Blue Petals, Silver Thorns

by Grassepi

Summary

When Yuuri Katsuki is eight years old, the worlds of dance and ice collide and call to him, ceaselessly echoing through his thoughts every second of the day. He can see the picture of his life so clearly in his mind- there’s the blue sky above, there’s black-winged gulls cawing in the mornings, there’s katsudon for dinner and there’s ice beneath his feet. All he can imagine in his future is a life of skating.

When Yuuri Katsuki is twenty-two, he is supposed to die.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Why aren't there more flower memes

There's memes about frogs everywhere. where's the justice for flowers

Sure flowers can be romantic or tragic or symbolic or whatever, but where's the ironic jokes?? cmon internet make it happen already

This work was beta'd by the lovely kat_hale, and I'm incredibly thankful to her for helping me so much with this. (Where would I and my over-use of commas be without you, Rachel?)

I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“The Hanahaki Disease is an illness born from one-sided love, where the patient throws up and coughs out flower petals when they suffer from unrequited feelings. The infection can be removed through surgery, but the feelings disappear along with the petals…”

When Yuuri Katsuki is eight years old, the worlds of dance and ice collide and call to him, ceaselessly echoing through his thoughts every second of the day. All he can imagine in his future is a life of skating. He can see the picture of his life so clearly in his mind- there’s the blue sky above, there’s black-winged gulls cawing in the mornings. There’s katsudon for dinner and there’s ice beneath his feet.

He doesn’t imagine he could need anything more than this, and lets Yuuko patiently guide him in learning to skate, lets Minako-sensei teach him to jump and spin flawlessly. He’s young, he’s clumsy, and no one but his two teachers seem to believe that he’s serious about his ambitions.

Yuuri isn’t going to let that stop him. He’ll become the best figure skater in town, in all of Japan, and then meet the world with a spin and a perfectly executed step sequence.

In this small, beautiful bubble of time and space, Yuuri is allowed to thrive and grow, surpassing everyone’s expectations. His natural talent for skating is bolstered by his desire to simply move on the ice, and his dreams are lovingly nurtured by Yuuko and Minako.

Someday, the bubble will pop. The reality of Yuuri’s lacklustre talent will become apparent to him, but the effort he puts in now- truly and naively believing that he can be the best simply by trying his hardest- will propel him to keep going. The innocence of a child, unsullied by rankings and competitions and technical scores, is what lets him grin and laugh as he lands his first proper jump on the ice, Yuuko cheering enthusiastically as he wavers but doesn’t fall. Doesn’t put his hand down on the slick, scratched up surface beneath his skates.

At eight years old, Yuuri Katsuki feels limitless.
When Yuuri Katsuki is twelve years old, Yuuko falls in love with competitive skating. She is entranced by the practiced, perfected movements of the professionals on the ice. She begins frantically ordering subscriptions to sports magazines, learning their training regimens and routines to try out with Yuuri, following their social media and buying posters.

Everything begins to ache, his muscles starting to clearly develop, baby fat dropping from his cheeks, voice cracking along with his self-esteem as Takeshi laughs at him ceaselessly for trying to manage his now awkward limbs. Movements that used to be easy are suddenly difficult again, his muscle memory sabotaging him as well as it had supported him before. The endless energy he had as a child- to spin and slide across the ice, to burst into jolts of speed and race Yuuko to the other side of the rink, to dance and propel himself upwards against gravity into a jump- is fading quickly, leaving Yuuri wheezing after simple practices and defeated after long, long days struggling to perfect a jump.

School is getting difficult, homework piling on and interfering with his skating practice. If he wants any hope at all of completing his schoolwork every day and doing well in class, he has to sacrifice hours of sleep and rest. Every hour, every second, every moment is busy with something or the other, and the surging reality that it will only get harder from here makes him break a little.

The future doesn’t seem quite so bright as it did four years ago. The sky is still above his head, but he can’t see a sun, can’t see anything at all, his eyes blurring with tears constantly. The stars, the clouds, and the moon pool into a dark void, like a stunning array of colours being mixed into a meaningless black, the vibrancy lost so quickly and fluidly it’s hard to believe there was ever a rainbow there in the first place.

There’s a swirling feeling in the pit of his stomach, a beacon of nervous tension, constantly sparking throughout his body. It’s making him sleep even less and eat far too much, the heavenly golden sauce of his mother’s katsudon all too appealing, Yuuko’s diets for fitness seeming bland in comparison.

He falls on the ice, over and over again, and bruises cobweb out over his pale, chubby form. He stares at them in the mirror. He likes to imagine the awful anxious feeling constantly running through his veins appears like this- the dark webs are the visible sign of his racing, fearful, hesitant mind, weathered down by the bleakness he can see beyond his glasses. He falls on the ice, and he blames the panic sitting heavy in his stomach.

Gradually, overwhelmingly, Yuuri succumbs to the pressure, feels himself losing his footing. The grounding and base of his dreams that had seemed so secure is fading beneath his toes, and he’s losing his balance, ready to fall. It would be so much easier to quit. He could relax for once.

Minako snaps at him for messing up a simple form, for eating too much, for looking far too chubby despite constantly exercising. He jams his toe against the ice trying to do a triple axel, and Yuuko looks down at him pityingly when he says he’s fine, when he tries to stand up and try again only to fall and get a bloody nose as well. He fails a quiz in english, and is so lost in the class he doesn’t even know what he did wrong. Ballet, skating, and school, it’s all too much.

It would be so much easier to quit.

Yuuko asks him to watch a competition with her, able to stream it on the television at the rink. She’s so excited. He couldn’t possibly say no.

Silver hair flashes across the screen, a lithe body filling out a sexy black outfit, the gemstones glittering beautifully as the skater dominates the ice. He makes it look easy, like jumps are only a mechanism to allow him to fly, like he chose to come back to everyone else’s level rather than gravity forcing him to. He makes it look like spins are only there to let him become a whirlwind for a
moment, a devastating force of nature, free and spiraling infinitely. He makes it look like skating is fun, and Yuuri finds himself itching, fidgeting, eager to try again.

Viktor Nikiforov enters his world like a hurricane, picking Yuuri up and carrying him along without even knowing he’s doing so.

Yuuri lands a triple axel for the first time in weeks that day, feeling his lack of weight in midair, feeling dizzy and tired and excited. Viktor Nikiforov is somewhere out there, and Yuuri wants to meet him. Yuuri wants to hug him, and talk to him, and see his hair in person, watch it flow and shine in the light.

But... he has to be good enough in skating to reach Viktor first. A triple axel isn’t enough- the twelve year olds in the Junior Grand Prix can do so much more, be so much better than Yuuri.

Yuuko cuts out a picture of Viktor from her magazines to give to him when he asks, absolutely and utterly delighted that Yuuri’s determined again. Yuuri frames it on his desk, even though it’s not an actual poster, not an actual picture Yuuri took himself. It’s Viktor; for Yuuri, that’s enough.

The darkness of his future is chased away by sparkling blue eyes and an uplifting breeze, and Yuuri can see the sky ahead of him again. All he can think is that it doesn’t quite compare to the colour of Viktor’s eyes.

Yuuri works on duplicating Viktor’s routines with Yuuko, imagining what it would feel like to be so graceful and elegant, closing his eyes and hearing his heartbeat in his ears as the image of Viktor skating replays in his mind. Sometimes, he likes to pretend that Viktor is coaching him instead of Yuuko. He imagines Viktor directing Yuuri on his own routines and gently rearranging his limbs, laughing softly when Yuuri messes up, encouraging him to stand up again.

He gets a poodle, enchanted by Viktor’s own, wanting to feel the soft fur under his fingertips and hug something warm when he feels too much prickling energy under his own skin, anything to help the fidgeting. Vicchan is adorable, full of life and energy, pulling Yuuri along no matter what. Yuuri loves him so much it almost drowns out the pressure sometimes, loves his dog more than he ever expected he would.

He has a reason to fight now, a reason to keep going when it gets tough. Yuuri is going to treasure that, cradle it close to his chest and protect it.

Vicchan and Viktor. They help to lift the weight.

Yuuri whispers thanks into Vicchan’s fur every night, and can’t wait for the chance to tell Viktor the same.

At age twelve, Yuuri finds his motivation.

When Yuuri Katsuki is sixteen, people start to cough up flower petals at school. Irises, crocuses, roses, lilies, cherry blossoms; the hallways are a sea of floral, a mosaic of soft pink and brilliant red, creamy white and vivid purple. Hiccuped leaves float to the surface, bright green or fading brown, spots of contrast in the ever-shifting tapestry of the floor.

All Yuuri can see is silver and blue, covering his room walls, reflecting in the ice below his skates, the colour of the sky and the clouds, the fog over the indigo ocean during winter. It’s every shade of blue, all at once, light shifting it from soft eggshell to the sky at night, always gorgeous, always seeking out Yuuri’s attention, always finding it. It’s a warm silver, silky and molten, looking like the most precious thing Yuuri could ever touch in his life, lengthy and fluid and ever-shifting.
Yuuri doesn’t think much about the flower petals. He only steps on them, letting them stir beneath his feet, feeling vaguely sorry for the people who coughed them up. His head is full of skating, full of competitions and success and failure. Yuuri doesn’t have time for love, doesn’t have time for much of anything else. His classmates mostly ignore him, only occasionally asking him about his skating, and he’s content to be ignored. School is difficult enough to keep up with as is, he doesn’t need to worry about the people there as well.

Hanahaki disease isn’t really as dangerous as they tell everyone in younger grades, anyways. Yuuri’s never heard of someone dying from it in Japan in at least ten years- that would have to be an extreme case, a love held protected by it’s owner and unreciprocated to it’s target for at least five years. It isn’t hard to recognize after all, sunflower petals falling from someone’s lips as they cough, golden yellow fluttering to the ground to settle amongst the other flowers. Simply another love unreturned.

If it gets really bad, there are procedures for removing the creeping vines in the lungs, though those have… unpleasant side effects.

Yuuri couldn’t fathom being able to go through on a surgery like that, knowing that feelings will be ripped out right along with the invisible roots travelling through one’s body, pulled out as easily as a weed that has to be plucked for new growth. To feel nothing at all for someone seems impossible to Yuuri. There are so many people in his life he couldn’t give up, so many people who are important to him. Even people he’s never actually met.

Figure skating was Viktor Nikiforov’s gift to Yuuri, along with ambition and motivation, along with so many other things. Too many for Yuuri to ever thank him all for. Figure skating is calming, refreshing, relaxing, the ultimate cure for the black hole of anxiety perpetually sitting in his stomach. He can draw figure eights, mindlessly practice step sequences, jump and fall and have no one laugh at him. But Yuuri is good at figure skating, after all those hard hours of practice with Yuuko.

Yuuri can win at figure skating, he finds out. Local competitions are stressful and exciting, making his heart pound and mind race, yet somehow he always does well in them. He’s nowhere near good enough for professional, of course, but Yuuri finds that he likes to win, likes to stand on top of a podium and clutch a medal to his chest. It’s a lot better than losing.

When Viktor Nikiforov shows up for the Grand Prix Final with his hair cut short, almost twenty-one years old, glorious and youthful and strong, Yuuri is just barely seventeen. He mourns the loss of Viktor’s silky, flowing hair quietly, shifting through his posters and pictures of Viktor- admiring the way it tosses as Viktor spins on the ice, the lift in it as he jumps. Yuuri’s dreamt of touching that silver-spun hair even once in his life for four years, but now it seems much more unobtainable- he’d have to practically be touching Viktor’s head. Yuuri knows he would never have the courage for that, could never be close enough to his idol to do something like that.

Víktor’s magnificent, ethereal gray cloud of hair is gone, but Yuuri likes the new shorter cut as well, the way Viktor’s bangs flop casually and perfectly over his eyes. How his slender neck is bare to the cameras, adam’s apple bobbing gently as Viktor swallows. Viktor’s shoulders look more filled out now, the extra hair not slimming him down at all anymore.

Yuuri would probably like Viktor still if he cut all his hair off and skated bald, though.

The exact moment this thought occurs, Yuuri is seized by a violent coughing fit. He hacks and splutters, chest heaving, unable to catch his breath until it’s over. Taking a sip of tea to wash down the ache in his throat, Yuuri turns back to his laptop, blinking away tears from the corner of his eyes and wondering faintly if he’s getting sick from the cold.

Two days later, his mother will discover a single azure blue rose petal slowly drying up on the floor
of Yuuri’s room, and think nothing of it as she tosses it out the window.

At age seventeen, Yuuri Katsuki realizes the depth of his love for Viktor Nikiforov, and begins to suffer for it.

When Yuuri Katsuki is twenty, he abjectly refuses the surgery to cure his disease. His feelings for Viktor are so strongly linked to his love for figure skating, to his motivation, that he’s afraid that removing his love of Viktor will simultaneously devour and extinguish his love for the ice.

Quietly, kindly, everyone in his life accepts this, even as the disease fills his lungs and makes him cough, entire blue roses spilling out of his throat late at night, bloody hacking fits yielding entire branches of a flowering rose bush- nothing about the sickness makes any sense, and it’s painful and suffocating, leaving Yuuri’s airways scratched beyond belief, his mouth constantly torn up with thorns.

Yuuri will hold the blue roses he coughs up, cradle them in his palms, letting moonlight spill over them from his window. When the sun rises, he puts them in water, letting them truly grow in the world. He imagines making a flower crown with them someday and giving it to Viktor. Inevitably, they fall apart, petals gently crinkling up on his desk… turning brown and brittle before his eyes. Celestino hates seeing the flowers, bitterly reminded of his student’s fatal weakness, but Phichit adores them.

“They’re sweet, aren’t they?” Phichit responds cheerfully when Yuuri asks why he likes them so much, tilting his head to the side in confusion, like the answer is obvious. “Like every inch of you, from your mind to your body, is crying out to be noticed by your love, is ready to give him something beautiful in exchange for his love. It’s tragically romantic!”

It makes Yuuri blush and laugh all at once, glad he has a friend here in Detroit, glad that friend is Phichit. The Thai skater is young and carefree, supportive and kind, only ever wanting the best for Yuuri. He pushes Yuuri out of his comfort zone while somehow managing to make him feel comfortable doing it, but also knows when to stop pushing as well. Most of all, Phichit is so, so ready to compete, so eager to practice skating and win for his country. He’s inspiring, bursting with life and colour, easily passing it along to everyone he meets.

If only he would stop stealing all of Yuuri’s cereal, he’d be Yuuri’s best friend. As it is, Vicchan holds that role, awaiting him at home along with his mother’s delicious katsudon.

Yuuri can’t wait to see Vicchan again, can’t wait to taste his mother’s cooking, can’t wait to sleep in his own bed again. Detroit is wonderful, with Phichit by his side, but it isn’t home.

College is going to take an extra year because of skating. He’s got two more years here, at least.

Hanahaki disease develops over the course of five years.

Yuuri’s going to die in two years.

He can’t wait to go home, and skate with Yuuko once more, and listen to the seagulls in the morning. Even if it’s just for one second, one moment, it will be enough. Vicchan, his mother and father, Yuuko and Minako. So many people he has to thank, so many people he has to say goodbye too.

Detroit is wonderful, but it’s not where he wants to die.

“Does it bother you?” Phichit asks one day, voice quiet and gentle. ‘The King and the Skater’ is
playing for the second time that night, the lights dimmed and popcorn bowl long since empty. Yuuri blinks at the teen, trying to parse his meaning, watching the white, pervasive light from the TV dance over his dark hair and flicker in the depths of his brown eyes. “Knowing you’re going to die for your love.”

Yuuri sits for a long time, pretending to watch the movie, Phichit doing the same. He’s thought about it before, of course he has. He never expected to have to explain his feelings to a seventeen year old who’s never felt the delicate and cruel touch of an impossible love before, though.

“Dying for Viktor is just the price of loving Viktor,” Yuuri says finally, voice as calm as a still pond, eyes focussed on a narrow point in the distance, something only he can see. Phichit watches him in wonder, enthralled by the sight of someone so absolutely certain of something. Certain of his own love. Yuuri doesn’t blink. “...Talking to Viktor for the first time and feeling nothing no matter what he says would be worse than death. The feelings I have now… I want to protect them. Even if they end up destroying me.”

The declaration rings out into the apartment, and Phichit nods slowly, turning back to the movie. He’d never seen his roommate so determined before. The silence is thick between them, the tension as hard as a block of butter left out in freezing temperatures. Yuuri continues to stare into the distance, and Phichit hums in thought.

“Yuuri, your blue roses are beautiful. I’ve always admired them, and the other day I was wondering what they really meant,” Phichit muses, fluttering his eyelashes slightly as he casts his gaze over at the current bouquet on the kitchen counter- half of them wilting, some dead, some fresh and fragrant. “Did you know that blue roses symbolize prosperity and love to those who look for it?”

Yuuri looks over at Phichit, abruptly nervous and unsure, gaze settling on the bounty of royal blue flowers, barely visible in the dark of their apartment. “So… I should go looking for Viktor?”

Phichit only hums again, possibly in agreement, but mostly mysteriously, and Yuuri hiccups. A single sky blue petal falls into his lap, settling atop the cozy blanket he’s wrapped up in.

Viktor is twenty-four now, already a legend and his lore only growing with every move he makes. Every illustrious title and award in figure skating, every record that is available for him to test, is being rewritten and snatched up by his powerful, graceful skating. He’s stunning, blinding, intimidatingly shiny as he stands on the ice, golden skates gleaming in the light, eyes glowing turquoise one second, then cerulean, then the colour of the sea at midnight. He’s captivating, alluring, enchanting as ever.

Yuuri’s surely not the only one in love with him, hopelessly trapped in Viktor’s hurricane, drawn in by his magnetic pull. There must be thousands upon thousands of teenagers with blue roses crawling up their throats, idolizing the same person, craving his touch and praise.

Viktor wouldn’t care about someone like him, a dime dozen in his legion of fans. Yuuri doesn’t have to look for him to know that.

At age twenty, Yuuri Katsuki is somewhat at peace with the knowledge that he is not special, and he loves Viktor Nikiforov anyways.

When Yuuri Katsuki is twenty-two, he is supposed to die.

After it’s announced that he’s qualified for the Grand Prix Final, Yuuri rushes to the bathroom, avoiding other figure skaters and media, vines reaching for air from his lungs, flowers pouring out of
his mouth- a cascade of thorns and brambles that bring blood along with them, the usual blue petals splattered with thick, dark splotches of liquid, his lips splitting and cracking of dryness as he heaves into the trash can, trying to ignore the people staring at him as they wash their hands. He knows he’s a spectacle, still in his skating costume and silver medal hung around his neck, on his hands and knees because of a disease that’s supposed to have already killed him.

He certainly feels dead. Every logical thought process should have led to him being in a hospital in Hasetsu right now, led him to getting the flowers weeded out of his lungs, led to him quitting figure skating a long time ago. But Yuuri can’t. He’s worked so hard for this, for so long, been supported by so many people along the way.

He’s finally qualified for the Grand Prix Final, and Viktor is going to be there. Yuuri might finally be able to thank him properly, before the thorns and flowers fill his airway, rendering him unable to breath. Already, his air is constricted, quick and wheezing inhales of air all he can manage. Every gasp outwards tastes like roses on his tongue, cloying and sweet and suffocating, and Yuuri despises it as much as he once savoured it.

“Yuuri!” Minako screeches, barrelling into the men’s bathroom without a second thought, crashing to her knees in front of him, hands immediately flying to his shoulders- steadying Yuuri, far more carefully than they appear to anyone else- and Yuuri can barely see her. His glasses are missing, but everything is spinning too, his wheezing not helping things. “Are you alright?!”

Yuuri’s not really alright- he’s a dead man walking. He nods anyway and forces himself to stand. Viktor is still waiting for him. Yuuri still needs to thank him. There’s so much more than he still needs to do. He can’t die yet.

He hasn’t even had a chance to see if his love could ever be answered yet.

At age twenty-three, Yuuri Katsuki suffers a violent attack of the Hanahaki disease during his free skate in the Grand Prix Final, fainting of asphyxiation on the ice and being forced to stop from illness, collapsing into a beautiful, beckoning bed of blue roses and silver thorns.

Within an hour, he is awake again and Yuri Plisetsky is scorching, blistering heat, a volcano exploding before Yuuri’s eyes, the lava burning everything it touches; the junior skater is appalled at him for daring to skate with such an illness, scolding him to retire before he pushes himself to death on the ice. Celestino agrees quietly once the boy has left, suggesting Yuuri go home to his family and enjoy his last few days.

They don’t know who Yuuri’s in love with. They don’t know who Yuuri’s been waiting for. They can’t understand why he has to keep pushing himself.

He pulls himself out of the stiff makeshift bed, barely able to breath through the brambles of the thicket in his throat and feeling unnaturally hot. Yuuri changes into his normal clothes, discarding his Free Skate costume with disgust and a dark sort of humour, unable to think about skating, unable to comprehend how badly he’s failed to do everything he was hoping to do here. His vision is still blurring before his eyes, even with his glasses on, head burning, burning, lights flickering before his eyes. Yuuri doesn’t care. He starts looking, desperate, wanting to see Viktor so terribly badly that every second step he’s coughing up a flower petal, every inch of him yearning for something that he knows he can’t have.

The trip through the rink is lost to him, time becoming a rushing river around him, moving seamlessly from a slow, warm soup that lets him slip through it easily to a crashing, roaring rapid, shaking him up and throwing him around. Yuuri can’t breathe, and he can feel himself sway with every step. It doesn’t matter. He keeps walking, looking for something, clutching at walls, at people,
anything he needs to stay upright and moving.

The lights above are too bright, overpowering his vision. His head pounds, blood rushing in his ears. Where is he? Everything smells like roses, nothing is recognizable. Sweat is dripping off his nose, but he can’t remember when he started sweating. It hits the floor quietly, serenely, steadily. Yuuri has to keep walking.

Yuuri doesn’t know how long he spends walking. All he knows is that he finds him.

He’s with Yuri Plisetsky, on their way out of the building on the drift of a cold breeze, luggage in toe, while Yuuri stands there, falling apart in their wake, gripping the wall with weak fingers to hold himself up.

It’s a miracle of sorts.

Yuuri doesn’t know where he is, or who the people around him are. No one is trying to stop him, and that’s enough. Every colour he sees is too vibrant for his thrashing brain, every light source is too dim to view anything by while also being overwhelming. Yuuri can’t hear a thing. His knees wobble beneath him, and his feet don’t feel like they’re there anymore.

Viktor Nikiforov is really there, really breathing in front of him, somewhere in front of him, some impossible distance before Yuuri. If there are people between them, Yuuri doesn’t know, only able to see one thing. He’s far more handsome in real life than in television, and this one fact is stunningly clear in Yuuri’s head, even as his own appearance becomes some vaguely forgotten memory in his head. Another drop of sweat hits the floor, just barely audible to Yuuri’s ears. Viktor’s just listening to Yakov yell at Yuri, waiting patiently, but it’s the best thing Yuuri’s seen in a while, seen in forever.

Yuuri opens his mouth to call out, to let Viktor hear him, and he can’t. He can barely breathe, let alone hold a conversation, thorns digging into his tongue and a sudden cough letting a shower of blue petals flutter to the ground, weak and meaningless. Silently, devastatingly, Yuuri Katsuki watches the Russian skaters go, watches the red and white of Viktor’s uniform blur into the distance.

At age twenty-three, Yuuri Katsuki falls to his knees, unable to hold himself up, and lets himself succumb to the darkness.

He expects to never wake up again, for this to be it. Yuuri will never return to Hasetsu again, will never see his mother or taste her cooking again, will never pet Vicchan or be able to see Yuuko and Takeshi’s kids grow up.

Yuuri, faintly, peripherally, is sad about this.

All he can do now is beg internally, cry out in his mind, pray for Viktor to please return to him. Just come back to Yuuri’s side. Stay close to him.

Don’t abandon him in his final moments. That’s the cruelest fate of all.

Thoughts spin out wildly, crashing into one another, softly fading out of existence, everything plunging into darkness.

Yuuri doesn’t remember a moment after that.

When Yuuri Katsuki is twenty-three, he wakes up the next morning, feeling haggard and muscles aching, and watches the sun rise from his hotel window. The sky is a stunning array of chilling blue
and bright orange, infused with splashes of violet, a faint bay of fog hovering over the Russian city. Yuuri hopes this isn’t a dream, but he wouldn’t mind if it was one. It’s gorgeous.

Delicately, he slips out of his bed, snug in his pyjamas, and fumbles with the balcony lock until it pops open, letting his bare feet hit the damp, freezing floor of the stone balcony without thought. The sea is far away, but it’s turquoise and glimmering in the dawn light. It reminds Yuuri of home, of running by the seawall and inhaling the purely refreshing scent of the sea, salt mixing with the clearest air Yuuri’s ever felt.

Yuuri takes a deep breath.

It smells like rain, like fresh winds and cold weather.

It smells like freedom and life.

He can taste tears on his lips, vaguely aware he is crying, but nothing smells like roses for the first time in five years and his lungs aren’t constricting or fighting him. The morning sunrise is so utterly perfect, it’s like it’s the first one he’s ever seen.

No other morning will ever compare to this one.

The sun feels warm on his skin. The breeze tousles his messy hair. Yuuri laughs, and can hear it carry into the city, can feel it slide over his tongue. Nothing about this makes any sense, but Yuuri doesn’t care.

Somehow, inexplicably, at age twenty-three, Yuuri Katsuki is cured of Hanahaki disease, and he can breathe.

He’s alive.

Chapter End Notes

In case anyone was wondering, if anyone were to fall in unrequited love with Yuuri, I think his flower would be Forget-Me-Nots. They represent true love, faithful love, and memories. A sort of "Remember me Forever" vibe.

Appropriate, considering Episode 10's :3c

mon-doodles drew some incredible art for this fic, go check it out and shower them in praise forever!!!

katsuuki-nikiforov (Rowan ❤️) deserves all the love too (update as of March 2018, it seems Rowan has deactivated their blog, so this link is broken now, however the links to the art should still work as they link to my own blog!), go check out their two pieces of fanart!!
Hello again!! It's been 22 days, but here I am with Part 2. You might have noticed that the chapter number has moved up, and that's mostly to accommodate how fiendishly long Part 2 turned out to be- so long I had to split it into two! Once again, thank you to my incredible, amazing beta Rachel (this would not have been nearly as good without the long hours you spent editing for me <3). And thank you for all the support for this story! I'm so happy everyone liked it so much, and I've had a blast writing it.

You might want to check the tags again to see how this story has changed! Otabek doesn't appear this chapter but please know that any Otabek/Yuri content can be read in a platonic or romantic sense. I sort of meant it in a platonic sense when I wrote it, but anyone who wants to take it as romance is welcome to. (I do ship them, but I don't feel like this is very shippy I guess. I feel like I'm phrasing that wrong, but it's 2 AM so forgive me.)

Well, here we go!

Screaming pulls Viktor back, makes him turn and look for disaster, heart jumping in his chest. The automatic doors haven’t even slid shut yet, so he has the perfect view to the man collapsed on the ground, surrounded by panicked guests and shouting reporters. Visions of azure petals and scarlet blood splattering across the pristine white surface of the ice swim to the forefront of his mind; without a second thought, Viktor rushes inside the rink again. Yuuri Katsuki is dying on the ground before him for the second time in one night, fallen like a puppet with its strings cut in the back of the lobby.

Ignoring cries from Yakov and Yuri Plisetsky, Viktor jolts to a desperate halt before Yuuri’s body, falling to his knees beside the limp body. Catching his breath (ignoring the pain that shoots up his thighs and the bruises that will be on his kneecaps tomorrow), Viktor wraps his hands around the other skater’s body and gently turns Yuuri onto his front. Yuuri’s breathing is erratic and whispery, barely there even when Viktor leans in closer. When Viktor clutches Yuuri against his chest more firmly so he can reach an arm up to feel his pulse, it’s fast and sporadic. Every internal alarm bell that can go off inside his head is ringing, pulsing panic through him. Viktor is absolutely, perfectly aware of how inadequately equipped for this he is. Being a five-time champion figure skater doesn’t give him any type of insight into curing unreturned love.

“Yura, I think he’s dying,” Viktor says brightly, voice loud and cutting overtop of Yuri’s yelling, so that the junior skater immediately quiets at Viktor’s tone. Yuuri’s head falls sideways, cheek pressing softly into Viktor’s shoulder. Viktor smiles sunnily up at Yuri, hands shaking and knuckles white in
his grip on Yuuri. “He can’t hear you.”

He’s still cradled in Viktor’s arms, tucked protectively into the curve of Viktor’s body when Yuri started yelling; he doesn’t remember doing it. There’s something inherently disturbing about the looseness of the man’s limbs, like Viktor could do a quadruple flip with Yuuri in his arms and still Yuuri wouldn’t wake up, wouldn’t stir at all.

Viktor doesn’t even know him. He hasn’t followed Yuuri’s journey through the Grand Prix Final at all, just knew his name and appearance before this because of him being Japan’s top figure skater. It didn’t matter to him because Yuuri didn’t seem to care about Viktor at all. Every skater at some point or another comes up to him, begging for an autograph or challenging him or wanting his help with something. Viktor doesn’t introduce himself to others— they come to him, always, begging for his attention.

Yuuri Katsuki has never once begged for Viktor’s attention until today’s performance on the ice. The heart-stopping moment when Yuuri had abruptly stopped skating and clutched his throat, hands visibly shaking even from Viktor’s spot in the stands… that had grabbed Viktor’s attention far quicker than any other skater ever has. Blue lips spun out blue roses, a wild storm of petals swirling into the open air, more flowers appearing than any of the bouquets that were thrown for Viktor when it was his turn on the ice. It was stunning. Captivating. Horrifying.

Viktor had thought Yuuri was dead on the spot when he dropped, head hitting the ice hard enough for even Yuri to wince and swear under his breath. The crack had reverberated through the near silence in the rink, the last chords of Yuuri’s free skate music fading out in the stadium.

In that moment Viktor had been enthralled. Yuuri’s prone, still body lay amongst the rich, chaotic bed of azure roses, like the rink was his coffin and the performance his funeral.

The only thing that would have made it better is if Yuuri had been able to continue skating, unhindered by illness or the delicate touch of death. The roses were gorgeous, but not nearly as enthralling as the skater lain among them. Viktor aches to see him move again, to be able to watch him properly now that Yuuri has caught his interest.

He thought it would be fine to leave and hunt down Yuuri later, stopping by Yuuri’s emergency care room to make sure he was alright on his way out. Viktor had been assured by Celestino that Yuuri was fine; Yuuri was on his way to recovery. Irksomely Viktor realizes he was blatantly lied to, but he squashes down the irritation at Celestino to focus on Yuuri, pale and numb in his arms, breath quivering in and out of parted lips.

“Where’s his goddamn coach?! He should have been watching him!” Yuri is shouting in Viktor’s ear again, so incredibly snappy and bothered that Viktor casts an eye over on the fourteen year old. Yuri yells a lot, gets worked up over things Viktor doesn’t really see the point being angry over, but there’s something so awfully sincere about this frustration. Yuri’s taking this far too personally, considering he just met Yuuri, leopard-print shoes never stilling as he stomps around, circling Yuuri and Viktor like a wild animal.

Everyone else in the lobby has started to quiet down. They’re held back from approaching closer by Yuri’s sneers and snarling, afraid to have that rampant anger turned on them. The few reporters who dared to take out their cameras were turned to ashes under the inferno of that fury, their precious pictures turned to dust in an instant when Yuri threw the devices at the floor. Yakov hovers nearby, allowing the fourteen year old to run the show. He doesn’t even protest at the violent swear words Yuri lets out while smashing the cameras under his heels.

“Go find him, Yura,” Viktor instructs, trying to pretend for a moment he’s a functioning adult who
knows what to do in dangerous situations and hasn’t spent twenty years ignoring everything except for skating. He can’t even remember the name of the disease Yuuri’s obviously got, mind gone blank except for the desire to help this beautiful skater who’d stolen his eyes and ears for the night. “Celestino should be around the medical rooms somewhere.”

Yuuri makes a faint noise, and Viktor snaps to attention, eyes searching over the younger man’s face for any sign of life. Yuri’s already darting off, full of blisteringly hot energy and adrenaline despite how tired he must be after winning the gold medal. Another camera gets slapped out of a reporter’s hand on the way, grabbed by the strap and thrown into a wall. Viktor winces at the crash before smoothing Yuuri’s messy dark hair away from his eyes, carefully tracing one of Yuuri’s eyebrows in slight wonder as it flinches slightly beneath his gentle touch.

A feeble cough, a single tiny blue petal settling on Yuuri’s bottom lip, and dark, smoky eyes peer up at him through thick eyelashes. They’re cloudy and dull, reflecting Viktor’s image back at him in a glassy mirror. Yuuri’s lips move, and the petal dances with them, a flash of royal, rich blue pressed into nearly colourless pink.

“Viktor…?” Yuuri manages, voice broken and aching, the whisper so quiet that Viktor wouldn’t have been able to hear it if Yuuri wasn’t propped up in his arms. The air flees his own lungs. Out of relief or fear Viktor doesn’t know. He takes a shaky breath to compose himself.

“That’s me, in the flesh,” Viktor manages cheerfully, speaking slowly and clearly, wary of Yuuri’s earlier concussion. Yuuri just blinks slowly at him, unseeing. Unhearing. Viktor blinks slowly back, trying out a warm smile on his face and seeing if that prompts a better reaction. “You’re going to be fine. Help is on the way.”

Yuuri’s eyes are endless, swallowing Viktor’s words and optimism in a vortex of dark. There’s no light in them. Viktor keeps staring into them anyway. He thinks he might like being sucked in like this, letting Yuuri pull him in.

“You’re the help,” Yuuri mumbles, mostly incoherently, but Viktor understands anyways. Yuuri is vacant, barely there, but manages to ever so shakily, ever so delicately, pull an arm up in the non-existent space between their chests and press a hand to Viktor’s pectoral. There’s no force behind it at all. Viktor thinks he can imagine how cold Yuuri’s hand is through his jacket and wonders if Yuuri can feel Viktor’s heart beating nearly out of his ribcage. “You’re the fine one.”

Viktor’s eyebrows shoots up to his hairline, and he’s at a total loss for words for a long moment. Did this dying man just… unabashedly, drunkenly, exhaustedly flirt with him?

“You, just try to stay still and calm, okay?” Viktor tries instead, ignoring Yuuri’s words, ignoring the hand on his chest. It’s totally inappropriate to flirt back with a dying man, no matter how stunning his eyes are, right? “Take deep breaths.”

“Help me breathe, Viktor,” Yuuri’s hand tightens on Viktor’s chest, fingers digging into the red fabric, pulling him even closer to Yuuri’s face. Viktor’s eyes widen, inhaling sharply at Yuuri’s stumbling, intoxicated tone, the scent of roses heavy on his breath. Yuuri smiles with one corner of his mouth, eyes unfocused but magnetically drawn to Viktor’s lips, tiny petal latched onto his lower lip. Viktor follows it, unconsciously licking his lips. “I’m drowning, I need CPR. There’s no other choice.”

“There are machines that can help you breathe better than I can,” Viktor promises emptily, hopelessly lost in Yuuri’s eyes, in his voice, in the overpowering floral smell in Yuuri’s disease-wracked breathing. Would it taste like roses too, if they kissed? Swallowing down his own selfish desires, Viktor bites the inside of his cheek, letting the pain pull him back to reality. This beautiful,
dying Japanese man needs medical help, not to waste his hollow breathing on flirting with Viktor. “Please, don’t speak. Save your energy for someone you care about.”

“Viktor, please don’t leave,” Yuuri mumbles suddenly, the fabric of Viktor’s jacket so twisted into the claw of his hand that Viktor thinks moving back at all would rip it. The blank and void eyes are misty with unshed tears, Yuuri reaching for air so harshly and needily that every inhale sounds like he’s choking. He’s so small and fragile against Viktor’s form, body wracked with feverish shudders. “Please stay with me, until I die.”

“Don’t you want your family?” Viktor says, words meaning less than his gold medals, less than Yuri’s forced politeness to the press, less than Yuuri’s final score tonight. Yuuri’s almost crying, dark eyelashes matted with tears, and he looks distraught at the thought of Viktor moving even an inch, a centimetre, a millimetre away. Viktor’s faintly aware his legs have long since fallen asleep. “We’ve never even spoken before. Why do I matter so much to you?”

“I love you,” Yuuri Katsuki says, fiercely. Proudly. His eyes flickering with more life in that moment than Viktor’s seen in his own for years. The hand on Viktor’s heart goes limp, falling bonelessly to Yuuri’s stomach. There’s no more strength left to support it. Yuuri’s bottom lip creases, and he curls in on himself slightly, eyebrows furrowing and tears spilling over his cheeks. He’s overwhelmed by his emotions, pressing his face into Viktor’s jacket to hide the tears, and Viktor can only hold him tighter, only watch him break. This incredible, lovely, strange skater, who’s stolen Viktor’s breath away without any of his own to rely on. “I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you. I’ve always loved you. Please, Viktor. Don’t make me die without getting to kiss you. Don’t make me die without getting to talk to you. Don’t make me watch you walk away again.”

Yuuri breaks off into sobs, and it’s too much. Viktor can’t take the staring, can’t handle the reporters and guests watching with gaping mouths and wide eyes, taking in Yuuri’s confession like it was meant for them. This isn’t a moment for them to share in. Viktor hooks a hand under Yuuri’s knees, making sure the other is secure around his back, and stands up, ignoring the creaking in his legs and cramping in his calves. His feet are fuzzy with pins and needles, blood flow long since cut off, but he doesn’t allow himself to stumble. Yuuri sobs weakly, collapsed against Viktor completely, completely unaware of his surroundings. Yakov doesn’t follow when Viktor walks away. The nearest empty room he sees he ducks into. Viktor’s suddenly uncaring of the crowd he left behind, of Yuri rushing back any moment with Celestino, of his luggage abandoned outside on the sidewalk.

It’s quiet here.

Laboured breaths mix with measured ones.

Faint humming of the air conditioner reverberates around them.

Distant shouting from somewhere behind the closed door.

Viktor just barely registers the room as a dressing room before collapsing to his knees, not from the weight of the skater in his arms, but from the weight of his words. Yuuri Katsuki, the captivating and diseased figure skater from Japan, who always ignored Viktor so utterly and thoroughly, is dying in his arms, because of him, for him.

He doesn’t understand.

Yuuri falls into his lap again, tears slipping down his cheeks, but otherwise silent and still. Shivers wrack over his form, and mindlessly, Viktor takes Yuuri’s hands into his own, rubbing his thumb absentmindedly over the back of his hand. The skin is soft.
“Why did you do this?” Viktor says, feeling cheated, feeling alone even with Yuuri in his lap.

Yuuri struggles to breathe. He coughs again, looking like the entire motion pains him. The blue petal finally flutters from his lip. Viktor might hate him. Dark eyes stare up at him.

“Why didn’t you talk to me?” Questioning harshly, cruelly. Unable to hide his emotions under a peaceful smile for once. This is unfair. “Why didn’t you look at me?”

There’s no answer waiting, only Yuuri’s eyes staring up at him, pleadingly, skin burning red from the tears, like a broken blush across his eyelids.

“We could have had so long together,” Viktor murmurs, heartbroken and close to tears himself. Unable to comprehend how selfish someone would have to be to live like Yuuri has. “We could have had years to fall in love with each other.”

Tears gather readily in Yuuri’s eyes again, tiny droplets of water tracking down the well travelled paths on his cheeks.

“You’re cruel, Yuuri,” Viktor snaps, glaring down at Yuuri, utterly furious, ready to boil over with his anger. The water in his eyes burns and feels more like salt as it starts to drip onto Yuuri’s forehead. “How selfish.”

Yuuri looks like his world has broken apart. Every line in his face is slack with shock, tight with sorrow, nostrils flaring for oxygen they’re unable to catch. Viktor can feel his body shudder against his thighs.

“If I’m awful to you, will the flower die?” Viktor muses aloud, letting Yuuri’s fingers slip away from his own, swiping at the tears scalding his cheeks without feeling. More take their place. He lets them. Yuuri tries to raise a hand from his stomach where Viktor left it and fails, tries to sit up or lift his head. He can’t. Viktor wants to sob, wants to make Yuuri take the flowers and emotions out, wants to burn Yuuri so badly the flowers go up in flames in the process. “Will your love for me die before you do?”

“No,” Yuuri whispers, voice the most assured thing Viktor’s ever heard. It effortlessly turns his unfathomable, unprocessable rage into pure, unadulterated sorrow. Dark eyelashes flutter closed. For a heart stopping, panic inducing moment, Viktor thinks he’s gone. Then Yuuri speaks again. “Never.”

Searching his face, Viktor believes that. Somberly, feeling like he’s lost something incredible just as he found it, Viktor runs his fingers along Yuuri’s jawline, leaning over him to place a simple, glancing kiss against Yuuri’s forehead. It tastes like sweat and foundation, remnants of Yuuri’s performance. Pulling away, Viktor lets the silence hang in the air for a while, running his hand rhythmically through Yuuri’s hair over and over again.

Yuuri keeps breathing, stops crying, just watches him. Viktor does the same.

“Who are you?” Viktor asks, gulping down the last of his tears, offering a weak but sincere smile. “What kind of person are you, to waltz into my life and deliver me this? A beautiful gift set to explode only a day later.”

“I’m…” Yuuri hesitates, eyes drifting away from Viktor for the first time in what feels like hours. His throat sounds like it has holes punched in it, voice addled and lost in the wind. “Yuuri Katsuki. I’m one of Japan’s certified ISU figure skaters. I-I lost the Grand Prix Final, and I’m dying from Hanahaki disease.”
“Wow,” Viktor drawls lazily, combing neatly through Yuuri’s hair, playing with it, letting it tumble forwards or backwards with every stroke. “Way to tell me absolutely nothing about yourself. What a waste of breath.”

“V-Viktor!” Yuuri can’t help but cry, struggling to sit up again only to fall back. The surge of energy leaves him lying back helplessly, sweat pricking along his forehead, still glaring up at Viktor but unable to stop his smile. “Y-You’re the cruel one…”

“If you say so,” Viktor responds easily, humming happily as Yuuri continues to grin up at him. “C’mon, Yuuri. Didn’t you want to talk to me?”

“And didn’t you want me to save my breath?” Yuuri sasses him back and Viktor is delighted, beaming down at the Japanese man. He finds himself wistfully wishing for more tiny moments like this, wishing for more time to get to know him, wishing Yuuri wasn’t such an idiot and had approached him long before now.

“I did! But this is an exception.” Viktor reaches down with the hand not combing through Yuuri’s shiny, slightly damp dark hair and knits his fingers through Yuuri’s again, squeezing gently every time Yuuri’s hand quivers in his grasp. “I don’t want to be responsible for the death of someone I don’t even know. So tell me about yourself, please. I want to know everything.”

“...Everything?” Yuuri is bewildered at the word, uncertain of himself, eyelids flickering drowsily as Viktor tugs peacefully at his hair. “Mm. I have a dog named after you.”

Viktor barks out a laugh at that, surprised and flattered, yet somehow not surprised at all. “Viktor the dog?”

“Vicchan,” Yuuri snickers softly, managing the strength to squeeze Viktor’s hand back for a second. “She’s a toy poodle. I love her a lot.”

“I’m sure she and Makkachin would get along,” Viktor doesn’t bother to explain who Makkachin is, certain Yuuri must already know. He’s the man who loves Viktor, after all. “Where is she? With your family?”

“Oh, I remember,” Yuuri replies with awe and wonder in his voice, astonished by this tiny detail he’s forgotten, joy and peace crumbling into the never ending fountain of Yuuri’s tears before Viktor’s eyes. “She died the other day.”

“Oh, Yuuri,” Viktor can’t offer anything for Yuuri, can’t give him anything to make this better, can only hold him and keep him warm. A kiss or a caress of any kind seems wrong right now, seems like it would be intruding on his memories. Placating, silly, trivial words are all Viktor has. “I’m so sorry.”

Yuuri squeezes his hand. Viktor feels like he might have imagined it, that feather light touch.

Everything about this is surreal, but nothing’s felt as real as this in a long time. Viktor felt that touch more strongly than he feels his blades on his feet, than he feels the medal pressing into his chest.

Yuuri is a maelstrom of horror and shock, a tremendous storm that Viktor has no other choice but to weather. It’s too much, too much pressure to say the right thing, to do the right thing, but that’s alright. Yuuri loves Viktor, and had a pet dog named after him, and wants to die for him.

Viktor feels unendingly, blisteringly alive.

He squeezes Yuuri’s hand back.
“What the hell is this?!” Yuri howls from the other side of the door, loud slamming indicating his kick just barely failed to knock the door open. Unrestrained Russian curses explode out from behind the closed door. When Viktor unlatches it to swing open with a wide grin, Yuri is hopping madly on one foot, clutching the damaged one in both hands, already glaring at Viktor with everything in him. Celestino is hovering awkwardly in the distance, medical personnel rushing in the moment Viktor allows them.

Yuuri starts to panic. Manic energy lets him clutch at Viktor’s hand so strongly, dark eyes pleading with Viktor to follow, to come with him.

Viktor can’t do anything but go, holding Yuuri’s hand all the way, even when it falls limp in his grasp.

Yuuri asked him not to leave after all.

________________________

When Yuri Plisetsky is six, his mother leaves. Details, semantics, they mean nothing to him. Whether it was by death, abandonment, or kidnapping, she has disappeared from his life entirely in the space of a single night.

Yuri, at age six, can’t comprehend the depth of emotions he feels with every second, can't understand how this reverberates through his life. One moment he’s sobbing, the next he is pacified. One moment he's being comforted, the next he is comforting.

Where did she go?

His younger siblings cling to him at night, desperate for warmth. The heating’s broken, and they can’t afford to fix it. Yuri remembers a time that seems far away now, lost to him, when everyone slept in their own beds, unless someone had a nightmare. Everyone seems to have nightmares constantly now.

Does it matter where she went?

Every time someone knocks on the door, Yuri rushes to answer it, praying that it’s her. It never is. Each time, he walks away with a heavier heart, shoulders bearing more strain upon them. He’s as unable to stop himself from shedding a few tears as he is unable to stop himself from answering the door.

How is Grandpa supposed to support their whole family with his bad back?

The floors creak from wear, and there’s a leak in the roof that they have to leave a bowl under when it rains. Grandpa is gone constantly, always looking for work, always bringing home food. Yuri breaks his toys in a fit of anger and throws a tantrum when he realizes they can’t afford new ones. His grandpa isn’t home to hear him scream.

Why is Yuri so sad, constantly, all the time, even when he’s angry?

His youngest sister cries for their mother in his arms, because no one can replace her. Yuri can’t do anything but hug her, letting her sob and screech into his shoulder. She quiets eventually, shivering in his arms. Winter’s approaching quickly, and the heater still isn’t fixed. Yuri holds her a little tighter.

What happened to cereal waiting for him in the morning when he woke up, his mother sleepily brushing his hair?
The hairbrush yanks through his blonde strands, tearing them out, and the little soft beads at the end of the hairbrush go as well. His roots burn, and Yuri has tears in his eyes, but the tangles were becoming too irritating. Another knot is worked through, and by the end of it Yuri is crying from pain. It’s his fault for letting his hair grow so long and go without being brushed for weeks. He was just hoping he wouldn’t have to be the one to brush it. She was so good at doing it painlessly.

Where did her hugs go? Why can’t anyone else hug as well as her?

Yuri can’t understand the answer to any of his questions. He doesn’t want to try to understand. He’s six. He shouldn’t have to understand.

Winter brings with it illness and his younger sister collapses into fever, delivering a slew of illnesses onto the rest of the family. A cough is passed around them, but it sits on Yuri like a weight, digging it’s way into his chest. Even when everyone else is healthy again, soup and blankets and rest enough to cure them, Yuri is still coughing, something stuck in the back of his throat.

Little yellow petals, like wisps of sunlight, start to tumble out of his lungs. They hurt, but not as much as his heart.

At age six, Yuri just wants his mother back.

The hospital smells awful in this ward. Too many cloying, contrasting floral scents mingle in the hallways, and Viktor doesn’t like anything about the chairs. The cheap faux leather is clingy and uncomfortable, low wooden backside probably destroying his spine. He won a Grand Prix Final today. He should be sleeping, resting. Yuuri wouldn’t even know if he left, sunk deep into an endless sleep with nothing but darkness waiting for him.

Viktor settles into the chair more firmly, trying to find a position to sit in that won’t obliterate his back. The task seems to be deemed far more impossible than winning a gold medal. Yuri picks viciously at his perfectly manicured nails beside Viktor, curled up in a tiny ball of hate and impatience, flexible and young body uncaring of uncomfortable chairs.

Minutes tick by, Viktor scrolling instagram mindlessly on his phone. What are they doing to Yuuri right now? Has he woken up and cried for Viktor, unable to find him amongst the machines and fear and the scent of roses? Is there any way for Viktor to see him again, ask more about his dog and home?

He likes Georgi’s latest picture with his girlfriend, Anya. His feet feel like they’re buzzing. His fingers shake across his screen as he scrolls down.

Yuri starts to pluck at the worn wooden handles of his chair, whittling away at the thoughtlessly crafted armrest. He makes no progress on the wooden lacquer in two minutes and starts to tap his fingers in random, frantic patterns on his legs.

Viktor looks up Yuuri’s instagram, disappointed when almost none of the pictures are selfies. Phichit, a Thai skater Viktor’s never met before but who’s hanging around Yuuri’s pictures from two years ago, is the motherload it turns out. Phichit’s instagram features Yuuri with him in hundreds and hundreds of photos, ranging from cute to stylistic to funny.

Gradually, neatly, Viktor begins to stalk Yuuri’s online presence. He doesn’t know if he’ll ever see Yuuri in person again. The person waiting for him in these photographs might already be gone.

His thumb rests on the home button for too long, and Siri buzzes at him. Viktor closes it quickly, pretending his face isn’t creased with distress. Looking at pictures of Yuuri isn’t fun anymore.
Vicchan was adorable. Viktor loves her at first Instagram picture.

Yuri is rocking back and forth beside him, breathing frantic and jade eyes darting randomly. His chair is making ominous creaking noises, the faux leather squeaking beneath him.

“Yura,” Viktor says, trying not to let the edges of worry creep into his tone, knowing it will just make Yuri draw up his walls all the faster. Nothing lashes out worse than an injured animal being cornered. “You’re fidgeting.”

“Huh?” Yuri sounds genuinely startled by Viktor pointing this out, so wrapped up in his own head that he didn’t notice the bleeding of the tips of his fingers and the tearing of his thin bottom lip against his scraping teeth. “Oh. You’re right.”

Viktor keeps scrolling Instagram, not even looking at the pictures anymore, settling a watchful eye over Yuri. Something is wrong and Viktor has no idea what, but he’s grateful for the distraction from his own all-encompassing worry. Yuri is never that placid and accepting unless he’s had some kind of revelation, effectively been forced back to the role of young, unknowing child when he’s constantly trying so hard to be the grown up.

“It smells awful here,” Yuri murmurs, no snap or spit in his words at all, eyes downcast. Every syllable sounds scripted, following a mental pattern to resemble Yuri’s usual speech. But without the fury behind every word, they sound cold and empty, more like a cry for help than anything else. “I hate it.”

“Yura,” Viktor starts, with no idea where his sentence is going or what to do. An angry Yuri, cheerful Yuri, even sorrowful is manageable, but the confusing, contradictory ball of muted emotions and quiet words curled up beside him doesn’t make sense to him. Viktor can’t deal with emotions like these, ones he doesn’t understand himself. Yuuri had drawn all of his emotional intelligence out today. Viktor has nothing left to give to Yuri. “Don’t you want to go home already? You can go.”

The fourteen year old glares viciously at him, pulled abruptly back to his normal self by indignation and outrage. “Like hell! Fucking Katsuki dared to pull this bullshit on you on his deathbed?! I’m going to kill him before the flowers can!”

Viktor can’t say anything as Yuri goes back to breathing so shallowly it can barely be heard, fingertips leading bloody smears on his black pants. They aren’t visible at all. Viktor still knows they’re there. His Instagram feed refreshes, revealing nothing new. He wishes he followed more people.

Yuri stares at the wall, not moving an inch. All Viktor can think is that they’re ridiculous.

Two gold medal winners of the Grand Prix Final, waiting in a hospital for the figure skater who earned his last place ranking with a performance as soulful as their own. It isn’t Yuuri’s fault that his roses got him a spot in the emergency room, not on the podium.

Viktor fiddles with his phone, trying on Snapchat filters. He sends a pile of silly selfies to Mila and Chris, not expecting either of them to respond anytime soon.

Yuri sits, tearing the unassuming wall apart with the intensity of his gaze. His fingertips have stopped bleeding.

Their gold medals hang pathetically on the inside of their jackets.

It smells too much like roses.
Yuuri stabilizes, eventually, or so the doctors say, letting Viktor and Yuri know that he’s open for visitors. Family, close friends, anyone like that.

Yuuri’s family are in Japan. His friends are far away, in their own countries, and the only person who even seems to remotely know Yuuri here in Russia is Celestino.

It’s baffling to Viktor. How can Yuuri be so unknown, have made his way so quietly through the skating world? Figure skaters are flamboyant, they’re performers, they wear bright outfits and dance before a crowd. Yuuri posts on his instagram once a week with dog pictures (cute and important dog pictures!) and only uses his twitter to thank his fans for supporting him every once in awhile. Phichit Chulanont- and Viktor will be remembering that name- is a lifesaver, because without him there’d be almost no Yuuri on the internet at all, nothing for Viktor to stare at and ogle. He would be a blank canvas and Viktor would feel even more hopeless.

Because he wants Yuuri to live. Somehow, in some way, Viktor needs to fall in love tonight. Even just a little, just enough to make the flower die, enough to wither away the blooms in Yuuri’s lung. His brain whispers to him that it’s silly and naive, that love doesn’t work like that, but Viktor doesn’t know if he cares what his head thinks.

He is a romantic in the end. Tonight’s a night to think with his heart.

“What are you plotting?” Yuri asks, quick as a whip and deathly focused in a way Viktor usually sees only when he’s trying to get a full combo on that music rhythm game he’s addicted to on his phone. Not even competition draws this kind of force out of Yuri and it’s a shame in every sense of the word. The tragedy of Yuri Plisetsky: the boy with all the talent in the world and so little competition in his age bracket that it’s all going to waste. A kid like Yuri needs rivals, needs drive, needs a motivation beyond simply winning and money. Viktor’s tried, pitifully, to force Yuri to practice harder and express himself better, instating the rule that he isn’t allowed to use quads, but Yuri didn’t care in the slightest. He breezed through to gold with triples and perfectly executed choreography, the epitome of pride and confidence, and Viktor kind of hates dealing with other skating geniuses. Any other skater would have been stumped by that and forced to rely on their other skills, but not Yuri. Yuri won, over and over, and as he won, his motivation to win seemed to fade before Viktor’s eyes, replaced by boredom and arrogance. Well, it’ll work out in the end. If he doesn’t shape up soon the senior division will chew him up and spit him out, and Viktor’s never known Yuri to give up that easily. Yuri grinds his teeth beside Viktor, picking off the dried blood on his fingertips, muscles tensing in his neck with every movement of his jaw. “Don’t ignore me Viktor. What are you planning?”

“I want to see Yuuri,” Viktor responds cheerfully, standing from the awful hospital chair to stretch and wincing slightly as his back cracks. With a skip in his step and a smile on his lips, he calls goodbye to Yuri as he rounds the corner to the receptionist’s desk. Yuri watches him go with a sullen scowl and a resigned sigh.

It’s surprisingly easy to get past the family barriers at the receptionist’s desk. There are perks to being famous, and there are perks to being the man the dying person is in love with- the only person who could save him at this point. Viktor barely has to explain a thing before the young receptionist recognizes him, wonder filling his eyes and delight in his voice as he does his best to stay professional and do his job.

Yuuri Katsuki and Viktor Nikiforov are trending on twitter, making headlines on major news sites, and being discussed by almost every social media platform in the planet at this very moment. Despite Yuri’s snarling and avid hunting of cameras, there were too many people in the room, and pictures of Yuuri being cradled in Viktor’s arms are flooding the internet. Everyone wants to know what their
relationship is, why Viktor helped Yuuri, who Yuuri’s dying for.

The receptionist is his fan so Viktor gets by to see Yuuri easily.

Actually, physically seeing Yuuri is hard.

The beeping of the heart monitor is faint, as though at a distance as Viktor takes in Yuuri. He is swaddled up in a neat hospital bed amongst cotton curtains and metal machines, doing things Viktor can’t understand. Yuuri’s gorgeous smoky eyes are sunken and dim, glasses resting gently on his nose, and with a start Viktor realizes Celestino must have been in already. Yuuri didn’t have those earlier. His hair is mussed and awkward, the product put in it earlier half-rubbed out, messy and unbrushed. Frankly, Yuuri looks sick, with pale skin and empty breaths, leaning back against the hospital bed in a way that tells Viktor he doesn’t have the strength to support himself right now.

The light is white and sterile overhead, but it’s dark beyond the window. It’s almost midnight. Viktor rubs his eyes, faintly aware of the exhaustion lingering on the fringes of his mind. He pushes it away; it must be nothing compared to how exhausted Yuuri is. Taking a deep breath, cringing a little at the overwhelming wash of rose hovering in the room, Viktor closes the door behind him. The lock clicks, catching Yuuri’s attention.

Sluggishly, he turns to look at Viktor, eyes sleepily following Viktor’s waving hand. Yuuri seems to realize who it is after a second, sharp inhale audible across the room.

“Yuuri! I’m here to see you!” Viktor charges forwards anyways, practically lunging for the chair propped up by the bed, leaning forward in his haste to be closer to Yuuri. Yuuri had been fine in Viktor’s arms. He hadn’t had an attack in Viktor’s arms. When Viktor’s here, Yuuri is safe.

It’s probably a silly thought. How arrogant would he be to hope that just his presence can dispel the grasp of death curled around Yuuri tonight? But Viktor indulges the thought anyways, sweeping even further forward to reach for Yuuri’s hand. It’s sweaty, cold, and clammy. Viktor shuffles his chair closer, until his knees are pressed uncomfortably into the side of the bed, and reaches Yuuri’s other hand. Yuuri doesn’t resist, only shifts nervously around while Viktor does what he pleases.

“I’m sorry I had to leave your side. The doctors were treating you. Because of that, I can be closer to you now, though,” Viktor squeezes Yuuri’s hands gently, delighted to feel Yuuri squeeze back even softer.

“I-It’s alright,” Yuuri says, voice sounding like he ate an entire lemon, or choked for an hour straight on pure gravel. It’s horrendous to the ears. Viktor can only imagine how much it must burn to talk, how much Yuuri must feel like his insides are torn apart and ripped up by thorns and vines. Still, he doesn’t tell Yuuri to be silent, doesn’t tell Yuuri to stop talking. He wants to hear Yuuri speak. Every word is a precious gift, and Viktor is going to treasure them. “You’re here now.”

“Yuuri,” Viktor draws their hands together, leaving them in a pile atop Yuuri’s lap, removing a hand to rest his chin on as he leans forward. His voice turns from calm and serene to whining and bratty in an instant, downright pouting at Yuuri. “Why don’t you like social media? You’ve barely posted a thing on anything! Do you know how hard it was to find anything on you?”

“Viktor!” Yuuri squeaks, turning abjectly red at the scolding, eyes flickering to look anywhere but at Viktor’s smug little grin. “Um, well… I don’t have very many fans. I’ve never been involved in a scandal, and I haven’t won anything big before. It’s never seemed that important.”

“Well, I can see why you would think pictures of Vicchan are more important than pictures of medals,” Viktor teases gently, delighted when Yuuri’s flush only grows more scarlet, the tips of his
ears practically emitting steam. “But I think it’s important. For example, what if…”

He toys with Yuuri’s fingers, afraid to move anywhere else on the man’s body. The hands are a safe zone. Yuuri hasn’t said anything, but Viktor isn’t going to push his limits. Viktor tries to pretend he isn’t heart-stoppingly nervous right now. His breathing is smooth, but his grip is shaky. His words are calm, but his blood is pulsing in his ears. Yuuri is beautiful, and Viktor is being swallowed up whole by the smell of roses.

It’s the years of performing, of being on the ice, that let Viktor shut down his nerves, forget the pressure, and simply enjoy being with Yuuri.

“How, what if you were to fall in love with someone you had never spoken too?” Viktor muses, watches Yuuri’s face fall a little. “And spent years suffering from a fatal disease for them. Then, on death’s doorstep, you collapse into their arms, and beg them to stay with you. Imagine that person follows you to the hospital, and waits for you to be safe again impatiently in the waiting room, and only wants to know more about the man who loves them.”

“Don’t you think, just maybe, it would be nice to find more than some vague locations and pictures of food?” Viktor laughs slightly, just a little too petty for it to sound genuine, and Yuuri winces before him. Instead of responding to the taunt, he draws in on himself, and Viktor casually files that fact away. Yuuri doesn’t like conflict. Viktor mentally backtracks, seamlessly transitioning into a sweeter laugh and tone, not giving Yuuri a chance to relay meaningless apologies. “After all, I want to fall in love with you tonight. Shouldn’t you give me a fighting chance?”

“F-Fall in love?!” Yuuri echoes in astonishment, completely baffled by the very idea of Viktor loving Yuuri. He’s as shocked as he was at Viktor even coming with him to the hospital, at Viktor talking to him and being interested in him. Yuuri’s self-deprecating. He likes food and poodles and skating, lives in Detroit with his roommate and best friend Phichit, and doesn’t believe for a second that Viktor could ever love him back.

Viktor wants to prove him wrong.

When Yuri Plisetsky is ten, he coughs up an entire bouquet’s worth of carnations, their blinding yellow as cheerful to others as it is repulsive to him. Yakov tries to make him leave practice early, but Yuri won’t, could never. Missing out on practice is unacceptable, because the time to start competing is just around the corner. He pulls his rental skates back on and keeps going, because he needs to do this.

He’s going to fix their heating, and the leak in their roof, and let Grandpa rest for once.

Ballet, skating, all of the expenses Yuri demands so he can keep training and perfecting the weapon that will be his body, he needs to pay back.

It’s unacceptable to lose. It’s unacceptable to stop.

He has to keep going, no matter what. There’s no one around to tell him to stop, to stop pushing himself so far, to stop trying so hard.

His siblings don’t remember his mother much. They were too young.

Yuri recalls her in moments, so achingly clear they feel like they just happened, even when they took place half his lifetime ago. Gentle touches to the back of his neck, a warm voice teasing him on how long his hair has gotten. Strong arms lifting him away from the ground, raising him to a height he could never see on his own. Jade green eyes staring sharply into his, seeing him clearer than anyone.
else, whispering words of comfort as he throws a tantrum over something silly and dumb.

The carnations smell gross. He throws them out on his way out of practice.

It doesn’t matter, really. He can smell them constantly anyways.

Golden, perfect yellow taunts him everytime he coughs, every time he breathes. The flowers are calling to him, reminding him of what he’s aiming for, which spot is acceptable. Nothing but the highest place in the podium is waiting for him. Anything else isn’t allowed.

Nothing else can earn him enough money to pull the mocking flowers out of his lungs for good.

At age ten, Yuri Plisetsky can’t afford to lose, for the sake of his house, family, and his life.

Chapter End Notes

:)  
when will we return to the hotel room?? who knows  
"certainly not me"- yours truly, happily sitting on the rest of the finished story  
(i hope everyone doesn’t mind that yuri’s been pulled into this story. I just... really love him. So much. 15/10 would die for him probably BUT ALSO his story in this AU is really important to me. Not everyone's flowers wither on their own, guys :) )

mon-doodles drew some incredible art for this fic, go check it out and shower them in praise forever!!!

katsuuki-nikiforov (Rowan ♡) deserves all the love too (update as of March 2018, it seems Rowan has deactivated their blog, so this link is broken now, however the links to the art should still work as they link to my own blog!), go check out their two pieces of fanart!!
Chapter Notes

The final one <3

Thank you everyone for all the support on this story, I've had a lot of fun writing it!!
And of course, yet another shoutout to my incredible beta Rachel <33 I really can't thank you enough, Rachel, for all the time you put into this with me!

Well. Here we go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There’s a harsh, banging knock at the door, and Yuuri is forced away from the dawn breeze, from watching the city wake up before his eyes. Confusion, worry, and a dull ache of pain settle somewhere deep in his head, but Yuuri’s so high on the elation of being alive that he can barely feel them.

At least, until he pulls open his door to find Yuri Plisetsky standing there.

His platinum blond hair is hidden under an inverted tiger-print hoodie, black base crossed over with harsh, streaking orange. There’s a sneer on his lips and a challenge in his emerald green eyes. All Yuuri can think about is how familiar this is, waking from a deep, forgotten sleep and being greeted with a devil disguised with the visage of an angel. It’s the second time in as many days that Yuri has descended upon him to chew him out the moment he’s woken up.

“Oi. Moron. We need to talk,” Yuri bites out, sounding bitter and resigned, his usual fire carefully contained inside a frosty exterior. He tosses his pale hair out of his eyes in a practiced motion, the soft-looking strands falling perfectly into place. “Let me in.”

“Are you here to scold me again?” Yuuri asks slowly, successfully not letting his nervousness shine through in his voice. Yuri is a lot smaller than him and Yuuri isn’t ill anymore. He’s not going to let a fourteen year old who probably wouldn’t weigh 100 pounds soaking wet push him around. Anymore than usual, at least.

“Of course I am!” Yuri barks out, entirely unabashed of his intentions, wrinkling his petite little nose at Yuuri. There’s not a single blemish on his skin. It looks like fine china, an unearthly glow settling into it, pale as the snow laying on the ground outside. “Are you going to let me in, or do you want me to yell at you in the hall??”

“No, no, please don’t do that,” Yuuri jolts back from the door, cringing at the thought of any of the other skaters hearing Yuuri get chewed out by a fourteen year old. It doesn’t seem like Yuri is going to just simply go away for anything in the world either. Yuri shoves his way in, roughly brushing past Yuuri with a slight grunt. “Um, feel free to sit on the bed.”

Yuri pointedly ignores his offer, striding to the center of the hotel room before spinning on his heel, hair flaring dramatically with a twist of his head. His hands are curled into fists at his side, his wrists so skinny and delicate they look like they’d crumple with a single punch. Yuuri closes the door softly, and the moment the lock clicks into place, Yuri snarls at him.
“What in the hell is wrong with you?!” Yuri takes a step closer to him, trying his best to put force behind it and stomp loudly, but only managing to make the carpet rustle beneath his shoes. “You knew you were dying! Why would you keep competing?! Did you just want to steal the spotlight away from Viktor?”

“N-No!” Yuuri manages to get out, letting Yuri crowd him against the door, unsure of how to deal with the child calling him out on everything his family and friends never have before. “That’s not it!”

“Isn’t it?” Yuri leers up at him, smile wicked and pulling at his cheeks, ruining his adorable features in a single instant. “Didn’t you want him to notice you? To talk to you, and fall for you? So you could keep living? Don’t you love him?”

“Of course I do!” Yuuri cries back, rising to the bait for once, then immediately falling back on his haunches. Yuri’s eyes are piercing and accusing, his smile far too malicious to be real, his voice loud and ringing in Yuuri’s ears. “I-I mean, the flowers were… meant for him, yes.”

“Ha!” Yuri leans back, letting Yuuri have some space again, dragging his feet on the carpet as he goes to collapse on Yuuri’s bed. Leopard print shoes dangle off the side of the bed, far away from touching the floor. “Why didn’t you just get them taken out?”

“Huh? Taken… out?” Yuuri ponders, the words lost on him, practically forgotten in his vocabulary. His family, his friends- they knew how he felt about the flowers, about skating, about Viktor. They’d respected his feelings and let him suffer in silence. It’s strange to talk to someone who doesn’t know his whole story for once. The flowers usually expose him as the victim in this whole elaborate play immediately, but that isn’t how Yuri sees it at all. In Yuri’s mind, the flowers are a symbol of Yuuri’s laziness, of his lack of dedication to life. They’re a manipulation, a tool to get Yuuri’s way, not a disease working every second to strangle the air out of him. Quietly Yuuri comes to sit beside Yuri on the bed, making sure to leave a couple feet between them for comfort. Yuri doesn’t acknowledge him in the slightest. “I fell in love with ice skating for the second time because of Viktor. I felt that if I removed the flowers, my love for skating would go with them.”

“That’s it?” Yuri spits out, bolting upright on the bed, hand lashing out to wrap around Yuuri’s bicep. He tries to flinch back, but Yuri’s spindly, bony hand is stronger than it looks, effortlessly keeping him in place. Yuuri can’t do anything but stare into the molten steel and fire of Yuri’s eyes, let the blaze of heat wash over him. “That’s your whole stupid reason?! What a load of crap! If your love for figure skating is so shallow that losing Viktor fucking Nikiforov would destroy it, then get off the ice! You don’t deserve your skills!”

“You’re right,” Yuuri says, clearly and concisely. Yuri halts in his tracks, breathing heavy, looking at Yuuri with confusion and shock. He’s not used to people agreeing with him, obviously. “I don’t deserve any of what I’ve got. That’s why I thought I should die for it, too. It seemed right.”

“Don’t die for anything but death, you idiot!” Yuri screeches, fingertips pressing so hard into Yuuri’s arm that they’re going to leave bruises, words not making any sense while simultaneously being the most understandable thing Yuuri’s heard in a long time. “Love isn’t worth dying for! Viktor Nikiforov isn’t worth dying for! What do you even see in him?!! He eats Kit-Kat bars the wrong way! Do you know how infuriating that is?! He just bites into them!”

Yuuri lays a hand over Yuri’s bruising grip on him, carefully pries the fingers loose, sets the fourteen year old’s hand on the bed awkwardly and takes a moment to let them both breathe. Closing his eyes for a long moment, Yuuri can only smile. It’s a droplet of peace into the brewing, blistering fury of Yuri; a reprieve from the yelling and noise. “That’s kind of cute.”

Yuri makes a horrible barfing sound, sticking his tongue out and gagging on nothing for a moment.
Yuuri can’t find it in himself to mind, smiling placatingly at the teen. One day he’ll understand the
type of love that lets one die for someone, even if that day isn’t today.

“You’re crazy,” Yuri mutters, gritting his teeth, sticking out his jaw, unable to help himself from
sneering at Yuuri a little. He looks like he’s physically restraining himself from screaming at Yuuri,
holding himself back from lunging at Yuuri’s throat. Confusion and fury swirl in steel eyes, emotions
continually held at a boiling point, full of questions and not understanding the answers. “What about
love could ever be worth dying for?”

It’s asked gently, with care, every syllable stressed and held close to Yuri’s chest. All the magma and
explosions in the world are available for him to throw at Yuuri, and he goes soft instead, vulnerable
and tired. Yuuri doesn’t really know anything about Yuri Plisetsky, only his medal history, only his
anger on this one subject.

But this fourteen year old child is undoubtedly, without question, more concerned about him than
anyone else in Russia right now. Yuri’s horror and ferocity spills out of him without hold, in every
word and every sentence, looking for a way to make Yuuri see reason. He wants Yuuri to live, so
much it seems to hurt.

A hand wraps around Yuuri’s wrist, tiny and seeking, nails digging into his skin. They feel jagged
and rough, bitten and picked at.

Something in Yuri’s face breaks, and he’s yelling again, leaning in close, glaring and scowling and
hissing. “Love isn’t worth anything! Stop staring at me like you know something I don’t! You and
Viktor, you’re both fucking stupid! You fall in love like desperate school girls, ready to break your
neck for a single kiss! So, tell me, what the hell have you been thinking, in your shameless pursuit
for Viktor?! Why didn’t you just remove the flowers?! I know how much they hurt! Love isn’t worth
that pain!”

Yuuri gapes, watching with awe and terror as Yuri completely loses it- his yelling is so loud the
bottom floor must have heard it. Green eyes are wide and thin eyebrows furrowed, his other hand
reaching around to grab Yuuri’s shoulder. Dragging Yuuri around on the bed, he forces the older
skater to face him properly. “Stop just sitting there! Answer me!”

“What makes love worth dying for?!”

When Yuri Plisetsky is eleven, he suffocates in a sea of yellow and gold, unable to stop the torrent of
carnations from escaping him. He hasn’t won enough yet, hasn’t won anything but the bare
minimum to put more food on their table, to let Grandpa relax a little more.

Most days, the hospital is colder than an ice rink to him. It’s not a very nice hospital. The surgery
hurt a lot. It hurt more than his mother leaving. The hospital gown is scratchy and it catches on the
stitches on his chest sometimes.

He breathes through a machine most of the time. His lungs are healing from the less than careful
work done at scraping off the roots and vines in his lungs, stuck in a maelstrom of pain and anger.
He’s so bitter, at himself and the world, at his mother and money.

His siblings come to visit him thrice in a week. His youngest sister doesn’t understand at first why
she can’t talk about how little Grandpa’s been around or how bad his back seems to ache when he is
around. The older siblings hush her, make her promise not to talk about how all they’ve had for
breakfast for the past week is plain bread- the stale stuff Grandpa gets for almost nothing from the
back of the market.
Yuri doesn’t hear them talk to her about this, but he knows they do anyways. It’s in the lines of guilt in their faces, the red flush over hers as she struggles to hold all of their secrets inside her. It’s in the ugly thickets of their blonde hair, unwashed and unbrushed, because Grandpa isn’t there to remind them to keep it clean. It’s in the thin wrists and hollow cheeks, the little glimmers of anger in his oldest younger sister’s eyes. She’s blaming him, because Yuri’s the one who got sick.

This time, he’s the one who’s making life harder for them.

But it wasn’t him who made it this way. It was all her. His mother.

He tries to remember what it felt like to miss her, but he can’t. He tries to remember what it felt like to cry over her, but it’s impossible. He tries to remember what it felt like to look back on moments with her and smile, but it no longer makes sense to his head, to his heart, to his soul. It’s all wrong, but perfectly right.

Yuri can’t remember what it’s like to love his mother, invisible strings cutting off the flow of emotion towards her. He can’t even hate her. There’s no anger, no happiness, no regret or wistfulness. He thinks about her, and he feels nothing.

She’s a stranger to him now. She doesn’t matter at all.

Something about this is incredibly painful to him, in a way he doesn’t understand. This is what he wanted, right? So why does it hurt so much?

His chest, his heart, his lungs, his head, they all spin and spin when he thinks of his mother, making his thoughts foggy and emotions muddled. His train of thought always spirals away from him in just a single moment. He tries not to think about her.

He wants to skate again, eager to practice. He’s so sick of lying down that he imagines his body melding into the hospital bed, imagining the ventilator helping him breath as a monster sucking the life out of him.

Yuri’s so confused. Everything he felt for her before is gone, leaving a gaping wound, a void inside him that nothing seems to fill. He thought he would feel better after getting rid of his feelings, but this is awful, an inescapable emptiness that leaves him just as hollow as his sibling’s stomachs. He doesn’t want to feel like this, but he can’t possibly stop it as well. All he can do is struggle to breath, fighting through the pain, watch his siblings grow more and more like wisps of light, dancing around him without speaking to him. They used to keep him warm at night, but now he’s cold and alone, stuck with the lightness of his heart and the indifference he feels towards… everything.

His mother ruined his life, ruined all of their lives. And Yuri can’t feel anything towards her.

Love only hurts and hurts, pulling out suffering and pain with glee, stringing along fools and promising everything will be okay when it won’t be. Yuri traces the scar on his skin, feels its bumps and tries not to scratch it, and swears on it that he won’t fall in love ever again. He lets his anger fill up the emptiness inside him, as superficial and silly as it is, and snaps at anyone who dares to come close to his heart the moment he’s let out of the hospital.

At age eleven, Yuri swears off love and never looks back.

---

Yuri’s leaning in, hoodie leaning forward with him, and Yuuri can see down the neck of his shirt. There’s a long, pale scar on his chest, starting at the base of his neck and leading down, farther down than the light allows.
“Love… for me, at least… is worth dying for because it’s worth living for,” Yuuri says, a little shakily, still struggling to keep up with Yuri’s breakneck pace of conversation, barely able to think in the heat and rush of Yuri’s arguing. He tears his eyes away from Yuri’s scar, grateful to see the younger boy didn’t notice him looking, grateful not to be yelled at anymore. “Viktor is worth living for. He’s worth dying for. I love him, and that’s… everything.”

“Everything?” Yuri repeats back, voice harsh and rough after all his yelling, loosening his grip on Yuuri. There’s a light in his eyes that wasn’t there before, like the dawn Yuuri was watching only minutes ago, like the light of the city at night. It isn’t something for Yuuri to try and understand, only something he can sit and marvel at. It’s ethereal and glowing, the spark of realization in Yuri’s green eyes, watching the epiphany slide over his face before settling in and being tucked away. “...You two are ridiculous. If you're going to love someone, make an effort to talk to them, at least. Do you know how badly you fucked him up last night?”

“...What?” Yuuri isn’t sure he heard right. “What happened last night?”

Yuri knits his eyebrows at him, line of his mouth dragging down, removing his hands from Yuuri’s body entirely and shoving them in his hoodie pockets. He waits, as if for a punch line. Evidently not hearing it, he raises one eyebrow, mouth hanging open slightly as if he can’t believe what he’s hearing. “You… don’t remember? At all?”

“I remember passing out in the lobby, and that’s it. Are you saying I met Viktor last night?” Yuuri tries to keep the panic out of his voice, but it isn’t possible, voice trailing off into something high-pitched and frantic. “Please tell me what happened!”

Yuri’s mouth curls into a taunting smirk, impossibly smug, before he shrugs and snorts out a laugh. He springs up from the bed, leaving Yuuri alone, heading towards the door. “Why don’t you ask Viktor what happened? I wasn’t there for most of it, anyways.”

“Ask Viktor…?” Yuuri whispers, feeling like he’s missed something huge and important and earth-shattering. Yuri twists open the lock, halfway out the door when he swivels around, face impassive as he looks back at Yuuri. A faint tinge of pink dusts itself over his cheeks, the lightest hint of blush. Yuuri thinks he might be imagining it.

“You did a good job… living for love, or whatever,” Yuri wrinkles his nose at Yuuri again, whipping around a hand to point at him. “Don’t fuck this up.”

When Yuri Plisetsky is fifteen, someone sees him as their everything. They’re willing to become nothing for him. They let their lungs fill with sprouts and pretend that’s okay, act like it’s fine to suffer through it when Yuri knows just how much it hurts. Otabek Altin loves him, and he’s asked Yuri to be his friend.

The bouquet of lilies in Yuri’s hands falls to the ground. He doesn’t want to touch them anymore, knowing where they’re from.

Something about this screams of irony- dancing, watching someone from across the room, forgetting, flowers. They’re gorgeous, tiger lilies splayed out in bursts of red and yellow, every shade of orange mixed in between turning them into something like a sunrise.

Tiger lilies are big. The carnations had been too large for Yuri’s tiny throat, even a single petal enough to choke him if it came up the wrong way, but they’re nothing compared to the blooming, beautiful lilies; scarlet and fuchsia and covered in blood. Otabek doesn’t complain.
He’d only handed him the flowers, claiming they belonged to him.

No one’s ever asked him to be their friend before, and meant it. The tiger lilies lie at his feet.

“Get rid of them,” Yuri spits out, ignoring Otabek’s hand and jumping straight for his throat, pale fingers grasping into the dark scarf. It’s softer than Yuri expected. Words fill his throat, but they feel like the flowers, too many at once to possibly get out. All he can do is stare up at Otabek- Otabek, who is calm and steady. A bead of shiny blood is sitting at the corner of his lip. Yuri can’t speak. It’s the third time someone’s stood before him who’s stupid enough to fall for love’s ploys and silly enough to give in to their hearts.

Once, in a mirror, he’d seen an idiot, desperate for his mother to come back, flowers made of sunlight clogging his lungs.

Once, in an ice rink, Yuri had watched a moron skate like his life depended on it, hoping beyond hope that his love’s eyes would settle on him, even for a moment. Roses made of the sky tried to stop him from breathing, and they failed.

Now, on a balcony with the setting sun casting this stupidly determined skater in every shade of auburn and gold, he lets his hands fall to his sides and tremble. Lilies made of flame and blood lay at their feet.

This is the third time he’s faced the Hanahaki disease, and Yuri can’t deal with this anymore. It’s three times too many. He’s been so lucky. He’s been so blessed to not have anyone die on him.

All these figure skaters, letting their emotions get the better of common sense.

“Just remove them! I don’t want this! I don’t want these stupid fucking flowers!” Yuri finds he’s having trouble breathing, probably hyperventilating, the heel of his foot crushing down on top of the glorious tiger lilies. The flowers crumple beneath him; some making satisfying crunching sounds. “Why is everyone I know such a fucking idiot?! It’s- I’m- You don’t even know me! We haven’t spoken in five years!”

Otabek is moving to grab him, concern flickering in his eyes, earlier serenity shoved aside. Yuri feels like it’s slow motion. Watching Otabek reach for him burns, makes all his old wounds ache inside him, makes his scar pulse with pain. Yuri doesn’t know what to do. His ears screech at him, sound coming from nowhere. The wind is drying out his eyes. It takes him a second to remember to blink. Otabek’s hand lands on his shoulder, comforting and gentle.

Naturally, because Yuri has been forged into a dagger made to break and destroy everything that tries to come near him by the heat of his own flames, he lashes out.

“What, did you think you could come crawling to my side and I’d fall in love with you in one night?! Did you think I was a softie like Viktor?! Like Katsudon?!” Otabek’s hand is slapped away, and the Kazakhstan skater pulls it back to his chest just as slowly as he reached out with it, gaze considering Yuri like he’s something fascinating. Like Yuri is still beautiful, even in the midsts of panic and anger and scathing remarks. It burns. His chest hurts. He keeps blaming it on his scar, even though it hurts far too much for the damage to be just skin-deep. “Friends?! Yeah, right! You’re in love with me, so just say it! Go the whole way! Ask to be my boyfriend or some shit like that!”

“No,” Otabek interrupts even as Yuri sucks in air to keep ranting, unendingly and impossibly patient. His voice is so deep, so forceful, so powerful. The blood starts to trickle down his chin. “You’d feel too pressured to say yes. That’s unfair to you.”
Yuri hates that he believes him.

Otabek’s lips look wrong in red.

“Besides, I…” Otabek flinches back a little in shock as Yuri scrapes his hand across Otabek’s chin, wiping away the trickle of blood. There’s a moment of silence. Otabek seems to need a long moment to process the action, before he looks Yuri dead in the eye and continues. His voice doesn’t even waver. “I want to be your friend. Will you let me stay by your side or not?”

Yuri’s been broken once or twice in his life. Chipped at the edges, taped back together, just like everyone else. He isn’t going to let himself feel sorry for himself, isn’t going to stop moving forward and striving to be better. Maybe, sometimes, he moves a little too fast, pushes too hard. Doesn’t give himself time to breath and settle.

This doesn’t really feel like breaking, though.

It feels a little more like the feelings he ripped out of himself a long time ago are trying to come back to him.

“Fuck you,” Yuri sobs, scratching at his face with his perfectly manicured fingernails as he tries to wipe away the sudden rush of tears. Otabek doesn’t react. He’s adjusted to Yuri’s explosions of emotion so quickly. Yuri’s chest feels like it’s splitting open. “Take out the flowers, Otabek! Don’t be an idiot! Don’t trust me to love you back! I stopped feeling that a long time ago!”

“You had flowers, when we first met,” Otabek steps closer, his boots crushing more of the tiger lilies. His dark eyes are so fierce, so unyielding. Nothing in him shakes, like it does in Viktor, even when he’s playing his best confident act. Nothing in him gives way, like it does in Katsudon. “You seemed so proud to be bearing them. Can’t I be proud to have your flowers?”

“Don’t talk about them like that!” Yuri takes a step back, unable to handle the overbearing tension, barely able to handle keeping his eyes dry. “They aren’t good! There’s nothing good about them! They’re ugly and gross and they hurt like a bitch! I don’t want to be hurting you!”

“Yuri,” Otabek breathes, the fight going out of him in a moment. He reaches up a hand, slowly again, and Yuri doesn’t knock it away this time. Deft fingers, rough with calluses, brush away tears Yuri didn’t realize he was still spilling. He’s panting again. Otabek tilts his head slightly, pulling back his hand just as slowly. “I’m going to be fine.”

“You don’t know that!” Yuri throws himself at Otabek, wanting to bowl him over, wanting to beat the shit out of him until Otabek can’t do anything but agree with Yuri. It doesn’t work, because Otabek is strong and solid and Yuri is a petite little thing, but Otabek goes with the movement anyways- landing on his back on the ground and staying there. Yuri is all elbows and shoulders, bony and draped across Otabek’s chest, all his energy going into yelling. He doesn’t have any to spare to hit Otabek with after all. Snapping his neck up, he searches out Otabek’s eyes again, taking in their strength and using it to keep himself going. “Take the shitty things out, I demand you take them out! Loving me isn’t something to be proud of, you moron! Stop looking at me like I’m… like I’m…”

Yuri makes an agitated noise, the words not coming to his head, starting to tear his hands through his silky strands of hair. Otabek sits up, carefully depositing Yuri out of his lap and onto the stone. Every movement he makes is measured and perfect, already planned and thought out. It’s kind of breathtaking.

Shuddering gasps heave in and out of Yuri’s lungs, though he doesn’t think he’s had a single
moment of peaceful breathing this entire conversation. Otabek silently tugs Yuri’s hands out of his hair, smoothing it back down into place effortlessly. When Yuri’s breathing doesn’t seem to be getting any better any time soon, Otabek shuffles over to sit beside him, placing a hand on Yuri’s back and rubbing small circles. It helps.

“Do you honestly want me to go?” Otabek asks, voice hesitant for the first time since Yuri’s met him. It’s startling and perplexing, to hear honest regret in Otabek’s voice. Nevertheless, the sincerity shines through like warm sunlight through mist, and Yuri knows if he asks Otabek to never talk to him again right now, Otabek would follow through without a second thought.

“No, I want to yell at you more,” Yuri mumbles, out of energy from panicking and losing his head and crying. He has to skate tomorrow. How is he supposed to skate tomorrow? How is Otabek supposed to skate tomorrow?

Otabek nods, the faintest hint of a smile on his face. His hand is warm through his biking gloves, rhythmic as it traces over Yuri’s back. Without thinking about it, Yuri flops over into Otabek’s side, taking advantage of his shoulder to rest on. Otabek accepts it seamlessly, letting Yuri do what he wants.

The sun sets. The wind grows stronger. It’s still not that cold though, at least with Otabek pressing against him.

Every once in awhile, Yuri will remember to mumble some vague protest against the flowers and love, but they grow weaker as time passes. Otabek just nods complacently at each one.

His scar has stopped hurting. Pressing a hand against it, Yuri traces the line he knows so well beneath the fabric of his shirt, just barely able to feel the raised line through the cotton. It had never healed well. It’s really, supremely ugly on Yuri. The old wound is dark and marring against his pale skin, labeling him as a victim for as long as he lives.

He wonders what Otabek would think of it. What Otabek would look like if he got surgery like Yuri’s. Yuri can’t help feeling that as wrong as blood looks on Otabek’s lips, a scar on his chest would look even worse there than it does on his own.

The glow of the city sweeps over Otabek from behind, tousling his hair as effectively as the howling wind. It’s cold, but Yuri is warm, letting heat seep into him from Otabek.

His hand drops from his scar, landing somewhere on the pavement. His fingers find tiger lily petals on their own, absentmindedly plucking them from their stalks and letting the orange offerings float away with the wind. Otabek is silent, occasionally watching Yuri’s fingers as they work, until there are no more flowers nearby to destroy.

There are no stars to stare at here. The city’s light pollution erases all signs of the glittering lights that hung so readily above in Hasetsu. Yuri misses them.

He thinks about the night he met Yuuri.

“Hey, Otabek,” Yuri says loudly, voice echoing into the silence of the balcony. “What makes love worth dying for?”

Otabek shrugs with his other shoulder, voice as sure of his answer as he seems to be of all the words he speaks. “Everything.”

“What does that mean?” Yuri asks, honestly curious, letting himself voice the questions he’s had brimming from his mind ever since Yuuri Katsuki said the exact same meaningless answer. Otabek
won’t judge him for them. Yuri knows that with a certainty that almost scares him. “‘Everything’ is so vague. It sounds like some bullshit answer you throw on an essay in the last minute that teachers eat up because they’re saps.”

“Everything about you,” Otabek clarifies, and if Yuri concentrates hard enough, he can hear the gravel in the back of Otabek’s throat. The lilies still litter the ground around them, a constant and bleeding reminder of the stakes at hand. “Your dancing. Your past. Your future. The leopard print.”

“...You were right,” Yuri mutters, a little bitterly, struggling to feel anything but the dizzying blush on his face and Otabek’s hand, now resting casually on his waist. “You aren’t going to die, are you?”

“No, I won’t.” Otabek agrees, eyes black as coal in the moonlight, staring right into Yuri’s dim green irises. “Because your love is not nearly as dead as you thought it was.”

The lilies in Otabek’s lungs don’t wither immediately. They linger for weeks and weeks, but watching the petals that Otabek coughs up grow gradually smaller and smaller is the most satisfying thing Yuri’s ever witnessed. The very last full flower that Otabek coughs up is perfectly formed and luscious, blazing like the sun itself, and it does not wither.

Otabek lets Yuri keep it. His grandpa tells him the flower won’t die unless Yuri’s love for Otabek fades away.

It’s the only thing he has that he knows will be exactly the same when he comes back home after travelling for competitions.

At age fifteen, Yuri Plisetsky makes his first friend, and Otabek Altin does not die. (But that’s really just the start of it.)

Yuuri’s alone for all of a minute, trying to recover from the reeling of Yuri’s yelling before his door crashes open with a force that makes him think he’s being attacked. His startled scream intermingles with another as Viktor Nikiforov, five-time consecutive winner of the Grand Prix Final- looking utterly wrecked for some reason- comes barreling in.

“Yuuri!” Viktor cries, rolling the vowels in a way that makes Yuuri’s heart skip a beat, slamming the door behind him in his haste to shut it and get over to Yuuri’s perch on the bed. “You’re awake! I can’t believe Yura made me go take a nap, I promised you I would be here when you woke up!”

“V-Viktor?!” Yuuri starts, completely and utterly bewildered as Viktor hastily runs a hand through his messy silver hair, trying to clear up his bedhead. He’s dressed in pyjamas: sweatpants and a loose t-shirt, the look completed with a clear lack of shoes. Viktor must have run straight over from his hotel room to Yuuri’s. “What?! Why are you here?!”

Viktor isn’t given a chance to answer, already too busy launching himself at Yuuri- arms outstretched, toes pointed. Yuuri’s body is entirely locked up, tense and coiled tight, and Viktor slams into him with vigor. He thinks he hears one of their collarbones crack. Viktor’s too busy giggling in his ear to notice any pain.

“Hang on- Oh my god-” Yuuri thinks he’s about to pass out, his hands pressed into Viktor’s deliciously toned abdominal. He’s trying to move them away, but he can’t, Viktor’s arms keeping him locked in against the other man’s form. Yuuri’s nose is pressed into Viktor’s shoulder, loose gray hairs ticking the outer shell of his ear, and he’s about to explode. “Please get off me!”

“Aw,” Viktor whines, drawing back just enough to make space between them. His fingers are still
stroking through the baby soft hair at the nape of Yuuri’s neck. Viktor’s eyes are sparkling with joy, and he seems entirely unable to keep a tiny smile off his face even when there’s nothing to be smiling at. Is he smiling just at the sight of Yuuri? “You don’t want me to hug you? We’ve already been closer, haven’t we?”

“No! No, that’s not what I meant-wait,” Yuuri stalls, mentally crashing and burning. His hands are still against Viktor’s abs, having unconsciously followed him when he leant back. Sucking in a breath, Yuuri quickly brings the wandering traitors back to his own body, timidly reaching up to settle them on Viktor’s wrists instead. Still in contact. Ready to remove the searching, seeking hands at any moment. Viktor just smiles at him patiently, long eyelashes fluttering as he blinks. “Um, closer?”

“Don’t tease, Yuuri.” Viktor slides his hands down from Yuuri’s neck to his shoulders, long fingers trailing and leaving behind little bolts of energy that slip down Yuuri’s spine and make him shudder. The look on Viktor’s face turns coy, the tilt of his smirk playful. “Unless you want a demonstration?”

“It’s okay! That’s not necessary!” Yuuri shuffles back on the bed, ducking out from under Viktor’s hands. As much as he’s craved to be noticed and touched by the other man for years, the actual ethereal physicality of it has overwhelmed him in just moments. Viktor’s touch is so enticing, inviting Yuuri to hope for more- it’s new, but the brush of his fingertips feels familiar. Trying to hide his blush by fiddling with his glasses, Yuuri puts a good foot of empty space between them, avoiding Viktor’s eyes.

“Huh? Yuuri? Are you feeling alright?” Viktor asks, starting to reach for Yuuri again before smoothly and cleanly stopping, somehow making the awkward motion of pulling back look effortless and easy. When Yuuri glances up at his gaze again, those brilliant blue eyes look a little pained, even though the smile is still holding onto his mouth. “If you’re not comfortable with so much touching, I understand…”

Yet Viktor’s hands keep twitching like they want to be doing something, reaching for something, holding onto something. Yuuri watches them for a second, then takes a deep breath to collect his thoughts. Viktor still doesn’t know that Yuuri can’t remember last night. It’s hard to think about what he should say next, what he should do, just as hard as it was with Yuri screaming at him.

His brain is trying to process this, trying to understand the reality of Viktor Nikiforov sitting on his bed- glorious in his disarray, beautiful in his messiness. His eyes are sunken with lack of sleep, little creases settling in more finely than usual under his eyes. He won a gold medal last night.

Viktor Nikiforov doesn’t fall on the ice, always standing high, up on his pedestal, yet Yuuri’s never seen anyone who’s fallen harder or faster than Viktor did last night.

It’s obvious in the spark in his eyes.

Viktor Nikiforov, somehow, miraculously, fell for him last night.

Yuuri just needs a minute.

Yuuri is just going to need to take a second to take in the reality of a Viktor Nikiforov who knows him. Of a Viktor Nikiforov who wants to run his hands through Yuuri’s hair and cradle his hands. Of a Viktor Nikiforov who’s in love with him.

Yuuri needs to tell him that he can’t remember. This isn’t fair to either of them- Viktor thinks he’s being rebuffed, and Yuuri can’t handle Viktor’s level of affection right now.
The quiet is deafening. With every second of it, Viktor seems to lose a little more of his cheerfulness, eyes dimming into something grim and lonely. He’s staring off into the distance now, and it’s painful to watch him trickle away into some dark place that Yuuri could never know. Still, the smile holds, as transparent as it is. Viktor looks older than he is, like a ghost who hasn’t died yet.

Involuntarily, without a shred of thought, Yuuri places his hand over Viktor’s.

“I’m… still trying to adjust to this, okay?” Yuuri says, lying and lying and not regretting it, letting Viktor believe he remembers. Wishing he really and truly did. Anything to stop that terrible look in his gloriously expressive eyes. Offering a slightly weak smile, Yuuri threads his fingers into Viktor’s, meeting no resistance. “Please be patient with me. I do… want to t-touch you, Viktor. I’m just… not used to this.”

“Okay, if that’s what you need,” Viktor is still angling his whole body towards Yuuri, broad shoulders and thin waist twisted to face him. The t-shirt is stretching delightfully across his chest and it’s a little much to deal with. Yuuri does his best to keep his eyes on Viktor’s face- never mind nipples that show through flimsy clothes. Viktor’s laugh is weak, barely any actual humour in it. “Ha, I thought you were going to tell me to get lost or something!”

“Never. I would never.” There’s a dull clanging reverberating through Yuuri’s head, like an empty space where something should be. As Viktor starts to rub gentle circles over Yuuri’s skin with his thumb something seeps into that empty space, a whisper of sensation. “I’m just…you’ve held my hand before.”

Yuuri cuts himself off, voice light with a note of shock. It’s a new memory, but it’s not. It happened only a day ago, but it’s only coming back to him now… but it’s always been there. It makes no sense. Yuuri still holds onto the memory tight, holds onto Viktor’s hand tighter, and doesn’t let go.

“Yuuri…?” Viktor frowns a little, obviously confused but rejuvenated from his sorrows by the simple sharing of his hands between them. “Are you sure you’re okay? You seem… out of it.”

There’s so little. Nothing about the room he was in, nothing about the people he was with, nothing about what was said. Nothing about how he felt. Only Viktor’s hands, clutching at his. Both of their palms were sweaty.

“Do you want me to call a doctor? Yuuri?” Viktor asks again, a little more forcefully, inching closer on the bed without Yuuri saying a thing. Vaguely, he realizes he’s squeezing Viktor’s hand hard enough for it to be painful.

“No, I’m okay.” Yuuri turns towards him on the bed, shoulders slumped. It takes some effort, but he lets his mind relax, lets it stop groping for more when there’s nothing yet. Viktor slinks even closer across the white sheets and when he twists, Yuuri sees a slip of pale skin and jutting hipbones in between his t-shirt and sweatpants that makes all of the blood in his body immediately rush to his face. Trying his best to ignore his massive blush, Yuuri takes a deep breath and looks into Viktor’s eyes.

It’s just one fragment of a memory, but it means that rest will come back with time and effort. There’s something grounding in that that lets Yuuri focus on reality, lets him stop poking at the still fresh wound. Lets him focus on how incredibly blue Viktor’s eyes are instead.

Viktor’s gotten very close.

It’s familiar. Yuuri can’t remember it happening before.
“So you… want me,” Yuuri tries to find the truest blue in Viktor’s eyes and can’t. From the sky to the bottom of the ocean, it’s a mosaic of cerulean. “You, um, want me to touch you?”

“Wow, Yuuri, that’s forward,” Viktor laughs, voice low and silky smooth. He tosses his gleaming hair out of his eyes unsuccessfully, peering up at Yuuri through the scattered strands. “Maybe after I’ve had some breakfast…”

“C-Can you stop? For one second?” Yuuri pleads, as incapable of dealing with Viktor’s alluring tone and looks at such an early hour of morning as he’s incapable of understanding how someone so silly and gorgeous and perfect could have fallen in love with him. “I meant…!”

Viktor’s silver hair has started to shine and glow with the rise of the morning sun, natural light pouring down onto them from the huge windows. Viktor looks like he wants to say something that will make Yuuri completely lose his head and blush to the roots of his hair again. Yuuri just has to interrupt, because this feels like a dream. Yuuri needs something to make it real already.

“Would it be okay if I… touched your hair?” Yuuri blurts out, quickly, like he’s admitting his darkest secret and just wants it off his chest. Instantly afterwards he loses his nerve, mumbling excuses and apologies, but Viktor just laughs them off. In a single night, Yuuri’s become as transparent as glass to him.

Viktor starts to lean down to give Yuuri better access to his scalp just as Yuuri lets go of his hand and reassembles his legs to form a proper pillow, feeling incredibly gleeful and struggling to hide it. There’s a beat of silence. Misunderstandings swirl in the air between them.

“Did you… want me to lay on your lap?” Viktor asks quietly, sounding awed. As if he’s discovered something incredible, a treasure so precious he wouldn’t give it up for anything. Yuuri doesn’t want to take that from him, even as absolutely embarrassed as he feels. He nods, just a little frantic perhaps.

In an instant, Viktor’s head is rested on Yuuri’s thighs, cheek squishing into the muscle of his left leg. The rest of his body stretches out on the bed, settling in in a way that speaks of his exhaustion. How long had he stayed up for Yuuri last night? Did he even get any chance to rest after his performance? Yuuri knows how much doing media can take out of you, and as the winner, Viktor must have had to offer something after the Grand Prix Final ended. How much energy must it take to win an international tournament and keep someone alive in the same night?

“You can rest now, Viktor,” Yuuri finally feels like he’s somewhat in control of the situation. Viktor is here before him, sleepy and grossly in love, staring up at Yuuri with a sappy smile on his face. Yuuri’s hands shake as he strokes back Viktor’s bangs. His hair is the softest thing Yuuri’s ever felt in his life. It has a fleeting, diaphanous texture to it that makes Yuuri want to bury his face in it and see what it smells like. “I’ve kept you up long enough.”

“Doesn’t this feel familiar?” Viktor muses, voice slurring one word to the next, drowsiness pulling his eyes closed. Yuuri can feel Viktor’s jaw move against his thigh as he speaks. “I doubt you enjoyed my hold as much as I’m enjoying yours.”

“Not likely,” Yuuri can imagine how thrilled he must have been to be pressed against Viktor, even in the throes of fever and illness, his head injury still rattling his brain. The rays of sunlight are making him sleepy, too, but it’s more important to keep playing with Viktor’s hair. This is incredibly important. He’s dreamt of doing this for five years.

Viktor’s eyelashes flutter. They’re so long and full, they can’t possibly be real. Everything about Viktor is so much more glorious than the videos and posters led Yuuri to believe. The cameras could
never hope to capture the true depth of Viktor Nikiforov’s beauty, simply falling asleep on Yuuri’s lap.

“You’re so beautiful, Yuuri,” Viktor sighs, raising a hand to trace along Yuuri’s jawline before letting it flop back down. His voice is so deep, so tired, so far gone. He doesn’t sound like he’s even aware he’s speaking aloud right now. “I’m so lucky, Yuuri.”

“Oh,” Yuuri says under his breath, because the way Viktor is looking at him right now is the way Yuuri’s felt watching Viktor’s programs. The slightly helpless smile, like he’s so full of joy he can’t help it. The shine in his irises that seems to reflect from some brilliant, inward light, rather than anything exterior. Everything in Viktor’s expression is soft, vulnerable, open. It’s there for Yuuri to look at. Viktor is making this face for Yuuri, and Yuuri alone. “You really do love me?”

“Not enough,” Viktor declares emphatically, sitting up just enough to peer a little closer into Yuuri’s eyes. “There’s so much more of you to love. I want to see it all. I want to know everything about you. My emotions were enough for the flowers. But not enough for me. I’m not satisfied yet.”

“Vik—” Yuuri begins, then is abruptly seized by a fit of coughing, his body shaking and trembling. He instinctively covers his mouth with one hand and grabs for the stabbing pains in chest with the other. Viktor’s immediately upright, alarms going off, hands rubbing up and down Yuuri’s back to soothe him.

It’s a perfect, pristine blue rose. Yuuri stares at it in his hand, thinking it’s the finest one he’s ever created. Viktor is panicking, practically beside himself, thinking the disease is back and looking to take Yuuri for good this time, but all Yuuri can do is admire the flower.

It’s the last one.

“Viktor,” Yuuri says with a rasp, wounds in his throat reopening from the coughing fit, only hints of his normal voice detectable. The rose smells intoxicating. “I’ve kept you in my heart for five years. I’ve had so much longer to think about you, and maybe this is selfish of me, but… I feel the same. I want more. I’ve always wanted more.”

Delicately, Yuuri offers Viktor the blue rose, smiling beatifically at him. Viktor’s eyes are wide, mouth hanging open slightly.

“Blue roses aren’t a real flower, Viktor. They’re a symbol of impossible dreams and loves. They’re a mystery that hasn’t been unravelled, something to look for but never find,” Yuuri says bitterly, watching Viktor’s long, graceful fingers take the coveted rose, purposefully brushing over every single one of Yuuri’s on the way. “They’re your flower. Mystery and impossibility. I thought I would never be able to reach you… so I never tried.”

Viktor brings the flower up to his face and inhales deeply, flinching slightly at the traces of blood on the winding stem.

“It’s my last flower, Viktor,” Yuuri breathes, and appreciates every moment of being able to do it unhindered. “You’re here now. So the impossible roses representing my impossible love can’t exist anymore.”

“Yuuri, it’s beautiful.” Viktor says lightly, fingernail tracing over individual petals. Eventually, he stops, simply holding the rose in his hands and smiling at Yuuri. “I feel like you’re offering me your love, or something. How romantic.”

Yuuri blushes and stammers as Viktor’s face goes stern, leaning in even closer to speak bluntly into
Yuuri’s ear.

“But if I’m holding this now, that means this flower exists. Neither this rose nor your love were ever impossible, Yuuri,” Viktor sounds scolding, his lips brushing against the outer shell of Yuuri’s ear with every syllable. It drives Yuuri a little mad, so he rushes for the easy way out from under Viktor’s spell.

Snatching the rose back, Yuuri bounces off the bed to take out a glass from the cupboard and fill it with water. Viktor’s laughter and whining follows him, but Yuuri bears it no mind as the sounds slowly trail off. Leaving the rose carefully balanced inside the cup on the kitchen counter, Yuuri turns back to the bed nervously.

Viktor is dead asleep, stretched out and drooling slightly.

Yuuri feels fuzzy, feet sloppy as they carry him back to the bed, tucking himself into Viktor’s side. They have so many things to talk about, so many things to do.

Medals to win, routines to skate, love to nurture.

That’s okay. They have all the time in the world to do all that.

The blue rose stands proud and strong in the vase. The impossible love is dead, but it remains, leading into greater things. They can only grow from here.

Yuuri curls his hand into Viktor’s t-shirt, clutching at the fabric, before flattening his hand and letting it rest on top of Viktor’s chests. He can feel him breathe. Yuuri can feel himself breathe, too.

They’re both breathing.

They’re alive, and there’s nowhere to go but up.

(At twenty-three years old, Yuuri Katsuki feels limitless.)

Chapter End Notes

:D IM SO HAPPY TO BE FINISHED Y’ALL!!

In case it was a little vague, the cause of Yuuri's memory loss was his concussion and heavy fever, which caused a double knockout combo to end him. However, (mostly because I feel Yuuri not remembering the night they really met is cruel and unusual and I want him to remember having so much fun with Viktor) Yuuri's memories will eventually come back! (Most of it is probably just the two nerds discussing their dogs. God, I love them)

Also, because I did put some thought into this, Yurio's tiger lilies symbolize friendship, pride, prosperity, and wealth. I felt it very fitting for our dear Ice Tiger ;3

(And his mother's yellow carnations are rejection, disdain, or contempt. They're meant to say, "You have disappointed me." Take that as you will :) )

<3 thank you for reading!
End Notes

You can find me on tumblr at grassepi!

(＠писать) thank you for reading! If you dropped a comment, it would really make my day <3

mon-doodles drew some incredible art for this fic, go check it out and shower them in praise forever!!!

katsuuki-nikiforov (Rowan♡) deserves all the love too (update as of March 2018, it seems Rowan has deactivated their blog, so this link is broken now, however the links to the art should still work as they link to my own blog!), go check out their two pieces of fanart!!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!