm sick of it!"

Germany was surprised by the outburst. He stilled himself so not to agitate the American anymore but that didn't stop the younger from continuing to squeeze, to bend, and . . .

Before a snap resounded across the room, Germany made to voice his pain. "Alfred, you're hurting me."

America blinked and in an instant let go. He backed away. He looked horrified.

Germany now nursed his sprained wrist, holding it against his chest, himself subconsciously scooting away from his boyfriend. Just in case.

"Oh . . . God, I'm so sorry, Ludwig, I . . ." America reached out as if to help but his hands curled back. He looked uncertain. Glancing over to the refrigerator he hopped off the couch and dug into the freezer, taking out the icebox and finding a bag to place the cubes in. When he returned to Germany both had calmed considerably and America slowly approached the older in an attempt to reconcile. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hurt you," he said as he placed the icepack on the swollen wrist. "It's not broken is it?"

Germany frowned. "Nein."

America sighed. There was a silence after that. Eventually Germany took the icepack from America and pressed it against his injury himself.

"I am sorry for trying to go too far," Germany eventually muttered. America looked at him, neither met gazes, and soon America was glancing down at his hands, ones that hurt his partner—such monstrous hands. "I didn't know that it would make you that uncomfortable."

"No, don't be sorry, I should have warned you," America offered.
Germany inwardly winced at America's tone. He had tried to warn him, multiple times, but Germany had grown too bold and stupid.

"You spoke in plural when you referred to intimacy," Germany brought up. He would have left the subject alone hadn't something America said in an outburst internally upset him. "Have the others harassed you?"

"No," America lied. "It's nothing to be concerned over."

"As your partner we need to share things, America," Germany insisted. He'd been over this before. Last year, amid the scandal, but even then his words seemed to have not gotten through to the boy. When would he learn he was there for him and would always listen and help ease his troubles? "Who was it? Was it Russia?" Germany frowned. If he found out that nation was still harassing his boyfriend even though they had declared courtship . . .

"No," America said, shaking his head. He then offered that god-awful fake smile of his. "Like I said before, don't worry about it."

"It's this, America," Germany insisted. "This attitude is why we cannot grow close. You need to let me know what is wrong, why you are upset, and who has done it do you."

"I can take care of myself," America answered, crossing his arms and leaning back against the couch.

"I know you can," Germany assured. "But is it so wrong I know more about your troubles so this," he held up his iced wrist, "doesn't happen again?"

America's eyes caught sight of the injury. He was mentally scolding himself, Germany could see it in his eyes, see the way he bit his lip and cast his gaze down in shame over what he had done in his fright. At least his jaw was still intact. It hadn't been as bad as '44.

America sighed again. His hand running through his hair. "Earlier, before I picked you up, I went to pay China some of the money I managed to scrape up."

Germany silenced himself. He hated America's debt, especially when it was owed to that country. China was becoming strong through this and no one seemed to care or give a concern in the slightest. But Germany was wary, had warned America countless times before, but that stupid boy still found himself owing the Asian country nearly everything he had.

"It wasn't much," America replied. That frown on his lips let Germany know even he hated owing the other country. "But . . . he suggested an easier way to pay off the debt . . ."

Germany's heart sunk. He had a feeling he knew what America was about to say and even so he could not help his fist from clenching at the atrocity of the thought if what he assumed were so true.

"He said one night," America admitted, bowing his head shamefully. "He said he'd forget the rest of my debt I owe to him if I spent one night with him."

"Dass hurensohn!" Germany spit out. He was on his feet in less than a second leaving his boyfriend seated still, looking up at him with wide blinking eyes. Germany paced, his nostrils flaring at the audacity of that country for even suggesting such a thing of his boyfriend. HIS boyfriend. "He asked you this? What did you say?"

"What do you think I said?" America looked slightly offended by the almost accusing question. "I would never do something like that, Ludwig. I have some dignity, you know."
Germany really wanted to leave and confront China about this issue. The nerve of that nation.

"Don't confront him about this. I don't want this issue getting out. It's private, okay. Was supposed to remain between me and him because nothing came of it, but since you insisted, I so shared it with my significant other," America reasoned. He sighed and looked at the time. He really should be going. "Look, I'm sorry for what I did, really. But I don't want this issue further explored, not right now."

America got up, gathered his belongings and left. Germany sighed. He had tried and failed; failed to listen to the voice of his partner. How stupid could he be?

America really had come close to breaking his wrist. Come morning he could barely hold a pole and Prussia took note of this.

"What's wrong, West?" Prussia glanced down toward the wrist his little brother was nursing.

Unlike America, Germany felt it easier to share his problems with a friend, or, in his case, a sibling.

"America," Germany replied. Prussia nodded in understanding.

"Get into a wrestling match with him or something?" Prussia chuckled as he reached out and took hold of his brother's arm carefully, examining the sprain in the quiet of the locker room. "You know that's stupid to do, right?"

"Nein, I . . ." Germany felt almost ashamed of himself. "I believe I tried going too far with him. I tried to get him to relax, but he wouldn't. He grabbed my wrist and nearly broke it before I even understood what was happening. He wouldn't let me go far."

Instead of Prussia teasing and poking like he would usually do he remained solemn and quiet. His grip on his injury was even careful. His fingers traced over the bruised skin lightly.

"Ah, I see," he spoke up. He let out a soft sigh and closed his eyes. "Looks like you're in no shape to preform today. That's fine, the awesome me will win the gold for you." Prussia stood up and took up Germany's poles. The Prussian gave his little brother an encouraging smile. "Hey, don't look at me like that, have some faith in your dear old bruder."

Germany was going to protest but Prussia was already making his exit of the locker room. Before his full departure he stopped. He turned his head slightly, his scarlet eyes glancing back toward his handicapped brother.

"I'll talk to you later about this, Ludwig." Prussia's tone was even and serious. "It's about time you know so that," his eyes scanned over Germany's hurt wrist, "doesn't happen again."

With that Prussia was off, filling in for his brother the entire day and as long as it took for the swelling in his wrist to go down.

February 21st 2014

Ukraine's smile had been so big and her face completely red with adorable embarrassment. America had insisted she wear her gold medal all day. Wining a biathlon was challenging, but awesome if one did.

Nearly everyone was there per America's request and the entire bar overflowed with nations. Ukraine wasn't used to so much attention but she was grateful for America's dotting, was quite adorable and he looked happy gloating over her and celebrating her accomplishment.
Belarus and Russia had insisted they celebrate among family members, but she had promised herself to attend America's celebration beforehand, and he had said that if siblings wanted to celebrate along with her then they would just have to accompany the group. They did come if only for their sister, but as usual remained quiet and to themselves, only talking to her when needed to.

"Don't you two have more to say? Your sister just won her first gold. Get up and party," America said as he scooted into the booth next to the three siblings. Ukraine smiled at his attempt to get the two to participate in the karaoke and pool, but did take note of her siblings distaste for the nation's presence.

"They have had a long day, Alfred. It is fine for them to rest," she excused.

"Long day?" America rolled his eyes. "No one worked as hard as you to win that gold, they're fine."

"Get him out of my presence," Belarus muttered. She rolled her eyes.

"Don't be like that," Ukraine frowned. "Come, let's go dance." She reached out and pulled her sister. She went to touch her brother's hand but he moved away out of her reach. She frowned but understood. She could pull her little sister but she could not push her brother. Well, if that was how he wanted then he could just remain behind with America.

"Go join them, man," America urged.

"Why don't you since you're so insistent?" Russia offered, taking the shot of vodka next to him.

"Parties are meant to bring families together, that's why," America said through his teeth. He was getting tired of trying and Russia seemed to catch this.

With a sigh, Russia said, "Why do you continue, Amerika?"

America blinked, straightening in his seat. "What?"

Russia wasn't looking at him. No, his eyes were glued upon his sisters. He would have smiled at the sight of Ukraine getting Belarus to dance, even a little, if only he'd been by himself with no one to see him.

"You've got better things to do than spend your time trying to coax me out into the crowd," Russia stated. He sighed and leaned back in his seat. "Just leave me alone."

"That's why I stay," America pointed out with a chuckle. He grinned at confusing the Russian nation. "Because you don't like it. Gotta push your buttons, man."

Russia sneered and America laughed, slapping his knee. "Just kidding." The blond then settled down a little, leaning his elbows on the table. "Nah, just don't want you to feel left out."

"Some people are better off alone," Russia stated.

"I don't believe that one bit," America said with conviction. They met gazes before Russia broke the contact and looked off to find America's lover.

"Your lover I am certain would rather have your presence. Why don't you pester him," Russia suggested. He didn't need the American to get into his head. He's let himself fall too many times from that.

America turned and took in Germany. He was sitting with Prussia and Austria, the older two having
more of a conversation while he kept to himself.

"I doubt he wants me anywhere near him for a while," America admitted with a hard sigh.

Russia rose a brow. He heard about the scandal but he heard about other things that actually took place here in Sochi between the two. Glancing down Russia caught sight of the fading sign of a hickey on the uncovered part of America's neck. It didn't matter if he disapproved of someone touching America like that because America wasn't his and America was taken.

"Why, I didn't know Germany was that dissatisfying in bed," Russia chuckled at his own downgrade. "Though, I suspected as much."

"It's not that, Russia," America groaned, narrowing his eyes at the older nation.

Russia didn't care for America's excuses. "Being the United States of Amerika, many rumors fly around the city. Many nations hear many things. I doubt some are far from the truth," Russia said.

"Oh, so then you heard about China," America muttered. It was really a mumble. Probably not meant to be heard by anyone but his own consciousness, but Russia had good hearing.

He frowned. America hadn't been looking and therefore hadn't caught the strange look Russia was giving him. He hadn't even seen the older nation turn his gaze to look for the Asian country. He thought about removing himself from the booth seat to talk to his old "friend" if that were the case.

What America muttered suggested so many things, and as annoyingly usual, Russia had the habit to grow upset over the thought of something like that. Really, he shouldn't concern himself with America anymore. They weren't getting along as of late any longer and Russia would not crawl back to him. He was not a kiss-ass.

If America got upset then it was Russia's fault. If America said to bow then Russia was expected to bow. Like hell. So, if China was harassing the younger nation then it served him right. The idiot got himself into debt with that nation and Russia, above all countries, understood how bad it was to be in debt to China.

China had a superiority complex. He wanted to be the top. It was best just to ignore him, but Russia knew America couldn't and therefore had no choice but to take the harassment.

Russia inwardly scoffed. A frown setting in as he watched China brag about his gold medals. What of it? He only had three. He couldn't compare to him, or Norway, or Canada, or even America. He had no reason to be here, that old fool.

Then he turned back toward where Germany sat, speaking with his German relatives. The nerve of him. Even if America didn't tell him about his issues—which America tended to be like that so not to worry other countries—he should at least know on his own and try to protect him from such abuse.

Why, if America had been Russia's lover he'd . . .

Russia stopped that train of thought. He groaned out a sigh. Why did he even bother? His eyes turned back to America, for once he noticed his silence. The younger looked to be in thought, his own blue eyes staring off into the conversing and dancing nations around.

Nothing would become of the two of them. So Russia had to stop himself; stop himself from wanting to think about him, from wanting to take on all his burdens so he didn't have to worry, from wanting to see him smile—at him, from wanting to hold him, from wanting to caress him, to kiss him, to . . .
Russia reached out and took hold of the bottle of vodka and poured himself a shot. He reached over and did so in a small glass America had been holding. The clink of glass and the slush of liquid perked America's attention back toward him. He glanced down at the refilling shot glass and then up at Russia quizzically.

After setting the bottle back down Russia took up his glass and tipped it toward America in a small sort of inclined toast. To his surprise, and America's, he even offered a small tilt at the corner of his mouth that could be registered as a tiny smile.

"Drink up then, it's all one can do to forget the worries," Russia said and followed his own advice. America wasn't too far behind him.

"Taking advantage of the neutrality of the Olympics I see." Russia's frown deepened after observing Germany approach them. The nation offered a polite smile before his gaze turned to America. No doubt he's come to take him away from him—like usual.

"Ameri—Alfred, may I speak with you?" Germany requested.

"Sure," America said with a roll of his shoulders, waiting.

Germany sighed, glancing toward Russia once more who had snatched up the entire bottle of alcohol and drowned himself in it. Doing his best to ignore the German nation.

"In private," Germany insisted.

America nodded. He turned to Russia and pat the table. "Sorry, boyfriend calls. I'll be back in a bit."

"Don't bother," Russia spoke. He didn't even look at America as he left—didn't care if he wasn't smiling anymore at all because of what he said. "Your presence is not needed here."

Russia heard America sigh. The screech of his chair resounded against his eardrums and then his presence vanished. Russia opened his eyes, looked at the empty chair. He then looked back to see Germany leading America outside, both placing their jackets on and Germany—he had his hand on the small of America's back, pressing him to follow him. Hm, they looked like lovers. Russia wished them the world, especially when it felt apart around them.

... ...

"Okay, okay, let's make this quick, it's chilly out here," America beckoned, rubbing his hands together and blowing warm breath into his palms. He looked at Germany. When he noticed him still rubbing his wrist he frowned.

There wasn't a minute gone by that America regretted hurting Germany. He had played in later games, while some Prussia had to step in for. Why couldn't America control himself by now, why?

"I wanted to say I was sorry about what happened the 14th," Germany stated. He finally looked at America and when their gazes met both saw each other's regret.

"Oh, don't be," America said, casting his gaze down. "I've forgiven you."

"That's not enough," Germany insisted. "I pushed you too far, I didn't mean to."

"It's cool, I understand that you just want to be close," America said. He pulled out a smile but it wavered as the snow fell down around them. "It's frustrating, I know, I've courted before. Just... just give me time."
"We don't have to," Germany suddenly said. America blinked in confusion. "If you don't want to then I am content with just being by your side. As long as you'll have me. I was selfish in my want that I assumed you would enjoy it as well. I was wrong, I'm not afraid to say it. I won't push you again."

America smiled at Germany's apology. He blushed lightly, enjoying the soft feel of the beat of his heart. Reaching out he took Germany's hands in his and squeezed. "Thanks, Ludwig. That's all I need."

How easily they were forgiven and their past offensives forgotten. It was probably because nationally they were on good standings. But even so, both of them would come to realize that because they were personifications of powerful nations they would never be able to bear an ordinary relationship.

Berlin, Germany. July of 2014

America had been so upset that the very door to the embassy was knocked off. Luckily no one was hurt in its hurl across the driveway and Germany would have scolded America for acting so foolishly had be not been in pursuit of his perturbed boyfriend.

"I'm sick of this!" America said, throwing his hands in the air. "I don't care what you think of me anymore!" Right before America had come to his car and touched the handle to the door Germany had caught him. He had grabbed a hold of his elbow and yanked him around.

"You don't care?" Germany looked just as upset, if not more so. Why wouldn't he be after what happened? "Why won't you defend yourself? Is it because this is all true?"

After the arrests Germany's boss was furious, and so was he. It just so happened that America had paid a surprise visit to Germany's home after his birthday and when the arrests came to the public, why, it looked as if he was about to be strangled but Germany's upset boss. So, while cornered and asked if America personally set up the spies he sealed his lips. He didn't defend himself. Didn't say a damn word to every accusation Germany's boss accused him of, of everything Germany suspected to be true.

Instead, America just threw up his hands and stormed out of the building. But Germany wouldn't let him get away, not when it was supposed to be he who was offended, not America.

"Think what you will," America said, pulling his arm out of Germany's hold. "I can do whatever the hell I want."

Germany's fists clenched. Not to strike America—perhaps in another time, long ago, when they were enemies—but America was not his enemy. No, he was far from it. He wasn't even his friend. He was his lover—his lover.

"This is my home," Germany insisted. "Have you any respect anymore? What do you take me for?"

"There was no harm done," America insisted.

"So then you're encouraging this?" Germany questioned, his eyes narrowing. "Alfred, I am your boyfriend. Why do you feel the need to do this? Can you not trust me? I would never—"

"I know," America said, turning his face away. "But the boss—"

"No, it is you," Germany accused, poking America in the chest which the younger retaliated by smacking Germany's hand away from him—away from his personal space. "Don't act like you
decide nothing. We have the near same amount of power as our leaders. Do you want to look this bad? What if my boss decides to declare us enemies? I don't want that, Alfred, I don't."

"You have the power, right? Then make sure it doesn't happen." America stood there, his arms crossed, a frown across his lips. Not making any sort of eye contact. Rude and disrespectful.

Germany grit his teeth. Oh, his blood pressure. "It doesn't work that way, Alfred. I am certain this will calm down eventually."

"Good," America cut in. He looked at Germany now. His gaze near uncaring. "Then stop making such a big deal out of this."

"Your people were spying on me like I was your goddamn enemy!" Germany hadn't raised his tone in decades, much less to America. He just wanted him to see how upset he was, how afraid he was for their relationship. But America . . . either he was wearing a perfect façade or he just didn't care. "Am I your enemy? Am I?" Germany just wanted a straight answer from America, but he wouldn't give it. Germany sighed in defeat. "I want to be close to you, Alfred, but I can't and it frustrates me."

America did not move. He stood still, listening to everything Germany had to say.

"I am beginning to feel that you want to pull away from me," Germany said. He felt sad. Depressed even at the very thought of America deciding to break their courtship. Their relationship had barely begun and already they were on their second major fight within a year. Germany didn't understand just what he was doing wrong; why he was so displeasing to America that he felt he had the need to . . .

"I want to be close to you, Ludwig, I do." Germany looked back at America. He was looking at him again. "But you're rolling over so much that I have to . . . I need to protect you."

"Protect me?" Germany asked. Just what delusions was America assuming? "In my own home? I am strong too, Alfred. Do not look down on me." Then, Germany saw it. He understood completely. "You haven't gotten over your paranoia since the attack." Yes, Germany caught America stiffen. "Alfred, I would never—" He reached out to offer a comforting touch but America shifted and twisted away from him, now standing with his back to him.

"I know, but that doesn't mean your people can't hurt me," America said.

"I would never allow it," Germany swore. "Please, what can I do for you to trust me?"

He watched America shake his head. Soon enough he turned, head bowed, pushing past him to open his car door. He was just going to leave.

"Alfred," Germany called, he caught the door as it shut. When America looked up at him he noticed the glisten in his eyes and the reddening of his face. "Alfred?"

"This is me, Ludwig, I can't change, I—if you can't handle it then just leave me. Just leave like everyone else!" Germany just wanted to hold America. He wanted to wrap him in his arms and hold him for years until he calmed down. He could see the paranoia shaking his limbs, bringing him to near tears.

"I'm sorry," Germany was caught off guard by those two words. America's rarely used such a phrase. "I can't get as close as you want to. It's not you, it's me. I told you it was a stupid idea to date me." Just then America offered one of his notorious fake smiles—he was getting almost as good as Russia—and then pulled on the car door, slamming it shut. The tinted windows blocked Germany's view and off America was ushered, back to his hotel room, back to the airport, back to the States.
The shock of America's sudden retreat was finally over after a minute. Now, the anger of him being so disrespectful came in and Germany turned and just demolished a patio statue. The white marbled grumbled to dust and coated his entire sleeve in powder.

"Hey, hey, no destroying the lawn ornaments." Germany huffed and turned to his brother who came jogging out with a few security guards. It wasn't long before Prussia noticed the empty driveway.
"Did he leave?"

"Ja," Germany said with a sigh.

A worry bubbled up in Prussia and he came close to Germany. "You two didn't call it quits, did you?"

"Nein—at least, I don't think so," Germany said. He hoped not. Yes, he was upset, and America seemed upset too, but he felt they could get over this. They got over the last problem. If they worked together to figure out this issue then everything could be resolved . . . but America was just so thickheaded sometimes!

"The boss sounds mad, but she's taking it better than before," Prussia informed. "I didn't expect Alfred to leave like that. That kid," Prussia sighed, shaking his head, "Always makes it look like he's the one offended and we're all to blame."

"Ja, he is good at that," Germany agreed.

"Maybe you should go after him, catch him before he gets on a plane back to his home," Prussia suggested.

"Merkel would be furious," Germany reminded. Prussia nodded in agreement. "I just don't understand him sometimes."

"How so?" Prussia questioned.

"Sometimes . . . I think he doesn't want to be with me," Germany admitted.

"You seen him looking at someone else?" Prussia questioned. He hadn't suspected America to be the cheater kind.

"Nein," Germany said, shaking his head. "He would never do that to me. But . . . whenever something like this happens he shuts himself away. He blames himself. I want to be close to him. I am fine if I can just stand beside him if that's all he'll let me do, but . . . I want to be so much more closer."

"Ja," Prussia nodded. He understood the frustration of relationships. He's seen plenty to understand the dynamics of it all. "Tensions and strains would ease if you two would . . ." Prussia stopped himself. He looked at his brother who took to kicking up loose stones in the driveway. The poor nation didn't understand at all. "Ludwig, I need to tell you something."

Germany looked at him, wondering what it was.

"It's about America," Prussia informed. "I was going to tell you sooner, back in Sochi, but since you and Alfred reconciled I held off, but now I understand your problem. You say you are happy just being beside him, but I know that's not true. You're young, ripe, and so is America. But . . . the truth is . . . I do not think he will let you that close to him any time soon."

Germany could understand, but for what reason. If he knew then he could relate to America, right?
And he did. He didn't want their relationship to go down like this.

"Do you remember what he did to your jaw in '44?" Prussia asked, tapping his jaw to signify the bone. He watched Germany raise his hand and rub the healed bone. He could still feel the kink in it, but it didn't hurt that much anymore. Germany nodded and so Prussia continued, "He once did the same thing to England back during his fight for independence." Of course Prussia would know this, he had been there helping train the boy to become a warrior and so Germany listened intently. "He retaliated violently. But there is a reason, always so."

Prussia sighed. He turned back to the security guards and wished them away. They did and now the two German brothers stood outside alone. At least their own people trusted them not to spy on them.

"You know what many nations resort to when an unruly underling will not stop resisting, right?" Prussia was ashamed Germany nodded his head, that he knew, but most nations would know of this method sooner or later—whether they were the enforcer or the recipient. "You were young when it happened and didn't see much of him, but England was beyond his last attempt to contain his child. He would not let him grow too rowdy to challenge him. What do you think the British Empire would do when he's run out of options?"

Germany's eyes widened and jaw loosened. No. What Prussia was saying . . . no, it couldn't be. Germany's seen England and America—they loved each other. What Prussia was saying was absurd.

"Ja, it is true," Prussia admitted. He smiled sadly. "America didn't want me to tell anyone. He was so ashamed. So broken from it. But . . . there are certain nations that can piece themselves back together. It is rare, very rare, but America was one of them. With him lashing back like that, it was revealed what kind of a spirit he was. You cannot contain him. He will fight until his last breath. Now, I'm afraid, he's still afraid to let anyone get that close to him. I would suggest the two of you do, you'd create a bond that way and probably fight less, but with the way he is . . . your jaw . . . then your wrist, I don't know when he'll be ready for that kind of intimacy. He needs it. God, that boy needs to get laid, but I'm afraid his body simply won't allow it."

Germany had sworn that if all America wanted him to do was to stand by his side then he would. He would keep that promise. But he wanted America. He wanted him so much because he loved him and wanted to show him how much he loved him. To make love to him; Germany's wanted to for so long, but after discovering America's insecurities about it, why, most of his hope was distinguished.

"Is there anything I can do?" Germany asked his brother.

Prussia rolled his shoulders. "Give him time. One day he'll be ready." He chuckled to himself and shook his head. "It's been, what, over two centuries now. Not sure when he'll be ready."

Well, Germany has waited this long. He had always been praised as a patient country. If that was how America felt then he would respect that. He would wait.

Ottawa, Canada. August of 2014

"Hey, Mattie, can I talk to you?"

Canada was surprised America would ask something like that, like Canada would reject him or something. He smiled at his stepbrother and said, "Yeah, of course."

America and he had sat down on a bench near Canada's home. It was a nice summer's day. Perfect weather. "You're part French, right?"

Canada frowned. He turned to America and narrowed his eyes. "What's this about, Al? Does this
have something to do with Germany?" Usually when America brought up the "French" in the Canadian he was wanting some romance advice. Like Canada's ever courted before.

America only shrugged. He ran his hand through his hair and sighed. "I screwed up."

Canada blinked. What was this? The great United States of America was admitting he was in the wrong? Oh, the revelations!

"You mean about the incident in July?" Canada watched America nod quietly. "Are you two alright?"

"I'm not sure," America said with another sigh. "I had warned Germany, I said I was no good with relationships. Said it was always me." America bowed his head in defeat and Canada felt for him.

"Don't be like that, Al, I'm certain there's something you can do to make it up to him," Canada insisted. "Was he upset?"

America shook his head and chuckled lightly. "No, that's why I'm so upset. He's too good to me, Mattie."

Canada smiled. He understood. He figured Germany probably tried to talk it out while America blew up—like usual—at the accusations and just left.

"Well, what do you have in mind?" Canada asked, making himself comfortable, prepared to hear every obnoxious idea America had to offer.

America sighed. "I really don't know," he admitted.

Canada frowned. That wasn't like America to be out of ideas. No wonder he came to him.

"No parties, feasts, or theme parks?"

America shook his head. "I don't want to seem like such a child to him. I'm getting older, Mattie, and he shows me more respect than anyone else. I want to show my appreciation but I'm . . . afraid."

"Afraid?" Canada questioned. "Of what?"

"Afraid?" Canada questioned. "Of what?"

"Of hurting him—again," America admitted.

"Al, you just said he's very understanding, and—"

"I mean physically," America said. He clasp his hands together, tightening the grasp more and more as the subject poked its ugly and shameful head out. He was finally getting this out with Canada. Why not? He was his neighbor after all, and his best friend. "Do you remember the Malmedy Massacre?"

Canada nodded.

"Germany was there . . . he . . . he tried to . . . to rape me," America said slowly. He didn't need to look at his brother to know Canada was gapping in surprise. "Before he could I struck him. Broke his jaw."

"God, I didn't know," Canada whispered.

"Then, back in Sochi," America continued. "Valentine's Day. We got hot and heavy. Germany wanted to go all the way. I didn't know what I wanted. I think I wanted it, but my body . . . I was still
frightened from what happened to me and I almost broke his wrist."

"Oh, Al." What could Canada say to that? He completely understood the trauma America's been put through. It made sense if he was still insecure about being intimate.

"I don't know how to get around it," America informed. "I thought I would be fine after decades, but I'm not. I can't shake it and I want to. I want to make this up to Germany." America was going to do it. He was going to attempt to make love to his boyfriend, but he didn't know how to get around his instincts. America looked at his brother. "I'm not saying you're the expert or anything, but any word of advice would be appreciative."

Canada then told America to wait for his answer. When America left Canada had invited his father over and asked him about this. After all, who knew better about the art of lovemaking than France? But, what surprised Canada the most was how unsettled his papa was about this subject and its concern on America.

"Non, Mattieu, I am afraid not even I have the words to fix this," France stated with a sad sigh.

"Why?" Canada asked. "It was attempted. Nothing came of it."

France's frown didn't leave and it unnerved Canada to see his father so unenthusiastic about issues like this when usually he always had some form of romantic advice.

"Non," France spoke up. "Amérique cannot be helped. I do not know how long it will take him to calm down. I had not known he was still traumatized by that day but it makes sense. Their relationship will strain, and I'm afraid it will be because of Amérique's lack of intimacy."

"Germany would not leave him from that," Canada assured.

"I agree," France nodded. "But Amérique will see the underlying strains as his fault and so pull himself from the relationship. That poor boy."

"I don't understand," Canada spoke up in confusion.

"Mon cher," France looked his son in the eyes, Canada had never seen such a sadness in them. "Amérique is no virgin."

Canada blinked. Well, he understood that the others called him the "Whore of the World" but he knew better as did America. He knew he had been with North Korea and Vietnam, but he knew what his father meant by saying this. But that also meant . . .

"Rape?" Canada questioned. He inwardly prayed it wasn't though he already knew by the signs.

"Oui," France nodded.

"Germany?" Canada wouldn't understand why America was dating the nation who raped him if that was the issue.

"Non." France sighed. "He had been so little, so innocent, so pure. But Angleterre had been so frustrated, he'd run out of resorts."

"Papa?" Canada was paling. He was even shaking. Dear God, had his adopted father really . . . ?

"Amérique never told me when I agreed to help him win his freedom," France said solemnly. "But I suspected. Angleterre was a fool of a parent. He had wronged little Alfred and so lost him forever."
France then offered his son a gentle smile. "Do not think anything less of that old tea-smelling midget, he's regretted it for centuries. He's repented."

Canada didn't know what to say to that. It was horrible, what had happened. He hadn't thought England would do such a thing, not to his only child at the time. He had always thought he loved him so much that he would never . . .

"That's what he meant then," Canada said. "Al said he is afraid of hurting Germany."

France nodded. "He had even hurt North Korea and Vietnam once."

"He had?" Why didn't America feel the need to confide in Canada until decades later? Just wasn't fair.

France nodded. "I heard about it through others. One incident was a broken arm from North Korea. It was said she rolled over on top of Amérique while they slept, wanting to rouse him. When he awoke by her ministrations he lashed out at her. Then, Vietnam. She had tried to service Amérique, tried to get him to lay still while she took the lead, but he lashed out when she went too far and caused a nasty concussion. If he is not in the lead in bed then he will attack. I'm afraid it is a result of his rape. It cannot be undone."

"Then why not do that with Germany?" Canada asked. Since America was more comfortable topping then just top the German. "Wouldn't that be the easy way out?" That would definitely solve their problems.

"Oui, it would," France agreed. He then smiled. "But don't you see, Mattieu? Amérique is wanting to relinquish control, to give himself completely to his lover. It's a very serious decision and sentiment one. I am proud of him for wanting such, but if he cannot control his harmful strength of his then he will not be able to lay under anyone."

Canada mulled over his father's advice for a long time. Soon enough he made up his mind and so persisted America go through with this.

"You need to make love to Germany," Canada insisted.

"I know," America said. "But how? I can't bottom to save my life." Canada understood perfectly now even though America wouldn't tell him the entire story.

"Do you want to top then?" Canada questioned.

"I could," America admitted. "But I don't want to."

Canada smiled at him. He was proud of his brother for finally deciding to let go of control—now, to actually do it.

"Well then," Canada tapped his chin before snapping his fingers. "Get yourself used to it all."

America rose a brow and cocked his head. "What do you mean?"

"Down here," Canada patted his crotch. "You're not used to someone touching you, right?" America nodded. "Okay, then take time to get it familiar with touch. I'm not saying have someone else touch you, but you, touch yourself so you're used to strokes and rubs down there."

America contemplated it. "But, it's different when Germany tries to touch me," he added.
"I understand that, but how often do you touch yourself?" Canada asked. He saw that flush spreading across the superpower's cheeks.

"Not . . . often," America admitted, shifting uncomfortably in his seat next to his brother.

"You see, if you get used to yourself then it's not too hard to get used to another," Canada replied. "Also, I don't know how you feel about this, but, try it at least; prep yourself."

"As in—?"

"Oui," Canada felt it appropriate to let his French slip out.

America sighed, rubbing his face. Canada was right and he knew it. He just needed to push past his discomfort and do this.

But, still, no matter how hard he tried—he even bought lubricant, and tons of toys—it was so hard to force himself to intrude any private place. He's wasted so much money after breaking so many items bought. Because of this he felt like a failure and he never had the guts to tell Canada even when the northern country would constantly ask for an update in progress.

America wanted to do this, he really did, but the world caught up with him and soon he hardly had any time to concern himself with preparation. His boss constantly demanded him by his side and with sanctions against Russia, why, he was thrust into another Cold War to his and his people's horror.

Sitka, Alaska, USA. February 13th 2015

God, it's been, what, a hundred and fifty—no, a hundred and forty-eight years since he's walked these roads, or even stepped foot in his old territory. The nostalgia washing over Russia that night in the chilling state of Alaska certainly was warming.

He smiled to himself. That was when he was Imperial Russia, when he had colonies of his own. Good times. Very enjoyable memories.

The hour was late, but he didn't care. He took his time walking down old forgotten trails that even some of the townsfolk hadn't noticed. Russia grinned when he touched a tree with a carved marker. He remembered marking that himself and the one next to it so the trail would be pointed out to any lost traveler who found themselves on that path.

Well, it was covered in snow now. Alaska had a good snowfall the past couple of days, but finally—Russia looked up into the deep blue above. He could name every constellation visible.

He had loved stargazing back then even. Some things he guessed would never change.

What would a Russian be doing in the middle of a U.S. state, noted the personification of said nation, especially in times like this when strains between their countries hadn't been this high since the Cold War? Well, that was simple, America invited him over.

Russia thought about not coming, to show the American that he couldn't be bossed around like he bossed the other nations around. But Russia had been bored and so humored himself. He probably leaned more to go when America's secret message had asked him to meet him in Alaska, in Russia's old territory. America stated that it was because the state was closest and would be the last place their bosses would think to search for them being that it is so out of the way.

Russia had not announced his coming. He left the invitation open and wouldn't care if America
wasn't even present in the state. He was enjoying his self-tour. More so than he thought he would.

The people, they were all American. It was a shame. He had hoped that the left-over Russian colonists would remain and intermingle with the U.S.’s people—they'd make such beautiful children if they did. But, sadly, there was hardly a Russian descent seen. Russia doubted they even knew how to speak his native language. A shame.

Tomorrow was Valentine's Day and Russia knew that America, no doubt, had something planned with Germany—though, from their frosty relations, Russia wondered if that were the case at all. Even so, if it was, Russia didn't care, which was why he arrived in Alaska so late.

If America was still there he would not be by tomorrow. Valentine's Day was special to the younger nation and made to be spent with ones he loved. Russia had contemplated on arriving on said Valentine's Day just to annoy America and ruin the day, but he decided against it. Whatever America wanted could be settled tonight and he could have the rest of the day to himself.

Russia took a back way to the home he suspected America to reside in, one he had taken so many times. He could see that no one thought about heading this way by the untouched snow before him. Russia was so very glad the night was clear. Because that meant the General was quiet. He knew for certain he would have lost himself with him howling in his ears.

There it was. Russia smiled shortly. Why had he given this place up? Russia would take it back in a heartbeat if so asked—his old home, the lodge he built himself. There were lights on, on the first floor. That must be America.

With a sigh, Russia brought his mind away from the memories of pleasurably building the home and marched through the snow. He came from the back, where the woods overshadowed the home, cutting up into the mountains where that lookout resided, the one where he had taken America on his birthday so long ago—where he gave him this state as a present.

Russia decided not to knock on the door. America was a big boy, he should feel him at his doorstep if he indeed was inside instead of some caretaker. What if it was the caretaker? Well, Russia wasn't too low from knocking them out so he could have a vacation at his old home. Would be very fun.

He could hear the sound of a movie. It was loud. It sounded like something America would listen to, but then again, America was his people and his people were him.

Then, suddenly, the noise was silenced. He could hear someone coming toward the door. Russia smiled. So, America had stayed.

The door opened and there was America. He was dressed casually, long-sleeved shirt, and sweatpants. He was frowning at him too.

"You're late," America muttered, moving out of the way to allow Russia inside.

Russia simply chuckled and entered the home. "You never specified the day," Russia informed. "All you said was this month, that is all. Plus, you know very well that I can get into a lot of trouble if my boss were to find out I left the security of Moscow to come here, to an American State."

"Yeah?" America jutted his chin outward. "Well I can get into some serious shit too if my boss found out I invited you over."

They were both taking a fragile step. Just like old times. This definitely was the Cold War II.

Russia might have said something more hadn't his eyes took in the home around him. He was in utter
shock. Nothing was changed.

Yes, there was air conditioning and heaters, as well as electronics, but other than that it was untouched.

"You remember this place?" America nudged him with his elbow, a smile on his face.

"Of course, I built this home myself," Russia informed.

"No way, you serious?" America looked taken aback. "Dude, why didn't you tell me that when I bought it?"

"Didn't matter," Russia said.

"Damn, didn't know you were an architect," America muttered.

Russia smirked. "You seem to like my craftsmanship."

America crossed his arms and rolled his eyes. "It's my national home in this state now, of course I like it. Plus, brings back some good memories."

Yes, very good memories. Russia mentally agreed. He just couldn't understand why America hadn't taken any of the portraits or emblems down. God, there was his old two-headed eagled crest over in the dining room and then by the fireplace. Why hadn't America taken them down?

"Well, since you took your sweet ass time getting here let's just get down to business," America said as he hopped over his couch and pulled out a box. "I would like to be back in the mainland by tomorrow, thank-you, don't give a damn how you're getting back."

"Such hospitality, I'm flattered," Russia remarked with that fake smile of his.

Of course America would give him the casual bird. It was no surprise to Russia. What did surprise him was America's casualness in this all. They had been at each other's throats for a year now, probably more if you look at the root cause. One meeting ended badly, America lashed out at him and had to be held back by four nations while Russia nearly connected his fist with that pretty face of his.

They barely dodged World War Three there.

Since then they were always at their bosses sides. The men refused to let them go amongst the other nations alone. So, yes, it was very strange that America ask him to Alaska for a secret meeting on the eve of Valentine's Day.

"Here we go," America chirped and plopped the box on the head of the couch.

Russia rose his brow and leaned over slightly to see what was inside. His eyes widened at the objects inside and when he looked at America with a hard questioning glare the younger didn't look the least bit fazed—where was his dignity?

"Why are you showing me these?" Russia asked. He could feel his jaw tightening and his teeth subtly grinding in disgust.

There was a light flush across America's cheeks as he dug his hands into the box full of brand new sex toys that he prayed he wouldn't break. They all added up to a pretty penny. "I know we haven't been on the best terms as of late, and I don't want to get into politics right now, that's not why I called
"You here." He picked up a dildo and handled it with a familiarity that made Russia's stomach churn. "This is just a national thing. No threats of war or nuclear outbreak. I . . ." America's eyes darted away bashfully. "I want to have sex with Germany."

Russia's teeth were grinding a little harder and he wondered if America could hear it. Why. Was. He. Telling. Him. This?

"It'll actually be my first time with a man," America informed. Second, Russia mentally added. "And, well, back in the second world war he did something, traumatized me, I guess, and I find it hard to do anything intimate with him so, if it's not so much trouble . . ." He looked at Russia, their eyes met. "I'd like for you to help prepare me."

Russia was insulted. Flat. Out. Insulted.

"What?"

America dropped the toy back into the box and sheepishly scratched his cheek. "I sorta hurt him last attempt, and, well, Canada said it was best to prepare myself and get used to being touched and all, but, I kinda keep breaking the toys, the hand just crunches them all to dust before I can do anything."

Russia felt hot. It wasn't uncommon. The last time he felt this boiled was when Germany went against their pact and tried to conquer his land back in WWII.

He balled his fists, but kept them at his side to hide. He could not, however, hide the way his lips puckered tightly together nor the rising malice in his gaze.

"What do ya say, big guy? Care to help a friend out?" God, Russia almost puked when America patted the box.

When he went to speak his lips curled into a snarl, he couldn't help himself at this point.

"You and your lover should figure out your sexual problems yourselves. This is an utter insult to me," Russia growled out before turning swiftly on his heel and ripping the door open. The cold night had never felt so welcoming in his existence!

"W-Wait!" Russia was stopped, America caught hold of his elbow and held him from leaving. "It's not an insult, it's a compliment," America swore. Russia turned his head and eyed him warily. When he looked down in warning at America touching him the other nation understood and quickly let go. "You're getting stronger again, I know it," America explained. "You . . . you've always been the only other country as strong as me." So, America felt it made sense to ask this of Russia for this dubious task just because he could hold him back in case he instinctively lashed out. Yes, that cleared everything!

Russia turned to America, straightening his form. He looked menacing. He looked utterly disgusted and he knew America could read every expression of his this time. Good, he wanted him to know how he felt about this bullshit.

Raising his hand Russia let his anger and upset get the best of him as he spat out, "Vy ne chto inoye kak grebanyy shlyukha. Otoydite ot menya!"

America flinched back, his eyes blinking at the sudden shout. If Russia had been so angry he would have taken note of America's recognition of the words, as if he understood them perfectly. But, then again, Russia was certain America's been called a "fucking whore" in multiple languages that he's memorized each phrase.
"What did you call me?" America should have looked confused by the words, instead he was showing signs of looking offended.

Russia dismisses it all though. He threw up his hands and sneered. "I will not be used by you anymore, especially not to help you and that bastard German. Do not look at me as the fault of you not being able to properly fuck your boyfriend." Each word was laced with venom and Russia hoped it coursed up into America's veins and suffocated his heart with the poison.

Russia made to leave, but instead he paced. Back and forth he paced in the doorway with the cold to his back. He wondered if General Winter was watching this. He was probably having a fucking laugh at him now, wasn't he?

"You," Russia was pointing to America again, his eyes narrowed while the younger gapped like a frozen statue. "Are a selfish brat. You think the entire world should cater to you like you're its king. You think that whatever you want must be whatever everyone else wants. If it's good for you then it's good for us. You are WRONG and need to shut your damn mouth!" Russia's aura arose and it was intimidating. "You do NOT ask another nation to do this—you do not ask ME to do this. Because it is a private matter. I do not care what you do with him. Leave me ALONE. Solve your pathetic problems yourself."

Russia should have just left, but he wanted to verbally hurt America. He wanted him to choke on every disrespectful thing he said to him.

"You are an immature child if you cannot consummate your relationship with your lover because of what your idiot father did to you centuries ago."

Russia watched it. He watched America's eyes widen, his lips part. And his skin paled. "H-How do you know about that?"

Russia felt no regret revealing that secret he knew. He felt nothing at all for America's inner demons. In fact, he wanted to feed them more.

"I tortured Prussia for information on you back in the good days," Russia lied. But, America didn't need to know. "It was funny when I found out, he begged me not to use it against you. I have waited the day. Now, look at you, you look like a little girl about to cry."

America did. His eyes were watering and his bottom lip quivering. More so it put color back into his face. It was getting redder by the second.

"How dare you." It was low at first, but soon America had raised his tone to match Russia's. "How dare you snoop into my personal life!"

Russia scoffed and sneered at the boy. "You obviously have no respect for it. Who is the one asking to help him prepare for another man's penetration?" Russia's frown and stance did not waver.

"Get out. Get out of here!" America was grinding his teeth, his arms stiff, straight, and shaking. He looked ready to strike at Russia. Good, let him, Russia was ready for him.

"Sending me away so soon?" Russia asked. "How immature. If you cannot let go of your past then there is no place for you in this world."

"You don't know anything!" America bit out.

"Do I?" Russia should have just left by now. "I am assuming this information isn't important enough to tell your lover—or is he not important enough? Apparently I wasn't when we courted."
America's eyes widened. Russia watched a lone tear roll down America's cheek, unnoticed by the boy. Russia felt nothing for it.

"It . . . It is unimportant," America said, insisting it more so to himself. Russia could see it by the way he glanced down, searching his mental bearings, trying to decide if they were strong enough—apparently they weren't.

"Really? Then how come you can't lay under another?" Russia questioned. He was pushing his luck as he leaned in, but he was enjoying his taunts. He wanted America to strike at him because when he did Russia would strike back. "Did you hurt Germany? Da, you did, I can see it on your face. Heh, how pathetic. You should not court if you cannot let your lover fuck you."

America closed his eyes tightly and bore his teeth. He backed away, shaking his head.

"You don't know me," America bit out. He opened his eyes. He looked unintimidating with those unshed tears. "You never have! You call me self-centered? Well, you are! You never cared about me once! Just like the others all you wanted was sex. You don't care!"

"I never cared?" Russia hated others accusing him of being a liar almost more than anything else. "I gave you Alaska, I was among the first to open trade, I supported you through your civil war, I held you—don't you dare accuse me of never caring for you!"

America was blinking rapidly again, this time from the intense sting in his eyes. More tears slipped down. Did Russia understand what he had just said, what he had just remembered so easily when before he had once claimed to have forgotten?

"You never once told me what England did to you," Russia continued, he stepped forward and watched America step back. Instead of relishing in the feel of having the U.S. in retreat something else washed over him. He wanted America to stay in place, to confront his demons—their demons. So he continued closer to him until America had backed himself against the back of the couch, his hands up, over his ears, trying to block Russia out.

"Get out!" America ordered.

"Why didn't you tell me back then?" Russia pressed. "Did you think I would not cope with you? Did you think I would not understand?"

"I said get out!" America shook his head. He really did look sad. The one thing in his past that nearly broke him still breaks him to this day. Truly sad.

"How can you expect to be close to anyone holding that inside you?"

Finally, America snapped. He flicked his head up, looking at Russia with watering bright eyes, eyes that looked haunted. "My own father raped me! What else do you think I'd do? I wanted to forget it, make it like it never happened! I was scared to death, scarred! Your only security just suddenly does that to you so to keep you as their slave. How do you think I fucking felt about it?! No one knows what I went through, what I'm still going through!" America coughed out a sob but caught himself, trying to look strong before Russia whose mood was shifting as America revealed to him his insecurities and dark past. "It's been over two centuries and I'm still haunted by it," another sob ripped itself out of America's throat, "We even reconciled. I love him again, but I . . . what he did to me . . . what he took from me . . . I wanted to give it to the one I loved. How could he have done that to me?"

America coughed and inhaled a shaking breath. His outburst calming to an extent of just flowing
tears that dripped down his cheeks and off his chin. He took Texas off and rubbed his eyes with his sleeve.

"I want to get over this so bad," America admitted, his arm fell limply to his side, his gaze off into the distance, staring into nothing. "But I can find no help." Then he looked at Russia with such sad eyes. Shaking his head he motioned toward the door. "I understand . . . I'm sorry for asking what I did. I overstepped my boundaries. Just go."

But Russia didn't. He stood there. He stood there as America pitifully cried to himself.

Russia should have left. He should have been on a plane or ship back to his home, but he was standing there in front of America, too many thoughts running through his mind. He wasn't angry anymore. The shouting had spat it all of the rage out. What was he then?

Confused? Sad? Apologetic?

America really did look pathetic with the tears falling down his cheeks and snot running out of his nose. The younger nation inhaled a cough and opened his eyes, looking to see Russia still standing there, unmoving.

"Leave," America demanded once again. He felt weak from the emotional drain. Much too weak to fight if that's what Russia wanted. "Leave me alone, goddammit!"

Russia should have but the cold winds outside pressed against his back and chilled him, pushing him forward. He took one step closer and then another, by the third he was standing right before America, hardly a foot in between the two.

"Get the hell out of my face." America turned his face, trying to hide his weakened state but was startled when Russia raised his hands and slowly pressed the tips of his gloved fingers against the side of his face. He flinched away, but was only met by the other hand's touch. "Stop it!" America was now glaring up at Russia who looked unreadable. "You've had your fun. Liked seeing me like this? Fine, get out. I don't need you here!"

Russia didn't move save for his right thumb that rubbed against America's red tear-stained cheek. He never liked the sight of America's tears, it hurt his wounded heart.

The bite in America had vanished all together again. Now Russia watched his face contort into sadness, a new wave of tears dispersed out from underneath his closed eyelids, his brows crashed together in angst and his teeth took hold of his bottom lip.

Again, America inhaled a snotty sounding cough. "The Russia I knew would have never done this." Russia felt his heart beat. It's been a while since he felt anything akin to a beat from the useless organ. It sent a cold shiver throughout his body and it did not stop there. America inhaled another sob. "He would have left me alone when I asked."

That simply wasn't true and Russia knew this. Did he when America had been harmed by England's fire? Did he when civil war caked over America? Did he when America was mourning the loss of his greatest leader?

America let out another cough. He simply wouldn't look at Russia, his eyes burned too much with painful tears. America really did look pitiful.

"What I would have done?" Russia questioned. The old Russia, Imperial Russia. He remembered it all. It was always so much easier to remember when he was away from his bosses, away from the General, with America. "I know what I would have done all those years ago."
Imperial Russia would have leaned down and kissed all the troubles America had away, and so Russia did so. America's lips were wet and salty, but so plump and warm, they always had been since he first pressed his mouth to his.

A passion Russia had almost forgotten surfaced and he held America still while he poured it all into him. He kissed him until he could hear no more sobs, until the wet tears slipping down did not moisten Russia's face. When he pulled back he sucked America's lips into his mouth one last time and then let go.

Their breaths mingled calmly, quietly, and Russia remained leant down for a little while simply gazing at those lips now swollen red. Yes, that is what his past self would have done for certain.

As if like a machine Russia moved his hands away from America's face, out first and then slowly retreated them back down to his sides. America was not crying anymore. No, he was staring wide-eyed up at Russia, that mouth of his still parted and making no more sob. Good.

Russia offered a sad smile before it faded back into his set frown. What he would have done. There was so many things left undone between the two and if America fought to let go of his dark past with England then so would Russia. It would cause the two less heartache and finally set their demons free.

Russia opened his mouth, his hand even rose. He wanted to caress America's cheek but he curled his fingers and clenched his fist to stop himself. Russia smiled again. Such force to do these things nowadays.

He had nothing more to say and so just smiled his goodbye to America. It was time to go.

Russia should have been back in Moscow by now, lying to his boss that he had been out visiting his sisters so he didn't suspect anything. If he left right then then he could get there soon. He could remember an excuse.

If he had turned and left right then then America wouldn't have had the chance to clasp his hand on the back of Russia's neck and press him down onto his eager lips. America had not kissed him in over a century. He moved against Russia slowly at first but the more he pressed the stronger he revived.

Now both of America's arms were locked around Russia's neck, pulling him close and kissing him for all he was worth. Russia found himself too easily falling into him. His hands immediately found places on his hips and his body took one more step closer, pressing their chests together, their abdomens together and their pelvises . . .

America sighed into Russia's mouth, his eyes having fluttered closed. He tilted his head to the right and then to the left, his kiss growing hotter, faster, deeper. Russia inhaled him. He felt alive again.

His hands came up, wrapping around his back, rubbing, pressing him closer. Russia needed him so much closer. He nipped at America's lips and too quickly the smaller nation opened his mouth, allowing Russia entrance. Their tongues met and danced once more. How long has it been since he's tasted him like this?

Too long.

Russia inhaled every breath the American exhaled. The heat from the younger seeping into his very being. The faint clunk sound of Texas slipping from America's fingers to the floor was heard but there had been no concern for the frames from either party. With both hands free America's palms
pressed against Russia's cheeks, pulling him closer but they were already close enough, sucking, biting, tasting.

Then, America moaned. Russia shuddered out a sigh that was inhaled by the younger nation and he leaned forward. He leaned forward, pressing America's back against the back of the couch, the box of adult toys slipping off and clattering to the floor.

Thighs pressed against his hips, the legs wrapped around squeezed Russia and ensured him that the Western nation would hang on for his plight.

He wasted not another moment. He was very glad and thankful that America had kept his old home mostly the same. There had been no remodeling, no additions to the home and so Russia easily found the master bedroom from memory.

The wooden door slammed open and hit the wall to the side. Russia left it at that and continued.

Nothing had changed. The fireplace, the four poster canopy bed, America hardly touched his room and when Russia laid him down on the bed sheets the rest of the detail of his old room was forgotten.

America was looking at him, and Russia was looking back. Their eyes met, sapphires and amethysts. A force brought Russia down, pressing him close to the younger body underneath him. And he kissed America again, all too pleased to find the younger kissing him in return with equal passion.

They remained lip-locked for what felt like an eternity, an eternity neither minded getting lost in. Russia hadn't known when he lost his gloves in this madness but when he felt his palms press against America's face, skin-to-skin, he moaned. The warmth that was underneath him was everything to him, and it was a cold night.

Russia could feel America's own hands, fingers carded through his hair, pulling on tangles, grabbing handfuls of locks and holding him there as if he wanted him. As if America wanted Russia as much as Russia wanted America.

Pulling his mouth away from those addicting lips Russia kissed the corner of America's mouth and then his cheek twice before falling further. He kissed his jaw three times and leant down to his neck, pulling on the American's sweater to expose more skin on that warm curved neck of his.

The way it arched into him, meeting his mouth before Russia even pressed closer, had Russia falling ever so fast. He bit, sucked, and licked. God, America still tasted the same as he remembered. Not a thing changed.

With one hand pulling the collar of the dark blue sweater down his other grabbed a hold of the hem and pulled up. The taut skin of America's abdomen rippled under Russia's touch and the older nation shivered in knowing the body was submitting to him, to his kisses, to his touches.

His sweater was gone from him so fast, tossed to the side of the room uncaring where it landed. Russia pressed close to America again, kissing him for all he was worth—for all America was worth, and to Russia, America was worth the entirety of the world. He loved him that much. So much.

Russia hadn't even known America's hands had already worked on the buttons of his coat, the article of clothing sliding down his shoulders. It would not slide any further because Russia refused to straighten his arms. He refused to let go of America's face.

They met gazes. Their irises glowing in the dark. Words were silently passed, feelings of electricity and longing shivering the both of them in this quiet agreement.

Russia finally let go of America, straightening his arms and shrugging off his coat. They left the
beige covering on the side of the bed, quickly returning to the other for fear that one might disappear and this all be nothing but a dream.

Their lips had not parted since. Russia's buckle was loosened blindly by both sets of hands, the remainder of Russia's own long-sleeved shirt had likely been ripped to shreds from his refusal to back away and pull it over his head. Now Russia was pulled flush against America, the younger so strong, his grip so tight.

One tanned hand cupped the back of his head, pressing him close. The other rubbed his ribs and Russia leaned into the touch.

His eyes opened and lips parted to let out a shuddering gasp. America had pulled down his scarf, it hung loosely on his shoulders now, and then America began kissing his neck, planting warm and loving kisses to those horrendous scars. No one was allowed to see them—to see the evidence of how many had tried to end Russia's national existence.

Now America's other hand caressing his ribs rose and both warm palms cupped Russia's jaw, tilting his head and allowing the younger nation more access to that delicate and private part of his body. Russia never showed these to anyone—not even to his sisters. They didn't know. They knew he had a hard childhood without them, but they did not know of how many countless times his life had been on the cusp of slipping from him.

Russia groaned and instead of pulling away, found himself pressing into that mouth. The teeth gliding along the marred skin were perfect and straight. He felt no threat to them as they nipped then parted to blow warm breath. The tingling traveled throughout Russia's body and he felt his bones shake with renewed energy.

The two nations pulled apart to look at each other again. Slowly, Russia watched America unwind the rest of his rolled scarf. He took care of the knit item, a care Russia hadn't expected to see. They never broke eye contact but Russia could still see the way America handled his beloved scarf.

He held it in his hands, bringing it up to his lips and holding Russia's gaze. Finally, Russia moved, he reached down and moved it away from the boy's mouth. If Russia would bear no covering then neither would America. The scarf was scooted away, near other pillows.

When America's arms wrapped around Russia's neck he felt the security in their hold. It was much more comforting than his sister's scarf and he never wanted them to let go.

They kissed again, long and deep. Their chests pressed close and Russia could feel the beat of America's heart through his ribcage. It thumped against Russia's own chest, encouraging his own heart to pick up its pace and match its rhythm.

America's eyes fluttered shut when he pulled away and a sigh escaped his lips. His face turned, neck and chest ready for Russia. He laid still, waiting.

Russia took the offering. He leaned down and kissed the other side of America's neck. In the wake of his kisses he ran his fingers across the sucked skin, the pads of his fingers gentle before his hand twisted and the backs of his knuckles rubbed. America arched into his touch almost as much as his kisses.

His hands traveled down further, rubbing against America's biceps, taking a hold of his sides when he leaned down and kissed that ugly scar lain right above his heart. America arched. He choked and took to biting his knuckles as Russia lapped at the light patch of skin. America was still ashamed of the scar, Russia could tell, but if he caressed Russia's horrifying scars then Russia would do the same.
Russia's arms slunk further, wrapping around America's back before one hand cupped the back of his head and pushed him a little higher. America opened his eyes, looking up at Russia with such vulnerability. Russia pressed their foreheads together while his other hand slipped back to America's chest and gently traced the scar given to America just fourteen years ago. Good and bad, Russia wanted America to know that he would love all of him.

This kiss was tender and chaste. A mere meeting of the lips and caress of his jaw. Their pace slowed for this. Until Russia's caressing hand traced down, his thumb rubbing over one of America's pert nipples.

America gasped into the kiss. His mouth opening was too much of a temptation. Russia's tongue joined America's once more, both too familiar with the other.

They moved like one being. They were unofficial—possibly soon official—enemies. Their peoples did not so much understand the other and so resorted to paranoid hate and fear. But there the two countries were, embracing each other, caressing, kissing; they both wanted this.

Eventually, Russia had to pull away. Once again he traced his lips down America's chin, down his neck, kissed his collarbone three times before skipping back to the scar. He hated the look of it, but it was a part of America now and so he loved it at the same time. A tender kiss was given to it. His kisses increased in pressure around America's pectoral muscles and then Russia opened his mouth and suckled one of his awaiting nipples.

America arched so beautifully into Russia, pressing his body closer than thought possible and the way those fingers snaked through Russia's hair, fingernails scraping against his scalp, he couldn't help but groan out a moan.

Russia popped his mouth off of the bud and grabbed a hold of one of America's wrists. He brought the hand to his mouth. He kissed the calloused knuckles first, pressing them against his lips and feeling the tough skin. Russia remembered a time when the younger once had the softest hands he's ever touched. These hands now were worn from years of fighting, of defense and aggression, but for now, Russia just wanted them to open, to caress and to hold.

Closing his eyes Russia pressed the hand against his cheek, holding it there for a moment. It was because they were nations, because so many sought their destruction and enslavement. They could not remain young and pure forever. If there was ever such a world to find where the eternity of youth was cherished then Russia would gladly take America and whisk him away to that world.

Opening his eyes Russia looked down at America. He was watching him. He looked beautiful laid out on the bed underneath him. Like how it was always meant to be.

Russia leaned down and pressed his forehead against America's again, the younger nation's eyes closed and took in his presence, took in the feel of him above him, pressing against him, touching him. When Russia's hand slid down and touched America for the first time he was not surprised to find the younger's hand gripping his wrist, stopping his decent into the pants. Russia tried to continue but America was strong and would not let him go on further.

Russia opened his eyes, looked at America. America was looking at him again. He looked unsure, even frightened. Russia understood.

With more force Russia pressed and this time cupped America's cock. No doubt he was the first to touch the organ in centuries. America's mouth opened in a gasp and he retaliated.
Russia was growing stronger again, yes, but America was still stronger. America pulled Russia's arm away just as violently as if they were in a brawl. Russia kept America's gaze this entire time. He could see it was indeed the country's own body reacting like this, his instinct. He was the alpha and his body fought to remain so—to keep control.

America needed release. He needed to release it all and Russia would help him.

Russia jerked his wrist out of America's hold and instead of trying again he grabbed a hold of both of the other's wrists and slammed them down into the sheets bunched around his head. America's breath began to labor. His eyes widening and pupils shaking. He was afraid.

But Russia understood. He understood everything about him in that moment, and he would not harm him. Not the one promised to him.

Russia leaned down, he kissed America again, keeping him still and taking in every paranoid breath escaping those trembling lips. Russia had no choice but to pull America's wrists up above his head, holding them securing with his strongest hand while his other returned to America's pants. He did not touch him again. Instead he simply slipped the trousers down, taking careful consideration of America's facial features.

Throughout the entire process they held eye contact. Russia was near unreadable for the most part but if he wanted to relay any silent message to America it was that he was taking care of him, that he would not harm him, and that the younger had nothing to fear. He could see America struggling with himself, no doubt fighting back that demon that turned him into a paranoid mess that pushed everyone away.

Bare. America was finally bare underneath him. No, this time America was not sick and Russia just trying to warm him from General Winter's chilling threats. No, America was rubbing Russia's hips with caressing knees and arching thighs, spread willingly.

Russia did not touch him with his hand. Instead he held America's gaze, watching, waiting for any reaction while his free hand returned to him, taking hold of his pants zipper and pulling it down. The sound echoed across the large room but America didn't move. Not even when Russia reached inside and grabbed himself, bringing himself out to rub against America for the first time.

The way America's eyes fluttered but didn't shut, the way his neck arched and his head fell back into the pillows, it was beautiful and enticingly arousing. Russia was so hard when he touched America. He wrapped his hand around both cocks and held them together to feel, to take in. Russia closed his eyes and sighed out a moan.

Suddenly, Russia felt it. America bucked against him. He opened his eyes and looked down at the nation. His eyes were half-lidded, his mouth parted, warm winds of pants escaping past pearly white teeth.

Russia could feel those tanned thighs trembling as well and his hand wrapped around their cocks left to rub the right thigh, caressing it to calm, pressing it closer to his hip. The skin felt so soft, so warm. Russia wanted it pressed against him, a part of him, forever.

He needed to feel him more. So, Russia slowly took his hand away from America's clasped wrists and drew those powerful hands to his mouth, kissing each and letting go to show his trust. He then leaned away from America. He was in the process of pulling the remaining article of clothing—his pants—off of himself when he stopped.

His eyes took in America. He had not moved much when Russia pulled himself away to sit back on
his knees. His knees still bent out where Russia's pelvis had been cradled, his arms were now by his sides, hands running up and down slowly, almost teasingly, and playing with the small blond hairs trailing from his bellybutton on down.

God, did America know what he was doing to Russia? The way the younger was looking at him with such dark blue eyes—did he even know the affect he had on the Russian nation? Want was evident in everything about the American; the look in his eyes, the way his hands played with himself, the way his legs spread ever so slightly more in invite.

Russia nearly forgot to discard his pants for want to lay back over America, but he wanted to touch him skin-to-skin and so did away with the last of his clothing. Finally, he laid back over him and pressed his cock to America's. The other hadn't retaliated yet and he was glad.

They kissed more while their hands explored. When fingers traced over scars they lingered, caressing gently, and if their mouth was close they would plant a tender kiss over the silvery patch of skin as if their kisses could heal any wound once given. Russia could feel the scar on America's back, the one Japan had given him in 1941. The American's shoulders twitched when Russia ran his fingers over it and in so America leaned forward kissing Russia's neck.

The United States was so very sensitive of his scars, each one feeling as if it were a newly healed wound one shouldn't mess with. Russia's scars were old, many he had received from Mongolia and his bloody childhood. The reminder of how he received them hurt more so than someone touching them, but as America kissed the patches, he even turned to the one on his shoulder—a larger one—and began sucking it, scraping his teeth against it and lapping at it, Russia felt this was the best way to deal with them. He did not mind America touching them.

Slowly, Russia moved his pelvis against America, rocking. America pulled himself away from his neck and clung close, wrapping his arms around Russia and pulling him flush, crushing. Russia knew America's virtue had been stripped from him violently, without his consent, but that didn't mean he wasn't any less of a virgin.

He had not been with a man since England had taken him all those centuries ago. In fact, this was his first time actually giving himself to another. This was America's first. Russia would be America's first.

The Russian smiled gently at the thought and cupped the back of America's head, comforting him. All would be well, for the both of them.

With his other hand Russia grasped America's hip and guided him in the movement. Small thrusts against each other before he pressed a little harder and had both of their hips rolling in a long intimate dance. When he let go of America's hip he no longer needed to encourage the younger nation to move, America was rolling himself into Russia, small moans escaping his lips that tickled the base of Russia's neck.

He could feel America curl his neck against his own, rubbing his cheek against his ear and resting his chin near the back of his shoulder. Russia rubbed against him in return and then tried something more. He moved his hips downward, his cock rubbing against the younger nation's testicles before rubbing down further until . . .

America inhaled a sharp breath and pushed himself away from Russia. His frame slammed into the mattress, his eyes closed tightly and lip bit into his mouth while his hands pushed against Russia's shoulders, squeezing and pushing. He would break Russia's bones shortly.

Instead of Russia forcing the hands off of him he pressed his own against America's neck, his thumb
rubbing up against the younger's jaw, caressing him, getting him to open his eyes. America did. He was trembling, afraid once more.

"Ya ne prichinyu tebe vreda. Dover'tes' mne. Dover'tes' mne," Russia managed to lean close to whisper this. Clarity of thought that he should have said it in English would come later, but in the moment Russia could not speak anything but his own native tongue and somewhere in the back of his mind beholding through his eyes it looked as if America understood what he was saying the more Russia whispered it. "I will not harm you. Trust me. Trust me." The English could not word it properly and so Russia spoke what was natural to him.

Both hands were caressing America's jaw now. The pain on his arms almost unbearable but Russia only pressed more. "Dover'tes' mne." Russia should have remained still, America was too tense, too close to breaking him, but he pressed his forehead against America, his own lips rubbing against America's who was letting out pant after hyperventilating pant. "Dover'tes' mne, Alfredka."

Then Russia felt it. He felt those crushing hands slowly release pressure. Then they were shaking. They slid up Russia's shoulders and cupped his jaw, trembling. Russia reached out and grabbed a hold of them to stop their shaking, he hated feeling them so afraid and so he kissed them until the calmed.

There, America was smiling at him. Tears in his eyes that have yet to fall glistened against his glowing irises. When he inhaled a sloppy gasp one tear slipped down his face.

"Ya lyublyu tebya." Russia could not help his being from saying it when he pulled America's face close and pressed it against his neck, cradling him in his arms. He felt as if his heart would burst. He loved America so much. "Ya tak tebya lyublyu."

America was fighting. He was struggling against himself for this and Russia was so proud of him.

Soon enough, America's breathing settled and his body relaxed. Russia rubbed against the back of his neck only feeling America let his head fall back into that touch. He was smiling at Russia with those dark eyes and asking to be kissed. Russia leaned down and did so. America's hand cupped his cheek in return and then Russia felt his legs spread further apart.

So, he rubbed himself against America's entrance, getting him used to the feel. America moaned into his mouth and it wasn't long before his rolled his hips down onto him. America pulled his lips away from Russia's in a gasp. Every little sound aroused Russia and he was losing himself too quickly.

While Russia did not wish to move his hands away from America's body he knew he had to. In their plight into room Russia had caught sight of a carton of lotion for dry skin on the lampstand next to the bed. It would do. He needed something because America was a male personification and did not lubricate naturally.

Russia reached over and took it into his grasp. He opened the carton and took a handful of the white crème, rubbing it against his hand and then he pressed his hand down against America's cock, lathering it and stroking it. The skin moved along with him and so did America's hips.

He was moaning, America had closed his eyes and laid his head back against the pillows underneath and moaned. His head sloshing back and forth perfectly. Russia leaned down and raked his teeth against that exposed neck while he built up pleasure in the younger.

His hand did retreat and lather itself again before traveling down further. The moment he touched that puckered ring of muscle America's legs clamped against his hips painfully tight. It knocked the wind out of Russia and he groaned.
He kept his eyes on America. The nation had went rigid, kept his eyes closed, and breathing as even as possible. He was struggling, forcing his body to calm itself.

Russia moved his other hand to one of the knees and pulled it apart, slamming the thigh against the bed sheets and holding it there. Russia pressed his weight against the other thigh and now America was spread perfectly before him.

Russia rubbed the ring of muscle again just to get that part of America's body used to his touch. He could see America's abdominal muscles tense and knew America was struggling to control himself. When Russia pressed a finger inside he half expected America to lurch forward, grab a hold of him, and toss him across the room. To his surprise America arched. He arched so perfectly that the finger slipped in easier and quicker.

Russia was amazed, but then again this reaction only made his heart race. The combining of nations was similar to humans but also different. If they so accepted a bond from another nation then they would accept their girth and all things given to them. There would be no tension, no pain. It was a beautiful thing—or so Russia has heard. He's never bonded with another nation before and he wondered if that is what he and America were about to do.

Yes, they were. They were about to bond.

America was sucking him deeper into him. Already three fingers and Russia felt as if the nation under him wanted more. He did. He wanted him in his fullest.

A nation didn't need much preparation, more so the males did for lack of lubrication. This was in the result of acceptance and submission. America has chosen to submit, to lay under another, to spread his legs thus so made his body ready. But Russia needed lubrication inside him because no matter the acceptance America would still hurt from dry penetration.

Rape was different. No matter if the other partner tried to arouse their victim through whatever means there would be no acceptance and so the penetration hurt and would scar. America had been through this. It was hard to get over. He was a wonder within himself.

When Russia began to stroke himself, lathering himself in slick lotion he wondered how different it would have been had he been able to return to America right away back in the late Nineteenth Century and fulfill their promise early on. Or, if it would have been the same.

Russia believed he would not have treated America any differently. He would have found out about his rape and he would have comforted him. He would have showed him how to properly make love, just like what he was doing now.

This was about to happen. Russia was going to make love to America. He'd waited his entire known existence for this; to have his mate. It wasn't fair that the two were at disagreements in the world right now because this was all Russia had ever wanted. He just wanted to hold America, to hold him, to kiss him, to caress him, and to make love to him.

Russia leaned over America. One hand holding the base of the younger's skull steady, the other cupping his own arousal, so thick and throbbing, and guiding it toward America's entrance. America had accepted him, had chosen to lay under him, he had picked Russia to give himself to.

The head of the phallus pressed against the entrance and America's hands shot up, clasped against Russia's jaw, holding the older's head still as the American nation looked up into his eyes, seeking comfort and acceptance of Russia's own. Russia did not take his eyes off of him and smiled.
He pressed inside. Russia watched America's eyes glow, they were so wide right then. They fluttered but would not close. Nostrils flared and jaw closed tight, America forced himself to remain calm as Russia slid the rest of himself inside.

There had been no resistance. America had accepted his entirety and now Russia was embedded within him. Russia could not contain the moan that he had been holding in his descent. His eyes fluttered closed, his head tilting back and his jaw loosening to part his lips.

Perfect. America felt perfect around him. Better than any livid dream he's dreamt.

From the moment Russia had seen his destined mate he had imagined this night; the time when they finally became one. At first it was at Empress Catherine's palace when America was so little—the small colony writhing underneath the larger mass of a nation—then it was in Paris, when America had finally become his own country, then it was at St. Petersburg palace when Russia had accepted him as a mature country in the world—he had imagined America in that Apollo outfit and how lovely the gems sounded as they cluttered to the floor in Russia's haste to strip the nation bare and merge with him—then, it was at Sitka when Russia had given America his American territory, he had been so ready for him then, so . . . just like now . . . in Sitka.

Russia felt tears well in his eyes and he blinked to relieve the sting only for them to fall out, bursting form on America's face below. The younger nation looked up at him, and then his right hand trailed up, the tips of his fingers touching the tears falling from Russia's violet eyes. Russia was crying.

Trembling, Russia reached forward and took America's wandering hand in his grasp, bring those fingers to his mouth and kissing each one and then the palm and then the wrist. Afterward he pressed the hand against his wet cheek and smiled sadly down at America.

They did it. Alaska. They became one in Alaska like they had so promised long ago. What once was thought a broken promise returned in fulfillment and Russia couldn't take it. His heart burst with emotions.

America pulled his hand free from the trembling Russian's grasp and then wrapped his arms around his back. He pressed his hands against Russia's shoulders and pulled him down, pressing their chests against the other so that Russia was closer to him again. Their eyes met and when America leaned up to kiss Russia the older nation shed the last of his tears.

With renewed vigor Russia reached down and grasped America's hips. He'd waited too long and his body was eager to share everything with America. He pulled out a little and then thrust back inside. America's insides were tight, just like a virgin's, and as an accepting country he could feel the way those walls clenched around him, sucking him deeper.

America took him whole. Russia's laid with others. None had been able to take him in his entirety, China had been the bitchiest bedmate that often left Russia quite unsatisfied. But America? Oh, America . . .

America sucked in sharp breaths when Russia pressed inside and exhaled when he pulled away. His breathing was controlled this way and the moans coming out along with those exhales hardened Russia to pain. The way America stretched around him was perfect. His warmth, his tightness, everything Russia wanted as his forever.

Russia rubbed his lips against America's in those breaths. Their breathing mingled and grew hotter the deeper Russia sunk. The practice from before came into play when America began rolling his hips in even flow with Russia's making the experience all the more pleasurable and America let Russia know just how much pleasure he was feeling.
"Oh, oooh!" America's head fell back onto the pillows underneath, his hair fanning out around him like a golden halo. Russia reached down and ran his fingers through that silky rich colored hair and when he leaned down America turned his head for Russia to kiss his temple.

Pressing his lips to America's ear Russia let him listen to him as he thrust into him. Every groan, every moan was for America and he wanted him to hear it all. America moaned in return, a full flush spreading across his face and down his neck just by hearing every lewd sound Russia gasped out.

The way Russia felt inside America was unlike anything he's ever felt before. England, America's father, had ripped into him violently and left him a bloody mess on the green among his dead men. It had hurt so bad that America never believed any pleasure could be given to a man from another man. But he was wrong, so very wrong.

Russia was big, probably the biggest out of any nation in the world, but he fit and filled America perfectly. America's eyes fluttered closed at the hot throbbing feel. It was almost like he was made for Russia because he doubted any other nation could take him fully inside like he had then.

America moaned, louder this time. His back arched. He wanted more.

Russia was keeping his thrusts even and deep, but feeling America arch under him tightened the muscles around his cock and he felt the shaft twitched. So, he shifted himself. He bent his knees and then took America by the hips, holding him close to his pelvis as he pistoned himself downward. America arched again, it was a little difficult since he was nearly bent in half with his hips angled upward against Russia's but he did so, his chest rising.

Russia could feel the younger's muscles clamping around him, sucking him. Being inside America was far better than any experienced mouth or one-night whore could ever be. Russia was smiling in relieved satisfaction, his head tilting up and eyes closing shut just to feel him.

They'd become one. Russia was now a part of America and America was now a part of Russia.

This was something more than just sex, much more than a fuck, and deceptively more than making love. There was no arousal of lust or pleasurable touch. No need to penetrate deep to feel tight warmth. It was not about the ecstasy of the body but the longing of a shattered heart.

The gentle ache to become one in spirit and body, in breath and mind, whereas lust and want held such high passion to dominate other emotions, this ache was deeper and its pull longer lasting. Unaware of its presence until the moment proves to bring the large canyon of nothingness in a heart nearly broken to undoing.

The ache went unnoticeable during its hiding and appearing that where Russia believed his longing to be a physical need of relief then turned into something both he and America never imagined would show. The humanistic need to please oneself in every sense of physical capability became the longing to connect in the most intimate way any creature on earth could.

When Russia entered America he not only felt their earthly forms connecting and joining together, but their spirits as well. It was something neither had experienced nor did they assume would ever. But the closeness, the entwined feel of physical, emotional, and spiritual; it was all too much for the two nations.

Russia felt every part of him heightened. His touch, his sight, his hearing, his feel, his taste. What was more was that he could feel America, actually feel him. His stomach rolled the same way America's did when he thrust back inside him and pressed at just the right angle, his breath left his lips just like America's, both inhaling the same hot atmosphere around the two of them. Their hearts,
Russia leaned down, took hold of America's wrists and pressed them next to his head. He could see the way his fists clenched, balled. Every press inside and America arched, his eyes rolling back and head tossing to and fro. He looked so beautiful in the throes of passion.

Russia kissed him and immediately felt him still his head and return the kiss with a skill that left both of them breathless. Russia's breath was America's and America's breath was Russia's. Both moaned in unison and when their eyes opened both saw the desire in the other's glowing gazes.

America wiggled his wrists free and reached out, cupping Russia's face and rolling his hips over and over until he felt like an experienced lover. The way he moved against Russia made the older feel as if he knew his entire body, knew how to move to make him react. Russia bucked a little harder into America and the younger mewed, his eyes closed and his lips hung in the perfect "O" before he evened his breathing and looked up at Russia again, silently begging him to do that again.

Russia did and their pace quickened. Closer, he wanted to be so much closer. Russia leaned down and when their chests pressed against the other he could feel it. His heart, it was beating, beating and beating—in the same as America's own heartbeat. The connection was made and until death would their hearts cease their synced dance.

"Ivan..." Russia nearly froze his entire being at the sound of his name. He had not heard his name pass those lips in over a century. He opened his eyes and beheld America. He was crying. He was moving his hands already placed on his face, fingers tracing the Russian's jaw and cheeks.

Russia rubbed his face against the touching hands and gave America a chaste kiss. They could not hold each other any closer than that. Their bodies connected, pressed so close that no air separate them, lips locked and arms wrapped around the other. They'd never been so familiar with the other than right then.

Russia had thought America looked his most beautiful underneath him, with the bed sheets ruffled under his naked form, but he was wrong. Now America was above him, squeezing his hips tightly with his thighs and rolling his own against him. Russia's breath was lost from him when America took his hands in his own and placed them on his sides, letting him hold him as America pressed down onto the large cock inside him.

The window, the one just to the left was illuminated by the light of the twinkling stars and bright moon. The light poured into the room and cast onto America's body, the sweat coating it made it sheen and shine and Russia saw everything, every muscle move perfectly in motion with his own. That tanned skin was the right shade with the moon's rays and Russia was falling in love all over again.

America would roll his entire body, first his hips and then his spine would arch and then the neck and in the end he'd lean his head back and moan in pleasure. Russia was mesmerized by the sight of it all that he forgot to breathe. His body even moving on its own to lean up and sit, looking America level in his glowing gaze.

They paused, both staring at the other, taking in the way the moon's rays shadowed their bodies and illuminated their skin. Russia's hair seemed to glow a silvery hue while America's hair paled. Both took in the beauty of the night.

It was America who leaned in to kiss Russia. Slowly at first until both decided on which way they would tilt their head and at which angle they'd lean in. Every kiss sent shivers throughout their bodies and both eyes fluttered closed.
Russia's hands on America's sides moved and explored. He grew upset in discovering every part of America he touched was rippling with fit muscle. It was expected after all America had to keep his figure from being the world power, but Russia's own physic was no doubt lacking. Since the fall of his union he wasn't inclined to remain in top shape. Lately, his boss had been drilling him, but it would take years before he was back in his prime like he had been as the USSR.

But America seemed just as enthusiastic about his body as he was about his. Russia could feel those warm strong hands running down his frame, rubbing, tracing. Then their journey ended in cupping the back of his neck where America leaned back and rolled his hips, continuing where Russia had stopped to feel.

Russia shivered when America moved over him again. He could feel him pulling away only to suck him back inside, into the heat and tightness. Russia could feel sweat seep out of him by America's movements. He was too good, knew exactly how to move to make Russia fall to pieces.

"Ivan," America sighed out. There it was again, his name. America's head was leaning back, his collarbone protruding and his back arching, his lean weighed him down and if Russia leaned forward then they'd both be tumbling back onto the mattress underneath them. Russia did so and America's back met the disheveled bed sheets.

He opened his blue eyes and waited patiently for Russia to cover him again, both of his hands on America's hips and rocking faster into him. America shook with each powerful deep thrust and if Russia hadn't kept a hold of his hips then he'd no doubt topple off the side of the bed.

America's head turned to the side, his eyes squeezing shut and he let out a loud gasp, sighing in pleasure afterwards. Russia struck him there again, the same reaction. So, he continued, angling his manhood to press and stretch just that way.

One harder thrust just right and America lurched forward, clinging to Russia and hooking his leg around his waist. They twisted, Russia's breath leaving him when his back hit the mattress again. America was leaning against him, rubbing himself onto him. His neck pressed against Russia's mouth enticed the older nation to wrap his hands around it and pull it into a bite. He felt America's moans vibrating through the throat and so twisted their bodies, slamming America down into the mattress again, holding his leg around his waist a little higher and Russia managed to slip more of himself than previous thought into his lover beneath him.

They both gasped in unison but Russia's cock demanded friction and so he moved a little faster, nearly pounding himself into the body connected to his. America was rutting against him, enthusiastically panting and silently encouraging Russia to go harder and faster. Russia did so.

Russia swallowed hard at the feel of those muscles squeezing around him, both of America's legs wrapped around his waist, pulling, pushing him deeper, and his anal muscles continued to constrict, to stroke his manhood inside America, gulping it deeper with the contractions. He could feel his testicles tighten, hardening. Oh, what America did to him.

So, he reached down and began to stroke America. Those blue eyes popped open when Russia finally touched him. His tanned lips parted and those pearly whites glew in the moon's light.

Russia pressed his thumb against the slit and rubbed America's cockhead. Circumcised, he should have suspected. He could feel the organ twitch in his grasp and the strange thing was that he nearly felt it himself; when he touched America's arousal, rubbing it, teasing it, it almost felt as if his own cock could feel the same ministrations on it.

"Ooh," Russia groaned, leaning down and biting into America's shoulder. The younger choked out a
moan, rolling his hips to meet Russia's thrusts.

They were harsher this time; the thrusts into America. Russia believed to seriously harm any lover with these hard and needy and quick rams, but America wasn't just any lover, he was his mate, made specifically for him. Formed to stand beside him, to match strength, to lay under him, to fit him inside, and to take any strength he'd give him.

Russia did not let go of America's shoulder until his urge to penetrate deep and fast faded so slightly and was replaced by gentler movement. There was red on his lips from America's bite wound but he didn't care, it did not stop him from kissing the younger nation and smearing the liquid all over his kiss-swollen lips. America was undamaged by Russia's brutal pace, just as he suspected. Those moans of his egged the Slavic country on.

America's kisses did the same. He kissed Russia like he was the only one he loved and would ever. He kissed him like Russia was his shelter, his defender, his hero. He kissed him in surrender because his heart beat for him, because Russia's heart beat as America's.

When Russia pulled his lips away he hovered over that warm mouth. They exhaled and inhaled the other. Each touch was what Russia wanted. Each kiss mentally asked for. The connection was deeper than expected.

Time? Both had lost in the other's embrace. Neither knew that it was indeed the 14th already and that the day was even coming to a close. Nations lasted longer than mere humans in bed, even if this was America's first time in such an intimate act the bond formed from this union drew the both out longer. In ancient times it was once said Rome could bed a nation—or multiple countries, according to the teller—for many weeks. This of course would come from multiple completions and then rises to claim again and again, but the nations nowadays were less inclined to have such resilience for so long.

Russia didn't know any nation who could last as long as that old and dead empire. But as far as first orgasm, Russia never expected to last this long. Over and over he would thrust into America feeling so close and yet he would not ejaculate. He sensed America felt the same, from the way his cock colored hot red to the look in his eyes begging him for release.

Their legs entwined, their arms clung, their hips rolled, and their hearts beat rapidly. They were lost in time and the space around them. The connection formed strengthened the longer they held onto the other, the more they kissed, the more they pressed against each other.

They didn't care about release any longer. They wanted each other. Forever they wanted this moment to last. Just to hold and look into the other's eyes so intimately delved into their hearts in cherishment.

But like every good thing brought there is an end to it. Their spirits soared in the deepening connection until the string of it pulled taught and bit by bit it snapped. Russia and America came together. They arched into the other, pelvis pressing against pelvis. Russia had burst deep inside America, pressing in so deep so that America would feel him within him and keep him there for a long time afterwards.

America came over both their chests. It coated a hot white and his orgasm continued ejaculating even after the first initial shockwave rocked through the both of them. Russia's breath left him and he collapsed. He fell on top of America who was still experiencing his long drawn out release.

America did not push Russia off. He said nothing about the larger laying above him. Instead, he wrapped his arms around him and clung close to him. His knees rubbing against Russia's hips and
sides lovingly.

When America began kissing Russia’s neck the white in Russia’s vision faded and his senses returned. He rose his head and looked at America. The younger let him see him close his eyes and lean his head back, pursing his lips. Russia took the invitation and leaned down to kiss America.

They kissed until Russia turned to his side. He made to pull out of America but the nation simply followed his hips with his own, keeping his leg wrapped around Russia’s hip to keep him close, to keep him inside. Russia understood everything in America’s bright blue eyes that looked into his own telling him things in secret, things both couldn’t possibly comprehend if said in voice.

A sigh left America’s lips and he closed his eyes, laying his head against Russia’s chest and listening to the slow beat of his heart. Russia wrapped his arms around the smaller and drew him as close as he could. His mind was clouded with nothing but America and the feelings of him therein.

When Russia reached out in want to caress America’s jaw the younger nation would jut his chin in preparation for the touch. When Russia wanted to lift America’s hand and entwine their fingers he found America raising his arm himself and holding his hand out for him, waiting for his own to clasp. When Russia wanted to give one last kiss to those swollen and abused lips America would lean his head back and pucker his lips in wait for Russia’s descending ones.

It was as if America knew what Russia wanted in the subconscious of his being. It was so strange but understandable all at once. The bond they had created would have to be torn violently if ever wanted to get rid of and in that violence Russia was certain they’d both perish. He’d never be able to stop loving America, never, especially not after this.

Chapter End Notes

Historical Notes:

The Winter Olympics of 2014 was held in Sochi, Russia with Russia taking 33 medals in total, America coming in second taking 28 medals, Norway coming in third taking 26 medals in total, and Canada coming in fourth taking 25 medals in total.

So, Germany and America’s relationship comes under strains from the 2013 mass surveilllance disclosures where the world finds out America’s tapping the phones. And then AGAIN in July of 2014 when two Bundesnachrichtendienst officials were arrested by federal prosecutors for allegedly spying on the German government for the C.I.A. Chancellor Angela Merkel asked the coordinator of CIA activity at Berlin’s U.S. Embassy to leave his diplomatic post. In response to the arrests, Merkel said, "Viewed with good common sense, spying on friends and allies is a waste of energy. In the cold war it may have been the case that there was mutual mistrust. Today we live in the 21st century.” German attempts to be included in the non-spying pact the US has with the UK, New Zealand, Australia and Canada were fruitless. Why can't Germany be included, huh? Poor country is trying. But, in light of that all Merkel reiterated the U.S. was Germany's most important ally, and nothing about their relationship would change. At which it has been stated that Germany is a close ally of the United States with the United Kingdom being its closest, Canada next, then Japan, and then Germany.
Aaaaaaaaand finally! The rest is history that I'm certain many of you are caught up with today!
He rested, but he did not sleep. He closed his eyes but he did not doze into unconsciousness. He was far from exhausted, he was on fire, he felt alive.

Russia was conscious but still. He had never rejuvenated so fully and so peacefully in his life. This . . . this is what he's wanted all along.

Had the world ended in his and America's union? Had Russia's subconscious cracked into a deformed beast? Had America so perished in life while lain out underneath him?

None of these horrendous supposedly foretold things happened. So why? Why had the world been so afraid of their embrace, so afraid that the moment their souls touched the planet itself would crumble and decay? Why had destiny fought so hard to break them apart when all they had been to the other was their half—their missing piece.

Russia's heart finally felt strong. He could feel it thumping inside his chest, the sound echoing in his veins. It beat like America's, and America's heart beat like Russia's.

The post results of their union satisfied Russia more than anything in existence. He could not stop the smile permeating on his face. He was so very happy. Nothing could hope to make him feel this except for the love in his arms.

Russia moved closer. His arms wrapped tightly while his nose dug into tussled tufts of golden locks. He inhaled the nation pressed close to him and smiled at the scent of his own self awash all over the boy's body. He inhaled again, their mixed auras calmed him.

America was so warm that the chill of the room perturbed him not. Russia knew that America would always be enough to keep him warm on days like these—when the General tried to bury them both in ice and snow.

Time wasn't of the essence in their peace right then, but if Russia had to guess he would assume the day to be the 15th or the 16th. He understood clearly that he and America had made love for the entirety of Valentine's Day. Russia smiled at the memory and rubbed his palms up and down the curve of America's back—if given permission Russia was certain he could lengthen that timespan.

The abrupt stop in pleasant thoughts was . . . painful.

Russia swore he felt the physical feel of something ripping from his heart, his body even shook from the pain encasing his being. In reality, America had just pulled away, and Russia had slipped out of his body. They were no longer connected intimately in a physical sense.
The peace was slowly disrupting and Russia opened his eyes. He had reached out to America, wanting his warmth to stay next to him but his heart broke, shattering in watching him continue to pull away from him, to scoot as far away on the edge of the bed—the bed they had unified in—as possible. With him gone, Russia felt a weight in his limbs, his arms fell back to the bed and he looked on almost helplessly, staring and staring into that broadened back of America's.

Why did he pull away? Why was he not returning to him, back to his arms, where he belonged? Russia's heart raced and he pressed his palm against his chest at the feel of it. Keeping his eyes on America he watched the younger mirror him, his own hand pressing against his sternum.

Then, Russia's breath caught when America turned his face to him. Their eyes automatically met. Both could see the longing, but soon enough some other emotion overwhelmed America and Russia could see it—he could feel it.

America's eyes averted. He blinked, and then bowed his head.

Russia rose his head from the pillows underneath him. *Come back, Alfred, come back to me.* Russia's arms spread on their own. America turned those blue eyes to him again. Without uttering a word, Russia heard him internally say, *I can't.*

Russia's throat constricted. He felt a cold wave wash over him. He knew the feeling very well; fear.

Slowly, like he knew the impending outcome, Russia sat up. His eyes keeping America's form, internally demanding he look at him—that he see how much he loved him. Fine, if America would not look at him and see it then perhaps he needed to hear it.

Russia had no qualms with telling America that he loved him every day, every hour, every minute, every second.

"Alfred." The name came out so easily on the Russian nation's lips. He saw how America reacted to it, the boy immediately turning to him once vocally called. "I lo—!"

Before Russia could even finish his declaration in the younger's native language he found fingertips closing his mouth shut. He blinked in confusion and then looked down at the stayed hand. When his amethyst eyes traveled up that arm toward the nation now leaning before him he frowned.

America had his head bowed, his eyes clenched shut. He was biting his bottom lip and the slight tremble in his arm reverberated up his hand and those four fingers pressed against Russia's mouth shook his very lips.

"No."

Russia blinked again. His own eyes searched for America's. He wanted him to look at him. It was very clear the younger was forcing himself not to.

Slowly, that hand moved away and curled into a tense fist. America wrapped his arms around his chest, notably concealing the 9/11 scar that he deeply hated. He'd become self-conscious again and Russia hated it. He hated it because he, himself, was bare before him; nothing hidden. America was free to touch him, to feel his scars, to see his entire life, but now . . . now America was no longer looking at him, no longer revealing himself before Russia with no worries.

"Don't say that." America had spoken again. His voice was too soft, completely opposite of his usual vibrant tone.

Russia's heart felt painful again—but this pain was completely different from the pain of longing.
Silently, he wondered if it was his own sole pain, or if it was shared with the one sitting before him.

Still, America did not meet gazes. His eyes glanced off to the side as he rubbed his arms. "You should leave."

Russia flinched at the halt of his heart. It had skipped an entire beat and in that moment he watched America flinch as well, as if he felt the same. The younger grit his teeth and then pulled away further.

He stood and marched toward the dresser in the room. He was quick to pull out a change of clothes. Even quicker to dress in said attire. A simple shirt and sweatpants, he hadn't even bothered to pull out any undergarment to accommodate him.

Russia's eyes were on him the entire time. He could see it, he could feel the forcefulness in those movements, in how America pulled himself away. The younger was forcing himself, Russia knew this.

America looked quite numb when he sat himself down on a comforter chair near the window. His hand on his mouth gave him enough of a distraction to say no more words that would hurt the both of them, or heal for that matter. His blue eyes looked strained, locked to the corner of the room near the lampstand. He was struggling not to look at Russia.

Russia leaned on his arms, his gaze looking for any sign that America would cease his struggles. "Alfred—"

America inhaled a deep breath and closed his eyes. "Leave." The word cut into Russia's heart. If they could feel each other then did America feel that? Did he know just what his words were doing to him?

Russia would have fought. He would have jumped to his feet with renewed vigor, marched over to the younger nation, taken a hold of him and tossed him back onto the bed to make love to him again. He would have done all these things hadn't he felt so . . . heartbroken.

He had no more energy. His heart clenched in his chest and his hand raised again to touch his sternum. Looking up he noticed America already clutching the fabric of the shirt he'd pulled on, the front chest of it.

So, who was the one whose heart was really broken?

Russia's head bowed and he blinked. He tried to comprehend everything. Just the previous day he and America had been making love . . . making love. Two could not do such a thing if love was not involved in the act.

What had he done wrong? Had Russia been so foolish to give all of himself to America? He had taken a chance, a large chance. He'd gambled everything. Had he really lost himself entirely?

Russia put one leg in his trousers and then the other. It was hard to dress himself now, his subconscious was elsewhere and so he struggled just to put on something simple like pants. It took too long to do anything and he felt that if he took any longer that he'd . . .

Russia felt the fabric of his beige coat touch his bare neck. He pressed his fingers to the scarred tissue and turned to look for his scarf. In his search his eyes gravitated back over toward America. He had been watching him silently dress.

America was quick to glance down and away just as their gaze came close to meeting. If Russia's eyes could not have America's gaze then they went on, continuing to search for his scarf. He found it
near the headboard of the bed and took it up.

He slung the scarf over his neck and began to wrap. One by one his sensitive scars were concealed. They may never been shown again.

Finally, Russia was ready to head outside, to leave the home, America's home; to return back to his own territory, to his boss, his people, his empty house. It didn't feel right. None of this did.

Russia closed his eyes. He felt awful. He felt nearly sick.

If his subconscious would not move his body then he'd have to forcefully. Each step he'd have to think about. When he reached to touch the doorframe on his way out he'd have to understand why he was doing this. He was leaving, he was leaving everything behind—his soul, his mind, his spirit, and his heart.

Russia turned. He looked at America. The nation had his eyes closed and his lips pressed against a fist.

What had Russia done to make him send him away? Couldn't he feel that he was breaking inside? How could he do this to him?

"I'm . . ." Russia even had to think of every word he was to say and so each spoken came out harder and harder, longer drawn. "Sorry . . . that I was such a disappointment . . ." Russia offered a bittersweet smile that faded too quickly. It didn't matter, it wasn't like America was looking at him. "Amerika . . ."

Russia felt his heart jump inside his chest. It hurt, it was hurting him so much. He took in a deep breath and passed the doorframe to the room and left.

He held his breath the entire descent down the stairs and then out of the home. The moment the echo of those heavy Russian boots faded signaled for America to let go of the breath he held. It came out as a choked sob and his hands shook whilst pressing against his mouth.

In and out he breathed until he felt some sense of control over the necessity. When America turned his face back toward the entrance to the room he patted his cheeks, forced out a smile. Russia was gone, one less problem in is life.

He stood, ignored the weight in his body, and walked back downstairs. He came to the living room where the mess from the 13th remained. As if in routine he placed his hands on his hips and grumbled at the clutter. Another chore, how fun.

America leaned down. He picked up the box and began putting all of the spilled adult toys back into it. This was definitely going in his attic. Didn't want anyone to see these bad boys.

He groaned in annoyance after feeling around underneath the couch only to find some had rolled under. After gathering up the rest escaped he made sure he didn't miss anything. He scooted around on the floor on his knees, dragging the box with him and scooping up some strays when he found them.

When his hand touched a thinner feel he halted. Turning he picked up his glasses. America jumped up and smiled. Texas!

Things always looked much more brighter with these things on. Wait . . . there was a smudge. America rolled his eyes.
Pulling off the lenses he held the glasses close to his shirt and wiped them clean. Again he pulled them back over his ears and tried them on again. Good as new. Not a scratch on the—ah, another smudge.

America sighed, shaking his head, pulling the glasses off and wiping them clean on his shirt. Before putting them back on his face he held them up in the light. The bulbs from the foyer flickering and shining his favorite accessory.

Even without Texas, America's eyes focused on door. Russia had left it open. His boot prints imprinted in the snow outside.

He was gone.

Just like America told him to be.

Just like . . .

A trembling hand slapped over America's mouth and he felt his knees buckle. He caught himself against the sofa only to slide down to the ground. What had he done? God, what had he done?!

With shaking shoulders, America curled forward. Texas slipped out of his fingers, the remnants of unrecognized tears already smudged on the glass frames.

His hands reached up and clenched his shirt, pulling on the fabric over his chest. He hurt. He hurt so bad and it was his entire fault.

He shouldn't have done what he did . . .

Sending Russia away broke him to pieces.

So he sat there and cried. His heart and body now in coexisting thought fought against the logic of his mind. The logical pattern of his thinking won the battle in the beginning, had been what forced him to tell the man he loved to leave. Because he cannot love two. Simply was illogical and impossible.

Now his heart punished him for doing what he had done—for forcing its other half away from it. It threw itself against his chest over and over. It was more than America could bear.

No. America wasn't a cheater. He would not do this to Germany, not after all he's done for him.

Yes, he had loved Russia first, and for so long, but Germany had waited and America could learn to love him in time, hopefully soon, and . . .

Ivan, come back . . . come back to me. Even America couldn't silence the longing cries of his bonded heart.

Kiev, Ukraine. February 16th 2015

Ukraine had just returned from a meeting with her frantic boss. Times were ever stressful and it seemed her ways of calming her people was lacking. She was just as frightened as they, but she was a wise old nation and so of course offered her wisdom—of which none was freely accepted.

That in itself upset the older Kievan Rus sibling. If they would not listen to her then clearly her presence wasn't needed. So she retreated back to her home.

She was tired and weary of the turmoil. The accusations, the fighting, everything was becoming too
much. She didn't understand how other nations could handle such happenings so often, this was killing her inside.

But still, inside her bountiful breast beat the heart of an older sibling. Of which the heart quickly pumped concern into its host upon noticing Ukraine's younger brother sitting in her living room.

"Ivan!" Ukraine gasped. She quickly shut and locked her front door so no prying eyes could see inside. She wouldn't know what would happen if her people found out her brother was there, in her territory, in her personal home.

Russia's eyes looked hallow, he stared at nothing in particular. His movement near non-existent as well. Hadn't it been for the steady rise of his chest, why, Ukraine would have—was he even breathing?

Then, Ukraine's heart stopped when Russia slowly turned his head toward her. Despite the lack of focus in those amethyst eyes he looked at her and said,

"Starshaya sestra."

The whine, the look in Russia's gaze, Ukraine hadn't seen such pitiful posture in him since the collapse of the Union. Big sister, Ukraine's baby brother had called her, "Big sister." He hadn't called her such in a long time, and at this time, right now, why it was confusing but more so concerning.

She was blasted back to a time when they were all so little—when Mongolia, Prussia, and Sweden were hurting her little brother. Every time he'd cry and run to her. She would hold him and shield him as much as she could because she was his big sister.

Tears welled up in Ukraine's eyes at the memory and now, seeing her big little brother look at her like that—like when he was little—why it tore her up inside and she quickly ran to his side, wrapping her arms around his head while his arms wrapped around her back.

"My love," she cried, pressing her cheek against his tussled sandy locks. "What is wrong? Oh, Ivanya, do not cry. Big sister is here. I always will be."

National tensions be damned. This was her baby brother, and nothing her boss or Russia's boss said would keep that fact from her.

Running her fingers through her younger brother's hair she tilted his face up to her. He was crying and her heart broke to pieces at the sight. She inhaled her own shaking resolve to remain strong before her disheveled brother. With her thumbs she tried wiping away those horrid tears coating his cheeks and dripping off his chin only to stain that beloved scarf of his she had given to him when he was just a little thing.

"Who did this?" Ukraine looked into her brother's eyes and saw the hurt. "Who has made you cry, Vanya?"

She watched his gloved hand pull at his coat. "It hurts," he cried, rubbing his face into her breasts, holding her tighter to him for comfort.

Ukraine smiled sadly when she pulled away and knelt down. She pressed her hand against her brother's chest, feeling the organ inside banging against his sternum, thumping against her palm in sporadic rhythm. This was nothing new.

She knew about her brother's heart condition for a long time. When he was just a baby she had feared him walking death, he had no heartbeat. Then, after one night, the organ began to beat,
though the rhythm was odd and concerning, at least it was beating.

Now she wished it had remained useless inside his chest. More so she could see the way his face contorted in pain that the heart created inside him, whether newly discovered emotional pains or the physicality as it threw itself against his ribcage. He was hurt by so much more these days because of that bipolar organ and Ukraine's come to hate it.

As far as she could see right now, the heart was just having one of its harmful episodes with no one but Russia to torment. She knew that something warm and a tight embrace would comfort her brother. She was about to rise and fix him something hadn't he said—

"It hurts because of him."

Ukraine felt her limbs freeze. She leaned closer. Watched intently the way her brother's face contorted. His teeth took in his bottom lip, his brows crashed together in pained sadness, and his eyes closed, the lids shaking out fresh tears.

Him?

Ukraine knew of one person who could damage her brother this way. But she was certain the two had distanced themselves. She was so sure that her brother had shielded himself, shielded his heart, and that America . . .

"Amerika?" Ukraine questioned. She would have pressed more on the subject, softly of course, but by the mention of the nation she felt her brother jerk his head up at her, look her in the eyes, desperation was written all over them in their hallow gaze, even the way he painfully clung to her tormented her inside.

"Tell me how to stop loving someone," Russia begged. He looked at Ukraine in plead that she answer him quickly, that the answer she gives him takes away the tormenting pain coursing throughout his being. "Please, please tell me! Please!" Russia pressed his face into her chest again and cried.

Ukraine was now choking at the effort of holding back her own tears. The sight of her brother's state was too much to bear, especially when she knew deep down inside that she could not fix him. She hated this . . . she hated being so useless when over and over he came to her, clung to her, looking to his big sister for advice when time and time again she'd let him down because of her inexperience in anything he's had to deal with.

She knew about her brother's love for the younger nation. She knew that despite tensions in the past and in the present it had not waned, the fire not doused at all. Even as America sought a relationship with Germany she knew that Russia loved him from afar.

She had wanted America and Russia to come together, to declare a courtship and to be happy. But lately, that seemed unlikely. So now, she wished that her brother stop; that he release his affections for the Western nation. She knew it would be hard, but if he could just try then maybe it would give him time to heal his already broken and abused heart.

"It is hard, Vanya," Ukraine whispered, running her fingers through her brother's matted hair. "It may take a very long time. Have you and he fought? I thought your boss told you to stay away."

She remembered the last international meeting they had—when America and Russia were allowed in the same room—they nearly began a war amongst themselves and their horrified allies. She certainly hoped her brother, nor America, had secretly sought the other out to settle that undecided battle. She
knew that even if it was in secret it could still have a damaging impact of their peoples.

"He told me to come to Alaska," Russia continued to cry into his sister's bosom, telling her everything. "Sestra, I haven't seen the old territory in so many years that I . . . that I . . ."

Something happened in America's state of Alaska. Ukraine peeled herself away from her brother. She leaned down, her face close to his. Raising her hand she cupped Russia's cheek and smiled gently at him.

"Vanya, you shouldn't have gone. You knew better," she reasoned. She didn't know what they had done, nor the possible repercussions. She was afraid to find out, but she offered her wisdom nonetheless.

Russia coughed out a sob, the next he tried inhaling, but the more he tried repressing the sounds the more his body shook to release them. He really did look like such a little child to Ukraine in that moment; terribly hurt and looking for nothing but comfort.

"D-Da," Russia coughed out. His breathing was heavy just trying to contain himself.

When he looked back up to his sister the older nation gasped at the sight of his smile. It was small but she'd seen it before—long ago when he had returned home after giving little America the Alaskan territory and informing her that they had agreed to begin courting. It was a smile full of love in recognition. Why she was seeing it now was beyond her.

"But I loved him," Russia spoke. Ukraine nodded at her brother's words in comfort. She wished he would just— "He cried . . . he cried and I couldn't stand it. So I held him and I kissed him because I loved him."

Ukraine's eyes fluttered. Her heart skipped a beat. Oh no, what had her brother done? "Vanya . . . ?"

"We made love," Russia informed, his head bowing at the pleasant memories made tragic over recent rejections. "I loved him and he loved me." Russia inhaled a sob and his entire body shook with the pain in his heart.

Ukraine placed her hand upon Russia's arm. Was this true? Had this all really happened? "Ivan . . . ?"

Russia pulled his arm from her hastily. She gapped at the sudden movement and watched an anger rise in him, shoving all weakening sadness aside. "I loved him and he loved me! He gave himself to me . . . then why . . . why did he pull away from me afterwards?" Russia looked back up at his sister, seeking answers once more. "Why, sestra? I know he loved me. I could feel it here." Once more Russia fisted the fabric covering his chest. He grit his teeth, a new wave of tears welling up in his eyes that his sister couldn't stand to see. "Even right now . . . I can feel him . . . we are the same now . . . and he hurts, I know it . . . I couldn't push him away because I hurt from it, then how could he? If he loved me just as much and now suffers just like me then how . . . how could he handle this much hurt?"

Russia bowed his head. He hunched over, groaning from the pain in his chest that he had described. Now Ukraine wondered if all of that tormenting pain was completely her brothers. A bond was formed after all, and with nations like America and Russia—this could not be used for good.

She really wished Russia hadn't. She really wished America hadn't. The world would not let them be and now they had doomed themselves.

She reached out to her brother again and embraced him. Again, she could not fix her brother's
problem, but she could hold him.

"Why won't he love me, sestra?" Russia cried into her arms while his elder sibling silently rocked him. "Why?"

Ukraine remained silent. She was torn inside. She wished this torture be place upon her instead of her brother, but her wishes never were considered.

Ivanya, her heart cried out. Oh how I wished you had loved another. But fate is always so cruel, da? Especially to you.

Ukraine looked down. What was a big sister to do when their baby sibling was in so much turmoil? She felt helpless but nonetheless held onto her mourning brother closer.

She had rocked him in her arms with familiarity. When his exhaustion ensnared him and he was limp in her arms she still held onto him with what strength she could. You have the most fragile heart out of anyone I know or have known, Vanya. You deserve some happiness. You deserve for it to last an eternity—not the expanse of a dream-like day. Ukraine frowned at the knowledge that her brother and America had laid together, that they had unified a bond. Shame on America for hurting you like this, but, Vanya, know that in doing so he hurt himself . . .

When Ukraine placed her hand on her brother's chest to feel his beating heart she smiled lightly at the feel of its stronger beat—she knew that was entirely America's strength of heart. He had strengthened the organ in their union, but in equality Russia had fragiled the younger nation's own. She did not doubt that America could feel Russia right now, feel the ache of his heart and bitter sadness over what he had done.

But Ukraine knew better. She knew that much of the hurt emitting out of Russia's chest was not his own. It was completely shared now. Those feelings were America's.

It gave the older sibling some small hope for reconciliation. In her understanding she knew it meant that America was just as heartbroken over their separation. Like Russia, however, she could not understand what possessed the young Western nation to pull away—to break both of their hearts now beating as one.

Russia was wrong in assuming that America did not love him because of this. Quite the opposite. Ukraine now understood the confirmation of her once-thought-dead hopes. But still . . . if it were all true . . . if America had indeed loved Russia just as much then why . . .

Why did he pull away?

Ukraine urged Russia to stay with her. She hid him from her people and remained close to him in love and comfort. She knew it was not the right time for him to return to his people or boss. He needed to recover from the trauma he had recently faced.

But when he left then she would as well. She was close to America now. Perhaps she could help settle her brother's torment by confronting him. Perhaps then she'd see the love her brother had sworn the younger had for him.

New York City, New York, USA. Not So Distant Future [?]

France finally caught sight of him and then grinned. "Oh hon hon hon. There he is. Look at him. Can't you see how much better he looks?"

England groaned from his seat next to France. He looked at the Frenchman with utter disgusted
annoyance before turning his head to behold his eldest son. Neither nation had seen him for a while, both assuming he was just caught up in the holidays. But France knew better, which had England a little more than on the edge of his seat.

"What?" England muttered. Clearly France was delusional—not that the Brit should be surprised. "Looks the same to me."

France simply sighed, keeping his knowing eyes on the American. "Wouldn't expect you to understand, Angleterre. Your observational skills are quite lacking."

"My what?!" England turned to France with a fist raised, daring him to say that again.

France paid him no mind though. His eyes focused on America who was currently speaking with Japan upon entering the room. "I can see it in the way he walks, look at his smiles, hear his laughter. Mon cher, he has been deflowered."

England choked on his spit. His words fumbled over the other quite unattractively. France was now getting annoyed of the stuttering Englishman.

Finally turning back to the nation he frowned at his reaction. "It was bound to happen sooner than later, Angleterre."

"You're lying, frog face!" England responded in denial. Turning back toward his son again he tried to see what France saw. He didn't get it, he simply couldn't. America looked exactly the same since he had last seen him so what was France rambling on about?

France groaned out a sigh and rolled his eyes. Why does he continue to try with this insensitive English brat? He didn't matter. America was near like a son to him so France felt that if England wouldn't then he would get up and go and congratulate him. After all, this was something special for nations, him being one of the few to understand this.

France ignored the condescending cries from the Brit to leave America alone and strutted up to the boy. Reaching out he threw his arm around the American's neck, pulling him out of a laugh with Japan and closer to his side.

"How is my little Alfred doing?" France felt him attempt to pull away but he responded by simply twisting them around again, giving the two a form of privacy from the blinking Asian nation near them. "How is your lover? I trust he was quite satisfied with your submission?"

"W-What are you talking about, France?" Aw, America was so cute, just like his papa; he started stuttering when he got all flustered.

France only grinned at the boy when he pulled himself away, trying to will away that adorable flush heating his face. Reaching forward he pinched those cheeks of his.

"The glow of your skin is enough to tell me—among other obvious signs," France replied. He chuckled when America slapped his hands away, those blue eyes of his scanning the room to make sure no one was listening to them. "There is nothing to be embarrassed about, mon ami. It is a beautiful thing to bond with your lover." France pressed close again, America taking a step back to retrieve his personal space. "You must tell me everything, Amérique. I want to hear every last detail."

Oh, where was France's camera? That look on America's face was adorable. He often wondered if his own little boy would make such "kawaii" expressions when he found himself a lover.
"Enough!" America groaned out. France was certainly confused in that catch of the boy's gaze falling down to his feet—that wasn't an embarrassed motion. He then watched America turn his eyes toward the other nations entering the meeting room, Germany was among them. Then he was looking back at France, saying, "I didn't do anything with Germany, alright?"

With that America left France dumbfounded. France had never been wrong about these signs. He knew the signs, he could discern through reactions. He knew for certain America had finally bloomed into a full bud with his lover.

Still, the silently confused old country didn't stop America from waltzing back to his lover and taking him aside.

"Can I speak to you for a moment, Germany?" America asked, brushing the German's hand lightly before walking out of the meeting room in suggestion that the older follow.

Germany looked back at America in confusion. He sighed and then followed. Outside of the room, near the water fountain, America had pulled him aside for a small talk.

"I'm really sorry about ruining our date," America apologized.

Germany frowned, crossing his arms and meeting the superpower in the eyes. "I know we've had troubles lately, Alfred, but that wasn't like you. You invite me over, pay for all of my expenses, only to have me wait at a restaurant of your choosing to not show up?" Germany had been confused that Valentine’s Day. He just never got the chance to speak to his boyfriend about. This was the first time the two had seen each other since.

"I know, I know. Just . . ." America slumped his shoulders with a sigh, his gaze off to the side in his thoughts. "Something came up."

"Obviously," Germany scoffed with a roll of his eyes. "The next day you text me and tell me you're away running errands. I asked for two whole weeks of leave for you, Alfred."

"I said I was sorry," America spoke up again, this time looking Germany in the eye. He did look apologetic. "I know, I ruined our date. I'll take the blame. But, please, is there anything I can do to make it up to you?"

Germany sighed.

"I know!" America piqued. "How about I come over to your place for a date, huh?"

Germany cringed at the idea. "Nein," he denied much to America's displeasure. "Mein bruder will not leave us alone and I doubt my boss will want you there for long."

"Well what a bitch."

Germany's eyes widened, gapping at what America has just said about his boss. "Alfred!"

America giggled like a little child. "Sorry," he apologized again. He sighed, scratching his head and pacing in thought. "I dunno. We need something to go on." When America looked back at Germany he noticed his boyfriend flipping through his black book—seriously? Who keeps those things on them anymore? That's what smartphones are for.

Snapping it shut Germany pressed the booklet inside his suit jacket. "Unfortunately I am quite busy for a while." Damn, America's lost his chance.
With a sigh, America nodded his head. "I understand. It's fine. My punishment, huh; for screwing you over?"

Germany groaned. "Nein, Alfred, times are hectic. Even you need to be dealing with your own issues. Now's just not a good time to take breaks. I'm sorry."

America nodded. "You're mad at me, aren't you?"

The German sighed again. "Confused, not mad."

America chuckled bitterly. Of course; Germany could never stay mad at him for long. Even with him being the cheating bastard that he was.

"I'll inform you when I'm free again, ja?" America looked up. His lips tugged to smile along with Germany who smiled back at him with sincere genuine affection that just left America exposed and feeling all the more guilty. He silently nodded.

He didn't remember giving any indication that he wanted to be kissed, but Germany leaned forward and planted one right on his lips anyways before turning and leaving back to the meeting room. America touched his lips, horrified by how little he felt for it. A kiss from Germany used to unsettle the butterflies in his stomach, now he hardly felt a flutter from the touch of his lips on his.

It was horrible. Just damn tragic.

Damn it . . . he was going to Hell for this.

. . .

Now one might think England to be the "Holier than Thou" when it came to being a know-it-all. In fact it was indeed France who prided himself in knowing everything about everyone and anything. Gossip was his forte, especially when said tall tales happened to be true.

To have information over anyone was intoxicating and the power trip that went with it was desirable as well. However, not all information had to be harmful. France's brain was filled with various accounts from embarrassing tales to endearing memories. If he did not need to bring up the ugly past of a deed heard from a friend of a friend of a friend then he would not.

However, when he felt himself right about a particular happenstance and another informed him he were undoubtedly mistaken, why, he took that as a direct personal offense. Because the République Française was never wrong.

It was impolite to snoop, France knew this, but the insistent nagging bug was imbedded when he happened to stand near his son while he conversed privately with America on a coffee break.

It seemed Canada had been just as expectant as France about the next step supposedly made by America in reference to his relationship with Germany. And, just like France, Canada was easily let down.

"What do you mean you didn't go out with Germany?" Canada sounded confused and France only imagined that bewildered look on his child's face. "I thought that was why you had invited him over for Valentine's Day. You planned that night for months, Al."

"I know, I know," came America's sighing voice. France frowned. He could tell by the tone that he was avoiding answering in full and settling confusion. "Things came up. What do you expect? I'm the superpower of the world."
France nearly chuckled in his coffee at Canada's 'humph!' He knew his little boy took that defiant stance. Step brother or not, though Canada and America were separated by blood the two were close and dear little Canada was not afraid to confront the powerful country.

"Seriously, Al? How long are you going to prolong this? It's like you don't even care."

"I told you things came up, so just leave it at that," America demanded. France idly sipped at his coffee when he watched America walk past him, having left Canada and their conversation.

The older nation frowned again and turned to his son. The two met gazes while Canada bowed his head and shook it sadly. Both knew that if it were an issue it was up to America to deal with it—but, unlike his son, France knew there was more to what America wasn't saying.

So, he stalked one last person he knew he could squeeze information out of without creating a scene and in such revealing a possible scandal.

He waited by the little boy's room for what seemed like forever. Any longer then the meeting would commence. He had to be there because—well, because he was France. The world couldn't turn again without him.

With the fifth glance down to his wristwatch France let out a sigh. The sound of a flush finally beckoned him to grin. He leaned against the wall near the door, waiting for the prey to come out.

"Wooo, I think I had too much vegemite for breakfast. Whaddya say, mate?" Australia looked none the wiser that he was being stalked, simply focusing on that pet koala hanging off his back. He didn't notice France at all, nor the trail of toilet paper stuck to the bottom of his shoe.

Before his pet even had time to nod its head France leapt forward and stole the Oceana country to himself. Off to the side was a coat check simply vacant of any one and so France decided that the ideal place for interrogation.

"Ow! What the hell?!" Australia was shoved against the desk, nearly bent in half over it with a concerning France looming over him. "F-France?"

"You will tell me now," France demanded, though Australia couldn't determine if he was intimidated or disturbed—France's face could swing his emotions to either or.

"Tell ya what?"

"You are close to your big brother, oui?" France pressed closer and Australia unnervingly pressed back to his best ability.

"U-Uh, yeah. What-what of it?" Australia glanced behind him. That counter was blocking his way from running for it.

"He tells you things, oui?"

Australia raised those large brows he inherited from daddy. "Yeah?" Just what was France wanting? Australia certainly didn't have any dirt on America—well, none that anyone could use. He was certain his big brother could whip out a skeleton far darker and more disturbing than anything anyone could throw at him.

"Tell me now; the names of his lovers," France insisted.

Again Australia was blinking owlishly up at him. He turned to his koala friend, the little creature just
shrugging. When he turned back to France he gave the older country an obvious look. "Vietnam, North Korea—"

"Non, non, non," France stopped him. "I mean a male." France was certain he'd seen the signs of submission from America. The nation had lain under a country—a male country. Trust France, he knew these things.

"Germany?" Australia was looking at France like he was the idiot, but the boy was simply not understanding the Frenchman.

"Non!" France reached out and grasped the boy's shoulders tightly. He had to know. "Before the German."

Then, France saw it, the visible sweat, even the subtle rise of the boy's Adam's apple in his gulp of anxiousness. He was hiding something and France grinned mischievously.

"I don't know what you're talking about, mate," Australia got out, each word slower than the previous. His eyes darted away, unable to hold eye contact while lying—ran in the family. "He hasn't had an open love life, like yourself."

"Non, he hasn't," France said, understanding that America stayed attached for too long. He also held grudges for quite a while too—America's thoughts on North Korea was proof of that, and he wouldn't blame him either after what she tried to do to South Korea—but Vietnam? Why, after her announcement that she wanted to get back together with America after nearly half a century, France could see why he pressed closer to Germany. America had been hurt in his relationships, and by the looks of it he wanted so desperately for Germany to be the one to never hurt him.

Even so, France could not shake the feeling that there was something more harbored within the young super power, something even he hadn't guessed.

"Tell me who the other lover was, mon ami," France bade, raising his hands and rubbing the Aussie's arms, making the poor boy shiver. "Right now, or I will have to make you tell me."

"T-There wasn't another lover!" Australia swore. He flinched away from France's touch but louder and louder the chorus of, "hon hon hon's" arose and startled the younger nation. "I swear it!"

"No one, are you certain?" France asked. He wouldn't have known if there was. After the XYZ Affair he and America hadn't been on visiting terms. America was quite secluded to his own hemisphere too, busy with new states, territory, etcetera. "No young attraction, physical satisfaction, nothing that caught his eye?" The mysterious nation didn't necessarily have to be a lover of America's. Perhaps a boyhood crush. Still, France wanted to know.

"Y-Yeah, no one." There it was again, Australia gulped. He turned his head. The guilty sweat was all over him.

"You're lying~" France sing-songed while moving his hands down and touching the boy's hips, his fingers slipping around, way too close to that firm buttocks of his. Which reminded France that he had yet to touch that—well, closer to check that ass of his "touched" list.

"AH! What's wrong with ya Frenchies?!" Australia squeaked, jumping just as soon as France's fingertips padded over the dip of his hips.

France quirked an acutely plucked brow—Frenchies, as in plural? So, perhaps little Canada had confronted Australia about the same issue. Of course France was certain his methods of interrogation were completely different.
"I-It was Russia, alright! Now get away from me!" Australia cried out in panic, the moment he had his pet hissed at France, crawling over his shoulder and readying to attack France's flawless face. The French nation quickly pulled away, for both the reasons of shock and caution from the wild beast.

"Russie?" France questioned. "They were . . . lovers?" That certainly would make the Cold War awkward.

"No." Australia scooted himself out to give him a clearing. He adjusted his tie and sighed. Finally, he was free of France's impending molestation. "Well . . . kinda. It was a secret. Alfred told me they had been courting in private for about four decades before the Great War. Nothing came of it, alright. I told Matt and now I'm tellin' ya. So just stay away, no more groping."

Australia was a sprinter. France was thoroughly impressed with the speed he had thrust himself out of the hallway from his presence. Hm, he expected a gold medal from him come the next Summer Olympics.

Inward praise of the younger's speed aside, France's mind was stuck in a conundrum. He hadn't known America and Russia had been so close to go as far as courting, especially with America's isolation. But, Russia had been there for America during his Civil War and so . . . yes . . . yes, it all made sense!

During the Great War when America was with France for a little while in the trenches the Frenchman had been the one to escort his letters off to delivery boys. America wrote a lot. Many letters heading to his boss, many to his men in different regiments. He wrote to Australia a lot, as well as to Canada and New Zealand.

France thought nothing of it that America would write to ones such as their allies in the war like England or even Russia . . . Russia . . .

Digging through his memories France remembered seeing America in the process of writing the letters. He remembered facial expressions and moods during each writing. With England, America was discreetly caring for his parent nation. With Canada, he was pleasant, Australia, playful, and New Zealand, trying.

What was he like when he wrote to Russia?

Think, think, think . . .

France fiddled with his beard before his eyes widened. Back then he thought nothing of it. But now that he remembered and was informed of new enlightenment France realized how true Australia's statement was.

Back in the trenches, when France would come to America's compartment and wait for him to finish writing his letters so he could seal them and then send them to be delivered he remembered a few times catching the boy in a delicate state. At first he seemed light, always smiling when he wrote—to Russia.

Then, as France recalled, America became more frantic, looking ever worried when he handed him that letter written out to the Eastern Nation. Even the multiple times America had inquired of any letter received from the Slavic nation France thought nothing of it. Now he remembered the disheartened look America gave every time he'd tell him there was nothing from Russia.

Like a lover with a broken heart.
France had assumed that America was just a sentimental nation, worried for family and friends alike. He was certainly grateful for the companionship, the boy had rushed out into No-Man's Land to save him multiple times. But never had France thought anything more of those sad looks when no letters from a certain nation were received.

Mon Dieu, how could France have not seen all of the signs?! They were all there, clear as day.

"Non!" France gasped. America hadn't . . . had he? Couldn't be. Not during this day and age—the two were at each other's throats, Russia even banned to certain meetings.

France turned when the chime of a bell rang. The nations followed the hall back toward the meeting room. When France's eyes caught sight of America he frowned.

That boy might have just ruined his relationship eternally with Germany. Before they entered the meeting room France watched Germany turn and offer a quick peck to America's lips. It was endearing and daring for Germany to say the least with his usual stance on public displays of affection.

But France analyzed everything. America did not return the kiss. It was quick enough for no one to notice, especially Germany who quickly turned and walked through the meeting doors. America lingered and it was in that moment that France realized his assumptions were true.

The American was touching his lips, rubbing them as if he couldn't feel the tingle at all—he might not. Then France's eyes widened when the young nation touched his chest and sighed. Oh no. He didn't.

Before America entered the meeting room and joined the other nations France witnessed his change in persona. With a more up-beat façade in place he entered the room. France pitied the boy, no doubt he had no idea what he was doing when he copulated with Russia.

A bond was created. France chewed on his lip at the thought. While he would usually congratulate such a miraculous and deep union this was not something to be proud of—not now—not between those two. Their countries were near at war with the other. What the two had done cannot be undone and now they were going to have to deal with the consequences.

Still, France wondered what would become of Germany and America's relationship. America's heart has already bonded with Russia's, was there even room for the rightful lover?

What was America thinking?

France sighed. He had not known America had been that in love with Russia. And Russia . . . God . . . what was Russia feeling right now?

As usual, France would keep these things inside him, hoping he didn't have to use them. Hoping things settled down. But, in his heart, he knew things would only get worse because of this. He just didn't have the heart to tell America, after all, it was not his problem and the boy and that other nation would have to realize the wrong they had done on their own.

It would be a long road to recovery for the both of them, and often times that road caved in on itself, swallowing both.

Virginia, USA. The Old Home. Not So Distant Future [?]

The Old Home is where America usually got his best ideas. It was calm there, a getaway from the stress. The place gave him time to let his brain turn those miracle-making gears.
But now? Now, America was struggling in the very place he'd never struggled before. Well, not since the Revolutionary times had he felt like this.

America groaned, banging his head against his desk right next to the pile of empty papers. Pens scattered abroad and the subtle smell of ink wafted into the air. With a wrinkle of his nose America prayed he hadn't broken a pen, because if that stuff got into his hair there'd be hell; ink was a pain to wash out of blond hair.

No, no, mustn't think negative thoughts. Positive. Positive waves is what America needed.

He straightened himself, cleared his throat, combed his bangs out of his face and then professionally reached out to take up the pen and write down his brilliant plots. He was America; there was nothing he couldn't do. The skies were the limit.

Land of the free. Home of the brave. Birthplace of entertainment; of so many inventions; innovations.

He was intelligent. Of course he knew this. Who else was the brains behind all that grand scheming during the tricky Cold War?

The Cold War . . .

Well, it certainly wasn't like Germany was the villain like Russia was.

Russia . . .

"Ivan." The whisper that passed his lips surprised even America. No one was around, not even Tony, so he didn't have to peer over his shoulder to make sure no one heard him, no, it was just him, and his heart.

America hadn't meant to, after all, coming to his old home was to find a clarity of mind to think about his lover, his boyfriend—Germany—not Russia—but there he was, writing down passages in time, occurrences in the Cold War were the two superpowers had interacted and caused havoc and tragedy. Each date was given a side note marking what had went wrong, or what had went right between the two.

Once it was finished America looked at the paper, held it before his eyes and scanned each incident. From the moment they saw each other again since the failed expedition to help the White Army; the '40's, the '50's, the '60's, the '70's, the '80's, the '90's, and the 2000's. The clarity of each situation was so overwhelming, but America knew them to be true in his heart.

His fingers skimmed over the jotted notes explaining each heartbreak facing the two. Miscommunication, longing, desperation; each feeling, each reaction was written down and America just understood now. He wondered if it was because . . .

Reaching up, America pressed his palm against his chest, right above his heart. The organ thumped against his hand, internally answering every mental question he asked.

Those menacing looks Russia seemingly gave were nothing of the sort, America realized now they were so very sad, and so very desiring. The hurt Russia had felt when misunderstanding America when he had told him something important, the startling fright even over the jealousy when America had clung to the likes of North Korea and Vietnam—and now Germany. The eagerness to please and seek approval when America had been invited over to Russia's new home during the Hockey summit between the Soviet and Canada. And, finally, the heartbreak when everyone left Russia and America never looked at him.
Oh, how very similar they were.

"Ivan." The name was so easily slipped from his lips now that America knew he'd have to be extra careful. Couldn't let the others know. He didn't know what they'd think about him. Not just that, but they'd probably tell his boss, and if he knew ... God ... America didn't want to think about it right now.

So his eyes skimmed over the written places in time. Oddly enough he smiled as if with a fondness to each of them. That simply wasn't true. Some of those dates were horrible strenuous times in his life and he wished he'd forget, but ... seeing Russia during each of these meetings brought a smile to America's face. He missed him.

He missed Russia dearly.

America's fingers flexed over the paper scribbled over in historical events. They splayed as if exploring the expanse of that nation's broad chest ... up those thick arms ... over those wide shoulders ... down that strong back.

And Russia would kiss him as he did this. Not on the mouth, no, that country would lean down and kiss him just below his ear where the jaw touched. Even more he would bend until his lips peppered against America's neck, leaning further until he'd press America onto his back.

America would look up at him, pleading that Russia look at him, that he see in his eyes how much he loved him—how much he still loved him just like he promised in those forgotten letters so long ago now. Now, Russia would look at him and then he would smile ... God, that smile ...

America's eyes fluttered closed to conjure such a perfect image. He had loved that smile. It was small but so true, so full of a love America had feared had died—in it was a relief, a relief that Russia felt in knowing America still ... still ...

"Ivan," America whispered again to the air surrounding. He crossed his arms around himself, trying to recreate the feel of being in those strong arms; they'd always remained so strong even in his times of famine, of collapse, of peace. America could feel that pleasant breath on his neck, cool but refreshing. He'd been glad to feel it, it let him know that Russia was alive.

Still, above all he missed the feel of himself pressed against that pale chest, his ear calmly listening to the soothing rhythm of that beating heart. The heart that connected with his own, the one he had once seen violently rip itself from Ivan's chest during the war meetings between the Allies now beat contently inside the cage it had now come to accept. The life inside Russia, when before he seemed to be walking death, was mesmerizing and enchanting.

And those hands, what once his people and bosses declared could hold nothing but guns and the device to nuclear destruction was proven wrong when he touched him, brushed him, caressed him, held him. America missed that so much, so, so much.

A shiver crept through the young nation's body as his heart picked up its pace to race. The longing and desire had become too much and the void carved inside it ached so much that America couldn't stand it.

Lips thought worn and rough with only a crude insult to pass through it were in fact soft and gentle and full of declarations of raw love that it left America breathless. Hands thought calloused and destructive were in fact well-controlled, protective, able to hold America and give him a sense of security. Eyes once thought so full of malice and spite and secret ploys to rid every nation on earth could in fact bare a devoted love and tenderness only shown to America.
Russia was a much older nation, believed even older than America's own father, but he had such an energy with him, such stamina that America wondered for the truth of his youth, or if, in fact, he could take a piece of his own and reflect it perfectly.

America would not let a moan escape into the room he sat himself in, but could not stop his right hand from falling into his lap and rubbing his crotch. He closed his eyes tightly, trying to think of something else, anything else, but with each beat of his heart an image of the one country he had pushed away was conjured.

A place, a meeting, accidental brush. America had to unzip himself to relieve the pain in his groin. When his fingers wrapped around the growing and pulsing organ America groaned in upset. His body upset that the touch wasn't its desired person, the one it had come to know so intimately not too long ago.

America remembered it, he remembered the feel of that cold bare hand touching him, guiding his hips, instructing him like the experienced lover he had hoped him to be. America's fingers squeezed tighter, beads of sweat forming on his brow, down his neck. His brows crashed together and his lips parted to let out pants of desperation.

He bucked into his hand, squeezing himself at the base, then sliding up the shaft to squeeze just under the head. It wasn't enough, nothing he could do would compare. He'd been tainted by something he feared he could never stop craving. His first, Russia had been his first, in America's heart he knew this.

Leaning his head back, America's golden head leant against the top cushion of the chair he sat in. His hips bucking faster only to be met with disappointment. An angry red the phallus took in color accusing its host of so many things that were in fact true. It wanted another's hand, that which America had swatted away, it wanted the feel of another of its kind touching it, rubbing it in sync.

America choked out a moan at the memory and quickly released his member to rub the underside with the flat of his palm, trying to mimic when Russia rubbed his . . . his . . . against him like . . . damn it!

A whining mewl left his puckered lips, America's eyes fluttering open at the same time, staring angrily at the ceiling above him. He wanted him. He wanted that damn back-stabbing nation.

He wanted him to touch him, to sweep him off his feet, to kiss him, to hold him, to tell him how much he loved him still and always would. He needed his hand around him, his tongue behind his teeth, his cock inside him, stretching him, penetrating him . . .

"Ah!" America cried out with such need, his hips left the cushion of his desk chair entirely. Legs spread and manhood leaking down his fingers to stick against his sweaty skin. His heart threw itself against his chest painfully, the shock drumming throughout his body to egg it on, to make it remember and want more and more.

He just felt empty, so empty that it hurt, it physically hurt. America lurched forward and gasped, one hand reaching up to press against his chest as his heart attempted to beat itself inside his chest and the other hand flew up to his desk to steady his shaking form. His breathing was heavy and his heart pounding loud in his ears to deafen.

He gasped again, trying to control his breathing. His head fell down onto the desk again in his panting. Closing his eyes he tried to will every overwhelming feeling away but he couldn't. The pain in his groin brought his memories back to the feelings at hand, to the disappointment his body was facing, to the memories of that night that began it all and the entire day he and Russia rolled close
together in the sheets to an intimate dance.

Dissatisfaction; that was all it was.

America had never touched himself before. During his teenage years he was busy building a new government, gaining and exploring new territories, and then in his late teens he was preoccupied with the heavy weight of the world calling him a superpower and now world power. He had no time to himself nor on such thoughts leading to personal exploration.

His feelings hadn't been deep enough to let the lust in to affect his body. No, not until Russia touched him, kissed him, held him, rubbed him, penetrated him—not until then.

America groaned out a moan, wishing that he could just will away his damn carnal need. Turning his face he bit into his clenched fist. The hand pressing against his chest fell, back down to his cock. He rubbed and rubbed and rubbed but nothing would work and the frustration was overexerting him, his face red and head spinning.

"Please!" America begged out into the keening silence around him. His throat dry and lips devoid of moisture, the heat from his body evaporating every bead of sweat from his skin. "Please, please, please!"

God, who was he begging to?! Certainly no one would come. The hero was on his own.

Never before had he jacked himself off—or attempted to—than right then. Neither had he even fingered himself. But he had been penetrated and he wanted filled again.

His hips rose again, his pulsing erection almost bumping into the curve of his oak desk, when he instantly shoved three fingers inside him. He bit his lip at the sudden feel of himself suck his fingers in so deep until his body threatened to take in the entire fist. He was in desperation, his need aching to be quelled.

America had never felt so uncomfortable. He was practically standing from his chair, leaning against his desk with his legs spread and his fingers pressing and pressing just to find some form of release since touching his manhood didn't seem to work. He shivered and shook when he felt slight jolts of electricity shoot up his spine. He was close, so close to the—

"O-Oh!" There, he found it. It still wasn't enough for his fingers to constantly rub against it because they just weren't big enough, thick enough, long enough, hot enough . . . "Nngh!" Knees buckled and instead of hitting the ground America simply pushed back from the desk and slid back down into his chair. It rolled some feet away from his desk, his eyes up, looking at the pale ceiling above imagining a pair of violet eyes peering down at him, a knowing smile on that man's lips.

"You cannot expect your touch to be enough. You're body craves me," he would say.

"And yours craves mine," America gasped out automatically. His eyes glassy, and the frames of his spectacles slipping sideways off the bridge of his nose from the dripping sweat.

There it was again, that knowing smile. "Da."

He knew what America wanted and America knew what he wanted. It was supernatural but all at once understood.

America could almost feel that ghostly touch pulling at his wrist, pulling his hand away, letting his annoying fingers slip out of him. His hand he swore was guided back to his penis, a silent order made to rub and to keep his eyes on him. America did so and he arched, finally coming—and to the
image of that loving smile, those deep passionate amethyst eyes, and powerful warm embrace.

Drool dripped down the side of America's lips as his dazed gaze watched with detail how Russia above him chuckled, rubbing the splattered semen off of his cheek and giving his fingers a cleansing wipe of it. He licked his lips as if he enjoyed the taste and America almost felt himself stir at the sight if he hadn't been so emotionally drained in that paralyzing moment.

When Russia leaned down, one of his hands pressing against America's slowing heart, America subconsciously raised his head. Closing his eyes had been easy, pursing his lips for the hope that Ivan Braginsky would see him and attract to him, and seal him.

But of course figments of the imagination sadly never exist and they fade when you open your eyes again. He was gone. America blinked at the spot he swore he had seen him and then averted his gaze to the mess he had made.

Shame, he felt so shameful. Bowing his head he stood up, his legs weaker than thought. He caught himself against his desk and held himself upright to let the feeling in his legs to return.

He should be sick with himself. He should be disgusted. How could he think such things when he was planning . . . with Germany . . . God, he was such a fucking cheater at heart!

America growled out a shout and shoved all of his personal items on his desk to the floor, completely angry at himself for falling again. Had Russia been there . . . God, if he had been near him then he would . . . he would have easily spread his legs and begged him to become one with him! America knew it was what his heart wanted, but he knew from various books that the heart was exceptionally deceitful and could never be trusted. Ever.

Right?

America should feel all of those guilt-laden emotions and yet he didn't. God, he's sunk down further than he thought.

After feeling the strength in his legs returned he straightened himself and quickly shoved his flaccid cock back in the confines of his boxers. He didn't bother zipping up his pants, he was going to shower and scrub hard and change his entire wardrobe at that. Damn it, he could still smell that fucking bastard all over him and he needed to forget.

But of course before he could wobble into the bathroom the knocked over phone rings. He turns and looks at the device. He was surprised it was still working—of course more surprised that he still had a landline of any sort.

"Probably the boss," America muttered. He sighed and pulled at his pants before kneeling down toward the phone and picking it up. "Hello?"

His boss hadn't even asked about the lower volume or the monotone in his answer, he simply got right down to why he had called.

"America . . . I just got off the phone with Mr. Putin."

America's world froze in that moment. Oh, God! What did that man know? Why was he calling his boss? Or did Obama call Putin?! Either way, why?!

His heart leapt into his throat and suddenly America was finding it hard to swallow it back down into his chest. He hadn't even known his grip was crushing the receiver of the phone. In his panic he almost didn't hear what the rest his boss had to say.
"America, are you still there?" The President asked.

"Y-Yeah, what is it boss-man?" America gulped again. What would they do if they knew? What could be done now that it's already been, well, done?

"Mr. Putin's expressed deep concern these last couple of months," Obama continued. "I would as well if the same thing happened here."

"What's wrong?" America asked, trying his damned hardest to keep his collectiveness while speaking with his leader.

"Russia hasn't been seen by his leader or people in a long time," Mr. Obama informed. America felt he should relax that the upsetting news didn't quite effect his people and government, but he couldn't. In fact, he was . . . saddened. "Mr. Putin called me after search parties failed to produce any track on his nation's whereabouts. Now, I am not accusing, and neither was he, mind you, but he asked me to ask you if you had seen him or heard from him lately."

". . . no . . . I haven't." America frowned. Where would Russia go if not back home? Shit, he wasn't still in Alaska was he?

"I thought as much." America caught that proud snicker in his boss' response as if he was proving a statement right. America didn't like it, but he wouldn't say anything more on the matter because the humans didn't need to know. "If you do see him you take care of yourself and be sure to tell him to leave you alone. He shouldn't be wandering U.S. territory or any other perimeters he's not welcome in."

"Yeah . . ." America felt his heart sinking and he reached up to rub his chest, trying to calm the saddened, insulted heart down.

Over and over the world would shout out against Russia. Why? All he's ever wanted were friends, true friends. But he was too big to not be considered a greedy warmonger for territory, too strong to play simple games or sports for jests, so it was always politics and serious conversations when he arrived at allies' homes. His smiles too shallow, and his mind too frighteningly sharp that many feared he'd outwit them even in the battlefield.

Undoubtedly Russia was the most misunderstood nation on the planet.

America chuckled to himself. Of course he wouldn't have understood such things himself if he hadn't . . . if they hadn't . . .

When nothing but the dial tone rung in America's ear he stood there, his mind off somewhere else, and his heart? His hand reached up and tugged against his shirt again. The organ hurt him and he now hated it for it. But he knew deep down that this hurt wasn't only his, but Russia's.

Somewhere out in the world Russia was feeling as lonely as America, and just as heartbroken.

A broken heart that America had caused, and regretted every day since he forced Russia to leave. Russia. Not So Distant Future [?]
did not want to see him go. He did not want to have to leave her. But they parted nonetheless.

She packed him food that he never ate, and dressed him in clothing he eventually threw in the trash. He returned to his borders but did not inform his leader nor his government or people of his presence. He wanted to be alone. Needed to be alone.

Up in the mountains laid a small cabin he hadn't used in years. It was near the place where he began. First, Russia watched the snowfall from outside the small home. He lit no fires to warm himself, simply kept to the hidden stash of vodka, drinking to the point he'd become sick.

After the cabin-fever set in Russia sat out on the porch for days on end, wishing for the General to freeze his being. But even still the cabin's rotting wood somehow managed to warm him. That, and the firewater. So he left both, traveling out into the frozen wilderness.

If General Winter wanted his sole servant then he could have him. He could have his mind, body, and soul. The General deserved nothing and so an empty shell is what he was going to receive into his icy embrace.

Russia stopped. He looked down at the snow piled up to his thighs. His surroundings ominous but familiar.

This was the place where he had been born—the place where his sister had found him near frozen to death. She should have left him in the snow. He shouldn't have existed.

The world would have been a better place without the nation of Russia in existence; he knew this.

Reaching up, Russia placed his hand to his chest. His heart had never felt so strong in his chest, beating evenly inside his ribcage. He urged it to stop, to let his body fail him, to return him to how he was before—cold, hollow, and empty.

It took a lot for a nation to die, particularly because only nations could kill other nations. But, perhaps if Russia gave up enough of his hope and laid there to let the ice freeze his limbs and stop the beat of that damned heart then he could fade from existence. Because all he wanted was rest, and he understood that the only way to get such an out-of-grasp aspiration was to cease to exist.

"Let me die," Russia begged to the snow-laden skies above. Closing his eyes he surrendered himself to the bitter cold, begging the General to finish what he started so many years ago.

How pathetic it must have been for the General to see him like this. But Russia gave in to the numbing darkness and all concerns for what that selfish ghost thought were nonexistent, and hopefully, he would be as well.

That is . . . if said wintery ghost wasn't gaining so much delight seeing his servant suffer like this.

General Winter chuckled as he drifted closer to the unmoving nation. Russia's attempt to end himself was futile. The General was not through with his servant, he would just have to teach him this lesson the hard way.

He had warned him. Oh, he had warned him not to give that boy his heart. He had told him to destroy him. In any impure way he had told him to wipe him off the face of the planet, but, like countless others—he too had become a worshipper of the sun's child.

General Winter has been around for a long time. Since the beginning of the world. No one has seen the rise and fall of so many nations and countries like he has. Well . . . save for one being.
Ignorant bliss was a blessing in disguise. The General's come to understand this after the cycle repeats itself and the nations, in body and mind, are reborn over and over. They do not remember who they once were in the past civilizations. But often times that was a good thing.

Where nations of this day and age are pleasant and considerate, their past selves were of nothing but corruption and spite of those surrounding. Of course that was not always true for every born nation. General Winter would know this because he remembered.

This worthless soul before him was one of said countries who hardly changed every time he was born. The life previously . . . General Winter smirked. He reached down and ran his icy fingers through Russia's freezing locks of hair. He was certain that this nation didn't know that it was he who caused the Ice Age, but, oh, how fun it would be to see the torment on his face from the revelation of such destruction.

General Winter could still see it, as if the previous cycle was just the day before. His hopelessly faithful servant had been so mad, so frustrated, so lonely. He heeded his words back then. He had taken that death of his and tore him to pieces, unwittingly unleashing the unmatched power of the winter spirit to reign supreme.

That had been a fun time, but sure enough the ice melted, the pathetic humans banded together, and nations were born once again—repeating yet another cycle. So, the General waited for his servant and when he was born he made certain the babe country would remember him instantly. He'd nearly frozen his small limbs right off. Ever since then Russia had been terrified of him from that traumatizing memory alone. Good, fear is loyalty.

He could not escape, no matter what, the General would not lose his true worshipper. Especially not to him.

'Do not think you can escape the pain by losing consciousness,' General Winter whispered with a dark chuckle. His fingers scrapped into Russia's scalp, pressing against his skull. 'I will let you dream though, but you will learn that they will offer you no ease of mind either.'

General Winter's mind had touched Russia's and soon the nation was overwhelmed by the visions spun into his black abyss he had slunk into. Little did he know that what he was beholding were not nightmares at all, but the memories of the chilled ghost.

Russia groaned, moaning at the pain from seeing such horrifying images. His body shook, limbs flailed even as they were frozen over in the ice and snow encasing him.

Disturbing images of him, but yet it wasn't him, and there was America—but that nation wasn't America. He was hurting him and the other was crying, pleading, begging him to stop, but Russia's doppelganger didn't. He continued to beat, to cut, to defile, and berate this other nation that looked so much like America.

The rage inside this nation that bore the likeness of Russia was overwhelming and Russia swore he could feel such an emotion coursing into and around his body. It was sickening, but not unfamiliar. He remembered feeling such things in similarity during the Cold War, but after mental training he had calmed himself and regained self-control. This though, this monster tossed away all care and bluntly murdered the younger nation. Such a shame, he had been so beautiful.

Russia choked at the sensation of his heart clenching at the sight of this horrible nation then perishing himself, his body falling lifeless onto the one he had abused to death. Dead, the both of them. Now, the sadness was overwhelming, all too familiar to the Slavic nation.
Chill and ice. It overcast everywhere, destroying everything. It had been General Winter's reign.

General Winter pressed close again, giving Russia images of his past lives, making it so that the Russian nation believed it all to be horrible fantasies evolved from the darker back of his mind. Each one was the same, he would die in loneliness and sadness. And it was all because of . . .

'Summer,' General Winter whispered his name. His other half, Mother Earth's favorite. He was the reason why his wintery season was so despised among mortals and nations.

General Winter had offered protection from enemies, impenetrable defenses would not be so easily tossed aside—or so he thought. But his price for such favors were high. He wanted lives, human lives, last breaths, frozen bodies, rotten corpses. And, above all, to never be forgotten and exalted for all he had done.

But Summer? He had nothing to offer and yet those countless nations would fall down to worship him. He was everything Winter was not; where Winter was cold, Summer was warm, where Winter was bitter, Summer was happy, where Winter was horrid, Summer was beautiful.

Golden hair like the sun. Eyes as blue as the afternoon skies. Skin bronzed in warmth.

This deity wanted no living sacrifice. He wanted no devotion. And, if he was forgotten, he's surely be remembered in time.

Summer only wished to behold smiles on every face, mortal and immortal alike. He wished to see happiness and fruitfulness. Just one touch of his hand would uplift a disheartened spirit. Summer lived on all of these things, and because of so Winter hated him.

Half of the year belonged to Winter, the other to Summer. Even when Winter reigned the inhabitants of the earth would cry out for Summer and beg his return. When he reigned they would forget Winter. Such ungrateful cretens.

For the fear of being forgotten Mother Earth granted Winter a true worshipper. The child was a nation, born in the dark of ice. Winter raised him, made him fear leaving him, saying he would die without his protection. So this nation gave everything to Winter and swore his soul to him as his faithful servant.

His faithful worshiping nation presented him as many lives as Winter asked of him. He always remembered him when he rose from slumber and when he laid his head down in the evening. Every minute, every second he would think of him. The other countries had thought the isolated nation had gone quite mad with how often he spoke as if to himself, in truth speaking to the spirit of Winter they seemed to have forgotten.

He had no friends. He had no family. The only person who looked upon his wretched image was Winter himself, and he would continue to be the only one so long as the nation always looked and hailed Winter in return.

But, such ideal pupils were really things of dreams. In as much that Winter hated smiles, and laughter, and joy, Summer hated frowns, and tears, and bitter sad loneliness.

Winter should have stopped Summer from even noticing his servant. He should have stopped him from coming to him, from touching him and turning his heart against the cold.

When Winter's servant's violet eyes beheld Summer he'd fallen in love . . . just like the countless other civilizations. His heart, once dead to the endless icy grip on it, now beat for the warmth, the smiles, and the laughter that Summer could offer.
Winter's servant had fallen out of routine faster than the spirit had expected. Worshipping was no longer filled with reverence or devotion, his thoughts strayed to green valleys and sun-filled skies.

Did he know that he would be killed if Winter did not protect him? He was vulnerable without his god's ice walls and heaving snow. Only a fool would abandon Winter.

Winter was not so keen in giving up his one true worshipper and so he froze the insolent nation's lands, beat him with heavy snowfall turning so much into barren frozen tundra. Famines purged the nation and he became weak and frail. Winter should have done worse, should have done more to keep him at his side.

Summer had been the one to come to him, to take pity on the nation. Like a fool Summer cloaked himself in a guise of a fellow nation. He did it so Winter's servant's frail heart would not give out from fright of the entity who should not come close to him.

In that guise he nursed Winter's servant. He touched him, he held him, and he gave mercy upon him. The frozen nation clung to him, absorbing Summer's warmth and begging he stay by his side. Summer didn't deny him anything.

All this time given to a servant not Summer's own produced a solidified heart in the core of his guised being. Its beat coaxed Winter's servant's own frail organ to beat in its same sure rhythm. Soon enough their hearts were as one and the overwhelming love Winter's servant drowned in for Summer was transferred to the entity and Summer fell in love all the same.

Winter should have kept his servant closer, even when he was forced to slumber for the half of the year he was so ordered to. He should have made sure he never strayed into the arms of another.

Winter's rage was set upon the two when he awoke from slumber, finding his faithful servant warmed by Summer's transformed body. They had become one. Summer had laid under Winter's national servant and held him close to him, encouraging him to take his warmth, explaining that he had enough to spare for the entirety of the world.

And, like the traitor he was, Winter's servant took so much from Summer, grabbing onto his warmth and absorbing it to melt his frozen form. Their passion would have aroused any observer. It was intense and hot like a scorching fire and as Winter's servant cried out in final satisfaction he sealed his doom.

Summer was a fool for stooping so low to take on a solid form. It took up too much energy to maintain, and much more just to create. Winter saw Summer's weakness, he saw his exhaustion in that moment as he lay spread under that traitorous servant.

He turned and looked at him. Summer's blue eyes met Winter's pale gaze. Winter let him behold his unbridled anger at what he had done, but Summer showed no fear, no, he let Winter behold the deep passionate love he held for his servant, and as Summer's arms wrapped tighter around Winter's servant's body above him the Winter spirit saw red.

Summer had plenty of worshippers and now he sought to take away Winter's one and only believer. How could he? What a wrong thing he had done!

But even so, as Winter made to strangle the element to death he cried out in frustration. Summer had taken on the form of a nation, and they could not be killed by spirits. Only a country could destroy another country.

So, Winter sought his end. He lifted his protective hand from his servant's land, coaxing his enemies
into a rage, and they came with large armies and murderous intents. Winter would see to it that his
servant beg for his forgiveness and shun the name of Summer. Then, Winter would still offer no
help.

But the servant never did any of these things. He fought against his enemies with renewed vigor.
Without Winter's icy fortresses he was weakened, but the spirit of his people revived from the love of
Summer.

Summer, however, exhausted in his national body fell into a deep slumber. He made himself
vulnerable. Believing Winter's traitorous servant would protect him in his state of rest was a mistake,
an opening that Winter waited for.

The moment Winter's ungrateful servant pressed too far away from the heart of his land to suppress
his surrounding enemies, Winter whisked into the core city enemy nations. They found Summer and
slew him where he defenselessly slumbered. In his death so too did that wretched servant perish.

When Summer's materialized heart stopped beating, so had Winter's servant's. Both lay dead. A
wrongful connection made right again in the ice spirit's eyes.

So came Winter's reign. He ruled the entire rotation now as sole deity and so many were sacrificed to
him. In such though the nations all warred against each other for food, water, supplies, warmth. They
killed themselves until nothing was left and man was scattered.

Winter remained. He watched the humans eventually come together again after many, many years.
New nations arose, some died, more were born.

Winter delighted in watching nations wither away. They were always born with so much hope for
their future that their deaths were always agonizingly sufferable. Silently he even watched as nations
once thought dead returned, in body and mind, but often times their names were very different than
their carnations previous.

So, Winter waited and waited until he was born into the world again. The spirit was delighted to see
him again. He thought about finding a way to kill him, but deemed the past a mistake on his part and
so he took his reborn servant and raised him stronger in belief than before.

But, to Winter's horror, when he was watching the rotation of the world one day he had beheld a
particular nation's passing. He gapped at how she died only for her legacy to survive through a
birthed child. Such a rarity. He screamed and howled when the child born bore the likeness of
Summer—in body and mind.

Immediately, Winter set out his servant against him, but when the nation had raised weapon against
the babe and beheld him his heart remembered its other half and he could not lay harm to him.
Instead, Winter's servant ignored his god again and took the child to guide and to love. When
Summer's national incarnation grew in maturity they became lovers and once again Winter's rage
was ignited.

This time, Winter's servant had perished first. Winter delighted in the sight of Summer falling after
his beloved. How he cried out for his heart's life. While the end was meant to bring satisfaction to the
Winter spirit his frown came in last in watching as that damned Summer welcomed death so that he
could join his love in the afterlife.

Winter reigned again.

He had been troubled previously and so his reign was softer, the nations all returned earlier this time.
With disapproval his icy hold on the planet faded quicker with Summer's national form birth first. Winter waited for his servant to appear but he hadn't in so long. When he finally did he became a whispering demon in his ear and when Summer's being came to him to offer friendship that always transformed into something more, Winter beguiled his servant with his own anger and jealousy, and the child attacked Summer's nation and let his blood spill to please his god, General Winter.

Of course Winter chuckled at the sight of his young servant falling down dead as well. He had neglected to tell the child what would become of him if he should kill Summer's country. It had been so very funny, the boy so stupid and Summer too blinded by love to see the threat that can come from his lifetimes lover.

Another victory for General Winter.

But over and over and over again Summer would return. Winter watched in different ways he was killed so that he could reign over the planet. Sometimes his servant had not existed upon Summer's death, sometimes the two never met while both were present at the same time in the world, and among one's death the other would mysteriously fade as well much to their people's horrors.

General Winter laughed. Summer desired to live amongst the nations and so should be fitting of his fate. But the General did not like it when Summer's country became aware of him. When he did he sought to destroy him once and for all; to become Winter's Death.

So, Winter's death fought him. He'd come close certain times, ruling near the entire world. But, if all else failed then Winter knew Summer's one weakness and the only being who could match might with him via nation.

The last time Winter had ignited jealousy in his servant. He'd shown all of the things that death of his had that Winter's wretched servant didn't have. He showed him all of the friends Summer's nation could gain that his servant—no matter how hard he tried—could not. He reminded him of all of the times his servant tried to offer affection only for national strains to tear the two of them apart.

Winter's death did nothing to fight for him. Winter's death was content with just the way he was. Winter's death did not love him. Winter's death wished the nation to cease to exist.

Those were all the lies he whispered into his faithful servant's ear. And he believed every one.

A bonded heart cannot go long without clinging to its other half. So General Winter watched in delight as his servant and Summer's country warred. Winter's servant was so violent, fed on the greed, the lies, and the lust. He maimed anything that came in his way.

When he broke through the other's defenses he took hold of Summer and forced him under him. He broke everything about him and in him and just as Winter's servant was sated from his prolonged tension Summer perished. A dead body underneath him.

The servant's heart gave out the same and he fell over limp, dead.

The Ice Age; General Winter's reign. Once that was over and nations began to form again and bear children, carrying on their genetics. Winter contemplated what he would do when his servant was born. He'd grown annoyed of him and wished his existence in the world to cease.

His traitorous servant was born into the world first, and General Winter sought to destroy him. He wondered if he could suffocate the babe with snow, if that would be enough to staunch his life. He failed in this because this time the servant was born as a little brother and his big sister was quick to come to him and take him against her bosom to warm and nurse to health.
So, he sought his end by means of other nations: Mongolia, the Teutonic Knights, Sweden, Denmark, England, the Ottoman Empire. He survived. He survived long enough for that death of Winter's to come into the world.

General Winter could now feel the signs of Summer's impending arrival and so Winter played with Russia, offered him a mate. He would guide him to him, he would show him how to woo him. It had worked but all too soon they were torn apart like countless times before. Good, Winter wanted this, he wanted his faithful servant to defile him, to destroy him from the inside out.

Russia did not.

He had strengthened their bond and now General Winter looked upon him with disgust. It will take one. Whoever shall perish first will bring the other with him. There was no use breaking the cycle. The General was just surprised to see such a bond last through so many incarnations.

He'd seen the bonds of other nations and he'd seen their rebirth after the world was destroyed and made new again. It was gone upon their death, but Russia and America's? It was an odd thing that it remained so strong even when they did not remember the other.

Their hearts did, and Winter wondered if it were for the fact that America was the spirit of Summer. After all, he was a deity first before that of a nation. Yes, General Winter was certain that had something to do with it.

If only he knew how to break the cycle.

General Winter sighed and pulled his hand away from the frozen nation. Russia was still, but the snow had stopped. It wouldn't be long now before his rapidly beating heart worked his body against the cold and forced him to seek warmth in the arms of his people who prayed for his safety.

Russia was a fool, but he was still General Winter's true believer in every life. The deity would not abandon him.

'I will find a way to free you, Ivan,' Winter assured, once more letting his fingers comb through Russia's hair, but only ice frosted over him. After all, spirits cannot touch nations except for their elements. 'Then we can return to the good days of old. Da, I would like that very much.'

Endless ice and snow; General Winter would coat the world in it and be sure that his servant ruled supreme over the other nations surviving. He would find a way to end the cycle of Summer's nation. He was tired of seeing his servant suffer from a useless emotion titled as: love.

Berlin, Germany. Not So Distant Future [?]

Now that Prussia was finally out of the basement Germany had the time to wander around his room and attempt to clean the pig pen without his older brother complaining that he was putting things away he'd never find. Well, it was simply called organizing, and God knew Prussia needed a sense of it.

It was sad really, before Prussia had been taken by Russia he had been so tidy and kempt. He used to exert this habit when he first came to live with Germany after the destruction of the wall, but now . . . he's just gotten lazy. Germany really hoped it was a simple faze because he didn't have enough hair to pull at the sight of all the clutter.

It took him hours to clean up the entirety of the room. After everything was cleared away and cleaned spotless Germany noticed the downgrade of the walls. He sighed once more. Looked like he'd need another time to get Prussia out of the house to take up painting the basement walls.
Reaching into his pocket he pulled out his black schedule book. Marking down the mental note into writing Germany jotted it down on a cleared date. Before he shut the booklet he noticed another side note on his calendar. The date was today and today it was time to go grocery shopping.

Even though he went shopping every week on Thursdays he still insisted on writing it down. He reasoned that sometimes he could not meet his weekly shopping because of politics or world meetings, so he continuously wrote down the time and date of his intended shopping duty. And today was Thursday.

With a nod Germany snapped his booklet shut and shoved it back into the pocket of his vest. The moment his mind sent out the commands to turn around and head back upstairs his keen ears caught sound of something. Germany froze in spot, his entire being concentrating on what he had just heard. It was hardly audible and Germany hadn't heard another sound after it. He could have been hearing things. Plenty of household objects clicked and went bump when no one was around.

That's what any other person would have believed, but not Germany.

Quietly himself, the German nation crept toward a cabinet where he kept Prussia's guns. He had a similar case in his room as well. Unlocking the glass he took out a trusted Walther P1 and held it close.

Slowly he ascended the stairs and as quietly as the creaking door would allow he opened the basement door leading to the hall. It was dark, he now realized how long he'd been down in that room cleaning.

Closer to the noise now Germany's head perked toward another hardly risen sound. It was coming from the living room. He did curse the fact that he had hardwood floors, they creaked like no other floor, but even still he managed to sneak near the living room barely heard.

Holding his handgun close he thought for a moment on who had broken into his house. He thought of enemies first, especially that of Russia. He knew they weren't on friendly terms as of late and there was more than one reason he could see as to why the Slavic nation would want to harm him, but he nor the other nations had seen Russia in a long while, or even heard from him.

So, with that image in mind, Germany prepared to confront the larger nation.

Whipping around the corner Germany took his stance and aimed his weapon. "Frieren!"

"AH! Don't shoot!"

Germany's heart raced a million miles a second the moment the perpetrator threw his hands in the air, guiltily holding some old records it seemed he had been browsing through. He could have shot, he really could have, and that is what the ice cold fright shivering through Germany's body was for.

Letting out the breath he had been holding, Germany felt his arm go limp, his hold on his gun easier. Reaching over he set the weapon down on a lampstand and flicked the light on. Now he could see the would-be burglar more clearly.

"What are you doing here, Alfred?" Germany felt a migraine coming on him and pinched the pinch of his nose to attempt to quell it. "And please don't tell me you broke into mein home."

America simply shrugged. "How else was I supposed to get in here?" He said it so casually like it was common to break into the homes of others. Oh, that boy.
"Why are you here?" Germany pressed, not caring to hide the groan in his tone.

"Aw, you sound like you don't want me here. That's no way to speak to your boyfriend." Before Germany knew it America had crossed the living room and leaned in to give him a peck on the lips. Germany rose a brow at his behavior. When America looked down at the records in his hand he chuckled. "I was looking for some killer music, but there's just a lot of classical instrumental."

"Ja," Germany affirmed, reaching up to snatch the old records out of America's grasp. "I prefer this music actually. You'll find none of your contemporary music here."

Again, America pouted. "You don't like my music?"

"I like some of it," Germany reasoned. "But not the loud things."

"Then how else can ya dance?" America asked with a snicker, placing his hands on his hips. It was clear to Germany that America was full of energy that needed exhausted. Gott help him.

So, again, Germany asked, "Why are you here, Alfred?"

"What else? A date of course!" America replied in his chirpier tone. Germany needed to remind himself on how young America actually was as compared to he and the rest of the world.

Germany sighed. "How do you even know I don't have anything planned?"

"Duh, had the satellites take snap shots of your little black book when it was open," America said, pointing upward in motion to the orbital devices.

Germany sputtered. Satellites couldn't do that! "Come on, let's go out, pleaseeese?" America was quite persistent and who was Germany to say, "nein," to the United States of America?

America's visit was unexpected, but Germany really was glad to see him again. It was true, both had been quite busy for a long time. The year was ending, entering into the month of October. The last of the warm days were waning and so the fun places and carnivals were running on their last weeks.

Of course it would be to a carnival that America dragged him to. Germany of course remained hesitant to go. It just wasn't a place for him. But, it was because his strong boyfriend, who would not let him dig his heels into the dirt, that he was quite reluctantly yanked along to play games, eat sweets and fried foods.

"We gotta play! We gotta play!" The words were repeated with excitement as Germany was dragged over toward the arcades, the pretzels and stuffed animals won falling out his grasp. "Come on, Ludwig, play with me!"

When Germany looked at the particular game America was bouncing over he nodded. It made sense, after all, America had been digging through his records for a tune to boogey to; the boy wanted to dance.

"Dance Dance Revolution." Germany nodded, acknowledging the game's existence, but that was all. "I'm not too fond with the game." Reaching into his pocket he pulled out the handfuls of tokens that they had purchased and shoved the coins into America's hands. "Have fun."

America gapped while Germany backed away from the machines like they were the Black Plague. "Oh, you did not just ditch me." The westerner frowned. "Come on, you're supposed to be my
"Partner's offer support, and I will support you from the sidelines," Germany explained, crossing his arms. He tried to remain stern in front of his younger lover.

Stance stern and resilient or not, no one could resist that upset face of the American nation.

"Fine," Germany sighed out in surrender. He glanced around, praying no one was close enough to witness this. "Just one song."

So America won the first round and he and the rest of the world found out that Germany didn't like to lose—at anything, anything. When the younger boyfriend happened to press another song it was also discovered that the upset red-faced Germany knew the selected song which just so happened to be a secret old favorite.

The second round they had tied. By the third round Germany was set to win it.

"Damn, Ludwig, you're going all out. Competitive much?" Germany glanced to his right where America stood on the platform, anxious and waiting for the countdown to finish. He was smiling at him, a daring and challenging smile. He even had broken out into a sweat like Germany had from the previous close matched dance-off. Good, it gave him the knowledge to know that even America was trying his hardest to win the game.

"Ja, I am a sore loser," Germany replied, his own challenging grin in place. He adored how they interacted. Yes, they had issues nationally, but Germany really enjoyed America's company. Surprise visits usually frustrated him, but coming from America—Germany welcomed it and silently encouraged more visits like this.

He was having fun. So much fun that he neglected to notice the crowd gathered around the two obviously dance-skilled nations. The level of dance was at its highest and step for step the two matched each other. At first they'd side-glance the other to keep track of their progress, but soon enough they were caught up in the game, having no time to focus on the other, simply pulling all of their brain power to help them win this pattern.

It had been close and both had really put their all in it; busting out dance moves from the '80's and '90's, but one came out on top. Germany had been such a quietly excited winner. His chest heaving from over stimulated movement as he read 'CHAMPION!' on his screen. He'd won, but he hadn't beaten America by much.

It was probably the splitting finish at the end that had won it for him. The crowd around clapped and cheered for both alike, wooting especially for the winner. The look in America's eyes looked relieved and more relaxed than Germany had seen him before. That smile on the American's lips let Germany know that he had not underestimated him and that he had known he could play just as effectively on this particular game as he.

"Kesesese!"

Germany froze, his head nearly shooting completely around like that of an owl's. His heart leapt up into his throat at the source of the laugh, choking his entire being to pale his complexion.

"Wow, West, didn't think you could move like that. I am thoroughly proven wrong," Prussia spoke up, his eyes were still on his phone, concentrating on zooming into his younger brother's embarrassed face. It was such a rarity to capture these days.

Oh God, he recorded everything didn't he!!
Germany quickly jumped to his feet, his face shifting redder as the likes of Austria and Hungary came into view. He had known Prussia was heading out with those two, but he hadn't known he'd be there at the carnival.

"Oh-ho, that was so adorable, you be sure to send me a copy," Hungary asked of Prussia as she clapped her hands together.

"Sure thing, Liz, I'll send it to you . . . and a few others who will flip seeing this!" Prussia laughed, completely ignoring his brother's discomfort.

"Hey." Everyone was so trained on the voice of the U.S. it was near habit to turn when he made himself known. America shook his head and waved his hand. "Let's keep this to family and close friends. I mean, I know Germany's got some awesome dance skills, but that wouldn't make him look too intimidating to the rest of the world."

Prussia frowned. Everyone could tell he knew that America was subtly asserting his authoritative power. And there the albino had thought he could get off easy by America's seemingly calmer mood since the two young lovers seemed to be on a surprise date. Boy was too quick-witted.

Placing the phone back into his jacket pocket Prussia looked toward his embarrassed baby bruder and smiled. "Glad to see you out of the house, West." He looked toward America. "Thought he'd remain cooped up in that house to clean. Thank Gott you showed up."

"Yeah, I've been plotting this for a while," America admitted, rubbing the back of his neck. "Man, don't know what I'd do if he turned me down after flying all the way out here."

"It's because he's got a soft spot for ya," Prussia chuckled, reaching over and slinging his arm around the American nation's shoulder. "Hey! We were just going to head out for some drinks, you two want to come with?"

Everyone turned to the silent Germany. He'd yet to make his decision. America was game for anything so long as his boyfriend approved.

Oddly enough, Germany passed down the beer. "Actually," he spoke up, his eyes blinking as if suddenly remembering something. "I need to go grocery shopping."

All four personifications looked to the German nation completely deadpanned.

"He's never going to change," Hungary said with a giggle while Austria nodded at the comment.

"Seriously, Ludwig?" Prussia rose a brow and released his arm from around America. He sighed and nodded. "Alright, but the beer's still gonna be there when you come to your senses."

America watched the three leave with slight regret. Turning he cocked his head at Germany. "Groceries?"

Germany couldn't help it, it was Thursday. Today he was supposed to go shopping. It was habitual routine. He even had his list in his pocket.

America chuckled and nodded. "Alright, let's go to the store then."

The drive there was quiet and when Germany pushed his cart around to gather all of the things necessary for the next week he was surprised to see America snatch up the list and read through it. The way his eyes squinted alerted Germany to his trouble with German vocabulary.
"What are you trying to do now?"

"Can you translate this into English?" The quick answer easily pushed out the first question.

"Why?" America was just over excited today and Germany was sometimes having a hard time predicting when the next spout of energy would come. Strange, he used to be so easy to foretell.

"That way I'll take half of the list and we can get the shopping done faster," America suggested with a beaming smile.

Another game, oh, now Germany understood. He shrugged and did as America wished and just as soon as the translated other half of the list was in the younger's hand he had picked up a basket and bounded off to search for the items. Germany chuckled at watching the younger nation dash through the aisles. There was never a dull moment with America; he was just too energetic.

Germany was glad for his youthfulness. It's how he's always remembered the other nation. Lately he had seen a subtle change in him, and he had been concerned that that spark inside him had finally fizzled out. Clearly it hadn't and so Germany had calmed.

After packing the truck with groceries, Germany set home. On his drive there he frowned. Had America wished to spend the night? If not, then what did he think of their surprise date? How did Germany, himself, think of the event?

Glancing over to his right he spied the American nation sitting quietly beside him. He wasn't looking at him, instead he had those beautiful blues pointed out the window, watching signs and buildings pass by on their drive. Germany hoped the boy wasn't depressed or upset in any way because if there was one thing he couldn't stand it was a disheartened America.

"I had fun today, Alfred." Germany hoped that some positive feedback was all it took to cheer up America.

The New World nation turned and examined Germany. The German nation hadn't had the courage to glance his way, instead he kept his eyes focused on the road again, his grip on the steering wheel tightening in anticipation for America's response. He knew he could be a killjoy but he hoped that his own boyfriend didn't see him like that.

He had a great time with him that evening, honest. So what if Germany's face often gave away other thoughts. It was just how he was. But if America wanted him to smile more then he would, anything to let him know how much he enjoyed his company, be it planned or unexpected.

Out of the corner of his eyes he finally caught a glimpse of those bright teeth. America was smiling.

"I'm glad," America responded. "I was a little concerned that you . . . well, didn't care too much for my visit."

Germany took his eyes off the road for a moment to give America a look that would erase all his doubts. "I enjoyed time spent with you, believe me, Alfred," Germany assured. He even smiled at America to make him feel better.

He wasn't one much for smiles, but around America he knew the boy appreciated the sight of them, and they seemed easier released in his presence. It was a nice feeling. Not forced at all, and the more Germany smiled and received smiles in mirror his heart flipped inside his chest making his body feel lighter than air itself.

"It was unexpected, yes, but that's just like you." Germany's smile softened his gaze. "And I
wouldn't have it any other way."

"To hell with our strained relationship," America spoke out, leaning into Germany's addictive smiles and affectionately leaning his head against his shoulder.

Germany snickered. "Ja, to hell."

The bump of the driveway alerted the relaxed American that they had arrived back at Germany's house. Both noticed the lights not yet on and so, therefore, deduced that Prussia had yet to return from the bar with his friends. Well, more alone time then.

Though Germany insisted that he could carry the groceries in himself, America insisted in helping. But of course once Germany had brought in the last of the groceries and set them down on the island in the kitchen he noticed America hadn't even bothered putting them away. It didn't matter, he could tackle this task himself, but he was curious where America had gone.

He spied a lamplight in the living room and thought about heading into the room, but the task at hand was calling to him and so he idly kept to himself, taking the vegetables out of the bags and loading the jars away in the pantry. His interest had been piqued when he heard the radio flick on a soft music hum across the house. He could reason with himself that America had finally found a record he liked and began playing it.

It was a nice song, slow and relaxing. Now, a mental image of just that of America—laid back on the couch, calm, peaceful, in a relaxed state of mind—came to mind and Germany longed to see him in such a state. After fighting back the urge to finish unpacking the rest of the groceries he decided just to take a quick peek and then return to the chore.

However, Germany didn't spy a relaxing America at all, instead he froze at the scene before him. America was standing before the radio, slowly moving to the rhythm of the song. Germany didn't know what to think but he wasn't reprimanded when America twirled around and caught him staring. No, the younger only smiled at his presence.

"Didn't get all of the dance out of you at the games?" Germany questioned. America, always willing to play and tease, never ended his motions. Hm, he really liked the song.

America shook his head, continuing his self-guided dance. "How 'bout you?"

Germany took in a calming breath. He knew this game well. "Ah, don't think I have either." He playfully teased back. A tooth-bearing smile appeared on his face when America motioned for him to join him. And Germany wasn't one to miss unpassable opportunities.

The two found themselves giggling in playful manners as they twirled the other dramatically and then set into the dips. All thoughts of the still out groceries or time of night gone from the pair. The evening really turned out to be immensely enjoying even though Germany hadn't participated too much in the carnival games and happened to take his date to the grocery store when he should have taken him to a nice restaurant or bar and ordered him something nice. Germany enjoyed the simple things and was easily pleased that America shared that enjoyment.

Germany had just arched America back to his feet after one of their numerous dips and met his gaze. "Why did you decide to come here?" Germany's tone was soft, keeping to the mood. Perhaps he'd get better answers than the official retorts.

America read Germany's gaze, but it seemed he had better control for blocking out the effects of mood than the other nation thought. He scooted a little ways away from Germany, altogether he had
stopped dancing and averted his gaze. Germany frowned and inwardly cursed himself for ruining their closeness.

"I just wanted to spend some quality time with my boyfriend. Is there any wrong in that?" America looked slightly offended which confused Germany to no end, but more so startled him in fright that he had upset his lover.

"Nein, nein, nein, I didn't mean it like that, Alfred," Germany swore, taking steps closer to the upset American. He didn't understand why America had been so moody lately. First he missed their Valentine's Day date and then promptly ignored him for the remaining months until the world meeting. Then, even there, America had been acting stranger: persisting that they get together quickly. Now, with this surprise visit that Germany had thoroughly appreciated and suddenly America's hidden answers he just didn't know what to think anymore.

He loved America, he really did, but he just . . . he just wished he'd let him in. Let him inside that head of his—can't be any darker than Germany's—let him inside that guarded heart, that heart that he knew was hurt from ages old wrongs. Germany just wanted America to trust him. He was his boyfriend, he should at least have that privilege.

Germany sighed for the thousandth time that day. "It was just an honest question, Alfred."

America turned his eyes to Germany, but when they met gazes those blue eyes darted away all too quickly again and it was perturbing Germany.

"Home's hectic."

To Germany, that sounded like the common scapegoat answer for America. He knew there was something else to America's visit. When America met gazes the younger offered an apologetic smile as he shrugged off his behavior Germany assumed America expected him to accept.

"And I . . ." America looked around the home and smiled. "I want this place to be my get-away." He then looked at Germany. "I want you to be my get-away."

Germany understood. America was going through a rough time, had been for a while. It was endearing that he was reaching out, wanting to make his lover's home his place of refuge when the world became too much for him.

With a smile Germany took a few steps forward to close the gap between he and America. There was still one thing he noticed that he wasn't sure America knew he was revealing. Reaching up Germany tipped America's chin up, silently pleading he look him in the eyes. Slowly, America did.

"Why are you trying so hard then?" Germany smiled but it was bittersweet. He could see the internal struggle; it was revealed in those translucent eyes, in those tense gestures, and forced facial expressions. He didn't know why America was having such a hard time making Germany a priority.

There was America's shrug again, his own smile hinted a subtle sadness. Germany could even see that sheen in his eyes in the dim lamp light. "I don't know," America answered honestly.

When had their roles switched? When did Germany have to be the one to offer consolation, comforting touches, and assuring kisses?

The kiss Germany had leaned in to give was one such kiss. He was gentle and considerate. Giving to America what he assumed he needed.

Germany did not, however, expect such a passionate response.
Fingers laced into his hair, pulling, pushing him closer. America was one hell of a kisser. Germany just about lost his bearings by the heat of the kiss America gave. He gasped and the moment his mouth opened the younger's tongue pressed its way inside.

Rationally, Germany should have thought about the situation. He should have noticed the strange air about America, the absolute need in the way he clung to him. The trembles in his limbs, the tightening of his grip, all were signs that there was something else off balance beside the feeling of passion for one's lover. America didn't need this as a distraction for whatever he was dealing with in his life, be it politically or personally, right now.

But Germany had waited so long. He could not stop himself from wrapping his arms around America's back, crushing him against his chest and pressing himself into the kiss, wanting to just bend the American in half over him and lay above him. America certainly didn't seem to have any qualms with his mind-set.

When America finally pulled away from lack of air Germany had wanted to lean down, to suckle his neck, to run his teeth along that jaw of his, but America leaned far enough back to motion to Germany that he wanted to look him in the eyes and so Germany obliged and they met gazes. There, Germany saw the passion and the want in those bright eyes. America was finally ready for him.

America was ready; Germany froze at the thought of it. His limbs locked like the fool he was and now he was becoming the self-conscious one. Luckily America seemed to notice this and just simply smiled, pulling away and tugging his hand.

America knew where Germany's bedroom was. He knew it so well that he hadn't taken his eyes off of Germany, nor did Germany glance away from him. He was mesmerized by those eyes that held a power over him. Simply enchanted.

There was no unceremonious tumble when the backs of America's legs touched the edge of the bed. No, America simply floated in that moment. He leaned back, sensually crawling back onto the dark neatly made bedsheets and urging Germany to follow him. The German nation had to, in that moment his body was not his own to command and now he was looking down at America who sprawled himself out under him, keeping his gaze, silently informing him that all of him, everything he was, it was all Germany's to take.

And Germany would take what was offered.

Breath quickened and pupils dilated. Trembling hands reached up to America's tanned slender neck and before Germany knew it he had initiated another kiss. America returned it with fervor.

Desperation; that is how Germany would describe America in that moment. The younger pulled Germany's hands, urging him to touch him intimately, press closer, kiss harder. While Germany was not unwelcome of the American's lead he had assumed that since he was above America he could set the pace.

This was going to be their first time, and America's first since . . .

Germany moaned gutturally when America leaned up and attached his mouth to his neck. He suckled for a moment before kissing his way down his jaw, simultaneously unbuttoning his shirt. Again, Germany felt embarrassed for being so immobilized. Before he knew it America was sliding his loose shirt down his arms.

"Touch me."
Germany blushed when his eyes pulled away from those peach-colored lips he'd been looking at. Glancing up he looked into America's demanding eyes.

"Touch me, kiss me," America whispered. His power over the German nation much too strong, the older doing just as he wished the moment his shirt was gone from his torso.

The breathy sighs from America's body slipped through Germany's mouth and shook his entire being. When he felt America's hands slide up his torso and rub his ribs he moaned himself. Pulling his mouth away from those addicting lips, Germany then aimed kisses down the length America's neck.

He would have wanted a slower tempo for their first time, but America's pleads, the fear that America's body would lock him out again and everything that they had worked for would have to be put on hold . . . again; all if it egged the urge inside Germany's mind that he hurry and complete their connection. So shirts were ripped overhead, belts yanked from loopholes, and pants kicked out of quickly.

Germany wanted to kiss every inch of the American, he was that beautiful. To have him under him, bare, presenting himself before him, it was his most intimate dream come true. Now, he slowed himself, just as his hands pulled at the American's boxers.

A caressing hand made its way onto Germany's cautious fingers. America's touch was warm. Germany looked back up to America and took in that easing smile.

"It's alright, I'll be fine, Ludwig," America assured.

Germany was still slow when he disrobed America completely though. He raised his calves and kissed each knee. He felt America's thighs twitch at the gestures, and Germany's cautious calculating eyes always spied a few glances back to the American's face to make sure he hadn't overstepped any uncomfortable boundary.

It seemed the only discomfort presenting itself to the younger nation was Germany's slowing pace.

"Please, Ludwig," America begged. He even pulled his legs away from Germany's touch and spread his thighs before him, provocatively asking him to come closer with that motion and those dark eyes of his.

Germany had leaned forward, kissed America. It was a soft press of the lips but America quickly sunk his teeth into Germany's top lip and pulled, keeping him over him. Germany was surprised by the action, but remained where America made very clearly he wanted him in position.

So, when America gripped Germany's wrist and pulled his hand between his legs so that he could touch him, so that Germany would press his calloused fingers to the outer ring of his entrance the German was baffled. When before the American nation had nearly snapped his palm from right off his wrist, now he was silently begging him to rub him, to familiarize himself with the secret places Germany had been told had been violated so long ago.

It was all strange behavior to the German nation, but after contemplating everything he came to the conclusion that this new attitude toward the act of sex had to have been worked on by America himself. He smiled at the thought, because in that idea of thinking it was understood that America had done this for him so they could complete this act.

Cupping America's face Germany pulled him close and kissed him multiple times before wrapping his arms around him and holding him close. He loved America so much. He was so happy in that
moment knowing that his boyfriend loved him just as much because of this.

While America's odd behavior had been dismissed for eagerness in such a long wait, the way his face contorted when Germany pressed well lubricated fingers inside him was another mystery. Germany had expected the show of discomfort again, or even slight fright. He'd been prepared for any negative reaction from the younger nation, not . . . this.

That look, America look borderline disturbed and disgusted. What surprised Germany even more was when America pulled at his wrist only after stretching him by two fingers.

"It's fine," America said, pressing the assurance once more. Afterwards he took a few calming breaths and then laid himself back, spreading his legs further.

He looked relaxed enough, but it simply looked like America was wanting to get everything over with. Germany couldn't shake his upset in America's reactions. Of course he was too confused by seeing this to even voice his disapproval to the younger country.

That, and he was aroused, aroused to the point only America's heat could take care of.

The need in Germany outweighed the cautionary oddity surrounding them. He leaned over again, grabbed a hold of America's thighs and pressed them close to his hips. He was pleased when America closed his eyes at the action and leaned his head back, calming himself for the next moment.

Germany shivered when he pressed against America's entrance and when he began pressing inside his head bowed. When his forehead fell onto America's neck his chest heaved and his nostrils flared to inhale the younger's scent. Now that Germany was so close he could smell the unique scent that was solely America.

Germany liked the aroma and took in deep breaths of it while he pressed into that pliant body underneath him. In that moment Germany knew he could easily substitute Mother Earth's oxygen for America's scent alone. That, he knew, was all he needed to live on.

The perfection laying underneath him made Germany tremble and jitter. It was more than anything he had ever asked for—or ever worked for. A dream come true. America was perfect, made just for him. And Germany had waited so long for this.

Caught up in such a high that in that moment of his descent Germany absentmindedly forgot to notice how America began to tremble underneath him, or even how tight the younger nation clung to him, those sweating hands of his shaking the more Germany pressed inside. In fact, Germany had been so caught up in his carnal lust that he failed to notice all of the strong signs that what they were doing wasn't right.

There was lust, and the need to please their bodies. Friction and thrusts, moans and groans. Germany had not caught the fact that America's eyes were closed tight, brows furrowed, even times when the younger grit his teeth.

There was no pain, though Germany could feel the way America's walls unevenly contracted around him which had concerned him for America's wellbeing. But, of course, whenever Germany faltered, letting his concern slow him down, America would roll his hips and moan out a plead that he continue the pace he'd originally set. The movement was a little rough, a little force applied every other thrust, but it wasn't difficult, per say, to move inside him.

Germany had been in bliss and given permission to carry out a pace and force to his own liking he drove deep into his young lover who spoke up no complaint. In fact America simply continued to lay
there underneath the German nation, his trembling hands against Germany's ribs, and his legs spread as easily as possible. But even so he was unreasonably quiet that Germany, caught up in his need of satisfaction, neglected to see. No, America hadn't shown any sign of unbridled pleasure.

The quickness of it all pushed Germany faster to euphoria than he had wanted. He was enjoying the feel of being inside his boyfriend—his lover. To press so close to him, bare, unguarded. Germany loved it and kissed America hard in the final moments of the throe of passion.

Germany should have noticed something sooner. He should have especially now as he kissed America who remained still under him while he climaxed and pressed deep inside him, filling him with his own essence. He should have guessed something was wrong by how unresponsive America was. Even then he wasn't returning the kiss.

Germany pulled away and inhaled the air he had neglected for so long. He was satisfied. The smile on his face revealed that as he looked down and let his clearing vision settle on America.

Immediately he froze at the sight of tears.

"Alfred?" Germany quickly pulled out of the American nation and rolled off of him. Had he done something wrong? God, he should have paid closer attention to America during the . . .

"I'm sorry," America whined out, his hands thrusting up to cover his face. "I'm so sorry."

"Nein, nein, you did nothing wrong," Germany swore. He was sitting up now, reaching out and touching America on his shoulder gently. Maybe it had been too soon that they try making love. Damn it, he should have controlled himself more! "Alfred, if anyone is to be sorry then it is me. I should have contained myself."

"No." America shook his head, the heels of his palms rubbing into his eyes trying to snuff the tears. "No it's me."

Germany bit his lip. He knew that America was referring to his inner demons, the ones bringing up his rape. Should Germany tell him he knew? Should he risk hurting him now more than he seemed he already was? Would America want to confide in him? Because Germany wanted him to trust him, to tell him things he was so very afraid to admi—

"I . . . I slept with Russia."

Germany had thought the sudden sight of America in tears after lovemaking was horrible, this new news, however, was utterly and unmistakably heartbreaking. He couldn't move, couldn't think, couldn't utter a word to that statement. He could feel his heart sinking into his gut where it churned out ice cold numbing pain across his body. The cold feeling finally settled into his stomach and he almost puked.

His horrified gaze was locked onto America's form as the world power inhaled a coughing sob and sat himself up. His head bowed and hands rubbing his legs, the younger couldn't look at Germany.

Finally, Germany managed to speak. "Did he . . . did he force himself on you?" Germany visibly paled the more he remained close to America. Inwardly he knew all of the answers and begged America in silence that he prove his condemning thoughts wrong.

"No," came America's low volumed response.

Germany felt the disappointment wash over him like a sudden illness. It made him dizzy and his heart weakened. The silence following paralyzed him until something began to pump through is
veins that made his limbs twitch and face heat. Anger. He was so very upset.

When, once upon a time, Germany could find no willful way or reasonable task to take his eyes off of the American beauty, now he had to actually look away from the other nation sitting on his bed. He was that upset.

After finally managing to get his breathing under control Germany turned to America again.

"Why?" Germany wanted to know. He wanted to know why the hell America would lay under that damned Russian nation who could offer nothing of value to him, yet refused to do the same with China who actually provided a sensible explanation as to why he should.

Watching closely Germany observed the way America's shoulders stressed, especially when he pulled his knees close to his chest to lean his chin on. He still would not look at him. Fine, whatever, but he better damn well answer him.

"Because he still loved me." That was America's best answer, but Germany didn't press anymore against it. He had realized such long ago. "And I still . . ." America shivered out a sob. "Loved him too."

Could Germany's heart sink any further? Before, he had expected America to share some sort of feelings for the Russian nation, but after he had accepted his courtship proposal Germany had thought that America had finally let go of useless feelings that always brought him to tears—it seems he had been wrong.

Now it was Germany who couldn't look America in the eye when the younger nation finally straightened himself and attempted to turn and look at him. Out of the corner of his eyes he could see America's tear-heavy blue eyes. Germany liked to think he knew America well enough, assuming he did, he figured that the younger was hurt by hurting him like this.

"We made love," America admitted, his eyes falling down to the sheets bunched into his fisted hands. "And I loved him for it."

"Then why aren't you in his bed?" Germany's question held a harsh tone, but it was expected and he knew that America understood he deserved it. Gritting his teeth Germany wished he could just cut all sound out. He didn't want to hear even the explanations now. He was hurt, so very much so.

Out of the corner of his eyes he watched America turn his eyes to him, even his hand reached up and touched his chest where his heart was. Germany wondered what he was feeling in that heart of his. He wondered if America could even understand the betrayal he was putting him through in that moment.

"Because I'm supposed to be with you!"

Germany turned at America's answer. He was surprised by its insistence and volume. When he looked at the boy he noticed the pain coating his facial features. Glancing down he noticed America's hand pressing closer against his chest, it seemed his heart was hurting him, but America was simply gritting his teeth and dealing with whatever pain it was giving him.

"You're my boyfriend, Ludwig, I'm supposed to be in your bed," America stressed. They were meeting gazes, America's blue eyes were insistent while Germany looked on in surprise. But all too soon America bowed his head. "So I told him to leave, because he should . . . because I have you."

The heartbreak in America's tone was felt through Germany and he found himself scooting closer, reaching out and brushing his fingers against America's draped bangs. He could see the way those
tanned shoulders shook, and hear how America struggled just to inhale the rest of his sobs.

At the feel of the touch America looked up, his tear-stained face revealed to Germany who was finally looking on him with saddened pity.

"I'm so sorry," America said, a sob escaped between some of the words. "I understand completely that you're mad at me, that you want me to leave, but I . . . I wanted you to know this is not your fault. It's all mine, and I acknowledge that I completely betrayed your trust—completely betrayed you. I thought . . ." He bowed his head again. "I thought that I could forget that it ever happened, but the way you showed your love for me, it wasn't right, not to you. I'm so sorry."

For once Germany's heart clenched in pity instead of the guilt that America had always been good at making him feel. His anger was still present in the back of his mind, but seeing America like this and hearing all he had tried to do—to make it like it never happened just so that they could be happy together. Such a failed attempt. So sad.

Germany's hand wanted to take a hold of America and pull him close, caress him, press against him, and let him know that everything was alright, because Germany loved him—he had for many, many centuries.

Then, a thought worse than America's confession disheartened him. Germany frowned. "Do you want to leave me that badly?"

America looked up at him. He looked astounded that Germany would even say something like that, perhaps even more so at that bittersweet smile now twisting his lips in pain.

"Would you go to him if I released you?" Germany met America's eyes. The younger had not stopped crying and he could easily see that bottom lip quivering more so at his words. Germany was afraid of what America would say because he knew that if it were he versus Russia then of course America's heart would choose its first love. It was the logical route.

"I don't know, I don't," America cried, bowing his head once more.

Germany sighed. So this was their end, was it? It's not that he wanted to let America go, and he didn't know if he believed America would return to Russia's arms afterwards. He looked truly sorry for what he had done; for betraying Germany like that even if the one he gave himself to was a previous love.

"I too . . . know what it's like," Germany began, gazing off to the side. He didn't need to see America raise his head and look at him, he could feel those sad eyes on him and it hurt. So, he eventually turned to look at America and in doing so smiled sadly as he finished saying, "To love someone you can't have." He saw how stressed America had become once again, and when the boy's mouth opened Germany spoke first. "It wasn't enough, was it? To look at him, to just brush by him in the meetings. You want to hold him, to kiss him, and for him to return your affections." America's lips closed and slowly the tears began to build up again, but no longer was Germany inclined to lean over and wipe them away. "I know that longing feeling very well. It kills you inside, and all you want them to do is look at you. It makes you wish you were mortal, to just grow old and die would be the best blessing you could ever receive from Mother Earth, but . . . here we are . . . hundreds—thousands—of years old, here we are. All so unsatisfied. But . . . that's the life of a nation, ja?"

America could not take Germany's sad smiles anymore and so looked down to avoid them.

"I can relate well, America." There Germany went, all intimacy between them was suddenly gone and it killed America inside, nearly as much as his tormented heart that hammered against his chest.
"I've struggled with relationships myself, so much so until I nearly perfected it." When America once again looked back up to Germany he choked at the tragedy in his aura. "I thought that when I was with you my relationship was perfect. I didn't care anymore about intimacy, I would have been content with just standing beside you if you'd simply let me hold you. I am sorry you were not satisfied enough."

"Stop saying that!" Germany seemed almost immune to America's tone. He seemed almost dead to his words, their impact nearly none existent that it frightened America. So he reached out, touched Germany's hand, silently begging him to look at him. "You were by far the best lover I had ever had the pleasure of calling mine." Germany finally looked at him and America, despite the tears and snot, offered him a true assuring smile. "I thought God, Himself, had dropped you out of heaven; you were that good to me. I had wanted you to take away the pain of my mistakes, of the torment inside me. But . . . I never realized how broken I was inside."

"And I couldn't fix it, I understand," Germany said with a nod, his eyes falling away. He wanted to pull his hand away from America's touch but he hadn't.

"I believed you could have, but I just went . . . and . . . and broke myself all over again," America reasoned, he pulled away, his hands resting in his lap. He bowed his head and closed his eyes.

"Then why not see if I can fix you?"

America's eyes opened. His head rose and he turned to Germany. He was looking at him again, and under his intense gaze America was stilled in amazement.

Germany reached out and pressed his palm against America's chest. He could feel the organ inside bumping against his hand. What a violent unhappy lump of meat.

"Give me another chance," Germany pressed. He watched America blink in astonishment. Surely it was the American who should have said those exact words. "Trust, really trust in me this time. If you honestly believed I had once been perfect for you then let me prove to you that I am. Let two broken souls piece the other back together."

"Ludwig . . ." America didn't know what to say. He really didn't deserve someone like Germany. He was just too good for him.

"No one is perfect, Alfred," Germany said and he recognized the relaxation in those baby blue irises when he said his name. "But it's always better to try with someone else than staking it out by yourself."

America hadn't meant to laugh. But the sound bubbled up out of his chest and escaped through his throat. He then reached out and touched Germany's face gently, holding his gaze.

He was happy. So very happy that Germany hadn't given up on him like he had on himself.

Their kiss was met half way. It held future promises and present oaths.

When Germany pressed closer America's back hit the sheets underneath them. Their kisses shared did their best to ease away the betrayal and the pain of their pasts. The press from both was not hard nor soft, but just right.

Germany then felt it, he felt America letting down every insecurity he had, laying down himself and easing his aura to let him inside. Hands moved up and down, feeling, touching, caressing and holding. Germany took America's hands in his own and laced their fingers together just as he pulled away, tugging those hands to press against his chest, near his heart.
"You have me, Alfred, and always will until you tell me frontally that you don't want me any longer," Germany swore between breaths. America looked like an angel lain under him, and when he smiled lovingly up at him Germany lost his heart to him all over again.

America took his hands out of Germany's grasp gently and reached up, cupping his neck, holding onto it as he leaned up and pressed his lips to his. Their kiss was deep and it encouraged Germany to lay himself over America again where the two held each other for moments after.

The kisses down America's neck were just as gentle as the ones on his lips. Tanned lips sighed contently, sky blue eyes closed and willed away the pain in his chest. He allowed Germany to love him properly like he should have the very first moment he laid himself in his bed.

Germany had his eyes closed as he kissed him, letting his lips map out America's body by feel alone. America felt light at the way the German showed his love. Who said Germans weren't good lovers?

Eyes fluttering underneath relaxed eyelids, America let out his very first pleasured moan when Germany kissed him on his abdomen. He frowned when he felt Germany lean away. He only opened his eyes when he felt the nation begin to rub his chest.

There was Germany, leaning over him, frowning in dismay as he looked down at the concealed scar on America's chest that the younger had applied cover-up to, to avoid stares. When Germany's eyes turned to America his face softened.

"Even your scars are beautiful, Alfred, don't hide them from me." America smiled at Germany's words and sighed when the nation leaned down and kissed him on the lighter patch of skin.

Germany's hands were gentle for such a warrior. Rough in texture and hard from the grown callouses but America leaned into the touch as they rubbed his hips, down to his thighs and when they rubbed inside he moaned. Bucking his hips he silently begged Germany to touch him, to . . .

"Oh!" America's eyes popped open and he quickly glanced down to see Germany had taken a hold of his cock and lathered the head with his tongue.

Their eyes met once before Germany grinned and pressed his mouth downward. America sucked in a sharp breath, his head hitting the mattress underneath as Germany pleased him. With eyes screwed shut he couldn't help but remember a time when Vietnam had tried to give him one of these —it didn't end well for her, but good God had America been missing out.

Inch by inch Germany took him into his mouth and America choked out a gargled moan when he felt the tip of his cock touch Germany's uvula. America was well endowed, but still Germany went on and deep-throated him. He was ready to just buck into that stretching mouth, but Germany had been in control, already pressing his hands against his hips and holding him down.

The pants exiting America's lips aroused Germany to the point he pulled away from the throbbing member in his mouth and turned to kiss each thigh. He leaned up again, brushing the bangs out of America's face. Those blue eyes opened and looked up at him. They kissed and held the other close just as Germany entered him for the second time.

America's mouth opened wide in a crescendo moan, his back arching with his tone. Germany shivered at the feel. He had been so rushed their first time that he had forgotten every reaction America had made. This time, he'd make sure to memorize it all.

Bending his neck, Germany littered America's neck with kisses and sucks. He could feel his moans vibrate though his neck and loved the feel of them against his teeth raking across tanned skin. Even
more so he loved the feel of strong hands laced into his hair.

Germany leaned into their touch as he pressed out and firmly moved back inside. This penetration was easier than the previous and now that he was in a better state of mind he could feel so much more. The way America's walls tightened when he pressed in, the warmth of just being inside, Germany could go crazy from simply making love with America.

Glancing down he took in America's calmed face. He hadn't remembered seeing such a sight before, but he was glad now. Reaching up his hand caressed a bronzed cheek. America opened his eyes and their gazes met. Yes, they were making love this time.

The rhythm was slow and in such drawn out. But Germany kept his thrusts steady and strong, making sure to press in deeper with each push. The feel of America's thighs tightening around him made him groan in pleasure. Even more so he enjoyed the way America would lean his head back, jut his chin upward just as his back arched when Germany pressed in at a pleasing angle.

Germany was so very happy they were doing this, he felt so much closer to America now that he'd let all his doubts fade away, and he hoped that in the future they would continue this intimacy, because he doubted he could stop from loving America.

The sounds, oh those beautiful sounds. America seemed to keen when Germany would rub inside his thighs. Of course he whined out a moan when Germany wrapped his strong hand around his manhood. Germany chuckled a little because of the cracked pitch that turned America's face red when he had been touched so intimately.

Germany only leaned down and kissed that heated cheek before offering America a firm squeeze. America especially enjoyed Germany's thumb rubbing the slit of his cock, smearing the cum slowly leaking out of the stimulated organ.

The heat radiating off of America could warm any partner in the coldness of their room. This made Germany press together all the more. Their lips rested against the others, parting, letting out moans and grunts, and inhaling the other's exhales.

Every inhale of American breath was like a warm summer's wind. America was just on fire and the energy of such a fervent heat—inside and out—enticed Germany to quicken his pace until America's cock was burning in his hand, his release in just a moment.

The end was one of the most beautiful things Germany had ever experienced with anyone. Together; they had both climaxed together, and just when they had America had reached up, wrapped his arms around Germany's neck and pulled him flush against him. He rolled his hips while riding out the trails of his orgasm, allowing Germany to follow his lead as he filled him once more.

They shared another kiss that lulled the both of them to slumber where once paranoid dreams tormented them now replaced themselves with optimistic dreams of the future.

... Germany was so strange. While many would wake at the clash of symbols or crashes of other such objects colliding together noisily, he awoke at the smallest of sounds. At the drop of a pen, a scurry of a mouse, or creak of a door.

Lightning blue eyes opened upon the sound of a light clink next to him. Immediately he was met with the sight of his older brother placing a tray of food and drinks down on the lampstand. When the older German noticed him awake he smiled. He didn't say anything for a moment, instead, those
scarlet eyes glanced over at the mop of honey blond hair cradled against Germany's chest.

"It's four in the afternoon," Prussia announced softly so not to wake the other sleeping partner. "Thought you two would be hungry when you woke up."

"Danke," Germany whispered back, trying his hardest to lean up the best he could in bed while not disturbing his bedmate who had his arms wrapped securely around his torso. His hand automatically cradled the back of America's head the moment he moaned in annoyance to his movement.

"Take your time," Prussia said, turning to retreat from the room. He turned one last time to look at the two. He smiled gently at the couple and then looked at Germany and said, "I'm happy for you, bruder. And for him."

Prussia shut the door with a soft click while Germany glanced down at the love of his life in his arms. He smiled just as happy. For what felt like forever, and after years of struggling hardship he felt the desires of his heart and dreams were finally coming true, and he'd do everything within his power to hold onto this.

Paris, France. Not So Distant Future [?]

France honestly believed he should host all of the world meetings. Why? Because instead of focusing on who was entering what war, or who had the most stocks, France focused on relationships. He focused on strengthening the bond of best friends, of reconciling rivaling siblings, and igniting passion amongst lovers.

That was how France saw world relations. If everyone could have his mindset then he knew world peace would be the next step after this realization.

This was exactly what he was looking for now while he set up the meeting room and prepared files, accommodations, and dishes for his soon-to-be guests. He was biased to no nation. America may disagree, but France had been working hard to make that boy actually listen to his reasoning. He really hoped that this meeting would bear some flowers of peace—God knew the world needed it as of late.

Just as he finished with the final decorations France's first guest arrived. Of course it was none other than Germany himself. That country was always first to arrive at any hosting nation's gathering.

"Ah, Germany, it is so good to see you, mon ami!" Naturally France embraced him and kissed his cheeks. While this was common in a couple European nations Germany was still a picky boy, and didn't like anyone too close to him—much less France. So, the nation of love waited for the younger country to push him away and turn adorably red.

But Germany didn’t.

France blinked in surprise as Germany nodded and offered a greeting of his own—verbally of course—and then made his way to his designated seat. Well, he was reasonably in a better mood this day. Rubbing his chin hairs France made it his personal mission to find out why.

After all he prided himself with knowing anything and everything about the other nations. Gossip was oh so lovely, especially true gossip.

France was about to saunter over to the German when Japan came into the room. Naturally France put away his previous mission and greeted Japan with two kisses. Of course the small Asian nation flustered and heated to a cute shade of red before bowing politely and excusing himself to take a seat next to Germany.
Italy arrived afterwards and the ex-Axis countries mingled peacefully under France's watchful gaze. He smiled when Italy took notice of Germany's easier state, but of course that particular nation doesn't quite keep things to himself.

Italy's gasped resounded across the meeting room. "Did you hear that, Japan? Germany said he'd eat some of the pasta I packed for lunch!"

"How interesting," Japan noted, crossing his arms and rubbing his chin.

"What is with you two?" Germany groaned, but the face never kept. His aura was less strained, as well as his form more relaxed than the usual uptight rigid posture. "I enjoy Italy's pasta too."

"But whenever I offer it you never want any," Italy complained. He pouted at the failures of the past but it was soon shoved away with a bright smile. "But that's okay, you want some today! I'm so very happy."

"Anything on a positive note makes you happy," Germany muttered with a sigh. He scrolled through his binders and fixed his reading glasses, ignoring the other two entering countries as they walked through the meeting doors who had been chatting amongst themselves before noticing the other nations already present in the room.

Germany gasped when the back of his chair tilted, his feet leaving the ground. He readily flailed his arms to balance his fall but he hadn't stumbled backwards to the floor, instead he found himself looking up at a cheerily smiling America.

Again, while the rest of the countries understood Germany as a stern nation, often embarrassed by anything close to any intimate display in public, what they were beholding was something else entirely. America had just walked through the door with Canada and the moment he noticed Germany already seated at the table he dashed over, pulled the German's chair back so that he was now looking up into his face.

There was no unease in the German at all. Instead, he seemed even more relaxed when he realized it had been America who playfully pulled his chair off balance. Their greeting came simply by the meet of gazes and the sweet press of a kiss.

Everyone knew they had been courting—all present had been there the day when Germany had asked for America's hand, but to see the two interact this way in public was something different. They knew America was one for holding hands, close cuddles, and kisses on the cheeks, but Germany would not let him, at least not when there were others around. He was a private man—usually, which is why everyone was gawking at the intimate scene before them.

When America pulled away he sat Germany's chair back onto its front legs and then took a seat next to him. France would have strained his hearing to listen to the two lovers' conversation had not Canada approached him with such a pleased grin.

For a moment France's son simply stood next to him, hands clasped together, and a bounce in his form as he rocked on the balls of his feet. France's gaze turned to him who seemed to have the faintest blush on his cheeks from the recent romantic display.

"They finally did it," Canada informed softly. His eyes held his step brother's form and the way he interacted with his lover. The both of them seemed so happy that he had felt so pleased to see.

France heard Canada. Unlike many other nations he did not need to ask twice. But even so, what Canada had just informed him disturbed him. He was a romantic soul and should be over-joyous but
found himself internally conflicted.

"He told you this?" France asked, his own gaze not leaving America or Germany. Yes, what Canada said was true. He could see it in the way they spoke, in the way their knees touched sitting next to each other, and the way their auras seemed to compliment the other, neither one over shadowing the others.

"Oui," Canada answered with a nod of the head. "Look at him, he's so happy."

Happy indeed. France sighed. He was grateful his son hadn't noticed his strange behavior because little Canada could be just as insistent on finding out a root-cause just like his papa.

"Yo, France, ma man, can ya whip up some coffee? Totally pulled an all-nighter, bro, and I'm about to crash," came America's demand for some beverage.

France sighed again. "Oui, coming right up."

It seemed even his troubled thoughts wouldn't let him go prepare coffee for his guests—not when Russia came walking up the stairs to the room.

"Oh, Russie, I am glad you chose to attend. I honestly didn't think you'd respond to my invitation, mon ami." France approached the larger nation but quickly rethought that when he noticed the subtle dangers in his stance, aura, and eyes.

Russia spared one glance to the hosting nation before making his way to the meeting room, no greeting of his own or acknowledgement. France would have been offended hadn't he been overly worried something wrong would happen once the Slavic nation entered that meeting room—Lord, America was already in there.

"Are you mad?!" France turned to see England a few steps down the staircase, seemingly the smaller nation had been keeping his distance just as much as he marched up the stairs behind the Russian. "How could you invite Russia of all nations? You know he's been unstable as of late." 

*It is the heart and soul that are unbalanced, the key guiders of the body. It is no wonder, after all, his bonded has clung to another,* France mentally noted. He doubted England would understand. He could try to explain to the Brit, but he feared his reaction when finding out his precious eldest child had slept with a nation as hated as Russia. No, it was best just to keep what he knew to himself.

"You're asking for a bloody war, you know that, France," England muttered just as he pushed past the Frenchman.

France aimed for peace, it was up to the other nations to embrace this mindset. Of course, with Russia in the meeting room things turned sour quite quickly. While France wanted to focus on the relationship status of the world it ended up being just business as usual.

Risking bringing up complicated relations could bring about a fight, and a fight could risk in a split of nations, and a split of nations could risk a war. France wanted them to make love, not war, but his hopes were so easily dashed that he quickly called for a break.

There possibly was no way around this issue concerning America, Russia, and Germany. Those countries were the most tense around the other. Neither addressed either directly, but insults were subtly worded, and glares mentally noted and intentionally missed.

If anything, France didn't want to be the country for the cause of World War Three. So he kept a close eye on them, and if anything he'd kick them all out. He wanted no part in this impending war
all internally threatened.

Matters of the heart was such a hassle... especially for the likes of nations. One thing France did notice later on in the day was how most simply ignored Russia—almost as bad as Canada's presence. He wondered how long any could go about simply ignoring the Federation of Russia for long.

Over and over Russia tried to see the point in General Winter keeping him alive. He had wanted the old ghost to chill him over, to let another nation be born from his corpse and live this mundane and unsatisfying life. He didn't want to be a nation any more. He hated his life more than anything. The only time he was ever happy in his own skin was...

Russia's dull eyes glanced over from across the lounge area where everyone had gone for their lunch break and spied America speaking with his little brothers, Australia, and New Zealand. He looked so happy and his laughter could be heard from where Russia sat in his corner. It had been the first time he'd set eyes on his living form since Alaska.

Only he ever made him feel like his life had been worth living, but that reason had ran from him.

Russia groaned at the way his heart clenched inside his chest. His hand reached up and tugged at his coat. With a frown he nearly dug through the fabric of his clothing and pierced skin. He'd thought about digging into his chest cavity and taking out the damn organ, it's been hurting a lot more lately and it was almost more than Russia could take.

The only way he'd been dealing with the unbearable pain was by mentally numbing his senses. This technique wasn't necessarily ideal. It lead to the lack of senses such as sight and hearing. His boss wasn't too keen on it seeing how Russia often missed important orders from him by this, and Putin didn't like to repeat.

Maybe he was looking for a reason for his boss to send him away for incompetence. Perhaps he was trying to urge his enemies to come to him and kill him while his senses were in disarray. Yes, that must all be the reasons. He just wanted to cease to exist.

It was always him though, America never once felt any guilt in his actions. Russia dealt with the pain if just to gaze at that Western nation who was now skipping along to speak with Japan—those two had grown quite close lately. He wished that America knew how he felt and wished he in turn felt the same... perhaps then they could die together. Oh, what a lovely vision.

The scowl on Russia's face was ever present preventing anyone from approaching him. He didn't wish to speak to anyone despite his delegates and boss urging him to gain new allies. He chortled at the thought of their words. They felt another war coming on, but Russia didn't care, especially if it was the long-feared World War III. He certainly hoped he was one of the nations to fade from existence first, he couldn't stand the planet any longer—much too crowded now.

Hm, there was a thought: a world much less dense than this present one. Only a handful of countries perhaps. A sunny world, the grass plains would yield up endless array of sunflowers, and summer would stay forever.

Of course Russia's frown deepened when he envisioned a familiar country prance around the sunflower fields. In the present he felt the world a better place without him, but it was his heart conjuring up this paradise, and the heart wants what it wants. So, his eyes fell back toward America and an anger arose straight from his heart when he watched Germany pass by the nation with a whisper only for America to catch his arm before he was out of reach and give him a quick smooch
for the entirety of the world to see just what a slut he was.

Russia growled and looked away. In his world there would indeed be no place for any affection for America. Those who even looked at the youth would be put to death, and the bosses say would be out of the question. In Russia's world the nations would rule supremely and do whatever they desired.

In his annoyance he had not understood that Germany had actually approached him. It hadn't been until the smaller nation cleared his throat to signify his presence that Russia even turned to look at him. While Russia would have been one to strike up a fake smile and greet the other he was in no such mood to do so right now.

But, of course Germany could tell this and so spoke up himself. "Greetings, Russia, it is good to finally see you at a meeting."

"You mean one where I am not banned to?" Russia didn't even bother looking at Germany, his eyes were much more interested in figuring out why America seemed so happy when before . . .

Germany frowned. "Then you should thank France for sending an invitation to you."

Russia had been surprised to receive one. The other meetings the nations hadn't thought twice about inviting Russia. France had oddly enough changed his tune, but for how long? It was different for each nation.

He and Germany weren't on good terms as of late and so as to why he was even speaking to him was beyond him that Russia didn't feel the need to inquire about; he could care less. He thought that promptly and quite rudely ignoring the younger nation would hint that he didn't want to speak with him, but the damn German didn't seem like he could take a clue.

"I'm not sure how France does it but it seems whenever we have a meeting at his home most of the countries are docile. Not a single retort, ja?"

Was Germany trying to strike up small talk with Russia? The larger nation quickly snapped his spoon in half and moved his soup out of his way—just in case. Crossing his hands he looked up at Germany from where he sat at his table.

"Why are you speaking to me, Germany?" Russia made sure his tone as well as facial features bore his annoyance of the other as much as possible.

"Honestly?" Germany asked—the damn cocky bastard didn't so much as cringe at Russia's pressing words; he was getting too bold for his own good. "I came to thank you."

Russia rose a brow. He didn't remember doing any favor for Germany as of late.

"Come again?" Russia inquired.

Germany frowned and straightened his form. "I will not repeat myself as I do not like saying such words to you of all nations. But I feel I should come and offer my gratitude to you for what you did to America."

This time, Russia's eyes narrowed. Just what was Germany talking about?

"I'm certain you understood that he and I were going through a hard patch in our relationship and it was damn near impossible to do anything intimate with America's super strength. Just recently I found out that you and he matched brute for brawn, and because of that he was able to confide in me
and took our relationship to the next level. We're much closer now."

When Russia's cringing smile returned to his face he stood and made sure he was a head over the German and that he was looking up to him. "Oh, da." Even Russia's higher disturbing tone was back. "I understand now, you're wanting to thank me for fucking him loose for you. Da, then, you're welcome."

Germany didn't look taken aback by Russia's response much to the Slavic nation's disappointment. In fact, Russia was certain he felt a spike in Germany's aura as if he were trying to dominate his own. Silly little German boy. He should know better.

"Well, now that I managed through that without churning over and vomiting, I did come to confront you about one more thing," Germany spoke up, his shoulders straight and stance unwavering before the Russian who was beginning to emit a threatening aura himself. "If you ever come near America again I will personally declare war on you myself."

"I certainly hope you have the arsenal to support that bold promise," Russia said with a hum to himself. His fists clenched, his heart urging him to strangle the nation before him so that America would have to love him and only him.

"Don't worry, I have the power to back up my claim," Germany assured, his jaw jutting out with pride. "Now I understand why my bruder had made sure I had power before courtship. He had told me how other nations could act as challengers."

"Da," Russia said with an eerily pleasant smile. "Just like you had done when he and I courted."

That certainly wiped the smile off that Nazi bastard's face. Along with that Russia's face morphed into something dark and sinister.

"I do not listen to little babies that do not know when to keep mouth shut," Russia stated. "But, unlike you, I will honor national decisions and allow your courtship with Amerika to exist, but his body was once mine as was his heart, so, once you have faded from this planet and are nothing but a memory he will remember me and come right back into my arms."

"Is that a threat?" Germany's eyes narrowed. Russia smiled at that, there was Germany's true threatening colors.

If politics were in play there would be a dancing around of words or even the smart rapture of silence to keep the peace, but there wasn't.

"Da," Russia answered straightforwardly. "I am contemplating on whether or not that I should let the other nations destroy you in the upcoming war or if I should do it myself. Oh well, I guess I'll decide when it comes about, da?"

Mentioning war between already stressed nations was dangerous.

Germany gritted his teeth and clenched his hands into fists. "How dare you take the notion of war so lightly. The world isn't ready for anything of the sort!"

"Da, they are not." Russia then scanned Germany's weak form. "And from my standard you are not either, comrade. But I have been ready for a long time."

The meeting had grown boring and the gathering of nations was deemed useless, and so Russia left with that statement. He didn't care if Germany told America of his threats. He didn't care if he told the rest of the nations present when presenting his speech. Why? Because Russia would not be there
for it. He left as soon as he turned from Germany.

He was always good on his word. If Germany didn't believe he'd fight for America then he would understand his spoken intentions soon enough. War was coming and Russia, as well as the other denying nations of the earth knew it.

Chapter End Notes

So, since we're out of history I'm sort of using your fan feelings for conflicts, how fun! :) Now, as you have noticed I don't have any set dates anymore and simply am saying "Not So Distant Future [?]" Do I know what's going to happen in the future? No. So, most of this stuff is open for debate. This is may or may not happens, and thus we get into the actual fiction and full blown made up stuff. Yay!

So, General Winter has brought up some serious issues that may or may not be true, after all the ancient ghost is a senile old thing. But many of his reminiscences have been hinted at throughout the story. Alas, I still have a few chapters to go before we're finished, so we'll just see where this all goes.
With turmoil upsetting so many territories and unnerving the sovereignty of the nations, it was a surprise that the United States of America took the time and liberty to construct and send invitations to his circle of friends and then the perimeter beyond that. It was an invitation to a beach party. The summer had been good in the States and the beaches easily pleasing for a place of gathering.

After mulling over the reason and probability of a functional gathering of nations amongst the sand and waves, the sense of it all was realized. This was a way for America to keep track of everyone as well as an opportunity to weasel his way into every country's business, acting as the self-appointed referee much to the annoyance of everyone. But America always threw extravagant parties and his invitations were never rejected.

All these reasons called for no surprise to arise when Russia received an invite. He thought about not going simply because his presence was not needed and he understood that even if he attended America would likely ignore him like he had the previous meetings. He would not look at him any longer and more oft than not opted to be in separate rooms than Russia. It was as if the older nation's very presence disgusted America. Russia wondered how he could continue handling these non-verbal insults and rejections because, unlike America, he wanted to see the younger nation even if they didn't speak or sit near the other. Just to look upon America's youthful form and see him with his own eyes was all Russia wanted.

So it was Russia who would ignore the foretold outcome of America's pending evasion and respond to the mass produced invitation and appear with numerous other countries on the sands of America's beaches.

Russia smiled lightly at the sight of the host. America was looking handsome today—as he did every day; red swim trunks, a light beach shirt hanging off his tan shoulders, and the latest trending shade over his eyes. Always a looker, that sunshine catching everyone's eye the moment he stepped out onto the beach to greet everyone and thank them for attending his shindig. But of course what surprised Russia the most was the lack of concealer he usually carried over his visible scars.

Clear as day, that ugly scar he received when the Twin Towers collapsed lay bare for all to stop and gawk at. He used to be so sensitive of the wound; being how much harder it was to frontally conceal than the Pearl Harbor injury. Russia wondered when the younger nation had stopped concerning himself with the stares and whispers of other viewing nations. As of right then the countries around didn't seem to mind the sight of the gruesome intimate scar, so Russia believed America had been going without cover-up for a while for the others to grow accustomed of the sight of it.

It reminds Russia of how long he's been gone from the affairs of the world—or how long he's been banned from them. Even still Russia merely sat and observed. Keeping to his silence while the world passed by him.

America was going back and forth from various cliques to find what was happening in the respective countries. When the small talk bored him he'd excuse himself and move on. This attitude really reminded Russia of the way the boy had been so long ago, but he was getting older and his need of advice or ear wasn't as necessary as it used to be. America was free of many world affairs for once in so long that Russia could easily tell he just didn't know what to do with himself.
He was still an ever active country, having absolutely no idea with what to do with something like "free time" or "vacation." His smiles weren't even as blindingly bright as they used to be. Russia could see he was slowly falling into a relaxed state. It was unique to see him like so since he used to be so paranoid of attack not too long ago.

The reasoning behind that calmer state of mind was undoubtedly the New World nation's strong boyfriend. Russia frowned when he watched the German finally come out of the changing shack, beach shirt, swim trunks, and shades. He was getting bigger in frame as well from his economic growth and power climb. Germany had not been spouting empty threats to Russia before, the younger country was intent on becoming a world power again and by the way he pulled America to his side it was easily reasoned that it be partly to protect the younger nation.

Russia scoffed at the idea. Like America needed protecting. The younger nation was still very strong and could keep his own head above the warring waters by himself. But even Russia could see how quickly America attached himself to the idea of Germany rising to power . . . as if that had ever been proven a thing of good throughout history.

Russia's bosses were concerned, his people unnerved, while once before they had spoken about the overbearing power of the United States they now whispered about the Germans and their rise to power. Germany was closer to Russia, dwelling in in the same land mass, however, Germany's distance from America was a lot farther than Russia, and seeing how the nation thought himself a reliable ally to America made Russia want to puke.

Even the sight of them now, with Germany's hand resting on America's waist in show of loyalty to the American nation—and possession to the viewing countries—it was as if the German personification was trying to reaffirm to the rest of the world that he would do whatever he could to keep by America's side. And Russia didn't doubt that he would try . . . but in the end Russia knew Germany would fail America, and he longed to see that day.

"Goddammit! I hate the sun! Why do I even try!?”

The very familiar cry of a Brit turned Russia's attention away from the likes of Germany toward England who was already sporting a nasty sunburn. Nice and red. That nation never tanned.

"Oh, Angleterre, if you would have allowed me to apply lotion then you would not be in this predicament." There was France, hair tied back, shades on, and a sizable bottle of sunblock in his hand. Though, Russia had caught that amused smile on his lips in seeing England in so much agony.

"No!" England denied, pulling his towel up to shield his scorched shoulders from the sun. "Your hands tend to wander, in case you forgot, frog! I'd rather do it myself."

"It's a little too late for that," France muttered with a sad sigh. "You now put the lobster to shame."

And of course it wasn't long before England's face matched the rest of his burnt body and he decided to damn his aching burnt skin while trying to strangle France, blisters and all. The party certainly reminded Russia of the old days; when he would sit still and watch as the rest of the world went on their casual ways with knuckles meeting jaws and knees colliding with guts. It always made Russia laugh, but not this time . . . he'd long since ceased smiling a while ago.

Now he resorted to observing, keeping his eyes on anything and everything. With the world passing by just around him it wasn't hard to decipher their moods or keen his ears in on their conversations. Nothing was really of interest to Russia. Most countries kept up pleasantries and enjoyed the beach and the sunshine . . . at least the ones whose bodies would enjoy a little darker shade.
"Kesesese, hey, Austria, look at my awesome sandcastle! I'll bet yours is minuscule compared to my genius architect!"

And there was Prussia, piling mounds upon mounds of sand to create some bizarre looking home fit for crabs. Russia was surprised the Albino was still even in existence from after being taken off the world's status for so long, but he was certain it was Germany's own growth and Prussia's distinct people that kept him alive to annoy the hell out of someone another day. That someone just so happened to be the usual nation of Austria who was busy getting lathered in protective sunscreen by a concerned Hungary—after seeing England's epidemic expanse of skin ruination many a tender shaded nation thought twice about the extra application of the lotion.

Austria seemed to pay the Albino no mind however and simply continued babbling on about newly purchased instruments to Hungary who nodded in response. But, Prussia wasn't one to be ignored—never was. When his mighty sandcastle ended up battered against the waves he moved on, scooting closer to his two old companions and enemies.

"Hey, Liz, do me next after you're done with him." Prussia hadn't even worded it like a question, simply demanded it.

One didn't demand things from Hungary. Russia thought the idiot would learn by now.

As usual, Russia watched the long-haired woman turn. In her hand the bottle of lotion crunched in the middle, the contents seeping out like the guts of a mortally wounded enemy. The show startled Prussia while Austria complained about the globs of lotion dripping onto his arms. Before Hungary even had a chance to explain her apologies away to her ex-husband she glared at Prussia and threatened him with the same fate as the bottle.

"Hey, I have immunity!" Prussia demanded, trying to save his own ass from the frightful woman who had definitely not lost her fire.

"Immunity?" Hungary scoffed. She continued breaking the bottle in two in her grip. "You live in a fantasy world now, Prussia? Not that it isn't a surprise."

"My brother's boyfriend is America, and right now we're at his hosted party, so I'm rightfully the guest of honor," Prussia reasoned with a snarky smile.

Hungary of course would have none of that and still chucked the crushed bottle at the albino's forehead. She had a good arm. "We're all 'guests of honor,' dimwit!"

One would think that all of the fighting between the nations was a bad show of the design and reason of the party, but it all fizzled out in the end. Prussia eventually was left to having to apply sunscreen by himself while seated close to Austria and Hungary, France and England had lessened their quarrel to simple bickering while the Brit sat by some shacks in the shade with his equally burnt older brothers, and the other warring nations simply parted and tried their best to ignore their tensions and strains and enjoy the sun, the sand, the water, and America.

Russia glanced toward America again, noticing he was making himself quite useful in squeezing himself into everyone's business. Over by the beach bar it was clear his lover was keeping an eye on him from over his glass of beer. The German even happened to glance Russia's way. Instead of turning his gaze to feign obliviousness Russia only met his gaze, matching might for might. He wasn't afraid of Germany in the slightest nor his rising power in Europe and if that damn bratty nation had an issue with him, well, then he and Russia could simply join the other usually fighting nations and have it out on the dunes.
"Hhhah, I'm surprised you even showed up, Russia."

The Slavic nation's stare down was cut by an ancient nation plopping himself down on the shaded table he resided at. Russia stared at China for a moment, watching the heated nation fan himself and then take off his hat and shades.

"Too hot, too bright," China complained—par usual.

Russia managed a grin, at least to his old friend. What they were now was up to opinion. They certainly weren't close, never really were, but being neighbors at least helped them talk to one another easier.

"I would say the same to you," Russia replied.

China only grinned. "Who denies an invitation from the United States of America? While the world is in a mess it is nice to come to a decently planned party and be paid to attend by another's own expense." China sighed, continuing to fan himself, his eyes wandering, catching sight of a few rival nations from his region. Russia caught him frowning at Vietnam, such a pretty little thing—a woman who could never be swooned by China or his money like many other countries. Russia figured that the old nation was sore about that, particularly with her continuing fascination with a Western country who couldn't offer her as much as China could.

The girl was just too small and skinny for Russia's tastes. What America had seen in her still presently baffling, but there she was, still trying to catch the superpower's eye by striking up small chat and offering to buy him a drink, to which he insisted on doing for her.

"She's always been stupid," China commented. Whether it was meant for a ramble to himself or to anyone who may listen, Russia still responded to it.

"As are many of your relatives," Russia commented in reply. He didn't need to bring up the history of Asia nor his perspective, he understood China knew very well what he thought of them.

"Westerners are more so," China said, not taking his eyes off Vietnam, nor her close kept proximity with America. "Which makes her doubly stupid."

Russia had his attention on America and his conversation with Israel and Greece, his interest always seemed to revert back to that young nation no matter how hard Russia tried aiming his concentration on something more fitting and productive. It would even take some of his harnessed will to bring in his attention to matters he should be concerning himself with more.

Finally turning back to China, the larger nation smiled and leaned back in his chair quite casually. "This party is meant to ease tensions, and possibly further diplomatic reasonings since our leaders seem to be quite incompetent as of late."

China snickered but nodded. "I'm not stupid," he replied, even the oldest nation knew the reasons behind this national get-together. Most gatherings consisted of business and politics, very rarely were they anything else.

"Then tell me, what will you do when it happens?" Russia turned his gaze toward the vast endlessness of the ocean before them. He knew China understood what he was speaking about, and even when he glanced over toward him he noticed the Asian looking at him indifferently, as if the mere mention of something so strongly fought against wasn't the tad bit disturbing. "I'm not going to be politically correct like the endless mass of fools here. I've been building for a long time. I'm about ready I should think." Being ready for World War Three was in a sense like writing a last will
to a nation. The haunt in Russia's eyes foretold the scenes of the end. All of which knew was coming
closer. All of which understood they felt in their bodies.

Everyone knew this would be the last war, that this would eradicate not only their populace but their
kind as well. Many even wondered if mankind would go extinct and that they, the personifications,
would cease to exist with the race. It was very likely, and so their end was carefully planned out.
Everyone knew where they wanted to be when the end came, what they wanted to do, who they
wanted to be with, etcetera.

China sighed, his own eyes wandering toward the ocean. He was silent for a moment, not to ponder
his thoughts to search for the answer, Russia knew he had already thought about it and that he
probably understood his ending better than any other nation.

There was a soft chuckle before China said, "I'm going to drink as many gallons of baijiu as I can
and then take a piss on the Thien Mu Pagoda." China laughed at the thought, smirking at the image
he was no doubt imagining. He then sighed, leaning back in his chair, looking too content. "Then I'm
going to return to that city and sit on the Dragon Throne until life itself fades away." Yes, China
seemed really content with that almost nostalgic idea. When he turned he jutted his chin out,
motioning for Russia to follow suit in confession. "What about you? What will you do?"

Russia hummed quietly to himself. Honestly? He liked to remain in a state of naivety; liked to think
that all his guns would protect him, that all his bombs made him feel safer, that his people would
survive the fall-out, and that the end wouldn't be so bad, because in reality he had nowhere to go to
fade away in peace. Looking at the other countries around he was certain they all had their plans for
the end thought out. A special place, a loved one, a thing to do that they never had gotten the liberty
to do before; Russia knew the nations had something . . . except him.

"I will stay with my sisters," Russia answered on default. It was easy enough to think of such an end,
and easy enough to say it.

China only snickered. "If they're not already gone by then," the ancient nation added in much to the
grim mood of their conversation.

Russia frowned at China's quip, but that didn't keep his eyes from wandering, from searching until
his amethyst irises landed on the most beautiful nation in the world. Russia wondered what the
younger nation would do in the end. If anything, and if given the chance, Russia was certain he'd
like nothing more than to spend the final days of all that he knew wrapped in his warm and strong
embrace. Ah, what fantasies Russia's heart could beat him with. The organ was so much harder to
handle now ever since Alaska. Russia hated it.

So Russia tried to focus on the warm day, the salty breeze, and the lull of the waves upon the beach.
But of course he was not born amongst this fine scenery. No, the hazardous terrain of jagged
mountains snowcapped with ice and storm were his pillow, and frost his concealing blanket. Russia
was more at home with a heavy snowfall than a day out on the beach. So he found no rest and let his
dark thoughts melt into his spirit, keeping all nations away.

China had left after deciding to chase around a rebellious Hong Kong, and then try and evade a
boisterous South Korea who stalked him to annoyance. No one else came up to Russia after him, not
even the ever-sociable host. And so it grew late and much to Russia's annoyance he should have
concerned himself with the protection of his pale skin. Looking down Russia noticed reddening
irritation spreading across his shins. While he had been seated in a beach chair under a large umbrella
the object had not offered his entire form shade.

So Russia got up and went toward the shacks to find some form of ointment for the itching pain. He
had passed by other fair-skinned nations who looked worse off than he, but they certainly would not share their healing lotion with him and so it was up to himself to complete the search for the relief ointment, or find America who knew where they were stashed.

Russia had ended up finding America first. The New World nation had been quite close to the shelves of gel emulsion. Of course his attention had been bribed away from helping those countries seeking relief from burns by a very privately audacious German nation who currently had his teeth raking down his neck and a hand down his swim trunks.

"Ludwig, stoooop," America had whined out in a giggling fit, his face growing redder the more his lover touched him so intimately. "God, just wait 'til we get back to the room—uh..." America had been the first to notice another nation's presence, and he had also been the first to open his eyes and look toward Russia since he was rightly so facing his general direction. The moment his body seized up was when Germany took notice and turned. He looked rather annoyed for the interruption, but when he understood which country had walked in on them he looked more than upset by the Slavic nation's presence.

"What do you want, Russia?" It was easy to tell German and Russian relations weren't at their best in this day and age just by the bite in Germany's tone when he addressed the older nation.

Quite quickly Russia reverted back to his old ways of smiling in kind even though he hadn't done so in a while—simply because he hadn't had to deal with the damn German brat in so long. "The sun had burnt me and I was looking for some skin care relief. Apologies, I didn't realize I walked into the lubricant aisle."

It was interesting how it had been America to shy away from the comment instead of the usual reclusive Germany. After all, the German liked to keep his private affairs away from curious eyes, but now, it seemed, that he's grown quite bold. Russia believed it was due to his rise in power that the nation was trying to strike chests.

"What did you say?" Germany frowned at Russia, completely pulling away from America where he had pinned him to a shelf and turned as if he were some defender of America's dignity—hah, what dignity was there left?

"Ludwig, no."

Russia grinned at watching just how tightly America's leash on Germany still was. Just saying his name made the German turn to America and look at him with a form of obedience. This was typical of America; trying to sway a fight that would happen sooner or later. So Russia smiled because it was humorous and to hide his disgust for the couple.

Russia would have liked to have turned around and left them, but something kept him rooted. His fists clenched at his sides and he struggled to hide his trembles. He really wanted to press his fist against Germany's face right then, just one punch.

"Hey, Ludwig, why don't you go wait for me at the bar? Order me something. You know what I like." There America went, fluttering his eyes to look pretty for his lover so he would comply with his ever-so-sweet demands. Germany himself looked reluctant, his eyes continually tried to focus on his boyfriend while glancing back toward Russia who would not move.

Germany reached out and took up America's hand and said, "Why don't you come with me? There's no finer company than the United States of America."

Russia really felt nauseous. Just watching that disgusting German attempt to flirt had Russia losing
his appetite for the next few days.

"Nah, he probably wouldn't be able to find the lotion. I'll help him out and then meet up with you," America explained with an encouraging smile that hid quite a lot even from Germany, but of course not from Russia.

Germany's reluctance really did annoy Russia. He, himself, was about to take hold of the man and toss him out of the room, but he refrained, saving his show of strength for another day. Eventually Germany gave in, as did many to America's persuasive ways.

With a sigh Germany nodded his head. "Ja, don't be long." When he moved away he pushed past Russia, being quite direct in letting him know that the shove was very intentional. Russia said nothing to it, and saved a piece of an idea of what to do to Germany once war permitted him.

"Sunburn, huh?" Russia's attention was pulled back to America once Germany had left the room completely. The light flush was fading from America's features. It was partially sad because America looked attractive with the light hued dusting—though the fact that it was brought on by Germany did entice another disgust within Russia which he, of course, kept to himself and hid behind his smiles.

America sighed and turned back toward the shelf. With a hop he snatched up a box on the top and then turned and tossed it to Russia. "There ya go. Just follow the directions."

When America went to leave the room and pursue his escort Russia spoke up saying, "Spasibo for the hospitality, Amerika. It's the first you've shown me all day."

Russia could hear America halt, no, he could feel him still himself. He could even feel him turn back toward him and glare at him... no, America wasn't glaring at him, not yet. It was so very interesting how Russia had yet to stop feeling him. He wondered if America felt the same—if the younger nation was even capable of feeling anything at all.

"Hospitality? I invited you here, Russia. I'm probably the only damn country who would!"

Russia kept his hiding grin even with his dislike for America's tone. He simply kept his eyes on the box of lotion and acted as if he were reading the directions. But even so it would not take long for Russia's gaze to seek out America's, and it did this time. The moment his eyes fell on those sapphires full of upset and other mixed emotions, Russia's smile began fading. It wasn't easy to keep up his façade around America, especially when they had no one but each other to look at to see all of the flaws and the regret that both continually denied.

"Go back to the bar, Amerika, your lover is waiting for you." Russia didn't want to say he saw upset in America's eyes over what appeared to be dislike for any form of rejection, like right now. It was because Russia didn't believe it when he clearly saw it, or when he clearly felt it. So it was he who walked out of the room first, trying to continue on his boring day, and America's uneventful and meaningless party. It had been a waste to come, Russia knew it would be, but he came because he wanted to see America.

Russian Wilderness. Not So Distant Future [?]

Tony hated Winter; just too cold and unforgivably heartless. Summer was his ideal season, not simply because the heat was easier on his formed skin, but he was brighter than Winter, smiled much more and his laughs were pleasant. Despite his current obliviousness, Tony enjoyed his comfort better than the other, which was why he was near him so often, but as of right then he had to seek Winter out and manage the chill running up his body.
It was funny how much the spirit resided in the desolate places of the world. Tony chuckled because of how sad it all seemed. The spirit was a deity, a being equipped with vast knowledge of the planet's creation and history following the evolution of life. Not many quite understood how life continually faded from the planet and overly again would spring up from the ashes of total desolation. Tony quite liked Earth's resilience to the inhabitants on her outer crust. Not many planets could go through such atrocity and damage to surface and atmosphere and still find the ability to produce life in the hundreds—thousands—millions—billions of years that it took to recover from so much ruination.

But Tony wasn't seeking him out as an enlightened person would for knowledge or worship. No, he had other things in mind, and finding him firstly had proved a little difficult after understanding he had come to hide himself away from most of the world for a few centuries now. Tony was honestly surprised with how quickly the world forgot about those placed in it long before the terrestrial lifeforms. The alien really suspected that even humans themselves would no longer be able to see the personifications of their grouped nations in time. My, that wouldn't be a good thing. But Tony shook the thought from his mind after realizing it would not happen.

Humans, themselves, would not forget their living nations they comprised simply because they'd never get the chance to.

"Fucking cold," Tony murmured to himself. Even with his arms wrapped around himself he couldn't stop the shivering. But this was what he got for taking on a physical form. "Winter, come out!" He didn't want to wait any more substantial amount of time in this God-forsaken place. He needed this visit meeting its purpose so he could finish the task and be on his way.

Tony watched the measuring devices in his control panel begin to drop; he'd been heard. The alien could easily just wait for the spirit inside his ship, but that was quite a rude thing. If anything, Winter was the rude one for making Tony wait so long for his appearance.

In a whirl of frost and ice the deity appeared before Tony. The gray creature simply stared at the form floating above him with indifferent eyes. It seems the spirit had seen better days, he didn't look so well.

"Was your reason for keeping me waiting your wretched state of health?" Tony questioned, of which the spirit only sneered, lowering himself a little to let ice stretch out to where the creature's feet were. As if he were trying to freeze his toes off.

'Why have you come to me, Nachalo?' Winter questioned. His tone of voice seemed much more weary than usual.

"To give you warning," Tony responded calmly even amidst the dropping degrees.

General Winter scoffed. The frown on his face seemed to deepen, but he didn't lash out at the alien he seemed quite familiar with. 'And of what kind?'

"To end this game of yours."

It was an interesting thing how the spirit of winter seemed to understand the small alien's meaning, or even more so come off with a familiarity to him. Indeed the two knew each other—had known each other for a long time.

'It does not concern you,' Winter said to Tony. 'You should mind your own business.'

Tony sighed. "Your game of torment does tax the planet, however. Do you want Earth to end up like the Pictonians home world?"
Winter chuckled at the comment. 'The mother has been fine since it began, and will reside in a perpetual state as it continues. You do not have the right to tell me what I can or cannot do upon the land which I roam, observer.'

"That is right, I am an observer," Tony agreed with a nod, his eyes narrowing at the foolish spirit. "And as such I have seen many worlds crumble over petty arguments escalating into the desolation of planets. I like Earth, and I enjoy the lifeforms with which she has born. I would like to see this floating mass still functioning as it should thousands of years from now, but you would risk collapsing this world into ruin."

General Winter was listening to Tony, but the lack of care about his words was easily seen as well as felt. So, Tony sighed. He knew he could not force the deity to obey him, but he was trying his best to convince him on which path was safer for the planet.

Tony then watched as the spirit stretched his arms out and showed the alien his state. Tattered rags adorned his spiritual form from lack of care, a thing of forgetfulness. 'Do you see me? Do you understand the levels of my power?' The General chuckled weakly still. 'I am in no fit shape nor appearance to grasp the world in my power again. Not unless his rise to power is staunched.' The smile pulling at the spirits lips did disturb Tony to some extent if only because it showed him of the madness in the ageless being. 'It is not chill and ice that is threatening the mother this time. No, it is heat and fume.'

"It is because he does not know!" Tony scolded. "Do not act as if you are exempt from blame. It was you who put him in this endless cycle. It was you who laughed at his oblivion and goaded his enemies to repeat his fate."

General Winter rose his hands as if to bare proof of his innocence. "I have not touched him," the seasonal spirit assured. And he hadn't. 'A spirit cannot harm a personification.' So Mother Earth made it to save the immortal beings on her planet from ruling over the other.

General Winter seemed to laugh at Tony's annoying upset. 'Well, unless I too retain a physical form. But I have yet found reason to. Unlike you and Summer, I could care less for the physical world.'

Tony ran his fingers up his arms. It was true that retaining a physical form brought on new dangers, in Tony's deity form as the mass of space holding the things in and of and around the universe he would not be feeling the chill of cold or the scorch of heat. No one would be able to beat, stab, or shoot a spirit, but remaining so was bothersome in its loneliness, and so Tony had taken on this form —though it was a mock rendition of the beings residing on the planet—to hold conversation, to touch, to taste, and to live with the lifeforms calling this planet home. And he had found friends, one friend who was lost in the same predicament as himself.

"No, and yet you care for one so ingrained into the physical world," Tony responded, looking at the spirit with absolute sustained pity. The deity had gone mad through the lifetimes he's watched over, and Tony began wondering if even in the beginning, when he was brought forth into this world as representation of a season, that he hadn't already been mentally unstable and unfit for sanity.

General Winter frowned when his unfaithful servant had been mentioned. As one deity to another he had not appreciated Tony's attempt to press his nose into another's business.

'Remain an observer,' Winter said, his tone deeper now with underlined threats—threats that, due to Tony's physical form, could not be fulfilled.

"Even in this form I will," Tony assured. "But I have come to concern myself for this planet and her terrestrial offspring. If you do not stop this grudge-held game of yours then the taxation of the planet..."
will prove to be too much." Tony had come to like the beings living in this world. They were so diverse, so lively, and so opinionated. "You would ruin my fun if this planet succumbs to the same fate as the others."

'I can assure you it will not be by my hand,' Winter replied. He has reigned before. Countless of times. And every time the world fixed itself, brought out new life and returned the nations to their cycles.

But there were times when Winter almost succumbed to the heat, even when Summer himself hadn't understood what he was doing. People like to fear ice and frost because it is fresh in their minds, yet they forget that the rise of temperature can be just as deadly if not more so with longer lasting effects. General Winter had to hide himself in the desolate places of the world to escape the oncoming scorch. He could already feel it and he was not to blame, never, it was him and his lack of knowledge on what he was doing.

"Aren't you concerned with what may happen to you in the fallout?" Tony inquired. He knew for certain not even the spirit of winter would be able to survive such fervent heat.

'In as much that a spirit cannot come to bring harm on a nation, so too do countries lack the ability to bring about the dissolve of a deity.' It was an answer that Tony saw coming, but one negligent in understanding the other possibilities that could come to pass.

"Unless said nation is Summer," Tony reminded. "You may have trapped him inside a physical form, but right now, with his power unharnessed he can very well harm you."

General Winter frowned and Tony silently reprimanded his narrow mindedness.

"Do you know why America succeeded in creating the first nuclear bomb when the others raced against him to accomplish the same in gaining the ultimate destructive weapon?" Tony set up the question. The winter spirit remained quiet. Tony understood. He was glad the fool was now beginning to understand just what was happening with the world and her nations. "Do you think it was a coincidence? Was Germany missing only heavy water, was Japan forgetting to add uranium? Of course they had those ingredients, but nothing worked. Do you know why? It was because no power planted or embedded in the soil of the ground or waters of the air or ocean could infuse such destruction, no, only the might of a deity could. America's people were the first to understand this and sought to their personified nation to offer his essence, but even they did not know the might in his soul. The others could have tried placing a piece of themselves into their constructed contraptions, but nothing worked, no matter what they gave. So a piece of him was stolen each time the others sought to have such destructive weapons in their arsenal."

It was all true. The heat, the energy, the radiation, all of it came from Summer's destructive abilities that too many forgot . . . that Winter surely remembered. And should the world fall into a nuclear war it will be by Summer's hand that the world could very well be made infertile of life. Summer had always been a well behaved spirit most of the time when he dwelt upon earth in his celestial form, but now that the repetitive cycles had hindered his understanding of his previously retained knowledge his might could end a perfectly healthy planet. And Tony felt that to be such a shame.

"If you would just end this cycle and help him return to his original form then this planet might not face such harsh extremities," Tony said. He was growing annoyed with continually trying to reason with the bitter spirit. He had long since realized that Winter was mad. While nations eventually faded only to return in the cycles of the world they were blessed with the lapse of the mind. Once ages old grudges from a life lived in anger were no more. Winter, however, had been wronged and saw to it that he held such upset inside him to continue his seemingly endless ongoing revenge.
Tony had been an observer for a long time, but he was growing tired of the spirit's idiocy. If it were Tony he would have deemed his revenge suitably appeased after the fifth cycle, but Winter had pushed those who had wronged him through so many depressing scenarios that it was out of hand. The tragically oblivious deity controlling such a destructive force did not know what he was doing, or whom he was giving power to. This had to be stopped before yet another planet full of life was snuffed out in a universe trying to maintain any blessing of breath it could.

Winter's silence perturbed the alien and he huffed in frustration. It was not easy negotiating with one who's already lost their sanity. "Despite my physical form I have promised to intercede in this planet's business in no way. If you wish this world which birthed you and many other inhabitants to fade then so be it, but know that you were the root cause and your selfishness and bitterness drove potential peace to all out bloodshed."

Tony turned on his heels and made to board his spaceship. The sound of General Winter's soft deep chuckle caught in his hearing receptors, and as he turned he noticed a faint smile on the old spirit's lips.

'You know he would have wanted to die as one of them,' Winter mentioned. 'He was always more fond of them, wanting to be closer to them than he was to me—his own brother and kind.' A frown set in and the bitterness seeped out while the winds chilled and snow began to fall. 'Good then. Let him die in such a lowly form, I care not . . . if this will be the end of us all then I will be well with it.'

Tony actually felt sad when he had left. He hadn't accomplished what he set out to do, which was to make the winter spirit understand the direction the planet was headed in and somehow coax him into helping his fellow deity break free of a physical prison he had been sentenced to for numerous life cycles. Tony really had liked earth. He had seen it since it first appeared and checked in on its process of life every now and then before deciding to create a physical form of his own dwell among the populace and grow attached to a certain personification who really was more happy as a lower immortal than a seasonal deity.

"What a pity," Tony mumbled to himself with a sigh. Now he needed to decide if he were to stay on the planet until the end or leave in hopes to find a similar planet to entertain himself with. Turning in his seat he watched his ship orbit around the blue ball. He smiled. No, he didn't believe he'd grow as fond of any other life source than planet earth.

He'd miss her.

Berlin, Germany. Not So Distant Future [?]

Once he tightened his tie enough America looked himself over in the mirror one last time and sighed. Deep down all he wanted was a five-hundred-year old vacation, but he was an influential nation and couldn't possibly managed to gain such luxuries, so he buckled down his duties and listened to what his boss said. Dressing up was just a means of business, like everything else.

"Ah," America felt his body lurch forward until the arms wrapped around him tightened to steady his frame. He smiled softly and turned his head to see Germany had buried his face into his suited shoulder. "Ludwig, come one, gotta go."

"Stay," Germany asked. The older nation had sighed and leaned his chin on America's shoulder, looking at the nation in the mirror, blue eyes to blue eyes.

"Can't," America said, as if he were repeating something he had said earlier. Of course he'd want to. Laying in bed with Germany's buff arms wrapped around him was his kind of lazy day, but national duties called and so did his ride. "Tell ya what though." America turned around and smiled at his
lover. "Once I'm done I'll ask the boss for some leave time to spend with you. Sound good?"

That frown was ever present on the German's face and it continued to annoy America. But he still chuckled and he still leaned forward to steal a kiss—of which Germany returned in kind.

With a sigh America placed his hands of his hips and shook his head. "You had no qualms with me leaving before. Now shouldn't be any different."

"It's because you're going to him," Germany stated condescendingly. His tone lowered and America's mood went with it.

America understood that Germany and Russia weren't at the best of relational status—hadn't been for some time now. He doubted the two would ever get along, but as long as they weren't plunging themselves in any war then America saw their cold tension with one another as no threat to society or the world. They simply just couldn't remain in the same room with the other for very long, not that big of a problem to handle.

"Honestly, I don't think the visit with Russia will be as bad as some of the other assholes I stopped in on," America muttered, already remembering previous stops to other countries home to find them incredibly rude and hostile to already planned hosting's. America subconsciously straightened his tie out of a frustrated habit. He did not want his frown to be permanent, especially not in front of Russia. God knew that nation needed to smile more often—naturally of course.

"What is there to check?" Germany asked, sitting down on the side of the bed, his arms crossed, and a clear look of disapproval written all over his face—Germany was another nation who needed to smile more often. "You know he is mass producing missiles, even if he hides them we both know what he's up to."

"Still gotta go," America said. What the boss said goes. He then turned to Germany and chuckled. "And, besides, how do you know? Maybe everything is starting to settle down, even for a country like him." America caught Germany's scoff and he frowned at it. "Hey, we don't need any more wars—especially not in Europe . . . God knows what happened last time."

"There is no wrong in being prepared," Germany muttered out later.

America nearly gapped at the man and walked up closer to him. "What are you saying? You too? Do you realize how many goddamn excuses like that I've heard on my nuclear arms check tour?" Damn too many. "So, what, it's okay for you to say these things but if Russia or, or, fucking Iran says it then we flip out and try our damnedest to restrict their count? No, we all have to agree on these codes, Ludwig." America hadn't meant to get so political with his lover—it wasn't why he was there in the first place. He was just stopping by for a little break before hop skipping over to Russia's place—but he'd been seeing nations nonstop, checking in on their arsenal, speaking with their leaders, and running over policies. His mind was running on negotiations outlines and having Germany react like so had him reacting in similar to how he'd show himself in debates.

America saw Germany open his mouth, he was going to say something in return and another debate would start. Again, America hadn't wanted to start arguing with his boyfriend. However, a light smile adorned America's face when he saw Germany close his lips and shake his head, choosing to keep silent and refrain from arguing when it wasn't needed—at least not right now.

"Thanks, Ludwig," America said, reaching out and placing his hands on the man's shoulders. "I promise to get this visit done as quickly as possible and then come back. Sound good, yeah?"

Germany met his eyes, still keeping quiet. He nodded and offered America a short smile. The
younger nation wondered if the German was upset over his insistence that he still had to go and see Russia or the fact that he could not argue back during this time. Whatever it was didn't matter and so America leaned down and graced Germany with a farewell kiss.

"Wait up for me, 'kay?" America smiled and then pulled away, hoping to get this job of his done as quickly as possible.

Moscow, Russia. Not So Distant Future [?]

"Russia, shouldn't you give the orders to move these?"

The Slavic nation hadn't even minded to turn toward his boss who had addressed him. Instead, he simply continued his gaze at the impressive armament before him. Layer upon layer of missiles lay for the naked eye to bear witness to and he continually counted more to their stash.

He knew America and his delegates were coming. He knew why he was coming. Russia didn't care for him to see his build because he no longer concerned himself with the opinions of the world. Times were coming soon when it would be a necessity to have such stockpiles of weapons. World peace was just a faux fantasy of the humans and would never come to pass so long as there remained hostility in the world.

Russia would later give the order to move the amount of deadly weaponry to another facility, but right now he wanted to show them off if just to see a priceless reaction from a nation working so very hard to keep weapons out of the hands of perceived enemies like the ignorant fool he was.

"Nyet," Russia spoke. He didn't care what his boss said or even if he tried to so order him to obey him. The older nation was through with being pushed around and so took responsibility. He understood that if he did, the slightest thing that went wrong would be on his head, but Russia didn't mind having all of the blame right now. "Keep them around for a little longer." He then turned to leave the room. After all, he needed to find something nice to wear for the arrival of his awaited guest.

"But Amerika might see them," his boss complained.

Russia grinned. "Da, good. I want him to."

America hadn't graced Russia's home with a visit in a long while. The older nation was pleasantly excited to see what he thought of the place. He was certain that America wouldn't overlook the obvious buffed defenses and subtle signs of preparedness.

Russia's boss was too nervous to even be around the country when he came, and he constantly insisted that he try to sway the American delegates away from the obvious signs that could likely land them with more sanctions—not that they didn't have enough, and not that Russia concerned himself with in the least. So now it was just the two nations, and it was clear to see America's discomfort for his men leaving him to be swooned by Russia's politicians. There was a short wonder if America's upset in separation was due to his worry for his people to fall victim to Russia's men's clever tongues, or that the younger nation just didn't like being left alone in the same room with a nation of strained relations. It could be one or the other, but Russia would not push out the possibility of it being both.

"Why don't you have a seat, Amerika? You look much too tense for a visitor," Russia mentioned, himself seated just fine while his eyes continued to scan every little detail of the American. The boy had grown some, and looked ever beautiful by the day. It was nice to see him so close up and without his annoying haggle of so-called friends.
"This isn't casual, Russia."

Russia frowned. He didn't like the way America said his name. There was too much annoyance in the tone when Russia, himself, knew he had done nothing wrong to offend the younger country with. And the lack of eye contact was increasingly rude and disrespectful and annoying the older to no end.

America sighed. Russia even caught the weary slump in his shoulders as if his energy drained from him just through visiting this place. "Look, I've got other countries to visit and routinely check, can we just get this over with?" America finally met gazes with Russia and the older saw indeed that he was tired. He didn't like the sudden vitality in the younger nation depleting so often. The weight of the responsibilities of the world was really weighing down on him harder these days. As Russia expected it would. The title of sole world power was not meant to be given to mere children—not on their own at least.

Russia maintained his grin and nodded while he stood. "Da, very well. Come with me."

The walk to the warehouse gave them both enough time for small chat, though Russia really wouldn't know on what topic to start with. America, however, turned to routine and began with a speech likely been recited to countless others he had visited previously.

"My thanks for letting me and my delegates visit and continue our check. Your cooperation along with the rest of the world will be noted and rightly appreciated."

Russia thought about shutting the American up with a quip of his own, but again, he had nothing to say. Instead he let the sound of the trucks transporting his arms from the warehouse draw America's attention away from the recital and toward the curiously risen activity around him. There were soldiers, labor men, as well as a few high ranking officials that Russia knew America recognized. Even when the younger nation had slowed to a stop to take in the activity around him Russia had not halted in wait for America to catch up, he continued his way toward the warehouse where he had planned to lead America from the start of this visit.

It wasn't long before America caught back up to him, nor was it a surprise when America's forward questions began pushing at Russia for a response.

"What is going on?" America asked. Russia could hear the unsettle in his tone. America was still an ever smart nation. Russia was certain he had already figured out the meaning behind the sights. "Russia!" America pressed again. He had stomped right behind him to call the Russian's attention, but Russia had just reached the locked door and had finished entering in the code. Slowly, he turned toward America, his face emotionless. America would have to call back his inner decoder to figure out what Russia was thinking.

"Let us 'get this over with,' da?" Russia smiled once more and then pushed open the door, entering inside first. America was quick to follow him and the look on the boy's face was amusing; just the expression Russia had been expecting.

"W-W-What is all of this?" America was at a loss for the right words. Russia knew it was now obvious in what America was beholding. He needn't explain himself.

The warehouse was still stocked full with missiles and arms for war. Currently the pile was in the process of securer transportation and the work going back and forth shocked America when it really shouldn't have.

Russia thought about saying something, but he simply smiled, thoroughly enjoying America's silence
and that wide-eyed shock on his face. He watched the nation's movements closely, watched America take a few steps forward when his eyes scanned over every missile and destructive device. America knew exactly what they were and Russia knew for certain he'd probably even be able to name the models—after all, the great United States of America was the father of such a devastating weapon.

"What . . ." America turned to Russia, his complexion paler than Russia previously remembered. Had the sight of this all really unnerved America that much? "What have you done?"

"What ever do you mean?" Russia asked, feigning confusion much to the visible annoyance of the younger country. Russia chuckled and motioned the entire expanse of the stocked warehouse with his hand. "You wanted a weapons check and I offered to show you. There they are. Impressive, aren't they?"

"You . . . you . . ." America's eyes constantly scanned the mounting missiles as if he were hallucinating and glancing over toward them once more would make them vanish. Sadly, it did not. He eventually snarled and when he finally turned to Russia again that mean look that Russia hadn't seen since their first Cold War flared up across his features. Well, that brought back memories for certain. "You're completely insulting the purpose of this visit!"

America addressed Russia as if he should be in the wrong. The older nation snickered at the idea and decided to remind the Western country that he too was just as sharp-minded.

"And what exactly is the purpose of these visits, Amerika? To come barging into our homes as if it is your territory and to look into our closets hoping we have put blankets on all of our skeletons? Nyet, I do not think so." Russia smirked when America's face grew red with frustration. His eyes glanced down to see America's hands clenched, and the fists shaking at his sides. He wondered if the boy would hit him. Russia wondered if it would hurt. "Do you think that just because you saw nothing while visiting them that there was nothing there?" Russia frowned at America's naivety. He shouldn't be so stupid. Russia knew America was far smarter than that and so his sheer idiocy in this present time disgusted him. "Nyet, I will not lie to you. Go ahead, look at it all. This is my power and I am preparing more. They are being moved to safer locations, da, but they will not vanish."

"So, what, do you plan on starting fucking World War Three?!" America was purely outraged. Russia knew it would have been better had the Western nation seen nothing, but Russia was tired of lying to people—especially to America. No more. He promised himself that he'd curl his words no more. Not when there would likely not be enough time to reconcile. After all, World War III was meant to end the world as they knew it, and Russia would no longer turn a blind eye to its coming like the rest of the insolate nations.

"Starting?" Russia questioned and then shook his head. "Nyet, just preparing for it. Which you should as well, Amerika."

"You're fucking insane!" America said and he turned on his heel, ready to march out of the warehouse and return to his people to issue consequences for what he had just witnessed.

"Go ahead and run off like the little baby you are." That stopped the American before he reached the door, though he still hadn't turned back to face Russia. Russia's teeth grinded together for a moment, absolutely upset with America's idiotic attitude to all of this. Russia had done no wrong and threatened no one. "You know you can't hide from this pending catastrophe forever." Russia huffed, straightening his form and trying his damndest to get America to see to his reasoning. "You may want to neglect the idea that this war is coming, but the other nations have not. They all smile at you while behind their backs they give signals to their manufacturers to double their weapons distribution. China, Iran, India, Israel . . . even Germany."
The mention of America's lover turned him toward Russia. America's lips were pressed together tightly in upset as well as to keep his tongue in an argument that could escalate nastily. But Russia was glad he finally had America's attention again.

"I know you know this, Amerika . . ." Russia's frown then deepened. "Or have you truly become the fool the entire world sees you as."

America's head bowed slightly. His jaw moved, a gesture he was far beyond upset. When his eyes closed tight and nostril flared to let out fuming breath, Russia understood he was trying to calm himself before saying or doing something he perceived as unnecessary.

"Why . . . are you telling me this . . . Russia?" America finally straightened. He opened his eyes and looked at Russia with all the seriousness he could muster in such a fragile moment. He was searching for answers in Russia's eyes and the older tried his hardest to bare it all before America; just to show him he was no longer going to hide from him.

"Because I have no longer reason to lie . . . especially not to you," Russia answered. A small smile quirked at the corner of his lips for a moment before his eyes turned back toward the missiles. "I have finally decided that enough was enough. There is no more reason to keep secrets . . . or to break hearts." He glanced back toward America whom he noticed was oddly solemnly quiet. He was listening; Russia could see America was listening to him and his anger was waning in the light of the situation. "There just isn't enough time for all of that nonsense anymore."

There was a short silence. Russia would have thought America had left if he could not feel him still present. When the boy spoke, Russia turned his gaze to him. It seemed America was having trouble accepting all Russia had just informed him, or making sense of it all.

"You really . . . want the world to end, don't you?" America looked sad, as if he had tried so hard in a task, pouring his heart and soul into the labor he built up, only to fail in the end—and miserably so.

"I can promise you this that I will not be the first to press the button," Russia assured—Russia swore. America could ease his presumptions.

America frowned. "But all of this . . . it will make everyone else—"

"It cannot make the other nations act in stride when they have their own stocks they are currently building. I know," Russia stated with a sure nod.

"Damn it, I forbid this world from ending!" America shouted. But Russia saw through his tantrum and took his expulsion of attitude with learned experience. America wasn't upset, he was simply frightened . . . as they all were.

"It is hard to come to terms with the truth," Russia said. "But, it is better to handle the end with a mature attitude. You'll be the first to fall if you act so immaturesly." Yes, the end was definitely a bet to see who lasts the longest. Russia could care less if he survives for years after the war or perishes in the first strikes, but he wanted America to remain strong and defiant and beautiful . . . he wanted him to be the last, and Russia knew he could not possibly be if he turned a blind eye to the obvious signs around him.

"There. Will. Be. No. War." America looked determined and sure in his statement. Of course if the United States of America so said, then it so would be.

Russia should have let him go. America seemed happy in his ignorance and Russia really shouldn't have cared. Yet he wanted the younger nation to see reason. He wanted America to open his eyes
and stop acting like such a goddamn fool.

"Do you enjoy listening to the closed-mindedness coming out of yourself?" Russia questioned. He was frustrated, more so upset that America did not believe him, and that he was simply running himself into the ground when Russia knew he could—should—hold his ground better than that. "Or do you care nothing for your allies, wishing they turn a blind eye to the foretold events so they may perish first. Hm, you never were loyal to anyone but yourself."

That seemed to tick America quite nicely. That frown on his face deepened and his eyes darkened in tone as well as narrowed.

"Don't you dare accuse me of lacking any fealty to my friends," America warned, his tone even deeper in underlined and audible threat.

Russia chuckled to mask his bubbling upset over past betrayals. "If you can leave a partner in bed then you can leave a measly ally oceans apart."

"Don't," America said, trying to stop this argument from getting any more personal than what he wanted to deal with. Hm, too bad.

Russia simply rolled his shoulders and played an air of aloofness. Unlike America, Russia wasn't afraid to handle issues pertaining to personal affairs because even national personifications had to deal with them, and it was best to settle them before they ate away at your soul just like this certain issue was doing to Russia and America.

"What? I am just giving you proof of your unfaithfulness." Russia's lips quirked into a small smile at the sight of America's attempt to distract himself from where this conversation was going. The younger nation's eyes kept glancing anywhere but to Russia's form. How like him to dance around an issue that needed justification.

In truth, Russia's statement could go either way, political or personal. It was up to America on where to carry the topic. Even if he detoured it's destination to the national issues of the world, Russia still found his heart seeping with hurt from remembering holding America that day and the younger holding him just as tight. Having America force him away was hard on him and nearly broke him hadn't his frail organ been strengthened through synchronizing with America's heart. But when America later ran to Germany's bed and ignored the connection that they had created in Alaska, that had set a bitterness inside Russia that he still felt to that day.

But he knew that if America would admit how wrong he was and how much he still cared for Russia, which the older nation had suspected he did, then all would be forgiven indefinitely.

While Russia expected the superpower to blurt out his reasons why he'd always remain loyal to his friends and why they would return the devotion, he had not, however, expected what America shouted back.

"I waited for you!" America looked beyond frustrated, and the slight glisten in his eyes was a curious thing even in Russia's sudden speechless state. Continually the younger nation tried to heighten his posture, but his body trembled with quivering upset. "You can't just accuse me of leaving you—"

"North Korea, Vietnam . . . Germany . . ." Russia was tired of America's excuses and bullshit. This time he would not let him get away from the responsibilities for his actions and choices. Russia was beyond fed up with the U.S. "You constantly sought a slut to warm your bed . . . until you became one yourself."
Russia's words bit into America and the younger nation visibly flinched by them. There was some small satisfaction from the reaction, but Russia kept silent after the remark, quite uncertain if he was glad seeing the conviction in America's irises or if he was hurt by the obvious distress in his spirit. There was a show of shame—or at least Russia assumed to see this—and now America began to shift uncomfortably from one foot to another.

Russia assumed America would turn and run off, like usual. The door was still right behind America. Just a push would open it. All America had to do was simply turn away.

But he didn't. America, instead, seemed to grow upset suddenly and when he looked at Russia the older had been surprised that he pierced his gaze with his own, revealing so many hidden emotions that Russia had suspected to reside there.

"The loneliness killed me, Ivan!" Russia was surprised America had called him by his human name. In that moment America didn't seem to understand what he had done and just continued on his rant. "Before, I had waited, remained celibate in hopes that you'd come to realize how evil communism was and how it was ruining you." America breathed out a frustrated breath and grit his teeth as if the mere memory of it all pained him. "Damn it, I wanted your economy to fail, your people to fucking starve just so they'd get angry and oust your psychotic leaders!" In that pause America's breathing eased, his limbs fell back to his sides lifeless, and his lips even managed to arch into such a sad disappointed smile. "But . . . my hopes were dashed . . . time and time again." America's speech softened and his words began pacing from the other. "When I saw you again after World War Two I even tried reaching out to you, telling you I was available, that I had waited . . . for you . . . but even then you wouldn't listen to me. I was heartbroken, looking for love." America frowned, his eyes once again turning back to Russia's. "So of course I looked for others."

Russia didn't believe America . . . at least he didn't want to. He understood that America had seen no one else until after the Second World War, but when did he even attempt to reach out to Russia? When did he ever make known his availability to Russia? Lies, it had to all be lies.

"Even after Vietnam . . . I waited for you," America admitted, his eyes falling down whether in regret or shame. But once more his temper got the better of him and he was showing his upset from the missed opportunities of the past. He looked back at Russia, his glare almost accusing. "Damn it, Russia, I wanted to court you again after the union collapsed." It was interesting how a chuckle bubbled out of America's throat even after the upsetting outburst. With a sigh America rose his hand and rubbed his eyes from underneath his glasses. "I guess I didn't put myself out as much as I should have. Fine, I understand it was my fault for that mistake." America laughed again, a stutter in the laugh alerted Russia to the boy's dampening spirits. "I would have said, 'yes,' in a heartbeat if you would have asked me . . ." The frown finally set in over the disappointment of lost opportunities. "But I grew tired of waiting. It's not easy to remain so isolated like this. I didn't know if you still desired me like I had you . . . and Germany . . ." Russia was disgusted to see a smile form on America's lips at the mention of the damn bastard of a nation. "He made me feel wanted when I was going through a self-loathing phase. And now he's helping me forget the ugly past."

What lies has America made himself believe? "But it wasn't ugly, Alfred," Russia dejected to the younger nation's negative view of the past—of their past. "It was beautiful." Both nations were surprised when Russia called America by his human name, but he only saw it fair when America saw it fit to call him by his own when no permission was given. "And we don't have to look back in our memories just to long for them again if we make everything right in the present."

Russia tried to smile, as well as tried to reach out and touch America. It was his desire for a long time; just to press any part of himself against America, to touch him and feel the warmth of his skin against his own, but instantly America had backed away, finding their forms too close. His back hit
the door and his face turned to dodge the feather-light touch of Russia's fingertips. Russia frowned at the reaction and let his hand fall away slowly in disappointment to another rejection from the one he always sought approval from.

"No." How Russia hated that word that always seemed to come out of America's mouth. "I'm with Germany now, and he makes me happy." America wouldn't even look at Russia as if he didn't want to acknowledge his presence even when the older nation was standing right in front of him.

"But I can too," Russia promised. He could make America a hundred times happier than that damn kraut.

Russia then motioned toward the fortifications around them and the impressive array of armament. "I would give you all of this, allow you to take shelter here if you could just come back to me." Russia's anger erupted then and he slammed his fist next to America, his knuckles crunching and bending the metallic frame of the door America had pressed himself against. America hadn't even jumped at the sudden aggressive action. "Damn it, you gave yourself to me!" It wasn't fair that America was not in his arms, not by his side. It wasn't fair that America use all of these fucking excuses when he was meant for Russia and they both could feel it.

"That was an accident," America informed.

Russia didn't know if he wanted to let his anger flare more over the statement or to laugh. He settled for the latter.

"Don't you lie to me, Amerika. I know when you're lying," Russia said, shaking his head with a forced smile. "You pressed into my arms just as much as I knowingly embraced you."

America still wouldn't look at him. Those golden brows crashed into the other and his eyelids squeezed shut as if to keep out all elements, sight and sound, everything. Russia knew his words didn't move others as some persons had the ability to, and so he let his soul reach out and brush against America's spirit, letting him feel him and remember him.

"Our souls fused. Mistakes cannot bring about the bonding of two nations," Russia explained, pressing his physical form close as he did his spirit, letting America know he meant him no harm to him and never would. All he wanted was America to trust him again, to come back to him and to love him again like he had once upon a time. "I know you feel the same. I know it." Russia rose his hand to his chest to feel his heart. Already he could feel the emotions seeping out of America's being into his own, filling his chest with feelings now consensually shared. "You feel it right here don't you?"

Russia then decided to try reaching out to America again. This time, instead of trying to caress his fingers alongside his face he pressed his palm to America's sternum and marveled in the way that strong heart of his thumped under his palm in the same rhythm as his own. Their connection still held despite their tragic separation, and it made Russia smile even in his sadness over their circumstances.

"Alfred." Russia wondered if he had said the nation's name verbally or spiritually. It didn't matter. All that was important was that America was looking at him again and now Russia felt that he could actually speak to the younger nation and that he would listen. "Why did you push me away?"

Through their connection Russia understood that America hadn't wanted to. His confusion heightened when he clung so close to Germany afterwards and it had Russia questioning the connection he knew he felt form with America, but now that they stood before one another, their close proximity fed the other with silent answers too hard to speak with the mouth and tongue. Russia could feel it. He could feel America's hurt, his regret, and his sorrow for what he had done.
Russia internally heard America's apologies even in the visible silence of the nation standing before him, unmoving. Russia would forgive him. He would forgive America if he would just come back to him.

"Come back to me," Russia pleaded softly. His spirit reached out to America's, brushing his and soon engulfing him with all of the tenderness he was still capable of. America was Russia's mate and the older would not lose him to any other. "Let me embrace you again. Give me the chance to show you love once more." Russia knew only he could give America the love he deserves. All others he sought warmth from, their embrace would fall short.

Russia felt his heart speed up. For sure he knew it was America's own picking up pace. Oh how Russia wanted to kiss the boy again.

Russia's hand rose, cupping America's strong jaw. His other hand joined and then he leaned forward. The moment his nose brushed against America's he felt his body shake. Russia would have thought it was trembling with anticipation, but he took notice of the disturbance in the boy's persona.

"Don't."

Russia blinked. His eyes had lowered to America's parted lips when they then rose back to look into America's eyes, but the western nation was no longer looking at him. Those blue eyes were glancing down and away, trying to prevent mistakes—or mending.

"Please," Russia heard America whisper so softly despite how close they were to the other. "Please don't make me do this."

The clarity in everything America said was simply enlightening to Russia. Before they had tangled their bodies and spirits, Russia had felt he was the best country to look into America's mind to understand what he said or why he did what he did, but now . . . now it was so clear. Russia knew that if he should press for it then America would fall into his arms and consent love to be made again between the two of them. But even still, Russia understood why America was fought with this shared connection of theirs so desperately to resist.

America was trying to remain faithful to Germany.

Russia frowned. While all he wanted to do was to take America in his arms and kiss his breath away while the world fell to pieces, all America could think about was his fidelity to a nation who was not meant to be his lover. Russia hated it and his anger spiked, forcing America to look back at him out of the feel of Russia's unsettled aura darkening.

"You wish to remain loyal to him?" Russia growled out. His hand threatened to wrap around America's pretty little throat. He hadn't done that in some time. "Germany deserves no respect from you. Not when he too is lying to you while bulking up arms in preparation."

Russia pulled away. He paced in front of America before he could stand the look of him no longer. He turned from him, focusing his eyes on the arms clogging the building they stood in.

"Go to him," Russia said. It was time for America to finish his duties in his home anyway. "Go to him and see for yourself. But when you know the truth know that when you can find an honest ally no longer my home will always be a place where you can rest and recover from the shortcomings of the world."

For a moment America hadn't moved when Russia expected him to suddenly turn and leave him. So his remained presence let Russia's mind wander to a time when there was no tension between them
or the world around them. A world where Russia could lay he and America down in a field full of sunflowers just to gaze up at a blue, blue sky. Was that too much of a thing to want?

"Would you . . . come back to me . . . if you let go of him?" Russia questioned. If he was perhaps second in America's heart then maybe he could take ease in knowing he'd only have to wait a little longer.

Russia heard a shuffling behind him. America was moving and opening the door to leave.

"I won't be able to cling to no one if we're all dead!" Those were America's final words. He slammed the door behind him quite hard, the sound echoed throughout the warehouse even amidst the work going to and from the building. Still, Russia couldn't help but chuckle and nod his head. Perhaps America was right.

Berlin, Germany. Not So Distant Future [?]

The day had really turned out to be a good day. Germany had a positive meeting with his boss about domestic figures, afterwards he met with his brothers at a bar and shared a few ales of beer. It had been a nice reunion with all of them, especially when not a single fight broke out. After that he headed home early to walk his dogs. He had just finished their miles walk and filled up their water bowls when he heard a knock on his door.

He answered it in kind, his smile only broadening when he saw his lover standing on his doorstep. Today could not have been more perfect. Now, all Germany wanted to do was embrace America and squeeze him and kiss him before pulling him inside to dash off to the bedroom to make love to end the most perfect day of Germany's life. He knew America wouldn't have any objections to such a fairytale ending and so he hadn't even taken a proper intake of America's appearance or expression when he habitually leaned in and puckered his lips for one hell of a kiss.

The slap to the face certainly was an eye-opener as well as a mood killer. His perfect day had definitely been ruined by his soaring confusion and stinging cheek.

"You son of a bitch!" Even the venom in America's tone deflated Germany's risen spirits. "How dare you lie to me, you bastard!"

America looked furious. He was shaking his arms he had been so angry. His eyes were narrowed and he looked to Germany as if he were ready for an all-out brawl.

Germany's confusion heightened by this show of aggression. He had to quickly dig into his brain to understand what could possibly be wrong with the superpower. It was then he realized that America had just returned from his visit to see Russia. The mere thought of the older conniving nation infuriated him, and his features quickly began to visibly show his internal upset.

"You're back from Russia's? What did he say to you?" Germany quickly recovered from the strike and straightened his form, his own aura clashing with America's threatening one if only to press him to find a reason for this upset.

"He told me enough," America bit back, coming close enough to bump chests with Germany. His hard eyes were dark compared to Germany's, but both stared the other down with equal upset. "You know when I went to check his home, guess what I found?" There was only a short pause before America blurted out, "Missiles, hundreds upon thousands of fucking missiles!"

Germany would say he was surprised, but he really wasn't. What did throw him off stance was the fact that Russia consensually revealed his stock to America. Germany had expected the Russian to
hide his weapons. It was reasonable that one did, just to keep America unaware so he wouldn't concern or harass. Why did Russia . . .?

"And you know who else was mass producing these weapons?" America asked, but again he hardly gave Germany the time to think of a decent guess or response. "You, ya bastard! You fucking lied to me. I went to thoroughly look myself after Russia told me you had them and, sure enough, I found them." America crossed his arms, his face completely unhappy with everything. "You escorted me yourself to prove you weren't hyping for some goddamn war to end all wars. You lied!"

A time when the United States of America trusted the nation of Russia more than the country of Germany was not a good sign in relational status.

"Enough!" Germany didn't want to raise his voice but he feared America wouldn't let him get a word in this accusation if he hadn't pushed his way into it. After his blurt there was a silence, it gave Germany enough time to collect his thoughts and calm his temper. He was not upset with America, more so at Russia for twisting him to his will.

Finally, Germany decided to remain the better man. When he looked at America his eyes softened and a small smile graced his lips. Reaching out he touched the livid nation's shoulder.

"Now, Alfred," Germany began, but, as if his hand was like a heated iron, America flinched away, his eyes narrowing even more with anger.

"Don't you touch me!" America bit out. The younger nation was upset, incredibly so.

Germany frowned. "This is not fair, Alfred. When I am upset you brush it off, but when you are upset you look to imprison me for war crimes."

"There's a difference in what I do compared to what you do," America clarified with a hard laugh, both nations remembering the scandals back in the early millennium. "Yes, I go about things a little differently, but it's because I want to protect, not start a damn apocalypse!"

"I am protecting!" Germany shot back, his eyes widening with frustration that America was not understanding. "I'm doing this to protect you!"

America gapped and in no way looked like he believed Germany. "Protect me?" America scoffed. "Ludwig, having that many weapons will cause a panic and entice triggers!"

"Having any less will result in annihilation!" Germany reasoned back. He understood that America wanted to keep the peace, but Germany knew, he always knew when war was close. He needed to be ready, and so did America. "What are you going to do, Alfred, put sanctions on me? For what? I swore I would never harm you. Russia's trying to turn us against each other, can't you see that?"

America rolled his eyes and glanced away. He didn't leave. He just stood there bouncing on his feet in his upset.

"I'm just so upset that you let him control you," Germany continued. That seemed to tick the American substantially.

America's eyes turned back to Germany in a second. They were harsh, and his frown deepened. "He's used to it," America excused. "But it seems like after you became a power again that's all you ever wanted to do; control others, control me." America's arms dropped and he leaned forward on his sole closer to Germany. "Love how you hate Russia so much. I wonder how you treat yourself since you're so much like him!"
With that America decided to turn and leave. Germany was offended. He was upset with being compared to that Slavic bastard, but more so at America giving up on him so quickly without letting him have a chance to properly explain himself and the reasons behind his mass armament.

"Alfred? Alfred!" Germany called out to him, but America did not turn around or stop. He continued his way down the path and when he got to the gate he reached up to push it open.

Germany was quick to rush after him. He couldn't let America go, especially not after all of this misunderstanding of intentions. He wouldn't lose his lover to Russia's lies. God knew what would happen if America suddenly pushed away from Germany and broke their courtship. This was what Russia wanted. This was all that bastard's fault!

"Alfred!" Germany called again, inwardly thanking that America had paused in his exit through the gate. He was motionless, his back still turned to Germany, and his hands gripping the gate bars.

"Alfred, come now, don't be mad at me. At least come inside and share a drink." Germany reached out and gently touched the younger nation's shoulders, minding his temper. "We've always found reason between our disputes. I see no reason why we can't now."

Germany tried to offer a smile. He knew how much America enjoyed those expressions. But America would not turn to him. Germany had wanted to press again for America to turn around and come inside with him when he noticed America's body trembling. When America leaned forward, Germany's eyes widened at the sight of blood drip out of America's mouth.

Germany wanted to press closer in immediate concern but he took a step back when America finally turned. The nation looked out of breath. He looked weak, and he looked extremely pale. More so he looked horrified.

One hand rose and touched the blood dripping out of his mouth, his hands shaking like the rest of his body. Wide blue eyes then met Germany's scared irises. What . . . ?

"L-Ludwig?" Germany watched a trail of blood seep out past America's nostril right before the younger collapsed.

Germany gasped. He lunged forward and caught America's frame before he crashed to the ground. Germany shook with fright just as much as America's convulsing body. What was happening?! What was wrong?!

"Alfred!" Germany cried out, his arms tightening around the nation who had his hands raised, looking at the blood painting his palms—his own blood. Germany's never seen such horror in the superpower's eyes. When America looked up at him Germany gapped at the sight of America's skin burning. He was being attacked . . . he was . . .

This was it. America had been struck by devastating missiles. Millions of his people were dying. But, if they all died then America would be no more. No, Germany could not let that happen.

The broken image of America in his arms, feeling the devastation that Japan had so long ago . . . it haunted Germany and his mind worked to determine on who was responsible. The fear of losing America right then and there, in his arms, tormented Germany and in his fright the image of one of his longest spanned enemies conjured into his mind.

Germany snarled. His eyes blinking away tears to glare in hatred for the bastard on who his blame was being placed right then. Russia was the easiest target right now, as well as a reasonable suspect.

A thick gurgle pulled Germany's attention back down to the burning nation in his arms. More blood
began to flow past America's lips, slipping out of the corner of his mouth and dripping down his cheek and off his ear. Once bright vibrant eyes dulled, but they remained focused on Germany, wide and trembling.

"Lud—" America spat up a considerable amount of blood—the substance flowed like water—the splatter staining Germany's shirt and spotting his clean face. "Ludwig, don't." America spat up more blood the harder he tried to urge in his damaged state. "Please." America choked again, heaving out his pain. But his eyes still pleaded with Germany to not act on his rising anger. "Ludwig . . ."

Germany couldn't hear a word America was saying now. All he recognized was the growing wound, burns on America's skin stretching up his neck and across his face while he struggled to breathe with blood filling his lungs and esophagus. Germany never wanted to see America like this. He had heard him gravely wounded before, but this was much more horrible. He cringed at the way the younger nation shook in his arms, making his own body shake in fright and distraught.

Germany's lips trembled and now he could finally feel tears slip over his cheeks. This day had been perfect, without a complaint in the world, and even when America showed up in anger Germany hadn't realized what would happen in the end. Ruined, everything was ruined; the day, the month, the year, the world . . . America.

Germany knew, he just knew, America would be the first to be struck. This was why he bulked up. This was why he hid them from America, because if America would not fire back then he sure as hell would!

Shifting America closer to his chest, Germany freed an arm to reach into his pocket and pull out his phone to contact his command center. He didn't care what his boss would say or his highest generals. He had the final say in this life-deciding decision.

Germany's eyes darted down to America in his arms. He was wheezing, looking up at Germany. The older nation thought he caught sight of superpower trying to shake his head. Those eyes of his were wide and his mouth continually opened and closed to try to staunch the blood flow so he could speak.

"No!" America finally managed to cry out. His shaking hands reached up and grasped Germany's blood-stained shirt. "N-o!" America's eyes fluttered, Texas began slipping down his face from the slick blood continuing to coat his skin. He looked faint, but he continued to stare up at Germany as he made the order.

Germany was crying. He was shaking when he dropped his phone and embraced America with both arms, holding him close.

"This was why," Germany gasped out the moment sirens began piercing the air, the sound of them still so terrifying. "Look what he did to you, Alfred!"

America cried to himself, his tears seeping into his radioactive blood went unnoticed by Germany just like his pleas to retain peace. Perhaps the others were right . . . in the end there would be no words to save peace. Peace has fleded earth and now the main concern besides question of personal survival was if the planet, itself, would survive such devastation, because certainly her inhabitants would not.

Moscow, Russia. Not So Distant Future [?]

Russia's taste for vodka was waning. He didn't know why. He was currently staring at a nearly full bottle, himself only drunken two glassfulls. He was swirling the clear liquid in his third glass-pour
just staring at it as if finally realizing this weak substance couldn't solve all of the problems he had hoped it would.

Russia chuckled to himself, wondering what America was doing at the moment. That little boy tried his best to save the world when it had already been doomed from the start. No, Russia didn't think there would be any saving the planet.

Even still Russia had hopes that America would see it pointless to hold onto contracts and oaths. The world was ending, even Russia made sure to clarify that in the superpower's brain, so why not spend what little time they all had in oblivious happiness? Russia would like to fade with a smile on his face. Every nation has thought of their end and finally . . . Russia had figured out what he wanted.

Russia wanted to hold onto America when the world crumbled around them. He wanted to kiss his lips and feel the younger press back into him. He wanted to know America still loved him and would not leave him as his soul entwined with Russia's as it had on that day in Alaska.

It would be frightening; in the end. Even Russia was nervous about finally meeting it. But he was certain, so very certain, that if he could have his hero standing beside him and holding him up then Russia could fade with a smile. He'd long since forgotten how to retain such expressions emotionally and he had hoped that America would help ignite that memory so they could both pass peacefully. It was what Russia wanted more than anything right now.

His isolated loneliness was striking him in the heart and he knew it was because of the constant pull of his and America's connection. Before, Russia could easily feel the younger nation's heart, his thoughts and emotions, now their connection was so stretched that Russia had a hard time telling if his own heart beat with hurt or if the feeling came from America's damaged organ.

Pressing the glass to his lips Russia decided this would be the last drink. The moment the burning liquid touched his mouth he lurched forward. His elbows struck the counter of the small bar he was seated at in his home before pulling back and choking for air.

After he finally regained his senses his eyes took in the sight of his glass. It was filled with red. Russia put the cup down and reached up to touch his mouth. Sure enough when he pulled his fingers away to see the damage he saw evidence of an internal wound. The shock had kept Russia from feeling anything for a moment before he lurched forward again.

Russia's body shook, his arm flailing and swiping the bottles of alcohol off of the bar counter. Its loud shatter echoed across his dark home as well as Russia's grunts of cries he tried so desperately to hold inside.

Belgorod and Voronezh were gone; Russia could feel it. Their burning frames clawed up his body and ripped into his skin. The blood spewing from his mouth came from the countless lives lost in the blink of an eye.

Russia's bloodshot eyes took in the sight of his shaking limbs, but he held himself against the counter trying with all his might to remain strong and upheld. When he finally managed to catch his breath, of what he could, he leaned his head down and rested. The feel of his body burning inside was horrific. Russia's muscles twitched from the strike and his mouth opened in want to cry out, but Russia held his voice back . . . because he had promised he would when this happened.

He certainly hadn't expected this to come about so soon, but he would not face the surprise as if it was new to him. He ached and his heart bled. Losing so many people killed him inside and he felt weak. His knees buckled and he almost tumbled to the ground hadn't he clenched his fists and locked his elbows on top of the counter to hold himself up.
Tears pricked Russia's eyes from the searing pain. His consciousness nearly faded but even in such a state it did nothing to deter him from smiling and welcoming in the long-awaited end. Oh how long Russia's waited to fade into nonexistence.
In the end everything burned. While allies clung to the strong in the beginning for self-preservation, in
the end they sought to destroy them, seeing them as the threat they possibly were... and possibly weren’t. Such was the chaos of the foretold World War Three.

So many people died. So many a nation was snuffed out. Trees shriveled, ground cracked, and the seas receded.

The planet in all her fertile glory was a complete wasteland now with but a little life still left in her. Of what she had she tried her best to nurture the survivors, whether they be fauna or flora. No one expected her to make it. So many sat down, still, and watched their lives disperse from the very core of the world.

Alaska, USA. The End.

Germany bit back the pain rising in his chest, as if he hadn’t felt worse. All he could focus on right now was getting to the place he was told to go. The weight in his arms was in turn pulling him down and all he wanted to do was sit and rest. But he refused, knowing that if he stopped, that if he slunk to the heated ground, that he’d lose all his strength and that his heart would stop and that he’d... he’d...

“Almost there,” Germany said aloud. He blinked away the burning tears in his eyes, stinging more than usual from the atmosphere around him. He was somewhat glad to be pushing vegetation aside that now corroded his path. He hadn’t seen anything green in a while and feared he’d never get the chance to lay his eyes on the hue again.

Stalk after stalk he pushed aside before he tripped. Germany cursed himself for losing footing. And sure enough, as soon as he hit the ground he felt the last of his strength leave him. He was exhausted, he was depleted, he was...

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,” Germany mumbled out. It was hard to speak with such a dry throat. He was thirsty, but nothing could quench him in a land full of heat and radiation.

His breath left him, which surprised the German more so than anything else. For sure he had thought he’d have nothing left in his lungs. But he existed still, just long enough to reach out and take the most precious thing to him in his arms.

“Alfred,” came Germany’s hoarse whisper. Germany looked down at the country with such sad eyes. America the Beautiful... reduced to this. No, this wasn’t what Germany wanted to remember in the end.

Slowly, Germany’s bloodied fingertips trailed over America’s face. Gently he pressed against burnt skin and splattered blood splotches, always trying his best to wipe him clean so he could look his finest when the time came. His fingers stopped just underneath America’s eyes—they were closed—and Texas was gone... had been for a long time.

Germany never wanted to take his eyes off of America, but always hated to look down at him because of his constant fear of his state. America had long since lost all of his impressive strength. Germany had been the one to have to carry him if just to get anywhere.
Giving heavier pressure, Germany prayed America would feel his touch and open his eyes. He did, but those dull blue irises did not look at him—they had yet to focus on anything for a while now.

“A-Are we here?” America sounded worse than Germany, his voice so soft, so light. His body shivered when he tried to speak, using up what little energy he had in the process put so much stress on his wounded physique.

Germany nodded and tried to offer a kind of smile for America, though the site of his cracked lips was less than pleasing. Germany was America’s eyes for now. “Ja,” Germany answered. He then pulled on a stock and let its touch brush against America’s skin, hoping the younger could still feel something.

The sight of America smiling lifted a weight off of Germany’s shoulder, and his heart eased at the observation of America reaching his hand up and taking hold of the stalk himself, caressing the leaves and then stroking the stem before reaching up and gliding over golden petals. Germany said nothing to keep the moment. He was content in America’s appeasement.

While Germany wished to keep his eyes on America his gaze did wander just in sheer wonder of what lay around them. They were in a field of sunflowers. America had told him, before he lost all ability to walk, that he wanted to go to his old state of Alaska to see the sunflowers once again—the ones he had planted in numerous array near an old national home.

What was left of the vegetation on the earth now looked far worse for wear. Germany looked on in amazement to how these flowers managed to survive the fallout. But, he didn’t question their resilience anymore. He was simply glad they remained to make America happy in the end.

Germany glanced back down toward America just in time to see him press his nose into the disk of the flower and inhale its essence. Though America’s eyes were focused on it there was a look of nostalgia in those dull irises.

“This brings back memories,” America said as he nuzzled into the large blossom. “Takes me back to my youth . . . what better times.”

Germany’s smiles were really hurting him now, but he held them just for America.

“But . . . right now . . . is fine too,” America remarked while playing with the petals and sometimes plucking a few off.

The distress and distraught of it all—of their situations, their conditions, of the world around them—all of it caught up to Germany and he finally burst.

“How could you say that?!” Germany’s entire body began to shake if only from the physical stress his body was dealing with and the emotional distraught engulfing him. “There’s nothing left, Alfred. . . nothing.” Germany promised himself he wouldn’t cry in front of America, but he did. Everything was gone; their friends, their family, their lives. It can’t come back to them. This was it, and the final thing to do was fade away just like the others.

Germany’s eyes fluttered closed from the immense burning and he briefly wondered if he’d ever open them again—or if he wanted to. But when he felt the touch of America’s palm against his cheek, the feeling stilled his trembling body and opened his sealed eyes once again to look at America. To Germany’s surprise, America was looking at him—actually looking at him.

“Because I’m with you,” America answered.

For a moment Germany paused his troubles. For a moment the world stopped turning. For a moment
he forgot his bodily aches and pains. For a moment he basked in the still heightened affection he carried for America so deep in his heart despite its currently damaged state.

Germany wished America could still not see around him, so that he could not see the tears slipping down Germany’s burned cheeks. They stung on their way down over ruined skin. Their feel much different than when he had shed the last of them.

Reaching up, Germany pressed his hand against America’s pressing palm and held his touch against his face. He turned his face and kissed that calloused palm before rubbing his tear-stained cheek against the younger nation’s hand again.

“Then I am happy too,” Germany agreed with a short nod. He tried to smile for America, he really did, but when his lips pulled up they hurt and too quickly fell to the quivers of Germany’s mouth. Sobs threatened to bubble up out of his throat, and Germany could find no more strength to halt them.

“I can’t express how thankful I am for you to . . .” America’s voice dropped and Germany felt the nation in his arms physically lose any more strength in his arm. Germany had to catch the younger nation’s hand when it fell and now he held on tightly to those numbing fingers. America’s wandering eyes turned back to Germany again and he offered a short smile of his own as well as an attempt to squeeze Germany’s clasped hand in return, though the pressure only came like that of a twitch in Germany’s grip.

Another twitch of a smile and America finished. His tone was very soft, and even though Germany’s ears still rung from the echoes of sirens, from the utter rushes of waves from the bombs, he keened his hearing to listen to what the love of his life had to say.

“To have stayed with me . . . until the end,” America finished. He sighed after the last word, seeming to relax more into Germany’s hold, though his eyes did continue to wander to the swaying giant blossoms around them, all of them arching their golden head up into the discolored skies, watching the sun set on a crisped planet.

Germany smiled. It pained him to do so, but he pulled America’s hands back to his face and nuzzled into the palm affectionately. “I told you I would,” Germany reminded of the past promise. “I have made mistakes before, Alfred, but I swore that I wouldn’t ever again . . . ever.” Not even when there would come a chance to even make any such mistake again.

Every time America closed his eyes Germany’s fright almost killed him. He feared the nation would just nod off, never to return to the conscious world. But Alfred simply nodded, resting for a moment, listening to the slush of the endless rows of sunflower stalks to echo in his mind a lullaby of peaceful ease.

In time Germany too was lulled into a relaxed state. There obviously was no need to be at full alert anymore. The notion of enemies was a laughable thing even though Germany understood that many had survived . . . so far.

The scenery around him was pleasant. He liked the greenery. He liked the flowers. And more importantly, he liked the feel of America in his arms.

It was amazing how quiet and calm everything was . . . in the end. Germany marveled at the last gasp of planet earth—or was it? As his eyes glanced over the fine looking stalks of sunflowers, Germany believed that perhaps something could still grow on this desolated rock. It didn’t necessarily have to be anything organic . . . a world full of flora such as this was pleasant on the mind and Germany found himself smiling easier at the image inside his head. What a world, what a
beautiful world.

“Is it . . .” The sound of America’s soft-spoken voice turned Germany away from his thoughts and his eyes focused on the nation in his arms once more. America had opened his eyes, his head lulled back, face just staring openly at the red sky above them. “Is it so wrong . . . that I feel so at ease in such an atmosphere?”

Germany shifted himself. He sat down in the dirt easier enough to relax his legs and in this form he pulled America more to lay on his lap, his arms tightening around him, locking even as if in a state of post mortem which didn’t disturb Germany as much as the thought should have. If he were to . . . die . . . like this—with America in his arms—then that’s all he could ever want.

In his arms, with America’s head cradled in the crook, and his chest pressed against Germany’s torso, the older nation could feel him laugh. It was short-lived just in time for a gurgle to bubble out past his lips, blood staining the patches of skin Germany tried so hard to keep clean and perfect.

“It feels as if I can breathe easier,” America said, his eyes focusing on nothing as they stared into the void. “It must . . . it must show just how horrible I am . . .”

“Nein, Alfred, do not think like that,” Germany said. His hand finally released America’s palm and reached down to run fingers through the younger nation’s matted dull golden locks . . . it was like America had lost all of his vibrancy. It was such a shame, such a pity for beauty lost.

“Then why . . .” Germany caught sight of a slight lip tremor, but it didn’t last long. Even fallen so far America was good at keeping up a façade of some sort. “Why did they all . . . turn against me?”

Germany grit his teeth, dealing with the smoldering atmosphere biting into his already dissolving skin. The memory of what transpired, of everything that had happened, of so much that fell apart, he didn’t want to think about it. He didn’t want to hold onto pointless grudges when he was so close to the grave, and he felt America shouldn’t dwell on these things either.

“None,” Germany cooed out, letting the feel of his caressing hand rubbing America’s scalp calm the younger. “Have none, Alfred. No regrets.”

America blinked and he slowly nodded his head. “I know . . . I just . . . wish I knew what . . . I did wrong.” For him to make his supposed allies turn on him like that, for them to abandon him when he was in desperate need of help, to hide behind him and allow him take so much damage if only to try to save themselves.

Germany really didn’t know what to say. While there were plausible faults, in reality he was certain that America could have been the most perfect ally; done no wrong or offended any of his national ties, and the younger nation would have still been trampled over for self-preservation. It was war, and it was the final war. It was expected.

“You tell me to not have any regrets.” America’s trembles were worsening, and all Germany could try to do was hold him tighter as those dull blue eyes began trying to focus again. “But I have so many!” Tears began slipping down America’s eyes, so easily. Germany’s hand massaging America’s hair fell and tried to wipe them away, but they were innumerable and continuously flowed. There was a choked sob before America inhaled and said, “I never got to tell England how much I loved him.”

Germany subtly shook his head—had America forgotten? He had. It was America who stayed on the line with the Britannic nation as he faded away thousands of miles from him. America had told England everything, everything. He told him of all the secrets he had kept, the biggest one of how
much he truly appreciated and still loved him for fathering him. After which, America explained his forgiveness to England for wronging him so long ago. Germany remembered hearing what sounded like the sigh of a satisfied smile from the receiver and then . . . nothing. No, America told England about his love for him, but he never got the chance to express it. Not many a nation got the chance to do what they wished they had done in their hearts in the end.

America’s sobs grew worse and when he began coughing, sprays of blood spit out, coating Germany’s already bloodied tattered outfit. Germany understood so much. America had remained strong when everyone fell, but now that it was almost over, it was time for him to let go and just . . . cry it out like he should have.

“A-And, Cana—Mattie . . .” America’s eyes clenched shut at the flow of tears and he grit his teeth. His burns looked bad. Layers of skin wore away and Germany wondered if he, himself, was becoming delusional. America looked . . . ever beautiful . . . the more he shed his earthly form. Had Germany slunk that far? Or had he come to witness something so marvelous? “G-God, they’re all gone, aren’t they . . . Ludwig?”

Germany slowly nodded. “Ja,” he confirmed in the case America had forgotten.

America shook, turning his head into the crook of Germany’s arm and crying in mourn. Germany let him. Even knowing America was depleting precious energy, Germany was glad that America would use it to shed tears for those he loved with all of his heart.

“I have so many regrets, Germany,” America sobbed into the German nation. “You can’t ask me to just be rid of it all! I have so many . . .” America sobbed a while before he inhaled a shaking breath and choked out, “I wish I had been there for them when they faded . . . I wish I had never become world power . . . I wish I had never invented such a destructive weapon. It came from me . . . I did all of this! I did!”

“Calm, calm,” Germany shushed, cupping the back of America’s head and rubbing gentle. “The outcome would have still be the same. If not you then another would have found a way to destroy the world . . . it was . . . inevitable.” The death of the nations—all of them—everyone knew it was going to happen. Everyone knew they were going to die, but when the time came so much refusal arose to only witness the tragedy of truth.

Germany inhaled a breath to remain calm himself. The loss of his family was hard, but they had wanted him to live and he lived—for as long as he could.

“Don’t think on the regrets any longer. Think of the things you feel no regret in,” Germany bade. “You are the United States of America. Where is that optimism I adore?”

That sad expression on America was heartbreaking, especially when his eyes fell. “I am not that nation any longer. The states . . . have dissolved . . . as I will too . . . very soon . . . and I regret that.” Germany wanted to scold America for breaking his heart with such words, but when the younger nation looked back up at him and gave a small smile to him it was because he said this, “But I do not regret falling in love with you.”

Germany smiled and leaned down, pressing his forehead against America’s forehead in a gesture of endearment. America had never been a regret of his either.

“I’m sorry,” America whispered. His eyes were focusing on Germany again, making the older believe he was really looking at him. “I’m sorry that . . . we didn’t have . . . as much time as . . . you would have wanted.”
“It was enough,” Germany whispered in return, leaning over America as if trying to shield his body from the harmful atmosphere around them, but the more he pressed close to America the more he felt as if the younger nation was radiating that same damaging heat himself. No matter. It did not deter Germany from pressing as close to him as he possibly could.

A silence passed over them. They basked in the other’s embrace, both so ready to just let go. But there was life in them yet. There was time to speak for only a little longer.

“Do you think . . .” America began, keeping his eyes closed to feel the numbness wash over himself little by little. The sound of the swaying sunflowers even seemed distant in his ears and he wondered if he was wandering from his body already. “Do you think that when we’re gone everything . . . we’ve ever done . . . the wrong we did to this world . . . and to others . . . will be forgiven?”

“Ja,” Germany muttered. The dead couldn’t hold grudges anyway.

“Even . . . Russia?”

Germany stilled at the mention of that nation. Ah, of course America would be thinking about that country in the end.

Pulling away, Germany sat back on his legs and continued to hold America close even as the younger country thought of another man. Germany hadn’t thought of that nation in a while, not since he tried so hard to keep himself by America’s side. The last he heard of him was that Russia was still amongst the living, his sisters weren’t so lucky. Now Germany wondered where he was. He pictured the tall nation in his own home amidst the snow and ice—wait . . . there was no such thing anymore. Winter was gone, and the heat baked over the planet. All of the nations left holding on to what life they had would boil away very soon.

Germany sighed. He didn’t know how to respond to this one. He didn’t know if he wanted to. He didn’t concern himself for the Slavic country, but he did worry over America’s well-being, whether physical or emotional, and Russia seemed to have ties to the longevity of both unfortunately.

“You know . . .” America sighed, making himself comfortable in Germany’s arms. “Out of all my regrets . . . I regret him the most.”

Germany listened to America. It was all he could do. He promised himself that no matter what America said or revealed he would not get upset, because there just wasn’t the time for that.

“I regret not loving him like I should have,” America admitted. “I regret ever pushing him away . . . I regret feeling so broken and alone just because I forced myself from him . . . I regret not giving in to my heart’s desire. I wanted to hold him, Ludwig, and I wanted him to hold me. I wanted to kiss him as I wanted him to kiss me.” America shifted in Germany’s arms, the older country surprised that he could even move this much anymore. With a heavy movement, America plopped his hands atop his sternum to feel the beat of his own heart—oh how slow its pace became. “I regret ever putting this organ through so much torment when it never did me wrong . . . it was always I offending it by not listening and heeding its pulls.” America’s lips twitched into another short smile. “Ludwig . . . did you know?” Germany offered a listening ear as he always did. “Did you know that I could feel Russia’s heart . . .?” Germany watched America’s facial features soften at the idea the same way Germany had witnessed his face ease at the feel of the sunflowers around him. “As he could feel mine,” America whispered. The younger nation let out a shuddering gasp and inhaled a sniff. More tears began to fall and America started to shake in distraught all over again. “But I can’t . . . I can’t feel anything . . .” Did this mean Russia was no more? Or was America that numbed to all of his senses, even a connection as deep as what he acclaimed to possess? “God . . . do you think . . . do you think that he’s . . .?”
Again, Germany didn’t care. All he cared about was the nation in his arms. So, reaching forward, Germany tried to wipe away those troublesome tears again. America trembled underneath his touch but pressed into his palm even still.

“I loved him, I really did, Ludwig,” America cried. The streaks of tears created a cleaner path of his skin, but the burns still marred the younger nation’s flesh, caking away to reveal almost a translucent interior. “But he didn’t listen.” America’s harsher sobs were coming back in his state of final regret. “Over and over I told him how much I loved him, but no matter how hard I tried, no matter how many times I repeated myself he did not listen to me . . . I regret that, Ludwig.” America broke out in a few sobs that wouldn’t let him speak until he rubbed his tear-stained face into Germany’s sleeve. “And I’ll regret leaving without making sure he knew.”

“Alfred,” Germany whispered softly, his fingers pushing the younger nation’s bangs out of his eyes. Oh, how he longed to see such vibrant hues of blue again. “It’s time to let go of all of that fear. It will do you no good now. I need you to stay here, with me. I don’t want to see you cry any longer, please.”

That seemed to calm America to an extent. He stilled at Germany’s words and when the older nation felt him suddenly relax into his embrace, he sighed and felt a small sense of happiness that America still heeded his concerned words despite his heart’s desperate need to tell a mate something it had been meaning to make right since the beginning. Germany pressed his hand above America’s heart and acknowledged its need to reach out. But he didn’t think it would be of any use anymore.

Alliances were broken. Families ripped apart. Even that of the bonded would be cut. That was death, and death was upon them.

“Rest, Alfred,” Germany said in final. “Lay in my arms and rest with me.” All Germany wanted was to see America at peace. But even he could sense how stronger the younger fought against the time of fading—and he was so close now, closer than Germany.

“But until I finish this,” America bit out, the pain inside his body as it failed him made him swallow hard and he shivered at the coolness of his body even as it fell to ruin. “I have to . . . I have to . . .”

“Shhh,” Ludwig lulled, rocking America even just a little with what strength the German still had in him. This was a nice place; quiet, beautiful scenery. A very pleasant place to fade away. “Alfred . . .” Germany really didn’t think all of the things America wanted were possible any longer, not in their states, not in the state of the world now. So, he needed to learn to let everything go and to fade in peace.

“Then you will promise me!” Germany’s eyes widened at the sheer strength in America’s grasp when he took hold of his jacket. The German glanced down to see America staring up at him, looking at him again while he pulled on the older nation’s tattered jacket. “You will promise me that you will tell him!”

Even though Germany knew America would leave first he had found comfort in himself acknowledging it, but when America began to understand this was to happen it hurt Germany. Germany wanted America to keep fighting death’s pull. He wanted America to struggle so that maybe, perhaps, Germany would be proven wrong in his assumption.

Germany blinked away tears. He nodded his head and tried to calm his wheezing breath. His heart rolled inside his chest, aching already, but now dying as America nodded his head along with Germany and then fell back in his arms, no more strength left in him.

America closed his eyes once more and leaned his head against Germany’s chest, listening to the
rhythm of his beating heart—sounding off much stronger than his own . . . and Russia’s . . .

“Thank you.” Germany hardly heard it, the whisper was so light. And even as America laid against him, Germany could not help but cry in the end. It was a selfish thing to do to place such a burden upon Germany, but Germany could not deny America, he’d promise him the world in paradise if it would make America happy and Germany assuring this message would find its purpose even if he failed to give it himself put America in his final peace.

Russia knew he had been called to this land. He followed the pull in a seemingly straight line until he simply found himself lost. Russia stopped for a moment and surveyed the scape around him. He wasn’t too certain if he recalled where he was. The lay of the land looked far different than something to strike memory in Russia’s mind.

So he wandered. He still clung to his automatic for unknown reasons. He hadn’t come across an enemy in a while, and the last he had proved to be of no challenge. They wanted Russia to end their misery, and so a barrel to the skull and Russia gave them mercy. Now, it was a habit to carry around his arms.

After the world threw itself into World War Three it was a necessity that all nations equip themselves with a means to defend as well as destroy. Now, after everything was gone, it was pointless to keep, but Russia could not pry his fingers from the weapons he’s held for so long, so he traveled with the weight to the place he hoped to finally let everything go.

Russia continued to walk through the desolate land with no sense of direction. What had pulled him earlier had lost all force and now Russia looked on which road to take to possibly find what needed to be seen. He passed by ruined cities and eerily familiar land formations before he came across something so curious it was strikingly beautiful.

It was a field of sunflowers. Russia could see the lines in their positions and knew they had been purposely planted. He smiled at the sight. They all looked so healthy even with having to absorb so much radiation in the soil . . . but it was what they did, was it not?

When Russia came close enough he reached out and touched a stalk. Firstly he was surprised by how well his fingers pried away from the hold of his gun, secondly he was surprised by how his hand could still feel the touch of something so . . . alive. Russia examined the flowers slowly, pulling at stalking stems and then moving his hands over leaves before bending the plant to press his nose into the disk to inhale its scent. Russia closed his eyes and smiled at the smell. It certainly brought back memories—very fond ones.

Russia still adored the flowers even in times such as these. The pleasantry pushed him forward into the mass of greenery. There he wandered, admiring the health of each blossom and the space they had come from.

The sight of all of them surrounding him brought him to a place inside his head—fictional, but a paradise once thought able to be made a reality. Russia wanted to remain there, but the feel of their stems brushing against his uniform was a nice feeling, and the deeper he delved into the gathering the more the scent strengthened and what a most pleasant smell it was.

Even with the smell and sight of the blossoms overwhelming Russia’s waning senses, he still comprehended that he had found himself in the presence of another nation.
Russia frowned at the sight of him. Even in the end he would not forgive their animosity between each other. He cared less about ending the nation’s miserable existence. Russia knew the younger country would eventually choke on the hazardous radiation like the rest of them. It was only time.

Russia, however, was more interested in the being the German was holding as he sat amongst the sunflower roots and wept. Russia even wondered if Germany knew he was standing there. Still he stood, watching the German nation cry, shudder, and sob.

America was dead . . . wasn’t he?

“He’s gone, Russia.”

Russia’s eyes turned back toward Germany who, for his part, remained hunched over America’s corpse, holding him so close that Russia had a hard time seeing anything else besides the youngest nation’s pelvis and legs. There was no movement, and the limping in those limbs were proof enough that the nation’s life was no longer flowing through him. Russia wondered how long he’d been gone.

Russia’s ears picked up the shivering sobs from Germany. He’d never heard him cry so heavily. Finally, Germany leaned back on his legs and looked toward Russia, his eyes red from the atmosphere and swelling with fresh tears. Russia could see America better now. Blood and burn caked over his pale face. He looked as if he slumbered, but both countries were wiser than to believe that assumption.

“Here’s proof,” Germany said, holding his arms out for a moment and letting Russia see the empty shell that was once the New World’s bodily form.

America’s head lulled and turned, letting Russia see the other side of his face—it was more burnt than the previous viewed side. He’d taken quite a bit of damage before his end. Russia was surprised he lasted so long and in a way regretted he hadn’t faded earlier—the world had gotten so ugly in the final throes of the war, so disgusting a place for one so beautiful as him.

“Now leave.” Germany choked out a sob and pulled America back toward his chest, wrapping his arms around him as if to cradle him in protection. It was a sad sight, but one that upset Russia to no end . . . it was supposed to be him . . . himself . . . America was supposed to have died in his arms . . . or he in America’s.

Russia remained where he stood, his eyes focused on America’s body, mentally cutting the outline of Germany’s frame over him out of his visual image. Germany didn’t seem to like Russia’s presence as Russia didn’t like his.

“What?” Germany growled, narrowing his eyes at Russia before those lightning blue hues landed on the gun Russia still clutched in his hands. “Have you come to be rid of me then?”

“Nyet,” Russia answered. “You will suffocate . . . like the rest of them.” Just like his sisters had.

Germany coughed, biting back the blood trying to leak out past his teeth. With a calming sigh, Germany took in Russia’s form. He too looked worn, but he couldn’t help but notice. “You look quite at home with this setting.”

Russia tried to smile like he used to do back then, but he was too weak for even that. Instead he remained stoic and answered Germany with the same bland expression. “I handle stress—internally, or externally—well. Better than you at least.”

Germany chuckled, shaking his head. He looked down at America and Russia notice his expression
soften while his thumbs caressed pale burnt cheeks. Russia didn’t enjoy the sight at all, but seeing
Germany in such a gentler and unguarded state was a rarity.

“You know . . . America once said he felt almost at peace in this atmosphere.” Germany smiled sadly
and blinked away a few bubbling tears. “Because he created such destructive weapons he called
himself a monster; he believed he caused all of this.” There was a short silence before Germany
asked, “What do you think, Russia?”

Russia continued in his silence. He said nothing.

“I believe the world would have ended with or without his ‘assistance,’” Germany replied in turn to
his own question.

“Da,” Russia agreed. His eyes looked up toward the discolored sky over them. The waves of heat
were easily seen and equally terrifying. Russia was surprised they all hadn’t just melted away yet.
“Germany . . .” Russia didn’t look back to see if Germany was looking attentive at him. He didn’t
care if he listened or not to be frank. “Do you ever feel as if . . . as if this world has been through
death so many times, that people, like us, have perished and risen again through mutual destruction? I
sometimes think about that. It gives me a little hope because it would mean that Earth does repair
itself . . .” Russia sighed sadly. “But I wonder if this is the final time before even she fades away.
The destruction is terrible, da? I cannot even fathom how any piece of this planet can be habitable
again. Even the places untouched will choke out with the global radiation, even those hidden will
die. We all will.”

“I am fine where I am,” Germany said, the sigh leaving his lips let out much of his strength. When he
looked down at the nation his arms still clung to he smiled softly. “I’m fine right next to his side.”

Another silence passed over him and Russia wondered to himself why he stayed. He wanted to
leave, but at the same time he wanted to give his eyes the last chance they may ever have in taking in
America’s features. No matter his tattered form, the younger was still so beautiful to Russia . . .
forever and always.

“What about you?” Germany blinked his eyes before turning his face toward Russia. His soft smile
was gone, nothing but a frown and hard eyes to stare upon the Slavic nation with. “Where will you
go?” To fade away.

Russia let out a breath that sounded too much like a wheeze. “I have not found it yet.” The place.
“Perhaps I will keep wandering still.” Russia turned his eyes back toward the greenery around them.
He wouldn’t mind walking through the expanse of the valley if only to be tickled by these
surprisingly thriving flowers.

Germany’s eyes turned back toward America. His frown still present even as he looked down at the
one he loved. “You know . . . there is room right here . . . beside him.” Germany’s fingers idly
moved locks of hair behind America’s ears. “He would like that . . .”

Russia nodded. His gaze turned down toward the lifeless body of the United States in Germany’s
arms. He offered a sense of pity for the child of a nation who always wanted and got his way. Not
this time, however.

“I do not think there is, comrade,” Russia said. His limbs finally moved and he turned on his heel,
urging himself to pace away unless his will fail him and he stay only to fall into ruin. “He has plenty
company.”

Russia’s hands clutched the hard frame of his gun, both arms unsatisfied that they were not holding
what they desired—what they deserved. Russia put one foot in front of the other to move away, but before the stalks passed over him and hid his appearance from Germany, the other nation called out to him.

“He loved you, you know!”

Russia stilled himself. He should have kept moving, because if there was anything he didn’t want it was to be near Germany when his end came.

Russia could hear Germany’s labored breaths. He didn’t sound well at all. His risen tone was using up so much energy. A stupid move on Germany’s part if all he were doing was telling an old enemy something he already knew.

“He fought until the end just to wait for you so he could . . .” Russia heard Germany cough and then compose himself again. “He made me promise to tell you.”

Russia nodded his head in understanding. America was always so persuasive, apparently, even in his death. Russia didn’t know why he had turned his head toward Germany a last time, but when he did he noticed the younger nation visibly trembling, struggling just to keep hold of the one in his arms.

“Did you know how much he cared for you . . . even until . . .” Germany coughed again.

Russia nodded and answered, “Da.” He did, and that was why he had to leave. As he walked away, stepping over fallen stalk the last thing Russia heard behind him was that of Germany’s form collapsing—finally succumbing to the death pulsing in his veins. But what a privileged country he was; staying in the company of America while their spirits departed them.

Russia would not remain there. No, because America had chosen Germany even though his heart had clung to his and Russia’s bond.

So Russia distanced himself as quickly and as far as he could. When he finally could manage to run no longer he found himself a rock to seat himself on. There he tried catching his breath—but he was not short of breath from over taxing his body, it was beyond that. It was the tears in his eyes and the stillness inside his chest.

Russia choked on coughs when his hand let go of the gun he was crunching and padded his chest to feel his heart. He laughed for a moment until he heard a voice.

“I am disappointed you are not dead yet.”

The familiarity of the tone and texture had Russia turning around where he sat. What he saw surprised him, but he did not move in fright or surprise. Even in physical form, Russia had long since outgrown his fear of him.

Russia frowned at the sight. “What special occasion is it that you take on physical form, General Winter?”

There the deity was, though encased within the form fitting to his spiritual appearance. Russia found it humorous of him to do so right now. In spirit form at least he could stay away from the harmful waves of death permeating over the entire planet. At least in spirit form he could have faded without the pain of what had been done.

The man laughed. Already he was hunched over, skin burning, and lungs convulsing just to breathe better air. Russia wondered if the personified season had turned himself into the likes of a human, or one such higher, as Russia and his kind were.
“It was to see you dead with formed eyes of my own,” Winter admitted while he rubbed his fingers over his lids. “Though, this atmosphere would have me blind.”

Russia wished he could smile at General Winter in return if only to mock his stupidity. “Well, perhaps you shall fade before me if you so wish to remain in that lacking form.”

General Winter frowned. “I shall leave it soon enough. Tell me . . . why hasn’t your heart stopped beating?” A bonded always died in the same moment as their bonded. When one heart failed, the other would not be able to take the separation and so would fail as well. General Winter’s upset wasn’t misplaced. Russia should be dead; should have died the very moment America took his last breath.

The heel of Russia’s palm pressed into his chest again. What he felt wasn’t surprising even to himself. “It has,” Russia replied. General Winter looked surprised. “I have lived before without its beat, so why not continue without it now?” Russia saw the upset in the deity’s face. He looked both disappointed and absolutely furious.

Russia was indeed walking death.

“Would not it have been easier on your pained body to fade along with him?” Winter asked. Russia watched him come closer, one uneven step at a time. “Is that not what you have wanted?”

“Da,” Russia answered. “But this is the end, hm, so perhaps that is why . . . he’ll only have to wait for me a little longer.”

General Winter chuckled. He stopped in his approach and just laughed his lungs out. “Do you really believe there is any place for the likes of your kind after everything? There isn’t. You all will just fade away, cease to exist until the humans can group together once more and form laws and governments of their own.” The man frowned deeply when his steely eyes turned to the demolished world around them. “But I do not think that will even happen . . . not with what you’ve done this time.”

“Good.” Russia internally grinned when the General looked at him again, his frown deepening. “Then the destruction is enough to get rid of even your kind.”

“Such a rude ungrateful servant, you always have been,” Winter sneered.

Russia couldn’t even allow his frown to deepen, he was too exhausted for that. “I have right to withhold any reverence I once held for you. You were useless to me. You always tormented me, I know it brought you great pleasure. The things you promised were never resolved. I stopped believing in your false power long ago. Now . . .” Russia turned back around, looking into the vast field of swaying sunflowers, bending in a wave of deadly heat. “Sit and let us see who shall be the first to fade.”

Russia’s breath caught in his throat before the sudden pressure, but he wasn’t entirely sure if he were even still breathing to make such a claim. Even still he needn’t turn around to know for certain that General Winter had his physical hands around his throat and fingers tightening to break airways or bone.

“I have given up so much energy to maintain this form just to watch you fade, I will not be disappointed!” Russia’s eyes clenched shut and his teeth grit at feeling to man lean down upon him, trying to push him down while tightening his grip. General Winter was strong even in physical form. “If I have to use the remainder of my strength to make you fade, then I will!”
The General wrangled Russia and the nation had to push aside the reason to let him if only to find some will to keep himself alive a little longer. Locking his arms against the ground, Russia further stressed General Winter’s goal in pushing him to the ground and strangling him there. When Russia bent his elbows and snapped them back into a lock he had pushed back, knocking into the season to throw his balance. He did.

Russia quickly turned around to shield himself from his attacker, but General Winter was fast upon him again. He had tackled him, tossed him off of the boulder Russia had seated himself on, and now they rolled in the stalks of sunflowers, snapping stems and pressing blossoms flat that fell under their struggling forms.

Spots of white pulsed within Russia’s vision when General Winter lifted him by the neck and then slammed him down back into the ground. The back of Russia’s skull connected with rock and he was dazed for a moment, his body weakening to succumb to the season’s assault. Soon, the white spots faded while the ring of Russia’s vision began fading black.

“I regret ever wishing for you!” General Winter spat at his once-servant. “With one hand you would worship me but with another you would worship another! Every time! Every cycle! I should have offed you from the start, but every time . . . every time I saw you again I wanted to make right. I wanted to believe you were still faithful to me and only me!”

Russia groaned, struggling underneath the General while the mad man rambled on. He could feel his body laying on his gun that had slung around to his back. If he could just grip it then he could defend himself against the season. So he let go of General Winter’s arms trying to snap his neck, and took in the tighter pressure around his throat if only to reach down and pull at the strap on his gun in hopes of sliding it out from underneath himself.

Once again General Winter lifted Russia up by the throat to bash his head back into the ground. It dazed Russia again and his body seemed to lose almost all struggle entirely.

“Take him back, Mother Earth!” General Winter bit out, his eyes reddening whether in rage or from the atmosphere encasing them. “Take this bastard back into the ground from which he came. I shall see my mistake corrected!”

The shot that rung into the air startled the both of them it seemed. The hands around Russia’s neck loosened. Winter’s eyes widened and his jaw loosened. Russia quickly kicked him off of himself and turned over, coughing for better breathing while his hands clutched his automatic to his chest.

After Russia had regained his senses and shook his spotty vision away he scrambled to his feet and came up to the place where the season had fallen. Russia slammed his boot into the man’s chest, where the bullet ripped through, showing no pity for the god he once worshiped.

“And I will see you dead!” Russia spat. His own eyes were just as red and when Russia raised his gun he thought about shooting that damn foul spirit in the mouth. The season was a fool for taking on a physical form. Russia could harm him for all of the harm he’s done to him now.

Russia wanted to see the General crying out as he felt pain for the first time, but no matter how much harder he pressed on the wound, no beautiful cries of dismay resounded. Instead the man paled, his eyes looking up into the sky and lips parting.

“Is this . . . pain?” Russia scoffed. It seemed as if General Winter didn’t even know the concept of the feeling.

Russia nodded and leaned down, pressing a majority of his weight on the gapping chest wound.
“Da, but it is nothing to the internal pain you’ve caused me!” Russia slammed the heel of his boot into the wound and was finally rewarded with the sweet, sweet cries from the General’s lips. Russia wondered if he could stamp the man’s chest cavity in... would he even find a heart inside? “You take on this physical form only to mock us! How would you know what it feels like to live centuries, to watch the people that comprise you; that follow you, that obey you, that love you, die? How would you know the coldness of a sword’s blade, the sting of an arrow, the bite of a bullet? How would you know the tragedy in massacre and failed treaties? How would you know the utter ruination of wars? How would you know the ache of a heart just as frail... as the lowest of creatures?”

Russia’s rant had fire at first, but his energy drained from him as he sought to break all of General Winter’s ribs. He possibly had, but he had yet to see his chest cave in before he, himself, fell to his knees and had fallen in the dirt beside him. Winter had ceased his cries of pain and Russia wondered if he had killed him. He didn’t care if he did as he lay there next to him. He could feel the season’s blood—still warm—soak over toward him and stain his tattered clothing. The stench of it sickened Russia if only because it was that damn deity’s useless life force.

Russia could hear the wheezing weak breaths coming from the man next to him. The occasional gurgle Russia had thought would be music to his ears, but instead it was becoming a nuisance.

“No... you weren’t... I think... you haven’t been... for a long time.” Russia wanted to shut the man out, but the softness of his weary voice hearkened the nation to listen to the dying deity. “And I... should have understood that... and just... let you go... from the beginning.”

There was silence then. Russia wondered if he had died. He lifted himself on his elbows and turned to the season only to see his cold eyes staring back at him. How very different that gaze felt now that it was behind a harmful physical form.

Without another word General Winter reached out and pressed his bloody fingertips to Russia’s forehead. Russia knew he shouldn’t have let the deity touch him, but he was empty of any more energy and doubted he could regain all of the strength he used in their previous struggle.

“It has been a fun game... Rossiya... but even if you’ve destroyed my body... I will pass in knowing... that you will be tormented with the last thoughts... of clarity...”

General Winter chuckled again and soon coughed up more blood. Russia watched the life fade from his eyes, but just as he passed into oblivion—along with the others—Russia’s eyes widened with the transfer of vast knowledge.

Before his eyes he saw, and understood, everything. It was overwhelming, the information made his head ache with a sharp pain, a pain that had Russia curling in on himself, clenching his eyes shut, and crying out. Russia’s fingers curled into his own hair and he pulled, the pain of strands falling out hadn’t even registered to any pain receptor still functioning. All of his focus had been on what he was taking in and on what he was feeling.

Cycles of lifetimes came into his mind. Memories that weren’t even his suddenly felt as if they were.
Things that he had done seemed so real now, words he had said, people he had known. Over and over, lifetime after lifetime. The splendor and horror of it all came into Russia and he nearly broke with so much knowledge.

But it went further than just distant memories of a life once forgotten. The clarity of his life lived now swirled around him, from his birth and then toward his maturity. Each memory passed his eyes and Russia felt as if he were reliving them again—wondering how much time had passed around him as he went through these slots of occurrences.

Russia remembered first seeing his sisters, then remembered his first leaders, his first battles, his first capture, his first torture . . . everything. When his memories grew to a time when he had met one figure his rapid intake almost seemed to slow—or perhaps it was all just in Russia’s mind.

America. Russia felt the memories slow even as he recalled them. Remembering more detail that may have slipped his mind due to latter brainwashing and delusion. Had America really been so young when he first laid eyes on him? Had his eyes been that blue, his hair that golden, and smile that bright? Why . . . it was as if Russia was falling in love all over again, and now . . . he ached. Russia didn’t understand why when his heart no longer beat. He didn’t know why he continued to feel these useless emotions when they’ve never once been of help to him.

Even without a working heart, Russia ached and he began to cry.

No more, Russia didn’t want to remember anymore. He wanted to return to the foreign memories of a face that shared his own appearance. He didn’t care for the tyrants that the past cycles brought upon, he just wanted to think of something else. But the memories continued to play, continued to evoke those emotions he felt when he met the young New World nation, when he held him close and danced with him, when he declared his friendship to him, when he declared his love for him . . . and America had in return. The touches, the kisses, the glances, everything that tore Russia up inside was now doing so again and his tears fell bitterly to the ground.

The regret that Russia could hardly bare when he was forced to give up such a love returned tenfold because he was aware of his present state . . . and that of America. The younger nation was gone, no more, and Russia was left to his loneliness again, tormented by the detailed memory of all of their bittersweet interactions.

The anger in Russia’s heart back when he and America had pushed against each other was felt as if from an observer. Russia was just a simple viewer in the reel of his memories. He watched the both of them, listened to their senseless arguments. The feelings during these times Russia remembered clearly but he still felt them in full force regardless of his internal pleas that he bid rid of having to relive these tragedies.

What tormented Russia more was a foreign feeling—those of America’s emotions. Through his bond he felt them now, even in the memories of his own. America’s sadness, his upset, and his bitterness seeped inside Russia’s chest along with his own overwhelming emotions.

It was the things overlooked in Russia’s upset after he had been forced away from America’s side on that day. Now, he wished he would have known sooner. If he had known America’s heart earlier would they have come together long before the time they had?

Would America have allowed Russia to hold him during the Second World War? Would America have allowed Russia to kiss him when their peoples held arms against the other in the Cold War? Would America have been Russia’s to call his own and embrace when the walls fell? Yes . . . Russia now knew it was no lie, America had been telling the truth. He had waited for Russia. In his heartache he had waited, watched, and hoped to no avail.
Russia saw and felt it all. He hurt from America’s heartbreak. Russia had hurt himself when Lenin and the others forced him away, but now feeling—and understanding—what America went through . . . what he had continued to go through when Russia had been idiotically blinded by rage and lust . . . was clarifying.

“Did you hear me?” America had asked Russia once in Tehran, when he and England came with their bosses to discuss the progress of the war. Russia had answered in kind that he had and let his upset override his senses when he should have just listened. No, Russia didn’t hear him, at least not correctly. That time had been one of the times Russia regrets letting slip by him now that he knew.

While he remembered that day clearly, watching it pass by his eyes that very moment only to see and to feel everything hurt him now. Russia had once requested of America to learn a little of his language . . . he never thought he had, and so with a horrible accent Russia had assumed America was simply saying something of similar sound in his own language. He hadn’t. He said something so intimate that—thick accent aside—Russia should have caught, he should have asked for America to say it again, he should have listened.

The bubbling sadness that overcame America’s senses in that moment when Russia had remembered walking away in upset was disrupting Russia’s senses. He was forced to see that memory in clarity and feel both of their hearts.

Once more, America had said the phrase once more at the wall during their anxious standoff. It was a hard memory on Russia, but he was reliving it and already he could take no more. He could not stand how he saw his abusive self, how he felt America should have struck him, should have stopped him before he could harm others—before he could harm him more. But America took the strikes, he took the glares, and threats because he clung to a hope that Russia knew he had never let go of.

Again and again, now, Russia could see it in America’s eyes. He could hear it in his voice, he noticed it in his movement. Himself, back then, was so blinded that he had ruined the both of them.

Russia wanted to laugh when America said it again. Once more he looked into his eyes and said it to his face, and once more Russia heard something else entirely.

“Youah? Too bad for you.” Russia heard America say it twice. Opportunity allowed the younger nation enough bravery and hope to say it twice only to have his heart shattered every time.

America hadn’t been speaking English in that time . . . had he? No, the boy had certainly learned a few Russian words that Russia had wished he had in letter a long time ago. The words he learned were simple enough to say, and he said them—not as perfectly as most, but he said them. It seemed it was the only Russian words he ever said to Russia in his native language . . . he would not speak to him in his language after even though Russia now knew America knew the language well.

But, back then, Russia had assumed America only ever spoke his own language. And so when he spoke to him, Russia tuned his ears to catch English words . . . not Russian. But what he said was Russian, and Russia regrets ever letting that fact slip by him twice.

“Youah? Too bad for you.” Was not what America had said at all, and despite his situation both times when he said this phrase, he still looked at Russia and said it. And Russia had missed it all. The phrase really was, “Ya tebya lyublyu.”

If Russia had known, how would he have reacted? If he wouldn’t have been so deaf to what America was saying then would he have stayed? Would his tormented heart have eased, and would have America accepted him back?
Twice. America had openly stated he loved him—still—in Russia’s own language only for Russia to incompetently continually brush him off as an arrogant offending snob. The hurt in America that Russia was feeling as he had tormented him more so than the regret of leaving him when he should have embraced him and returned such declared long-lasting love. Russia knew he had been a fool and now, all he could do was laugh, laugh and laugh as the remaining of his memories played out only to reveal of all the missed opportunities. What a fool Russia had been.

Even when the memories of America finally accepting Germany’s courtship brought him much heartache, the understanding of it all eased Russia’s spirit. He understood that America had been sad and just looking for someone to return his love. Germany treated him good, while Russia continued in his ignorance and pulled himself away.

Alaska . . . Russia was at least glad to know America had been just as happy as he was when they bonded souls and hearts and bodies. It was America’s loyalty that kept him by Germany’s side, but Russia felt his heartbreak more clearly now and the longing in his spirit when the younger nation forced his entire being to push Russia away. It was why America could not be near Russia for long, it was why he had his representatives speak to him more often than he. Oh, the heartbreak in them both.

Finally . . . Russia’s memories caught up with the present, and even still the clarity of the emotions he had felt was the pull of America’s heart. When Russia was guided back toward Alaska it was from America’s spiritual urging. America wanted to tell him, to verbally confirm his feelings so that he didn’t pass away with anymore regret than he had.

Through these detailed memories Russia felt the moment when his heart stopped beating . . . the moment when America . . . The older country had gotten lost then without the connection of the bond guiding him. It made sense. All of it.

Russia blinked. The throb in his head hurt still, but all was quiet and Russia found a sense of peace in it all. Bending his elbows he pushed himself up off of the ground to sit up. He looked at the sunflower field around him and then at the lifeless body of General Winter—the bastard still had that malicious smile on his face as if he’d had the last laugh. Perhaps he had. It must have been fun watching Russia’s wayward decisions throughout history.

Such a funny thing once looked at from afar. Russia found himself laughing. He moved through the field again and just laughed. He wanted to be encased in fragrance and golden blossom to help calm him, but he became hysterical, laughing and laughing while his tears slipped down his face from the tragedy of his life.

He had lived, laughed, fought, and loved in his life, and out of all of them Russia regretted loving the most. He wished he had never come to know such an emotion, but in the same understanding he was so glad to have felt it, so glad to have loved America and to finally know that he had loved him back just as much.

The laughs ceased, dying in volume, while the cries, the sobs, all began. The noises started out small, but the louder they grew the more it sounded as if Russia cried out in pain, his voice echoing around the lifeless valley he resided in. He simply let go, threw his head back, and cried.

No more. His body stilled and would not move. Russia fell to his knees, out of breath, out of tear, and out of life.

Russia had been dead for a long time—perhaps even longer than when America’s life faded from him. Russia was certain of it. He was nothing but an empty shell walking with no purpose simply waiting for the day when all vitality left him. Why couldn’t he just lay down and die?
To cease to exist; it was all Russia wanted. Perhaps General Winter was right, perhaps there was no life after this, not even a gathering place for the deceased. How sad.

Russia’s life had been filled with nothing but torment and struggles. He was glad to finally see an end to his over-lengthened life. But at the same time he was sad . . . so sad that he was going away alone.

Russia ignored the blurriness of his vision and the sticky streaks of tears down his cheeks. His hands reached down and took up his gun so he could bite the barrel.

It was quite sad to come back down to the planet after all that had happened. Tony had promised himself that he’d stay away and simply observe, but even when planet Earth was engulfed in an ending war the alien had to look away and occupy his time with something else. When he finally returned the world was quiet.

At first he tried a simple radio communication, wondering if anyone would pick his signal up. No one did. They weren’t looking up at the stars anymore, no, they were gasping on their last breathable breaths as the atmosphere churned into something completely uninhabitable.

Tony told himself to just move on and find another planet to entertain his time with, but a fondness pulled him back to Earth and soon enough he was landing and walking the ground again. It was dangerous to walk about in his terrestrial form and so he kept his celestial physique. It was easier and much faster to move now, simply gliding over the land and oceans, seeing the destruction that everyone saw coming.

Tony immediately began searching for the nations, but only empty houses and once-territories remained. All was quiet, all was nothing anymore.

As an observer Tony should not concern himself with the fate of the planet nor the creatures in it, but he admitted he had made friends, and one in particular he missed. And so he searched for him, guided by the past remnants of signature auras. Some had simply faded long ago, while others—the ones who had faded more recently—still held lingered traces of their mark in the world.

Tony was glad he found his old friend. By the review of his essence he had been gone for a while, but that didn’t stop Tony from standing beside him and reaching out to touch him. The nation was laying on the ground and looked as if he were sleeping. There was a country next to him, laying quite close—his life too had expired.

“It’s a shame it all had to come this, hadn’t it?” Tony reached out and let his hand glide over America’s face, examining the burnt skin and the splotches of blood.

A loud shot echoed across the valley. Tony turned his face toward the direction he had heard it. He left America for a moment if just to quell his curiosity. The closer he came the more he felt the shattered partials of a once aura—a nation was close by.

Descending down through the swaying sunflowers, Tony noticed the way their blossoms fell, as if they were sad or simply observing the being laying near their roots, giving them the essence of himself to feast upon if they were famished enough. The nation was easily recognized in Tony’s examination. It was Russia.

Tony sighed and leaned down over him. He seemed so out of place. The nation should have gone to America and faded there because Tony knew his friend would have wanted that.
It didn’t happen often, and the only other nation Tony even remotely concerned himself with to consider the slightest emotional attachment was America simply because he had known him for a long, long time. But . . . Tony knew this one as well, not as intimately as he had with America, but he’s seen his cycles and understood his fate to turn nearly exactly the same in each. It was a pity as it was cruel, but Winter is dead and so Tony smiled, reaching out to place his hand upon the nation in a last bout of comfort.

“May you finally find peace in oblivion, tormented servant. Dream dreams of paradise and find happiness there,” Tony bade. It was sad to see him fade like this. In the end Tony wished he could finally lay next to the one he loved, but in the end that just didn’t happen.

Tony wondered if a cycle could ever be undone. A world continuing into eternity was a nice image, but it could not be so until the people and the nations harmonize—and no matter how many eons it just seemed they never would. But those two nations . . . they were as different as the seasons yet loved each other despite laws of nature and the fate of destiny.

Tony would like to call it beautiful, but in the end it was just another tragedy the earth had to see repeated.

With a sigh Tony left the nation to his resting spot. He returned to America to simply dwell beside him in thought. His eyes observed the condition of the planet and he frowned at it. The world was in a mess, and it had all come about from lack of control.

Tony looked down at America and shook his head. The poor thing hadn’t known. It was just another simple tragedy bound to happen.

The deity really had wished he had the chance to spend more time in the world with America and the others as a guest. Perhaps it was his own fault for deciding to materialize at that certain point in time, but it had been a good few years. If Tony would allow himself, he would certainly see to another cycle.

Looking back down at the still nation beside him, Tony noticed some of America’s skin was so burnt it curled and peeled. The deity smiled at the sight. He managed to concentrate enough energy to take hold of the layer and pull it off. America looked much better without such a frail shell encasing him.

“What do you say we see if we can fix all of this?” Tony didn’t know if it was even possible, but if there was one thing living amongst humans and nations that taught him it was that second chances could come in threes or fours or fives.

Perhaps the planet had one last cycle left. If not, well, then this planet was certainly the most interesting one Tony’s ever had the privilege of observing.

Chapter End Notes

DaughterOfTheRevolution: Songs listened to while writing this was, A Little Fall of Rain from Les Miserables, and October and April by The Rasmus. I am particularly fond of the second song simply because it fits Russia and America so well (at least I think it does :) ), come on, it sings of a warmer month April and a colder month October falling in love despite it being doomed from the start. Is it such a coincidence that those two exact months are defining months for America and Russia? The beginning of America as a nation (the Revolutionary War) began in April and Russia’s well known
revolution happened to take place in October (The October Revolution) ;D Yep, there was my two cents . . .

Anways,

Russia's clarification mentioned happened in Chapter 11: Love is a Battlefield where America, England, and Russia met in Tehran. It was the first time America had seen Russia since the Bolshevik Revolution and it was also the first time he tried telling him he loved him in Russian. Didn't turn out well at all, as you all know by now. The second time America said this misheard phrase was in Chapter 13: Secrets Revealed. When Russia was strangling him against the Berlin Wall America managed to say it, in which it was misheard again.

"Ya tebya lyublyu" can sound an awful lot like, "Yeah, too bad for you" if the accent is horrendously horrible and one is expecting to hear English words instead of Russian.

Throughout history Russia and America danced around each other because of these misunderstandings and even in the end it was never reconciled. Such is their tragic love.
Russia woke with a start. His eyes shot wide open and his body lurched forward, knocking over pillows and ruffling sheets. His entire body seeped sweat, sending a chill throughout his limbs, making them lock and tremble.

In and out he breathed. He understood he was afraid, frightened, terrified, but the wonder of why had left Russia the moment he stilled himself. When his wide eyes eventually looked up after a sensing pull he froze altogether.

There before him, just as frozen as he, was America. The younger had just slipped on a boot, his foot still raised while he looked back at him, those blue eyes as wide as Russia’s. The confusion inside Russia bubbled over and finally he spoke.

“A-Amerika?” Russia noticed the younger nation’s lips moving. And if he spied correctly, it looked as if America had silently said the word, “Dammit,” before stomping his foot to the ground and coming toward him.

“Did you have another nightmare?” America asked when he slid down onto the bed and sat himself close to Russia.

The older was still swimming in confusion, now more so at why America was sitting so close to him, his hip touching his own, and why he was reaching out, running his fingers through his matted sandy locks.

America sighed, shaking his head and looking at Russia with concern in his soft glowing eyes. “This happens every night it seems, huh?”

Russia’s lips quivered. He could hear America’s words as clear as day. He could feel America’s touch as if he were really real.
Before Russia even understood himself, he reached out and wrapped his arms around the nation, pulling him to collide chests. Russia’s head fell down into the younger’s neck junction and he honestly felt he wanted to cry. America felt so warm, so full of life, and so very there with him.

Russia nearly flinched when he felt America’s hands press against his back, embracing him in return. The gentle massage was nice and slowly Russia began to calm himself and just relax into the embrace of America.

“There, there,” America patted. “I am here, you can hold me and feel.” America then pulled back a little, his smile still on his face while he took a hold of one of Russia’s arms and pulled it from around him only to take his hand and press it against his firm sternum. “Feel that?”

Russia focused his attention on the feel of a thumping organ beating as strong as it was healthy. After a little while a sense of warmth trailed into Russia’s palm, expanding throughout his fingers and then rushing down his wrist, up his forearm, shoulder, chest, and then settling in his heart. He felt his own organ pick up pace, awaken as it matched America’s beat.

Russia smiled and nodded as he leaned in and pressed his forehead against America’s collarbone. He remained in silence and in America’s presence, taking in him being there with him, taking in the bond of their synchronized hearts.

Russia felt America chuckle as he said, “I guess it’s officially impossible for me to slip away before you wake up.”

Russia turned to look up at America curiously, but the other nation didn’t seem to mind his blank stare in the slightest. Instead he moved away again, offering another warm tight embrace before pulling the sheets off of Russia’s lap.

“Come on, up and at ‘em,” America motivated. “If you want, you can come with me. The boys found an amazing find. I’m excited about it myself. Was going to go alone and let you sleep in, but we really can’t separate for long, huh?”

America combed his fingers through Russia’s hair once more before letting his hands fall back to his sides. He looked utterly happy and content, and if Russia wasn’t mistaken he was looking at him with quite a large amount of affection.

Russia had no intention on moving, especially not when his mind was still stalled. But slowly he looked down at his state of dress and understood it to be lacking. With hands reaching down he went to pull the sheets back over himself to create some sort of dignity. But again he heard America chuckling and so he looked back toward him.

“It’s not like I haven’t seen it all before. Come on, don’t keep me waiting any more. I really want to head out there.” Once more America pulled the sheets from Russia and tossed them off the bed. Afterwards he turned on his heel and headed out of the room. “I’ll be waiting out in the lobby.”

With that Russia was alone.

A sadness fell over him and he realized that it was because America had left him. The sensational feeling was manageable but it certainly gave him a motivation to stand up and find something appropriate to wear.

Coming to his wardrobe, Russia stopped to take in the room. It was a large room, filled with many detailed furnish and other exquisite pieces such as gem-encrusted chests, golden sword ornaments, and marbled pillars. It reminded Russia of his imperial days, but all at once the things he viewed
looked . . . different.

From what he understood was the wardrobe opened under his pull. He reached inside and grabbed an outfit. Just by holding it and feeling its texture, Russia knew that it was only one piece of clothing. There were other things to put on, sashes, gems, epaulettes, woven and braided golden silk and ribbons.

It was all common and habitual in Russia’s mind now. Just at holding these formal pieces Russia began to understand his rank in the world unraveling around him.

Russia was the highest ranking nation.

Yes, of course Russia was. Why had he thought otherwise? The more Russia awoke, wiping the sleep from the previous night’s slumber from his eyes, the more his fear settled, the more his part in this world came into light.

Russia dressed himself as he was certain he had been for thousands upon thousands of years. There was a large mirror next to the changing quarter and when he turned he examined himself.

“What’s taking you forever, Ivan?” Russia turned to see the door pushed open. America returned and he didn’t look so pleased with having been kept waiting, but when those blue eyes of his landed on him he tsked and shook his head. “Wardrobe malfunction, huh?” America trotted up to him and instantly began fixing a few things Russia had misplaced in a bout of forgetfulness. “There you go. Every bit representation of the Grand Russo International Republic.”

Russia observed the changes America made to his attire and at the mention of the name he felt a familiarity arise inside him. All he had to do was focus on that tinging familiar recall, but when his eyes took in America he found himself smiling and then reaching out to tug at the simple attire he was wearing.

“And you do not wear clothing suitable for your title, States of the American Republic.” The words came easier now. Speaking to America was becoming habitual, and Russia seemed to understand why, even when he was a little baffled by it himself.

America batted Russia’s pulling hand away and slid a step back so he was safely out of reach of anymore tease. “I know. But I’ll just get the clothing dirty anyway. Come on, I really want to go and explore the exuviation sight!”

Russia understood his internal upset over America not heeding his wish to dress more professional when making a public appearance, but he could not say, “no,” to the younger nation—especially when it was so early in the morning. So, Russia let the offense slip once and accompanied America while they traveled to the sight.

They got to their desired destination fairly quick thanks to their mode of transportation. It reminded Russia of an airplane, but this was solar-powered and its build slightly different as well as its functioning. Russia smiled, knowing that the advancements upon the planet were great achievements accomplished through patience and unity. There would be more inventions to revolution their already advanced world, and Russia felt an excitement knowing he would see them all.

When they landed America was the first to jump out and race toward his people who were the ones to make such a discovery. Russia followed behind at a more controlled place. It was nice to see America’s enthusiasm about the exploration, especially when his face lit up in awe at the sheer unexpected find.
"This . . . this . . . is amazing!" America jumped up in excitement. He looked like he wanted to run toward it, but he wasn’t completely blinded to sensibility. He was too far away right now to make it so close to view the detail of it all. When he turned with his bright smile, his eyes just seemed to glow even more when he looked at Russia. "Ivan! Can you imagine we’ve found something like this! I knew it! I just knew there had to be something left over. This . . . this is what I was hoping for."

Russia’s eyes turned toward the recently discovered mountains in newly authorized territory he allowed to open for exploration. Russia had been waiting to see America’s face when he discovered this piece of ancient history that he knew still existed.

“I want pictures of every angle. I want it scanned in proportions and sent to tech to virtually rebuild. I want to know how old it is, how it was carved. Damn it, I want to know what kind of tools might have been used on this thing.” America was precise in telling the archeologists how he wanted things. After he had finished verbally marking off his ordered to-do list, he turned back to the carved faces in stone.

Russia observed America in his awed silence. The older nation already knew what this monument was. It was a relic left over from long ago. He knew America and his people would discover it after he permitted this territory to open under exploration. There were other places that Russia believed America would remember, but he would introduce him to those places little by little. Right now, he was looking at the younger nation to try and see if he recognized the four faces carved into the mountain.

“I wonder who they were,” America whispered. His eyes scanning every viewed detail of the faces as he could see from there. He seemed thrilled with the find and excited to understand how this formation came to be and to learn of the people who constructed these men.

Russia was coming to believe that America would never remember the previous cycle . . . as the others hadn’t. But Russia did, and he supposed that was what set him apart from the others.

Russia remembered opening his eyes for the very first time in this world. He was born alone, and remained that way. He grew up alongside his gathered people, but after a little while he came to understand he had retained the knowledge of the previous life.

His intelligence culled bloodthirsty leaders that tried to control his people as well as him. This time, Russia made certain that the humans treat him and the rest of his kind like gods.

Those other nations he ran into in his early years bore familiar faces. Some were kind, but some were foolish in their attempts to dominate him and the world around them. So they had to be enslaved and retaught under Russia’s knowledgeable guidance, and those who refused to see to his ways were unfortunately terminated.

Russia sought for peace. He knew by now over past experience that it was not gained through well-intended deeds and simple talks to convince even the most aggressive to lay down their arms. No, first, Russia had to be powerful for any other nation to remotely take him with a serious thought.

He was ancient, compared to most. Russia was born when nations began appearing again. He was privileged to come earlier instead of later, though he made certain that he didn’t fade into the memory of grandchildren like many of the nations around him had. It was entirely his intelligence and insight in the world and previous personalities of the once-known nations that set Russia a step or two in front of everyone else.

And so at an early age Russia set himself and his people as reigning world power. His knowledge let
the people advance faster, his knowledge had other nations flocking to him to be tutored and guided by his wisdom. It was through this he tried to instill peace into the new young nations coming into the world around him, many he remembered as his peers, as his subordinates, as his enemies.

Russia remembered the wrong of the previous cycle and tried his best to make a way so that those same mistakes could not be repeated. His wanted to give back to the world. So he did all he could within his power to help the planet heal from the devastation it had suffered.

Slowly, but surely, the patches were healing. Russia was seeing a complete recovery and possible more vibrant health to the planet they called home. This caused for more people to outstretch across the lands and regroup, and from that nations were born.

However, Russia began to grow weary in the world he had worked so hard to mold. Yes, he enjoyed the respect and worship given to him by the people of the planet and nations he helped shape into ideal countries and governments. Yes, he enjoyed how freely they all came to him in company while in later times biding him a fond farewell of the likes he had never had the privilege of knowing in the previous cycle. He was a well-thought and highly regarded nation this time, and Russia adored the praise. But he was weary, tired, and strained in his status.

Ruling by one’s self tormented the soul.

In retaining the memories of the previous cycle, so too did Russia keep his emotions; his feelings. With new life his heart began to beat anew, but it was still so hurt from the memory of the organ it had bonded to so intimately. In the beginning Russia did not have the time to address it and simply went on ignoring the ache until it became a sort of dull sensation in his chest while he made himself grow tall and strong in the rush to rule a world in recovery.

But after everything was settled, after the world began to slow and the rise of fellow nations ceased immediate rapid growth, Russia had begun to feel the ache all the more. He did not address it and for the most part tried to keep himself with international affairs and business with his multitude of friends so that he did not have to dwell on it. For a time, for a long time it worked and eventually years turned into decades, decades into centuries, and centuries into millenniums. But even with his kept time, Russia’s pace slowed.

Too often the reigning nation found himself without a thing to do in the days and in the nights. When there wasn’t a presence to speak to, when there wasn’t new literature to read, art to view, or freshly composed scores to listen to, Russia would find himself alone, left to nothing but his thoughts and the aches of his ancient body—the most prominent and pronounced being the soft burn in his heart.

It was then that Russia understood that coming into this cycle with the knowledge of the previous life was that of a curse as well. The damage done to his heart was carried over and still it did not beat as strongly as he wished, as he longed for. This slow time for him isolated him from ally and public to the point that the entire world had grown concerned.

The meditation seemed to hurt him more than anything else, and the dreams came to him, those of memories wished forgotten like the rest of the others walking about the earth. They were too real and Russia would awake screaming even as if reliving the final throes of his death . . . no . . . not his own . . . but his.

Since Russia’s rise to power and in taking world-wide territory in his sovereignty, he had set himself as an authoritative figure but in many a sense a guide, especially to the nations seeing him as the wise old personification that he was. They came to him seeking advice on an adversary they were in current enmity with, they came to him for insight on trade routes, they even came to him for
comments on simple things like interior decoration. Russia was happy to provide them with the wisdom they sought, but in this Russia used their superstition of his knowledge to keep them from certain parts of the world . . . those parts once belonging to him in a time long gone. Russia kept it that way in a silent form of mourning, and no one questioned him, at least not verbally.

It was during this slow period, and the growing and acknowledged ache in his heart that Russia finally lifted the ban. He allowed only one country to venture out into the territory that Russia had previously kept hallow from what he could. England was ordered firstly to survey once and then report back to Russia on his findings. Russia already knew what lay in those lands—nothing—but he allowed the British nation to carry on in his exploration for . . . reasons Russia himself wasn’t entirely sure of.

Just to survey once at first, but when England expressed his desire to sail the waters of the Western Hemisphere again Russia allowed him to. His requests later were granted in kind as well, and soon England was privileged with marking those waters on his trading routes only he was cleared to pass. Other nations complained and negotiations about the thrilling newly opened territories began.

Russia hadn’t wanted to believe it, but in time—after allowing the likes of France as well as Spain to send their people through the restricted territories—it was understood that he was suddenly trying to recreate the colonial age. As if everything that had happened before would happen the same as it would now. It was a stupid idea, but Russia was curious and more so . . . hopeful.

Just enough, Russia granted them all just enough space to set up colonies. From there he waited for anything, for the possibility of appearances. There were some problems however. These nations surrounding Russia were indeed not the same he recalled from before. Their personalities were near warped from the previous cycle, some retained the same, but many did not, and England had no interest in colonies. He was a lover of newly uncharted territories which Russia did not open often. And so he quickly abandoned his colonies to die off while he continued sailing the seas and trading, and building his own lands.

Russia was unamused, especially when France and Spain nearly found themselves in a war over their clashing colonies that produced offspring of which Russia was not familiar with in relation before. The children died, new ones were born. This cycle seemed to repeat from hostilities and Russia’s lack of allowing either nation more territory in which to settle. But they would not dare strike a war with Russia, not when he was too powerful and too smart.

From this horrible start, the other nations looked on the notion of colonies as a waste and trouble they did not have time for. This mind frame kept for centuries later, even as France and Spain’s colonies slowly grew and kept to a certain size. And soon enough, even Russia paid mind to them no longer, not even when his aching chest continually pulled him to go to the land himself and just . . . search.

To find the most beautiful nation the planet had ever had the blessing of bearing was nothing but a fantasy now. Russia was certain of it. It just took a few thousands of years until he came to these terms of understanding.

And so he remained quiet in his solitude, and denied his aching upset. He dressed accordingly for one in mourning, he had since the day he had been reborn. Many asked as to why he did this and for whom he so treasured so deeply to continually remember them throughout such a timespan. Russia only offered a smile and continued silence on the subject because he knew none would understand because none remembered. How could he make them see the horrible loss when they didn’t know what was missing? No, it was impossible.

Winter was dead and summer thrived in the air, so even if Russia could not have his presence with him, he was glad for the recurring memory of times once pleasant spent every time he came out and
basked in the warm sun that overlaid his lands for the first time since he had been brought up from the earth. He was no longer a country of ice and death, but of greenery and sunshine... just like he was. And Russia was happy in it, and swore to remember him always when he felt the warmth he provided on his skin and the sun for his people.

It was such an interesting world now; a world without winter. A paradise was all Russia understood it as, and once he banished the mere thought of war and famine then he truly believed that heaven was not a place one could go to once their soul passed on from this life—but a place that could be made here, on earth. Nothing seemed amiss in a world without violence, but, oh... maybe one thing.

It seemed to upset Russia knowing that the world he worked so hard to make lacked something. It was frustrating to a perfectionist like him, but now dreadfully depressing knowing that it was only he whom this irritable feeling would affect. So he let it go, kept it a secret, and kept to his silence.

So it had been to no wonder how surprised the rest of the world nations were when Russia had neglected all form of proper greeting when England paid visit with his famed golden ships and bounteous treasures. The case for Russia’s misdemeanor was not from enthusiasm and excitement for the gifts of which the smaller nation would give him. No, it had been something else that moved his heart to make race out of his palace without entourage nor transportation, and rush toward the docks on the swiftness of his own legs.

There had been a little boy that England had mentioned he found during a routing expedition that took longer than necessary. England had only mentioned him briefly before announcing his arrival to the world capital. The isle nation had brought the child for a naming ceremony, as was custom.

In Russia’s understanding of all things, and the other nations acknowledgment of said wisdom bestowed upon him, it was sought that every nation, whether micro, upcoming, sibling, or offspring, were to be brought before Russia and given a fitting name. This was to be no different and England was just doing what was customary. But he held the fair child so close and the child clung to him back. England looked quite fond of him, his eyes never leaving him for a moment until he had noticed Russia’s plight to the docks by his very own.

England had been the first nation to see Russia cry. The island nation had looked so shocked, so unprepared for this behavior that he was at a hysterical confusion on what to do. Of course he never would have guessed that all he needed to do to quell Russia’s falling tears and choking sobs was to let the weight of the newly found child press into the ancient’s arms.

It had even been a mystery to the very day of present how the child came about. There had been no planned colonies, nor remembrance of any form of various groups of humans settling into the forbidden hemisphere. Yet this child appeared as any upcoming nation had, and since England had been the first to discover him through sheer accident, he attached to him and so dubbed him as his brother.

Be it that they were a great span of years apart, the two formed a bond of kinsmanship, though many believed this only because the child knew of no other nation than the isle personification. But even so, on the day of his arrival into the world the entire planet seemed to halt for a moment and alert her residents of his new place. Nations from all over refused to continue their duties and came to see the child in the naming ceremony. The gathering was grand, but it was a detail Russia had remembered neglecting, when all his gaze and thoughts were solely on the boy.

He was a handsome child, and endearing with the way he clung to England despite it being time to hand him into Russia’s arms for the gift of a name. He was well-mannered for the most part as well. His features betrayed his want to rest in England’s arms, but in time those wide blue eyes of his
looked upon the ancient nation now holding him, and the easing curiosity settled him.

When Russia had announced both of the child’s name it was commonly understood and in habit everyone clapped. But when Russia had afterwards announced the boy to be granted status as his future mate, the room turned quiet. The ancient nation of Russia never showed interest in any sort of bond with any personification nor mortal. The announcement startled every nation, and unsettled England most of all.

England had been born an only child into this cycle and the thought of him being able to name a nation as his sibling thrilled him, but after Russia’s announcement he was one of the many to understand that the newly discovered nation would have to leave his home and merge with Russia’s as his spouse. The British nation tried to be reasonable and see to the privileges in his mind, but his upset was noted amongst many of his peers and even to Russia. While the ancient nation wished to have the child live with him immediately, he, however, granted England the chance to raise him until the merging ceremony was called upon.

It seemed to ease the younger nation substantially, but Russia quickly took notice of the other nations’ confusion as well as upset. It was a highly esteemed position, to be Russia’s partner, when before he made no inclination of ever desiring one so close. Russia’s memory was good and he recalled the times of his high rise into power and how many sought an alliance, a partnership, merges. He declined every offer no matter the territories, riches, or even tactical advantages to gain from such unions. He would love no other than the one his heart ached for.

Russia even believed he would have still felt this way even if he had lost all memories prior to waking up in this cycle. He was finally retaining a happiness in his life now that the young boy had been discovered and brought to him. He made sure to send to England gifts for the child and to visit often so the boy did not grow too estranged from him.

Russia and young America had pleasant times together, and he did not mind playing such rugged games with the child if he wished to even if his older brother saw the playdates as disrespectful. If the boy wanted to climb trees then Russia would settle him in the branches, if the boy wanted to ride wild stallions then Russia would pick the most rowdy animal and dare the child to tame it, if the boy wanted to try the most controversy foods for simple dares then Russia would order them for him and even join him in his attempt at braving the unknown. Russia had never had so much fun; standing beside America as he grew into a young lad. He took the role of best friend more than anything else, even despite his age, while England was almost seem more as a parent than an older sibling. But Russia would not deny the love America had for his brother or even the other nations whom he showed fondness for.

He was in the form of a mere young fourteen-year-old when Russia could find himself to wait for his maturity no longer and deemed him ripe to merge with. America and his people were intimidated by the announcement continually showed their unease even through the ceremony. England had bid his wishes that Russia continue to wait until the boy’s body grow a little more, but this time America’s growth rate retained a slower pace and was not nearly as fast as it had been previously, so Russia’s stunted wait was understandable—at least to himself.

To appease England in any way, Russia offered riches directly from his treasury to him in a sort of dowry for the union as well as opened other banned territories to England alone. The nation was somewhat quelled with the gifts, but the Brit remained quite upright through the entire unification ceremony, and easily showed his decline in letting his brother go.

But Russia was kind to America on their unification day and showed the entire world present how privileged the boy was now. His lands were favored over others, his people seen as more attractive
than those of ancient breed. His schools were prized, his product deemed of superior quality, and his trade of high recommendation now through Russia’s desire of the nation. He was closed off from the rest of the world after the unification became official and any older nation wishing to seek treaties or set up trade would now have to come through Russia’s demands.

For a while Russia had been afraid that young America hadn’t wanted the union. Even in this cycle the boy was fond of his independency, and so Russia worried that he saw a unification as a means of enslavement, when Russia only meant for him to see it as a promotion in world status. While Russia still reigned supreme on the scale of nations, he wanted his mate to have the same privileges, to grow in military might and set up bases alongside his own. If America wished to visit another land then he was free to do so. Russia gave him as much power as himself, but he was still far older and so many decisions would weigh upon him alone due to his wisdom in foresight.

It was the day of their unification that worried Russia the most. America was quiet a majority of that day, and Russia feared him to be frightened of the idea that he was now bound to another nation in the laws of marriage. Russia wanted the young nation to like his new status, to enjoy his recently acquired territories, and to love his husband.

America trembled when Russia and he made to consummate their union. Russia was gentle with him and patient. The much younger nation did not fight him or attempt to pull his mind away from the act, but he tried to remain still and compliant. Russia tried to help him understand how much he loved him even in something that was imperative they do due to the fact of the binding treaty.

So quiet, America was still so quiet even on the morrow after. He laid still, eyes awake and watching while Russia tended to him and cleaned up the sweat and grime from his skin. In this task Russia explained his affection for the boy and even the lifetimes of his love for him. He knew the younger nation wouldn’t understand and it hurt Russia a small amount in knowing that the better memories of a life of regret were even forgotten, but in his task of cleaning the boy he watched as America responded to him, as he looked at him, as he reached out and took up his larger hands to hold and spread his legs to invite.

Their second joining was a much better experience for the both of them. In this America responded better to Russia’s touches and kisses, and made to return the older’s passion in his own way. In time America came to love Russia as much as Russia had always loved him. The feeling grew in their marriage and soon they were both as close as Russia had always longed to be in every cycle.

It had been a perilous journey full of long-suffering, but Russia would not deny the fruition of his work. Right now he enjoyed watching how enthusiastic his spouse was over the new find in the recently opened mountain regions. Russia remembered the reason for this large carving’s construction, but he kept to himself to let America and the others fascinate over their existence. Russia often wondered when he would tell everyone of the previous cycles. Would they believe him? Would they even be able to comprehend?

Russia enjoyed the present peace and so kept to his silence in hopes to retain it.

“It’s marvelous, Ivan, it really is.” America looked so awe-struck with the newly found structure. His men had already scanned it and digitally uploaded the format onto America’s folder device. America’s fingers constantly stroked the miniscule hologram of the structured layout.

When Russia watched those fascinated blue eyes of his scan the contours of the carved faces, it amazed the older nation how no recognition flashed across his spouse’s irises. It was sadly humorous because Russia remembered a time when nothing; no catastrophe, or detrimental event, could ever erase those familiar face’s from the boy’s memory. Now, those four once-heroes of his never existed in America’s life—at least not this one.
“I wonder who constructed it,” America said in curious question. “Was it the indigenous people, or perhaps there had been a civilization here before . . . long before . . .” His eyes then turned toward his mate. “Would you know anything of this?”

Russia had sworn never to steal truth from his spouse on their merging day. He made to keep that oath as well, but he was uncertain if he, or the other countries, could even comprehend what Russia understood in clarity. There were theories of what indeed had happened, of the cycles of the nations of their peoples, but they were not looked upon with any amount of seriousness as they should be. No, instead, Russia evaded directly answering until he was sure some understanding of his knowledge could be comprehended in those being informed.

“I knew of no other nation to pertain these borders except you, Alfred,” Russia answered, and he was telling the truth. There had been no other nation except him in these lands, not even in the ancient society of which Russia was birthed from.

“Yeah, but, that’s because these lands were sealed off, forbidden from any settlement,” America spoke up, keeping his gaze upon the faces. “There’s just . . . so much we don’t know,” he muttered to himself. “All of these advancements mean nothing if we can’t understand where we came from.” Alfred sighed in frustration, his form falling beside the place where his spouse sat himself. “I’m sorry, Ivan, I just . . . I want to know so much.” There was a fondness in those blue eyes that Ivan was very familiar with when America looked at the 3D hologram of the scanned sculpture. “I want to explore the rest of the forbidden territories, I want to know who sculpted these faces.” Blue eyes glanced upward toward the setting sun and the space above. “I want to know what’s out there, past this planet.” A smile graced the boy’s lips as he pointed toward the vision of the revealing moon. “I want to fly up there and set foot on the surface of the moon. We have all of this technology and yet we still haven’t breached the atmosphere.”

Yes, that pioneering spirit was still embedded into America, and it always made Russia smile. However, the lack of having such limited freedom to do the things he longed for made the younger nation sad. The excitement would build until memory reminded him of the restrictions and lack of funding for these sort of expeditions. Nothing was approved without Russia’s say-so, including commandeering a mission into space.

While what America had said was true; that they were highly advanced enough to accomplish all of their heightened dreams, it was still up to Russia to give approval of exploration, whether on or outside of the planet. Even the moon held artifacts that Russia knew his spouse would baffle over. A flag of red and white stripes and fifty stars continually held up there. Russia knew America wouldn’t remember putting it up there, but he knew the boy would wonder why it was there and seek information on forgotten civilizations past.

In time Russia would tell him all, with no expectancy of his young mate comprehending. The ancient nation had no qualms with revealing the things in his intellectual mind, but now just was not the right moment. As of right then he would remain quiet and supportive of America’s exuviations and exploration endeavors.

“I have faith you will discover these revolutionary mysteries in time,” Russia said, reaching out and pressing his hand down upon America’s knee while the Western nation continually gazed and memorized the makings of the carvings. “Don’t let one conundrum drive you into the depression of the unknown. You are smart, Alfred. You will unravel its mystery in time.” Leaning forward, Russia reached up and brushed America’s hair behind his ear and placed a tender kiss to the shell of cartilage. “And you are young, you have many, many years ahead of you to tackle the endless questions inside of you.”
Russia was glad to see the boy smile. He reveled in the feel of America turned to him, wrapping his arm around his neck and pressing the palm of his hand against the back of his head just to pull the older forward and grant him a pleasantly sweet kiss of gratitude.

“I know, I just tend to get ahead of myself,” America replied when he pulled his lips away and blushed at his usual rushed behavior. Russia automatically shifted when American leaned himself against him, pressing his head against his shoulder and finally taking his eyes off of the hologram for a moment.

Russia chuckled at America’s statement. He would have let them stay like this, enjoying the other’s presence and closeness, but he had to mention, “Then you must remember the naming ceremony scheduled for this evening.”

Just as expected; Russia felt America stiffen. He was curious if the boy would play aloofness about the entire situation and act as if he had remembered the upcoming event, but he hadn’t. Instead he pulled away and looked at Russia with wide eyes.

“Who?” He questioned.

“Prussia,” Russia answered. “His cleared colonies have produced him offspring. He means to bring the child for me to name.”

“Tonight?” America suddenly jumped up. “Why didn’t you tell me?!”

Russia sat thoroughly amused while America darted over to his team of experts, gave them a list of what he wanted done by the end of the day involving the dig site, and then gathered all of the things he would look at and test back in the capital before rushing off toward their mode of transportation.

“Ivan, are you coming? We’re going to be late!” came America’s call while the younger nation tried shoving all of the artifacts into their compartment, clearly he hadn’t seen the trail he had left from the main setup research base toward their vehicle.

Russia took his time getting there for as long as it took to pick up the dropped pieces. When he finally reached the door he was met by quite an aggravated American nation. But those narrowed blue eyes and condescending frown vanished in the blink of an eye when they locked onto the dropped items he had left behind in his hurry to race back to their transport.

Russia had those relics out of his hand as quickly as he had revealed them to his forgetful spouse. Before a chuckle even resounded over the quick speed of clearing his hands, America had leaned out of the seating compartment and offered a thankful peck on the lips, but that was all Russia got when it was clear America had leaned back into his seat, expecting to leave immediately.

It did not matter if Russia and America turned up fashionably late or not. The ceremony would not proceed without Russia, for it was he who graced the new find with a name fitting. A few upset kept nations would not deter the couple from taking their time to prepare themselves in accordance to public appearance.

“A lot of the countries are attending this time,” America noted, himself already ready and now seated to read to list of checked-in attendees.

“I know,” Russia replied back after fixing his wardrobe ornaments. His uniform was tedious as it should be in its exquisite display, and he had to constantly turn and examine himself in the mirror to make sure every decoration was in its rightful position and angled properly. It certainly reminded him of the cycles previously, of his glamorous imperial age, and looking over, Russia’s smile turned at
the lavish scene of his American bride. The boy had no qualms with such extravagant attire, and had since grown used to the fittings and dazzlingly displays in public. Now he sat calm in the regal dressing.

Crowns with speckled, and perfectly cut brilliant gems shaped their brows, revealing their status through ornate declaration. It was expected for the both of them to always bear their attire of supremacy, even in something as small as visiting a city charity. Russia wanted to make sure that all eyes always turned to them when they made their presence known, and he deftly wanted to ensure that all gazes viewed his spouse as the most privileged nation in the world . . . because he indeed was.

“This year has been very pleasant,” Russia recalled as he walked over toward his awaiting spouse. Those big blue eyes glanced away from the attendee sheet and up toward his powerful husband. “A year full of exploring new frontiers than barricading borders, of finalizing peace treaties than signing declarations of aggression, of new nations and colonies arising to be named than falling before their time, forgotten. Yes, this is what I strive for, and what everyone else should as well.” Russia’s eyes glanced toward the list of names and let his gloved fingers trace over a well known signature. “England is here. I’m certain you cannot wait to tell him of your findings.”

America smiled and nodded in glee. He stood up and expectantly wrapped his hand around Russia’s arm before the two turned and headed out of their changing quarters to meet their guests.

Russia would never grow tired of the official announcers declaring their entrance into public. It had been all Russia had longed for in every life; to have America by his side, his partner, his equal, holding onto him as he held onto him while their names were exclaimed in all compliments to the other.

“The Grand Russo-American Union of the International Republic. All rise for their entrance.”

Perhaps more so better than having America next to him, holding onto him, was having all of the nations respectfully acknowledging their union and understanding why Russia had chosen America of all to treasure with such titles. This had been all Russia had sought previously, and now, there was no animosity between anyone over this decision of relationship, there was no jealousy, there was no forcefulness, all was consent, and if some wished to secretly long for the things Russia himself had accomplished then they could because Russia knew that everyone understood their place, and to steal from the Grand Russo International Republic would be thought of nothing more than the inconceivable likes.

No, Russia had no fear of letting go of America while he mingled himself into the crowd of awaiting countries after their arrival announcement because he knew the young nation would always faithfully return to him.

“England, England, I have to tell you what I’ve found!” America had found his brother rather quickly and readily talked his ear off about the fascinating discover he and his people had found recently. Russia liked the way England’s eyes lit up, the two siblings both shared in the love for anything new and mysterious. It was a good thing that had so many related interests, even though it had been centuries since America had lived with his older brother, the two still kept in touch regularly through distant communication and occasional visiting.

The two supreme nations mingled with the crowd of nations, waiting until the appropriate hour to give the name to the newly birthed colony. Russia saw the to-be-named child resting in their parent’s arms, all dressed for presentation and quiet. Russia was glad to see the parent nation happy again. This was actually his second colony, the first having perished from an unexpected disease outbreak. The help hadn’t gotten to the sick fast enough to save anyone and so the people and their young
colony they consisted of passed away. This new young one was born some years later after the tragic event, and now all were hopeful she would build up the majestic structures from the ashes of her fallen brother.

“It’s been a while since I’ve seen your cousin smile so happily,” Russia spoke up, making the nation who remained quiet, eyes on America as he chatted away with his brother, jump and turn toward the higher reigning country.

The young German offered a smile and a polite bow in reverence to Russia before straightening his posture. “It is. But he’s worked hard at this new colony. I shouldn’t think she to vanish as quickly as the other one.”

“So we should all hope.” Russia’s eyes turned back to the child who looked quite content in Prussia’s arms while he talked away to the nations surrounding him and inquiring his standing on the colony’s development. Russia then smiled and looked at the young German, actually the youngest nation in Europe at this point. “Frankly, I am surprised you have yet to approach me for approval of colonies of your own.”

Germany’s eyes widened at Russia’s suggestion and a faint unsure blush dusted his cheeks. “I wouldn’t think I’d know where to start. No, I’m happy where I am.”

“Hmm, perhaps when you are older.”

Russia knew there were still parts of the world that needed populated, and could sustain human life. He’d gladly accept more countries wishing to colonize if the idea of such would grow more on the countries. Right now, there still weren’t many comfortable with sending out various groups of their people and funds to sustain a surveyed colony, especially not after the disasters that occurred with the very first ones. However, Russia was surprised to see Prussia start all over again even after the heartbreak of losing his firstborn son. Now, Russia hoped that his enthusiasm would help ease the fears of the other on-looking countries and goad them to follow in his successfully striving footsteps.

“What about you?” Germany’s question pulled Russia’s concentration from his wandering thoughts and when he looked at the young German who stood tall and expectant to reach full adulthood like his peers, the young nation motioned back toward where America continued his conversation with England. “Are there any thoughts of colonization of your own? America might take to the notion.” Germany’s light eyes turned toward the nation who had broken out in a laughter over something humorous England had mentioned. The boy had such nice laughter. “I’m certain the colonies would be very appeasing, and very beautiful.” The sigh in Germany’s tone was noted. Not that Russia had to be reminded; he had known for a long time of the young nation’s affection for his spouse.

Germany had been born into Europe’s land when Russia and the others were all very old, thinking no more nations—not even the ones Russia remembered from the previous cycle—would appear than who already had. But Germany appeared and was brought before Russia to name in his infancy. The child had cried in his arms during the naming ceremony and wouldn’t silence until America reached out and took him into his arms. The child was automatically smitten with the western beauty and from then on, as the German nation grew around his cousins and neighbors, his eyes held to the west where America lay in desire just to see him.

It seemed that even forgotten affection continued without an explanation how.

“We haven’t the need for a colony,” Russia simply replied, his own gaze returning to where Alfred stood and conversed. Truthfully, he’s never brought the subject up with Alfred, nor had the younger nation spoken about it with him. Russia wasn’t certain on his spouse’s standing about the subject. “We are content how we are.” And they were.
Germany offered Russia a smile of formal meaning, but when he turned his eyes upon America his smile softened and seemed to hold for much longer. “Well, maybe later. My cousin seems to be doing something right.” The German nation’s gaze turned back to Prussia who was showing off his daughter colony. “Perhaps the need to colonize will have a ripple effect and other nations will begin to spread out of their own borders. There’s always the prohibited western territories under your jurisdiction. I’m certain that would be a pleasant place for you and he to start.”

“Perhaps one day,” Russia responded only in kind. “But we are still discovering the interesting things about recently opened borders. One step at a time.”

Russia then moved on and came up to Prussia, announcing it time to name his colony. It was formal as anything else. Every nation stood at attendance and beheld the spectacle as Russia approached a pedestal and stood higher so that the gathered nations could see when he took the child into his arms and blessed and named her.

America fell in his place by his side, standing just a little away from him. Even though America was his spouse, these naming ceremonies were only fulfilled with Russia’s guidance. He held the child and he recited the name. America was there only to present himself during the naming.

It was still an exciting thing to see no matter how many millennia Russia continued with this tradition. Russia would grace the child with a national name as well as human, and every nation present awaited to hear what this newly born colony would so be called.

Russia turned his eyes upon Prussia. The Prussian country knew what to do after having done this exact cycle with his previous child. Once the supreme nation’s eyes were on him he came up onto the stand, holding his child close. He stopped, stood still, waited for Russia’s next movement. Russia then turned to him, stood still for a moment, holding Prussia’s gaze. When Russia held out his arms to take the child, Prussia didn’t wait a moment’s longer before placing her into the Grand Russo’s arms.

When the babe was in his arms, Russian turned back to face the crowd of nations. The room was silent in anticipation for the given name. Violet eyes fell on the child and a kind smile offered to the child staring back at him. She was a lovely little girl and felt strong in Russia’s arms. With the right amount of care she would survive to adulthood unlike her unfortunate brother.

Taking all the time he wanted to examine her features, Russia sighed contently before he turned toward his spouse. The American looked quite surprised, off guard that Russia had turned to him. The motion was not traditional at all, and by the way America looked right and left and then toward his mate with confusion only confirmed his bewilderment.

“Yes, would you like to name her, Alfred?” Russia offered, even going as far to hold out the young colony before the nation.

America’s eyes widened and then blinked, looking down at the child, completely unsure of how to respond to such a request. But his arms came out, and the second they looked study enough to hold, the child was placed into his embrace. There was a slight awkwardness in positioning the child right in his arms, but after that, Ivan pressed his hand to the back of America and urged him to step forward and declare a name fitting for the little one in his arms.

“I, uh . . .” America’s eyes kept glancing down to the child and then back toward the awaiting crowd. He’d held children before, but was never honored in allowing a name.

Russia has always named every child, colony, nation, or micronation alike. America didn’t know where to start. But even so, America has always been a very forward speaker and for him to
suddenly come up with nothing to say was unusual for him.

America’s nervousness seemed to fade away the more he held his eyes on the child. He’s always loved children and usually after naming ceremonies, was always the first to ask the parent to hold their offspring. The little girl was beautiful and held the much older nation mesmerized by her spirit. Her little hand even decided to take hold of his thumb and keep it with her until her time on stage was over.

“I think . . . no . . .” America chuckled, excusing his unprofessional self before adjusting the girl in his arms once more and saying, “Lemuria, yeah, that name sounds like it’ll fit her.”

“And what about her other name?” Russia questioned to remind.

“Oh.” America nodded his head and then took a moment to think about it while keeping his eyes on the girl who held his gaze. “Amelia,” he answered. “I’ve always . . . liked that name.”

Russia chuckled quietly. Those certainly weren’t this girl’s name in the previous cycle, but what was wrong with new names for new lifetimes?

With a nod, Russia stepped forward with acceptance and then turned his gaze toward the nations. “She has been named, accept her and respect her. This is Lemuria.”

Claps resounded in the room and Prussia approached America to receive his daughter again. America had all but forgotten the final motion of handing the child back to the parent. The girl simply enraptured him and he had been in another world with her.

“Oh, sorry. Here you go.”

America smiled and handed the little one to her parent nation who smiled affectionately at her and softly repeated her official name to her. It was a heartfelt sight, one that Alfred would remember even after the nations returned to their own homes and retired their duties for the night.

“Why did you let me name the child this time?” America asked while he and his husband took their leave of presence and returned to their private wing.

Russia halted for a moment, his eyes turning toward his young spouse with curiosity. “Did you not wish me to?”

“It’s not that,” America swore, his hands holding onto Russia’s arm began curling fingers, digging into the ivory fabric of Russia’s decorative attire. “I just hadn’t been expecting it.”

“You named her rightly,” Russia said, patting America’s hand. “Far better than what I could have named the child.”

“What would you have named her?” America questioned with an interested smile. The boy leaned close, his chest pressing warmly against Russia’s side. The older nation smiled in return, knowing full well how to handle the younger’s playful curiosity.

“A name that shall not exist,” he simply replied teasingly and continued walking back to their room with or without his spouse clinging to his arm.

America had loosened his jaw, his lips parting in either shock or a whine. He had stayed behind while Russia continued on the path they had been on. Before long he chased after his spouse.

“Come on, I really want to know!” Was his complaint all the way back to their quarters.
Russia wasn't so much as annoyed by America's persistence in the matter than he was convicted. He halted before the entrance to their chambers, his hand already reaching out to grip the handle but not pulling. Their daily routine to retire to bed together at the end of every day halted to present clarification . . . for the both of them.

"Do you remember our vows when we unified?" Russia turned his eyes toward America. He was right beside him in wait for him to either open their bedroom door or grant him an answer to his pressing question. But, by Russia's, America looked taken aback; eyes fluttering and lips parting ever so slightly while his entire form took a step back to regain mental bearings.

"That was a long time ago," America replied, a chuckle leaving his throat to note his lack of preparedness to instantly answer the ancient nation's question.

"But do you remember them?" Russia questioned once more. It was true that the day of their unification had been centuries ago. The thought alone made Russia smile. They'd been married for many, many years without one single problem between their peoples. Not many nations could accomplish such seemingly steep feats.

"How could I forget them?"

The softened tone swooned Russia's heart. There America stood, right before him, smiling gently and looking at him with an ever growing endearing gaze. Those blue eyes seemed to shine so brightly when he looked at Russia like that, they were the reason the ancient nation continually fell in love with this young inspiring country day after day after day.

"This day, hence forth do I swear . . ." A fondness arose in Russia's heart during the recital that it rose inside his chest and pressed a content sigh out of his nostrils. "To join myself to this nation. To uphold your constitution as you revere mine. To treat your land with sacred respect and acknowledge the sovereignty of your citizens and their ordained rights. To remain by your side in growth, in crisis. To aide and enact all fairness involving the lay of your territories."

"Where you walk, so will I," America began as if his memory hadn't faded from that moment at all. He'd come a long way in reciting these binding verses than when he was the little boy stuttering, repeating, and nearly forgetting all of the rehearsed words before the audience of the world. "Where you rest, so will I. Whom you wrestle in enmity against, so will I offer a strong hand in alliance. Your companionship do I accept. Your guidance do I accept. Your declaration of my sovereignty to reign I will uphold and in so respect your presence by my side."

"As my partner," Russian began to finish.

"As my companion," America continued on with him, his smile growing while they recited their old vows that neither dared forget.

"As my mate."

"My spouse."

The couple smiled alike, both of their gazes sparkling while the need to lean in and press lips to lips to complete the oath arose inside them. But Ivan blinked away the gleam in his eyes to express something much more weighing.

"You are my equal, Alfred," Russia reminded. "So often does the world, as well as you, see this. We recited this promise on the day of our unification. I said those words for the other nations of the world to hear and understand that I meant every word. I know that I am old and my wisdom
seemingly overshadows your own, but so too are you intelligent beyond my understanding, and perhaps your own. I wish for us to stand side by side during ceremonies instead of you just slightly behind me. I want the other nations to look to you for guidance as much as they do me." With a smile, Russia reached up and brushed his knuckles against the bronzed cheeks of his spouse. "Because I already do," Russian admitted in case America had forgotten. "And if the others view me as such a model country then I would wish they cherish you and your words and your ideas and your presence as much as I do."

Russia's heart fluttered when he felt American lean into his touch, rising his own hand to press against Russia's held touch if just to keep him there, pressing against his face.

Russia could even see the disappointment in the boy's expressions when he took his hand back and remained a distance from the western nation.

"That is why I have decided to open up the rest of the banned territories." When Russia had stated that, he watched America's eyes widen in surprise.

"You would do that?" America sounded absolutely shocked, and why shouldn't he? Russia's had those perimeters titled as off-limits for thousands upon thousands of years.

"Yes," Russian nodded. "But I am leaving these opened borders for you to explore and map and excavate. I do not want the others attempting to stake claims just yet. These territories will be in your hands. You are to do with them as you see fit."

America blinked, his mouth opening as if to say something only to close with a tied tongue. "Well, I'm still just discovering all the things in the recently opened territory." America chuckled while scratching his cheek. "I'll move into the rest in time."

Russia nodded. "Whatever you want will be given to you." He had said this multiple times before even though in the past, when America inquired about the outer reaches of the sky as well as the banned territory, Russia would turn his thoughts away from them and simply explain that their exploration was not needed at the moment. Of course it wasn't to Russia because he already knew what lay in those curious sectors, but he should have never turned away his mate's curiosity.

"If you wish to reach the moon just to see what it is made of then I will gladly fund every expedition."

America chuckled, reaching up and patting Russia's shoulder. "Let's find out all we can about this world first. A journey to the moon sounds tempting, but maybe after every terrain on this planet's been explored."

Russia enjoyed the way America's eyes shined with excitement. The youth in him was all envied by the others, even by the Grand Russo himself.

"Why the sudden change of heart? If you don't mind me asking." Wide blue eyes looked up at him expectantly, waiting, hoping for an answer.

"To be honest? It began during the ceremony, when you looked as equally surprised to be allowed to name the colony," Russia admitted. "I didn't like how you and the others viewed yourself as just a privileged nation. True, you are, but your authority should coincide with my own. I was at fault as well for not fully understanding mine, as well as your own, role in our marriage. I would . . ." Russia sighed. It had been a while since he's felt shame, but after this realization and America's question that budded this confession, he knew it was only right to feel it. "I would ask for your forgiveness in neglecting your authorized supremacy. You are my mate, my partner, my lover, my equal, my
spouse. To hide something from you should be punishable by death."

When Ivan then felt Alfred press his hand against his face, the Russian's violet gaze turned to look into the face of his spouse. America was smiling at him, every expression made seemed understanding, as the boy always was. Right away Russia caught on to the slight shake of that golden head, a sign of disagreement in the American.

"But then who would I love if you die?" America questioned softly, the pads of his fingers rubbing gentle against pale skin.

Russia's arms opened without a command signal from his brain when the younger nation pressed close and wished to be held in the strong arms of his much older husband. So was the result of their bond, but Russia didn't mind, because their desires worked both ways. Right then he wanted American to hold him back just as a strong embrace, and the young nation did, quickly wrapping his arms around the Russian country in security.

"No matter what you do, Ivan, you'll never get me to fall out of love with you," America answered with conviction, nuzzling his face against Russia's sternum.

Russia's fingers curled, digging into the fine gold and blue fabric of America's attire. The jewels laden upon America's neck and clothing jingled under the ancient nation's touch, tingling Russia's ears, but more so was he focused on the breathing of his love, and the feel of the warmth of his body pressed against him. He remained still, just basking in the presence and reality of holding American so intimately in his arms. When he pulled back if only to look the boy in the face, Russia's fingers traced that strong American jaw, marveling at the absolute perfectly structured nation before him.

"What if I were to kill you?" Surely that would make America loath him beyond the grave. Visions of previous circumstances rolled across Russia's vision in his mind. Deftly not forgotten by the ancient nation, much to his inner torment.

Never once had Russia spoke about death with America. He's expressed his dislike for any who harmed America, intentional or not, and spoke in detail of what he'd do to any unfortunate individual who'd enact this, but to speak so openly of death when Russia wished no country to think of it, much less suggest a possible murder of the one he proclaimed to love, why, it was provocative, and frightening in its own sense.

But America showed no fear. Confusion had flashed though his bright topaz-like eyes briefly in the beginning before a smile warmed his gaze and darkened the hue of his irises.

"If you did, I know you would not be long after me," America answered in a retort way.

"And why is that?" Russia was curious why he believed his would-be murderer would likely fall into the throes of death shortly after committing the deed to slay him firstly.

"Because you love me," America answered with all the serious conviction on his held gaze. Reaching up, America placed his palm to Russia's cheek again. "You wouldn't be able to live without me as I wouldn't be able to live without you." No, the world just wasn't worth existing in if love wasn't present, and assuredly it couldn't be if the love of their life simply ceased to exist.

Russia nodded in agreement. Leaning into America's warm hand. In a grim sort of happiness, Russia was glad to know America would love no other and that he'd rather die than exist in this world without him. Well, the feeling was mutual. Similar enough to evoke a small fear in the couple's chests that urged them to press closer, hold tighter, and lean in to one another so to touch lips.
Their kiss held in intimacy while they allowed their spirits to reach out and caress one another, erasing every brought up fear and uncertainty. For what their spiritual auras could not coax into assurance, so did their bodies that moved against the other. Hands pressed close just the right way, stances shifting almost like a dance, creating a steady movement to rock for the both of them.

Even while they remained deep in the recess of their territory, of their expansive home, in their own private wing where no other nation nor servant of any kind were allowed, they still pressed forward, urging for their presences to vanish into the darkness of their chambers, even being so considerate to close the large doors behind them. The security of their room relaxed both nations to an extent, but not near enough as the other’s embrace. They stood in the dark by the door way in one another’s arms, remaining so until they moved otherwise.

When they moved again it was to meet lips. The press of their mouths harder than before, but their lips never strayed from one another, nor had their hands while clinging to the other. They remained in simple content in the quiet of their room, keeping eyes closed and nostrils open to take in the scents of their surroundings, and tongues exploring to remember the taste of their beloved.

Their spirits rejuvenated with each touch, taste, and smell. Their bodies began to tremble with vigor, the energy so trapped inside their muscles that they opted to cling tighter before moving limbs to feel familiar physiques. The two had kept their eyes shut while they felt and smelt and tasted. They enjoyed just knowing the other was real underneath their touch when they reached out to feel.

But when their eyes opened, and the glow of their irises shamed even the moon’s rays falling through the large scenic windows. They let their minds get lost in the other’s gaze, sharing their secrets, their thoughts, their declarations, their history with one another in absolute silence.

And after a while of just looking at the beauty standing before them they pressed close again. This time fingers slid into fabric if only in an attempt to feel the other, skin to skin. Both knew their attire were at the peak of formal, and it would take some tasking time to remove these obstacles, but they set to the mission without a complaint.

Russia’s hands caressed the sides of America’s face while he felt his lover reaching behind him to unclasp the straps hidden underneath his ceremonial cloak. Those fingers were so familiar with the lay of the garment and its working that it was fluttering to the floor quicker than Russia had time to lean in again and press a kiss to his spouse. Even when their lips met again at the ancient’s demand, America’s mind had not trailed away from his sought after task. Those hands continued to slide up Russia’s arms, to his sides, his chest, unhooking, unbuttoning, unstrapping.

When Russia felt the clothing worn upon him loosening he then sought to have America in a fit of his own. So, taking off the gloves adorned on his hands, he then moved his pale fingers to the boy’s wardrobe. He firstly took off the ornate jewelry, setting aside the precious stones and expensive medals before starting to loosen the clothing fitted to the American nation.

Russia’s lips began wandering astray from the American’s hot mouth, pressing firstly to the corner, the kiss half on and half off those tanned lips, and then to the chin, and now Russia was placing gentle kisses upon America’s neck. Feeling the way the younger arched his neck into the loving kisses urged Russia to continue his exploration of already mapped territory. His lips pressed harder against pulsing skin, and when his mouth parted he began to run his teeth along the curves of that neck, nibbling on his way down to the unclasp collar.

Russia felt a sigh leave America when his lips pressed down onto his vocals. He had the urge to pull away a few inches if just to look upon his face, hoping to see appeasement. Russia’s lips turned when America’s eyes fluttered open and looked upon him with glowing eyes. Those lips of his were plump from previous kisses, and parted to let out the content sighs his body created from reaction of
Russia’s tender affection.

Their lips met halfway this time while arms tangled their long limbs around the other’s body, tightening embraces just to press as close as physically possible. The sealed lips moved against one another in a quicker dance, encouraging folds to part and tongues to taste of the other again. Fingers curled into the fabric of clothing, pulling on loosened sets.

It had been Russia who then moved his hands firstly. He reached down, whilst his lips moved away from America’s seeking mouth if just to press against an offered neck. Russia’s hands found purchase on his spouse’s hips, feeling the belts and holsters for the American country’s decorative ceremonial pieces. His fingers did not seek for the buckles to these straps, instead they held tightly to the pelvis, wrists flicking in a twist so the turn the boy around and press his back to the ancient’s chest.

Automatically America melted into Russia’s body. The older nation’s hands coming around to rub against the younger’s chest and then dip down toward his abdomen, just to feel the way he breathed. But when hot breath blew against his neck, Russia turned his face, now looking into the eyes of his lover whose irises darkened by the second while he moved against him, his own arms coming up to press against his neck while the other tangled fingers into Russia’s hair.

A moan passed out between America’s parted lips the moment Russia rolled his hips for the first time. In sync, America rolled his hips back against him, letting his firm behind press against Russia’s crotch just the right way. The movement evoked a shuddering sigh out of Russia’s throat and egged on another roll.

They pressed their mouths close to one another, but did not lock lips. Instead they inhaled the other’s breath, feeling how it felt against their skin and teeth and tasted on their tongue. All the while they moved against one another, rolling, sighing, and moaning.

Both could feel the arousal burning inside their guts, and the gentle throb aching their southern territories. When American closed his lips to smile, he leaned in close to Russia’s face, closer than he had been, and nuzzled his nose against Russia’s affectionately before pressing his lips to his mate’s in a sturdier kiss.

When America pulled away, he did so subtly. Russia had been holding him, moving his hips against his one moment and then the next he had paralyzed him with a delectable kiss and moved himself away without his grasp of the action. And America kept him mesmerized as he walked a few paces away, standing ever closer to the large bed they slept on at nights. He stood with his back to him for a short moment before turning to Russia, a smile on his lips while his hands reached up and slid the loosened garments down off his shoulders.

The rest of the clothing was easily slipped out of and now there America stood, bare, bathed in the bright moon’s rays falling from the windows. When America reached his arms outward, stretching them, and then arching them back behind his head, Russia’s eyes fell on those toned muscles, shadowed in the silvery rays. The younger nation was godly in form. He grew slower than Russia had previously called, but when he finally pushed past those adolescent years, he began filling out steadily, and now Russia was able to see the result of full maturity of body.

Nothing was said in the viewing. America gladly showed off his body to his mate while his eyes motioned for him to follow his lead. Instead of heeding those silent pleas, Russia came closer. His hands reaching out to run along America’s ribcage, fingers tracing along muscle while journeying back behind, to run up along his spine and rest palms near his shoulder blades.

Eyes on him, and Russia’s eyes on America. Again they met in the middle when a kiss was sought.
after. And while Russia pressed America more into him with his pulling hands, the younger nation did no such thing with his own embrace. When he reached his hands up, Russia thought him to hold him as he held him, but instead his hands began sliding up loosened clothing, tugging at them, even managing to pull some away without breaking their kiss.

When the kiss was broken, it was from America’s want to press his lips to revealed skin. Right away he leaned his head so that he could kiss Russia’s pale throat, lingering on some patches of skin just to suckle and attempt to discolor. Those warm hands of his splayed out across Russia’s chest, rubbing over muscle and small silvery hair while his lips followed the trail of their caress.

Russia’s own hands fell to the small of America’s back, and held him closer at the abdomen while enjoying the way his mate lavished him with affection. His ceremonial attire was unimportant as America disbanded it, nor were the places the articles fell. All that was significant in that moment was being able to press skin against skin, and now, Russia finally could.

America reached back up, wrapping his arms around Russia’s neck, pulling him closer to kiss now that they could feel the other’s body without hindrance. They suckled the other’s mouth for some time before their legs tangled together and the only means to settle the problem was to move . . . back to their bed.

On instinct, without so much as breaking their shared heated kiss, America moved back, crawling backwards onto the mattress until Russia was able to come over him comfortably and rest their entire bodies on the bed. It was then their forms relaxed and their hands went to work caressing the other’s body again.

The kisses Russia placed on America’s lips soon waned and had fallen back down his neck and then toward his chest. The younger nation made much more pleasing sounds when Russia’s lips pressed against the grooves of pectorals and abdominal muscles. When Russia had taken a nipple into his mouth he sighed around it, rolling the bud with his tongue before pulling at it with his teeth.

He could feel the way America arched into him, almost turning at a strange angle if just to press more of himself into Russia’s mouth. But soon enough Russia let go and lathered the other bud with the same amount of affection. After Russia’s turn, America would have to fight for his right to do the same.

Pressing chest to chest, America desired to sit up. Russia didn’t allow him to do so, simply because he enjoyed that frustrated look amongst his flushed features too much. Before a giggle was even attempted in the throes of creation, Russia had found himself suddenly flipped over. The twist had brought the both of them closer toward the edge of the bed, but not near close enough to cause a hazard.

Stretching against the sheets, Russia relaxed under America’s body, watching the way the boy rolled his hips against him, straddled him with strong thighs and made to rub every part of his body. Russia had almost recalled a time in America’s adolescence years when the young country had been so sexually needy that he pounced on Russia at whatever chance he got. The memory brought a smile to Russia’s face because he recalled having to officially take off time from his duties until America’s needs were met . . . and with America being in teenaged age form for so long, well, Russia was gone from national duties for quite some time.

His thoughts were pulled away from the memories when he felt the obvious touch of lips against the head of his penis. Eyes blinked and as he looked down he realized America had scooted down and was now sitting on his thighs while leaning over, gripping the Russian’s cock in one hand while pressing his lips to the head. The suction was soft, almost like nibbles, simple teases to the foreskin until America pressed his tongue out, rubbing the underside while slowly slinking down the organ.
Russia could feel the way he throbbed and grew in America's hand. The stimulation from his descending mouth made the Russian hot all over, and now he was burning to the touch. The way America's hand twisted around the base of his cock make Russia swell, and he had to calm himself before he began bucking into the younger nation's mouth prematurely.

With eyes opened and lips parted, Russia contained his bodily urges if only to keep America on him, sliding his mouth over his shaft. In the time it took the western nation to do so, Russia continually held his gaze on the decorative ceiling. Eyes scanning over paintings and decor while his body shook with pleasure.

A quiet gasp left his lips when he felt America's lips move against the base where those tan fingers continued to rub and caress the veins curling around the shaft. He stayed there for a moment before pulling back and sucking the head of the phallus and then moving back down again. Gasps and grunts came out of Russia's mouth while his spouse orally pleasured him with an expertise that came from centuries of routine and practice. He could feel the entire engulfing process; moving past America's teeth, wiggling tongue, bobbing uvula, and then down a shuddering esophagus.

Skin moved with how hard America sucked, hallowing cheeks to turn the organ in his mouth red. Russia's cock was thoroughly lathered in spittle, making it easier for America to slide back and forth on him, and it wasn't too long after America picked up his pace that Russia could feel himself swelling to near discomfort in that hot mouth.

But he no longer offered words of warning or concern to his bedmate. They had been lovers for so long that neither needed any signals of state. Both were well-versed in the ways of pleasuring their partner's body that nothing was needed save consent.

Finally, America popped off of Russia's cock with a breathless gasp. His hand still held the throbbing organ, holding it still from any twitches. The young nation's lips were plump from the actions earlier, coated with slick saliva that sheened in the moonlight and the small gleam of precum that was wiped away with a swiping tongue. When Russia looked down at the boy he felt a shiver rush through his body. America's eyes were dark, lidded, and pleading.

Yet those eyes held Russia still in a sort of paralysis. He could not move when the boy looked at him like that, and so watched in stillness while America moved, settling one knee on each side of the ancient nation's hips.

When America leaned down and kissed Russia, the older felt him reach behind, taking hold of his heated manhood and then pressing the leaking head to the ring of the younger's entrance. With their second kiss shared, America slid down, not stopping until every last inch wedged inside him. The boy moaned out in Russia's mouth and the older happily ate every sound.

With their kiss broken, the two rested lips against the other's mouth, panting heated breaths while their hands roamed, feeling the body of the other in a mapping and soothing way. One of Russia's hands rested down on America's hip while the other slid down the boy's spine, tracing fingers along the couture before pressing his palm against the small of his back. The moment Russia's hands moved to guide, so too did America, rolling his hips before rising up with strong muscular thighs and then falling back down to slide all of his husband into him.

"I-Ivan... ughn." Russia would never grow tired of hearing America's moans and gasps. The sounds made him hold his love that much tighter, reaching up to caress that passion-riddled face. He swept golden bangs out of fluttering blue eyes while America leaned back and moaned again whilst rising and falling on Russia.

Their movements were so much synchronized that neither felt the need to push and pull with hands,
but they clung to one another desperately, just to feel the way limbs trembled and bones jutted in perfect motion. The feeling of America's kisses to his palm sent sensations down throughout Russia's arm that at first made his fingertips tingle before the feeling drifted down further and settled within the cavity of his chest, drowning his beating heart with the love he's had for this man across so many lifetimes.

Eyes fluttered when Russia felt America beginning to clutch him. He would open himself to create an easy entrance when he lowered himself down before rising and tightening his walls. Russia groaned from the actions and now both of his hands were gripping the young nation tighter, nails digging in to mark tan skin, while fingers curled to bring about bruises.

Russia caught sight of his cock whenever America rose. He was swollen, his base thickening while the veins curling along it throbbed with so much heated blood. He was shifting to a redder color while Russia then noticed America's small struggle to fully seat himself on the organ. The swelling size was stretching the younger country with each sit, and when Russia began bucking his hips upward to help in assisting America with taking all of himself into his body, the older noticed the shrill pleasure lacing America's face.

Golden brows crashed together, eyes squeezed shut, teeth grit before pulling lips into the mouth to bite. America's chest was heaving, Russia could see how his chest muscles quivered with each breath. The sweat precipitating across his flawless skin made him shine and glow in the rays of the moon. He was always such a sigh to see in the throes of their lovemaking.

"Alfred," Russia gasped out as his hand reached up, pressing against the boy's leaning neck. The pulse beneath his touch raced, and when blue eyes fluttered open to look at him, Russia desired a kiss. And America granted him one.

The young beautiful nation leaned down and pressed his lips to his husband's. Lingering there until either saw it fit to pull apart. America had opened his mouth, urging Russia to enter the other orifice. The moment Russia pressed his tongue inside he felt the boy clamp his teeth down onto the slick strong muscle and then begin to suckle it as he had done with Russia's cock.

Their mouths moved against the other; sucking on lips and then tangling tongues. It was in this dance that Russia pressed his chest upward, colliding into America's while knocking the boy off balance. Now it was Russia who was pressing the younger nation into the sheets, his hands running down from hip to thighs that spread all on their own.

With a roll of his hips, Russia picked up the rhythm he had thrown. The feel of his cock swelling made it as if America's walls were simply tightening. He hummed at the feeling and rubbed the inside of America's thighs to help him relax with his girth.

"Oh . . . oh!" America tossed his head back into the sheets, his hair fanning out around him, cascading like golden silk. Those eyes clenched shut continually fluttered long beautiful eyelashes that brushed the boy's high cheeks. America's hands weren't so much gripping Russia above him as they were the sheets they lay upon. His fingers curled into the fabric, pulling and tearing—this wasn't the first bedding they've ruined.

"Ivan, oh . . . yes, Ivan!"
America's pitch was growing, as were the trembles in his body. Already Russia could feel the way America's inner walls shuddered against his penetrating shaft. Russia, himself, shivered at the feeling of his testicles bouncing off of America's ass, pressing up against him so close until only they remained dangling out.

His movement had become a little more forceful if just to continue to press his swollen, dripping cock inside his mate to finish. Their moans, gasps, and groans were familiar echoes to their bedroom walls. It was a sign of their close relations as their people's love and respect for one another. As long as the Americans and the Russians awoke to celebrate another day of unity together then so too would their nations awake in the other's arms.

“Ivan!” America gasped again, his eyes opening and fingers releasing tore bed fabric if just to cling to his spouse's body. "Ivan, ah! C-C . . . inside, please!"

Hips smacked against pelvis upon the plea. Russia could not help himself while he leaned down and kissed America's breath away. He could feel those young strong hands moving up his back, one pressing against his neck as if to make their kiss more intimate, while the other hand of the boy's reached up and tangled into ashen locks. Russia groaned out a moan before shoving himself into his mate as deeply as he could and let himself come undone.

"Mmmgh, ah, yes, oh . . . yes . . .” America sighed out in their final moments, himself having orgasmed without so much as a need for touch these days. His own cock rested against Russia's stomach, hot and pouring out the evidence of the pleasure it took from rubbing against the ancient nation's abdominal muscles.

In the time America ejaculated, Russia had reached between them and rubbed the younger nation's cock while it expelled its built up contents. America's sighs turned into short moans. In truth, America very much enjoyed the feeling of Russia's cock pumping out its seed and filling his depths more so. He hummed at the feeling as his walls stretched around the swollen cock if only to accommodate the wide expanse of the semen expelled.

The two nations had remained still for a moment, basking in their connection renewal and the other's presence. The sounds of their panted breaths arose and reigned until satisfied sighs left out of their mouths and their bodies calmed into a state of relaxation.

"I love you, Alfred," Russia whispered against the boy's chest that he now currently rested on top of, if just to listen to that quickly paced heart slow its beats. "Say that you love me as well."

The fingers carding through his hair, slowed for a moment, opting to cup the base of his skull in a cradle-like fashion instead.

"You know I do," America responded softly.

The feeling of his knees rubbed Russia's hips soothingly while the young nation occasionally clamped down on the softening cock still lodged inside him for a closer feel when they embraced afterwards.

There was a silence before America spoke again. "You're going to be like this in the morning, aren't you?"

Russia felt content in America's arms, feeling his restless soul take to peace. At the question he hummed, his mind not alert enough to make connections behind the meaning of America's words just yet.
"You know, like this morning," America reminded, his hands now running down Russia's neck and back. "Every night we make love as if we're afraid of losing each other in the next moment, and then, come morning you awake from nightmares and hold me as if you had recently witnessed the death of me." There was an annoyed sigh, but the matter wasn't further delved into.

Russia remained quiet in this and only held onto America tighter. The idea of falling asleep only to dream of times when the both of them were enemies, of when they sought to end one another was daunting. Dreadfully horrible.

"We will handle that when morning comes," Russia answered instead, trying to ease any troubles he might have placed on his husband. Instead, Russia smiled and leaned up on his elbows to view the beauty beneath him. "Why don't we fill with excitement for tomorrow, hm? I'm certain you are eager to see the newly opened territory."

America grinned and nodded with glee while his hand clasped his own tightly. "But only if you're with me."

"I wouldn't know where else I'd want to be," Russia replied contently, leaning down and nuzzling against America who returned the affection.

Another silence enveloped them while they held one another, basking in the aftermath of their passion, and eagerness for the morrow. It had been when America sighed that the silence broke.

"Ivan . . . what do you think about the colonies?"

Russia smiled, leaning to his right so to lay beside America instead of on top of him. Now he looked at him, amethyst eyes gazing into deep sapphires.

"I cherish them and respect all the hard work their parenting nations put into their creation and stability. I believe that one day, many of them could even become nations like us." Russia reached out to caress America's face, enjoying the way America nuzzled back in return. "What about you? Are you wishing on starting colonies of your own?"

"Well, with much unexplored territory just opening, these places will need civilizing, and would be perfect land for colonies, but, no . . . I do not want to start colonies of my own."

Russia chuckled. "Then why the sudden interest? You have a point, and I would wish others to populate these places." Again. "These lands I've given to you firstly. If you wish to colonize then you so have the right to before all others ask for permission to settle."

America was quiet for a moment. In fact Russia noticed he hadn't even been looking at him. He was unsettled by some thought.

"Actually . . . I would only approve of that idea if . . ." Sparkling blue eyes finally looked back toward Russia and the most loving smile curled America's lips, baring his pearly white teeth to glow in the silvery moon rays. "You colonized with me."

Russia blinked. It was honest to say he hadn't expected his spouse to suddenly interest himself with the formation of colonies, nor spout his longing to only colonize with him. It was an endearing notion, yet one that Russia, in all his thousands of years of lifetime, hadn't seen coming.

"B-But that'll be after we've explored and mapped everything out, and possibly made trips to the moon. It was just a thought, one you don't really have to think on right now."

America's ramble let Russia know that the boy really had been giving this idea some thought,
perhaps for a long time. Russia wondered how long.

With a sigh, America's gaze drifted over the moon's rays falling over them. His fingers traced the light before he muttered, "I wonder if the moon could be colonized. That would be funny, huh, Ivan?" America had laughed, trying to make their topic a little more lighthearted.

Russia offered him a chuckle at the thought, but then leaned up on his arm and pressed a kiss to America's temple. "I do not know if that will work so well." Not saying that they couldn't try of course. "But we will firstly colonize earth before trying to reach beyond."

Russia felt America stiffen underneath his lips and when he pulled back to look at his face he noticed the surprised look he was giving him. It made Russia laugh again.

"This look is becoming you. Already I've seen you wear it today."

America didn't flush or pull his gaze away from the humorous observation. Instead he leaned forward, making sure no jest was hidden within Russia's gaze. "You . . . you'd really colonize . . . with me?"

Russia smiled, reaching for America's hand and holding tightly onto him. "As long as it's only with you."

America's sudden wide smile was even bigger than when Russia had seen him looking at what once was called Mount Rushmore. It was endearing, as it was when the boy lurched forward, arms stretched wide if only to wrap around Russia's neck so tightly he nearly choked him to death. His sudden push had Russia rolling onto his back while America slid on top of him and straddled him in the tight hug.

"Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you!" America praised, squealing with exuberant enthusiasm. He had about squished Russia's cheeks when his hands came to press against the sides of the ancient nation's face. Planting kiss after kiss on his spouse's mouth was welcoming and Russia simply complied with America's show of appreciation.

When America pulled back his smile was soft and breathing back under control. "You really have changed, haven't you?"

Russia nodded, his hands rubbing the small of America's back. "You are my equal, Alfred. Whatever you want, so will I."

America nodded in understanding before wrapping his arms around Russia again and then leaning against him, resting his form down on top of him.

"Then I will wait impatiently for tomorrow," the young nation said dreamily while closing his eyes and wrapping himself around Russia's essence. "Even if you wake up in a fright like usual, I'll be here to tell you of all the things we have planned together. And I know . . ." America sought Russia's hands and clasped them both to hold throughout the night. "That you'll be just as happy as I am right now." He then moved Russia's held hands to his sternum where his heart beat against. "I love you, Ivan."

While America drifted off into sleep, Russia held him tight, himself looking forward to the rising sun and the bringing in of a new day. The daunting notion of falling to sleep to dream of such harsh memories still weighed on Russia's mind, but he knew that with America by his side, he'd be able to move on each day and slowly put that tormented past behind him.

And even . . .
Even if this was all a dream . . .

Even if Russia was just envisioning this moment, this lifetime, as a means to cope with the distraught
and tragedy in his life during his end before he faded to nonexistence, then he would gladly admit to
his content. This day in paradise was everything to him, and it helped his heart beat again as if he
were alive; something he's never really had the chance to feel in any lifetime . . . except now.

Perhaps this really was a dream then.

And so Russia closed his eyes on the day to discover if this was or wasn't some paradise conjured
just to appease his tattered and shattered heart in the end.

The End

End Notes

Historical Notes

Commentated by the Authoress

May 4th 1607 was the first permanent English settlement in the Americas. The settlement
became known as Jamestown in the Colony of Virginia. I deem this as America's actual
"birth" day because it's literally his beginning.

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