Are we humans?

by neioo

Summary

During the Second World War, members of the Axis started experimenting on Nation Avatars, marking the worse case of dehumanization the Nations have ever faced. After the war, the Soviet Union decides to continue the research founded by the Axis powers on their newly acquired satellite states. The experiments, as well as other actions taken during the war, drive the Nations to begin to question who they are as people, and whether or not they should blindly trust their governments. Their decisions cause them to go behind their governments' backs to fight for what they think is right, as well as lead to their own self-discoveries. (Historical!Hetalia that takes place during the Cold War. Real life events will be followed. Human and country names used. Many characters will be in the story, but only the most important are tagged.)

！！！中文翻译

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
It’s hot; the kind of heat that’s suffocating and hard to breathe in. The air tastes like gunpowder, piss, and vomit. Prussia tries to ignore how hard it is to catch his breath and attempts to focus on shooting the Soviets. However, his vision is blurry, and his arms are exhausted, so he has no idea whether or not his shots are hitting anything.

“Don’t waste ammo,” Austria gasps. His appearance mirrors Prussia’s—bloody and sweaty with a delusional expression on his face.

Prussia doesn’t know what he’s doing anymore. “Why?”

Austria doesn’t answer. A woman screams.

Germany starts to retch in the corner where he’s propped up by boxes of ammunition. His appearance is worse than theirs, due to the fact the Berlin invasion affects him the most. He’s covered in cuts, bleeding from some, while pus is building up in others; and is sitting in his own piss.

His eyes are also bright red.

“Why are we still shooting the Soviets?” Prussia asks, his vision blurring.

“Because we’re holding out for the Americans,” Austria replies weakly. “Once they come, we’ll surrender to them.”

“They’re not coming, Roderich.”

“No.”

“The Soviets will have won by then.”

“No, they’re—they’re coming. They have to come. Gilbert—”

They make eye contact.

“Fine,” Prussia mumbles, reaching for his gun, ignoring the twisting feeling in his gut. They’re stationed in an abandoned building on the top floor, firing out a window. Because of their height advantage, they’ve been able to hold their position for about a day now.

But if Russia is here, he can track them down.

There’s a flurry of movement on the street, and Austria begins firing haphazardly at the soldiers below.

Prussia’s thoughts wander.

He questions why he’s still alive, why he hasn’t faded away like the other German states. He thinks about how much he hates Hitler, remembers when he first saw another Nation being tortured, and how it was exhibited to the other Axis Leaders like it was just a simple experiment. His mind stays fixated on that moment, when he, Germany, Italy, Romano, Japan, and Austria
walked into that dark, dingy room to see Hungary, Poland, Denmark, and Norway chained up, stark naked and bald, surrounded by various torture instruments.

Prussia clenches his jaw, aiming his gun out the window.

Someone started talking in German after they entered, explaining that they were performing experiments on Nation Avatars from conquered countries.

“Then why the hell is Elizabeta here when Hungary joined the Axis willingly?” Prussia spat out after the clarification.

There was an instant reaction.

All of the government officials’ heads snapped in his direction, Germany grabbed him, and Hungary, she looked at him with such a dead expression it made Prussia want to cry.

“Who is this ‘Elizabeta?’” the man that spoke before said. “All that’s here is an abomination.”

Prussia shoots a Soviet soldier in the head.

There’s the distant rumbling of tanks. He takes aim again but sees that the soldiers aren’t targeting the building. They’re backing off.

His stomach constricts. He wants a cigarette, but they don’t have any.

“Why am I with you two?” Austria blurts out, causing Prussia to jump. His hands are shaking.

“Why wasn’t I locked away?”

“Because you’re the country where Hitler was born, Specs,” Prussia says weakly, miserably aware that this is the longest conversation they’ve had since the start of the war.

Germany hacks up blood in the corner.

Austria is shaking. “What happened with you and France?”

“Roderich.”

“Gilbert, we’re—we’re finally alone. You can tell me!”

Prussia can’t make eye contact. “It doesn’t matter.”

“But you and Spain—”

“He’s here,” Germany gets out in a mangled voice.

There’s a new gash on his chest, and Prussia feels his stomach drop. Now, he can feel Russia’s presence himself. He wants to help and knows there’s nothing he can do. He’s useless. Austria is grabbing onto his arm and saying something, but he’s useless. He can’t understand.

There are voices outside the broken window.

Germany screams, and Prussia’s head abruptly feels as though it’s being split open. He grabs his gun and thinks he orders Austria to stay down as he aims, but—

A missile is shot through the window.
Prussia can feel himself dying.

It’s like going to sleep, but heavier. Giving in would be easy, but he hates doing that, even if it’s the more practical option. He can’t even feel or see anything, and the only voices are distant and muffled.

But then there’s light.

Prussia’s vision refuses to focus. He tries to blink rapidly, but half of his face is paralyzed.

Someone stoops down. “It’s over.”

That seems like a pleasant thought. Prussia smiles.

Russia shoots him in the head.

Chapter End Notes

Hi! (This has since been revised since I've first posted this fic)

This story came to be, due to my need for a story that explores /realistically/ how the Hetalia characters would have reacted to real-world events. I'm American, so some of my perspectives on WW2 and the Cold War may be biased due to how I've learned history within my classes and through my research; however, I tried to keep an objective view on history and show how the characters react to certain events.

■ _ ■ thank you for clicking on this stupid series
“What are they?”

“Nation Avatars, beings that represent a country or a group of people. They’re immortal; their body can be destroyed beyond all measures and grow back.”

“Why do they exist?”

“No one knows.”

“…”

“Maybe they’re demons.”

“Demons?”

“They’re born from nothing and are infertile. They have super strength. Their eyes glow red when they’re close to dying or get really emotional.”

“Glow red?!”

“Yeah, the entire eye just turns red and starts glowing. You can’t see their pupil or the whites of it. It’s terrifying.”

“Can they really speak and understand any language too?”

“Any language that’s currently in use. They can also ‘sense’ each other’s presences, as well as those of people from their country. They use it as a tactic to overwhelm each other and identify foreign invaders.”

“…What monsters.”
Prussia wakes up chained to a bed.

He has no idea where he is. The room is barren and laced with nothing but the smell of mold. He falls back and forth between consciousness and unconsciousness, and when he’s finally able to stay awake, someone else is in the room.

He focuses on the other man, who’s clearly a Soviet guard. Prussia tenses up and tries to move, but his head hurts and his body’s limp, so he ends up slumping further into his mattress.

The guard notices he’s awake. “You’re going to come with me.”

For once in his life, Prussia doesn’t make some snappy remark.

Five Soviet guards abruptly enter the room. They unchain Prussia from his bed and force him to sit up. His vision swims. He notices he’s wearing new clothes. Upright, he can also get a good look at
his legs. They were originally crushed in the explosion but now seem to have fully regrown.

The guards yell at him to stand up. As soon as he tries, his legs give out.

He curses in German.

“It’s been nine weeks, why the hell can’t he walk?” one guard asks.

_Nine weeks?_

“It’s been chained to a bed, that’s why. It has no muscle mass anymore.”

Prussia’s arms are grabbed, and he’s forced to his feet. The guards then attempt to make him walk, but his steps are shaky, and he collapses again before they can pull him up.

They end up dragging him down the hallway.

There’s another person at the end of it who the soldiers scream something to in Russian. They return with a wheelchair that Prussia is chained to. He wishes he could understand what everyone is saying, but he’s in too much pain to translate.

They take him outside to where there’s a truck waiting. In there, and also chained to a wheelchair, is Austria and Germany. Before he can say anything to them, though, a gag is stuffed into his mouth. Three guards then climb into the back, all with guns, and sit down. The truck starts to move.

Prussia has no idea where they’re going.

He makes eye contact with Austria, who’s pale white and looks terrified. Germany, meanwhile, is unconscious. His legs are still mangled, and his one arm is twisted in the wrong direction.

The drive probably isn’t long, but it feels like an eternity.

They’re greeted by Ally soldiers when they arrive.

“We’ll take them for now,” an American walks up and says in English as the three of them are unloaded.

“No need,” one of the Russian guards responds, his English heavily accented.

It’s as Prussia is wheeled away from the truck that he recognizes where they are. Potsdam. At Cecilienhof Palace. It’s actually in good condition, but he doesn’t have time to marvel it.

Instead, he’s taken into a huge dining room.

Prussia wants to be wheeled right back out. The room is filled with Nations who were involved in the war, and the sight of them causes his head to pound.

The Allies are together, seeming ‘thrilled’ to be alive. France is standing and looking like a person, though. That’s all Prussia can ask for.

_Australia, New Zealand, and Canada are next to their group, appearing equally as miserable. Belgium, Netherlands, Luxemburg, Portugal, and Monaco are in their own corner. Belarus, Ukraine, Latvia, and Estonia have absolutely blank expressions. Poland and Lithuania are uncomfortably close to each other. All of the Scandinavian countries and Iceland are standing together. Switzerland is talking to Liechtenstein while glaring at anyone that comes remotely close_
to them. Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus look awful.

Then there’s Italy, Romano, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania.

It doesn’t matter which side a Nation was a part of. Five of the so-called ‘Official Axis Nations’ being tortured proves that.

Spain is standing near them.

As soon as Prussia, Austria, and Germany are taken into the room, everyone freezes. The three of them are then put next to the other Axis Nations, and Prussia stares at the ground, his ears ringing too much to understand when the soldiers with them say something. It gets even more suffocating when they leave, and—

France rips the gag out of his mouth.

Prussia is shocked and can only muster a pathetic noise of confusion as he looks up at France’s face.

He’s crying.

Prussia feels choked. France demands him something, but he’s too distracted by his appearance to hear what. His hair is growing back. His skin is almost translucent, but it looks like skin. And he’s actually walking—

“Gilbert,” France gets out.

Prussia jolts. “Francis, I—”

Spain runs over and pulls France into a side hug. It pushes the two of them into Prussia’s wheelchair, and they both scramble to steady it.

Spain is crying too.

“Does everyone know?” Prussia chokes out, eyes darting around the room.

All Spain can get out is a, “Yeah.”

“Why’d you do it?” France asks. Snot is dripping out of his nose.

Prussia searches for words. His mouth feels numb. “Because you’re our friend, Francis.”

“But our countries—”

“It doesn’t matter,” Spain interrupts. He smiles. For once, it doesn’t look fake. “It’s over.”

France grips Prussia’s arm.

Prussia remembers when his country surrendered to Germany.

Hitler had personally assigned him to go to Paris and oversee France getting tortured. They shaved him, harvested his organs while he was conscious, broke his bones for fun, pulled out his teeth to watch them grow back, dissected his eyes, tested different toxins and cosmetic surgeries on him. Prussia was forced to watch all of it. It was his punishment. He was too rebellious. Too ugly. Hitler hated him, so he was sent to France to be ‘re-educated,’ sent there to watch his friend suffer.
Prussia tried to warn them before the war broke out. He pulled both France and Spain aside during the Berlin Olympics to give them information.

But.

“We can’t go against our governments,” France said, backing away. “We’re—we’re aligned with our country.”

Prussia felt tears prick the corners of his eyes. “We’re human beings, Francis. We can do what we want. Just because we represent one country doesn’t mean we have to accept its ideals or government.”

France didn’t take the information Prussia had. Spain did, but his country was in a civil war, so it was useless. The only thing Prussia was able to accomplish is that Spain gave him a way to get in contact, thanks to something he and Romano set up. Prussia nearly forgot about it too until he hit his breaking point in France. And once he remembered, he began to plan. He escaped the Nazis. He met up with a French resistance group. Spain got his letter and came to Paris. And then, a few days before the original date scheduled for D-day, after cutting the power and interrupting Nazi communications, they attacked the compound where France was being held.

They succeeded. But while France was saved, Francis was gone.

His body was so mutilated that he couldn’t hold consciousness, and any time he was slightly aware, he was in distress.

There was nothing they could do, so they buried him. Burned his body and put all of his ashes into a coffin. That way, he would reform slowly and no longer be in pain.

Prussia returned to Germany afterward. He was fully aware of the consequences he faced, but he had to go back. He had to watch over Germany and Austria. Even after being tortured for months, he still doesn’t regret his decision.

Spain, meanwhile, left the coordinates of France’s location with Romano, then returned to Madrid. A month after the real D-day, he and Italy were taken captive by the Allies. France was found shortly after.

Hungary interrupts Prussia’s thoughts. “Your two friends are crying, and all you’re doing is staring off into space.”

He looks at her, feeling too many things at once. She’s bald, severely underweight, and seems like she’s about to fall apart.

She still smiles.

“Also, you left poor Roderich gagged,” she adds on, untying it. His expression is unreadable.

With their commotion, other Nations begin to talk to each other.

Spain begins to chat with Romano and Italy, and Austria and Hungary become engaged in their own quiet conversation, so Prussia focuses on France, bumbling on about nonsense while he keeps crying.

Eventually, Prussia gets distracted by some movement outside the door.

“Gilbert,” France finally chokes out.
He startles, his handcuffs rubbing at his wrists. “Yeah?”

“Arthur has been trying—cooking. I’ve been cooking a lot. It’s calming and helps, so…when we’re out of here, you should eat some of my pastries.” France looks like he’s about to throw up. “If you want.”

Prussia’s stomach growls at the thought. “If I want? Of course I want to. I can’t even remember the last time I’ve had something sweet.” Prussia is desperate for him to return to his usual self, is desperate for any sense of normalcy.

France gives a weak smile.

Prussia’s vision abruptly fades out.

All he can see is the meeting room down the hall.

“Gilbert?” France asks worriedly.

“Signing here means we’re all in agreement that the state’s land will be dissolved and split between these countries.”

Shit.

There’s white-hot pain throughout his body as soon as the man’s pen hits the paper. Prussia felt such pain after the First World War; however, this is worse.

Much, much worse.

He screams. A spasm goes through his body, and he crashes to the ground, still bound to his wheelchair. His one arm dissolves, his leg falls cleanly off his body, and his vision fades out. He can’t think. He can’t breathe. All he can feel is pain.

There’s then a gunshot, multiple gunshots. People other than him are screaming. He’s being dragged. He tries to see something, anything. He’s scared. He doesn’t want to die.

“Just let go. It’s easy,” he remembers Bavaria telling him the moment before he blissfully dissolved into dust.

Prussia doesn’t want to dissolve. He screams and clings to life. His other leg disappears. His entire body burns. But he keeps fighting until he feels his body kicking into its defensive mode, lulling him into a normal human death to regenerate.

Unconsciousness welcomes him.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah I apologize for the reading level of this fic?? I'm used to writing in first person with my own OC work, but I know people reading fanfics hate that (?? idk why I'm fine with it), so I'm trying to write in third person and it's a bit hard. Yeah...
If I still have the strength to continue, the next POV will be America's

(edit from myself almost a year later: you fuck you continued this and now you're fucking swamped with editing this shit. @myself what the hell *coughs* and gif commissioned from jeanryde.tumblr.com)

(edit 2 years later: fuck you maddie why is this entire au 400k+)

(edit 3 years later: *bashes head against wall*)
The atmosphere is tense and awkward.

It’s silent; America, Russia, and China can hear two people arguing in Japanese from somewhere else in the house. Currently, the three are sitting in a room used for tea ceremonies. The house they’re in was used by Emperor Hirohito during the war; however, it’s now been taken over by American army personnel and is being used to house Japan. And that’s why the three Nations are here, to look at Japan.

There’s a calendar on the wall that America is staring at because he has nothing else to do. The date is marked: September 15, 1949. The calendar is in English—American; one distributed by the military—and is crudely tacked up on the wall. Across the room is another calendar, this one more elegantly placed and in Japanese, marking the same date: 1949 年 9 月 15 日. The years of occupation have caused the house to be run-down, and the calendar reflects that.

The silence is unbearable. America hates it but has no idea what to do. He doesn’t know what he should say, or rather what’s appropriate. He barely knows Ivan or Yao. And a personal conversation is out of the question, especially after Potsdam.

Thinking about Potsdam makes him nauseous. He remembers how France, after months of being depressed, disassociating, and having panic attacks; finally looked happy again. And then Prussia started to have a seizure, and when France and Spain panicked, soldiers, American and Russian, came into the room and shot them in the head.

That, of course, caused more panic.

As some Russian soldiers dragged Prussia’s disintegrating body out of the room, others grabbed the Nations claimed by the Soviet Union. When they were being hostile with Ukraine and Belarus, Russia attempted to stop them. As a punishment, the soldiers shot him in the head, then corralled China out of the room when he made a noise.

This is the first time America has been alone with them since.

He hasn’t been able to contact England or Canada in a while to see how France is doing either, mainly because of his superiors. They’ve been acting real tense with him, asking questions like:

You’re loyal to the United States, correct?

You would never act out against the country, right?

Have you ever acted out?

Can we trust you?

Ever since Prussia and Spain actively defied their own countries, leaders and government officials alike are afraid that their Nations will do the same. Even though basically everyone agrees that Hitler was an evil, horrible person, they’re still baffled as to why Prussia, especially, would go against him because “Isn’t Prussia a part of Germany? He went against his own Nature!”
China starts coughing. America and Russia try to ignore it out of politeness since they know the cause is his own Civil War; however, his cough persists until he starts hacking up blood, and at that point, America awkwardly asks, “Do you need a glass of water?”

“I’m fine,” China snaps, wheezing for air. There’s blood on his hand, and he looks as though he doesn’t know what to do with it. Russia frowns, fishing a handkerchief out of his pocket, and gives it to him. China takes it and wipes off his hand.

It’s silent once more.

America hates the outfit he’s wearing. It’s a military uniform, one that Generals wear. It’s stiff and hot and decorated with a bunch of medals he didn’t earn. China and Russia are also wearing military uniforms; ones embellished with many medals too, but instead of looking impressive, they’re all just miserable.

A fly comes through a hole in the paper door leading to the garden. It lands on the ugly American calendar.

“Do you like animation?” America blurts out, feeling a bead of sweat roll down his back.

Russia and China stare at him.

Thankfully before one of them can give an awkward response, a soldier opens the door and tells them they can look at Japan.

America wants to stay put. He’s seen Japan since the atomic bombing. He’s been stationed here since September 10th and has been forced to look at him every day. And every day, the sight of Kiku makes him want to vomit.

He stands and exits, China and Russia following him, his mind reeling as they walk to the dark, dingy room where Japan is. After the firebombing of Tokyo, the Japanese government relocated to Kyoto. Japan was there when both nukes were dropped.

America can’t imagine what he would look like if he were in either Hiroshima or Nagasaki.

He frowns and stops outside of Japan’s room, nervously turning around to China and Russia. China appears absent of any emotion while Russia’s face is neutral. America knows why they’re here to see Japan. It’s a scare factor, a threat from the American government. Don’t mess with the US or we’ll drop an atomic bomb on you, and your Nation will look like this!

Technically, America isn’t supposed to give them details about Japan beforehand. His officials want China and Russia to be surprised. But he can’t just let them walk in not knowing what to expect.

“So, um,” he eloquently starts off with. The other two Nations stare at him. “Uh, yeah, he looks really bad. Like, I’ve never seen a Nation this injured before.”

“…” is how both parties respond.

America continues while staring at the ground. “He’s not healing. He hasn’t healed at all since the bombs. He has two main areas where his skin appears melted off—his stomach and right hip. In his stomach area, his organs are exposed, and some are rotting. In his hip, you can see bone and muscle.”

“…”
He begins to ramble. “And the other day there was mold on his body? Possibly? We don’t know because no one wants to go near him, and I can’t because he freaks out. He’s, like, partly conscious, which is horrible, and whenever I get close to him, he thrashes his body and attempts to scream, but he can’t make any sounds because his neck has a ton of bruises on it, so we think bones there are broken, maybe. And his hair is matted with blood, and the room smells horrible, and his one eye has rotted out of its socket, and the other is filled with pus, and he defecates and urinates on the bed he’s been placed on, and I don’t even know how he does that since he can’t eat anything —”

“Just show us him,” China interrupts.

America swallows the excess saliva that’s built up in his mouth and nervously opens the door. They’re greeted with the pungent waft of a strong disinfectant, and he sneezes, taking a couple of steps inside as Russia and China follow. The room is dark and small, the air is damp, and the smell of mold gives him a slight headache. Japan is in the corner, as far away as possible from the door, so it’s hard to make out his body from where the three are.

They stand in silence for a good minute, which only makes America’s building nausea worse.

“Can I get closer?” China eventually asks. His voice lacks emotion, just like his facial expressions, and America wonders how he’s able to suppress them so easily. He wears his on his face, whereas China and Russia can hide theirs well.

“I wouldn’t do that,” he responds, staring at a broom tucked up against the wall. “I told you, he freaks out when I get near him. He can’t see us, but he can sense our presences, and I don’t think yours would comfort him.”

“…It wouldn’t.”

They continue to stand there.

“I can’t really see him, though,” Russia eventually says. The tone of his voice is neutral, almost carefree, and America hates it.

“Well, getting closer isn’t an option, so we might as well leave now.” He doesn’t want to deal with an episode from Japan. He’s exhausted, nervous, and wracked with guilt. He just wants to leave.

Russia turns towards him and smiles in an unsettling manner. “I’ve been shipped out from Moscow to look at Japan’s body. Do you know how long and tense that trip was? It wasn’t fun. My escorts weren’t thrilled about coming here at the request of the Americans, but we did so because we’re ‘Allies.’ ” He says the word Allies in English, annunciating each syllable. “So now I’m going to see the body, okay? Because that’s why I’m here.”

Before America can respond, Russia walks forward, and China sighs and follows him. America frantically trails behind. It doesn’t take many steps to get closer to Japan, and as they do, his once lifeless rotting body reacts by jerking forward. The one eye filled with pus begins to glow red, and suddenly his presence fills the room, causing China, Russia, and America to double over in pain. Japan then attempts to scream, but only high-pitched squeaks come out as he thrashes.

America rushes closer to place him back on the bed when he nearly falls off of it from moving so much, which only causes him to react more violently. America grabs him, attempting to control his strength so he doesn’t injure him more, but it’s hard. He ends up practically throwing him, then running outside with Russia and China.
The hallway is empty except for whom America refers to as his ‘personal babysitter’, who’s really just a government official appointed by the President that oversees and tracks his actions; and two American soldiers pointing guns at them. With the light of the hallway, America can see blood and urine smeared on his uniform.

“Everything’s okay,” he rushes out. “Stop pointing guns at us.”

“We’ll determine if everything’s ‘okay,’” America’s babysitter responds tensely.

“We’re here, under your orders, to look at a rotting Nation. You pointing guns at us is an active threat, do you understand?” China says in English, his tone laced with anger.

America’s babysitter sighs and waves the guns down. “America, you need new clothing. China and Russia, we have lunch prepared. We’ll escort you there, and then when America returns, the three of you can eat together.”

Eating together is the last thing he wants to do.

The lunch is traditional Japanese food. Though it’s only been five days since America’s arrived in Japan, he’s already sick of it, and his mind wanders as he pushes the food back and forth, mainly thinking about Japan, about Kiku.

At one point, he would consider them to be somewhat of friends. They shared some of the same interests, and Japan’s personality balanced out his. Now he’s not even sure if they can ever be in the same room again. The thought makes him sad; however, he’s not quite able to distinguish why so he buries his emotions and attempts to focus on something else.

China and Russia are sitting across from him. They’re in the tearoom again, the table they’re eating at low to the ground, so they’re on pillows. It would be fine, but the two are in each other’s personal space, which makes America feel a bit uncomfortable since he’s forced to watch them interact.

After the incident, China was pale and looked unsettled, but now, fifteen minutes into lunch, he’s regained his normal composure. Russia’s demeanor hasn’t changed this entire day.

The only sounds are of their chopsticks clinking against the bowls. The silence is then broken by Russia saying, “I do like animation.”

America feels his face heat up. “Cool. Yeah. Me too.”

“Technology’s amazing,” Russia says happily, and once, just once, America wants him to stop acting. He’s put on this front ever since Potsdam.

_How do you feel after you were shot in the head for attempting to help your pseudo Nation sisters? Do you care that Prussia’s dissolving body was dragged away? What do you think about Japan’s episode?_

“Do you like animation, Yao?” Russia asks, crinkling his eyes when glancing at him.

“I guess?” China responds. His voice is distant, and he sounds detached, just like how France is most of the time now.
The door abruptly slides open.

“Hyeongnim!” Korea screams as tears pool down his cheeks, practically climbing over Russia to pull China into a rough embrace. “I’m so glad you’re safe!”

Korea and the other Nations that Japan conquered during the war were experimented on, much like in Nazi Germany. Korea was found in a military base outside of Kyoto along with Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Hong Kong, and Thailand. And since they were experimented on, Korea’s currently emaciated and nearly bald. China was able to escape Japanese capture by never actually being engaged in combat.

He looks shocked to see Korea and immediately tries to break free of his embrace.

“Stop hugging me,” he says urgently.

Korea continues to sob.

“Yong-Soo, stop hugging me. We can’t do this,” he says desperately, this time in Korean. “They’ll get angry.”

Russia stands up like he’s about to pry Korea off of him but stops when he sees Hong Kong, Thailand, and Vietnam at the door. America’s babysitter is behind them.

“A reunion has been granted by China’s advisors. America and Russia—please come with me.”

Russia looks reluctant to leave. He glares at Korea until China gives him a pained expression, causing him to frown and walk out the door. America hastily follows, scooting by the other three Nations.

Russia’s babysitter is waiting in the hallway.

“Russia will now be leaving and traveling to China,” America’s babysitter says. America nods and turns towards him, unsure what they should do. Wave goodbye? Shake hands? America doesn’t want to kiss him, oh God no.

Russia mutely offers his hand. As they shake, their babysitters exchange weirdly friendly-looking words. Russia and his then walk away, Russia seeming stiff and angry and passive all at once.

“We have some documents we want you to look over,” America’s babysitter states when the two are out of sight.

America nods, already wanting to go to bed.

He hears Korea’s sobs through the wall as they walk away.

Chapter End Notes

hyeongnim means brother.

Also: I know Taiwan technically existed as a Nation at this point, however since the island had been inhabited by different groups of people over the course of centuries that are in no relation to most of the inhabitants of Taiwan now, for the sake of this fic,
the Taiwan we know in Hetalia will exist after Taiwan is established as a sovereign state after the Chinese Civil War. I’m not the expert on Taiwan; so sorry if this information is dodgy.
Reconstruction

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It’s the night after the meeting with China and Russia, and America can’t sleep. The room he’s in is humid—the paper wall to the outside garden is very thin, which means he can hear every screaming bug outside; and his back hurts from the uncomfortable bed that’s far too low to the ground for his taste. He wants to leave Japan and go home, maybe to his apartment in New York City or his house in Pennsylvania.

He groans and rubs his face. He doesn’t know what time it is—there’s no clock—but he knows it’s either very late at night or very early in the morning. He also knows that he’s gotten no sleep at all. As soon as he closes his eyes, he’s plagued by faceless nightmares. The result is restless fits of slumber that leave him more exhausted than when he went to bed.

Sometime in the middle of the night as the cicadas scream, he decides that he’s going to help Japan, help Kiku, even if it’s just a little bit.

He can’t bear seeing him suffer in that closet any longer.

He’s outside Japan’s dark, dingy room, terrified. He knows he doesn’t have to do this. He knows he doesn’t really have to do anything at the moment. His superiors have no orders except stay out of Europe, read updates on foreign policies, and don’t get fat. For whatever reason, they’re really insistent on the ‘don’t get fat’ part.

He takes a deep breath and strengthens his resolve. There are no windows in there, no lighting, and it’s moldy and damp. He knows those conditions won’t help Japan recover, so he’s going to move him to his room. America doesn’t know where he’ll sleep from now on, but he’s not too concerned about that at the moment. All he knows is that: (a) his room opens up into the garden, (b) has plenty of sunlight, and (c) there’s no mold.

As he stares at the wall, an older Japanese woman walks by. She keeps her head dipped and scurries away, and America sighs when she’s gone. He then opens the door, a waft of disinfectant hitting him, and is instantly reminded of yesterday. It takes a lot of willpower to make himself walk inside.

As he allows for his eyes to adjust, he contemplates how he’s going to move Japan. He knows the hospital bed is disgusting and needs to be washed, but he doesn’t think that carrying Japan’s the best idea.

Maybe if I do it quick enough.

He swallows.

This is for your own good, Kiku.

He powerwalks over to where Japan is, bracing for his reaction. Japan’s actions are more or less what they were yesterday. His presence expands, and America’s head is instantly pounding.
He gets closer and attempts to pick him up.

Japan screams.

America is sticky with something and doesn’t know what. Once he has somewhat of a solid grip on Japan, he sprints. Exiting the closet leaves him blind for a split second, though, and he almost bumps into the Japanese woman from before. She gasps, and America nearly trips past her as he stumbles to his room. He practically dumps Japan’s body onto his bed.

He leans up against the door once he scrambles outside, hearing Japan continue to thrash.

The Japanese woman approaches him.

“Everything’s okay!” he rushes out in Japanese, his gaze focused on the ground. He knows he looks like a wreck.

The woman says nothing. It’s only when he looks up that he notices the mirror behind her.

His eyes are glowing red.

He slams them shut, his heart beating rapidly in his throat. Japan is still thrashing in the other room.

“Why did you move him?” the woman asks in Japanese.

America squirms.

“I know what you two are…”

“Oh,” he mumbles, opening his eyes.

“Why did you move him?”

“Because no one can recover in that—that closet he was in.” He knows his Japanese accent is probably terrible right now, but it’s the least of his concerns. I just want to save Kiku and be a cliché sort of hero, alright? I have a massive amount of guilt that’s making me nauseous every day and preventing me from sleeping, so I thought this would help ease it. Please go away.

“Ah…” The woman smiles. “Well, then if the Nation Avatar of the United States is willing to help the Nation Avatar of Japan, maybe this country isn’t as bad off as I originally thought.”

America opens his eyes.

“I took care of him during the war, but I’m no longer allowed to.” She shakes her head like she’s thinking of something ridiculous. “…So please, take care of him now.”

“Okay,” America answers in English. Before he can correct himself, the woman smiles.

“Thank you.”

“…”

“He’s very broken…” She’s almost down the hall now. “Not just physically.”

America swallows, nodding after the woman disappears around the corner. He then focuses on the mirror. He originally put on a clean short sleeve collared shirt and dress pants, but now both are
covered in a mixture of bodily fluids from both Japan and himself.

He pathetically stares at his reflection.

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September 23, 1949, America thinks while looking at one of the many crude military calendars. *Where has the time gone?*

He stares at Japan’s lifeless body. He’s in one corner while Japan’s in the other. They’re as far away from each other as physically possible.

Since moving him, America’s been attempting to clean him. Each day as he does, though, he swears he injures Japan even more. Feeding him is also disastrous. All America can really do is keep the room tidy.

It’s all he’s been doing for a week now. Clean, feed, clean again—all at the same times to form a schedule so that Japan knows what to expect. Each day has gone slightly better than the previous, but that’s all that can be said.

America doesn’t know why he’s sitting in the room for a longer duration today, but he figures it’s probably because he’s avoiding his babysitter. America knows he’ll want to talk about politics, about China, and that’s the last thing he wants to discuss.

He decides to vocalize his feelings.

“Yo, Japan,” he says in a dull voice. He’s met with silence. Japan still can’t talk. He doesn’t even know if Japan can hear. “Ha ha, you probably can’t hear me, so I’ll just ramble and it won’t matter because nothing does. So, like, you know about the Chinese Civil War, right? Yeah, I bet you do. Anyway, guess what?!! Today, Yao officially picked a side—he’s now communist! I mean, everyone already knew he was with Mao more, but now that it’s official and stuff, people are wondering if another Nation Avatar is going to spring to life.”

A cicada screams. The paper door to the garden is currently open, and a cool breeze blows through.

“It was only a matter of time before he ‘officially’ picked a side because, if he didn’t, he would’ve dissolved. You know, France once told me that that’s what happened to Italy. According to him, right after the Roman Empire fell, there was another Nation Avatar, but when Italy was divided up, she couldn’t decide where to go or what side to take, so she just completely vanished. Wild, right? Have you ever met Rome? You’re so much older than I am, holy shit. I wonder if China met him.”

Japan coughs, and America jumps. He doesn’t know how Japan’s even conscious half the time.

He looks at the rock garden. “I probably won’t see China for a while now. There’s talk of banning the Mainland from the UN because of Mao.”

A gnat flies into the room.

“Japan isn’t even a part of the UN.”

The gnat comes closer, buzzing annoyingly.

“I think the UN is better than the League of Nations. I’ve heard rumors about possible Nation UN
meetings too.”

Japan coughs again as America swats at the gnat. His back is to him, and he’s naked, only covered by a blanket because it’s easier to clean him that way.

“I wonder if you can even hear me.”

He squashes the gnat and cheers silently to himself, then sighs and looks at the garden again.

“You know, I’ve been reading health books because for whatever reason you have a huge library here. …You never told me you liked to—anyway. One said that talking to a comatose person helps them heal. I mean, you’re not exactly in a coma, but I guess I’ll keep talking, even if it’s annoying.”

America stares at Japan until a thought occurs to him. “Or maybe you just can’t understand me. I know when I’m injured it’s hard to understand anything but my native language, and I’ve been talking to you in English this entire time.” He pauses and then says in Japanese, “I’ll make an effort to talk to you in Japanese now, sorry.”

Japan gives him a look he can’t decipher and coughs weakly in response.

“Reconstruction is underway,” some American official says. America loses track of all of them. Right now, he’s in a meeting with Japanese and American representatives to discuss Japanese economic reconstruction. The goal’s to give aid similar to the Marshall Plan.

America doesn’t feel like focusing, and he knows he doesn’t really have to. He’s only there as a symbol of power.

He stares at the calendar. 1949年9月26日. The past three days, he’s been reading to Japan in Japanese; mainly tidbits of newspapers that have information on reconstruction, or some pop culture highlights to lighten the mood. He also found a radio yesterday and has placed that in Japan’s room. In addition, he’s been digging through the house’s extensive book collection and picking out some to read.

America knows Japan’s condition is slowly improving but is aware there’s a limit to how much he can help.

That’s why he needs to talk to his babysitter.

Once the meeting is over, America approaches him. “Do you have a moment?” he asks when everyone has dispersed.

His babysitter blinks, looking cautious. “Yeah, I guess.”

“I have a request.”

He frowns. “Do you now. What is it?”

America swallows, suddenly feeling nervous. “Okay. Okay, just listen to me. One of the reasons Japan hasn’t been recovering is because he’s been isolated for so long since no one wanted anything to do with him. And people suffering from trauma should be around friends and family to help them recover.”
“So…?”

“Japan still isn’t talking, and he looks absent most of the time, and, well, how do you feel about letting Germany and Italy come to pay him a visit?”

“…”

“I mean, I think they’d help! They’re friends? At least, North Italy made it seem that way. So, them paying a visit would boost Japan’s morale and help him recover faster.”

“It’s not our responsibility—”

“And if he recovers faster, that looks good for the US-Japan alliance and also shows how invested the United States is in this country. So boom, a solid relationship and a guaranteed ally here in Asia to help prevent the Domino Effect.”

His babysitter purses his lips, then releases a breath after a while. “I don’t have the authority to make decisions on things like this. I would send a telegram directly to Washington to file a request.”

America nods, and his babysitter walks away. He should probably know his name by now, but America sucks at remembering names.

He sends a formal request that night. In between that and the meeting, he reads more foreign policy documents, attempts to feed Japan, attempts to clean Japan, and then reads to him—Japan giving him a weirdly confused glance the entire time—until he falls asleep.

America then, feeling tired himself, retreats to his own room. Since Japan has taken his old one, he’s been moved into what used to be a sitting area. In there, are ceiling-high bookshelves that he’s been rifling through.

America sighs, changes into his pajamas, and attempts to get a full night’s rest.

As usual, he’s greeted with nightmares and barely sleeps.

The next morning he finds out that the government actually accepted his request, which is huge considering Potsdam is still fresh in everyone’s minds. For once, America feels like he’s accomplished something. North Italy and Germany will be landing in Japan in three days on the 30th of September, and the anticipation is making his stomach churn.

America sighs. He’s covered in sweat from running. He positively hates doing it but is also afraid of the consequences if he gets unfit. So every day he forces himself, then feels gross and nervous afterward.

He’s walking back to freshen up when he encounters Japan’s old caretaker.

“Hi,” America says in Japanese, fully aware of how much he smells.

“I dusted the room,” the woman answers.
“I thought you weren’t allowed—”

“No one really cares right now.” The woman frowns. “I can’t help it either. I’m doing nothing right now.”

America shifts awkwardly. “Well, thank you. I really appreciate it.”

The woman looks at him, and America feels like he’s being dissected. “You’re doing good; you know that? What you’re doing isn’t in vain. Even I…couldn’t bring myself to touch him after—what you’re doing isn’t in vain.”

“I—I’m trying my best, I guess.”

“That’s all the matters.” She then smiles and shuffles down the hallway. America doesn’t know how old she is. She looks to be around seventy.

He wonders if she lost anyone in the war.

“Sika deer are a species of deer native to much of East Asia…”

America is reading random animal descriptions to Japan. It’s the middle of the afternoon, and even though it’s now the end of September, it’s still hot and humid outside. The door to the garden is open, but there’s no breeze, and America can feel beads of sweat rolling down his face. He placed a cool towel on Japan’s forehead thirty minutes ago, but he doesn’t know how much it’s helping at this point.

Today is the morning of September 30th. America has no idea when Italy and Germany are supposed to come, and he hasn’t told Japan because he wants it to be a surprise. Currently, Japan is facing him. His other eye has finally grown back, and the one that was originally filled with pus looks pretty normal at this point. He still has major wounds, though, but because they’re being kept clean, they aren’t as bad as they once were. He still can’t sit up on his own, nor talk, but with help he can finally eat and drink without spilling three-quarters of it all over himself. He and America also have, somehow wordlessly, come up with a system to deal with him having to go to the bathroom.

He’s been more conscious lately and looks to have a bit of a spark in his eyes. Right now he’s watching America, his face pale with red blotchy spots.

America stares at the words of the book, but his eyes become unfocused, and they blur away. He takes off his glasses and rubs the sweat off his face.

“We have deer in the US, but you probably knew that, so I don’t know why I’m telling you. I’ve hunted some. I don’t really like hunting, but I used to go with some of my Presidents who were into it in the past. It was like, bonding time or whatever. I have a huge male buck’s head hanging in my cabin in Virginia,” America says in Japanese.

Japan blinks.

“You don’t seem like the type of person who likes hunting.”

There’s a knock on the door.
“Come in,” America says in Japanese, thinking it might be Japan’s old caretaker. Yesterday, she told him to call her Aida.

When there’s no response, he repeats himself in English.

His babysitter opens the door. He still doesn’t know his name, or his official title besides ‘babysitter,’ and doesn’t really care.

“What?” America asks, noticing Japan stiffen. American people still make him tense; however, he’s learned that America himself isn’t a threat and relaxes around him now.

“I need you to come with me to escort the guests,” his babysitter answers, his expression stiff.

America feels his heartbeat quicken at the anticipation of seeing the other two. He jumps up and notices Japan’s eyes following him, his eyebrows furrowed.

America walks over and removes the towel from his forehead. He nearly gets sidetracked when he notices that Japan’s clothes need to be washed but forces himself to focus. He gathers some pillows, props Japan up into a sitting position in the gentlest way he possibly can, then backs out of his personal space because he knows how much that agitates him.

“I’m going to greet some guests. I’ll turn on the radio before I leave. Aida might come in later to help you wash, depending on how long I’m gone.”

Japan moves his mouth like he wants to say something, but nothing comes out. Though he doesn’t express much emotion, due to his reserved nature, America can tell he’s frustrated.

He fidgets. “I’ll be back soon.”

Japan blinks, frowning. America wonders if he thinks he’s annoying.

He wonders if Japan hates him.

There’s an airbase in Misawa that’s located at the far northern tip of Japan’s main island, Honshu. It was taken over by American troops after the war and has since been rebuilt. It’s nice but, Kyoto, where America and Japan are, is located in the southern part of Honshu. There are some airbases being constructed in Okinawa, which is closer; however, they aren’t completed yet, so Italy and Germany were unable to land there.

For that reason, they had to travel by train to get down to Kyoto, which posed a problem since only half of the railways have been repaired, and many of the trains are decommissioned. The two landed in Japan yesterday on the 29th, and finally arrived in Kyoto by noon today. Currently, they’re in the American government building that’s recently been established in the area. America’s going to meet them there.

He’s dressed in a suit despite the sweltering temperatures, and it’s doing nothing to help his nervousness. He’s very aware he doesn’t know Italy or Germany that well and that this encounter will probably be as awkward as it was with China and Russia.

He takes a deep breath before entering the sitting room they’re in.

They notice him immediately. Before America can say anything, though, Italy squeals and hugs
him without any warning.

“Uh,” America says at the same time Germany yells at Italy to get off of him.

“I’m so happy to be here! Thank you so much, Mr. America! Thank you!” Italy says, still keeping an iron grip. Germany walks over and pries him off.

The last time America saw them was Potsdam. They both look much better, Germany especially. Though he still appears frail and his skin is paler than it should be, he can walk and talk, and that’s a huge improvement from last time. Italy also appears underweight and a little sickly, but that doesn’t seem to be dampening whatever mood this is.

“Hi,” America says, forcing himself to make eye contact. He hates making eye contact with people he doesn’t know. Sure, he’ll be loud and eccentric with his friends, but he gets unsure of himself around strangers. He’s afraid they’ll find him annoying.

He has no idea what to say, so instead, he asks, “Where’s Romano?”

Italy waves his hand. “Back home moping.”

America has no idea how to respond to that. “Ah. How long have you two been waiting here?”

“Not long,” Germany answers.

“Cool. The house where we’re staying is only a short drive away. Once we’re there, I can have someone make lunch if you’re hungry.”

“I love food!” Italy practically shouts. Germany rubs his temples. “Italian food is the best, but Japanese food is good too!” He adds a ‘yum’ for emphasis while Germany mutters something. Italy shoots him a look.

“…Okay,” America says slowly, caught off guard. He fidgets. “I should, um, tell you about him, Japan, before we go—like his appearance and stuff—so you two know what to expect. But before that, I was wondering if you could do something for me. You especially, Italy.”

Italy frowns. “What?”

“So Japan has been bedridden and hasn’t been able to get outside. Every day, I’ve been telling him about the reconstruction projects going on, but I haven’t been able to show him. I don’t have a camera here—my only good one weighed too much to bring—and I can’t paint. I found some of your art in a storage closet, though, and like, holy shit they look photo-realistic. There are supplies here, so I was wondering if you could paint some of the nearby scenery—if that’s okay. You don’t have to do it today, but if you could do it before you leave…”

Italy studies him. “Yeah, no problem.”

“And then I was wondering if you could just talk to him in Japanese and tell him what’s going on in your lives. I find that helps.”

Germany and Italy nod.

“Okay, good,” America says, feeling less nervous.

He begins to describe Japan’s appearance.
On the way over, America also explains the schedule he's set up. There are two other people in the car besides them, his babysitter and some soldier with a gun, and throughout the car ride, they keep making eye contact.

It does nothing to help his anxiety.

When they arrive back at the house, the three take off their shoes and start heading to Japan’s room. America only stops when he sees Aida.

“I just dusted,” she responds after he asks if she’s done anything. “And I got him a new towel. He was listening to the radio.”

America nods.

After she leaves, each step closer to the room makes him feel more nervous.

“All right?” Germany asks after they stop.

“Yeah,” America responds, not understanding why he’s so apprehensive. “Let me go in first and tell him you’re here. He probably already senses your presence, but…”

He knocks and quietly slips inside. Japan is still propped upright, looking into the garden as the radio plays in the background.

“Hey,” America says in Japanese, trying to keep his voice soft.

Japan jumps, startled by his entrance.

“I have a surprise.” His hands feel sweaty. “Because I think you deserve it.”

Japan scrunches up his eyebrows just as America calls for Italy and Germany to come in.

Italy wastes no time and practically flings himself through the door. Germany follows, looking apprehensive as Japan blinks in shock. He glances at America, then back at the two former Axis Nations.

America feels awkward. “Let me tell the cooks to prepare some food,” he says in a rush. He then leaves and shuts the door, only hovering when he hears Italy launch into a mundane story.

He definitely deserves this…

The next few days are weird.

America has become used to following a schedule, and with the arrival of the other two Nations, it’s been completely abandoned. The first full day they’re there, he stays with them, mostly so they can understand the extent of Japan’s care. After that, he rarely comes around, instead staying cooped up in his room, memorizing military documents and reading random books.

He’s bored, he realizes.

He misses his own friends, he also figures out, rather pathetically. He hasn’t heard from England,
Canada, or France in weeks, and he misses them. Seeing Germany, Italy, and Japan is like adding salt to his wounds. It’s obvious they have a close-knit relationship, and Germany and Italy probably know everyone in Europe fairly well.

America barely knows anyone, and for once he’s angry about his country’s isolation.

He knows Japan is merely tolerating him. Clearly, he enjoys spending more time with Germany and Italy. Who was he to kid himself, thinking that he and Japan could be friends?

Was that what he was after with all of this? Is that why he helped Japan? Or was it just guilt that was motivating him—guilt after hearing no one had been taking care of Japan, guilt that all the Japanese at this mansion were afraid of the Nation rotting in the closet.

He thinks about Prussia, randomly on one of the days when he’s avoiding the other three. He and Prussia spent a fair amount of time together during the Revolutionary War, and it was during the war that Prussia said something that’s stuck with him since.

“You may be fighting England, but remember—England and Arthur are two different people.”

But America and Japan just murdered each other’s citizens. America just dropped a nuke on Japan. He’s—it’s his country that’s the reason Japan is like this. Maybe Alfred and Kiku can be friends, but America doesn’t want to delude himself.

He continues to stay away.

America’s back from his morning run when Germany stops him. It’s the fourth day, and they’ll be leaving tomorrow night.

“What do you need?” he asks, out of breath.

“Japan’s been asking for you.”

America stretches his legs. “He can’t talk.”

“Well, he can now, and he’s been asking for you.”

America stares at him.

“He doesn’t know where you’ve been, and he’s nervous. You can come and see him with us, you know.”

“It’s…okay.” America forces out a laugh. “I think he wants to spend more time with you two anyway.”

Germany frowns. “America, he…I don’t know how to say this. I—I don’t want to talk about the war.”

“You don’t have to—”

“This is the most alive I’ve seen Japan in twenty years. As injured as he is now, this is the most alive—the Japan I knew back then was a calculated persona. But now—He’s being genuine. You should talk to him. Really.”
“Okay,” America says, feeling lightheaded and anxious all at once.

“Actually,” Germany mumbles, looking very uncomfortable with this conversation. “You need to at least stay with him today. If you want Italy to paint, the two of us have to get away for a couple of hours.”

“Okay,” America repeats, his voice even quieter.

Germany rubs the back of his neck. “Can you show me where the paints are?”

America avoids eye contact. “Yeah, follow me.” As they walk inside, he can’t help himself. It spills out of his mouth before he can stop it. “Have you heard anything about Prussia?”

Germany’s expression shuts. “We can’t talk about this.”

The back of America’s neck feels red. “I—Sorry.” They enter his room, and he hands Germany the paint supplies he found. They’re in a basket.

“I don’t know what’s what. I found some paper, but I know there are different types…”

Germany fidgets. “I’m sure it’ll work.”

“Okay,” America responds and cringes. He feels like that’s all he’s been saying.

Germany starts to leave. “Drop by Japan’s room in an hour.”

America bites his tongue and nods.

He’s midway through changing clothes when Italy knocks on his door.

“Yeah?” he calls, throwing on a clean shirt. His hair is damp from his shower, and he pushes it to the side.

Italy walks in. “Are you coming to Japan’s room?” he asks, no hand movements, no little dances.

America has no idea how to react. “Uh, yeah. I was going to come over right now, actually.”

“Good. He’s been asking for you.”

“Germany told me…”

“And I’m telling you again.”

They stare at each other.

“I was really happy when you invited us out here,” Italy says first. “Being here gives me the chance to pretend everything’s okay.”

“…”

“I like doing that—pretending everything’s okay. It’s easier than acknowledging the fucking hell the three of us went through these past years.” He rubs his face. “Just—visit Japan. Germany and I have to leave anyway so I can paint.”
“Did I get you the right paper?” is the only thing America can bring himself to say.

Italy nods, his eyes glazed over. “It will suffice.”

A couple of minutes later, America heads over, hovering outside when he hears Italy laugh. It sounds overdone and fake.

He takes a deep breath and knocks lightly.

Italy opens the door, only pausing for a split second.

“Cool, you’re here!” he cheers in Japanese, no trace of his earlier tone. “Germany and I are going to do our thing now. Bye, Japan!”

As America steps inside, he sees Germany standing up. Japan is in the corner, propped up by pillows. The radio is on, and there are cards spread out on the table in front of him. The door to the garden is also open.

While Germany and Italy leave, America makes eye contact with Japan. He forces out a smile, but Japan’s eyes are guarded.

Wants to see me—my ass. He doesn’t want me here.

“Hey,” America says dumbly. He sits down at the table and attempts to figure out what card game they were playing.

Silence.

“I heard you can talk now,” he blurts out, ripping his eyes away from the table once he sees it’s solitaire.

Japan looks at the floor. “Not well,” he answers, slurring the words.

“Your vocal cords were damaged. Don’t worry; you’ll heal fast enough.” America suddenly feels choked up.

“I can’t even sit up on my own,” Japan mumbles.

America doesn’t know if he should apologize. He isn’t used to Japan talking and is afraid he’ll yell at him at any moment, even though he knows Japan never yells.

He screams when he’s afraid, though.

The air is tense, and America wants to leave. He feels suffocated.

“You’re allowed to speak English,” Japan suddenly says. “Please…stop using Japanese. It’s weird.”

“Can you understand me well enough, though?” America asks in that language.

Japan nods. America nods. Someone far away yells something.

America feels the need to break the silence. “I’ve been looking for wheelchairs.”
“Oh?” is the response he gets.

“Yeah, that way you can have more mobility. You must be going crazy—being cooped up in here. Uh, I requested one a couple of days ago. It should be here soon.” America’s palms are sweaty. “That way you can do things without me. I, um, bet you’re looking forward to that. There’re talks of dismissing me from here soon anyway.”

Japan’s eyebrows instantly shoot together. “Wait, already?”

“It’s October 4th. I’ve been here since September 10th.”

Japan chews his lip.

They lapse into another silence.

“I was hoping the bombs would kill me,” Japan whispers after a bit.

“What?”

He’s staring at the table. “I was really hoping the atomic bombs would kill me.”

America doesn’t know how to respond.

Japan closes his eyes. “I supported the war.” His voice sounds broken. “Honda Kiku supported the war for the country of Japan’s sake, and all that did was turn me into a thing that only existed to follow orders. I slowly lost all of my connections. I lost my friends. I watched Nations get tortured; then thrown in a jail cell to rot. I saw my own government turn against me. I—” Japan swallows. “I really wanted to die. But I lived, and then people hated me even more.”

America has a headache. “People don’t—”

“Alfred, you’re the first one in years to show me kindness, and I’m not quite sure how to handle it.”

“O-Oh.” America’s mouth feels dry.

Japan tugs at his hair. “I don’t want to think about the war and all the people the Japanese murdered. I don’t want to think about the atomic bombs either. Obviously, people got—people got obliterated. I want to say that I deserve having my body undone like this, despite how pathetic I feel now, but none of the civilians—they didn’t deserve that.”

America swallows.

“I should hate you for killing my civilians. That’s how the West views Nations are supposed to function, right? But, you—Alfred, you…” Japan looks embarrassed and almost angry, even. America feels weird since Japan keeps using his human name. “You’ve been so kind. You’ve helped me. And somehow, you got Feliciano and Ludwig out here too.”

“It was the least I could do,” America chokes out. “You deserve it.”

“You said that before.” Japan looks in disbelief. “I don’t deserve anything. You don’t even know me.”

America feels a little hurt. “We’ve talked in the past. We—We’re friends.”

“Friends?”
America’s pulse quickens. “I.” He stammers. “I—”

“If you…” Japan just looks confused. “I’d like to be friends.”

Something in America’s chest feels warm.

The paintings Italy creates are gorgeous. They’re oil based and photo-realistic.

Japan gets emotional. Germany looks proud.

America grins.

The next day, America spends some time with the three.

He finds Italy’s charades to be a bit annoying and somewhat creepy now that he knows it’s all an act, but they make Japan happy, so he deals with it. Before Italy and Germany leave, they’re treated to a large dinner. Japan attempts to eat by himself but struggles, so America helps him. It’s the only part of the evening that’s uncomfortable.

The goodbyes are quick. Italy hugs Japan gently after asking his permission, and Germany shakes his hand. America thanks the two verbally, and then they’re gone—just like that.

The wheelchair arrives two days later.

“We need to strengthen your muscles before you can use it,” America says to Japan.

He nods. They were just given the word that it arrived. Currently, they have books spread out in front of them, reading. Japan can, thankfully, now hold one by himself. It’s colder out today, and the cool air feels nice against their skin.

Italy’s paintings are hanging on the wall. America admires them before returning to his book.

“Alfred?” Japan eventually asks. Ever since their conversation about the atomic bombs, he’s only been calling America by his human name. America has been making an effort to use Japan’s human name as well. He doesn’t know if they should be doing this, but he doesn’t care.

“What?” America responds.

“The calendar fell.”

America lazily rolls over and pins it on the wall. He then checks the date since he’s forgetful. It’s October 7th.

Once it’s secure, he turns around and faces Japan, who’s gone back to reading. America flops on the ground, suddenly feeling restless.
“I’m going to the bathroom. I’ll be right back,” he says.

Japan doesn’t respond, but America knows he heard him. He gets up and leaves. After going, he aimlessly walks around for a bit.

“Ah, there you are,” he hears when he’s admiring a sculpture. It’s his babysitter.

America frowns. “What do you need?”

His babysitter rubs his face. “There’s a UN, Nation only meeting in London in two weeks.”

“Nation only?”

“Yeah. It’s a test run for possible bigger ones in the future. I think…six other Nations are going? The President wants you there too. You’ll be leaving Japan tomorrow to have enough time to refresh yourself on foreign policy.”

America knew this was coming, but he’s still shocked. “Will I come back here?”

“I don’t know. If you do, it won’t be at least for another month.”

“Oh.”

“Japan’s mental and physical state has improved remarkably. He’ll be able to get by on his own now with the help of his government.”

America looks at the sculpture again and ignores him.

His babysitter says something else, but he doesn’t catch it. After that, he walks away. America continues to stare at the statue.

He’s not sure what he’s feeling. Bitter? Sad?

Someone touches his back.

He whirls around, only to find Aida.

“What you’ve done hasn’t been in vain.”

America swallows, “Uh, you’ve told me that.”

“And I’ll make sure of it. You don’t have to worry about Mr. Honda while you’re gone, okay? He’ll be in my care.”

“I…thought you weren’t allowed to care for him now.”

Aida shrugs. “Does it even matter anymore?” A sad expression washes over her face. “After what Mr. Honda has endured, I owe him this.”

“Well, thank you,” America mumbles, feeling relieved that Japan will have a support network while he’s gone.

Aida turns to leave.

“Why do you know about our existence?” America blurts out.

She smiles, suddenly looking very tired. “By accident.”
“That took a while,” Japan accuses when America finally returns.

“One of my officials stopped me,” he mumbles.

“About what?”

“I’m leaving earlier than originally thought.”

“When?”

“Tomorrow.”

Japan stares at him. He opens his mouth to say something; then quickly shuts it.

“Aida will be in charge of you, so you don’t have to worry about that,” America says. He can then feel it, word vomit. He starts to ramble. “Now your government will have full control of you again, which is good because that means that Japan is finally getting back on its feet. And by this point, you don’t really need me anyway because you can do most things by yourself, and what you can’t do, Aida said she’ll take care of. So you’re in good hands, and you won’t have to worry about anything. You also won’t have to listen to me ramble all day long, and you’ll finally be able to get some peace and quiet.” He ends by forcing out a laugh.

Japan’s eyebrows are pinched. “Alfred, it’s—it’s been nice listening to you talk.”

America doesn’t know what to do with himself. He fidgets. “Really? ‘Cause you don’t say much yourself.”

“It doesn’t mean I don’t like to listen.”

They look at each other. America can’t fathom why Japan seems dejected.

“I’ll be back in a month,” he says. He can see Japan relax and feels weird. “And when I come back, I’ll bring some new books for your—for your collection.”

Japan gives a small smile. “That’d be nice.”

America pauses and studies his hands, feeling embarrassed. He realizes what the weird feeling in his stomach is. “I’ll miss you.”

He doesn’t look at Japan, but he hears a quiet, “I’ll miss you too.”

America sleeps soundly that night.

He’s roused early.

While people pack his belongings, he visits Japan one last time and helps him with breakfast. It’s an awkward goodbye. America isn’t sure what to do, and somehow they end up hugging.
“If I’m not back in a month, I’ll send a telegram,” he says. “If you want,” he then blurts out, feeling unsure.

“I’d…like that,” Japan murmurs.

“We have to go,” some soldier says to America’s babysitter.

America sighs, dropping his arms.

“Thank you, Alfred,” Japan whispers.

He feels uncomfortable. “It’s my country that—”

“Thank you for being the first person to treat me like a human in years.” Japan is avoiding eye contact.

“Frank, we really have to go.”

Frank the babysitter motions for him to leave, and he feels torn. He touches Japan’s arm, then walks away.

He misses Japan glumly wave.
Chapter End Notes

(picture commissioned from ket3.tumblr.com)!

*The League of Nations— Basically a failed version of the UN that was formed after WW1. The US wasn’t even a part of it.

**The Marshall Plan—Basically an economic plan that gave aid to Western Europe. It was formed after the Truman Doctrine in 1948. It made Western Europe like the US, and helped combat the spread of Communism under the ‘domino effect’.

***Domino Effect—When one country falls to communism, the rest around it will also convert to communism.
As a note: There will be other OC’s, like Aida or ‘America’s babysitter’ (aka Frank), that will play small, but important, roles.
France is sick of hearing English. All he wants to do is retreat back to his own country and avoid everyone. Maybe his problems will be magically solved if he does that.

He’s not paying attention to the conversation going on around him; he doesn’t have the energy to do so. Thankfully, everyone understands to some degree, and they’re leaving him alone.

He’s in London, waiting for the unofficial Nation UN meeting to occur. He’s been here for a week now, but it’s nothing new. Back when he was an utter mess, he spent months just moping around Buckingham Palace. Everyone’s used to him. England. His annoying brothers. The Commonwealth Nations.

Them, France can stomach. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are harmless. And then Northern Ireland barely talks, so he’s not really an issue. Wales is okay if he’s alone.

Scotland. It’s Scotland that sucks.

Whatever anger France and England harbored towards each other in the past centuries has died down. France doesn’t know when he actually got to know Arthur Kirkland, but when he did, suddenly, he didn’t despise him anymore. It was almost the opposite for Scotland. At first, France liked Scotland because Scotland hated England, but as soon as Francis got to know Alistair, he never wanted to talk to him again.

He, Scotland, is dominating the conversation. Wales is joking around with him. Northern Ireland has been stabbing his fork into a singular pea for the past five minutes. France’s gaze has been rotating between that and some wallpaper peeling in the corner of the room.

After some time, Canada gently pokes him.

“Are you okay?” he asks in French.

“Mm,” France responds, never okay.

Canada frowns but doesn’t push.

France glances at him; then sighs and attempts to listen to the conversation. He wants alcohol, but after he killed himself from alcohol poisoning, no one’s letting him near any.

Right now the conversation is about football. France hears one word, then decides he doesn’t give a shit and stares at the wall again.

Eventually, he hears his name being called and looks up to see who said it. “What?”

They’re all in the dining room, finishing up dinner. France isn’t hungry and has barely touched his food while everyone else has mostly finished their plates. They’ve moved on to drinking a variation of coffee and tea.

*We could have been drinking alcohol if the frog weren’t here,* he remembers someone saying. It sounded like Wales. He knows it wasn’t England because he doesn’t call him that as an actual
insult anymore. Now it’s like some weird affectionate nickname.

France doesn’t know what the hell is going on between the two of them.

“Anything interesting on that wall over there?” Scotland sneers. His expression is annoyed. He’s been bitter ever since France started staying here to recover, and France knows why. While he’s been given free range to mope around and do whatever he wants, Scotland always has some sort of official spying on him for no goddamn reason. It’s the same with Wales and Northern Ireland as well.

“It’s for security reasons,” England mumbled one time.

France didn’t think that made any sense. “What are they going to do?”

England looked uncomfortable. “They…have the same Nation status as Prussia did when he rebelled, so our officials are paranoid.”

“Oh just shut up,” England says before France can respond.

“You’re telling me to shut up?!” Scotland exclaims. “I’m not the one who’s been talking non-stop for the past ten minutes about how excited I am to see America tomorrow!”

England attempts to say something, but it comes out as a garbled mess.

“Stop fighting,” Canada urges quietly, but Scotland pays him no mind.

“What are you thinking about, Frenchie?” he asks France with a sneer on his face. “Anything riveting?” His expression screams: why the hell are you still this messed up after all this time?

In the past, France might have gotten into some argument. Perhaps he would have even been amused. Now he’s just tired. He’s always tired, and sometimes he wants to stop existing. At this point, he doesn’t even know what he’s living for.

He’s afraid of the future.

He doesn’t know what his government thinks of him.

Where’s Prussia?

Is Spain okay?

“Fuck off,” France mumbles in English, his accent thick and his voice rough.

Scotland actually frowns. Wales punches him in the arm. England’s expression is broken.

No one bothers him for the rest of dinner.

After dinner, France goes to bed. Sleeping is good. It’s almost like death.

Sometimes he really wishes he could die.
He’s wearing a suit. Normally, he likes dressing up and looking classy, but today he feels stiff and uncomfortable.

He, England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are going to the UN meeting, which is being held at some complex in the middle of London. Thankfully, since Arthur represents both England and the UK, only he’s going and not his brothers.

In addition to them, America and Russia are supposed to be there. Though there are others a part of the UN, only these countries agreed to send out their Nation Avatars for this event. Mao Zedong wanted to send China, but his request was denied.

The five Nations arrive, and even though France’s mind has been in the gutter this entire morning, he tries to tease England when he notices how nervous he is.

“Afraid to see your colony, Eyebrows?”

England glares at him as they walk inside, his cheeks tinted pink. He responds lamely with, “Oh shut up.”

France smiles.

“Thank God we’re finally away from those other three, yeah?”

New Zealand and Australia chime in their own comments, and France laughs. It feels good. Sometimes he can joke around like this, but often the illusion of happiness it creates will leave quickly, only to be replaced by a dull aching sensation.

England and France’s advisors are currently escorting them, along with a handful of both British and French soldiers. Inside, America and Russia’s give their greetings. The two in question are already waiting in the assembly room, apparently.

All five Nations are shown where it is, and they enter together. It’s huge—there’s a stage in the center back part that has a table and seats, plus rows of chairs in front that are divided into three columns.

On the stage are America and Russia, America seeming extremely uncomfortable while Russia appears amused. Upon them entering, they both look up, stopping whatever painful conversation they were having. America then scrambles off the stage and sprints over.

“What’s he talking about?” England asks when America’s within earshot.

“Nothing,” he says quickly. His cheeks are red with embarrassment, but he looks happy. “Holy shit. Thank God you arrived now; that conversation was awful.”

“Happy to see you too,” England responds sarcastically.

They quickly start talking about anything that ranges from pop culture to new restaurants in London. Canada chimes in every now and then, and New Zealand and Australia become engaged in their own conversation. Russia is still on the stage, staring at the wall. France has no intention of joining him. He’s tried being civil in the past—in fact, has gone out of his way to do so—but nothing good has come from it.

The man is too damn creepy, and France is too damn tired.
Instead, he watches the English-speaking Nations converse. He’s too drained to contribute, but watching them feels nice.

After about five minutes, Russia gets up from where he’s sitting. No one notices him, except France, whose eyes follow his movements.

*Why does he have a slight limp?*

“France,” America says loudly.

Russia leaves out a back entrance. France feels startled. “What?”

“Have you ever—”

He’s cut off by approaching footsteps.

UN delegation members arrive just as Russia reenters the room with a pissed expression on his face.

The meeting starts.

They sit on the stage around a large table and are handed scripted documents they’re supposed to read off of. They recite policy statements one by one. In the future, they’re told, they’ll be given topics to discuss before the real UN meetings to speed up the decision-making process. Right now they’re going over documents that have already been reviewed, which really defeats the whole purpose of this entire thing, in France’s opinion.

The discussions are boring and dry, and their superiors breathe down their backs as they talk. Apparently, they won’t be here in the future.

*‘Apparently,’* France thinks.

His mind wanders since he’s unable to focus. He wonders if something will ever hold his attention again. Right now, everything’s so gray and pointless that he doesn’t have the willpower to put his energy towards anything.

America mentions something about atomic weapons.

Russia responds.

Their mouths are moving, but France can’t distinguish what they’re saying.

*Where’s Prussia?* is all he can think when he looks at Russia.

His mind spins in circles at the thought of Prussia, Gilbert. *He risked his life to save me. And now, he could be—he could be—*

France refuses to think about the possibility of Gilbert being dead.

*But he was dissolving.*

*His leg fell off.*
He almost died before.

My country was the one who decided to kill him, and I knew.

But he still called you a friend and risked his life.

Where is he now?

Is he being tortured, just as I once was?

In the dungeon, with, with the different—

He suddenly feels panicky, like he can’t breathe.

“Call me by my human name, Francis,” is what Prussia would tell him again and again, and for whatever reason, that thought keeps repeating in his mind.

England—no, Francis, human names, that’s what Prussia wants. You have to do what he wants—

“Francis,” Arthur says calmly.

Everyone looks at him.

He speaks slowly. “What’s wrong?”

Francis quickly gets out of his chair and vomits onto the floor. He’s panting. People are now talking, some are crowding around him, and he feels cornered. The lights are too bright. Everything is too loud.

“He still has panic attacks?” he hears Ivan ask.

“Fuck, get him some water,” he hears Arthur swear.

“We need to move him,” he hears Alfred command.

“Everyone step back,” he hears Matthieu urge.

There are other voices—some complaining about the vomit, others trying to gain control of the situation.

Francis can’t take it, and he blacks out.

He wakes up on a couch.

His head is throbbing as he opens his eyes. All of the Nations are in the room, but it’s silent. Canada is the closest to him, sitting on a chair right next to where he’s lying.

As France attempts to sit up, Canada gently pushes him back down and hands him a glass of water.

France feels pathetic but takes it anyway, and as he does, Canada stands up, saying something about going to tell someone that France is awake. Australia and New Zealand follow him out of the room.

Now it’s just France, America, England, and Russia.
Russia shifts his weight after no one says anything, then stands up. “I’m going to the bathroom.”

“No one cares,” England mutters when he’s gone.

Before he can say anything else, France sets down his now empty glass and stands up in a wobbly motion.

America and England jump to their feet.

“Francis, sit down,” England orders.

“I’m fine…”

America frowns. “France, what happened? You—England said you haven’t had a panic attack in a while.”

He sighs and sits back down on the couch. “I don’t know…” He suddenly feels on the verge of tears. “I thought about Gilbert, I guess.”

There’s silence.

“I—I want to help him.”

“There’s nothing we can do,” England says softly.

France is sick of him being this kind. “There has to be something,” he snaps.

“Well, what then?” England hisses. “We can’t just break into the Soviet Union and extract him.”

“…We can’t, but Ivan can,” America mumbles.

England’s head snaps towards him. “Russia wouldn’t help us.”

“Why do you say that?”

England closes his eyes. France, though, stares at America, suddenly feeling a bubble of hope for the first time ever since the Nazis ripped his body apart.

America fidgets. “Ivan wouldn’t be able to do it alone, though.” He’s whispering now. “We would need a plan, and we would need other Nations involved. So if you can draft some sort of plan, Francis, I’ll talk to Ivan for you.”

England opens his eyes. “What the—what are you two talking about? Were you there at Potsdam? Bloody hell, and you saw how they reacted when we were at Buckingham Palace!”

America frowns. “We’d make sure they wouldn’t find out.”

“You two are idiots.”

“Would you help us?”

“Of course I would.”

France gawks, feeling lightheaded. “I’ll figure something out,” he breathes.

*I swear to it.*
Chapter End Notes

the whole “animation” thing will make sense in the future. I’m building towards something, work with me

///
It’s dark except for the stars.

There’s a slight breeze that’s pulling in storm clouds. China studies them from the balcony of the Zhongnanhai in Beijing, feeling something unidentifiable.

Wondering how he even got to this point.

Just last September, 1949 年 9 月 23 日, he publicly declared his alliance to Mao and the Communist Party. Most already knew his association with them, but nothing was official yet. This announcement meant that many Nations would be breaking contact with him. It also signified that another Nation Avatar might appear if the communist People’s Liberation Army didn’t fully defeat the nationalist National Revolutionary Army.

China frowns.

They defeated them. Or at least, on October 1st, Mao Zedong gave a speech declaring they did. But the National Revolutionary Army kept fighting, and eventually, the most prominent members escaped to the backward island of Taiwan, messed up from both the Japanese and the West, and declared it their own.

So now, not only is there a new country, but also a new Nation.

What’s worse is that both are seen as the ‘true’ China in the eyes of the UN. The People’s Republic of China and Wang Yao aren’t real by their standards.

For his entire life, China has made calculating moves to hang onto his existence. He’s not sure how he feels right now.

He wants to think he made the right decision.

Since the end of the Civil War, Mao has been instigating economic reforms. The Nationalist rule caused hyperinflation and a severely weakened economy, and to fix it, Mao’s created the ‘First Five Years Plan,’ based off of a Soviet model. That’s why Soviet advisors have been called out to Beijing.

That’s why, on 1950 年 3 月 10 日, Russia is also out on this balcony.

If someone asked, China wouldn’t be able to describe what type of relationship they have.

Maybe he’d say it’s complicated.

In the years where Western Nations were barging into his country and taking advantage of its resources and people, Russia, Ivan, was the only Nation that attempted to understand him and his situation. All of the other Western Nations were cold. They seemed to have forgotten how China had been more advanced than them for thousands of years until they became isolated from the West, and instead, they focused on exploiting his country. They didn’t care about him, Yao, or his people. They were just there for business.
Russia was different.
Russia took the time to talk to him, to get to know him.
Russia he actually had things in common with.
Russia treated him like a human.
Russia…
“It’s the Great Wagon,” he whispers.
China blinks. “The what?”
He pauses. “I think I once read that you call it the Seven Stars of the Northern Dipper.”
“Where is it?”
“Look,” Russia murmurs, walking over. He hesitates, though, when he gets close.
They make eye contact. “Where is it?” China repeats.
You can touch me.
Russia sucks in some air and stands behind him. He points over his shoulder with one hand, while gently pushing China’s head with his other arm.
“Ah. I see it now,” China murmurs, breathing in his smell.
They hold their positions.
“You know your constellations,” he eventually says to break the silence.
“It’s technically not a constellation; it’s an asterism.”
“Alright then.”
Russia laughs. The vibrations rock his chest. “Asterisms are patterns of stars that don’t form an official constellation, so you can’t use them to navigate.” He then playfully adds, “You didn’t know that?”
“No.”
“Even though you’re thousands of years old?”
China rolls his eyes. “That doesn’t mean it’s a necessity to learn how to read constellations.”
“You wound me,” Russia says, moving away. China shivers when the cold air hits his back.
They stare at the sky.
“Does anyone know we’re out here?” Russia asks a few minutes later, his voice apprehensive.
China hates hearing him this uneasy, hates that others never notice how unsure he is of himself. All they focus on is his intimidating appearance.
It gets under China’s skin.
He chews his lip and shrugs, but he’s not sure if Russia can even see him. “No, but it’s around one in the morning, so I’m pretty sure everyone’s asleep.”

“…”

“We can go back inside if you want…”

Russia fidgets. “It’s fine.”

“No.” China walks closer, talking in a hushed tone in case anyone’s listening. “Are you still worried about what happened at Potsdam? Haven’t you proved your loyalty?”

Russia grimaces. “I guess. They’ve…”

“They’ve what?”

“They’ve disciplined me, and I accept it, which I think pleases them.”

China feels a surge of anger and forces it back. After being alive for so long, he’s mastered the art of suppressing his emotions, especially the dangerous ones.

“In Asia, Nations were never treated like dirt until the West invaded.”

Russia laughs quietly in response, sounding exhausted.

China’s angry. He’s tired. He knows Russia has, or at least had, an infatuation with him. That especially became clear the month they spent together during the Second World War. God, during that time, even China’s emotions started spiraling out of control. With the years they’ve spent apart, though, he thought he got a handle on them. He thought Russia worked out his own as well.

It takes one action to prove that nothing’s changed.

Without thinking, he presses his hands to Russia’s chest to warm them up. Russia breathes in sharply, and China can feel how rapidly his heart is beating.

He doesn’t want this to get weird, so he doesn’t acknowledge what just happened. “How are your sisters?” he practically chokes out, snapping his hands away.

Russia’s voice is higher than usual. “I recently had to watch them get beaten. I—I tried to reason with my officials to stop, but…they didn’t like that.”

They make eye contact.

“It’ll get better,” China whispers.

Russia’s expression is broken. “Really?”

He doesn’t know how to respond, so he looks away and rubs the back of his neck. “Let’s go inside.”

No one is eavesdropping when they enter the building, but China can’t help but be paranoid.

After all, none of their governments have trusted Nations since Prussia rebelled.

When China gets to his room, he lies down on top of his covers, burying his face into his pillow.
Prussia’s goddamn rebellion. Responsible for China losing the last bit of prestige he was clinging onto. The reason he had to act so goddamn cold towards Korea when they were finally reunited. Guilty for preventing him in showing any interest in Japan’s recovery.

Maybe he should have joined the nationalists. That way, he’d be able to see Korea, who at this point is just associating with the US-influenced Southern half of his country. He’d also be able to check in on Japan’s recovery. The US would let him if he represented Taiwan.

China’s head starts to pound. He wants to say he picked this side for its ideals, for the communists that will benefit his country and people.

But he knows he’s kidding himself.

He’s mostly here because of Ivan.

They’re in a conference room. Soviet officials are sitting on one side of the table while the Chinese are on the adjacent. There are two translators seated at the ends; however, most of the Chinese know Russian. China and Russia are next to their head officials. At the moment, Mao Zedong and Josef Stalin are conversing somewhere else.

China and Russia don’t really need to pay attention. They’re just there as a status symbol.

But since the conversation is about Korea, China actively listens.

“The American forces are going to pull out of the South soon without any attempt to reunify the country. In the event that fighting breaks out, we want to build up a military in the North,” a Soviet official explains. “If the Soviet Union helps in such endeavors, we were wondering if the People’s Republic of China would also be willing to extend their aid.”

“The People’s Republic would not be opposed.”

China digs his nails into his palm. Lately, his country has been bending over backward to please the Soviet Union.

“The South has been looking weaker and weaker in these past months. If we act promptly, it could easily be brought under control again,” another Soviet official adds. “Americans are also withdrawing from the region drastically since they don’t seem to consider it strategically important.”

“What about the Nation Avatar?” a Chinese official asks. “Where is he?”

“There was an agreement to have him split his time evenly between the North and South. This functioned in the beginning, but since the Americans have significantly withdrawn, this exchange has been difficult. At this point, he’s mostly been stationed in the South, so if a war were to occur, the North would probably have to fight without his aid. A new Nation won’t form as long as the other side is defeated.”

People nod their heads.

“There have also been some discussions about a new military strategy we could attempt to ensure overall victory,” another Soviet official adds on. “In the event of the North goes through with an attack.”
“And that is?”

“And a army of Nation Avatars.”

What?

The Soviet man continues, ignoring Russia and China as if they don’t exist. “In the recent years, the Soviet Union has obtained many Nation Avatars that we could train and use at our disposal.”

“What Nation Avatars would you consider, then, for such an army?”

“As of now, we’re measuring the strengths of Lithuania, Estonia, and Prussia. We’ll have more conclusive data later, which we’ll share with you when we obtain it.”

China doesn’t dare make eye contact with Russia and stares straight at the wall. He digs his nails even further into his palm.

“It also wouldn’t be a waste to send the Chinese and Russian Nation Avatars.”

Now everyone in the room acknowledges them. China feels like throwing up.

“We’re willing to help the Soviets in North Korea, especially since the region is strategically important to us. However, if you wish to progress further with this ‘special army,’ we’ll need to have a further discussion later,” a Chinese official states.

The rest of the meeting continues.

China doesn’t hear any of it.

Chapter End Notes

*Zhongnanhai: a central government compound near the Forbidden City (which is a palace, despite its name)

**The Great Wagon: The Big Dipper. It has different names in different regions (that means different things in English.) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Dipper
Soviet Russia

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Prussia can’t hold onto a coherent thought. His body is too weak, and he can barely remain conscious. When he is partly awake, he’s pulled back into death. He’s too weak to live, but he can’t die—Nations can’t die. The result is a fitful slumber that leaves him exhausted and brain-dead.

He tries to think, tries to recollect memories, but the amount of energy he expends trying to do so plunges him into death.

So instead he counts.

Counting doesn’t take too much energy, and it’s almost like a game to remember what number he’s on.

He’s around 12,357 when someone forcefully props him up. He blinks, attempts to talk, but he’s too weak and passes out.

12,358; 12,359...

Prussia realizes he’s still alive. Usually, after two numbers his body freaks out and kills him; however, now he feels healthy enough to stay awake. His eyes are heavy, but he forces them open.

He’s lying down on a bed. Before he was on a stone floor in a small cell, but now he’s in a larger, cleaner room. There are also needles in his arm, and he momentarily panics. The last time he’s seen any was when someone was being experimented on.

I can do this. Shit it will all be over soon, and then I’ll be in Germany and see Ludwig, and Roderich, and Elizabeta, and Antonio and Francis are counting on me, and fuck, I—

He feels nauseous.

He’s also extremely weak, weaker than pre-Potsdam. He can barely lift his head or move his arms, and...

Oh.

There’s another person in the room.

Russia is sitting motionless on a chair, staring at the wall, his back hunched as he looks angry about something. Wrapped around half his face is an old scarf he’s had for about three hundred years.

Prussia remembers taking it once during some battle of some war. He’d snatched it from Russia’s neck and hurled it into a lake, and Russia didn’t even hesitate as he dove into the water after it. Prussia had laughed, and then someone stabbed him in the stomach for breaking ‘war etiquette.’

That’s the last time he saw him wearing it.
Prussia starts to get restless after Russia doesn’t move. No one’s coming into the room, and he wants to get whatever torture they have planned over with. He coughs to get his attention.

Russia jumps. As soon as they make eye contact, though, he leaves the room.

*Great.*

Prussia chews his lip and scans the room. There are no windows, and the only furniture is the bed he’s on and the chair previously occupied by Russia.

The door opens.

Outside is this huge group of people. They’re all speaking Russian, firing sentences rapidly at each other.

Prussia realizes he can’t understand jack shit.

There are two men with guns dressed in military uniforms. There’s also one older guy who’s wearing a lab coat and carrying a clipboard. He has an assistant, a mousy looking kid who can’t be older than sixteen. Russia is also back, lurking behind the other people. He still has his scarf, but it isn’t wrapped tightly around his face anymore.

They enter, none of them paying attention to Prussia until Clipboard Man shouts something at him. He feels his throat go dry.

Clipboard Man says something again, this time, angrier. He’s waving his hands.

“I can’t understand Russian,” Prussia attempts to respond, but he’s barely audible.

Clipboard Man’s Assistant says something to one of the military men, who then raises his gun and points it at him threateningly.

“I can’t understand what you’re saying,” he says again in German, this time slightly more coherent. He can feel himself breaking out in a cold sweat.

Russia says something to the people in the room. They respond. He then walks over to Prussia and starts speaking German.

“Are you just fucking with us? You can’t understand Russian?”

“I’ve been dead for like—God, I don’t know. Give me a break. I practically dissolved.”

Russia glares at him, then turns around and says something to the other men. They converse for a couple of minutes, and with each word, Prussia feels himself getting angrier and angrier. He wants to act out but knows doing so will not help in any way.

Russia speaks in German again. “They’re going to examine your health.”

“What?”

He signals for the band of people to come over. “Just remain passive and don’t make any sudden movements unless I tell you to.”

They poke and prod him—grab his limbs and twist them in random directions. Prussia has no muscle mass to control his movements even if he wanted to.
He doesn’t know how long they take. It’s probably only ten minutes, but it feels like hours. Every now and then, Russia gives him a direction. They range from press your foot against his hand to open your mouth or look into the light.

Eventually, some liquid is placed in a pouch and hung above his head. It’s then attached to one of the needles in his forearm.

He drifts off.

He’s woken up by someone placing a catheter in him.

He’s so shocked he’s mute. It’s Clipboard Man’s Assistant who’s handling his piss, and Prussia wants to console the kid, tell him he understands what it’s like to be stuck with a shitty job. He wonders what this kid did to get himself involved in this mess.

Once he’s finished peeing, Clipboard Man’s Assistant pulls out the catheter and caps the piss bottle. He then looks up and jumps when he realizes Prussia’s awake.

“Hi,” Prussia attempts to say in Russian. It’s slurred and coated in a heavy accent.

The kid responds with something. Prussia can only make out one word, which is sorry as he darts out of the room.

The rest of Prussia’s day is dull. He mostly stares at the wall. At one point, another man who he’s never seen before enters the room and spoon-feeds him a mushy substance. It has no taste and has the consistency of applesauce.

Prussia waits for someone to come in and dissect him, maim him, hurt him.

No one ever does.

He dreams. It’s the first time he’s dreamt since Potsdam. Maybe it’s because he’s finally gaining strength. Maybe it’s because he’s so uncertain about his future. He doesn’t know, nor care.

The dream is of the past. More specifically, his current self is viewing a memory. He’s trapped behind a thick wall of glass, looking into the world he once experienced.

The memory he’s stuck watching is the one where he first met Austria. He was no older than fifty at the time. The beginning years of his life he was locked away, for fear that he was a demon, so Austria was the first Nation he met.

Because the very band of people he was supposed to represent, at the time the Teutonic Knights, had rejected him, he was rebellious compared to other Western Nations. He wasn’t subservient. He didn’t believe he was simply their pawn piece. He held onto his humanity.

He had a name.

No other Western Nation had a name. They were simply called by the title of their country or group of people they represented.
He chose his name. When he was first taken out of the cell, due to the leader of the Teutonic Knights learning that Nation Avatars could be useful and not just evil creatures, they told him he was the Teutonic Knights.

Prussia remembers vividly. He laughed at them. He said he was Gilbert.

Why Gilbert? Even he doesn’t know. He has vague memories of a mother calling him that. A sister. A father. He has vague memories of being loved.

But also of them being murdered because—

“Look at his appearance! He’s a creature against God!”

If only they knew what albino people were back then.

His family was murdered because of him. He was murdered too, but—

he came back to life.

He became immortal.

He once tried talking about this with another Nation—Bavaria. He had laughed at Prussia, called him delusional.

“Nations were never humans. Nations never had families.”

What did he know?

He’s dead now.

In the memory, Prussia took Austria to the garden while their leaders conversed.

“So, what’s your actual name?” he asked.

“I’m sorry, I don’t understand,” Austria replied. “My name is Austria.”

“Okay, yeah, your name is Austria, but what’s your real name? Mine is Gilbert.”

“…Gilbert?”

“Yeah, so what’s yours?”

Austria scrunched up his nose. “Nations don’t have ‘real’ names. We’re not humans. We’re Nations.”

They were about fifty at the time but resembled children no older than seven. Austria had the knowledge of an adult man but looked innocent and confused. Prussia, having never met another Nation, was fascinated, enthralled by the other boy in front of him.

“Let’s steal some horses,” he blurted out.

Austria didn’t reply.

Prussia grabbed his wrist and dragged him to the royal barn. “Let’s take some out for a ride. I can tack them up. You stay here.”

Austria was silent, baffled. Prussia tacked up his favorite horse, Royal Blue, and chose the horse,
They got on the horses and rode outside the confines of the castle, racing past the unsuspecting guards on duty.

Prussia watches the memory through the thick glass, marveling at how carefree he once was. Austria, on the other hand, was nervous. As they were riding, Prussia kept calling out to Roderich The Horse to keep up. Even after they were caught and scolded, Prussia continued to call Austria, ‘Roderich,’ just to get a rise out of him.

But somehow, the name stuck.

Prussia is overcome with such a longing sensation to see him that he feels choked, hopelessly alone, afraid—

…

He wakes up on the verge of tears.

It’s dark and silent, and his ears are ringing. He clutches his bed sheets, only to remember how Hungary was also dragged out of the room in Potsdam.

He breaks down.

In between one of his slumbers, he wakes and finds Russia in the room again.

Except, he isn’t alone.

Prussia stares at him and China. They’re both sitting parallel to the bed on old, rusty chairs that have been pushed together. They’re facing the wall, and the two aren’t talking, but their knees are pressed together.

Prussia doesn’t know what to do, cough again? Why are they even here? To torture him together? Are they there to observe him?

Prussia’s armpits get sweaty. He suddenly feels gross, and abruptly sneezes, causing both China and Russia’s heads to turn in his direction.

They make eye contact. Prussia doesn’t know what to say.

“What’s today’s date?” is what he blurts out.

China looks bored and emotionless. “1950, the 22nd of April,” he replies.

Prussia nods, feeling dazed. If that much time has passed already, then he should be able to make it through the rest of his confinement.

This will be over before I know it.

“Could you understand him?” Russia asks in German.

Prussia realizes he could. “Yeah,” he responds in Russian.
“Good.” He and China get up and leave the room, leaving Prussia feeling empty and confused. He feels like crying again. There’s a sob stuck in his throat, threatening to burst if he speaks. He blinks his eyes rapidly and attempts to calm down, but he can feel himself getting worked up. He can’t control his thoughts, and they filter in memories of Hungary and Austria and Germany, and each new recollection causes him almost to lose control. Snot starts building up in his nose, and he feels pathetic.

I want to go home.

As soon as that thought enters his mind, he almost laughs. Home? What is there left for me to return to?

The door opens. Russia and China enter with three Russian guards, all who are carrying guns. Following them is a Russian official. At the last moment, before the door is shut, Clipboard Man and his assistant enter the room, lugging in a typewriter.

Prussia feels overwhelmed.

The Russian official speaks once the typewriter is set up. “My name is Kazimir. I will be asking you questions. You must answer truthfully, or there will be consequences. This entire conversation is being documented.”

Prussia nods, feeling lightheaded.

“Okay, we will begin now. During the war, is it true that you went against your government to help an Ally Nation?”

Prussia attempts to speak, but his throat is full of mucus, so he has to clear it. He cringes and adverts eye contact, hating himself for becoming so weak.

“Yes,” he responds in Russian.

“Can you give me an overview of how you were able to accomplish such a feat?”

He thinks of Spain. What has he told? Will there be any consequences for him if I reveal too much?

“We established contact before the Second World War,” Prussia mutters. “Spain and I.”

“How and why did you establish such contact?”

He shrugs, chewing his lip, trying to prevent himself from shaking. “Because I was afraid.”

“But how did you establish such contact?”

Something inside his head snaps. “Does it even matter!?”

The guards in the room aim their guns at him. Kazimir barely blinks. “I’ll repeat my question; how did you establish such contact?”

Prussia grips onto the thin dirty blanket covering him. “Because Antonio lived in a fascist dictatorship that barely paid attention to him, so he was able to skirt around his government and keep contact with the goddamn Italian mafia since organized-crime was on the rise. Because I was absolutely terrified of what Hitler was planning, so I stole any bit of information I could to keep Antonio and Francis safe and gave it to them,” he spits out, rambling. Some tears leak out of his
eyes, and he tries to wipe them away. However, his arms are still weak, so they cramp up against
his will.

Kazimir is unfazed. “It’s funny how you refer to them as ‘Antonio’ and ‘Francis.’ Why are you
calling the two Nation Avatars, Spain and France, that?”

Prussia feels as though he’s been transported back centuries into the past.

He stares straight at Kazimir. “Fuck you. Your own Soviet regime dehumanizes people and
Nations just as much as the Nazis. Fuck you. FUCK THIS ENTIRE REGIME!” He turns his head
towards Russia and China, who are passively watching. “HOW DO YOU FEEL, IVAN AND
YAO? NOT GOING TO SAY ANYTHING, ARE YOU?”

“Calm down,” a guard orders, gun still raised.

His eyes turn red.

“Calm down now,” someone else orders.

“Do you know that we’re rehabilitating you?” Kazimir calmly asks.

Prussia is shaking with anger.

“We could be torturing you and continuing Nation research, but we aren’t. However, that doesn’t
mean we won’t. We saw your strength as a valuable asset and are willing to nourish you and let
you live in comfortable conditions, as long as you cooperate with us. Your actions now are causing
me to doubt you. Please reassess your behavior.”

Prussia summons what little strength he has and forcefully exerts his presence, causing Russia and
China to double over in pain. He then lunges out of his bed at Kazimir.

He’s shot in the head before he reaches him.

“You still want to use him? You still want to send him to Korea?”

“He clearly exhibits much strength that will be valuable on the battlefield. He’s also emotionally
compromised, and we can use that to our advantage to manipulate him. The other Nations we’ve
chosen should keep him in line, especially now that we know he has a connection to Hungary,
thanks to information provided by China and Russia. We’ll continue building up his strength. And
then he’ll be sent to North Korea to train with the rest of the Nation Army.”

“What about Russia and China?”

“They’ll be sent out periodically. They’ll be valuable only when war breaks loose.”

Chapter End Notes

IV’s weren’t widely used until the 1950s, which is why Prussia is confused about what
is in his arm
Relations

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“We’ll be landing shortly,” America’s babysitter, Frank, tells him.

America nods while staring out the airplane window, feeling his stomach churn.

He’s nervous.

God, in October he told Japan that he’d see him in a month, and now it’s April 22nd.

He clenches the newspaper he’s holding so that it crinkles. If it annoys Frank, he doesn’t say anything. They’re the only two on the plane besides the pilots in the cockpit. Other American officials are already in Japan, waiting for them.

America’s mind is a jumbled mess. He’s trying to think about anything other than Japan, other than Kiku, but it’s not working. He’s only getting more and more stressed. He thinks about Taiwan, the sour situation in Korea, the spread of Communism in Eastern Europe, the fact that Francis wants him to somehow get in contact with Ivan and break Gilbert out of the Soviet Union.

That UN meeting was in October, and so far nothing has been done to further their ‘breakout plan.’ Over the past few months, America’s time has been divided between D.C., London, and Paris. But even though he’s seen England and France regularly, their interactions have been short and/or monitored.

What’s worse is that ever since America and England promised to help France formulate the ‘plan,’ his mental health has improved drastically. So now America feels guilty about the whole damn thing.

He doesn’t know when he’ll ever get the chance to talk to Russia alone!

The plan isn’t completely hopeless, though. England told him that he and France are figuring out how to get the ‘sufficient funds’ needed, and, in addition, they have the plan’s basic logistics worked out. Somehow, they need to get into the USSR and extract the Nations from whatever facility they’re in; then find a way to get the hell out. Betting on the fact that the Nations would be kept isolated somewhere in Siberia, it wouldn’t be smart to go through Eastern Europe. Instead, they would need to go East—crossing the Pacific into the US, taking them across the country, and then back into Western Europe where the Nations rescued would be placed in safe houses. The ‘funds’ are needed for those safe houses.

There’s also the issue of how the Nations would be returned once, hypothetically, the Soviet Union either restores the sovereignty of those Eastern European states or collapses altogether. And there’s also the fact that they have no idea how the Soviet Union will react when they find out their Nation Avatars are missing.

America frowns, balls up his newspaper, and throws it at the wall in front of him. Frank doesn’t look up from the book he’s reading.

The plane starts to land.
Tokyo is still under major repairs, so Japan’s location hasn’t changed. Thankfully, more roads and runways have been reconstructed, though, so America and Frank are able to land in an airbase nearby and drive to the house.

As they pull into the property, America’s hands start to sweat. He wishes he had something to occupy them with, but there are no more newspapers for him to ball up. All he has is a bag full of books next to him that he doesn’t want to damage.

The car stops. They step outside.

America instantly freezes.

Waiting for them are some Japanese officials and staff from the residence, as well as Japan.

He’s standing.

He still looks weak and frail and has a noticeable cut on his face, but he’s standing without any support.

America feels frazzled. He and Japan make eye contact, and America quickly looks away and stares at the ground. He doesn’t know what to do. Hug him? Bow? Give an awkward pat on the shoulder?

Frank nearly drags him forward. The Japanese greet them by bowing. America gives a messy one back, hyperaware of how fast his heart is beating.

Japan walks closer to America when everyone starts to disperse.

“Uh.”

America looks at him, then starts to ramble when they make eye contact. “Hi, haven’t seen you in a long time. Yeah, I’ve been stuck in Europe, so that’s why I haven’t been able to make it out here. Europe is being reconstructed, just like Japan is. Tokyo’s doing a lot better, right? We flew over it, and from the air, it looked good. Also, I heard that the railroads around here were—”

“Alfred.”

He swallows. “Yeah?”

“Let’s go inside; they’re preparing tea.”

“Okay…”

They follow the other people into the house, take off their shoes, and are then shown to a private room.

It’s the goddamn tearoom America sat in with Russia and China.

The American calendar is still there. Someone has been keeping up with the months because it’s flipped to April.

The tea is already set up when they walk in, so the two sit down at the small table on the cushions.

Japan takes a sip of his tea. America fiddles with his bag, and then suddenly remembers the
“Oh! I got you books!” he says excitedly, dumping out twenty novels onto the floor.

Japan stares at the pile, wide-eyed.

“Some are my favorite novels from back home, but I also found some really cool ones in London and Paris. England and France recommended some. The plots vary—I know you like adventure novels like me, so I included a bunch, but there are some romantic ones too because France insisted.”

Japan is speechless. “You…didn’t have to do this,” he eventually whispers.

America shrugs, suddenly feeling embarrassed. “I said I would, so I did. If you don’t like them—”

“No, I really love them…” Japan shifts around the book pile and examines each one carefully. “Thank you, Alfred,” he says once he stacks them all into a neat pile.

They look at each other, and Japan smiles, his eyes crinkling.

America finally feels all of the stress seep out of him.

The two wander around the estate after they finish their tea. It’s evening, and the sun is setting.

They study the rock garden in contented silence. However, America’s thoughts are busy, and he can’t help but ask questions.

“So,” he starts off with.

“Yes?” Japan responds.

America doesn’t even know where to begin. “Who changed the calendar in the tea room?”

Japan blinks.

He feels the back of his neck grow hot. “It’s ugly as hell; I’d thought someone would have taken it down by now.”

“I’ve been changing it,” Japan says, avoiding eye contact. His cheeks are slightly flushed.

America can’t comprehend. “Why?”

“I didn’t want to let a calendar go to waste.”

“You have a Japanese one in the room too.”

Japan squirms.

It’s silent except for one lone chirping cricket.

“The calendar reminded me you were coming back, I guess,” he finally says in a quiet tone.

America feels awkward. “I said I was.”
“I…” Japan picks at a loose string on his shirt. “It’s—the Second World War was so long.” His voice cracks.

America impulsively reaches out and rests his hand on his shoulder.

Japan stares at it for a weird amount of time, then ducks his head. “I was isolated for years. It’s just—it’s just nice to know I have someone who’s coming back to see me, I guess. The calendar reminded me of that.”

America’s head feels tight. He drops his hand. “You won’t ever be isolated again, Kiku.”

“…Thank you, Alfred.”

The cricket chirps even louder.

“How’s Aida doing?” America asks after a few moments.

“She…died last week.”

America feels like he’s been punched in the gut.

“Oh,” he finally says after a few moments.

Japan looks at him and frowns. “She passed away peacefully in her sleep.”

“But she seemed fine…” He’s never been good at confronting death, accepting that other people are mortal when he is not.

Japan watches him. “Well, there’s nothing we can do about it now.”

The cricket chirps again. This time, another one responds.

“Let’s go inside,” Japan murmurs. “I want to put the books you gave me in the study.”

The study was America’s room during his stay in Japan after the war, so he knows where to go. He insists on carrying the books—he wants a distraction and doesn’t want Japan to hurt himself—and Japan sighs and lets him. When they enter, America immediately notices Italy’s artwork on the walls.

There’s also a framed book page describing Sika deer in Japan.

He bursts out laughing, despite still feeling a pit in his stomach.

Japan looks startled. “What’s so funny?”

America points to the page. “Why is that framed?”

“I, uh, forgot to take that down.” Japan’s face is turning beet red. “I just…liked looking at it. It made me happy.”

America beams, not sure what he’s feeling—relief that Japan doesn’t hate him? “I’m starting to see that you’re the sentimental type.”

Japan’s ears are still tinted red, but his face is beginning to fade back to normal. He busies himself by sorting his new books onto the bookshelves. “So what if I am,” he mumbles.
America’s grin widens. “I am too. I have a whole storage room filled with junk at my home in Pennsylvania. One day I’ll have to show you.”

Japan smiles. “I would like that.” He then reaches to put a book on a high shelf and grimaces, losing his grip. It crashes to the ground.

America rushes over. “Are you in pain?”

“I’m fine.”

“You’re obviously not. What’s hurting? Shit, here, sit down on this chair.” America drags a chair over.

“Alfred, I’m fine. I just need time to work through some of my injuries,” Japan insists.

“Please sit down.”

Japan sighs but obliges.

America picks up the book. “Where do you want it?”

“Just at the end.”

He places the book on the shelf; then turns to Japan. “Where are you still injured?”

“I’d rather we not talk about this.”

“But—”

“Alfred.”

America feels frustrated.

“I just need time to heal.”

“…”

“Let’s talk about something else,” Japan suggests.

America looks at him. “You have to tell me if it hurts. I can’t help you if you don’t tell me.”

“You don’t need to help me anymore. You’ve already done more than enough.”

“I—” America throws his hands up. “No, I haven’t!”

“The atomic bombs were out of your control, and you—”

“Let me tell you about the latest movie I saw. You wanted to change the subject, right?”

Japan gives him a guarded look. He then sighs and rubs his face. “What was it about?”

They talk, avoiding any subject of substance until 1 AM when Japan passes out from exhaustion and America from jetlag.
That night, America dreams. It’s of Aida. She dies alone in her bed, and her death is finite, dragging her consciousness into nothing.

The human America befriended as a child, Davie, is also in the dream, old, in his coffin. England is suddenly there, telling America that he’s different from humans, telling him that Nations can’t die.

Someone screams.

It’s Japan’s rotting body. His sounds are mangled. America is watching from a distance, frozen, unable to move, feeling a crushing amount of guilt.

Someone touches him.

It’s Prussia.

…

America wakes up covered in sweat and gasping for air, thankful when he sees that Japan is still sound asleep. He desperately tries to regain his composure, but it’s useless. He’s on the brink of a panic attack.

He really hates death. He really, really hates it, and he hates that other Nations are able to dismiss it so easily. Like, Japan described Aida’s passing as if he were talking about the weather. He had no attachment. That’s America’s issue; he makes attachments too easily, clings onto people that he feels comfortable with, and then they die.

America realizes he’s shaking and hates himself. He has to hold back a sob as he stands up to leave the room.

“Alfred?” Japan asks groggily.

Shit.

“Uh.” America’s voice cracks. He clears his throat. “Go back—Go back to sleep. I’m just going to take a walk.”

Japan sounds more alert now. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

“Alfred, what’s wrong?”

Why can’t I be like China? Why do I have to wear every thought and feeling on my face?

He hears Japan get up, but he’s too busy blinking his eyes to see where he is.

Japan lightly touches his shoulder.

“Alfred, talk to me. What’s wrong?” he asks again, his voice hushed.

America starts to cry. Suddenly everything he was stressing about earlier comes crashing down, every little memory of World War II races back to haunt him.

He tells Japan about his fear of death and resentment over his immortality. He wants to tell him about the plan but knows he can’t, and the stress makes him cry harder. The memory of Potsdam makes him shake. Japan pulls him into a soft embrace. It’s awkward and weird, and America’s
extremely conscious of the weight he’s putting on him, but it’s okay—it’s more than enough.

He doesn’t know how much time passes, but eventually, he calms down.

“I’m sorry, Kiku,” he croaks. He hates feeling weak. He’s supposed to be the one saving people, not the one being coddled.

“We’re here to help each other,” Japan responds. His voice is muffled by America’s hair. “Okay? That’s what friends do.”

“Okay,” America mumbles. He hiccups and pulls out of the embrace, forcing himself to smile. It’s more like a grimace. “I think I got snot on you.”

“It’s fine.”

“Yeah, alright. I know you don’t like people in your personal space.”

Japan looks away. “I don’t mind it when it’s you.”

America furrows his brow just as Japan gets a weird expression on his face, almost like he’s surprised he just said that.

“Go wash your face,” he nearly blurts out before America can say anything. “I’ll get you something to drink.”

America stumbles out of the room into the dark hallway, startled when he sees officials standing there. They don’t say anything, but they watch him as he walks to the bathroom. They’re gone when he returns.

When he enters the room again, Japan has a lamp turned on and is holding a glass of water.

America takes it and drinks, wanting to contemplate the men in the hallway, yet too exhausted from crying to care that much.

“Better now?” Japan murmurs, touching his arm.

“Yeah,” America mumbles. “I’m sorry,” he then adds.

“I already told you; don’t be.”

“But you’re the injured one; I should be helping you.”

“Why do the two of us have to compete? We can both take care of one another.”

America nods, defeated. “Okay.”

“Do you want to try to sleep again?”

“Sure.”

They move their bedspreads closer to one another. They aren’t touching, but they’re pretty close. This time, America falls into an exhausted, dreamless slumber.

They wake up early, fortunately avoiding the topic of last night. America is thankful for breakfast
since shoveling food into his mouth is a great way to pretend all his problems don’t exist.

Frank has to ruin his mood, though.

“When’s the last time you’ve exercised?” he asks when America goes to grab thirds.

America drops his chopsticks and angrily pushes the bowl away. He nearly misses Japan giving a nasty look to Frank. It catches him off guard.

Once breakfast is finished, Japan and America are escorted into a meeting room. Officials discuss reconstruction plans, but America is too tired to focus.

“We’ll be visiting the Republic of China on Taiwan after we’re finished here,” an American official explains to the Japanese near the end of the meeting. “We’ll be discussing maritime security, which is an issue relevant to Japanese interests, so we were wondering if you’d like to send your Nation Avatar with a team of escorts. It would be a great opportunity for him to meet Taiwan’s”

“When are you leaving?”

“In two days.”

“We’ll have to ask, but most likely the response will be yes: we’d like to come to Taiwan.”

“Wonderful. We’ll make arrangements.”

“It’s weird to think that there’s a new Nation Avatar,” Japan says absentmindedly when the two are having lunch alone. “Have you met him?”

“Her, actually—and no, I haven’t.”

Japan’s eyes are partially glazed over. “I wonder why she didn’t form when the Japanese were colonizing the island.”

America shrugs. “It’s strange that there’s such a disproportion between male and female Nations,” he mumbles after a bit.

“There were once many female Nations in Europe.”

America scrunches up his eyebrows. “Really?”

“Yeah, but they all died.”

“Oh.”

“Yao knew them, but he never spoke of them to me, so I don’t know many details.”

America looks at the door, afraid that someone’s listening. He then rubs the back of his neck. “I always forget how old you are.”

Japan leans his head on his hand. “I often do as well. Most of my past is a blur at this point.”

America wants to ask more questions about his childhood but knows China is tightly bound with it,
so he doesn’t push.

Someone will get angry if he does.

The following two days are marked with lazy afternoons and scattered meetings that Japan and America are forced to attend.

It’s during this time that America also gets acquainted with Japan’s use of his name Alfred.

When he jokingly asks him why he doesn’t add on any honorifics, Japan gives him a blank stare and says, “You’re American. It means nothing to you.”

America isn’t sure if he likes his name being used this often. Or rather, he’s not used to it, and he’s not used to referring to Nations as their real names either. Usually, he only says them for emphasis or when he really needs to get someone’s attention.

It’s weird hearing Japan call him Alfred. But it’s also…nice.

Eventually, it’s the 24th.

America walks onto the jet, looking over his shoulder to make sure that Japan is okay climbing up the steep steps. Going with them is Frank, as well as Japan’s new babysitter-advisor-person, a stern looking woman whom Japan addresses as Ms. Nikko.

America and Japan sit down next to each other, their babysitters across from them. The flight won’t be too long, but they’ve brought books to keep themselves entertained—Japan the new ones America gave him, and America the ones that Japan insisted on gifting him in return.

The plane takes off without any interruptions. It’s relatively uneventful too until they’re about thirty minutes away from their destination.

“America,” Frank says, breaking the silence.

He glances up from the fantasy book Japan gave him.

“And Japan,” Frank adds on, causing Japan to raise his eyes.

“When we’re in Taiwan, you’re not permitted to go anywhere without an escort. We are only visiting for this meeting, and then are returning to Japan tonight. Is this understood?”

America feels tired. He and Japan nod.

“There will be both American and Japanese escorts,” Nikko adds on in English. “Don’t stray away from them.”

“Okay,” America and Japan mutter at the same time.

America starts reading again when Frank says another thing that catches him off guard.

“The Nation Avatars Hong Kong and England will also be there. British officials happened to be in
the area, and wanted their Nations to meet Taiwan.

America feels a rush of giddiness, missing Japan tense up. He tries to engross himself in his book again but is unable to concentrate. He’s excited. He feels childish because of that, but shit, he loves spending time with England.

The minutes take forever to tick by.

They land right outside of Taipei and drive the rest of the way into the capital, eventually pulling into the back entrance of the Presidential Office Building. There, they meet up with the rest of the Japanese-American delegation and are escorted inside.

Japan and America are guided away from the majority of the group, into the far end of the building. They’re then taken into a room that seems to be doubling as an office space and bedroom.

Before either of them can look around, a little girl pops out of nowhere and runs over.

“Who are they?” she asks one of the Taiwanese escorts.

“They’re Nations. Have fun.”

“We’ll be just outside,” Nikko says in English.

The door shuts.

The little girl stares at them with wide eyes as Japan stiffens. America shifts his weight from one foot to the other, eventually blurting out, “Hi. I’m America—or the United States of America—but just call me America.”

The little girl grins. She’s missing teeth and can’t be older than five, physically, at least. “You talk funny, but I can understand you. My name is the Republic of China in Taiwan, but people just call me Taiwan!” She jumps up and down and points to Japan. “What’s your name? Why’s your face hurt? Are you okay!?”

Japan squirms. “My name is Japan. I’m fine; don’t worry about the cut.”

She giggles. “You also talk funny. I have some bandages if you need them for your boo-boo.” She darts to another side of the room, rummages through a box, and pulls out some gauze like that’s a normal thing to have. “Do you want some?!?”

“I’m fine, but thank you,” Japan answers, a little exasperated. “And we sound funny because we’re not speaking Mandarin Chinese like you are.”

“What’s that?”

Japan sighs.

America studies the girl. She’s wearing a pink dress and has pink flowers woven into her black, wiry hair. It’s sticking out in random directions.

The girl chucks the gauze back into the box and skips over to the other two. “I’ve never seen other people like me before! They’ve told me that there were others, but this is cool! You two are old.” She giggles; then has a serious expression on her face and whispers, “What’s your real names?”
America is caught off guard by the question. Japan answers, “This is Alfred Jones, and I’m Honda Kiku.”

The girl nods like they’re conducting serious business. “I’m Xiao Mei. They told me that ‘Westerners’ don’t like these names, but they said we use them here in Asia.” Her mood abruptly shifts. “They gave me a map! I can point out Asia! Here, look!” she darts over to the map and points eagerly. “Here! Here!”

Japan and America walk over, much to her delight. “I can’t read what it says yet,” she says. “But I’m learning!”

There’s a knock on the door.

Before they can say anything, it’s slammed open. Hong Kong practically stomps in, his hands balled into fists while England miserably trails after him.

America hasn’t had the chance to examine Hong Kong in years, and he’s taken aback by how much of a mess he still looks. His hair is short, his skin is pasty, and he’s skinny, really skinny.

He seems to have aged too, which is—

Japan quickly retreats into the corner of the room.

America follows him while Taiwan runs up to the other two.

“Are you okay?” he breathes while Taiwan squeals in delight.

Japan is rigid and is avoiding eye contact. “I haven’t seen anyone since the war besides you, Ludwig, and Feliciano. And I—I watched—”

America can feel Japan growing scared, pushing out his presence around him like a security blanket.

America gently takes hold of his hand. “It’s just Arthur and—” America realizes he has no idea what the fuck Hong Kong’s human name is. He starts over. “The war is done. It’s in the past, okay? You’re not responsible for any of it. You’re not, Kiku.”

Japan nods slowly but doesn’t move.

Taiwan peeks her head around the corner to look at them. “What are you doing?”

England follows her, and Japan sees him and drops America’s hand as if he were burned.

America’s head hurts. “Arthur!”

England frowns. “…Hi,” he says slowly, staring at Japan.

“You two know each other!?” Taiwan squeals like that’s the best thing in the world. “Where’s your country on the map?! Point it out!”

She grabs England’s hand and leads him over. While doing so, England strains his neck and attempts to make eye contact with Japan. Japan refuses to look at him.

“England isn’t mad at you,” America whispers. “He’s not. Kiku, he knows the war was out of your control.”
Japan doesn’t respond.

America’s hands itch to take his again. “Kiku…”

“I’m sorry, I just—I don’t know what’s wrong with me.”

Hong Kong comes around the corner.

Now Japan fully freaks out, projecting his presence. Everyone flinches. Taiwan looks confused. Hong Kong ignores it.

He’s clearly trying to act as nonchalant as possible, so much so that he looks a little pathetic. “If you’re still beating yourself up because of that one time, stop worrying about it.” He’s speaking in English, mumbling with his British accent and making his sentence hard to understand.

“…”

Hong Kong’s expression breaks, but he quickly masks it. “Besides.” His voice cracks. “There was nothing you could do.”

Japan looks physically ill.

America is pretty sure Hong Kong is sweating. “I’m just happy you’re no longer a mangled mess.”

“You saw me?” Japan asks in a horrified tone.

America realizes Japan is unaware of that one time everyone visited. Hong Kong looks at America in disgust. “Yeah. Like six months ago Russia and China were there with all of us who were in the cell outside of Kyoto.”

“Yao and Ivan were there?”

Hong Kong sneers at America. “What the hell?”

America is suddenly pissed off. He ignores England motioning something. “I didn’t tell him only because the day was so awful that I’ve been trying to forget about it myself.”

Hong Kong clenches his jaw. “It was horrible for you? I was in a room with China, who hates the fact I even exist, while Korea sobbed on him and talked about how we were tortured, and everyone acted like they were goddamn best friends while I sat in the corner—”

“I sat in a sweltering room for two hours and had to make small talk with Russia and China while China hacked up blood, and then had to show them—” America cuts himself off.

Hong Kong looks away. “Oh, boo-fucking-hoo.”


That completely sets Hong Kong off. “DON’T TALK TO ME YOU BLOODY BASTARD.”

England’s face is flushing with anger. “Nothing will get better if we don’t—”

“I don’t give a shit. Okay? I don’t give a shit, Arthur. Just leave me alone.” He storms to the opposite end of the room and flops down on a chair facing away from all of them.

“Fine, we don’t have to talk, but at the very least control your language,” England growls.
“What, ’cause of the little twerp here?” Hong Kong spits. “I don’t give a fuck. Go talk with your
model colony and leave me alone.”

Before England can respond, Taiwan bounds over to Hong Kong all excited. America stops paying
attention to the two when he hears her ask, “What does fuck mean?”

England rubs his face and walks over to America and Japan. “Sorry, I—we’re trying to resolve
some issues.”

“No shit,” America mumbles. He is aware, though, of how the British sold out Leon to the
Japanese.

“Why didn’t you tell me about people coming to visit?” Japan abruptly asks.

America feels guilt eating away at him. “I—I didn’t mean to keep it from you. It wasn’t a good day
for me either.”

“…”

“I’m sorry, Kiku. Shit, I didn’t—I don’t know.”

Japan looks spaced out. “It’s fine. I guess I deserve having them see me like that.”

America tugs at his hair and makes eye contact with England. Feeling lost, he silently begs him to
(a) change the subject and (b) not mention Japan’s apparent injuries.

picked out? France and I helped a bit.”

America could hug him right now.

Japan bites his lip. “I just started reading them on the plane ride over.”

“How long was yours? Ours wasn’t bad. An hour and a half at most.”

Japan has a dead expression in his eyes, so America quickly says, “Ours was about three hours. It’s
certainly better than traveling by sea.” He forces out a laugh that sounds nothing but extremely
awkward.

England gives an equally strained smile. “Doing so probably would have taken a day or two.”

“Remember when you were a pirate?”

Now England’s face turns pink. “Stop.”

America loves teasing him about this. “You thought you were so cool.”

Japan’s eyebrows are scrunched together. “Excuse me?”

England groans. America laughs. “He had an outfit and everything for it to go, like, beat the shit
out of Spain.”

“You can be the pony!” Taiwan suddenly shouts, cutting off their conversation. “Or the princess.
Wait, I think I have an outfit. Wait.” She starts furiously digging under the bed, chucking clothing
onto a disgruntled Hong Kong.
England nudges America. “Are you coming back to Europe after this?”

America sighs. “No. My officials want me to go talk to Korea next and persuade him to say in the South in case of war.”

“Oh. Fun.”

“Yeah. He hates me.”

“When will you be in Europe, then?”

America shrugs, feeling exhausted. “I don’t know. A few months, maybe?”

England frowns. “Well, I’m happy I get to see you now, at least.” He looks embarrassed as soon as that sentence leaves his mouth.

America smiles. “Well, this is less than desirable conditions, but yeah, me too.” He then turns to Japan, who’s staring at the wall and clenching his jaw for whatever reason. “Kiku?”

He jumps; then looks at him.

“Do you want me to get you your book?” America murmurs. “You can just read and relax while England and I talk.”

Japan smiles wearily. “You don’t have to—”

“I’m going to get you your book, okay?”

“I—” Japan’s eyes dart away. “Okay. That would be really nice, thank you.”

“I’ll be right back.”

As he walks to the door, past Hong Kong, who’s holding some sort of doll while Taiwan is perched in his lap; he hears England remark, “He’s such a gentleman, isn’t he?”

America rolls his eyes and gives England the middle finger. He misses Japan’s weird expression.

When he’s walking back from the plane, accompanied by what feels like at least fifty soldiers, he hears the Taiwanese officials talk about their Nation, how they want to start training her, how they want to start cultivating her into an adult.

It leaves a bad taste in America’s mouth.

After five hours of hanging out in Taiwan, they leave.

He says goodbye to England before they go, giving a quick, awkward hug where England becomes strangely flustered, and high-fives Taiwan. He ignores Hong Kong. Hong Kong equally ignores him.

On the plane ride back, Japan doesn’t even look up from his book. America feels restless the entire
time, knowing that tomorrow is going to suck. He and Korea will probably only say two sentences to each other, then sit in silence for the rest of the time.

America rubs his face.

They arrive back in Japan. They have dinner. They prepare themselves for bed.

Japan finally says something to him when they both lie down.

“When are you leaving tomorrow?” he mumbles.

America rolls over and faces him. “Around noon, I think.”

Japan looks away.

“Are you angry that I didn’t tell you?” America blurts out, his stomach churning. “About the other Nations seeing you? Because I’m really—”

“No, I’m—” Japan makes a frustrated noise. “I’m angry at myself. I’m angry about what I did during the war. God, I’m angry about what I didn’t do.”

“Kiku, it’s really not your fault.” America’s voice cracks. “Because if it is, then the bombs are mine—”

“No,” Japan nearly snaps.

America sighs. “Then realize how ridiculous you’re being.”

There are a few moments of silence.

“When I saw you with Arthur,” Japan’s voice is barely above a whisper, “I got jealous. I got weirdly jealous. I—” He pauses, his eyebrows furrowed. “Maybe—Maybe it’s because you have other friends, and I…don’t.”

America frowns. “Kiku, Italy and Germany care for you immensely. And Hong Kong clearly doesn’t hate you. And when—When China visited, he was…sad.” That realization just dawns on America. “Those are only four examples. You’re not alone. Really.”

“…”

America reaches over and touches Japan’s arm. His presence freaks out for a second. “And even if you have no other friends, which isn’t true, I’ll never leave, okay? You won’t ever be isolated again,” America breathes.

Japan’s expression is twisted, and America isn’t sure if the dark lighting is playing tricks on him, or if his face is really that flushed.

He tenderly takes Japan’s hand and squeezes it. He hears him breathe in sharply.

America’s stomach feels weird. Maybe it’s because Japan is acting so odd. “We’re friends,” he murmurs.

“We’re—We’re friends,” Japan chokes out, his hand suddenly feeling clammy. “We’re friends,” he repeats.

“Kiku, are you okay?”
Japan yanks his hand away. “I—” His face is still flushed. “I’m fine,” he gets out. “I’m just tired.”

America frowns. “Let’s go to sleep, then.”

If he were any closer, he’d be able to hear Japan’s erratic heartbeat.

Chapter End Notes

In the midst of writing this, I read one 62 page document on Japan from the 1880s to 1910s and another 58 page document on the Cold War in East Asia. I also took about 11,000 words of notes in total. College, am I right? Ahahhahhadfjh fadskjh asjkh (I did get good info though for this story. It helps when you read history with a hetalia prospective haha)

note from future maddie: taking 11,000 words of notes is not a normal thing and i needed to calm the fuck down back then
The air is oversaturated with moisture.

Prussia rests on the side of the track and gasps for breath, spitting out excess mucus. He wants to stop. They’ve been at this for hours now.

“I said run!” a meaty Russian soldier screams, glaring at him as he fires his gun into the air.

Prussia wants to punch him, but he grits his teeth and breaks out into a rhythmic jog.

“Hurry up,” Hungary attempts to tease as she passes him. She says that in Russian.

They’re forbidden to speak anything else.

Prussia watches as she runs ahead. Like him, they’ve also rehabilitated her. She’s been responding great to therapy—her hair’s growing back quickly, and she’s gaining weight and muscle. Prussia, on the other hand, is doing horribly. His body refuses to put on any muscle mass, his injuries are still healing, and he’s emaciated and practically bald.

It’s almost like his body’s fighting against him, like it wants him dead, which Prussia finds hilarious.

“It’s because he no longer represents a country anymore,” Clipboard Man theorized during his last checkup. “That’s why he’s healing slower.”

To fix that, they had a Secret Official Commencement Ceremony Thing to make him represent East Germany. It consisted of Josef Stalin signing a typed document, an awkward moment where they stared at each other, and then Prussia being whisked away back to his cell. That was a month ago, and the document is now hanging over his bed here. Prussia hasn’t felt any different.

In addition to him and Hungary, Estonia and Lithuania are also on the track. The two of them are healing at a relatively good pace.

It’s just Prussia who still looks and feels like utter shit.

He wants to leave this camp. At least time passed quicker when he was in his cell. Now the days just drag on and on. He’s always sore and tired. His mind is too clear. He doesn’t want to be able to think; he just wants to sleep until this whole ordeal is over.

The Soviet soldiers are aware of how much he hates this goddamn place too because they keep threatening to harm Hungary. That’s why Prussia’s in North Korea in the first place—they threatened to harm her if he didn’t come, torture her and make him watch, just like what happened in the Second World War.

Hungary doesn’t know this, and Prussia doesn’t plan on telling her.

There are some perks to being in North Korea, though. He gets to eat three times a day, which he guesses is cool. Plus, he gets to talk to Hungary. Not deep, substantial conversations, but they’re enough to make him feel relatively human.

They’re enough to make him want to live.

He doesn’t know when he started loving her or Austria. It doesn’t matter; it’s not like he can even
act upon his feelings. He’s tried a few times in the past and has written about those experiences in his diaries, but those attempts have failed, and now all of the diaries are gone after getting destroyed.

It sucks—the failed attempts and the diary thing. He deals with it.

He’s not sure if either Austria or Hungary knows that he’s in love with them. He hopes they don’t. His greatest fear is that they’ll be punished if anyone finds out. Okay, not being reciprocated is also another thing he’s scared of, but it’s less important.

France and Spain have already been hurt because of the friendship the three of them share. Prussia can’t imagine what would happen if people knew what he thought of Austria and Hungary.

As he continues to run around the track, his mind wanders. He thinks of Germany, feels sad, and blinks rapidly to prevent himself from tearing up.

Since Prussia’s now officially ‘East Germany’ in the eyes of the Soviets, he knows the country won’t be reunited anytime soon. He wonders what that means for Ludwig, and how he’s doing, and whether or not he’s gotten a new dog. He probably—

“That’s enough for now!” the meaty Russian soldier yells.

Prussia stops running and crouches down, putting his head between his legs. He doesn’t want to throw up again. That was embarrassing.

Hungary walks over and pats his back. “You nauseous?”

Prussia grits his teeth. “A little. I’m fine, though.” He despises speaking Russian, and the words roll off his tongue in a thick German accent.

He stands up slowly, dabbing his forehead with the baggy part of his shirt. Over Hungary’s shoulder, he sees Russia and immediately feels a taste of disgust. Surprisingly, China isn’t with him. Christ, a week ago it seemed like they were attached at the goddamn hip.

He really hates the two of them, Russia especially.

The man in question has his scarf on, and for some reason that sets Prussia off.

“Are you cold, Commie!?” he shouts.

Russia glares at him, Hungary grabs his shoulder and tells him to shut up, and five soldiers point their guns in his direction.

He grins and waves. One of them spits at him.

Riling up the Russians is one of the few ways he manages to have fun.

Before Prussia can say anything else, the meaty Russian soldier cups his hands. “It’s lunchtime!”

Prussia, Hungary, Estonia, and Lithuania are herded into a small, hollow, metal building. Inside, the air is even thicker. Prussia can feel his eyelids sweating. They sit down at a picnic-bench—Hungary next to him, Lithuania and Estonia across.

The food is flavorless, and Prussia longs for something sweet.

Kazimir, the Russian official who interrogated him in the past, walks into the room midway
through lunch. Prussia thought that the first visit was the last he’d ever see of him, but no, he just —keeps showing up! Asking invasive questions, generally being an asshole, yelling at them…

Prussia is hoping he dies soon. Kazimir is only in his twenties, but shit, there has to be some sort of airborne disease he can contract here.


Prussia wants to retort a sarcastic comment, but he holds his tongue.

“Two days from now, North Korea will be crossing over the 38th parallel. The mission is to unite the country. The Soviet Union will be assisting such endeavors.”

Russia slips into the building, still wearing his scarf.

“You four will be assisting the North Korean army. Mainly, you’ll be doing specialized missions that normal soldiers would die in.”

Prussia glares at Russia. He’s now playing with the stupid scarf.

“If you decide to desert at any point, or go against orders, there will be severe consequences.”

Still playing with it.

“But if you follow orders, then you’ll have nothing to worry about, and you’ll be rewarded. In that sense, it should be quite clear how you should act, and what you should do.”

Prussia rips his attention away from Russia. “What if I accidentally kill a Soviet; what would happen?”

Kazimir regards him coolly. “We would assess that individual situation and make a judgment based on the facts.”

“What about Korea—the Nation Avatar. You don’t have him on your side, so isn’t that going to cause an issue?”

“The two sides will be reunited before any major problems with the Nation Avatar arise. It’s none of your concern, East Germany, so don’t worry about it.”

Prussia hates that they’re calling him that now.

He grumbles something.

“Are you finished?” Kazimir spits.

“…”

“Getting back on topic, your training will increase in rigor during the next couple of days. You’ll be testing out new equipment, as well as becoming acquainted with whom you’ll be working with. I do hope that all of you cooperate so that no major disciplinary actions are needed.” He says the last sentence while looking at Prussia.

They dully stare at him.

Kazimir rubs his face. “That’s all.” He then walks out of the building, Russia following.
Hungary side-eyes Prussia as soon as they leave. “I wish you wouldn’t make comments.”

“They deserve it.”

She rolls her eyes. “I’m not arguing that. I’m just saying; eventually, they’re going to punish you.”

Prussia waves his hand. “I’ve dealt with worse.”

The 25th of June 1950 is the first time Prussia sees the full scope of the North Korean army.

On that day, he, Hungary, Estonia, and Lithuania meet with their squad and platoon leaders: Lieutenant Kyung-Seok Ryu and lieutenant Dae-Won Suh. Kazimir tells them beforehand that the two men have been briefed on what Nations are, and during the meeting, they seem mystified when looking at them.

The Nations learn that on missions, a Russian soldier or Soviet official of some sort will accompany them.

It makes Prussia anxious.

He finds himself almost looking forward to the war, to the fighting.

He wants a distraction from his own reality.
There’s nothing but the sound of clinking forks and the occasional cough.

France reaches up to play with his hair, only to have his hand brush up against his face. He grimaces and lays it on the table, looking off to the side. America is whispering something to England, and not a second later, England abruptly laughs. He then covers his mouth. France leers.

His obvious crush is getting annoying. France doesn’t know if England’s even aware of it. He’s certain America’s oblivious, though.

He focuses on his fork, feeling cagey when he remembers how happy England was when he found out America was coming. At the time, they were both in Austria.

France clenches his jaw.

That was miserable; he’d rather not dwell on that, but he also doesn’t want to pay attention to the current ‘event’ going on—the lovely NATO lunch. There’s a grand assortment of allies here: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Romano, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, England, and America.

Italy and Romano are sitting together, and the two haven’t said much since they’ve gotten here. France tried to talk to Italy earlier, but the only response he got was Italy practically cowering from him.

France is in a shitty mood.

Canada is next to him. Since England and America are in their own little world, they’ve been talking to each other, but France doesn’t have much energy, so he hasn’t been able to keep a conversation going. He feels bad. Canada doesn’t seem to mind, but he still feels bad.

Maybe that’s why England is completely ignoring him today. Who’d want to talk to such a miserable person?

As for the other Nations, Iceland, Norway, and Denmark are in one group while Luxembourg, Netherlands, Belgium, and Portugal are in another. No one’s really talking, though, except for—

The door opens.

America’s advisor enters, vaguely looking like he wants to hang himself.

“What do you want?” America snaps.

“Nothing. Just here to tell you there’s a Nation only UN meeting scheduled for tomorrow in Paris.”

“Tomorrow?”

“I just got told about it five minutes ago.”

France scrunches up his eyebrows. It’s in his own damn country, and no one could be bothered to tell him about it? Not that anyone in his government really tells him anything now…
“We’re leaving right after whatever the hell this is,” America’s advisor continues.

“Are we getting, like, packets with information to discuss, or what?”

“I don’t know. I think the whole thing is centered around North Korea, so I’m sure you’ll get something on that.”

The advisor leaves before America can ask anything else.

He rubs his face. “Russia’s still boycotting all of these things, right?” France isn’t sure if the question is directed towards England or Canada.

“Yeah, he still is,” Canada answers.

“Thank God.”

England smirks. “What, you don’t want to have a chat with him?”

“You don’t understand how painful those conversations are.”

France stares at the tablecloth. America said he would eventually talk to Russia in private, but so far, he hasn’t. England told him he needs to be patient, but France is anxious.

Prussia is out there, suffering, and he wants to act now.

Italy’s wineglass falls to the ground and shatters.

Everyone looks at him as he jumps out of his seat, scrambling to clean everything up. Romano helps. France is near them, so he stands up to assist, but as soon as he gets close, he swears Romano nearly has a heart attack.

“We’re fine,” he snaps, looking frantic.

France feels irritation build up in the back of his throat. He doesn’t understand what Spain—Spain.

He hasn’t seen him since Potsdam.

He hasn’t been allowed any damn contact with him at all.

“I can help,” France says, plastering a smile on his face. He’s been getting better at faking his mood, making himself look chipper when he wants to die.

Italy says something in garbled Italian, and France hears the word ‘Potsdam,’ and the phrase ‘not allowed to talk to you.’

He suddenly wants alcohol. He’s been allowed to have small quantities again, but fuck that. Right now, he just wants to get blackout drunk, maybe even drink himself to death. He wants to stop thinking; stop feeling.

He sighs and backs away. Iceland, who’s also close, helps the brothers clean up the mess, Denmark and Norway singing him praises the entire time. France can’t help but notice that the two of them have mostly recovered from being tortured. He feels a bitter taste in his mouth. Why is it that they get to move on while he still pathetically—
Canada lightly puts his hand on France’s arm. “It’s their government, not you,” he murmurs in French, knowing that France loves when he speaks it.

England also puts his hand on France’s arm, startling him. He looks concerned, and France suddenly feels a weird sort of affection towards him, mixed with annoyance, mixed with a vague tinge of disgust. The disgust could be remnants of the hatred he once harbored for him. It could also have to do with the fact that England’s been ignoring him for America all day.

France realizes he’s jealous and gets a weird feeling in his stomach.

“Are you okay?” England murmurs.

“I’m fine.” France didn’t mean to snap but that just happened.

England ignores his tone. He’s been so patient with him over these past years. It’s made recovering a lot easier, but England was never patient in his goddamn life before any of this happened, and it just gives France a headache when he tries to think about it.

America ignores whatever is going on between the two of them. “Well, I guess since, ‘apparently,’ we’ll be in Parris tomorrow, you guys need to help me find some French books.”

England drops his hand. France rubs his face. “For Japan?”

“Yeah, he already read through my last batch.”

“Didn’t you bring him, like, twenty books last time?” Canada asks.

America nods. “According to his last telegram, though, he said he already finished them.”

“You telegram each other?”

America gets a weird expression on his face. “Yeah.”

“How’s he doing, by the way?”

America squirms. “Okay? Like, he still—he still has some injuries, but most have healed by now.”

“He looked good when I saw him about a month and a half ago,” England adds on. “Physically, at least.” He frowns. “He was acting weird that entire time. Is he doing better?”

America fidgets. “I mean, yeah. He—Yeah.”

The conversation fades into something else that France can’t bother to pay attention to. When the door finally opens again, France’s advisor leads the four of them away.

They’re escorted outside to a car. France climbs inside, gets situated, then promptly falls asleep.

He dreams of the trip he and England took to Austria a couple of weeks ago.

It was awful. France had two panic attacks, Austria broke down crying, and they had to meet with some Russian officials stationed in the country.

They were also interrogated about Potsdam.
Those events play over and over in his mind. Random images attack him from all directions.
France can’t breathe. France can’t—


The dream morphs into an incomprehensible nightmare. Austria grips onto his legs, begging him to do something. Spain’s in the distance. France runs. He passes by Italy and Romano. He begs for their help. They just stare at him. He runs. Germany looks like a monster. He sprints. Spain is still in the distance. He can’t catch up to him. He turns a corner.

Jeanne d’Arc is being burned alive.

She mouths something to him. He sees her say, “Why didn’t you save me?”

He tries to grab her.

“Why can’t you save anyone?”

…

“Francis!”

France jolts awake, only to see that he’s still in the car. England, Canada, and America are all staring at him.

Pitying him.

“We’ll be arriving at the airport soon,” England murmurs.

France blearily sits up. He hates himself. He hates all of this.

“You mentioned Joan of Arc while you were sleeping,” America blurts out.

England hits him. The conversation drops at that.

They arrive in Paris around 7 PM.

The four of them are taken to France’s apartment. It’s in the middle of the city, near the Eiffel Tower. France would be happy that he’s home, but he’s unable to focus on anything.

That is, until they’re left to their own devices.

“Does this mean they trust us again?” he asks, more to himself than to the others as they walk inside. France is rarely left alone. This could—

“Maybe not completely, but it’s a step in the right direction,” England murmurs. America takes off his suit coat and chucks it to the side.

France feels lightheaded. “Then we can use that against them.”

England frowns, his eyes shooting to Canada. Canada blinks. America disappears into the kitchen.

“I’m not as naïve as you think I am,” Canada mutters, his voice low. “And you two aren’t as secretive as you like to believe, especially around me.”
England looks nervous. “Matthew.”

“I’m not an idiot. I’ve heard you guys whispering about some convoluted plan these past months.”

England rubs his face. France feels his heart rate pick up. “It’s not convoluted.”

“Really?” Canada’s expression is dull. “I could make my own judgment if you tell me about it.”

“We—”

“No,” England hisses. “We’re not involving anyone else in this.”

Canada clenches his jaw. “Oh, so Alfred can—”

“Alfred’s only involved because—” England cuts himself off in a groan. “We have no idea what we’re doing, okay, Matthew? This entire thing is ridicu—”

“No, it’s not,” France snaps, feeling a flash of anger. “If Gilbert could somehow rescue me, then—”

“France, how do you use your stove?” America yells, oblivious to the tension.

Canada storms to the kitchen.

France glares at England. “If he wants to help, then let him. I trust Matthieu.”

England closes his eyes and breathes out slowly. “It’s not about trust. I just don’t want people getting involved and then suffering if we fail. We have no idea if this will work. Francis, this whole thing is ridiculous. We’re going to charge into the USSR and break out Prussia, then move him to a safe house in Western Europe? There’s a bloody good chance we’ll fuck up and get caught.”

“But the more people we have helping us, the less of a chance that may be.”

England opens his eyes. He and France stare at each other.

England looks away first. “Fine.”

“Fine?”

“If Matthew wants to help, we’ll let him.” England side-eyes him. “We need more resources for money anyway, I guess.”

France feels a weird urge to hug him.

Just as they walk into the kitchen, America and Canada stop talking. Canada looks pissed. America is wearing a guilty expression.

Canada addresses the three of them. “I’m helping.”

England sighs. “I just want you to know that you’re under no obligation—”

“Matt, I haven’t even talked to Russia yet,” America butts in. “This plan won’t work until I do that.”

“Then I’ll work with England and France to build up the needed funds until you finish your task.”
America rubs the back of his head. “Fine.”

France feels excited. “Here, let me tell you what we’ve already accomplished.”

It’s 2 AM.

France is in the living room, staring at the ceiling. The TV is on, but it’s mostly just static, and he’s too lazy to readjust the antennas. He honestly hates television. He’s never been one to adjust easily to evolving technology.

The other three are asleep, and France is jealous. He hasn’t had a full night’s rest in ages, and the nap he took earlier in the day certainly isn’t helping. He’s thought about drinking; that would knock him out. In fact, there’s a bottle in the cabinet right next to him.

It’s like a staring contest, him and that bottle. France only loses when he hears the floorboard creak.

England nearly stumbles into the room, and it takes a moment for him to register France’s presence.

“Oh shite; I forgot you were in here,” he says quickly. His face is flushed, and his forehead is slick with sweat.

France dully blinks. “I’m not sleeping, so you’re fine.” He glances back at the bottle. It’s mocking him.

England awkwardly stands there, fidgeting incessantly.

“What?” France asks, looking at him again.

“I—I think something’s wrong with me,” England blurts out. He’s staring at the ground.

France doesn’t know how to respond. He can barely take care of his own issues, let alone someone else’s.

“What’s wrong?” he asks cautiously.

England’s face turns a deeper shade of red, and he starts to pace back and forth. “Ah,” is all he gets out.

“Shit, Arthur, what’s wrong?”

“IthinkI’minlovewithAlfred.”

France blinks, not comprehending what he just spewed out. “What?”

England bolts to the sink and retches. France frantically jumps up and runs over.

“Arthur, what’s wrong?”

“It’s Alfred. I’m—” He’s on the verge of tears.

France understands. “You just realized?”
England looks up in horror. “You knew?”

“You’re kind of obvious.”

“Fuck.”

“He’s really oblivious, though, so—”

“Francis, I can’t be—I can’t be a homosexual. I can’t—it’s illegal.”

France feels utterly lost. He’s always accepted the fact that he finds beauty in all people. Gender has never bothered him. However, he’s never actually fallen in love with a man and hasn’t considered the ramifications of it.


France doesn’t know. “Just live with them for now,” he gets out. “Your feelings. Maybe they’ll go away eventually.”

“Eventually?”

“I don’t know how to help you.”

England let’s out a shudder. France tries to think of every coping method he’s used over the past years and settles with a pathetic, “Just distract yourself.”

“Distract myself?”

“Yeah. Watch TV with me.”

“I don’t want to—”

“You could also drink yourself to death, but I seem to remember you getting angry at me for doing that,” France mutters.


“Go to the TV. Let me clean up the sink.”

After he half-heartedly wipes away the trickle of vomit, the two watch horrible quality television until the sun rises.

The morning, in summary, is awful.

England can’t even look at America without shaking, America nearly throws up himself because of the smell of leftover vomit, and they’re almost late to the assembly’s 8 AM start time.

They arrive out of breath and covered in sweat and are hastily ushered into the general assembly room.

France hasn’t been with this many Nations since Potsdam.

Australia and New Zealand see the four of them and wave. France scans the room; then chides himself. He knows the other Nations aren’t willing to talk to him and doesn’t know why he even
bothers anymore. He joins the other English-speaking Nations, feeling a headache form.

Australia takes in their appearances. “You all look like shit.”

Canada rubs his face. “It’s been a hectic morning.”

“You two never did clarify why there was vomit in the sink,” America mutters, staring at France and England.

New Zealand raises his eyebrow as Australia laughs. “What, were one of you drinking?”

France latches onto that idea. “Yeah.”

That shuts them up.

They start talking about something else, but France stops paying attention as he glances around the room. Not everyone a part of the UN is there. It’s mostly just the Western European countries, some South American ones, and India.

India looks miserable and seems to be staying as far away from England as physically possible.

France’s attention is drawn back to the conversation around him when he sees America put his hand on England’s shoulder. England immediately becomes stiff as a board, and America frowns, dropping his hand when England refuses to make eye contact.

Before France can make a comment, Korea angrily storms over.

His country isn’t even a part of NATO, let alone the UN.

He doesn’t give them any time to ask questions. “The meeting’s starting.”

Five different expressions flash over America’s face. “Why are you here?”

Korea looks awful. “This whole thing is involving my shit-tastic country, so why wouldn’t I be here?”

“Uh.”

“Also, your government forced me to come.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah.” He makes a face of disgust. “You have to sit next to me.”

“It’s time to begin,” a French UN ambassador says before America can respond.

America follows Korea to their seats, looking completely flabbergasted. France, England, and Canada end up in the row behind them.

The French ambassador introduces some American official. The official then says, “The purpose of this meeting is to vote upon whether or not military action should be taken in Korea. North Korea has violated international terms set by the UN, and thus the US wants to intervene. Today I’ll be laying out our proposal for why the United Nations Security Council should give its support.”
They vote. They’re told that it will be factored in with the actual UN general assembly’s decision.

“It appears that there is a consensus; the UN grants approval to get involved militarily in Korea with the backing of the UNSC,” the French facilitator says. “That concludes this session. Thank you for your time.”

As everyone stands up from their seats, France sees America and Korea being ushered out by an American official.

“I guess we won’t get to say goodbye,” Canada mutters.

France stares at the direction they disappeared in, ignoring how England fidgets. “I’m sure we’ll see him soon.”

*Maybe he’ll have talked to Ivan by then.*

Chapter End Notes

lol they call Matt three different things. FACE family at its finest

technically Korea wasn’t at this UN meeting (this actually existed: http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/soviets-boycott-united-nations-security-council), but I’m taking my creative liberty since a real /Nation/ UN meeting never existed and placing Korea there just to spice things up.
As soon as the French facilitator ends his sentence, Frank is suddenly there.

“We need to go.”

“What?” America asks, standing up slowly. He attempts to look over his shoulder to where France, Canada, and England are, but some other official pushes him out of his seat.

“Wait,” he starts to say, twisting his body to make eye contact with either of the three, but England is still blatantly ignoring him, and America is pushed out of the assembly room before he can say anything.

Korea is with him.

“We’re on a tight schedule,” Frank rushes. “You two are going to board a plane that’s headed for Korea.”

“Now?” America questions.

No one answers him. Instead, he and Korea are led outside to where there’s a car waiting.

America really doesn’t want to go to Korea. “Why the hell—”

Frank cuts him off. “We’re acting under the president’s orders, okay? He said that if the UN approved American intervention, you would be going to Korea.”

America sneers.

“You’ll receive further information once there.”

With that, he and Korea are practically shoved into the car. America’s pushed in first and becomes squished up against the left side when Korea stumbles in after him.

America sighs and adjusts himself. There’s a divider between the passenger and driver seats, so the two of them can’t see who’s in front.

“Is this how you normally operate?” Korea asks sarcastically.

America ignores him and swallows. His throat is dry.

They depart, and it’s silent until Korea starts coughing. America awkwardly stares at him through the window’s reflection until he zones out.

*How long am I going to be in Korea? Do they want me to fight? I barely fought in the Second World War. I did a couple of aerial missions and participated in D-Day, but past that…. What would I do in this war? Will I have to fight with Korea? Fuck, I forget his human name, and I know he hates me, and this is probably going to be just as bad as it was with China and Russia. I wonder if England hates me. Why was he ignoring me today? Did I do something wrong? Is he angry about Canada helping now? I still need to talk to Ivan. I don’t want to talk to Ivan. I—*
“How far is the airport?” Korea asks, clearing his throat.

America swallows. “I have no idea.”

Korea stares at him; then rubs his face.

America grapples to find something else to talk about. Shit, even though they’ve known each other since the late nineteenth century when the US barged into East Asia, America has barely interacted with Korea, especially on a personal level.

He’s very aware of the topic of ‘animation’ and doesn’t want to use that as a conversation starter. “What’s your human name again?” he blurts out.

Korea doesn’t even look at him. “Im Yong-Soo. Just call me Yong-Soo if we’re going to refer to each other that way.”

“Oh, okay. Well, my name’s Alfred F. Jones. Just call me Alfred, I guess.” He thinks he’s told Korea this before. He can’t remember.

Korea frowns. He’s still not looking at him. “What does the ‘F’ stand for?”

America laughs nervously. Korea makes eye contact with him.

“I have no idea.”

“You have no idea?”

“England named me. I’ll—I’ll ask him the next time we see each other.”

Korea fidgets. “Yao named me.”

At the mention of China, America doesn’t know what to do but say, “Oh.” He squirms. “How old are you?”

“I once represented the Silla kingdom.” Korea looks tired.

America’s brain is too fried to do mental math. “How old is that?”

Korea rubs his face. “Like around 2,000 years.”

“Well, I’m like, 300,” America says after an uncomfortable pause.

“Wait, how?”

“I existed just as a colony at one point.”

Korea starts coughing again.

“Do you need, uh, a tissue or handkerchief or something?”

He grimaces. “I’m fine.”

Some time passes.

“I’ve been promised that American intervention would end this war quickly,” he then says out of the nowhere.
They make eye contact.

“You’ll end this war quickly and reunite the two sides, right? That’s why I stayed in the South. I was promised your side was superior.”

America feels panicky. He stares out the window, avoiding any direct confrontation. “The American troops are going to try their best.”

July 10, 1950. They arrive at the military base in Busan during the morning, but America’s completely jetlagged and just wants to sleep.

Unfortunately, Frank has other ideas.

“I’m going to introduce you to your superiors here,” he tells America as soon as they get off the plane.

America dully stares at him. Korea yawns. They barely conversed with each other on the flight over; rather, America read some of the novels that Japan gave him during his last visit.

He’s pissed he didn’t have any time in Paris to buy him new books.

“Korea, come with us too,” Frank adds on.

Korea looks bored. “Okay,” he responds in English.

America is introduced to five people, and he forgets all of their names immediately.

“They’re the only ones that know what you are,” Frank tells him and Korea once they walk away. “So if I’m not here, go to them if you have any issues.”

He then shows them to their sleeping quarters. It’s pretty basic. There are two beds on adjacent sides, and there’s no other furniture except for two desks.

Frank dully points. “There’s a bathroom through that door.”

“What am I even doing here?” America says as a response. “How long will I be here?!”

Frank looks like he needs to sleep for an entire day. “You’re here to help the war effort and will stay until you’re dismissed or are needed elsewhere. I don’t know what you’ll be doing—analyzing documents? Keeping up-to-date on foreign policy? Just follow orders.” Frank turns to Korea. “We’ve been given permission from Syngman Rhee—you’ll also follow the American officials’ orders and remain stationed here unless you are needed. If North Korea keeps advancing, that might be soon.”

America frowns. Korea grunts.

Frank rubs his face. “Lunch is at thirteen hundred. You can do whatever until then.”

It’s been two days, and America wants to leave.
If he thought being in Japan was bad, this is worse. This is much, much worse. He just wants to go home, go back to Japan, go to Europe—anywhere besides Korea, anywhere besides this military camp.

Day 1? He was yelled at for his weight and worked until he passed out from exhaustion. Day 2? Same thing. Now it’s nighttime, and he’s lying in his bed utterly drained. Korea, meanwhile, is wheezing over on his side of the room, his nose bleeding due to the rapid advances the North keeps making.

The wheezing eventually turns into coughing, though, the longest being uninterrupted for a minute. America sighs and stands up once he catches his breath, his legs screaming in protest, and walks over with a bottle of water.

Korea blinks; then frowns and grabs it, America hobbling back to his bed afterward.

“This is awful,” he mutters after he takes a few sips, breaking the silence.

America gives a bitter laugh. “Yeah.” At least we can agree on something.

“These commanders are awful.”

“Yeah.”

Korea starts coughing again.

America sighs, cracks his knuckles and back, then sits up.

Korea watches him as he stands. “Where are you going?” he rasps.

“Just to the bathroom.”

When he gets back, Korea is still watching him.

“What?”

He looks away. “I wish you weren’t here.”

Alright. Cool. America wishes he wasn’t here too. Especially considering the situation is looking worse and worse every day.

Korea must see the expression on his face. “No, I mean like—I wish the West never came to Asia.”

America really doesn’t know how to respond to that. He settles with a pathetic, “Sorry.”

Korea snaps. “Because then none of this would have happened, and the Qing Dynasty wouldn’t have imploded, and Japan wouldn’t have turned into a power-hungry monster, and the Joseon Dynasty would have been left alone—but no! No! It all happened! It all happened, and then my country was fucking colonized!”

America has no idea what to say. Korea’s presence is expanding. “And maybe colonization wouldn’t have been so bad for me. Maybe I could have just—rode out those years or something! But of course not. Suddenly the West decided that Nations were dirt, and then they started doing experiments on them in Germany, so then Japan had to follow suit.”

“K—”
“And even with *that war* being over, everything is still a shit show! My country is divided! Fuck, the South might even *lose*. I’ve barely seen Yao, and *now I can’t* because Communist China is only supporting the Communist North. But here I am! Here I fucking am because the Americans *insisted* that staying in the South was better. Want to know what they told me, Alfred? They threatened that if I went to the North, then I’d be tortured *again*. I can’t—I want to see Yao so badly, but God they kept telling me and telling me this shit. I was scared. I was so fucking scared. So, here I am! And here you are! Getting cornered in Busan!”

America stands there in disbelief as Korea starts crying. He has no idea how to comfort him. He doesn’t know if Korea even wants his comfort.

“How’s Kiku?” Korea asks through gasps. His nose is running, but still is bleeding, so blood gets smeared on his upper lip. “Is he still a rotting corpse?”

America feels queasy. “No.”

“I want to say he deserved it. I want to say I enjoyed looking at him like that, but *shit*.”

America’s head starts to hurt. Korea hiccups.

“I just want this to be over,” he chokes out.

“You and me both,” America mumbles.

Korea blows his nose and hastily rubs his eyes. “Sorry,” he mutters.

“No,” America says quickly. “Don’t be. Let’s—let’s just work through this together, okay?”

Korea warily stares at him. “Why?”

America squirms. “Why not?”

“You’d be the first white person who’s ever wanted to be nice to me, then.” Korea coughs weakly. “Not that the Japanese are any fucking better.”

“We can—just ignore all of that. You as Yong-Soo—me as Alfred; we can work through all of this as them. And the South isn’t going to lose either, okay? We’re working on an offensive attack.”

Korea gives him a wary look. “Fine.”

It’s when they’re stressed and completely cornered by the North Koreans that they actually start talking to each other.

Korea hacks up blood into a trashcan. “I hate this.”

America is staring at the ceiling. “You hate a lot of things.” He doesn’t know why they haven’t been used in any offensive attacks yet. MacArthur seems to think they’ll be useless in the plan he’s drafting.

So here they are. Rotting at this Busan military base.

“Shut up.” Korea coughs again. “I swear to God, you like everything.”
“No, I don’t.”

“Give me an example, then.”

America’s mind blanks. “I hate tobacco?”

“I thought all Westerners smoked.”

“Well, not me.”

Korea coughs again. “So that’s it? Just tobacco?”

America is so taken aback that they’re having a real conversation that he says, “Frank,” without thinking.

Korea bursts out laughing and drops the trashcan. “He is pretty awful.”

America cracks a smile.

“Do you actually like anything?” America asks after Korea’s done complaining one night. MacArthur is finally getting close to launching his offensive attack in Incheon.

Korea frowns. “Yeah, I…”

It’s silent for an awkward amount of time.

“You sure about that?”

“Shut up. I like board games.” He then shrugs. “And drawing.”

“Do you like books?”

Korea scrunches up his face. “Ew. No. Too boring.”

America nods.

Korea flops down on his bed. “And they were always Kiku’s thing,” he mutters, disgust lacing his tone. “So maybe it’s out of spite that I hate reading so much.”

America feels weird, suddenly missing Japan so much that his head starts to hurt. “Kiku isn’t bad,” is what comes out of his mouth.

Korea rolls over and faces him. There are bags under his eyes. “What, you think you’re friends with him?”

America swallows.

“Kiku isn’t friends with anyone. That asshole isn’t even capable of feeling emotions.”

That seems a statement more fitting to China, but America keeps his mouth shut.

He lies down. Korea doesn’t want to drop the conversation. “He’s a manipulating—”

“Kiku isn’t like that.”
“Really?”

America doesn’t know. He feels anxious. “I’m tired,” is what he blurts out. “Can you turn off the lights?”

Korea stares at him, then wordlessly complies.

America has such a violent nightmare that night that Korea has to shake him awake.

September 27, 1950.

Finally, they’ve recaptured Seoul after MacArthur launched his surprise attack on the 15th. Now, the troops are in a position to go on the offensive against the North, and at last, there are discussions to use America and Korea for something.

America’s not sure if he’s relieved or anxious.

…


FRANK RADZINSKI

BUSAN BASE XXXXX

THE TWO NATION AVATARS AREN’T NEEDED. THE WAR WILL BE OVER BY THANKSGIVING.

GENERAL MACARTHUR

WAKE ISLAND XXXXX

…

America and Korea dully stare at the message Frank handed to them.

“So now what?” America asks.

“Truman says you can go on vacation for a week,” Frank mutters.

He blinks. Frank rubs his face. “Congrats. You’ve done nothing to earn this.”

“What about me?” Korea mutters, coughing weakly.
“I don’t know. I’m not your advisor.”

“I don’t have an advisor.”

“Go wherever the hell Rhee is for a week, then.”

“Wait, but we haven’t done anything,” America blurts out. “Like, you’re right. Why are we getting this?”

“I’ll quote what Truman also sent me. ‘We’re allowing them to have more freedom because we know that’s why many of them are still angry, and we want to secure their loyalty.’ Or something like that.” His expression gets weird. “Are you still angry?”

America can’t even fathom why they’re having a conversation this long. He ignores the question. “So I can go anywhere?”

“Yeah.”

He picks Japan.

He arrives on the 16th.

The flight over is short, and he lands in an airfield right outside of Tokyo. From there, he’s driven into the city.

It’s amazing what one year’s worth of construction can do. Tokyo actually looks like a city again. There’s still evidence of the war, but it seems as if people are finally rebuilding their lives.

America will be staying with Japan. His townhouse is on the outskirts of the city, hidden amongst the others on its street, all of which belong to government officials and American military personnel.

America’s escorts hover while he knocks on the door. He feels queasy, doubting if coming here was the right thing.

That all changes when Japan opens the door.

He’s out of breath, and America is overcome by such a wave of emotion that he hugs him without thinking. When he realizes what he’s doing, he quickly jerks away, taken aback when Japan seems to chase after him.

There’s a weird moment where they just stare at each other.

“Call me if you need anything,” Frank mutters,startling both of them. He and the others then leave.

Not knowing what to do, America reaches for his suitcase, but he’s too slow, and Japan grabs it first.

“Kiku, I can—”

“I got it.”
America’s face feels hot as Japan guides him inside.

“*Kiku isn’t friends with anyone. That asshole isn’t even capable of feeling emotions.*”

He swallows, glancing at Japan after they both take off their shoes.

Japan frowns and touches his arm. “You’ve lost weight.”

“They made me,” America mutters.

Anger flashes across his face. “Well, you didn’t need to.”

“Tell that to my superiors.”

They stand there, neither moving.

America’s anxiety then overwhelms him. “We’re friends, right?”

Japan’s eyebrows shoot together. “I thought we already had this conversation.”

America swallows. “I—I know, but.”

“I wouldn’t send you telegrams if we weren’t friends. You wouldn’t be here if we weren’t friends.”

“…”

“What’s wrong?”

America squirms. “I don’t know. Just…Yong-Soo said—”

Disgust flashes across Japan’s face. “What? What did he say?”

America realizes Japan is now gripping his arm. He fidgets. “Never mind. It’s stupid.”

A few moments pass. America allows himself to bask in Japan’s presence, his anxiety finally fading away as Japan begins to rub circles into his skin.

Japan then jerks back, his face pink. “I—let me show you around.”

He smiles. “Okay.”

———

Italy’s paintings are hanging in the kitchen. There are also some photographs of German Shepherds.

“Whose dogs are those?” America murmurs.

Japan smiles. “Ludwig’s. He sent them to me.”

“You’re allowed to write to each other now?”

He nods. “The letters have to be checked first, but it’s something.”

America grins. “That’s awesome, Kiku.”
He blinks, then looks away and rubs the back of his neck. “Yeah…”

America admires the photographs some more, glad that Japan’s life is finally getting some sort of normalcy.

*He deserves to be happy. He deserves to have friends.*

*He’s not an asshole. He’s not manipulative. He…*

America blinks when he notices that Japan is staring at him.

“Kiku?”

“I’m—I’m surprised you got permission to be here for two weeks!” he blurts out. “Don’t get me wrong; I’m really happy, but…”

America laughs, feeling more cheerful than he has in months. “It’s a new thing they’re trying because Nations are still upset about Potsdam.”

“Ah…”

A slight breeze blows through the open window, rustling some paper on the counter.

“What…actually happened at Potsdam?” Japan asks slowly.

“Oh. Right. You weren’t there.”

America hasn’t thought about Potsdam in a while.

He closes his eyes. “Uh.”

The vivid image of Prussia’s dissolving body comes into his head, all the other Nations getting shot and dragged out, France and Spain losing it.

*You still haven’t talked to Ivan,* something screams at him.

“Alfred?”

“Nothing good,” he choke out. “Uh. There was, like, a happy reunion, and then Prussia was formally dissolved, and a bunch of people were shot.”

Japan tenderly puts his hand on his back, and America wills himself to calm down, desperately trying not to think about the plan, and England, and France, and Russia—

“Let’s start making dinner,” Japan murmurs.

_____________________________________________________________________

He makes America’s favorite Japanese dish. It’s the best meal America’s had in weeks.

It’s after they’re finished eating that Japan awkwardly asks, “How long have you been in Korea.”

America sighs. “Since early July.”

“That’s…a while.”
“Yeah. I’m going back after this too.”

“For how long?”

America takes off his glasses and rubs his eyes. “I don’t know,” he mutters. “They’re training me for military missions, both infantry and aerial combat.”

“What about Yong-Soo?”

America attempts to gauge Japan’s emotions, but his face is cryptic. He looks away. “He’s just being trained as an infantry soldier.”

Japan makes a noise.

“We’re both stationed at the same camp. He’s currently in Seoul.”

“What did he say to you?”

America’s face heats up. “It’s stupid, really.”

Japan’s presence loses control. “Did he insult you?”

He laughs at Japan’s angry expression. “No. No, Kiku, it’s fine.” Except it wasn’t when he had that nightmare, but Japan doesn’t need to know that.

“Then why can’t you tell me?”

America swallows. “Because he insulted you, and I don’t want to repeat it.”

Japan blinks, his presence immediately retracting.

“I told you,” America mumbles. “It’s stupid.”

A few moments pass.

“He’s… always hated me,” Japan says, his voice quiet. “And if I were him, I’d hate me too.”

“You don’t deserve any of that, though,” America word vomits. Japan blinks. “Like, the war was awful, and everything right now is still kind of shitty, but you—you didn’t personally lock him up. You didn’t cause his civil war.”

Japan grimaces.

America feels nervous. “Fine, he—he said you were probably faking your friendship with me because you’re manipulative, or something, and I—”

“Not with you, Alfred,” Japan interrupts, unable to make eye contact. “I—I’ve had fake relationships with people in the past, but not with you. Never with you.”

It feels hard to breathe for some reason.

They sleep in the same room, inches apart.
America hasn’t felt this well rested in ages.

The week fly by.

America doesn’t want to leave. He finally feels like a normal person again. And Japan—being around him is great and fun and relaxing, and America feels warm and fuzzy, like none of his other problems matter.

But he has to leave.

He promises to send letters. Books as well, especially since Japan gives him some to read for his trip back.

They’re by the front door. The car’s waiting out front, and America feels like crying. He knows it’s ridiculous.

“Thank you for coming,” Japan whispers.

“Thank you for letting me stay…”

“The next time you have free time like this, you can come again.”

“I’m not too annoying?” America jokes.

Japan frowns. “You’re never annoying.”

They stand there until America embraces him, feeling goosebumps ripple across his body when Japan places his head in the crook of his neck.

The hug lingers for longer than what’s considered normal.

Japan pulls away first. “You have to go,” he chokes out.

America doesn’t want to. “I already miss you,” is what tumbles out of his mouth.

Japan makes a noise that sounds in between a laugh and a cry.

October 23rd. Korea’s already at camp when America arrives.

When he walks into their sleeping quarters, Korea’s underneath the thin sheets on his bed, moaning in pain. His trashcan is pulled up next to him, littered with bloody tissues.

America doesn’t know whether or not he should disturb him, so he just quietly walks over to his own side of the room and sets his belongings on his bed.

Korea’s head pops out from under the covers. “Hi.” His eyes are bloodshot, and his forehead is shiny with sweat.

“Hey,” America responds, realizing that he actually missed him, despite everything.
“I thought we were winning this war now. Why do I feel so shitty?”

“Because the other side is losing horribly, and you still represent them.”

Korea makes a groaning noise.

“Once they’re defeated, and the country’s reunited, you’ll feel fine. The same thing happened to me during my civil war.”

“Let me know when that happens, then.”

America rolls his eyes and sits down, his ass hitting something. Confused, he pulls up his covers and sees a board game and a note.

...  

_For your “pleasure.”_  

...

“What’s that?” Korea asks.

America frowns. “I think my babysitter left me a board game?”

He perks up. “Which one?”

“Monopoly.”

Monopoly causes America and Korea to ignore each other for the rest of the day because they’re pissed about the game’s outcome.

Frank is getting screamed at.

“I come here to get an update on the war, and what do I see!? Two Nation Avatars playing _board games_ in their sleeping quarters while you’re fucking around outside!”

Frank looks like he’s about to vomit. “MacArthur said—”

“MacArthur doesn’t have jurisdiction over the Nation Avatar! My division does! What the fuck have they been doing!?”

“They’ve been training—”

“Really!?! Well, a squadron of aircraft is going to launch tomorrow to attack the supply lines of the North Koreans. If the American Nation Avatar really has been training like you’ve been reporting—and you don’t want to even know what will happen if I’ve found out you’ve been lying—then he’ll go with them to assure the mission’s success.

America feels his heart drop. Korea looks at him.

Frank is sweating. “O-Okay.”
October 24th.

America takes off at thirteen hundred, strapped into his F-80 and tasked with nothing but to drop bombs at a random location.

Korea looked at him with pity when he launched. Frank was ghostly pale.

America hates this.

He’s bored.

In the beginning, they do multiple check-ins, but since then it’s been radio silence. It’s fourteen hundred. They’re only ten minutes away from their target, and America can’t wait to get this over with and go back and take a nap or something.

He’s thinking about that when he notices something on his radar.

“Planes are approaching,” someone says over the radio.

“From what direction?” someone else responds.

“From—”

America’s vision cuts out.

All he can see, all he can feel, is Russia.

His presence is everywhere, and it feels as though America’s head is being split open. He’s in so much pain that he wants to cry. His vision becomes blurry. He feels nauseous.

His plane starts to nosedive.

Someone screeches at him, but America ignores them; instead, gritting his teeth and fighting back, exerting his own presence.

The radio comes to life. “One of the approaching planes just fell out of line.”

America’s heart is pounding.

Someone tells him to get back into formation. Someone says something else. America—

He clicks his radio button.

“A Nation Avatar is flying,” is all he can get out.

One of the Soviet aircraft launches a missile. The American aircraft have to swerve out of formation to dodge it.

All hell breaks loose.

America yanks his plane upward, his head screaming in protest. He needs to target Russia,
wherever the fuck he is; that’s what his body is screaming for him to do. Target Russia, and the pain he’s experiencing will stop.

America locks in on a Soviet aircraft and launches a missile. It hits the wing of the plane, causing it to explode. It’s not Russia’s, though. Russia’s presence is still there, and it’s suffocating.

America’s ears are ringing. His entire body is screaming in pain. He’s never engaged in one-on-one combat with another Nation before. He never knew it hurt this much. It’s unbearable; it’s all he can think about. It consumes him. He has to eliminate its source. He has to—

A plane dives at him, and America knows that this one is Russia’s. He forces his plane above the cloud line in an attempt to shake him.

“AMERICA,” he hears someone scream over the radio.


“AMERICA, RETREAT. YOU CANNOT BE KILLED!” Frank screams. “NOT THERE!”

Russia is approaching him, and America has to do a barrel roll to get away. Doing so puts him under the cloud line again, where most of the planes are concentrated.

An American plane explodes.

“Everyone retreat.”

No. Kill him. You need to—

“ALFRED.”

Russia’s plane dives forward, and suddenly all America can see is him jumping in front of Ukraine and Belarus, begging his officials not to hurt them.

He yanks his plane in the opposite direction.

They stop being pursued.

During the Revolutionary War, Prussia, Spain, and France were with him at the final battle. From a hill, America watched as France and England attempted to kill each other before he intervened in the end. They fought like animals—their eyes glowing red and their faces masked with pure, unadulterated hatred.

America could never understand how and why they let battles consume them like that.

But now he does.

When he lands back at base, his head is pounding. He has his aviation gear on—his helmet and air mask—and he’s afraid to exit the cockpit.

He knows his eyes are glowing red.
He starts to hyperventilate when people surround his plane.

*Where's Frank Where's Frank Where's Frank*

It’s Korea who runs up and yells at everyone to step away. America shakes as he exits, refusing to take off his mask. He keeps his eyes shut when he lowers himself to the ground and nearly collapses because his legs give out.

Korea helps support him, despite his own awful condition. When they make it back to their quarters, America finally takes off his mask.

His glowing eyes are reflected in the metal walls.

Just as he sits down, Frank abruptly enters, only to halt in his tracks after seeing his appearance.

He seems absolutely terrified.

When he backs out of the room, America knows he’ll never see him again.

---

“It’s okay, Alfred. It’s okay,” Korea repeats like a mantra.

America nods.

He knows it isn’t.

---

The very next day, the Chinese forces cross the Yalu River and join the war.

It gets worse.

America and Korea are taken to Seoul and are forced to sit through many strategy meetings. Korea’s appearance becomes worse and worse, and he tells America that he doesn’t want to fight China.

That he *really* doesn’t want to fight China.

The entire month of November is spent going over policy after policy. The Chinese troops keep pushing southward and overwhelming them with their sheer amount of numbers.

On November 30th, Truman declares that the US may need to use an Atomic bomb in Korea.

America is flown home the day after.

---

He spends the entire month of December in D.C, getting briefed about the rest of the world.

Germany and Austria are still under occupation, and the Soviets don’t look to be making compromises regarding East Germany anytime soon, especially since communism is rapidly spreading in Eastern Europe. Japan’s reconstruction is still going on under US occupation; the
Korean War is actually helping their economy. The Marshall Plan’s also jumpstarting Western Europe’s industry, and there are currently disputes going on in the Middle East regarding Israel, as well as the French are causing issues in Indo-China, which the US is thinking about getting involved in.

They don’t know what to do with America now. The Korean war is running so awfully, and his singular mission was such a shitfest that he sees no point in returning. He knows it’s tradition in the West to have a Nation Avatar devote their time to their country’s war effort, but clearly a Nation’s presence is no longer required to launch an attack, and now there can be multiple, simultaneous wars on opposite ends of the world.

Despite all of this, they still plan to send him back.

“We’ve been informed that the Soviets have a ‘Nation Army’ stationed there, which is why it’s important for you to stay in the area.”

It sounds like complete bullshit.

He knows the real reason why they keep sending him to Korea is because they don’t want him talking to the Western European Nations. Prussia’s actions freaked them out. If he can go against the Nazis, then what’s stopping the other Nations from conspiring together against their own governments?

America thinks it’s hypocritical that they perceive the non-Western Nations as less of a threat.

He sends some letters and gets responses from Japan. He never gets any from Canada, France, or England, though, which is aggravating since he’s sent them a couple.

America curls up in his bed.

He misses everyone.

On January 4, 1951, he gets sent to a UN meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark.

The South just lost Seoul again to the North.

America arrives the night before.

It’s been six months since he’s seen Canada, France, or England.

He’s anxious.

His officials force him to show up early, so when he does, only three other Nations are there—Denmark, Norway,

and Russia.
It’s as if the universe wants to spit in his face.

America is practically pushed into the assembly room. Denmark greets him politely enough and then focuses on Norway again.

He swallows, walking over to where he’ll be sitting so he can drop off his stuff. He keeps his gaze focused on the ground, praying that Russia doesn’t walk over.

Russia walks over.

“Hi, America,” he says cheerily.

America forces himself to make eye contact.

“I recently saw one of the latest Disney movies—the animated one, Cinderella.”

America can’t believe they’re still on this fucking topic. He attempts to laugh. “Yeah, it’s a nice film. I’ve seen it too.”

“It’s amazing how the US has such a large budget for animation. We recently had a film released in Russia called The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish, but I bet you haven’t even heard of it.” Russia smiles.

end this conversation end this conversation end this conversation

“No, I haven’t. Maybe I can watch it sometime.”

“Maybe when you’re not in Korea, right?” Russia offers him an even bigger, faker smile.

More people enter the room.

“Maybe when you’re not in Korea, you can watch some more American films too,” America says, beaming, feeling something inside of him snap. “Or maybe you can practice flying a jet.”

Russia gives him a threatening glare.

I shouldn’t be baiting him. I shouldn’t be—I should be asking him about Prussia. I should—

England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand enter.

Suddenly America doesn’t know if he’d rather be talking to Russia or them.

“Let’s just hope we don’t meet again in battle,” Russia says through his teeth as he continues to grin. He then spins around and walks away.

America watches him, his head pounding until Canada taps him on the shoulder.

“Al.”

He jumps.

“Hi,” Canada says, giving a half-wave.

America feels exhausted. “Hi,” he responds.

“Come join us.”

He almost sighs. “Okay.”
As they walk over, he makes eye contact with England, who looks away immediately.

America is suddenly angry, immensely fucking angry. It’s like—it’s like it’s World War I again when England would refuse to make eye contact with him. They’ve finally moved past that, so why—

*Why is he doing this? What did I do?*

“Hi,” America spits out when he joins the group.

“Uh, you okay, mate?” Australia asks.

“Perfectly fine,” he responds through gritted teeth.

“Well,” New Zealand starts, “uh, what have you been up to?”

“I’ve been in Asia for practically the past six months.”

“Oh,” Canada responds. “Ever since that last UN meeting?”

“Yeah. I finally went home to the US in December, you know, right after the war started going to shit.”

“Have you been fighting in it?” Australia asks. “The war?”

“Yeah.” It feels like a game of Twenty Questions, and America wants it to stop.

It doesn’t.

“So you’ve just been in Korea?” New Zealand asks.

He glares at England, who picks at a hangnail and ignores him. “No. I went to Japan for a ‘vacation’ at one point.”

“A vacation?” Canada questions.

“Kiku actually responds to my letters, so yeah.”

“You’re on a first name basis with him?” Australia asks.

America’s face feels hot. “I’m going to the bathroom.”

Canada frowns. “Wait, Al.”

He powerwalks away.

When he gets to the bathroom, he almost runs into France.

“America!” France greets. His hair is finally back to its old length, which is nice to see.

He forces out a smile, wishing he meant it more. “Hi.”

“Where have you been all this time?”

“Korea.” He doesn’t want to have this conversation again.

France frowns, then leans in, “Have you talked to Russia?”
America wants to scream. “I haven’t had the opportunity…”

“Oh…okay.”

“…”

“I’ll see you in the assembly room, then.”

As soon as France leaves, America slams his fist into the wall, cracking the tile and causing his hand to bleed.

He doesn’t return until a minute before the meeting begins.

After the meeting, he gathers his supplies without talking to anyone. He knows he’s heading back to the US once this is over, and he’s actually looking forward to getting out of here.

Away from everyone.

He’s almost out the door when Canada grabs his shoulder.

“What?” America asks dully.

Canada frowns. “We haven’t seen you in six months. Do you really have to leave now?”

“No.

“Probably.”

“Are you sure?”

“Look, England doesn’t want me near him, and France is only concerned about whether or not I—yeah. And I haven’t, so yeah. What the fuck are we going to do anyway?”

“It’s just nice to talk to one another. You don’t have to be such an ass about it.”

“You’re the ones who haven’t been responding to me.”

“I’ve responded to every single letter you’ve sent me. What are you talking about?”

Russia walks up behind Canada, and America wants to hit something again. “It appears that our officials scheduled a meeting that we’re both supposed to attend,” he says, sounding cheery as ever.

For once, America is happy he’s here.

“Alright.”

Canada frowns.

America spends the next month in D.C. and doesn’t return to Korea until February.
China’s aggressive attacks mean the US, UN, and South Korean forces can’t take back Seoul until March.

And then time blurs by as it often does for Nations.

America mostly stays in Asia, going back and forth between Korea and Japan. There’s no more talk about him participating in any fighting since they’re still freaked out about the whole dogfight thing.

He doesn’t even have a new Nation Advisor yet.

They keep promising they’ll ‘find him one,’ but until then he can’t do anything too risky. Korea, meanwhile, is thrust to the front lines at random intervals when the commanders desperately need someone to sense where the enemy is. He never fights anyone, though.

Instead, both of them mostly stay at the Busan base and rot.

Time goes by. America’s hardly in Europe, and when he does see England, France, and Canada, he’s cold towards them.

The year 1951 is filled with attacks after attacks that end in a standstill, and on July 8th, peace talks between the two sides begin but end in failure.

1952 is filled with air raids. Eisenhower also gets elected as President and America has to go through the motion of introducing himself to him and his new cabinet.

The year is also marked by America’s crumbling relationship with England, France, and Canada, but it’s not completely dismal. He and Korea get to know each other even better to the point of friendship—being bored out of their mind at the Busan base will do that—and he and Japan stay just as close.

Now it’s 1953. Both sides are equally matched, and the war isn’t going anywhere.

“Your government isn’t thinking about using Atomic bombs here anymore, right?” Korea asks one night when they’re both about to fall asleep.

The question catches America off guard. “No, Eisenhower doesn’t think it’s necessary.”

“Good,” Korea says in a small voice.

So much time passes that America thinks he’s fallen asleep.

“Alfred,” he then whispers out of the nowhere.

America grunts in acknowledgment.

“I’m feeling better.” Korea sounds scared. “Like, when we attack the North, I don’t feel any pain.”

He frowns, turning to face him.

“I think a new Nation’s going to form soon.”

“Yong-Soo—”
“Alfred, we need to defeat the other side.” Korea’s voice cracks.

“There’s still hope,” America tries to reassure, but those words are as useless as when Korea told him it was okay after the dogfight.

He knows they’re almost out of time.

July 11, 1953. There’s been a report of a child with red eyes wandering through villages in the North.

Chapter End Notes

Korea is a complex character because I don’t have much to work with. Hima first wrote him very controversially because he used racist Japanese stereotypes, so I’m trying to work outside of that boundary and use some canon elements, but mostly headcanons to develop his character – let me know if you have advice on how to develop him further or criticism since I’m a white American girl that’s writing his character.

fun fact: the only time the US and USSR ever engaged each other in combat in the entire Cold War was during the Korean War—in dogfights
Prussia’s perception of time has been thrown out the window. He doesn’t know if he’s thankful for that, or apprehensive.

It’s 1953. He’s been in Korea for three years, mostly remaining at camp but doing random missions here and there. He’s died twice, but they were nothing major.

Hungary, thankfully, hasn’t died once.

Her hair is long again, and she wears it twisted up in a tight bun. Prussia’s hair has also grown back, and he finally feels healthy. Not strong, not by a long shot, but fit enough.

Russia has been in and out of camp. For a brief period, he was being trained in aerial combat. But then he encountered America, so that has since stopped.

Prussia didn’t think the whole situation was that big of a deal while it was happening. So what if he and America shot a few missiles at each other? But apparently, Russia failing to kill him while other Soviets died was seen as a huge offense, because when he landed back at base, he was drug out of his plane and beaten.

Kazimir stood close by the entire time, looking like he was going to piss himself.

For a brief moment, seeing Russia get kicked, shot, and maimed made Prussia almost feel sympathetic, but that quickly faded. He can’t stand him. He can’t stand how he parades around camp with his military officials, can’t stand what he represents, or how robotic he is. All he does is thrust his head down and listen to orders. There’s never any recognition in his eyes that Prussia, Hungary, Estonia, and Lithuania are more than just objects taking up space.

And then there’s China. Ever since his country joined the war, he’s been making regular appearances, and every single time Prussia sees him, he and Russia are attached to the hip.

That fact alone is enough to make Prussia despise him.

In his years at this camp, Prussia has never been forced to interact with the two of them.

He’s pissed that has to change.

“Your mission is to retrieve the new Nation Avatar,” Kazimir says to the six of them. “You’ll be airlifted and dropped at the location where he was last sighted. Lieutenant Kyung-Seok Ryu and Dae-Son Suh, Senior Airmen Aleksandr Galerkin, and Captain Wang Zhen, who’ll be leading a squad of five other Chinese soldiers, will accompany you. You’ll speak in either Russian or Chinese.”

He turns his attention to just China and Russia. “The other four Nation Avatars will listen to your orders. If they fail to follow basic procedures, report to me immediately when you return. Understood?”
The two nod their heads. China’s face is void of any emotion. Russia’s eyes look glassy.

Kazimir appears satisfied. He then glares at Prussia and gives his usual warning of: “If you act out of line, there will be severe consequences.”

“It’s been three years,” Prussia spits out in Russian. “When have I once?”

Kazimir mutters something under his breath and turns to leave. “Stay in here until further instruction’s given,” he says as he’s walking out. “There’ll be a strategy meeting in about ten minutes, and you’ll be leaving in two hours.”

He shuts the door.

Prussia makes eye contact with Hungary. She gives him a rather pathetic half-smile, and Prussia forces himself to give one back.

He then sighs inwardly and stares at the ground.

There’s a new Nation Avatar, meaning that Korea is really fucked up, really divided. There will be no ‘reuniting’ the country. There will be no reclaiming the old Nation Avatar.

The old ‘Korea’ is now ‘South Korea.’

Prussia closes his eyes.

He wonders if East and West Germany will ever be reunited.

He wonders if he’ll even see Western Europe again.

They’re given the coordinates to where they’ll be dropped off.

The mission’s supposed to be quick—grab the Nation Avatar and come back. It’s estimated that it shouldn’t take longer than twelve hours. And getting this Nation Avatar is important because whatever side has him will have leverage when negotiating a ceasefire.

A ceasefire. That’s all everyone’s concerned with now, and Prussia knows the war is coming to a close.

He almost doesn’t want it to end.

He has no idea what will come afterward.

They’re loaded onto a large plane—a type used for paratroopers. Everyone except for the pilot will be jumping off.

They all have a basic military uniform, equipped with a rifle and grenades, as well as a backpack filled with extra ammunition and a survival kit.

Prussia’s strapped into an uncomfortable plastic chair, rather insecurely, in his opinion; that’s squeezed into the back. These chairs line the siding of the plane. The ‘lesser’ Nation Avatars are
on one side, the back left, and Russia and China are on the other, the upper right, with the Chinese squad plus the two Korean lieutenants.

When the plane takes off, it’s bumpy. It lurches when it’s in the air and makes an awful noise. The door almost sounds loose as wind rapidly bangs against it. Once the plane’s higher up in the sky, though, it stabilizes, and everything gets quiet. Prussia realizes he’s been clenching his jaw the entire time.

He attempts to clear his mind by focusing on something specific—like the cracks in the metal siding, but he loses track of counting them when one of the Korean lieutenants says something. This happens on and off again. He doesn’t know how much time passes. Eventually, though, a horrible beeping sound starts.

“What’s going on?!” Captain Wang Zhen yells to the pilot in Russian.

“My radar’s picking up other planes!” Aleksandr yells back.

“From the North?!”

“I can’t—”

The front half of the plane explodes.

Prussia is launched out of his seat, ripped out of the harness from his shitty chair and ejected outside.

Everything is chaotic.

His head is ringing. He can feel himself falling. He can’t see. His arm feels light and airy, and he realizes that it isn’t there. There’s metal around him. Screaming. Presences.

Everything blurs.

There’s fire.

Heat.

The smell of gasoline.

Burning flesh.

Prussia’s body is spinning out of control. He attempts to grab something, attempts to right himself. He hits the ground before he can.

Prussia wakes up in the middle of a forest covered in dirt and dried blood.

He’s lying on his stomach. In his delirium, he attempts to examine himself, despite it now nearly being pitch black out. Half of his uniform has been either ripped off or was disintegrated in the explosion. He probably lost his left arm too, but in the time he’s been unconscious, it’s grown back—albeit not well. It’s currently only skin covering bone, no muscle, and he can’t move it. It looks disgusting. He attempts to ignore it.
Using his functioning arm, he examines the rest of his body. His head’s matted with dried blood, and his entire face is sore. He probably broke his skull, and he’s not sure how well his face has mended. His pelvis is also throbbing, and his legs feel weak, probably both from being broken and the burn marks that his entire body is marred with.

He surveys his environment. There’s debris scattered around him, but no signs of other people. As his eyes adjust to the darkness, he notices some faint smoke rising above the trees in the distance.

*Is that a fire?*

He attempts to stand and collapses immediately, and steadying himself with his arms only causes the left one to give out.

He curses.

Gritting his teeth, he stares at the smoke while using his good arm to drag himself across the forest floor. It’s a painfully slow process, though, and it feels like it takes him ten minutes to move only five meters.

He gives up and resorts to screaming, really not caring if the wrong people hear him. His voice starts to give out though, and he begins to panic—

“Gilbert?”

His head whips around. “Oh thank fuck.”

Hungary runs over and pulls him into an embrace, and Prussia allows his body to slump into hers.

“You’re crushing my arm,” he eventually mumbles, happy to speak German again.

“Oh, shit. Sorry,” Hungary replies in her own language, pulling away. She sounds dazed.

Prussia avoids eye contact. “It’s fine. It’s just growing back.”

“…Fuck, Gilbert, you really got injured.”

“I know.”

“Your face is all bruised. God, are those burn marks?”

Prussia scrutinizes her. “Wait, how are you *not* injured? The plane exploded for Christ’s sake.”

Hungary frowns. “I was locked into my seat when we crashed to the ground.”

“Were there any others with you?”

She gently props him into a sitting position. “Yeah. Estonia was also in his seat, and I don’t know—somehow Russia got launched to the back of the plane, so he was with us too. We found China and Lithuania nearby. They’re just about as injured as you are now.”

Prussia nods, using his good arm to rub his face.

“Oh, and all the humans died.”

He frowns. “I hate it when you do that.”
“Do what?”
“I hate it when any Nation does that.”
“What are you—”
“You refer to them as humans as if we’re not.”
Hungary laughs sharply. “Fuck, Gilbert! Look at what we’ve been through these past fourteen years. Are we humans? I mean, really? Did Hitler consider me a human when—”
Prussia feels nauseous. “Stop.”
“Do you think any of those Soviets believe we’re humans? No. No, they don’t because we aren’t. Look at this plane crash! A fucking human couldn’t survive something like this!”
“…”
“Only a monster.”
“So that’s what we are?” Prussia spits. “Monsters? That’s it? Would you call Roderich a monster?”
Hungary is taken aback. “N-No.”
“Or Ludwig, or Italy, or—”
“Gilbert.”
“Or Spain or France?” Thinking about all of them makes him want to cry.
Hungary lets out a breath. “You’ve always been like this.”
“Like what?”
She tugs at her hair. “We’re monsters. You can’t argue that, Gilbert. But Christ, despite that, you’ve always been able to hold onto your humanity. Despite everything, you and Spain—”
They make eye contact.
This is the last conversation he wants to have right now in the middle of the night, in some random Korean field surrounded by mountains, half-naked with a dead arm.
The wind picks up.
“Did you guys light a fire?” he asks. “I see smoke.”
Hungary stares at him; then rubs her face. “Yeah. It was a bitch to start.”
“Wasn’t there a fire starter in the survival kits?”
“There was, but we only have one backpack of supplies, so we’re trying to ration things.”
“Great.”
“Yeah. On top of that, we have no idea where we are.”
“Even better.”

They sit there for a few moments.

“Has everyone else woken up?” Prussia eventually mumbles.

“Lithuania is fine. China, I think, is still dead.”

“Darn,” he mutters sarcastically.

“See, normally I would agree with you, but Russia was downright nasty until we found him and now is even more pissed that he’s still dead.”

Prussia pinches the bridge of his nose. “What time is it?”

Hungary gives him a look that basically says, ‘why the hell would I know?’

“Point taken.”

They sit in silence for a bit until Hungary stands up. “Here, I—We should get back to camp.”

Prussia gives her a dull look.

“I guess I’ll have to carry you.”

“Joy.”

“Think your masculinity can handle that?”

“Well, my pride will definitely be hurt.”

She hoists him over her back. Some of Prussia’s muscles scream in protest, but he ignores them.

The walk back is a long and tedious process.

Being this close to Hungary is also overwhelming. It doesn’t help that her words are spinning in his head.

Prussia knows it’s been fourteen years of absolute misery now, especially for her. It’s his country’s fault too.

But they’re not monsters. That puts all the blame on them. Hungary wasn’t locked away because she’s a monster; she was locked away by them.

And now the two of them are alone in the middle of Korea. The thought is overwhelming. The last time Prussia was unsupervised was when he and Spain broke out France.

He buries his face into Hungary’s hair.

After what his country did to her, after he watched her get dissected, after he was only able to save France—

he can’t believe she still likes him.

Prussia is suddenly overwhelmed with how much he loves her and doesn’t know how to handle it. Her hair smells like gasoline and metal, but it also smells distinctly like home.
He feels himself drifting off.

“...The least you could do is not fall asleep on me,” Hungary mutters. “Your body’s going limp.”

Prussia tries to reposition himself. “Sorry.”

After a few moments, Hungary sighs. “You can’t change the topic forever, you know.”

“Seemed to work well back there,” he mumbles into her neck.

“Aren’t I owed some sort of explanation?”

“…”

“Come on, Gilbert. We haven’t talked in…” Hungary trails off; then laughs in utter disbelief. “Shit.” Her voice cracks. “This is the most we’ve talked to each other in over two decades.”

“Liz…”

“And I’m carrying your body through some random Korean forest in the middle of the night! God, what the hell.”

Prussia squirms. “I…I just don’t want to talk about it.”

“Because you regret your actions?”

“No.”

“Then if you don’t regret rescuing France, what—”

“I’m angry I couldn’t save you too.”

Hungary twists her head and frowns.

Prussia feels near tears. “I couldn’t do anything for you, or for Roderich and Ludwig. All of you suffered.”

“Gilbert…that was out of your control.”

“Why, because we’re monsters?”

Hungary turns her head away. “No.”

There’s a light up ahead.

“I’m sorry,” Prussia whispers.

“Don’t apologize for anything.”

They enter a clearing.

When Prussia looks over Hungary’s shoulder, he’s completely taken aback. Any bit of regret and anxiety he previously felt is replaced with pure bafflement.

Russia is cradling China.

Russia is intimately cradling him.
The two are leaning up against scrap metal, positioned near the fire. Prussia can’t sense China’s presence either, meaning that he’s still dead.

He can’t contain himself. “What the fuck?”

He sees Lithuania and Estonia lift their heads from the opposite end of the fire.

“Gilbert,” Hungary warns.

Russia gives him a nasty glare.

“No, screw that. When the hell did this happen?” he asks, still astounded.

Hungary drops him.

Prussia barely registers his ass colliding with the ground. His head is spinning. Being truly alone for the first time means that he can be intimate with Hungary after years of being denied any personal relationships with other Nations, which is cool.

But it also means he can finally speak his mind to the Nations he hates.

Prussia feels drunk with power. He forces his legs to work and stands up, ignoring when Hungary shoots him a warning glance. He smiles as Russia sneers at him. “I hate your fucking guts.”

“Is this news? You’ve hated me since we were children,” Russia spits.

Prussia wonders if he remembers the scarf incident.

He shakes the memory from his head and smirks. “Have you two fucked yet?”

Russia’s expression breaks, his face turning a shade of scarlet as he grips China tighter. “You don’t know anything.”

Prussia laughs sharply. “You’re right; I don’t know anything! I’ve been either locked up in a cell or have been in North Korea for the past three years because of you and your shitty government!”

Russia grins, and Prussia almost feels the temperature drop around them. “So this is my fault? That’s what this is? I thought your whole shtick was that Nations were separate from their governments.”

Prussia doesn’t give a flying fuck. “Sorry, that only applies to Nations who don’t seem to enjoy watching their Soviet buddies beat the shit out of—”

China’s presence is everywhere.

Prussia nearly collapses as Hungary, Estonia, and Lithuania flinch. It’s just Russia who seems unaffected.

China moans. “Where…Ivan?”

The way he says his name causes Prussia to have acid reflux. Russia is now frazzled. He says something in response, Prussia doesn’t hear what, and untangles himself from China. He then tenderly lays him to the ground and takes off his military jacket so that he can use it as a pillow.

Hungary puts her hand on his shoulder. “Ignore them.”
Prussia lets himself fall to the ground. Hungary sighs and sits next to him.

“We’re going to need more firewood soon,” she says quietly.

“Ew,” is the only response Prussia can muster.

He watches Russia hand a disoriented China some water, and seeing the two smile at each other pisses him off.

“Hitler snorted cocaine,” he says loudly.

Everyone stares at him.

“He also drank bull semen once.”

“Gilbert, what the fuck,” is how Hungary responds.

“What, you want to watch them interact with each other…?”

Russia grabs China’s hand and pulls him to his feet. He then snaps it away. China frowns.

“Honestly, I don’t care,” Hungary mumbles. “Maybe you should do the same.”

Russia shudders when China touches his arm.

“I want to go home…”

Russia chokes something out. China hugs him.

Prussia snaps his eyes away and looks at her. “Me too.”

She studies the ground. “God, I’m just so sick of,” she gestures vaguely, sounding slightly hysterical, “whatever this is.”

“Would you rather us be pawn pieces again?”

“Is that not what we are now?”

“I mean, like, lining up and beating the shit out of another Nation.”

“I’d take that over sitting here in the middle of nowhere.” Hungary pulls at her hair. “Not that I was allowed to fight after I aged.”

“Liz.”

“When people said I was a man, they wanted me to fight. When people said I was a woman, they wanted me to serve. Now what am I? What’s my role in this pathetic excuse for a Nation Army?”

Prussia doesn’t know how to respond.

“I don’t want to be anything. I don’t want to be a fighting man or a serving woman. God, I—” Hungary chews a strand of her hair. “Sorry, I don’t know.”

“You’re allowed to rant…”

She gives a watery grin.
“Hey, after this, after we’re free, you never have to be a man or a woman again if that’s what you want.” Prussia whispers.

“Does that make me a monster?”

“No, just a human.”

Hungary leans her head back. “Let me know when that day arrives, then. It sounds blissful.”

“It’s right around the corner.”

“Is it now?”

“Uh-huh. Just wait, tomorrow the USSR is going to explode, and then we can go home.”

“I’ll pack my bags.”

They get quiet enough to hear Russia and China’s conversation.

“Do we know why the plane exploded?” China asks.

Russia frowns. “We were shot by the Americans.”

“So they’re in the area?”

“Probably.”

“Ivan, we need to get out of here. You especially need—”

“Once you’ve recovered well enough to walk, we’ll leave,” Russia breathes. “It’s also probably best that we wait until the sun rises.”

“Do you know what direction the camp’s in?”

“I think.” Russia doesn’t sound too confident, but China doesn’t call him out on it. It pisses Prussia off. “I’ve looked both at a map and the stars, so I think I can lead us back.”

“Did you sense America when we were being shot down?” China asks more quietly.

Russia’s gaze darkens. “No. But if he’s with Korea, he could track us down.”

China responds, but Prussia misses it.

“We should probably sleep,” Hungary whispers.

Prussia gives a short laugh. “Yeah, good luck with that.”

“We should at least try since we’re apparently going to be on the run all day tomorrow.”

Prussia sighs.

They lie down next to each other, curling up to stay warm. Hungary drifts off after a while, but Prussia remains wide-awake.

All he can think about is how he has the opportunity to run away.
He really wants to sleep. He does. But all he ends up doing is watching China and Russia the entire night. While the others pass out, those two talk quietly until the sunrises, looking intimate, being vulnerable.

It’s disgusting.

As soon as it’s bright enough, Prussia stops fake sleeping, startling Russia and China when he stands up. Hungary dully lifts her head.

“Where are you going?”

He dusts some dirt off his pants and what he thinks is a bug. “I need to take a piss.”

“Lovely.”

“We’re leaving soon.” Russia’s voice cracks when he speaks to him.

Prussia gives him a blank look.

“So don’t be gone for too long.”

“Is that a threat?”

Russia bristles. China murmurs something. Prussia walks away.

His arm feels a lot better. It’s still deformed, but at least he can move it without resistance.

He swings it around when he finds an optimal spot to take a piss.

Once he’s finished, he feels rooted into place. He doesn’t want to go back. Not yet. He walks instead, almost begging for someone to find him—the Americans, the Russians, at this point it doesn’t matter. Eventually, he ends up at a river, skipping rocks until the sun is almost fully over the horizon.

He sighs, turning around to go back.

There’s a kid behind him.

Prussia nearly has a heart attack. The kid’s Korean, looking to be about five, and he stares at Prussia until his eyes turn bright red.

“You’re like me…”

Prussia has absolutely no idea how to react, nor any time to before the kid latches onto his legs.

“Hey—”

He begins to bawl. “They’re—They’re after me! You’re on my side. I can feel you on my side. Make them stop. Please. Please, make them stop. Please.”

Prussia stoops over, his head pounding. “It’s going to be okay.” He doesn’t know what else to say. “It’s going to be okay, alright?”

The kid clenches onto him harder.
Dazed, Prussia picks him up. The kid now has a death grip on his shirt.

He carries North Korea back to camp.

It takes him about ten minutes to walk back, and his heart is pounding the entire time. Shit, he didn’t mean to wander this far away. His stiff arm is hurting too, and North Korea is still hysterical, and—

“Where the fuck is he?” Russia snarls right before Prussia enters the clearing.

North Korea makes a choking noise into Prussia’s shirt, and everyone’s head whips around as he walks into sight.

There’s an odd moment where they all just stare at each other.

“Well, I found this,” Prussia gets out first.

China looks in utter disbelief. “Where?”

“Uh, by a river. He approached me.”

North Korea tightens his grip on Prussia’s torso.

“I can carry him, I guess?” Prussia says because he has no idea what else he should do.

China rubs his face. Russia nods slowly.

Hungary walks up to Prussia’s side and attempts to comfort North Korea, but that only ends up making him cry harder. She steps back quickly.

“Let’s move out,” Russia orders, thrusting their lone backpack into Lithuania’s arms.

Prussia takes a deep breath.

They trek for what feels like hours and make seemingly no progress. They don’t talk. They don’t even look at each other. Russia and China lead the pack, but it’s obvious they have no idea where they’re going.

It soon becomes clear that they’re much stronger than the rest of them too. Even as the hours tick by, their stamina remains intact while the others feel like they’re going to pass out.

“We need to stop,” Estonia says feebly.

Prussia’s arms and feet are aching, and his mouth tastes vile. He wants something to eat and drink.

“We can’t stop,” Russia spits. “Keep up.”

“They’re following us,” North Korea says quietly, his words muffled into Prussia’s chest. He stopped crying about an hour ago.

“What?” Prussia asks.

North Korea just shakes his head.
Eventually, they hear a noise.

It’s an American plane.

Russia freezes and looks up at the sky. They’re under enough clearing that it doesn’t see them.

“Are we going the right way?” China hisses.

Russia looks pale. “I thought we were.”

North Korea starts screaming and thrashing.


“Make him stop. He’s—He’s hurting my head and wants to find me and hurt me, and—Please, make him stop! **Please!**”

“Who?” Russia demands.

North Korea screams again.

“We need to go,” China urges. “We need to go; come on.”

“Where, though?” Russia says in a panicked tone. “We don’t—”

They hear another plane approaching overhead.

Russia sprints back into the forest, and the rest have no choice but to follow. They don’t stop running, and Prussia’s lungs are burning. He’s gasping for air. Russia and China are pulling ahead, and North Korea’s still screaming, and Prussia almost drops him—

“Ivan, we have to slow down!” China screams. “They can’t keep up!”

“Screw them! It’s only us the Americans are after—”

Prussia suddenly feels America’s presence.

North Korea screeches as a pure expression of panic crosses Russia’s face. China yells something.

They enter a clearing. Russia and China are much further ahead than the rest of them, and the two stop for a split second to argue about something. Russia then turns—

“IVAN!” China shrieks, violently shoving him.

There’s an explosion.

Prussia is knocked to the ground and nearly crushes North Korea. It takes him a moment to get oriented. His ears are ringing, and his throat is full of dust. He rights himself, checks to see if North Korea and Hungary are okay, and then stands up in a shaky motion, holding North Korea to his chest. As the dust clears, he sees the cause of the explosion.

It was a landmine.

Russia stands up from where he collided with a tree, wearing a look of absolute shock.
China’s body is completely mangled.

There are chunks of it everywhere; limbs and guts liquefied and spewed all over the place.

Russia stumbles forward, his legs buckling when he reaches China. He then cradles him to his chest, his eyes turning red, looking completely deranged and broken and—

America and South Korea’s presences.

Prussia almost collapses. North Korea screams.

Prussia, Hungary, Lithuania, and Estonia slowly back towards where Russia’s standing.

His presence engulfs them. “I KNOW YOU DON’T CARE ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS TO US. JUST FUCKING LEAVE.”

Even if Prussia wanted to, he can’t. America and South Korea crash into the clearing. They’re riding on a combat vehicle. Both have tinted eye gear on, and with them are other soldiers.

Chaos.

South Korea jumps off the vehicle and starts screaming. Prussia can’t understand him; the roaring in his ears makes it impossible. He first looks at Russia, who’s hunched over China’s body, baring his teeth in an almost animalistic manner, then snaps his head towards Prussia, who’s still holding North Korea.

He lunges at them.

America restrains him.

“He NEEDS TO DIE!” South Korea shrieks. “ALL OF THIS WILL BE SOLVED IF HE JUST FUCKING DIES, ALFRED! THERE SHOULDN’T BE TWO KOREAS! THERE SHOULDN’T—”

Prussia’s heart is lurching in his chest. America looks at him. He remembers training him in the Revolutionary War, remembers telling him that just because two people are on different sides, doesn’t mean they can’t be friends.

What a funny thing to think of.

North Korea is thrashing. South Korea is still screaming. Russia is gripping China so hard the whites of his knuckles are showing.

“Shoot them!”

There are fluorescent lights above Prussia when he wakes up. He expects to be strapped to some sort of operating table. Instead, he finds himself on a normal bed in what appears to be military sleeping quarters.

He blearily looks around. Estonia, Lithuania, and Hungary are also in the room, Estonia and Lithuania sitting on beds across from where he is, Hungary next to him.

“Elizabeta?” Prussia asks.
She jumps; then gives a tentative smile.

Prussia’s voice cracks. “Where are we?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” she replies, giving a strained smile. “No one’s come in since any of us have woken up.”

Prussia sighs and sits up, his mind spinning in circles. He thinks about China—wonders what happened to Russia, and where North Korea is, and what’s going to happen to him.

It’s hard to tell how much time passes. Eventually, though, there’s a knock on the door.

Everyone freezes.

Whoever’s at the door knocks again, like they’re afraid of disturbing them, and suddenly the whole situation almost feels comical.

“Uh, come in?” Prussia says in English.

America awkwardly enters.

He closes the door and grabs a metal chair from the corner of the room. He then drags it across the floor, but it screeches horribly. Everyone flinches. Fumbling, America picks it up, sets it in front of the door, then sits down.

There’s an uncomfortable pause.

“My officials insisted that there was some sort of ‘Soviet Nation Avatar Army,’” America blurts out. “And I thought they were fucking with me, but—”

“Alfred, where are we?” Prussia interrupts.

America squirms. “About that. We’re in some random US base that’s on the border between the North and South. The thing is, we weren’t really supposed to go here, but Yong-Soo and I weren’t prepared for bringing back these many Nations, so,” America swallows, “we had to change plans. And now no one here knows that Nations exist.”

Prussia feels his heartbeat quicken.

“No one’s monitoring any of our conversations. We’re—We’re going to be alone here for at least two days.”

Prussia’s head is pounding.

“I’m not going to let anyone hurt you,” America mumbles. “And if you have any questions, I can try and answer them.”

“How’s Francis?” Prussia immediately blurts out. Hungary touches his arm.

America smiles weakly. “He wants me to coordinate something with Russia so we can break you out of wherever.”

Prussia bursts out laughing, realizes he’s not joking, and then stops abruptly. “Wait, excuse me?”

“He, England, and Canada are already draining money from their governments to ‘prepare.’”
“Are you actually serious?”

America stares at him.

Prussia’s vision blurs. “He can’t do this.”

“Well, you broke him out, so he wants to—”

“He can’t—what the fuck?” Prussia’s head is spinning. “Our cell is in Siberia.” He throws up his hands. “And why the hell are England and Canada helping!? Why are you helping?!”

America swallows. “Because France wanted to do this, and this is the first time he’s wanted anything since the war.”

Prussia feels like he’s been punched in the gut.

“It’s not just about you, though.” America avoids eye contact. “And it’s not just about making France happy. Potsdam was—What happened at Potsdam was awful. So if there’s any way that we can fix what happened, then…”

“What about Antonio? How’s Antonio doing?”

America releases a breath. “He hasn’t been allowed to see anyone since Potsdam.”

“What?”

“All of our governments are really freaked out about what you two did. No one has heard from him. Not that—not that I’m in Europe much anymore to know these sort of things, but.”

Prussia feels lightheaded.

“Where are China, Russia, and North Korea?” Hungary asks.

America chews his lip. “I put the other Korean Avatar in a separate room. I—I don’t know what to do with him. Yong-Soo went back to military headquarters, so it’s just me right now, and—”

America grips his hair. “Russia and China are in a room down the hall. I’m not going in there until China’s body is fully healed.”

Hungary nods.

America laughs nervously. “I have no idea what the hell I’m doing.” He squirms again. “But I’ll try to make this worth something. Here—let me get you some, like, food and water.”

As he scrambles out the door, Prussia leans back, feeling overwhelmed.

France wants to break him out.

Spain hasn’t been seen in eight years.

No one here knows they exist.

“Do you really think he’s going to break us out?” Hungary says, her voice barely above a whisper.

Prussia closes his eyes.

“Who knows.”
here’s an article about Hitler drinking bull semen and snorting coke:
China doesn’t think when he shoves Russia away from the landmine.

He doesn’t know what overcomes him.

He just acts.

He hears buzzing.

It’s off and on. Sometimes his skin prickles, but that’s it.

At some point, he’s so hungry and thirsty that he wakes up.

His eyes flutter open, and he’s immediately disoriented. His face is pressed up against something, and he’s unsure whether or not he’s being restrained.

Without moving, he tries to gauge his injuries. Ignoring his hunger and thirst, he has a dull pain coming from the bottom half of his body while his arms feel numb. He shifts to see what’s restraining him, and whatever’s surrounding him stirs.

“Yes?” he hears Russia ask, his voice cracking.

China attempts to respond. His tongue is numb, though, and his throat feels constricted, so he can only get out a slight sound.

Russia positions him so that they’re facing each other. China realizes they’re on a bed, and that Russia is lying down, his back propped up against the wall with China on top of him.

They stare at each other.

It comes to China’s attention that he’s naked and only wrapped in a thin sheet. He knows he should be embarrassed, maybe even horrified, but all he can muster is a feeling of tiredness.

Russia’s the first one to break eye contact. “I’m sorry.” His voice shakes.

“Ivan,” China manages to croak out.

Russia shudders and ducks his head, and China realizes he’s crying.

Something inside of him breaks.

He wishes he had control over his emotions. Whatever developed between the two of them during their months in London should have faded by now. But it hasn’t, and he’s so tired and overwhelmed that he gives up fighting.
China forces his left arm to move. He notices it’s thin and scraggly, but he disregards that and cups Russia’s face.

Russia stares at him, tears leaking silently from his eyes as China brushes his fingers over his cheek. China then takes his hand off and signs, “It’s not your fault.”

Trembling, Russia pulls him close as if he’s afraid he’ll disappear. China can hear his heartbeat, can smell him, can feel him. It’s intoxicating. Russia’s face is buried in the back of his head, repeating his name like a mantra. It makes him feel dizzy.

He forgets about his hunger and thirst and drifts off.

He doesn’t know how much time passes. But when he wakes up again, he notices he’s still relatively in the same position. The dull pain in his legs is not as apparent, and parts of his body are less numb. His head is still aching, though, and he can feel areas where his skin’s tender.

He shifts.

“You?”

“Mm,” he replies, attempting to get his bearings.

Russia angles him again so that they’re looking at each other. His eyes are sunken in.

China doesn’t know what to say, so instead, he asks, “What does my hair look like?” He clears his throat afterward.

Russia laughs wearily. “It grew back to how it was.”

China nods. Russia rubs circles into his back; then freezes and shoves his hands underneath his legs.

“I don’t know where we are,” he chokes out. “And I don’t know how much time has passed.”

China frowns, wishing this situation wasn’t so complicated. “Has anyone come in?”

“No.”

“…”

Russia’s voice breaks. “Why did you shove me out of the way?”

“Because I didn’t want you to get hurt.”

“…”

China closes his eyes, feeling overwhelmed. “I care for you, Ivan.”

He hears Russia give a weak laugh. “You’re probably the only one who does at this point.”

China opens his eyes. “Your sisters—”

“Are being experimented on in Siberia because of my government.”
They stare at each other. Russia then lets out another laugh, his voice trembling. “Fuck.” He looks away. “Fuck.” His body starts to shake, and China realizes he’s crying again.

He moves to hold him, and Russia curls into his embrace, shaking even more.

“I’m so sorry.”

China rubs his back. “Why are you sorry?”

He shakes his head.

“Ivan—”

“I’m in love with you.”

Oh.

A wave of heat runs through China, causing him to feel dizzy as Russia lets out a sob.

Russia tries to move away. “I’m so sorry.”

China’s heart is beating erratically. He locks his arms together. “Ivan.”

“We can—we can pretend—”

“Ivan, I’m in love with you too.”

Russia freezes.

China can hear the ringing in his ears. “I’m in love with you,” he repeats, realizing the weight of his words.

He gains enough courage to look at Russia’s face. He appears in shock.

“Ivan?” China’s voice cracks.

More tears spill out of Russia’s eyes. He cups his face; then has to hold back a sob.

China smiles. It feels watery. “I love you.”

Russia buries his face into his chest, wrapping his arms around him, turning into an ugly mess. China pets his hair and massages his neck, and nothing has ever felt more right in his life.

“I’ve been trying to fight this for so long,” Russia chokes out eventually, trembling. He laughs. It sounds broken. “This can’t be real. This has to be a dream.”

China kisses his forehead.

Russia is crying again. “Yao, we’re—we’re in an American base.”

He leans their foreheads together. “Let’s not worry about that right now, okay?”

Russia clumsily grabs his hand.

“Everything will work out…”

Russia pulls away, his face bright red, his eyes still wet and puffy. He nods. China shouldn’t find
him beautiful right now. He still does. It takes his breath away. All the feelings he denied over the years—feelings that he masked with harmless flirting and subtle touches—are strangling him.

His heart feels like it’s going to leap out of his chest.

“I probably look awful right now,” Russia gets out, rapidly wiping his face.

“No,” China murmurs, wanting nothing more than to stop him from trembling. “Just beautiful.”

He makes a choking noise.

They sit there for a while, both just trying to calm down and process everything. China begins to grow aware of how hungry he is too. It’s unpleasant. He wants to feel anxious about it and everything else, but Russia’s presence is like a drug and prevents him from getting too worked up.

It’s about twenty or so minutes later that there’s a knock on the door.

They tense up at the same time.

Another knock.

Russia and China scoot closer to each other.

“I heard you two talking earlier; I know you’re both alive,” America says.

Now all China is is confused. Russia looks equally baffled.

“Oh, I’m going to come in. It’s just me.” The door opens, and America awkwardly walks in, holding two trays of military rations.

He takes in their position, looks extremely uncomfortable, and sets the trays of food down on the floor. Out of a bag that’s slung over his shoulder, he takes out some sweats. “They’re, uh, for you, China.”

China looks at the food and clothing, wondering if this is a trap.

America shuts the door, picks up a chair, and sets it by the food and clothing in the center of the room. He then sits down and stares at the ground.

“What are you doing?” Russia growls, grabbing onto China’s hand.

“So, funny story,” is how America responds, looking up. “No one at this military base knows that Nations exist.”

Time seems to slow down.

“Yong-Soo and I got dropped off in the North to ‘capture’ the other Nation Avatar.”

The use of Korea’s human name catches China off guard.

“The mission was just supposed to be tiny, so when we found you guys, we were completely unprepared. We had to go back to the nearest base in the South, and, well,” America does miserable looking jazz-hands, “here we are.”
China and Russia don’t respond.

America swallows. “Yong-Soo is heading back to headquarters to, like, figure out what the hell we’re supposed to do. As for the other Nations, North Korea has his own room while the rest are grouped together in another one.” He laughs nervously. “And I’m in charge at the moment. It’s been two days since… I thought Yong-Soo would’ve made contact by now, but he hasn’t.”

“And why do you think we should trust you?” Russia spits out.

America averts eye contact. “Because it’s been two days and no one’s done anything to you, despite how weirded out everyone is from your ‘Soviet Red Eye Technology’ and the fact that I’m hoarding dead bodies for no apparent reason.”

“…”

“We were all in London together,” America chokes out. “We all saw France. We all had to watch what happened at Potsdam. Do you think I want any of that to happen again?”

Russia and China avoid eye contact.

“You can trust me, really. I—” America bites his lip. “I don’t know when my military officials are coming here; I haven’t received any telegrams. I think what’s going to happen is that we’re going to exchange you guys to negotiate a ceasefire between the North and South, but.” He shifts. “Even if that happens, I won’t let any of my military officials touch you.”

China’s head is pounding. Russia is still clenching his hand. America awkwardly stands up.

“You two eat, and uh, put on clothes. I’ll be back.”

It’s when he’s at the door that Russia finally asks, “Why are you doing this?”

America gives a nervous smile. “I already told you.”

“We’re enemies.”

“That doesn’t mean I want to see you tortured.”

“…”

America lets out a shaky breath. “And okay, listen.”

There’s a long, uncomfortable pause.

“France wants your help.”

Russia laughs abruptly, letting go of China’s hand. “What?”

America looks like he’s about to throw up. “He wants to break out Prussia and the other Nations from wherever they’re being held in Siberia and place them in safe houses in Western Europe.”

Russia stops laughing, now looking baffled. China frowns. “Are you serious?”

America swallows. “Unfortunately.”

“…”
“He wants to emulate what Prussia and Spain did during the Second World War, and God, he, England, and Canada have already been developing a plan for three years now, and they been stealing actual money?” America tugs at his hair. “France wants your help, Russia. He’s been harping on me for like three years to ask you.”

“You saw what happened at Potsdam,” China says slowly. “You saw how our governments reacted to what Prussia did, and despite that, you still want to follow through with this plan?”

America looks nervous. “I don’t know.”

“…”

“I just—Personally, I want everything to be normal again. I don’t think any Nation deserves to go through this.”

China closes his eyes. He thinks about Korea and Japan, what they’ve been through, how he can’t see them anymore.

Oh.

Maybe this could be the one way he could get in contact with them again.

“I’ll help,” he murmurs, opening his eyes.

Russia’s head jerks towards him. “What?”

“I’ll help.”

America blinks. “If—if you did…that could—we were thinking that if we were to break the Nations out of Siberia, we would go east and not west, cross the Pacific, take them across the US, and then into Western Europe. If we could go through China—”

“How much have you even thought this through?” Russia snaps.

America squirms. “Not much. Nothing is concrete yet at all. Honestly, the last time we discussed it was around two or three years ago, but that’s mostly because I’ve been in Asia or the US.”

There’s a long stretch of silence.

America then jerks his head back to them as he places his hand on the doorknob. “Okay, so I was having a conversation with Kiku a while ago, and he said that, China, you knew ancient Nations in Europe?”

China has a headache. Russia looks baffled. “What?”

America’s face is getting redder by the second. “I uh, sorry that just came to me because I realized I probably won’t have another conversation with you in a really long time and I—you should eat and put on clothes. I’ll go. Here, let me—”

He powerwalks out of the room.

“This is surreal,” Russia mutters after the door shuts.

“…”

“He’s asking us to commit treason! He—what the fuck; why do you want to help him?”
“Because he clearly knows Yong-Soo and Kiku,” China whispers.

Russia looks confused.

“He was using their human names,” he offers as an explanation. He then slowly stands up from the bed, his muscles aching. “Ivan, you know how desperate I am to see them—to have one normal conversation. Maybe this is the way that can happen.”

China dresses himself. He hears Russia fidget.

“How do you think this plan could help my sisters?” Russia chokes out once he’s fully clothed.

“Yes.”

Russia’s expression is pained. “But what would happen if we were caught?”

“Something horrible, probably.”

Russia runs his hands through his hair. China brings over the trays of food.

“Let’s just eat…”

They grow silent. After a while, China’s stomach finally starts to feel better. The food tastes bland, but it’s better than nothing.

“Would helping be worth it, though?” Russia eventually whispers. “Maybe I’d see Katya and Natalia, and maybe you’d see Kiku and Yong-Soo. Is it worth it based on that?”

“You’d be saving your sisters from being tortured.”

“…”

“You’d be saving all of those Nations.”

“But who gives a fuck?” Russia’s voice cracks. “They all hate me! They all deserve to hate me. I’m a—”

“Don’t ever say you’re a monster.”

Russia is shaking. “Well, the USSR is.”

“Then prove you can go against your ‘nature.’ Prove all of our governments wrong—both the communist and the capitalist ones. Screw them. Prove that Ivan Braginski exists.”

“Does he?” Russia mutters.

“Yeah.”

“…”

“Because I’m in love with him.”

Russia stutters, his face immediately turning pink. China touches his arm, and he responds by burying his face into his shoulder.

They stay like that until there’s another knock on the door.
America enters just as they move away from each other. He walks to the chair he was on earlier and sits down.

The atmosphere becomes uncomfortable.

“So…” America begins, trailing off. He squirms. “This is really weird.”

“I believe we’ve established that,” China mumbles, his headache coming back.

America says nothing. Russia is rigid.

“Where did you send Yong-Soo?” China asks to break the silence.

America tenses. “I’m not sure if I can tell you that?” He phrases it like a question. “Yong-Soo was really upset, and the presence of the other Nation Avatar was bothering him, so I told him that he should be the one to go back to where our base is…”

Talking to America about Korea—no, he’s South Korea now—causes something to stir within China; emotions he’s been suppressing, feelings he’s wanted to vocalize for years.

“Why did he stay in the South?” he almost whispers.

America frowns. “My government threatened him.”

China can hear the ringing in his ears.

“He wanted to see you, but he was afraid,” America continues, swallowing. “He was afraid that he’d be tortured again.”

The reunion they had feels like a lifetime ago. No, it doesn’t even feel real. They barely got to talk. And on top of that, Japan was a corpse—

“How’s Kiku?”

“Better,” America answers quickly. “Nothing like what you saw; he looks like a normal person now.” He squirms. “There are still injuries, though.”

“Still?”

America laughs nervously. “That’s the power of atomic weapons…”

China suddenly has so many questions. “Have you met Taiwan?”

“Y-Yeah.”

“What is she like?”

“A cute little kid who’s going to get her childhood robbed from her.”

“Hong Kong, have you seen him?”

“I’ve—yeah, I’ve seen him.”

China knows absolutely nothing about Hong Kong, and it’s not like the British government has ever let them talk to each other. “What’s he like?”

“What’s he—he hates my guts; I don’t know.”
China frowns.

“He thinks you hate him too.”

“But I don’t?”

“Well, he thinks you do.”

China’s emotions quickly overwhelm him. He feels anger at not knowing what’s happening with the other Nation Avatars in the rest of Asia, sadness that he’s cut off from them, jealousy towards America, hatred towards Western imperialism.

He tries to suppress everything; tries to keep his face blank as he’s trained himself to do through the millennia.

It’s hard.

Russia snaps a spoon in half.

“That costs money, you know,” America says dully.

“Why do you care? You’re stealing it from your government anyway.”

“No, that’s just the other three. My job has just been to find a way to talk to you.”

Russia examines the crushed plastic in his hand.

“And here we are.”

Silence takes over. America is the first one to talk. “I know this seems ludicrous. It is ludicrous, but…we wouldn’t break the Nations out of Siberia tomorrow. We would need to exchange information over a period of time.”

“…”

“And I,” America swallows. “I think I know how we could.”

Russia looks up. “How?”

“I’ve been sending letters to Canada, England, and France for a while, but now that I’ve had the time to—to rationally think about it, I think they’ve been being censored.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“If I call my government out on it, that gives me some leveraging opportunity. I could ask if our two countries could facilitate a possible letter exchange between the Eastern European Nations in the Soviet Union and those in Western Europe who want to write to them. And then, at UN meetings, there would be a formal exchange between you and me. Our governments can censor and read the letters as much as they want—since they seem to love to do that—and during the exchange the two of us could possibly sneak in our own pieces of information through slips of paper or verbal code, maybe,” America rambles. “This way we can plan and only act when we’re sure we’re absolutely prepared. And then you can relay the information we give to each other to China.”

Russia nods slowly. China blinks.
It seems feasible.

“Just think about it,” America adds on, his tone unsure.

China looks at him. “Listen, if you get this plan to work, I want Ivan and I to help you escort the Nations across the United States.”


“That way he can be with his sisters.”

“Won’t that be dangerous, though?”

“We’ll figure something out. Who would help you escort the Nations across the country?”

“Uh, I have no idea.” America squirms. “Again, everything is really basic.”

“Could Kiku and Yong-Soo help?”

America’s expression twists. “No.”

China was not expecting that answer. He feels a little pissed. “Why?”

“I am not getting Kiku involved in anything dangerous. Fuck, and I don’t even know if they’d want to help; Yong-Soo especially.”

“Aren’t you friends?”

“I—what?”

“You’re calling both of them by their given names.”

“Jesus, Yao,” America spits out. “They don’t know anything about this plan at all.”

Russia bristles. “Well, Alfred, if you don’t get them to assist with transporting the Nations across the country, then I won’t help.”


China feels some stress seep out of him.

They pause. America lets out a breath after a while.

“I’m going to have the other Nations write some letters now,” he mumbles, standing up. “I’ll have them do two copies—one that can be censored by the Soviet Union, and one that I’ll smuggle out.” He then stops at the door. “I don’t think I can let you guys leave this room. There’s a bathroom attached to that door over there, though. I’ll bring food later and let you know if I receive a telegram.”

“Alfred,” China says when he’s almost out the door.

He pauses. “What?”

“If it all somehow works out that Ivan and I and Kiku and Yong-Soo help you escort the Nations across the country, then I’ll tell you about the ancient Nations in Europe then.”
America’s face flushes. He shuts the door.

“This is a mess,” Russia mutters.

“It will be worth it,” China breathes.

He’s sure of it.

America comes in later that day with a clock and random books he found lying around the place so they can be ‘entertained,’ as he puts it.

The clock is propped up on a table, it reading 5:01 PM, 1953 年 7 月 13 日.

Time ticks on.

It’s nighttime.

There’s only one bed. That fact didn’t seem to matter when China was injured, but now Russia is frazzled.

“Ivan, we can sleep together; it’s okay,” China murmurs, touching his arm.

Russia’s ears are pink. “It’s really tiny.”

“So?”

He fidgets.

They sit down next to each other. With the lights off now, it’s dark.

Russia hesitates, then brushes his fingers over China’s arm.

“You’re allowed to touch me,” China breathes.

His hand quivers.

China studies him, his hair falling out from behind his ear, and Russia quickly darts his eyes away.

“Ivan,” China whispers, scooting closer.

He doesn’t move.

China cups his face.

Russia’s breathing becomes broken. He doesn’t seem to know where to look as China leans their foreheads together.

Time passes.

“Can we kiss?” Russia chokes out, sounding desperate. “I’ve wanted to kiss you for so—”
China cuts him off by bringing their lips together.

He meant for it to be chaste, but that’s thrown out the window as soon as Russia makes a noise in the back of his throat. It causes a jolt to go through his body. He deepens the kiss. Russia reciprocates, grabbing the back of his shirt.

They break away eventually, gasping for air.

Russia’s voice is hoarse. “Yao.”

China feels like he’s on fire. He can only guess how disheveled he looks.

“Ivan,” he breathes.

It’s enough to make Russia pull him into another frantic kiss.

1953年 7月 15日.

They’ve still heard nothing from South Korea.

America visits Russia and China in the afternoon. When he comes in, they’re lying on the ground, paper scattered around them that China tore out of the old military textbooks America threw into the room. China was showing Russia how to make origami before America came in and interrupted.

They all regard each other awkwardly.

“I still haven’t heard anything,” America mutters first, kicking the trashcan by the door.

China frowns. “It has only been a few days.” He’s worried but knows he won’t gain anything from stressing about it. Instead, he focuses on folding his crane. Russia is watching him intensely.

America frowns. “I guess…”

“How’d you do that?” Russia asks, frustrated. The crane he’s trying to make looks mutated.

China laughs softly. “Here.” He gently takes Russia’s hand and guides him in folding the paper. He can feel America watching them. He doesn’t care.

America doesn’t make any comments, though. He walks over and picks up a finished crane that China did. “This is amazing.”

He shrugs. “It’s okay.”

“Well, coming from someone with no artistic talent, this is amazing.” He then looks at Russia’s attempt at a crane. “That’s what mine would look like.”

“Thanks,” Russia mutters sarcastically. His cheeks are flushed.

America hovers. “Can you show me how you did that?’”

Russia cautiously side-eyes him as China shrugs. “Sure.”

They fold cranes for two hours. The entire time it’s extremely weird, the situation’s messed up.
1953 年 7 月 16 日.

At 11:45 AM, America enters the room, causing both Russia and China to stir from a nap.

Russia is spooning China, and it takes both a second to realize their position. They jerk away from each other, but America doesn’t even seem to notice.

“I received a telegram.”

They abruptly sit up.

“And?” China asks.

America bites his lip. “We’ve pissed off a lot of people.”

Russia curses under his breath. China feels tense.

“Officials will be arriving, quote, ‘as soon as possible,’” America rambles. “We’ll be ‘collected’ and taken to Panmunjom, where there’ll be negotiations. Yong-Soo will be meeting us there.”

China feels anxiety climbing his throat. He attempts to swallow it.

“I promised I wouldn’t let my officials hurt you, and I’ll keep that promise,” America mumbles. “I won’t…forget this.”

“Thank you, Alfred,” China murmurs.

America forces out a smile. He then turns to leave, but Russia stops him.

“Wait.”

He looks at him.

“Don’t we need to develop a verbal code?”

America perks up. “Yeah.”

Russia smirks. “It could be around animation. Whenever I mention something about it, know that the information to follow is important. We could work whatever we need to tell each other into its plot.”

America looks exhausted. “Are you going to hold the animation thing over my head forever?”

“It was honestly the most pathetic attempt I’ve ever heard in my entire existence to break an awkward silence, so yes.”

The tips of America’s ears become red. “Fuck you.”

Russia gives him a shit-eating grin.
It’s 5 AM when America knocks on the door again.

Russia and China barely have time to wake up before he enters. Even in the darkness, China can tell he’s uneasy.

“Get up,” America orders like he’s trying to sound forceful.

China begins to untangle himself from Russia when someone yells from the hallway.

“Hurry up!”

America gives them a pleading look.

China and Russia walk over to the doorway. Outside are five people holding assault rifles and one man dressed in a suit.

“Follow us,” the man in the suit snaps, sneering at the three of them.

They’re manhandled to another room where the rest of the Nations are waiting, minus North Korea.

China makes eye contact with South Korea. He quickly looks away, blinking rapidly.

_Yong-Soo_

“You’ll all be transported to Panmunjom by car,” the man in the suit barks. “Don’t attempt to try anything or there’ll be severe consequences. You’re under US custody; don’t forget that for a second.

“If we ask you to respond to us, you’ll do so in English. You’re not permitted to talk in another language.” The man’s face is turning red from anger. “We’ll now lead you to the car. _All Nations will ride together except for the new Nation Avatar, who’ll be receiving separate transportation._”

Russia and China are shoved forward first. America glares at the man in the suit but says nothing.

The eight Nations are led outside to where a military vehicle’s waiting. The car’s setup is awkward —there are two sets of seats facing each other in the back, and then a separate part of the car where the driver is.

Russia and China are jostled in first, followed by America and South Korea. South Korea ends up next to China, and they both pause when their legs are squashed together. Hungary and Prussia are shoved in on the other side, followed by Lithuania and Estonia.

The door’s slammed shut.

China has no idea where to look when the car starts moving. Across from him is Prussia, who he’d rather not make eye contact with, and South Korea is pressed up against him to his left. He desperately wants to talk to him but knows now is not the time and the place.

Not even a minute passes, and he wants to leave the car.

“I fucking hate your new babysitter,” South Korea mutters to America.

“God, me too. I’d take Frank back any day.”

“Do you even know his name yet?”
America snorts. “No. I’ve just been calling him ‘Suit Man’ in my head because that’s all he ever wears.”

South Korea shifts, and his arm bumps against China’s. China tries to scoot away as much as possible, not knowing how to handle himself, but as a result, he ends up leaning into Russia. Russia freezes. Prussia leers.

China wants to scream.

It hasn’t even been five minutes.

“Why are they making the two of us ride back here?” South Korea grumbles to America.

He replies with something, but China can’t make out what.

The car then goes through a pothole and knocks everyone into each other. South Korea falls into China and sputters an apology immediately, almost calling him Hyeongnim, then Yao, and then China, all in the same breath.

“My government threatened him.”

China wishes everyone else didn’t exist right now. “It’s okay,” he murmurs.

South Korea looks like he’s about to cry.

It takes about an hour to get to Panmunjom.

They’re in a waiting room now. It’s vacant—there’s only one couch, a table, and a potted plant—and tiny. China is leaning against the wall, next to Russia, trying to drown out his thoughts.

It’s been about an hour since they’ve arrived. So far, nothing’s happened.

“I have to pee,” Prussia groans. He’s been pacing back and forth ever since they’ve gotten here.

“Uh,” is America’s response. He and South Korea are on the couch. “I don’t think we’re allowed to leave the room.”

“Pee in the plant,” Hungary mutters.

Everyone stares at her.

“What? You have a dick; use it to your—”

The door opens.

The man in the suit walks in. Following him are three men with assault rifles.

“China and Russia, come with me,” he orders. For the first time, China notices how young he is.

America stands up. “Where?”

The man in the suit stares at him. “That’s none of your concern.”

“There aren’t any Russian or Chinese officials here yet.”
“And how do you know that?”

“Because South Korea would have sensed them.”

“I shouldn’t have to repeat my orders,” the man in the suit snaps. “China and Russia, come with me.”

China doesn’t want to. Suddenly all he can see is France’s mutilated body, knowing they would do that to them.

“Move!”

“They’re staying here,” America snaps.

“No, they’re not!”

There’s a flurry of movement. The man in the suit reaches for something, causing America to stand up. One of the men with the assault rifles then takes aim.

China closes his eyes.

A gunshot.

His eyes fly open. America is in front of him and Russia, shielding them. He’s gripping his right shoulder, and China can see blood building up beneath the fabric of his shirt.

His eyes are red. He looks vicious, animalistic.

“Get the fuck out of here and don’t come back until the actual Chinese and Russian delegations have arrived.”

The man in the suit looks pale. He lowers his arm, the soldiers around him seeming stunned as they back out of the room.

America’s legs give out as soon as they’re gone.

South Korea runs over, his words jumbled when he speaks. “Is the bullet—Alfred, is it lodged there? I can help you remove it.”

America’s expression is blank.

China frowns. He shouldn’t be acting this way. He glances at Russia—

America starts to have a seizure.

Everyone is shocked. His eyes are bright red, and he’s foaming at the mouth as the right side of his face turns blue.

“It’s a poison bullet,” Prussia chokes out.

“What the fuck is that?” South Korea screams.

“The—The Nazis used them to incapacitate—”

Just hearing the word ‘Nazis,’ makes Hungary back up. She looks like she’s about to throw up. China hears a roaring in his ears. Russia is rigid. Lithuania and Estonia are frozen.
“HOW DO WE STOP IT?” South Korea shrieks.

“Fuck, you—you have to remove it. The poison is coating it. You can’t touch it. You can’t—”

America’s presence is everywhere. China almost drops to the ground.

South Korea attempts to rip off America’s shirt, but he’s thrashing too much for him to get a good grip. He looks desperately at China.

Russia moves first, his actions jerky. “I can—I can hold him. Yao, help Korea extract the bullet.”

China grits his teeth and hurries closer, his head screaming in pain.

Russia exerts his strength to push America down, which only causes him to fight back. More of his face turns blue. Everyone else’s eyes turn red.

China and South Korea rip off America’s shirt, and China can see the entry wound.

“Don’t touch the poison,” Prussia chokes. He looks like he’s going into shock. Hungary gags. Vomit starts to trickle out of America’s mouth.

China wraps a wad of America’s shirt around his hand and attempts to dig through the wound. South Korea is pressed up next to him. He’s crying. For a second, China forgets where he is. It’s all too surreal.

He can feel the bullet. It’s deep. He takes out as much as he can in one piece and then fishes to get the rest.

It’s a long two minutes.

“I think everything’s out,” China manages to say. America’s presence is like a knife being stabbed into his head.

“Then now what?” South Korea demands, clenching onto America’s arm as he still throws a fit.

Prussia shakes his head. He’s trembling. China has never seen him this unsettled before, and it makes him feel nauseous. “You either—you either let the poison kill him slowly, or you kill him now.”

China makes eye contact with Russia. He can’t see his pupils; all he can see is red.

“How the fuck—what do I kill him with?” Russia says, gritting his teeth.

South Korea is almost hyperventilating. “Snap his neck.”

Russia appears hesitant but then follows through.

The room is silent except for the sounds of America choking on his own vomit, which is only broken by an awful CRUNCH.

He finally stops thrashing.

China’s forehead is slick with sweat when Russia releases his neck. He realizes he’s still holding the bullet fragments and drops them.

“I thought I picked a side where I wouldn’t be tortured,” South Korea chokes out.
If the Americans have Nazi technology, China knows the Russians do as well.

He has to stop himself from breaking into hysterics.

Two hours later, the Chinese and Russian delegations arrive.

The negotiations are smooth. America remains dead. China isn’t allowed to say goodbye to South Korea, and he doesn’t even know where North Korea is.

He and Russia are led away as if nothing happened; yet, China knows the truth.

And he refuses to be compliant.

Chapter End Notes

Please listen to this song because it fits this chapter: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4HFTVANRJQ

Thanks for reading,, really thank you ;; o/
America gets shot.

He doesn’t know by who, and he doesn’t have time to contemplate it because that’s when the pain starts.

So much pain.

It’s suffocating him. He can’t breathe, and Russia is there, and is he under attack and why is he being cho

Consciousness smacks him in the face.

It’s as if he’s awoken from a nightmare. Disoriented, he opens his eyes, blinking rapidly to focus them, only to see that he’s shirtless and doesn’t have his glasses. It looks like he’s on a wide gurney —

Oh.

America almost thinks he’s hallucinating. Japan is at the foot of the bed while South Korea is to his left on a chair. Neither looks thrilled.

He’s about to say something until he’s caught off guard by Japan brushing his fingers over his leg. It sends a jolt through his body, and he freaks out, closing his eyes just as South Korea says something.

“I swear to God you touch him every five seconds.”

America feels Japan’s presence grow. “And why does that matter?”

“It’s disgusting.”

“Disgusting?”

“Yeah. You. Fretting over him. Acting like you have feelings.”

“I don’t want to—”

“Acting like you haven’t just been pretending the entire time with him!”

Japan’s voice is vicious. “You don’t know anything.”

“Really!? I know how fake you are, Kiku! All you ever did was watch us with that cold expression!”

“I—”

“Act like your relationship with Yao and I never existed. Turn into a Western bitch.”
“Now is not the time to talk about this,” Japan hisses.

“When is it, then?” South Korea spits.

America doesn’t want them to fight, hates any talk about the Second World War, and has no idea what’s going on.

He sits up.

Japan snatches back his hand in surprise as South Korea jumps.

There’s an awkward pause.

“Where are we?” America blurts out first, his head spinning.

Japan slowly stands up while South Korea avoids eye contact and stares at the ground.

“Where are—”

“Dongducheon,” Japan responds, coming closer and kneeling beside his head.

“Why are you here?”

He grimaces. “For diplomatic reasons. Though we weren’t expecting...this.”

“Why did you do it?” South Korea mumbles. “The bullet—”

“Shit, what happened after?” America interrupts, more concerned with that. “They weren’t tortured, were they? I can’t—I can’t remember.” He attempts to sit up, but Japan pushes him down.

“Relax, Alfred.”

“Why did you do it?” South Korea’s voice cracks. “Western Nations aren’t supposed to—” He grips his hair.

Western Nations, them especially, aren’t supposed to go against their governments. America knows. That’s why when Prussia did, everyone panicked.

He feels lightheaded as he remembers Russia and China’s terrified expressions. “I—I couldn’t let them be hurt.”

“You protected Yao. You don’t even know him.” South Korea looks like he’s about to cry.

“Could Kiku and Yong-Soo help?”

America doesn’t know how to respond. He feels choked. Maybe he protected Russia and China because of Potsdam. Maybe it’s because they agreed to help with the plan, which is the absolute last thing he wants to talk about right now.

South Korea opens his mouth, but Japan cuts him off.

“That’s enough. You’re stressing him out.”

“Fuck off,” South Korea growls, standing up.

Japan shields America.
South Korea barks out a laugh, sounding slightly deranged. “I’m not going to hurt him. Just because I’m not touching him every five seconds like you doesn’t mean I’m not his friend.”

The back of Japan’s neck turns red. America is taken aback by South Korea’s declaration. Before either of them can respond, though, the door opens.

“I heard conversation; I know you’re awake,” Suit Man sneers. He enters the room with two other soldiers, both who have guns.

America’s view of them becomes obstructed as South Korea moves in front of him, next to Japan.

“You two need to leave,” Suit Man spits. “America and I have to have a private conversation.”

America barely knows this man. He was only assigned to him recently, and all of their previous meetings have been in short bouts until now.

Japan and South Korea stay still.

“I said go!”

“Sir,” one of the soldiers hisses.

“Put the guns away, and we’ll move,” Japan says calmly in English.

“You think you have the right to make demands!?” Suit Man shrieks.

“Yes.”

“You’re the ones that put us in here,” South Korea mutters at the same time, also in English.

America sits up. “It’s—it’s fine. Really, guys; it’s fine. I can talk to him.”

He doesn’t need them to get in trouble.

Japan and South Korea both look at him over their shoulders. Japan frowns. South Korea bites his lip. They both really seem to hate this man, and America doesn’t know what to think of it. Christ, Japan hasn’t even met him before.

“We’ll move, but we’re not leaving,” South Korea hisses, stepping to the side. Japan moves in the opposite direction, exposing America to Suit Man and the accompanying soldiers. Suit Man’s face is red, and America can see a vein popping out of his forehead.

He then feels word vomit building up, and before he can stop it, it spills out. “If you’re angry about me blocking the bullet, then I wholeheartedly apologize. I never meant to go against orders, but surely you must be aware of what happened in the past. I didn’t want any Nations to get tortured, and I didn’t want the United States to stoop down to the level of the Nazis and continue that tradition, and I understand that information could have been gained, but to use unethical methods—I haven’t kept anything secret about what happened at the military compound. I told the escort team everything when they arrived. I’m completely open to sitting down for more talks if you wish to know more about—”

“Enough!” Suit Man cuts in. Now there are two veins visible on his forehead.

“Robert,” someone calls from the hallway.

America makes a mental note of his name.

“I need to talk to you,” whoever’s in the hallway says. America thinks it sounds like Frank, but knows he’s being delusional.

Robert grumbles something and motions for the two soldiers to follow him. They leave the room, slamming the door behind them.

It’s quiet.

America turns to look at Japan and feels taken aback when he sees that his eyes have a red tint. South Korea also seems furious.

He studies his hands, feeling nervous. “You two don’t have to defend me; it’s okay. I’ll accept the consequences of my actions.”

South Korea explodes. “What actions?! Blocking the bullet?! It’s fucking bullshit! Especially since they used a Nazi weapon, and—”

“Wait, what?” America interrupts, his heart pounding.

South Korea’s mouth snaps shut.

Japan looks nauseous. “The bullets were coated with a poison,” he whispers, avoiding eye contact. “That’s what Yong-Soo said, at least. And the Axis Powers used these poison bullets to subdue Nations since it prevents them from healing. I…I know from firsthand.”

America feels the blood drain from his face.

“That’s why you were so affected,” Japan adds on, his voice strained.

America can’t breathe. He thought the mistreatment of Nations was only a Soviet problem now. He thought his government agreed that what happened to everyone, including the Nations, during the Holocaust was inhumane.

“Alfred?”

But no. No, his government is continuing the research. Who the fuck is he kidding? Why did he think his government wouldn’t continue it? They murdered the natives, and enslaved the Africans, and interned the Japanese-Americans, and nuked a country, and—

“Alf—”

This isn’t good versus evil because there is no good and evil. Both the USSR and US are rotten trash that will do anything to secure power, and Nations will continue to suffer if that’s what’s seen as the most optimal choice—

Japan grabs his shoulders.

America realizes he’s crying. A shudder rips through his body, and he immediately feels disgusted with himself for being so weak.

Japan quickly engulfs him into an embrace, resting his hands on his shirtless back—rubbing it, trying to soothe him. America chokes back a sob and grips Japan’s shirt. He’s feeling too many things at once. He’s never allowed himself to break down in front of someone as much as he’s done with him—not even England. And doing this in front of South Korea makes him feel pathetic.
He doesn’t understand why Japan is able to lower his defenses like this. He’s supposed to be the hero. He’s supposed to be the stable one. But instead, he’s weak and emotional and—

“Alfred, it’s going to be okay.” Japan’s voice cracks.

“I’m sorry,” he chokes out.

“You don’t have to apologize for anything,” South Korea mumbles.

America cries harder.

They’re left alone for around two hours.

America eventually regains his composure. Now, he and Japan are sitting silently on the bed, next to each other, their thighs barely touching. South Korea is on the chair near them. Sometimes he hums, or whistles, or snaps his fingers like he’s trying to relieve his boredom. It’s annoying. America and Japan don’t say anything.

Sometime during the two hours, America thinks about the letters he told the Eastern European Nations to write. Prussia wrote three, one to both France and Spain, one to Austria, and one to Germany; Hungary wrote one to Austria, and Estonia wrote one to Finland. America has no idea how the hell he’s going to deliver that one. Finland isn’t even a part of the UN, not to mention America has had, like, a grand total of five conversations with him.

Lithuania wrote nothing. Estonia had tried to persuade him to send at least something, but that exchange ended with Lithuania spitting that all of his friends were rotting back in the USSR.

America rubs his face. The real letters are hidden within his book collection and are being shipped back to his house in Pennsylvania. The fake letters he had them write, the ones with mundane information that can be approved for an exchange, are currently stuffed in his military folders.

He wonders if they’ve been found yet.

He’s prepared to explain but is also terrified of what his officials’ reactions will be, especially after the whole poison bullet ordeal. Before, he was prepared to try and blackmail them into accepting the exchange, using the fact that he found out they’ve been censoring his letters to Canada, France, and England; but now that’s the last thing he wants to do.

Robert comes back into the room eventually. This time, there are no soldiers with him, just two other men in suits, and he looks more composed.

Japan and South Korea are completely tense. America fidgets.

Robert holds up America’s military folder and takes a deep breath. “Would you care to explain?”

Japan and South Korea both shoot him a confused look. America forces himself to smile. He feels like he’s going to vomit. “I wanted to make a proposal directly to the Soviet Union’s diplomats, but, unfortunately, I was unconscious at the time.”

South Korea balls up his fists. Robert stares at him.

America swallows. “Basically, I was wondering if there could be an exchange of letters between the Nations in Eastern and Western Europe. It could be done formally, facilitated by the Soviet
Union and the United States. The letters, of course, would be reviewed by both governments before being sent.” He knows he sounds like an idiot.

Robert’s expression scrunches up.

“I feel as though an exchange would allow for a more peaceful coexistence between Nations,” America rushes out before he regrets anything. “As well as cause them to feel more satisfied with their governments and put Potsdam behind them.”

The mention of Potsdam causes a shift in his officials’ expressions.

America rubs the back of his neck, trying to appear sheepish, like the letters are no big deal, like he didn’t completely break down a few hours ago because of what his government is doing. “I wasn’t trying to keep them a secret from you if that’s what you’re wondering. It was my goal to be upfront.”

“And you believe this will raise Nation satisfaction?” one of the men asks.

“It will certainly cause Nations to trust their governments more,” America says, knowing that that’s exactly what his officials want to hear. His nausea increases.

Robert absorbs the information, finally settling on, “I’ll have to get this approved.”

America realizes there’s a pistol hanging from his belt.

His vision swims. “Understood.”

Japan must see how pale he gets because his hand brushes up against his thigh.

Robert looks away. “Well, now that that’s sorted out, we’ll be getting you a change of clothing. You’ll then eat since you haven’t had a sustainable meal in a while, and then all of you will be flown—”

South Korea interrupts him. “Pal, it’s one in the morning.”

America didn’t even realize the time.

“Are you really going to fly us out now?”

There’s a vein forming on Robert’s forehead. “Fine.” He actually looks frazzled. “You’ll stay here until the morning.”

With that, he and the two other men leave, and America is left alone with South Korea and Japan once again.

“What are these letters? What the hell is he talking about?” Japan asks as soon as they’re gone.

America’s throat is dry.

“Could Kiku and Yong-Soo help?”

No. He can’t tell them. Not yet. Not now. Maybe in a few years. Maybe if this letter exchange actually works out and he and Russia don’t get caught.

“It’s exactly what I said it was,” he chokes out.
Japan’s expression scrunches up. South Korea frowns. It’s clear they both know he’s lying, but they don’t push.

Eventually, all three of them are given a change of clothing, America his glasses as well, and after that, they’re given military rations to eat. It’s gross. The portion sizes are small. America apologizes, knowing the reason they’re so tiny is because of him, and his weight, and how much his officials hate him. It causes both Japan and South Korea to get pissed at him, then pissed at each other for both getting pissed at him.

America has a headache.

Once they’re finished eating, they’re told they’ll be woken up at 7 AM. The officials then leave them alone in the room with nothing but a single bed and chair.

“The letters,” America blurts out when they’re gone, not wanting Japan or South Korea to hate him for lying. “They—Russia—Ivan and I talked about it.”

Japan frowns. “So the exchange is both of your ideas?”

“K-Kind of.”

“Kind of?”

“He agreed to it, but I…proposed it.”

Japan frowns. “Why?”

America studies his hands. They blur away. “I want to say that it’s so all of the Eastern European Nations can communicate with their Western friends, but I’d be lying.” America swallows. “It’s for France. So he can talk to Prussia.”

Japan doesn’t respond. Neither does South Korea.

“I just want him to be normal,” America chokes out, not even knowing what normal is anymore. He misses him and Canada and England. But right now, resolving what’s between them seems like a pipe dream.

Japan touches his arm. “I’m sure he’ll be grateful.”

“…”

“Is he doing better?”

America has vaguely told him about France in the past but has never gone into too much detail because talking about it hurts. “Y-Yeah.”

“What, he’s still hung up over the war?” South Korea sneers as if he’s not himself.

America swallows. “After Potsdam and what Prussia did, yeah.”

South Korea looks away.

America tries to suppress a yawn but fails. Sleeping, though, is the last thing he wants to do, despite his body screaming for it. He’s almost certain he’ll have a nightmare.

“We should go to bed,” Japan murmurs.
There’s an awkward pause.

“Well, I’m getting the chair,” South Korea says first. “Alfred, you take the bed, and Kiku can go lie on the floor over in the corner far away from us.”

Japan glares at him. America rubs his temples. “Okay, no. Kiku is not sleeping on the floor.” He chews his lip. “Actually, I don’t think I’ll be able to sleep tonight anyway, so I can—”

“No, you need to sleep, and you’re not going to lie on the floor,” Japan interrupts. “Not after what you went through today. I’m fine. I’ll lean up against the chair.”

“Don’t lie to yourself, Kiku,” South Korea sneers. “What you really want is to share the bed with him.”

Japan turns rigid. South Korea smirks. America finds the exchange bizarre.

“I mean, we could share the bed,” he mumbles, not wanting the two of them to fight anymore. “We have slept this close with the futons before.”

Japan’s face flushes. South Korea bores his eyes into him.

America frowns. “I’m not letting you sleep on the floor, Kiku.”

“I—” He squirms. “Okay, fine. We can share it.”

America takes the left side, near South Korea, while Japan takes the right. It’s big enough that there’s about an inch of space in between them, but it feels like they’re touching since Japan’s presence wraps around him like a warm blanket.

It’s nice.

America somehow drifts into a dreamless slumber.

They’re woken up rudely, ushered into breakfast, then steered outside to where there are planes waiting for all three of them.

America barely has time to say goodbye.

His farewell with Japan is short and bittersweet, but he knows they’ll keep in contact like they always do, so he doesn’t feel too sad. The future is uncertain and frightening—America doesn’t know how France will react to the letters and whether he, England, or Canada still even likes him—but at least Japan isn’t going anywhere.

One day he’ll tell him about the plan. Not now, though.

They embrace. Japan grips America’s shirt, and America closes his eyes and leans into him. It’s warm. It’s comforting. He doesn’t want to leave. He doesn’t want him to leave. This visit was so short, and God knows when they’ll see each other in person again.

He forces himself to pull away. Japan frowns and looks up at him, causing his hair to fall into his eyes, and without thinking, America brushes it out of his face.

He freezes when he realizes what he’s doing. Japan’s eyes are wide, and his face is turning red.
“Sorry,” America blurts out, snatching his hand away, hating himself for being so frazzled all of the sudden.

“It’s fine,” Japan says quickly, bowing his head.

They stand there.

“Be safe, Alfred…”

America watches him get onto his plane, feeling empty.

Saying goodbye to South Korea is filled with more uncertainty. South Korea said they were friends, but America doesn’t know if they’ll keep in contact, or when they’ll see each other again, or what his country’s policy towards the South will even be now, or Christ, what’s going to happen with the North.

“Next time we see each other, I’ll bring a board game,” he chokes out first.

South Korea opens his mouth; then closes it.

America turns to leave, not knowing what else to say.

“Wait,” South Korea blurts out.

He stops.

“I—I hate Western imperialism, but I don’t hate you, Alfred.” South Korea squirms. “I really don’t hate you.”

America finds himself smiling. “I really don’t hate you either.”

South Korea almost laughs.

“I’m glad we’re friends,” America murmurs.

“Yeah…”

“Is it okay if I write to you?”

“Only if Monopoly is not the board game you bring the next time we see each other.”

America grins. South Korea returns it.

“Yong-Soo,” he then chokes out as he starts walking away.

South Korea looks at him.

“I’m sorry we couldn’t reunite the two sides.”

He gives a watery grin. “I’m sorry too.”

“You’re awfully close to him, aren’t you?” Robert mutters as their plane takes off.

America doesn’t know whom he’s referring to. “I wasn’t aware I’m not allowed to have friends.”
He never responds.

July 19, 1953, an official agreement is reached with the delegates at Panmunjom. July 27, 1953, an armistice is signed. The 38th parallel is now the official boundary between the communist North and the anti-communist South.

America stays in D.C. for a few weeks, attending meetings with Eisenhower and getting himself paraded around the White House. He’s seldom alone. It’s suffocating.

The incident with the bullets is never mentioned either.

On August 8th, Eisenhower informs him that the Soviet Union has accepted the idea of the letter exchange. The fake letters America had the Nations write have been reviewed, and he’s told that at the next Nation UN meeting, Russia will be delivering them to him to pass along to their recipients.

August 17th, he travels to his home in Pennsylvania and picks up the real letters.

August 20th, he travels to Ottawa, Canada for the next Nation UN meeting.

He’s never felt more anxious in his life.

To his surprise, he’s allowed to travel by himself. As long as he checks into the UN building at the right time, his officials are fine with it.

“It’s a test,” Robert told him. “We want to see how this works out since it makes everything easier.”

America flies out on a commercial airline and checks into a local hotel. He knows that staying with Canada would probably be easier, but he didn’t have the guts to send him a telegram, not after their last exchange.

Somehow, even that was two years ago.

America stays in his hotel, wakes up early, goes running even though he hates it, bathes, and then arrives at the Canadian UN building anxious and jittery.

He walks inside feeling like he’s going to throw up. After checking in at the front desk, he’s led to where the assembly will take place.

There’s only one other person waiting.

Russia.

They make eye contact, and seeing him suddenly makes this situation feel more real. They’re about to exchange letters and possibly pass on information. They’re going to follow through with the plan. America actually has to talk to England, France, and Canada today.

He’s even closer to vomiting when Russia walks over, acting as aloof as ever.
“America, long time no see.”

He forces himself to return a smile. That’s all he can muster.

Russia either is oblivious to how uncomfortable he is or just ignores it. “The official letter exchange will be during the lunch break. One of my officials will be facilitating it.”

America fidgets. “I’ll provide the responses, then, at the next UN meeting.”

There’s a long pause.

“We both got here too early,” Russia mutters first.

America swallows. “We did.” We always do.

Canada walks in.

America feels his stomach clench up and finds his reaction almost comical. Somehow he feels more comfortable with Russia than him. Only months ago, he would have laughed at the notion.

Canada regards the two of them with a nod; then walks over to where he’ll be sitting. America follows him with his eyes.

“You can go talk to him,” Russia mutters.

“…”

“Go. Our officials will get suspicious the longer we interact.” With that, he retreats to a separate corner of the room.

America chews his lip and walks over to Canada, who seems surprised that he’s taking the initiative to start a conversation.

“Hey,” America says lamely.

Canada gives a tight smile. “Hi.”

He almost wants to blurt out everything that has happened but bites his tongue. Instead, he says, “Doesn’t hockey start up soon?”

Canada looks at the ground. “In September.”

“Cool.”

“Yeah.”

“So…” America says, trailing off, desperately searching for a new topic—something natural, something that will lead to discussions of letters and censorship and all that jazz.

Before he can think of one, France and England enter.

America wants to retreat to Russia’s corner.

France and England are talking to each other, but when they see him, they both pause mid-conversation. France smiles. England looks away.

Right. This is why they haven’t been talking to each other.
America can feel his blood boil but attempts to keep calm. “Hi,” he says, and it comes out more vicious than he intends.

The tone of his voice causes England to glance up, and he revels in it. Any self-control he previously had is now gone. “Haven’t seen or talked to you two in about two years,” he spits out. Something is screaming at him in the back of his mind to approach this more lightly. He ignores it.

“Alfred,” Canada starts, but America cuts him off.

“But whatever. Screw it. It doesn’t matter.” Except it does.

“You’ve been involved in the Korean War; that’s why we haven’t seen each other,” France says, putting up his hands and attempting to play off the situation.

*That* pisses America off.

Suddenly he’s the irrational one? Sure, his letters were being censored, and he was wrong to get worked up when he thought they weren’t responding to him, but this isn’t just his fault. France has only been caring about whether or not he has done anything for the plan these past three years and literally nothing else, and England has flat out refused to talk or even *look at him* at all. For no reason! America *still* has no idea what he did. And Canada! He’s just been passive in this, and somehow that’s equally, if not more, frustrating.

America feels his presence expanding. He tries to rein it in; tries to remain in control and think about Japan and South Korea to calm down because he knows they actually like him, and that there’s proof since they’ve been sending him letters these past weeks, and—

Russia forcefully slaps his shoulder.

“Please calm the fuck down,” he says through gritted teeth. “Your presence is giving me an immense headache.”

America nods mutely, dazed. Russia slaps his shoulder again, then walks back to his corner while France, England, and Canada all stare.

“Uh,” Canada says first.

America promptly leaves the room.

He’s not sure where he’s going. He passes Cuba in the hallway. He thinks he sees Robert. There are two other Nations that he barely catches.

When he sees a bathroom, he bolts inside.

His eyes have a red tint when he looks into the mirror. He rubs his face; then splashes water onto it, debating whether he should just wait in here until the meeting starts, questioning whether doing the letter exchange was really a good idea, wishing either Japan or South Korea were a part of the UN —

The door to the bathroom opens.


He grips the sink. “What?”

England awkwardly shuts the door and steps inside.
“What?”

“I’m sorry.”

His head snaps up.

“I’m sorry,” England repeats. He looks pale and sleep-deprived, and America feels lightheaded.

“What did I do wrong?” he whispers. He’s been racking his mind for years but can’t think of anything. Just, randomly one day England started ignoring him. That’s it.

England swallows. “Nothing.”

Well, that’s infuriating.

“Then what the fuck has this been for the past three years?” America yells. “It’s like it’s pre-World War One again when you acted like I didn’t exist!”

“I sent you a letter once, but you never responded,” England says weakly.

Now America is even more pissed off. He punches a wall and dents it.

“Jesus Christ, Alfred,” is what tumbles out of England’s mouth as he runs over.

America’s hand is bleeding, but it heals quickly.

“I never got your letter.”

England is frazzled. “But I—”

“I never got your letter because my officials have been censoring them.”

England’s expression scrunches up.

“I sent a bunch to you, Canada, and France, but when I talked to Canada, he only got like one or two of them.”

“I—I got one of them too,” England mumbles. “But it was kind of confusing. I…It took me a while, but I did respond. I swear, Alfred. But then you didn’t respond, so I thought you were still angry at me, so then I didn’t talk to you because,” he swallows, “I don’t know.”

“…”

“This is pretty stupid, isn’t it?”

“Why did you start ignoring me in the first place?” America mutters.

England looks like he’s going to vomit. “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?”

“…”

“I’m not a fucking kid anymore, Arthur! Don’t act like you’re my guardian.” America spits out the word. He hates England acting like a parental figure. It makes him feel like a child. It makes him feel belittled. All he wants is to be Arthur’s equal. God, ever since he was a kid, that’s all he’s wanted.
“I know I’m not your guardian anymore,” England chokes out. He sounds in disbelief. “This has nothing to do with that. This is—This is just me being stupid and our governments cutting off our communication.”

“…”

“Can we move past this? Please, Alfred. I—you have every right to be mad at me, but please.”

America achingly misses him so much it’s ridiculous—Canada and France too, but especially England.

“Alfred?”

He can’t make eye contact. “Fine.”

Without a moment of hesitation, England pulls him into an embrace. America hugs back, burying his face into England’s hair. He feels him tense up, and his presence does a weird thing, but he doesn’t pull away.

The hug is nice. Something in the back of his mind questions why those from Japan feel so different, though.

“It smells in here,” America mumbles after a while.

England’s voice is higher pitched than usual. “Yeah.”

They’re still holding each other.

America steps away first, rubbing his neck. “Should we head back?”

“Only if you want to,” England murmurs.

America stares at the dent he put into the wall. “Let’s go.”

They walk in silence, America feeling lightheaded when he passes by Robert for the second time, who is pacing for whatever reason.

France and Canada are in the corner when they return to the meeting room. They look up as he and England approach, both putting on wary expressions.

America feels queasy. England grabs his arm and tugs him forward.

“Sorry,” America mumbles when close. It’s the only thing he can think of to say.

Canada gives him a strained smile. “It’s not your fault. We have been insensitive to how the war would affect you, among other things.”

“…”

“At least it’s over now,” France tries. “The war.”

America swallows. “I guess.”

“I can only imagine how rough it must have been with Kor—uh, South Korea,” England gets out.

“Actually, we’re friends now.”
England blinks. “Oh.”

“I mean, we’re sending each other letters.” America thinks of the one he’s supposed to show to France. And also to Spain, technically, but God knows where he is.

Anxiety starts building up in his stomach.

Canada breaks his thoughts. “I think the letters you sent us in the past were being censored.”

“Yeah, I eventually figured that out myself.”

England shifts uncomfortably. Canada rubs his face. “All of this was just one big misunderstanding.” He grimaces. “Wonderful.”

“I’m going to confront someone about it.”

Canada frowns. “Don’t get in trouble.”

America’s mind flashes to the poison bullets, and abruptly, he feels unsure. Really unsure. What if they get angry that he knows? What if they shoot him again? The anxiety in his stomach starts to worsen. He tries to suppress it but fails, and to distract himself, he blurts out the first thought he has.

“What does the ‘F’ stand for?”

That catches the other three off guard.

“Excuse me?” England asks.

“In my name, the ‘F.’ What does it stand for?”

France actually laughs. “What made you think of that?”

America recalls the conversation he had years ago with South Korea. He shrugs, feeling like he doesn’t owe them an answer, and chews the inside of his cheek. It helps alleviate some of the anxiety.

England’s face is turning red. “Um.”

France elbows him in the ribs. “Come on, Arthur, what does it mean?” He’s smirking.

England starts to garble out something, but America doesn’t listen. He realizes he hasn’t really looked at France since the start of the Korean War. And shit, he seems back to normal now.

It could be a mask; he knows that. But seeing France show emotions other than exhaustion or contempt gives him a rush of relief he didn’t even know he was waiting for.

“A book character?”

“I’m awful at coming up with—don’t laugh at me, Francis!”

America makes eye contact with Canada. Canada smiles at him.

In that moment, everything feels like it might be okay.
The first half of the meeting passes relatively quickly.

America has to sit next to Russia, which is awkward and their presences clash against each other, but everything else runs smoothly.

It’s lunch break now.

America doesn’t even have time to look for England, Canada, and France before a Soviet official bounds over to him and Russia.

“My name’s Kazimir Gorelov,” the man says before America can even utter out a greeting. “I’ll be facilitating the letter exchange. Please step out into the hallway.”

America studies him, feeling a vague sort of recognition. The man looks young; he has bleach blonde hair and blue eyes, and America guesses he’s seen him around Russia before.

He mutely follows them both into the hallway.

They pass by some Soviet men, who glance at Kazimir as if asking whether they should accompany him, but he waves them off.

They’re outside now.

“Um,” America says. The sun is beating down on him.

Kazimir doesn’t respond. Instead, he thrusts the letters to Russia, who acts like he’s surprised, and all of them fall to the ground. Kazimir then, just, turns away as Russia shoves in an extra piece of paper, giving everything to America afterward. He finally looks back at them when that happens.

America has a headache, hoping that this man is trustworthy if Russia is enlisting his help. He takes the letters without a word and shoves them into his suit jacket.

They walk back inside.

“There’s a buffet set up that the other Nations are going to,” Kazimir says. He has the voice of a person who sounds like they constantly have a stick up their ass. “Let me escort you two to it.”

The room isn’t far, but it seems like it takes forever to get there.

Russia walks inside immediately, clearly wanting to get as far away from Kazimir as possible. It really doesn’t increase America’s confidence that he can be trusted.

Just as America is about to follow him, Kazimir pulls him to the side.

“Are you and Frank working together?”

America has never felt more caught off guard in his life. “What?”

Kazimir drops his arm. “Ah. Never mind.”

America knows he should walk away, knows he shouldn’t be talking to a Soviet, but his curiosity gets the better of him.

“Do you know Frank?” Christ, he hasn’t seen him since he bolted after the Korean War. He thought he quit. He probably has quit. How the hell does Kazimir know him?
Kazimir squirms. “Um, we’re both Nation Advisors, so we’ve talked a bit. Never mind. Forget I asked anything.

Robert picks that moment to show up.

America doesn’t feel like dealing with him. He tries to edge into the room with the other Nations.

“Wait,” Robert spits.

America flinches. His eyes fly down to Robert’s belt, but he doesn’t see a gun. It only relaxes him a bit.

Robert only half glances at Kazimir before he studies America. “I need to talk to you. Alone.”

“What, outside again?” America mutters.

“I will be,” Kazimir struggles to speak English, “leave the you, then.” He side-eyes Robert. “See you later.”

Robert looks weirdly shy. “Okay.”

America really wants to go into the room with the other Nations. Instead, Robert takes him down a deserted hallway.

“I’ll keep this short,” he hisses. “I’ve been put in charge of your letters now because that’s how shitty my job is, and I don’t know why the people in charge of you after Frank left were cutting off your communications, but I’m not going to do that anymore because I give less than a shit.”

Today has been a weird day.

America’s head is pounding. Of all people, he didn’t expect Suit Man to tell him about this. He’s not sure if he should thank him.

He opens his mouth.

“I’m going to go smoke. Have fun at lunch.”

Robert leaves him there.

Dazed, America finally stumbles into the buffet room. The fake letters and Russia’s note feel like they weigh a hundred pounds. Thinking about the real ones in his briefcase makes him want to vomit.

The only food left is a pitiful salad bar.

He chews his lip and scans the room, spotting Canada, France, England, Australia, and New Zealand all talking to each other.

America looks away. He should go over and talk to them, but now he’s hesitant. Hungry, too.

He backs up against the wall and lets his mind spin.

He doesn’t have to deliver these fake letters, but he does need responses, so shit, he does actually need to deliver these fake letters and explain that they’re fake. But that means he has to deliver the real letters with the fake letters, and France is maybe the only one he can deliver them to because that would require the least amount of clarification. Spain? God knows what’s happened to him.
Germany? Well, they bonded during their visit to Japan, but explaining *everything* would be difficult—awkward, too. Austria? If he explains the situation to Germany then maybe Germany can give the letters to him? But Finland is just ridiculous; how the hell is he—

France puts his hand on his shoulder. “Are you okay?”

America wills his heart rate to calm down. “Yeah. Sorry. Just thinking.”

“Did you eat anything?”

“No…”

“Well, you’re not missing much; this food is awful.” France pauses. “Do you want to come to Matthieu’s house for dinner? He invited all of us. Well, Australia and New Zealand can’t come because they have to catch a flight, but.”

America squirms. “As long as Matt is okay with it.”

“Why wouldn’t he be?”

“We were all fighting for, like, three years.”

“It was a misunderstanding. Here.” France grabs his arm and starts dragging him over to the other Nations.

America blinks.

This is how he used to act.

This is how he used to look.

New Zealand says something as they get within earshot.

America wants to believe that everything is getting better, that everyone is almost healed from the Second World War, that they’re actually going to do something for those Nations in Siberia.

But then he thinks of the poison bullets and is wracked with uncertainty.

The meeting ends at 5 PM.

America is ravenous, and he’s almost thankful because it kind of distracts him from the letters in his briefcase.

Kind of.

“When do you have to go back to the states?” Canada asks him as they walk to his apartment.

America swallows. “I have a flight from here to D.C. that leaves around 8 AM tomorrow.”

“Ah.” He looks at England and France. “What about you two?”

“Our flights are both at 10 AM,” England answers.

They make small talk for the rest of the way.
When they reach the apartment building, America feels as though he’s been punched in the gut. He knows he has to bring up the letters soon and tries to remain calm. They take an elevator that feels like it crawls at a snail’s pace; then finally reach Canada’s apartment and step inside.

The other three take off their suit jackets and hang them up. America keeps his on. The fake letters and Russia’s note feel like they’re burning a hole in his pocket.

“You can take off your jacket,” Canada says slowly.

“Uh…”

England frowns. “What’s wrong?”

America opens his mouth; then swallows and opens his briefcase. He fishes out the letters and holds them up. The three give him confused expressions.

“What are those?” England asks.

“Letters.” America’s voice is high pitched.

“From who?”

“Prussia.”

France drops his bag.

The only word England can get out is, “How?”

America stares at the ground. “There was a mix-up in Korea,” he chokes out. “Yong-Soo and I were sent out to track down the northern Nation Avatar, but Russia, China, Prussia, Hungary, Estonia, and Lithuania were also sent to find him, and we ran into each other, and they were defenseless, so Yong-Soo and I captured all of them and brought them to an American base, but it wasn’t the base we originally planned to go to after we got North Korea since we didn’t know we would have to transport that many Nations, so no one at this base knew that Nations existed, so then Yong-Soo left me alone and in charge and I was able to talk to them?”

The other three are staring at him in disbelief.

“So first I talked to Russia and China, which was weird and awkward as hell, and somehow ended up mentioning the plan, and then China persuaded Russia to help if I could get Kiku and Yong-Soo’s assistance eventually, I don’t know, I haven’t even mentioned the plan to those two yet, but then I thought of this whole letter thing because of our letters being censored to each other, so basically I set up an official exchange where the Nations would write fake letters to be censored, and then Russia agreed to slip me the real letters plus any bits of information for the plan during the actual exchanges, which is what happened today when I left the room with him, and—”

France pulls him into a forceful embrace.

“Thank you.” His voice is shaking. “My God, Alfred, thank you.”

“Was it just Prussia that wrote anything?” Canada asks as France pulls away, grabbing the letters from his hand.

America fidgets. “No. Hungary and Estonia also wrote some, but I have no idea how I’m going to deliver those. The one Prussia wrote to you, Francis, is also addressed to Spain, but.”
France swallows, clutching the letter. “I’ll save it and give it to him when—whenever we see him again.”

England looks anxious. “Wait, so Russia and China know about the plan?”

“Yes, I—I thought telling Russia was what I was supposed to do.”

“But China now knows?”

America squirms. “He was attached to Russia’s hip; I had no choice but to tell him.”

“You couldn’t have put them in separate rooms?”

America’s mind flashes back to when Russia was clutching China’s corpse like his world was ending.

Canada frowns. “Arthur, we need all the help we can get.”

“You have to understand that the more people know about this; the more at risk we are.” England tugs at his hair. “These other letters, do you have to deliver the censored ones? What’s even in them?”

America swallows. “I don’t have to deliver anything, technically. I’m just handed the censored versions to pass them out.”

“Well, we can’t just give them to the other Nations without explaining the entire plan!”

“I—I know.”

“We can wait,” Canada says calmly, “To deliver these letters until we have a more concrete plan and feel as though we can explain the entire situation to them.”

France is clutching Prussia’s letter and crying.

“The recipients are allowed to write responses, though,” America gets out. “Censored and real versions. So if I don’t deliver any, then the Nations in Siberia won’t get responses.”

England is rubbing France’s back. Canada frowns. “Well, we can’t jeopardize the plan.”

“…”

“If you find an optimal moment to give them the letters; then do it. But I would be patient.”

He leaves America and walks over to France.

Feeling numb, America takes out the note Russia slipped him.

…

20 August 1953

Alfred,

I don’t know why you blocked the bullet. My officials don’t know why you blocked the bullet.

But, thank you I guess.
I don’t know you, Alfred, besides from our awkward interactions in London during the Second World War. I’m not great with other Nations, either, but I’m willing to try and work together.

They’re torturing my sisters. If we can do anything to stop that, I’ll be in your debt.

Yao and I currently see each other regularly. I don’t know how long this will last, but I’ll try to make the best out of this situation. Right now, we’re thinking of possible escape routes out of Siberia. How we’re going to break the Nations out is another story. I may need your help for that in the future.

Also, remember you have to get Japan and South Korea’s help so we can all travel across the United States together, I guess. Yao really wants to see them. Please.

You said that England, France, and Canada were figuring out where to house the Nations once they escape, so I’m not going to even think about that. I also don’t know if you have a deadline on when you want this ‘plan’ accomplished by—so let me know.

Update me at the next exchange.

-Ivan

Kazimir is an asshole, and I’m using him, so don’t listen to a word he says.

France is still crying. England and Canada are comforting him.

America doesn’t know what to do with himself.

Hey Francis and Antonio,

I’m still alive, so that’s pretty neat. You two can’t get rid of me that easily. Alfred just handed me some paper and a pen and told me I could write to you, and honestly, I have no idea what to say.

Russia sucks, but I don’t want to bore you with those details, or guilt trip you guys in any way. Please don’t worry about me and fuck up your relations with your governments. What I—what we did, Antonio, during the Second World War—it was different. I’ll be fine. I’ll see you guys again someday.

Did you know that Hitler snorted crack? That’s your Fun Fact of the day.

Let’s see—I’ve been in Korea for the past four or so years. Lately, it’s been hard to keep track of time. I think, now that this war is over, I’ll be going back to Siberia. I have a nice cell there that I lie in basically half-dead the entire time, so it isn’t that bad.

Shit, no more talk about Siberia. I’m done.

Alfred said that you two would be able to respond to me, so I guess I’ll ask some questions?
1. This isn’t a question, rather a demand; tell me how football in Germany is going.
2. How’s reconstruction going in your countries?
3. That’s really all I got
4. Let’s do happy topics, all right? I need a pick me up. Tell me about happy things

At that moment, I’m sitting on the ground, writing this letter, and my ass hurts. Thought you should know.

How is

I don’t know what I’m writing

I really want this to be happy, fuck, but just let me rant a bit, okay?

When I almost died (for the third time wow! that’s my life!) I thought I saw Bavaria again.

I never I’ve never told anyone exactly what happened, but he turned into dust right before my eyes. Like, I act like it doesn’t bother me, but it does.

It was after Ludwig was officially announced as the new German Nation Avatar. He was little, so he went to bed early. There was this celebration going on at the Berlin City Palace. Officials were in one room, and Nations were in the other. After some time, I went to check on him, and when I came back to the party, only Bavaria was there. I thought everyone was playing a trick on me. They weren’t, and I knew they weren’t when I saw the discarded clothing.

I don’t know why Bavaria hung back, but he did, and then he started talking to me and telling me that I should die too. He knew how afraid I was of this German reunification. I didn’t want to die. I still don’t want to die! But Bavaria did, and he just—turned to dust!

And you know, for a second, I thought I could let go too—let go of everything and turn to dust. So I started to dissolve. I let my hand disappear, and for two seconds everything seemed peaceful until reality hit. So I stopped dissolving and then bled out on the carpet.

Do not ever tell Ludwig this. He doesn’t know.

He’s already seen me dissolve the other two times and doesn’t need to know that there was a third

That entire situation has fucked me up and is probably the reason why I’ve clung to life after both the end of the First and Second World War. I don’t know. But if that shit story means anything, know that if I start dissolving again, I’ll cling to life, dammit.

Just wait for me. We’ll ride out this situation together. Wait for me, don’t do anything brash, and I’ll keep my shitty body intact.

That rhymed. Cool.

Gilbert

…

On September 7, 1953, Khrushchev officially becomes the head leader of the USSR. Some people
in the US think that he’s causing a rift to form between China and the Soviet Union. They’re happy.

America isn’t.

He hopes Russia can keep in contact with China.

The letter exchange continues.

Only France is receiving his.

…

12.7.1953

Roderich,

I don’t really know where I’m going with this letter, so you’ll have to bear with me. It’s funny, I used to write so much in my diaries, but I guess I’m now out of practice.

I think, how

How’s life treating you? Alfred mentioned your country was being occupied by the Allies, so I hope that that’s working out and that you don’t get split up like Germany. (That’s a lot of ‘thats’. Wow.)

Want to know something amazing? I ‘officially’ represent East Germany now. There was a ceremony and everything for it.

Yay! I’m not dying anytime soon!

Right now I’m in Korea. Yeah. A part of this ‘Secret Nation Army.’ It’s actually called that.

Liz is here with me. She says hi. Okay, no she didn’t, but she’s writing you a letter as well.

She looks really good right now. Her hair has grown back, and she doesn’t look anything like what we saw when we were Nazis. I mean, this situation sucks, but she’s better, Roderich.

I really hope you and Ludwig are doing better too.

I can’t believe years have passed already. I hope you’re all moving on. I hope this is an era of peace.

I miss you so much it hurts. I promise that I’ll come back to annoy your ass. Sometimes I remember your music and hum it to myself to keep me going. And shut up, I know that’s really cheesy, but I do it anyway.

I wish we could have talked more when I came back to Berlin.

I wish so many things could have gone differently in the war.

But most of all, I wish I could have saved you and Ludwig too. I’m sorry I could only do anything
for Francis. You don’t know how sorry I am.

Honestly, I’m overwhelmed at the chance to write to you, so I don’t know what else to say.

I’m sorry we never got to surrender to the Americans. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.

I’ll write again. Just wait for me, okay?

Gilbert

…

1953 comes and goes, and soon it’s 1954.

America finally feels like his and England’s relationship has returned to normal. And now that he’s no longer in Korea, he goes to Europe often and is seeing him, France, and Canada a lot more.

The letters keep coming from Japan and South Korea. Robert seemed genuine in that things are no longer being censored.

America still doesn’t tell the two of them about the plan, though.

He doesn’t deliver the letters to the other Nations, either, and tells himself he’s just waiting for the right moment.

Not that he knows what that’ll even look like.

…

12.7.1953

Ludwig,

How are you doing?

The last time I saw you, you didn’t look great. I hope you’ve recovered. I hope that Germany is recovering.

If you can’t sense what’s going on in East Germany The Soviets have officially proclaimed

Have you got a dog yet? I know you wanted one after what happened to Blume. And name the next dog something manlier than Blume. You should get a German Shepard. They’re pretty cool. What breed did we have last time? Shit, I forget, sorry. You know I’m not a dog person.

You know what is my thing? Birds. Which you already know, but holy shit come on, Ludwig, we should train some pigeons. They have pigeon contests! That actually exists! We’re doing that when I come home; you just wait.

I hope that the Nazis haven’t ruined your self perception of what ‘nationalism’ is and your identity as a Nation. You were literally forced to follow Hitler’s orders, and who were you to question him.
I hope you’re not mentally berating yourself about the things that happened during the war because you’re such a caring person who really means well.

I’ll be out before you know it!

Gilbert

I’m so sorry.

...

On May 7, 1954, the Viet Minh defeat the French at Dien Bien Phu in Indochina, causing France to withdraw and leave four independent states: Cambodia, Laos, and what becomes North Vietnam and South Vietnam. The US stations itself in the South and the USSR in the North. The Geneva Accords calls for free elections to unite Vietnam, but none of the major Western powers want this to occur, in the likely case that the Viet Minh, or Nationalist Communists, will win.

So now the US wants to send troops.

It’s agreed that America won’t ever be setting foot there, though.

On August 11, 1954, the CCP starts shelling various Taiwanese islands.

America is finally being sent back to Asia.

Chapter End Notes
America is shaken awake.

His eyes fling open, and when he looks around, it’s only Robert hovering over him.

“What’s wrong?” he choke out.

“There’s been a change of plans.” Robert looks exhausted.

“What?”

“We’re stopping in Tokyo first before we continue to Taipei.”

America’s head is spinning. “Why?”

Robert gives him an annoyed look. “Hell if I know.”

He leaves America alone and confused in the cabin.

The noise of the plane hitting the runway is what wakes him up again.

They land right outside of Tokyo and take a car into the city. America barely knows what day it is. The clock says it’s one in the afternoon, but his body is telling him it’s the dead of morning.

Supposedly, it’s August 12th too. That seems like a lie.

“Why are we in Japan?” he asks when they’re almost at the National Diet building, this time hoping for an answer. The Diet building is where they’ll be meeting everyone. America has no idea who ‘everyone’ is, but he assumes Japan is included.

“Because there was a change of plans,” Robert mutters.

America wants to punch him.

They arrive fifteen minutes later, and members of the Japanese delegation accompany them inside. Right as America steps into the lobby, though, three new escorts pop out of the nowhere and beg him to come with them.

“To where?” one of Robert’s assistants asks.

“To the Nation room,” a Japanese man quickly responds in heavily accented English.

As Robert starts talking to them, America is dragged away, down the hallway and into a meeting room, before he can say anything.

In there is South Korea, Japan, and Hong Kong.

They all look up when they see him. America blinks in confusion at Japan and South Korea’s
relieved expressions. Hong Kong, on the other hand, appears more annoyed.

The escorts don’t even say anything; they just dip their heads and practically slam the door shut.

America feels like he needs to sleep for a year. “My officials have refused to tell me why the fuck I’m here and not in Taipei, so if any of you have an explanation…”

He makes eye contact with Japan, but South Korea stands up and cuts off their view of each other as he walks over. “We’re still going to Taiwan,” he says, making arm gestures. America realizes he hasn’t seen him in a year and feels a little overwhelmed.

South Korea slings his arm around his shoulders.

America glances at him, bewildered. “Uh.”

“Our officials seem to think that the current situation in the Taiwan Strait has created the ‘perfect’ opportunity for a ‘Nation Avatar get together,’ so right now all of the ‘Asian Allies’ of the United States are going to Taiwan, together, for some ‘symbolic’ reason, while our leaders negotiate.”

South Korea is sneering at Japan, and America scrunches up his eyebrows when he notices how irritated Japan looks. He shrugs off South Korea’s arm and takes a step back. As he does, Japan moves closer to him. South Korea smirks.

“Cut it out,” Hong Kong spits in English, his British accent thick as ever.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” South Korea responds in a singsong voice.

“Kiku, I finished that book you mailed me,” America blurs out after Japan glares at the floor. “The astronomy one. It was really cool; where’d you find it?”

He shyly looks at him. “I recently organized my personal belongings and happened to stumble across it.”

America finds himself smiling genuinely, all of his worries starting to melt away. Something in the back of his mind is screaming about the plan, but he ignores it. “Well, thank you!”

“It’s really no problem…”

“I wish I knew that I was coming here in advance because then I would have brought some books in return, but God forbid. There’s this really cool one I found recently which I know you’d like. I’ll definitely mail it out soon.”

“Thank you, Alfred,” Japan murmurs.

America turns to South Korea, who’s staring at them with a weird expression. “I also found a new board game.”

He perks up. “I did too!”

“Really? What—”

Hong Kong groans.

America looks at him. “Why the hell are you even here?”

“Don’t ask me; it was probably England’s idea.” He spits out his name in disgust.
America frowns. “You know he had no say in this.”

“What the fuck would you know?”

“I know that Arthur has no jurisdiction over shit like this. He wouldn’t deliberately send you here either because he’s not an asshole.”

Hong Kong stands up, and the chair nearly gets knocked over. “Not an asshole? NOT AN ASSHOLE? THE FUCK WOULD YOU KNOW? YOU’RE THE MODEL COLONY.”

“What does that even mean?! I’m the first colony to not be a goddamn colony anymore!”

South Korea tries to cut in, but Hong Kong ignores him. “All he does is compare everyone to you. The favorite child.”

America tastes bile. “I’m not his child.”

“Well, you’re something!”

“You don’t even have to see him anymore,” South Korea finally interjects. “You now have the body of an adult and live in Hong Kong full time, so stop being a whining brat and drop this.”

Hong Kong flinches and sits down again. Japan has edged over near America. His expression is stony while South Korea looks flat out annoyed.

The atmosphere is uncomfortable.

“Arthur didn’t sell you out during the war,” America finds himself saying, knowing that’s the root of Hong Kong’s hatred.

“Yeah, but when I screamed his name because I was terrified of being taken to Japan, all he did was stare at me with an utterly blank expression.”

Now both South Korea and Japan look nauseous, and America feels bad for even bringing up the war in the first place.

“Can any of you do origami?” he blurts out after a few moments, noticing a paper sculpture in the corner of the room.

All three of them give him baffled looks.

America points to the sculpture, feeling stupid.

Japan’s skin returns to a normal color. He gives him an amused smile. “Yes, I can.”

South Korea rubs his face. “Only because Yao would make us do it for hours.”

“Yeah, because you’d beg him.”

“Shut up.”

America laughs, only briefly glancing at Hong Kong when he sees him staring at the ground. “Well, I have no artistic talent, so I’m jealous.”

Japan gives him a warm smile. “You have talent.”
“In what?”

“Your photography. It’s beautiful.”

America rubs the back of his neck. “I wouldn’t call it that.”

Robert slams the door open before he can say anything else.

“We’re leaving.”

“Now?” he mutters after all four of them jump.

Robert looks like he’s about to drop dead. For the first time, America notices how greasy he looks and can only guess what his own appearance is like. “Yeah. It’s going to take four hours, so hurry the hell up and follow me.”

South Korea glares at him. “All of us?” he asks in English.

“All of you.”

They follow Robert into the hallway where there’s an escort waiting. From there, they’re taken to the airport, then put on the plane. While America’s exhaustion starts to hit him, he doesn’t sleep since talking to Japan is much more fun. The hours actually seem to fly by during the flight too. Thankfully, there’s no arguing either since South Korea dozes off while Hong Kong angrily engrosses himself in a book.

They arrive around 5 PM.

The car waiting for them in Taipei is small; only five people can fit.

Hong Kong takes the seat next to the driver while America, South Korea, and Japan climb into the back. Even though he’s the tallest, America takes the middle seat because he doesn’t want Japan and South Korea to fight.

It’s as the car starts that America’s exhaustion finally catches up to him. His internal clock is now even more screwed up too, considering Taipei is an hour behind Tokyo.

South Korea, on the other hand, is wide-awake. He’s moving around in his seat, staring at the passing buildings. “Wow, everything’s really modern here.”

America yawns. “Yeah, in Taipei especially.”

“When’s the last time you were here?”

“Uh, 1950? So it’s been four years.”

“What’s Taiwan like?”

“She’s just a little kid.” America yawns again.

“You can fall asleep,” Japan murmurs. “I’ll wake you up when we get there.”

America shakes his head. “It’s fine; I won’t be able to wake up again if I do.” He shifts. “Plus, I
have nothing to lean my head on.”

Japan looks away. “You could use my shoulder.”

America feels the back of his neck heat up and is confused at his own reaction. He stares out the window.

Midway through the drive, though, his head starts bobbing up and down. He eventually drifts off into a light slumber, his face pressed into Japan’s neck.

He’s halfway between sleep and consciousness when he hears South Korea say something to Hong Kong.

“Why the hell are you always using English?”

“Because that’s what I’m supposed to speak…”

“How?”

Hong Kong garbles something, and America shakes himself awake just as the car pulls up to the Presidential Office Building.

Robert greets them as they go inside, looking even worse than before. With him and the other American officials are members of the Japanese, South Korean, and Hong Kongese delegations. Taiwanese officials then lead them into a meeting room, and inside more members are waiting.

America sees a little girl and does a double take.

It’s Taiwan.

She’s aged, decently, and America feels like he’s gaping. He forces himself to look away and makes eye contact with Japan, who seems just as surprised.

Apparently, the Taiwanese officials are going to give some sort of presentation about international relations, and then have a separate discussion with US officials about the crisis currently going on. At least, that’s what America interprets from the conversations going on around him.

He and the other Nations are led to the row of seats where they’ll be sitting. Taiwan is already in her chair down at the end.

She appears miserable.

As they approach, she looks up, and a moment of recognition suddenly passes over her face. “I—I know you!” She’s standing and pointing at them now.

“Ms. Xiao, sit down,” one Taiwanese official yells.

Taiwan looks like she’s been slapped. She follows orders and bows her head.

America feels angry, but he suppresses it and walks over, taking a seat next to her.

“Hey.” He tries to keep his voice soft

Taiwan’s hair is covering her eyes, so he can’t see her face, but he hears her sniffle.

“Government officials are always stingy; don’t worry about it,” America murmurs.
“That’s Mr. Zhang. He’s always mean.”

America points. “Well, you see that man in the suit over there?” Taiwan looks up. “That’s Robert. He’s awful.”

She giggles.

“What’s so funny?”

“Your language is silly sounding.”

America smiles. “Yeah.”

He looks to his right and sees both Japan and South Korea hovering. Hong Kong has already taken his seat at the other end of the row, and somehow he’s managing to look even more miserable than Taiwan.

She in question also looks to America’s right. “That’s Kiku and Leon, right? I remember meeting you guys. Who’s the other man?”

“That’s South Korea. His human name’s Im Yong-Soo.”

Taiwan nods, digesting the information.

America’s stomach growls obnoxiously.

Taiwan blinks; then giggles. America laughs along with her, causing a few heads to turn in their direction.

He sees some Taiwanese man, he thinks it’s ‘Mr. Zhang,’ talking to Robert; looking in their direction. Everyone’s now starting to take their seats, and America sighs, bracing himself for a long, boring presentation.

But then he’s thrown for a loop.

Taiwanese officials approach them. “You Nations are permitted to leave and skip this meeting. Be back by 7 PM.”

It’s Japan who asks for clarification. “I’m sorry, what?”

“You’re permitted to leave. You can go.”

America blinks in confusion.

Robert walks over, almost annoyed. “It’s pointless for you to watch this presentation, so we’re excusing you. Go.”

Baffled, America stands up. He and the other Nations are then practically herded from the room, outside and through a back entrance.

They all stand on the street.

“What the fuck?” Hong Kong blurts out. For once, America agrees with him.

“We don’t even know what’s around here;” South Korea says in disbelief.
Taiwan pipes up. “There’s a fishing market nearby!” She cocks her head. “Can we go there?”

America blinks. “Sure, why not. Do you know the way?”

She nods. “Yeah!”

Before America can say anything else, she skips ahead, rapidly gesturing them.

“She’s aged a lot,” Japan murmurs as they start following her. He’s next to America.

America tries to suppress a yawn, but he’s unsuccessful. “I know. I guess they’re forcing her to grow up.”

“Was she not this old before?” South Korea asks, walking on his other side. Hong Kong is behind them, dragging his feet.

America shakes his head. “She looked to be about five when I last saw her; not nine or ten.”

The sun starts to set as they walk further away from the building. With that brings cooler temperatures and some slight relief from the oppressive humidity, and as a result, the streets begin to get more crowded.

“We should all speak in Mandarin,” Japan murmurs after America calls out to Taiwan in English, urging her to stay close to them. For once South Korea doesn’t argue, and they all agree to switch languages.

The locals stare at them as they walk down the street, mainly because they stick out like a sore thumb. Taiwan’s wearing a fancy dress, the other four are wearing suits, America’s the only white dude in the vicinity, and then there’s the fact they’re speaking Mandarin and not the local Taiwanese Hokkien or Japanese left over from the colonial period.

“Taiwa—Mei, don’t get too far ahead,” America yells after she nearly disappears.

She seems a bit confused as to why he’s not speaking English, but she doesn’t question it and trots back over to them.

A minute later, she turns to South Korea. “You know, I never introduced myself. Hello. I’m Xiao Mei; nice to meet you.”

South Korea looks taken aback by her politeness. He then laughs. “Hi. I’m Im Yong-Soo; nice to meet you too.”

“Wait, you’re also using Mandarin. Do you normally speak it?”

“Nope, I speak Korean. But like Alfred said, we’re in public, so we need to use one language.”

She whips her head towards America. “You almost called me Taiwan. Why’d you do that? Is that a Western thing? They told me about that.”

America rubs the back of his neck. “I guess it is.”

“Why?”

America laughs awkwardly. “I don’t know. I didn’t make the ‘Western rules.’” He cringes as soon as that phrase comes out of his mouth.
Taiwan doesn’t seem to care. “Why didn’t you make the rules?”

“Oh.” South Korea is giving him a shit-eating grin while Japan looks amused. “Because I was a colony? I’m not as old as the other Western Nations.”

Taiwan nods, digesting the information. “Then, are there colony rules?”

“I guess?”

Taiwan grabs onto his arm and starts jumping up and down. “What?!”

“Oh…” America’s mind blanks, and before he can think, what slips out of his mouth is, “I had this huge portrait of England.”

“Holy shit, wait,” Hong Kong blurts out. “Others—Others have these too?”

South Korea starts howling with laughter.

America blinks. “Even with as young as you are, his officials still insisted on giving you the portrait?”

“Yes?! What the actual fuck!?”

“I—well, it’s a colony thing, but I would have thought—all of his colonies have his portrait. I threw mine out during the colonial period, but.”

South Korea is still laughing. “How big are these things?”

America fake coughs. “Ten feet.”

“Ten feet?”

“You don’t even know how big that is,” Japan mutters as South Korea nearly starts crying from laughing so hard.

Hong Kong’s face is pink with either anger or embarrassment. One of the two. “I thought I was the only one who had that hideous thing.”

America rubs the back of his neck. “Well, now you know you’re not alone.”

“Who—Who the hell mass-produces giant portraits of themselves?” South Korea gasps in between laughter.

“What, you’re telling me Yao never gave you his portrait?”

“Not ten feet of it.”

Japan rolls his eyes. “You still don’t know how big that is.”

Taiwan jumps up and down. “Then how big is it?”

“Almost two of me,” America says sheepishly.

South Korea starts laughing even harder. “Wait, then how the hell does it fit in your house, Leon?”

“It’s in the foyer,” Hong Kong mumbles, his cheeks turning a darker shade of pink.
“It’s featured *that* prominently?”

Before Hong Kong or America can respond, they turn the corner and are suddenly right smack in the middle of the market.

A person with a food cart almost runs into America. Japan blindly grabs his arm and yanks him back.

There are stalls scattered throughout the square and boats lined up along the coast. Shopkeepers are calling out to people, urging them to buy whatever they’re selling. It’s loud and slightly overwhelming.

America doesn’t realize Japan is holding his wrist until Taiwan pries his hand away. He takes a surprised step back while Japan’s cheeks turn pink. Neither have time to say anything, though, and South Korea can’t get in a comment because Taiwan grabs both his and Japan’s arms.

“TO THE MARKET!” she screams, dragging them into the crowd.

South Korea and Japan twist their heads to look at America. He grins and waves at them. Japan practically glares at him. South Korea gives him the Korean equivalent of the middle finger.

Once they disappear, he and Hong Kong stand there for a while until America can’t help but say something.

“Why’s your name Leon?” he asks in English. It’s the only question that comes to him since his sleep-deprived brain is slowly turning into a pile of mush.

Hong Kong kicks a pebble. “Because England named me it,” he responds, also in English.

America frowns. “…Do you like it?”

“No.”

“Then why don’t you change it?”

Hong Kong glares at him. “I can’t do that.”

“Why not? Who’s stopping you?”

Hong Kong opens his mouth to say something, and then closes it, thinking. “I dunno,” he ends up mumbling.

America yawns. Some people pass them and stare.

“Why do you care?” Hong Kong abruptly asks.

America rubs the back of his neck. “Because no one should have a name they dislike?”

“…”

“Listen, I know you hate me, but really. You can change your name. I’m sure England wasn’t thinking when he picked it. Like, apparently he named me after a fictional character.”

Hong Kong refuses to make eye contact with him.

America sighs and scans the crowd. Just as he spots the other three, though, Hong Kong mutters in
Cantonese, “I like Lei Kha Loung.”

“What?”

Hong Kong squirms. “For another name.”

“Well, I can call you that if you want me to.”

Hong Kong kicks another pebble. America looks around again.

“Okay,” Hong Kong whispers. He almost misses it.

Some minutes later, Taiwan bolts from the crowd, holding a bag of oysters.

“LOOK WHAT I HAVE!” she exclaims. Japan and South Korea are warily trailing her.

America laughs. “Where’d you get the money?” he asks the two of them, back in Mandarin.

“She had it,” Japan says in disbelief.

Taiwan holds up the bag, grinning. “We’re going to have a feast tonight!”

South Korea cracks up.

America sees the sun setting more rapidly. He checks his watch, then realizes it’s still on US time. His head feels hazy. “Hey, we should head back.”

Everyone nods in agreement.

It’s as they start walking that Taiwan runs up to Hong Kong and commands his attention. He actually plays along with her.

America stares into space. He knows he’s part of the reason why Hong Kong dislikes him. He’s never been mean to him, but he also hasn’t gone out of his way to ever talk to him either, especially when England was there. He’s not a bad person, clearly. He’s just been hit with unfortunate event after unfortunate event. He’s never had too many interactions with Nations outside of the Commonwealth, has had his identity stripped from him, has been ignored by England, then shipped across the world after the British sold him to the Japanese…

No wonder he’s always so bitter.

Taiwan points to something. Hong Kong smiles.

Japan touches America’s arm. “Alfred.”

He jumps a bit. “Yeah?”

“Are you okay?”

America blinks. “I’m fine. Just…God, I’m exhausted.”

Japan frowns. “The nap in the car didn’t help?”

He rubs his eyes. “No.”

“I shouldn’t have kept you awake on the plane…”
“I wanted to talk to you, though,” America says quickly.

Japan avoids eye contact.

“It’s been a while since we’ve seen each other in person,” America murmurs.

“When we get back, you should sleep.”

“But what if I want to talk to you more?”

Japan’s cheeks turn pink. He gives America a playful shove. “You need to go to bed.”

South Korea is suddenly behind them. “Don’t make me into a third wheel.”

Japan drops his hands and glares at him. America rolls his eyes. “You’re not a third wheel.”

“Yeah. Alright.”

Taiwan breaks off her conversation with Hong Kong. “Am I a third wheel?!”

Japan mumbles something. South Korea laughs. “No, Mei.”

“Is Leon one?!”

The two of them bant the entire way back while Japan mutters to himself.

America amusingly watches.

He almost misses when Hong Kong leans over and tells Taiwan to call him Kha Loung.
When they arrive at the Presidential Office Building, the Taiwanese officials don’t even blink at the random bag of oysters they’re carrying.

After a quick dinner that seems to blur by, America is shown to his own room. He’s then told he has a meeting at noon but doesn’t hear the rest.

He passes out as soon as his head hits the pillow.

He wakes up at three in the morning because he feels like he’s being watched.
At first, America thinks he’s still dreaming when he sees Taiwan three feet away from his bed. When he sees her eyes tinted red, though, he snaps himself out of his haze.

“Mei?”

Taiwan jumps. As they make eye contact, hers fill with tears.

“It hurts,” she whimpers, “and your presence was making it better, so I—I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be here.”

It takes America a moment to register what she’s talking about before he remembers the on-going situation in the strait.

He sits up. She steps back, appearing scared.

“Don’t worry, I’m not mad,” America murmurs. His voice cracks and his breath tastes a little foul, but he ignores both. “I know it hurts. I’m sorry; it will be over soon.”

“…”

“Here, let’s go back to your room. I’ll stay with you until you fall asleep, okay?”

She sniffs, then nods.

America stands up, thankful he has a t-shirt and pajama pants on, and takes her hand. He then leads her into the hallway.

Halfway to her room, they nearly run into Japan.

“Kiku, what are you doing up?” America asks, surprised.

“I couldn’t sleep.” He frowns. “Is everything okay?”

“Yeah. She’s just in pain, though, and my presence was helping. I was going to stay with her until she falls asleep.”

Japan studies him. “Did she wake you up?”

Taiwan squeezes America’s hand tighter.

America feels like he’s going to pass out. “Yeah. It’s fine.”

“Alfred,” Japan murmurs. The way he says his name causes America to feel weird. “You need to sleep.”

“I will. Once she’s comfortable.”

Taiwan fidgets.

“I can come with you two, then,” Japan nearly whispers.

America looks at Taiwan. “Do you want Kiku to come with us?”

She nods.

They make it back to her room, and Taiwan climbs into her bed. As America tucks her in, he’s
shocked to see how different everything is. Four years ago there were toys everywhere. Now it’s void of anything that looks remotely fun. The only bit of color, besides for the ugly yellow walls, is a vase with pink flowers.

He and Japan kneel beside her.

Taiwan sniffles. “My chest hurts.”

“Don’t focus on it,” America murmurs. “Here, I can tell you a story. Do you want that?”

She nods slowly.

America has no idea what to tell.

He’s exhausted, and his brain is slow, and he hates the awkward silence. That’s why, “Did you know that Sika deer are a species of deer native to much of East Asia,” tumbles out of his mouth.

Japan bursts out laughing.

He covers his mouth, looking embarrassed as Taiwan giggles at him.

America feels his face turn red. “Scratch that. Let’s talk about Cinderella. Do you know her?”

“Who?”

America tries his best at retelling the Disney version of the story, and by the end, Taiwan’s asleep.

America and Japan watch her.

“It’s more like an office in here than a little girl’s room,” America whispers. He can feel his eyes beginning to droop.

Japan glances at him. “You’re good with children.”

“Not really…”

“Well, you’re better than I am,” Japan murmurs.

They look at each other, and Japan smiles so that his eyes crinkle. America suddenly feels warm.

He looks away, feeling flustered. “Should I stay here?” He frowns. “I don’t want her to be in pain again…”

“You need to sleep.”

“But so does she.”

“…”

“I could lie on the floor next to her,” America tries.

“You won’t be able to sleep that way.”

“If you stay with me, I could.”

The sentence leaves America’s mouth before he can think about it. All Japan does is stare at him.
“I sleep better when you’re with me,” America gets out.

Japan ducks his head and rubs the back of his neck. “You do?”

“Yeah, your presence is really nice…”

Except now Japan’s presence is doing something weird.

“You—You don’t have to stay,” America says quickly. “Sorry, I don’t want to guilt you into—”

“We can make a makeshift bed,” Japan blurts out. “With blankets.”

America blinks. “You sure?”

“I’m sure,” Japan chokes out.

There’s a pile of blankets stacked in the corner, so they grab and arrange them on the floor, next to Taiwan. They then both lie down next to each other, only inches in between.

America can feel himself drifting off immediately, feeling much more comfortable than he did back in his own room.

He closes his eyes.

After a couple of minutes, Japan must think he’s asleep because he moves his arm so that it brushes up against his. America can feel him pause, and then start to rub tiny circles into his skin.

He drifts off, something in the back of his head telling him friends don’t do this.

It gets buried alongside any thoughts about the plan.

________________________________________________________________________________________

He wakes up to someone pounding on the door.

Mr. Zhang walks in just as America opens his eyes. They make eye contact, and it’s clear the man is confused.

“They helped me get to sleep,” Taiwan blurts out, sitting up. “I’m sorry.”

Japan is still next to America, currently pressed up against his side. Mr. Zhang stares at them. America stares back, his head spinning. He then nudges Japan and stands up, who disorientedly cracks open his eyes.

“Sorry,” America blurts out. He’s not sure who he’s apologizing to.

“It’s 9 AM,” Mr. Zhang gruffly responds. “Breakfast is being prepared. Be in the dining room by 9:30.”

America nods. Japan looks startled. Taiwan nearly coughs up blood onto her bed.

________________________________________________________________________________________

The day blurs by.
Mostly, America’s forced to attend meeting after meeting while South Korea, Japan, and Hong Kong stay with Taiwan. He wishes he could hang out with them, but at least being at the meeting allows him to overhear a conversation between Mr. Zhang and Robert.

“I think she trusts them. So as long as they stick together, we would feel okay sending her to some future UN events to be there as a symbol of our independence.”

Robert rubs his face. “I’ll see if I can arrange something.”

At dinner, America finally has a break. Though he knows he’s getting on another plane and heading to Australia once it’s finished, he tries not to dwell on it.

Instead, he eats and makes small talk, which actually isn’t too bad. Hong Kong seems to be in a pleasant mood, and for once Japan and South Korea aren’t at each other’s throats.

Afterward, America heads back to his room to pack his belongings.

South Korea comes inside when he’s about halfway done.

America looks up. “Hey.”

South Korea leans against the doorframe. “Hey.”

“Where’s the other three?”

“Wei’s room.”

“Ah.”

They’re silent for a bit until South Korea speaks first.

“It’s been nice seeing you.”

America looks up from folding his suit jacket and smiles. “You too.”

“Though Kiku being here has been annoying.”

America frowns.

South Korea looks away. “Listen, Alfred.”

“I know you don’t like Kiku, but—”

“No. Listen to me.”

They make eye contact.

“Kiku has a crush on you.”

America hears a ringing in his ears. “What?”

“He has a crush on you.”

The ringing gets louder.

South Korea explodes. “Don’t you care?”
America has absolutely no idea. He doesn’t know what to do with his hands and goes back to folding. “I don’t know.”

“But isn’t it weird? Gross?”

America squirms. “It doesn’t bother me.”

South Korea stares at him.

“Does he want me to do something?” America’s voice cracks. “Is that why you’re telling me?”

“No,” South Korea says, almost angrily. “No, he probably doesn’t want you to do anything. The fact that I’m telling you this would piss him off.”

“Then why are you telling me?”

South Korea looks in disbelief.

America goes to fold another shirt; then realizes he has none left.

“It really doesn’t bother you?”

“It’s just Kiku,” America gets out. “Of course it doesn’t bother me.”

“Do you feel the same way?”

America’s mind blanks. “What?”

South Korea’s expression is stony.

“I—” America really wants this conversation to be over. “I don’t know. I—I’ve never had a crush on someone before. I’m not—I don’t know what it feels like.”

South Korea won’t let the conversation drop. “Have you been attracted to men before?”

America’s face turns red. “Have you?”

South Korea hastily stands up straight.

“I told you—I really—I don’t know what it feels like to have a crush on anyone.”

“Sorry for pushing, then,” South Korea mumbles.

An awkward silence falls.

“I really like Kiku,” America whispers after he can’t stand it.

“Well, he really likes you too,” South Korea mutters.

He then leaves.

Everyone says their goodbyes.

Hong Kong acknowledges him. Taiwan gives him a hug.
It’s awkward, though, with South Korea and Japan.

America can’t help but be hyper-aware of every little action Japan does, but it’s frustrating because everything seems so normal. Normal for them, at least. Is that not normal? Is there something wrong? America likes their relationship. Is that wrong?

“Maybe we’ll see each other soon,” Japan murmurs into his ear as they embrace.

The back of America’s neck feels hot.

“I think my officials mentioned you might be going to a UN meeting,” he mumbles.

“Do you know when?”

America avoids eye contact. “Within a few months or so.” He forces himself to look up. “I’ll write to you about it.”

Japan smiles, his eyes crinkling.

When America turns to South Korea, he doesn’t know what to do with himself.

“Let’s just forget our conversation,” South Korea mumbles after they quickly hug each other.

America likes that idea.

Forget this.

Forget that he has to tell them about the plan.

Forget, forget, forget…

It’s hard to forget anything involving the plan, though, when the letter exchanges keep happening.

All America can do is deliver the ones to France. He has no idea how to give out the others. Canada keeps telling him to be patient, but…

He doesn’t even know what he’s waiting for.

Time goes on.

America still doesn’t see how Japan has a crush on him.

Why would he even have a crush on him in the first place? What’s there to like?

The more he thinks about it, the more confused he gets too. Christ, it even keeps him up at night when he realizes how much he misses Japan, and how much he doesn’t want to involve him in the plan, and the fact that he doesn’t mind the idea of Japan having a crush on him, and that hanging out with him feels different than hanging out with someone like England or Canada or—

He thought that having a crush on someone meant he should want to kiss them and have sex, and he doesn’t want to do that with Japan, but
He’s not stupid.

Friends don’t toss and turn in their bed at night achingly missing the touch of their other friends.

America has never felt this way before.

He’s overwhelmed.

January 1, 1955.

America’s told there will be a Nation UN meeting in France.

“On the 8th,” Robert always looks like he vaguely wants to hang himself.

America fidgets. “Where?”

“Paris. It’s going to be different from other ones because Nations who aren’t a part of the UN will be there as a ‘preliminary test for their actual admittance.’”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“It means that Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan will be going.”

America’s heart rate increases.

“You’re supposed to watch over them or whatever, so all three of them will be arriving in D.C. on the 6th so that you can then fly out commercially to Paris on the 7th.”

America has a headache just thinking about the plane ride. “Are we staying at an embassy?”

“No. You’re free to choose whatever hotel you want as long as you check in with us.”

Robert then leaves America, alone and stewing with anticipation.

On January 4th, he gets a list of all the Nations who will be attending.

It makes him want to throw up.

Before, he had the excuse that the Nations he was supposed to be delivering letters to weren’t a part of the UN.

But now Germany, Austria, Italy, and Finland are all going to be there. Even Spain. Even fucking Spain, who no one has seen since Potsdam.

America feels sick the entire day.

He sends a telegram to England, asking him for hotel recommendations, trying to find any bit of
distraction to keep his mind off the plan.

England’s response starts off with a long-winded explanation of how he hates Paris, so why the hell would he know, and then ends with him providing a long, detailed, list.

America finds it amusing.

He’s still anxious, though.

“Francis told me he wants to have a party at his house once the UN thing is over,” Canada murmurs over the phone.

America is out in the open because he’s using a government line. He knows Robert is eavesdropping from where he is. “It makes sense,” America tries not to choke out. “There will be Nations attending we haven’t seen in a while.”

“It will be a perfect time to exchange gifts.”

“Would it really be?” America hisses.

He hears Canada sigh. “I don’t know. I really don’t know anymore.”

“We would have to explain the intention behind these gifts.”

“I know, Al.”

America chews his lip.

“Have you explained the gifts to South Korea and Japan?”

America wants to die. “No.”

“Well…” Canada makes a noise. “We have to tell everyone about these gifts at one point, and the party would be a great opportunity.”

“So what, is France just going to invite Finland? That’s going to be so awkward.”

“We’ll play it by ear.”

“…”

“I’m sure everything will work out,” Canada murmurs.

January 6, 1955.

Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan should be landing soon. America is currently in his room at the White House, sitting on his bed, stewing with anxiety.

Every single undelivered, uncensored letter is sitting in the briefcase in front of him.
He knows he has to tell Japan and South Korea about the plan. He should probably do it before the
party too, but that’s not going to happen.

The fact that it will, though, makes him want to scream.

He sighs and rakes his fingers through his hair, then stands up and starts pacing.

His brooding’s interrupted by a knock on the door.

“What?” he barks, thinking that it’s Robert.

The door cracks open an inch.

America stares at it, his head pounding. “Uh, come in?”

Taiwan pokes her head into the room. “You sound angry.”

America’s surprised to see her here so early. “I’m not—I thought you were someone else. Come in.”

Taiwan turns around and screams. “I TOLD YOU HE WAS OVER HERE; YOU TWO ARE IN THE WRONG HALLWAY.”

She then skips in and looks around. “This is where you live?” she asks.

America nods. He kicks the briefcase under his bed, not wanting to even think about it. “But only sometimes. I also have other houses throughout the country.”

Her mouth forms an ‘o’ shape, and she looks around. America does the same. His room is rather plain, decorated with nice furniture. There’s some of his photography hanging on the walls, as well as bookshelves packed with his favorite novels. Additionally, there are some of his photo albums stacked on a table near his bed.

He sees Japan and South Korea coming down the hall, both looking frazzled.

America’s anxiety about the plan and the letters is suddenly bulldozed to the side to make way for the stress about Japan’s crush.

“It’s not that much of a maze,” America blurts out. “You should have just followed Mei.”

“She took off,” South Korea grumbles.

Japan takes everything in. “I find it funny I’ve never been to the White House before,” he murmurs.

America rubs the back of his neck, feeling jittery. “Well, you’re here now.”

“Yeah…”

“I can—let me give you some of the books I’ve been telling you about.”

He walks over to one of his bookshelves and rummages through it. Taiwan watches him while South Korea and Japan catch their breaths.

“What’s this?” Taiwan asks. America turns and sees her holding a comic book he threw to the ground.
He smiles. “It’s about superheroes.”

“Superheroes?”

America’s anxiety eases a bit. “Yeah.” He stoops over. “That’s Superman.”

Japan crouches next to him. “Is this the one you’ve sent me?”

Despite everything, America’s anxiety starts to melt away just with Japan’s presence.

“No, it’s a different edition. Did you like the other one?”

Japan nods. “I meant to send you more comics myself, but I forgot.”

America laughs. “It’s okay.”

Japan touches his arm.

“Are these your photos?” South Korea asks loudly.

America jolts. Japan fidgets and removes his hand.

“Oh the wall?” America gets out. “Because yeah.” He then goes back to the bookshelf and pulls out the three books he’s been saving for Japan.

“Thank you, Alfred,” Japan murmurs, bringing them to his chest.

“No problem,” America mumbles, fiddling with his shirtsleeve. To distract himself, he then turns his attention back to South Korea, who’s now picking up one of his albums.

“What’s this?”

“Just a bunch of photos.” America stands up. “I don’t know of what, though.”

South Korea opens it. “Um, there are pictures of Europe.”

“Oh. It’s probably from when I was in London for six months during the war.”

“There are…pictures of the Allies.”

America rubs his face. “Yeah. When you’re all forced to hang out in London for two months, you get bored.”

“So you took their picture?” Japan asks, amused.

“Believe me, it was that, or watch England knit.”

South Korea opens his mouth to say something, but he never gets the chance.

Robert opens the door and hastily rushes them to dinner.

Even if he wanted to hang out with the three of them, he can’t, since they all nearly fall asleep at the dinner table.
He wishes them pleasant dreams once they’re finished their meal. Japan smiles at him in response. It causes his stomach to feel weird.

America goes back to his room and stresses about the plan for the rest of the night.

They have to leave at 6 AM to catch a plane at 7 AM, and America has to wake up at 5 AM to listen to a lecture about how his government is placing a lot of trust in him.

It’s brutal.

Especially since he really didn’t sleep.

The flight will take around seven hours, and since France is six hours ahead of the US, they’ll land there around 8 PM. At that point, they’ll have to find the hotel England recommended. The UN meeting starts at 10 AM the next day, so they’ll also have to force themselves to sleep, even with their jet lag.

Getting to the airport isn’t eventful. They make it onto the plane with ease, and, fortunately, they’re all in first class. America’s seated next to Japan, and Taiwan’s with South Korea. There aren’t many people around them, which America’s thankful for since Taiwan is full of energy. She’s across the aisle and keeps calling out to him and Japan, sometimes forgetting she has to speak English, so her sentences are a weird mix of it and Mandarin.

Japan has the window seat while America is in the aisle, next to South Korea.

“Do you think she’ll stay awake?” America asks.

Taiwan is coloring.

South Korea stretches. “I don’t think that will be a problem.”

“I can hear you,” Taiwan says in Mandarin, rolling her eyes. “I’m big! I can stay awake!”

A few seats up, America hears a white couple make a racist comment, craning their heads to look behind them. America glares at them menacingly while South Korea jokes around with Taiwan. They shut up and face forward.

“Relax, Alfred,” Japan murmurs.

America feels on edge. “If they say anything racist to you I swear to God I’m going to punch them.”

“Yong-Soo would beat you to it. We’re fine, Alfred, calm down. You’ve been tense this entire morning.”

America’s briefcase filled with the fucking letters is under the seat in front of him, and he wants to vomit.

Japan takes out a novel for him. “Read this, okay? Everything will be fine.”

God, he really hopes that’s true.
Their plane is slightly delayed, so they arrive in Paris around 8:30 PM.

They step outside after collecting their luggage. America’s anxiety calmed down after a while on the plane, but now being in Paris has only heightened it again.

“Any idea where the hotel is?” Japan asks in French. They’ve decided to switch languages.

“I have the address.” America fumbles to get it out of his pocket. “We can give it to the cab driver.”

The airport is on the outskirts of Paris, so there are a bunch of cabs waiting outside.

Taiwan rubs her arms as they walk over to them. “It’s chilly!”

“It’s because of the snow,” Japan murmurs. “I haven’t been to Paris in such a long time,” he then whispers, more to himself.

America smiles, desperately trying to ignore his briefcase. “Well, you’re back at a good time because construction’s pretty much complete at this point.”

Japan blinks; then returns a warm smile. “Yeah…”

“I’ve never been to Paris,” South Korea says. “I want to see the Eiffel Tower.”

“I know what that is!” Taiwan exclaims. “I’ve read about it! I want to see it too!”

America grins and flags down a cab.

“It’s the Arc de Triomphe!”

America takes out the last suitcase from the trunk. “What?”

Taiwan is jumping up and down. “Look!”

The cab driver pulls away as America turns his head. The arc is lit up.

“You chose a good hotel,” Japan murmurs as South Korea picks up Taiwan for a better view.

America rubs the back of his neck. “You haven’t even seen the room yet.”

It has two beds and a couch, as well as a small balcony that the Arc’s visible from.

“I want the couch!” Taiwan proclaims when they enter, dramatically draping herself over it.

South Korea puts up his hands. “Mei, by all means, take it.” He turns to Japan and America. “But I’m getting my own damn bed. You two can share.”

America feels his face heat up. Japan starts to fidget.

“Is that okay?” America gets out. “Sorry, this was the biggest room they—”

“It’s fine,” Japan says quickly. “It’s perfectly fine.”
Normally, Japan’s presence can lull America into a deep slumber.

But thanks to the anticipation of tomorrow’s party, he barely sleeps.

There’s luggage everywhere.

America’s half-dressed, his suit haphazardly across his bed while Taiwan looks at him with pleading eyes.

“I can’t do a ponytail by myself; I need someone else to do it.” She’s holding a brush and a hairband.

America sighs. South Korea’s currently in the bathroom, and Japan left ten minutes ago to pick up some pastries from the nearby bakery.

“Mei, I can’t.” America hasn’t had to tie back his own hair in more than a century, and doesn’t quite know how to tackle Taiwan’s without hurting her, especially since he’s oozing anxiety right now.

She pouts. “It’s not hard.”

“If it’s not hard, then why don’t you do it?”

“Because someone else always does!”

“Yong-Soo!”

“I’m taking a shit!”

America rubs his face.

It’s already 8:30 AM, and with the pace they’re moving, they might be late.

“Why don’t you comb it first,” America tries.

“Someone does that for me too.”

America sighs. “At least let me put my suit on before I help you.”

“Help her with what?” Japan asks, coming through the door with a bag of pastries in one hand and coffee in the other.

“Oh thank God,” America breathes. “Can you do her hair?”

“You can’t?”

“I’ve had short hair for 95% of my life; cut me some slack.”

Japan rolls his eyes and sets down the stuff.

After getting dressed, America nurses a cup of coffee and tries to calm down. Christ, Japan and
South Korea are relaxed. Taiwan is bubbly.

America wants to throw up.

*everything will work out everything will work out everything*

---

Japan and South Korea aren’t relaxed.

The closer their cab gets to the UN building, the paler both of them look. America’s briefcase feels like it’s burning him. The only one who’s excited is Taiwan, armed with pages of coloring books to entertain herself during the meetings.

They arrive around 9:25 AM.

“We’re early, so there really shouldn’t be anyone here yet,” America says as they pull up to the building. His voice nearly cracks.

Japan mutely nods. South Korea seems frozen.

America knows he’s lying through his teeth, though. Russia will be there. He always is.

They go inside and check in. Their coats are collected, and they’re directed towards the assembly room. As they walk to it, Japan and South Korea stay noticeably behind him, Taiwan between the two, taking everything in.

America enters, and yeah.

Russia’s there.

They make eye contact. America silently begs him to stay away.

“America,” Russia says in a singsong voice, walking over.

Japan and South Korea tense up.

“Hi,” America blurts out. Before he can say anything else, though, Taiwan grabs onto the back of his legs and peeks out from around them.

“I don’t like him,” she declares. “His presence isn’t nice.”

America wants to smack himself.

Russia grins. America isn’t sure if it’s supposed to be civil or terrifying. “I see you have a whole group with you today.”

America opens his mouth.

“So I won’t bother you for long, but I recently saw the Disney movie, Snow White.”

No.

“There was a viewing *party*.”

*Ivan, please no. This will already be awful enough.*
“I didn’t want to attend, but I figured it would be best, especially to make sure the right information was being given to the people watching the film.”

“The fuck does that even mean?” South Korea blurts out.

Russia ignores him. “I’ll tell you more about it later.” He then walks away.

Taiwan sticks her tongue out at him.

“Don’t tell someone you don’t like them to their face,” America says weakly when he’s gone.

“But it’s true,” she protests. “His presence is icky.”

“The hell was that entire conversation?” South Korea asks. His skin is still pale. Japan appears nauseous.

“Oh, you know...he’s just weird,” America gets out. He forces a laugh.

South Korea looks at him like he’s full of shit.

“Let’s find our seats,” America blurts out.

It’s as they’re dumping their belongings that America hears the unmistakable laugh of Scotland.

Japan must see his change of expression because he quickly asks, “Alfred, are you alright?”

America doesn’t remember seeing them on the guest list. He wants to scream. “That was Scotland.”

South Korea frowns. “So?”

Scotland, Wales, and Ireland barge into the room, all three of them extremely loud. Northern Ireland is trailing miserably three paces behind. New Zealand, Australia, and England are following them, and finally, Hong Kong is behind the pact, looking absolutely dismal.

Several things happen at once. Taiwan recognizes Hong Kong and calls out to him, making him look in their direction, but also causing Scotland, Wales, and Ireland to realize they’re there.

America then makes eye contact with England, who seems just about as miserable as Hong Kong and Northern Ireland.

Japan and South Korea completely tense up again as Taiwan sprints forward and embraces Hong Kong, causing him to sputter. Everyone stares at her, and since they’re distracted, England makes a beeline for America.

“I’ve been with them for the past week,” he hisses when he’s within earshot.

“Ireland too?”

“Not him,” England spits. “We just ran into him at the entrance—”

“America! Long time no see!” Scotland calls. He then leers. “I see you’ve brought Asia.”

America opens his mouth to angrily respond, but he’s cut off when Italy sprints into the room.

“KIKU!”
He nearly tackles Japan to the ground in an embrace. Romano’s trailing after him, looking weary.

“H-Hi,” Japan sputters.

Taiwan commands both South Korea and Hong Kong’s attention, and Scotland becomes distracted by Ireland, so America and England are left alone.

America scans the room for Canada and can’t find him.

“Thanks for the hotel recommendations,” he mumbles after a bit.

“Did you find one okay?” America fidgets. “Yeah.”

The commotion around them only gets louder.

“Matthew helped Francis set up for the party,” England mutters.

America feels nauseous. “Who’s coming?”

“Who do you think? He wants to deliver the damn letters.”

“Even Finland, then?”

“Francis said he would talk to him today.”

America squirms. “This isn’t going to go over nicely.”

“You think I don’t know that?” England swallows. “Have you talked to South Korea and Japan?”

“N-No.”

“Are they coming to the party?”

“I guess?”

More people arrive.

“Alfred, this plan is about to enter its second stage,” England whispers.

America knows, and he’s getting more and more terrified.

Chapter End Notes

(image commissioned from diorlesbian.tumblr.com)

*“The true Korean equivalent of sticking up your middle finger, is to hold your hand in a fist, and then stick your thumb up, in-between your middle and ring finger.”

http://www.lifeaftercubes.com/2010/08/13/korean-culture-101-learn-before-you-get-there/ Let’s just pretend that America knows what it means. I’m sure South Korea gave it to him once or twice during the Korea War
France sprints towards Spain as soon as he sees him.

“Antonio!”

Spain looks in his direction. “Franc—”

France collides their bodies together.

“You look great,” Spain chokes out. He sounds near tears.

“I always look great,” France tries to joke, feeling overwhelmed.

Spain makes a wet noise.


Spain gives a broken smile, and France realizes how much weight he’s lost. “Is it?”

*We have a plan to rescue Gilbert,* France wants to say. Five different officials are staring at them, though.

Spain releases a shaky breath and puts on the fake smile France has come to know. Repress and bury his emotions. That’s Spain’s motto.

“There are so many Nations here,” he mumbles, trying to discreetly wipe his eyes.

France pretends like he didn’t just notice. “Romano is one of them.”

Spain stares at the ground.

France’s eyes dart to the officials staring at them. He then leans in. “He’s the one who told the Allies where I was.”

Spain gnaws on his lip. He’s never done that in the past, and France doesn’t know what to do with himself. He opens his mouth to say something, then sees Canada out of the corner of his eye.

“Matthieu?”

Spain looks up. Canada awkwardly waves and walks over.

“Is something wrong?” France asks, noticing Canada’s expression.

“Nothing except Scotland, Wales, and Ireland screaming.”
“Ah.”

“It’s nice to see you, Canada,” Spain gets out.

Canada smiles. “Likewise. How are you doing?”

Spain’s eyes dart away. “Fine.”

“Matthieu’s been so generous lately,” France says quickly. “Helping me clean my home for today’s party, going grocery shopping—I’m touched.”

Spain frowns. “Party?”

France’s palms feel sweaty. “Yeah. After this UN meeting, I figured a bunch of us could walk around the city, and then go back to my place for some dinner.”

Spain has a weird expression. “Who’s coming?”

“Well, you if you can.”

Spain squirms. “I don’t know if I’m allowed.”

“If you weren’t, your officials wouldn’t be letting you talk to me right now.”

“…”

France is jittery. “So there will be you, Germany, Italy, Romano, Austria, and then America, Canada, England, and I.”

“I saw America with South Korea and Japan,” Canada mumbles.

“Oh, okay, then they might be coming too.” France rubs the back of his neck. “Same with the Nordics.” At least, he hopes. They all looked at him weird when he approached Finland earlier.

Spain’s expression is unreadable. “That’s a lot of people.”

“Is that an issue?”

Spain tugs at his hair. “No, but…” He makes a noise. “Fine, then if no one stops me, I’ll come.”

France breaks into a smile. “No one should—”

Someone taps him on the back.

He whips around, only to see that it’s just one of his officials.

“We’ve talked to Spain’s advisors; he’ll be allowed to go to your dinner party.” Anything they think will make France less of a depressive mess they’ve been completely supportive of.

France forces out a smile and glances at Spain. “There you have it.”

The official is still hovering. “The meeting is starting soon. You should head to the assembly room.”

They walk to it in silence.

France’s head starts to spin. His officials have known about this party for a while and even let
Canada stay with him for the past week.

Over the course of it, they worked on the plan.

The two of them stole an account number from a wealthy government member, drained some of their assets, and transferred it to another account, as well as went real estate hunting and set up connections with the sellers. And now, with the party, the other Nations can learn about the letters.

They can finally start moving forward with the next steps of the plan.

France feels nauseous just thinking about explaining everything, though, but he tries to forget about it for the time being and enjoy the fact that Spain is here, that he’s allowed to have parties and talk to other Nations, that finally after a decade, everyone is starting to leave the war behind them.

He gets overwhelmed as soon as they enter the crowded assembly room, though.

“You okay?” Canada murmurs.

France nods, swallowing. He hasn’t had a panic attack in a while and refuses to let himself have one now.

“Have you found your seat yet?” France asks Spain, trying to make himself audible over all the noise. His voice only cracks a little bit.

Spain shakes his head.

“Well, it should be this way.”

Before they can move, Romano approaches them.

Spain gets stiff.

“Lovino,” France forces out. Besides inviting him to the party, their last interaction was when Italy dropped his wine glass.

It’s not a fond memory.

Romano looks pensive. “Francis.” He then glances at Spain and frowns. “You look like shit.”


“Antonio.”

Spain’s expression cracks. “What, should I talk about how fucking awful my life has been since the war?”

“Mine hasn’t been much better; trust me.”

“…”

Romano frowns. “You coming to the party?”

Spain avoids eye contact. “I guess.”

“Good.”

“You stopped sending me letters during the war.”
“Are we really going to have this conversation right now?”

Canada and France exchange an awkward look.

Romano rubs his face. “Antonio, they were watching my every move at the end. I couldn’t. And my government hated me. I thought that if I responded, they’d not only torture me but find and hurt you too.”

Spain gnaws his lip.

“I got your coordinates, though,” Romano mumbles. “I gave them away.”

Now France feels weird. All he can get out is, “Thank you.”

Romano’s expression twists. “Thanking me is the last thing you should be doing.”

Some moments pass.

“Can I hug you?” Spain eventually chokes out.

Romano embraces him as a response.

“Spain’s in love with him,” Canada mumbles as they walk away.

France has known for a while, but it’s something he hasn’t thought about in a long time. “You—You noticed.”

“What even is their relationship?”

“Complicated,” is the only word France can think of. He then does a double take when he sees a child skip past him.

“That’s Taiwan,” America mutters from behind him.

France nearly has a heart attack. “Jesus, Alfred, a little warning.”

England is with him. “Sorry,” America mumbles. He’s pale.

“Do you have everything for the party?” Canada asks.

That only makes America look worse. “Yeah.”

England touches his arm, and France finds himself staring at his hand, feeling a weird pit in his stomach.

Before he can say anything, one of his officials announces for everyone to take their seats.

The meeting ends at 2 PM.

France stands up to stretch his legs, scanning the room for Spain. When he sees him talking to Romano, he turns his head back to England, Canada, and America, but America has seemingly disappeared while England is saying goodbye to New Zealand and Australia.

“When are the Nordics coming over?” Canada asks in a hushed voice.
France fidgets. “Later. I wanted us to have time to walk around first.”

Canada nods; then takes off his glasses and rubs his face. “I’m not ready for this.”

France feels a pit in his stomach. “This is the next step, though.”

“I know,” Canada murmurs. He gives a painful smile. “But I’m still not ready.”

England rejoins them and rests his hand on France’s back. “Everything alright?”

“Yeah. Just discussing the party,” France mumbles, trying to ignore how hot his touch is.

“You wanted to take a walk first, right?”

France fidgets. “I thought it would be nice.”

England gives a warm smile. “It will be.” He pauses, then looks around. “We should group up with everyone.”

France follows England’s eyes. Spain is still talking to Romano while Italy is with Germany and Austria. America, meanwhile, is with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and…

“Is Hong Kong staying in the UK?” France asks.

England frowns. “No. He’s returning back to his own country.”

“Wouldn’t his flight be soon, then?”

“I guess. Why?”

“He’s over there with America.”

England’s eyebrows scrunch up as he cranes his head to look. “He hates Alfred.”

“Maybe Leon can come to the party?” Canada tries.

England side-eyes him. “Does he have to?”

“Arthur.”

England rubs his face. “You know that means we have to involve him in the plan, right?”

Before France can make a comment, Italy practically drags Austria and Germany over.

“Feliciano,” Germany hisses.

“No. You two are coming whether you like it or not.”

France hasn’t seen Italy be this bold around him in more than a decade.

It makes him want to cry.

Austria fights against Italy’s arm. “I really don’t think—”

“Why? Your officials don’t care! No one is stopping you.”

Austria looks away.
“You two are allowed to enjoy yourselves,” Italy snaps. “When’s the last time that’s happened—you especially, Roderich.”

Austria looks like he wants to throw up.

Canada forces out a smile. “The party’s nothing extravagant, so don’t worry. It will just be friends hanging out.”

“Friends,” Austria says flatly.

Spain slaps him on the back. “I’m your friend, Roddy!”

Austria’s face turns red. “I’ve told you not to call me that.”

Romano is behind Spain, his expression muted. Most of the room has cleared out by now.

“I’m not going to force you to come,” France gets out. “But it will be fun.”

“We’re going to take a walk around the city too,” England says quickly.

“Just us?” Austria mumbles.

Italy looks over his shoulder. “Japan said he would come if America was. America’s coming, right?”

France nods.

“KIKU!” Italy screams.

Everyone in that group looks startled.

“YOU’RE STILL COMING, RIGHT? WE’RE LEAVING NOW.”

South Korea says something to America while Hong Kong angrily packs up his belongings. America rubs his face.

“I wanna walk around, Kha Loung,” Taiwan whines loud enough for France to hear. “Please come with us! Please! Please! Pl—”

“Okay. Jesus Christ, fine.”

America looks more nauseous than Austria when he gets closer. Japan is touching his arm and frowning while South Korea and Hong Kong are trailing behind, holding Taiwan’s hands.

“Is this okay?” America mumbles to France when they’re close enough.

England miserably looks at the ground. France ignores him. “Yeah.”

Now Taiwan plants her feet. “Wait. Are we still going to see the Eiffel Tower?”

“I don’t know, Mei,” South Korea grumbles.

She puffs out her cheeks. “I don’t want to go if we can’t—”

“My house is right near it, so we’ll definitely be able to see it,” France says quickly.

Taiwan is suddenly his new best friend.
She drops the other two’s hands and sprints up to him. “Are you France? You’re speaking French, so I guess you’re France.”

“Yes—”

“French is nice sounding. I like it better than English. Western languages are weird. And I guess since you’re Western, you won’t use your human name because of those Western Rules.”

“Western Rules?”

“Do you also have a ten-foot portrait of England?”

The room becomes dead silent.

“Excuse me?” France eventually gets out.

England’s face is turning beet red. “What the hell; you told her about them?”

America pinches the bridge of his nose. “Mei.”

“Arthur, they are really weird,” Canada says.

Hong Kong sounds in disbelief. “You have one too?”

“I told you that all the colonies have them,” America mutters.

England is sputtering. “It wasn’t my decision to have the fucking paintings done!”

“Watch your language,” Hong Kong says mockingly, enunciating his British accent.

England looks like he’s about to strangle him.

Spain smirks. “My country was a shitty imperial power, but at least I didn’t force my colonies to have a huge painting of my face.”

“It wasn’t my—”

“Let’s drop this,” America quickly says. Taiwan is giggling.

When they finally get outside, everything becomes a little calmer.

They fall into different groups as they make their way to the Eiffel Tower. France ends up in the back with England, so he’s able to watch Italy chattering on about something to Germany, Austria, and Canada; Spain and Romano having a hushed conversation, Taiwan rattling off a story to South Korea and Hong Kong.

Japan and America.

France didn’t really notice them during the meeting, but now that it’s just the two of them…

He’s never seen America infatuated with anyone, but that’s how it looks from where he is. The two are in each other’s personal space, and Japan is angling his body towards him, even as they walk. Despite how panicky America looked back at the UN building too, Japan seems to be melting that stress off of him.

They aren’t noticeable at first, but he and England have a clear view.
“Arthur,” France murmurs as they turn a corner, noticing how tense he is.

His fists are balled. “What the hell?”

France has absolutely no idea what to say. “They were together a lot, so of course they would become good friends.”

“We both know this isn’t about friendship,” England spits.

America says something. Japan is blushing.

France frowns, feeling weird. “Didn’t you want to move on from him?”

“Not to have him end up with another man.”

Canada is suddenly beside them, frowning. “What’s wrong?”


“Okay.”

After a bit, America starts talking to South Korea while Japan turns to Italy, Austria, and Germany. Unfortunately, it barely does anything to improve England’s mood.

“Seriously, Arthur,” Canada tries again after a bit. “What’s wrong?” Everyone else looks like they’re having fun while the three of them are miserably walking in the back.

“He’s just crabby about Hong Kong,” France says quickly.

“You two know that you’re both still really shitty liars, right?” Canada spits.

“We’re not—”

He angrily walks ahead of them.

France rubs his face just as Spain joins them. “I thought this was supposed to be fun.”

“It is fun,” France says weakly.

“Arthur looks like he wants to commit homicide.”

England glares at him.

“Are you that worked up about the paintings?”

“Yes.”

Spain looks away. “All right.” He then turns to France and gives a pained smile. “Hey, isn’t...the next corner that bar we once started a fight in?”

France feels a weight on his chest. “Yeah, so that means...”

They turn the corner and see the Eiffel Tower.

Taiwan squeals in delight, demanding for America to pick her up since he’s the tallest, and he squats down and lifts her onto his shoulders. She then grins, bending over to tug the back of Hong Kong’s collar in excitement, causing her to nearly choke him when America leans over to say
something to South Korea. Japan rolls his eyes at them.

It’s weird seeing how close they all are. America has never had any friends that France didn’t know, and he’s not quite sure what he’s feeling.

Germany says something to Austria. He frowns.

France nudges Spain. “I guess it’s been awhile since you’ve been to Paris.”

Spain’s expression shuts. “Francis, I was here with Gilbert.”

The only ones talking now are America and Japan.

Spain bites his lip and looks away. Romano touches his shoulder.

France feels numb. He knows Prussia and Spain rescued him, but he’s never learned any of the details about how.

“He went back to Germany because of us,” Austria chokes. “If he just stayed with you—”

“No.” Spain’s voice cracks. “No, it’s neither of your faults.”

A breeze picks up.

Germany’s voice is strained. “We shouldn’t be talking about this.”

France knows he’s right. Not in public, at least.

“We should head to your apartment,” Canada says quietly.

France nods.

It’s tense when they arrive.

France, England, Canada, and America all stay by the door as everyone else goes into the living room. Japan hovers until America tells him he’ll be right there.

England’s mood hasn’t gotten any better. America is pale. France is jittery.

Canada is the only one putting up a calm front. “When are the Nordics supposed to arrive?”

France swallows. “Any moment now.”

“How are we going to approach this?”

“America did an okay job telling us about—”

“Don’t put this on me.” America looks sick.

England frowns. “Well—”

A knock.

France hears Spain ask who that is, but he ignores him and opens the door.
“Why are we here?” Norway grumbles as a greeting. Denmark hits him.

Finland steps in front of them and smiles. “Hi!”

“Hi,” France gets out. “I’m really sorry about this; I just need to tell you something, and then you can leave.”

“What is ‘something?’” Sweden grumbles.

Despite the cold, France feels a bead of sweat roll down his back. “Come into the living room, and I’ll explain.”

They comply. Iceland mutters something.

Before France shuts the door, though, he sees America straining to look over his shoulder.

He scrunches up his eyebrows. “Is something wrong?”

America takes two steps backward and almost crashes into Canada. “No.”

“Did you see one of your officials?” Canada whispers.

America rapidly shakes his head. “It’s nothing.”

France isn’t too sure about that, but he has other things to worry about.

Everyone in the living room looks extremely confused.

America shoves his briefcase to France. France takes a deep breath.

Spain’s expression is unreadable. “Francis, what’s going on?”

“I need to tell you something.”

“I get that.”

“I need to tell everyone something.”

“Then what the hell is it?”

France opens his mouth.

There’s a knock.

“Al, who the fuck is outside?” Canada hisses as America curses.

He darts to the door. Canada and England flank him. France stands there in disbelief while everyone else strains to look.

He suddenly hears Russia’s voice. “Let me in.”

“How the hell did you get away from your officials?” America chokes.

At this point, Japan and South Korea look extremely tense while Spain’s expression is morphing into that of extreme anger.

“I bribed Kazimir. I’m not an idiot.”
“You don’t—you don’t need to be here—”

Russia walks into the living room.

Spain stands up. “Francis, what the *fuck* are you doing?”

Russia blinks. “What, he doesn’t know?”

“I haven’t seen him since Potsdam,” France says weakly.

Russia frowns. “What about the letter exchange?”

“WHAT LETTER EXCHANGE?”

Russia ignores Spain and stares at America. “Has he not been getting the letters?”

America swallows. “No. Only France.”

“What the actual—have you told anyone else about the plan yet?”

America looks like he’s about to vomit. “That was the point of *this* before you came.”

Spain’s eyes are turning red.

“What the hell is going on?” Norway grumbles.

Russia ignores him and looks directly at Japan and South Korea. “So you haven’t told them anything either?” He’s still talking to America.

“N-Not yet.”

“You promised Yao—”

“I was planning—”

“What is this about Yao?” South Korea snaps. His eyes are turning red.

Russia gives him a blank look. “He wants to see you.”

“Why did he tell you this?”

Russia’s expression twists. “He wants to see both of you, so you’ll be taking a trip across the US.”

Japan scrunches up his eyebrows. “Excuse me?”

“Ivan,” America hisses.

“Why would they take a trip across the US?” Spain spits.

Russia side-eyes France. “You tell them.”

France feels light-headed. “Because we’re going to rescue Gilbert.”

He doesn’t know what he was expecting, but Spain explodes.

“YOU CAN’T DO THAT!”
“You two did it for me!”

“WE DID, AND LOOK WHERE THAT GOT US!”

“Antonio—”

“Francis, I’ve been isolated from everyone for ten years!” Spain grabs his hair. “And we only had to rescue you from Paris! That’s easy to get to! Where the fuck is Gilbert; Siberia?!”

“Yes,” Russia says flatly.

Spain whips his head around. “Why are you helping?”

Russia’s expression is blank. “Because we’re not just rescuing him; we’d be saving my sisters and the other Nations at that compound too.”

Austria starts to say something, but it’s drowned out by South Korea losing it again.

“Then why is Yao helping? Did you coerce him into this?”

Russia glares at him. “No? He’s the one who talked me into it.”

“Right,” South Korea sneers. “I don’t know what game you’re playing, but I know Yao. If you’re manipulating him because of the disgusting feelings I’ve seen you harbor—”

Russia snaps. “The feelings I harbor?”

This is the last argument that needs to happen right now. France tries to say something while America frantically gestures to South Korea. Both are useless.

South Korea’s expression is wild. “Yeah, you—you faggot.”

The atmosphere shatters.

Russia’s eyes turn red. “I’m sorry you’re a weak country that was easily colonized and then split apart by a civil war, who has a power-complex and insecurity about your own relationships with people as a result of that.”

“What the fuck does that—”

“Yao isn’t in love with you. He was never in love with you. Get over yourself, faggot.”

The color drains from South Korea’s face.

Russia shoves a briefcase into America’s arms. “Sort this shit out and give me the information I need during the next exchange. Yao and I have an escape route and a timeline, but we need to find a way to get out of China to the US, either by plane or boat. We also have contacts established since Khrushchev and Mao fucking hate each other and relations are quickly straining.”

He storms out of the room and leaves, slamming the apartment door behind him.

“Hey, why are we here?” Denmark says weakly.

Canada pulls himself together first and gives a strained smile. “Because there’s a letter to Finland that Estonia wrote.”
Five different emotions flash across Finland’s face just as South Korea bolts out of the apartment. America looks frazzled. Japan walks over and murmurs something to him.

“We need to go after Yong-Soo,” Taiwan whispers, nudging Hong Kong.

His voice cracks. “What? No, we don’t.”

Taiwan’s expression is determined.

Japan tears his gaze away from America. “Mei, it’s fine.”

Taiwan actually looks angry. “No, it’s not, because Yong-Soo is upset, and he needs to come back so he can hear the plan because then he will get to see that Yao person—”

“Mei, the plan has nothing to do with you,” America gets out. “Don’t worry about it.”

“I may be little compared to you, but I’m not an idiot!”

America blinks. Japan frowns.

Taiwan stares at them. “We’re going to find him.” She then grabs Hong Kong’s hand and drags him out of the apartment.

America buries his face in his hands just as Japan touches his back.

Spain’s eyes, on the other hand, are finally fading back to normal, but he still looks extremely pissed.

“How was Estonia able to write a letter?” Denmark asks while Finland still appears in disbelief. Sweden is awkwardly patting his shoulder.

France forces himself to answer. “There was a mix-up when Alfred was in Korea, so he was able to be alone with him and have him write it. Since then, Russia has been helping us exchange letters with the other Nations in Siberia, but we could never find the right time to contact you or explain any of this.”

“Gilbert—is Gilbert writing letters?” Austria asks desperately.

“Him and Hungary,” Canada murmurs.

Germany looks like he’s about to vomit. He gives France a pained look. “Why are you doing this?”

“We have to save Gilbert. We have to save everyone.”

“Francis,” Spain hisses.

“No, Antonio. I have to. You saw what I looked like after the war. I had no idea who I was!” France’s voice cracks. “And he stopped that. You two stopped that. This is the least I can do for him—for all of them there.”

Spain looks away. “It’s extremely dangerous.”

“I know. Maybe I’m selfish. I wanted to die after the war, but this,” France gestures vaguely, feeling tears prickle the corner of his eyes. “Working towards this has finally given me a reason to live again.”
England touches his shoulder.

“We can rescue him. We can.”

“I want to help,” Austria whispers, his voice cracking. “During the war, I did absolutely nothing while Gilbert and Eliza—”

“You didn’t do nothing,” Italy interrupts.

For the first time, France realizes how many Axis Nations are in the room.

Austria grabs his hair. “Then explain why I watched them and countless others get dissected! And now, Christ, now they could be going through the same thing again!”

“But that’s over,” Denmark interrupts, paler than normal. Norway’s expression is utterly blank. “The Soviets are different from the Nazis. They wouldn’t continue experiments.”

“I think they are, though,” America chokes out, Japan gripping onto his arm.

A weird silence falls across the room.

“What do you mean?” England says first, eyes glued to Japan’s hand.

“Alfred, we don’t have to talk about this right now,” Japan murmurs.

“No, what the hell do you mean?” England spits.

America is staring at the ground. “Poison bullets.”

England scrunches up his eyebrows. “What?”

“Where?” Romano asks, his voice low.

“My officials shot me with them.”

“Why the fuck were you shot?!” England hisses, angrily taking a step towards him. “When did that happen?”

Japan pulls America back. “During the Korean War.”

“Why do you know about this?!”

“He was there afterward,” America chokes out. “I—Kiku, let’s go find Yong-Soo.”

“Wait, your officials? Why did they have poison bullets?” Romano demands.

Japan is guiding America to the door. “I don’t know,” America chokes out. “But I’m certain the Soviets have them too.”

Romano opens his mouth to ask another question, but Japan drags America outside.

The door closes.

“Francis,” Spain says slowly, calmer now. England, meanwhile, looks like he’s about to hit something. “All of this is ludicrous.”

“I know.”
Spain rubs his face. “What if you guys are caught?”

“We won’t be. We’ll plan. We’ll wait years if we have to.”

“The letter from Estonia,” Sweden says after Spain doesn’t respond. “You have it, right?”

France feels lightheaded. “Yeah. In this briefcase.”

He passes all of them out while Canada looks at England and frowns. “Arthur.”

England is shaking. “I need to go smoke.”

“What—”

“I’ll be on the balcony.”

He disappears down the hallway.

“Listen,” Norway mutters after a bit. “I don’t know what you want us to do.”

France tears his eyes away from the area where England disappeared. “Nothing,” he blurts out. “You don’t have to do anything. I just—I wanted to deliver that letter.”

Denmark looks away from Finland. “You need help, though, if you want this plan to actually work.”

“But you don’t have to—”

“Francis.” Denmark never uses his human name, so it’s weird. “Lukas and I know what you’ve gone through. It’s been…recovery has been difficult. If the Soviets have Nazi technology and are using it on their Nations, then we want to help; all of us.”

“Thank you, Mathias,” France whispers.

“We’ll help too,” Romano says quietly.

Austria is crying. Germany is gripping his letter.

France looks at Spain, who seems defeated.

“Antonio, please.”

Spain closes his eyes. “Fine.”

Once the Nordics leave, France joins England out on the balcony.

England glances at him; then stares at the surrounding buildings again. He reeks of cigarettes.

“Dinner is cooking,” France murmurs.

“You’re the host; shouldn’t you be in the kitchen?” England mutters.

“Italy and Romano chased me out.”
England sighs and offers him a cigarette. France takes it.

“The Nordics gone?” England asks as he lights it.

France inhales the smoke. “Yeah,” he breathes.

“So, what now?” England mumbles.

“They’re going to help with the plan.”

“…”

“Everyone is.”

“Even Japan and South Korea?” England sneers.

France breathes in. “They haven’t come back yet,” he says after exhaling.

Some time passes.

“Am I a faggot?” England eventually whispers.

France frowns. “No, you’re just someone who likes men.”

England is gripping the guardrail so tightly that the whites of his knuckles are visible. “And the man I’m in love with likes someone else.”

That sentence makes France’s stomach turn unpleasantly. He rests his arm around England’s shoulders and blinks in surprise when he leans into him.

England breathes out more smoke. “This is so fucked up.”

France nods. “Yeah.”

“You really want to go through with this plan?”

France squirms. “I have to.”

“…”

“But—but you don’t, Arthur. You’re not obligated to do anything.”

England frowns. “You know I’ll help you until the end of this, Francis.”

“Why?”

It starts snowing.

England scrunches up his eyebrows. “Because.”

France stares at him. “Because you feel guilty about the war?”

He steps away.

France looks at the skyline, missing England’s warmth. “I feel guilty about what my country did to Gilbert.”
“But it’s not about guilt,” England mumbles. “Of course I have guilt, but you’re not only helping Prussia because you feel bad, right?”

“No,” France mumbles. “He’s my friend, and friends help each other.”

“Well.” England’s face flushes. “I’m your friend too.”

France blinks in surprise as England quickly looks away, rubbing the back of his neck.

France feels himself grinning. “That’s nice to hear.”

“Shut up, Frog.”

He walks over. “Your hair is getting covered in snowflakes.”

“So is yours.”

France laughs and brushes it off of England’s head. His face is still flushed.

“Francis,” England says after a bit.

“Yeah?”

“We’re going to rescue Gilbert.”

He’s staring at the skyline, and France’s stomach twists when he realizes how beautiful he is.

“Thank you, Arthur…”
England and France go back inside when the sun sets.

Italy, Romano, and Canada are in the kitchen. Austria, Germany, and Spain, meanwhile, are still in the living room. Germany and Austria are on the couch while Spain is on the armchair adjacent from them.

Letters are scattered everywhere.

Spain looks up when France and England enter. His expression is unreadable. “Gilbert is… optimistic.”

The radio crackles in the background.
France looks away. “He always has been.”

“Francis, can I talk to you?”

France nods.

They end up out on the balcony.

“It smells like cigarettes out here,” Spain mutters. Everything is being illuminated by streetlamps now.

“We smoked a pack,” France mumbles.

Spain runs his hand through his hair.

“Alejandro—”

“No, let me talk.”

A breeze picks up.

Spain lets out a breath. “I was interrogated for a year.” His voice is barely above a whisper.

France frowns.

“Harassed by all the Ally governments. I told them everything, yet they still—they didn’t understand why Gilbert and I did what we did. So they isolated me. They were afraid I was dangerous and would somehow cause an uprising of Nations, or something.” Spain laughs miserably. “I understand, Francis, okay? I understand what you went through at the end of the war. I understand why you were miserable and why you’re so desperate now to help Gilbert.”

They make eye contact.

“But I’m afraid of what will happen if you’re caught—if we’re caught. The repercussions would be worse than before.”

France frowns. “I know.”

“Even Gilbert is warning us in his letters not to do anything stupid.”

“I know.”

A child is laughing on the street, trying to catch snowflakes with her tongue. Her mother is watching.

“We won’t be caught,” France whispers. “We’ll rescue Gilbert. Antonio, with your help, I know we can do this.”

Spain doesn’t respond.

“Ten years have passed, and they sucked.” France swallows. “But they’re over.”

“I might be isolated after this,” Spain mutters. “It might be two years before I even see you again.”

“That won’t happen. Not now.”

“You sound confident about that.”
“My officials are trying to ease my depression. If I act happier from now on after hanging out with you, trust me, you won’t be isolated.”

They make eye contact.

“You know,” Spain chokes out after a bit, looking away. “I thought it was over during Potsdam. I thought from that moment on, things would get better. The Nazis were defeated. You looked human again.”

“Antonio…”

“But no.” A sob goes through Spain, and he looks horrified. “Of course not. Gilbert’s body started fucking dissolving.”

France hugs him. Spain makes a wet sound.

“He’s still alive,” France chokes out. “He’s not going anywhere…”

They go back inside when Spain calms down.

Everyone sits and listens to the radio since France’s TV is awful, and France checks in every now and then with the Italian brothers. Each time he is shooed out of the kitchen.

Eventually, America and Japan return with South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Their visit is brief, though.

France hopes England doesn’t see America touch the small of Japan’s back when they leave.

Austria, Germany, Spain, Italy, and Romano stay until 10 PM.

Talks about the plan are avoided, but France, England, and Canada agree to give them more information later about what they should do. Germany is the only one who looks extremely wary at this prospect.

They then say their goodbyes, leaving only France, England, and Canada.

They all go to bed early.

\[12 \text{ July 1953}\]

Finland,

I know luck has been against us these past decades, but I still treasure our friendship and just wanted to let you know. Currently, I’m in Korea with Mr. Russia. I’ve been here for the past four or so years, training to be in some sort of ‘Nation Army.’

I don’t know how to comment on my time here. On one end, it has ended the dull monotony I
experienced when locked up in Soviet Russia, yet on the opposite spectrum, I’m being worked to the bone, and I have time to think; think about how awful my life is. I know; I’m feeling sorry for myself. When we spent time together trapped under Russia’s rule, it was amazing how positive you were able to stay, so I guess I’m trying to do the same. I mean; you got this letter, which is pretty amazing. Because of a Soviet miscalculation, the Americans have captured us, and America is allowing us to write. Hungary and Prussia are also here, writing. Lithuania isn’t. He has no one to send a letter to. His friends are rotting in a Soviet prison cell.

In all reality, I don’t know what the point of this letter is. Perhaps this will never make it to you, and I’m just talking to myself. I don’t expect my situation to change; I know what awful luck I have.

But...

I saw humanity in Russia the other day, and it shook something inside of me. I felt a glimmer of hope and remembered what’s waiting for me once this is all over. So, I’ll hold on. I’ll keep enduring.

I hope to see you again someday.

-Estonia

1953.7.12

Roderich,

I honestly don’t know what to say. Gilbert is next to me writing like a madman, and then there’s me, who has been staring at this piece of paper for the past ten minutes.

I expect he’s told you why we’re writing and where we are, so I’ll spare you another explanation.

It’s been awhile, hasn’t it? When’s the last time we talked—the Olympics? Potsdam?

That’s a little depressing.

I want you to know that during the Second World War, never once did I blame you, even as you were forced to watch that one time. I still can’t believe Gilbert spoke out. Though that moment was terrifying, it was almost…comical? Like, it’s so…Gilbert to do that, and for a second, I remembered who I was and felt, I don’t know, human. And then when you and Ludwig grabbed him to shut him up, it almost felt like old times.

God, you don’t know how much I miss those stress-free days of the past, how much I miss you.

I wish history could have gone differently. I wish someone could have rescued me, but would it even matter?

This is not to make you feel guilty. Don’t ever feel guilty about the war.

I love Gilbert. I’m in awe of what he did.

But why couldn’t it have been me, you know? Why couldn’t he have rescued us?

I wish America gave us something other than these crappy pens.

I don’t know how to end this, but I look forward to the day where we can sit in your lounge, bathe
in the sun, and listen to music. It sounds like an utter dream.

I love you, Roderich. Hold out for me. Hold out for us. Gilbert and I will make it through.

Liz

Time passes.
France plans.

On 5 May 1955, the Allies finally end the military occupation of West Germany.

“The city looks great,” France says, attempting to force a conversation.

Germany looks away. “Yeah.”

France frowns. He’s been trying to get more than one-word answers out of him for the past ten minutes.

They’re in Bonn, their officials having a meeting in the capital building while they’ve been permitted to walk around.

“Even though Bonn was in the British zone, it’s good to see that it’s not rundown,” France attempts to joke.

Germany nods again. France nearly pulls out his hair.

He tries a different approach. “How are your dogs doing?”

“Good.”

“Listen, Ludwig; I’m trying. But, you’re going to have to put some more effort into these conversations because otherwise, this is going to be painful.”

Germany gives him an awkward glance. “What’s there to talk about?”

France throws his hands up. “I don’t know, the weather? Jesus, you talk so much with Italy and Japan.”

Germany looks away. “That’s different.”

“When you were younger, you would babble on and on to Gilbert too.”

Germany stares at the ground.

“Do you not want to do this?” France whispers after a bit. He knows the city is probably crawling with spies, but he has to ask.
Germany frowns. “What?”

“The plan. You flinch whenever anyone even mentions his name.”

They make eye contact. Germany swallows.

“I want to help,” he whispers. “He’s my brother.”

“…”

“But I—” Germany clenches his fists. “Nations aren’t supposed to go against their governments.

“Gilbert did.”

Germany’s eyes squeeze shut. “I know. And when he came back to Berlin, he was beaten mercilessly for weeks until I begged my superiors to stop.”

France frowns.

A breeze picks up.

“I’m just afraid,” Germany mumbles. “After the war, after everything, I’m afraid.”

“I am too,” France whispers.

A woman rides by on her bike.

A kid kicks a football in an alleyway.

“But I miss him,” Germany whispers, his voice cracking. “So despite everything that’s been ingrained in me, I’ll help.”


Germany looks away. “After what my country did to all of the Nations, it’s the least I can do.”

On May 15th, Austria is neutralized, and the Allied occupation of the country ends.

Life moves on. More letters come.

“So, we have a deadline set?” Canada asks, sitting at France’s kitchen table.

France is shuffling through some papers. “We want to aim for April of 1971.”

“That’s so far away….”

France frowns. “I know, but it’s necessary.”

“For the housing and funds?”

“Yeah…”
Canada shifts. “Who are we rescuing again?”

France reads off a list. “Prussia, Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine, the two Nations that form Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Armenia, and Georgia.”

“That’s all the Nations at the compound?”

“Yeah.”

They both organize some more papers.

“We have Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Austria, Spain, Germany, Italy, Romano, you, me, and England working on housing, correct?” Canada eventually asks.

France nods. “As well as collecting the money to support these Nations for up to twenty years.”

“What about the escape plan?”

“Russia and China claim they have a route set up, but they won’t disclose it to anyone except America. …Whatever it is, though, America is going to set up a week or so long road trip with South Korea and Japan as an excuse to transport the Nations across the US. He told me Taiwan and Hong Kong also want to help, but I’m not quite sure what they’ll be doing.”

Canada frowns. “How old is Taiwan?”

France rubs his face. “I don’t know. America thinks she’ll be mature enough by ’71, though.”

Some time passes.

“I could always meet him if he needed help,” Canada murmurs. “During the road trip. Border security is awful, and my government gives less than two shit about what I do, so…” Canada frowns. “I could just disappear, and they wouldn’t notice.”

France smiles. “Well, that’s a good thing for us.”

Canada looks at him with a twisted expression. “I’d rather the opposite.”

“You don’t want your government breathing down your back, trust me.”

“I’m sick of feeling invisible, though,” Canada mutters.

“Matthieu, you’re not invisible.”

“…”

“You’re the one who has gotten the most money for this plan so far. Everyone recognizes that.”

Canada looks to the side. “I guess…” He rubs his face. “What were we even supposed to be doing today, talking about NATO? When’s our meeting?”

France waves his arm. “In the evening.”

Canada sighs and lays his head on the table as France puts more papers into a folder.

“How’s England?” Canada asks once he’s done.

“In every phone call America and I have had recently, half the conversation has been about Japan, and I’m afraid he does the same when he talks to England.”

France forces out a smile. “Well, I’m not sure why that would upset him, but—”

“Francis, I already told you two that you both suck at lying.”

“…”

“England has a crush on him.” Canada’s expression twists as soon as the sentence leaves his mouth. “Okay, that feels really weird to say out loud.”

“He’s trying to get over it,” France says quickly.

Canada looks up at him, head still on the table. His glasses are being pushed up his face. “Well, he better because America and Japan are infatuated with each other.”

France looks away.

“But I’m sure if you told him about your crush, that would help,” Canada mutters.

France jerks his head towards him. “Excuse me?”

Canada smirks. “Nothing.”

France feels flustered and goes to rinse out a coffee mug next to him.

“Hey, Francis,” Canada murmurs as he stands up.

“Yeah?”

“I’m happy you’re better. You…finally seem to be your normal self again.”

“Well, then I’m happy to be back,” France murmurs.

Canada smiles, then seems horrified when tears start leaking out of his eyes.

France forgets his mug and embraces him.

Chapter End Notes

(image commissioned from ghostpressure.tumblr.com)

*An important note for the Nations being rescued from the USSR: Also a part of the USSR was Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan.

i knew nothing about these countries when i wrote this (and really know nothing about them now), so they're not included... But in the Sequel..........

i just deleted so many notes man was that a rush
1955 年 7 月 18 日.

The room is completely silent.

China is next to Russia at a huge dining table, while America, France, and England are across from them. They’re at a Big Four summit. China shouldn’t be here, but his officials pushed him onto the Soviets, Mao explaining how it’s a symbolic gesture.

Or something like that.

So far, he’s been in Geneva for two days, and it’s been hell. He’s constantly being watched, and the one moment he and Russia did find time to be alone, they quickly had to stop being intimate for fear of being caught.

China side-eyes Russia, wanting to touch him so much that it’s maddening.

Across from them, the other three look uncomfortable. America is adjusting his silverware every five minutes, France appears spaced-out, England is bouncing his leg up and down…

The last one is really starting to get on China’s nerves.

When they first entered, they all made eye contact, as if exchanging an unspoken nod about the plan. Since then, though, they haven’t acknowledged one another.

It’s America who finally speaks after moving his fork for the fifth time. “How long is our officials’ meeting?”

England finally stops jiggling his leg. “Five hours.”

“Please tell me you’re joking.”

England’s leg starts moving again.

China wishes he could fast-forward time.

“They don’t expect us to wait here for another three hours, right?” America moans once they’re finished eating.

He’s met with dull shrugs.

America throws his head back and grumbles something. China shares the same sentiment. This entire thing feels useless. All of them are doing nothing but sitting here and occupying themselves, something reminiscent of their time in London.

The only difference is that France is now alive.
China rubs his face. At least he has Rus—

Russia is staring at him.

China doesn’t know why he’s so caught off-guard, but he feels his entire body flush at the sight of Russia’s parted lips and glazed over eyes. Russia must realize what he’s doing too because he blinks rapidly and yanks his head away.

The other three don’t say anything.

China wants to kiss him until he can’t breathe, and has a headache knowing that’s impossible.

He feels cagey until he’s distracted by America standing up.

“Those statues are ugly.”


America points to some busts on a podium in the far corner.

“Not as ugly as the ten-foot-tall portraits,” France mutters into his water glass.

England hits him.

America walks closer. “They look like they weigh two hundred pounds.”

“None of us know what that means except for Arthur,” France says, moving away from England.

Russia gives China a look just as the door opens.

What little calm atmosphere there was, shatters.

For whatever reason, Eisenhower, Eden, Khrushchev, and Faure are all standing at the door, and China wants nothing more than to disappear.

Eisenhower’s eyes immediately shoot to America, who starts to slink back towards his seat.

“Stop. Pick that up.”

America freezes. “What?”

Eisenhower’s gaze is intense. “The statue. Pick it up.”

“But I might—I might break it.” America’s voice nearly cracks.

“That looks like it weighs at least 100 kilograms,” Eden, the British Prime Minister, mutters. “He won’t be able to lift it.”

America picks up the statue like it weighs nothing.

He looks like he’s about to vomit as Eden and Faure gape. Eisenhower smiles.

Khrushchev is expressionless while his translator mutters something to him. He then points at Russia. “You, pick that up too.”

China digs his fingernails into the palm of his hand as Russia robotically stands and walks over to where America had awkwardly set down the statue.
Eisenhower side-eyes Khrushchev. “It’s a military’s size that dictates the strength of a Nation.”

“Then there should be no issue,” Khrushchev mutters after the translation delay.

Russia picks up the statue like it’s nothing.

Eden frowns. “Well, the British Nation Avatar can—”

England rapidly shakes his head.

Khrushchev gives a smug smile. “Strength is not the only indicator of how powerful a Nation’s country is.” He turns toward the door. “How fast they recover from their wounds, for example, is another useful gauge…”

The accompanying guards raise their guns in question.

Eisenhower starts walking down the hallway after the translation delay. “I believe it’s also important to look at…”

The door shuts.

China can hear the ringing in his ears.

“It was like a joke to them,” Russia spits in Swahili. He’s pale.

China makes eye contact with him. His heart is beating in his throat, but he tries to keep up his calm façade.

“But nothing happened,” he murmurs in Gaelic.

England is looking more and more furious. “Something could have, though” he spits in Icelandic. “I wouldn’t put it past them.”

“This only proves we have to betray them,” France mutters in Slovenian.

All America does is stare at the statue. No one says anything else.

It’s the last time China sees England, France, and America for more than a decade.
The Sino-Soviet split of 1962.

China is thrown into isolation afterward.

It’s been eight years since China has talked to another Nation.
Every day is something he has to endure.

He’s lonely.

The nights where it’s really bad, he’ll read the last letter Russia gave him.

…

13 February 1962

Yao,

It looks like our formal relations will be ending soon, so you and I probably won’t see each other for a long period of time.

To summarize the plan,

- Alfred and I are using the nukes as bribing methods (and don’t worry about how and where we’ll be getting them). We’re going to trade them to the Russian mafia group that’s helping the two of us escape. only you know about the nukes, don’t tell anyone else

- The escape route is from Siberia to Hong Kong. First, we’ll rescue the Nations, then cross over into China. There, we’ll get into contact with the organized crime group that’ll sneak us into Taiwan from Hong Kong, which is where we’ll meet Alfred. Hong Kong is also helping us get into his country

- Alfred said he’ll have a plane to fly us to the US himself. We’ll all be dead in cargo boxes

- When we get to the US, we’ll take a ten-day road trip across the country to Philadelphia. Kiku, Yong-Soo, and Taiwan will be with Alfred as a cover

- Spain and France will be in Philadelphia, and Alfred will hand us off to them. Those two will then sneak us onto a cargo plane headed for Paris

- When we arrive, you and I will contact the previous mafia organization we worked with and sneak back into Russia. We’ll part ways there
I’ll contact you a few months before all of this is going to happen. Remember the code phrase. We’ll be meeting on the border and then going to Siberia.

I

Why did

How come

I hope that you, Kiku, and Yong-Soo can reconcile after the trip. I hope that I can save my sisters. I hope that everything doesn’t fall apart.

Kazimir

-

Kazimir is getting worse. Greedier. It’s infuriating. Don’t trust him when we meet up. He’s still sneaking me into the Siberian base, but I don’t know if that’ll last.

I don’t know how to

There are so many blot marks because I don’t know how to articulate myself.

I love you. It feels weird to write something that’s been repeating in my head for decades now. Not being able to see you is going to kill me.

Wait for me. Please.

I love you. I love you so much. I wish I could shout that to the world. Yao, you make me want to keep living.

I love you.

Ivan

…

China loves him too.

It’s threatening to tear him apart.

Sometimes, he thinks of Japan and South Korea and wonders if he’ll ever see them again.

The plan barely feels tangible.

At one point, Wang Yao supported Mao Zedong and the good things he did for the country, but those times have since passed.
Both the chaos from the current Red Guards terrorizing former government employees and intellectuals, as well as the repercussions from the famine caused by the Great Leap Forward, are enough to make China dislike him. Watching the 77-year-old man be coddled by his young wife at dinner certainly isn’t improving his opinion either.

There are other prominent members of the CCP having dinner with them, and to say it’s uncomfortable is an understatement. None of them are making a sound. They’re only there to prove their loyalty, to make sure a Red Guard doesn’t murder them in the middle of the night.

The only reason China’s in the room is because he’s treated like an art piece. He’s to accompany people and have no one acknowledge his presence. He’s a statue. A relic. Something that was once worshipped.

Forgettable.

That’s what he’s become—an afterthought. But it’s not like he’s even done anything since the Sino-Soviet split. He’s been obedient to the point where guards don’t feel the need to watch over him anymore.

Eventually, the dinner ends.

China retreats to his room.

1970年9月23日.

China is on a balcony, staring at the Beijing skyline.

The stars are no longer visible because of light pollution.

He’s not one to become irrationally angry over stupid things such as this, but for a second he wants to—

“Mr. Wang?”

China whips his head around.

Behind him is a man he doesn’t recognize, but he looks like a member of the government.

“Yes?” China asks, attempting to keep his expression blank.

The man smiles. “I hear you like animation?”

The world seems to still.

He leaves, and isn’t caught, and forks over the money he and Russia prepared years ago for this, and in exchange is given documents from the USSR.

China is shaking when he makes it back to his room.

The genuine emotion is welcomed. He can’t remember the last time he felt this alive, felt this
aware of the world outside of the CCP’s inner circle

He checks the documents.

There’s information on outside foreign policy, details of the deals Russia’s made with the mafia organizations working for them, and a map and timeline of dates.

There’s also a small note.

…

*Meet me at the border on April 2\textsuperscript{nd}*

our designated spot

…

Seeing Russia’s handwriting causes China’s chest to constrict.

He grips the note and shuffles through more of the papers, eventually noticing a crudely folded origami crane that’s been flattened.

There’s another note with it.

…

*I’ll be in contact again soon. I can’t wait to see you.*

*I love you so much. God, you don’t even know.*

…

China takes a deep breath, feeling a rush of adrenaline go through his body.

He finally has something to live for again.

Chapter End Notes

*I’ve read multiple 70-page documents on the Sino-Soviet split (and I wish I were joking), and some say that it was in 1960 while others 1962. 1960 was considered the year they announced it, I guess, while 62’ was when the Soviets really were like “fuck you China” and sided with India against them. In terms of this fic, basically, Russia and China stopped seeing each other in 62’.*

some sources:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJyoX_vrlns
1971.

Somehow 22 years have passed since they started the plan.

And soon, they’ll be putting it into action.

“I’ll be landing in Japan on April 11th.”

Taiwan chews her lip. “And then you and Kiku are heading to Taipei in your personal plane, right?”

America has a slight headache. “Yeah. I’ll have the book crates too.”

“Will there be enough space for the four of us?”

“There should be. I mean, Kiku will sit up front with me, and then you and Yong-Soo can sit in the small passenger area in the back.” He pauses. “Yong-Soo won’t have any issues getting to Taipei, right?”

Taiwan dully shrugs. “He said it would be fine. His officials approved it, and South Korea is the US’s ally. I don’t see why it would be a problem.”

Most South Korean citizens aren’t allowed to travel outside of the country because of its military dictatorship, but that’s something America rather not dwell on right now.

At least he knows Yong-Soo isn’t being mistreated.

What would really be nice is if his country were a part of the UN so he could attend these Nation sessions, though being at this one right now is the last thing America wants to be doing.

Taiwan pulls him out of his thoughts. “You’re lucky you have your own plane.”

“It’s old, but it’ll work.”

“That doesn’t make me feel confident about flying.”

America waves his hand. “We’re landing as soon as we get to California, so we’ll be fine.”

“Alfred, that’s still a fourteen-hour plane ride.”

“We’ll be fine.”

“Oh boy. Then not only do we get to fly in a rusty old death trap, we get to immediately hop into two huge vans and drive for another couple of hours afterward!”

“That’s the joy of road trips!”
Taiwan rolls her eyes. “Just for the record, I’m not driving.”

America laughs. “I’ll handle the one. Yong-Soo can drive the other.”

“Oh, I’m sure he’ll be thrilled,” Taiwan says, playfully leaning into him.

Japan is suddenly there.

Taiwan steps away, causing America to blink. “Kiku, I thought you were with Italy and Germany.”

“They’re coming over,” he mumbles, leaning into him and avoiding eye contact.

Italy bounds over before America can respond.

“You overreact, Kiku.”

Japan’s face flushes. “I do not.”

Both Italy and Taiwan smirk as Germany warily walks up to them.

America realizes Japan’s still leaning into him and feels a little hot. He tries to distract himself.

“Thanks for that cassette tape you gave me, Ludwig.”

Germany blinks. “It’s no problem.”

“It’s for the road trip, right?” Taiwan asks.

America rubs the back of his neck. “Yeah, so we can have a diverse range of music from different countries.”

“You road trip!” Italy exclaims in the fakest voice ever. “I forgot you guys were going on that.”

Germany now looks like he’s about to throw up.

America’s voice nearly cracks, feeling much more nervous talking about it now than when he did with Taiwan. “Yeah. We’re leaving in about two weeks.”

Italy cocks his head. “It’s for ten days, right?”

“Yeah,” Japan murmurs. “We’re traveling from LA to Philadelphia.”

The four of them start talking, but America’s mind wanders—not about the plan, but about another source of his anxiety, who’s still, in fact, leaning into him.

Japan.

It’s been 16 years since that party in Paris. During it, something changed, but it’s hard to define. While they’re more than friends now, they’ve never actually vocalized that to each other. Everything is just through subtext, and America has no idea how to handle such a thing. He and Japan send each other gifts and mementos that clearly have a romantic vibe to them too, yet they still never talk about what this is between them.

It’s slowly starting to eat away at him.

He’s aware he’s half of the problem. He should bring it up. He knows for sure Japan has a crush on him. But his own feelings are just so confusing that he chickens out every time.
He really likes Japan, a lot. He wants to hold him and sleep next to him, but—

America chews his lip and stares at the ground.

He knows he can never reciprocate sexually, and he’s afraid of how Japan will react once he finds out. He doesn’t know if he could handle being rejected.

So America won’t say anything. They’ll just keep up this dance around each other. They’re two male Nations anyway. It’s impossible what America wants.

He feels himself getting worked up. If everything were normal, he’d be able to calm himself down. But it’s not, and this bit of added on stress is making everything hurt, and it hard to breathe, and—

Japan is grabbing onto his arm. “Alfred.”

Russia leans over the two of their backs. “If you could stop having your presence expand, that’d be wonderful.”

It’s the shock America needs.

He forces himself to get a grip. “What do you want?”

Russia slips his hand into America’s pocket. “The AristoCats was a good movie.”

“Was it, now?” He can feel Russia place a piece of paper there.

Russia smiles and removes his hand. “Yup!” His expression then sobers up when he side-eyes Japan. “He’s looking forward to seeing you.”

Japan gives him a blank look as he walks away.

“Talking to him doesn’t get any less uncomfortable,” Taiwan mutters when he’s gone.

America feels all over the place. “Do you want to insult him to his face again for old times’ sake?”

Her face flushes. “Cut me some slack; I was a little kid!

Now, she has the body and mind of a teenager.

Italy jokes around with her while Japan pulls America to the side. “Alfred, are you okay?”

America swallows. “Just nervous.”

“I…” Japan looks away. “Well, I guess I can’t help with that.”

“Sorry.”

Japan scrunches up his eyebrows. “Why are you sorry?”

*For being an utter mess.*

America looks away. “I don’t know.”

Japan sighs. “Well, at least we’ll have a break from policy stuff while on the road trip.”

“That’s one way to be optimistic,” America mutters.
“We’ll also be together for ten days.”

America’s cheeks flush. “I am looking forward to that.”

Japan brushes some of America’s hair behind his ear. “Me too…”

France coughs.

They abruptly take two steps away from each other.

America’s heart is going wild. “I thought you were with Spain.”

“What, I’m not allowed to talk to you?” France says, looking unfazed.

America sees England and Canada walking over as well. “Y-You are.”

“We were just going over the road trip,” Japan says, his voice higher pitched than normal.

England’s now within earshot. “I hope you two have fun.”

It’s without his usual malice, and America is thankful he’s finally stopped hating Japan for whatever goddamn reason.

That was an exhausting few years.

There’s an awkward pause, so America can’t help but blurt out, “Where is Spain?”

France’s eyebrow twitches. “With Romano, and I really didn’t feel like third-wheeling, so.”

“I’m always third-wheeling you and England,” Canada mutters.

England glares at him. “What does that mean?”

“Nothing.”

Japan says something to Canada, but America can’t hear what because his ears start roaring.

He then has a coughing attack.

Japan wipes a wet paper towel over America’s mouth.

“I’m fine, Kiku,” America mutters, gripping onto the bathroom sink. “It’s just from the Vietnam War.”

Canada studies him. “You had a panic attack at the sight of blood.”

America has no idea why he felt the need to accompany them.

“I’m fine,” he snaps. “It just caught me off guard.”

“Yeah. Uh-huh.”

Japan drops his hand, giving America a wary look. “You sure you’re okay enough to go back to the assembly room? The next meeting is about to start.”
America feels a bead of sweat roll down his back. “I’m fine.”
“…”
“Really. A-Okay.”

To review:

- We’ll be traveling from Siberia down to Guangdong.
- We’ll sneak into Hong Kong (with his help) and be smuggled over to Taipei on an Amoy Food cargo ship with an IMO number of 9074729.
- You’ll be picking us up at the Taiwan Shipbuilding Corporation. We’ll be in cargo boxes, and you’ll have to discard your fake decoy boxes there before you take us (have the real boxes prepared at your home in Pennsylvania).
- We’ll be dead during transportation and will have means to keep us that way.

After this UN thing is over, I’m flying to Siberia and am meeting Yao, who’s already been smuggled over. The CCP hasn’t reported his absence yet, so I think we’re in the clear. And the USSR definitely won’t report their missing Nations because they won’t want to show any signs of weakness.

Hopefully, everything works out so you’ll be able to receive us on the 12th. I’ll be handing over the payment to the mafia organizations. Thanks for getting me those nukes.

By the way, this entire plan is fucked up.

America drops Russia’s letter and stares at his bedroom ceiling.

It takes everything in his power to keep it together.

They’re going to rescue the Nations. This is the right thing to do. And what he’s doing is the right thing to do because then no one else will get hurt. He can endure the pain. He’s not lying to everyone; he’s fine. He’s fine. He’s

That night, his dreams are of poison bullets

Chapter End Notes

Escape

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Time is an illusion.

It’s fake. It stopped being real ages ago. Maybe years. Prussia doesn’t know. He’s unable to grasp it, only able to hold onto clarity for brief flashes until he’s dragged back into an abyss of semi-consciousness.

There are some moments when his head is clear, but they’re rare, and usually only when Russia comes to his cell to read some letters. His visits are infrequent, though, so Prussia has stopped using them to try to grapple the amount of time that’s passed.

He used to write responses to these letters. He doesn’t know when that stopped or when he got too weak to grip a pencil. Eventually, even his voice gave out, so he couldn’t tell Russia what to write either.

Why is he here? Why is he existing like this? Do the Soviets not care?

All he’s doing now is wasting away.

Sometimes, he wants to die. But then Russia will appear and read something stupid from France or Spain or Austria or Germany, and Prussia is able to summon what little willpower he has left to keep enduring.

The only other reoccurring figure Prussia sees is Kazimir. He’s always with Russia, and every time Prussia focuses his eyes, he seems to age.

He’s not sure what would be better—living in this purgatory state as everything changes and grows around him, or being tortured. The rational answer would be to pick his current existence. But at least when he was being tortured by the Nazis, he knew the date.

He wonders when it will end and if it will. Sometimes, he swears Bavaria is right next to him, telling him how easy it would be to let go and move on. But then, he’ll disappear and be replaced by Russia and Kazimir’s looming figures, Prussia forgetting his words when Russia reads the letters from his loved ones.

Perhaps spite is the reason he’s still alive. He’ll die one day, but not here.

Definitely not here.

There’s a figure outside his cell.

Prussia regains consciousness. Is it Russia? Kazimir? He lost the ability to sense Nation presences a while ago, so he can’t rely on that. But his eyesight is also awful, and the cell is dark, so the figure is nothing but a black blob.

Are they going to give him food? Water? Rarely that happens, and usually only when Russia and Kazimir show up.
But this figure doesn’t seem like either of them.

They jostle the door, rapidly, and Prussia feels a jolt go through his body as soon as it screeches open. He feels himself lock up. Are they going to experiment on him? He takes back wanting to be experimented on. Where are they—

IVs. When were there IVs in his cell? The person is disconnecting Prussia from a bunch of dangling liquids. Normally, he’s too weak to experience any sort of intense emotion, but at this moment, he feels on the brink of a panic attack.

The person leans over him.

It’s China. He has to be dreaming. His mind must be playing tricks on him. Why is he cutting his tubes? Why is he here?

China picks him up and cradles his emaciated body to his chest.

Prussia wants to say something, anything, but his tongue isn’t cooperating, and his throat feels constricted, and everything is so overwhelming he feels like he’s going to black out at any second.

China carries him into the hallway. The light adjustment causes Prussia to recoil and close his eyes. His body is begging him to let it die, but he ignores it and pries his eyes open.

Blood.

There’s blood everywhere. Dead bodies. China has blood on his clothing. It reeks of gasoline too. Does he notice? Where is that smell coming from?

China starts moving at a brisk pace, and Prussia feels nauseous despite not having anything in his stomach. Is that Clipboard Man? Is that his assistant? He’s no longer a scrawny teenager, but rather a grown man. And he’s dead. They’re both dead. Did China kill them?

A gunshot.

Prussia’s heart feels like it’s about to leap out of his chest as China abruptly breaks into a jog.

They see Russia when they turn the corner.

It takes Prussia a moment to process who it is. He’s covered in blood. His eyes are red.

There’s a gun in his hand.

Kazimir is on the ground in front of him, blood pooling from his shoulder, and he appears stunned. He yells something to Russia, who screams in response. Prussia can’t understand. He can’t understand China either when he makes a comment.

Suddenly, he and Kazimir make eye contact.

Kazimir stands up, gripping the shoulder that Russia shot, and says something to him. Prussia has no idea why. He looks desperate. He’s shaking.

More people come into the hallway. All of them have guns, and they start pointing and talking to Russia. Kazimir is shaking even worse now. He spits out blood and yells something.

Russia snaps.
He shoots him in the opposite shoulder, and Kazimir screams in pain, collapsing to the ground. He’s crying now. Begging. Prussia sees that he’s urinated.

Russia opens his mouth, but China says something curtly and starts walking away. After giving Kazimir a venomous look, Russia follows, and Prussia has to crane his head to look at the man behind them.

He’s wriggling in pain, screaming.

Yelling.

Pleading.

Everyone just leaves him there, and for a second, Prussia wants to go back and help.

His thoughts are interrupted when they exit the building.

The cold air causes a jolt to go through his body. Why is he outside? Why are there trucks? Oh. He’s being dumped into the back of one. Why are there other dead Nations? Why—

It finally hits him that this is a breakout.

He’s too weak to move, but because he was thrown on top of the other bodies, he can see out the window where Russia and China are talking to some men.

Prussia can’t process why the two of them are doing this. All they seem is stressed, and they don’t look any better when they climb into the car.

Russia grumbles something as he starts the engine. China, meanwhile, begins unfolding an obnoxiously huge m—

Russia starts driving.

Prussia’s body is thrust backward. He lands on top of more dead Nations and blearily looks out the window, just in time to see the entire compound explode.

The shock of the explosion nearly knocks the truck off the road. Prussia rolls off of whoever he was on, his heart pounding. He can’t breathe. What are they doing? Where are they going? Why? why why why wh

“G…”

Prussia’s eyes dart to the noise.

Hungary is bald and emaciated, but she forces her mouth open again.

“G…”

The rush of emotions Prussia feels causes him to blackout.

“I didn’t ask to be stationed out here! Fuck, I’ve been helping you!” Kazimir screams, wriggling in pain from where he was shot again.
“You just threatened to sell us out to the Soviet Regime!” Russia yells back. “Fuck you! Fuck all of this! This is payback!”

“Ivan,” China says in Russian. “Just leave him.”

“No!” Kazimir cries out. “Wait! Please don’t leave me here!”

They start walking away.

“PLEASE, I’M SORRY! PLEASE!”

Sunlight is filtering through the car windows.

The uneven road jostles Prussia enough that he wakes up, and he’s instantly confused. Working
through his memories is tiring, like trying to recall a dream, and it’s only when he sees the other
dead bodies around him that he abruptly remembers what’s happening.

The first thing he notices is the smell of the car. It’s a mixture of the metallic scent of blood and
the stench of urine. He gags, but there’s no escaping it. His head is pressed against the floor where
he’s sure the smell is worse, but it’s not like he has the strength to lift it.

The car is silent. Prussia wonders what China and Russia are even doing.

He swallows and tries to examine the bodies around him. Everyone is dead, and their bodies are all
emaciated. He can’t find Hungary. She must be twisted up on top of someone.

Russia says something.

China responds.

Prussia frowns, unnerved and confused. He still can’t comprehend why they broke him out. Where
are they even taking them? How long have they been planning—

The car goes through a pothole.

Prussia’s head slams against the floor, and he blacks out.

“When’s our next checkpoint?” Russia mutters.

China frowns and glances at the map. “Around 100 kilometers or so.”

“Is that close to the border?”

“Kind of... we’ll still be another 45 kilometers away at the checkpoint.”

Russia takes one hand off the wheel and rubs his face. “I’m sick of this.”

“We’ve only been traveling for three days and still have another four to get to Guangdong.”

“I’m still sick of this.”

China touches his thigh. Russia makes a noise.

“At least we’ll be dead when we’re transported to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and California,” China
murmurs. He starts rubbing circles into Russia’s thigh. “Everything will work out.”

The car swerves a bit and goes through a pothole.

“Please don’t crash.”

“—” Russia steadies the car. “You’re distracting me.”

China smiles and looks out the window.

“Yao,” Russia murmurs after a bit.

China looks over his shoulder. “Hm?”
“I love you.”

“I love you too…”

Russia wrinkles his nose. “I wish I could say that in a place that didn’t smell this disgusting.”

China laughs, feeling hopelessly endeared. “The more you think about it, the worse it gets.”

The car is motionless when Prussia wakes up again.

It’s dark. He’s currently on his stomach, pressed against who he thinks is Slovakia. He attempts to move, but his body’s so weak that it refuses to cooperate.

He strains to hear if there’s anyone outside and is caught off-guard when the trunk abruptly opens.

Russia and China start grabbing bodies and carrying them away, but Prussia can’t see where. His heart rate only increases the closer they get to him, and when Russia finally starts to pull him out, Prussia panics and twitches his arm.

Russia nearly drops him.

Prussia wishes he could speak. Or at the very least, understand other languages.

He can do neither.

China runs back over and says what sounds like a question as Russia holds him up. Prussia makes a noise in the back of his throat, not really knowing what he was going for.

They both bring him over to some crates.

“Don’t try to stay alive,” Russia grumbles in German as he places him in it. “Your body is weak enough that you can just remain dead.”

“We could give him the cyanide tablets that we’re going to take when we wake up,” China murmurs.

“What, like he’ll be able to grab them? Just stay dead, Gilbert.”

The use of his human name causes Prussia to feel overwhelmed. He wants to ask so many questions, but all they do is seal him in a crate.

Eventually, he allows himself to die.

There’s the sound of a foghorn.

Is that a plane engine?
Water.

He wakes up rapidly and nearly gets blinded by sunlight. There’s a blurry figure spraying him with a hose, who’s talking to multiple other people.

Prussia’s too overwhelmed.

He blacks out again.

When he wakes up, he’s on a mattress.

Everything is dark and blurry, and all Prussia can see is that someone put a t-shirt and sweatpants on him. After a while, though, he notices a flickering light and turns his head towards it.

He freezes when he sees them.

The light is from a TV that Russia, China, America, Japan, South Korea, and some other female Nation are gathered in front of.

There are also mattresses scattered around the room that the other Nations from Siberia are on, and Prussia’s head starts spinning. The atmosphere seems awkward. Those six aren’t even saying anything to each other.

Prussia is about to make some sort of noise, but he gets distracted when he realizes the TV is in color. He doesn’t know how much time passes, but eventually, South Korea mutters a comment that makes the female Nation laugh, causing China to look away with a pensive expression.

His gaze lands on Prussia. They make eye contact.

China says something to America, who quickly stands up and walks over to him with a bottle of water.

“You need to drink this,” America murmurs in German, stooping down. “Here, let me prop you up.”

Japan is now hovering, but Prussia barely registers him when he realizes how thirsty he is. He doesn’t know how many water bottles they hand him, but he drinks all of them. He’s then spoon-fed oatmeal, and Prussia knows the whole situation is pathetic, but he’s too hungry to care.

As soon as he finishes one bowl, he promptly falls asleep.

It’s been a while since that’s happened. Usually, he just dies.

America awkwardly holds the bowl. “He’s asleep, right? Not dead?”

Japan touches his back. “He’s asleep.”

“For whatever goddamn reason he’s been regaining consciousness more than anyone else,”
Russia grumbles from the couch. “Even though he looks the worst out of all of them.”

“Prussia always makes things exciting,” America mumbles, standing up. He then turns around and sees China whispering into Russia’s ear.

South Korea looks like he’s about to commit homicide.

America represses a sigh, feeling a headache forming. He doesn’t know what he expected to happen between South Korea, Japan, and China, but it’s been nothing but awkward.

Japan gently takes the bowl from him and sets it on the counter.

When Prussia wakes up, he’s still on his mattress.

He blinks when he realizes how clear his head is, knowing it hasn’t been that way since the Korean War.

It’s a bit overwhelming.

He chews his lip and looks around. There’s sunlight filtering through the windows, and the room is empty except for one person on the couch.

South Korea.

He’s not really doing anything but staring at the wall. Prussia shifts to try and get his attention, then realizes something terrible.

He has to pee.

And he really, really doesn’t want South Korea to help him, but shit.

“Hey,” Prussia says, his voice cracking horribly.

South Korea jolts, his head whipping towards where Prussia is.

Prussia awkwardly wiggles.

South Korea springs up from the couch. “Uh, hi,” he blurts out in German. “Do you need anything?”

Prussia can feel a headache forming. “I need to piss.”

“Oh, uh.” South Korea rapidly looks around. “Let me get a bottle.”

He grabs one from the kitchen, then awkwardly stoops down and hands it to Prussia. His grip is too weak, though, and it falls right through his fingers.

They make eye contact.

Prussia’s headache gets worse. “You’re going to have to touch my dick.”

“What?” he hears America ask in plain English.

Prussia realizes that he understood him just as South Korea jolts upward. His face is tinted red. “He
needs to pee,” he blurts out in Korean. “And he can’t hold the bottle.”

America smirks. “Well, then you’re gonna have to touch his dick.”

“How me!”

“Because you did a shit job of hosing them. It was Kiku and I who did all of the work.”

“Fuck you.”

“Touch his dick.”

“I can understand you,” Prussia says wearily.

America rubs the back of his neck. “Let me get you some water.”

South Korea sighs and stoops down as America disappears into the kitchen, holding out the bottle. He awkwardly fumbles, but eventually Prussia’s able to relieve himself.

South Korea empties the piss on the flowerbed next to the deck.

“Please wash your hands,” Prussia mutters when South Korea shuts the sliding door.

He makes a beeline for the bathroom. “Don’t worry.”

America dodges the other mattresses, then props Prussia up and helps him drink.

His stomach growls as soon as he’s finished the glass.

America stands up. “Here, let me get you some more oatmeal.”

“Wait,” Prussia blurts out.

America pauses.

“What the hell is this? Where am I? What’s the date? Why—why?”

America takes off his glasses and rubs his face. “It’s April 13, 1971.”

Prussia hears a ringing in his ears. “1971?”

“I’m sorry it couldn’t be sooner.”

Prussia wildly looks around at all of the other Nations, none who even seem close to waking up. “I thought—During the Korean War you mentioned that Francis wanted to do this, but after all these years, I thought it was a joke.”

South Korea is now hovering in the doorway.

America frowns. “It wasn’t a joke.”

“I was fine with just the letter exchange. I didn’t think that you guys—” Prussia grips his hair, feeling overwhelmed.

America fiddles with his glasses. “Well, we did it.”

“What the fuck is next? How the hell are you going to cope with the repercussions?”
“There’s a plan, and you guys are going to be placed in European safe houses.”

Prussia opens his mouth.

“But that’s the last thing you need to be worrying about right now.”

South Korea takes the bowl from America. “Does he need more oatmeal?” His voice is hushed. America nods, his face pensive.

“Alfred,” Prussia chokes out. America’s head jerks in his direction. “I was a Nazi. I was prepared to accept the punishments my government had in store for me. What about you guys? Do any of you even realize what could happen?”

America swallows. “Yes.”

“Does China and Russia? Where even are they?”

“They understand, and they’re sleeping.”

“Sleeping?”

“It’s 6:30 AM.”

Prussia now feels bad for being so loud. “Why are you awake?”

“Because Yong-Soo and I promised to keep watch in case anyone woke up.” America’s fiddling with the sleeve of his shirt.

“Wait, why is South Korea here? Why are Russia and China? Why are any of you—I don’t understand.”

South Korea reappears with the oatmeal. “Why do you care?”

“Because, fuck!” None of the other Nations even stir. “You could face heavy repercussions if this all falls apart!”

America looks nauseous. “Gilbert, we know. Okay? We know. But none of you deserved to suffer any longer.”

Prussia opens his mouth.

“Everyone is helping for their own personal reasons. Maybe what you did with Francis was a wake-up call. Maybe it was Potsdam. But we’ve been planning for more than twenty years.”

“Fine. So I guess Russia wanted to save his sisters or whatever, but why is China here, so they can fuck?”

America’s expression shutters while South Korea angrily drops the oatmeal bowl on the counter and walks away.

“The Asian Nations are all here for their own personal reasons,” America eventually mutters. “Wait, did they actually—”

“It’s six in the fucking morning, and I can hear you from all the way upstairs,” Russia spits,
walking into the living room.

Prussia’s mouth slams shut. He can hear South Korea angrily closing cabinets in the kitchen.

America rubs the back of his neck. “Where’s China?”

“Taking a shower.” Russia glares at Prussia. “Did anyone else wake up, or just him?”

“Just him…”

“Of course.”

There’s an extremely awkward pause.

America runs over to the TV and flips it on. “Look!” he blurts out. “It’s in color!”

Russia disappears into the kitchen, and South Korea briskly walks out.

He and America take turns awkwardly feeding Prussia the oatmeal while Russia makes a bunch of noise. Prussia eventually smells eggs.

He looks at America when he sets down the bowl. “Am I allowed to eat whatever he’s cooking?”

“I don’t think your stomach can handle it…”

The TV keeps playing. South Korea mutters something about how he hates the current commercial.

Prussia blinks. “But the entire thing is so cool.”

“Not when you’ve heard that song fifteen times already.”

America stands up. “I just remembered something I think you’ll like.”

Prussia opens his mouth to ask what, but he doesn’t get the chance before America darts away.

Russia reemerges from the kitchen. “Do you want me to make you anything?”

South Korea gives him a look of disgust. “No.”

“Are you ever going to talk to Yao?”

“Fuck you—”

“Wait,” Prussia blurts out.

South Korea stands up and storms outside. He slams the door shut behind him.

Russia rubs his face. “What?”

“Why?”

“Excuse me?”

“I understand you did this for Belarus and Ukraine.” Their mattresses are both grouped together. “But why did you keep coming back and reading the letters? Why did you write responses for me?” Prussia’s brain is short-circuiting. “Why?”
“Am I that much of a monster that you think I don’t have any basic humanity?”

Prussia stares at him. “No, but—we’ve always hated each other. You have no reason to like me!”

“Then maybe it was for the greater good.” Russia turns around.


Russia sighs. “If you’re just going to keep asking questions—”

“The letters were part of the reason why I didn’t give up and dissolve.”

Russia stills.

Prussia’s mouth tastes metallic. He still forces himself to say it, though. “Thank you, Ivan.”

Russia’s head twists around, his eyebrows scrunched up.

“Thank you,” Prussia repeats, not sure what he’s feeling. “You helped keep me alive.

“You’re not a monster. None of us are monsters. I’m still trying to process this, but know that you were never a monster.”

Russia’s face is actually turning red. “Okay. We can stop this conversation now.”

America starts laughing, and both of them jump and look at the doorway. He’s holding a…thing.

“I’ve never seen you this embarrassed.”

Russia’s face turns even redder. “Go away.”

“Oh. Getting angry.”

Russia disappears into the kitchen. “Go watch some animation.”

America rolls his eyes and sets down whatever the hell he’s holding. “Where’s Yong-Soo?”

“He…went outside.”

America rubs his face. “Alright.” He then shakes his head. “Well, this here is a cassette player.” He takes some square-looking things out of his pockets. “And these are cassette tapes.”

“Which is…?”

“The new way to play music!”

“What about records?”

“These are more portable. You can create mixtapes and put them in cars too, and,” America fumbles to get one of the cassettes into a slot. “Here, you’ll like this one.”

Prussia can’t remember when he felt this alive and carefree. “Will I?”

America presses play.

Prussia freezes as soon as the first notes hit, and a roaring begins to fill his ears. The music gets louder. Tears start to prick the corners of his eyes.
It’s one of Austria’s songs.

The tears overwhelm him and start pooling down his face. He can’t see America, but he can only imagine his expression.

“How did you get this?” Prussia eventually manages to choke out.

America fidgets. “Austria had me help him record it.”

Tears are streaming down Prussia’s cheeks. “I haven’t listened to music since—the Soviet Invasion—I think that was the last time I’ve—” he breaks off in a sob.

America pats his shoulder. “I also asked Germany for his favorite bands, so I—”

Hungary’s voice cracks. “Roderich?”

America immediately rushes to comfort her as South Korea opens the sliding door. “I felt a—” He must pause when he sees Prussia.

Hungary is tended to. At some point, Prussia is handed a tissue.

“Gilbert,” Hungary eventually chokes out after she’s more aware of her surroundings.

Prussia tries to keep himself together. “Yeah?”

She smiles. “They broke us out.”

He starts sobbing again.

One by one, the other Nations start waking up.

Japan, China, and who Prussia learned is Taiwan eventually come downstairs to help everyone, and as that’s happening, Prussia listens to the music. America puts in his own ‘mixtape’ after Austria’s cassette is finished playing, and Prussia can only conclude that he has a really bizarre music taste.

He and Hungary talk for a bit after she’s finished eating and drinking, but she’s so weak that she quickly drifts off. That’s what happens with most of the Nations; they become alive again, take care of their basic needs, then fall asleep. By noon, all of the Nations from Siberia are sleeping except for Prussia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

Russia has dragged their mattresses into the attached dining room and out of sight. Prussia can hear Ukraine crying.

The TV’s on again, and it’s awkward. Taiwan won’t stop fidgeting, China keeps trying to make eye contact with South Korea, who is blatantly ignoring him; and then there’s the fact America is passed out on Japan’s shoulder.

Every now and then, he’ll squirm or make a whimpering noise.

Japan is staring at the TV with a laser-focus just as the commercial comes on that South Korea hates. He groans; then stands up abruptly and starts gathering trash together.
“Don’t wake up anyone,” Japan mutters.

“How long are we staying here?” Prussia quickly asks, not wanting to deal with a fight.

China dully looks at him. “Two days.”

“Where are we?”

“Nevada.”

Prussia has no idea where that is.

“Are we driving someplace else next?”

China rubs his face. “Yeah. Iowa.”

Prussia still has no idea where that is. The only states recognizable to him are the ones in the northeast.

“We can’t even sit up, though. How are we going to get into the car?”

“We’re going to build up your muscles tomorrow.”

“How?”

“You’re awfully chatty.”

“With some basic aerobic exercises,” Taiwan squeaks. She’s fiddling with a hair tie on her wrist.

Prussia doesn’t really know how to talk to her. “Ah.”

South Korea walks to the kitchen and chucks all of the trash into the trashcan. When he comes back, it’s quiet again.

Ukraine’s sobs are more audible than ever.

South Korea sits back down on the couch. “If you leave Alfred like that, he’s going to drool on your shoulder.”

“He doesn’t drool,” Japan hisses.

“Yong-Soo, you’re the one who does that,” China says at the same time.

South Korea’s face starts flushing. The annoying commercial comes on again.

Prussia can feel a conversation about to happen between the three Asian Nations. He’s begging for it, hoping the awkward tension gets resolved.

But then Russia walks into the room.

China stands up. “Are they asleep?”

“They’re getting tired,” Russia mumbles.

China walks over and touches his back, guiding him into the kitchen. “Should we make…”
Prussia closes his eyes, not wanting to stay awake any longer.

It’s 6 PM when he’s fully conscious again.
The first thing he hears is Hungary.
“Can’t pee in a bottle.”
Prussia turns his head and sees a flustered South Korea standing over her. “Don’t—”
“Here, I can get a pan,” Taiwan interrupts. “And I’ll help her.”
South Korea mumbles something.
“You need to grow up.”
“I’m one of the oldest here.”
“Hey, uh,” South Korea and Taiwan startle. “Sorry,” Prussia awkwardly says, “but I also have to pee.”
“Do you think you can grip the bottle?” South Korea asks in an exhausted tone.
Prussia moves his hand. His muscles feel stronger. “Maybe?”
South Korea gives him the bottle, and thankfully he’s able to get a steady enough grip on it. It’s awkward as he and Hungary relieve themselves, but Prussia feels immensely better afterward.
South Korea and Taiwan dump the piss on the flowerbed outside.
“How do we wash these?” Taiwan asks when they walk back into the living room.
“Uh, the sink.”
“Isn’t that …?”
The two disappear into the kitchen.
“Hey,” Prussia murmurs, turning towards Hungary despite his body’s protests.
She smiles. “Hi.”
There’s so much to say that Prussia feels tongue-tied.
“Colored television exists now,” is what he ends up blurting out.
“That’s neat.” She pauses. “I’m mostly impressed by the…cassette player.”
They get silent.
“Where are we now? Do you know?” Hungary eventually murmurs.
“Wherever Nevada is.”
She frowns. “Are we…staying here?”

“No. We’re leaving in two days once we ‘build up our strength,’ or something.”

“To where?”

“Idaho.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. But apparently our end goal is Philadelphia, and then we’ll be going back to Europe to be placed in ‘safe houses.’”

Hungary chews her lip. “So I guess we still won’t be going home.”

“Probably not…”

Hungary sighs. “You know, when America told us that France wanted to break us out, I thought he was lying.” Her expression scrunches up. “I thought he was taking pity on us and trying to make us feel a little better. Even when I got the letters, I don’t know, sometimes that didn’t even feel real.”

“Liz.”

“But we’re—we’re here. And Gilbert, you did this.”

Prussia scrunches up his eyebrows. “No, I didn’t.”

“You did! You went against the Nazis. You reminded everyone that we’re humans.”

Prussia can’t make eye contact.

“And not monsters,” Hungary chokes out. “Just like you told me. We’re not monsters.”

“…”

“Gilbert, I actually have hope again.” Hungary sounds near tears, and Prussia looks at her. She gives a watery smile. “Maybe our lives can finally start getting better now.”

Prussia reaches out and grabs her hand, trying not to cry himself.

He really hopes she’s right.

Eventually, all of the other Nations start to wake up again.

Japan is currently feeding Prussia some oatmeal, which he’s very quickly getting tired of.

“Is there anything else?”

“Yeah, but you might throw it up.”

Prussia bats his eyes. “Please?”

Japan shoves more oatmeal into his mouth.
Just as Prussia swallows a chunk of it, he sees America grabbing his keys.

Japan frowns. “Where are you going?”

“To get food for us.”

Japan puts Prussia’s oatmeal to the side and stands up. “I can come.”

“Do you have to be attached to his hip?” South Korea mutters, standing up from where he was feeding Estonia.

Japan glares at him and opens his mouth, but China cuts him off. “Don’t pick a fight.”

South Korea’s presence starts expanding.

Russia slaps America on the back. “Let’s go.”

“What?”

“Here, I can act American,” Russia says in English with an American accent.

China frowns. “Wait, Ivan—”

“Or like a Texan. I can do that,” Russia says in English now with that accent.

America doesn’t even have time to protest before Russia drags him out the front door.

The atmosphere is now extremely awkward.

Taiwan moves first and quickly starts collecting all the bowls and utensils.

Japan frowns. “Mei, you don’t have to get all of them.”

“It’s fine—”

Taiwan trips on the edge of a mattress.

South Korea manages to catch a bowl before it hits Latvia in the face while Japan grabs Taiwan’s arm so that she doesn’t face-plant the floor.

His shirt rides up, though.

Prussia doesn’t think he’s ever seen a scar that nasty, especially on a Nation. Japan quickly yanks down his shirt while Taiwan sputters five different apologies, but it’s too late.

Everyone already saw.

South Korea grabs the bowls from her and takes them to the kitchen while China stares at Japan with a pensive expression. He avoids eye contact.

Hungary hits Prussia’s arm. “The commercial that’s playing is cute.”

It’s the one South Korea hates.
Eventually, they all end up watching TV.

Well, except for Taiwan. She seems to have overcome her shyness and is talking excitedly to Czech and Belarus. Prussia and Hungary also make little comments to each other every now and then, so Prussia guesses it isn’t too awful. Like, South Korea and Japan aren’t fighting, and China isn’t making any comments that egg either of them on.

But then the phone rings.

“…Do we answer it?” South Korea eventually asks, sounding unsure.

Japan frowns and walks over to it. “Maybe they’re just doing a check in.”

He takes a deep breath and picks it up.

“Hello?…No, he’s not here right now.” He frowns. “Yes, this is Japan.” Pause. “No, he just went out to get some food.” The room is silent as everyone strains to hear. “Yes, the South Korean and Taiwanese Nation Avatars are with me.” Pause. “Yes, I’m aware.” Pause. “Okay, thank you.” Japan hangs up the phone.

“Who was it?” South Korea asks.

Japan gives him a confused look. “Frank.”

South Korea’s face scrunches up. “Like, babysitter Frank?”

“Yeah. He sounded drunk too.”

“Wait, what the hell. Didn’t he resign around twenty years ago? Alfred hasn’t even mentioned him to me since.”

Japan chews his lip. “He hasn’t mentioned him to me either, but that’s who the man on the phone said he was.”

“What did he want?”

“He told me that we have to remember to check in, but I know Alfred already called Joseph and did that, so…”

China seems concerned. “Is this an issue?”

Japan frowns. “I don’t know. He wasn’t really making any sense.”

The TV hums in the background.

A few commercials play.

And then, South Korea explodes.

“How the hell are you getting back to China, Yao?”

China frowns. “That’s none of your concern.”

“Why—”

“Because Ivan and I really don’t want anyone else to get caught up in the mess we’ve made.”
Mentioning Russia was the wrong thing to do.

“Why the *fuck* are you doing this!? Because of him!? Did he coerce you!?”

China’s eyes flash red. “I agreed to help because I didn’t want any more Nations to suffer.”

South Korea opens his mouth.

“And also because I wanted to see you two, but all you’ve been doing is ignoring me.”

Japan tries to cut in. “Yong-Soo—”

“SHUT UP, KIKU.” South Korea whirs back to China. “Maybe I’m avoiding you because you seem like a completely different person!”

“People change, Yong-Soo,” China spits out. “And it has been nearly half a century since we’ve been able to talk like this.”

South Korea’s eyes flash red. “Why did you join the Communist side? So you could *fuck* that ugly Western Nation?”

Prussia can hear the ringing in his ears. He’s never seen China look this angry.

“I would expect you to understand that there were many factors which influenced my decision to stay with Mao, the main being he guaranteed me protection from fighting in the war,” China eventually hisses. “Alfred told me you were afraid of going to the North because you were afraid of being tortured, so don’t act like you staying with Rhee is any different.”

South Korea’s presence expands. “When did he tell you that?!”

“You need to calm down,” Japan hisses.

“SHUT UP,” South Korea screams, lunging for him.

China darts in between the two. “You’re acting like a child,” he spits.

“GOD, YOU ALWAYS DEFEND HIM.”

“Yong-Soo.”

“No! The last time you saw him, he smashed a fucking *vase* over your head!”

Japan looks nauseous.

“And not to mention he watched me get dissected and did *nothing*—”

“Enough,” China hisses.

“What, are you feeling guilty for him now that you saw his disgusting scar?”

“All you’re doing is taking jabs just to get a rise out of him and me,” China spits.

South Korea opens his mouth.

“You need to understand that everything is different now and will never be the same, okay?

“Do you think I want it to be like this? Do you think I want there to be a North and South Korea
“And three other Nation Avatars representing parts of China?! Do you think I want to be living in isolation as my country gets into more and more turmoil?! If I could turn back time to when it was the Tribute System, I would do it in a heartbeat, but that’s over!”

“Don’t act like you give a shit about any of that!” South Korea’s voice cracks. “I’m the only one that cares about the past! If you and Kiku did, then both of you wouldn’t be in love with Western Nations!”

The front door opens.

America and Russia are joking around until they see the three Asian Nations.

America places his keys on the nearby table with one hand and holds the bags of food in the other.

“…Is everything okay?”

“Frank called,” South Korea spits out. He then slams open the sliding door and storms outside.

America looks nervous when he sees Japan’s appearance. “What the hell happened? Did Frank say anything?” His presence expands slightly.

Japan shakes his head. “He said nothing.”

“Wh—” America frowns as Russia takes his bags from him and sets them on the counter. “Then what the hell?”

“It was just a stupid fight,” Taiwan murmurs as China walks up to Russia and whispers something to him. Japan then approaches America, and the two of them walk upstairs as Russia and China disappear into the kitchen.

It’s quiet.

Prussia and Hungary make eye contact, Hungary looking away first. She rubs her face.

Eventually, Taiwan stands up and mutely goes to inspect whatever food Russia and America brought back.

“Chinese food?” Prussia sees her mouth to herself.

China and Russia suddenly reappear from the kitchen, and she freezes.

“What type of food is this?” she eventually gets out.

Russia looks exhausted. “The place America took me to was labeled as a Chinese restaurant.”

She scrunches up her face. “But it doesn’t look Chinese.”

“It was literally called ‘Chinese Food Restaurant.’”

China grabs Russia’s arm and tugs him. “Let’s go sit on the couch.”

“What about Yong-Soo?” Russia murmurs.

“He’ll come back when he wants to.”

By the time Prussia falls asleep, South Korea still hasn’t come inside.
The next day starts at 5 AM with Prussia waking up and having to take a shit.

“Did you even sleep?” he asks when he notices South Korea sitting on the couch. He’s staring at the wall.

South Korea jumps, then looks away. “No.”

Some time passes.

“So, uh,” Prussia says awkwardly. “I have to use the bathroom.”

“I can get you a bottle.”

“Not that type of bathroom.”

South Korea closes his eyes. “Great.”

“If I could stand up and go on my own, I would. Believe me.”

“Have you even tried standing?” South Korea asks, opening his eyes to give him a pleading look.

Prussia stares at his blanket. “No, but I don’t think it’s going to go well.”

South Korea walks over and stoops down. “See if you can sit up first.”

Prussia can barely move his back and bites his lip out of frustration. South Korea helps prop him up, and eventually Prussia’s on his feet, but he’s only able to keep his balance because South Korea’s practically hugging him.

He’s sweating and feels pathetic. “I don’t think I can walk,” he chokes out, trying to be quiet.

South Korea stares at the hallway where the bathroom’s located. “I could carry you and set you down on the toilet.”

Prussia likes that plan. “Okay.”

South Korea grunts and picks him up bridal style, struggling to swerve around the other mattresses as they make their way towards the bathroom.

They nearly run into Taiwan in the hallway.

“Can you open the bathroom door?” South Korea wheezes.

Taiwan mutely follows orders, appearing confused.

South Korea gingerly places Prussia on the toilet. “I’ll stand outside the door. Just let me know when you’re done.”

Prussia nods.
After the grueling process of attempting to take off his sweatpants and underwear, he’s finally able to relieve himself. Washing his hands and getting his clothing back on proves to be another hurdle.

The other Nations are waking up when they make it back to the living room, and unfortunately, all of them have to use the bathroom too.

Taiwan looks overwhelmed. “What do we do? I can’t carry anyone!”

“I really can’t either. Go wake the others.”

“I’m not waking them up!”

“Well, I’m not either! They all hate me!”

“I really have to go,” Poland complains.

Prussia and Hungary make eye contact. She looks at Poland, then makes a face.

Prussia tries not to snicker.

“They don’t hate you,” Taiwan breathes. “If anything, Yao hates me more.”

“He doesn’t hate you…”

Poland is squirming. “Seriously.”

South Korea angrily picks him up and carries him away.

“Who else needs to use the bathroom?” Taiwan weakly asks.

About half of the Nations raise their hands.

“There’s another bathroom upstairs, right?” Taiwan asks when South Korea returns with Poland.

“Yeah, one in the master and another in the hallway, but there’s no way in hell I can carry them up the steps.”

“Why would you need to carry them?” Japan asks as America darts to the kitchen.

South Korea ignores him. “Alfred—”

“I’ll help after I’ve had my coffee.”

Taiwan weakly tells Japan what’s going on. South Korea has an unreadable expression.

―

They’re all sitting in the living room.

Breakfast was a chore. Prussia was forced to sit up himself and eat, and he feels like he just ran a race. Right now, another one of America’s ‘mixtapes’ is playing. It’s equally as weird.

Everyone is awake and listening to it, except for South Korea, whose head keeps bobbing.

“Are we going to start the strength exercises today?” Russia eventually mutters. Both Belarus and Ukraine have to lean against him to prop themselves up.
America takes off his glasses. “We should. Everyone needs to be strong enough to take showers before we leave tomorrow…”

“What about clothing?” China asks.

“We can go to a department store nearby.”

Japan frowns. “Do we have enough money?”

“Ye—”

America is overcome by a coughing fit.

It doesn’t stop, and he nearly drops his coffee. Japan takes it from him, and just as Prussia sees sprays of blood coming through America’s fingers, he darts to the kitchen.

“Alfred,” Japan rushes out, flanking him.

“I’m f—” Prussia hears America retch, then feels his presence expand.

Everyone flinches. South Korea now looks awake.

The coughing eventually dies down when the kitchen sink starts to run.

South Korea stands up and looks at Taiwan. “Do you think they need help?”

She chews her lip and shakes her head. “He got really angry at the last UN meeting when I tried to do anything.”

“…”

A couple of minutes later, the two come back into the room.

“Sorry,” America gets out. His skin is now pale, and his eyes are sunken in. He clears his throat, looking twitchy.

Russia frowns. “You don’t see me coughing up blood because of the Vietnam War.”

America picks at his long-sleeve. “It’s mainly because of the protests.”

Beethoven starts playing.

Russia looks away. “You have the weirdest goddamn music taste.”

America doesn’t even try to deny it. “We should probably come up with some exercise plans.”

He, Japan, China, and Russia disappear into the kitchen. Taiwan and South Korea quietly remain in the living room.

They’re divided into different groups to perform exercises. At first, Prussia thinks it’s stupid, but he’s not quite laughing when he tries to walk forward and nearly face-plants the ground.

He’s sweating. He took like three steps, and he’s sweating. It’s a warm spring day, so that’s contributing a bit to it. Everyone is wearing tank tops or has their sleeves rolled up.
America, though, looks like he’s dressed for winter. He has a long-sleeve turtleneck on.

“Pay attention,” South Korea mumbles. He’s been put in charge of Prussia’s group.

Prussia attempts to focus. “Sorry.”

Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria are also with him. Since they don’t have to try to walk right now, they’re all joking around and having fun.

Prussia is not having fun.

South Korea yawns. “Grip onto this and try to take a step forward.”

Prussia follows orders. “How are you not tired?”

“I’m fine.”

“You pulled an all-nighter.”

South Korea rubs his eyes. “It’s fine.”

Prussia takes another step forward. He wants to comfort South Korea but doesn’t know how.

“I don’t think it’s just you who cares about the past,” he tries.

South Korea gives him a look. “Take three steps forward.”

Prussia nearly falls down. “Seriously.”

“What would you know?” South Korea spits.

“Well, China used to reminisce all the God damn time when he and Russia were forced to hang around us in Korea, so that’s one thing.”

South Korea blinks. Prussia nearly trips.

He’s able to steady himself and feels like cheering. “And I know talking about the war is shitty, but I knew Japan before it, okay? And during those times, I could see how much he longed for the past. He had to bury that during the war as a coping method.”

“…”

“That doesn’t excuse what happened to you, but it doesn’t mean Japan doesn’t care. And I know China definitely does.”

South Korea avoids eye contact. Prussia takes a few more steps.

Hungary wolf-whistles. “Show them how it’s done!”

Prussia flexes. There’s almost no muscle. “Don’t get too jealous.”

He almost misses South Korea mumble a, “Thank you.”

“There’s nothing to thank me for.”

“Walk in that direction.”
“And just because they,” Prussia feels weird saying it out loud. “Just because they love other Nations doesn’t mean they don’t love you.”

“Now you’re just showing off!” Hungary screams.

Prussia falls on his face.

He misses South Korea laughing genuinely.

The shower that night is the best he’s ever taken in his life.

In the morning, they eat, go to the bathroom, then divide up who’s going in which car.

The vans are arranged so that there are three rows behind the driver’s seat and shotgun. The first row can hold four people, and the subsequent ones can hold five.

Prussia is in the car America’s driving. He and Hungary are crammed into the second row with Poland, Lithuania, and Estonia. China, Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine are in the row in front of them, while poor Latvia is in the back, sitting amongst various crates and other supplies. Japan, meanwhile, is next to America.

Just as they’re about ready to go, America jams a cardboard box in between the driver’s seat and first row.

Russia looks at it. “The hell is this?”

America shrugs. “Books if you wanna read them.” He then starts the car and rolls down his window.

“Just follow me, Yong-Soo! We’re going to that department store first!”

South Korea does not look comfortable driving the other car. He glares.

America grins and pulls out of the driveway.

The trip to the department store is short.

When they pull up, Prussia’s in disbelief.

It’s Poland who vocalizes what he’s feeling. “Why the hell is this store so huge?”

America seems unfazed. He’s the only one. “All Walmarts are like this.”

Inside the store is equally as overwhelming.

“The clothing section is that way,” America says, pointing. “You can all pick out one or two outfits and multiple pairs of underwear. Try not to go over fifteen dollars. We’ll meet up here at the entrance in thirty minutes, and then I’ll pay for everything.”
“Don’t we, um, stand out?” Hungary asks in English. “We’re all bald emaciated people who are wearing sweats.”

“You’re in a Walmart in Nevada, so trust me, this store has seen weirder customers.”

Hungary holds up a bright neon vest. “Like, don’t get me wrong, fashion has always been weird, but.”

Prussia holds up some ugly legwarmers as a response.

Hungary thumbs through some shirts, then nudges him. “Isn’t that Russia?”

He has five different dresses thrown over his shoulder. Ukraine and Belarus are close to him, while China is leaning against a nearby pillar, looking completely amused.

“That dress is cute!” Hungary exclaims, pointing to the one Ukraine is holding when they walk over.

Ukraine smiles. “I have one that would look great on you.”

“Do you want a dress too?” Russia sneers to Prussia as Belarus throws more clothing onto him.

Hungary holds up one of the dresses Ukraine gave her. “Clothing is a social construct, and there is nothing wrong with men wearing something considered feminine.”

Prussia holds up his hands. “Thanks, Liz, but I’m good.”

“Suit yourself because that one would really bring out your eyes.”

China smiles at them and points. “The men’s section is over there.”

Hungary throws the dress she was looking at on top of Prussia’s head. “Let’s go find you some ‘masculine’ clothes.”

He removes the dress and follows her, attempting to get his revenge by chucking it onto her head. She squeals as he does, and retaliates by throwing a random pair of socks.

As they hurl random shit at each other, Prussia realizes he’s having fun.

It’s been awhile since that’s happened.

Chapter End Notes

(picture commissioned from rynisyou.tumblr.com)

sorry for all the talk about peeing and like using the bathroom in general? I mean, everyone’s gotta use it

my fic now passes the bechdel test guys
They drive nonstop for hours.

It’s both boring and stressful. While China knows there’s a chance anything could go wrong, almost none of that feels real as he stares out the window.

It’s Russia who helps keep him tethered to reality.

He’s leaning into him, half-asleep. It endears China, makes him feel like he’s alive after eight years of isolation.

But he’s also terrified.

This trip will come to an end. It’s already the 16th, and on the 22nd, they’ll be smuggled into Europe, going their separate ways afterward, returning to a life of isolation without knowing when they can see each other again.

“Are you really playing Christmas music in April?” Russia grumbles, breaking China out of his thoughts. Right now, it’s 1 AM, and everyone is sleeping for the most part.

America yawns. “Aw come on; it’s happy.”

“Why is it on the same mixtape as the Beatles?”

America shrugs as Japan starts to rummage through the box of cassettes.

China feels a pang in his chest.

Japan’s right there. China has been waiting for more than fifty years to talk to him, and he’s right there. So why is it that he’s been unsuccessful in approaching both him and South Korea? Why did that argument happen? Is what South Korea said true?

The last one is a stupid question. Of course it’s true. Japan is in love with America. It’s been right in China’s face ever since they started this trek across the country. And the fact that he doesn’t know how long Japan’s feelings have been like this is choking him. Does America know? Does America reciprocate? It’s hard to decipher anything based on his actions.

Did Japan fall in love with him after the atomic bombs? Before them?

China no longer knows Honda Kiku, and it feels like a punch in the gut.

When Japan was a child, they were close. It was a weird relationship, but they were closer than China has ever been with anyone before. South Korea was with China more because of the tribute system, but their relationship was based on South Korea’s idolization of him. China loves Yong-
Soo, but in the past, he felt like he could never be a person, just the God figure everyone else viewed him as. But Japan. Kiku. He got annoyed easily and treated him like an aggravating older brother. It was the relationship China craved.

And then the Japanese isolated themselves for 200 years and stopped sending their Nation as tribute.

China rubs his face.

When the West invaded, China finally saw him again, but the meeting was nothing short of painful. Japan had a breakdown. He smashed a vase over China’s head.

Since then, they’ve barely said anything to each other. China just wants one normal conversation. He knows it’s been centuries, but he’s still pathetically clinging to the hope that he and Japan can somehow regain their old relationship.

They have less than a week to do that, though.

And then there’s South Korea. When they saw each other during the Korean War, their interactions were strained. They were very strained, but South Korea didn’t seem to hate him. Now it’s like he despises him, and China isn’t an idiot.

He knows it’s because of Russia.

He also knows the first night didn’t help resolve whatever animosity South Korea has for the two of them being together, but China couldn’t control himself. Suddenly, he and Russia were alone in a bedroom, and he lost every little bit of self-restraint.

America cuts through his thoughts.

“There’s a rest stop in five miles that I’m going to, so if you need to use the bathroom or are hungry…” His voice is hushed, trying to be mindful of everyone else.

“Do you have cash?” Russia grumbles.

“Yeah.”

“I can drive, Alfred,” Japan murmurs after he yawns. “We can switch when we get—”

“It’s fine.”

Japan frowns. “You look like you’re about to pass out.”

“I’ll sleep when we get to Iowa.”

“That’s in another six hours.”

“I’m fine. Really.”

Japan places his hand on America’s thigh. “Staying awake is not going to make them any better.”

“I don’t want to talk about this right now,” America mutters.

China wants an elaboration on both his refusal to sleep and what relationship he has with Japan. He gets none.
Eventually, they pull up to a shady looking rest stop.

South Korea drives up next to them and rolls down his window.

“Didn’t we already get gas?” he asks as America parks.

America turns off the engine. “Yeah, but I have to make a phone call.” He opens the door. “And pee. Though I’m not looking forward to seeing what the bathroom is like.”

“The last one wasn’t bad,” Japan murmurs as South Korea parks next to them.

America climbs out. “Yeah, but that was at a gas station in a somewhat populated place. The ones at these truck stops can get nasty.”

China opens his door, trying to be as quiet as possible, and Russia follows him outside. He then stretches and looks at South Korea’s car. Everyone seems to be asleep except for him.

America hands some money to Russia. “Go wild.”

“Oh boy, with this much money maybe I can buy two water bottles now!”

“Listen.”

They walk inside. South Korea ends up next to America, completely ignoring China and Japan. “Who the hell are you calling?”

“Joseph. It’s to finalize that we’re not going to my government mandated house.”

“You really think they’ve bugged it?”

America rubs his face and yawns. “I don’t know, but it’s better safe than sorry.”

Inside, the building’s run down and looks like it hasn’t been cleaned in years. China suddenly feels wary about the bathroom, but reasons it shouldn’t be worse than an era without plumbing.

He nearly gags when they enter it.

The remainder of the rest stop is comprised of three sad looking fast food places, seating that’s falling apart, and pay phones shoved in the corner. Once they escape the putrid air of the bathroom, Russia heads to the McDonald’s. China briefly glances at Japan and South Korea, but they follow America to the payphones without even looking at him.

China walks up behind Russia just as he throws the money on the counter. “Two water bottles.”

It’s a very shitty American accent, but the girl doesn’t seem to care. All she does is go to fetch it while her older, white male coworker stares at them. China makes eye contact with him at one point. He seems to get angrier.

“Anything else?” the teenage girl asks when she returns.

Russia looks at China. “You want anything?”

He hates speaking English. “No.”

That’s it. Just that small word and the laziness on his part not to change his accent sets off the old white guy.
“God damn fucking Orientals swarming this coun—”

He can’t finish the sentence.

“If you say anything else, I’m going to bash your face in,” Russia hisses, leaning over the counter. His Russian accent becomes more pronounced.

_That_ freaks out the man. He physically backs up while the girl hands Russia the water bottles, seeming unfazed.

“Have a nice day.”

Russia snatches them and storms out the back entrance.

China rubs his face when he gets outside. “Ivan, it’s okay.”

Russia kicks a wall. He’s squeezing the water bottles so hard that they’re getting warped.

“The man looks like he’s about to die any day now; don’t waste your anger on someone that pathetic.”

Russia looks at him, then releases his breath and sits down. China takes a seat next to him.

It’s a warm, clear night.

“You can’t go anywhere in the West without encountering assholes like him,” Russia eventually spits, dropping the water bottles. “I—” He grabs his hair. “I want to kill all of them.”

China gently takes his hand and moves it away from his head. “Well, you certainly made the man afraid for his life.”

“He deserved it.”

There are a few moments of silence.

“I think it was your Russian accent that freaked him out the most,” China murmurs first, nudging him.

Russia cracks a smile. “To these people, Russians are demons.”

“I should have flashed my eyes red, then. Could you imagine?”

Russia laughs quietly. “I think he would have self-combusted on the spot.”

A breeze picks up.

“Are there any constellations you recognize?” China whispers, studying the sky.

“That one’s Draco…”

“Where?”

Russia lets go of his hand and gently moves his head. “There.”

“I can’t see it.”

“It’s right—”
China kisses him.

It’s meant to be chaste, but after Russia makes a groaning sound, all restraint is lost.

Somehow China’s arms end up tangled in his hair. Russia’s, meanwhile, get flushed around his waist. Thoughts are becoming muddled. Everything is getting warm.

“Ivan.”

Russia starts kissing his neck.

China is getting aroused and knows this is not the time and the place. All common sense is being replaced by desire, though. “Ivan.”

“I love you,” Russia chokes out.

“I love you t—”

“You two are making out next to a fucking dumpster.”

They abruptly break away.

South Korea is looking at them in disgust. “We’re leaving.”

China wants to call out to him as he whirls around, but the words die in his throat.

“Sorry,” Russia mumbles when he’s gone. His face is beet red.

China rubs his face, his arousal starting to calm down. “I’m the one who initiated it.”

“…”

He stands up and offers his hand. Russia takes it, avoiding eye contact.

China leans in just as he’s about to walk away. “Don’t forget the water bottles.”

“You’re not helping me calm down,” Russia mutters miserably.

China pulls away and smiles, feeling so in love it almost hurts.

While his old sibling relationship with Japan is something he desperately craved, something like this he feels he’s been starved for his entire life. This is someone who views him as a person, an equal, someone who loves him for Wang Yao and not just idolizes his Nation status, someone who is beautiful and genuine and—

Russia’s face is still just as red. “You’re staring at me.”

“Because I love you.”

Russia looks like he’s about to pass out.

“It’s not a secret,” China says, trying not to laugh.

Russia covers his face. “It doesn’t feel real half the time. I don’t deserve you.”

“Don’t ever say that…”
At the car, Japan is in the driver’s seat, and America doesn’t look overly thrilled about it.

They’re having an argument, so they don’t notice China and Russia’s disheveled appearances, thankfully.

Japan looks annoyed. “Just go to sleep, Alfred,” he says as they climb inside.

America tugs at the hoodie he’s wearing. “But I’ll wake everyone up.”

“You don’t know that.”

“They’ve been getting worse.”

“You said you sleep better with me.” That sends off fifteen different red flags for China. Japan grabs America’s hand. That’s another two. “And I’m right here; you’ll be fine.”

America mutters something unintelligible.

“The house is going to be disgusting when we get there, so you won’t be able to sleep then. Please, Alfred.”

The engine is running. China can feel South Korea staring at their car.

America takes a deep breath and lets go of Japan’s hand. “Fine.”

Just as America closes his eyes and gets comfortable, Japan and China make eye contact in the rearview mirror. China feels like he should say something after Japan quickly looks away and fidgets, but he doesn’t know what would be appropriate.

Eventually, he leans into Russia and drifts off.

What wakes him is America screaming.

China jolts into an upright position just as the car swerves and pulls over to the shoulder. Japan then unbuckles and leans over to shake America. Several others start groaning.

“What the hell’s going on?” Prussia slurs as Japan repeats America’s name.

America opens his eyes before anyone can respond.

His presence fills the car, and everyone flinches except Japan. He grabs America’s arm. “You’re okay.” His voice cracks. “You’re here in the car with me. You’re okay.”

America still seems disoriented, but he nods. His presence slowly starts to fade.

South Korea knocks on the window. China can see his car flashing its hazard lights.

“What’s everything okay?”

Japan ignores him and soothes America. China gives a painful nod. South Korea sighs.

“Do you need water?” Russia asks when South Korea walks back to his own car. His voice is still
gruff with sleep.

America nods. Russia hands the bottle to him.

It’s quiet as he takes a couple of sips.

“Sorry,” America mutters after a bit.

“It’s fine,” Japan rushes out.

“I should’ve driven.”

Japan looks exhausted. He moves back to his own seat. “Sorry.”

America smiles. It looks forced. “Why are you apologizing?”

Japan doesn’t respond.

There’s a long stretch of silence.

“What time is it?” Ukraine eventually asks. China can see the sun peaking over the horizon.

“6:30,” Japan says, his voice barely above a whisper. “We should be at the house in thirty minutes.”

The engine makes a humming sound.

America eventually squirms. “Can I drive?”

Japan doesn’t argue.

The house they arrive at is in a field in the middle of nowhere.

“No offense, but this looks sketchy as hell,” Prussia mutters as they pull into the driveway.

All America gives is a, “Yeah.”

Inside isn’t any better. Everything is coated with a layer of dust.

Japan is the first one to speak. “Do you want to try sleeping in the car while we clean?” he murmurs, touching America’s arm.

“I’m fine.”

Russia shoves him towards the door. “Go sleep in the goddamn car.”

“I’m fine,” America grumbles, rubbing the area he pushed.

Russia gives him a look.

“Go with him, Kiku,” South Korea mutters.

Japan squirms. America protests. South Korea ignores them and walks further into the house.
“Take him to the car, Kiku,” China murmurs. “We’ll clean.”

Japan looks at him, then stares at the ground and guides America outside. America keeps protesting until he’s out the front door.

The only sounds now are of South Korea’s footsteps.

“If you’re tired, don’t worry about cleaning,” Taiwan quickly says. “The four of us can handle it.”

“Joy,” Russia mutters, rolling up his sleeves.

“We can help, though,” Ukraine objects. She and the others look like they’re about to fall down from standing for so long.

China ties back his hair. “Just don’t strain yourselves.

At 11 AM, the house is finally clean.

America appears back to his normal self. “I don’t even recognize this place.”

“When’s the last time someone’s lived here?” South Korea grumbles, looking exhausted.

America shrugs. Japan is behind him, walking around and admiring everything. “I purchased it with cash when it was in foreclosure, so who knows.”

“Do you want us to unload the cars?” Taiwan asks.

“Kiku and I can do that. You guys rest.”

“How long are we staying here?” Prussia asks when they’re gone. South Korea is staring at the ceiling, and from this angle, China can see how pronounced the bags under his eyes are.

He looks away and tries to recall the schedule. “For two days. We’ll leave on the 18th and then drive nonstop to Pennsylvania, where we’ll stay until the 22nd.”

“How long is nonstop?” Belarus grumbles.

Russia leans into her. “About fifteen hours.”

She gives him a look of disgust. He shrugs. South Korea’s head starts bobbing.

China wonders why America is having nightmares.

Lunch is pretty lackluster, and there’s not much to do afterward except listen to an old radio.

Everyone is lying around. China’s head is on Russia’s thigh, and every now and then he’ll make eye contact with either South Korea or Japan. It still doesn’t lead anywhere.

“I miss the TV,” Prussia groans after a while.
America sits up from where he is on the couch, jostling both Japan and South Korea. Japan shifts so he’ll remain pressed into him. Half-asleep South Korea falls into Taiwan. She makes a noise. South Korea groans. America ignores them. “My house in PA has one.”


“If you’re bored, you can read the books we have,” Japan murmurs. He looks at America. “They’re still in the car, right?”


Japan frowns and sits up. He tries to prompt him. “What else you…?”

America stands and bolts up the stairs.

Japan becomes rigid. “Alfred, what’s wrong?!”

America shouts something from upstairs, but it’s inaudible.

South Korea dully lifts his head. “Is he okay?”

“I don’t know,” Japan snaps.

South Korea bristles. China sits up in case he has to intervene. Russia sighs. Taiwan starts squirming.

America stumbles down the stairs.

“Are you okay?” Japan rushes out.

“I have your diary.”

“What?”

“Prussia. Gilbert. You. I have—this is your diary.”

Prussia looks extremely confused. “Excuse me?”

America hands it to him. “This. It’s—it’s from the Revolutionary War.”

“Why—wait, what the fuck. Why do you have this?”

“You left it.”

“So you’ve kept it for—Jesus, like two centuries?”

“I have a storage room, so it’s been in there until I moved it here a year or two ago so I could give it to you now.” America swallows.

Prussia is still in disbelief. “All my other—all my other diaries were burned in a fire during the First World War.”

Hungary nudges Prussia. “Open it.”

The leather cover is rotting, and the yellow pages are falling apart. The thing is somehow still bound together, though.
“Did you ever read this?” Prussia asks, his voice hushed as he flips through the pages. America rubs the back of his neck. “If I did, it was centuries ago, so I don’t remember anything.”

“Where the fuck did I leave this?”

“Valley Forge? I think?”

Japan has finally calmed down. South Korea has fallen back asleep. Hungary is looking at the diary over Prussia’s shoulder. “Your handwriting is shit.”

“Thanks.”

It’s quiet for a couple of moments. America returns to the couch, leaning into Japan when he sits down.

China stares at them until Prussia starts laughing.

“Apparently on 1 March, 1778 you threw a snowball at my face because you were pissed I made you run laps.”

America’s cheeks flush. “You were kind of an asshole then.”

“I’m always an asshole. Holy shi—We’re going to kill England, so that’ll be cool. Well, that’s a stellar way to end an entry.”

As he reads a few more bits out loud, everyone starts talking about their own harmless memories of the past. China silently listens until he gets up to use the restroom.

Russia is waiting for him when he finishes.

“Want to go outside?”

China blinks. “Sure, but why?”

“I need some fresh air.”

They end up on the front porch. It’s rotting and overlooks nothing but prairie grass.

“Have you ever kept a journal?” Russia eventually murmurs.

China leans on the rail. “No, not really. You?”

Russia chews his lip. “No, but I wish I did.”

“Me too. Most of my memories blur together at this point.”

There’s a pause.

“Do you remember when we first met?” Russia murmurs first. China looks at him. He’s flushing.

“No, sorry…”

“Ah. Well, it was a long time ago.” Russia fidgets. “I looked like I was five, and you were the same physical age as you are now.”
China laughs. “And you still remember this?”

Russia squirms. “I…”

“What?”

“I remember because when I first saw you, I thought you were the most beautiful person I’ve ever seen.”

China blinks.

Russia’s face is turning beet red. “I really tried to suppress my emotions after that, and—” he grips his hair. “We didn’t see each other that much, so I was successful. I even forgot about those feelings. For centuries. But then you completely—you unraveled all of that.”

China’s face feels hot. “When?”

“Nanjing,” Russia chokes out. “You called me by my name and told me you would miss me.”

“I wasn’t lying.” That moment is something China knows he’ll never forget.

Russia avoids eye contact.

China touches his face. “When we met again after so many years, I also thought you were beautiful.” Russia shivers as his fingers graze over his cheek. “Male beauty and male love was something normalized, so I didn’t think twice about my attraction, but I thought it was nothing more than something physical.”

“Yao,” Russia whimpers.

“But then you genuinely cared about how I felt and how a situation would affect me, and you broke every single emotional barrier I’d perfected over my lifetime.”

Russia kisses him.

At 6 PM, America and Russia leave to get groceries, Russia doing his Texan accent all the way out the door.

China and Japan both offered to go. The other two ignored them.

China knows what they’re doing. But while he’s grateful they’re giving them alone time, it still doesn’t make it any easier to approach either Japan or South Korea. So instead, he’s outside in the backyard. It’s a crisp April night. The sky is clear. There’s a gazebo rotting in the corner of the yard.

He’s poking one of its wooden planks with a stick when someone taps him on the back.

China nearly flings the stick at their face. It’s Japan.

There’s an awkward pause.

“Is everything okay?” China eventually asks.
Japan squirms. “I…” He takes a deep breath. “Alfred keeps telling me we should talk.”

“…”

“So, I…I want to try.”

China wonders if it would be overstepping his bounds to touch him. “I want to try too.” He feels very nervous, though, and the long stretch of silence that follows doesn’t help.

“I’m sorry,” Japan eventually chokes out, his voice barely above a whisper.

China frowns. “You don’t have to apologize.”

“But I thrust a sword up to your throat. I smashed a vase over your head. My country—”

“I’m upset at what Imperial Japan did,” China rushes out. “I would be lying if I said I don’t have a negative bias towards your country. But…”

Japan squirms.

“I know that Honda Kiku isn’t responsible for any of that.”

Japan takes a step back. “I wanted China to crumble. I was fed with so much propaganda that I convinced myself I wanted it to crumble. I didn’t even know who I was after a while. I wasn’t even a person at the end of the war.”

“…”

“I’m sorry,” Japan whispers. “I don’t—I don’t know how I’ll ever grapple with what my country did or who I became. I hate myself. I hate everything I represent.”

“But all of that is in the past, Kiku,” China murmurs. “You deserve to move on.” He takes a small step towards him. “You deserve happiness.”

Japan hangs his head. “Alfred said something like that once.”

Finally, China lets himself ask.

“Are you in love with him?”

Japan makes a miserable noise.

“How long have you felt this way?”

Japan looks like he’s about to cry. “Since he cared for me after the atomic bombs.”

China frowns. “Does he reciprocate?”

“I don’t—I don’t know.”

A breeze picks up.

“We sleep in the same bed,” Japan chokes out. “We cuddle. He’s told me he sleeps better when I’m there. He sends me gifts. But we’ve never—I don’t know what this is between us, and I’m afraid to say something because I don’t want it to unravel. I’m terrified it will.”

China remembers how frightened Russia seemed when he admitted his feelings. “It’s not going to
do that.”

“You sound so confident.”

“I’m always confident.”

Despite how anxious he is, Japan gives him an annoyed look. It makes China’s chest fill with warmth.

He takes another step closer. “I’m confident because I’ve seen the way he looks to you for comfort.”

“It’s never sexually.”

“Do you want it to be that way?”

“I don’t know,” Japan moans. “I just—” He makes a noise. “I get so jealous.”

China laughs. “You?”

Japan’s face flushes. “And the more uncertain I am about what we are, the more infuriated I get whenever he even looks at another person. It’s ridiculous. I don’t know what he’s done to me, and I hate it.”

“You’ve never felt this way before?”

“Have you?” Japan snaps.

“With Ivan, yes.”

Japan quickly looks away. The breeze dies down.

“Why’d you pick him of all people?” he eventually mumbles.

China closes his eyes. “Because he cares for me. Because he makes me feel like a person, just as Alfred does with you.”

Japan mutters something unintelligible.

China moves even closer. “You make me feel like a person too,” he murmurs. “You’ve always felt like a little brother. You don’t have to be one if you don’t want to be, but know that I’ve always treasured that relationship. You made me feel normal after being worshiped by everyone else. It’s something I’ve always craved.”

“I was scared of you when I was little,” Japan mumbles. He wipes his eyes. “And then I was isolated for two centuries, and when I realized how much I missed you, I nearly broke.”

China hugs him, and when Japan reciprocates, everything feels like it might be okay.

Eventually, they break apart.

“If I was a little brother, what was Yong-Soo?” Japan mumbles.

China looks up at the stars. “Also a little brother, but he idolized me. It was harder to feel like a person.”
“He’s always had a crush on you.”

“I wouldn’t call it that. I think now he just hates that we’re leaving the past behind.”

Japan gives him a look. “Well, he hates Ivan.” His eyes dart to the ground. “And me.”

“He doesn’t hate you.”

“If he liked me, I wouldn’t understand why.”

“Honda Kiku and the Empire of Japan are separate entities.”

“But what he said was right.” Japan’s voice almost cracks. “All I did was watch and do nothing during the war.”

“But what could you have done?”

Japan frowns.

“You were under the finger of your emperor. It’s not your fault for that.”

Japan looks away. China reaches out to touch him.

“Even if it wasn’t my fault, I know I’m not doing anything to help our relationship.” Japan mutters. “Alfred’s friends with him too, and I still can’t bear to talk to him.”

“I think you two need to—”

The back door opens.

Since China and Japan are by the gazebo, they’re too far away for anyone on the deck to make out their figures.

Taiwan and South Korea are visible, though.

China’s not sure if he should say anything. They don’t seem to notice them.

“Didn’t Yao and Kiku go outside?” South Korea grumbles.

“If they did, I don’t see them…”

China’s about to move, but Taiwan talks before he can.

“I don’t think Yao likes me…”

Japan grabs China’s shoulder. China frowns. South Korea gives Taiwan a confused look. “Why would you say that?”

“Well, there’s the fact that he screamed about how he wished there weren’t other Nation Avatars representing parts of China.”

“…”

“He also hasn’t even talked to me once.”

China hasn’t realized. With everything else going on, interacting with her has been the last thing on his mind.
But he doesn’t hate her.

“He wasn’t yelling at you, though,” South Korea mutters, looking away. “Unlike with me—”

Taiwan explodes. “Oh, shut up!”

Japan drops China’s shoulder in surprise. South Korea looks like he has whiplash. “Wh—”

“He yelled at you because you’ve been being an asshole ever since seeing him and Russia together!”

“I—”

“He still loves you! He obviously still loves you like family! But me? I’m nothing more than a fucking piece of him! I’m no better than Hong Kong or Macau! In his eyes, I shouldn’t exist! That’s exactly what he said to you!”

“Mei,” South Korea gets out. China feels dazed. “He was referring to the country.”

“Yeah. Alright. I know we preach all this shit about how we’re separate people, but come on. I’m Xiao Mei, but I’m also Taiwan. We all have bias. Don’t act like you’re free from that because if you were, you wouldn’t send death glares to Kiku all the goddamn time.”

“Well, I think—I think you’re being too hard on yourself. You could be misinterpreting his—”

“Don’t treat me like a kid, Yong-Soo. I know I’m nothing but a fraction of your age. I know I don’t fit in with the other Asian Nations, and that I’ve barely met any of them, and that I don’t know old languages, or what the tribute system was like, or have an affinity for ancient Asia—”

“Mei.”

“But I’m not a kid!”

“Just because you’re young doesn’t mean that the other Asian Nations hate you,” South Korea gets out.

“Well, none of them know how to talk to me. I’ve barely even met them too because of this Cold War shit.”

South Korea frowns.

“I’m jealous of you. You know that, right? I’m jealous that you have a long history with Kiku and Yao because I have nothing! I barely see any other Nations, and then when I do, I’m treated like a kid. You have people who are your equals, who you have genuine emotional ties too, and you aren’t doing anything to salvage your relationship with them!”

“It’s because it’s complicated.”

“Why? Because you’re in love with Yao?”

China’s head starts pounding. He feels Japan look at him.

“Because of the Second World War? I don’t understand why those two things are making so many complications!”

“You don’t—”
“Yao still loves you. Maybe not romantically, but shouldn’t you be glad he’s found happiness? And Kiku clearly regrets what happened! Christ, Yong-Soo, I’ve listened to him and Alfred. He’s immensely regretful; yet, you never seem to give him the chance to express that!”

“I don’t want to talk about the war,” South Korea spits. “We don’t need to. It’s over.”

“Then fine! But stop acting so angry! You just said it yourself—Nations and their countries are separate. If you believe that, then act like it!”

“…”

“Talk to Yao, Yong-Soo. You’ll eventually move on from whatever feelings you harbor, but only if you actually have a conversation with him.”

South Korea isn’t looking at her. He squints in China and Japan’s direction. China feels his stomach drop.

“Are you even listening to—”

South Korea expands his presence.

China flinches. Japan rubs his temples.

“What the hell; the two of you were eavesdropping?”

China warily walks closer, Japan trailing behind him. “We were out here first.”

South Korea looks away, a mixture of anger and mortification on his face. Taiwan squirms next to him.

There’s an uncomfortable stretch of silence.

“Yong-Soo,” China eventually gets out.

“I don’t need your—”

“Part of me did join the Communist side because of Ivan,” China whispers, wanting to resolve their last argument.

South Korea freezes.

China has never admitted that out loud. He looks away. “You know what he means to me by now. I’m sorry I can’t return your feelings.”

The wind picks up again.

“That doesn’t mean I don’t care for you. God, you don’t know how much I’ve missed you.”

South Korea starts shaking.

China makes eye contact with Taiwan. “I’m sorry if the last argument made it seem like I hate you. All I wanted to stress was how everything was changing and that we have to embrace it, good or bad. You’re right—I’m bitter the Chinese Civil war ended with the creation of another country, but I hold no bias towards you, Mei. That’s the genuine truth.”

“…”
China moves closer to South Korea. “I miss the past. I miss what we used to be. Just because I care for Ivan doesn’t mean I don’t remember everything that we’ve been through. Just because Kiku is different doesn’t mean he has forgotten it either.”

Japan is avoiding eye contact.

China touches South Korea’s shoulder. “I persuaded Ivan to help with this plan because I knew Alfred was friends with both of you. I thought that it might be the only opportunity for us to see each other after so many years. I hate that I was right. I hate that we’ve wasted so many days being awkward around each other too.”

“…”

“Yong-Soo, Ivan hasn’t coerced me to do anything. I promise.”

South Korea starts crying. China hugs him.

“I’m sorry,” Japan mumbles after a bit. “For everything.”

South Korea’s voice is muffled into China’s chest. “I don’t want to talk about the war.”

Japan sighs. Taiwan forces out a smile. “See what happens when you don’t run away from your feelings.”

China rubs South Korea’s back.

Japan frowns. “Then take your own advice.”

“I don’t—”

“Mei, I never knew you were that upset over not ‘fitting in’ with the other Asian Nations. You need to be more open about that.”

Her smile falters. “But then I’ll be babied.”

“Then tell us if we’re babying you so we can stop.”

She looks away.

After a few moments, South Korea pulls away from China and wipes his eyes. “Sorry…”

China finds himself smiling. “It’s fine.”

As he says that, though, America and Russia pull into the driveway.

China almost says something about how they should help them unload the groceries, but he’s cut off by America storming out of the car.

Russia angrily opens his door just as America slams his shut. “I’m the one person you can talk to about this!”

America ignores him and walks towards the garage. The deck is around the corner, so he becomes out of sight.

“Do you think I don’t understand!??” Russia yells.
“I’m fine,” America snaps.

Russia gets out of the car. “Then why have you worn a turtleneck every single day? Why are you having nightmares? You couldn’t even watch the guy at the meat counter with his knife!”

Japan suddenly gets very still. China frowns.

America doesn’t respond.

“Are they mistreating you?”

“I don’t want to talk about this.”

“I’ve been mistreated too.”

“Ivan, please.”

An uncomfortable amount of time passes.

“Let’s just bring in the groceries,” America eventually mumbles. “Please.”

Russia frowns.

The other five silently slip inside.

While most of the Nations are sprawled out downstairs, China and Russia are lucky enough to have their own bedroom.

They’re facing each other.

“So you don’t know what they’ve been doing to him?”

Russia shakes his head, absentmindedly playing with China’s hair. “There’s something seriously wrong with him, though.”

China frowns. “Maybe I should ask Kiku.”

“I don’t think he knows why Alfred’s acting this way either.”

They get quiet after that.

Eventually, he hears Russia drift off, and it’s when he silently leaves to use the bathroom that he sees Japan and America’s door cracked open.

China can feel how shaky Japan’s presence is.

America is frowning. “Kiku, what’s wrong?”

“I just don’t want you to be suffering,” Japan eventually gets out

“But I’m fine,” America says quietly.

Japan doesn’t respond.
“Are you this worked up over that? It’s just some stupid nightmares.”

“You can barely sleep.”

“They’re getting better.”

“Alfred.”

“It’s—Kiku, it’s fine. Really. You don’t have to waste your time worrying about it. Let’s just go to be—”

“But I want to worry about it.”

China can see America’s confused expression.

“Alfred.” Japan sounds like he’s about to throw up.

“What?”

“…”

“Kiku, what—”

“I love you.”

Everything seems to still.

“I—” Japan squirms. “I’m in love with you. I know—I’m really sorry. I know—”

“K-Kiku.”

Japan edges away. “You don’t have to—”

“I think I’m in love with you too.”

He freezes.

“I think I’m in love with you,” America repeats, almost curling into himself. “I don’t know what that—”

“Alfred—”

“But I don’t think I can fathom ever kissing someone or having sex. I understand if you don’t—”

“I don’t care,” Japan rushes out, clenching America’s arm. “I don’t care.”

“But I’m—I’m broken. I can’t give you—”

“You’re not broken. I don’t even care about that,” Japan chokes out, sounding dazed. “We can continue what we have now.”

America squirms.

“I just—I want you to let me care for you. I want to know what’s wrong. I want to know you’re mine. I—” Japan’s face is turning beet red. “I want that.”

America looks like he doesn’t know what to do with himself. “Kiku.”
Japan is near tears. “You made me feel like a person after years of wishing I would die. Please, Alfred. Let me help you. Let me be here for you. That’s all I want.”

“But I’m fine. Really—”

“You’re not fine!”

“I need to protect you, okay?” America chokes out. He grips his head. “You don’t need to be put in any more danger. You don’t ever need to deal with that again in your life. I can’t bear—please, Kiku. Just drop this. I—”

“Alfred—”

America starts crying.

Japan immediately pulls him into an embrace.

America buries his face into the crook of his neck. “It’s just stupid nightmares, okay?” he chokes out.

China decides its time for him to stop eavesdropping.

When he finally lies down again, Russia throws his arm over him.

“You were gone for a while,” he mumbles.

“Sorry. I thought you were asleep.”

“Everything okay?”

China frowns.

“I don’t know.”

It’s pouring outside when he wakes up.

“I was surprised you could sleep through most of the thunder,” Russia murmurs when he shifts.

China twists his torso to look at him. His expression is gentle. China’s arm is by his waist.

He never wants this to end.

“I’m a deep sleeper.”

Russia gives a breathy laugh. “I’ve noticed.”

There’s a huge crack of thunder followed by the power cutting off.

Russia rubs his face. “I hate this fucking house.”

There’s nothing to do.
Everyone is scattered around the living room, half-dressed in pajamas, listening to the nearly inaudible radio as the rain pounds on the roof.

China is in the corner, staring at the ceiling while Russia talks to his sisters. He’s not sure how they can hear one another and gets startled when South Korea dumps a huge pile of newspapers next to him.

China sits up. “What are you doing?”

“Do you still fold origami?” South Korea mumbles, shyly sitting down next to him.

China gives a warm smile. “Occasionally.”

He’s making a crane when Taiwan edges over. “I’m sick of third-wheeling Alfred and Kiku. Let me join.”

“What are they talking about?” South Korea mumbles, concentrating on his lily.

“Some movie. Or something. I don’t know. They’re being extra sappy today. Also, how the hell are you doing that?”

China sets down his crane. “Here, I can teach you.”

He rips a piece of the newspaper for her as Taiwan chews a strand of her hair. “Alfred’s still wearing a turtleneck.”

“I tried asking him about it last night, but he completely shut down until Kiku took him away,” South Korea mutters, setting down his lily.

“The two of them talked about it too,” China says quietly. “But the conversation didn’t lead anywhere.”

South Korea frowns. “Did Kiku tell you that?”

“No. I overheard them.”

“Is eavesdropping on things your new hobby?” South Korea asks, playfully nudging him.

Russia puts his hand on China’s shoulder. “What are you doing?”

South Korea’s expression shuts.

“I’m going to teach Mei how to do origami,” China murmurs, glancing over his shoulder.

She squirms, seeming unsure now that Russia is there. “You don’t have—”

“Ancient Nations in Europe!” America blurts out from across the room.

Russia gives him a look. “Excuse me?”

America’s staring at them. “Yao, you—” His face is turning red. “You told me that during the road trip you’d tell me about them.”

China does not remember this.

Russia apparently does. “Your thought process is so goddamn weird. What the hell made you think
of that?”

America is looking more and more embarrassed. Everyone is staring at him. “The origami.”

Now China remembers that conversation.

“You spew out the weirdest shit whenever it’s the three of us,” Russia mutters. The rain is quieting down.

“You two don’t make it any less awkward! With all your whispering and flirting and—”

“Oh, don’t act like you’ve never blatantly flirted with England in front of me before. You don’t know how goddamn uncomfortable that is.”

“I’ve never flirted with England? What the fuck are you talking about?”

“Well, he’s certainly flirted with you.”

“No, he hasn’t?”

Russia gives him a look of disbelief. “You know he has a crush on you, right?”

“Excuse me?”

“Wh—How oblivious are you?”

“Are you actually being serious?”

“Yes? Jesus Christ, he was all over you when we were in London.”

America’s looking more and more distressed. Japan grabs his arm, seeming just as agitated.

“He’s moving on,” Taiwan says quickly. “Don’t worry about it.”

America looks nauseous. “You knew about this too?!”

“I mean, it’s obvious, but Kha Loung also told me—Arthur and Francis are, like, a thing now. So—”

“Yo, yo, yo, excuse me?” Prussia abruptly asks.

Taiwan looks very uncomfortable. “Oh. Um. Yeah. I talked to Matt once about it.”

“And?”

“Uh. They…” Everyone is staring at her now. “They…like each other?”

It takes a couple of seconds for Prussia to process that sentence, but once he does, he loses it.

He starts laughing uncontrollably. Others make comments. America stands there in what seems to be utter disbelief as Japan murmurs something to him. He seems possessive. South Korea’s comments aren’t helping.

China makes eye contact with Russia, who looks unsure what to do.

He sighs and tries to break the tension.
“I went to Western Europe on an expedition.”

Everyone looks at him. Prussia starts to calm down.

“It was after Rome accompanied a delegation to Asia.” China frowns. “They had invited us to go back to their capital, so we accepted, then set out a few years later.

“I don’t have many memories of Rome. I don’t think he had a human name. I don’t think he even cared. It was surreal for me. The Nations in Asia were being worshipped as Gods while he was being treated like a king. What was stranger is that other Nations in his empire were beneath him and nothing more than slaves.

“They were used for a bunch of things. All of them were women, so mostly for sex, but…” China frowns. “Also for entertainment, which is what our delegation was invited to watch when we arrived.”

Everyone is staring at him.

China awkwardly looks at the ground. “So we went to the coliseum tournament. It was packed. Everyone was there to watch a death match between Nations like it was a normal occurrence. Rome was excited—he was talking my ear off, but I don’t remember about what. I don’t think I was paying attention.

“What was supposed to happen is that the Nations would be released from gates, grab a weapon from the pile in the middle of the ring, and then try to kill the others to be the last standing. I remember the crowd was going crazy. Rome was excited. But when the gates opened, nothing happened.

“The Nations then abruptly began chanting about how they hated the Roman Empire. People started screaming at them. They only protested louder. It was surreal at first and then turned into something out of a nightmare.

“They…Suddenly, they all just started dissolving.

“I’ve killed other Chinese Nations before, so Nation death was nothing new to me. I’ve never seen any willingly give up their life like this, though. And even more terrifying was Rome. He—He started dissolving too. Maybe it’s because they made up what he represented. Maybe it was some other force. But in a span of five minutes, they were all gone. They were just…dust.”

The rain is almost inaudible now.

“And that was my adventure in Ancient Europe,” China finishes lamely.

No one seems to know how to react.

“So that’s why the Ancients don’t exist in Europe?” Ukraine asks quietly.

“I guess.”

Taiwan looks like her mind is imploding. “They really were all women?”

China nods.

Everyone starts talking as America gives China a look. “That was the absolute last story I was expecting you to tell me.”
China shrugs. “It is a bit gruesome.”

America opens his mouth to ask China more questions, but Russia deflects for him as Japan pulls him to the side.

“She’s been giving me that look,” Japan mumbles to himself, but China appears to ignore him.

“Thank you for changing the subject…”
China smiles. “Did you like the story?”

“It could have had a happier ending…”

The power turns on. Japan looks away. China wishes so too.

Besides for Canada calling in the afternoon to let them know he made it to Pennsylvania and that America’s house isn’t bugged, nothing much really happens during the rest of the day.

It stops raining around 6 PM, and afterward, China prepares dinner with South Korea and Taiwan. It’s peaceful. It’s uneventful.

China doesn’t want to think about how it’ll all be over soon.

At around 8 PM, America gets restless.

“Do you want to go somewhere?” Japan murmurs as he paces around. He’s fiddling with his sleeve. China waits to see if it’ll ride up.

“Where?” America eventually mumbles, yanking it over his wrist.

Japan touches his shoulder. “We could just drive.”

South Korea lifts his head from the couch. “I want to come if you’re going.”

Japan’s eyebrow twitches. “Only if Alfred—”

“Wait. I need to get out of this house too,” Prussia interrupts.

There are other “I want to go’s” and shuffling around.

And that’s how America, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Russia, China, Prussia, Hungry, Ukraine, and Belarus all end up in the car.

America drives aimlessly. They open the sunroof and roll down the windows. Japan digs through the box of cassettes and pops a random one in.

It’s the most carefree China has felt in a while.

Russia has his arm slung around him when Prussia shouts over the wind.
“How fast can this go?”

America looks at the speedometer. “I think 80 miles per hour.”

“How fast is that?”

America floors the car.

Because it’s so huge, it awkwardly lurches forward and makes a noise a car probably shouldn’t make. Japan starts shouting at him. America laughs. Belarus gets Russia’s arm in a death grip. Prussia sticks his head out the window and shouts. Taiwan starts cackling as South Korea looks more and more carsick.

America eventually brings the car back to a normal speed, then pulls over onto the shoulder. Japan is pale. “Please don’t do that again.”

“Aw, come on.” America nudges him. “At least I’m a better driver than Italy.”

Japan smiles and mumbles something as Taiwan cranes her head out the window. “Is that a lake?”

Hungary knocks Prussia to the side to look. “It seems like it.”

“Can we get out?”

America stops blushing at Japan and looks around. “Well, we’re in the middle of nowhere, so sure. I don’t think it’s private property.”

Taiwan hops out.

“But we should be prepared if some lunatic with a gun appears!” he shouts after her.

Taiwan waves her hand dismissively.

They all climb out and follow her, and China falls into step next to Japan and South Korea. They don’t fight. The sky is clear. The lake is reflecting the stars.

It all feels like a dream.

They stare at the lake until Prussia picks up a rock and throws it.

“That was lame,” Hungary chides after it only skips four times. She throws her own. It skips five.

It turns into an unofficial contest.

After Prussia teaches Taiwan the proper throwing technique, she’s able to get at least three skips. South Korea becomes the champion when he gets six, but Japan almost immediately shows him up. It seems like they’re about to fight too until America steps in. He then just chucks a rock into the water to see how far he can throw it.

China is so overwhelmed at how peaceful everything is that he and Russia fall back to the car.

“You okay?” Russia murmurs when they climb onto the hood.

China looks up at the stars. “I just can’t believe we have less than five days.”

“I don’t want to think about it either,” Russia murmurs, staring at his sisters.
The sounds of laughter are echoing off the lake.

China reaches for his hand. “Are there any constellations you recognize?” he breathes, not wanting to think about the inevitable.

“Well.” Russia points. “The Great Wagon is right there…”

China smiles. “That’s not a constellation, though. It’s an asterism.”

Russia chuckles and pulls him into his lap. “I’m surprised you remembered.”

China rolls his eyes. Everyone starts chanting Ukraine’s name.

“Yao,” Russia eventually whispers.

“Mm?”

Prussia wolf-whistles. Hungary takes a bow.

“I don’t want this to end.”

China closes his eyes. “I don’t either.”
The following day, they leave at 7 AM.

The plan is to arrive at the house in Pennsylvania around 10 PM, and the entire trip is uneventful. Whereas the other drive felt like it drug on forever, this one seems quick, like time is passing by faster.

China wants to grab onto it, but he can feel it slipping through his fingers.

The lights are on when they arrive, so they know Canada is there.
The house is beautiful; the walls are a mixture of brick and stone with ivy growing up the sides. In the back, there’s a huge garden and screened-in porch, and everything is secluded in the middle of a forest.

Everyone climbs out—some half-asleep, others cranky from being in the car for so long.

Canada opens the door before they get inside.

America blinks. “Matt.”

“Don’t you dare touch what I’ve been preparing in the kitchen.”

America looks sheepish. “I’m not as awful as England with cooking.”

“No, but you’re pretty damn close.”

The house is old, so it’s filled with many twisting hallways and closed-off rooms. Most of the walls are littered with photographs.

It feels cozy.

They all wait in the living room as Canada makes the final preparations for dinner. It’s somewhat small. There’s a huge fireplace on one end, and overflowing bookshelves lining the adjacent wall. There’s also a couch and some chairs surrounding the TV, which is pushed up next to the fireplace and the door leading to the screened-in porch.

Prussia is fawning over the TV when Canada starts to bring in some of the dishes, complaining to America the entire time about how disorganized he is.

They’re acting like siblings. China likes siblings. It’s nice to watch. The food is nice. Everything is so nice and passes easily.

It’s driving him insane.

There are seven bedrooms that they split between them. Thankfully, Russia and China end up in their own.

“Are you okay?” Russia murmurs when they both sit down on the bed. “You’ve been quiet all day.”

China rubs his face. “I’m fine.”

Russia stares at him.

“I…” China sighs. “I don’t know. It just felt like this day went by so quick. …I don’t know how I’m going to handle being alone again after this is over.

Russia gently grabs his hand. “Then we should make the best of our time now…”

China faces him. Russia looks away first, blushing.

He leans forward and presses their foreheads together. “I’m just happy we got to make amends with our Nation siblings.”

Russia’s voice is breathy. “Me too…”
China closes his eyes. “I feel like there’s so much progress to be made, though. And the fact that I don’t know when I’ll ever get another chance like this hurts…”

Russia doesn’t respond.

China opens his eyes. “Ivan?”

“Can you kiss me?” Russia whispers, his voice hoarse.

He doesn’t hesitate.

Chapter End Notes

(art commissioned from ket3.tumblr.com)
Collaboration

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It’s April 17th.

The plan’s in motion, and nothing has gone wrong, but everything is relying on so many uncertainties that France is afraid he’ll blink, and suddenly everything will fall apart.

He’s at a bilateral meeting in London. Afterward, he’ll be flying out to Madrid to meet Spain so that they can have their one-week vacation.

The amount of bargaining it took to get it gives France a headache.

England’s next to him, bouncing his leg. They’re sitting in the corner away from their two leaders, who are discussing something about the economy. Maybe. France isn’t paying attention.

Okay. Tomorrow Antonio and I will sneak onto the cargo ship that’ll take us to the US…

“I find it ridiculous we’re postponing the next Nation UN meeting,” England’s advisor mutters behind them.

Then we have to smuggle the other Nations into Paris by plane…

France’s advisor shifts his weight. “Sometimes it’s good for the Nations to have a break.”

And then when we arrive there on the 23rd, they’ll be picked up by their assigned caregivers and be taken to their different safe houses.

“But we’re not postponing it because of their vacations, we’re doing so because Brezhnev demanded. The Soviets never withhold their Nation Avatar unless their whole country is boycotting the UN. It just seems dodgy.”

England and France make eye contact just as their leaders stand up.

“Let’s adjourn the meeting. I’m hungry.”

When they’re about three blocks away from the government building, France speaks.

“Where are we having lunch?”

England jumps. “Oh. Uh. I was heading to our usual place.”

The fact that they have a ‘usual place’ makes France feel warm.

“Is that okay?” England quickly asks.

France nods. He hopes it doesn’t look too eager. “Yeah.”

The wind picks up. It’s a normal, cloudy, miserable day in London.
“When are you going to Madrid?” England mumbles after a bit, both hands stuffed into his pockets.

“After this is over.”

England glances around. “Ah.”

“I don’t think we’re being followed,” France mutters in Farsi. He’s been checking ever since they got outside.

“You can never be too sure,” England grumbles back in Cantonese.

They keep walking.

“You should have brought your coat,” France murmurs when he sees England shiver.

He hunches his back. “I know, but I wanted to get away from everyone else as quickly as possible.”

France frowns as he jams his hands further into his pockets. Eventually, he can’t stand it. “Here, I’m not cold,” he says, removing his jacket.

“You don’t have to—”

France pulls him to the side of the crosswalk and places it over his back.

England’s face is turning pink. “I’m fine.”

“Just take the coat.”

He grumbles and puts it on. “It reeks.”

“Of what? My wonderfully smelling, very expensive cologne?”

“Yeah,” England mutters, grumpily zipping up the jacket.

France tries not to stare when they start walking again, but it’s hard when England’s hair is ruffled by the wind so that it has just the right amount of dishevelment. His eyes seem extra green today too, and—

France forces himself to look away.

He didn’t mean to develop feelings. He wasn’t even aware of them until Canada pointed it out either. And while he should be stressing about the plan or making sure they aren’t being followed, his emotions are more distracting, and it’s all he can think about.

He remembers when the two of them went to a theater production, and how England’s eyes sparkled while he watched the play, or a few weeks ago when England got drunk and became overly handsy, and then there’s when England attempted to cook dinner when France was in London for some meeting about the EU because he knew how stressed out he was, and the food was awful, but England was so sincere and was trying so hard to cheer him up just as he always does, and he was blushing, and—

England abruptly grabs his shirt and yanks him back.

France is dazed. “Wh—”
“You almost got hit by a car!”

France realizes he’s at the edge of the sidewalk.

He rubs the back of his neck. “Sorry?”

“Be more careful,” England mutters, dropping his hand.

France slings his arm around his shoulders after they cross the street. “But that’s what you’re here for!” He expects England to shrug him off.

Instead, he hunches his back and blushes. “Shut up.”

France drops his arm and smiles. England grumbles something.

They arrive at the café.

“So, you and America went to a Beatles concert last month,” France says after they order and find a small table. “How was that?” He knows England’s finally getting over him. That simple fact probably shouldn’t make him as elated as it does.

England perks up. He’s still wearing France’s jacket. “It was wonderful! You should come next time.”

France smiles. “Sorry. I had meetings.”

“Don’t apologize. But God, the crowd was amazing, and the music—brilliant. It was brilliant.”

France nonchalantly plays with a packet of sugar. “And going with America was okay?”

England blinks. “Why wouldn’t it be?”

France tries not to grin.

“Oh. Oh. Yeah, it…”

“Hmm?”

England looks bewildered. “It doesn’t bother me anymore.”

“Really?”

England’s eyebrows crease. “Yeah…. I think I’ve moved on.”

The waitress places their food on the table.

France takes a bite out of his as soon as she walks away. “Well, that’s good,” he says after he swallows. “It’s what you wanted, right?”

England’s expression is muddled. “Yeah. It just feels weird, though.”

“I told you you’d eventually get over him.”

“Eventually’ was a very vague way to put things…”

“But I was right!”
He pulls France aside after the meeting is finished.

The French delegation is gathering their belongings together, so France knows he doesn’t have too much time.

“What’s wrong?”

“Be safe, okay?” England murmurs.

France touches his shoulder. “I’ll be fine.”

England looks away. France can feel his advisor staring at them.

“Antonio and I are just going fishing,” he says weakly. “I think we’ll survive.”

“You better.”

France drops his hand and smiles. “I’ll see you soon,” he murmurs, knowing they’ll be reunited on the 23rd.

When England doesn’t respond, France starts to walk away.

England grabs his arm.

He looks flustered and lets go immediately. “Please be safe.”

France feels dazed. “Arthur, I’ll be fine.”

“I know, but I’m—I’m terrified something will happen.”

“Nothing will. I promise,” France makes eye contact with his advisor and quickly looks away. “It’s just a fishing trip.”

“…”

France hugs him, feeling his heart rate increase when England returns the gesture. He almost doesn’t want to leave.

“Good luck,” England murmurs into his ear as he pulls away. “Gilbert’s waiting for you.”


England’s face is flushing. “I haven’t done mu—”

“We need to go,” France’s advisor interrupts.

“You’re one of the main reasons I’m finally better,” France mouths as he’s guided away.

He’s not sure if England understands, but his face turns even redder.
France spends the entirety of the three-hour plane ride to Madrid stressing.

It’s a private jet, at least, but while he can chain-smoke; it does little to quell his nerves.

All of the housing is set up, and he rationally knows everything should be okay, but he can’t help but freak out. This is the riskiest part of the plan. The Nations will be staying at these locations for an indefinite amount of time. Their caregivers will have to keep risking and risking getting caught to provide them with amenities.

Prussia and Hungary’s location freaks France out the most. He couldn’t convince Austria to house them anywhere but his fucking basement.

The others are staying in separate properties from their caretakers, at least. They’re divided into groups of two or three, so it shouldn’t be too much of a burden.

Denmark has Lithuania and Poland, Norway has Belarus and Ukraine, Finland has Estonia and Latvia, Sweden has Czech and Slovakia, Romano and Italy have Romania, Bulgaria, and Moldova, and Netherlands has Armenia and Georgia…

Netherlands wasn’t really supposed to find out about the plan, but they needed more caretakers, so Spain approached him and Belgium. It was a risky move, which England was completely against, but…

Everything seems to have worked out.

France taps his cigarette ashes into a bowl. Those who aren’t housing Nations are in charge of gathering resources, and he’s been blown away by the amount of support everyone has been giving. Even Germany has stepped up. France almost went into shock when he told them he stole wiretap-detecting equipment.

His advisor dully pokes his head into the cabin. “You doing okay?”

France rubs his face and nods. The advisor leaves.

He doesn’t know how everyone is going to make it to Paris on the 23rd. England said he was taking care of it so that France and Spain didn’t have to stress. But here he is, stressing. About this. About everything.

Maybe it’s because they’re so close. France is close. He can finally repay Prussia. He planned decades for this, recovered for this, but if just one tiny thing goes wrong, the entire thing could fall apart.

But even so…

He has hope. He actually has hope again, even after everything that’s happened.

So maybe just that alone will make sure the plan succeeds.

“Francis...”

France slowly opens his eyes. Everything around him is white and misty.

Jeanne d'Arc is in front of him.
“J-Jeanne?”

She smiles.

France stands up and stumbles forward. “I’m sorry I couldn’t save you,” he chokes out. “I wanted —”

“I know.”

“I loved you.”

She’s fading. “I knew that too.”

“W-Wait!”

France runs towards her but ends up crashing into someone else.

He looks up. Prussia’s eyes are black.

“Of course I want to eat your pastries.”

France is paralyzed.

Prussia’s voice gets distorted. “So don’t let me die like her.”

... 

France wakes up in a cold sweat and doesn’t sleep for the rest of the trip.

When the plane lands around 5 PM, Spain is waiting for him, but the two barely have time to greet each other before their advisors launch into a lecture about what they can and can’t do during their ‘fishing trip.’

“That was exhausting,” France mutters when they walk back to their car.

Spain ignores him and starts whistling.

“Antonio—”

He shoves a piece of paper into France’s hands.

Before France can question what it is, Spain climbs into the car.

Francis!!!!

This car is bugged

France looks at Spain through the windshield. He waves.

So don’t talk. Please. Unless it’s about fishing. Though I don’t really know anything about fishing. You know, Gilbert and I went fishing right after we buried your body. Fishing kind of sucks.
France climbs inside and buckles up. Spain pulls out of the parking lot.

Romano and I have set things up with the cargo company that will be shipping us to Philadelphia. So here’s the plan:

1. We’ll be meeting some members of the mafia we’re working with (Lovi still won’t tell me why they owe him a favor) at 6:30 PM, right outside of Madrid.
2. We’ll drive to Santander, which will take around four hours.
3. We’ll leave on my shitty boat that I somewhat blackmailed my officials into buying me, then travel to the cargo ship.
4. We’ll board the cargo ship and have the mafia members take over my boat and make it appear as though someone’s still on it.

Good news!! My boat isn’t bugged for some reason. I think it’s because I did nothing during my 10-year isolation period and supposedly have done nothing since. So now my government only half-asses spying on me, i.e. putting wiretaps in this stupid car.

Fuck them!!

Just to review.

--It should take five days to get to Philadelphia, so by the time we arrive, it will be the 22nd as planned.

--After stopping in Philadelphia, we’ll sneak onto an aircraft carrier and land in Paris on the 23rd.

--There, we’ll meet the other Nations, and they’ll take whom they’re safe housing.

--The two of us will then be smuggled onto another cargo ship that will take us back to Spanish waters, where my boat will still be stationed. We’ll then board it and sail to Santander.

If this blows up in our faces, we’re fucked :)

XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXO

I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t looking forward to seeing Gilbert, though.

We’ve really gotten ourselves into some deep shit, haven’t we? But if Gilbert and I did it 30 something years ago, what’s stopping us now.

“You know,” France murmurs, looking up. Spain side-eyes him. “I’m happy we’re doing this.”

Spain focuses back on the road.

“Despite everything…”

The letter was mostly upbeat in tone, but Spain looks underweight and like he hasn’t slept in days.

“I am too, Francis.”
France looks out the window.

“More than you know…”

Chapter End Notes

/
It’s late.

“How was crossing the border?” America mumbles. It’s just him, Canada, and Japan downstairs by the fire. Everyone else has retreated to their bedrooms.

Canada rubs his face. “A pain in the ass.”

Japan starts absent-mindedly rubbing circles into America’s arm, and he nearly gets distracted. “How come?”

“They thought my passport was fake because I don’t look twenty-five. Apparently.”

America snickers. “I mean; you do have a baby face.”

“That’s big talk for someone who looks just as young as him,” Japan murmurs playfully.

America feels his cheeks blush. “Hey, I think I look old enough for someone who has their physical age at nineteen.”

Canada looks disgusted. “Ew, wait. We’re both only nineteen?”

“How do you know your age?” Japan asks at the same time.

They’re both staring at him. America squirms.

“I know because they just evaluated me.”

“Who did?”

Thankfully before America has to explain himself, China picks the perfect time to moan really loudly.

They all try to act like they didn’t just hear it, but the noises Russia does immediately afterward makes it hard.

Canada stands up. “Well. I’m going to bed.”

“The noise will be worse upstairs,” America grumbles.

“Not if I use the earplugs I brought.” Canada stands up and walks to the doorway, then pauses and gives a shit-eating grin. “Plus, I’d rather be in my own room with a door than alone down here with you two.”

America’s face rapidly heats up at what he’s implying as Japan stands and pushes Canada into the hallway. “Thank you, Matthew, this has been nice.”

“It really has b—”

“Goodbye.”
“Alright, I get it.” America can hear the smirk in Canada’s voice.

He has no idea what to do with himself and fidgets when Japan sits next to him.

“Do you also want to go to bed?” he eventually blurts out.

Japan looks uncomfortable. “I’d rather not head upstairs.”

Russia moans.

America squirms, feeling insecure after what Canada said. “I’m sorry I can’t—” He swallows.

“What?”

“I’m sorry I can’t do what they’re—”

Now Japan’s face is bright red. “I told you I don’t care about that.”

America doesn’t know where to look. “Really?”

“I—” Japan squirms.

There’s an uncomfortable amount of silence.

“You’re attractive,” he blurts out when China moans again. “And I’ve had sex before, but I don’t need it, okay?”

America chews his lip.

Japan grabs his hand. “I…I already told you, Alfred. I just want you. That’s it.”

America feels overwhelmed and has no idea how to handle it. He buries his face into Japan’s neck, whose presence sputters, then calms down as he pulls him into an embrace.

“Please tell me that creaking sound isn’t from the ceiling,” America mutters after a bit.

Japan laughs. It sounds a bit breathless. “Let’s turn on the television. That’ll help drown it out.”

He pulls away and stands up. America’s eyes follow him.

“I love you,” he mumbles when Japan sits back down.

Japan’s face gets even redder. “I love you too.”

They awkwardly sit with some space in between them and watch the local news station until America leans his head on Japan’s shoulder.

Japan takes his hand and starts rubbing circles into it. “Do you want to sleep down here?”

America fidgets. “On this tiny couch?”

“It’s that, or we go upstairs.”

America stares at the TV. He feels Japan starting to roll up his sleeve and pulls his arm away. “I’m actually not that tired, but if you want to—”

“Don’t pull this bullshit for another night in a row, Alfred. Please.”
“…”

“Are you finally going to tell me what the dreams are about?”

America squeezes his eyes shut. “It’s nothing. Really.”

Japan cups his face. America’s eyes flutter open.

He’s frowning. “Don’t you know how much this is hurting me—seeing you suffer like this?”

America suddenly feels on the verge of tears and hates himself. “I’m A-Okay, though. Honestly.”

He stares at his lap. Japan drops his hand and sighs.

“At least lie down with me,” he eventually murmurs.

America knows he shouldn’t. He knows he’s being selfish if he does. All he’s been doing is waking Japan up almost every goddamn night. He doesn’t deserve him. He doesn’t deserve anything. How is Japan actually in love with him? It doesn’t—

Japan tugs his shirt.

America surrenders, placing his glasses on the coffee table, and ends up spooning him.

“Is this fine?” he chokes out. Though they’ve slept together, it’s never been this close before.

Japan’s presence is sputtering again. “Yeah,” he nearly blurts out.

America knows he doesn’t deserve this. He shouldn’t be letting himself indulge.

He presses his face into the back of Japan’s hair and tightens his grip.

When he hears a loud bang in the morning, his eyes fling open, mostly from the confusion that he’s not having a nightmare.

Japan is still flushed against his chest, and everything is so quiet that, for a second, he thinks he imagined the noise.

There’s another crash.

Japan’s eyes open. “What was that?”

America clears his throat, feeling way too aware of his morning breath. “I don’t know.”

Japan sits up, his hair a tangled mess.

More noise.

“I think it’s from the kitchen,” he murmurs, glancing at America as he also rights himself.

America rubs his eyes and nods just as Japan touches his arm.

“What?”
He smiles. “You didn’t have a nightmare.”

This is honestly the best night’s sleep America has had in months, despite it being on a couch that is far too small for the both of them.

He rubs the back of his neck, feeling himself blush. “It’s because you were there.”

“But we’ve been sleeping together since—”

“I know, but—” America’s face feels really hot. “This is the first time I’ve held you.”

Japan’s eyes dart to the floor, his own face turning pink. “Oh. Uh. We can—we can sleep like this from now on, then.”

“You—are you okay with that? I know you like your personal sp—”

“I’ve told you before; I don’t mind when it’s you.”

Another crash.

Japan stands up and offers his hand to America, looking embarrassed. “We should probably see what whoever’s in there is doing.”

In the kitchen is a singular person, and that is Belarus.

America has no idea how to react. It looks like a bomb has gone off with the amount of stuff everywhere.

“What are you doing?” he gets out.

Belarus barely looks up from the bowl she’s stirring. “Cooking.”

“Cooking,” America repeats, glancing at a smashed egg on the counter.

“…Do you need help?” Japan asks slowly.

Belarus angrily stirs the bowl faster. “No.”

“What are you making?”

“Pancakes.”

There’s a huge thing of baking soda and ketchup sitting next to the bowl.

Japan warily takes a few steps forward. “Really, it would be no problem. You must be tired.”

“Not after hearing my brother have sex—”

Japan grabs a whisk.

“Ugh, are both of you going to do this?” Belarus side-eyes America. “Because Canada said he couldn’t cook. And if he’s anything like England—”

“I am not as bad as him,” America blurts out, slightly offended, especially since this is coming from the girl who he’s pretty sure put ketchup in the pancake batter.

“Go get dressed and brush your teeth,” Japan murmurs. “I’ll figure out…this.”
The morning is the best America has had in a while.

After eating the pancakes Belarus took all the credit for, everyone ends up scattered around the living room.

“No. No one can be a worse cook than you and England.”

“Screw you,” America grumbles. Canada is sitting next to him on the floor. “At least I know not to put ketchup in pancake batter.”

Canada smirks. “Really?”

“Shut up.”

Japan is currently talking to Taiwan about something, and America tries not to stare. He finds himself itching to touch him.

South Korea sits next to America just as Canada opens his mouth. “How the hell do you actually look well-rested?”

America rubs the back of his neck. “Because Kiku and I stayed downstairs.”

“I should have done the same.” South Korea has bags under his eyes. “The room Mei and I share is right fucking next to theirs.”

“Staying with Al and Kiku wouldn’t have been any better,” Canada mutters into his mug.

America’s face flushes while South Korea looks bored. “Them? No. The most they do is hug each other and blush.”

“Yong-Soo,” America hisses.

Whatever retort South Korea has is drowned out by Prussia shouting at the TV. It’s playing Speed Racer.

“You’re far too into this,” Hungary mutters.

Prussia makes arm motions. “But did you see that shit?! This animation is so cool!”

It’s as if some otherworldly force draws America and Russia’s eyes together. His arm is around China while he’s talking to Belarus and Ukraine. He smirks.

America chucks a tissue box at him.

When everyone starts cleaning up and putting on real clothes, China pulls America to the side.

“Where’s your laundry room?”

Something cheers in America’s head that he won’t have to touch his and Russia’s sheets.

He leads him down the hallway and points. “Right there.”
“What’s next to it?” China asks. The door is different from all of the others, so America can understand his curiosity.

He rubs the back of his neck. “It’s nothing; just my storage room.”

Russia picks the worse time to come up behind him. “Are we allowed to go inside?”

America would rather they not. “Uh.”

“What, do you have classified secrets in there?”

“N-No.” He awkwardly looks away. “It’s just embarrassing.”

Despite all his protests, though, somehow everyone ends up gathering outside of it like he’s about to do some big reveal.

“There’s honestly nothing inside,” he mumbles.

Russia smirks. “The more you protest, the more interested I am.”

Japan rubs America’s arm. “If you don’t want to—”

“Show us what’s inside, Alfred,” South Korea interrupts. Japan glares at him. South Korea opens his mouth.

America hastily opens the door before they can go at it.

“It’s just how I remember,” Canada says as everyone walks inside. “Huge, dusty, and cluttered.”

“I don’t know how you can tell,” Prussia says. “It’s dark as fuck in here.”

America sighs and flips on the light switch.

He regrets that decision immediately.

“Holy shit,” South Korea blurts out.

America wants to stop existing.

“You lied. You didn’t throw it away!”

Turned to its side and only half covered by a tarp is the idiotic, ten-foot-portrait of England.

“Shit, wait, isn’t that the painting Francis took down and pissed on?” Prussia asks.

South Korea loses it.

Taiwan wrinkles her nose as Canada frowns. “He’s wearing a different outfit in yours compared to the rest of us.”

America fake coughs. “Anyway! I think we’ve seen enough—”

Everyone moves further into the room and starts picking up things.

America really wishes he could phase through the floor. Japan nudges him, looking like he’s fighting to suppress his laughter. “You kept it?”
“Yes,” America mutters miserably.

“But you told us you threw it away.”

“I did throw it away. But then a few hours later I saw it outside covered in mud and felt really bad.”

“So you lugged that giant thing back inside?”

“Yeah. At 3 AM. When electricity didn’t exist.”

“When did this happen?”

America stares at the pathetic, fading painting. “The Revolutionary War. Francis, Gilbert, and Antonio all got drunk and convinced me to tear it down.”

“And Francis pissed on it?”

“Yeah.”

Now Japan is laughing. “And you still touched it?”

America’s face is on fire. “Maybe.”

“Alfred!” Taiwan calls.

America isn’t sure he wants to walk over, but he does so anyway. Japan follows him. “What?”

She, South Korea, and Canada are all crouched around a few boxes.

“Are these toy soldiers?”

_Fuck._ “Yes.”

“They all have individual faces! Did you handcraft them?”

Canada is squinting at the bottom of one.

“No. It was a gift,” America says quickly.

“How old are these?” South Korea asks.

“I got them before I was a country, so, uh—”

“This is Arthur’s signature,” Canada interrupts. They usually never use his name if it’s just the two of them.

America wants to chuck all of the soldiers back into the box.

“He signed the bottom with Arthur. He never uses his real name.”

“It’s because I only called him that when I was little,” America mutters.

Canada gives him an annoyed look. “He never gave _me_ any custom made toys.”

America feels really uncomfortable; especially now that he’s aware England had feelings for him. He’s taken aback when Japan and South Korea surround him.
South Korea points. “Are those photo albums over there all yours?”

“Uh, yeah,” America gets out when Japan grabs his arm.

Canada puts the lid on the box. He and Taiwan stand up as South Korea continues rambling. “What’s in them—”

“Hey, um, Alfred,” Prussia interrupts.

He and Hungary have walked over, and America warily looks at them after Japan drops his arm. “Y-Yeah?”

Prussia holds up a wig.

America wants to die.

“What the actual hell?”

“Uh.”

Hungary wrinkles her nose. “It smells.”

It feels like everyone is staring at them now.

America rubs the back of his neck. “I, uh, accidentally stole it?”

“It’s not even yours?!”

Canada looks at him. “How do you ‘accidentally’ steal a wig?”

“Um.”

Recognition suddenly passes over Prussia’s face. “Holy shit, wait. Is this from when we dared you to take George Washin—”

“Okay! I think we’ve seen enough!”

“You actually—”

America herds everyone out of the room.

Russia appears way too amused. “But I wasn’t finished looking.”

America opens his mouth to make a retort, but instead, he’s overcome by a coughing fit.

Japan starts rubbing his back. Others step away.

“Alfred, are you okay?”

He tastes blood and darts to the kitchen.

His vision is blurry.

Japan hands him another glass of water. “Are you sure you’re alright?”
The sight of blood makes America want to curl into a fetal position. He downs the water, then goes back to scrubbing his hand. “Yeah.”

“What major happened with the Vietnam War?”

“No. It’s just protests.”

Japan sighs and touches his back. “I think it’s clean.”

America’s hand is bright red now. He knows how pathetic he must look.

He squirts on more soap. “I’ll rinse off after this.”

Japan is frowning when Canada lightly knocks on the open doorway.

“Al, you okay?”

The soap is gone. America moves to pump out more.

Japan takes away the dispenser. “He’s fine.”

America’s sleeves are wet. He fidgets, then grabs a huge wad of paper towels to wrap around them.

Japan opens the window above the sink. “You know, it’s nice out today.” His voice is a little strained. “Maybe we could go for a walk somewhere. I think it’d be good for everyone to get some fresh air.”

Canada frowns as America drops the paper towels into the trashcan. “Everyone? Because that could be a security issue.”

“If they didn’t bug this house, then we’re probably okay,” America says, suddenly feeling cagey. He wouldn’t mind going out.

Canada sighs. “You have a point, but…”

Japan takes America’s hand and rubs it. “Are there any trails around here?”

“There’s a bunch at Valley Forge,” America mumbles, basking in his warmth.

Canada ignores them. “What kind?”

“I dunno, like, some through fields and others through a forest…”

“I think we should go,” Japan murmurs.

Just as Canada opens his mouth, the phone rings.

“Do you think it’s Joseph?” Japan asks as they walk to the office.

America remembers Frank supposedly calling earlier and feels sick to his stomach. He swallows. “Maybe?”

It’s Hong Kong on the other line.

“I don’t have much time to talk,” he blurts out immediately.
Canada mouths, “what’s wrong,” as America scrunches up his eyebrows. “Is everything ok—”

“Some person named Frank called the other day? Like, on my government line? And it made no sense, and I haven’t been able to get away from everyone to call you until now.”

America’s head starts to pound. “Wait, *excuse me*?”

Both Japan and Canada are frowning.

“All he said was that his name was Frank and that he knew you? And then he babbled on about how we’re not as secretive as we think. My officials also had no idea who the hell he was.”

America swallows. His ears start to ring. “He was my first Nation Advisor.”

Japan’s eyebrows crease. “Alfred, what’s going on?”

“Did you know he called?” Hong Kong asks.

“No, I—I haven’t even seen him since the Korean War.”

“Then, what the—shit. Shit, I have to go. Please tell me this won’t blow up in our faces.”

He hangs up before America can respond.

Russia, China, South Korea, and Taiwan are now at the door. China frowns. “Who was that?”

America feels nauseous. “Kha Loung.”

“Why?”

“Because Frank called him.”

South Korea scrunches up his eyebrows. “Him too?”

“Did Frank say anything to him?” Japan asks.

“No, it—it was about as nonsensical as when you talked to him.”

They all stand there pensively.

“I really think taking a walk would be good,” Japan eventually gets out.

America’s not sure he wants to be doing this when he pulls into the parking lot.

He feels paranoid, especially since everyone decided to come.

“Maybe we should go back,” he hisses to Japan as they all start to climb out.

Japan frowns. “Alfred, I think a walk would be good for you.”

*Why, because you think I’m losing it?*

America’s eyes dart around the parking lot; terrified his officials are hiding somewhere. They have to be. They didn’t bug the house, but—why else would have Frank called *twice*?
He was gone! He left after America’s episode in Korea. Now it’s just Joseph. Even Robert was better, but now it’s just Joseph and those others and—

“Don’t throw a fit. You signed up for this.”

I didn’t volunteer you.”

Japan is staring. America tries to pull himself together.

“The trails through the fields are that way,” he chokes out when everyone is gathered in a big clump.

They all nod and lazily start walking in that direction.

There are a few who notice him cracking, though.

“Are you okay?” South Korea mutters when he hangs back. It’s weird hearing him speak English.

America feels a bead of sweat roll down his neck. “A-Okay. Just a little hot.”

“You could’ve put a short-sleeved shirt on,” Japan mumbles.

“I’m fine.”

They enter the clearing where the fields are. The sun starts to beat down on America even more, and he can feel Japan frowning at him.

There are families milling around. People on jogs. Couples.

They’re all giving them weird looks.

America’s anxiety starts to grow as China and Russia approach them.

“They’re all looking at us,” China says in a low voice.

Japan chews his lip. “I think it’s just because our group is so big.”

Every person they pass seems like a potential spy. America’s vision starts to blur, and he tries watching Taiwan to distract himself since she’s picking dandelions with Canada, but it only suppresses his nausea for so long.

He knows Japan, South Korea, China, and Russia are all staring at him, and it’s because he’s doing a shit job at keeping his presence stable.

“That way leads to the huts,” America chokes out when they get to the top of a hill. A hiker passes them. His heart rate increases.

“Alfred, do you need to sit down?” Japan’s voice is low.

“No.”

“You’re getting paler by the second.”

Taiwan strings her dandelions together. Prussia cracks a joke to Romania. Belarus playfully shoves Lithuania.

“Alfred,” Japan hisses.
“You’re doing this for the betterment of everyone else. You’re saving them. You’re helping this country.”

America puts his head down and starts walking. He hears Japan call after him.

“This research is important. It needs to be done. And you’re doing it willfully! How heroic is that? You’re saving the others. I mean; you wouldn’t want your so-called friends to have to do this, right?”

A father, daughter, and a mother. They’re all potential spies. They could be watching him. They could be reporting back his behaviors. This could be a test. This could all be a test.

Why did Frank contact Hong Kong, though? Does everyone know about the plan? Is that why? Is everything going to fall apart, even after years and years of planning?

No. He was secretive. They all were.

But what if his government has known since the beginning, and this was all just a test—

“Alfred.”

What’s going to happen? How far are they going to let them proceed with this? Are they waiting for the right moment? Will they lock up him and everyone else afterward? He disobeyed them, and they told him not to, or he’ll end up like France—

No.

No

No

No

Japan grabs his arm.

“I’m taking you to the car,” he hisses.

“Yong-Soo, go with them,” China mutters. “We’ll stay with everyone else and then head back.”

South Korea nods. America struggles against Japan’s grip. “I’m fine. We can keep walking. It’s fine. Really. I’m fine.”

Japan turns him around. “No, you’re not fucking fine,” he hisses in Japanese.

South Korea says something else, but America misses it.

There’s an older man approaching them.

He passes by a little girl and her father and heads right towards them, and he’s white, and slightly tall, and is a little overweight, and has a beard,

and it’s Frank.

America’s vision sharpens. He can feel his eyes turning red.

Joseph stood over him. “They just need to harvest some organs today. Relax. You’ve had worse.”
“Where are you going?” America choked out.

“Me? I don’t have to watch this.” Joseph left him strapped to the gurney. “I’m just a Nation Advisor. I don’t give a shit about what happens to you.”

They made eye contact.

“None of us do.”

America starts moving. He’s not sure why. Japan tries to hold him back, but he exerts his presence and pushes him, and he flings back like he weighs nothing as America charges forward. The little girl and her dad scream. America can barely breathe. There’s yelling. It gets drowned out by the ringing in his ears.

He and Frank make eye contact.

“Nations are nothing more than war machines. You’re a weapon.”

America body slams him to the ground and puts him in a chokehold.

“You’re serving your...”

“We would do this to your friends if you refused.”

Frank’s face is turning purple. He isn’t struggling. America squeezes—

Russia wrenches him back.

He hits the ground and attempts to move, but the wind is knocked out of him, and Russia is pressing his face into the ground, and everything is so overwhelming there are black spots in his vision as someone rapidly apologizes to the families around them while Frank makes choking—

“America, what the fuck?” Russia hisses in English.

“What the fuck that’s disgusting,” some scientist spat out. “Look at him; he’s already regenerating.”

“Why the hell are you here?” South Korea hisses. Is it to him? To Frank?

America can’t breathe.
“It’s not human; that’s why. It’s a Nation.”

“Get off of him.” Japan sounds hysterical.

“You’re in control of this situation,” the person breathed into his ear. “You’re in total control. This is your choice.”

I’m in control.

Japan is saying something to him, looking like he’s speaking to a wounded animal.

I’m in

Frank isn’t moving.

I’m

America blacks out.

_____________________________________________________________________

He wakes up in a bed.

He’s immediately disoriented. It’s quiet. The light is dim.

Someone is crying.

America’s eyes dart around, and he feels like he’s been punched in the gut when he sees its Japan. He’s not alone either; South Korea, Taiwan, and Canada are leaning against the wall.

this is your fault this is your fault this is

America moves to comfort him, and Japan drops the box of tissues he was holding in surprise. Everyone else stands up straight.

America stares at his outstretched arm and realizes he’s not wearing a long-sleeved shirt.

“Alfred, what are they doing to you?” South Korea demands, his voice two octaves higher than normal.

America’s arm is covered in scars that refuse to heal from the various experiments his government has been performing on him. His abdomen looks even worse.

He retracts his arm, feeling sick to his stomach.

“Why have you been covering this up?” Taiwan whispers.

America stares at his lap.

“Al,” Canada says, walking closer. His voice is low.

“Where’s Frank?” America chokes out.

“In a bedroom where China and Russia are watching over him. He hasn’t said anything since we’ve brought him here.”
“Is he—Is he okay?”

“You broke his shoulder and bruised his neck. He can barely move.”

America starts shaking.

“Alfred, what are they doing to you?” South Korea demands again.

Japan blindly reaches for his hand. America takes it, trying to fight back a sob.

“Al—”

“Experiments.”

“What?” Japan chokes out.

America’s throat feels closed off. “Experiments.”

Dead silence.

“But it’s different! It’s voluntary. I can—I can stop whenever. I’m in control.”

They’re staring at him.

“I’m in control,” he repeats pathetically. “It’s better this way. No one else is getting hurt. I just—slipped today! It won’t happen again—”

Japan’s breath catches.

Impulsively, America leans over and embraces him, and all it does is make the two of them sob.

Canada, South Korea, and Taiwan silently leave.

“You know you can tell me anything, right?” Japan chokes out after a while. His voice is muffled.

America buries his face into his hair.

“Alfred.” Japan’s voice cracks.

you lost control and pushed him you lost control and

“It’s not healthy to bottle up your emotions. You can talk to me. I’ll listen. I’ll always listen.”

America shakes his head.

“Why are you doing this?”

“It’s—it’s my choice.”

“Then stop.”

“I can’t.”

“Why!?”

“Because they’ll hurt you and everyone else if I—”
“No, they won’t,” Japan chokes out. “Your government can’t do anything to the Nations they don’t have control over.”

Tears stream out of America’s eyes. He can hardly catch his breath. “But it’s fine. I’m in control. I’m A-Okay.”

Japan’s arms are shaking. “You don’t have to fight through this alone.”

America can’t muster a response. He knows he’s getting snot on Japan’s shoulder.

“I hated myself after the war. I felt humiliated and wanted to die. But then you— you nursed me back to health and made life worth living again.” Japan’s voice cracks. “So let me help you. Let me help you fight through this. Let me help you make this right.”

America grips him tighter.

“You know how much I love you,” Japan chokes out.

“I don’t deserve it,” America garbles. “I’m weak and pathetic and—”

Japan kisses his forehead.

America sobs even more.

It takes a while for them both to calm down.

America is numb when he finally stops crying.

“Do you want to talk to Frank?” Japan murmurs.

America squirms.

“You don’t have to—”

“No,” he whispers in a small voice. “I should.”

He throws on some more clothing. Japan gives him his glasses.

Canada is crouched in the hallway when they exit the room.

“Matt?” America questions, his voice cracking.

Canada jumps and looks up, then sighs and takes off his glasses to rub his face. “How are you feeling?”

Awful. “I’m fine.”

“He wants to talk to Frank,” Japan mumbles.

America swallows. Japan’s hand is dangling near his, and he’s tempted to grab it.

“Do you want to go to his bedroom?” Canada asks.

All of the bedrooms are tiny. America would be very close to Frank and doesn’t know if he could
handle that.

“Can we move him to the living room?” he chokes out.

“You’re okay talking to him out in the open?”

America swallows. He brushes his hand against Japan’s for reassurance. “Y-Yeah. It’d probably be better that way.”

“Okay. I’ll tell Russia and China.”

The walk downstairs doesn’t feel real. Japan taking his hand is the only thing that keeps him anchored to reality.

All of the other Nations are in the living room.

Despite it only being 4 PM, America is ready to crawl back into bed. His numbness is starting to be replaced by anxiety.

South Korea and Taiwan approach them as everyone else blatantly avoids looking in his direction.

“What’s going on?” South Korea mumbles. “Did you talk to Frank?”

Japan squeezes America’s hand. “No. He’s going to do that here.”

“Oh. Alright.”

“Wait, you guys are bringing him into this room?” Estonia asks since he’s close to them.

It gets quiet.

“Y-Yeah. If you want to listen to what he has to say, you’re allowed,” America chokes out.

No one moves, and there’s an uncomfortable pause as they wait. America can hear Russia, China, and Canada’s footsteps from upstairs.

Japan squeezes America’s hand when they get closer. “I’m going to be right here with you this entire time,” he whispers.

America wants to throw up. He nods.

Russia and China carry Frank into the room.

Canada is following them, making sure the chair Frank is tied to doesn’t tip over. America can’t help but stare. There’s rope bound tightly around Frank’s midsection while his upper body is stiff and being propped up by a makeshift collar.

Everyone moves to the opposite side of where they set him down.

His eyes are glassy, and they only seem to light up when he and America make eye contact. Japan lets go of America’s hand. He takes a couple of shaky steps forward until he’s the closest.

“I’m just a Nation Advisor. I don’t give a shit about what happens to you. None of us do.”

America’s vision blurs.

Just as he sat down, Frank abruptly entered, only to halt in his tracks after seeing America’s
appearance.

He seemed absolutely terrified.

“Why are you here?” America chokes out. “How many others know? Are they watching—”

“I’m here because I want to be,” Frank responds, his voice raspy. “No one else knows. Your plan’s not in danger.”

America’s head starts to pound. “Then how do you know about it if no one else does!?”

“Because your letter exchange was the most insecure thing I’ve ever seen.”

“How would you know; you stopped being my Nation advisor before it even happened!”

Frank laughs. “I’ve been working behind the scenes ever since the Korean War, that’s why.”

“What do you mean you’ve been behind the scenes?”

“I mean I was put on the background team that’s supposed to oversee both you and the Nation Advisor. You’re lucky Robert and I have never given a shit about any of this. I have no idea why Joseph is so into his job.”

America hasn’t seen Robert in years. His headache increases.

Frank is looking more and more deranged. “I was handpicked for this position, you know. I was chosen right out of college. Little was I aware that once you have the job as a Nation Advisor, there’s no way out. And believe me; I’ve tried to leave. After what I saw during the Second World War and the Korean War, I was tired of this goddamn freak show.

“But they wouldn’t let me go. I knew too much.

“So, though I never made a physical appearance in front of you, I was always there in the background, always there with the other past Nation Advisors, all of us rotting away as we were forced to monitor you. No families. No lives. We didn’t exist. We don’t exist! We’re only here to serve the government.”

America tries to cut in. “Wh—”

Frank ignores him. “Maybe that’s why I decided to help you when I got fed up with my absolutely pointless life. You want to know why no one has found out about your plan yet? Me. Your messy letter exchange? I covered that up. Your fucking nuclear weapon deal? I had to erase your tracks.”

America’s blood freezes.

Only Russia and China know about the nukes.

Frank seems to realize this by looking at his face. “No one else knew.” He laughs, then coughs. “Sorry.”

“Why are you here?” America demands, not wanting to look at the other’s expressions. His vision is getting blurry. “If you were still around all this time, why did you decide only to make an appearance now?”

“Because you killed him.”
“What?”

“You—You killed him, didn’t you?”

He isn’t looking at America anymore.

“Killed who?” America demands. His voice cracks.

Frank ignores him and closes his eyes. “You know, information is spreading, and there are too many coincidences happening at once right now.”

“Killed who—”

“Don’t underestimate the consequences of your actions. Nations aren’t as important as they once were, and you can all easily be disposed of.” He smiles. “Especially now. Look at what the government is doing to you. You’re a pawn piece. I’m a pawn piece. I’ve been a pawn piece ever since the government recruited me.”

America’s presence is spiraling out of control. He finds it hard to breathe.

Frank opens his eyes and smiles. “But today, I can get out of this hell. I’ll join him. He’s waiting for me.”

“Who—”

“You’re all monsters; you know that?

“Red eyes, inhuman strength, immortality—it’s fucked up. Have you ever looked at yourself when you’re having an episode? Like right now. With your bright red eyes, you look absolutely demonic. You don’t know how long that episode in Korea haunted me.”

America wants to vomit. He opens his mouth to demand another answer.

Frank fishes a tablet out of the corner of his mouth and bites into it before he can.

The effects of it are immediate. He starts foaming at the mouth and convulsing and thrashing, and his eyes roll into the back of his head, and

He’s dead.

America’s mouth is dry. He stares in disbelief, unable to process anything.

He’s dead.

Canada cuts through the silence. “What nukes?”

He’s dead—

“What fucking nukes, Alfred!?”

America turns around, knowing that he’s trembling. Everyone’s eyes are red.

It’s Russia who responds. “How easy did you guys think it would be to break the Nations out of Siberia?”

Canada turns towards him, shaking in anger.
“It was a necessary payment that only concerns Alfred and me.”

“It was necessary!?” Prussia explodes. “Antonio and I did nothing like this and still faced heavy repercussions, and you guys stole nukes?!”

“We need to get rid of the body,” China says without any hint of emotion in his voice.

America looks back at Frank and almost gags.

“Are there any other secrets, Alfred?” Canada hisses.

America loses it. “You think I wanted to keep this a secret!? Why do you think I’ve been screaming myself awake FOR THE PAST FEW MONTHS, MATT?”

Canada flinches. America feels unhinged.

“I haven’t been keeping all of this private to be selfish! I got my body ripped apart to protect all of you and get this stupid fucking road trip approved, and did the nuke deal so Ivan and Yao could get the Nations out of Siberia, so what was I supposed to do, confront you, Arthur, and Francis about all of this when Francis is finally a functioning human again?!”

“We need to get rid of the body,” China repeats as Japan grabs onto America’s arm. “Before they come looking for him.”

Canada’s expression looks broken. “Al—”

America has a coughing attack before he can finish that thought.

Japan gently wipes America’s mouth as if he were made out of glass.

They’ve been in the kitchen for a while. The blood he vomited is now cleaned up.

“Do you want another glass of water?” Japan murmurs.

America shakes his head, feeling pathetic. His hands are raw from where he washed them.

Japan crouches next to him. “Do you want to lie down?”

“No…”

He frowns.

“Kiku, you don’t have to do this,” America chokes out after a bit. “You don’t have to try and comfort—”

“We already had this conversation, Alfred. I want to.”

Tears prick the corner of his eyes. “But all I am is a burden.”

“You’re not a burden.”

“I kept secrets to try and keep all of you safe, but now I’ve somehow made it worse—”

“You haven’t made it worse.” Japan takes a shaky breath. “Many of us are just upset because we
don’t want to see you suffer, and that’s what all the secrets you’ve kept have done.”

America brings his knees up to his chest just as Canada knocks on the door and awkwardly walks inside.

They make eye contact.

Canada looks away first. “I’m going to take the body across the border.”

Japan frowns. “When?”

“Now.” Canada rubs his face. “I don’t know; if he was telling the truth, then the government shouldn’t be aware of where he is right now, but I’m going to take him anyway before they come looking.” He frowns. “Everyone else is cleaning the house, so all the evidence should be taken care of.”

There’s a long pause.

Canada turns around. “Well. I’ll be going.”

“Wait,” America chokes out.

He frowns and looks at him.

“I’m sorry.”

Canada’s expression breaks. “You’re sorry?”

“Yeah, for lying, and—”

“Jesus Christ, Alfred. I’m sorry. I’m sorry you’ve shouldered all of this shit and felt like you couldn’t confront anyone about it. I’m sorry I got weirdly—I don’t know, jealous? About that for whatever reason. I—” Canada gives a broken smile. “I never thought I’d feel sibling rivalry over something as awful as this, but I guess I can be an awful person.”

America’s head is pounding. “You’re not awful.”

“Well, then neither are you.” Canada takes a step forward. “You need to do something about your situation, Alfred.”

Tears start to build up in America’s eyes.

“You have people who love you. Let them help you. Recover. Stand up to your government. If other members of it knew what was happening, they wouldn’t allow it.”

America suppresses a sob as Canada hugs him.

“Thank you for everything, Matt,” he gets out when he pulls away.

Canada’s eyes are puffy. He gives a broken smile. “You too, Al.”

It seems way too quiet after he leaves.

Japan touches America’s arm. “What do you want to do?”

He feels himself aching for something. “Can I—Can I make a phone call?”
“You can do whatever you want. I’ll help everyone else clean.”

America stumbles to the office, feeling drunk when he fumbles to dial the number.

He crouches onto the floor. The receiver clicks.

“Hello?” Scotland grumbles.

“Is Arthur there?”

“…Yeah, he’s here.” Scotland pauses. “Kid, are you all right?”

“I’m fine,” America responds, his voice cracking.

Normally he feels like Scotland would make fun of him, but instead, America hears him call for England, followed by the sound of the receiver being handed over.


“I’m fine,” America repeats like a broken record.

“Alfred—”

“Arthur, can you please just talk to me, like, just talk about anything. I’m sorry, I just—” There’s a sob stuck in the back of his throat.

“Shhh. It’s alright. Okay? …I, um, went to the market today. We’ve been there together before. There’s always a lot of interesting characters, but today I saw that bloke with the pet bird again, the one who carries the cage around with him.”

America laughs through a sob.

“Well, today that bird…”

I don’t like being babied by you.

“And then when he set it on…”

I don’t like you assuming a guardian role. It makes me uncomfortable. It makes me feel childish and pathetic.

“I thought the woman was about to piss herself when she…”

But God, does it feel nice to be comforted by you.

Eventually, America calms down.

“You sure you’re feeling better?” England murmurs.

“Yeah,” he responds in a small voice, knowing even though he’s given England absolutely no explanation, he’s still been this caring and understanding.

He doesn’t deserve him.
“Arthur?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m sorry.”

“Alfred, you know you can call me whenever you—”

“I’m sorry I’m childish and am oblivious to other people’s emotions and have hurt you because of that,” America blurts out, feeling sick to his stomach. He still doesn’t know why England harbored feelings for him. The pathetic and unstable piece of shit. The one who lost control. The one—

“I didn’t—I didn’t mean to hurt you,” America gets out, trying to silence his intrusive thoughts. “I never meant to hurt you. You mean so much to me.”


America makes a pathetic noise.

“You mean a lot to me too, okay? It was never your fault. I was selfish in the past and didn’t handle my…emotions correctly. But I’ll always be here. We’re friends. I care about you.”

Don’t abandon me.

America sniffs. “Thank you…”

I’m sorry I didn’t love you the way you loved me.

“I can keep talking if you want,” England murmurs. But you still mean so much to me and I don’t want to lose you.

America clenches the phone. “I should probably talk to everyone else.”

He can hear England take a deep breath. “The plan is okay, right?”

“Yeah,” America whispers. “Sorry. I just—”

“Don’t apologize.”

“Thank you.”

“You don’t have to keep thanking me. You know I’d do anything for you.”

“Because you were my guardian?”

“No. Because you’re my friend and equal.”

America’s breath hitches.

“Call me again if you need to, okay?” England whispers.

“Okay,” America says in a small voice.

He stares blankly at the wall after the line goes dead. He’s not sure for how long, but long enough that someone eventually knocks.
“Alfred?” South Korea’s voice is muffled.

“Yeah?” America mumbles.

South Korea walks inside and closes the door behind him.

America studies his hands.

“The house is clean,” South Korea says awkwardly after a long pause. “And Mei and Kiku are cooking dinner.”

America doesn’t know how to respond. South Korea sighs and sits next to him.

There’s another stretch of silence.

“Let’s just work together through this, okay?” South Korea says in English.

America lifts his head. “What?”

“You said something like that during the Korean War.”

They make eye contact. America looks away.

“You said you’d be Alfred and I’d be Yong-Soo, and that we’d forget we’re Nations and just… power through everything.”

“…”

South Korea sighs, looking defeated. “Alfred, I’m still trying to grapple all of this. It’s…I think I’m infuriated. The poison bullets should have been a warning sign, but I think I so desperately wanted to believe that Nation experiments were just a thing of the past.”

America feels tears welling up.

“Why did you hide it from everyone?” South Korea chokes out. “From me? I thought we were friends.”

“Because I wanted to protect all of you,” America whispers, his voice starting to waver. “They told me my friends would be hurt if I didn’t comply. I couldn’t—not again. I couldn’t see more of my friends—not again.”

“Alfred—”

“And I kept the nukes a secret because if everything fell apart, Ivan, Yao, and I didn’t want anyone else to have to take the blame for it, and—”

South Korea pulls him into a hug.

America makes a muffled noise.

“You have to stand up for yourself,” South Korea gets out, his voice cracking. “Bring up what’s happening with other government officials. There has to be someone who knows this is wrong. Resist. You have a democratic government that says it represents the free world and wants peace and harmony. Torturing Nations is something the communists are doing. Tell them that. They’ll lose their minds.”
America chokes out a wet laugh. He pulls away to rapidly wipe his eyes. They sit there for a while until they both calm down.

“Promise me you won’t submit to them,” South Korea eventually whispers. America’s hands blur away.

“Please, Alfred.”

“I’ll try…”

They get quiet. America can hear activity out in the hallway.

“Do you want to play a board game?” South Korea eventually asks. “We found a stash in your living room.”

America gives a watery smile. “As long as it’s not Monopoly.”

South Korea grins. “Fuck Monopoly.”

No one except America knows how to play The Game of Life, but it’s still fun.

There are so many people that want to join that they end up on teams, which doesn’t really make sense, but they figure it out anyway.

Taiwan throws smack talk when she and South Korea start winning. Prussia almost gets into a fight with Belarus. Ukraine has to break them up. Japan comes in and out of the kitchen, always touching America when he sits down next to him.

For a brief moment, America almost feels like a normal person with friends.

He doesn’t know what he’s done to deserve any of this.

He nearly screams when he exits the bathroom and Russia is waiting outside.

“There’s another toilet upstairs,” America says once he’s regained his composure.

Russia’s voice is low. “Alfred.”

America’s anxiety starts returning with a vengeance. “What?”

“I…” Russia looks exhausted. “I’m sorry for egging you on after that one trip to the grocery store.”

Of all things, America wasn’t expecting him to bring that up.

“It’s—”

“But I wasn’t lying when I said I understood. The Soviet government mistreats me too.”

America gets still.
“It’s not as bad as what you’re going through.” Russia rubs the back of his neck. “But if you ever need to talk to someone, you can approach me.”

“You don’t have to do this,” America mumbles.

“I don’t care.” Russia sighs. “I’m sorry about the nuke deal too. I can only imagine how that was adding to your stress.”

“It’s fine—”

“If it were, you wouldn’t have lost it today.”

America closes his mouth.

“You can stand up to your government,” Russia whispers. “I can’t. Christ, we just rescued two carloads of Nations from mine. Yours hasn’t stooped to that level yet, though, so just…stand up for yourself before it’s too late.”

“I’ll try,” America mumbles.

Russia awkwardly shifts. “Good.”

A few moments pass.

Russia starts walking into the bathroom. “Well. Go back to that shitty game. I’m going to piss.”

Something inside America feels lighter. “It’s an American classic.”

“Is it, now? Just like animation?”

America hits him. Russia gives a shit-eating grin.

Despite everything, he finds himself genuinely smiling.

_____________________________________________________

“Did you tell him Frank was staring at us at the end?”

“No. I didn’t want to make him even more stressed.”

“Ivan—”

“It doesn’t matter. Either way, they’re both dead now.”

_____________________________________________________

America is afraid to sleep.

“Do you want to take a shower?” Japan whispers when they sit on the bed.

He shakes his head and picks at the sheets, knowing that Japan is watching him.

“I’m scared,” he eventually whispers.

“Of the nightmares?”
America squeezes his eyes shut. “Of everything.”

“Alfred…”

“Everyone wants me to stand up for myself, and I’m not sure I can. I—I’m weak.”

“It’s okay to be weak,” Japan murmurs.

America opens his eyes, trying not to shudder.

Japan cups his face. “It’s okay to be scared. But I know you can do it, Alfred.”

Tears leak out of America’s eyes. “I love you.”

Japan’s face flushes. “I love you too.”

“I’m sorry I pushed you. I can’t believe I—”

Japan pulls him into an embrace. “It’s fine Alfred. It’s fine.”

“I love you.”

“Ssh.”

“I don’t deserve to. My country destroyed your body.”

“Alfred.”

“You were angry I wasn’t showing you my scars when I know you never take off your own shirt because you hate—”

Japan moves away and starts undressing. America feels nauseous. “You don’t have to—”

“I don’t like this scar, okay?” Japan gets out, pointing to it. It’s white and pinkish and about the size of a basketball. “It reminds me of all the Japanese people murdered. It reminds me of all the people the Japanese murdered. But it’s also the reason you nursed me back to health and made me feel human again.”

America makes a muffled noise.

“I don’t hide it because I’m disgusted. It’s just private. I don’t hate you for it. Why would I hate you, Alfred? You had nothing to do with it.”

America leans forward and presses his face into Japan’s shoulder.

Japan pets his hair. “This is almost over, okay?” he whispers. “It’s almost over. Everyone will be saved. You did that. Alfred F. Jones helped rescue all these people.”

He shakes his head.

“And then we can all focus on healing. Remember what I said once? We’re here to help each other. That’s what friends do. That’s what—that’s what lovers do. Don’t ask ‘what if questions’ about your past actions. Live in the present. Focus on healing.”

America’s presence is all over the place. “Are you going to tell me stories about Sika deer, then?” His voice is small. “That’s what I did to help you.”
Japan laughs softly and weaves his fingers through his hair. “If you want.”

“They’re native to much of East Asia.”

“Are they?”

America nods. Japan moves his hands and cradles him.

He closes his eyes and tries to pretend everything is okay.

Chapter End Notes

song I listened to when America had his breakdown: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U38JBoY09GI

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The ceiling is blurring away.

Hungary nudges him. “Move over.”

“Can’t. I’m too lazy,” Prussia mutters.

Hungary sighs and sits down next to him on the bed. “What, are you stressing?”

“Maybe.”

They’re alone in the bedroom they share with Ukraine and Belarus. Prussia is in a weird mood, and all that keeps replaying in his mind is America’s advisor losing it.

“You killed him, didn’t you?”

Prussia chews his lip. He definitely was staring at Russia and China when he said that.

Hungary nudges him. “Stop worrying about the nukes.”

“I wasn’t mulling that over, but thanks, now it’s the center of my thoughts.”

Hungary gives a pained smile. “Then think about the bright side. Soon we’ll see Roderich and Ludwig, and Francis and Antonio…”

Prussia sighs, missing all of them so badly it hurts.

Hungary opens her mouth to say something else just as the door opens.

Belarus stomps inside. Ukraine is in the hallway with Russia and China.

“Ivan, are you sure—”

“It’s fine.”

“This is the last thing any of you should be worrying about, okay?” China says quietly. He starts guiding Russia into their next-door room. “Good night.”

Ukraine frowns. “Good night.”

Belarus angrily closes the door.

Prussia does not want to deal with any of their drama, nor wants to hear Russia and China have graphic sex again, and low-key really, really hates that he and Hungary were put into this room.

Ukraine turns to Belarus and gives a strained smile. “Well. You heard them; we shouldn’t worry.”

“Ivan is going to be ripped apart when he gets back to Russia, and possibly never let outside again if they find out about the nukes.”

“They said it’s—”
“Especially if the American is that much of a psychotic mess, I can only imagine what will happen to Ivan.”

Ukraine is still smiling, but her eyebrow twitches.

“Your hair is growing in nicely, Katya,” Hungary says after moments of very uncomfortable silence.

Ukraine looks relieved. “So is yours!”

They force a conversation about hair while Prussia lies down. He makes eye contact with Belarus briefly, but she rolls over and stares at the wall.

Prussia closes his eyes.

He dreams.

The Nation Advisor Frank is with Kazimir. The two of them laugh, both of their eyes red. Hitler’s figure is above them, staring down at Prussia. He feels helpless. A man in a suit appears, raising a gun. He shoots.

America runs in front.

The bullet hits him in the shoulder. He’s screaming. His face is turning blue.

Prussia falls.

When he crashes to the ground, Austria is there.

“Don’t waste ammo!” he shrieks. Soviets are swarming the building. A missile is shot through the window—

…

Prussia wakes up completely disoriented.

He gets even more confused when he realizes Hungary is spooning him, and his dream quickly fades out of his memory. He fidgets. She doesn’t move.

He stares at the wall for a solid minute until he decides to get up.

“Sorry,” Ukraine blurts out in a hushed voice when Prussia carefully wriggles out of Hungary’s grasp. “Did I wake you?”

Belarus flops to the side. Prussia shakes his head. “I didn’t even know you were up.”

He stumbles out of the room, haphazardly brushes his teeth and washes his face, then meets Ukraine in the kitchen.

It’s about 7 AM. No one else is awake.

Ukraine is opening and closing cabinets. “We don’t have much…”

“Isn’t there pancake mix?” Prussia asks, not knowing what to do with himself.
Ukraine wrinkles her nose. “I guess. Do you know where the box for it is?”

“Uh.” Prussia starts opening random cabinets and pauses when he sees some cereal boxes. He knows he’s been cut off from any popular culture since the 40’s, but. “Why does every single one of these have a brightly colored character on it?”

Ukraine stops taking out some bowls and walks over. “Is that a caveman?”

Prussia opens its box. The cereal is rainbow colored.

They make eye contact.

“Try it,” Ukraine says.

“Ew. No.”

She laughs. Prussia sets the box aside, then hands her the pancake mix once he finds it.

He leans on the counter after Ukraine starts humming to herself. “I see you like cooking.” He frowns when he realizes how little he knows about her.

“I’m not so sure I like cooking, but I’m good at it, so that’s nice.” She grabs some eggs. “I guess it makes me feel useful.”

Prussia frowns. “Useful?”

“Yeah. Because I’m not a very good Nation.”

“Why would you th—”

“I’m a woman. Imagine the old days, marching out to battle with a female Nation in front. And I can’t fight on top of that. I’m emotional too. I cry at the drop of a hat.”

Prussia doesn’t know what to say.

“So then when Stalin gave up on using Nations to fight during the Second World War and turned me into a maid, suddenly I felt like my life had a purpose. Cooking was only something I could do. Not Natalia. Not Toris, Eduard, or Raivis. Just me.” Ukraine gives a wistful sigh.

Prussia’s mouth feels dry. “If you were a cook, then why did he lock you up after the war?”

She avoids eye contact. “Maybe it was the Nazis influence. Maybe he just got sick of us or was afraid after what you did.”

“…”

“But whatever the reason was, here we are.”

Prussia squirms.

Ukraine grabs some more flour. “I know you don’t care for him,” she murmurs after a bit. “But I’m worried for Ivan.”

“I don’t dislike him.”

“Yeah, but I’ve seen the way you look at him. It’s with resentment.” Ukraine sighs. “He does that
—makes enemies easily. Both his personality and what he represents doesn’t help.”

“...”

“But despite all the enemies he has, despite how everyone here has some form of resentment for him, he still helped all of us. He’s risked so many things, and in a mere two days he’ll be returning to his awful government.” Ukraine takes a shaky breath. “He told me not to worry, and I know I shouldn’t, but I can’t help it. Especially after yesterday’s...events.”

“He’ll be fine,” Prussia finds himself saying, knowing it’s nothing but an empty phrase.

Ukraine gives a tight smile.

Prussia feels like he should say more. “I am thankful for him.” He’s the reason I’m alive, I guess.

“I know.”

“Katya, what’s wrong?”

Prussia looks up and sees Lithuania and Poland in the doorway.

Ukraine rapidly wipes her eyes. “Nothing, Toris! I’m just making breakfast.”

“Did he insult you?”

Prussia feels slightly offended. “Why would I do that?”

“He was just listening to me ramble.” Ukraine smiles. “Here, take a seat.”

Poland does so and props his feet up onto the table. “Is there only pancakes?”

Lithuania mutters something as Prussia points to the cereal box he was too lazy to put away. “There’s that.”

Poland sits up straight and looks at it. “Why is it so colorful?”

Prussia shrugs, grabbing the box and tossing it to them.

Poland nudges Lithuania after they examine it. “Try some.”

“No.”

“Come on.”

Lithuania cracks a smile. “You’re not going to persuade me.”

“Prussia, have you tried any of it?”

He shakes his head.

Poland huffs. “Well someone has to.”

He gingerly opens the box, and a cloud of sugar seems to pop out after the bag is unsealed. Lithuania coughs. Poland looks fascinated.

He grabs a piece, then sticks it in his mouth and chews for far longer than necessary.
“Well?” Lithuania asks.

“It’s…sweet.”

Prussia grabs a handful because he hasn’t had something sweet in decades.

Poland gives him a wary look. “Like, it’s really sweet.”

‘Really sweet’ does not cut it. Prussia gets a headache almost immediately.

Ukraine laughs at him as he downs a glass of water to wash the sugar taste out of his mouth. “I can’t remember the last time I’ve had anything with sugar.”

Lithuania is studying the box. Poland looks unimpressed. “Well, don’t waste your first taste on this. It isn’t even that good.”

“What isn’t that good?” Hungary asks, walking into the room.

From the sink, Prussia points to the cereal. He sets down his glass and turns towards her just as she sticks a few pieces in her mouth.

She looks unimpressed too. “Well, it’s something.”

“Do you have a headache?”

“What? No. Do you?”

Prussia feels really lame. “Maybe.”

“Aw, can you not handle sweet things?”

Prussia grumbles for her to shut up just as Poland props his feet back up on the table. “Man, I want something sweet that’s good. Like chocolate.”

“You could ask America to buy some,” Ukraine says over the whirring of the stove.

Poland’s face scrunches up. “Maybe I’ll ask someone else.”

There’s an uncomfortable pause.

“First pancake’s done,” Ukraine blurts out.

Poland stands up immediately and snatches it before Prussia can even move.

Hungary starts rubbing his back, and Prussia tries not to jump.

“You’ll get the next one,” she breathes into his ear.

Prussia’s body erupts in goosebumps. He hates the fact that now that he’s finally healthy and in a good state of mind, he has time to worry about feelings and other mushy shit. His crush on her has returned with a vengeance…. His longing for Austria only increases with every passing day….

He rubs his face. Hungary smirks.

South Korea pops his head into the room and only pauses for a split second when he sees Ukraine cooking. “More pancakes?”
She shrugs. “It’s really all we have.”

“I guess someone can go grocery shopping….” South Korea steps inside. “It will probably be Mei and I. What do we need?”

“Have you even been to an American grocery store before?” Prussia asks.

“Uh, no,” South Korea squirms. “…But I’m 90% sure Kiku won’t even let Alfred out of the house today, so.”

There’s an awkward silence.

“I’ll make a list,” Ukraine says quickly.

South Korea looks like he doesn’t know what to do with himself. “Thanks.”

“Chocolate,” Poland blurts out.

“What?”

“Can you buy chocolate?”

“Sure…?”

“And candy,” Prussia tacks on. Maybe it’s just the cereal that gives him a headache. He can eat sweets, dammit.

“Any more junk food?” South Korea asks dryly. “And have you even looked to see if Alfred has any? He has a sweet tooth.”

“There’s none that I’ve found,” Ukraine says.

“I didn’t know when I would be here next, so that’s why there’s none,” America says from behind South Korea.

Everyone jumps as South Korea whirls around. Japan and America are at the doorway, both looking utterly exhausted.

America rubs his face. “Do we need to go grocery shopping?”

“Mei and I can do it,” South Korea says immediately.

“No, you don’t have to—”

“Let them go, Alfred,” Japan murmurs.

America mumbles something.

He, South Korea, and Japan all leave the room just as Ukraine plops down another pancake.

Prussia suddenly doesn’t feel too hungry anymore.

On a surface level, it’s a lazy morning, but there’s an underlying tension that no one wants to address. No one really looks at America. Russia and China both appear like they didn’t sleep.
At around 9:30 AM, South Korea and Taiwan are the only two dressed.

America looks like he’s about to throw up. “There are only two days left. If we ration—”

“Alfred, I don’t want to ration food. Mei and I are fine.”

“But you don’t know this area, and—”

“We’ll drive until we find something!” Taiwan is forcing a grin.

America squirms. Japan rubs his arm.

“Come back immediately if you see anyone suspicious,” Russia mutters. Belarus is pressed against his side, but she’s refused to look at him all morning.

South Korea gives him an annoyed look. “We know.”

“F-Frank could have been lying,” America chokes out. “There could be more people—”

“If there were more people, they would have come to the house by now,” Japan interrupts.

America deflates. Taiwan and South Korea head towards the door.

“Do either of you have the car key?” China asks when they’re almost out of sight.

South Korea flushes, crinkling the list Ukraine gave him. “Uh. No.”

Russia’s eyes follow China as he stands up and hands the keys to South Korea, who turns even redder as soon as China touches him. Russia tenses up. China tiredly walks back after the two disappear.

He sits down near Russia, who scoots closer and slings his arm around him possessively.

Prussia dully looks at Hungary. “Do you want to put real clothes on?”

“Sure, anything to get me out of here,” she mutters.

It’s a beautiful day.

Prussia and Hungary are dully wandering around the backyard.

Prussia kicks a shed that’s rotting in the corner. “What do you think’s inside?”

Hungary shrugs. “Gardening tools? A secret stash of liquor?”

“I could go for a beer right now.”

“I don’t think America has any alcohol.”

“No candy. No alcohol. And he doesn’t like to smoke, so no cigarettes. What the fuck.”

“He’s healthy!”

Prussia makes a noise.
Hungary grabs the handle. “Do you think it’s lock—”

She stumbles backward when the door swings open.

The two blink and cautiously step inside. When Prussia’s eyes adjust, he’s surprised to see it filled with various sports equipment.

He kicks a football net. “We should play.”

“Just the two of us?”

“No, like—everyone. That’d be fun.”

She smiles. “It would be.”

Everyone gathers outside to play except for Russia, China, America, and Japan. Prussia has no idea where those four are.

No one also has any idea how to divide into teams.

“We could count off?” Ukraine tries after everyone mumbles some half-hearted suggestions.

“Who are the team captains, though?” Czech asks.

“I can be one.”

“Then I want to be the other,” Belarus mumbles.

They count off, and Prussia ends up with Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, Romania, Moldova, and Georgia. The other team is Ukraine, Hungary, Estonia, Czech, Poland, Bulgaria, and Armenia.

Prussia ends up as the goalie. Hungary is the one for the other team and is currently making faces at him.

Belarus looks at Prussia before the kickoff. “Don’t fuck up.”

“I’m a great goalie.”

“We’ll see about that.”

For all of them being extremely out of shape, the game quickly gets intense.

Belarus’s team starts winning in the beginning, but Ukraine’s makes a quick comeback and overtakes them. Hungary keeps taunting Prussia about it from across the field.

That’s why he’s distracted when Ukraine starts advancing towards him, swiftly dodging around Romania to get a nice, clean kick towards the goal.

Prussia scrambles to block.

The ball hits him right in the dick.

“Fuck.”
“Oh my God. Oh my God, I’m so sorry. I’m a trained medic. I can—”

Her apologies are drowned out by the laughter coming from the screened-in porch, where Russia is practically losing it. China, Japan, and America are watching with him.

It hurts for Prussia to breathe. It’s also the first time out of this entire trip that everyone looks like they’re having fun.

He smiles despite being on the brink of tears.

In the end, Ukraine’s team wins, much to Belarus’s protests, and everyone is happily milling around inside when South Korea and Taiwan come back.

America, who was actually looking relaxed, instantly tenses up again. “Did you have any issues? You were gone for a while—”

“We just got a little lost.” South Korea tosses the car keys into a nearby basket. “I didn’t realize there was so much horse country around here.”

America unclenches as Japan murmurs something to him. “Sorry my directions sucked.”

Taiwan brings a few bags inside. “They didn’t suck. I’m happy we got to see the horses.” She frowns as South Korea takes the bags from her. Russia and China stand up to help. “You know, when Yong-Soo and I were talking, I realized I’m probably the only person here who has never ridden a horse.”

America blinks. “Yeah, that’s probably true.”

Taiwan pouts.

“Then maybe the next time you come to the states, I can take you to a barn.”

“Really!? ”

“Sure.”

“Don’t Americans have a weird riding style, though?” South Korea mutters.

“Yeah, but we still ride English…”

Their voices get drowned out as Prussia turns up the cassette player. He and Hungary are lying behind the couch, listening to Austria’s music in silence.

That’s why he’s unprepared when a bag of candy hits him in the face.

“Ow,” he says dramatically, looking to see who threw it at him.

South Korea grins.

Prussia examines the bag and nearly thinks it’s fake for a second. It’s see-through and filled with various types of sweets and chocolates, all of which are massive in size.

“Is that enough candy for you?” South Korea asks.
Prussia knows he won’t be able to finish any of this. “Maybe.”

“Well if it isn’t, there are ten more bags.”

“Ten?”

“There was a sale.”

Hungary grabs the candy from Prussia as South Korea walks away. “Well, if you can’t handle the sugar in this, then I’ll eat it.”

“I can handle it!” Prussia says defensively.

Hungary laughs.

Austria’s music continues to play. It’s comforting.

“I want to go home,” Hungary mumbles.

Prussia looks away from the sky and blinks. There’s too much light pollution to see any stars.

“But I know that’s a wistful thought.”

“At least we’ll see Roderich soon.”

“I know…. And I’m happy! But then what; live in secret with him forever?”

Prussia looks away, not knowing how to respond. When she asked him if he wanted to go outside after everyone else started playing a board game, he didn’t expect her to talk about this.

The night feels cool.

“It’s better than Siberia,” Prussia mumbles.

Hungary squirms. “I know. But at least our future there was stable.”

Prussia closes his eyes. “Well, what’s already happened has happened, so we just need to accept our circumstances and move forward, despite if this plan is stable or not.”

“Is that what you told yourself during the Second World War?”

Prussia opens his eyes and looks at her. Hungary appears small.

“Liz...”

“Sorry.” She shakes her head. “That was a stupid question.”

“Can I talk about it anyway?”

Hungary frowns.

“I don’t know what I felt during the War.” Prussia swallows. “But when I had the opportunity to save at least one person, I went for it.”
“…”

“I’m sorry it couldn’t be you.”

“I already told you once not to apologize for that.”

“I know, but. It was agonizing. I thought you and Roderich were safe. You were Axis Nations, and Antonio and Francis weren’t, but then Roderich got his face fucked with, and you were dammed to a hell of Nation experiments, and suddenly I was sent away to where I couldn’t reach either of you.”

“Gilbert, I’ll say it again. Don’t feel guilty about something that was out of your control.” Hungary looks away. “I don’t blame you for not rescuing me. I would be lying if I said I don’t feel any resentment. But I think the resentment is aimed at myself.”

“Why?”

“Because if I was in your position, I don’t think I could have done what you did. Because shit, look at where we are now, and I’m terrified for the future!”

Prussia takes a step forward. “I’m terrified too.”

Hungary makes a noise.

“This has turned into something bigger than I could have ever imagined when Antonio and I rescued Francis.” Prussia gives a miserable smile. “But what’s happened, happened, and we can’t change that.”

The breeze picks up. Prussia can hear the distant sound of a highway.

“But we have to move forward…”

Hungary takes a deep breath. “Then if we are, I want to tell you something.”

Prussia blinks, feeling nervous. “What?”

“I like you.”

“I like you too?”

Hungary sighs and looks away. “Don’t be dense.”

Prussia feels like he’s been hit by a truck. “Wait.”

“Yes, Gilbert. That kind of like.”

Prussia has lost all use of his mouth.

Hungary laughs at his dumbfounded expression. “Was it not that obvious?”

He makes a noise.

She looks away and fidgets, suddenly seeming unsure. “But I like Roderich too.”

“I also like Roderich,” Prussia blurts out. “Him and you. For a long—him and you.”

There’s a lengthy pause until Hungary bursts into laughter. “This has to be the lamest confession in
the history of mankind.”

Prussia’s face is burning.

“Of all the ways I thought this would turn out—God. Why did I keep this internalized for so long? You’re just—cool with it! I—” She’s laughing mostly out of what sounds like disbelief.

Prussia hugs her, feeling drunk.

She keeps laughing and hugs him back, her body warm, and Prussia feels like he’s vibrating. He buries his face into her hair, and she breathes into his ear—

There’s someone crying.

Hungary and Prussia’s heads jerk up. There’s definitely someone sobbing from over where the shed is.

They give each other a look, then edge over to that area.

Prussia is not prepared to see Russia and China.

China is the one sobbing, and Russia is pretty damn close himself, and somehow Prussia feels more taken aback than when he saw Russia cradling China’s dead body.

“—hurt, and I can’t stop it, and we won’t see each other for possibly decades—”

“Y-Yao—”

“You don’t have to go back; you could stay with your sist—”

“What about you, then! You—”

“I won’t be hurt! I can’t—you can’t—the nukes and the Nation Advisors and—if someone finds out—”

Hungary tugs Prussia back.

He feels dazed.

It’s the first time, he realizes, he’s actually seeing those two with a range of emotions. Now it seems so simple to say that they’re more than Nations, but it’s taken him this long to even acknowledge that Ivan and Yao exist, even after all they’ve sacrificed.

He understands the hypocrisy of his own views, claiming that Nations are humans while subsequently dehumanizing the ones he doesn’t like.

Hungary guides him back to the garage door.

“Liz,” Prussia mumbles when they stand outside of it, his head feeling foggy.

“Hm?”

“Can I kiss you?”

She smiles. “I guess.”

It feels like the most right thing Prussia’s ever done in his life
That night he hears someone crying again.

The next day passes by in a blur.

He wishes it didn’t. He wishes they all had one big happy adventure, or something.

But all anyone does is mope around.

At 7 AM, their alarm clock rings.

Prussia disorientedly wakes up from a dream that he thinks Roderich the horse was in as Hungary groans into his back. Belarus throws a pillow to shut up the clock. It falls to the ground.

“Morning,” Prussia grumbles to Hungary when he sits up.

She grunts in response.


Nothing.

“You have the real book crates, right?” Russia mutters to America when they’re about to leave the house.

America’s voice is gruff. “They’re in Philadelphia. We’ll be dropping you off and then heading there with the decoy crates to switch them out.”

France and Spain are only an hour away, waiting for them. Somehow Prussia’s about to see them after more than twenty years.

All he does is clutch his diary like a security blanket the entire car ride.

They park at a shipyard.

The car is dead silent as America nervously glances into the rearview mirror.

“We aren’t being followed,” Japan murmurs.

America swallows; then opens his door and climbs out when South Korea parks next to them.

Prussia’s anxiety is through the roof. He blindly grabs onto Hungary’s hand when she leans into him.
It’s actually happening.

This is actually happening.

It’s really

France and Spain come into sight.

Prussia wants to cry, laugh, and scream all at the same time. He nearly scrambles out of the car, and when France sees him, he doesn’t even hesitate.

He sprints forward.

Prussia is pulled into such a tight embrace that he drops his diary. He can hardly breathe when Spain joins them.

France is crying. Prussia is desperately holding back his own tears.

Spain gives a watery grin. “Gilbert, it’s over.”

Prussia breaks down.

His face is pressed up against France’s hair, and he remembers how thin and short it was the last time they saw each other. He looked like a living skeleton then. But now—now he finally seems back to normal, and Spain also is healthy, and—it’s overwhelming. Everything is.

When they pull away from each other, they all look like a mess.

Prussia goes to pick up his discarded diary, and when it’s not there, he sees Hungary holding it. She smiles warmly.

France sniffs and rubs his face. Around them, others are talking. They’re nothing but background noise to Prussia, though.

“We need to get going,” France finally gets out.

“We still have some time,” Spain reassures. He then, being the ever-inclusive man, looks over at Hungary and smiles. He gestures towards the diary. “What’s that?”

“It’s Gilbert’s.”

France and Spain look at him.

“Alfred found my diary.” Prussia’s voice cracks against his will. “Apparently, I left it here by mistake during the Revolutionary War.”

France laughs. It’s wet sounding. “Of course he’d keep it.”

“What’s in it?” Spain asks, slinging his arm around Prussia’s shoulders. He’s shaking slightly.

Prussia feels dazed. “Nothing too interesting; mostly me talking about training and wanting to kill —” he breaks off as he remembers the whole ‘France has a crush on England’ conversation.

“Who?” France prompts.

“Well, you probably wouldn’t want to any longer.”
“What?”
Prussia gives a shit-eating grin. “Arthur.”

France blinks; then blushes. Spain frowns. Hungary rolls her eyes.

“What?” Spain asks.
France is tongue-tied. “How did you—what—”
America walks over before Prussia can make any sort of response.

“You guys should get going soon.”
Spain drops his arm and checks his watch. “We have some time.”

“I know, but—just in case.”

“Alfred, are you okay?” France asks, his face returning to a normal color.
The warmth Prussia was feeling is being replaced by his usual anxiety.

“I’m fine.” America’s voice is short.

“You don’t look fine.”
America takes a step back.

“Does this have to do with Mathieu not being here?”

“Don’t worry about it.”

“Does Arthur know what’s going on?”

“Jesus Christ, Francis—”

“Is it Kiku? Did he do something to you?”
Prussia hastily slings his arm around France’s neck. It feels surreal to even have the privilege of doing such a thing. “Everything is okay, Francis. We’re all just stressed out about this.”

France squints at America. He stares at the ground.
Japan approaches them after breaking away from a conversation with China and South Korea.

“What’s wrong?”
America mumbles something. Japan guides him away.
France stares at their backs. “Why isn’t Mathieu here? All Alfred told me is that he was unable to make it.”

Prussia swallows. Spain and France are staring at him.

“He just wasn’t able to come,” Hungary says easily. “Something about his government? I don’t know, he called, and America is stressed about it. That’s all.”

France moves away from Prussia. Spain nods.
Prussia looks around and suddenly feels like he’s in a dream

China and South Korea are talking. South Korea seems like he’s about to cry. France has pulled America to the side and is hugging him. Taiwan and Japan appear wary. Ukraine and Belarus are saying something to Russia, and neither of them look happy.

Prussia needs the assurance that any of this is real. He grabs Spain and Hungary’s arms.

Spain jerks. He then forces out a smile. “This is really happening, isn’t it?”

“You’re the one who helped organize all of this.”

“You’re the one who sent me that letter during the war.”

Hungary takes Prussia’s hand. He closes his eyes.

“I guess I did.”

The other four leave like their trip across the US never even happened.

Spain and France smuggle the rest of them onto a cargo plane.

None of it still feels real.

The plane ride is grueling.

Spain pokes Prussia in the back when he’s finally starting to fall asleep. “So I see you two cuddle now.”

Prussia is shaking from being so cold. He’s spooning Hungary for warmth.

“Yes.”

Hungary lifts her head. “We’ll fuck if you want us to.”

The cargo area is pretty large, but it’s packed with boxes. It’s impossible to hear one another unless you shout. Turbulence is also awful, and it smells like mildew.

Prussia would endure it a thousand times if it meant he could see Germany and Austria again.

Spain blinks. “Poor Roddy is going to be devastated that you two are together now.”

“Roderich has dysentery?” France shouts in confusion.

Despite all the uncertainty and anxiety, Prussia laughs easily.

They’re smuggled off the plane when they reach Paris.
Their destination is a huge warehouse that France and Spain seem key on getting to as fast as possible, and Prussia is so preoccupied with that that he’s completely taken aback when Russia and China break away from their group.

Ukraine bursts into tears as soon as Russia takes two steps away. Belarus looks angry.

He gives them the saddest and most pathetic looking smile Prussia has ever seen, briefly hugs them, and then they leave.

They came into his life suddenly ten days ago, killed an entire compound, shot Kazimir, and now it’s over. Prussia’s existence at that compound felt like an eternity, and in just one short ten-day trip, they turned his entire life around, despite both not even liking him.

He has to tear his eyes away from their backs.

The presence of the warehouse is overbearing.

Prussia’s heart is beating rapidly in his throat. He feels gross. He’s sleep deprived. The fact that Austria could be on the other side of that door is filling him with such a nervous tension he doesn’t know what to do with himself.

When France knocks, and England opens the door, it takes Prussia a few moments to even register him.

“Did you have any issues?” England asks as they walk inside.

“Besides for Mathieu not being able to come, no,” France murmurs.

“Really? Because Alfred called me crying at one point.”

“What?”

Prussia doesn’t hear the rest of the conversation because he sees Austria.

He’s standing in the middle of the warehouse along with the other Nations, and as they make eye contact, the rest of Prussia’s world blurs away.

His throat constricts. He can’t breathe.

Hungary grabs his arm and yanks him forward.

The three of them nearly collide as Hungary pulls them into a hug. They clutch each other’s backs, trying to hold back tears but failing, terrified someone is going to tear them apart, frightened, dazed, happy.

“I’m sorry we couldn’t surrender to the Americans,” Prussia chokes out.

Austria sobs into his neck.
Chapter End Notes

Picture commissioned from cycloalkane.tumblr.com

I live in Pennsylvania near Valley Forge
I want to dedicate this chapter to the woman working at Panera who now recognizes me and gives me discounts because I come in so often to sit down and write this stupid fic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

America wants to scream.

He sets his chopsticks down in his now empty bowl and stares at the wooden table. He then swallows and sneaks a glance at China, who’s sitting across from him.

China’s face is emotionless. America doesn’t know why he expected anything different.

He tugs at his collar. It’s July 10th, and they’re in the middle of Beijing, so the room they’re in is sweltering. He wonders if good old Henry Kissinger is melting in the room next to them as he talks to Mao, but maybe it’s just him who feels this uncomfortable. China, for one, doesn’t even look like he’s sweating, and he’s dressed in more layers.

The silence is suffocating, but America doesn’t know what to say and is petrified to speak. Someone could be listening. Someone is always listening.

“You’re thinking too hard.”

America freezes.

“Just relax,” China murmurs, resting his head on his hands.

America looks away.

He wants to stand up and break something.

Don’t you know the implications of this meeting; that this means the US recognizes the Mainland as the legitimate China now? Don’t you know what this means for Taiwan—for Japan and South Korea?

After the road trip, America overheard some of his officials talking. One of the main reasons why it was approved was to build confidence in US-Japan, US-South Korea, and US-Taiwan relations before this bombshell was dropped.

The road trip…

America bites his lip so hard he tastes blood.

It finished without a hitch. It was fine. It was fine for a week, and he wasn’t questioned about Frank, and everything was fine. But then; then he was approached and told that he should submit himself to some more experiments. The ones he consented to. The ones he was in control of.
It took every ounce of his willpower to muster up the courage and tell them no.

The consequences of his actions have haunted him since.

When he refused, he was screamed at. Threatened. When he still didn’t give in, he was beaten until fucking Robert, fucking Suit Man of all people, stepped in. Until that moment, America hadn’t seen Robert since he ‘resigned’ five years earlier. And when he saw him, suddenly everything Frank said about Nation Advisors seemed legitimate.

America was dragged to his room afterwards, dragged like he was some sort of unruly animal. At that point, he was hyperventilating and desperately needed to talk to someone. When he picked up the phone, though, the line was disconnected.

He had a mental breakdown that night.

Excluding today, he hasn’t had contact with any Nations since. No letters. No telephone calls. He hasn’t even been allowed to leave D.C. except for this trip.

He stares at China’s hands, which are now neatly folded across the table, and wonders if he’s suffered any consequences.

America feels like screaming.

He’s afraid.

He’s alone.

He knows his government is trying to wear him down so that he’ll give in, and honestly he’s about ready to.

America can feel himself start to shake and is startled when something bounces off the side of his head.

He blinks and picks it up. It’s a napkin folded into a crane.

It takes every bit of his willpower to hold back tears.

*This will pay off in the future. Having my life be shitty now will be worth it in the future when my government learns to respect me.*

China starts folding something else.

Stay in control.

Stay...

China is overflowing with so many conflicting emotions that they’re hard to contain. Out of the corner of his eye, he watches as America stares at him.

He looks awful, and China knows he too should feel wary and unsure because of the plan, but God.

He’s happy.
If the United States recognizes the Mainland as the legitimate China, then the UN will follow and their period of isolation will be over.

And the fact that Mao is letting this meeting happen…

There are many reasons why he accepted Kissinger’s request to come, but China knows one of the main ones.

It’s thanks to the plan.

After China and Russia landed in Paris, they met up with the Russian mafia group they were working with and were smuggled back into the Soviet Union. Once there, they parted ways.

China doesn’t know what’s happened to Russia since.

Once they split up, China was taken to the Sino-Soviet border where he purposefully maimed and killed himself. The Russian mafia group then sent out a tip to the CCP, claiming they worked with some crazy Red Guard members to steal the Chinese Nation Avatar.

There was a whole retrieval process, a ‘negotiation’ between the two sides. In reality, Russia and China paid their associates in advance.

And it worked. Everything went smoothly.

China was handed back over to his government, and when he was taken to Beijing, not once was he accused.

Not once was he even blamed.

Mao blamed the Soviet Union. That’s why when Kissinger wanted to secretly come over to the Mainland for negotiations, he accepted. With the prospect of aligning with the United States against the Soviet Union, he didn’t want to refuse.

So here they are now.

China stops folding another crane and really studies America. He’s lost weight. There are dark circles under his eyes.

*Does Ivan look just as bad?*

He blocks out the thought when it threatens to become suffocating. At least if the Mainland is accepted as the ‘true’ China, he’ll be able to go to UN meetings. He’ll be able to see him. They won’t be able to talk or interact, but it’d be better than the situation they’re in now.

He goes back to folding, wondering what will happen to Taiwan.

Mei’s existence is the only reason he feels somewhat guilty.

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It’s a beautiful spring day.

France has all of the windows open in his Parisian apartment. There’s a warm breeze blowing through, and he can hear the city teaming with life.
He’s currently doing some spring-cleaning with the help of England.

England is shuffling around in his bedroom when France starts to dust off a table in the living room. He gets distracted, though, when he glances at his balcony, suddenly remembering that party he hosted all those years ago.

He almost doesn’t believe it’s 1976.

“Francis.”

France looks over his shoulder. “Are you finished?”

“Yeah, but you’re obviously not. I swear you just invited me here so I could clean your entire apartment.”

“You volunteered. I had nothing to do with this.”

England rolls his eyes.

They both start dusting as France mentally runs over his to-do list. He needs to check in with Spain to see if their trip to Austria has been approved, has to go over the safe-housing budget, needs to memorize the latest economic report for the next UN meeting…

Alfred will be there…

“Were you able to call Alfred the other day?” France asks.

England pauses and looks down. “No. My call was denied.”

“But you were approved last month. I thought you were allowed one call per month, no?”

England gives a dejected shrug.

France sighs, running his hand through his hair. “At least it’s getting better. He’s now allowed to talk to other Nations at UN and NATO meetings for a little bit. And you’re permitted to call once a month, usually.”


France pulls him into an embrace from behind. England seems startled, and France half expects him to push away, but instead, he relaxes.

God, now France knows he’s upset.

“It will be okay,” he murmurs, rocking back and forth.

England closes his eyes and hums.

They both listen to the commotion outside.

“UN meetings are so weird,” England mumbles. “Alfred, Ivan, and Yao all show up, are not really allowed to talk to anyone, so they just stand there while their officials hover—and then they leave. They just leave.”

“Alfred can talk to Nations during lunch breaks, though. Ivan and Yao can’t even do that.”
“Francis, he looks so drained. Every time we see him, he looks so bloody awful and yet he’ll still smile at us.”

“He has to do this if he wants respect from his government.”

“…”

“It’ll be okay.” Someday.

“I just hate how he never told us. We only found out about this second-handedly, and it—it just makes me so angry.”

The breeze picks up, rustling some papers.

“Did your trip to Austria get approved?” England eventually mumbles, switching topics.

“I need to check with Antonio,” France responds, rubbing his shoulders. “But I think so.”

“That’s good. Tell Gilbert and Elizabeta I said hello.”

France pecks him on the cheek. “Will do.”

“Get away from me,” England mumbles, giving him an uncommitted shove. He’s red in the face.

As he starts to dust again, France’s thoughts wander.

It’s been years since he spilled his feelings.

It was messy and ugly.

They were drunk, smoking cigarettes in a Madrid bar after a late UN meeting. France doesn’t exactly remember what happened, but he said something that led to the two of them messily kissing in the bathroom. When Spain and Romano found them ten minutes later, though, they completely froze.

England then threw up on France’s shirt.

Spain and Romano had to drag them back to his house because they were both so intoxicated. When France woke up, he remembered everything. England acted like he knew nothing. That resulted in a screaming match, which somehow led to England crying and then them kissing again while Romano pretended to vomit.

Since then, he and England have had a weird relationship of sorts. Kissing is a thing now, and France is very open with his displays of affection. They haven’t had sex yet, though. They got close once, but England seemed too nervous, so France didn’t push it.

And though they’re ‘together’ to an extent, they’ve been careful to conceal everything. France just wants to keep everything in the realm of England’s comfort level.

France had a conversation with Spain once about maintaining a relationship with another Nation, but all that did was give him an excuse to ramble on about Romano for thirty minutes. He also did that another time when the two of them met with Prussia; completely just talked about Romano for a solid length of time.

They’ve been arranging monthly visits to see him. So far, their governments haven’t questioned it. In fact, Austria’s government welcomes the visits because they think they’re the reason why their
Nation is recovering from his depression.

Germany is also a monthly guest, sometimes even tagging along with France and Spain. He finally looks happy again. He’ll still get nervous about the plan, but there’s nothing to worry about.

So far, everything has been running smoothly.

Prussia is safe and happy too, and that’s all France can ask for.

“I’m literally cleaning this entire room for you,” England grumbles, cutting through France’s thoughts.

He grins. “That’s what good boyfriends do—”

England’s dust rag hits him in the face.

They start play fighting and nearly bump into the alcohol cabinet that used to haunt France.

Now it’s simply a piece of furniture that needs to be cleaned.

It’s easy for Prussia to fool himself into thinking Siberia was all a dream.

This is especially true when he’s lying on Austria’s couch. It’s positioned right next to the piano, up against a window, and around noon, the sun shines in perfectly and creates just the right amount of warmth that lulls him into an easy nap.

It’s hard to believe that it’s 1976.

The past four years have been relatively easy. Though there have been times of stress when Austria has to leave for a trip, or when government officials visit, and Prussia and Hungary have to hide in the old bunker under the house; most of the time things have been peaceful.

Somehow.

He and Hungary are usually free to roam. The bunker is just the place they go to hide. There are times when they’ll get daring and venture outside, but often those excursions are too risky, so they just play it safe and remain indoors.

Sometimes Prussia finds himself going stir crazy, but then he remembers the alternatives he could be facing and is able to come to terms with the situation. It’s often harder for Hungary to do the same. As a coping method, she usually ends up running laps around the house or doing some sort of physical activity. Austria has been investing in a gym, so currently, they have miscellaneous exercise equipment lying around.

Hungary keeps trying to get Prussia to workout with her, but it’s honestly the last thing he wants to be doing. He doesn’t want to tell her that one of the main reasons why is because it hurts. His body isn’t like hers—sometimes it fights against him, and exercising only makes him feel awful for a couple of days.

They do other activities together, though, like playing instruments. Prussia usually picks the flute and Hungary the violin, but sometimes they’ll mix it up. They practice while Austria is out of the house and then give a mini-performance when he comes home. In return, he’ll play the piano for them, allowing them to pick any song they want to hear. Prussia loves those moments.
He loves being with them.

At first, their interactions were filled with caution. Prussia doesn’t know what changed or who had the first bit of courage to do something more, but now they’ve fallen into an easy relationship. It’s all he could have dreamed of and more. They cuddle. They kiss. At times, these interactions are hard to balance, and jealousy is something that needs to be addressed, but they’ve worked it out.

Prussia used to convince himself that such a relationship was only of his wildest dreams. The fact that he can experience this is something he’ll never take for granted.

Days are sometimes long and seemingly endless, but Prussia has picked up various hobbies to keep himself occupied. He’s writing again and learning about new-age photography and video making, but by far his latest fascination is video games.

Austria hates them. Hungary loves them.

Germany bought Prussia an Atari console his first Christmas back, and he and Hungary often find themselves playing it. Austria always grimaces when he sees them cooped up in front of the television, wasting their time on what he calls ‘the stupid thing,’ but Prussia just thinks he’s bitter because he can never seem to get a hang of the controls.

Germany always seems to be bringing him presents like this, saying things like, “I saw this and thought of you.”

The gestures often make Prussia want to hug him and never let go.

The first time they saw each other was when he and Hungary first arrived at Austria’s. Austria was still parking when Prussia had jumped out of the car to hug him, and he was in shock when Germany’s knees buckled in response.

Since then, he’s learned to value their relationship.

Germany’s now a bi-weekly visitor. Each visit Prussia barrages him with questions, simple shit like: “what’s your favorite color” or “what music are you into.” Their past relationship was built on the needs of their government. But this time, it’s of their own accord.

Spain and France also visit often, usually monthly, and Prussia looks forward to seeing them. Every now and then, Italy and Romano will come by too, or whoever else just wants to drop in and say hello.

Life is easy. Prussia has nothing to complain about.

But sometimes when he lies awake in bed, he’ll remember Siberia or Nazi Germany. Sometimes he’ll think about Kazimir or Frank, or about the poison bullets. Sometimes he’ll think of America and Russia, and wonder how they’re doing, whether or not they’re being tortured, whether or not their nuke deal has had any ramifications.

Prussia tried asking about them once when Spain and France were over, but all they gave was unclear answers; then dropped the conversation.

When Prussia lies awake in bed with Austria on his one side and Hungary on his other, he’ll usually think life is great and feel thankful for everything. But every now and then, he also has to wonder about the future and what will happen if the Soviet Union falls.

He watches the news in an attempt to monitor the on-going Cold War situation, but there’s always
a lack of information that leaves him grappling for more answers, answers that Austria is reluctant to provide or doesn’t even have to begin with.

It’s frustrating, but he has to keep moving forward.

So he does.

The heat is on so high that America feels like he’s suffocating.

Standing on a stage in a room full of Nations also isn’t helping.

“And that summarizes this Nuclear report,” Russia says next to him, dully. China, who’s on America’s other side, yawns.

They’re at a UN conference in Rome, the first one of 1977. It’s late January, and America doesn’t think it’s that cold outside, but apparently, it’s enough for the Italians to crank up the heat.

The stage lights are blinding him, so he can’t see into the crowd, but he can feel Japan and England’s stares.

He swallows. “Any questions?”

There are only coughs in response.

“Fabulous,” Russia mutters, turning off his microphone.

“That concludes this session,” Italy says from the other side of the room.

America sighs, turning off his own mic as China does the same. He then bites his lip, knowing what comes next. The three of them will be corralled away and forced to leave while all the other Nations can have fun and socialize.

As he stands on the stage, waiting, he can feel Russia and China sneaking glances at each other. It’s uncomfortable. He fidgets. And a couple of minutes later, Russia’s officials come and lead him away.

America braces himself when he sees his babysitter approaching them. China’s is with her, and the only explanation America can think of why they’re together is because, before the UN meeting, Carter insisted on visiting China to see Deng Xiaoping’s newly organized government. Maybe it’s something involving that.

This babysitter was assigned to him a week ago, though, so he currently has no idea what her name is and has been calling her ‘glasses girl’ in his head. She’s young and looks fresh out of college. It makes him feel wary.

China’s babysitter, meanwhile, is some old dude who always seems like he’s about to sneeze for some reason.

America stuffs his papers into his briefcase and gets ready to be led out, but his babysitter stops him and China before they can walk off the stage.

“Today, we wanted to try something different.” Her voice cracks.
America and China blink.

“You two can go and socialize with the other Nations,” she blurts out, rushing to get through everything. “And you can go anywhere, but you have to stick together and be back in four hours by 5 PM.”

America just stares at her.

It has to be a trap. This is a new way they’re trying to wear me down. Yeah. That’s what this is. I shouldn’t trust her. I shouldn’t—

“Oh okay,” China says dully.

“Perfect. Have fun.” She then turns heel and powerwalks away, sneeze man following her. He seems tired.

More Nations file out of the room.

America hasn’t had this much freedom in years and has no idea what to do with it.

He looks at China.

China looks back.

There are circles embedded under his eyes, and America can only imagine how awful he looks himself. He feels exhausted. He knows he’s underweight.

Suddenly the prospect of spending four hours together doing, whatever, seems very daunting.

“Are you two okay?” Italy calls out after he finishes talking to one of his officials.

“Uh,” is America’s eloquent response as Germany and Japan join him with their jackets and briefcases. America and Japan make eye contact, but Japan quickly ducks his head.

“We got permission to ‘go places’ with other Nations until 5 PM,” China says easily.

Japan’s head snaps back up. China smiles.

“Really?” Italy asks. “That’s fun!”

“We have no idea what to do, though,” America mumbles, rubbing the back of his neck. It’s covered in sweat.

“You can come with us,” Germany offers. “We were just going to get lunch and walk around the city.”

“That’d be nice,” China says, stepping off the stage. He turns his head when America doesn’t move.

“Come on,” he murmurs.

America swallows and follows him, despite everything screaming in his head not to.

Standing in front of the other three is overwhelming.

America and Japan make eye contact again, and America offers a pathetic smile. Japan hesitantly
responds with his own. They talked at lunch, but it was shallow and brief. Their last phone call was at the beginning of December too, so it’s been awhile since they’ve had a conversation about anything substantial.

“Where’s Romano?” Germany asks Italy in a hushed tone.

“He ran off with Spain, France, England, and Canada,” Italy responds. “He said something about going to a bar.”

Germany scrunches up his face. “They’re going to get drunk at this hour?”

Italy shrugs.

They silently head out. America can feel both his and China’s officials watching them, and knows that they’ll be trailed.

He can feel his feet dragging, and he ends up falling behind everyone. It feels wrong to do this. It feels wrong to even stare at the back of Japan’s head. It’s a trap. He knows it’s a trap.

Like, he hasn’t been allowed to be alone with him in five years! He hasn’t been allowed to be alone with any of his friends! Not France, or England, or Canada. Fuck, and he hasn’t even seen South Korea or Taiwan since the road trip. So why the change of heart now!? It has to be a trap!

America feels like he’s about to cry. Is this their new way of torturing him? Letting him think that he can have this freedom?

Just as he takes off his glasses to rub his face, Italy bolts towards a stray cat.

America is too startled to be afraid when Japan joins him.

“Were you able to purchase that video game console I told you about in December?” he nearly whispers.

America’s throat feels closed off. He wants to touch him. He jams his hands into his pockets instead. “Not yet.” He wouldn’t even dream of asking of his officials for such a luxury.

Japan frowns. “Oh.”

“Tell me about it.”

“What; the console?”

America swallows. “Only if you want to.”

Japan starts to drone on about it, and America desperately wants to pay attention, but the roaring in his ears is making it impossible.

China, meanwhile, is walking with Italy and Germany. He’s having an easy conversation with them. America wishes he could manage the same.

You’re pathetic.

His vision blurs.

No. No. I’m in control. Happy thoughts. Joseph is gone. Glasses girl might not be any better, but—no. This afternoon is progress. Kiku is here. Listen to him. Appreciate this.
“Alfred,” Japan murmurs.

America’s head jerks up.

“Am I boring you?”

“N-No. I—” He swallows. “Sorry.”

“Please don’t apologize.” Japan picks at his sleeve. “Is there any of your hobbies that you’ve been doing lately?”

“Reading.” It’s the only one I can do since I have so many of the books you gave me.

“What novels?”

At first, America feels shy and stupid, but the more they walk, the more confidence he gains. Japan isn’t angry that he’s rambling, and he’s smiling at him, and his presence is nice, and the weather actually feels pleasant, and holy shit has America missed him—

It feels like a rude awakening when they reach the restaurant.

He realizes he’s hungry, though, when they sit down, and he can’t even remember the last time that’s happened. His appetite has been non-existent for years. But it’s been okay. His officials like it when he skinni—

No. Don’t think about them right now. It’s your afternoon.

It’s yours.

The table is round, and America’s in the middle of Japan and China while Germany and Italy are on the other side.

As he picks up his menu, he makes eye contact with China, who gives him a genuine smile. It catches America completely off guard.

Wait, maybe this is real, and I’m actually getting my freedom back—

No. Don’t get your hopes up.

But Yao never smiles, and he wouldn’t smile if this were some sort of trap.

America squirms, notices Japan staring at him, makes eye contact, then watches as he jerks away to stare at his menu.

He wants to blurt out everything to him.

He wants to tell him how much it aches that they can’t touch or talk.

He wants to shake China and demand how he and Russia got back to their countries.

He wants to ask Russia if he’s being tortured.

He wants to do a lot of things but knows all of them are impossible.

His eyes are tearing up again when Japan places his hand on top of his, and the shock of the physical contact makes him jump. Japan quickly pulls away as if he’s been electrocuted.
“Sorry,” he whispers.

America swallows and stares at his menu. He’s read absolutely none of it so far.

“Hey, Kiku,” Italy asks a few moments later. “What are you going to—” He stops abruptly.

America looks over to Japan and sees him crying.

No.

Italy frowns while Germany looks completely lost.

Don’t do this.

“Hug him,” China murmurs.

America is terrified.

“Alfred…”

His heart feels like it’s about to explode out of his chest.

Despite that, he leans over and embraces him.

Japan lets out a sob and clutches his jacket, and America loses any bit of self-control he had left. He buries his face into his neck, suddenly on the brink of tears himself.

“I missed you,” Japan chokes out.

America doesn’t trust himself to speak.

“Please let this be the start—be the start of something.”

“I love you,” America whispers into his ear, not knowing if it is, not knowing when he’ll get to say that again.

Japan turns into an even bigger mess.

Robert is sitting in front of his superiors with the other past and present Nation Advisors.

“They arrived back on time; in fact, earlier than 5 PM,” he pushes. “And we have their entire conversation recorded. Not once did they talk about anything remotely related to politics or government. And he finally looked like anything other than a living zombie—”

“What’s your point?” one of his bosses spits out. Next to him are the new members of the Carter administration plus the President himself. Though there’s a permanent ‘task-force’ that oversees Nation endeavors, there’s a changing administration that comes with each presidency.

“My point is; he’s trustworthy, clearly illustrated by today’s events, and should be allowed to have the freedoms that were previously granted to him.”

The new Nation Advisor, Lisa, fidgets, and Robert tries to suppress his annoyance, knowing that he’s quick to anger at irrational things.
*If only you could see me now, Frank.* While Frank’s disappearance is still a mystery to everyone else, *he* knows what happened.

“If he’s happy, he’ll look healthy, and having a strong, healthy Nation Avatar provides a good image for our country,” Robert continues since there’s no response, feeling a bitter taste in his mouth at the thought of Frank. “And his interactions with the other Nations always help improve relations because it encourages cooperation and trust.”

“But the experiments we performed were valuable to military research,” Joseph, the previous Nation Advisor, interjects. Robert suppresses the urge to stand up and punch him. “And now we’re behind on this research compared to the Soviet Union.”

“Do we really want to stoop to the Soviet’s level and commit these crimes against humanity?” Carter muses.

Joseph looks away.

“And to gain what? These experiments haven’t been done in…what, five years?”

“Yes,” Robert’s main boss states.

Robert clenches his jaw.

“I’m fine with the Nation Avatar’s past freedoms being reinstated,” Carter drawls after a bit. “It will set a good human rights example and prove how we’re better than the Soviets.” He stands up. “Besides, I’ve been informed about what’s happened to the Nations in the past. Is putting him on a leash like this really the best way to guarantee his cooperation?”

There are murmurs. Robert feels shocked.

His main boss lets out a sigh. “Okay. The Nation Avatar will have his freedoms restored, and we’ll let him know immediately.”

Carter nods. “Meeting dismissed.”

Robert is lightheaded. He makes eye contact with Joseph, who frowns. Robert glares in response.

“I don’t want to work with him.”

“*Sir, Mr. Donati and Mr. Radzinski worked closely together, and it was proven to produce good results—*”

“I don’t need them. Those two lowlifes didn’t even graduate from university.”

Robert stands up.

“I know you are sad about Radzinski’s disappearance or death or whatever you want to call it, but it’s nothing to get mental issues over.”

“Sir, a moment please,” he says to his main boss once Carter has left.

The man dully blinks. “Yes?”

“If we’re really that hell-bent on continuing these experiments, and if the military truly did gain valuable information, then why don’t we just use the satellite Nations we’ve recently acquired from the Middle East and Pacific Isles? That way there’s a compromise, our Nation Avatar doesn’t
get tortured, but we don’t lose military research.”

His boss purses his lips. “Why are you so concerned about the fate of our Nation Avatar?”

Robert thinks about his past conversations with Frank, and how he wants to piss Joseph off by un-doing every single thing he’s established, and his own pathetic, meaningless life, and the fact that Ka—

“I’m patriotic.”

“It’s an interesting proposal. I’ll definitely consider it and pass the idea along.”

Robert leaves the room, his head pounding.

_I did it. I did it. I_

He leans up against the wall, dazed.

_Alfred will no longer be treated like a prisoner._

He thinks of all the bitter interactions they’ve had; of Alfred’s not so subtle gibe at calling him ‘Suit Man.’

But it doesn’t matter. This isn’t for him.

He did it. He did it. To have a purpose. He can have a purpose! Fuck them. He can have a purpose even if Frank is dead, and Kazimir—

Robert takes a deep breath.

He gives less than a shit if those other Nations are tortured now. It shouldn’t even matter.

None of the ‘main’ ones know they exist.

Robert stumbles down the hallway, feeling like he’s drunk.

He suddenly doesn’t want to be alive anymore.

---

1980年4月5日.

China can’t believe it’s 1980.

He’s dressed in traditional clothing, sitting in a meeting room next to Taiwan, who’s also dressed the same way. While he feels comfortable, she looks stiff and out of place.

The meeting is between party members of the CCP and GMD. They’re arguing over Nation rights and representation. It’s only been going on for ten minutes, but it feels like it’s been an eternity.

In 1978, Taiwan and the Mainland were officially reunited, Taiwan maintaining some individual rights and sovereignty, but acting under the Mainland as a state. Other countries aren’t allowed to have any official relations with them, and everything must be conducted through the Mainland. Because of that, Taiwan the Nation Avatar hasn’t been doing much these past couple of years.

And that’s what this meeting’s about.
Zhang Hua, Taiwan’s personal advisor ever since her ‘birth,’ is currently arguing why she should be allowed to attend the UN and other international meetings China’s present at. He brought up the example of the two ‘Italys’ at one point, but it was shut down because the CCP party members considered it an awful analogy.

So now he’s rambling about how knowledgeable Taiwan is.

“She can bring a new perspective—”

“She’s only a child,” a CCP party member interrupts. “She’s not nearly as knowledgeable as our Nation Avatar.”

“I’m as old as your crusty ass,” Taiwan mutters.

There are two rules when attending these meetings. The first one is obvious; don’t speak.

The second one is also obvious; if you must speak, do so politely.

China tries to save her blunder. “What she means is that our physical appearances don’t dictate the amount of knowledge we’re capable of possessing.”

Zhang gives an enthusiastic nod.

“There is only one China,” the ‘crusty ass’ CCP party member spits out. “And having two Nation Avatars goes against that.”

“There are two Italian Nation Avatars!” Zhang argues back, returning to his original point. “And there’s only one Italy!”

China’s ready for this meeting to be finished. He breaks rule number one just for the sake of it. “If I may interject; perhaps she could simply come as a figurehead. She wouldn’t be allowed to speak, but her presence would be symbolic enough to appease what the GMD members are arguing for, and would not be harmful to the ‘one China’ image.”

People blink; then give sounds of approval.

The two parties start to draft some sort of agreement, and while doing so send China and Taiwan out of the room. They end up sitting outside in an inner courtyard.

As China admires the garden in the evening light, he sees Taiwan pick at the flowers woven into her hair.

“I’m going to be sad when Mr. Zhang dies,” she eventually mumbles, dropping her hand.

“Zhang Hua?” China questions.

Taiwan nods, biting her lip. “I used to hate him, but…he’s always been a constant in my life, something similar to family, I guess. But now he’s getting sick and old and soon… Everyone I knew as a child is slowly dying.”

“It’s the curse of immortality.”

“Then, I don’t want to be immortal anymore.”

China looks away. “Unfortunately, that’s something out of your control.”
Taiwan fidgets. China readjusts his hair.

“Thanks for sticking up for me,” she mumbles after a bit. “You didn’t have to do that.”

“It makes no sense for you to be isolated like this.” They make eye contact. “So of course I’ll stick up for you.”

She digs her nails into the palm of her hand. “Even if I’m not the real China…?”

“Do I look like I care about that?”

“It’s hard to tell. You rarely show any emotion.”

China smiles. Taiwan gives a small one back.

Though she’s been isolated, it’s not like she’s being mistreated. In fact, both governments treat her well, but…

“Hey, Yao?” Taiwan whispers.

China blinks. They rarely get to talk to each other this long, even if she does spend six months on the Mainland.

“Yeah?”

“Do you ever feel so lonely you want to cry?”

China looks up at the sky and sees the seven stars of the northern dipper.

“More than you know…”

It’s June 1985, and there’s evidence the Cold War may be coming to a close.

It’s great. France is also freaked out.

The USSR’s survival is looking worse and worse with each passing day, and at this point, France knows he has to draft a plan for the Eastern European Nations to return to their home countries.

He’s been monitoring the situation through America, and it’s been easier now that he’s been granted all his previous freedoms. Honestly, though, France is just happy he’s okay. It was a transition period, but finally, he looks back to normal.

He’s not the only Nation whose life has improved either.

Taiwan is allowed to come to meetings again. She refrains from speaking during the actual discussions, but before and afterward she’s full of energy, running around and interacting with everyone.

China is also finally allowed to talk to other Nations, and usually, he’s with India, Thailand, or Vietnam.

What Vietnam has gone through these past forty-some years is still shrouded in mystery. When the French were colonizing the area, France interacted with her, but since then they haven’t had one
conversation. She looks sickly and worn out, but happy enough when talking to China.

So China’s happy. America’s happy.

Russia’s life is still miserable.

But maybe soon, even that’ll change.

France sighs. Currently, he’s sitting in a Montreal café with Canada, attempting to draft the return plan.

France is stumped.

Canada’s not.

“We could wait until one country breaks free from the Soviet bloc and send the Nations there,” he suggests. He’s speaking French because they’re on the French side of the country, and France loves it. “They could get in contact with that government, who’ll then alert the international community, and bam—problem solved.”

“But why would they be there?” France says, biting the tip of his pen. “What excuse could we make up for them being in that particular country?”

“Because that’s where the Soviet mafia took them after they were captured. But once it was clear the Soviet government would collapse there, the mafia abandoned them. They’ve been hiding in that country ever since, mainly out of fear, only feeling confident enough to contact that government when they were sure it was safe.”

France blinks. “That could work.”

“And we could draft up an individual story for each of the Eastern European Nations to memorize when they’re questioned.”

France nods, suddenly feeling the urge to start.

He begins scribbling into his notebook when Canada leans backwards in his chair.

“You know,” he muses. “It feels surreal to even think the Cold War could end.”

“I’m just happy Gilbert might finally be able to go home.”

Canada smiles. “I’m just happy you’ve recovered.”

“I did that years ago.”

“I know. I’m still happy.”

France leans over and hugs him.

Canada is smiling. “You spilled your coffee.”

“Shut up.”

—

Prussia and Hungary are sitting on the couch watching TV when Austria nearly crashes through
“You okay, Specs?” Prussia asks, looking over his shoulder into the foyer.

Austria walks into the living room, his forehead slick with sweat. He’s holding some papers.

Prussia and Hungry simply stare at him.

“Yesterday,” he gasps, out of breath, “Gorbachev announced at the UN General Assembly that the Soviet Union will no longer militarily interfere with Eastern Europe.”

Prussia blinks. He knows the news is important, but he can’t fully understand the depth of it.

“And?” Hungary asks.

Austria holds up the papers. “America and Russia have been communicating and seem to think the Cold War will be over soon.”

Prussia’s heart starts pounding.

“France, Canada, and Spain have drafted a plan to get you guys back into your countries. You have to memorize these stories I’m holding. They don’t know how long we have, but…”

“We could actually go home soon?” Hungary asks in a small voice.

Austria nods.

*I could go back to Germany…?*

Prussia smiles and reaches for the papers.

Chapter End Notes

The title is the word ‘hope’ in German, English, French, and Chinese if that wasn’t apparent.
“Repeat it to me again,” France says.

Prussia is sick of doing this. “From where?”

“From the beginning.”

He gives him a look; then starts rattling off. “After the Second World War, I was shipped to Siberia and placed in a facility used for Nation experiments. I know its location because of some conversations I overheard while in Korea to fight in the—that’s really vague sounding, you know.”

“Just continue,” Austria says from the other side of the room.

Prussia grimaces. “After the Korean War, I was sent back to Siberia where experiments were performed on me for many years, but I was so weak and malnourished that I don’t really remember what happened. All I know is that eventually, I was abducted. It was this large-scale breakout by these Russian mafia members who kidnapped us, then blew up the building to try and get money from the Soviet government. They took us to Hungary while, I guess, the negotiations went on, but they kept us malnourished enough that I barely knew what was happening until we realized they were gone. I think they left as soon as it was clear Hungary would break away from the Soviet bloc. Yay.” Prussia does some jazz hands.

“I wish we could have gotten them into Poland,” France mutters, ignoring him.

“Yeah, but we’re seizing the situation here in Hungary. We’ll be fine,” Spain responds.

Prussia stops doing jazz hands. “That’s all I have to say, right?”

France nods. Spain gives a thumbs up.

“Please don’t make me repeat mine again,” Hungary mutters.

Germany looks like he’s about to vomit. “But we need to make sure that you two don’t mess up—”

“We’ll be fine, Ludwig.”

It’s 14 October 1989.

They’re at Austria’s house—well, Prussia is always at Austria’s house—rehashing the return plan before tomorrow when all of the other Nations and their caretakers meet them here. They, the lovely Eastern European Nations, will then be smuggled into Hungary with the ‘help of some people’—Prussia has no idea what that means—and they’ll stay in a safe house and wait until there’s the official announcement that the new Hungarian constitution has been amended. After that fun bit, they’ll get in contact with a man ‘whose number Spain and France will provide,’ and he’ll sneak them into the parliament building where they’ll…Jesus, hopefully, find someone who knows about the existence of Nations.
Prussia dully stares at the ceiling from his favorite spot on the couch as France and Austria prepare lunch. The stupid script they had him read five times earlier in the day is crumpled up next to him. He doesn’t know how Spain and France got all the intel to know about the Hungarian situation. Their only response when he asked was:

“America and Russia.”

“I thought Russia wasn’t allowed to talk to anyone.”

“Ever since Gorbachev took power, he’s had a lot more freedom.”

“You look like you’re thinking too hard,” Hungary murmurs. Germany is pacing behind her.

“Maybe a little.”

“Let’s play a video game. You too, Ludwig. Calm down.”

He grumbles something. Prussia smiles.

The rest of the day, no one brings up the plan.

Instead, they have fun.

They play video games for a while. France, unsurprisingly, hates them since he’s always been an old man who resists change, and Spain tries his best to play but is simply awful.

Germany is good, though. Prussia would disown him if he weren’t.

He, France, and Spain also play pool for a solid two hours. And pool is hardly an aggressive game, but Spain nearly ends up breaking the table at one point. Austria is less than thrilled. Prussia finds it hilarious.

Near dinner, he and Germany sit outside and talk about day-to-day life, during which Germany tells him about the new dog he wants. Prussia subtly tries to convince him to buy some pigeons. It doesn’t work.

After dinner, the six of them watch an old Austrian movie that’s playing on TV. It’s simply awful and fun to pick apart, and once it’s finished, they lie around the living room, drinking beer and talking.

It’s a perfect day.

Prussia’s dreading tomorrow.

He dreams.

He thinks Bavaria’s in it but isn’t sure.
At 10 AM, Norway and Denmark arrive first with Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine. It’s a bit awkward at first, but eventually, everyone falls into easy enough conversations. France and Spain rudely drag Prussia away at one point though, when he’s leaning into Austria and having quite a pleasant time.

“What?” he grumbles.

France hands him a slip of paper with a number on it. “Keep this safe.”

“Oh boy, is it the guy ‘whose number you’ll provide?’”

“Yeah.”

“You had to pick this exact moment to give it to me?”

Spain slaps him on the back. “What can I say; we like to be cock-blocks.”

Prussia throws the slip at them. Spain and France laugh.

His stomach is churning.

The rest of the Nations slowly arrive—Finland with Estonia and Latvia, Sweden with Czech and Slovakia, Netherlands with Armenia and Georgia, and Romano and Italy with Romania, Bulgaria, and Moldova.

Besides for France and Spain being a killjoy and questioning all the former Soviet Nations about their stories, it’s a relatively fun day. The fact that they’ll be leaving at 2 AM tomorrow to sneak across the border by 4 AM looms in the back of Prussia’s mind the entire time, though.

Around 4 PM, the Nations who safe-housed the others start to go home. Germany stays for dinner, but even he too ends up leaving around 8 PM.

It’s an awkward goodbye.

“I’ll see you soon,” Germany mumbles.

Prussia frowns. “Yeah.”

They stare at each other, neither moving. Prussia knows he should hug him, but they don’t do that often, so it’s a bit weird.


“Bye…”

Prussia watches his car pull away, feeling numb.

“You okay?” Hungary asks, opening the door to the front porch he’s sitting on.

“What if this entire thing falls apart?” is Prussia’s response as she sits down next to him.

“It won’t.”
They look at each other.

“Everything will be okay.”

“Everything will be okay,” Bavaria said to him.

“Just let go.

“Let yourself dissolve.”

Prussia can’t sleep.

“It’s freezing,” France says.

He jumps. “Christ. What are you doing here?”

“What are you doing here?”

He’s sitting on the grass in the front yard, gazing at the stars. His ass is wet, and he’s shivering, but it’s better than staring at the ceiling.


They’re both quiet for a few moments.

“Well,” France eventually says. “Antonio was obnoxiously snoring, so that’s why I came outside.”

The wind picks up, and France starts to take off his sweatshirt when Prussia shivers even more.

“Stop. I’m fine.”

France gives him a look. “You’re shaking.”

“You don’t have to.”

“I’m not cold.”

Prussia sighs and gives in as France hands it to him. When he puts it over his head, the smell of cologne immediately clings to the inside of his nose.

He tries not to make a face. Thankfully, France isn’t looking at him anymore.

“You know,” France mumbles after a bit. “I never got to bake for you.”

“What?”

He rakes his fingers through his hair. “During Potsdam; I promised to bake for you.”

“The hell made you think of that?”

France glumly shrugs.
“Well,” Prussia says, nudging him, hating to see such a forlorn expression on his face. “You can bake for me now.”

“I guess…”

The breeze picks up again. Prussia buries his face into the sweatshirt and tries not to gag when the smell becomes even stronger.

“Why did any of this have to happen?” France whispers. “Was it because of the sanctions France placed on Germany after the Great War? If that never happened, would that have stopped any of this?”

Prussia looks away. “Maybe. Maybe not.” He fidgets. “But you know what those sanctions did eventually lead to?”

“All of us suffering for almost a century?”

“I mean, okay, yes. But…” Prussia suddenly feels cheesy.

“What?”

“It…brought us together. As humans. Not Nations.”

France blinks; then laughs in disbelief. “I guess.”

Prussia slings his arm around him. France leans into his shoulder.

“You know,” he mumbles after a bit. Prussia looks at him. “During Potsdam, when I saw you, I suddenly had hope again. I thought everything was finally going to get better. But then you started screaming, and they—they just started shooting us.”

Prussia hardly remembers what happened after they signed the document. He rubs France’s back.

“Well, it’s over.”

“I thought you were going to die.”

“But I didn’t, so you’ll have to deal with me for centuries to come.”

Another breeze picks up, and Prussia shivers.

France pulls away. “Let’s go inside.”

Prussia groans.

“Gilbert.”

“Fine.”

He hunches his back as he stands up, getting another full whiff of the cologne in the process.

“This sweatshirt reeks,” Prussia mutters when they start walking back.

France flushes. “Well, Arthur likes it.”

“Tell him to get a new nose.”
They get startled when Austria opens the front door.

“Uh, everything okay?” Prussia asks quietly as they step inside, mindful of the sleeping Nations.

Austria fidgets. “I woke up, and you weren’t there, so I got worried.” He squints. “Are you wearing France’s sweatshirt…?”

“It’s chilly out there,” Prussia mutters, going to take it off.

“If you’re still cold, you can keep it,” France says, his voice at a normal level.

“I wouldn’t be able to give it back to you.” Prussia responds, slightly louder.

“You can keep it.”

“No.”

“It’s fine—”


The three of them jump. She’s standing at the top of the stairs.

“Sorry,” Prussia says sheepishly.

She gives him a look; then disappears back into her room.

The three regard each other awkwardly.

France rubs the back of his neck. “Well, even if we have to be up in three hours, we should still try to sleep.”

Prussia makes a face and chucks the sweatshirt onto his head.

Austria drags him back to their room.

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“France is my friend,” Prussia spat out to Bavaria.

“France is going to kill you eventually.”

“No, he’s not—”

“Stop being in denial and accept death like all of the other Germanic kingdoms. We’re no longer needed. There’s a new Nation Avatar now.”

____________________________________________________________________________________

2 AM comes entirely too fast.

Austria is crying.

“Roderich, we’ll see you soon,” Hungary says as she pats his back.
“I—I know but, it’s 2 AM, and I’ve barely slept, and I’m going to miss you, and—”

Hungary kisses his cheek. “I’m going to miss you too.”

Prussia pats his shoulder once she moves away. “Seriously, don’t worry, Specs.”

His glasses are fogged up. He nods.

Prussia slides his hand down his arm, and Austria catches it just as he’s about to move away.

Prussia blinks.

Austria kisses him.

His knees feel weak. He reciprocates, trying not to groan when Austria deepens the kiss—

France is suddenly there.

“Hi. It’s two in the morning and you two are making out right before we have to go.”

Both break apart and glare at him. Hungary laughs.

“Like you should talk,” Prussia mutters, stepping back. “Antonio told me that you and Arthur once started—”

France powerwalks away before he can finish. Prussia smirks and licks his lips. They taste salty.

He watches Austria’s figure disappear as they drive away, holding Hungary’s hand the entire time.

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“It’s over,” Prussia said with an exasperated smile.

France refused to look at him.

He felt dejected. The war was finished. They could finally move on and rebuild, so why—

Pain.

Prussia collapsed, his vision fading in and out to an agreement that was being signed as France and other figures started looming over him until there was no one but Bavaria

_______________________________________________________________

“There is no one but Bavaria.”

_______________________________________________________________

“Just dissolve, Gilbert.”

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Someone is nudging him awake.
“Gilbert, we’re here,” Hungary says softly.

Disoriented, he blinks and looks around. Everyone’s climbing out of the car, so he does the same. He can hardly see a thing.

France and Spain eventually come into sight with two women. “These two work on the border and they’ll be smuggling you across it,” France says. “Lately, border patrol has been extremely lax, so there shouldn’t be any issues.”

“And they think you only know French, so don’t speak anything else,” Spain adds on.

“Are they okay with that?” the one woman questions in her native language.

Spain nods. “Can you show us to your car?”

The two women gesture, and everyone follows them to where they have a big truck parked. It’s loaded with cargo.

“They’ll be hidden amongst the stuff,” the other woman says. “Can you tell them to climb in?”

“You heard her,” Spain says.

As Prussia starts to move, France and Spain stop him.

France looks antsy. “Do you still have the contact number?”

“Yeah.”

“Remember, they’ll be taking you to a safe house in Budapest.”

“Francis, we’ve been over this a billion times now. I know.”

France squirms. Spain forces out a grin. “We’re just making sure.”

They stare at each other.

Spain then pulls the three of them into a hug. “We’ll see you soon, Gilbert.”

Prussia nods mutely, suddenly feeling far too emotional.

“Thank you,” he whispers when they pull away.

“Thank you for what you did during the war,” France whispers back.

*It’s what friends do.*

“I haven’t heard other people speak Hungarian in decades,” Hungary murmurs when Prussia sits next to her. “It’s like music to my ears.”

“And soon you’ll get to hear more of it,” he murmurs.

She smiles at him. A tarp is thrown over them.

Prussia closes his eyes.
He woke up on a couch.

France was sobbing over him.

“It’s fine,” he said. “Francis, it’s fine.”

Except it wasn’t.

Bavaria’s words seemed to haunt him.

They arrive around 7 AM at an old house.

The two women leave immediately afterward.

They have a radio to listen to the news, a little bit of rationed food, and an old telephone. That’s it.

There’s nothing to do but wait and pray everything works out.

“Why won’t you die?” Bavaria asked him, his own body rapidly dissolving.

Because I’m afraid, Prussia thought.

They wait three days.

On October 18th, it’s broadcasted that the Hungarian constitution has been amended. With that, they’ve passed over the first hurdle, but now the next step’s to somehow get in contact with the Hungarian government.

They wait one more day to call the man whose contact information was left with Prussia, and he agrees to meet them at 11 PM.

Prussia doesn’t know what he’s expecting when the man arrives, but all he does is tell them to follow him outside into the city like it’s nothing.

People are still celebrating the constitution amendment, so the streets are teeming with life.

It’s magical. Hungary looks enthralled.

Prussia feels more alive than he has in decades.

He expects there to be some sort of challenge to get into the parliament building, but there’s absolutely nothing. Their escort shows his badge to the two security guards, both who Prussia is pretty sure are drunk, and then they just walk right into the goddamn thing.

It doesn’t take long for someone that knows what they are to find them.
The UN interrogates them for two weeks.

Once they were discovered, members of the Hungarian government escorted them to their own separate rooms and locked them inside.

The next day, UN members were there and ready to ask questions.

And boy, have they asked.

Prussia talks to a wide variety of people about the Second World War, the Soviet Union, and how the hell he ended up in Hungary. After a few days, it starts to get tiresome.

The downtime in between, though, is boring and endless.

All he can do is wait and hope.

It’s his last session that throws him a curve ball.

He’s in a room with an American and German man, the American man asking the questions. A German woman is hovering in the background, looking like she’s itching to say something.

It starts off with the same basic questions as the others: (1) Explain how you escaped the Soviet Union. (2) You didn’t escape? Then why are you no longer there? (3) Can you provide more information on the mafia members that kidnapped you?

Once they cycle through those, Prussia expects the American man to ask them again, but with different phrasing.

Instead, he holds up two pictures. “Do you know who these men are?”

It’s Frank and Kazimir.

Prussia feels his breath catch. The American man raises an eyebrow, so he quickly responds in English, “I know the one man. Kazimir. He was my advisor during the Korean War.”

“Kazimir Gorelov, yes. He was Russia’s Nation Advisor during the Second World War up until his disappearance in the early seventies. Do you know what happened to him?”

Prussia thinks of Russia shooting him and then the building exploding.

“I have no clue.”

“We believe these two may be, hmm, connected to the Russian mafia that abducted you guys.”

Alarm bells go off in Prussia’s head. He tries to ignore them. “Well, I haven’t seen Kazimir since the Korean war, so I don’t know what happened to him. And I don’t know the other man.”

“His name is Frank Radzinski. He was America’s Nation Advisor during the Second World War up until the middle of the Korean War.”

“I don’t know him.”
The man hums and purses his lips. “Okay. Another question. By any chance, did you see anything else get stolen when you were captured by the Russian mafia group?”

“What do you mean?”

“Perhaps weapons, maybe even nukes.”

*Shit, shit, shit—*

“I was half-dead. I hardly remember anything besides the explosion.”

“Hmm. Alright.”

They stare at each other.

“Did you know that the Russian and Chinese Nation Avatars were also stolen by this…‘mafia?’”

*Fuck, fuck, fuck—*

“No.”

“Ah, well, they were. But they were both able to be retrieved by their governments. The Chinese blame the Soviets; they’re the ones who told the United States about the incident, so we’re just trying to put together some puzzle pieces since your story coincides with what they told.”

Prussia doesn’t respond. He feels like throwing up.

“Hmm. Well, okay. That’s enough for this session then.” The American man pushes out his chair and stands up. He smiles; then walks out. The German man makes no move to get up, though, and Prussia blinks in surprise when the German woman sits down.

She extends her hand, and Prussia reciprocates in an unsure manner.

“My name is Ilse Richter.” She takes his hand and holds it in an iron grip. “Starting today, I’m your Nation Advisor.”

Prussia nods mutely, still freaking out over the last questions posed to him. He retracts his arm after she lets go.

“We’ll be taking you to West Germany after this,” the German man says. “And by the way, I’m Germany’s Nation Advisor. My name is Michael Haase.”

Prussia blinks, “Wait, I’m going to Germany today?”

Ilse nods, giving a smile. “Yup. You’re lucky too. Besides for Hungary and Poland, the rest of the Nations are going to be placed in the hands of the UN. They’ll be going to the headquarters in New York City.”

Prussia suddenly feels emotional and forgets about Frank and Kazimir.

*I’m going home.*

“When are we leaving?” he questions.

*I’m actually going home.*
“Whenever you’re ready,” Ilse says, giving a warm smile. “We can’t wait to show you how West Germany has flourished since the war.”

Prussia almost starts crying.

It’s when he’s being escorted to his jet that he hears Hungary scream his name.

He freezes and turns around as she shoves through a group of people to run towards him.

He opens his arms as she gets close.

She jumps in.

They fall to the ground. Hungary’s on top, pressed against his chest, and they burst out laughing when they look at each other.

“Hey,” Prussia says once they calm down. “I—”

Hungary kisses him.

Prussia sighs into her lips. He can feel her grinning. As they pull away from each other, she caresses his cheek. “I’ll see you soon. Tell Ludwig I said hi.”

They stand up, Hungary’s Nation Advisor clearing his throat from behind them.

“I love you,” Prussia whispers.

If she were to grin any wider, her cheeks would split open. “I love you too.”

It’s only after Prussia boards his plane that he thinks about the possible ramifications of that kiss.

But before he can even worry, Ilse smiles. “That was cute. Is she your girlfriend?”

“Oh,” is all Prussia gets out.

Ilse just winks in response. “Don’t worry about it.”

Germany is waiting for him when he gets off the plane.

Prussia wastes no time.

Though they’re not one for hugs, he runs forward and pulls him into an embrace, Germany letting out a shudder as soon as they collide together.

Prussia remembers that abandoned building they were stationed in during the Berlin invasion, remembers how Germany sat in a pool of his own blood and vomit, his disfigured body propped up only by a box of ammunition.

Now it’s like a distant nightmare. The Germany here is healthy and strong.

“Welcome home,” Germany whispers.
Prussia starts crying.

He’s allowed outside.
He can just—do anything! No one cares!
God, it’s so weird.

He and Germany are walking around Bonn, and Germany is pointing out his favorite locations, giving Prussia a tour to show him how it’s changed.

Prussia feels like he’s in a dream. It’s sunny and crisp. People are speaking German. He has a new camera that Germany bought him, and there’s no set time he has to be back home. It’s too nice. He’s too happy.

It must be a dream.

About a week after Prussia gets home, he’s lounging in Germany’s apartment, watching TV with him, when the phone rings.

Germany goes to pick it up but freezes mid-action. The receiver slips from his fingers and falls to the floor.

Prussia jumps up. “Ludwig?”

No response.

“Ludwig, what’s wrong?!”

Germany’s expression is blank.

Prussia scrambles for the phone. “What’s going on?!?” he demands into the receiver.

It’s the Nation Advisor, Michael. “Prussia?” he asks, sounding breathless.

“What’s going on?!” Prussia demands again, looking at Germany’s vacant expression.

“Prussia—Gilbert—the Berlin Wall—it’s falling! The Wall is falling!”

Everything seems to slow down.

“…Really?”

“They’re knocking it down as we speak!”

Prussia starts laughing. Maybe out of disbelief, maybe out of excitement, but Michael joins him. Germany then unfreezes and grins.

9 November 1989. Prussia will never forget this day.
One by one, the Eastern European countries break free from the Soviet bloc.

Prussia happily watches the Cold War spiral to a close.

His place as a German Nation Avatar is debated in the beginning, but it’s decided that, for the time being, he’ll just go with Germany to most of his meetings and act as a figurehead until he learns more about their country’s new policies.

He doesn’t really care what he does, though, as long as he can go to UN meetings.

He finds them hilarious.

The first one he attends is in Athens on 6 January 1990. And, well, it’s certainly something.

Notable things include: Prussia walking into the bathroom and interrupting France and England mid-make out session; Taiwan and Italy tackling him to the ground when trying to hug him; Austria bursting out into tears when Prussia makes a knock-knock joke because he’s, quote: really happy; America and Russia talking to each other and laughing—that’s it—they’re just having a good time; China eye-fucking Russia across the room; and, by far the most entertaining—Belarus seeing Russia and sprinting towards him with such determination that he looks terrified for a split second.

The meeting is fun.

It’s like they’re allowed to enjoy themselves and be happy.

What a concept.

On 3 October 1990, Germany leaves Prussia alone in their Bonn apartment to attend a cabinet meeting in Berlin. It’s about the official reunification of East and West Germany, and Prussia is excited.

He’s currently lounging in his underwear, watching TV and drinking beer. It’s wonderful. The stupid dog Germany got recently has finally settled down too.

He hasn’t wavered on his stance about the pigeons, yet, but dammit, Prussia will get them eventually.

Around 9 PM, he realizes he has to pee and dramatically sighs and walks to the bathroom. The dog lifts her head and watches him. Prussia stares back.

He locks the bathroom door so she won’t barge inside.

It’s when he’s washing his hands that his vision cuts out.

“And with this document, the official reunification of East and West Germany will be complete!” German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, announces. Michael grins at Germany as everyone claps.

Prussia remembers the secret official commencement ceremony he had to make him represent East Germany.
The document Josef Stalin signed.

How it hung over his bed when he was in Korea.

He had forgotten about it, shoved it away in the recesses of his mind.

“East and West Germany will be no more!” Kohl announces, pen in hand. “Just one fully united country!”

Now he remembers, though.

It’s worse than what he felt at Potsdam.

He screams and collapses to the ground, his head slamming against the sink. He vomits. His vision is fading in and out. His one leg is dissolving. There’s an arm lying next to him. Why is that there? Oh, it’s his right arm. It fell off, and his shirt is matted with blood, his ears are roaring, his head is pounding—

He feels heavy.

Keeping consciousness is hard.

He just wants to sleep.

Just…

“Just let go,” Bavaria whispers into his ear.

Prussia screams. He attempts to shove him away using his remaining arm, but he hits air.

There’s no one.

“Just let go,” Bavaria repeats.

Prussia panics.

I don’t want to die. Everything just got better. I don’t want to die.

He vomits again. His other leg dissolves. The pain he’s feeling is unbearable. He wants it to stop.

He needs it to stop.

I don’t want to die.

He hears barking. Something’s scratching at the door.

I don’t want to die.

He’s crying.

Please.

His consciousness is fading rapidly; he can’t hold on.
He can’t hold on.
"..."
The pain eventually stops.

Prussia and Bavaria were together, watching the new Nation Avatar, Germany, sleep.

“You know, when the time comes, he’ll replace us,” Bavaria said.

“What do you mean?”

“We’re no longer needed. We’ll probably die.”

BANG!

Something is slamming against the bathroom door.

BANG!
Prussia abruptly gains consciousness.

*BANG!*

“Gilbert!?” Ilse yells. “Gilbert, are you in there!?”

The dog barks.

*BANG!*

Prussia tries to say something, but his throat feels closed off. He’s lightheaded.

*BANG!*

The door breaks down.

“Gilbert!?” Ilse asks frantically. She then gags, the color completely draining from her face.

Even the dog doesn’t move.

“Gilbert, what happened?” Her voice cracks as tears fill her eyes, probably from the smell. “Are—are those limbs? Is that your blood?”

From his twisted position, Prussia looks at his body. His legs, which he watched cleanly dissolve, are both there and intact. His arms are whole. His body is…normal, like nothing happened.

The only evidence left is just what’s around him.

Ilse is shaking. The dog shoves its head under her hand.

“I came because the neighbors were complaining about the dog barking, and they weren’t sure if they heard screaming, and then you never picked up when I called, and I was close, so I decided to come over, and—” she breaks off.

“Don’t tell Ludwig,” Prussia slurs.

“What?” she asks, looking frightened.

“Don’t tell Ludwig. You can tell anyone else, but—”

“Gilbert—”

“He doesn’t need to worry about this. I’m fine. It’s okay. The German reunification; it just,” he attempts to chuckle, but it comes out hysterical. “I’m fine.”

“Gilbert, you—you’re surrounded in a pool of blood and vomit.”

“*Please* don’t tell him. Please, I just…” he trails off, unable to finish his own thought.

They stare at each other.

“We need to get you cleaned up,” Ilse forces out, looking away. “I’m going to take you to the parliament building. I’ll—I’ll have someone else come here to deal with this.”

Prussia finds himself nodding.

He then faints.
Time passes.

Prussia never lets Germany or anyone else find out.

Sometimes he finds Ilse staring at him with sadness in her eyes, but it’s better than having the other Nations look at him in pity.

On 25 December 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev resigns as President of the USSR.

On the 26th, the Soviet Union dissolves.

On the 31st, all Soviet institutions cease operations.

It’s decided there’s going to be a Nation New Year’s Eve party to celebrate, hosted in Switzerland because of its neutrality. All the Nations are invited regardless of whether or not they’re apart of the UN, and the fact they’re allowed to be together like this makes Prussia want to cry.

They’ve come a long way—all of them Nations.

He and Germany arrive early since Germany has to be early to everything otherwise he starts to panic. The party is at Bern’s Federal Palace, the main event hosted in a large ballroom.

“Well, you happy? No one’s here yet,” Prussia says jokingly.

Germany blushes. “But now we get to watch them arrive.”

“Yeah, as they’re all fashionably late while we stand around like losers.”

Germany mutters something as they enter the ballroom, and Prussia blinks in surprise when he realizes they aren’t alone.

Russia and China are also here.

There are no government officials in sight either, and the two of them are off in the corner, laughing and talking.

Before he can stare any longer, Taiwan jumps in front of him.

“Thank you,” she breathes. “Save me from having to watch that.”

“What, being the third wheel isn’t fun?”

“Shh! They’ll hear you,” she hisses, looking mortified.

Prussia laughs as she purses her lips. Germany looks confused. “Since when were they—”

“I’m glad you guys were able to make it!” Liechtenstein says, walking into the room.

They talk as everyone else starts arriving.
Hungary shows up in a suit that’s nicer and more put together than what anyone else is wearing.

When she walks up to Prussia, she strikes a pose. “How do I look?”

Prussia swallows and blurts out, “Good.”

She then seems embarrassed. “I didn’t feel like being a ‘girl’ tonight.”

“It doesn’t matter what you are; you look great.”

She blushes. “Thanks.”

When Austria arrives, he looks just as nice, and Prussia has to mentally compose himself.

Alcohol is passed out while they file in, and Prussia finds it hilarious how little tolerance some Nations have.

England, for example, is already shit-faced.

France gives a weary smile and walks over, practically dragging him along.

“We went to a bar beforehand,” he explains.

Spain and Romano are also there. Romano looks baffled. “Why would you do that?”

“M’ not drunk,” England slurs. He’s not even able to stand upright.

France sighs. “He insisted.”

“Be careful he doesn’t throw up on you,” Canada says from behind him. Everyone turns around. America is by his side, and the two seem to be angling away from him.

“M’ fine!” England says angrily.

America wordlessly hands him a glass of water. England glares at it; then reluctantly drinks.

Everyone splits off into different conversations.

Prussia finds himself talking to America and Canada. Japan joins midway through, though, and he and America quickly get lost in their own little world, so Prussia just ends up talking to Canada until South Korea bounds over.

Taiwan and Hong Kong are wearily trailing after him. It’s clear he’s drunk since his face is bright red, and when he sees America, he flings himself at him and nearly crashes into a table. Japan glares as America helps him up. Hong Kong and Taiwan laugh.

It’s a fun night.

And Prussia’s happy. He really is happy.

When it gets close to midnight, everyone gathers together to do a countdown, and since most of them are pretty drunk, it makes for a chaotic environment.

By far the best thing that’s happening is America and Russia arguing about…space? Prussia thinks? And China is next to Russia, but China’s also wasted and seems to have lost all sense of awareness because he’s openly groping him in front of everyone. Russia’s face is bright red, but
that isn’t stopping him from rattling off facts that America is trying to refute for whatever reason. And then there’s England, who’s attempting to help America, but England’s also on his eighth glass of wine. What he’s spewing out is complete and utter nonsense.

Prussia is currently standing off to the side, just watching this entire shit show.

He chuckles when England nearly trips on his own foot.

Japan, who’s watching this entire disaster with him, smiles. “What’s so funny?”

“This entire situation. I love it.”

The fact they’re all able to stand here like this, together, drinking and arguing over weird shit; it’s like they’re normal humans at a party. It’s like they have normal lives.

He’s not paying attention when England trips.

He crashes into Prussia, and his wine glass shatters and cuts Prussia’s hand.

“Fuck, sorry,” England sputters.

Spain and France run over. “Are you okay?” Spain asks.

Prussia grimaces at his stinging cut. “I’m fine. I just need to go to the bathroom and clean this out.”

“Sorry,” England says again, sounding guilty.

“It’s okay; we’ll clean this up,” France reassures.

“Do you need any help?” Austria asks, walking over. Hungary and Germany are next to him.

Prussia waves his good hand. “It’s fine. I’ll be right back.”

He walks down the hallway to the bathroom, passing Switzerland and Liechtenstein. They’re talking and laughing about something, and Prussia’s happy Switzerland is smiling for once.

He also passes different Nation Advisors and government officials, but they pay him no mind. Instead, they seem to be focusing on enjoying themselves.

He enters the bathroom and turns on the sink, putting his hand under the running water. He then picks out the glass and waits for the cut to heal, now that the debris is out of it.

A continuous stream of blood flows down his hand.

He waits and checks for more glass fragments. The cut should have healed by now.

It continues to bleed.

Prussia stares at his hand, then at his reflection.

It’s still bleeding.

He laughs. Suddenly the whole situation seems so fucking comical. It’s like he’s a normal person, a normal human who heals at a normal pace.

The sink is turning red.
He wonders what would happen if someone shot him right now. Would he bleed out? Would he die for real?

It’s still bleeding.

Just because he finds the situation so comical, he tries to sense for the other Nations’ presences.

He can’t, even though he knows there’s a room full of them nearby.

He laughs even harder. The hand continues to bleed.

_So this is it. I live through another dissolution, and this is what happens to me._

He lifts his hand, staring at it like it’s some foreign object, then grabs a wad of paper towels and attempts to compress it. Eventually, the blood flow stops.

He stares at the bloody paper towels.

_“We’re no longer needed,” Bavaria told him._

_“Fuck you,” Prussia mutters._

He then washes the sink, flushes the paper towels down the toilet, and returns to the party, keeping his hand in his pant pocket. No one seems to notice as they all count down the start of the New Year.

_“Three…two…one! Happy New Year!”_

China kisses Russia, America and Japan hug, France laughs as England slumps into him, and Hungary and Austria run over, surprise Prussia, and pull him into a hug.

He feels warm and happy enough to forget about his hand.

Instead, he relishes in new beginnings and the next big adventure.
I came up with this fic idea during 2012 but was never confident enough to write it down. But once I felt as though I was a better writer, and had more historical knowledge, my confidence increased this was the result. Though this is my first fanfiction (not counting the neopets ones I did when I was 13, yikes) I have written ‘novels’ before-- when I was 14 I wrote an unfinished 200k OC novel that was awful and no one will ever see it and when i was 15/16 wrote another OC novel, this time finished and coming up to around 130k

In all reality, this fic did take three years to develop. Just by reading and watching hetalia, absorbing other people’s headcannons, and learning about the Cold War in school, this thing slowly came to life, and I’m proud of the finished result. Though in the beginning I was wary and didn’t know if I was going to finish it, I’m glad I stuck it through.

[edit: and now editing this fic makes it five + years in the making]

And the reason I stuck it through is because of the wonderful people who acknowledged this fic. I’m grateful for everyone who simply clicked on it, gave me a kudos, bookmarked, or commented.

It was a constant battle to keep the hetalia characters ‘in character’ while trying to make their interactions realistic. I really hope that I’ve stuck to the canon personalities while incorporating more different traits to develop their characters. I also hope that I’ve done some justice to my favorite ships, as well as portrayed their relationships well.

(And hey, if you read this and one of the pairings wasn’t something you shipped, hats off to you because I struggle with doing that)

So yeah, that’s it.

It’s been fun, guys :-)

commission from ask-risorgimento-italy.tumblr.com !!

End Notes

blog: nejoo (or) lordsardine

music for the au