In Our Dreams

by phoenixwaller

Summary

Victor Nikiforov, the Junior World Figure Skating Gold Medalist, has a secret skill. He has the ability to dreamwalk; to visit the minds of others while his body sleeps.

The evening after his Junior Worlds exhibition performance he finds himself in the mind of a young Japanese skater, Yuri Katsuki. He feels the boy’s awe at watching the performance, and is overwhelmed at Yuri’s desire to skate against the Russian one day.

Notes

When this concept came to me I knew I had to write it, and I hope you all enjoy it as much as I do.

This is going to be a long piece, it reached 36 chapters just in outlining, and that will inevitably increase as I split chapters due to length or feel. I’d be surprised if it doesn’t easily top 100K words by the time I’m done.

It's also going to be EXTREMELY slow build to the smut. Oh we'll get there, but not for a
while. I mean we're starting when they're kids, and since I'm sticking as close to canon as I can with the dreamwalker overlay... well there are a lot of their years to get through first. No smut until after THE KISS.
Chapter 1

The ice was a familiar place to Victor. He blinked away the glare of frozen white and relished the lines of shavings and etchings on its surface. It was silent except for the dull scrape of blades, just him and the ice.

A hand stretched into his line of sight. It was the first clue that he was dreamingwalking. Small fingers shook with the effort of trying to be graceful while staying balanced atop the thin blades. It was an obstacle he’d overcome years earlier. As he settled into the surroundings he noticed the telltale markings of his secret gift: signs in a foreign language - Japanese this time, light that was a different quality, and, most strangely to him, the marked unsteadiness on the skates beneath him.

*I'm in the mind of a younger skater,* he thought to himself as he felt the chilled air against the skin of the person whom he was inhabiting.

Movement stopped. “Is somebody there?” asked a nervous voice.

Victor guessed that it was a boy several years his junior as he made a point to close off his thoughts; to keep his presence secret.

*He sensed me. He must have the ability to dreamwalk as well.*

Eyes traveled from the ice to the sound of a door opening. A person came into fuzzy view, and a comfortable warmth filled the boy’s heart.

“Yu-chan!” the boy called excitedly, internally deciding that what he thought was a voice in his head must have been the sound of her approaching.

Victor stayed silent, watching as the boy glided across the ice to stand at the barrier.

“Come on Yuri-kun!” the girl exclaimed. “They’re about to air the exhibition.”

Victor smiled to himself as the boy, Yuri if he had understood properly, pulled guards over his skates and stumbled to another room. There he joined the girl and a slightly older boy to crowd around a small television set. Both Yuri and the girl, Yuko according to the boy’s thoughts, were giddy with excitement as a familiar rink appeared on the screen.

Victor watched with a bemused feeling as the two teens he had shared the podium with only two days prior skated their exhibition routines. He still hadn’t worked out what had called him to this boy’s mind.

“Victor’s next, right?” Yuri begged of Yuko as the rebroadcast of the exhibition cut away to a commercial.

“Yes!” Yuko squealed. “He won gold so he gets to perform last of the junior skaters.”

Victor felt warmth flood through the boy at the thought of watching Victor skate, and he started to understand why his dreamwalking had brought him there.

The commercial ended, and Victor watched himself glide across the ice for a program he had
performed mere hours earlier. A part of him felt funny listening to the introduction in Japanese, but he had long ago learned that language was no barrier when two minds touched as they did like this. As long as the host understood a language so would he.

“…Junior World Champion, sixteen year-old Victor Nikiforov…” came the announcer’s voice.

Excitement fluttered in Yuri’s chest as the music started and the Victor on the screen skated the opening sequence. Victor felt Yuri’s awe flow into him as he danced across the ice, and he heard Yuko’s excited squealing with every jump and spin.

Within the few minutes of the skate Victor came to understand just how much his own skating influenced the boy. There was a quiet reverence paid to the way he moved across the ice, and a reserved awe for every subtle nuance of pose or expression.

However, even knowing that this boy was a fan wasn’t enough to prepare Victor for what came next, a simple thought that floated through Yuri’s mind.

*I want to skate against him one day. I want to skate with him one day…*

Victor almost howled in frustration as an alarm clock buzzed and pulled him back to his own body. He opened his eyes to see the bland view of a hotel room. He draped an arm over his face before rolling over to turn off the alarm. If he let it go too long Yakov would start yelling from the adjoining room. He wanted to go back to sleep, to learn more about the boy Yuri, and why his dreamwalking had taken him there.

There was pounding on the door to his room. “Vitya, get up. The press conference starts soon, after that we’re returning to St. Petersburg.”

“Da,” Victor called in reply. He sighed and moved to dangle his long legs off the side of the bed. He held his hand out in front of himself, just as Yuri had. His fingers were longer and thinner, but more than that, they were steady. Long gone was the uncertainty he had felt in the boy’s mind.

Victor sighed and stood. He moved to the bathroom to shower and groaned as he saw the tangles through his long platinum hair.

*Every time,* he thought to himself. *My hair always tangles worse when I dreamwalk. It never fails, and I have someplace to be today too.*

The tall teen reached into the shower and fiddled with the temperature until it was just right. As he lathered himself clean he tried to wash away the lingering feeling of being in another’s body. However, he already knew that the boy Yuri was different.

*It’s because he’s probably a dreamwalker too,* Victor tried to convince himself. *Their thoughts always linger longer. The connection is stronger.*

Victor stepped out of the shower and toweled himself dry. He wrapped it around his waist and took a comb to his hair, slowly easing the tangles loose. But even as he worked, the boy’s thoughts kept drifting into his mind. He remembered the way Yuri had gazed at his hair streaming out behind him, and caught himself smiling when that fleeting thought that he was the most beautiful thing the boy had ever seen popped into his head.

Eventually Victor stopped combing his hair and pressed his palms to the bathroom counter. “Enough, get out of my thoughts!”

For a brief moment there was a period of calm in the maelstrom of his mind, but Victor knew that it
wouldn’t last. Something was different this time.

Victor wasn’t sure why, but he had the thought that the boy needed him. Or maybe it was the reverse. For the first time he wasn’t entirely sure, and it annoyed him. Eventually he decided that the boy had called to him somehow.

“Why does it have to be me anyway?” Victor asked of his reflection. “I’m just me, there’s nothing all that special, is there?”

He stared. He was tall for his age, but had barely started to fill out. His shoulders were still narrow. Heck, even concerns about facial hair seemed to be in the future.

He reached out and touched his reflection. “What do you see in me?”

Victor’s hand dropped back to the counter and he hung his head. He wasn’t going to get an answer from the mirror, and he had too full of a day to allow himself the luxury of dwelling.

“Besides, it’s not likely I’ll dreamwalk into his life again. I don’t know how to control it yet.”

Victor strode from the bathroom and dressed for the press conference, his hair loose over his shoulders. Once he was satisfied with his appearance he made sure that everything was packed and ready for the return flight, except for some comfortable clothes he would change into before they left.

There was a knock at the door. Victor opened it to see Yakov standing there, only slightly fuming that he had to retrieve his star pupil.

“Ready Vitya?”

Victor nodded and followed the man down to the room where the press had assembled to interview the competitors.

However, no matter how many questions he answered the lingering memory of the Japanese boy remained lodged in the back of Victor’s mind.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!

Geek out with me about Yuri on Ice and other anime on tumblr at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Young Victor Nikiforov is preparing for his senior division debut, but even months after first encountering the young boy from Japan his thoughts are still drawn to him.

Chapter Notes

Victor is such a blank slate, and we know so little about him. Some things can be extrapolated, but there is a lot that is left entirely to the imagination. I’m excited to explore Victor’s relationship with his family, and there is a brief introduction to that in this chapter. It will continue to be revealed and I hope that it gives him the depth of solitude we saw in episodes 10-12 as it develops.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The next few weeks were spent in a blur of training and publicity. Victor managed only a few days off to celebrate his recent win before Yakov increased his workload in anticipation of his senior debut. More often than not he arrived home exhausted and fell into deep, dreamless sleep.

Despite that he found that he couldn’t get those last thoughts of the boy out of his mind.

“I want to skate against him one day. I want to skate with him one day…”

Victor remembered his own determination from his younger days, his drive to make his own mark on the world. A smile crossed his face every time he thought about the boy, and knowing that his skating had impacted another so much. He found that it also gave him a renewed sense of purpose. Even if it was only a single encounter he realized that he wanted to keep inspiring Yuri. He wanted to fill that boy’s heart with the same amazed warmth every time he took to the ice.

As Victor grew accustomed to his new routine his exhaustion lessened and the dreamwalking started again. There was a gentle comfort in it; being somebody else for just a short while, and he often found himself where he needed to be. The young girl picking flowers in a meadow calmed him the night after he fell on a critical jump and worried about not being able to compete at the senior level. The downhill skier provided the sensation of frozen wind on his face after an afternoon of feeling cooped up waiting for a magazine interview.

They were almost never aware of his presence, except in the rare instances when the other person had the ability to dreamwalk as well. Even those were a joy, especially when the more experienced gave him tips on how to control the skill.

However, no matter how many minds he stepped into, Victor still wanted to revisit the boy from Japan, the one whose heart sang at seeing him skate.

As the weeks stretched into months Victor pushed his desire to reconnect with Yuri to the back of his mind. It had almost become a distraction in his waking life as he wondered not only what the boy
was doing, but if he was still as entranced with his skating as he had been on the day following the exhibition. He realized that the pure elation that had swept through the young skater’s body was something he wanted to feel again.

As he tried to drive thoughts of Yuri from his mind he redoubled his training efforts. Spring turned to summer, and before he knew it the first competitions of his senior debut were upon him. With his win at the Junior Worlds he was seeded into the Grand Prix series. His first competition of his senior career would be at Skate America, and the second at the Trophée Éric Bompard.

Victor was excited, but knowing when and where he would be skating also sparked his competitive streak. He studied the histories of the other skaters, watched old programs and tried to understand what they would be bringing to the ice. He compared their various strengths to his own, and worked with Yakov to refine his program.

The biggest problem was the relatively new scoring system. It was only the second year of the ISU Judging System, and everybody was still adjusting their styles. Victor only had a single season to study skaters under it, and even taking their strengths from the 6.0 system into consideration there were too many changes as those at the senior level pushed technical elements in order to stay competitive. He drilled triples until his legs ached, but hadn’t yet found his footing for quads and was glad that few men attempted them. At the same time he found himself studying the step sequences and body language of ice dancers, trying to mimic their expressiveness in his choreographic sequences.

*I might not be able to match their technical scores,* Victor reminded himself every time he worried about the level of jump difficulty. *But as long as my performance components are high enough I should be able to make up the difference.*

Despite the reassurances to himself, Victor grew increasingly nervous as the dates of the competition approached. He had been unstoppable at the junior level, but was now sharing the ice with far more experienced skaters who would fight to keep their titles.

Anxiety grew, and several weeks before Skate America Victor began regularly missing his jumps in practice. Sometimes he thought that Yakov would explode his face was so red by the end of the day, but he kept comparing himself to the older skaters and worried that he wasn’t ready.

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Victor hurt everywhere from repeated collisions with the ice. He had spent a good portion of the evening with an ice pack on a swollen knee, and had switched to a hot bath to soothe his aching muscles. As he sat in the warmth his mind once again drifted to the boy from Japan.

Victor ran his hand across the surface of the water and watched the ripples spread. “A missed jump might be a small thing to me, but what effect will it have on him? Will my small failures grow like this?”

Victor gulped air into his lungs, slid down in the tub, and plunged his head into the water. He held himself there until he felt a burn in his chest, and gasped for breath as his mouth broke the surface again. He opened his eyes and stretched his arm toward the ceiling. Droplets fell from his fingertips and landed on his face, streaming to the sides like tears.

“Will you still be my fan if I fail?”

Victor sighed and climbed out of the bath. He toweled off and wrapped a robe around himself before blow-drying his hair. Had the competitions not been so close he would have slept on it wet, but
couldn’t afford even the slightest chance of a cold. As soon as it was dry enough he flopped on his bed, he had another full day of practice ahead, and needed to give his body time to heal from the continued strain.

Lingering pain kept Victor from sleeping restfully, and he found himself waking repeatedly when he put too much pressure on one sore spot or another for too long. He looked at the clock and groaned when it read only slightly past one in the morning. It meant both that the hours of sleep he had left before he’d have to get up for morning practice were dwindling, and that he had several more of tossing and turning in pain remaining.

Victor shifted some pillows to provide cushioning and elevate one leg a bit before trying again. He expected that the relief wouldn’t last long, but would take any decent sleep he could get.

He was convinced that he had barely closed his eyes when he felt the gentle warmth of a fall sunrise against his face and the chill of ice surrounding his legs. He couldn’t remember waking or jogging to the rink for morning practice, but he was most definitely skating.

Excitement fluttered in his chest, mixed with newfound confidence, and Victor realized that the emotions were not his own. However the one emotion he knew was his was almost overwhelming in its intensity: hope.

Victor quickly walled off his thoughts and feelings as the awareness that he was dreamwalking coursed through him. He knew that he was in the mid of a fellow skater, and quickly took in his surroundings, silently wishing that he had somehow reconnected with the boy named Yuri.

His heart soared when he saw signs in Japanese, and the mascots painted under the frozen surface. A moment later his feelings were confirmed when the glass door to the rink opened and a familiar girl walked in.

“Sorry Yuri-kun,” Yuko said. “The door was sticking and it took me a few minutes to lock it again.”

Yuri shook his head. “I’m just glad your parents let us skate before school.”

Yuko pulled her hair back and secured it with an elastic before stepping onto the ice. She skated a few laps around the rink before joining Yuri in the middle.

“Nishigori isn’t coming today?” Yuri asked nervously.

Yuko shook her head. “No, we have a test this afternoon, and he didn’t do so well on the last one. His parents said no more morning practice until he brings his grades up.”

“But he’ll still be here in the afternoons right?”

“Probably,” the bubbly girl replied, “unless he slacks off and doesn’t pass.”

Yuri glided around the ice a few times. “What’s your mom going to have us work on during this afternoon’s lessons?”

Yuko caught up and they moved side by side around the rink. “I think she’s planning to focus on spins and simple steps. If she can get the younger skaters comfortable going backwards she said she might show us a toe jump though.”

Victor felt a wave of nostalgia flow through him at the thought of learning technical elements for the first time.
“I can’t wait to show Minako-sensei!” Yuri replied.

“Make sure you can land it first,” Yuko replied with a laugh.

Victor felt heat across the boy’s cheeks and realized he was blushing.

“You still go to Minako-sensei’s studio every day for ballet too, don’t you?” Yuko asked.

Yuri nodded. “She’s gotten even stricter about ballet since I told her I want to become a figure skater like Victor.”

Victor felt a wave of emotion overcome him. Relief mixed with excitement and gratitude, and for a moment he had trouble masking his presence, but he doubted the boy noticed.

“The magazines all say he’s training hard for the upcoming Grand Prix series,” Yuko said excitedly.

“I can’t wait to watch him this season!” Yuri exclaimed. “I bet he wins everything!”

“He’s skating in the senior division this year though,” Yuko mused aloud. “Even in interviews he’s admitted this season will be challenging.”

“That doesn’t matter,” Yuri refuted in a tone which caused Victor a bit of shock.

Yuko slid to a stop on the ice. “Why not?”

“Because his skating is so beautiful. Surely the judges see it.”

“But the new scoring system is harsher.”

Yuri crossed his arms and jutted out his lower lip. “Still, even if he misses every jump… I want to skate like Victor some day. Besides, he’s only sixteen. If he doesn’t win this year there is next year and the year after that. There are skaters who are in their twenties and still competitive!”

Yuko laughed, and Victor felt a blooming warmth within himself.

*He believes in me, even if I don’t perform perfectly… even if I don’t take gold he trusts that I will eventually.*

“Come on,” Yuko chirped. “Let’s skate before we have to leave for school.”

Yuri smiled and followed the girl through several warm-up laps.

Victor was astounded at the gains Yuri had made in the months since the Junior Worlds. His footing was much more stable, and his hands were steady as he reached and tried to mimic familiar movements.

*He’s trying to dance on the ice. I remember these motions from my short program last year.*

“No, Yuri, like this!” Yuko exclaimed as she slid to a stop in front of the boy.

Victor watched in awe as the girl worked to copy his step sequence from the previous year. She didn’t have the technique for the jumps yet, but he could see that she truly enjoyed ice skating.

As soon as she was finished the boy’s body began to move. Though Yuri was smaller and less experienced, Victor could feel the familiar tension in the muscles. The result wasn’t without flaws, but when he recalled how the boy had been only months prior he realized that Yuri had the ability to
make his dream come true.

*He’ll make it, and one day I’ll be able to face him on the ice.*

Yuko’s face split into a huge grin. “Amazing Yuri! You look just like Victor!”

“Really?” the boy exclaimed.

“I can’t wait to see you when you start learning the jumps! You’ll be skating against him in no time!”

Yuri beamed at the girl. “I hope so!”

Victor remained in the boy’s mind for close to an hour, until the pair had to leave for school. He left as silently as he’d arrived, and felt renewed confidence as normal sleep took over for the rest of the night.

When Victor awoke in his own body he was happier than he’d been in weeks. Just the glimpse into the young skater’s life was enough to replenish his enthusiasm for the upcoming season. He didn’t even mind dealing with the tangles in his hair he was so glad to have been given the opportunity to connect with Yuri again.

*He believes in me, even all these months later. He still wants to skate against me.*

Victor attacked practice that day, and for the first time in close to a month he nailed every jump. His body still ached from the repeated falls over the previous weeks, but Yuri’s confidence had boosted his. Even his spins and step-sequences were more polished, and by the end of the day Yakov’s face was merely pink from frustration rather than the violent red that Victor had seen so often.

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Victor’s nerves mellowed over the next several days, and by the time they boarded the plane to the United States he was confident in his abilities once more.

*I guess I needed Yuri’s unwavering confidence in me; his unconditional trust that I would perform my best, Victor thought to himself. He may never know it, but at Skate America I will skate for him.*

Between jet lag and frenzied practice sessions the next few days flew by until it was time for the short program. Victor wondered if Yuri was watching as he took to the ice for the warmup, and then remembered that due to the time difference it was early morning in Japan.

*They’ll probably air a rebroadcast in the evening. Either way, my program is for you Yuri.*

Applause sounded throughout the building as Victor took his place at the center of the rink.

*You believe in me, and I believe in you. One day we shall meet here, as equals, and competitors.*

The music started, and Victor lost himself in the program. He’d chosen gratitude as the theme of his short program, and as he thought of Yuri he spread his arms wide, symbolically embracing the world around him.

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Victor was hardly surprised to find himself dreamwalking that night, and it was with a sense of joy that he found himself once more in the mind of Yuri. The boy had his eyes glued to the television, but it wasn’t the one at the rink. The walls were red with wood accents everywhere, and he seemed to be seated at a low table.
Victor recognized the voice of the bubbly Yuko beside him, and the girl let out an excited noise as he took to the ice.

*It feels so different to watch myself through his eyes.*

He watched as he spread his arms, and had to suppress a mental chuckle as he hadn’t even realized that he’d closed his eyes while thinking of Yuri.

Victor relaxed as he watched his performance, and could see the confidence and freedom in his program, emotions that had only been possible because of the trust Yuri had displayed in him.

Only a couple minutes later the familiar sense of awe swept through the boy. Victor was almost overwhelmed by the strength of it, but clung to it at the same time. It was more powerful than the most thunderous applause.

“That was perfect!” Yuko squealed.

“Amazing…” Yuri breathed.

A bark came from Yuri’s left, and the boy looked toward the sound. Victor saw a small brown poodle, almost like a miniature version of Makkachin. The boy bundled the dog into his lap.

“What did you think Vicchan?”

Yuri’s inquiry was met with an excited bark.

“I know, I thought so too.”

“Ok kids,” came a motherly voice from behind them. “It’s time to do your homework.”

Yuri turned around to look up at a smiling woman. “Can we watch to the end? Please? There are only a few skaters left.”

The woman sighed, but smiled. She looked over to where another woman was sitting at a nearby table.

“It’s ok with me if they watch to the end, but if Yuko’s grades drop because she slacks on her homework then she might not get to watch the rest of the series,” the woman warned.

“I’ll study extra hard Mom!” Yuko exclaimed as Yuri felt her move beside him. “I promise.”

The woman nodded and the children turned their attention back to the television as the scores were announced and the next skater prepared to take the ice.

“Look at those scores!” Yuko jumped when she read them. “He might stay at number one after the short program!”

Victor knew the truth of course, that the last skater of the night would edge him out, and that he would be in second going into the free skate, but the confidence of the duo felt good.

The evening ended with disappointed groans from the youngsters, both adamant that Victor’s program had been better. Yuri and his mother escorted Yuko and her mother to the door of what appeared to be a restaurant or inn, and waved goodbye in the chilled air. Victor wondered why they were staying, but quickly understood when the woman put her hand on Yuri’s shoulder.

“Up to your room now to finish your homework.”
Victor considered staying with the boy for a while longer, but decided that he should get proper rest himself before the free skate the next day.

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The journalists and fans all seemed to agree, Victor Nikiforov had made a stunning senior division debut at his first Grand Prix series event. He had performed a flawless free skate program to claim gold at Skate America.

They attributed it to almost everything: talent, Yakov’s training, tireless dedication to his craft… But Victor knew that it was more than any of those. He had all of that in those weeks that he consistently missed jumps.

No, his biggest factor in winning had been Yuri. They boy had believed in him when he didn’t believe in himself, and that meant more than anything else.

Victor found a new sense of freedom in his skating after the competition. He still drilled the technical elements, but he allowed himself to skate for the joy of it as well.

It wasn’t until he received a call from his parents a week after his return to Russia that he felt the edge of doubt start to creep back in. The conversation had been brief and cold, exactly what he expected every time he spoke to them. They reminded him that they would stop paying for his training when he turned eighteen, and that he had better keep winning if he wanted to keep skating after that. He asked politely what country they were in for their season, and the classical musicians informed him that they were touring with an orchestra in France. The call concluded with his father pointedly mentioning that several European conservatories were already vying for his younger brother’s attendance.

It was a poignant reminder that he didn’t meet his parent’s expectations. Both of them were classical musicians, his father a violinist and his mother a harpist, and among the top in the world on their respective instruments. His brother was already an accomplished cellist at fourteen. Victor was considered the black sheep in a family of musicians that stretched back several generations. He had chosen a path of athletics, even if it was performance based.

It was also a reminder that he would be completely on his own in just over a year. His parents hadn’t disowned him, per se, but hadn’t been more than politely supportive of his chosen profession. They paid for training and for tutors so that he could maintain his education around the schedule of a professional athlete.

Victor sighed as he set the phone down. It wasn’t that he disliked music, rather the opposite. He loved it, he just preferred to move to it rather than make it. In fact his parents’ music was what had introduced him to skating. A Russian ice dance pair had commissioned a piece featuring his father, and the family had gathered around the television to watch the performance.

Victor had always loved dancing to his parents’ music, but seeing the steps as the pair moved across the ice was magical. He’d begged for weeks after to take beginner lessons at a local rink, and when the teachers managed to convince his parents of his dedication and talent he was finally allowed to get a coach and train in earnest. He’d worked under Yakov ever since, beginning just after his eighth birthday.

At first it had been difficult to be apart from his family, and the music that always filled whichever apartment they lived in for the season. But he found the support he needed in his coach, and his passion for the sport blossomed. Now he was closer to Yakov than his own parents, and slightly preferred it that way.
Unfortunately, their infrequent calls had a tendency to put him on edge, and that one couldn’t have come at a worse time. Though he managed to keep himself composed and on-task during practice, he couldn’t feel the same joy that he had before Skate America.

In addition his dreamwalking had not returned him to Yuri’s mind since the day of the short program.

He arrived in France for his second competition with a heavy heart. He felt the difference in his performances, and was grateful to stand on the podium with silver draped over his neck, and a guaranteed spot in the Grand Prix Final.

Though he was spared another phone call after his performance in France, Victor felt more pressure to win. His seventeenth birthday was only weeks away, and then he would have only a year guaranteed to him before he would have to make his own way as an athlete.

He’d saved his winnings and anything else he’d earned for years in anticipation of that day, but that cushion did little to ease his mind. Between Yakov’s coaching fees, college level tutors, and housing he only had the funds for a couple years if he somehow hit a slump in his career.

By the time he took the ice for his short program at the Grand Prix Final he was solely focused on what it would take to win, and despite landing all of his jumps his performance scores suffered. He found himself in fifth place going into the free skate.

He felt like his world was slipping out from under him.

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“Victor didn’t skate like his usual self today,” said a familiar voice, which Victor quickly realized was Yuko. The girl didn’t sound angry though, she sounded worried.

“I hope he’s ok,” Yuri replied, and Victor saw his score on the television, Yakov lecturing him as the announcers discussed the number.

Victor felt ashamed. He knew he was better than that.

I’m letting my biggest fan down.

If he hadn’t been inside Yuri’s mind he would have started crying.

“He can still win though… right?” Yuri demanded.

Yuko was silent for a moment and held her chin in her fingers, slowly she began to shake her head. “He might be able to get bronze, possibly silver, but I don’t think he’ll be able to win gold. The points gap is one thing, but he’s also performing with a lower base technical score. I don’t think he can make it up.”

“What if the other skaters fall?” Yuri asked hopefully.

Yuko narrowed her eyes, and Victor felt a similar irritation before the girl started scolding him. “Do you think Victor would be happy winning like that? Think about it. Does it feel better to win on your own, or because the people ahead of you messed up?”

Yuri cast his eyes downward, and Victor saw the boy’s hands fidgeting before he looked up again. “I… I think Victor would want to win because of how he skates, not because others fall.”

Yuko nodded, and Victor wished that he were in the room to toss his arms around the girl and thank
“Then I just hope he skates his best tomorrow!” Yuri exclaimed. “I know if he skates his best it’ll be beautiful, even if he doesn’t win!”

Yuko smiled softly.

A wall that he wasn’t even aware of broke inside of Victor.

_He’s not a fan of my accomplishments… He’s a fan of me!_

A spark of an idea crossed through the boy’s mind, and the world went dark as he squeezed his eyes shut.

“What are you doing?” Yuko asked.

Yuri squeezed his eyes harder. “I’m wishing that Victor skates a program that he’s happy with tomorrow.”

“Why what makes him happy and not his best?”

Yuri opened his eyes and beamed at the girl. “Cause as long as he’s happy with his program I’m sure I will be too, no matter what place he finishes in!”

Yuko laughed, and for the second time in only the span of a few minutes Victor felt moved to tears, but for a completely different reason.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!

You're welcome to geek out with me about Yuri on Ice or other anime over on my tumblr at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Victor is bolstered by Yuri’s confidence in his performances, and delivers a beautiful free skate at his first Grand Prix Final as a senior division skater. With a newfound purpose he focuses his attention on an ambitious new goal, making the Russian team for the 2006 Olympics.

However, things don’t go exactly as planned.

Chapter Notes

So I touched on it in chapter 2, but for those who don’t know the figure skating scoring system used to be vastly different than what we see in the show. That change happened right around the time Victor would have made his senior debut. I even wrote a sorta-meta post on it here.

The reason I mention it is because we know, as an adult, Victor produces his own programs. But the piece from his junior worlds was identified as a Tchaikovsky, so it makes sense he would continue to use classical pieces by well known composers for a while. Coupled with the family history I gave him it makes sense.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The opening notes of Mozart’s The Magic Flute poured from the sound system. Brass and strings contrasted with beats of silence and Victor allowed himself the joy of just skating to the music.

The overture was considered a safe choice by most skaters, powerful but sure to not clash with the sensibilities of the judges. It held a different meaning for Victor. It was music that he’d heard at a young age; a lullaby as his parents practiced long into the night. It was the piece he’d learned to move to as dancers led him through the choreography during rehearsals. It was the first opera he’d ever attended. He loved it, and long ago decided that he would skate to it his first season in the senior division.

The gentle swell of sound carried him to his first, then second jumps, followed by a spin. He knew this music, this routine. His feet danced to the staccato of strings, and his arms accentuated the melodies of flute and oboe.

All he had to do was skate in a way that made him happy. If he did that he knew Yuri would be happy too.

Victor tuned out the applause of the audience, forced himself to forget about his fellow skaters and focused on his love for the music and for his profession. He’d done most of the choreography himself, with only minor input from Yakov. He’d matched his feelings about the piece to elements of his program, now his body just had to carry him through to the end.
Layers of sound built, one upon another, rising to a crescendo. Victor absorbed each note and reflected it on the ice. The music was inside him, he merely needed to play his part.

All too soon he was in his final pose, breathing heavily in the brief silence before the audience roared to life. Victor’s eyes welled up as he bowed before the crowd. He didn’t care about the score, he was happy with his performance. Even Yakov’s lecture about which elements needed work couldn’t bring him down from the euphoria of skating just the way he wanted to.

He allowed himself to enjoy the routines of his fellow skaters, and by the time there was one skater remaining he was in second place. His senior debut would have him standing on the podium at the Grand Prix Final with a bronze medal, and he couldn’t stop grinning.

He didn’t need to connect to Yuri’s mind to know how the boy felt about the performance. He was free on the ice, and he knew he’d conveyed it. The weight of the medal hanging around his neck was secondary to that knowledge.

However, Victor didn’t have time to celebrate his success. The following day he attended a press conference for the medalists, then hopped a plane back to St. Petersburg. He had only about a week to prepare for the Russian Figure Skating Championships.

He found it a little serendipitous that he would be skating the short program on his seventeenth birthday, and on the heels of his bronze he had an ambitious new goal in mind. What more could he ask for as a birthday present than to make the Russian team for the Olympics?

Yakov, of course, was thrilled as the week progressed. As soon as Victor had made it clear he intended to make the Olympic team he focused on helping the boy clean up his programs. By the middle of the week the coach had given days off to anybody who wasn’t competing and drilled his top skaters, some of whom it would be their last chance to win one of the coveted spots.

Victor almost felt guilty at times, aiming so high during his first year as a senior. Some of his rinkmates were within a year or two of retirement. If he made the team they wouldn’t, and they never would. But he also couldn’t help himself, he wanted to give Yuri that rush of excitement.

How will he react when he hears I’m going? I have to find out, and the only way to know is to actually make the team.

Victor woke early to practice and arrived home late and exhausted almost every day during that week, but each time he thought he needed to slow down he would remind himself that the opportunity came along only once every four years.

I don’t know what the future holds. I can’t wait, I can’t step aside. Everybody wants this, so I have to fight even harder.

The flight from St. Petersburg to Kazan was the most rest during the day that Victor had allowed himself since his return from the Grand Prix Final. He felt the familiar ache of pushing himself too hard as he shifted in his seat during the short flight, but he didn’t care. No matter what happened when he took to the ice he knew that he would fight to the last note to give a performance that he could be proud of.

***

Watch me Yuri! Don’t look away.

Victor was jubilant as he took his place on the ice for the short program. He was ready as Yuri’s thoughts rang through his head. All he had to do was keep skating in a way that made him happy.
He knew he could do it.

Victor let confidence and enthusiasm carry him through the following three minutes, and when he joined Yakov in the kiss and cry the normally stern coach had nothing but praise for his performance. Victor beamed as his scores were displayed. The numbers were high, and he was confident that, even with half a dozen skaters remaining, he would be in striking distance of the podium.

By the end of the night he was right where he wanted to be. He was in third going into the free skate, and he needed to take either gold or silver in order to make the team.

*I want to feel your smile, to know your excitement. I want you to keep reaching for me Yuri.*

Victor was too excited to dreamwalk that night, and he was quietly grateful for it. He didn’t want to find himself in the mind of another until after he stood on the podium.

***

Victor stared at the silver medal in his hand, and was both astonished and dismayed that he had it.

He’d underestimated his competition’s hunger for a position on the team, and had made it on only the thinnest of margins and the backs of others. What should have felt good was bitter instead.

*I shouldn’t be holding this.*

He’d skated a flawless program. Every element was perfect, but his competition was fierce, and the night had been filled with personal bests. After his free skate he was in second place with two skaters left to take the ice. Both were known powerhouses determined to end their careers with a flourish.

For several long minutes it appeared that Victor would come in fourth, not even eligible as an alternate. He retreated to the restricted area of the venue, and had slumped against a wall when he heard the faint voice of an announcer from a nearby monitor. The skater after Victor had first fallen, then popped a jump.

After the scores were announced it was clear that Victor was guaranteed bronze at least.

*An alternate to the Olympic team my first year at the senior level really isn’t so bad.* Victor tried to tell himself, but inside he was angry.

*What could I have done differently? Should I have moved more jumps to the second half? Do my step sequences need additional work?*

Victor was headed to the locker room to fix his hair for the medal ceremony when he heard an astonished gasp from the audience, then the music cut mid piece. He stopped and slowly made his way to a bank of monitors where he could see that the final skater of the night was sitting on the ice in obvious pain. Blood flowed from a wound on his head, but the way his leg shook was even more concerning.

“… suffered an injury after last season, and had pushed a tight recovery schedule in order to compete tonight. It appears that last jump may have caused a recurrence,” the voice of an announcer drifted from tiny speakers.

Victor felt his stomach drop.

*Not like this. I don’t want to win like this. A missed jump, a fall… I can handle those. But an injury?*
Victor watched in horror as a medical crew skated over. He knew even before they moved the injured man to the backboard that it wasn’t good.

“Vitya…” came Yakov’s voice from behind him.

Victor turned and nodded. No words were needed. Yakov knew Victor hated the circumstances, and Victor knew the reverse was true.

Nobody wants to win like this.

Victor’s shoulders sagged as he resumed his walk to the locker room. Inside he saw the man who was now guaranteed a gold medal, his eyes wide and glued to a small monitor as he watched the medical team carry the injured man from the ice.

They shared a glance that conveyed more than words ever could. Neither was happy, and in a few minutes they’d both have to wear fake smiles and accept their medals. It was part of the performance, whether they liked it or not.

Victor grimaced. I’ll work harder, I’ll make it right as best I can by showing the world the power of Russian figure skating.

Victor combed the inevitable tangles from his hair as the other man smoothed his costume and made sure that it looked just as he wanted. They left together toward the rink, neither saying a word. Both Yakov and the other man’s coach waited just inside the wings with similar sour expressions.

“Ready Vitya?” Yakov asked quietly a few minutes later as one of the event staff informed them that the medal ceremony would begin in a shortly.

“No,” Victor replied truthfully. “But I don’t think anybody is ever ready for this.”

Yakov nodded solemnly. “No, but you know what you have to do.”

Victor nodded. “Do they know what happened yet?”

Yakov sighed. “He suffered a stress fracture late in the summer, and the doctors told him twelve weeks of recovery. Apparently he started training again early. The medical crews have taken him to the hospital but the guess is that the fracture opened up again and he may have a broken leg.”

Victor grit his teeth. “It wasn’t supposed to be like this.”

“No, but now isn’t the time to dwell. The Olympics are a month away, and you’re going to be competing in them. How you got there has to be put aside or it’ll affect your performance.”

Victor nodded, and forced a smile as he was ushered once more in front of the public. However, he noted a dramatically muted atmosphere had diffused through the arena.

He couldn’t blame the crowd one bit.

***

Victor felt that his heart was about to break when he found himself in Yuri’s mind. A part of him wanted the boy not to watch, not to realize how the night unfolded. But he also knew that it was necessary for Yuri to see the truth.

If he’s going to be a competitor he needs to know the stakes; that there are circumstances that we cannot control. He needs to know there are situations that leave this bitter feel to a win.
“Mom said Victor made it to the Olympic team with a silver medal!” Yuko squealed, kneeling on the bench. He recognized the surroundings as the lobby of the ice rink.

*That’s right, the rebroadcast probably isn’t at night since it’s not an international competition. So they would have no reason to be home to watch.*

“Really?” Yuri begged, and Victor felt the surge of energetic hope through the boy.

Yuko leaned forward and nodded.

“I bet his program was flawless, just like at the Grand Prix Final!” Yuri exclaimed. “I can’t wait to see it!”

The conversation continued and Victor heard the music of his competitors. The kids were waiting for the scores of the skater right before him when Yuko’s mother walked out from behind the counter of the rink.

“Time for practice after Victor skates,” the woman ordered. Victor immediately saw through her fake smile.

*She knows, and she’s trying to protect them.*

Victor felt Yuri’s confusion, but for the time being he nodded to the woman’s demands.

The woman walked away and Yuko leaned in and whispered to Yuri. “His scores must be incredible if it’s so good that it’s not worth it to watch the last two skaters.”

Victor saw himself standing in the middle of the rink and the music started. He saw the calm and confidence that he felt throughout his program. He wished it had been enough, that he’d have stood on that podium because of the strength of his skating. Despite that, he had to admit that the program was clean. Every element was well executed, and he knew his love of the music was evident.

By the end he was even more conflicted. He had turned in a performance to be proud of, and he knew it. But the bittersweet taste of it hadn’t lessened.

“Ok kids,” Yuko’s mom called as the applause was still sounding. “Skates on. Get in there and start warming up.”

“We wanna see the scores!” Yuko protested.

“Now, Yuko,” her mother declared, an unrelenting tone in her voice.

Yuko huffed, but laced up her skates. Yuri had turned his attention to his own laces, but decided that he wasn’t happy with the tightness and loosened the boot on his right foot so that he could fix it.

“See you in there Yuri,” Yuko said as she stood and walked toward the ice.

“Right behind you,” Yuri replied.

Yuri stood a few seconds later and was just two steps toward the rink when the scores were announced. He seemed to not consider the numbers, and for that Victor was glad, until the announcer cut in with:

“… putting the young skater in second place, with two left to take the ice.”

Yuri stopped and turned to look at the television. “Second?”
“On the ice Yuri!” Yuko’s mother scolded.

“Yuuki-san?” Yuri asked cautiously. “How did Victor make the Olympic team if he’s only in second now?”

The woman’s lips faded into a thin line as she pursed them. “Don’t worry about that Yuri,” she finally said softly.

“But the final two are amazing! They’ve been the top Russian skaters for years. What happened?”

Even as young as he is, he’s perceptive.

The crowd roared to life, the next program was about to start.

“Go warm up Yuri,” Yuuki said softly, not even trying to hide behind the mask of a stern teacher. She was now a mother who was worried about a child she considered one of her own.

Listen to her Yuri, you don’t want to see it.

“Yuuki-san, I want to know what happened!” Yuri demanded, realizing that he was being sheltered.

The woman sighed, walked over to the glass doors and called Yuko back in from the ice.

Yuri sat back down, and watched as the next routine started. He wasn’t surprised to see the fall, and Victor felt the boy’s dawning realization that something worse had happened.

“Mom?” Yuko asked as she came into the lobby just as the music ended.

“Have a seat, Yuko,” her mother said as she knelt before the kids. They were waiting for the scores, and all three knew that a decision had to be made quickly.

“I didn’t want you two to watch the final skate from last night,” she explained carefully. “It doesn’t end well, and I don’t want to discourage you from skating.”

Yuri swallowed. “He gets hurt, doesn’t he?”

Yuuki nodded. “Yes, he was injured.”

Yuri looked to his right and saw that Yuko had gone pale. He turned back to Yuuki.

“I want to watch,” he said softly.

“You really shouldn’t Yuri,” Yuuki replied.

“Is it bad?”

Yuuki shook her head. “A little blood, and a broken bone. But with his age it means the end of his career. I don’t think you want to see that, especially when you want to be a figure skater too.”

Yuri looked at his feet, his toes turning inward nervously. “That’s why I need to watch.”

Yuri...

The boy looked up again. “If I want to skate I will see injuries, I might even get hurt myself. I… I need to be able to face it.”

Yuuki sighed, knowing there were only seconds before the scores for the previous skater were
announced. She turned to her daughter.

“Yuko. I’d prefer you not watch, but it’s your choice.” She then stood and returned to her position behind the counter.

Yuri was shaking slightly as the scores were displayed, putting the second-to-last skater in fourth. But the nerves settled when Yuko took his hand in her own.

“I need to see it too,” she said softly, squeezing his fingers with her own. “I might not want to go pro like you, but one day I’ll manage this rink. I need to learn to see it as much as you do.”

Victor considered leaving. He hadn’t watched the replay. He’d avoided it out of a sense of guilt, and because he didn’t want to see one of his idols fall like that. But he realized that he had to display as much strength as his juniors.

Victor set his nerves as the opening notes sounded from the speakers. The intro was flawless, the first two jumps clean. But he saw a strained expression coming out of the flying sit spin.

*He knew… he knew right then, and decided to push through the pain in the hope of giving one last, great, performance.*

The next jump, a triple, turned into a double and Victor saw that the man was fighting to keep going.

*Just stop…*

“He doesn’t look comfortable,” Yuko said, a worried tone to her voice.

“I think he’s already hurt,” Yuri replied.

Victor knew it was coming up, and when the man turned to face into the axel he saw the leg tremble as he flexed for the jump.

Two and a half perfect rotations. Victor knew that the man on the screen had downgraded his program to push through. The blade came down on the ice, steady and sure, and the man collapsed around the leg that failed under him. He was able to mostly brace his fall, but was close to the barrier and slid into it, the impact jolting him again and making the side of his head slam into the ice.

Shocked gasps and groans filtered down through the audience as crews scrambled to cut the music. Victor was grateful that the rebroadcast cut not long after the medical team skated over. Rather than dwell on the accident they focused on highlights from the evening. They also skipped the terrible minutes between the accident and the medal ceremony and after a few commercials he saw the podium, and his own fake smile as he accepted silver.

“Poor Victor,” Yuko said softly. Victor could hear the dismay in her voice. “He must have hated that. Look at that smile, it doesn’t reach his eyes at all.”

“He looks so sad,” Yuri agreed.

“He’ll be ok,” Yuuki said from behind them, and Victor realized that nobody had noticed her make her way back over. “Yakov Feltsman is one of the top coaches in the world. He’s seen injuries before, and even if Victor is having a hard time right now his coach will help him through it.

“Besides, even if it’s fake, he’s smiling. He’s strong enough on his own to put on that performance for the public. That’s important. A weak person can’t do that”
There was a pat on Yuri’s back as the woman made her way toward the rink. “Take a minute, then it’s really time for practice, ok kids?”

“I wish I could give him a hug…” Yuri said, dismayed. “He looks like he needs one.”

Victor felt a moment of surprise when he realized Yuri was right. He’d pushed people away in order to focus on his sport, and in that moment something as simple as a hug seemed an absolute necessity.

“Maybe Coach Yakov will give him one,” Yuko suggested. “Mom said he’ll know what to do to help Victor.”

**Yakov? Hug?** Victor thought about it for a minute.

“Do you think he wants a hug though? He just turned seventeen, right?”

Yuko turned from where she was walking ahead of Yuri and looked at him. “Wouldn’t you want one? Seventeen isn’t that old, he’s only four years older than you are.”

Yuri stopped and thought about it. “He might… I can’t imagine ever not wanting hugs.”

Yuko grinned. “I bet if he needs a hug he’ll know where to go for one.”

Victor felt strangely calmer after the exchange. A part of him wanted to stay through their lesson, but he already knew that the media would be ruthless the next day.

***

Victor was ready before Yakov had to come fetch him for once. He’d pulled his hair into a low ponytail, rather than let it drape freely over his shoulders as was his normal style.

He needed to project the confidence that he would be able to deliver a good performance in Turin. Every aspect of his wardrobe reflected that. He was in his best suit, and looked a bit older with his hair pulled back.

Now he needed to stop faking it and feel the emotion.

*I took third at the Grand Prix Final. I can skate at the highest levels, and I’ve already proven that. Yes, fierce competitors withdrew to focus on the Olympics, but their absence does not take away from my achievements.*

He stared at himself in the mirror until he thought that he could convey a confidence he didn’t feel. Before his insecurities about the circumstances could overwhelm him he stepped into the hallway and walked down a couple doors to Yakov’s room.

Yakov was visibly surprised to see Victor standing there. “Ready Vitya?” he asked, masking concern at the unusual punctuality from his student.

“Almost.”

“Go back to your room then and do whatever you need. We should head down in a few minutes.”

Victor shook his head. “What I need isn’t in my room.”

“Vitya?”

Victor looked at Yakov, and though he tried to smile he could feel how strained it was, how much
inner turmoil he was still facing.

“Yakov… can I have a hug?”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!

You're welcome to geek out with me about Yuri on Ice or other anime over on my tumblr at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Victor is under increased pressure after making the Olympic team. He is caught in a careful balancing act between training, adjusting his programs and adapting to the changes that come with his newfound status as an Olympian.

To make matters worse, the European Figure Skating Championships are in the middle of January, adding a competition and a trip to France to his already full roster.

Chapter Notes

So I had a total research fail, and almost missed it. In my head I had switched the dates of the 2006 Olympics and the 2006 European Championships. I had a completely different chapter all but ready to go when I realized my mistake.

However, the sudden calendar shift presented me with an opportunity. It set the stage to explore a dynamic of young Victor's life that I hadn't planned on delving into for several more chapters. So in the end it worked out. At least I think so. ;-)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As much as he wanted to, Victor didn’t have the time to mourn his win. The Olympics were just over a month away, with the European Championships right in the middle. The tight competition schedule was one thing, but he also had an entirely different problem on his hands.

During his years in the junior division he had never really sought out the assistance of sponsors. Some came to him as he collected medals, but it was a minor part of his career. He was happier focusing on the sport, and with his parents covering his expenses he’d decided to devote his time and energy where it mattered.

However, his bronze at the Grand Prix Final and his participation in the upcoming Olympics had garnered attention. Almost as soon as he returned to St. Petersburg for training he noticed an increase in the number of calls from both the public relations firm and the sports management agency that Yakov worked with. The media wanted to talk to him, and companies wanted to associate the young skater with their brands.

At a time when he knew he should be focusing on training, he found himself losing what felt like days at a time to interviews, photographers and commercials.

Victor compensated by throwing himself into his work as much as he could. He obsessed over the routines of his competitors every night, memorizing their strengths and trying to guess what they would change to garner additional points. He ordered foreign sports magazines in both English and French in an attempt to learn even more from any interviews that his competition had given.

His biggest concern was the top Swiss skater, Stéphane Lambiel. The older man had taken gold at
the Grand Prix Final and the rumors were flying that he would attempt a quad-jump combo at the Olympics. Victor hoped that the theories were just the trappings of an overeager press, but Lambiel done nothing to deny them either.

Victor knew that if he wanted to win he had to squeeze every possible point from his program. He was still unable to land a quad cleanly. He couldn’t seem to get the height required, and he refused to put one in at the last minute without it being flawless. No, he had to find other ways to make up the difference.

Victor took to carrying a notebook with him every time he left the rink. He considered the probable alterations to other skaters’ programs, and played with them until he was confident that he had an idea of their highest technical bases. Then he tore apart his own programs with only days to master the changes before he left for France.

He switched more difficult jumps from the first half of the program to the second for the points bonus, and added one to bring his program up to the allowed maximum. He took a solo jump that was repeated and turned it into a combination so as not to suffer the penalty imposed on a second triple of a particular type. He even found that on two types of jumps he could comfortably raise an arm for a higher grade of execution.

He also made subtle changes to his step and choreographic sequences, adding little bits of flair that would likely garner the slightest bump in performance scores. He adjusted his entry into as many elements as he could to increase the difficulty, and then drilled the new programs until he ached.

By the time he and Yakov boarded the plane to France for the European Championships Victor was both mentally and physically exhausted. For the first time he was glad that there were only scheduled practice sessions for competitors, it would force him to take a much-needed break.

***

“Are you sure you want to do this now Vitya?” Yakov asked, unable to hide the note of concern in his voice.

Victor nodded. “I want to return to St. Petersburg as soon as the competition is over.”

Yakov sighed. “Normally I’d tell you ‘no;’ that you need to rest before the short program tomorrow. But that’s not going to happen, is it?”

Victor shook his head.

“You just don’t let it get under your skin, not this time.”

Victor nodded. “I’ll do my best.”

Yakov wandered off in the direction of the hotel bar. Victor could hardly blame him.

Victor headed to his room to change into casual but nice clothes. An uncomfortable knot had started to form in the pit of his stomach. Both he and Yakov knew that this was actually the last thing he wanted to do while in France, but proper etiquette demanded at least this much.

As he was preparing to leave he eyed his Olympic team jacket, but decided on a wool duster instead.

*No point in pouring fuel on the fire.*

Victor set out, address in hand, and was glad that his parents had demanded he be at least tri-lingual.
It meant he could navigate the unfamiliar city more easily. He asked for directions at the concierge desk, then boarded a bus that would take him where he needed to go.

He wanted to go back to the hotel, or maybe to the arena to watch the ladies short programs. Anywhere else but his destination.

*Maybe I should listen to Yakov; head back to my room and sleep. Maybe luck will be on my side and I’ll connect with Yuri.*

Victor shook his head to rid himself of the thought. It was too tempting, and he knew if he dwelled on it he would give in to the desire to try and see through the eyes of the Japanese skater.

Less than 20 minutes later he was walking along a row of old but well-maintained terrace houses. He stopped and looked up when he reached the one with the number that matched the address.

_The lights are on. No excuse now._

Victor took a deep breath and climbed the four steps to the front door. He couldn’t ignore the shake in his hand as he formed it into a fist and knocked.

He stood there in the January chill for a moment, silently hoping that nobody was home after all. Then the door opened and Victor saw the hazel eyes and long chestnut hair of Dmitry Nikiforov.

“Victor?”

“Good evening father,” Victor replied politely.

Dmitry moved aside and gestured for his son to come indoors. Victor nodded in reply and stepped into the foyer.

“How is it?” Natalya Nikiforova called from another room.

Victor’s father ignored the question and instead yelled up a narrow staircase. “Alexei! Come down and see your brother.”

“Victor?” Natalya asked, drying her hands on an apron as she walked out of what Victor assumed to be the kitchen. Her ocean-blue eyes displayed shock and a few strands of platinum blond hair had fallen from where she had tied it back. She strode over and pulled her son into her arms.

“Hi mom.”

“How are you? What are you doing here? Is everything ok?” she asked, holding his face between her hands, searching for anything off.

Victor smiled. “I’m fine. I’m in town for a competition and thought it impolite to not visit.”

Footsteps thundered down the stairs. Victor turned from his mother and barely caught his flying brother.

“Victor!” Alexei cried.

Victor couldn’t help but laugh at his brother’s exuberance, running his hands through a head of dark blond hair. “Hello Alyosha.”

The fifteen year old squeezed Victor tight.
“Careful there kid,” Victor chuckled. “I’ve got to skate tomorrow. No breaking me.”

“Come in, come in,” Natalya insisted, pulling her son toward the family room.

Victor followed and allowed his eyes to roam the rented home. So many details were as they were wherever they lived when he was young: music stands and harp in the corner for practicing, collections of sheet music spilling from bookcases. But he noticed the subtle differences that had crept in over the years. There were now three stands instead of two, and one section of a shelf appeared to be devoted solely to solo cello works. There were more photos as well, the ones from when he still lived with his parents mingled with newer ones featuring jubilant faces and Alexei holding up awards from numerous music competitions.

A part of him ached that his parents weren’t as proud of his own achievements.

The family sat and stared at each other for a moment before Dmitry broke the awkward silence. “So you said you’re in town for a competition?”

Victor nodded. “Yes. It started tonight. I’ll be here for a few days then will return to St. Petersburg.”

“Which competition?”

_I shouldn’t be surprised_, Victor thought. “The European Figure Skating Championships.”

“That’s a big one, yes?”

Victor nodded, swallowing his hurt. “Yes father.”

Natalya reached over and patted her son’s knee. “We’re proud of you Victor. You’re doing so well.”

Victor forced a smile, the one that always seemed to fool the cameras. “Thanks mom.”

“Congratulations on making the Olympics!” Alexei cut in, unable to reign in his excitement for another minute.

That time Victor’s smile was genuine.

Aided by Alexei’s enthusiasm at seeing Victor the family started opening up and they talked for several hours. It was still cold, Victor knew he didn’t fit in, but it was the most time he had spent with them in years.

As he was preparing to leave Victor took a deep breath and reached into the pocket of his coat. He pulled a couple of slender envelopes from it.

“One of my new sponsors gave me these, and I thought it only proper to offer them to you first…”

One of Natalya’s eyebrows rose, and Dmitry had a questioning look.

Victor held out the smaller envelope. “These are tickets to this week’s competition... if you want to come see me skate.”

“What days?” Victor’s father asked.

“Tomorrow, and Saturday. If I medal I’ll be an exhibition on Sunday.”

“Tomorrow’s Wednesday. We have rehearsal.” The words were devoid of any emotion. “We have another Saturday, but it’s in the afternoon so we might be able to make it if we end early enough.”
A better commitment than I expected. At least it wasn’t an outright no.

“Can I go?” Alexei begged.

Dmitry looked at his younger son. “There are still a couple months until your next competition, right? Have you started practicing your piece?”

Alexei nodded.

Natalya placed her hand on her husband’s shoulder and the man sighed. “You may go.”

The teen jumped and let out a noise of elation.

Victor smiled. It wasn’t much, but knowing that at least his brother was excited for him made him feel better. He clutched the second envelope tight before holding it out.

“What’s this one then?” Dmitry asked.

“I know it might be tight, but… please come watch me at the Olympics.” Victor squeezed his eyes shut, not wanting to see his parents’ reactions.

“That’s in February right?”

Victor nodded. He felt the envelope pulled from his fingers. He looked up to see his father eyeing the dates on the tickets. The elder Nikiforov sighed.

“It’s so close…” his mother lamented as she glanced over at the details.

Victor looked to the floor. He already knew the answer.

“We’ll try Victor,” his father said softly, a tinge of regret around the edges.

Victor looked up, shocked.

“Your father’s the featured soloist in a concert series that begins less than a week later,” his mother clarified gently. “We will do our best to be there though. The rehearsal schedule isn’t set in stone yet. We may not always understand, but even we know how important the Olympics are.”

“I’ll talk to both the conductor and the director,” Dmitry said without the normal edge to his voice. “We can’t make any promises, you know that Victor. Not that close to an opening. But we’ll do everything in our power to make at least one of your performances.”

It was more than Victor expected, more than he’d even thought to hope for.

Alexei looked between Victor and his parents nervously, an unspoken question threatening to tumble from his lips.

Natalya nodded. “Yes Lyosha. You may go to Turin to watch Victor, even if your father and I can’t.”

Alexei grabbed his brother around the middle again. “I get to see you skate in the Olympics Victor!”

Victor smiled. As much as he felt out of place with his family, there were times he wished he was closer to them. That they would even make an effort meant a lot.

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“Victor! Congrats!”

Victor followed the sound of the voice up to see a blond teen shouting from the stands. At first glance he appeared to be a fan around Alexei’s age, but then Victor recalled seeing him skate earlier that evening.

“What’s your name?” Victor asked.

“Christophe Giacometti.”

Victor smiled and pulled one of the roses from the multitude he held in his arms. “Okay,” he tossed the rose at the boy. “Chris, see you at Worlds.”

Victor stepped off ice and out of the way of Stéphane Lambiel, whom he had just edged out on his way to gold. There had been only a handful of points between them, and the Swiss skater had not attempted the rumored quad combo.

Victor looked to the stands once more. He smiled when he saw Alexei and his parents sitting in the block of seats that his sponsor had purchased. He walked over and informed them that once he changed he would meet them in the lobby.

“I can’t believe they came,” Yakov said as they walked through the passageway to the locker room. “They’ve never seemed interested before.”

Victor sighed, as good as it felt to have his family there his coach was right. “I think it’s because Alexei was so excited. I wasn’t expecting them to actually make it myself.”

“And the Olympics?”

Victor shrugged and hung his head. “They don’t know. They have an important concert series opening the next week. Alexei will be there though.”

Yakov nodded. “Better than I expected.”

Victor chuckled, a painful sound that escaped from his throat. “Same. But it’s the most interest they’ve ever shown in my skating, and they’re my family. A part of me still wants them there.”

“Just remember, they’ve let you down in the past. Don’t get your hopes up.”

Victor laughed, and it sounded even more bitter than the previous noise. “I know. I honestly expected them to refuse outright.”

“I’m sorry Vitya,” Yakov said softly.

Victor shook his head. “No need to be. We both know how they make me feel, and the stakes are too great for me to get distracted by emotion right now.”

Yakov’s reply was a firm pat on the back.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading.
I sometimes post between-chapter writing updates, random thoughts and more on my Tumblr at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com. Feel free to pop over and geek out about Yuri on Ice or other anime.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

The pressures of expectation continue to weigh on young Victor as he returns to St. Petersburg to train in the final days before the Torino Olympics. He finds himself pulled in multiple directions as everybody seems to want to talk to the young celebrity.

All Victor wants is to train for the upcoming games, and peek into Yuri's mind again. But will a couple chance encounters prove enough to help him control his dreamwalking abilities?

Chapter Notes

There were several little things I needed to get the ball rolling on in order to advance the plot over the next couple chapters, so I think it got more introspective on the dreamwalker abilities. But on the plus side this chapter is a lot less angsty for Victor. It's still got some, but it really takes a back seat to other stuff going on.

Victor’s win at the European Championships only fueled the enthusiasm of Russian media. He’d taken gold from the skater who had defeated him at the Grand Prix Final, and one whom international press and critics all agreed was a strong contender for an Olympic medal. He hoped that with the win he would be able to spend most of his time on the ice in the final run up until the games, but instead he found himself the center of even greater attention.

The pressure to bring home Olympic gold was mounting. With every call and interview request it became clearer that he was the new hope of Russia in the upcoming games. The eyes of the country, and possibly the world, were upon him.

On top of that, spending time with his family had left him unsettled. It was good in a way, but served as a reminder of the connection he lacked. The photos in the rented house emphasized how they doted on his cellist brother, and the fact that only Alexei had known about Victor making the Olympic team just further cemented the fact that his parents were solely focused on the affairs of the music world.

In the end he’d gone to dinner with them after leaving the podium in Lyon, but only his brother had bothered to come for the exhibition skate. He was disappointed, but not surprised.

Victor sighed and shook his head to rid himself of the memories. He didn’t have the luxury of dwelling on unpleasant thoughts. He’d only been back in Russia for two full days and was already in a car with staff from the public relations firm, on the way to another interview.

He was watching the snowy scenery slip by outside the window when he sensed a presence inside his head.
That’s odd, so this is what it feels like to be host to a dreamwalker.

He felt a sense of shock that was not his own, then laughter. It was the first thing that had made him truly smile all morning.

First time? the person inside his head asked.

Yes, he replied. At least that I know of. I’ve visited others of course, but none have come to me.

Well, we are only about one percent of the population. So it is rare. I can think of only a handful of times I’ve found myself on this side of the experience. When I do interact with others like us, which is uncommon for me, it’s usually me in your position. This is refreshing in a way. So where are you?

Victor looked at the historic architecture in the distance. St. Petersburg, Russia.

Beautiful, the person in his head seemed to appreciate the view.

And you? Where are you from? Victor inquired

Colorado, in the United States.

I hear the mountains there are lovely.

They are. It’s part of the reason I moved here, to enjoy skiing during the winter.

You’re an athlete? Victor asked, hope filling his chest. He prayed that he’d found a comrade in his unexpected visitor.

I enjoy it, but I’d hardly call myself an athlete. It’s something I do for fun.

Oh... Victor couldn’t hide his disappointment. He felt torn in so many directions that he wanted somebody outside of his circle to talk to.

What’s wrong? asked the voice in his head.

I... I’m just feeling a lot of pressure and I was hoping to talk to somebody who may have been there.

Hmm?

Victor sighed, then moved so that he could clearly see his reflection in the rear view mirror of the car. His escort in the front seat glanced at him, wondering if he needed anything but quickly turned her attention back to the road ahead of them.

I see, said the voice in his head.

So you know who I am?

Not as well as a follower of the sport would, but the magazines here have made it clear that you’re going to be strong competition against the American skaters. Aren’t you excited though? You’re so young and already going to the Olympics.

Yes... and no. Victor replied. I just want to skate, and to thrill people with my performance. However right now I’m doing anything but that. Ever since I was named to the team it feels that my time hasn’t been devoted to practice, but to interviews and endorsements. I’m surprised I was left alone during the European Championships.
I thought that was the life of a pro athlete.

I guess, but I’m not used to it, and the timing is bad.

Can I offer a little advice?

Hmm?

Find something that grounds you. I can feel it, you’re like a leaf on the wind, blown whichever way is strongest. You need to find an anchor.

I… There is a boy I sometimes connect to through my dreamwalking, but I never know when or if I’ll ever find myself in his mind again. Something about him seems to give me strength.

You’ve connected more than once to the same mind?

Yes. Though I can’t control it.

Hmm. I’ve never been so lucky myself.

It’s not common? Victor asked.

From what I understand it’s extremely rare. But who really knows? It’s not like anybody is keeping track of what happens with us. We each seem to have our own talents. I’ve learned that I have the ability to influence those I inhabit, though I try not to.

I thought we could only interact like this with each other.

Oh I can’t do anything even as simple as acting as a voice in their head, but I can nudge emotion. I know I’ve been able to prevent three suicides in my life. I push just enough hesitation in their decision to allow help to arrive.

Victor sighed internally, and had to restrain himself from making it audible. I wish I had a talent like that.

Victor felt the other person’s smile. You have your own skills, I guarantee it. Look for trends. We all agree that our abilities take us where we need to be, for either ourselves or another.

The car slowed. Victor looked out the window and saw that they were approaching the media tower. I can’t talk for much longer. I’m heading into an interview. You’re welcome to stay though. I just need to focus.

No, I’d only be a distraction. But before I forget, you mentioned somebody you wished you could control your connection to?

Yes.

It might not work, I’ve never had the occasion to try it. But during one of the rare occasions I’ve spoken with another of us I asked that question out of curiosity. They said, for those you have enough affinity with to connect to more than once, to think about what they mean to you and hopefully what you mean to them. Then, before you leave their mind leave a bit of that thought as a thread that you can follow back.

Is it really that simple?

Victor felt the mental shrug. Who knows? I’ve never connected to the same person twice, even when
I wanted to. But it's worth a shot if this person is that important to you.

Victor smiled, partially as he was about to exit the car and needed to project happiness for the cameras, but in gratitude as well. Thank you.

You're welcome, and though I know I should cheer for my fellow countrymen… good luck.

Victor was aware of a sudden emptiness as the person left. However he was also calmer. He wondered briefly if the other had used their ability to influence emotion, but decided that he was more at ease because he had something to try. Even if it didn’t work, he had a possible method that could allow him to connect to Yuri more often.

***

Victor knew as soon as he lifted off that his position was wrong. He was at a bad angle, and didn’t have enough speed to correct it during the rotations. He prepared to cushion his fall, but still came down hard, and one shoulder slammed into the ice.

Victor rolled onto his back, and decided to take a moment.

“Vitya?” Yakov called from the other side of the rink, a touch of concern in his voice.

Victor raised one hand and waved it in a way that he hoped said “I'm fine, just taking a break.”

Yakov seemed to get the message, because he immediately turned his attention to another teen, a recent addition to the rink named Georgi.

When the chill at his back got to be too much Victor rolled over and pushed himself back up to his feet. He skated over to the barrier and one of his older rinkmates handed him a towel and water bottle.

“You normally don’t miss that jump. Everything ok?”

Victor took another gulp of water before answering. “I’m fine Ivan. Just having problems concentrating.”

The older skater scowled. “Yakov needs to put his foot down on these appearances. You just got back from France, there is less than a week until you leave for Italy, and you’re practicing half as much as you need to be.”

“Nothing we can really do about it,” Victor countered, resigned to the uncomfortable fact that he was now a celebrity outside of figure skating circles. “Before France I’d heard rumblings that I might be a better chance for a medal than Sokolov. Ever since though…” Victor sighed. “Now… I can feel all eyes on me. I’m expected to hold my own against Lambiel again. In every meeting I feel the expectation weighing on me. It seems all of Russia won’t be satisfied unless I bring home gold.”

“You won’t be able to give it your all if you aren't at you best though. The media and especially the businesses courting you need to back off.”

Victor smiled and rubbed at the sweat along the back of his neck with the towel. “I don’t think it’s going to happen. I just need to make up for it by training harder when I am here.”

Ivan frowned. “You’re going to get hurt if you push yourself too hard, even if you are trying to make up for lost time.”
Victor sighed, knowing that he didn’t have a good response.

“At least get off the ice for a few, you’ll be black and blue if you take many falls like that. Go for a run, pull on some ballet flats and work on your choreography in the studio. Give your body a break.”

“Ivan,” called Yakov.

“Coming coach!” the man replied before turning back to Victor. “Think about it.”

Victor took a deep breath, held it for a moment and finally released it in a long sigh. Ivan was right and he knew it. He skated over to the entrance, grabbing his skate guards along the way, and stepped off the ice.

“I’m going to go for a run,” Victor explained when Yakov walked over. “I need to shake off that fall.”

Yakov grunted a noise in understanding and Victor went to the locker room to change into running shoes. He pulled them on, then added layers of clothing to combat the frigid January weather. He jogged in place for a few minutes outside of the ice rink, allowing his body to adjust, then set off on a well known route.

In truth, the increased demands on his time from sponsors and media were only part of Victor’s problem. He’d been so busy that he hadn’t been able to dreamwalk since the national championships, and though it wasn’t something he could control he missed it.

And Yuri.

I need to learn how to control it, at least a little, Victor thought as he ran. I learned how to close myself off easily enough, and how to leave on my own. There’s got to be a way that I can make it happen and not rely on chance.

Victor’s breath puffed out in tiny clouds of vapor as he ran down a narrow street, tall buildings on either side, dodging patches of ice that wouldn’t melt for months.

I need to focus, I know that. But the more I connect with him the harder it is to get him out of my mind.

Victor turned a corner, and almost out of habit thrust his hand into his jacket pocket. He felt the familiar crumple of bills and heard a few coins jingle. He turned another corner and was pleased to see that there wasn’t a line outside of his favorite coffee shop. He sped up along the mostly empty street, relishing the burn in his legs.

A bell above the door sounded as he walked in, breathing a little hard from pushing himself during the run. Victor closed his eyes for a second and savored the smell of the shop’s most popular teas coming from the samovars. The middle-aged woman behind the counter heard the noise and looked up. She smiled when she saw him, the expression highlighting the soft crinkles around her brown eyes.

“Hi Victor. What can I get you today?”

“Afternoon Yana. Peppermint tea please.”

One of Yana’s eyebrows shot up, but she moved to grab a cup and fill it with hot water. “This is a different choice for you. Feeling ok?”
Victor laughed. “I’m fine, just felt like a different flavor today.”

She cast a look over her shoulder, a few loose strands of brown hair dragging along the fabric. After a few seconds of studying Victor she set the steaming cup on the counter and added several heaping teaspoons of peppermint into a deep filter bag, bypassing the pots of concentrated black tea.

She turned back and passed him the steaming cup, the tail of the filter sticking out from under the lid. She rung him up and Victor passed over the money for the bill before waving and resuming his trek back to the rink.

Though Victor would never admit it, the choice of peppermint hadn’t been merely for a change in flavor. He’d found many years before that the cool notes had a relaxing influence on him, and between the tight schedule and his lack of dreamwalking he was on edge. He brought the rim of the cup to his lips, inhaled the delicate scent and took a careful sip of the warm liquid.

By the time he returned to the rink he was significantly calmer, though he knew he was in trouble as soon as Yakov spied the cup.

“Go home Vitya,” his coach ordered.


“I can smell the peppermint from here. I’ve known you too long, and I know what that means. You haven’t taken a break since you made the team. You’ve either been working with sponsors, the media, or here. Take a day, come back tomorrow.”

“But…”

Yakov walked over and pressed his fingers against Victor’s arm where he had come down on it earlier. The teen hissed and winced, not even realizing that a bruise had started to form under his long-sleeve shirt.

“Go home, before you hurt yourself.”

“Yakov…” Victor tried to protest before being cut off again.

The older man shook his head, normally angry face softening. “You’re not my first Olympian Vitya. I know the strain, I’ve seen it before. Listen to me for once. You’re under more pressure than ever, from the fans, the media, even the government. It will swallow you whole if you let it. I’m telling you to take a few hours for you, not even a full day.”

“We don’t have the time!” Victor finally managed to spit out.

Yakov sighed. “I’ll put in some calls if you go. We’ll make more time for practice, but only if you leave now.”

Victor clenched and unclenched his free hand several times before finally relaxing. He glared at the floor. “I’ll go, but you better find that time.”

“Go.”

Victor walked into the locker room and changed out of his practice clothes. He hated being kicked off the ice, but at the same time couldn’t fault Yakov for doing it. Except for the forced downtime during the European Championships he hadn’t taken a single day off since nationals. His normal free days had been overtaken by sponsors and the media in the intense run-up to the Olympics.
Victor finished his tea, not wanting to carry the cup on the walk home. He then slung his bag over his aching shoulder and strode from the rink once more.

He wanted to be angry, but knew that Yakov was right. At the same time he didn’t know what to do with the sudden free time. He’d been torn in so many directions at once that he’d forgotten what relaxation felt like.

Victor stopped not far from the rink, sighed, and turned toward the coffee shop again. He’d enjoyed the tea, but drank it too quickly. He wanted more of the soothing warmth.

*I should have kept my cup…*

“Victor?” Yana asked when the bell over the door sounded again.

Victor smiled. “Can I get another cup?”

She blinked but turned to prepare another cup of tea.

“You know… make it a mug instead. I’ll drink it here.”

“Sure thing,” she replied as he handed over the money.

A minute late Victor had taken a spot at a table near a window, gazing out into the street. It was quiet, the few people outside bustling to and fro, trying to escape into the warmth of their destination as quickly as possible. Only one other person was sitting in the coffee shop.

“It’s not like you to come in and sit during the day like this,” Yana said softly, moving to sit at a nearby table. “Everything ok?”

Victor turned to look at her and smiled. “Yakov kicked me off the ice.”

“Any particular reason?”

“He wants me to take a break.”

She chuckled. “You’re not the first skater I’ve had in here say that, but the first in a while. Let me tell you a little secret.”

Victor stared at her.

“Yakov only forces people to take a break when he knows they need it, when they’ve pushed themselves far harder than he would. And he only does it when he feels they are ready. If Yakov kicked you off that ice today, so close to what you’re working for, it means that he knows that not resting will be a bigger detriment than any lost practice.”

Yana stood and patted Victor’s arm. “Trust your coach to know what’s best for you at a time like this.” She then walked back to the counter to help a customer walking through the door.

Victor turned his attention back to the street outside, where snow had started to fall.

*What do I need? Rest?*

He blinked a couple times, his eyelids suddenly feeling heavy.

*I forget sometimes that Yakov cares. He’s a coach first, but has been closer than my family for nearly a decade. And Yana, so considerate…*
Victor was lulled by the heat and flavor of the tea, and the soft swish of traffic outside. He set his elbow on the table and leaned his head in the palm of his hand. Almost immediately his eyes drifted shut, and were harder and harder to open.

_Oh… finally…_ Victor thought when he realized that he was dreamwalking.

*Well hello there,* came the thought response as the other person looked out on a view that was undeniably London.

Victor paid attention when he realized that his presence was known. _Do you want me to leave?_ he asked, trying to convey the politeness that most with the skill tried to display with one another.

_No, but I must ask what you were glad about._

Victor hoped his thoughts conveyed his gratitude. _I’ve been too busy and stressed to dreamwalk lately. I missed it._

Victor felt sympathy from the other person. _It is difficult sometimes, especially when you can’t get into the right mental state for your trigger._

_Trigger?_ Victor asked.

_Yeah, the mood you need to be in to dreamwalk._

Victor sighed. _Knowing what mood I need would at least be a start, maybe then I’d be able to figure out how to control it._

_You can’t?_ the other person asked, seemingly shocked.

_Not yet. I don’t even know where to start._

_How old are you?_

_Seventeen._

_Ah, that explains things._

_What does age have to do with it?_

There was silence as the other person thought. _Mindset has a lot to do with dreamwalking, and the teenage years are notoriously turbulent. You have to be in the right place mentally in order to control it._

Victor perked up. _What mindset?_

He felt a moment of uncertainty. _It varies person to person. Strangely enough, I need to be hungry when I go to bed. I have to be calm too, but no matter how relaxed I am if I’m not hungry I’m staying put. Laughter. That one took a while to figure out. I once talked with a person who had to be crying just before bed, said that certain books and movies were always on hand. The best I can offer is to look at trends. How are you right before it happens?_

Victor laughed internally. _Well I’m pretty sure I just fell asleep in the middle of a coffee shop, so I really don’t know._

More laughter from the other person. _I guess if you just disappear it means somebody woke you up,_
Maybe, but the owner knows me. I think I’ll be ok for a few minutes.

Everybody has their own internal trigger. Figuring it out is the first step, it’s also a good way to stop it from randomly happening if you would rather not dreamwalk. If you don’t meet whatever your personal conditions are it’s almost impossible.

You said that the trigger is the first step.

Yes, once you know your initial conditions you will be ready to start working on initiating it. Most of the time it’s just telling yourself that it’s going to happen. Many just have to set the thought in their mind.

I was thinking about how much I wanted to dreamwalk just about an hour ago.

You’re probably closer to controlling it than you realize.

Thank you.

Don’t mention it. I remember when I was first learning, not that long ago in retrospect.

Victor smiled internally. I should probably leave before the manager gets worried.

Go, I’m headed to work anyway.

Victor opened his eyes just as he heard footsteps headed his way. He looked up to see Yana standing over him.

“Hey kiddo, it’s getting late. I’m sure your tea is long cold.”

Victor blinked at her, and looked outside to where the sun had dipped significantly. “How long have I been asleep?”

“Couple hours. I bet you needed it though. You were pretty restless at first, but settled down after a little while. Since we’re slow today I decided to just let you sleep.”

Victor sat up more and ran a hand across his hair. He was glad that it had still been tied back from practice, nonetheless he felt where a couple tangles had crept in.

“Do you want me to call you a cab? You look pretty tired still.”

Victor shook his head. “No, thank you. I think the walk home will do wonders.”

Yana smiled. “Looks like Yakov was right, you needed the rest after all.”

Victor smiled. “As strange as it sounds, that’s the best sleep I’ve had in weeks.”

Yana laughed. “I’d credit the tea, but you barely had a couple sips. Stop pushing yourself so hard kiddo. Everybody has a limit, and you need to be able to cut off others’ expectations of you before you reach it, or you’ll end up disappointing yourself and all those around you.

“Come on, get up now. It’s time for me to close, and for you to head home young man.”

“Yes ma’am,” Victor said with a chuckle. He slung his practice bag over his shoulder and winced as the strap landed on the forgotten bruise.

Yana scowled at the pained reaction but said nothing as she ushered the teen out of the shop.
Victor started keeping a journal after his coffee shop nap. He tried to note as much as he could, searching for a pattern that would allow him to control his ability. He also realized that it was an effective way to distance himself from events and reflect on the day.

Yakov delivered on his promise of more training time, working with both the public relations and management firms to cancel or postpone any interview, appearance or other obligation that they could, and to shorten and reschedule those that were critical so that Victor had more time on the ice. He also made himself available for additional hours in order to fit in as much as they dared in the remaining days.

Then they were on their way to Turin, among the last of the Russians to arrive, with only a week until the opening ceremony. Many of Victor’s counterparts from other sports had already been there for some time, training and learning the nuances of the ski slopes and twisting ice tracks.

Walking into the Olympic Village for the first time was a surreal experience for Victor. It was a place of energy and excitement. People of every race and nationality mingled and moved in the relatively small area. Fierce friends sported jackets of different countries, and a sense of camaraderie pervaded the atmosphere.

He gaped, watching the commotion. He felt welcoming pats on the back from other athletes who noticed that his luggage indicated his arrival. In a week they would each fight for the glory of their sports and their countries, but now… now they revelled in the elation that came with just being there.

They took a day to settle in, then Victor found himself on the ice for public practice early the next morning. There were skaters from so many countries that practice time was strictly limited. Yet his days were still filled. He felt as if sponsors and media had followed him to Italy, but Yakov insisted that he humor them, especially since they’d pushed aside meetings the prior week.

During those moments when Victor found himself blissfully free he explored the venues, watching other athletes and trying to memorize every aspect of the experience. He ran into the young Swiss skater from the European Championships, and enjoyed talking with the teen until they were each pulled away to other obligations.

However the highlight of his week was unexpected. He received a call from his parents the night before the opening ceremony. They were driving from Lyon the next day to see him during the parade of nations. They had also managed to secure time the night of his free skate, and informed him that Alexei would be there for several days.

Victor knew better than to get his hope up that they would actually be there, but it was more effort than he expected. For a few minutes he wondered if there was a way to repair the broken relationship he had with his family.

His heart felt light that night, and when he opened his eyes he saw the familiar signs, the armored mascots painted under the ice and could barely conceal himself as an excited girl called across the ice.

“Yuri!”

Chapter End Notes
Thanks for reading!

Random, but when I wrote the line about nuances of the "twisting ice tracks" I was totally remembering the bathtub scene from Cool Runnings, and how hard they trained to nail every curve in the bobsled (thanks to that movie bobsled, luge and skeleton are my second favorite Olympic sports after figure skating)

Feel free to join me on tumblr at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com to geek out about Yuri on Ice or whatever other anime I happen to be watching.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Young Victor at his first Olympics.

Chapter Notes

Want to hear the music I selected for Victor? I finally put together a playlist for easy listening. I'll add to it as additional chapters are released so as not to introduce musical spoilers (I've got several seasons already decided). Listen [here](#).

Note: the passage I picked in the Rachmaninov piece takes place from approximately 15:10 - 17:47.

Also I made a big boo-boo in terms of timeline, and in order to fix it I had to alter an ISU rule (those who have mentioned my research will know which one when they get there). I'll explain more about that in the end notes though.

Finally, I'm so sorry to Evgeni Plushenko. Victor pretty much took over his history starting with the 2006 European Championships, not that I won't deviate again but since we had canon Victor winning in Lyon it was already happening so I rolled with it.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Victor was glad that his short program wasn’t until the fifth day of the games, it would give his feet a chance to recover.

He’d been standing for hours in an area filled with hundreds of athletes. Noise from the grand display that was an Olympic opening ceremony drifted down, but he’d tired of craning his neck to watch it on an overhead monitor. Despite the cramped conditions and the long wait, he knew that he wanted to be there.

Excitement coursed through him, and he wasn’t sure if it was all entirely his own. He’d spent several hours observing Yuri the night before, and the boy had been exuberant about seeing Victor at the Olympics.

Yuri’s emotions were powerful, and Victor thought that they were a bit contagious if nothing else.

He reached into his pocket, pulled out his phone, and thumbed the button on the side. The tiny screen on the flip lit up, displaying the time. He estimated that the athletes had been standing there for nearly four and a half hours, each huddled around the flag for their country.

He’d received a call from his parents earlier, they and Alexei were in the stands to see him walk with the Russian team. He knew his brother would love the spectacle above, but wondered if his parents
were enjoying themselves in the slightest.

At least they’re here. They made the effort to come, he reminded himself. And they’ll be here again in less than a week for my free skate. Alexei will be back even sooner. Maybe they’re finally starting to understand that I love skating as much as they love music.

Volunteers drifted through the throngs of athletes, informing them that the Parade of Nations would begin soon. Victor sighed as he thought about how much longer the wait would be. Greece would be first. Italy, as the host, would be last, and the rest of the countries were in alphabetical order. Russia, with it’s large contingent of athletes, was near the end.

He shuffled in place, easing the pressure from one foot and putting it on the other. Yes, he’d need that several day interim for his feet to recover, and he felt sorry for the athletes with closer events that had decided to participate rather than rest.

Movement from the front of the room. Victor watched as a field of blue made their way to the stadium. The atmosphere in the cramped space changed. The wait was over, now they just had to display a bit more patience before their turn to walk out and show their pride as athletes and Olympians.

Applause drifted down, growing loud for large countries and returning to a level of polite for smaller ones. The room slowly emptied, then the Russian flag was moving. Victor felt the mass of his countrymen push in around him as they walked forward.

The crowd roared as the Russian team emerged from under the Olympic rings. Victor grinned, and followed the example set by his peers, raising his arms and waving, his loose platinum hair falling back from his shoulders and off the red jacket.

It was a moment of jubilation before the fierce competition of the games was to begin.

***

Victor took a seat next to Alexei in the crowded rink. The free program for pairs skating was in progress, with the second to last grouping taking the ice for their warm up.

“Will you be able to manage on your own tomorrow Alyosha?” Victor asked. “I’ll probably need to be here earlier than you want to arrive.”

“I should be fine Victor,” Alexei replied as he watched the as duos jump side-by-side and women turn complete trust over to their partner for throws, lifts and spirals.

“You don’t have to be here the whole time if you don’t want to be. There are thirty skaters and I drew the seventeenth spot, so it’ll be a while before I’m even up.”

Alexei shook his head. “I’ll watch everybody. I want to.”

“You’re such a good kid Alyosha,” Victor said, running his fingers across his brother’s hair.

“Victor…” Alexei complained at having his hair mussed.

“Lyosha, my bratishka… call me Vitya like you used to.”

Alexei stared at the ice. “I don’t know if I should. We barely see each other. Besides, even mom and dad use your proper name.”
Victor smiled and threw his arms around his brother. “Lyosha, you’re so sweet. Don’t worry. I want you to call me Vitya.”

“O… ok… Vitya.”

Victor squeezed Alexei before releasing him and turning his attention back to the ice. “If you want me to explain anything let me know.”

Victor noticed silence from his brother and turned to see the teen blushing. “Alyosha?”

Alexei fidgeted. “I think I can recognize most of the jumps and spins.”

Victor stared until Alexei looked up at him.

“I watch when I can,” the younger explained. “I… I like watching you skate.”

Victor smiled softly. “I didn’t know. Father never said anything during our phone calls.”

“I used to watch in secret, when they were away for rehearsals or late at night after I was supposed to have gone to bed. They finally figured it out last year, and made it clear that as long as I maintained my practice schedule they didn’t mind.”

Victor hugged his brother again. “Lyosha!”

Alexei squirmed until Victor released him.

Victor laughed as he sat back up in his seat. He turned his attention back to the rink, where all but one duo were beginning to make their way from the ice.

“It means a lot you know…” he said after a moment.

“Hmm?” Alexei asked, looking up at his brother.

“You watching me skate,” Victor explained. “I… I thought… I mean I knew mom and father don’t really understand. I guess I always assumed that you didn’t either.”

Alexei smiled. “I’m proud of you Vic… Vitya. You followed your dreams, even when mom and dad didn’t want you to. You worked hard, and look where you are now! I hope I’m as brave when I know what I want to do in life.”

Victor looked at his brother in shock. “You don’t like the cello?”

Alexei smiled. “I love the cello, but… I want more. I just don’t know what yet.”

“What’s worrying you then?”

Alexei made a face. “You know how dad is, or at least I think you do. He wanted both of us to follow in his footsteps. Dedicate ourselves to an instrument, and become the best. It’s been the family way for generations. When you chose skating it fell to me. But as much as I love the cello… it’s not enough. I don’t know if I need to take up a second instrument or if there’s something else. I love music, it’s in me, but the cello by itself isn’t enough to let it out.”

Victor smiled and leaned forward as the opening notes for the program poured from the speakers. “You’ll figure it out, and you know I’ll support whatever decision you make.”

Victor looked at his brother as the teen leaned in and hugged him. “Thanks Vitya.”
“Representing Russia, Victor Nikiforov…”

Victor glided across the ice, arms spread, acknowledging the audience and the stage as he moved to take his starting position.

Gratitude, he thought. What am I grateful for? The support of Yakov, and Alexei, and my fans. I’m grateful for skating, it’s allowed me to find myself. I’m grateful for Yuri. I hope I get to meet him one day. I’m grateful for my dreamwalking, it led me to him.

There was a moment of silence, then the sound of a piano filled the rink. The passage from *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* was slow and gentle, the calm eye in the storm of the piece which surrounded it.

*Rachmaninov. So much of his music is filled with frenetic energy, but I wanted to skate to something by him. When I heard this passage, two and a half minutes in the much longer piece, I knew it was perfect.*

Victor moved into a sit spin as the orchestra joined the piano, the intensity of the music swelling but maintaining a feeling of calm.

*I’m glad I visited my family in Lyon. Alexei is here, he wouldn’t be if I hadn’t reached out. Mother, and father, they’ll be here day after tomorrow for my free skate. The European Championships was the first time they’d watched me skate in six years. I was still in the novice division then, barely eleven.*

The step sequence led into a series of jumps as the music reached a crescendo. The orchestra began to fade and he went into a flying spin. The following choreographic sequence matched the diminishing feel of the fading instruments, and finally it was him and the piano again. His final element, the combination spin, took him through to the final notes and ending pose.

*Thank you.*

The crowd roared with applause, and Victor blinked. He smiled and bowed before the judges and the audience. Flowers, carefully wrapped to keep stray petals from falling onto the ice, and stuffed animals rained down around him.

Victor turned, bowed and waved again, then made his way to the kiss and cry, picking up a stuffed poodle that looked like Makkachin along the way. For once Yakov had no lecture as they waited for the score, and as soon as they were announced Victor realized why. He’d surpassed his numbers from the European Championships by a comfortable margin and was in first.

He’d bypassed his strongest competitors, who had skated earlier in the evening, including both Stéphane Lambiel and Johnny Weir. Of those that remained only Evan Lysacek, the gold medalist from the 2005 Four Continents Championship, was a large concern.

Victor spent several minutes in interviews before moving to the stands to find Alexei.

“Vitya, that was beautiful!” his brother cried as he hugged Victor.


“What made you choose Rachmaninov?”
Victor thought about it for a moment. “I guess part of it is that he’s a Russian composer, but I like his sound too.”

“It’s a great piece.”

They watched for the rest of the night, commenting on the programs and the talents of the skaters. One in particular caught Victor’s eye.

Christophe Giacometti performed twenty-seventh that evening. Victor smiled at the innocent style of his program. It reminded him of running through a meadow. Though the Swiss teen didn’t advance to the free, Victor knew that one day the younger skater would be a fierce competitor.

He was looking forward to that day.

Fans and competitors alike congratulated Victor on finishing the evening in first as he and Alexei made their way from the rink.

“What do you have your guest pass for the village?” Victor asked as he waited with Alexei for a bus that would take the teen back to the hotel he was staying at.

Alexei patted his jacket pocket. “Right here.”

“Good. I’ll meet you just inside the gate in the morning then.”

The bus pulled up and Alexei got on. “See you tomorrow afternoon Vitya!”

***

Victor woke early for practice the day after his short program; his hair a tangled mess from dreamwalking. He hadn’t figured out his trigger, but quickly found that whatever led to his nocturnal wandering had been strong enough the night before to allow him to experiment with his ability.

He remembered what he’d learned in the coffee shop, that mindset and will were important. When he found himself laying on a sunny beach he decided to try something other than just leaving. Instead he told himself that he would continue to dreamwalk rather than return to himself. When he left the warm beachgoer he quickly landed in the mind of somebody reading in front of a roaring fireplace.

He repeated the process several more times, and determined that he could indeed continue to dreamwalk, though the longer he pushed his skill the more fatigue he felt creeping in.

Finally he decided to take a leap of faith. Before leaving a stargazer he focused on Yuri, and their connection. He thought he could feel it, but the next person wasn’t the one he was looking for. He focused, and tried again.

On the third try he was successful, or at least he thought he was. He found himself staring at a whiteboard, a lesson in Japanese history filling the space and a stern-looking teacher at the lectern.

Victor stayed several minutes, and though muted in the school setting, the emotions felt familiar. His suspicions were confirmed with a fleeting thought through Yuri’s head.

_I can’t wait to see Victor skate tonight! I hope he does well._

Victor smiled to himself. He’d been able to control his connection to Yuri for the first time. He contemplated what the boy meant to him before leaving his dreamwalking state for the evening. He wanted to strengthen the bond, to make it even easier to find him in the future.
Victor was tired when he awoke, and realized that though his body had rested his mind had not been given enough time to recharge. He made a note of it; that he would need to limit himself in the future.

Despite his mental fatigue, Victor was jubilant as he spent the morning practicing and the rest of the day with his brother.

***

Victor’s parents arrived little more than an hour before he had to head to the rink. A part of him wondered if they had always planned to arrive so late, or had waited to see when he would be skating. Either way he was glad that he was in the final group of the night.

The final six skaters took to the ice for their warmup. Victor, knowing that he was first of the group, only did as much as necessary to loosen his muscles for the routine ahead. He did a lone triple jump and a few doubles interspersed with some footwork patterns to get a feel for the ice. As he stood at the barrier, watching the final five contestants of the night skate off he took a deep breath and tried to focus. Yakov was saying something, but he tuned it out. He already knew what he had to do.

This music makes me happy. My program is one that I refined until I loved every nuance. I’m happy to skate it, and I want to make the whole world happy to see it.

His name was announced and he took the center of his frozen stage.

Step sequence with staccato strings, twizzles to the flute. Why didn’t I think to have twizzles from the beginning? They work so well with that passage. This is more than a program for points now, it’s me having fun on the ice.

Victor allowed muscle memory to guide him through the four and a half minute routine, enjoying every element and adding flourish wherever he could for the sheer sake of it. This was his love, his program, and he wanted there to be no question that he was happy with it.

As he left the ice he heard his performance described as ‘jubilant’ and his expression ‘radiant’ from those within earshot, and the scores agreed. He had once more topped his performance from Lyon.

Is it enough? Victor asked himself. Is Lambiel going to attempt his quad? Do I have enough of a cushion?

Victor watched as the Swiss skater took to the ice. Though Yakov wanted to lead him toward a group of reporters the teen insisted on watching the program that followed. His heart caught in his throat when the older skater landed a quad in a combo, and he held his breath as the man in front of him prepared for a second quad in the latter half of the program.

Lambiel stepped out and his hand touched the ice. Victor felt the tension leave his body with the breath that rushed out. He knew that the man on the ice would have high marks, and would beat his own scores from the European Championships, but with the deduction Victor was confident that he would hold onto the lead.

Even with the step-out he skated an amazing program, one to be proud of. He attempted two quads!

Victor allowed a couple brief interviews, and managed to take a seat next to his family just as Johnny Weir was leaving the ice. As the last three competitors, from Canada, France and Japan, gave their performances it became clear that he would maintain the lead.

Yet even expecting it did little to dull the shock of realization after the final performance. Victor had won Olympic gold during his first visit to the games. He barely felt the arms of his brother as they
wrapped around him and squeezed his middle, and the surprised congratulations of his parents sounded like a dull echo from far away.

It was Yakov who managed to bring him back to himself. “Vitya!” the man yelled from some nearby stairs.

Victor turned his head to look at his coach, still processing his win.

“Go get ready,” Yakov ordered. “The medal ceremony will start soon.”

Victor stood and turned to his family.

“Congratulations dear,” his mother said softly, while his father acknowledged the achievement with a firm nod of approval.

Victor mussed Alexei’s hair as he stepped away and headed toward the locker room to make himself presentable.

The rest of the evening Victor felt like he was moving in slow motion. Gold was draped around his neck and the Russian national anthem poured from the speakers. Cameras flashed and he knew he would be hoarse the next day from speaking to so many reporters. At some point Yakov must have noticed because he told him that he would have the next day free from sponsor meetings in order to rest, but would be expected to give appearances to the media in the afternoon.

He joined his parents for a late dinner, leaving the restaurant well after midnight. The were headed back to France the next day and would not make the exhibition skate, as they would be performing themselves. Victor said he understood. They informed him that Alexei would be there though as it was a Friday night. Victor smiled from his haze.

Finally he was back in his room, the lamp beside his bed casting a narrow beam of light. He held his medal up toward the ceiling and stared at it until his arms ached.

***

A part of Victor knew that he needed to wake up, that it had to be past noon in Turin. But he had dreamwalked into Yuri’s mind during the rebroadcast of the free program and couldn’t bear to tear himself away.

Just let them get to my skate before my alarm goes off. Yakov knows I’m napping, and my interviews are still more than an hour away.

The setting was the same as it had been during his Grand Prix Final performance; the red walls and low tables of what he now understood was the family business. He thought given the size and number of rooms that it might be an inn, but wasn’t positive.

Once more Yuri was joined by the girl Yuko, and this time an older woman as well. Victor wondered who she was as she pointed out details in choreographic sequences for Yuri to study. But a brief exchange between Yuri’s mother and the woman allowed him to gather that she was Yuri’s ballet instructor, Minako.

Victor allowed himself to relax and enjoy the excitement that Yuri felt as they approached his program.

It’s so different watching through his eyes.
Victor stayed with Yuri through the medal ceremony, and savored the way the boy felt about his skating. He clung to the emotion that spread through him when the boy renewed his dedication to skate against Victor one day.

*Never stop being my fan Yuri. Never stop striving for me.*

***

“Victor!”

Victor stopped walking and turned toward the voice. He saw the young Swiss skater, Chris, jogging to catch up.

“Hi Chris!”

The blond caught up and bent slightly, his hands on his knees as he tried to catch his breath.

“Congratulations!” he finally got out.

“Merci.”

Chris looked up, confusion written on his face. “On your way to another interview?” he asked in tentative French.

Victor smiled and shook his head. “No, finally done with those, at least for today. Yakov thinks there will be more. I’m on my way to the rink to watch this evening’s programs,” he replied confidently in his third language.

Chris grinned at Victor’s ability to speak his native tongue, but was quiet for a moment before an unsure expression filled his face. “Isn’t tonight the compulsories for Ice Dance?”

Victor nodded. “Exactly.”

Chris stared for a minute, something obviously on his mind.

“Come on Chris,” Victor said, throwing an arm around the younger skater. “Join me.”

“The compulsories?”

Victor laughed. “Don’t like them or something?”

“They’re just… a little… boring,” Chris replied, trying to cushion his words.

Victor stopped and, with a soft, knowing, smile asked, “Why?”

Chris blinked several times before responding. “What do you mean why? There’s no freedom. They all skate the same pattern to the same music. The elements are in the same place and their sequences are set for them.”

Victor threw his head back and laughed. “That’s why I like them so much!”

“Say again?”

Victor grinned. “Think about it. When everything is determined like that what makes one pair win over another?”

“How well they match the pattern,” Chris replied dryly. “It’s pure technique.”
“Yes, and no,” Victor said with a chuckle. “When you get several pairs all skating the pattern perfectly is when it’s best. That’s when you see their style shine. Each duo brings something unique to the ice. Some will be more expressive, others reserved. It’s because the patterns are the same that you can see it though. The best ones make it look natural.”

Chris was giving Victor a dubious look from under the mop of curls on his head.

Victor threw his arm around the teen. “Come on. Just watch them with me, you’ll see.”

Chris stumbled a few paces before finding his footing and keeping up with Victor. “Are you sure you want me there?” he finally asked. “I mean you took gold… and I… I didn’t even make it to the free skate.”

Victor paused in leading Chris toward the rink. “Why should that matter?”

“I… uh… well…”

Victor smiled and turned to face him. “You’re here for a reason Chris. You don’t make it this far by being a bad skater. Besides, I watched your short program. You’re going to be one of the best someday, I guarantee it.”

Chris smiled, then a competitive spark shone in his eyes. “One of the best? Why not the best?”

Victor laughed. “Cause I’m not giving up that spot!”

“I’ll fight you for it.”

Victor’s blue eyes met Chris’s green ones, and he knew the words were true. “Well, my friend, prepare for me to fight equally hard.”

Chris grinned, and Victor slid his arms over the teen’s shoulders again and resumed their walk to the rink.

“I’m still not sure about the compulsories though,” Chris said.

Victor smiled. “Trust me. Watch each pair carefully. You’ll see. In no time you’ll be wondering why you didn’t study them sooner. There are no dazzling jumps to distract you, no distinct choreography to set them apart. Everything boils down to technique and personality because there’s nothing flamboyant to hide behind.”

Chris relented and soon the two of them had found seats in the stands.

They were several pairs into the compulsory dance when Victor noticed Chris lean forward slightly, his eyes downcast. He stopped pointing out the ways the previous pair had owned the pattern in comparison to the technically sound but cold demeanor of those currently on the ice.

“What’s wrong?”

Chris looked at Victor and smiled, but the older teen saw immediately that the expression didn’t meet the eyes.

“Ok, spill. What is it?”

Chris sighed. “It’s just… I still feel like a failure. It was supposed to be my big day, my birthday present.”
“Huh?”

Chris laughed. “My birthday was the day of the short program.”

It suddenly made much more sense to Victor. He thought about it for a moment then tossed his arms around the Swiss skater.

“Why didn’t you say something? How old are you? We need to celebrate!”

Chris turned his head up and their eyes met. He started laughing.

Victor smiled. “It feels good to let it out, doesn’t it?”

Chris nodded. “Yeah.”

“So tell me, how old are you?”

“I just turned fifteen.”

“Just snuck in under the rule change huh?”

Chris smiled. “Maybe it’s too young after all.”

Victor shrugged. “Who knows? Either way, we’re going to go do something fun either tonight or tomorrow to celebrate. It’s just a shame Alexei went home already. He turned fifteen a couple months ago and I bet he would have loved meeting you.”

“Alexei?”

“Oh sorry, my little brother.”

“The one you were spending time with the past few days?”

“That’s the one. You noticed us?”

Chris shrugged. “I saw you a couple times.”

“You should have come said hi.”

“I didn’t want to interrupt.”

Victor smiled. “How about we not worry about that in the future, I mean we’re friends now right?”

Chris smiled and nodded.

***

Victor took his place on the ice, the spotlight on him for his exhibition skate. He chuckled as the first notes drifted down, wondering what people thought of his choice in music, The Ecstasy Of Gold. It was the opening song of a Metallica concert after all, but so beautifully portrayed by the full orchestra that had played alongside the heavy metal band.

The irony of the name wasn’t lost on the young skater.

His first trip to the Olympics had been a whirlwind of competition and activity, and he wouldn’t have traded the experience for anything. Between new friends and what felt like newfound support from his family, and knowing that he was returning to Russia with gold, he was exuberant.
He looked toward the future as he skated, determined to keep showing the world his passion for the sport.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!

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So when I started *In Our Dreams* I was still working under the impression that it had taken place concurrently to the 2016 season. But as was later pointed out it would have actually happened during 2015. Overall a year's difference was not a huge issue to me...

Until we reached Chris. It's established in Episode 7 that they met at the European Championships in 2006, which took place in Lyon. Chris even said it was his first year in the senior's. However, with backdating from 2016 that would have made Chris 14 at the time, a year too young for the senior division.

I was left with the option of writing in an additional year that I hadn't plotted, and between already posted chapters, AND changing details in existing chapters or changing either Chris's age or a rule. I picked the rule, and moved age requirement change of 15 from 1996 to 2006.

I know this would have also made Victor eligible to move up to senior's earlier, but since one doesn't *have* to go up to seniors until 19 I figured it was no big deal for him to take an extra year, especially with the scoring system change.

(side note: this also explains why Yuko said "biggest score in history" in episode 1, that year difference put Victor's Junior World Win in the last year of the 6.0 scoring system, which means he'd always hold that score. It had always bothered me before I realized the year change cause OF COURSE it would be the highest cause the scoring system was brand new.)

Also, yes, in 2006 Chris would have skated the Olympic short program on his birthday. :) I thought it was just a funny little detail.

Finally, I know Plushenko had a quad combo during the 2006 Olympics, but since I'd established that Victor had none I didn't toss one in. I know IRL that would have been a huge controversy, but this is fiction. :-P

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Come geek out with me about Yuri on Ice or other anime on Tumblr at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Victor finds himself the center of even more media attention after the Olympics, and learns that his win has a longer lasting effect than any of his previous medals.

Meanwhile, he finds himself dreamwalking consistently and works on strengthening his bond with Yuri, and is excited to see the progress that the younger skater has made since their first encounter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Vitya.” Yakov was strangely contemplative as they waited to retrieve their luggage at the baggage carousel in St. Petersburg.

“Yes?”

“You should consider withdrawing from Worlds.”

Victor blinked several times, trying to determine if he was hallucinating. Finally he decided that he wasn’t. “Say that again Yakov? I’m not sure I heard you correctly.”

“You heard me right Vitya. You should consider withdrawing from Worlds,” the older man repeated.

“But… why?”

Yakov sighed. “You’re not going to have enough time to practice. Not now. And no matter how much I push it’s not going to be enough.”

“But the Olympics are over.”

“And you have a gold metal. Things aren’t going to be the same for you.”

Victor grimaced, and was about to argue when Yakov turned to face him.

“Listen Vitya, almost all the other gold medalists have already announced their withdrawals. There’s a reason it’s practically a tradition. Expectations are high before the games, but for those who make the podium it doesn’t end once you are home. The media will be insatiable, you may even have requests for interviews and appearances from outside Russia. Prepare to make plenty of trips to Moscow over the next several weeks. You’ll be expected to attend state functions for the medalists.”

Victor stared. Surely Yakov is exaggerating.

“You’re going to have more sponsor inquiries as well, probably so many that you’ll be turning some down. I imagine your manager will have you in the office for full days in the next couple weeks, discussing the benefits of one sponsor or another, and probably which media appearances will be best for your brand.”
“My brand?”

Yakov chuckled dryly, a sound Victor couldn’t remember hearing before. “You managed to hide before because you didn’t need sponsors. You were a talented youth; a rising star, but an enigma. You could give an interview or two and return to training. You won’t have that freedom anymore.”

“Yakov…” Victor started, though he wasn’t sure what he was about to say before his coach shook his head.

“Listen to me Vitya. Work with your manager and public relations coordinator, the sooner the better. Craft a public image, learn to smile for the cameras even when it’s the last thing you want to do. I know you’ve had to do it before, but nothing like you’ll face now. Your name, your image, and your reputation are all commodities. How much they’re worth depends on you. Be the athlete that people want and you’ll have opportunities that last beyond your career, but tarnish your brand and you could find yourself struggling once you leave the ice.”

Victor gaped as Yakov took a few steps away to retrieve his luggage. Victor saw that his hadn’t found its way onto the belt yet.

“Withdraw from Worlds Vitya,” Yakov reiterated when he returned to the teen’s side. “You’ll be exhausted by then, and people will expect too much if you participate.”

Victor saw his bags and stepped forward to grab them. They then walked toward the exit in silence.

“One last bit of advice,” Yakov mused as they waited for a cab in the cone of light cast by a lamp. “If you don’t have one already, get an accountant. I’ve seen great athletes squander their money thinking they could handle it themselves. I know you’ve worked hard to save, so I don’t expect you to be so reckless. However you probably don’t want to spend time managing it either, it’ll become a burden soon if you try to do too much yourself.”

As Victor climbed in the cab he wasn’t exactly sure what to do with the impromptu life lesson from his coach.

Victor quickly realized the wisdom of Yakov’s words. Within a few days he had announced his withdrawal from the World Figure Skating Championships. He spent more time in the offices of the public relations firm and sports management office than on the ice, and the frantic energy that infused both places made it evident that anything presented to him had already been vetted by staff.

Victor had all but forgotten a series of meetings from several years prior that had resulted in first Yakov, then him, being allowed to sign contracts, but was repeatedly reminded by grateful employees who, at first, worried about calling in the teen’s parents from abroad for time-sensitive offers. However, even with the legal ability to sign for himself, he frequently consulted his coach when he was unsure about offers or companies wanting his attention.

With each passing day Victor felt less like an athlete and more like a celebrity. Magazines that didn’t focus on skating or sports at all asked for articles on the photogenic teen and his accomplishments, and prestigious clothing lines offered to outfit him. He shook the hands of more politicians than he could name, and wondered if the talk show cycle would ever end.

The days Victor managed to get on the ice felt like the calm in the storm. He relished the feel of the cold against his skin and the dull scrape of the blades on the frozen surface. The sound of Yakov’s yelling through the rink was a song that he missed.
He’d only been back in Russia for about two weeks, and already felt more exhausted from the celebrity status than he ever had from skating. He was relaxing with an early morning skate when Yakov called across the ice to him. He skated over and took a long draw from his water bottle.

“Vitya, did you cancel your flight and hotel room in Canada?”

_Shit._

“Sorry, coach, I forgot. Let me go do that now,” he said, reaching for his skate guards.

Yakov grabbed Victor’s wrist. “No.”

“But…”

“Worlds starts in a couple days. Head to Canada and get a break from the media and sponsors.”

“But I already withdrew.”

Yakov shook his head. “I didn’t say compete Vitya. Go and watch. Show your support for your countrymen, and enjoy the sport as a spectator. It’ll look good in the press, and more importantly give you a break.”

Victor thought about it, and considered his schedule. He didn’t think there was anything that couldn’t be postponed until he got back.

He smiled when he remembered that it would give him an opportunity to see Chris again.

Victor nodded. “If I can get my schedule altered I’ll go.”

“I’ll make some calls. I want you to take a break, and most of the people you’re working with are well aware that the off-season is coming so I don’t expect inquiries to diminish significantly for another couple months. You’re not used to it, and I think getting out of the country for a few days is the best plan.”

Victor smiled and nodded. Yakov returned the gesture and turned to talk to another skater. Victor was about to return to his practice, but stopped. “Yakov?”

“What is it Vitya?” the old man asked.

“Thank you. I would have been overwhelmed these past couple weeks without your guidance.”

Yakov grunted in reply, but Victor could detect the soft note to the noise. “Make sure to be the loudest person in the arena when Russia is on the ice.”

“I will coach.”

“Georgi!” Yakov yelled. “You’re not in the novice class, stop skating like it. Get your feet under you and fix your edges. They’re sloppier than a toddler’s.”

Victor took off toward a relatively empty section of the ice to work on his jumps. He was headed into a series of meetings that afternoon and would have time to discuss schedule alterations then. At that moment all he wanted to do was skate.
Despite the hectic schedule, Victor found himself dreamwalking almost every night. It was more consistent than it had ever been before, and each morning he studied his journal in an attempt to figure out what was triggering it.

Unfortunately, so many emotions and physical states repeated that he was only able to eliminate the least likely causes. Even things he had expected would prevent dreamwalking, like exhaustion and anger could not be completely excluded.

Whatever mental state he needed to dreamwalk was strong enough to overwhelm almost anything that might have prevented it. But he wondered what he had felt that much more of in the short time since his return to Russia.

Victor used his consistent dreamwalking to strengthen his abilities. He learned how to control when during his sleep cycle he stepped into the minds of others, so that he would not push himself to mental exhaustion as he had during the Olympics. He also focused on his bond with Yuri. He was quickly able to consistently reach out to the Japanese skater, and view his life through his eyes.

Observing the younger skater was also soothing during those days Victor was kept from the ice. It was a strong reminder of his own love of the sport, and what brought their minds together. He would wake up significantly calmer, ready to face the almost non-stop onslaught of press and sponsors.

Despite his desire to connect as much as possible, Victor set rules for himself. He knew that it was impolite, in a way, to continually visit without Yuri being aware of his presence. He decided to limit his visits to those times that Yuri was on the ice or watching figure skating events on television.

To reach that goal he started peeking into Yuri’s life at various points during the night. He noted clocks and sun angles as much as he could, and tried to reconcile timezone differences during the day. He paid attention to when the younger skater was in school, or at home. He added the information to his journal, trying to approximate a schedule.

Yuri was important to him, therefore he wanted to respect his space even though his presence was hidden. He wanted to meet Yuri, and learn about him through talking, not know everything and have no surprises.

Until that day he wanted to communicate with Yuri in the best way he knew how, through skating.

“Chris!” Victor leaned over the railing of the stands and called to the teen passing into the competitor tunnel below.

Christophe looked up and smiled, “Hi Victor!”

“Congratulations on making it through your qualifying round.”

Chris beamed. “Merci!”

“Do you have some free time, or does Coach Karpisek want you to rest before the short program tomorrow?”

Chris turned to his coach, who had been silently observing the conversation. The bald man shrugged and waved in a way both teens understood to mean, “Don’t push yourself,” before wandering in the direction of the locker room.
The boys grinned at each other.

“Lobby in fifteen?” Chris suggested.

“Sounds like a plan.”

Victor noticed a confused glance from some Russian pair skaters coming out of the tunnel as he conversed in fluent French. He turned his attention from Chris and waved at them. “Davai!”

The pair smiled. “Will you be watching Victor?”

“You have a practice, break, then the pairs shorts start at two-thirty, da?”

The duo nodded, and Victor saw Chris out of the corner of his eye, the teen now the one with the confused expression. He smiled.

“Chris, let’s get lunch then watch the pairs short. I’ve only got one person I need to cheer for in tonight’s portion of the men’s qualifiers so we can head out early after that.”

Chris nodded. “Coach would probably approve, watching pairs means I won’t exert myself before tomorrow.”

“We’ll be there,” Victor replied to his Russian teammates.

“Thank you!” they replied as their coach ushered them to take to the ice for their practice.

Victor watched as Chris headed toward the locker room, then made his own way toward the lobby. He put on a smile for the cameras that would inevitably appear at some point during the competition and ran through his prepared statement as to why he had withdrawn.

_It was a competitive season and I thought it best to withdraw. However I am excited to be here to support my teammates._

Short and simple.

“I wish Victor was skating tomorrow.”

Yuri was pouting and Victor had a hard time concealing his amusement.

“Me too, but mom says it’s normal for Olympic gold medalists to withdraw from worlds,” replied Yuko, skating in lazy circles. “The Olympics put a lot of pressure on them, and the media demands after are too much. It’s hard for them to practice, and they’re usually exhausted.”

Yuri grumbled.

Victor could tell by the light in the rink that it was likely after school practice, and he made a note to add it to his loose schedule.

Yuko turned to face Yuri, and a scowl passed over her face.

“Yuri, stop complaining that you won’t get to see Victor skate at Worlds.”

“But…”
The girl glared. “Practice Yuri! You’re planning to debut right into the junior division next season right?”

_Yuri’s going to start competing?_  

“Yeah?”

“You need to practice then. You’re skipping the novice division entirely, and will be against already seasoned competitors. Mom’s working hard to help you prepare, but you need to do your part!”

Yuri was silent for a moment, fidgeting. “Maybe I should go into novice for a year after all. I can still only land a couple doubles, and no triples at all.”

Yuko sighed. “You need to decide soon Yuri. Mom has to submit the paperwork so that you can be properly affiliated with Ice Castle.”

“How soon?”

“You have until Golden Week,” came Yuuki’s voice floating across the ice. “The paperwork will need submitted right after, otherwise you won’t be able to skate in the regional meet.”

Yuri skated to the barrier. “Yuuki-san, can I compete at the junior level without triples?”

The woman frowned. “We’re going to get you as many triples as possible before the regional meet in September. But Yuri, you need to set realistic expectations for now. You’ve never competed, and I’m not a proper coach. I’m going to help with the technical elements, and Minako is going to choreograph your program. You’re a good skater, and are getting better faster than I’d expected. Go in and aim to win, but even more important is to learn from the experience. Okay?”

There was a blend of emotions swirling through Yuri that Victor had a hard time sorting through. Nerves, excitement, fear, hope and longing were the most prevalent, but he knew that he would be lost in the depths if he probed too deep.

Yuri nodded. “Should I start in novice instead then?”

Yuuki was quiet for a moment. “Only you can decide that Yuri. There are others in the juniors who won’t have triples, and some that will. Another advantage is that you can stay in the same division for longer, if you start in novice you’ll meet the age cap before the end of your second season, but you’ll have until nineteen as a junior.”

Yuri chewed on his lower lip, and Victor could feel the slightly chapped skin.

Yuuki sighed. “Think it over Yuri. You have a couple weeks, and who knows, you might even have a triple by then.”

Yuri nodded.

“In the meantime, get out there and practice!”

Yuri squeaked in a way that Victor thought was adorable and proceeded into a couple warm-up laps of the rink.

It was going to be a good day, Victor knew it. The Ice Dance compulsories were in the morning, and
the men’s short program that afternoon. He’d connected to Yuri the night before, and the press hounded him less than he’d expected.

He was going to cheer for his fellow Russians, and for his friend Chris.

He heard footsteps and looked up to see the fifteen year old standing nervously beside him.

“Can I join you?”

Victor smiled and shifted to the empty seat next to him, allowing Chris to sit.

“I thought the compulsories were boring,” Victor teased.

“Yeah, well you changed my mind.”

Victor grinned and hugged his friend. “I knew you’d see it,” he said as he sat back up. “You’re too good a skater to miss an opportunity to improve your technique.”

Chris sighed and slumped.

“What’s up?”

“I’m worried about the short program.”

“What?”

“Even if I don’t mess up, I don’t think my technical scores are high enough. Only the top twenty-four advance to the free skate. If I had placed closer during the Olympics I might be more hopeful, but I’m down in the middle of the pack of those who didn’t advance then.”

“I can’t help with the scores,” Victor said with a sigh. “But I have a bit of advice.”

Chris looked up at him, his blond curls bobbing with the movement.

“Skate in a way that makes you happy.”

There was silence for a moment before Chris started laughing. “What does that even mean?”

Victor grinned. “That’s up to you to determine! It’s an emotion! You’ll know when you find it though.”

Chris turned his attention to the pair on the ice, their steps carrying them around the pattern.

“Is that what you do?”

Victor leaned forward, his platinum hair spilling over his shoulders. “I only recently figured it out myself. I learned it from somebody important to me. They said that how I placed didn’t matter, as long as I was happy with my performance.

“Sometimes you’re going to give your best, and somebody else does better,” Victor continued. “But if you skate in a way that makes you happy then it’s harder to let doubt creep in. Skate your love for the ice Chris.”

They watched the compulsories, had lunch and Victor made sure that he was the loudest voice in the arena when Chris took the ice. He consoled his friend when his score meant he was eliminated from further competition, but saw a marked change from Chris’s attitude during the Olympics.
“I’m going to work harder. I want to always be happy with my skating.”

Worlds turned out to be exactly the break that Victor needed. He congratulated Stéphane Lambiel on his win, and commiserated with Chris and the Russians. He felt a different sort of camaraderie being on the sidelines, and though he missed the ice and wanted to compete those days, he was glad that he had followed Yakov’s advice.

Then he was back in St. Petersburg, training as much as he could and still bound to a schedule set by sponsors and the media. He skated exhibitions and special events, joked with comedians sitting at desks and appeared in commercials that had no ties to figure skating whatsoever.

At some point he learned that the biggest trigger of his dreamwalking was love.

When he felt it towards him was when it had the greatest impact, and it explained why his dreamwalking had been so consistent immediately after his win. It wasn’t that the emotion was particularly strong from any one person, but that there were so many small amounts directed his way they had a cumulative effect.

But he could also initiate dreamwalking by thinking about love, and feeling his love for others. It wasn’t as strong, but more reliable. He thought about his love for Alexei, and Makkachin, the ice, and his friends.

Each time he initiated dreamwalking he pushed himself a bit further. He tried to develop his skills and control. He spent several days in a row just telling himself he would visit the minds of people in various countries until it started to work consistently.

He refined his makeshift schedule of when Yuri was on the ice, until he knew almost to the minute when he should visit or leave.

It was because he’d worked so hard to learn the schedule that he was surprised to find himself pulled into Yuri’s mind at a far later hour in the night than normal.

Yuri had progressed quickly in the weeks since Worlds, and was consistently nailing his doubles. Victor felt a sense of pride whenever Yuri realized that his technical elements were getting stronger.

“Yuri!” Yuko called. “I’m going to go to the store and get some bentos for lunch.”

“Ok,” Yuri replied.

“Mom’s up front if you need anything.”

Yuri skidded to a stop and waved bye to the cheerful girl before resuming laps around the empty rink.

Victor settled in, realizing that it must have been a day off from school, and didn’t mind the unexpected bonus time. He felt calm as Yuri circled the rink, practicing doubles and spins.

Yuri performed a step sequence across the ice, and managed a difficult entry into a double axel. Victor felt excitement from the younger skater, and his own pride at how well Yuri was doing.

Yuri finished whatever program components he was thinking of and started drilling jumps again. 

_Yuko’s taking a while to come back, _Yuri thought. _The store must be busy._
He landed a perfect double toe-loop. Victor was impressed at the speed and height.

*That felt good, I need to do it again.*

Yuri landed several more perfect toe loops in a row.

*I want to try a triple.*

Victor smiled to himself. Yuri was going to be a fierce competitor if he was already pushing himself like this.

Yuri skated around the rink again and nailed another double with a difficult entry.

*I wonder what Yuko will say when I land a triple.*

Victor allowed his thoughts to wander, thinking of Yuri landing triples.

*That doesn’t feel right,* Victor realized, noticing a strange stain from Yuri’s leg.

Victor snapped to attention. Yuri was gaining speed, too much for a double.

*Surely not, there’s nobody else here… He wouldn’t try without a teacher present would he?*

Yuri turned and the strain in Yuri’s leg turned to mild discomfort.

*He’s got to realize that the muscle is protesting.*

Yuri looked behind, and Victor felt the determination to try a triple set in the younger skater.

*No Yuri! Listen to your body, your entry is wrong, your leg is protesting. Stop! You’ll hurt yourself!*

Yuri crouched and extended one leg behind.

*No! There's no way you won't be seriously injured if you don't stop.*

Victor panicked and ripped down the wall that had kept his thoughts separated for more than a year.

*Please don’t let it be too late.*

*Yuri! No! Stop!*

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, and for any comments, kudos or shares.

Like any author I like knowing when people enjoy my scribblings.

_______

Let me just say "YAY!!! I FINALLY GOT HERE!"

You have no idea how long I've wanted to get to this point in the story. But earlier chapters kept getting longer and splitting so I could focus on Victor's history more. It was necessary, but author me was like, let's move it along already!

I'm really excited about where the story goes from here, really, really REALLY
FRIGGIN EXCITED!

In the meanwhile, geek out with me on tumblr at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com, or check out some of my other word doodles around here.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Victor has made contact with Yuri in a panicked attempt to stop the younger skater from injuring himself. But what happens when Yuri discovers that somebody has been observing his skating from within his head?

Chapter Notes

CONTACT!!!! Everybody was screaming about it in the comments on last chapter, so I'll scream with you! :P

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Yuri! No! Stop!

The younger skater was already flexing for the jump, but lost his focus at the sudden and unexpected screaming from inside his head. He jolted and the skate slipped out from underneath him. He tumbled onto his side, slamming his shoulder into the ice before crashing into the barrier.

Victor could feel the throb in Yuri’s body from the impact, but breathed a sigh of relief. Thank goodness.

“Is… is somebody there?”

Victor felt Yuri’s fear, and his own. He’d revealed himself in a panic. He frantically started to reassemble the pieces of his mental barrier.

“Please…” Yuri sobbed through the pain in his shoulder. “Please… tell me I’m not crazy.”

There was a moment of uncertainty before Victor realized that there was no way he would be able to hide again with a clean conscious.

You don’t need to speak out loud, he thought at the boy, we can hear each other’s thoughts.

Relief washed over Yuri, then the pain hit him fully. He shook, and whimpered when he tried to push himself up to stand.

I… I’m sorry Yuri, Victor thought. I know it hurts, but it was about to be a lot worse. I had to stop you.

The door on the far side of the rink opened, revealing Yuuki. She spied Yuri laying on the ice and ran to the opening in the barrier. She stepped onto the slick surface without a second thought, trusting the special grips on her shoes, and made her way to the boy.

“Yuri! Are you alright? What happened? Can you stand? Let’s get you off the ice.”
Yuri winced as she helped him to his feet, he was obviously favoring the shoulder that had slammed into the ice. She helped him to a nearby bench and sat him down, then started running her hands over him, checking for injuries.

Yuri bit his lip and whimpered as she lifted his right arm and pressed her fingers to the shoulder, and again as she felt along the outside of the same thigh.

“You’re going to be bruised for a few days,” she said, a worried tone in her voice. “But I don’t think it’s anything worse than that. Whatever were you doing to fall like this though? I heard you slam into the barrier from the front counter.”

“I…” Yuri started nervously. “I got distracted and my skate slipped just before a jump.”

She studied him for a moment and sighed. “Don’t scare me like that, ok Yuri? I trust you here on your own, but if this becomes a habit, or if you get reckless and push yourself I’ll insist on supervision. Is that understood?”

Yuri looked into her eyes and nodded.

Yuuki stared at him, even Victor could tell that she had her doubts, but she eventually wrapped her arms around the boy. “Ok. Just promise me that you’ll be more careful in the future.”

Yuri nodded again.

She passed him his skate guards and stood. “You’re done for the day though. You need to give yourself some time to recover after a fall like that.”

“But…”

“Don’t argue with me Yuri.”

An uncomfortable silence passed between them.

“Hi Yuri! I’m back with bentos!” Yuko called from the door before seeing her mom and Yuri.

“Go eat,” Yuuki ordered, “Then go home. Twenty minutes of ice for the swelling, twenty in the onsen. Repeat two or three times. It won’t feel good, but it’ll help.”

Yuri looked at the floor and nodded.

“Mom? Yuri?” Yuko asked in confusion.

Yuuki turned and smiled at her daughter. “You two should go outside and eat on the steps. It’s a nice day. Walk Yuri home when you're done, ok Yuko?”

“I can walk home on my own!” Yuri protested.

Yuuki studied him for a moment before relenting. “Fine, but only if you’re not limping. You’re going to be pretty sore by the end of lunch.”

“Mom, what happened?” Yuko asked cautiously.

“Yuri had a bad fall honey. I’m sending him home for the day.”

“I’m sorry Yuri!” Yuko cried. “They had a line at the store.”
Yuri shook his head. “It’s not your fault.”

“Go on kids, head outside and eat before you catch a chill. Rinkside is no place to be without heavier clothes.”

Yuri nodded and winced as he leaned over to remove his skates. He was a bit shaky as he stood but managed to walk outside without having to favor the injured leg.

*I’m sorry Yuri*, Victor thought again.

*H… how are you inside my head?* Yuri thought in return.

“**Yuri, are you ok?**” Yuko asked, holding out a bento.

**Eat Yuri. I can stay for a little while. I’ll talk to you when you have some quiet time. Ok?**

**O...ok,** came the uncertain reply.

Yuri took the bento and opened it. He looked at the food and ate quietly.

“Talk to me Yuri,” Yuko said. “Are you ok? What happened?”

Yuri took a deep breath. “Just a bad fall Yu-chan. I guess I’m still shaken.”

“Are you sure?”

Yuri put on a smile, but Victor could tell it was fake. “I’m sure Yuko. I’ll be fine, promise.”

The girl stared at him for a moment before smiling. “Ok.”

They ate in relative silence, and Yuri bid farewell to Yuko at the bottom of the stairs.

*Do you want to talk now? Or shall I wait until you get home?* Victor asked.

*How are you inside my head?*

Victor smiled to himself. *I’m a dreamwalker Yuri.*

*I thought dreamwalkers were only a myth.*

*No, you’re one too. We couldn’t converse like this otherwise.*

*But… but I’ve never dreamwalked, not that I know of.*

*It’s different for everybody, maybe a part of you isn’t ready yet.*

*Did you know my name automatically? Is that a skill dreamwalkers have? You called it.*

Victor tensed.

*Why are you nervous?*

*I’m sorry Yuri. I… I’ve been watching you for a while now. But only when you skate,* Victor quickly clarified.

*So it wasn’t my imagination?*
Victor felt Yuri searching his memory. *You sensed me?*

*A… a bit… I think. Then, Why me?*

Victor paused, trying to put words to his feelings.

*Is it bad?*

*No, Yuri, no. It’s not bad, Victor answered quickly. I’m just trying to find the right words.***

They were both silent for a few minutes before Victor decided on what he wanted to say. *I think the short answer is, you inspire me Yuri.*

Yuri stopped on a bridge and looked out over the water. *I… inspire you?*

*Yes.*

*How?*

*I sensed how determined you are to skate, and somehow it makes me want to be better too. When I was feeling down, questioning my own abilities, visiting you would give me strength.*

*I… gave you strength?*

*Yes, Yuri. I sensed it the first time my mind touched yours. You have a goal, and are determined to reach it. You don’t know how powerful that is.*

Victor could feel the embarrassment flood the boy. *You know?*

Victor sensed the nerves flooding Yuri and knew that he had to be careful of his answers. *That you want to be a competitive figure skater? Yes, I know.*

*If… if you know that… why did you stop me? I was about to try a triple toe loop.*

*You were about to hurt yourself.*

*But I am hurt. My shoulder is throbbing and I think the bruise might be bigger than my leg once it stops growing.*

*Not like you would have been. Didn’t you feel the strain in your leg?*

*Yes, but…*

*No Yuri. Your body was warning you. If you had launched that jump you would have torn a muscle in the process. It should never feel like that, understood?*

*How do you know?*

Victor suddenly realized that he had said just a bit too much. *Because I’m a figure skater too,* he finally answered.

*Really?*

*Yes.*

*What’s your name?*
Victor quickly walled off the fear and nerves that flooded him at the question. He didn’t want Yuri to stop striving for him, and he worried that having the person he hoped to meet someday in his head might be too much. I need a nickname… Vic… Nikifor… he thought to himself. That’s it.

Nicky.

Nicky?

Yeah, Nicky.

Can you teach me Nicky?

Less than a day had passed since Victor stopped Yuri from a dangerous jump, and the question took him by surprise.

However, the request resonated within him. After a day of thinking about it he had agreed, albeit with the clear understanding that he was not, and could not replace, an actual coach. But as somebody who was intimately familiar with how elements should feel from doing them himself, he would be able to guide Yuri.

Victor had gathered from previous visits that Yuko’s mother Yuuki was teaching him, and that his ballet instructor would choreograph the program. But Yuri confirmed almost immediately that he didn’t have a proper coach.

It had only been a couple days since Victor revealed himself, and Yuri had already fully accepted his presence. He’d learned that the reason for the afternoon practice was due to something called Golden Week, and that Yuri had decided to enter the Junior Division immediately after all.

Victor didn’t know the strengths of competition of the juniors within Japan, only how those sent to international competitions in previous years had performed. He tried to study in his off time, but between his own training and tutoring schedule he found it difficult to look for news and videos down to the regional level.

With that in mind he aimed to give Yuri as strong a base as possible, but knew that without more information about what the boy would face, the best he could do was make his protege as rounded a competitor as he could.

Yuri ached, and Victor could feel it as well. But the boy was also determined and it was what had kept Victor from stopping him.

What am I doing wrong Nicky? Why can’t I land this jump?

You need a break Yuri, Victor thought, knowing that he needed one himself.

I’ll take a break when I land this jump.

Yuri, it’s only your first year in competition. You need to pace yourself. You have time.

One more try.
You said that ten tries ago. You’re not going to get the height you need if your muscles are too tired to launch it.

Instead of heading for the gap in the barrier, Yuri took a lap of the ice. Victor sighed and braced himself for yet another impact. As expected, he came down hard, arms shaking from absorbing the shock.

That’s it Yuri. I’m leaving for the day unless you take a break. I feel those too you know.

Ok, ok.

Yuri skated to the break and pulled on his guards.

Why don’t you go for a run Yuri? It’ll help you shake off those falls.

Victor felt Yuri’s agreement, and a few minutes later the boy was jogging across the bridge again.

Have you picked your music for the short program?

Nerves fluttered in Yuri before he responded. Yes.

What is it?

I… I picked The Lilac Fairy.

That’s a good choice, but why that song? Victor had a feeling he already knew, but had to ask anyway.

Because Victor Nikiforov skated to it when he won the Junior Worlds.

Are you trying to imitate him Yuri?

Yuri slowed to a walk. No, not exactly. But…

But? Victor prompted after a moment.

I feel more connected to the ice when I look to Victor. Every time I try to copy his programs, or listen to his music I fall in love with it all over again. Victor’s the reason I want to skate competitively, instead of just for fun. I want to skate against him one day… But right now a part of me needs that anchor. Does that make sense?

Victor smiled to himself. Yeah, it does.

Minako-sensei likes the piece too, Yuri thought after a moment. I think she thought I was going to pick something more contemporary.

She’s a dancer, yes?

Mm-hmm. When I told her what song I chose she told me that she even danced the part of the Lilac Fairy once, back when she toured.

It must be a good memory for her then.

I hope so.

A moment of silence passed between them.
Can you look at your watch for me Yuri?

Victor read the number and sighed. I should get back soon, I need to get in some actual sleep or I’ll be tired in the morning.

Is… is it that hard? Yuri asked tentatively.

It’s… strange. The body feels rested but the mind isn’t. You know how you feel after staying up too late and getting up too early at the same time?

Yeah?

That’s kind of how it feels if I dreamwalk too long. But without the physical need for sleep.

Oh.

Another moment of silence.

I’m sorry Nicky. I don’t mean to make you tired.

Victor startled. I want to be here Yuri. You’re not making me do anything. It’s my choice to spend my sleeping hours with you.

But I asked you to teach me. What if I’m not as good a skater as you hope I’ll be? Won’t you be wasting your time?

Nonsense, on both counts.

Huh?

Yuri, you’re just starting out, but you’re going to be a far better skater than you realize. You have a drive and passion that’s infectious. One day you’re going to have people looking up to you the way you do to Victor, I promise. And you’re far from a waste of time. Even if something happened and you couldn’t skate, I would cherish every minute. So please, believe me when I say that I want to be here.

Ok.

Victor skated in aimless, lazy circles. Though he was on the ice in the morning for the first time in several weeks, his mind wasn’t in it. He was considering slight modifications to Yuri’s short program. He knew the boy was capable of more, if he just worked hard enough.

He had quickly realized that observing Yuri from behind a self-imposed wall held nothing to actually working with the boy. Every accomplishment, even the ones that Yuri himself barely acknowledged, was new and incredible. He was watching and helping Yuri to grow into a competitor, and it was one of the best feelings that he could imagine.

“Vitya!”

Victor slid to a stop on the ice, looking at where Yakov was yelling from the barrier. When he realized that his attention wouldn’t be enough he skated over to where the man waited.

“Yes coach?”
Yakov scowled. “What’s gotten into you today Vitya? I thought you’d be excited for a full day of practice, but you can’t seem to keep focused.”

“Coach?” Victor asked, unsure what Yakov was referring to.

“I thought you were going to practice jumps, or maybe start on new choreography. Instead you’re out there daydreaming. Why even put on skates if you’re not going to work?”

Victor grabbed his towel from where it was draped over the barrier and wiped at the sweat on the back of his neck. “I guess I’ve got a lot on my mind is all coach.”

“Well get it out and get your head in the game. The grand prix series will be here before you know it.”

Victor blinked. “But they won’t even announce the assignments for another month.”

“And I can guarantee that you’ll be in them. The media and sponsors are finally starting to back off, and that mean’s it’s time for you to focus. You still need to pick your music for this season and start working on your programs. Expectations will be high this year, so you don’t have time to slack off.”

“Yes coach,” Victor said as Yakov turned and stormed off with a huff.

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Despite the other jumps being easier, Victor slowly realized that Yuri’s strongest double was the axel.

Yuri was standing at the barrier, rehydrating, when Victor finally decided to say something.

*Yuri, I know it’s not normally the triple skaters go for first, but I want you to try for a triple axel.*

Yuri promptly proceeded to choke on his water, earning a confused glance from Yuko as she practiced her own doubles.

*I can’t do a triple axel! It’s the hardest jump, and I don’t have any other triples yet.*

*I think you can do it Yuri. Your height and speed feels good, and you seem more confident going into it.*

*I… I like seeing where I’m going. But I’m not sure if I’m ready for a triple of it.*

Victor laughed. *If you don’t want to we can wait, but I really think you can do it.*

Really?

*Mm-hmm. You wanna try?*

Yuri was contemplative for a moment before he nodded. *Yeah.*

*Good.* Victor smiled.

Yuri took off on a few laps of the ice. *What do I need to do?*  

*First run through a couple more doubles, get as much speed and height as you can, but control the jump. Don’t over rotate, ok? I want to make sure you’re ready for this.*
“Yuri?” Yuko asked.

“Just running some axels.”

“Ok, but you’re going a bit fast aren’t you?”

“I’m trying to work on controlling them.”

Victor could feel Yuko staring as Yuri turned and faced into his jump. He launched it, and Victor loved how clean it felt. Two and a half rotations and Victor felt a confident edge as Yuri landed.

_That was perfect Yuri. Can you do it just like that again?_

_Yeah._

Yuri took off on another lap of the ice, passing Yuko, who had moved to watch from the barrier, and landed another perfect double axel.

_One more time Yuri._

Yuri nodded and did it again.

_How do you feel?_

Yuri moved back to the barrier and took another drink of water. _It feels good._

_Do you want to try it?_

Yes.

_You’ll likely fall the first couple times. That extra rotation can feel weird, but I think you have enough speed and time in the air to get it in._

_Anything else?_

_Tuck tighter, do anything you can to prevent drag._

_Got it._

Yuri set down his water bottle and set off again. Bright morning light streamed through the tall windows and somehow everything felt right to Victor.

_Good speed. Give it as much power as you can._

Yuri turned, and crouched into the jump just a bit more than it took for a double. He launched it and Victor could tell that it was good. Yuri pulled his limbs tight, and for a second Victor thought he’d land a clean edge the first time.

Yuri ended up stumbling and coming down on the ice. However, Victor was jubilant. Yuri had managed the required three and a half rotations.

_Are you ok Yuri?_

_Yeah. Can I try again?_

_Only if you’re feeling up to it._
It was good, but I wanna land it.

“Yuri! Was that a triple?” Yuko squeaked.

Yuri didn’t answer as he gained speed to make another attempt. Victor heard the girl scramble out the door but he put it out of his mind to focus on what Yuri was doing.

Yuri launched it again, and, although he fell, Victor could tell it was a better attempt. He got up and went right into a third try.

Victor was amazed when Yuri only put a hand on the ice on his third attempt at a triple axel.

*Does it feel that good?*

*It feels amazing! None of the other triples I tried felt like this. Can I try again?*

*Just don’t hurt yourself.*

Yuri rounded the rink again and turned to face into the jump. He launched it, and Victor could feel the elation in the younger teen’s body.

The edge wasn’t clean, but Yuri kept his feet as he came out of the jump.

*Yuri! That was amazing!*

*I can’t believe I landed a triple!*

Victor felt more excitement for the boy than he had for his own first triples. Yuri was blossoming, becoming a better skater before his eyes and he couldn’t wait to face him in competition.

“Katsuki Yuri!”

Yuri looked up from where he was gliding out of the jump to see Yuuki glaring from the break in the barrier. “What do you think you’re doing young man?”

“Yuuki-san?” Yuri asked, confused.

“Did you seriously try a triple without me present?”

“Yes?”

The look on her face darkened, and Yuri gulped in response.

“How could you be so reckless? What would have happened if you’d have fallen or hurt yourself?”

“But I didn’t.”

The woman glared.

Victor felt Yuri shrink in on himself. “Gomen’nasai.”

The set of Yuuki’s face softened. “Come here Yuri.”

Yuri skated over to where she stood, and she crouched to look him in the eyes.

“Look Yuri, I know you’re determined, but you have to understand that the more difficult your jumps become, the greater chance you could injure yourself. Do you remember the way your
shoulder got hurt during Golden Week?"

Yuri nodded.

“I didn’t say anything at the time, because I was hoping you’d learned. But I had my suspicions then. I don’t want you trying new jumps or difficult technical elements without me or Minako here. Is that understood?”

Yuri shrunk further and mumbled, “Yes, Yuuki-san.”

“Once we’re confident in your abilities you can practice them on your own, but we have to set limits since you are allowed to be here alone. If you got hurt trying something new, and nobody was here…” She took a shuddering breath. “I don’t want to think about it.”

“I’m sorry Yuuki-san.”

She held her arms open. Yuri moved forward until she hugged him. “I’m sorry for yelling,” she said against him. “But I don’t want to see you hurt. Ok?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Now Yuko said that you were trying for a triple axel?”

Yuri nodded.

“Did you land it?”

Yuri looked up and beamed at her, nodding enthusiastically.

“Show me.”

Landing his first triple had given Yuri the confidence he needed, even though he still struggled to add additional triples to his roster.

Unfortunately as the summer wore on Victor knew that he would have to spend less time with Yuri. He’d received his assignments to the Grand Prix series and was increasingly busy preparing for his own season. He had to dedicate time to sleep in order to perform well on the ice.

Though he tried to visit with Yuri every few days at least, he could see that the lack of consistent work had led to a stalling in the teen’s progress. He knew it was something that he had to address if he was going to face Yuri one day.

‘Yuri, Victor said one morning toward the end of before-school practice.

Yes Nicky?

I know you have Minako-sensei and Yuuki-san, but I think you need a proper coach.

But, what about you?

I told you at the outset, I’m not a coach, and I’m preparing for my own upcoming season. I want to work with you, but I can’t give you the time you need. I want you to keep improving, and I think you need a coach to make it happen.
Victor could feel the panic that infused the teen. *Oh Yuri, I'm not leaving. I just want you to do your best! You need more than I can give right now. I'll still be here, I promise.*

Really?

*Absolutely! I want to see you compete against Victor one day too! But I think you'll get there faster if you have a proper coach.*

Comments/Kudos/Shares appreciated!

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Meet Nicky :-) Cause I don't think anybody believes that Yuri wouldn't FREAK THE EFF OUT if he knew his idol was in his head.

I kept going back and forth as to whether I was satisfied with this chapter or not. On one hand I wanted to just drench it in several emotions (and none of them romance, LOL), on the other hand it makes more sense for that to develop slowly. I finally decided that it needs to build naturally and that my first instinct would have forced it. Hopefully it works for you all.

Also, if you like this please check out some of my other YoI works at http://archiveofourown.org/users/phoenixwaller

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Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Both Victor and Yuri are busy preparing for the upcoming season. But while Victor is eagerly anticipating the start of competition, Yuri is anxious that he isn't ready. Can Nicky allay the boy's fears?

Chapter Notes

Yay! It's chapter 9. It was a bit delayed cause of some writer's block. This is a completely different chapter than what I had in the outline, but made sooooooo much sense to put in once I started and I'm in a much better place moving forward.

If you've been enjoying this work please punch the share button up above and spread the love.

Also if you haven't seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: Shared Gravity. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.

Finally, I've updated the In Our Dreams playlist to include Yuri's pieces for this chapter.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Run it again,” Yakov demanded from the barrier.

Victor nodded and skated to the middle of the rink. He saw that Yakov was about to start the music when he skated to the barrier himself.

“What is it Vitya?”

“Gonna add another elastic to my hair. I can feel this one slipping. The last thing I need is being unable to see at a critical moment.”

Yakov grumbled as Victor leaned over to a cart and grabbed an elastic from a small pile.

“I know what you’re going to say Yakov. I like my hair long.”

“You need to consider your image Vitya. You’ll turn eighteen this season. There’s not much longer you’ll be able to get away with childish whims.”

“It’s not childish, and it’s not a whim. I like my hair this way. It’s a preference. Besides, I hear the fans like it.”

Yakov huffed as Victor returned to his start position. Music drifted from tiny speakers and echoed through the rink, but Victor focused on it.
The ice. It connects us Yuri. You might have been just another person who’s mind I dreamwalked into. But you were on the ice. Then you showed me that you love seeing me on the ice. When I was selecting music this seemed the best.

The music ended.

“Again! Mark the jumps. I want to focus on your step and choreographic sequences.”

Victor nodded, wiped some sweat from his brow, and started the short program over.

*Hurry Yuri. I want to face you on the ice.*

The rink was silent in the soft light of the morning, and Yuri seemed to like the solitude. Victor enjoyed the feel of the skates underneath the boy.

*Can I really do this Nicky?*

Victor was observing as Yuri ran through his programs. The younger skater was still a bit rough around the edges, but Victor knew he would make a good debut. *You’re going to be fine Yuri.*

*I’m not sure I can win though.*

*Yuuki-san and Minako-sensei have both stressed that experience is more important right now. Listen to them. Don’t focus on winning your first time. There’s a big difference between practice, exhibition and competition. You need to learn how each is different. Take this time and just enjoy it.*

*Enjoy it?*

*Yes. Dance for your audience. Bow to the judges. You love the ice, right?*

*Yes.*

*Go out there and skate that.*

*Will I be ready though?*

*Yuri, your competition is still a month away. You’ll be fine. That’s plenty of time to refine.*

*But I still only have the triple axel that’s clean. My only other triple is the toe loop and the landing’s still shaky. Won’t my competitors have more?*

*Don’t worry about them Yuri. Focus on making yourself the best skater you can. If you worry too much about them right now it’ll just distract you.*

*If you say so.*

*I know so. Now, ready to go again?*

*Yeah.*

Yuri ran through both his programs in silence a couple more times before he took another break. Victor was a bit shocked at the lack of fatigue in the teen’s body.

*You doing ok? A lot of people wouldn’t run them back to back so many times like that.*
I’m good, Yuri replied. Though I think I need to get off the ice for a few minutes.

Good, you’re learning to listen to your body. You’ll need to do that more as you progress. If you don’t you could get injured.

I know.

Yuri went to the locker room and removed his skates. He pulled on a pair of running shoes and stepped out into the comfortable heat of a summer morning. Victor was quiet in Yuri’s mind for several minutes but soon noticed an uncomfortable silence.

What’s wrong Yuri?

I… I just wonder if Victor was as nervous before his first competition.

Victor chuckled. Well he started younger than you, but I can guarantee that he was nervous that first time.

How do you know?

Because we’re all nervous in the beginning. It’s an unknown. How good will the other skaters be? Will you land your jumps? Will the judges like your program?

So what do you do?

You go out and skate. You try to touch people with your performance, and if you fall you get up and do it again. You keep skating, because you never know who you’re touching with your art. One skate may seem a miniscule thing to you, but it might be the world to somebody else.

Really?

Really. Keep forging ahead Yuri and I promise that one day just seeing you skate will be the highlight of someone’s day.

Yuri, it might be hard to convince my coach for an extra free day with my season approaching, but do you want me to try and be there for your first competition?

Yuri slid to a stop near the barrier and fumbled for his water bottle. Once he was comfortably gulping down the liquid he finally turned his attention to Victor’s question.

I… want you to be there… but…

Victor was silent.

I… I think I should do this on my own Nicky. You won’t always be able to be there, and I need to start out right if I’m ever going to meet Victor on the ice. I wish you could be with me, but not in my head. I want you on the sidelines, cheering me on where I can see you.

I understand, and I’m proud of you. I wish I could be there cheering for you too.

Nicky?

Yeah?
September dragged on, and Victor noticed an uptick in calls from sponsors and the media. The season was quickly approaching and they wanted to schedule interviews and endorsements before the competitions started in earnest.

Victor was grateful that his medal at the prior year’s nationals meant that he would be seeded directly to the final, and that he wouldn’t have to compete up from the local level. It ensured that he could give the sponsors the energy they required early and be able to focus when it was time for him to compete at Skate America at the end of October.

Victor finished reviewing his schedule for the following few days and was looking forward to reading a magazine that had just arrived from America. There was an article about the US skaters that he wanted to read before meeting them on the ice. Makkachin was asleep in her bed and it was the perfect time to indulge.

Victor was only a few paragraphs into the article when he felt a fluttering sensation in the back of his mind. His breath hitched in his throat before an all too familiar presence squeaked out Hello?

Yuri? Victor asked carefully.

Nicky! the voice inside his head cried.

Yuri what’s wrong? Victor would deal with the implications of Yuri being in his head later. Right now the boy obviously needed something.

He stared at the magazine in his lap, not really seeing it and focused on Yuri’s distress.

I… I’m scared Nicky!

Something clicked in Victor. The date! Your competition is tomorrow, isn’t it Yuri?

I’m not sure I can do it Nicky. What if I’m not good enough?

Yuri, you’re ready. Trust me.

But I only have the two triples, what if the others have them all?

What if they do? Remember Yuri, this is your first competition. You need to relax and just learn from it. No matter how you place it’s going to be an invaluable experience.

Victor could feel Yuri’s nerves, and decided to try a new tactic.

Yuri, tell me what your schedule is tomorrow.

My… schedule?”

Yeah. After you wake up what will you do?

How much do you want to know?
Everything! Will you eat breakfast? How long is the train ride? What time is your practice? Break
the day into pieces for me.

Victor could feel Yuri’s confusion at the request, but it was better than the nerves.

We’ll have breakfast early, then a couple hours on the train. The station isn’t far from the rink.
Practice is in the morning, then lunch, and immediately after lunch is the Junior level competition.
The seniors skate a bit later.

Are you nervous about breakfast or the train ride?

Surprise. Of course not.

Why not?

Who gets nervous about breakfast?

Victor chuckled. What about the practice time? Are you nervous about that?

No. I practice every day.

Why not though? You’ll be practicing with the people you’ll be competing against. If they make you
nervous to compete against wouldn’t practice make you nervous too?

Yuri was silent for a moment as he considered the answer. No, because it’s still just practice.

So what is it about the competition that makes you nervous? Are the programs brand new? Are you
skating something different than what you practiced?

Of course not, I skate them every day.

Well if you’re not nervous about practice because you do it every day, why are you worried about
programs you skate every day?

There will be other skaters, and judges… and…

And?

And I don’t want to disappoint anybody. Everybody has worked so hard for me. I want them to be
proud.

Bingo.

Yuri, I can guarantee that they’re already proud.

But I haven’t performed yet.

That doesn’t matter. You’re doing something new and scary, and it’s a hard thing. Everybody has
dreams Yuri. Everybody. But you’re not just dreaming, you’re working to make it happen. That
takes courage. I’m proud of you and you haven’t even stepped onto the ice yet. I can guarantee that
everybody else is proud too. So just go out there and try to enjoy yourself. Ok?

Victor could feel the flood of Yuri’s emotions, and he knew that the boy would be crying with relief
if he were awake.

After a moment Yuri seemed to be better, and Victor could feel his curiosity. What are you reading?
Those look like American figure skaters.

They are. It’s an article about the American figure skaters who will be participating in the Grand Prix series.

I recognize that one, Yuri said when Victor’s eyes landed on a photo of Evan Lysacek. He was in the Olympics.

That’s right, and he’s rumored to be a top competitor this season.

Is that why you’re reading about him?

Yes it is. It’s not something you should concern yourself with right now, but as you get closer to competing internationally it’s a habit you’ll want to develop. Who will you be skating against? What are their strengths and weaknesses? What can you do to your own programs that will give you an edge?

I thought you said worrying about the other skaters is a distraction.

It can be, if you let fear about them be the sole point of concern; if you let yourself get so wrapped up in how they will do that you can’t see your own strengths. But studying them is another matter. It’s not based in fear, it’s based in competition. When you study your competition it should never be in the mindset of comparing your flaws to their strengths. Instead it should be a matter of seeing what they do well and making yourself better in those areas in order to beat them. Flaws and weaknesses can be overcome, but only if you go into them with a positive mind. Convince yourself that you’re horrible, and you’ll stay horrible. Be determined to match and exceed, and you’ll grow by leaps and bounds.

Do you think Victor studies his competition? He’s at the top of the world right now.

I know he does. We all do. Because as much as it’s about beating them, you learn from each other as well. How do they handle an element you’re uncomfortable with? What do they do that makes a program unique? Eventually you cheer for your competitors, and are glad as they get better, because they force you to keep growing as well. Strong competition is something to want, not something to be worried about.

I never thought of it like that.

Victor smiled. For now focus on yourself. What can you do to improve your own skating? I bet you have a list of things you want to work on. After tomorrow that list will get longer, but it’ll be good for you.

Nicky?

Yes?

Thank you.

You’re welcome Yuri. But I am curious…

About what?

When did you start dreamwalking? Had you started since we met?

Silence. No. I don’t think so anyway.
So you managed to find me the first time? Whatever were you thinking about before bed?

Nervousness. I… I really wanted to talk to you, and since you promised not to visit for the competition it made me sad.

Do you want me there after all?

No… I mean I do… but…

Yuri?

No. I want you there someday, cheering me on, surrounded by my family. I want you to watch me, not watch my skate through me. Does that make sense?

Perfect.

Silence, then Victor had an idea. Yuri, does either Yuuki-san or Minako-sensei have a video recorder?

I… I think so. Why?

It’s another habit you should develop anyway, and this will let me see your skate too. Have one of them record your performance. Once you return it’s time to watch it. It’ll help them remember things they wanted to point out, and let you see how you look to the audience.

Victor felt Yuri’s surprise at the suggestion. And… and you can watch it with me?

That’s right. It won’t be as good as live, but this way I can see how good you look on the ice. Is that a good compromise?

Yes!

Victor loved feeling the boy’s excitement, and it matched his own. He would finally be able to see Yuri skate and not just feel the movements.

Nicky? I… I think I should go to sleep, but… I… I don’t know how.

Victor smiled. Just relax and imagine yourself back in your own body. Will it to happen. You might wake up the first couple times you do it, but once you get the hang of it you’ll stay asleep through the transition.

Ok.

A moment later Victor felt Yuri’s presence fade and he breathed a sigh of relief. He stared at the magazine in his hands, grateful that it was in English and not Russian.

I should have expected he’d visit one day. But I need to be careful to not let him figure it out.

Victor strode from the wings of the sound stage and clasped hands with the late-night comedian. He was led to a chair and briefly greeted the celebrity that had been interviewed before him.

They discussed the Olympic experience, and his plans for the upcoming season, but for the most part Victor was on auto-pilot. It was no different than many of the other interviews, with just a handful of
unique questions. Soon they were cutting for a commercial break, and he relinquished the chair to sit on the couch alongside the other guest.

His mind was somewhere else, and he couldn't wait to go to bed. Yuri had performed his free skate for the first time earlier that day, and he wanted to know how it turned out. Once the recording was over he had to exchange pleasantries with the host and other guests for a while, along with sign autographs for the audience.

As soon as he could escape he boarded a flight back from Moscow to St. Petersburg. The afternoon taping had taken him from the ice, but he’d arrive home at just about the right time.

Yuri had convinced Yuuki to record the performances so that he could rewatch them and figure out where to make improvements. Victor planned to join him and watch the boy skate for the first time.

He couldn’t be more excited as he walked into his apartment, hugged Makkachin, and prepared for bed. A mug of peppermint tea sat on his nightstand, and Victor sipped it slowly while remembering the events of the day. Despite being away from training for the taping of the evening’s show, there were advantages. He’d felt the admiration from his fans and, combined with his excitement about finally seeing Yuri skate, he was in a perfect mood for dreamwalking.

Victor finished his tea a few minutes after his segment ended and settled into bed just after midnight. Almost immediately he found himself in Yuri’s mind, the boy on his way to the rink for morning practice.

Nicky!

How’d you do Yuri?

There were nine of us competing, and i took fourth! I qualified to move onto sectionals!

You’re advancing after your first competition? That’s fantastic Yuri!

It’s even better. There was a coach there who only works with Junior division skaters. Her main student is moving to the seniors next season. When she realized that I didn’t have a proper coach she said that I could have first dibs on the opening in her schedule. She travels around the prefecture a lot to meet skaters where they train, so I wouldn’t have her every day, but she said that with Yuuki-san and Minako-sensei I’m already in a good place to handle that.

Oh Yuri! I’m so proud of you! Not only did you advance but you caught the eye of a coach. That’s a great thing to happen. I can’t wait to see your performances. Yuuki-san is bringing the video of your skates today, right?

Yes, and she filmed the others too. I asked her to record everything so I could study their performances.

Victor felt pride infuse him as he realized that Yuri had internalized the idea of studying the competition. He hoped that knowing what to expect would help the boy’s nerves.

Yuko was waiting at the rink, bouncing with excitement as Yuri jogged up the stairs. She immediately threw her arms around the boy. “Congratulations Yuri! You advanced to sectionals your first competition!”

The teens stood there hugging and chatting excitedly until Yuuki opened the door of the rink and allowed them inside. They immediately went to the bench in front of the television and Victor saw that the camera was attached by a couple cables so that they could crowd around and watch right
“Yuri, I don’t know why you insisted on watching these this morning,” Yuuki started. “But there isn’t enough time to get through everything before you two need to leave for school. So what do you want to watch first?”

“Can we go over my programs first?”

Yuuki nodded and advanced the video to the start of Yuri’s short program. Victor watched with silent awe as he saw the boy on the ice for the first time.

_You’re beautiful Yuri_, Victor said once the short program was over. _I knew it felt good, but seeing you skate is amazing._

_Really?_

_Really. I could see how nervous you were, but you overcame it well. It was absolutely stunning for a first performance._

“Let’s move onto the free skate,” Yuuki said. “Then we’ll review them again with an eye for things that need improvement.”

Victor was excited for the free skate. He’d felt it, but never heard the music as Yuri preferred to practice in silence in the mornings. Gentle piano music drifted from the speakers. It was slow a beautiful, but as Yuri skated Victor heard a sound that wasn’t there.

Yuri wasn’t skating _to_ the music, rather he was _accompanying_ it. His movements provided an energy that changed the entire tone of the piece.

_What’s the music Yuri? It’s beautiful._ Victor wanted more. He wanted to remember how much the skate touched him. He knew he’d have to add the piece to his personal music collection.

_Solitude, by Ryuichi Sakamoto. Minako-sensei picked it out for me._

The piece ended, and for a moment Victor had no words. Over the course of more than a year he knew that Yuri had talent, passion and the overall skill to win. But seeing him skate was a new experience. Notes not in the music echoed through his head; passages and trills created by steps and spins. Victor had never seen skating that had such an effect on him.

_Keep skating like that Yuri, and you’ll be on the same ice as Victor before you know it._

_Really?_

_Absolutely._

“Ok kids,” Yuuki said as she paused before the short program. “Let’s tear it apart. There’s just over a month until sectionals. If you see a problem, point it out.”

Victor stepped onto the ice, and the crowd at Skate America roared. It was his first event of the season, and the day after his free skate Yuri would go into his second. Victor was determined to give the boy a performance that would inspire him as he started his own competitive journey.
Thanks for reading! Comments/Kudos/Shares are much appreciated.

I know it's probably completely unreasonable for Yuri to advance after the first competition if it were normal, but he DID have an Olympic gold medalist in his head helping him train, even if he didn't know it. Also, after peeking at how junior skaters in the region advanced last year it's not surprising for him to have moved on with the fourth place finish.

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

The beginning of Victor's second season at the senior level begins with Skate America, and he immediately faces fierce competition. Meanwhile Yuri is preparing for his regional competition, only his second competitive skating event.

Chapter Notes

It's a bit of a shorter chapter, but I'm ok with it cause what was supposed to be one chapter has already split twice now to be less filler and more plot. Since it might split once more I'm just gonna let it fall as it wants to.

I've updated the In Our Dreams playlist to include Victor's pieces for this chapter. I know some will point out that the Pruit Igoe and Prophecies video is dated 2009 for the movie Watchmen, and this chapter is set in late 2006. However, I picked that particular arrangement as I wasn't all that pleased with the sound quality of the clips from Koyaanisqatsi. It's the same songs just arranged for the newer film.

Side note, if you've never seen Koyaanisqatsi I recommend it. It's really a trip, and since there's not a single line of spoken dialog it's fine no matter what language you speak.

If you've been enjoying this work please punch the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Victor spread his arms above and waved to the crowd in Connecticut as he took to the ice. He could imagine the commentary of the announcers as he waited for the music to start.

“Victor Nikiforov of Russia, 17 years old, is about to see if he can turn his gold medal at the Olympics into another gold in the opening event of the Grand Prix series. He’s skating to Vivaldi’s Winter.”

Victor closed his eyes as he waited for the music to start. He thought of cold, of snow, of ice and how love of dancing on the frozen surface tied him and Yuri together.

You advanced in your first competition Yuri. I’m so proud of you. In just a few days you’ll skate in your second. I hope I can inspire you to do your best.

Victor moved, light on his feet like the first few breaths of a snowstorm; a flurry of movement akin to flakes caught in the wind. He danced to glittering frozen swirls and the chill of a landscape covered in white.
At the end of the short program Victor was in second place.

*Are you there Nicky?* Yuri asked from his spot in front of the television for the evening’s rebroadcast of the Skate America short program.

*I’m here Yuri.*

*The program is about to start… but… why did you want to watch with me?*

*Let’s call it part of your training. I want you to watch the performances and point out flaws.*

*I can’t do that!*

*You want to compete against Victor right?*

*Y… yes.*

*Then you need to learn how to evaluate performances. We’re looking at the seniors so you don’t worry about people in the junior division.*

*But…*

*Yuri, everybody makes mistakes. All skaters have weaknesses.*

*Not Victor.*

*Even Victor.*

Victor could feel the grumbling from Yuri, and it was heartwarming, but he wanted the boy to start seeing him as a competitor.

*Yuri, you have to skate as if you’re aiming to surpass him. There’s no other way to get to his level. If you look at him as the top, as a cap to your own abilities, you’ll only limit yourself. Do you understand?*

*I think so.*

*Good. Now there’s a bit of time before Victor skates. He drew the tenth spot this evening out of twelve skaters. So hopefully you’re comfortable spotting flaws by the time he’s up.*

Victor found the time watching the competition with Yuri relaxing. It let him step back and see the routines from a different perspective. He spent almost as much time pointing out stylistic choices that would improve the score as minor flaws that Yuri missed initially.

By about the halfway point he felt hope fluttering in Yuri’s chest.

*Yuri? What’s go you so excited?*

*You keep pointing out things that can improve a score, and I can integrate some of them right now.*

*Oh?*

*Like the flexibility on the spins, or the lightness in the step sequence. I just never thought to do it like that.*
Just don’t do anything that’ll mess you up in your competition.

He felt Yuri’s agreement as the next skater, Evan Lysacek, took the ice. That’s the skater from the magazine you were looking at. Isn’t he?

That’s right. The American team has a handful of really powerful skaters right now, and he’s one.

Yuuki-san thinks that Oda-san will beat him here.

That’s a possibility. He’s rumored to have strong programs this year.

Did you research Oda-san too?

Of course, though he was a bit harder since I don’t read Japanese.

Nicky?

Yes Yuri?

Was… was it ok that I visited you?

Of course.

It’s just that, you seemed nervous. You’re normally very open and it was different.

I’m sorry Yuri, I didn’t mean to make you worried about visiting me. I just wasn’t expecting it.

I’m sorry Nicky.

Don’t be. But would it make you feel better if you had a regular time or day of the week where I was prepared for you? I know you probably can’t control your dreamwalking that well yet, but I can teach you a little when you can make it work. And… maybe you can help me read figure skating articles in Japanese?

Do you mean it?

Of course! Let me think a few days, and after your competition I’ll give you a schedule of when is good for me. I’ve got a lot of obligations so it won’t be able to be regular, but I’ll make sure to let you know. Ok?

Ok. I’d like that.

Another skater from the US took to the ice, and Victor was proud at how Yuri was able to assess the performance.

Then it was Victor’s turn. He managed to hide his nerves behind Yuri’s excitement as he heard the familiar music start.

He looks stiff, Yuri thought.

The observation caught Victor by surprise, but as soon as he looked he knew that the boy was right. His motions weren’t as fluid as usual.

He’s under a lot of pressure, Victor reasoned.

True, but I don’t think that’s it.
What do you mean?

I don’t think it’s nerves. I can’t explain it, but there’s something different.

Victor tried to think but couldn’t think of anything else to explain it.

Do I have to critique Victor’s skate? Yuri asked once it had ended.

Yes Yuri.

Victor could feel the boy’s sigh. *His footwork during the choreographic sequence wasn’t as well defined as usual, and his flying sit spin looked a bit loose at first.*

Victor made note of the observations. He’d thought the spin could have been better himself, but, once Yuri mentioned it, he couldn’t believe how sloppy his footwork had been. Even Yakov hadn’t pointed it out at the time, and the coach was notorious for noticing the small details.

But… it was still a beautiful performance! Yuri added after a moment. *The best one tonight.*

The scores came in and he was in first with two skaters left, but Victor knew that Oda, who would be skating next would end the night with a comfortable margin.

Wow. Yuri thought after Oda was finished. Victor felt a pang.

What was so good about it? Victor asked.

Yuri was silent for a moment. *His technical elements scores were higher than Victor’s, but I think Victor could have beat his performance scores with a cleaner program. Maybe moving one of the harder jumps to the second half too. There wasn’t that much of a difference.*

You think Victor can beat him?

I know he can beat him. Victor’s incredible.

They watched the final of the skater of the night, then Victor had to depart. His free skate was that evening and he would need to sleep and focus.

Victor took a deep breath and stepped onto the ice. He leaned against the barrier, staring at his skates, while children carried off stuffed animals and flowers. Evan Lysacek had just skated an incredible program, with a base technical score several points higher than his own at least. He doubted he’d be able to make up the difference, and would need to skate a perfect program just to make the podium.

“Vitya,” Yakov barked. “Get your head in the game.”

Victor looked up and met his coach’s eyes. The elder man promptly shut up when he realized that the teen was determined and focused.

Yakov nodded in satisfaction, then Victor’s name was announced.

Victor took a deep breath and moved to the center of the ice. He heard the announcer struggle with how to pronounce the title of the movie that his music had come from, then sound filled the arena.

*Koyaanisqatsi, everything about that movie speaks to me right now. There’s beauty and sadness,*
everything feels so unsettled. It accomplishes so much without a single line of dialog, music and imagery combine to tell a story, and I’ll tell my own here.

Victor could feel the chill of the rink through the see-thru panels on his costume, made to look as if it had been ripped apart. He let the frenetic energy and the highs and lows of the compilation, a combination of the songs *Pruit Igoe* and *Prophecies*, carry him through the next several minutes.

He felt the difference from the night before in his skating. His edges were clean, almost harsh with the music, spins tight with turmoil.

He knew it wasn’t enough to beat the programs with the higher base score, but he was confident that he’d put on a good performance for Yuri. He ended the night in third, with Nobunari Oda claiming the top spot and Lysacek second.

Thought he’d wanted higher, Victor was satisfied with the bronze medal. It was only the first event of the season after all. There was still plenty of time to refine his programs to reclaim gold.

In the meanwhile, he was looking forward to a hot bath back at the hotel, maybe even a soak in the large hot tub that he’d spied near the pool. He had a dull ache throughout from the intensity of the performance and thought the soothing heat would be a perfect remedy.

Victor spent less time that night making Yuri analyze the performances and they both just enjoyed watching the competition. Victor kept a keen eye on the couple of competitors he would see again in Japan, but tried not to let Yuri notice how much he was studying them.

All the programs were so good, Yuri said after the medal ceremony. *I wish Victor had won gold though. His free skate was so raw and passionate.*

The others had higher technical scores, Victor countered.

Yuri grumbled. *His program was still prettier.*

And he had high performance scores to show for it.

But not the highest.

Victor sighed. *There will always be some subjectivity in the performance scores. It’s how they balanced the artistry and the athleticism with the new scoring. I doubt Victor would have skated to that music at all under the six point oh system. It’s a bit out of the mainstream.*

*I guess you’re right.*

Don’t worry about Victor. *It’s just the start of the season. He still made the podium, and there are still plenty of competitions left for him to do better in.*

Victor could feel Yuri start to argue and quickly changed the subject. *Are you ready for your own competition tomorrow?*

*I’m nervous, but not as much as last time.*

*Oh really?*

*You... you really helped me Nicky. I know you wanted me to look at the skaters last night and*
tonight as future competitors, but you showed me that everybody makes little mistakes, even at the senior level. I... I think that even if I do mess up it’ll be ok.

That’s right Yuri. You can always pick yourself back up and try again.

They were silent for a moment before Victor decided that he had to prepare for the next day himself. It would be filled with press before the exhibition.

Do you really have to go?

Yes. I have obligations to fulfill. But unless something comes up I’ll be back the morning after your free skate to watch the videos with you again. Ok?

Ok!

It was still mid-afternoon when Victor got home. He dragged his suitcase into his apartment feeling more tired than he had in ages. All he wanted was a bath and sleep. Even food was a distant third.

He plodded to the bedroom, sleep taking priority. He pulled off the clothes he’d traveled in and grabbed a pair of sweats and a comfortable t-shirt to sleep in. He tugged the shirt over his head, noting it was a bit more snug than he’d remembered.

It must have shrunk in the wash. Shame, I like that shirt. Maybe it’ll stretch back out.

Victor flopped on his bed and curled around one of his pillows. He wished it were Makkachin’s warmth beside him, but he hadn’t picked her up from the sitter yet and was too exhausted to even think of setting foot outside until after a nap.

Stupid jet lag. It’s normally not this bad.

“I feel like I could sleep for a week,” he muttered to the empty room. He didn’t even care about the light streaming through the windows as he closed his eyes.

He knew immediately that he had slept dreamlessly until deep into the night when he felt the tug in the back of his mind.

Is Nicky not coming?

Yuri!

Victor didn’t know how, but just enough of Yuri’s thoughts had followed the thread between them to remind him of their scheduled time.

Though he was still exhausted he managed to somehow make it to Yuri’s mind.

Nicky! I was worried you weren’t coming.

Sorry Yuri. I fell asleep too early and my dreamwalking wasn’t planned in advance.

That’s all?

Yes. Why?
I thought maybe you were disappointed in me.

Why would I be disappointed?

I came in eighth.

Out of how many?

Twenty-three, I think.

Yuri, that’s incredible!

Really?

Yuri, it’s only your second competition. I don’t know what you were expecting but to give a program that does so well right away is quite something.

There was a moment of silence before Yuri spoke again. Nicky?

Yes?

I want to make my programs even better before nationals.

Victor felt momentary shock. Yuri, did you just say nationals?

I… I qualified for the junior division nationals. They’re near the end of November.

Oh Yuri! I’m so proud of you!

“Ok Yuri,” Yuuki said, and Victor finally noticed their surroundings. “First you were excited to watch, then you stalled. Make up your mind because there’s just enough time to watch and evaluate your programs before you need to leave for school. Otherwise lace up and get on the ice.”

“We’re watching!”

The woman nodded curtly and Victor felt squeezed between Yuko and a boy slightly older than Yuri.

Who’s the boy Yuri?

That’s Nishigori Takeshi. He practices with us in the afternoons but usually doesn’t come in the mornings.

Yuuki forwarded past the earliest competitors to Yuri’s short program, and Victor could immediately see the improvements that had been made since the boy’s debut performance. The program overall was more refined, and the teen looked more confident about his jumps.

You improved so much in only a month Yuri! That’s incredible.

Thank you. I worked hard to make the program better.

It shows.

Victor watched in awe as Yuri floated across the ice in the recordings. He’d known that the boy was strong even after the first competition, but seeing how much he’d grown in only a handful of weeks proved how talented he was.
You... you'll help me make it better, won’t you Nicky?

Of course Yuri, though it’s fantastic already. But I do have my own competitions to work for. So you know I can’t give you as much attention as I did over the summer.

I know. But you make me a better skater. I just know with your help I’ll be able to face Victor on the ice one day.

I know you will too Yuri.

“Vitya!” Yakov bellowed from across the rink as Victor came down on his hip. Victor looked at the red-faced man. “What’d I do coach?”

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

“Practicing my jumps, just like you wanted.”

“Like hell. You don’t miss those jumps. You’re trying to add a quad mid-season aren’t you?”

Victor scowled. “So what if I am? I need to bring up my technical scores. Skate America proved that I can’t keep winning with triples alone.”

Yakov sighed and walked around the rink. Victor knew that the man rarely did that unless he wanted a conversation to be a bit more private than his normal yelling.

Victor got up from the ice and skated to the barrier.

“Look Vitya. I know how you must feel. But now’s not the time. Your body just isn’t ready for quads. You need to wait until you’re a bit older. You’ll get there, but your muscles need to develop first.”

“I can do them. I just need to figure out how!”

Yakov’s face was turning redder, but Victor stared defiantly. Eventually Yakov softened.

“You’ve never landed a quad and even your attempts are under-rotated. I want to see you with one too, but I don’t want it rushed haphazardly just to try for a higher score. Unless you can land it clean and consistently in practice I don’t want to see it in your program. Ok?”

Victor grit his teeth, and Yakov sighed.

“One hour a day Vitya. I don’t want to give you even that much, but you can devote one hour a day to trying to land a quad. No more, and no slacking off on other practice or I’ll take it away again. I still don’t think you’re ready, but I know you’ll fight me on this.”

Victor nodded his agreement to the deal.

“Good. Now dust the ice from your pants and let’s run your programs. We’re going to squeeze them for every point possible.”

Victor pushed off from the barrier and moved to his starting position. Yakov was about to start Winter when Victor called out. “Coach. I think my footwork could use some work during the
choreography. Can you watch that in particular and let me know what you think?"

Yakov made a confused noise then nodded.

*Next time you see this program Yuri, you’ll see that everybody works to improve and get better. Even me.*

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

I know that Yuri doing so well his first few competitions is still unlikely. But remember, Olympic gold medalist in his friggin head. Also I've peeked at what I can in the regionals etc for advancing in Japanese competitions and it doesn't look all that surprising that he would move on even from eighth.

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at [phoenixwaller.tumblr.com](http://phoenixwaller.tumblr.com)

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Also if you haven't seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: [Shared Gravity](http://phoenixwaller.tumblr.com). Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Victor's second season in the senior division has him facing a string of competitions, all with his eighteenth birthday looming. Meanwhile Yuri prepares to skate in his first Junior Nationals.

Chapter Notes

Just a big thanks to everybody who's been reading this. I love seeing the comments and sharing this story with you.

If you've been enjoying this work please use the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Victor was up against several deadlines, and he wasn’t sure if he was excited or terrified. First was Yuri’s skate at the Japanese Junior Nationals, followed only by his own competition in Japan for the NHK Trophy a week later. Assuming he qualified for the Grand Prix final it was less than two weeks after that, then only another three weeks until the Russian Nationals, thankfully being held in early January.

Somehow though, he felt less pressure from the string of competitions than he did from another looming date: December 25th. His eighteenth birthday.

Despite multiple high-level wins he knew that his father was stubborn, a family trait it seemed, and he would quickly find himself responsible for his own costs. The influx of sponsors around the Olympics had helped, he’d grown his safety net by several years. However, the thought of financial independence still scared him.

Victor pushed the thought to the back of his mind. He had an appointment to keep, and a pressing concern in an entirely different matter.

He still hadn’t figured out how he was going to explain his absence during the NHK Trophy to Yuri. He hoped that the younger teen wouldn’t ask, but knew better than to rely on it. He silently cursed himself for wanting to watch the Skate America rebroadcast with him as it set a precedent.

Victor looked up at the clock. He wasn’t sure if Yuri would be able to dreamwalk to him or not, his skill was still so new that he doubted the boy would be able to control it. However if he did manage it he would be arriving shortly.

Victor took one last tour of his apartment. His television was off, and he’d taken pains to hide anything with cyrillic writing. He’d also chosen a spot fairly free of reflective surfaces. Makkachin
was asleep in another room, and anything he could think of that would allow the teen to discover his identity was hidden.

He didn’t want Yuri to know who Nicky was until they were finally able to meet and talk about it face-to-face.

*I want you to reach me Yuri. You don’t need to know I helped until you do.*

Victor looked over his assortment of magazines, in English, French, and a couple in Japanese in case Yuri made it. The blood drained from his face when he saw the address labels, and he scrambled for a black marker.

*I can’t be careless like that.*

Victor felt a tug in the back of his mind and smiled. Somehow Yuri had managed to find him again.

*Yuri! You made it!*

________________________________________________________________________

“Focus Vitya!” Yakov shouted across the rink as Victor fell for the third time that day.

“I am focused!” Victor called back from where he was already pushing himself off the ice.

“Why are you missing your triple axel then?” Yakov retorted. “You never miss that jump.”

Victor skated to the barrier and took several gulps from his water bottle. He was breathing heavily and almost gave himself a case of the hiccups while rehydrating. He just couldn’t seem to find his center of balance.

“I think I’m going to mark my jumps today coach,” Victor declared after a moment.

Yakov scowled. “There are only a couple of weeks until the NHK Trophy Vitya. It’s hardly the time to be marking your jumps.”

Victor sighed. “I know, but I just can’t seem to land anything today. I don’t want to risk an injury forcing it when I’m obviously off.”

Victor was uncomfortable under the intense glare of his coach, but he stood firm. Finally the older man relented. “Fine, mark for today. But if you’re marking again tomorrow then the next day we’ll spend the entire day on jumps, you hear?”

Victor nodded and moved back to an empty section of the ice.

*Yakov’s right. I don’t miss these jumps. But I just can’t seem to land them, it’s like I’m skating in somebody else’s body and don’t know where the feet are.*

Victor paused on the ice and took a deep breath. He closed his eyes and imagined the music. The flitting melody of Vivaldi’s *Winter* played in his head. He moved across the ice, but stopped and kicked at it in frustration only a moment later.

“What’s wrong Vitya?” Yakov demanded.

“My step sequence is off. It’s too heavy,” Victor growled.
Yakov walked around to the section Victor was practicing in. “Show me,” he demanded, a funny tone in his voice.

Victor moved back into his starting position. He cleared his mind and envisioned his movements. He started, but instead of individual flakes dancing on the wind he felt like a clump of snow falling from a rooftop.

He marked the jumps, but he didn’t even need to hear Yakov’s opinion to know that it was bad.

“Go practice in the studio.” Yakov declared as he made his way back to his normal position overseeing all of his skaters.


Yakov stared at him as if he had suddenly sprouted a second head. “If you haven’t figured it out already you will soon enough. In the meantime, to the studio with you. Work on the basics, not your program. I don’t want to see you back on the ice until you’ve found your feet again.”

Victor stared at Yakov’s back as the coach walked away, but somehow he knew better than to argue. He skated to the entry, snapped on his blade guards and moved to a bench to remove his skates.

Victor stomped to the locker room and traded his skates for a pair of split-sole dance boots, which he carried to the studio upstairs. The ballet instructor looked at him as he walked in, but nodded to an empty section and quickly resumed working with children from the novice division.

The basics huh? Victor placed his hand on the barre. Fine then.

Working with Yuri was a welcome relief from Victor’s problems. His own body felt awkward and clunky for no apparent reason, but there was a sense of place with Yuri.

A part of him wondered if he spent too much time with the younger teen, and that was the cause of his own issues. At the same time he doubted it. If working with Yuri was going to cause him problems then it should have over the summer when he was devoting more time to it.

That felt good Yuri, Victor said as the teen finished a runthrough of his short program. Yuuki-san showed you how to hook up the video recorder to the television right?

Yeah, Yuri replied. You wanna watch it now?

Let’s run it and your free skate once more each, then we’ll review.

Ok.

Yuri moved back to the center of the rink and ran through it again. Victor could feel the improvements with each repetition, but he wanted to get Yuri to a point where he would be a serious contender in his first nationals. He knew the chances of him making the podium were extremely slim, but would do everything he could to try and make it happen.

Yuri finished the short program, waited a moment then went right into his free skate.

You didn’t want a break between them Yuri?

No, I felt good. Besides I’ll have to leave for school before we know it. I want to watch the video with
you at least twice and know what to work on this afternoon.

That’s a good plan.

Victor could tell by their casual conversation that the programs were already a part of Yuri’s muscle memory. It was a good thing, it meant that he wouldn’t have to think about them as much in competition.

Yuri stopped, and Victor knew that the teen was happy with how it felt.

You want to watch it?

Yeah. Point out anything I can do to make it better. Ok Nicky?

Of course!

Yuri moved to the lobby and took off his skates before hooking the camera to the television. Yuko joined him a moment later to help review as well. Soon they were pointing out tiny flaws and places where the performance could be better.

Victor knew that Yuri would make a splash in his first national competition.

Victor pushed off from the ice, and nailed his flying sit-spin. He still felt as if he was in the wrong body, but not as badly as he had the week before. However Yakov insisted he spend time each morning in the studio running through dance basics.

Victor had to admit that it was helping. His jumps were still bothersome, and he felt like he was wearing lead weights during his step sequences, but by finding his center of balance before stepping onto the ice he was able to practice to some degree of effectiveness.

However, just as he was learning to deal with one issue another one crept up. He found himself exhausted by the end of training almost every day, and more often than not a dull ache suffused through his body.

He was relaxing in a steaming bathtub when he felt the familiar tug in the back of his mind.

Nicky? Yuri asked carefully.

I’m sorry Yuri. I completely forgot about our meeting tonight.

Are… are you in the bath?

Victor could feel the boy’s embarrassment.

Yes, Yuri. I’m sorry. I had a rough day and needed to relax.

Do you want me to leave?

Victor smiled. You’re ok, as long as you don’t mind me being in the bath.

My family runs an onsen. I’m quite used to seeing people… well...

Onsen? I thought it was an inn.
Yuri’s amusement filled Victor. *Technically it’s both, and a restaurant. Onsen are hot springs. My family runs a hot springs inn, and the restaurant that goes with it. But because public bath houses are common in Japan it is also frequented by locals as well.*

Victor sighed. *Sounds lovely. I could lose myself in a hot spring right now.*

*I hope you can visit one day.*

*I’m sure I will.*

Victor leaned back and closed his eyes, enjoying the warmth and the company.

*Nicky?*

*Yes Yuri?*

*I’m getting nervous about Nationals. What if I don’t do well?*

Victor had to keep himself from sighing. *Yuri. It doesn’t matter. You could come in dead last and I’d be proud of you. I’m sure your family feels the same. You’ve done so well for it being your debut season.*

*But won’t people expect me to keep doing well? I don’t want to let them down.*

*Yuri, I know I can’t speak for anybody but myself. But the only way you’ll let me down is if you give up. Ok?*

*Ok.*

Waiting for Yuri was almost like torture the night after his Junior Nationals skate. They had agreed that Yuri would visit Nicky to let him know how he had placed, and that they would watch the video the next morning when Nicky visited Yuri.

When Victor finally felt the tug in the back of his mind he felt the boy’s disappointment with it.

*Yuri!*

*Hi Nicky.*

*How’d you do?*

*I fell on my triple toe loop. Somehow I didn’t have enough speed going into it and I couldn’t save the landing.*

*Are you hurt?*

*No.*

*Then it’s ok. As long as you’re not hurt.*

*You’re not mad? We worked so hard for me to have that triple, and I messed up.*

*Yuri… Everybody has off days. There’s nothing you or anybody else can do about that except get up, dust off the ice and try again. You missed a jump. It happens to everybody. There isn’t a skater I*
know who hasn’t fallen in competition. You can’t let it get you down, ok?

Have you fallen Nicky?

Of course I have. Heck I was tripping over my own feet all day it seemed.

I meant in competition.

Plenty of times. Some days everything is right and you nail all your jumps, other days the ice is the wrong temperature, or your skates are too tight, or it’s just not your day and you fall. You never like it, but it’s part of the sport. The only way to handle it is to get up again and keep trying.

Victor could feel the teen calming as they spoke, and he decided to broach the subject again. So how’d you do?

I came in tenth.

And how many skaters were there?

Thirty.

Yuri that’s still amazing! Just think, even with a fall you performed better than so many others.

But I missed the podium.

So? It’s still only your debut season. You have plenty of time to make it.

Really?

Of course. So when’s your next competition?

Yuuki-san is looking at several more regional skating competitions for me to enter after the start of the year. Of course they are only local.

That doesn’t matter. Right now you just need to practice performing and competing. You can worry about what event feeds where later. Ok?

Ok!

Victor looked out on the crowd in the Nagano arena and waved. He wished that Yuri were in the audience, but the teen had informed him that it was too far to go on his own, even if he had just turned fourteen a couple days prior. He knew the boy was at home watching though, and he wanted to give him a spectacular performance.

Victor was still having difficulty with several elements. Every time he thought he’d figured them out he’d wake up and they were off again. However he wasn’t going to let it stop him.

I’m in fourth after the short program. I lost points by putting a hand down after my triple lutz. I have to make up for that here. I can still make the final if I’m on the podium.

The slow intro of Prophecies started, with its somber tones. It wove back and forth seamlessly with Pruit Igoe, and Victor took advantage of the strengths of each piece. Hydroblading and spins during the slow portions, jumps and energetic step sequences during the powerful portions of the song. He
remembered the cinematography, and imagined the same explosions that brought down the doomed housing project propelling him into his jumps.

By the end of his program he was breathing heavily and exhausted, but he had done it. His program had been well executed and he stood on the podium, bronze draped over his neck and a guaranteed spot in the Grand Prix Final.

It was a slow realization, but once Victor figured it out he wondered what had taken him so long.

It was the stubble that had given it away.

Victor’s face had always been smooth, but as he showered a few days after the NHK Trophy he noticed the roughness on his skin for the first time. He’d nearly tripped over the ledge of the shower in an attempt to get to the mirror.

It was barely perceptible, but there. He had the beginnings of a beard.

*The falls, my shirts all feeling too tight, the exhaustion, the aches…*

Victor fell to his knees, naked on the bathroom floor, his hands above him still grasping the counter, suds from his hair dripping down his back.

*No. Not now. I’m in the middle of the season.*

Another thought came to him as he sat there, reflecting on all the signs of the past few months.

*Yakov figured it out as soon as I started having difficulty with my skating. Why didn’t he say something?*

For a moment Victor felt a flash of anger, then realized the reason the coach hadn’t said anything.

*He knew it would become a distraction. He wanted to give me ways to cope first.*

Victor suddenly understood why he’d been sent to the ballet studio before skating every day. It allowed him to readjust to the slow changes in his body. He was able to find his balance without the danger of the ice under him.

Victor picked himself up off the floor. He needed to get to practice. He returned to the shower to finish rinsing shampoo from his hair, then got dressed and left for the rink.

As he jogged he realized something else. His cheeks burned in embarrassment, but he doubted he could avoid it. He only had a week until the Grand Prix Final and he’d need to look presentable.

“You’re late Vitya!” Yakov scolded as soon as he walked in.

Victor blushed, and pulled on his coach’s sleeve until the old man got the hint and stepped a few feet away and out of earshot of any other skaters.

“Yakov, I need a favor,” Victor murmured.

“What is it Vitya?” Yakov asked, exasperated.

“Can… can you teach me how to shave?”
Yakov stared at him for a moment before he started laughing. “Finally figured it out did you?”

Victor glared, then nodded.

Yakov smiled and patted his hand. “Look Vitya, the Grand Prix Final is only a week away. I’m not going to send you out there with nicks all over your face, and believe me there will be nicks for the first while until you get used to it.”

“So you’re going to send me out with a beard?” Victor asked, horrified at the thought.

Yakov burst into laughter. “Of course not. Luckily for you the final is here in St. Petersburg, that’ll make it easier.”

“Huh?”

Yakov smiled. “I’ll teach you how to shave after the final. For now you’re going to get proper trims from my barber. I’ll call and make the appointments.

“In the meanwhile, to the studio with you. You understand why I’m making you do ballet warmups every day, right?”

Victor nodded.

“Good. Now go find your feet. We’ve only got a good week for practice, and you’re still heavy in Winter.”

Victor wasn’t exactly sure what set of circumstances had converged to make it happen, but he had somehow managed a silver medal at the Grand Prix Final. The gold went to a Frenchman, Brian Joubert, and the bronze to Nobunari Oda.

The two Americans who had qualified, Evan Lysacek and Johnny Weir, had both withdrawn due to injury. Given the ongoing changes to his body, Victor counted himself lucky to not be among them.

He now had three weeks to learn how to cope with the physical changes while preparing for the second half of the season. He was determined to come back strong, and show Yuri that the only way to fail was to stop trying.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

Yeah, Victor's almost eighteen, and he's finally getting that last growth spurt. That's gotta be hard as an athlete.

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

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Also if you haven't seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: *Shared Gravity*. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Victor continues to struggle against the changes in his body as he turns eighteen. His second season as a senior comes to a close with him competing in Russian Nationals, European Championships and the World Figure Skating Championships.

Chapter Notes

Bit of a shorter chapter, but really since what was supposed to be one chapter split into 3 I'm ok with it. (yes, this entire season from skate america through worlds was originally plotted as a single chapter. I'm glad it split though.)

If you've been enjoying this work please use the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

I've updated the In Our Dreams playlist to include Chris's pieces for this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Victor sat in a chair next to the window, watching the snow fall over St. Petersburg. His apartment was dark, the only light coming from the streetlamps outside. He ran his fingertips over the edge of a box held in his lap, but wasn’t in the mood to open it.

Somehow opening that box would make everything more real.

He stood, walked it over to the coffee table and set it down before returning to the chair. He curled up and stared out at the silent city, hair loose and falling over his shoulders. Makkachin padded over and laid her head on the chair, whining softly and glancing up at him.

He reached out and ruffled the poodle’s fur. The whining stopped, but he could still see the concern in her eyes.

He’d provided food for a lunch party at the rink, but had barely been able to enjoy himself with his rinkmates. What should have been a happy occasion felt like stepping off the edge of a cliff. He was in freefall and wasn’t sure if his parachute was big enough to save him.

He tightened his arms around his knees and watched the lights of the city. Cars moved along the snow covered street, and shadows shifted behind windows. The world was continuing on, and dragging him along with it, no matter how much he wanted to stall time.

Victor sighed, stood and retrieved the box. He figured his parents would call at some point that evening, assuming that they hadn’t been invited to a holiday party. They’d probably ask about the package.
He let the light shining in from the street illuminate the box as he poked at the tape with his fingernail. The thin film separated, and he pulled back the wings of cardboard. Inside was a number of wrapped gifts.

He read the tags as he removed them, putting the ones for Christmas aside. Even though his parents had adapted to celebrating Christmas on his birthday with most of the countries they toured in, he still preferred to celebrate it in January, as was tradition in Russia.

Toward the bottom of the box he found a small bag with pawprints on it. Alexei’s scrawl was unmistakable, and Victor smiled at the thought that his brother had sent some treats for Makkachin.

The poodle perked up as soon as she smelled the treats, and Victor handed her one. She bounced with it to her favorite spot on the floor and curled up to gnaw on it.

Victor took out a toy that had been included in the bag, tied it closed again and set it aside. He then faced a small collection of birthday presents. Victor sighed and opened the one from his father first.

He almost felt that he’d been stabbed when he opened the box to see a finely crafted watch. There was a note inside that explained it was family tradition to gift a watch on the eighteenth birthday, but to him it was just a reminder that he was on his own.

*You’ve run out of time, so start keeping track of it.*

The gifts from his mother were a bit more practical. She’d sent several cookbooks in French, knowing that Victor sometimes liked to dabble in foreign cooking. Along with them she’d sent a selection of spices and specialty items that he’d have trouble finding locally.

Victor felt tears in his eyes when he opened an envelope from both his parents to find two tickets to the opera, and saw that the show was Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*. He didn’t know who he would take with him, but somehow knowing that his parents remembered which opera was his favorite meant more to him than he’d imagined.

He’d saved Alexei’s two gifts for last and stared at them for several moments. They were both the same size, and appeared to be compact disk cases. Eventually Victor reached for the one on the left and opened it.

Inside he saw Alexei’s scribble on a home burned DVD. *Alexei Nikiforov Competition Performances - 2006.*

Victor’s breath caught in his throat. He’d mentioned to his brother during their time at the Olympics that he regretted not being closer. While Victor’s performances were often televised, cello competitions were not and he wished he could see his brother play.

Victor felt a tear slip down his cheek. His brother had not only listened, but had taken the time to compile a video for him.

His hands were shaking as he reached for the last gift. He opened it and stared for several moments. *Alexei Nikiforov - Original Cello Compositions - Top Secret.*

Victor saw a slip of paper tucked behind the disk and pulled it out to see his brother’s email address. He blinked a couple times and realized that he’d never had it. A note scribbled on the back indicated that he should email about the music rather than discuss it on the phone.

Victor held both disks in his hands, weighing which to play first. He finally decided on the video,
leaving the chair by the window to sit on the couch.

Victor was mesmerized by his brother’s music. Alexei’s bowing technique was precise, but had a soulful quality to it. Victor knew most of the set pieces from his years of listening to classical music both in the family and for programs, and understood both how hard they were, and how well his brother had played them.

He immediately realized why his parents were so proud of him, he could easily become one of the top cellists in the world. The audience was rapt with attention in every piece, and he could feel emotion filling the concert halls.

As the video compilation ended Victor weighed the other disk. He stood and carried it to a CD player he kept on a shelf and returned to his chair by the window.

Where Alexei’s music was precise and complex in competition, Victor could tell that he was just beginning in his composition attempts. The pieces were simpler, but harnessed a completely different energy than the boy projected on stage.

Victor closed his eyes and listened. He could hear the beginnings of a story in every song. The depth wasn’t quite where it needed to be, but each piece had been carefully thought out. The chord structures were solid, tempo good and he could hear years of musical training behind each note.

The disk had just ended when the phone rang. Victor stood in the dim apartment and made his way to the cradle. He looked at the caller ID. As expected, it was his parents. He took a second to compose himself before picking up.

Victor wanted to visit Yuri, but the teen had told him that between Christmas, New Year’s and increased traffic to the inn for the holidays that he would not be skating for slightly over a week. He was unsure of his schedule and really couldn’t provide Nicky with good times to visit.

He’d also apparently been unable to control his dreamwalking or had been too tired for it, and he hadn’t come to Victor either.

It was the longest they’d gone without communicating via dreams since Victor had revealed himself, and he’d slowly started to realize how precious those interactions had become to him. He missed Yuri’s exuberance for skating, and for growing as a competitor.

Victor trudged toward the rink in the chill pre-dawn. Yakov had gifted all the skaters a late start time for the New Year, nine in the morning rather than seven. However, routine was burned into him, and after treating Makkachin to a longer walk found himself headed there shortly before eight.

He had only a couple of days until Nationals. He could take the personal time at the end of the season.

Besides, he just wanted to be on the ice. He wanted to ignore the dull ache that greeted him daily, forget the tiny cuts accumulating on his face, fit into his clothes again, and lose himself to the frozen dance.

Yakov grunted a greeting as he came through the door, on his own way toward the ice. Victor nodded in return, made his way to the locker room and pulled on his dance boots. He climbed the stairs to the ballet studio, and started warming up, discovering where his feet were for the day.
“Victor!”

Victor stopped and turned at the familiar voice. Christophe Giacometti was running up the tunnel behind him, a fellow competitor at the European Championships.

He grinned, not having seen his friend since Worlds the year before. The teens embraced before continuing toward the locker room to prepare for practice.

“Congratulations on your gold at Russian Nationals,” Chris said in excited French.

“And you on your Silver in Switzerland,” Victor replied. “Does it feel good to have earned it two years in a row?”

Chris nodded. “I still can’t beat Stephane, but I’ll get there eventually.”

Victor grinned. “You’ll be standing on top before you know it. You’ve got quite the program this year.”

They made their way to their individual lockers and pulled their gear out.

“I really tried to increase my technical scores,” Chris said. “A part of me was still stuck in the old scoring system.”

Victor chuckled. “Same. It helped that it changed while we were preparing to come up to seniors, but some things are so drilled in that it’s hard to adjust them.”

“I’m still shocked you were able to alter your programs halfway through the season for higher scores last year. I’m still firmly devoted to committing one program to muscle memory and that’s it.”

Victor grumbled slightly. “I think we’re all going to have to start thinking on our feet. Sure, we all know we lost points for falling or popping a jump before, but now we know exactly how much those mistakes cost. We’ll have to adapt, alter programs mid-skate to bring up the scores.”

Chris shuddered. “Mathematicians on ice. God help us.”

Victor laughed.

They were in the middle of changing when Chris asked the question that Victor dreaded. “Did you get taller?”

Victor turned and nodded. “Yeah, broader shoulders too it seems.”

Chris made a face. “How’s your skating?”

Victor cringed. “It’s… a struggle right now. I wake up every day feeling that my limbs have been rearranged overnight. I fall a lot in practice.”

Chris scowled. “I’d never have guessed given your recent string of podium appearances.”

Victor managed a smile. “They were a lot harder than you’d think.”

Chris took a deep breath. “I don’t envy you, and honestly, the thought scares me. I know it’s only a matter of time before I’ll have to go through it too. Any tips for when I do?”
Victor smiled. “Yakov has me doing ballet warmups before getting on the ice each morning. It helps a lot because it forces me to find my center of balance. I know my skating would be suffering without it.”

Chris smiled. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

Both teens had laced their skates by then. They strode from the locker room and took their places on the ice for the morning warmup.

Victor felt a surge of energy during the European Figure Skating Championships. He’d explored Warsaw with Chris around their practice schedules, and had been able to visit with Yuri again for the Japanese teen’s morning skates.

Victor was warming up for the short program in the holding area when he felt a tap on the shoulder. He turned to see Yakov standing beside him. The old man gestured with his head toward a monitor and Victor pulled the buds from his ears.

“Your Swiss friend is about to skate Vitya.”

Victor smiled. “Thanks Yakov. But how’d you know I wanted to watch him?”

The grouchy coach just gave him a stare and shook his head. “You two have been together at every opportunity since the Olympics. Of course you’d want to cheer for him. Now get to the competitor seating before he takes the ice. But I expect you back here as soon as his scores are announced.”

Victor hugged his coach, and quickly made his way through the twisting halls and tunnels. He emerged to see the teen standing at the barrier, receiving last words of encouragement from his coach.

The man stepped back and Victor cupped his hands around his mouth. “Chris! Bonne chance!”

A mop of blond hair looked up and the teen waved exuberantly before taking off toward the middle of the rink.

Victor took a seat and smiled when the opening notes of Chopin’s Nocturne Opus 9 No.2 drifted from the speakers. It was sure to be a hit with the locals, and, as expected, the audience applauded with the familiar composer’s work.

Victor smiled as he watched his friend skate. It was a beautiful program, the only mistake being that one of Chris’s triples turned into a double. The teen received a respectable score, and with thirteen skaters remaining was in third place. Victor smiled, knowing his friend would end the short program no lower than the mid-teens, a significant jump from the previous year.

The European Championships ended with Victor taking silver, losing again to Brian Joubert, and Chris climbing all the way to eighth after a stunning performance to Fritz Brun’s Symphony Number 8’s andante.

Chris was ecstatic with his placement. In only a year he’d climbed from twenty-first to the single digits.
Victor couldn’t be happier for his friend. They separated, promising to see each other again at worlds.

Despite not earning a gold, Yuri was excited about Victor's skating. Though he’d felt defeated standing on the podium with silver, the Japanese teen’s enthusiasm reminded him that he still had the ability to show the world beautiful programs.

Yakov insisted that Victor take a few days off as soon as they returned to Russia, arguing that he needed the break to give his changing body a chance to rest. Worlds was two months away, and the coach didn’t want his star pupil to injure himself before then.

Victor wanted to argue, but knew that his coach was right. Besides, there was something he had to do.

Victor took a deep breath. Outside of training, tutoring and costs on his apartment it was probably going to be the biggest expense he’d had since he’d become independent.

He needed an almost entirely new wardrobe. Nothing fit properly, and he was tired of pulling at his clothes to make them sit better. So as much as he loathed spending the money, he spent one of his precious days off shopping. He didn’t replace everything, he figured he could squeeze into his suit one more time for the banquet after Worlds, giving him a few extra months before the larger expense. But he ended up with almost entirely new practice and casual outfits.

Victor stared at himself in the mirror after returning home. While he didn’t notice the day-to-day changes, he could see how much his body had changed from just a year prior. His shoulders were broader and more muscular. Somehow, even in the interim state, he was starting to get a glimpse of the man he would become.

Two months turned out to be a long time, and as the changes in Victor’s physique continued he found it harder and harder to maintain his edge. He fell more, and by the time Worlds arrived he was ready to end the season.

Chris had come all the way up from not qualifying for the free skate the year before to placing eighteenth, easily demonstrating how strong a competitor he’d be. Victor was looking forward to competing against his friend on equal footing.

Victor hadn’t fared so well, dropping off the podium entirely. He’d finished in fourth, Brian Joubert in first again and sweeping the competitions that year.

Even as the season closed with disappointment, Victor was determined. He would come back the following year stronger and reclaim his titles. He’d learn a quad, and make his programs more difficult.

He’d show the world the power of Russian figure skating, and he’d show Yuri what he’d said as Nicky so many times: It’s only a failure if you let it stop you.
I know there was less Yuri in this chapter, but you got baby Chris, so hopefully that made up for it.

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

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Also if you haven't seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: Shared Gravity. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Victor relaxes after the 2007 worlds, and over the next several months both he and Yuri prepare for the 2007-2008 skating season.

Chapter Notes

Somebody asked last chapter for me to find ways to clarify the dates easier. I put it in the chapter summary this time, but since I'm not using chapter titles would people prefer I just title the chapters with the year? I personally think as we get closer to canon it might become a moot point, but am willing to do what people need to stay in the timeline. Let me know in comments.

I've updated the In Our Dreams playlist to include the new pieces for this chapter.

If you've been enjoying this work please hit the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Are you ready Yuri?

Yuri skated lazy circles around the rink, warming up in the mid-morning sun. It was early April, and though the season had just ended for Victor, Yuri was already working hard for the next one.

Nicky?

Yes Yuri?

Victor’s going to be ok, right?

Victor felt a moment of confusion. What do you mean?

He skated so beautifully, but came in fourth. That had to have been hard.

Fondness swept through Victor, an emotion he had to shield carefully from the younger teen. Yuri, didn’t you see that he was struggling?

No? Is he hurt? I haven’t read anything. Please don’t tell me he’s hurt.

He’s not hurt Yuri, but watch the replay closely, and compare it to videos from Skate America. Look at his costume. You’ll see how much tighter it is.

Understanding flashed through Yuri. Oh my god. I didn’t even notice.
He’s eighteen. It had to happen eventually.

I should have seen it sooner though. I was so happy to see him skate I didn’t realize it was happening.

Victor smiled. I’m sure you’re not the only one. Now, back on topic. Are you ready? Your new coach is coming today, right?

Yes. Her other student has officially moved up to the seniors and she’s going to start working with me.

What’s her name again?

Nakamura Ami.

So… Nakamura… san?

Or Nakamura-coach.

Did you like what you saw from her other students? Did you ask them what she’s like as a coach?

Yes, and Yuuki-san had her own questions as well. Everybody liked her and Yuuki-san was pleased with what she heard.

That’s good. So when is she arriving?

Any minute now. She’s seen me in competition, and wants to see me privately before officially taking me on as a student. But she said at this point it’s just a formality.

Do you want me to stay, or shall I leave before she gets here so that you can focus?

Can… can you stay? I don’t think we’ll be able to talk, but I want your opinion after seeing her in action.

I can do that. I might have to go at some point for some sleep, but will let you know if I do.

Thanks Nicky.

Victor settled in as Yuri’s first real coach came into the rink. He could immediately see that she was professional and enthusiastic about Yuri’s skating. She had him demonstrate his previous year’s programs, though she’d seen them in competition, and had him run drills on the basics.

Victor liked her approach. She was almost the opposite of Yakov, encouraging and firm, rather than demanding and loud. He knew that he would have clashed with her personality if she was his coach, but that she was exactly what Yuri needed right then.

Nicky? What do you think? Yuri asked as his mother and new coach were discussing fees and schedules.

I think she’ll be good for you Yuri. It was a good thing that she noticed your talent and agreed to take you on.

Really?

Absolutely. She’s going to help mold you more than I can, and she has valuable experience that Yuuki-san and Minako-sensei don’t.
But you did so well last summer.

I’m glad you think so, but I have my own goals this year, and I’m going to have to work hard for them. I might not be around as much. It makes me happy knowing that you have a capable coach.

Silence.

Nicky, what do you mean you won’t be around as much?

Yuri, I still want to see you skate. But my own skills are lagging. I’m going to be working hard this summer to get better so that my next season is a good one too.

It… it’s not my fault is it? You spent so much time with me last summer. Did I hold you back?

Oh Yuri, of course not. It’s just part of the new reality. Skaters are pushing technical elements for higher scores, and I need to start doing that too. That’s all. I’ll still be around as often as possible. At least once a week. Ok?

Really?

Really.

Thanks Nicky.

Victor pulled the envelope from his mailbox and glanced at the return address.

Geneva? Who do I know in Geneva?

He opened the envelope once he was inside his apartment to see a multi-page letter and several photos. He leaned against the counter and unfolded it to find that it had come from Alexei.

Dear Victor,

I’m betting mom and dad forgot to tell you that we moved again. We’re in Geneva now! Luckily all the French I learned in Lyon is still useful here. I hate moving and not knowing the language until it’s almost time to move again.

Thanks for your input on my top secret pieces. It means a lot, and I’m so glad you watched my competition videos! Before we left France somebody showed me a new website where you can upload videos and other people can watch. I’ll see how it works and will try sending you links so you can see me sooner.

I’m sorry you missed the podium at worlds. Your skating was so beautiful I thought for sure you’d make it.

By the way, are you getting bigger?

Mom says we’ll be in Russia for a week or so in June. Apparently great-grandma Zoya’s health is declining and she wants to take some time to see her now. I’m hoping I get to see you while we’re there. Dad won’t be joining us, of course. He’s already preparing for several major solo pieces this year.

What are you planning to do next season? Have you picked out your pieces? Let me
know what they are! I’m so excited to see you skate again in the fall.

I’ll chat more via email, but wanted to make sure you had our new address, and the photos.

Love,

Lyosha

Victor looked inside the envelope and found several candid photos of Alexei practicing the cello. He smiled, it was evident how much his brother adored the instrument, even if he was looking for something else to go with it.

Victor walked over to the fridge and added a collage style photo frame to his shopping list so that he could display the photos properly.

Victor took a deep breath before dialing. Alexei’s letter had spurred him to think about his music, and the more he thought about it the more he wanted a particular piece.

And a particular musician to play it.

“Victor?” his father asked as he answered the phone.

“Good evening father,” he replied politely. “I hope that it’s not a bad time.”

“No, we just weren’t expecting your call. I trust that everything is ok?”

“It is. Alexei wrote that you moved to Geneva.”

“Ah yes, I was asked to perform this season with several nearby orchestras. It was a good central location. Your mother also has been asked to fill a seat for a harpist out on maternity leave in one orchestra, and will be soloing herself with another. We expect it to be a good year for the both of us.”

“That’s good to hear.”

“So why the call Victor? You hardly ever call us.”

Victor took another deep breath. “I have a favor to ask of you father.”

“Now Victor,” the man chided. “I know you had a rough season, but you knew that your eighteenth birthday was the agreed upon date. I know it’s scary being on your own, but…”

Victor grit his teeth and cut off the accusation mid-sentence. “That’s not what I’m calling about.”

“Oh?”

“I want you to play the music for my free skate. I’ve already asked Alexei to play for my short program, and he’s agreed, but it would mean a lot to have both of you represented.”

Victor heard a surprised intake of breath. “You asked Alexei to play? You do know he has a full competition schedule, right?”

“Yes father. We discussed which pieces he was already practicing and I picked from those. I’m
going to use the Chopin Etude for my short program.”

“Which one of those is he playing this year again?”

“Opus 25 number 7.”

“Oh, that’s a nice one. Very mellow.”

“And he plays it beautifully. He’s already excited, so is his accompanist.”

“I really wish you’d have discussed it with us first Victor.”

“Why? He was already playing it.”

“We just don’t want to get him too excited. You know how much he looks up to you.”

Victor sighed. “That’s part of the reason I asked. I knew he would love it.”

Victor could tell in his father’s tone that it was about to become an argument, so he quickly steered the topic back to the reason for his call. “I still need the music for my free skate though, and I was really hoping that you would play it for me.”

The elder Nikiforov sighed, knowing what his son was doing. “What piece did you have in mind Victor?”

Victor swallowed. “The Devil’s Trill.”

There was a beat of silence. “Are you sure you want to skate to that? There is a lot of complexity in the music. You’re not worried about it overpowering your skating?”

“That’s part of the reason I want it. Making a program that works with it will be difficult, and perfect for the next season.”

Dmitry Nikiforov sighed. “Normally I’d say no due to time reasons, it’s a challenging piece and I have many other commitments. But I’ve been in discussions with a few others here in Geneva who want to hold a series of smaller ensemble performances. We had yet to decide on a couple of pieces and I think I can sway them to include it.”

“Thank you father.”

“No promises. I’ll let you know when the decision is made. Was there anything else?”

“No.”

“I’ll let you talk to your mother and brother then.”

“Thank you.”

“Yakov, it’s the off season. Besides, I don’t even have my new music yet. What else am I going to do?”

The coach didn’t look convinced. “I’m just not sure now is the best time Vitya. You should take it easy this season. You have time to get back on the podium. Don’t push yourself when you’re not in
a good place. Your body is still changing. You should give yourself this year for it to even out and get used to the differences. You can chase medals again next year.”

Victor scowled. “And fall further behind? Everybody is pushing technical elements. If I don’t start learning quads now I might never be in the position to chase the podium again.”

Yakov sighed. “Fine. You can increase to two hours a day to learn a quad. But that’s all.”

Victor nodded, it was at least something.

The excitement that greeted Victor was palpable when he arrived on a mid-may morning.

Nicky! I have another triple!

Yuri, that’s fantastic!

Nakamura-coach is helping so much. She tells me where I’m making mistakes I can’t even feel.

Oh Yuri, I knew having a real coach would do wonders for your skating. So what’s the new triple?

The flip!

Ooh, that’s a hard one. I’m sure it’ll impress the judges.

I’m still a bit shaky on the landing though.

You have time. But since I’m here, why don’t you show me? Maybe I can offer some advice.

Will you? Yuri’s excitement was effervescent.

Of course!

Victor was used to the dull ache that greeted him daily. It was part of life and he was determined to push through. He’d gone up another shirt size since his clothes shopping after the European Championships, and the tightness of his pants indicated that they needed replacing as well.

He sighed. Clothes would have to wait for another day. It was already June and the assignments for the Grand Prix series had been announced. It meant that it was time to start focusing on the next season.

He’d been assigned to an early and late event in the series, just the way he liked it. He would skate in Canada at the beginning of November, then in Moscow at the end of the month.

It was still early, not quite five in the morning, but he knew Yakov would be at the rink. He was always there almost the entire night after the announcements were made, researching the lineups and giving his skaters tips on what they needed to podium against individual competitors.

Victor pulled on his running shoes and set off on an easy jog. The early light made the buildings glow up in a way that he loved, and the hour meant that he had the streets almost entirely to himself. He was soon standing in outside the rink, pressing the buzzer that would alert anybody inside to his
As expected, Yakov appeared a few minutes later, circles under his eyes from researching all night. He opened the door. “I take it you saw the assignments?”

“Skate Canada and Cup of Russia.”

Yakov nodded. “Good. Now first thing, don’t get distracted by your Swiss friend being in Canada. I know you’re probably excited for him, but he’s advancing fast and will be a serious competitor within a couple years.”

Victor laughed. “I’m looking forward to it!”

Yakov sighed. “Your friend aside, you’ve got some serious competition. Joubert is assigned to Canada as well, then you’re against both Weir and Lambiel in Moscow.”

“Why do you think I’m here early? I’ve got to work even harder against that lineup.”

Yakov grunted in approval. “Go warm up in the studio. I’ll be in my office. Come get me when you’re ready to take the ice.”

Victor nodded.

“Vitya!”

“Lyosha!” Victor held his arms open and caught his brother as the teen ran at him through the airport terminal. They smiled and laughed as their mother strode over confidently.

“You didn’t need to meet us Victor,” she said softly. “You gave us your address, and I haven’t completely forgotten how to navigate St. Petersburg.”

“Nonsense,” Victor retorted. “What kind of host would I be if I didn’t come?”

Natalya Nikiforova smiled and held her arms open. “Come here.”

Victor smiled and accepted the hug from his mother.

“You’ve grown so big Victor. When we saw you at the Olympics you were still so slender. Now you are starting to have the muscles of a man.”

Victor nodded. “It’s been a struggle, but I’ve been working hard to keep my skating up while my body changes.”

“Don’t push yourself too hard.”

“I’m not.”

“You’re eating properly?”

“Of course. The nutritionist at the rink adjusted my diet to ensure I’m getting enough calcium and essential vitamins. I’ve also been told that for now, unless it’s super high in processed fats or sugars, to go ahead and eat anything I want. They don’t want my body stealing from itself to build muscle mass.”
She smiled. “I sometimes forget that you have an entire team of people looking after you.”

“Speaking of food…” Alexei interrupted. “I’m starving. When’s dinner?”

Natalya laughed. “Ahh, growing boys. Can never feed them enough.”

Victor grinned. “A lovely little place just opened not far from my apartment. Or if you can wait I have food at home to cook.”

“Nonsense,” Natalya replied. “You’re opening your home to us while we’re in town. Let’s go to dinner tonight, and you can show us your cooking skills on your free day.”

Victor smiled as they made their way to baggage claim. His mother would be spending a lot of time with her mother and grandmother, but Yakov had allowed Victor to rearrange his schedule so that he and Alexei could spend as much of the trip together as possible.

Everybody at the rink loved Alexei, even Yakov, who had met him briefly in Turin. Georgi and Ivan both took turns teaching him how to skate, and the teen laughed at lacking the grace of his older brother on the ice.

Victor had a special treat for his brother as well. He’d received Alexei’s piece a couple weeks before their arrival and had been working through choreography in anticipation of this moment. He planned to increase the difficulty of the jumps as he developed quads, but he was happy enough with the beginnings of the program.

It was his brother’s last day in St. Petersburg, and Victor was intent on sending him back to Switzerland with happy memories.

Yakov clapped his hands. “Everybody off the ice. Except you Vitya. I want to see what you’ve got.”

Victor smiled and nodded at his coach. He saw Alexei standing at the barrier, rapt with attention. Then the music started, Alexei’s piece edited down to short program requirements. Victor heard the gasp when the teen realized what was happening.

It wasn’t as polished as it would be in a couple months, and he didn’t have the costume or a fancy sound system, but when he finished and looked at his brother he knew it had the exact effect he was looking for.

Alexei was in tears from watching his older brother skate to his music, the biggest smile Victor had ever seen plastered across his face.

_Yuri, that feels beautiful. It’s so gentle, but there is power to it too. And your jumps! I swear they get better every time I’m here._

_Thank you Nicky. Nakamura-coach was excited to be able to work with Minako-sensei on my choreography. But I really think you’re helping more with my jumps. She might be able to point things out visually, but you’re better at making sure they feel right._

_Nonsense, it’s your talent that it helping you advance so quickly. You really are an incredible skater._
Victor could feel Yuri’s embarrassment and decided to change the subject. *You first competition of the season is soon isn’t it? The regional?*

*That’s right. Next month. End of September.*

*How are you feeling about it?*

*Better than last year, but I’m still nervous.*

*Why? You know what to expect now. Besides, you made it all the way to junior nationals last year. That’s quite an achievement.*

*That’s why I’m nervous. What if I don’t do as well this year? I don’t want to let everybody down.*

*Yuri, you’re doing great. How about instead of looking back, look forward. See how close you already are to competing against Victor. You have the skill to win, so make the rest of the world see it. You’ll be on the same ice as him in no time.*

*Do you mean it Nicky?*

*Absolutely.*

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Victor was doubled over at the barrier, trying to catch his breath.

*He warned me. But I’m not giving in now.*

“*Vitya… are you sure about that music?”* Yakov asked, a concerned tone in his voice. “*It’s late, but if you pick a new piece now there’s just enough time to develop a new program before Skate Canada.*”

“No Yakov. I’m skating the Trill. I knew it was going to be a difficult program before I ever asked for the music.”

“*Vitya, if anybody can skate to it, you can. But I’m just concerned. You’re pushing yourself hard with it, and pushing again trying to get a quad. I think it’s too much.*”

Victor glared up at his coach. “*I’m sweeping the competitions this year. That’s my goal. I have to work hard to do it. I’ve got the rotations on a quad toe, now I just need to land it. If I can do that and this piece I know I’ve got the points to win.*”

The teen and the old man stared at each other until the elder finally relented. “*I know when you’ve made up your mind Vitya, just know that I’m against this. I’d rather you skate this piece next year, after you’ve stopped growing.*”

“*Noted. Now can I run it again?*”

Yakov glared down his nose. “*Once, then you’re on break for an hour. Got it?*”

Victor nodded, moved to an empty section of ice and started again. He’d asked Yakov’s wife, Lilia, for help with the step sequence, and it was hellish, but he knew that it would impress the judges.

*I’m taking my place at the podium again Yuri. Just wait and see.*
Victor wished the growth spurt would just end. He was tired of waking up aching. It had been a year, and his next season started in a matter of weeks. At the rate it was going he worried that he’d outgrow his costume before Nationals, and was glad that he’d asked his costumer to leave extra room in the seam allowances in case it needed to be let out.

On top of that the pain was so unpredictable. It had been slightly worse in his right leg for a week, which made landing the quad even more difficult.

“One more time Vitya,” Yakov demanded from the barrier. “You’re not light enough on your feet during the allegro. My Lilia helped you with that step sequence, don’t make her regret it.”

Victor nodded, wiped the sweat from his brow and grit his teeth through the pain as he ran it again.

“Better,” Yakov called when he was done. “We’ll pick that up again later. For now you can work on your quad.”

Victor sighed with relief. He wanted to put the quad in his free skate, but hadn’t yet as he still put his hand down more often than not. He knew he was close, he just had to drill out the flaws.

*Crossovers to get speed*, he thought as he moved across the ice. *Faster. I need more height. I’m not in landing position when my skate hits the ice. More height will give me that fraction of a second I need.*

Victor glanced to make sure that the ice was clear, then pushed into the air. *Height is good, pull tight to minimize friction.*

He came down, unsteady on the blade but didn’t need to put his hand to the ice.

“Again Vitya!” Yakov called. “You didn’t put your hand down, but your landing was still shaky.”

“Yes coach.”

Victor rounded the rink and started gaining speed again. He forced the dull throb from his mind, it was just one more side-effect of the growth spurt.

The second quad was better. He winced with the pain in his leg, but otherwise felt good. There was only a tiny wobble in his blade that time.

“Good. Let’s see if you can nail the landing this time.”

Victor checked the ice, and went into it again. Everything felt perfect when he launched it. There was no friction from the air, and the height was just where he wanted it.

His blade touched ice, steady and true. Then intense pain flared in his leg as the impact travelled up from his foot.

Victor cried out and crumpled onto the ice, sliding to a stop a few feet from the barrier.

“Vitya!”

The cold felt good against the pain. *Just a muscle spasm. I didn’t warm up as much this morning. I should have stretched more.*

He held his hand up to tell his coach that he was fine.
God it hurts. I'm going to go to the medical office and get an ice pack.

The adrenaline and endorphins started to wear off as he sat on the ice, catching his breath, and the pain only intensified.

Maybe I should call it a day.

Victor pushed up, and cried out again as soon as he tried to put weight on his right leg. He immediately fell again, unable to stand through the agony.

No.

“Vitya?” he could hear the worry in Yakov’s voice.

I have to get up.

He scooted to the barrier and used it to help stand on his left foot. But as soon as he put any weight on his right leg intense pain flared through him.

He collapsed back to the ice with a strangled cry of pain.

“Vitya!” Yakov was running and yelling. “Georgi, get the medic from the office.”

There was commotion all around, and every time Victor tried to use his right leg there was fresh agony. But despite the pain, there was a distant thought.

My season is already over, and it hadn’t even started yet.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

I know a couple people saw that coming, and really, Victor said as much himself in Episode 4, when he said to Yuri "You also haven't had any major injuries."

But this chapter had Yuri... AND ALEXEI!!! And Alexei is adorable and was so happy to see Victor skate to his music. So that counts for something, right?

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

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Also if you haven't seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: Shared Gravity. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

September 2007 - Victor learns the extend of his injury and what it means for the upcoming season.

Chapter Notes

Shorter chapter today, but I didn't plan a good portion of this and it just happened. I'm actually happy with it though. So you're getting it too.

If you've been enjoying this work please hit the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Victor sat on the examining table, still in pain, but not as bad as it had been before he was given medication and an ice pack. He couldn’t walk. Every time he tried to put any weight on his right leg it would flare in agony. He’d actually been grateful for the wheelchair when they entered the sports medicine hospital that the rink contracted with.

Yakov was at his side. Victor tried to get him to return to the rink, insisted that he’d be ok. The coach refused to leave, giving the excuse that Victor would downplay his injury if he didn’t hear it directly from the doctor.

Victor was grateful for Yakov’s stubborn streak for once. He was in pain, and needed a familiar face by his side. With his parents in Switzerland, and being closer to Yakov than them anyway, it was a comforting presence.

The hospital started their examination by seeing how much Victor could move without pain, which wasn’t much, then ushered him through a series of tests. X-rays and MRIs were taken, and they were waiting for the results.

The doctor walked in, a burly man with a gruff voice. “You’ve pulled your hamstring,” he said without any pretense.

Victor saw a strained expression on Yakov’s face, but a pull didn’t sound so bad immediately.

“So I just overexerted. I can be back to skating in a week or so, right?”

The doctor’s eyes narrowed in annoyance. “If you’re lucky you can start physical rehabilitation in the next two weeks. You’ve partially torn the muscle. I’m sending you to a specialist for this type of injury, but given the severity, and the fact that you’re growing on top of that, I don’t see you returning to training for six months or more.”
Victor felt his heart drop.

Six months…

No skating for six months…

The entire season, gone.

The doctor prescribed him medication for pain, and gave him a sheet of home care instructions until he could see the specialist. He was to ice the area several times a day, and wear a compression wrap to help the swelling. He barely heard any of it, his mind still processing the fact that he’d wound up with an injury major enough to lose an entire season.

Victor proceeded through the next hour in a daze. He was sized for a pair of crutches, drilled on what he needed to do to help speed healing, then discharged.

Yakov was silent as he drove Victor home, not speaking until he pulled up in front of the teen’s building. “Vitya, you should bring Makkachin and stay with Lilia and I.”

Victor blinked at his coach. “Why?”

Yakov growled and gave him an annoyed look. “Because you’re hurt and live alone, that’s why. I don’t think you understand how serious this injury is. You’re going to be in a lot of pain doing simple things, especially for the first couple of weeks. Cooking, bathing, even just moving around will be incredibly difficult. If you don’t take care of yourself properly you could end up making it worse.

Victor knew that his coach was right, but all he wanted in that moment was to get inside, cuddle his poodle and sleep off the pain medication. “I’ll think about it.”

Yakov stared, then grunted. “Call if you need anything. I mean it Vitya. I don’t want you trying to push yourself.”

Victor was silent for a moment before nodding. “Fine. I’ll call if I need.”

His coach studied him for another minute before relenting and unlocking the car’s doors. Victor clumsily navigated standing on the crutches and made his way slowly toward the entrance. He could feel Yakov’s eyes on him the entire way, the older man testing him to see if he could even make it into his building without help.

Somehow Victor satisfied Yakov’s scrutiny, and he watched the coach’s car drive off from the lobby of the building. He breathed a sigh of relief before scrunching his face in pain. He moved slower toward the elevators, and collapsed onto his couch as soon as he was inside his apartment, breathing heavily from pain and exertion.

Makkachin padded over a few minutes later, concerned that she hadn’t been called from the door and sensing her human in pain. She whined softly and pressed her nose into his hand. Victor ruffled through her fur, but discovered that he couldn’t invite her onto the couch without it bothering his injured leg.

Realization set in. He was injured badly enough to be out for an entire season. The work of his father and brother gone to waste because he wouldn’t be able to skate their programs. He couldn’t even cuddle his poodle without pain.

Victor grabbed a pillow from the other end of the couch and curled around it, crying until he fell
asleep.

Victor awoke to the smell of food and coffee. He scrunched his nose in confusion and turned over, still hazy with medication. Pain flared through his leg at the movement, which brought his full senses to him immediately.

He groaned in agony and slapped at the nightstand. At some point he’d woken up from the couch just long enough to grab a glass of water and his pain medication. He took them to the bedroom before falling asleep again.

He finally found the switch for his lamp and turned it on. He sat up enough to take his medication then looked around. Makkachin wasn’t in her bed, and he could see dim light seeping under his bedroom door.

He scowled. Somebody was in his apartment.

He carefully situated himself on his crutches and made his way from the bedroom. Once in the hall he saw that the light was coming from the kitchen and heard the happy thump of Makkachin’s tail on the floor.

*Must be somebody she knows. I wish they would have called first.*

Victor moved slowly, still getting accustomed to not putting pressure on his leg. He heard water run into a pot, and the soft tick of the stove as the burner was turned on. He rounded the corner to the kitchen to see his mother poking through his cabinets.

“Mother?” he blinked in disbelief. “When? … How?”

Natalya turned to look at her son. She walked over and embraced him gently. “Yakov called. When he said you insisted on staying at home I decided to come and help out for a couple weeks.”

“But it’s not even been a full day. How did you get here so fast?”

She laughed. “It’s only a five hour flight, and it was early evening when he called. There were still outbound flights available. So I packed a few things and came.”

“What about your concerts?”

She kissed his forehead. “That’s why I can only stay for a couple weeks. We’re in a bit of a break right now before the fall season starts in earnest.”

“Don’t you need to practice though?”

“Don’t worry. I brought my travel harp. It’s not as good, but will give me what I need.”

Victor stared. His mother had come from Geneva only a matter of hours after his injury. “Why?” he whispered.

Natalya looked at him, pain in her eyes. “You’re still my baby boy Vitenka. You have your own life, but you’ll always be my baby boy, and what kind of mother lets her child suffer alone?”

“Mama…” Victor choked.
She wrapped her arms around him and kissed his forehead again. She held him for several minutes.

“Go rest for a bit. I have the batter for blinis rising and we’ll have breakfast soon.”

Victor nodded and made his way to the couch, Makkachin on his heels and happy at having another human around.

Victor was dozing on the couch a few days after his injury, on the precipice of falling asleep again from his pain medication. It helped more than he liked to admit, but left him drowsy all the time. A part of him supposed it was a good thing, it meant he was less likely to move around and aggravate the pulled muscle.

It was barely ten in the morning, but his stomach was full with his mother’s cooking, the warm sunlight in the room was cozy and his mother was practicing on her harp across the room. The gentle melody was lulling, and he quickly found that he couldn’t resist the pull.

Then he was on the ice, afternoon sun streaming through the windows. He felt the soft burn of intense practice, but not the pain that had dogged him for days.

Nicky? Yuri’s inner voice was timid, as if he was scared of the answer.

Yuri!

It is you! I was… I was worried you’d stopped coming.

It was the first time Victor had dreamwalked in days, and he immediately realized that he had missed their last scheduled session.

I’m so sorry Yuri. Emotion overwhelmed Victor, guilt, pain, sorrow, loss. Everything came together at once and he couldn’t help but flood the younger teen with his feelings.

Nicky… are you ok?

Victor took a moment. No Yuri. I injured myself in training. I… I won’t be able to skate for six months, maybe more.

Victor hardly had a name for the emotion that overwhelmed him from the younger skater. It was a blend of sadness and sympathy, but so powerful that he knew Yuri had poured his entire being into it. Nicky. I’m so sorry.

He broke down, pouring his soul to Yuri. I worked so hard. My programs were the hardest they’d ever been. I was even preparing to perform a quad.

A quad? Are you serious?

I’d just landed it properly for the first time, then there was pain, and just like that my season was over.

Nicky! Comfort, a mental hug, and anguish as the fourteen year old Yuri realized what a loss that would be to him as well. What can I do?

Just… skate. Please. I need to feel the chill, the ice underneath.
Is practicing my short program ok? I need to work on it for my regional competition this weekend.

That’s perfect.

Victor stayed with Yuri for a couple hours, until it was time for the younger teen to head home to have dinner and do his homework. They discussed the upcoming regionals, and Victor reassured the Japanese skater that he would still support him, even if the pain medication might cause him to miss their meetings.

When he opened his eyes Makkachin was snoozing on the floor beside him. He reached out and ruffled her fur. “I saw Yuri again just now…” he murmured.

Natalya peeked out from the kitchen. “Vitya, are you awake?”

“Da.”

“Come have some lunch before you take your next dose of medication and ice your leg again.”

Victor grabbed his crutches and stumbled to the dining table. He saw that his mother had made simple sandwiches, but it seemed perfect. He ate slowly and relaxed once done.

“Let me comb your hair,” his mother said after a few minutes.

“Mama?”

Natalya smiled. “The tangles are the worst part. I learned how to control almost everything else I needed, but I could never stop the tangles.”

Victor’s eyes widened and he stared at his mother in disbelief. She smiled in return, and strode out of the room in search of a comb. When she returned she pulled a chair behind his and started working it through his platinum locks.

“I had a feeling when you were born with my hair,” she explained softly. “It tends to skip generations, but from what my grandmother told me, they go hand in hand in our family.”

“So Lyosha?”

“No. I don’t think so. It would have started several years ago, and he’s never shown any of the signs.”

The realization was still slowly sinking in as his mother worked through his hair.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” Victor finally asked.

“You were too young, then you were away training. I didn’t want to bring it up unless I knew for sure. I was pretty confident about it back in June, but with Lyosha here it wasn’t a good time.”

“Why not?”

Natalya was silent for a moment before sighing. “I trust your brother completely, but he’s still too young to understand how important silence is.”

“What do you mean?”

She brushed his hair back and tied it with an elastic. “Just that you should only discuss this with people whom you trust to the very core of your being, and then only if necessary. Even others like
us. Most are safe now, but there was a time when that wasn’t necessarily the case.”

“Mama?”

She hugged him from behind then moved the chair to sit across from him. “Don’t worry about that now. But tell me: what do you know how to do, and what are you still struggling with? I may not be able to help with everything since it’s so dependent on the person, but I’ll help where I can.”

Victor stared. His mother was a dreamwalker too. “Does father know?”

Natalya shook her head. “I don’t think there are any on his side of the family, so he’s never recognized the signs. I’d thought about telling him over the years, but you know how he is. He’d either be skeptical, or wouldn’t care since it doesn’t affect him. I eventually decided to let it be.”

She leaned across the table. “So tell me Vitya, when did it start for you?”


“I was thirteen. What’s your main talent?”

Victor thought for a second. “I think it’s connecting with others... like us. It’s how I learned a lot.”

She smiled. “I rarely get to talk over that link. You’re lucky.”

Victor smiled in return as they chatted, bonding over something he never thought he would.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

What do you think of that? Victor’s mom is a dreamwalker too!

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

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Also if you haven’t seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: Shared Gravity. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Late Sept - Mid Dec 2007 - Victor continues to struggle with his injury. He helps Yuri develop more jumps through his dreams, but as Russian Nationals approach he finds himself struggling with the lack of skating.

Chapter Notes

So a few people have asked in comments why Yuri hasn't noticed that Victor and Nicky are injured at the same time. Honestly... total non-issue. If Yuri!!! on Ice is your introduction to figure skating it may seem like a nice intimate bunch. But, it's a competitive sport, and the show gives us a glimpse of those only at the very top. In countries with a strong background there are going to be a number of extremely talented skaters that don't quite make it to Europeans/4CC or Worlds, or to the Grand Prix series.

In late 2007, where we currently are in the timeline, there were over 175,000 members of US figure skating alone. (http://www.usfsa.org/content/FactSheet.pdf) Granted, that was all age groups, pairs, ladies, mens, synchronized etc, but you get the picture. You have those names that break through to the world stage, and a lot of highly competitive people aiming for their spots, and at any time there will be plenty of injuries hanging about.

Anyway, hopefully that makes more sense as to why Yuri doesn't put two and two together there. He knows how big a sport it is, cause he's competing in it. He might be from a smaller country without a high number of competitors, but he's well aware that there could be any number of skaters named Nicky who just haven't broken though to international recognition.

Finally, I've updated the In Our Dreams playlist to include Yuri's pieces for this chapter.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Are you ready for your first competition of the season Yuri?

Silence. I guess.

Victor was worried, the Japanese teen was unusually subdued, even for him. What’s wrong?

Nicky?

Yes?

Did you know that Victor was injured? I read an article that said he won’t be able to skate at all this
Victor was silent for a moment. Yes, he finally replied.

Why... why didn’t you tell me?

Fear gripped Victor and he wondered if Yuri had made the connection. Tell you what?

Why didn’t you tell me about Victor?

Victor could feel pain in the question, but was still confused.

I can understand Yuuki-san not telling me, she still wants to protect me, but I thought you trusted me more than that! I had to find out from reviewing who he would be against in Canada, only to see that he’d withdrawn.

Surprise, that wasn’t what he was expecting. Yuri, I’m so sorry. I thought you knew. I can’t imagine that coach Yakov took more than a day to pull him from competition. Since I missed a couple of our meetings due to my own injury I assumed that the news had already reached you. I’d never keep something like that from you.

Really? You really thought I knew and you weren’t trying to protect me?

I promise Yuri. I know how important seeing him skate is to you.

Yuri finished lacing up his skates and made his way toward the ice to warm up. His regional competition was only two days away.

I’m sorry Nicky, Yuri said after a few minutes. I thought you were trying to protect me. I know I’m weak emotionally, so everybody tries to shield me from things that they think will upset me. But sometimes that makes it worse. I don’t know what they’re hiding from me, and it makes me even more anxious.

Yuri, you’re not weak. It takes a lot to face anxiety. You’re much stronger than you give yourself credit for.

Silence, then, Thank you. Another few moments where nothing was said between them as the fourteen year old skated lazy circles. Nicky, will Victor be back next year?

Of course he will. Why would you think otherwise?

His injury is bad enough to have him out all season, will he be able to recover?

It’s bad, but he’ll make a full recovery with time and physical therapy. He’ll be back on the ice before you know it.

Really?

Really. He’s not going to let this keep him down.

A sense of peace swept through Yuri. Good. I can’t wait to see him again. His skating is so beautiful and I hope to be just as good one day.

Keep working hard and you will be.

Yuri nodded, a motion that made Victor chuckle. Can we work on my triple Salchow before Minako-
sensei arrives? I think the landing could still be cleaner.

Of course!

“Were you with your Japanese friend again?” Natalya Nikiforova asked from her place behind the harp when Victor woke from his medicine-induced nap.

Victor rubbed the sleep from his eyes and nodded. “Da.”

She paused her fingers on the strings and smiled at her son. “You seem calmer after you visit him, less stressed about your injury. Is it because he’s a skater too and let’s you feel it?”

“That… and how much he believes in me. I think he might rival Lyosha for the title of my biggest fan.”

“That’s quite a level of dedication,” she laughed. She stood, walked over and sat next to him on the couch. She ran her hand through his hair. “I know right now, that kind of interaction is what you need. Just don’t lose yourself.”

Victor smiled. “I know Mama. I’m helping him so that one day I can meet him for real.”

“Oh?”

“His biggest dream is to face me on the ice. We work on his skills when I visit, and he’s getting better so fast. I just know that he’ll make it happen.”

She leaned in and kissed his forehead. “That’s such a good thing for you to do. But does he know who’s helping him?”

Victor laughed. “Of course not. He thinks my name is Nicky, and I’m careful to not give it away.”

She stared for a minute. “Nicky? Really? That was the best you could come up with?”

“It had to be a quick decision.”

“Oh Vitya, you should have figured that one out in advance, but maybe it’s my fault. In the future be more careful with your identity. And maybe pick something less obvious than Nicky.”

“Hey, it’s not that bad. It could be short for Nikolai, or Nicholas, or Nicole since gender isn’t known automatically… In some countries it’s a name all its own. I think it’s pretty vague.”

“I still think it’s too close to the truth, but I’ll let you make your own judgement. You’re a man after all.”

Nicky! I took silver!

Congratulations Yuri! I knew you could do it!

Nakamura-coach was so happy. She said that most of her students take longer to advance. She says that I’ll likely continue to place better than I did last year.
I’m so proud of you! Do you have the recordings of your skate?

Yes. Nakamura-coach wondered why I wanted to watch them with Yuko, Yuuki-san and Minako-sensei, but she gave in when I told her it was tradition. She’ll go over them with me in a few days.

“You ready kids?” Yuuki asked as she turned on the television at the rink.

“What’s the music for your short program?” Victor asked as they waited for Yuuki to forward through to the start of Yuri’s skate.

Rêverie by Debussy.

Oh, that’s a pretty one. I think it matches your style well.

The Yuri on screen started skating, and Victor was utterly captivated. The music, which was so gentle, let the young skater take advantage of his strengths. The spins and footwork perfectly accompanied the tune, and though some jump elements were still a bit shaky Victor could see the dramatic improvement from the year before.

Then there was Yuri’s triple axel, near the end of the program, and it was perfect. There was no reason that his other jumps couldn’t be as clean or even strong enough to aim for higher grades of execution.

Yuri, that axel was perfect. I know you have it in you to make all of your jumps that clean. Isn’t your coach pushing you to develop them more?

Yes, and no. She says I don’t have enough confidence going into them.

But you build that confidence by drilling.

Silence.

Yuri, do you want to work on more jumps?

Yes.

Do you want me to teach you?

Silence.

Just ask for what you want Yuri. It’s ok to be confident.

Nicky? Can you teach me all the triples you know?

That’s better. Yes. I’ll help you learn all your triples.

“Free skate’s up. Yuri? Are you paying attention?”

“Sorry, yes!”

The crowd roared with the first few notes of piano, seemingly excited about the music that Victor had never heard before.

What’s the music Yuri?
You haven’t heard it before?

No.

It’s from one of my favorite movies, Spirited Away. It’s quite popular so the crowd loved it.

The music started soft and built slowly to a crescendo, then evened to a gentle finish. Yuri’s program was perfect for it, and Victor just knew he could take the piece to Junior Worlds if he polished it.

He’d learned that the young man’s anxiety made it difficult to give such an ambitious target from the start. But there was an interim goal that was within reach.

Let’s get your jumps going Yuri. I want to help you make the podium at nationals.

The podium… at nationals?

Victor could almost hear the nervous squeak.

You can do it. That program and refining your jumps is all it’ll take.

Are you sure?

I’m positive. So let’s get started.

A moment of silence, then Victor felt determined agreement through the teen.

“Youuki-san?” Yuri asked nervously.

“Yes Yuri?”

“I… I want to work on adding triples to my program. I think I can make it even better.”

The woman smiled. “I agree. What do you need from me?”

“You said not to try new elements without you or Minako-sensei here.”

She nodded in approval. “Go warm up. I’ll be there to supervise in a few minutes.”

Victor felt Yuri’s eyes widen, then an enthusiastic, “Thank you!”

Though Victor’s mom had only been there two weeks, the apartment felt empty after she left. It was quiet without the soothing sound of the harp, and even Makkachin padded from room to room in search of her missing human.

“She’s gone back to Switzerland Makka,” Victor explained softly when the dog sat next to him and whined, head cocked to the side in confusion. He ruffled the poodle’s thick fur. “But I’m sure she misses you too.”

Victor sighed and went into the kitchen. His mother had made sure to go shopping before she left, and his pantry was almost bursting with boxes and cans of whatever she thought he might use. He’d still have to purchase meat and vegetables, but not worrying about the weight of staple goods was going to be a help.

He sighed again. The apartment was too quiet. It was time to go to the rink.
He’d progressed from crutches to a cane, the doctor wanting him to start getting the muscle used to bearing weight again once the inflammation went down. He went to the door, put on a coat and shoes and grabbed the accursed cane.

He looked around once outside his apartment. His mother had rented a car, and he’d always jogged to the rink before. It took him a moment before he spied the bus stop a little ways down the street. He hobbled toward it, still not used to being careful with his injury, and was relieved when the bus arrived only a few minutes later.

He felt silly. Half the reason he’d picked the apartment was because it was within jogging distance of the rink. To take the bus had never occurred to him, and the short distance bothered him.

But he knew he couldn’t make it that far, even with the cane. He hated it, he hated feeling limited.

It was only a few minutes later, and with a confused glance from the driver that he stepped off at the entrance to the rink. The bus pulled away, and Victor took a deep breath.

The lobby was empty except for the woman behind the counter. Morning practice was already well underway. Victor nodded, chatted a moment then made his way toward the ice.

The chill, the dryness of the air. It hit him as soon as he opened the doors. He missed it. Even dreamwalking with Yuri wasn’t as good as feeling the ice under his own feet, feeling that frozen air on his own skin.

He watched for a moment. Ivan was working on his step sequence, and Georgi was having trouble with his triple axel. For a moment his thoughts drifted to Yuri, and how, with the rest of his triples, his artistry could already rival those in the senior division.

It was one of the female skaters, Elena, who noticed him first. “Victor!”

All movement seemed to come to a stop, and everybody turned to look at him. He ran a hand over his hair nervously before everybody skated toward the barrier nearest him.

“Yakov said it was a pulled hamstring…”

“We heard you’re out all season…”

“Why didn’t you come visit sooner…”?

The questions came all at once and from every direction as his rinkmates pressed him for details and tried to find out how he was.

“Vitya!” Yakov bellowed from where he was walking along the perimeter of the barrier.

All noise ceased as the skaters waited for the coach to make his way over.

Victor swallowed as Yakov’s steely eyes locked on him, waiting for whatever lecture was incoming.

“It’s good you’re back,” the man said, wrapping an arm around his student. “I was starting to get worried.”

“Yakov?”

“Most can’t stay away this long, unless they’re reconsidering their careers,” he explained softly. It was one of the few times he’d heard the man speak so gently.
“Thank you Yakov,” Victor said. “Mom said you’re the one who called her.”

“Damn right I did,” the coach retorted, reverting to his usual demeanor. “I knew you wouldn’t.”

Victor smiled.

Yakov clapped his hands. “Back to practice, all of you! You can catch up with Victor during your breaks.”

The skaters quickly returned to their individual assignments, not wanting to incur the wrath of their coach.

“Don’t make me worry like that again,” Yakov chided before walking away to yell at Georgi about his triple axel.

Victor smiled. He was still hurt, but he was home.

The next two months were a blur. Victor went to the rink every morning, and Yakov even put him on unofficial coach duty for the juniors. He watched for flaws and pointed out where the younger skaters could improve.

He had physical therapy in the afternoons, and by the time December rolled around he only had to use the cane after long walks when he could feel the fatigue in the aching muscle. He’d even begun walking to the rink rather than taking the bus.

Yuri had cleaned up his triple Salchow to the point that he’d been able to use it in sectionals to take another silver medal. Unfortunately he only managed third at nationals after falling coming out of his first triple loop in competition.

Victor was still insanely proud, even though he knew that it meant Yuri would not be showing off the program during the 2008 Junior Worlds as Japan had only qualified for two spots.

As Yuri turned to focus his attention on smaller, local, competitions, Victor’s rinkmates were angling to place at Nationals and earn their spots going into Europeans and Worlds. Watching them train and get ready was too much, and he stopped his daily visits to the rink in early December. The more he sat on the sidelines the worse he felt.

He wanted to skate; needed to compete, and he couldn’t do either.

He was leaving the rink, shoulders slumped, about halfway through December when Yakov called to him in the lobby.

“Vitya.”

Victor turned to look at his coach.

Yakov sighed. “Pack a bag, and bring Makkachin to my house.”

“I’m fine at home Yakov. I don’t need help.”

Yakov pinched the bridge of his nose. “You’re not staying with me Vitya. Makkachin is. I’m putting you on a plane to Geneva.”

“You’re depressed. I understand, you can’t skate. But the more you hang around here the worse it’s getting. I’ve already cleared it with your physical therapist, and your parents are expecting you.”

“And you think sending me out of the country will help?” Victor yelled. He couldn’t help it, a part of him felt like he’d been abandoned.

“Listen to me Vitya,” Yakov scolded. “I want you back out there, but you’re not helping yourself by coming here and getting more depressed by the day. Take the time now, go spend your birthday and Christmas with your family. Take a month, maybe two. Reconnect. The ice will be here when you get back.”

Victor kicked at the floor, a motion that made him wince as the force traveled up his still injured leg.

“Yakov…” he started to argue.

“Enough Vitya!” Yakov’s face was developing a pink tint. “I’m your coach, and I’m telling you that you need to do something to get out of your head. I’m sending you to Geneva to spend some time with your family. How long you stay there is up to you, but I don’t want to see you in this rink until after the European Championships. Then we’ll look at where you are in your rehabilitation, and start preparing you for next year.”

Victor clenched his fists, but he knew that it was because Yakov really did care that he was taking such drastic actions.

“When does my plane leave?”

“Tonight. You have a few hours to pack, and I’ll take you to the airport. You know Makkachin will be fine. Lilia loves having her around, she always did have a soft spot for my skaters’ pets.”

“You better work me hard as soon as I can skate again.”

“Count on it.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

Yes, we're shipping Victor off to Switzerland next chapter!

Also, @urtin pointed out that I've misspelled Alexei's diminutive this whole time and it should be Lyosha, not Loysha. So I'll be fixing that. Thanks!!

Since I came in to edit something anyway... somebody asked in the comments how Yuri came in third at nationals but it was only early December at the end of the chapter. The answer is that Japanese Junior Nationals take place at the end of November, and it's the senior nationals that take place later. \0/ So that clears up that confusion.

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com
Also if you haven't seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: *Shared Gravity*. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

December 2007 - Victor goes to Geneva to spend time with his family while he's injured.

Chapter Notes

What? A chapter mid-week???

Yep. I was lucky enough to have a bit of a break this week. I don't expect this to be a normal thing though. But who knows. A lot of things start changing in subtle ways over the next few chapters and I'm excited.

If you've been enjoying this work please punch the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Vitya!”

Victor looked around for the voice, and spied Alexei outside the security gate. He leaned on his cane and made his way over.

He was glad that Yakov had splurged for first class. His leg hurt from being cramped into even that seat, and the thought of business class or coach were painful to even think about.

Alexei bounced excitedly as Victor made his way past the security area, eager to see his brother. Victor braced himself, and was still almost tackled by the hug as soon as he got close.

Victor took a moment to study his brother. “Did you get taller Lyosha?”

Alexei nodded. “Yeah, it’s my turn it seems.”

Victor smiled. “Just don’t be stupid like me and push yourself.”

“Don’t worry, I have no plans to get a marble cello. Besides the acoustics would be terrible.”

Victor laughed and hugged his brother. “How’s it feel to be seventeen?”

“About the same as sixteen, but with added growing pains.”

Victor laughed again. “You don’t have to remind me. Hopefully yours go away sooner.”

Alexei smiled, and they started walking toward baggage claim.
“Where are Mama and Father?” Victor asked as they walked.

Alexei looked at his watch. “My guess would be intermission.”

“They had a concert tonight?”

Alexei shrugged. “It’s the holidays. They’ll be fairly busy all the way through Christmas. It should slow down some after the new year though.”

Victor stopped for a moment to process.

“Vitya?”

“Sorry. I still celebrate Christmas according to the Russian calendar. I just had to think about it a second.”

“Mama and Papa tried for a long time, but we do most of the celebrating with whatever friends they’ve made now. It’s just a small family dinner for the Russian Christmas.”

“I see.”

They found the escalator and followed the throng of people who just wanted to get their things and find a place to relax.

“And you? How are you doing? Made friends since starting in your new school?”

Alexei grinned. “I’m great, and I have a good group of friends. Mama and Papa found a high school with a music focus and a university track. Most of my classmates are also aiming for conservatories in college.”

“Is it going to be hard when Mama and Father relocate next season?”

Alexei paused. Victor could see the baggage carousel. It hadn’t started moving yet. “What’s wrong?”

“Vitya? Is it scary living on your own?”

Victor blinked. “No, but I’ve been doing it for a while now. I’m used to it. Why?”

“Mama and Papa haven’t decided where they’re going next season. I want to ask them to stay here, but if they go… I might ask to stay.”

“Lyosha?”

The teen fidgeted. “Next year is my last year of high school. I’ve got a good group of friends, and am in a program I like. I’ve started to make contacts at the Conservatoire de Musique de Genève, and I’m really thinking about applying there for college. It’s got a strong history, and I think I could learn a lot.”

“So you’d be willing to stay and live alone to pave your own way into the future?”

“Yeah.”

Victor smiled, he couldn’t miss the nervous tone to his brother’s voice. “I’m proud of you.”

“What? Why?”
“It’s a hard thing to do. I was so young when I made that choice, but I think you’re in a good place for it.”

“I still don’t understand.”

“Lyosha, you’re thinking about your future. You’re willing to do what it takes to make it your own. It’s a scary thing, to step away from that security. So I’m proud of you.”

Alexei hugged Victor. “Thank you Vitya.”

“So do you think you can pass the auditions for such a prestigious school?” Victor teased.

“If you can win an olympic gold medal at seventeen, I can surely pass an audition to get into my dream college at the same age, maybe even eighteen by the time they roll around.”

“Let me know if I need to come and put in a good word.”

Alexei laughed.

A few minutes later they were in a taxi headed toward an old section of the city. Houses were lovingly cared for and had the charm that Victor had come to expect of his parents.

“The guest room is upstairs,” Alexei said as they walked in. “I hope that’s ok.”

Victor eyed the stairs. “It’s fine. My physical therapist has been working me on a stair machine. As long as it’s not more than two stories I’ll be ok.”

Victor yawned. It had been a long day, and suddenly the only thing he wanted was to sleep.

Alexei was already carrying the larger of the bags up the stairs. Victor smiled. His baby brother was starting to look like a man, and was starting to make decisions like one too.

He slung his duffel over his shoulder, grabbed the last suitcase and followed to the guest room. A few minutes later he had face-planted on the bed and was quickly asleep.

The lack of a routine bothered Victor for several days. He’d grown accustomed to heading to the rink, then to physical therapy. In the downtime he worked on assignments from his college tutors. He quickly realized that, between Alexei being in school until Christmas, and his parents busy with concerts, he would have to fill his time on his own.

He started by contacting his tutors and asking for extra work. He’d soon have to declare a major, and getting some required courses out of the way would be good. He then sought out places for physical therapy, found one that was willing to work with his therapist in St. Petersburg, and scheduled appointments for several times a week.

He also slept more, going to bed a bit later than he would have during training, and waking similarly. The slight change in schedule allowed him to help Yuri during both his morning and afternoon practices, and the Japanese teen blossomed again under the help. Within two weeks the fifteen year old had started to inconsistently land a triple loop.

Then they were swept up in the holidays. Alexei was out of school for break, and Victor’s birthday was only a few days away. The family was invited to several parties, and Victor had to adjust to wishing people a Merry Christmas. He wore the fake smile that he’d developed for the media. Those
who recognized him were thrilled at meeting an Olympic gold medalist, and those who didn’t were quickly swept up in the fervor.

He signed autographs and posed for photos with world-class classical musicians.

He looked at the cheery lights, and missed the snow and cold.

He missed his poodle.

He missed skating.

He was happier once the holiday had passed. It meant he could retreat again. He hated telling strangers that he wouldn’t be skating that year, that he was injured.

It was Thursday, two days after his nineteenth birthday, and it was drizzling outside. He wished it was snow.

He sat on his bed, knees to his chest and arms wrapped around them. His head rested on his knees, his hair spilling over his shoulders. He’d started counting the days to the Russian Nationals, wondering who would skate.

He wondered how hard his comeback would be.

There was a knock at his door.

“Da.”

Victor heard the door open, but continued to stare out the window. He expected Alexei to bound in and try to get his attention, or maybe the gentle presence of his mother. Instead there was uncomfortable silence. He finally turned to look, and saw his father standing in the door.

Victor uncurled and sat to face the man. He blinked several times, wondering if he had been expected for some function or another and had forgotten.

“Am I supposed to be ready to go somewhere?” he asked cautiously. “If possible I’d prefer to stay in tonight.”

A pained look crossed Dmitry Nikiforov’s face. “Vitya…”

Victor winced, he hadn’t been so familiar with his father in a decade.

“Let’s go to a little cafe not far from here. Just you and me.”

Victor studied his father for a moment. He nodded and stood. “Let me change into something more appropriate.”

“Meet me downstairs when you’re ready. I’ll be reviewing a score I was handed a score this morning.”

“You’re the concertmaster?” Victor asked, surprised. “Or is this strictly a solo piece?”

“I’ve been offered the role of concertmaster. I haven’t decided yet. We can discuss it later.”

Victor nodded and strode to the wardrobe. He pulled open a drawer and fished out a pair of jeans, then selected a sweater from a hangar. When he turned back to the door he saw that his father had headed downstairs.
He quickly changed, pulled his hair back, then found his father in the living room, reviewing a complex score.

“Don’t tell your mother or Alexei about this yet,” Dmitry said as he stood and slid the music into a briefcase. “I was only asked myself this morning, and I want to determine how I feel about it before discussing it with them.”

“So why tell me?”

The elder Nikiforov frowned. For a second Victor thought he was going to talk, but instead he picked up the trench coat he had folded over the back of a chair. “Come Vitya, the cafe will close if we wait too long.”

Victor grabbed his own jacket from the rack near the door. “Is it far enough I should bring the cane?”

“You should be fine. Grab an umbrella though, just in case it’s raining on the way back.”

Victor nodded and grabbed one of the umbrellas before following his father out into the chill weather. They walked in silence, the sound of cars on wet roads their accompaniment. A couple blocks later Dmitry paused and opened the door of a quaint cafe.

They went to the counter, and Victor perused the menu. Once their order was placed they found a quiet table near the back and waited for the coffee and pastries to arrive.

They stared at each other for several minutes, Dmitry looked as if he was about to say something several times before reconsidering.

“I’m proud of you Vitya.”

Victor blinked. It was not what he expected.

Their order arrived and his father paused to take a sip of coffee.

“You were such an impulsive child,” Dmitry continued after a moment. “Everything fascinated you, and you wanted to experience so much. You flitted from one interest to another. At first we thought it was just the nature of children, but Alyosha was the exact opposite. He was content to observe, to let the world come to him.

“I remember when you declared that you wanted to play the piano. But the next week it was the oboe. A month later you had decided to become a percussionist. You never seemed to find your place. Then came the year we played with the opera. You wanted to be a danseur for six months, we even enrolled you in lessons.

“Even then you didn’t quite find your place. You were happy moving to music, but enjoyed the lessons less and less.

“When you decided that figure skating was your passion your mother and I thought it was the latest whim. But you were insistent, and we were there when you put on your first pair of skates.

“I remember the tears in your eyes when you fell on the ice for the first time. Lyosha had been out there with you, but quickly decided that it wasn’t for him. Once you found your balance though, you loved it. You wanted to go back every day, and you begged us for lessons.

“Your mother and I thought that, just like your other interests, you’d move onto something else in a few months. We were in no rush for you to settle down. You brought so much joy and energy into
our lives. But you didn’t lose interest.

“We thought it was just a matter of time. Then, seemingly overnight, you were asking about coaching and training. You were only seven, but had decided that you wanted to go back to Russia by yourself to train under one of the best figure skating coaches in the world. We even let your teachers from the rink work out the details so that Yakov could meet you.

“We thought he’d say that you were too young, to try again in a few years. We thought we had that time for you to find your next interest. But… he watched you for less than an hour and declared that he could turn you into one of the best figure skaters in the world.

“Your mother and I agonized over the decision. You were so young. We didn’t want to send you to live on your own, but we couldn’t take away your passion either. We tried to get you to consider other coaches. We had been offered good positions in Spain at the time, and were willing to stay a few years to let you figure it out. But you only wanted the best.”

He paused, sipped his coffee, and stared out the window at the clouds and light rain.

“I know that my actions probably irreparably damaged our relationship, but I was scared Vitya. We’d seen you flit from one interest to another so often we thought it was just a matter of time, and you were asking us to let you go.”

He paused to take another sip of coffee and a bite of carac.

“I know the world of music. It’s demanding. It requires dedication and talent. One has to be able to pour their soul into an instrument, maintaining precision while they play. It’s hard, and I love it.

“I know almost nothing about the world of athletics. The one thing I do know though, is that it’s a career with a lifespan. Your mother and I, we’re in our forties. Our careers are still going strong, but you and I both know you won’t be competing at forty. You may have special appearances, but your athletic career will have effectively been over for a number of years by then.

“We wanted to see you succeed at whatever you wanted to do. But you were asking so much. We wouldn’t be able to look over you. We’d already contracted for the next season, and had received offers for the one after that.

“We thought about moving to St. Petersburg as soon as we could. But, and I’m sure you know this, your coaching fees weren’t cheap. We, your mother and I, didn’t command the fees we do now, and after looking at every orchestra and opera in St. Petersburg we realized that we wouldn’t have enough to continue supporting you if we settled down. We had to keep touring, keep soloing.

“If we wanted to give you your dream, we couldn’t be there for you. It ate at me. There would be so many things that we’d miss, but the biggest fear I had was that you might never understand just how precarious a path you had chosen.

“Your mother was initially against cutting you off at eighteen. We argued about it for weeks. She said we’d make it work as long as you needed. I wanted to agree, but I was still scared. Without us around to help you understand the long-term implications of your career I didn’t know if you would be prepared when it ended. Eventually she did understand my reasoning, but was never happy with it.

“You were a child that only saw the now. What I did may seem cruel, but I did it with your future in mind. I forced you to have a stake in your decision. By making you prepare for a date on which you knew you would be on your own, I hoped that you’d learn the importance of planning for those
major changes that invariably accompany the path you chose.”

Victor clenched his hands in his lap. “So why tell me all of this now?”

Dmitry sighed. “Because, my son, I think you’re finally old enough to understand.”

Victor blinked in confusion. “You don’t think I would have understood before?”

His father grimaced. “What seven year old thinks about where they’ll be at twenty… thirty? Some might, but most are still discovering the world. If we were going to lose you, we wanted you to be the best. The only way I knew to make you push that hard, to not get distracted, was to make you fight for it. It was a dual lesson. It would prepare you for an uncertain future, and that drive to hold on would make you better.

“You always hated losing anything you really wanted. When I told you that we’d only support you until eighteen a part of me wanted you to give in. If it didn’t seem worth the hassle then we wouldn’t lose our little boy to a career we knew almost nothing about

“You had such resolve, and you were so angry that, even after ten years, you might not get your way. I remember your little fists clenching, like I’m sure they are now.”

Victor loosened his hands, caught.

“Then, only a couple months after you turned eight, I put you on a plane to Russia. Your mom went to help you move in, but she cried every night for weeks once she came home. I was hurt and angry, you had chosen the ice over your own family.”

He paused, lost in thought.

“For a while we expected the call. Come get you, you had lost your interest. Or you were tired of getting hurt. But it never came, and as I realized that my little boy had truly gone I… I couldn’t let go of the hurt.”

Victor couldn’t hold back. “So why didn’t you support me? Why did you almost never come to my competitions?”

Dmitry frowned. “Vitya, it’s not such a simple matter as that. For so long your competitions were in Russia, and during the time of year that we were most busy. As much as we wanted to, we couldn’t drop everything to go.

“Then there were the times that we thought everything was going to work out. We were close enough to get away, or a competition was in one of our few downtimes.”

He sighed.

“One time I was offered a solo position at the last minute, after the featured soloist fell ill. I had played the piece two years prior, and I was the only one available who could step in on such short notice. The pay for the handful of performances would cover your coaching fees for several months at a time when we were struggling to fit it into the budget.

“Before we knew it, you were thirteen and had joined the junior division. You made it to nationals your first year, and we were so excited. We’d promised to be there, but Alexei developed appendicitis. We were waiting for him to come out of surgery when we were supposed to be on the plane.
“Alexei was terrified that you’d hate him. He looks up to you so much. So I took the blame, and I told you I forgot. Everybody always jokes at how easily I forget things that aren’t important, so I knew you would believe it.

“But it drove the wedge in further, and seeing how devastated you were… yes, we saw a recording after… we knew we couldn’t make those promises any more.

“Eventually, it hurt too much. Our boy was away, and thriving without us. Watching the recordings reminded us of all the milestones we missed. We had to look away, because if we wanted you to keep growing we couldn’t be there. You had to find that strength in yourself. You’d found your place, and we weren’t in it.”

Dmitry stopped and looked at Victor. He smiled, one of the few times Victor had seen the expression on the normally stern man’s face.

“When you called last spring, I was terrified you’d run out of whatever money you’d set aside. I thought I’d failed in setting a proper goal. But you asked me to play for you instead. You don’t know how much that meant to me, even if you did pick such a difficult piece. I was angry you didn’t ask about Lyosha’s piece, not because I didn’t want to see you skate to his music, but because he’s still so sensitive. I knew he’d blame himself if things weren’t perfect.

“When we heard you were hurt I worried that you’d give up. But I’ve seen you fight the whole time you’ve been here. You’re determined. You’ve done so much already, not many nineteen year olds have Olympic medals, but you’re not done yet.

“So I’m proud of you Vitya. Those things that so scared me when I let you go, you’ve overcome them. I know I made mistakes along the way, and I’m not asking for forgiveness. I don’t deserve it. But I’m hoping that now you know why we did some of the things we did. It was always for you.”

Victor was speechless. “Papa…”

Dmitry smiled. “Not yet Vitya. That’s too much to put on you at once, and I honestly expect you’ll be angry after you think about it. We’ll talk about it more another day, once you’ve had time to reflect on what you want to say. I’ve had years to plan for this, so it’s not fair for me to expect an immediate response.”

Victor stared, and finally nodded.

“Finish your coffee and meringue. Your mother and Lyosha should be a few hours still. I trust you still remember how to read music?”

Victor nodded.

“Good. I’ll let you look over that score. It’s a big decision, and I think I’d like the opinion of another man.”

Victor felt tears in his eyes as he nodded.

Victor sat on the bench, watching the skaters move clumsily across the surface of the outdoor rink. Alexei was in the sea of people, practicing the few moves that he’d learned over the summer.

Victor wanted to join him, but the walk had made his leg ache, and all he could do was watch.
It had been a few days since the talk with his father, and he was glad that the elder Nikiforov had insisted that he not reply immediately. He was angry, not like he expected though. His emotions were muddied, and he needed to think.

“Lyosha, try that three turn again,” he called across when he saw his brother almost execute the move properly.

“Da!”

Victor leaned against his cane. His brother seemed to like the ice. He’d never have the love of it like he did, but he could see the enjoyment on the teen’s face.

“Good!”

Alexei smiled then disappeared as a cluster of families skated between them, sticking close to the safety of the barrier.

Victor wondered if he could get away with renting a pair of skates and just moving in the same careful circles. It was like walking to him, surely it would be ok.

He stared out, and sighed. He’d asked his physical therapist several days prior, but they didn’t want him on the ice again yet.

When he looked up he saw his brother practicing crossovers.

“Good Lyosha!”

He could see his brother tiring, not used to being on the ice. A couple minutes later he was joined on the bench, Alexei loosening his rented skates.

“You did well out there,” Victor praised. “You remembered what you learned over the summer.”

Alexei beamed up at him and tugged back on his shoes. “I’ll return these, then we can decide what else to do.”

Victor smiled and watched his brother wander to the rental booth. There was a short line, and he knew it would be a minute.

His eyes drifted back to the ice, and his hand clenched around the handle of his cane. He wanted to be out there.

He wondered what else Alexei would want to do when he was roused by his thoughts by a voice behind him.

“Victor?”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

Hopefully that wasn't too exposition-y. I really wanted to get Victor's father's viewpoint in, and so many little changes happen in Geneva, some of which won't even show up
until almost the end. It's a good time for Victor to reconnect.

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

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Also if you haven't seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: Shared Gravity. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

End of Dec 2007 - 20th Jan 2008 - A reunion with a friend gives Victor some new perspective and allows another friendship to bloom.

Chapter Notes

The mystery voice is revealed... or not. A lot of people guessed and I didn't try to hide it, LOL.

Bien sûr = Of course (according to google)

If you've been enjoying this work please hit the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Victor?”

Victor turned, and his eyes landed on Christophe Giacometti. The younger teen grinned, ran over and glomped his friend from behind.

“Chris? What are you doing here?”

Chris laughed. “I should be asking you that. I live here, but last I checked you were Russian.”

Victor felt an embarrassed blush cross his face. “I guess I forgot that you live in Geneva.”

Chris laughed harder, and Victor noticed that Alexei wasn’t the only one who had grown several inches. “I missed you at Skate Canada my friend. Somebody told me you were injured?”

Victor held up the cane. “I wish it were all a joke.”

“So you’re really out for the season?” Chris asked as he moved around and took a seat next to Victor on the bench.

“Nationals are just over a week away... and I haven’t been in skates since September. Even if I were miraculously better tomorrow, I don’t think I could be up to competition readiness in that short a time.”

Victor heard a small shriek and looked up to see Alexei standing there.

“It’s Christophe Giacometti!”
Victor blinked several times. Meanwhile Chris stood and put on a huge grin. “Always nice to meet a fan.”

Victor chuckled. “I guess he looks different than he did at the Olympics, and you didn’t see him much. Chris, this is my little brother, Alexei.”


Victor laughed, he’d fallen into French so easily when talking with Chris that he forgot he was speaking it.

“Is your English better?” Chris asked, switching languages.

“Yes,” Alexei fidgeted. “But I should work on my French. So if you don’t mind just talking slower?”

Chris grinned. “Bien sûr.”

The three teens looked at each other for a moment, and quickly decided that the bench was no place to talk.

“Come,” Chris said with a grin. “I know a great little place not far from here with a fantastic beer and wine menu, and the food’s pretty good too.” He then paused and looked at Alexei for a moment. “You’re old enough right?”

Alexei nodded. “I turned seventeen at the end of October.”

Chris laughed. “Older than me then! You don’t look it.”

Alexei made an annoyed face about how young he still looked.

“Do they have anything harder?” Victor asked, the conversation with his father still weighing on his mind.

“That’s right,” Chris joked. “You’re old enough for the harder stuff. They do, but trust me, the beer selection leaves nothing to be desired.”

Victor smiled and allowed his friend to lead the way. Soon they were seated around a small table in the crowded cafe.

“So Victor,” Chris said after they placed their orders. “You never did say what you’re doing here. Family vacation for the holidays?”

Victor cringed, and Chris winced in response, noting immediately that he had touched a sore spot.

“Yakov sent him to live with us for a while during his recovery,” Alexei explained quickly.

“But I thought you lived in Lyon.”

Alexei waved his hand dismissively. “We’ve been here for almost a year. We move around a lot, depending on where Papa and Mama have the most offers for solo performances.”

Victor clenched his hands, remembering how Alexei had been the one to let him know where they had moved to.

“Victor?” There was a strong note of concern in Chris’s voice.
Victor forced a smile and took a sip of the beer that had just been set in front of him. “I’m fine.”

Chris frowned. “No you’re not.”

Victor sighed. “I’m just frustrated.”

“About skating?”

“Yeah,” Victor half-lied, recognizing the out.

“You’re in your head too much Victor.”

Victor looked up at Chris. They were walking toward the library together to work on assignments from their tutors, the younger teen having finished practice for the day.

Running into, and hanging out with Chris had helped Victor’s mood immensely, but he was still unsure of how to respond to his father. It had been nearly two weeks since their chat, Alexei had headed back to school and a part of him felt guilty for taking so long.

“It’s… personal,” Victor finally said.

Chris was silent for a few moments then sighed. “Is Alexei joining us today?”

“No, one of his classmates has a recital. Apparently they’re nervous, so Lyosha is going as moral support.”

“That’s good of him.”

Victor smiled. Chris and Alexei had become fast friends, and they often studied or went out as a trio. Victor had to admit he would miss the connection when he returned to St. Petersburg.

“So have you decided on a major yet?” Chris asked as they took their seats at a long table in a back corner of the library.

“Not for sure, but I’m leaning toward sport management.”

Chris cocked an eyebrow. “Oh?”

Victor leaned on his elbow, face cradled in his hand. “The more I watch Yakov and my managers, the more I realize that there is a lot of stuff that happens behind the scenes. By the time I’m introduced to sponsors they’ve been vetted to make sure they’re a good fit for me and vice versa. My public image is carefully crafted by public relations staff… just… there’s me, then there’s a whole lot of people supporting me. I want to know more about what they do, and when I eventually retire it’s not a bad path. I’ll have been there, so I’ll be able to help guide a new generation.”

“That’s more thought than I’ve given it.”

“You’ve still got a year and a half of high school.”

“Only technically. My tutors have been pretty happy with my progress. If I asked for a heavier course load in order to,” Chris made air quotes, “‘graduate’ early I’m sure they’d let me.”

Victor smiled, and for a moment his thoughts drifted to Yuri. “Did you ever skate while attending
regular school hours?"

“For a while, until I entered the junior division.”

“I started with tutors as soon as I moved to St. Petersburg. My schooling has always been around my skating. Is it hard?”

Chris shrugged. “It’s got its ups and downs. I definitely had more friends my own age when I was in school, but my skating got a lot better once I switched to tutors.”

“So it’s hard to skate around a normal school schedule?”

“I never felt like I had the right focus,” Chris said, leaning into his hand. “A bit of practice in the morning, then it was off to class. Then a bit more in the afternoon. Squeeze in dance lessons and strength training and it just felt fragmented. I always seemed to grow during breaks, when I could properly devote myself, and spent the rest of the time maintaining my skills.”

“So that’s why…” Victor mused.

“Pardon?”

“Oh. Nothing. So are you going to continue to college level courses, or quit after high school to focus?”

Chris stared for a minute, studying Victor. “I think I’ll continue. I’m used to the routine, and I should probably do it while I’m still young.”

“Don’t want to be the only thirty-year-old in the classroom?” Victor joked.

“Don’t want the hordes of fans chasing me after I start taking gold from you is more like it.”

Victor laughed. They turned to study for a bit, but the silence let the cloud build over Victor’s thoughts once more.

“You’re in your head again,” Chris accused.

“I…” Victor sighed. He couldn’t argue.

Chris stared. “I don’t know what’s going on, but it’s always worse when I don’t see you for a day or so. I’m not going to ask, but I know family tension when I see it, and you’ve been screaming it ever since I ran into you. Stay at my place for a few days. My mom will be thrilled to have company, especially the skater friend I met at the Olympics. We can invite Alexei this weekend so it doesn’t interrupt his schooling. It’ll give you a few days away by yourself, then some time with the brother you dote on.”

Victor was poised to politely refuse when he realized that a few days away might be what he needed. “You know… that sounds nice.”

“Great!” Chris said. “I’ll meet you after physical therapy tomorrow.”

Victor was ecstatic. The more he thought about spending several days with Chris the more exciting it sounded.
Even better, the physical therapists had consulted about his progress and he had been cleared to put on skates. He was forbidden from spins or jumps, but could practice basic steps.

Chris put in a call to his coach as soon as he heard, asking if Victor could accompany him to the rink the following day.

Chris looked at his phone as soon as he hung up. “He said he’ll talk to Yakov?”

They started toward Chris’s apartment.

“It wouldn’t surprise me if they had each other’s contact information,” Victor said as they walked. “They’ve both had students on the international stage for long enough that it was likely useful.”

Chris laughed. “I guess you’re right.”

Only a few minutes later Victor’s phone rang. He looked at the caller ID and saw that it was Yakov calling. “Da.”

“Vitya, can you explain the call I just got from coach Karpisek?”

“I can try, but I don’t know what he said.”

Victor heard a sigh of exasperation. “He said that your friend asked if you could go to his rink to skate.”

Victor laughed. “I guess the physical therapist didn’t call. I was cleared to practice basic steps just about an hour ago. I’m still banned from spins and jumps. When Chris heard, he asked if I could join them. It came as a surprise to me too.”

“You said you’re cleared for basic steps?”

“Da.”

“Well at least I know you aren’t foolish enough to try anything too difficult without your own skates. I can trust you’ll stick to that rule if you’re stuck in rentals?”

“Da.”

“I’ll allow it. But be respectful. At least pretend to listen to him.”

Victor laughed. “Of course.”

Yakov was grumbling as he hung up.

They only made it a few more steps before Chris’s phone rang. After a short conversation he beamed at Victor. “Josef says you can practice with us!”

---

You feel excited today Nicky.

Yuri was practicing spirals while waiting for his coach to arrive.

I was cleared by my physical therapist to practice basic steps again. I can’t do anything like jumps or spins, even these spirals you’re doing are probably pushing it. But it’s going to feel great to be on
the ice again.

Congratulations. You’d seemed down lately. Was that why?

That… and family issues.

Family? Did you get in a fight?

Victor sighed internally. Not… exactly.

Yuri skidded to a stop next to the barrier and took a few swallows of water. I used to get in fights with Mari-nee-san a lot, but not as much the past couple years, since she started working at the inn. It always felt bad, but not like you were feeling lately.

It comes across that much?

Sometimes. I could feel the pain of your injury too, I think when your medications were wearing off. But it was only for a few days.

I’m sorry Yuri! Why didn’t you say anything?

Because I didn’t want you to leave.

Victor was startled, and felt overwhelming fondness for the boy. Yuri, I never want to make you uncomfortable. You should tell me these things.

Yuri pushed off from the barrier, gained a bit of momentum then moved into a camel spin. Was the fight bad?

No, and it wasn’t a fight… Just…

Nicky?

Yuri, your parents support you right?

Of course they do! They might not be able to make it to competitions because of work. But they hold viewing parties of the videos Minako-sensei takes, and they were so proud when I was on television for Junior Nationals.

Are they fans of figure skating?

Not before I started. They don’t understand it, but they always tell me how proud they are. Even when I don’t think I did so well.

You’re lucky.

What do you mean?

I moved away for training when I was young, and I never felt like my family supported my skating. They almost never called after a competition, they only ever actually showed up for a few.

Nicky, that’s horrible. I’m so sorry.

A couple weeks ago I had a long talk with my father. He tried to explain things, but somehow… it made it hurt worse.
How could it get worse than them not supporting you?

He said that the reason was because they missed me too much. They had work as well, but... He said that seeing me thrive without them hurt. It was easier for them to turn away than watch. I just... I don’t know how to respond.

Yuri was silent for a moment, pushing off into a triple axel.

Here in Japan there is a saying: kawaii ko ni wa tabi o saseyo. It translates roughly to 'send the beloved child on a journey.'

Yuri?

Sit spin.

It means that children need to learn to be independent, so they can experience life for themselves. Good... or bad. It doesn’t excuse emotional distance, but in a way, they let you go on that journey didn’t they?

Yes?

Did you learn to be a stronger person because of it?

Yes.

Then maybe that’s where you should start. Separate the good from the bad, then see how you feel.

“Does your hair always tangle that badly when you’re asleep?”

Victor looked up from where he was running a comb through his hair. He smiled at Chris. “Not always, but many nights.”

Chris shook his head. “I don’t get how you can stand it. It would drive me crazy.”

“It’s just something I’ve learned to live with. It comes with the long hair.”

Chris was silent for a moment, studying his friend, before smiling. “You’re in a better mood today. Excited about skating again?”

Victor nodded. “Yeah. I don’t care if I am going to be stuck in a pair of rental skates, it’s going to be great to be on the ice again.”

Chris laughed. “Let’s get going then. Josef is expecting us a few minutes early so that the rink doesn’t explode all at once from you being there.”

“It’s not that big a deal Chris.”

“You may say that, but you weren’t there last year when the rink Stephane trains at had chiller problems. He was only around for a few days, but half the rink was awestruck at the Olympic silver medalist being there with us.”

“I bet he could actually skate though, not two-foot through basic steps.”
Chris laughed again, green eyes glinting in amusement. “I’m sure you’ll be more a center of attention than you think.”

Victor glared, and Chris turned to grab some things. “Hurry up with the tangles Victor.”

----

_Do you think you’ll be skating when the next season starts Nicky?

I’m pretty sure I will be. Practice felt good today. Why?

Will you tell me your real name?

Victor was sure that if he were awake he would have felt ice in his veins. _Yuri?

You… you help me so much, and I want to cheer for you too. I feel like we only ever talk about me… or Victor Nikiforov. But that’s not fair to you. I want to cheer for you, and watch you do well.

Victor’s heart swelled with pride, but he knew it wasn’t time. _Yuri, I’m sorry. But I can’t, not yet._

But why? There was a hint of fear in Yuri’s emotions.

_Yuri, as much as you want to skate against Victor, I want to skate against you. I want to meet you on the ice. You’re doing so well I know we will one day. And, it might be selfish of me, but I don’t want you to know who I am until after that happens._

Why not?

_Because I want you to see me as just another competitor when that day comes. I don’t want you to feel any obligation other than to do your best._

_But how will I know who you are?

I’ll tell you when the time is right._

"How long are you in town?"

The three teens were sitting in the same cafe that they had been at two weeks prior. Victor looked up at Chris. “Pardon?”

“I asked how long you’re going to be in town.”

Victor sighed. “Another week or so? Yakov said he doesn’t want me back in St. Petersburg before the European Championships. I plan to head back right after though.”

Chris grinned. “Great. How about you come with me then?”

“Huh?”

“To the European Championships. Just because you’re not skating doesn’t mean you can’t watch. Call it a good opportunity to check out the competition.”

“I don’t know Chris…”"
“Come on. You too,” he said, turning to Alexei. “My sponsors always give me spare tickets. I’d be thrilled to have the two of you cheering for me.”

“What about the hotel rooms?” Victor countered. “The official hotel has got to be almost booked by now.”

Chris gave a dismissive wave. “I’ll just have the hotel switch me to a double. Josef always rooms alone. You two can take the other bed.”

Victor sighed. “That’s not the best idea. I’d keep Lyosha here awake all night. I toss and turn a lot.”

“Pfft, then he can bunk with me. I’ll keep my hands to myself.”

Victor was looking for another argument, but saw Alexei bouncing excitedly. He sighed. “Fine… I’ll go. Lyosha will have to check with our parents though.”

Alexei grumbled. “Yeah, but I don’t have any competitions until early March, so a couple days should be ok.”

“Competitions?” Chris asked, intrigued.

Alexei smiled. “Cello competitions.”

“I thought I told you that Lyosha was a cellist,” Victor said.

“Yes, but you didn’t mention anything about competitions. I always thought it was just performances and such. Alexei, you’ll have to let me know when it is so I can come support you.”

“You don’t need to.”

“Nonsense!” Chris laughed. “It’s what friends do. So tell me, how do competitions help you as a cellist?

Alexei was thoughtful for a moment. “Sometimes it’s just to compete and weigh skills against others, sometimes there are special concerts and it’s as much an audition. Right now I’m preparing for a lot of them. I’m aiming for the Conservatoire de Musique de Genève for college. The more competitions I place at the better it’ll look on my application.”

“Don’t you mean ‘win?’” Victor teased. “You haven’t taken anything lower than first in your age group in years.”

Alexei blushed. “I’m not that good.”

Victor fixed his brother with a stare. “Lyosha, I was going to skate to your music. You realize that right? If I hadn’t gotten hurt the whole world would have heard your playing.”

“It’s not my music. I just played something somebody else wrote.” Alexei sighed.

“You played it beautifully, and what you put into it makes it yours.”

“He’s right you know,” Chris added. “I may not be a musician, but I have to listen to a lot of music. Once I decide on a piece I still try several versions. Each conductor, each musician, has their own take on a piece. Technical precision is one thing, but there are subtle variations. The slightly faster tempo of one, or the way things like dynamics are handled. Those all add flavor and are things I can build on.”
Alexei softened slightly. “Really?”

Chris laughed. “I’ll prove it to you. I’ve been researching who I’ll be against in Croatia. There are two people skating to *Carmina Burana* in the short program. *O Fortuna* is the perfect length, so it’s popular. But it’s highly unlikely they’ll be skating to the same recording. When you’re there listen to the different versions and watch to see how they are interpreted.”

Alexei smiled, then sighed. “I still wish it were *my* music.”

“What’s stopping you?” Chris asked.

Alexei looked up. “What do you mean?”

“You want to make music that’s all your own. Why don’t you?”

Alexei fidgeted. “I’ve tried a couple original pieces, but… I can only write for cello.”

“So?”

“What do you mean ‘so?’ It takes more than one cello.”

“Then write for two, or three. If you want to make your own music, then do it.”

“But if I really want to write music I need to learn the piano, and I need a lot more music theory.”

Chris shrugged. “Then do it. Even I know that the school you’re aiming for has a history. I bet you can double major. Focus on performance for your cello, and learn piano and music theory too.”

Alexei’s eyes widened slightly.

Victor smiled. He saw something click inside his brother, and a new determination in him. He leaned across the table slightly. “Lyosha, when you have a piece you’re confident about, that’s completely yours, give it to me. I’ll skate to it.”

“Really?” Alexei’s eyes shone with excitement.

“If he doesn’t, I will. How’s that sound?” Chris countered.

Alexei grinned, then his face fell again. “Are you sure? It’ll probably be several years. I need a lot of work before I can put out something good.”

Victor smiled. “I’ll wait.”

---

Victor was leaving for Croatia the next day to join Chris at the European Championships. What had felt like a punishment, being sent from St. Petersburg, was now a few precious hours left.

He descended the stairs, the house oddly silent. When he peered into the living room he saw his father studying the same score from before and making notations on it.

“What we talk?”

Dmitry set the music down and took off a pair of reading glasses. He fixed his eyes on his son.

“Mama said that you’d accepted the position of concertmaster.”
“Yes. The pay is good, and they were willing to give me only a single year contract so that I can decide if it’s for me.”

“Lyosha’s excited.”

“I could tell he didn’t want to move again. He hasn’t spoken to me about it, but I have enough connections to know he’s making friends at the conservatory. There are already rumors he plans to apply next year, but I’ll let him talk to me about that on his own time.”

“Does mama have enough work?”

“The orchestra she is substituting with says they can use her for a few additional months, their harpist said she’d take the time if they had her chair covered. She’s also been asked to be a soloist for a smaller group. We’ll probably have to arrange some chamber performances for late summer if something doesn’t come up before then, but it’ll work out.”

Victor took a deep breath. “Paying for my coaching fees really put a strain on the budget, didn’t it?”

Dmitry smiled softly. “It was what you wanted…”

Victor clenched his fists. “I could have sought out sponsors! The Russian Skating Federation could have helped! You didn’t have to do it all! You could have been there for me!”

Dmitry startled at the outburst. “We didn’t want you burdened with obligations like that. They would have placed expectations on you. By paying for your coaching and fees we kept you from that. We did what we had to for you.”

“You supported me monetarily, but you never supported me!” Victor fell to his knees, the floodgates had failed and he couldn’t hold back. “All those years I thought you hated me. You never came to see me, you never congratulated me, you never consoled me. For so long I hoped that you’d be there, in the audience, but you never were.

“Half the time I didn’t even know where you were. I only learned you were here in Geneva so early because Lyosha wrote me a letter. You forgot to tell me you’d left France, and it wasn’t the first time! I used to try to send cards, but got tired of them being returned.

“You didn’t even call except once every few months! So many times I saw the other skaters get flowers from proud parents on the side, or the ones who trained away from home would get calls almost immediately after their performances. I had none of that. I felt like I was written out of your life, like I was one more bill to pay.

“At some point I just… gave up. I couldn’t hope any more. I learned to lean on Yakov, all those moments you claim you missed… he was there for. You never even asked me about them!” Tears were streaming down his face, but he didn’t care.

“Am I your son, or am I a bill that’s finally been cleared from your ledger?”

Dmitry stood. “Vitya!”

“No! You don’t get to call me that! Not now. You can’t tell me how guilty you feel eleven years later and expect it to be better. I understand you made a mistake. I know you’re only human, and that you’re my father, but I barely know you!”

Silence, then, “Victor…”
Victor stood and wiped his eyes. “I’m going back to Russia after the European Championships. Alexei will come home with Chris.”

Dmitry’s face fell.

“I can’t forgive you, not yet. But I will give you a chance at a fresh start. I realize I could have reached out too. So this is me doing that. We can’t start over, but we can start again from here.”

“Victor…”

Victor shook his head. “No. If you want to make it up to me, then support me. Not with money… just be the family I never had.”

Victor stormed from the room before his father had a chance to respond.

Natalya embraced Alexei, then Victor. “Safe travels. Have fun cheering for your friend.”

“We will!” Alexei exclaimed.

Natalya put her hands on Victor’s shoulders. “It was good having you here. Please visit more often.” She hugged him again. “If you need me, think of me in your dreams,” she whispered.

“Mama…” Victor replied, hugging back.

She kissed his forehead then stepped back.

Victor and Dmitry shared a glance.

“I know you’ll do well next season Victor,” Dmitry said after a few seconds. “Give us your competition schedule when you know it?”

Victor nodded. It was a token gesture, but at least a start. “I will.”

The elder Nikiforov nodded. “Safe travels son.”

“Thank you.”

A taxi honked out front, and the two teens quickly loaded their bags and were off to the airport.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

The trifecta! Alexei, Chris AND Yuri... all in one chapter!!

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

------------------------------------------------------
Also if you haven't seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: *Shared Gravity*. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Victor, Chris and Alexei hang out during the 2008 European Championships.

Chapter Notes

Short chapter today. I just wanted a few days of fun between the boys before Victor headed back to Russia and Chris and Alexei back to Geneva.

I've updated the In Our Dreams playlist to include Chris's pieces for this chapter.

If you've been enjoying this work please click the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Victor and Alexei waved Swiss flags as Chris took to the ice for his short program. Victor wished he were waiting for his own turn to perform, but he was determined to make the most of their time as a trio.

“Good luck Chris!” Alexei shouted as the Swiss teen took a lap of the rink.

Chris spotted them and waved as he settled into his starting position.

“Did Chris tell you what he’s skating to?” Victor asked.

“No,” Alexei replied with a pout.

Victor grinned. “Good. I told him not to.”

“Why would you do that?”

“Because I wanna test you. You have three measures to guess the song and composer.”

Alexei grinned. “You’re on! But when I get it you have to buy me a dessert from that cafe near the hotel.”

“Oh, in that case make it two measures.”

“You’re on!”

The music started and only the first measure passed before Alexei smiled. “Palladio” by Karl Jenkins. You could have at least made it a challenge.”
Victor grinned. “That was a warmup. The real challenge will be the free skate.”

“Oh?”

“Get that one right, and if Mama and Father allow it, you can come stay with me in St. Petersburg for a week this summer, Chris too.”

“You mean it?”

Victor nodded.

Alexei hugged Victor as Chris landed a perfect triple lutz. The crowd roared, but Victor’s heart sank when the Swiss teen touched down on a triple loop, and two-footed the final jump of a combination.

“I guess I shouldn’t feel bad about how hard I struggled last season,” Victor murmured.

“Huh?”

“Chris has grown several inches since last year. He’s struggling out there because he’s still getting used to his body. I was so mad at myself, but seeing it from here… I know that it’s just something that happens.”

“You still skated beautifully.”

Victor smiled and hugged his brother.

A few skaters later Chris made his way over and plopped into an empty seat next to the brothers. “Well there goes my chance of medalling. No coming back from the twenties.”

“It was still beautiful!” Alexei stated.

Chris smiled. “Thanks for the vote of confidence, but I know when I’m beat.”

Alexei narrowed his eyes, making Chris laugh. “I’m sure Victor is all too aware of this, but jumps are damn hard to land when you don’t know where your feet will be when you touch down.”

Victor nodded in agreement.

“Knowing how I feel, I’m amazed he was able to get on the podium at all last year.”

Victor shrugged. “The ballet helped.”

“I’ll give you that,” Chris countered. “But I’ll add the caveat that results may vary.”

Victor laughed.

They watched the rest of the short programs, waving Russian flags for Victor and Alexei’s countrymen, then Swiss flags again when Stephane Lambiel skated next to last.

They left for dinner as a trio, then spent the evening watching cheesy movies in the hotel so that they didn’t tire Chris before the free program the next evening.

Nicky?
Yuri was lacing up his skates and preparing for his morning practice. He had a local competition that weekend and was trying to get as many repetitions of his programs in as possible.

Yes Yuri?

Was it my imagination, or did I see Victor in the crowd at the European Championships?

Victor laughed. You could make one person in a crowd like that? Besides, that, how did you see them? Won’t they air tonight?

His hair is pretty unique, and it looked like he was sitting with Christophe Giacometti. I’d read somewhere that they were friends.

Yuri stood and stepped onto the ice. The edited version will air tonight, it’ll combine the men's short and the pairs free. But… not everybody will be shown. Luckily Minako-sensei showed me a cable channel that was airing it live. Since it started so early in the day I was able to watch most of the men before I had to go to bed.

Well, as big a fan as you are, if you thought you saw him then you probably did.

What do you think he was doing there?

You said he was friends with Giacometti, probably supporting him and checking out the competition.

That makes sense.

Yuri ran through his program, downgrading what Victor thought was a triple loop to a double.

Wasn’t that supposed to be a triple there?

My coach and I downgraded it after nationals. It’s still not clean, and I don’t need it for the next few competitions. She says I could probably win with just the axel and the salchow. We’re going to work on the loop and the lutz once the season is over.

Victor could feel that something was bothering the fifteen year old. What’s wrong Yuri?

Nakamura-coach thinks I might get sent to one of the Junior Grand Prix competitions this year.

Yuri! That’s fantastic!

I'm not sure I'm ready is all.

Of course you're ready. Are you going to use your current programs? I know the international audiences will love them.

No, I don’t know what I’m skating next year, but it’ll be new.

Why? Your programs are so pretty, and there’s no rule saying you can’t reuse them.

I know, but if I want to skate at Victor’s level I’ll need to learn to push myself. I could upgrade the jumps, but I think I’m ready to go up a level on my step sequences too. I’d rather learn new programs with higher difficulty than revamp these from practically the ground up.

I guess that makes sense, but I really think you could take them for another season.

It just requires too much reworking. I don’t want to plateau just because I didn’t push myself when I
knew it was time.

I guess that makes sense.

Victor was silent for several minutes. For the first time he felt at a loss in how to help Yuri.

Nicky?

Yes?

One thing I want to work into my new programs is a higher GOE on my axel. I think the entry is the way to go. Will you help me run through some different entries?

Of course!

Thanks!

“You’re butchering it.”

Victor turned to see Chris standing in the door of the hotel bathroom. “Butchering what?”

“Your hair.”

“There’s a difference between brushing and butchering,” Victor countered as he struggled with a particularly difficult tangle.

“Not from where I’m standing.” Chris walked in, put his hands on Victor’s shoulders and steered the older teen back into the room. “Sit,” he ordered as he pulled the chair so that it’s back was near the edge of the bed.

“I can brush my own hair Chris,” Victor sighed as he passed back the brush.

“And you can break it in the process,” Chris replied, making sure none was caught between Victor and the chair. “Look, I know what I’m doing, even if I have short hair. My grandmother used to have long hair and she’d wake up with tangles all the time. I’d brush it for her when I visited. You can pay me back by helping with my makeup later. I’ll sneak you backstage somehow and you can help with that damnable gold dust that gets everywhere but works with my costume.”

“Oh I hate that stuff. I swore to never use it again. I’d rather body glitter.”

“Yeah, I don’t know how the girls do it with all their different makeups.”

“Luckily we don’t have to do much, just enough for effect during performances. I can’t imagine doing that every day.”

“Ugh, I don’t want to even think about it.”

Chris started working the tangles out from the bottom and only a few minutes later was drawing the brush in long strokes through Victor’s hair.

“There!” he proclaimed. “Tangle free.”

Victor stood and ran his fingers through his hair. “Thank you. How’d you get it out so fast?”
Chris shrugged. “I worked at it from the bottom and sides rather than try to force the whole clump.”

Victor smiled and returned his brush to the bathroom.

“Now,” Chris said as he walked back in. “What should three teenagers do before the free skate tonight?”

“Well… umm…” Victor started, until Chris started laughing.

“Come on, you know I was joking. Let’s get lunch then find our seats for the ice dance portion of today. I know you wouldn’t miss it.”

Victor grinned.

“That is, just as soon as your darling brother returns. Where’d he go anyway?”

“I think he went in search of flowers and plushies to throw today.”

Chris grinned. “He can buy them outside the arena. He knows that right?”

Victor shrugged. “He said something about not wanting to throw the same things as everybody else.”

“I guess as long as the flowers are properly wrapped it doesn’t matter. Probably won’t break the bank going a bit farther out either. Those sellers near the rink have the advantage of proximity so they can charge more.”

Victor laughed, then cocked his head. “Random question. Is your hair darkening? I thought you were blond, but it’s more of a dark blond now.”

Chris laughed. “You’re just now noticing?”

Victor scowled, which made Chris laugh harder.

“Yeah, apparently it’s a thing in my family,” Chris said. “Blond, then at some point in the teens it starts darkening. But it sun bleaches stupidly easily, so a lot of us end up with two-toned hair. The upper layer blond with brown underneath.”

“Huh.”

The sound of the keycard in the lock, and Alexei stumbled in, burdened with bags of plushies and perfectly wrapped flowers. “Ok, I’m ready.”

“Looks like Russia’s going to have at least one, if not two medals in ice dance this year,” Chris said as they stood. “Then France… another usual.

They had a short time for dinner, then would need to be back in time for the men’s free skate. Chris would be in the first group, having not made it out of the twenties in the short program.

“Not a surprise,” Victor replied. “It’ll be different once Worlds comes around though. The Americans and Candians have been putting up some good teams.”

Chris laughed and slung his arms around the Nikiforov brothers. He saw the big bag Alexei still needed to go through during the men’s portion of the day. “Let’s sneak back to the locker rooms and
store that, shall we?”

“It’s ok.” Alexei replied.

“Nonsense, you don’t want to lug that through dinner. Victor’s going to help me with my makeup anyway, so he can grab it when he comes back out.”

“Only if you’re sure it won’t be a problem.”

They made their way to the restricted area, and between some sweet talk, and pointing out that Victor was the reigning Olympic gold medalist, managed to get all three teens back to the locker room.

They planned the next couple days of sightseeing over dinner, then made their way back to the arena. Alexei went to their seats while Victor followed Chris to the locker room.

There were more competitors around, and Victor received a few stares as he sat and helped Chris. He kept his head down, nervous about being there and not being able to compete when he felt a clap on the back.

Victor turned to see Stephane Lambiel standing behind him.

“Chin up,” he said to Victor. “We all get hurt. Just don’t stay away because of it.”

Victor breathed a sigh of relief then smiled. “Nothing could keep me away. I plan to train hard as soon as I’m fully cleared.”

“Good to hear.”

Somehow the encounter broke the tension in the room, and other competitors came around to wish Victor a speedy recovery. By the time he found his seat next to Alexei his heart felt lighter. He had been so burdened over the tension with his father that he forgot he had a second family in the competitors and coaches that he faced on the ice.

“Chris is third in the first group,” Alexei said as Victor sat.

Victor nodded. “I’ve been thinking about today’s guessing game. I think, unless you’re really a Hugh Jackman fan you might not know the name of the song or what movie it’s from. So I’ll settle for composer only.”

“Oh?”

“It’s… a very abstract film. Visually stunning, but the plot can be quite convoluted. It took me a few watches to understand it.”

Alexei blinked a few times.

“Oh, and you have the full skate to guess.”

They watched the first two skaters, then it was Chris’s turn.

The opening notes, powerful and sad.

“It sounds like Philip Glass…” Alexei mused out loud, then the sound changed. “No, just influenced by Glass.”
Victor smiled, confident that his brother would get it.

“It’s from a movie, but it’s obviously not Williams or Zimmerman,” Alexei muttered.

Strings screamed angst and torment, then determination. Chris pushed himself across the ice in a fierce step sequence.

Then the pause, and the climax of the piece. Chris leapt into a jump and a series of spins. Alexei’s eyes widened.

“Clint Mansell?”

“Good job!”

“It’s a different style than *Requiem for a Dream* and *Lux Aeterna*.”

Victor nodded. “He really took a new direction, and the sound is gorgeous.”

“So what’s the movie?”

Victor grinned. “Chris and I watched it last year during a competition. The movie is *The Fountain* and the song he just skated to is *Death is the Road to Awe*.”

“What a depressing name.”

“It was kind of a depressing movie. Worth it though.”

“What’s it about?”

“Umm… this is going to sound cliche, but the best way to explain it is as the struggle of reconciling mortality and the search for eternal life.”

“Ok?”

“It’ll make more sense when you watch it.”

“How do you know I will?”

“Cause I can see in your eyes that you want to hear the rest of the soundtrack and how it fits into the visuals.”

Alexei scowled, then grinned.

“Just not tonight,” Victor said as Chris’s scores were displayed.

“Why not?”

“He took some deductions, and will probably stay in the twenties. It’ll be a reminder. Besides, he’ll have listened to that song to death in the past couple weeks. Watch it when you get home, or wait until you come visit this summer.”

Alexei nodded, then the implication of him winning the guessing game washed over him. “You mean it? I can come see you in St. Petersburg?”

“As long as Mama and Father are ok with it. Early in the summer is better though. I’ll probably have to work my way back up from local competitions, unless I’m given a pass to go right to Nationals.”
“Why wouldn’t you be?”

“Because I didn’t place in the top ten this year.”

“But you were injured, and the last time you competed in Nationals you won.”

“I don’t make the rules Lyosha. If they want to give me a pass that’s fine, but it’s not guaranteed. I didn’t compete at all this year, so it might be better to work back up anyway.”

“Why?”

“So I can find out how my body will accept the strain. Training every day is one thing, but being out there is another. You know that from your music.”

Alexei nodded.

A few minutes later Chris joined them, and Alexei told him how well he skated. They spent the rest of the evening enjoying the other performances, throwing flowers and plushies at the competitors.

Victor embraced his brother and his best friend. Their flight back to Geneva would begin boarding any minute, and his to St. Petersburg not long after. There was just enough time between the two flights for Victor to move from one gate to the other.

“I’ll see you both this summer, da?”

“Of course,” Chris said.

“I’ll be there,” Alexei said at the same time.

“Chris,” Victor said, “thank you. It was fantastic seeing you outside of competition.”

Chris smiled. “Same. We’ll have to do it more often.”

Victor nodded. “You have my cell number and email address now, how we never exchanged them before I don’t know. You know where Lyosha lives too, so you can always stalk me that way.”

Victor looked like he wanted to say something to his brother, but just pulled him into another long hug. “Thank you Lyosha. Thank you for believing in me and being there when I thought I was fighting alone.”

Alexei hugged back.

“We need to do worlds,” Chris said as they announced the flight boarding in the background. “I’ve got the tickets, and this was too fun not to.”

Alexei grinned, and Victor nodded.

“Great! I’ll have the hotel switch me to another double.”

“See you in Sweden then,” Victor replied.

“See you in March,” Chris replied.

Victor waved as the other teens and coach Karpisek got in the line for their boarding group. He then
made his way toward his own gate.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

Back to the grind for Victor next chapter. He's gonna have to work hard to get back up to where he was and he knows it.

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

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Also if you haven't seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: Shared Gravity. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

End of January - Mid-Sept 2008 - Victor works hard to push himself to be ready for the next season, and returns to full training after the World Figure Skating Championships in March. As the middle of summer arrives Yuri is notified of his first assignment in the Junior Grand Prix series, and as summer turns to fall both teens are back to competition in September.

Chapter Notes

Whew, out of the injury year! And there is much rejoicing!

So time gets sped up again, but I think it's a good thing. Seriously if we don't take some of these early years at 6 months in a chapter this thing would just be OBSCENELEY long by the end, and it's already gonna be long.

Also, somebody asked in the comments to see what Alexei looks like... I'm really bad at rendering teens, but here's an Alexei at around the time of canon events. So just age him down a few years in your head for nowish. [Link to Alexei image]

OK, Serious business time. I'm looking at some schedule changes in May, and looking at revising my update schedule. I'd appreciate any input on a poll that I've created. You can vote here: [Poll link] and I'll likely stop taking responses on Friday April 28.

Finally, I've updated the In Our Dreams playlist to include Yuri's pieces for this chapter. I know that those particular recordings are after this year in the timeline, but the pieces themselves are old enough that I'm sure older orchestral versions exist.

If you've been enjoying this work please click the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first time Victor put on his skates and took to the ice in St. Petersburg again was like a dream. He’d only been in Geneva for about a month and a half, but it felt like everything had changed.

He’d turned nineteen, celebrated his birthday in the presence of his family for the first time in more than a decade. He’d finally started to clear the air between himself and his father. He’d connected with his brother, and established the bonds that he knew would carry the friendship between himself and Chris well beyond the end of their skating careers.
When he left Russia he was broken and despondent. When he returned he was healing and saw potential in the future again.

Then there was the thought of Yuri being sent to the Junior Grand Prix the next season. Victor was a realist, and knew that he’d probably only be placed in single event, and there was no way to make the final with only one. But it would finally put the Japanese teen on the world stage.

He couldn’t wait. He was so excited for the world to see Yuri’s talent and beauty.

Victor smiled as rinkmates welcomed him back. Ivan had placed at Nationals and had just returned from Croatia. He had been on the same flight as Victor and they’d spent most of it talking, but the rest of the Russians were excited to see him again after so long away.

Everybody was gathered around him when Yakov walked back into the rink. The coach clapped his hands to get everybody’s attention. “You can talk later, get to work everybody!”

The other skaters clamored to get onto the ice and Yakov walked up to where Victor was waiting. “It’s good to see you again Vitya,” the coach said softly. “Now show me if you can still skate.”

Victor smiled and felt the glide beneath his feet. His edges weren’t as clean as he’d have liked, but after the short practice he knew that he’d be competing again by the start of the season. He was sad when he had to leave after only a couple hours, limited to short sessions until his physical therapy was farther along.

He jogged home, invited Makkachin to join him on the couch, and happily curled up with his poodle for a mid-morning nap.

He was determined. If he had to leave his own ice, then he would join Yuri on his. He’d help the younger teen shine in the eyes of the world.

It was the beginning of March, and Victor had been cleared for single jumps. His daily time on the ice was still limited, an attempt to prevent him from aggravating the still-healing tissue, but his therapists wanted him to start getting used to the strain again.

Victor and Yakov had been informed that if he remained on track for healing he’d be cleared to return to full practice by April, and would only need a few followups prior to the season.

There was nothing like plunging his toe-pick into the ice for the first toe loop.

Victor wanted more. It felt so good. He wanted more speed, more rotations. He was flying again, at home on the ice. His edges still weren’t clean, and he’d still been growing just enough that he had to re-find his balance, but he was carving his mark into the frozen surface again and nothing felt better.

_You’re not coming around for afternoon practice anymore after Worlds, are you Nicky?_

Victor was comfortable with Yuri, but sometimes the younger teens perceptiveness took him by surprise. _No Yuri, but how did you know?_

_You’re restless. I can feel you itching to practice in how you’re pushing me. During the fall you_
pushed hard, there was a desperation. You missed the ice so much that you clung to my every movement. It was better once you were allowed basic steps, and almost gone when you started jumping again.

The past couple weeks that desperation has only been there when I’m working on triples. Yuri continued. Don’t get me wrong, I love having you around, and I’m excited that the desperation is gone. But it’s been replaced with restlessness the past few days. You’re itching, just waiting, and I finally figured out that you’re waiting for Worlds.

Victor laughed. Yes. I was cleared by my physical therapist to return to regular training after Worlds. I’ll be traveling to Sweden to see the competition in person, and I hope it’ll give me new inspiration for next season. I’ll need to work hard to make it there myself, and I’m excited to be able to try again.

I’m glad for you. But I’ll miss you too. I’ve gotten used to you being around so much.

Victor was taken aback. I’m sure you’re excited to sneak an afternoon off here and there to spend some time with your friends though.

Yuri moved along the ice, practicing choctaws and mohawks. I really don’t have any friends.

The simple statement was like a punch to the gut. Surely there are other people Yuri. What about friends from school?

No. Yuri stopped practicing his steps and started gliding.

Victor had the feeling that the sad statement didn’t bother Yuri at all.

I have people I’m friendly with, but nobody I really consider a friend. Not like you or Yu-chan, or even Nishigori.

And you’re ok with that? Even with the separation from family, Victor still had friends: Chris, and his rink mates.

Yeah. It lets me focus anyway. I can skate, and not worry about people getting upset that I’m not spending time with them.

Something about it just seemed so sad to Victor, but he didn’t know how to respond. Eventually he realized that Yuri was skating a pattern over and over, switching feet and edges.

Yuri, are you skating figures?

Yes. I used to skate them all the time. I mean, before I saw Victor skate. I started doing more free skating then. When Nakamura-coach found out she wanted me to start doing them again. She said that they’d help my footwork even more.

You know they haven’t been required for a long time.

I know… but there is something relaxing about them. They help me focus.

You find figures relaxing?

Mmhmm.

Victor relaxed as Yuri traced the shape in the ice over and over, until he realized that he couldn’t visualize the image that was forming on the frozen surface.
That doesn’t feel like a figure-eight pattern Yuri.

It’s not. It’s an original designed for me by Minako-sensei and Nakamura-coach.

You’re skating an original figure? Victor was surprised, not many people skated figures at all, and fewer still original ones.

I wanted something more complex.

What is it?

Wanna see?

I can?

Victor felt Yuri’s pride, obviously pleased with his figure. The teen moved from the ice, clipped on his blade guards, put on his glasses and strode to the glass doors. “Yuuki-san, I’m going upstairs to study my figure.”

“Oh,” came the cheerful voice.

She seems happy. Victor said.

She likes that I’m practicing figures for an upcoming figures-only event. It means she doesn’t need to worry about me hurting myself with jumps.

That explains it.

Victor hadn’t even realized that there was a small alcove at the far end of the rink. Yuri opened a door and climbed stairs until he was on a tiny balcony that lead to the lighting system and overlooked the rink.

You ready?

Yes.

Yuri grasped the railing in his hands and leaned out just enough so that he could peer down onto the rink.

Victor felt shock through him. Etched into the ice below, created by dedication and footwork, was a stunning cherry blossom. Five equally sized petals met in the middle, while the pistils were formed with precision footwork radiating from the center.

Yuri, it’s beautiful.

Chris and Alexei spent several minutes teasing Victor about his dedication to watching the ice dance compulsories before settling down themselves. It was the first day of Worlds, and Chris didn’t skate until the fourth, giving the teens a few days to relax, have fun, and enjoy spending time together.

Though the European Figure Skating Championships had only been two months prior, it felt like an eternity had passed since then. Victor could see that Chris and Alexei had only grown closer, and a part of him wished that he was back in Geneva with them.
“You’ll be here with us again next year, won’t you Alexei?” Chris asked. “You’ll cheer for me too, even when I’m skating against your brother right?”

“What’s it next year?”

“The United States, I think,” Victor replied as he focused on the pair moving across the ice.

“Hmm, that might be harder.” Alexei sighed. “I think it’ll have to depend on how my own competition schedule looks.”

“Won’t you know if you’ve been accepted into college or not by then?” Chris asked.

Alexei nodded. “Yes, but I’m approaching the upper age limit on several competitions. Placing means I might get invited to solo at more concerts. I need that experience while I can get it. After college I’ll have to fight a lot harder if I want to solo, and experience will prove that I’m capable of it.”

“I thought you were going to start composing,” Chris joked.

Alexei blushed. “I’m thinking of doing both. I love the cello, and performing. I can’t imagine giving it up entirely.”

Chris laughed. “I know what you mean. A part of me is terrified for when I need to give this up.”

Alexei looked at the Swiss teen with an unreadable expression.

Chris laughed. “Luckily that’s still a long ways off. I plan to be skating for several years to come.”

Victor smiled. “That’s right, and next year you’ll be right there beside me on the podium.”

“Don’t you mean above you?” Chris teased.

Victor laughed. “Better work hard Chris. I’m coming back next year and don’t think for a minute that a season off the ice has weakened me.”

Alexei looked between the two and laughed.

The boys spent the days in Gothenburg sightseeing, and watched cheesy movies in the hotel at night.

But between the laughter and fun, Victor found his mind straying to thoughts of Yuri. A part of him felt bad that he was enjoying himself so much, relishing the time spent with his brother and his best friend. He wanted Yuri to know the same sort of excitement.

He wished he could invite the fifteen year old to join them. But he knew he couldn’t. Yuri idolized him too much, and probably wouldn’t take well to knowing that Victor was Nicky.

Not yet.

One day though. One day Victor would tell him everything. How much his support over the years had meant, and how much Yuri inspired him.
Chris didn’t make it out of the twenties during the World Championships, but he seemed accepting of it and blamed it on the growth spurt. Victor was impressed, remembering how hard it had been to keep skating at any decent level with the constant body changes. He knew that Chris just making it to the Free Skate itself had been quite an achievement under the circumstances, and was proud of his friend.

Then Worlds was over, and the teens headed home. Chris and Alexei boarded a flight to Geneva with Coach Josef, who had obviously started to accept that his skater had developed quite the attachment to the Nikiforov brothers. Victor caught his own flight back to St. Petersburg a short while later.

As soon as Victor returned to the ice Yakov started training him hard, just as he’d promised so many months before.

It was difficult, trying to get back to competition readiness after so long, and there were times his muscles ached and refused to let him continue.

Victor had learned to listen to his body, at least most of the time.

“Go home Vitya,” Yakov said, afternoon light streaming through the windows on a day in early May.

“Just a bit more Yakov,” Victor protested. The rink was finally empty and he wanted to work.

“No, Vitya. Now. It’s past seven. I’d like to lock up, and you need a break. You’ve been here for twelve hours, either on the ice, in the weight room or the studio. You need to call it a day. Go take Makkachin for a long walk if you need more.”

“I need to train.”

“You need to rest.”

Victor could feel an argument bubbling in his throat, but his coach cut him off. “What season are we going into Vitya?”

Victor blinked. “Two thousand eight, two thousand nine.”

“And what happens in twenty ten?”

Victor’s eyes widened slightly.

“We can’t lose you a second year,” Yakov sighed. “Not this year, and not next either. They’re too important. So do what I say for once. Take a breather, don’t push yourself to the breaking point again. Russia just barely managed two spots in worlds for next season, but you and I both know that one of those will be pretty shaky if you’re not back. We want three spots in the Olympics. You can do it Vitya, you can get us those spots, but not if you’re out another season.”

Victor felt the argument die on his tongue. At some point he’d stopped skating for himself. He’d always carried national pride with him, but now the weight of expectation was on him. He was the reigning gold medalist. It was up to him to defend the honor of the country in less than two years.

It was the first time he’d really had to face that there was more than his personal pride at stake.
Victor nodded, suddenly feeling very tired.

“I’m sorry Vitya,” Yakov said, noticing the change in mood. “I know you skate for the love of it, and that’s one of the things that makes you so good. But your country needs you too. It’s not just about you anymore.”

Victor greeted Alexei and Chris at the airport on a bright June afternoon. The two were visiting for a week, and though Victor still had a few hours of practice each morning they had plans to show the Swiss teen the sights of St. Petersburg.

What excited the trio even more though was that, just as Victor had been welcomed in Chris's home rink, Yakov greeted the rival politely and allowed him to train and learn with his skaters during his visit.

Between training, sightseeing, and introducing Chris to every Russian delicacy that they could find, the week passed far too quickly.

As Victor watched them disappear through the airport security he wondered if he'd ever be able to do the same for Yuri.

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Nicky! Did you see the announcement?

Of course Victor had seen it. It was early July and he’d been waiting for days for it. Congratulations Yuri!

I can’t believe it, I’m going to compete in Italy!

It’s coming up so fast too. The beginning of September. Will you be ready?

Of course! My new programs are coming along nicely.

What about other things? Do you have a passport? Do you need to apply for a visa? What about hotel and flight arrangements? Who will be joining you?

Yuri laughed out loud, causing Yuko to look over at him.

I’ve had a passport for a few months. Nakamura-coach wanted me to get one after nationals, just in case I was called up as an alternate for Junior Worlds. I don’t need a visa. Minako-sensei and Nakamura-coach will both be with me, and they’re handling the hotel and flight arrangements.

Oh I’m so happy for you Yuri. You’re going to have so much fun. I remember my first Junior Grand Prix event. I was terrified and excited. But once you’re on the ice, surrounded by a worldwide audience, everybody cheering, everything changes. There’s nothing like it.

You went to the Junior Grand Prix?

Victor remembers it fondly, and can feel Yuri’s acceptance of his emotion. Many years ago, yes.

Did you win?

Victor laughed. No Yuri. Not the first time anyway. You’re only going to one event, so take this time to learn. Work hard, but don’t be disappointed if you don’t win. Watch your competitors, learn their
styles and how they represent their countries. You’re going to be skating against a lot of these same people for years to come. Try to make a friend or two.

You can be friends and still compete?”

Victor laughed again. Of course you can. Look at Victor and Giacometti.

But Christophe Giacometti is so far behind Victor. Is he even competition?

A part of Victor wanted to immediately defend his friend, and he struggled for a reasoned response. Giacometti has advanced quickly. He had a bad year, but if you compare the videos against prior seasons I’m sure you’ll see he was in the middle of a growth spurt. He’s got talent, and just you watch Yuri, he’ll be standing on the podium beside Victor before you know it.

I… I’m sorry Nicky.

It was then that Victor realized that his tone had been scolding. No Yuri, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have been so harsh. But never underestimate your competition, how’s that? Take a bit of time and watch videos of Giacometti. You’ll see. The talent is there, and when he figures out how to unlock it he’ll be a force to be reckoned with.

Silence between them for a few moments.

How about we work on your triple lutz? A high power jump like that will surely do you well in Italy.

Victor felt Yuri’s agreement. Sure.

Victor wished he could fly to Italy and watch Yuri compete, but when he reviewed the schedule for his own qualifiers the idea was quickly put aside. He couldn’t afford to take the two days off with less than two weeks before his own competitions.

“It wouldn’t have been a good idea anyway, right Makkachin?” Victor asked the poodle as he walked to the kitchen to refill the dog’s bowl. “Why would I suddenly show up to a Juniors competition when I have my own to worry about?”

Makkachin stared, head cocked to the side as she tried to decide if her human wanted a tail wag, a bark or reassurance.

Victor laughed and scratched behind her ears, which the dog took as permission to start eating.

Victor walked back into his living room and flopped on the couch. It was early August, his free day, and he didn’t know what to do. A part of him wished he could just go somewhere, but nothing on the public transportation routes in the city seemed interesting.

He wanted to take Makkachin for a walk in the woods.

He looked at the clock and smiled. It was just past eight in the morning.

It was impulsive, but exactly what he needed.

Victor went into his bedroom and grabbed a backpack. He took it to the kitchen and filled several water bottles, which he set at the bottom. Between them he nestled smaller bags, just in case he found berries or mushrooms on his trip. A few other essentials went into the bag, then he walked to
“Come on Makka!” The dog ran over excitedly. “We’re going up to Vyborg for the day. You’re going to get a nice long walk in the woods.”

The excited half-jumps and tail wagging made Victor think she almost understood every word.

Yakov was mad about Victor’s impromptu trip on a day off, which confused the teen, but settled when he produced a homemade batch of kissel to share with the coach and his rinkmates. He’d found enough berries on his walk through the woods to make the treat.

However the chiding didn’t stop once the coach was assuaged with the drink.

“Vitya, do you know why I’m upset?” Yakov asked, quiet for once.

Victor laughed. “Honestly Yakov. I have no clue. I didn’t know it was a bad thing for me to take my dog for a walk in the woods on my free day.”

Yakov sighed, set his cup aside and tugged on Victor’s arm until they were standing in front of the locker room mirror.

“Now do you see why?”

Victor laughed at the pink skin, burned from the extended time in the sun walking from the train station to the woods and back.

“I wore a hat and sunscreen. I swear!”

Yakov pinched the bridge of his nose. “Call your press manager Vitya. A magazine wants to schedule you for an interview in mid-September. Showing up sunburnt is not going to be fun for either the photographer or makeup crew.”

Victor laughed again. “That’s a month and a half away Yakov! This will fade by then. But if it makes you feel better I’ll buy a higher grade of sunscreen if I get the urge for more trips to the woods.”

Yakov sighed and left the locker room.

Yakov wasn’t happy, but he allowed Victor to take a half-day on a Wednesday only a week prior to his first competition of the season.

Victor was excited, and he had a hard time forcing himself to sleep in the middle of the day, but he wouldn’t miss it for the world.

Yuri had returned to Japan, and there would be a public viewing of his competition at his family’s inn. Since the event wasn’t televised, but had been recorded for highlight reels, the contestants had been provided copies of the footage upon request.

Nicky!
Yuri! Did I read the results right? Did you make fifth place?

Yeah…

Yuri, that’s fantastic! There were thirty skaters, and it was your first time on the international stage. You couldn’t ask for a better debut!

Really?

Really!

They turned their attention to where Yuri’s father was putting the recording in the disc player, and Victor felt that there were far more people than normal.

There are more people today Yuri.

Embarrassment flooded the teen. My homeroom teacher informed everybody that I missed class in order to compete in Italy. When word got out that we were going to watch the tape a lot of people asked if they could come.

Yuri looked around and saw about twenty teenagers crammed into the dining area, struggling to get a good view of the television.

Yuri! Look at all these people! How do you not have more friends?

They’re here because they need to decide if they need to be nicer to me or not. I don’t think they actually care.

Victor felt unease twist through him, but he forced himself to ignore it.

So how many skaters before you?

None. I was first.

Oh goodness, I’m sorry Yuri. That’s the hardest. But it just shows how good your skating is if you still did so well with your competition getting a good look at you.

The Yuri on the screen took his place on the center of the ice, green and brown costume glittering. His classmates whooped and hollered when the music started.

Victor laughed. I love it Yuri! An orchestral version of the Legend of Zelda theme.

The free skate is to the Super Mario Brothers suite.

The program was clean; the step sequence crisp and fun, and when Yuri finished his classmates were cheering.

Minako had been granted control over the remote, and she forwarded to the scores. A minute later the next performance began.

So did you make any friends? Victor asked as the next skater tumbled out of a triple salchow.

No. I stayed to myself.

Nobody came up to you?

A girl from the ladies division did, and she seemed nice. But her twin brother came in a couple
minutes later and he was very protective of her. He’ll skate a bit later.

It was the first time Victor was really getting a good look at some of the upcoming juniors, and he had to admit that the skill level had increased in only the few years since he had moved up to the seniors. He’d have to keep pushing himself if he was to compete in a few years.

They skipped the first half of the free skate since the kids had school the following day, and Minako continued to forward through the breaks between skaters leaving the ice and receiving their scores.

Then Yuri was on the ice again, wearing a red top with blue suspenders and pants.

Somehow his free skate was even more carefree than the short program. He touched down on his triple lutz, but otherwise the performance was clean.

Yuri’s classmates were disappointed when he ended up missing the podium, but they still congratulated him on a good performance.

Yuko and Nishigori hugged him before leaving, and their congratulations were much more heartfelt. They understood the achievement in a much more tangible way.

Yuri, I can’t wait to face you.

It was the Monday before Victor’s first competition, and he was in Moscow for a magazine interview and photoshoot. It was the feature piece: the young athletes who would be the center of winter sports in Russia that year and leading into the Olympics. He found that he wasn’t the only one in the studio, with other teens who did everything from things like speed skating to biathlon and even the ice track sports.

Victor looked around at the assembled group, wondering how many were competitive enough to make the Olympic games. He assumed they all were, otherwise they wouldn’t have been called, but he quickly realized that he was the only person headed into them a second time.

They’d been interviewed separately, but the photoshoot was supposed to be as a group and then smaller breakouts of individual, duos and trios. They mingled for a while, wondering what was taking so long, and were informed that one person was missing. They exchanged names and sports as they went.

A few minutes later a woman about Victor’s own age rushed through the door, auburn hair bouncing. “Sorry everybody! I had another shoot that ran long. At least they only had to touch up my makeup when I got here.”

“Everybody, this is Irina Vasilieva,” the director said as he made his way over to where the teens were gathered near the backdrop. “She’s expected to do well on the skeleton track this season and is hoping to make the Olympic team next year.” He paused and turned toward her, gesturing to the set. “Irina, I’ll let the others introduce themselves during the breakouts so that we don’t lose any more time.”

The assistants got all the athletes into position. Victor was wearing his new costume and a pair of skates that he kept just for photo sessions. Others were shown with their various equipment and gear.

After several different poses as a group the teens were dismissed and taken to different backdrops for the smaller sets. Victor did one with a skier and a snowboarder, and one with a biathlete holding both
his rifle and his skis.

Victor thought he was almost done when the director called him over to where the female athletes had been assembled.

“You and Irina are going to do a couple photos together,” the director said. “Everybody is excited for your comeback, and with Irina’s off-season fame we think the two of you should be on the cover.”

“Ok…” Victor replied as they were lead to a smaller backdrop. Assistants situated them back to back, and handed Irina a skeleton sled.

“Sorry about being late,” she whispered as the photographer took several shots.

“It’s ok,” Victor replied. “But you mentioned another shoot?”

She laughed.

Click, click, click, click, click.

“Yeah, I had a fashion shoot this morning, but one thing after another happened and we ran over.”

“You’re a model?”

“Lean against each other a little more,” called the photographer.

Irina leaned back and Victor moved slightly so her shoulder was against his.

“Yeah, it’s so different than the ice track,” Irina whispered.

Click, click, click, click, click.

“You don’t train over the summer?”

Click, click, click, click, click.

They moved into a new position.

Victor was captivated by her bubbly personality as she laughed.

“I do, but a lot of my training can be done easily over the summer. It’s mostly running during the warmer months, trying to increase my speed. I do travel some to keep in competitive shape, but since each track is different it’s not like I can do much before I’m actually on them.”

Victor smiled. “I can’t imagine doing what you do. It seems terrifying to me, hurdling head-first down an ice track at those speeds.”

She laughed again. “Says the person who does those jumps, is expected to land on a knife’s edge, and doesn’t even wear a helmet.”

Victor thought about it, and started laughing.

Click, click, click, click, click.

Somehow the conversation was easy between them, and after a few minutes Victor was excited to watch her events.

“You train in St. Petersburg right?” Irina asked as they stepped away from the backdrop.
“That’s right.”

She stopped and Victor turned, his blue eyes catching her hazel ones. “It might be forward of me,” she started, “but I live there too. Do you wanna get dinner sometime?”

Victor smiled. “Yeah. I think I’d like that.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

Just a random sidebar thing... Irina's name isn't related to anybody famous or not. I literally went through sites that listed popular names, and I liked Irina, and I liked the last name and it seemed to be a common one. That was literally my naming process with her. Any resemblance is purely coincidental.

Don't forget to vote in the poll thingy: https://goo.gl/forms/W3XikW44qUauJbla2

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

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Also if you haven't seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: Shared Gravity. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Sept - Dec 2008 -- Victor takes to the ice for his first performances after his injury. Meanwhile a budding relationship develops between him and the model and Skeleton racer, Irina.

In Japan, Yuri is quickly garnering attention as an up-and-coming star.

Chapter Notes

Good news Dreamers, the results of the poll showed a lot of interest in balancing updates between this story and Shared Gravity. While I don't have a schedule yet as this is going to be a strange month, I plan to start updating this story twice a week rather than once a week.

A few people have asked about how intimate I'll show Victor and Irina. There's kissing, and a "fade to window" where you know sex happens, but it's not described in the detail that it will be with Yuri. Hopefully it's a good balance.

Finally, I've updated the In Our Dreams playlist to include Chris's pieces for this chapter.

If you've been enjoying this work please click the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Victor took a deep breath and released it slowly. It had been a year since his injury, and he was about to step onto the ice in front of an audience for the first time.

He’d had to have his costumes completely redone. His shoulders were significantly broader, and he was taller. Gone was the wispy teen, replaced with the form of a man. His long hair tumbled over a muscular frame.

“You’re ready Vitya,” Yakov said as the almost twenty-year-old removed his blade guards and set foot on the ice.

Victor nodded, and somebody gave him the signal that the ice was clear from the previous skater. A little girl loaded with gifts skated past, arms full of flowers and plushies.

A hush settled over the crowd, he knew that far more tickets had been sold than normal. People were excited to see him, to see if their Olympian could make a comeback.

The sequins on Victor's costume glittered as he took a lap of the rink, waving to the audience. Silver
tumbled down one shoulder, fading into midnight blue, both blending to black as the color traveled down his legs.

He’d kept his music, so lovingly played by his brother, and expertly expressed by his father. His theme had changed though. He’d discarded the idea of family, not that it wasn’t appropriate, but the music suited his new theme perfectly: *Dreams and Nightmares*. There was a plaintive tone in the cello piece played by Alexei, that he felt lent voice to his longing for the ice while he was injured. The complex tones of his father’s violin spoke to the nuances, the range of emotion and the way his soul felt ripped from him when he couldn’t skate.

A hush fell over the audience, then the first notes filled the arena. He pushed off, building speed for a sit spin as the piano joined the cello.

The piece was gentle, like Alexei, and Victor had given up on the idea of forcing a quad into it. Instead he focused on the artistry, pouring his love of skating and his brother into his performance.

Soon it was over. Victor stood in the middle of the rink, chest heaving, one hand reaching for the sky.

The crowd erupted in cheers. The performance had been flawless. Their champion was back.

Victor wasn’t the only one competing in qualifying competitions that weekend. Yakov was surprised when his skater rushed back to the hotel after his skate, rather than go to celebrate with fellow athletes.

Victor needed to hold onto that feeling from the crowd. He felt loved, and wanted to channel all of it into his sleep. He would use every bit of the emotion to forge a strong connection.

Yuri was going to let him be there for the morning practice before his own long program. It was the first time that Yuri had allowed him to be there the day of a competition, and he was excited for it.

Victor relaxed on the bed in the hotel for a while, laptop propped on his knees. He checked the internet to see if the scores of his short program had been posted, and found that they had been. He smiled. He would be able to provide Yuri with some good news to inspire him for his performance.

Yuri was a bundle of nerves when Victor arrived, a state that took the Russian by surprise.

*Yuri!*

*Nicky!*

*Why are you so nervous? Did the short program not go well?*

*No. It went fine. I’m in first.*

*Then what’s wrong?*

*I’m just nervous. I don’t want to disappoint anybody.*

*Why do you think you’d disappoint anybody?*

*Because I did so well in Italy. What if I don’t do as good here?*
Oh Yuri, everybody has bad days, bad skates. What matters isn’t the bad days but the good ones. If you let the bad drag you down it’ll only turn into a self-fulfilling spiral.

Yuri seemed contemplative.

*How about some good news?*

*Hmm?*

*I checked the internet before I went to sleep. I figured you wouldn’t have a chance to this morning. Victor is in first at his qualifying event after the short program.***

*Really?* Victor could feel the nervousness replaced by excitement.

*Really.*

The excitement was quickly replaced by disappointment. *I won’t be able to see it though. It’s not likely that even the cable channels will have a replay of a Russian qualifying event.***

*You could always see if there is footage on the internet.*

Yuri perked up again. *I could try.*

There was fresh hope in Yuri as he ran through the morning practice, and when he left, Victor knew that the teen would perform well that evening.

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Victor was still grinning ear to ear when he walked into the restaurant a week later. Both he and Yuri had taken gold by wide margins in their opening qualifiers.

He was back, dancing on the ice again. And Yuri would surely dazzle audiences through nationals, and Victor hoped into Junior Worlds as well.

Victor spied Irina sitting at a table in the rear corner of the cafe. She waved excitedly, a large smile on her face.

“Congratulations!” she exclaimed as Victor took his seat. “That was quite the comeback.”

Victor smiled. “I didn’t expect my performances to be shown on the news. It was just a qualifier.”

“Nonsense! You’re making your comeback. Everybody is excited. Even my babushka in Omsk was thrilled to see your performances on television. She couldn’t believe that I actually met you!”

Victor felt a blush spread across his cheeks.

“Oh on that…” Irina turned to a bag she had placed in the chair beside her. A moment later she was holding out a glossy photograph showing herself and Victor back to back. “Would you sign this? Her birthday is coming up and she’s a fan, and I know it would mean so much. And…”

Victor started laughing. “Only if you sign it too. And where did you get it?”

Irina smiled. “I asked the director for prints of the photos. Didn’t you?”

Victor blinked, he hadn’t thought about it. “I guess not.”
“You should get some. I always ask for prints. Sometimes I get them, sometimes not, but I carry a stack in my bag. That way when people ask for autographs I have something to give them rather than them scrambling for a napkin or a piece of paper.”

“Ahh, but there’s the problem. I’m not one to carry bags.”

Irina laughed, a bubbly sound that Victor found intoxicating. “You must carry bags to events.”

Victor thought about it. “Carrying glossy photos isn’t my thing, but maybe I’ll talk to my PR team and see what they think.”

Irina smiled.

“So, who am I making this out to?” he asked as he accepted a silver marker. Their fingers brushed, and he smiled when a blush spread across her cheeks.

“Oh! My babushka’s name is Olga,” she finally replied when she realized that he’d asked a question.

They’d been dating a week and it was already beginning to make news on the tabloid sites. His triumphant return to skating had generated a buzz, and when he was spotted with an up-and-coming model slash athlete the rumors started to fly.

At first their respective PR teams had tried to downplay the relationship, but when the magazine ran a teaser of the upcoming issue and pre-orders went through the roof they started to collaborate and use the situation to their advantage.

They were leaving a joint meeting, during which the magazine editors had come on board to schedule a signing event, with Victor and Irina headlining, and as many of the other athletes as they could manage from the article coming on board.

Everybody was determined to use the momentum to drive national interest in the athletes in the runup to the twenty-ten Olympic games.

Irina pulled Victor into an alcove just before they reached the lobby of the building and pressed her mouth against his, kissing him, fingers weaving into his long, platinum, hair.

Her lips were soft and warm against his. It was the first time Victor had ever been kissed, and suddenly all the stories made sense. It was intimate and sweet, and a pleasurable experience all its own. He held her tight against his chest as he tasted her breath and the fake-cherry flavor of her lipgloss.

“Sorry,” she breathed as they broke apart. “I couldn’t help myself.”

Victor smiled and leaned in again. “It’s ok,” he murmured against her mouth before returning her kiss with one of his own.

Irina was beautiful and Victor genuinely enjoyed her company. Her bright personality shone through in all her interactions. She was energetic, laughed at the drop of a hat, was a bit clumsy, and loved Makkachin.
In the three weeks they’d been dating they had fallen into an easy rhythm, spending as much time together as possible. During the day they trained, her pushing modeling aside to focus on the upcoming season. Then they met during the waning light of evening to take the poodle for a jog.

The nights that they didn’t go out to dinner Victor would cook while Irina poured over photos of the ice tracks she would be competing at. Every so often he would catch her swaying, shifting her body weight in her head to maximize speed and control through a turn.

He could see that she loved her sport, though the thought of racing head first down a chute of ice at a hundred and twenty kilometers per hour still terrified him.

Victor smiled as she scrunched her brow at a photo, swayed, made a face then went through it again in her head. She was a good person, and he liked her as a friend. He enjoyed kissing her too. But he started to wonder when those feelings would deepen.

It was the end of October, only a few days before the magazine was due to hit the shelves, and they were in Moscow for the signing event. From the original group only a couple of the hockey players were absent, already having started their season.

Victor was able to sneak a peek at the line forming outside of the bookstore hosting the event, and saw that a sizable crowd had developed, eager to get the magazine a few days early and to have it signed by the young athletes in the feature story.

Irina took Victor’s hand under the table as the doors were opened. He was glad for her presence. Despite his achievements he still struggled to put on a good face for the press and fans, while it came as second nature to her.

Then the first fans were there, excitedly holding out fresh copies of the magazine or glossy photographs that were also for sale.

The next several hours passed in a blur. Victor remembered running through several markers, and hearing words of praise from more people than he could count. He’d signed autographs before after performances, but never so many all at once.

It was shocking in a way. He hadn’t realized how many fans he had, but many who came talked about their favorite performances from his junior days, and how excited they were to see him on the ice again.

In that moment it seemed that all of Russia was excited to see his return to skating.

November came, and with it the first of Irina’s competitions. They kissed feverishly the night before she was set to leave.

Victor was going to miss having her around, even for only a few days. She’d become a dear friend, and he enjoyed the time they spent together.

She asked to spend the night rather than go home. She said she was already packed, and her flight didn’t leave until midday.
A part of Victor wondered if it was mistake when he said yes, and the voice got louder as their kissing took them to the bedroom. He pushed the voice aside as he reached for a condom.

As they lay there afterward, her asleep in his arms and pleasure still thrumming through him, the voice came back.

She was a friend, but even after losing his virginity to her he felt nothing more than that. Physically he was attracted to her, but the romantic emotions that had eluded him for a month remained doggedly out of reach.

“What do you mean you want to go with us to Japan?” Yakov bellowed as he tried to walk away. Victor just kept skating backwards around the perimeter of the rink, keeping his eyes on his coach.

“Come on Yakov. You’ve seen the list. Weir will be there, so will Oda. It’s a good chance to watch their new programs before worlds.”

Yakov stopped and stared. “And you could watch them just as well on television. You want to go with us because that little Swiss friend of yours is skating don’t you?”

Victor grinned. “That too, and to support Ivan of course.”

“Glad I wasn’t completely forgotten,” Ivan yelled from halfway across the rink.

“Have you forgotten that you’ll be skating less than a month later at Nationals?” Yakov started walking again.

“So will Ivan,” Victor pointed out.

“Yes, but he’s competing, you’d be sitting in the stands.”

“Come on Yakov, you know I’ve been performing up to your standards during the qualifiers. Ivan is my biggest competition and my scores are easily higher than his.”

“Hey!” Ivan called. “I’ll have you know I’m just preparing to peak at Nationals.”

Victor laughed. “Funny coincidence, so am I.”

“You’re not going to give up, are you Vitya?”

Victor shook his head, and Yakov sighed. “Fine.”

“Great!” Victor exclaimed. “Now, can I go a few days early to watch the Japanese Junior Nationals?”

“What?” Yakov bellowed.

Irina pouted at Victor from the other side of the table. For a moment he wondered if the food didn’t agree with her, then realized that she was upset for other reasons.

“Do you have to go Vitya?” she asked, lips turning down into a frown.
Victor sighed. “No, but I want to. I always get a better idea of a performance’s weaknesses and strengths in seeing it live versus on the television. Besides, my best friend will be skating and I want to support him.”

“And your rinkmate?”

Victor smiled. “Yes, Ivan too.”

She sighed. “Why do you have to go so early though? You’ll be gone a full week, and I’ll only have a couple of days with you when you get back before I’m off to Germany.”

Victor leaned across the table and kissed her forehead. “Japan has been putting out a number of highly talented skaters over the past several years. I just want to get a jump on seeing the competition before the younger ones make the transition to seniors.”

“But you don’t seem to want to do that with the Americans. Haven’t they always been some of our biggest rivals?”

Victor thought about it for a minute. “In a way I know what to expect from the Americans, and even most of the European countries. But the Asians are bringing new artistry to the sport. They’re going to be the ones to watch.”

“But why not just watch them here with me?” she pressed.

“Ira,” Victor sighed. “It’s a national competition yes, but Juniors events are rarely televised even if they’re international. There’s no way it would be shown here.”

Irina went back to pouting.

Victor knew her pouting meant she’d probably go home that night rather than spending it with him. In a way he was relieved, part of him was increasingly guilty every time they slept together. He was starting to think that the feelings she had toward him weren’t going to be reciprocated.

---

Yuri?

Yes Nicky?

Yuri was skating the basic school figures as part of his warmup.

_I want you to know that I’ve arranged to be in Japan during Junior Nationals. I plan to be in the arena when you skate._

Yuri slid to a stop.

_Did I understand right Nicky? Did you just tell me you’re coming to Japan to see me skate?_

_That’s right Yuri._

_But... why?_

_Because I want to._

_But why would you want to see me skate?_
Because your skating is beautiful, and I’m tired of watching recordings. I want to see you live.

Victor could feel how flustered the fifteen year old was. But I’m nothing that special.

But you are Yuri. I see amazing skaters every day, and I know talent when I see it.

I’m not the only reason you’re coming am I? Please tell me there’s another reason why you’ll be in Japan.

Victor laughed. I have a friend competing in the NHK trophy the next weekend. I’m just going early to see you too.

You’re staying all those extra days?

To see you skate? Yes. And I’m glad to do it. I know I won’t be able to indulge like this next year, so I want to see you live now.

Will… will you tell me who you are while you’re here? Will I get to meet you?

Victor sighed. No Yuri. I want to meet you on the ice and face you properly. But I promise I’ll throw something after your performance that I know you’ll love.

“You look ridiculous,” Alexei said as Victor combed some spray-on black color through his long platinum hair.

Victor glared at his brother. “Nobody asked you, you know.”

Alexei grinned. “That makes it even better. Cause you really do look ridiculous.”

Victor rolled his eyes. “I figured you’d find a way to join us when you learned that I was coming, but why did you decide to come so early? I thought I’d be coming to this competition by myself.”

Alexei laughed. “I had to see what so captured my brother’s imagination that he’d come to a Juniors competition, and not even an international one.”

Victor sighed. “It’s like I told Ira. Japan has been sending some extremely talented skaters to the world stage lately. I want to see who’s waiting in the wings.”

“Speaking of your darling girlfriend,” Alexei said, flopping onto the bed. “When do I get to meet her? I was thinking of coming to see you in Kazan. Think she’ll be there?”

Victor sighed and sat down next to his brother. “I’m thinking I need to break up with her.”

Alexei sat up, startled. “What? Why?”

Victor took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I just don’t feel anything when I’m with her. I know she’s moving closer to me, but I can’t see her as anything more than a friend.”

“Have you had sex with her?”

Victor gaped at Alexei.

“I’ll take that as a yes. That didn’t change anything?”
Victor sighed and shook his head. “No, except I feel guilty after.”

“Now I see the real reason you wanted to come see Chris. You wanted to get it off your chest.”

Victor smiled. “Some outside opinions are something I’m in search of, and I don’t want to talk to the people to at the rink.”

Alexei made a face. “If you don’t feel anything then it’s probably better to end it sooner than later.”

Victor stared at the floor.

Alexei looked at Victor as he handed over a small cardboard tube.

“When he’s done skating take this down to the barrier and hand it to him personally,” Victor said.

“Oh? You didn’t have anything personalized for anybody else. What makes this one special? I remember you threw a poodle plush yesterday.”

Victor smiled. “He’s the other reason I’m here. He’s a fan. He wrote me a letter and told me how much he wants to skate against me one day,”

“So why don’t you take it? Or do you not trust that black spray in your hair?”

Victor laughed. “I think he’d probably recognize me even with the spray. In his letter he mentioned that he spotted me in the audience at the European Championships last year.”

“I bet he’d be excited to have something handed over by you directly then.”

Victor shook his head. “It would be like Yo Yo Ma personally congratulating you after a performance.”

Alexei was silent a moment. “Ok, I might not have picked Ma myself, but I get your point.”

“So you’ll take it?”

Alexei sighed dramatically. “Fine, but you owe me sushi later.”

“Save it for when we’re with Chris after his skate?”

“Ok, but you’re still buying me ramen tonight.”


“I wouldn’t have expected a Japanese teenager to speak Russian anyway.”

Alexei started laughing as soon as the much-loved video game music started, but he quickly started studying the performance. “He’s good.”

“I know.”

“He’s really good.”

“I know.”
“And he wants to skate against you one day?”

“I can’t wait.”

“He might win. His footwork puts yours to shame.”

“Hey.”

“Just telling it like it is. He’s going to be a force to be reckoned with when he moves up to the senior division.”

Victor smiled and turned to study his brother’s face. It was then he caught sight of a brown ponytail a couple rows down from them on the other side of the aisle.

Victor took out his cell phone and quickly researched a name, once a photo filled the screen he elbowed his brother. “Do you see that man with the ponytail?” he asked, pointing.

Alexei looked. “Yeah, why?”

“When you’re coming back up, see if this is his face.”

Alexei studied the photo. “Ok... why? Who is that?”

“Just a hunch, but look at how he’s studying Katsuki. I think we’re not the only people from outside Japan here for him tonight.”

“Oh?”

The music stopped and the crowd was on their feet. Alexei rushed down the stairs with the cardboard tube, and a flustered Yuri accepted it with a smile. Victor saw his eyes widen when he read the text on the side of the tube.

Alexei sat back down. “That man totally looks like the photo. So who is he?”

Victor beamed. “He’s one of the top figure skating coaches in the world. There’s Yakov, Coach Josef, and him, Celestino Cialdini. There are others of course, but, in terms of consistently producing winners he’s one of the best.”

Alexei looked to the man again.

“And you think he’s here for the boy we just saw?”

Victor glanced to the coach and nodded as the man sat back. “Oh yes. See, he’s totally relaxed now and writing down his observations. If somebody else catches his eye he’ll pay attention again, but he’s definitely here scouting Katsuki.”

The scores were posted, and Yuri had won gold.

The crowd went wild, and the coach stood to leave the stands for a break before the ladies portion.

Victor’s eyes met the coach’s as the man walked past. Celestino stopped and studied him.

“Black doesn’t suit you Nikiforov.”

Victor grinned. “Told you I’d be recognized by anybody who knew me,” he said to Alexei.
“I take it we’ll see you at worlds again this year.”

“Of course.”

“Should I ask why you’re here?”

Victor shrugged. “Takahashi, Kozuka, Oda. Japan has been sending up a lot of winners, and I want to see what the upcoming generation looks like.”

“You’re not here for Yakov?”

Victor shook his head and laughed. “You know Yakov only takes Russians.”

Celestino smiled. “He might make an exception one day though, especially for raw talent like that.”

Victor smiled. “I wouldn’t mind it, I know he’s a fan, but no. As far as I know there are no non-Russian skaters on Yakov’s radar.”

Celestino was silent.

“Are you going to approach him now?” Victor asked.

Celestino shook his head. “Not tonight, maybe after Junior Worlds. There are logistics to consider, one of which is that he’s still in high school. He also hasn’t announced an intention to move up to seniors yet. His coach is good, one of the better ones in the country, but since she only works with juniors I’m not too worried about him settling in.”

“But you’re worried about somebody else snatching him up too,” Victor pointed out.

“Of course. We all want talented skaters like him. But it goes both ways you know.”

Victor grinned. “Yakov is the only coach for me.”

Celestino laughed. “Exactly.”

The crowd was starting to thin as people left to use the restroom or get food between the mens and ladies portions.

“I should get going,” Celestino said. “There’s a girl I’m considering, though I think I’ll pass. I want to make sure though. I’ll see you at Worlds Nikiforov.”

Victor grinned. “Call me Victor.”

Celestino smiled and stuck his hand out. “Victor then.”

Alexei stared at the man’s back as he climbed the stairs to the exit.

“He’s a coach?”

Victor nodded. “That he is, and if he’s scouting Katsuki it means that I’m not the only one who expects him to go far.”

Alexei laughed. “I guess you’d be a good judge. Let’s go get that ramen now.”

Victor smiled. “Yes, I’m starving.”
Nicky?

Yes Yuri?

It was the day after Yuri’s free skate, or still the night of for Victor. He and Alexei had stayed up late and were sleeping in. Obviously Yuri had woken early and Victor had found himself tugged to the teen’s mind.

Thank you Nicky!

Victor felt warmth in his heart.

You’re welcome Yuri. I knew you’d like it.

I love it. But... how?

Friend of a friend. I knew somebody who was going to be in Moscow during the signing event for that magazine. It took a few favors, but I managed to get that for you.

Yuri held up the glossy photo showing Victor in his free skate outfit, glittering crimson across his shoulders fading to black then to silver on his calves. He traced over the silver marker with one finger. The writing was in English, a simple “Skate your best Yuri!” but the signature was in Cyrillic.

Yuri started crying, and suddenly Victor didn’t know what to do.

Yuri? What’s wrong? Did I have my friend ask for the wrong thing?

Yuri started hiccuping, trying to control his tears.

No, it’s nothing like that. I... I’m just so happy. It means so much.

“You need to let her go,” Chris said, leaning back in the chair. He had seemingly grown another several centimeters since Victor had last seen him over the summer. He now stood taller than Victor and drew eyes wherever he went.

Victor had to admit that the cute little boy was gone, replaced with a devilishly handsome man.

Victor sighed. “Why did I have the feeling you would say that?”

Chris laughed. “Alexei here probably said it first. But you knew I would say it because you know it’s the right thing to do. You felt guilty for a reason.”

“What if my feelings change?”

Chris sat forward and fixed Victor with a stare. “Do you honestly think there is a possibility of that?”

Victor took a sharp breath, before sighing it out again. “No. There’s just nothing there, and I know there never will be.”

“Look Victor, she didn’t sign on for a friends-with-benefits situation. You say you like her as a friend and as a person, and that means that you have to respect you’re not headed in the same
direction. You need to let her go now, before she gets any more attached.”

Victor sighed again.

“Do it for her Victor,” Chris ordered. “She’ll be hurt, I can tell from your reluctance, but imagine how much worse it’ll be if you let this continue. Letting her go now is infinitely kinder than dragging it out and making her think you have a future together.”

Chris’s theme was *Spies and Allies*, and he skated two movie selections to rousing approval from the audience. His short program was from the *James Bond* franchise, while his free skate was set to the *Mission: Impossible* theme.

A few mistakes cost him points, and Chris ended up in last place, but he had many more flowers and generic plushes littering the ice than the other mens competitors.

Victor could see that his friend was going to be a crowd favorite in that and upcoming seasons.

Irina was in tears, and Victor didn’t know how to help. He tried to be gentle, to explain his lack of feelings, but it seemed to make things worse.

Eventually he pulled her into his arms, against her objections. He kissed her forehead.

“I’m sorry Ira, I really am, but it’s not fair for me to get your hopes up. I want you to be happy, and I know you won’t find it with me. I care about you, as a friend and as a person, but I know those feelings will never turn romantic. I tried, and I hoped they would develop, but they didn’t and I can’t hold you back any longer.”

Irina sobbed against his chest, and he held her, giving her as much comfort as he could in their last moments as a couple.

Victor was almost melancholic when he took the ice for nationals. Despite not having romantic feelings for Irina, he had enjoyed her presence. A part of him missed their jogs, the way Makkachin would bark excitedly at the girl who was willing to play for hours. He missed watching her shoulders sway as she barreled down a chute of ice in her head.

He performed his free skate on his birthday, and, as he glided over the ice, he reminisced. In the past year he had recovered from injury, rediscovered his family and found that Chris would be a lifelong friend.

He’d watched Yuri compete for the first time on the international stage, and secure his place at Junior Worlds that season after having earned a gold medal at his nationals.

He’d had his first relationship, and though he hated the hurt it caused, he knew it was right that he’d ended it.

By the end of four and a half minutes he had new hope. He was twenty years old, and just getting started. He was back on the ice, and his future was bright.
Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

Victor's 20 and with a positive outlook. Next chapter Europeans and Worlds!

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

Also if you haven't seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: Shared Gravity. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Victor joins Chris at the European Championships, but soon realizes that he needs to increase his scores.

Meanwhile Yuri is gearing up for his first Junior Worlds.

Chapter Notes

So I didn't realize people were going to be bothered by Victor's other relationships. It's not normally something I have to think about in my writing TBH. They're fantastic avenues of character development, and different interactions are important to well-rounded people.

Given that we started with them so young, and that it was pretty well established in the show that Victor had been with people prior, I legit thought people expected to see them when doing such a deep dive into Victor's past. It never occurred to me that anybody thought I would gloss over them, at least not all of them.

I've seen a lot of people express like for Irina, and some people uncomfortable. I'm going ahead and changing the tags to include a Victor x OC because somebody asked for it.

That said... For those that do care and want to know what to expect. There will be two more "on-screen" relationships with OCs. They'll be handled much like Irina, glimpses here and there of the important stuff and no explicit sex, just indications that it's happening (I'm saving the smut for Yuri). I really can't take them out because so much of Victor's mindset evolves during these times, and when we DO get to Yuri it'll be flat without them.

If you've been enjoying this work please click the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“It’s a shame that Alexei couldn’t make it,” Chris said, flopping on Victor’s bed.

Victor sighed, pulled a chair around and sat, watching his friend. “I know, but it was this or coming with us to Worlds in America. He’s been all over Europe with Mama and Father, so Los Angeles is a much more interesting prospect.”

“How’s his English?” Chris asked. “It seemed passable in Japan, but I think we lucked out with people who spoke a bit themselves. Other than that I think I’ve only heard him speak it a few times,
when he doesn’t know a word in French.”

Victor shrugged. “I actually haven’t conversed with him in English. It’s French with you, and Russian at home. It’s a pretty standard subject in schools though, so I think he’ll be able to at least be able to at least get by. And I assume it’s his go-to language when in a new country.”

Chris nodded, smiled, then sighed. “It’s too bad we won’t be able to celebrate your return to Worlds properly.”

“What do you mean?”

Chris laughed. “The absurd drinking age in America. I was looking forward to going out with the two of you after for drinks, something harder than beer I mean.”

Victor smiled. “That’s right, your birthday is next month. Eighteen, right?”

Chris grinned. “I can’t wait.”

“Oh? Why’s that?”

“It means my mom will stop bugging me about sponsors.”

Victor laughed. “What, does she think you don’t have enough? You’ve been consistently placing silver at your nationals, and are moving up the international stage at a good rate. I’m sure you have your fair share by now.”

Chris laughed again. “No,” he waved his hand. “I’ve got plenty of sponsors. She’s tired of signing the contracts. She’s already had me start contacting my them for re-signing after worlds. She says I should be able to handle that stuff on my own, with the ‘you went to the Olympics at fifteen’ line.”

Victor smiled sadly. “I guess I didn’t think about it from that end. I’ve been signing my own contracts for so long that I forgot that others usually have their parents sign.”

Chris sighed and sat up to stare at his friend. “They didn’t even sign your sponsorship contracts?”

Victor shook his head. “The first few, but they quickly put through the paperwork to let Yakov sign instead. It did make things faster, no mailing all the documents around, but it was one more measure of separation. I was allowed to fully sign my own contracts before I was even out of the junior division.”

“Mon dieu.”

Victor leaned back in the chair and stared at the ceiling. “Looking back, it’s amazing how much distance there was.”

“Are things better now?”

Victor held out his hand and tilted it side to side. “Eh, somewhat. They called on my birthday and congratulated me on my win at nationals. They also called after my first qualifier.”

“Still not showing up though?”

Victor sighed. “Not on my birthday, no. Too many Christmas concerts. I think they’re trying to decide if they can come to worlds or not though.”

“Think they will?”
Victor smiled. “Lyosha will be there. That’s enough.”

“Are you sure?”

Victor turned to look at his friend. “At least he’s openly excited. Even when my parents did show up I was never sure if they were glad to be there or if it was an obligation. Lyosha is free with his emotions, and I can see how much he enjoys it.”

Chris sighed. “I can’t imagine my family not being involved. My dad is often away for work, but mom makes sure to come to as many competitions as she can. She has a harder time with the ones outside of Switzerland, travel costs add up when she has to take off work for a week and all, but she’s always there for the local ones.”

Victor smiled. “A part of me envies you, then there is the part that’s so used to it I can’t imagine what proper support from family would be like.

“I guess Lyosha’s a good middle ground,” he concluded with a laugh.


Victor nodded. “Right now it’s a lot of basic accounting and business classes. It’s a pretty broad field, but most branches need those essentials. I guess those going into public relations maybe not as much, but even then it might be good if they’re running their own firms.”

“Makes sense,” Chris replied. “Maybe I should add some business and accounting electives just to have a baseline knowledge.”

“ Wouldn’t hurt, you can also follow what your accountant is doing with your money then too.”

“Accountant?”

Victor laughed. “One of the best pieces of advice Yakov gave me when I started getting a ton of sponsors. Use some of that money and pay an accountant to handle the details. Even if you can do it yourself, it takes the work off your shoulders and lets you do other things.”

“Good advice.”

“So what are you thinking about for your major? You’re going to start classes… well, tutoring… this summer right?”

Chris nodded. “I’m pretty set on psychology. If I want to practice I’ll have to continue onto advanced degrees and stuff like practicum hours. But I could also go into a research field.”

Victor thought about it for a minute then smiled. “I think it’s a good fit for you.”

Victor found a quiet area of the arena and slammed his fist against the wall.

He’d become complacent.

*Sixth…*

He’d been in second after the short program, poised to return at the top of the world.
Then he popped his axel, and flubbed a combination trying to make up the lost points. In addition to the technical deductions he’d taken a beating on his performance components because the transitions weren’t clean and the flow was off. In the end his free skate score was twenty points behind the leaders, and had been even lower than Ivan’s, who had placed eighth.

Victor turned, leaned against the wall and slid down, feeling the painted cinderblock catch on the back of his practice jacket. He pulled his knees to his chest and curled in on himself.

He clenched and unclenched his fist. He was furious with himself. He was better than the performance he had just delivered and he knew it.

“Everybody has bad days Victor.”

Victor looked up to see Ivan standing in the otherwise empty section of tunnel.

“Not me,” Victor replied tersely.

“Even you.” Ivan argued. “And nobody faults you for them.”

“It was a stupid mistake, and I let it turn into two. I knew I needed more speed going into the axel, and I had enough time in the exit transition to add in a couple extra crossovers to build it. But I went for it there because of the music. I could have taken the tiny deduction for it not matching that phrase perfectly. Then I tried to change the last triple to a combination when there was no time in the transitions for it, and it threw off the rest of the performance.”

Ivan sat down next to him. “So what you’re saying is… you had a bad day.”

Victor laughed sarcastically.

“How do you think I feel?” Ivan asked, putting his hand on Victor’s knee. “I delivered two clean skates, and I came in eighth.”

“They underscored your performance,” Victor retorted.

“I agree, but there’s nothing we can do about that.”

Ivan slung an arm around Victor’s shoulder and pulled him into a hug, which Victor found oddly comforting.

“You of all people should know how to pick yourself back up. You’ve spent the last year doing it. Call it what it was, a bad day, and work hard so that it doesn’t happen again.”

Victor took a deep breath and released it slowly. After a moment he stood and held out a hand to his rinkmate.

Ivan smiled as the younger man helped him to his feet. “Let’s go find Yakov, da?”

Victor nodded.

“You going to Junior Worlds?” Chris asked from next to Victor as they watched the exhibition. Victor was still upset with himself that he missed the podium and the show wasn’t helping.

Victor blinked and looked at his friend. “What?”
Chris smiled. “Your friend will be there right? The one who won junior nationals in Japan?”

Victor sighed. “He’s just a fan.”

“A fan who you had Alexei deliver something personalized to.”

“He told you huh?”

“He was wondering if I’d heard of him.”

Victor smiled.

“I didn’t know you cared about your fans so much.”

“Well he reached out to me, and he’s a good skater.”

“So you gonna go?”

Victor shook his head. “I’ve got to bring up my scores before worlds.”

Chris studied him for a minute before returning his attention to Brian Joubert’s performance.

---

Are you ok Yuri? The sixteen year old was warming up with school figures again.

I’m fine.

You seem down.

Just worried about Victor.

Victor felt momentary surprise. Why?

Didn’t you see his face after his performance? He looked devastated.

It wasn’t a good performance, Victor argued.

He missed a couple of jumps. It was still beautiful. That step sequence was absolutely stunning. I could feel the pain of the past year in it.

Victor sighed, he was still angry at himself, but he recognized that Yuri felt different.

So what are your plans after Junior Worlds? Victor was eager to change the subject.

Yuri blinked a couple times in confusion. What do you mean?

Are you moving up to the seniors? The Olympics are next year. Are you going to try to make the team?

No. I’m going to stay in juniors another year at least.

But your skating is beautiful. It would dazzle audiences in Vancouver.

I don’t think I could make the team. Oda-san, Takahashi-san and Kozuka-san are all amazing and have already been competing in the seniors for a while. I think even if I did do well at nationals they...
would be sent instead as they have a proven record.

You can’t know that Yuri. Victor went to his first Olympics at seventeen, and he took gold. You’re easily as good a skater as he was.

Was. He’s better now. I can’t compete yet.

So you’re satisfied staying where you are?

It’s better for now.

“What the hell are you doing Vitya?” Yakov yelled as Victor came down hard.

“I’m putting in the quad.”

“What do you mean you’re putting in the quad? Are you insane? You were barely able to land it before your injury and you haven’t been practicing it regularly.”

Victor slid to a stop at the barrier. “I need the points. Even without me screwing up, Joubert has a higher base score, and you saw the results from Four Continents. Lysacek and Chan put up numbers that were even higher.”

“Then increase your GOE. You don’t need the quad to win.”

Victor kicked the ice in frustration. “Russia wants three spots in the Olympics right?”

Yakov’s expression turned dark.

“I need the quad. Execution alone won’t get me there.”

“Then put in another combination.”

“You know the quad is worth more.”

They stared at each other.

“Practice it with a combination too,” Yakov relented. “Drill both versions into your muscle memory and decide which to use on the ice. And you better believe that if I think you’re going to hurt yourself again I’ll put a stop to this quad nonsense.”

Victor nodded, doing the math in head to figure out which combination he could fit in and try for a higher grade of execution on.

He was determined to land the quad in competition though.

Yuri was good enough to move onto the senior division. Victor knew it.

He had found a channel broadcasting the Junior World Championships, and the free skate portion was about to start. Yuri’s scores after the short program were lower than they had been at his nationals, but were still high enough that he’d have likely made the free skate if he’d been a senior.
As much as he wanted to push the teen, a part of him knew that Yuri was right. Japan had three champions in the senior division who were all proven competitors, and their scores were still significantly higher. Even if Yuri managed to challenge them his first year in the seniors, unless his scores were well ahead, the seasoned skaters would likely be sent to the Olympics.

Victor sighed. Even though he knew Yuri was right, it didn’t mean that he had to like it. It felt like Yuri was underestimating his own ability still.

Victor wished he’d been able to give Yuri a pep talk that morning, but he was too busy practicing for his own performance. The changes to the program were coming along, but his edge coming out of the quad wasn’t clean, and every time he tried for a higher grade of execution in the combo he flubbed it. Holding his arms up or angling for a more difficult entry were just causing more problems than he’d like to admit.

He watched the Yuri on screen take his place for the free skate. The teen’s score had been lower than normal during the short program, and he’d seemed tense, likely due to nerves. He hoped that things would settle and allow him to perform his best during the free skate.

Unfortunately Yuri appeared stiff, his normally fluid movements missing. He also touched down on two of his triples. Between the deductions and the lower performance scores he ended the night in twelfth place.

Victor sighed. Yuri was good enough to move up, his performance still competitive even at the senior level, but the nerves had obviously gotten to him.

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_I’m so sorry Nicky._

It was a few days later, and Yuri was back in Japan.

Victor was surprised. _For what?_

_I failed. I came in twelfth._

_How is that a failure?_ Victor realized that Yuri wasn’t at the rink, instead he was walking his toy poodle along the beach.

_Everybody wanted me to do so much better. I disappointed my coach, my family and you._

_You didn’t disappoint me Yuri. There were more than forty competitors, and it was your first time at junior worlds. You did amazing. You were against the top young skaters from around the globe._

_But…_

_Don’t doubt yourself Yuri. It’s not a failure._

_But Victor won when he was at junior worlds._

_Not the first time._

_What?_

_How old were you when you saw Victor skate for the first time?_
Twelve.

So you saw Victor’s last junior worlds?

Yes. He won.

But that wasn’t his first time at junior worlds. Even the year before he didn’t win. The year before that he got bronze, and the year before that he barely made the free skate. You did far better.

Really?

Yes.

Yuri was silent for several minute.

Yuri?

Yes?

I have something to tell you. I waited until after worlds so that I didn’t make you nervous.

You’re leaving…

What? No! Why would you think that?

Because I’m not that good a skater.

Oh Yuri, what I have to say is the opposite.

What do you mean?

You’re being scouted Yuri.

Yuri stopped. “Nani?”

The dog stopped and looked up at the teen in confusion.

When I saw you at nationals I spotted a coach, a good one. You were being scouted, and when I spoke to them after I confirmed it. Your skating has caught eyes Yuri, some of the best in the business.

Me? … Scouted?

That’s right Yuri. And if the one I saw is interested they won’t be the last. You’re being scouted from the top down.

What? … What do I do?

You skate for now. They’ll approach you when they’re ready.

Will you tell me who it was?

Not now. Once you have a few offers I’ll help you with the information that I know, but choosing a coach is a serious thing. You need to evaluate not only their records, but how you mesh with them. I don’t want to sway your opinion before you’ve had a chance to meet anybody.

I think that makes sense.
I know it will once you meet with a few.

Scouted…

Start thinking about your skating and what you want from it Yuri, besides facing Victor. Take a good look at your strengths and weaknesses, and how you want to approach them. Each coach has their own style and their own strengths. You need to determine how you’ll mesh.

But will they still be interested after that disaster?

Yuri, what you call a disaster is what a lot of people would recognize as a competitive score. Look back at the European Championships, and you’ll see that you would have placed in the teens. Watch senior worlds, and I can almost guarantee that you’d have made the final twenty-four. You’re a much better skater than you give yourself credit for.

“So what are we doing after the free programs when the ladies and ice dance free are all that’s left?” Alexei asked excitedly.

Victor and Chris both grinned.

“Disneyland, of course,” Victor replied. “Have to go while we’re here.”

“It’ll be a good way to unwind,” Chris said.

“You mean stand in long lines and get sunburnt, right?” Alexei asked, quirking an eyebrow.

Victor shrugged. “The sunburn is a side effect.”

“Yakov will kill you if you’re all red for the exhibition,” Chris pointed out.

Victor pouted. “Fine, we’ll go next week since we’re all staying after the competition anyway.”

“Which brings us back to what we’re doing…” Alexei sighed.

“Well I plan to watch the ice dance free,” Victor said.

“But that’s at night,” Chris pointed out.

“We’re in Los Angeles, I’m sure we’ll find something to do,” Victor retorted.

“Just as long as we don’t have to hang out with Mama and Papa,” Alexei said.

Victor laughed. “Probably at dinner but otherwise it’ll just be the three of us.”

Victor plunged his toepick into the ice and launched into his first quad in competition.

One, two, three, four…

He had the rotations.

His edge was at the wrong angle, and he fell onto the ice. He got back up, but could feel that he was
off the music for the last thirty seconds or so. Between the technical deductions and the lowered program components he was in second with two skaters left.

Yakov was yelling something about the combination jump. Victor didn’t care. He left the kiss and cry as soon as his scores were posted. Lysacek and Joubert were left, and he knew what they were capable of. Unless one of them made a major mistake he’d be in fourth.

Ivan looked to be ending the night in tenth.

Yakov found him a short while later, hiding in another competitor tunnel.

“Fourth Yakov,” he said. “You don’t even need to tell me that I screwed up. I cost Russia that third spot.”

“Four points Vitya,” Yakov said softly. “You missed the podium by four points.”

Victor was about to hit the wall when his coach spoke again.

“You made the right call. Even if the combination had been perfect it wouldn’t have got you the bronze. It was a risk to go for the quad, and it didn’t work out, but it was the right decision.”

Victor leveled a stare at the old man. “I messed up. I cost us that third Olympic spot, by four points.”

“And Ivan came in tenth, by a smaller margin. He was only about two points behind that Swiss friend of yours. He could have worked for higher performance scores, or not put his hand down on that jump. This didn’t rest entirely on your shoulders.”

Victor glared. “You can tell him that then. But I know I screwed up.”

Yakov sighed angrily. “You made a call Vitya, and it was the right one. The only thing you can do now is practice and make sure it doesn’t happen again. In the meantime, start thinking about what you want to skate to in Vancouver. You’re our best bet for a medal, so give it some thought.”

Victor stared as his coach walked away.

Victor was pink with sunburn by the time he, Chris and Alexei boarded a plane to Geneva. They’d spent several days exploring downtown Los Angeles, and another two at Disneyland.

Victor’s parents had headed back immediately after the free skate, needing to return to practice, but they’d come, which was more than he’d expected.

He was going to spend another two weeks in Geneva with his family and Chris. Then it was back to training. The Olympics were less than a year away.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

Victor starts gearing up for the Olympics in the next chapter! And what will we see from Yuri now that he knows he’s being scouted?
Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

Also if you haven't seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: *Shared Gravity*. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

April - October 2009 - Victor prepares for the 2009-2010 season

Chapter Notes

Lots of just little vignettes as we take peeks at Victor's summer and early fall before we get into the 2009-2010 season.

Also, I've updated the In Our Dreams playlist to include Victor's pieces for this chapter.

If you've been enjoying this work please click the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Victor made his way down the stairs of his parents’ house in Geneva. Alexei was at school and his father was in a meeting with the conductor, reviewing the string assignments for the upcoming summer concert series. It was just him and his mother.

A gentle melody drifted up to greet him. Natalya was practicing for her own chamber events. The tune was beautiful, and Victor just wanted to enjoy it.

Natalya smiled at him as he walked into the living room and took a seat on the couch, her fingers dancing on the strings.

Victor leaned back and closed his eyes. There was something so soothing in his mother’s music, it took him back to happy memories. He let the sound fill him until he started swaying to it. He could feel the movements in his mind.

The music ended.

“Mama?”

“Yes Vitya?”

“Can I skate to that?”

“Don’t you want something more dynamic, more powerful? A piece like this is more suited to a female isn’t it?”

“It’s perfect. I love how simple it is. Just the harp. I think it will surprise audiences. Everybody else will be trying for raw power or to wow with popular music this year for the Olympics. This will stand out for just that reason.”
Natalya laughed and started the piece again. “Give it some thought Vitya. If you still want it in a few
days then we’ll make a recording for you.”

Victor smiled. “I don’t need to think about it.”

“Twenty years old and still so impulsive.”

“Only about things I know I want.”

She laughed. “There’s a digital recorder in your father’s desk. It’ll be a couple weeks before we can
arrange time in a sound studio for a proper recording. You’ll need to use a raw from practice until
then.”

Victor nodded and went to retrieve the recorder.

Victor leaned back from the desk, the music pouring from his earbuds. He tapped a pencil against a
notepad, half the page filling up with timestamps to cut the thirteen minute piece to the four-and-a-
half minute program length size. The other half of the page was dedicated to mapping out technical
elements.

The simple sound of the music was perfect, but he quickly realized that there would be nothing to
hide behind. His skating had to wow audiences without relying on the love of a well-known or
popular song.

He needed to provide the accompaniment. He had to give the music the power that it lacked.

Victor glared at the paper, sat up, tucked his long hair behind his ear, and crossed off ‘4T’ writing
next to it ‘4T-3T’.

Yakov was likely going to lose his shit, and Victor didn’t care. He wanted the gold, and he knew the
quad combo would get him there.

Nicky?

Yes Yuri?

Can… can you help me with my jumps? I’m still shaky with my lutz and loop.

Of course.

Victor tried to pay careful attention as Yuri moved across the ice, but he couldn’t quite pinpoint the
problem himself. He knew that they felt slightly off, and guessed it started as early as the entry, but
wasn’t sure.

After an hour of coming down on the ice Yuri was frustrated.

Yuri?

Yes?
I have an idea, but we’d need to coordinate.

What is it?

I’m currently on vacation, and will be for a few more days. I just happen to have my skates with me. What do you think about trying to come to me and feeling the jumps as I skate them?

I don’t want to inconvenience you! Besides, it would get in the way of your vacation.

Nonsense, it’s not an inconvenience. And it’s my vacation to do with as I please. I just need to find a good rink.

Are you sure?

Of course. I’ll need one more thing though.

What’s that?

I have a sense of the problem, but I need to see it. I need to study it, more than just one time. Can you have somebody record your jumps and email it to me?

Email?

Actually, video is probably too big to attach. Do you have a YouTube account?

No?

Hmmmm, let me give it some thought. We’ll make it work somehow.

Victor had never given much thought to communicating with Yuri outside of dreams, but he quickly realized that it made a sort of sense. It would let them share information and hold conversations without the time limitations that kept one or the other from getting overly tired.

He knew his normal email address was out of the question, but a few minutes later he had a new one from a free provider. Getting the videos was going to be more difficult. He didn’t want to make the teen set up an account online for something that he didn’t expect to be a regular thing.

After about an hour Victor decided that he’d use a new file-sharing service that his public relations team had set him up with. It let him see documents and proof photos before they went live. He created a free account with the special email address. Yuri would still have to sign up to the service, but Victor thought it would be safer than one of the video websites.

He committed the email address to memory as he would be unable to double check it while asleep.

Victor had the videos on his laptop by the time he awoke the following morning, but it took almost the entire day to find a rink that would let him have a bit of private time after hours. He didn’t want to rely on Chris, and managed to secure a space only after autographing a poster for a manager and paying an additional fee.

Victor laced up slowly in the deserted locker room, silver blades gleaming in the low light. Yuri was
still a bit shaky when coming to him, so he hoped that the teen would manage ok.

With several minutes left he stood in front of the mirror and pulled his hair back. He tied it, then twisted it into a bun. He secured it with several pins, and finished with a spray to set it and keep any strands from coming loose and giving away his identity.

Victor was a bit uncomfortable with the manager's insistence at observing the ‘practice,’ but knew that it was likely for liability reasons so he let it slide. He wasn’t practicing anything for his upcoming routines anyway.

Yuri arrived a few minutes after Victor finished his warmup.

You managed a private rink?

Victor smiled. I didn’t want there to be any distractions.

Wow.

Now, I think I pinpointed the problem from the videos you sent, Victor said, getting straight to work. Your angle was off and you weren’t able to maximize your muscles.

Wouldn’t coach Nakamura have noticed something like that though? She hasn’t said anything about my angle in a while.

Do you fall often in practice with her?

Not really.

When do you have the most problems?

Victor felt a flustered embarrassment from Yuri. When something’s distracting me.

You’re probably reverting to bad habits when you’re not focused. What you were doing wasn’t good, but it wasn’t going to cause falls when performing doubles, but you need to be much more careful with triples.

Ok.

Are you ready to know how a triple feels to me?

Yes!

Victor smiled and did several laps of the ice, gaining speed. He crouched, then pushed off into a lutz. He landed cleanly and skated out before he could automatically transition to the movements that had proceeded it during the season.

Wow.

It’s not much different, but did you feel my angle leading into it?

Yes, but how did you get such height?

Victor had to force himself not to laugh out loud. It’s all in the leg muscles.

Oh…
What’s wrong?

It’s just… my legs aren’t so strong.

That can be changed, and you’re not finished growing yet either. There’s time.

Victor skated for about forty minutes, and knew he was running out of the time he had paid for.

Yuri?

Yes?

Do you want to know how a quad feels?

Yuri’s amazement flowed through him. You can do one?

Just one, a quad toe loop. It’s not always clean, but yes. Like I said, I needed to bring up my skills in order to be competitive.

You’d… you’d really let me know how it feels?

Of course.

Nicky! Thank you!

Victor smiled and heard a cough from the manager. I’ll only be able to do one or two, my time is almost up. I hope they’re clean.

I’m sure they will be.

Victor set off on laps of the rink again, building up the speed, and when his toepick his the ice he knew the first was going to be clean. He landed steady after four rotations.

Amazing!

Victor felt Yuri’s awe.

One day you’ll be doing that too.

Are you sure?

Positive. You have the skill Yuri, I know you do.

Yakov yelled for nearly an hour before relenting and allowing Victor to put the quad-toe triple-toe combination into his free skate, after which there was another half hour of raised voices before Victor had the combination in both programs.

However they did agree to one concession. The combination would be their ace-in-the-hole. Victor would practice two versions of each program, and use the one without the combination in all competitions before the Olympics.

When Victor took to the ice he set his sights on nailing the combination. He had a bit of time before he had to start drilling his programs, so he aimed to be ready with the jumps as soon as he started them.
Victor was mad at himself for the fourth place standing at worlds, but Russian media seemed thrilled with his comeback. His public relations team had several interviews lined up by the end of May, and several more endorsement deals as his sponsors prepared for Olympic advertisements.

He’d been away from the sport for an entire season, and had clawed his way back to the top. They expected that he’d do even better the next year.

Unlike several years prior, when his appointment to the team was well into the season, sponsors had the time to schedule filming and photoshoots during the summer. While it would affect his practice going into the Grand Prix series, he knew that he would already be aiming to peak during the Olympics instead and would view the earlier competitions as warmup.

Yuri, that felt fantastic!

Yuri had just run through a series of triple jumps and had landed all of them cleanly.

Thank you, but I still have a tendency to come into them wrong. I have to focus or I’ll fall on the lutz and loop.

You’re still getting used to the entry. Once you drill them into muscle memory it’ll get better.

Nicky?

Yes?

Thank you. I think I’d still be messing up on those jumps without being able to feel them from you. I was able to put that to use immediately, and even coach Nakamura is surprised at how quickly they improved.

I’m glad I was able to help. Though I’m afraid it won’t be able to be a regular occurrence.

That’s ok, you already did more than enough.

You can still send videos though when you have a problem. I might not always be able to help, but more eyes is a good thing. And feel free to email me whenever you want. I want to see you succeed, and I want to support you however I can.

I will!

The assignments for the Grand Prix Series were announced near the end of June. By that time Victor was routinely landing the quad in practice and had started to work on the combination. On the ice he forced himself to gain as much speed and height as possible, and off it he worked his leg muscles hard, knowing that he’d be unable to perform the difficult move without the strength.

He’d started dating again, but a part of him wondered if it was a good idea. His focus was on the upcoming season, and he’d ended both budding relationships after only a couple weeks. He’d felt less for the two women than he had for Irina.
He didn’t have time for dating anyway. He was the defending gold medalist.

Yuri! Have you seen your assignments yet?

The Japanese teen fidgeted before pulling on his skates. Poland… and Croatia.

Are you excited?

I’m nervous.

Why? You’re going to be great.

I… I just don’t want to disappoint everybody.

Oh Yuri, you know as long as you do your best nobody will be disappointed.

Yuri was silent.

What’s wrong Yuri?

It’s… a big responsibility. I know I’m just the junior champion, but I’m still representing Japan to the world.

It is, but you can do it. I know you can. Be proud of yourself, and your country.

Chris spread his arms and twirled in the middle of Red Square. He and Alexei had joined Victor on a trip to Moscow in mid-July. Victor had several interviews over as many days, but was glad to have his brother and best friend there.

Both Chris and Alexei had officially graduated high school and were preparing for college. Chris had been accepted to his first choice school, and had already arranged for all of his classes to be taught by private tutors with tenured professors overseeing the curriculum.

Alexei had applied to and had been accepted to Geneva Haute école de musique, the new name of the Conservatoire de Musique de Genève. He’d made it in on the merits of his cello performances, but had been quickly approved for a dual major that included composition and theory.

The trip to Moscow had become half a trip for work, and half celebration with the younger men.

“Oh Victor,” Chris sighed as he came back to join them after Alexei had taken several photos. “How I wish I’d been assigned here with you in October.”

Alexei nodded. “There’s no way I can make all the events my freshman year to see both of you. It would have been nice for the two of you to have been paired in at least one before you get to the final.”

Victor frowned. “You really had a lot of leeway in highschool didn’t you?”

Alexei smiled. “I’d moved schools so often that I’d been ahead in a lot of subjects, so it wasn’t a big deal to miss.”
Chris slung his arms over Alexei’s shoulders. “Just come with us to Canada for the Olympics, and Japan for the Grand Prix Final if you can.”

Alexei smiled. “I think I can make those two. Where’s worlds?”

“Turin,” Chris said with a grin. “Same ice arena from the last Olympics actually.”

Alexei thought about it for a few minutes. “I might be able to make it, it’ll depend on school and transportation schedules.”

“Ok Victor,” Chris said with mischievousness in his voice. “How long until your next interview?”

Victor looked at his watch. “About two hours before I have to head that way.”

“Fantastic! Let’s get some horribly touristy Russian cuisine for lunch!”

Victor lead them to a restaurant he knew that was close to the historic site.

“Stand still Victor,” complained a wrinkled man with thinning white hair from where he was kneeling next to the young man.

“I am still Pyotr.”

The old man looked up and removed a pin from between his lips. “Not still enough, unless you want me to jab your ankle.”

Pyotr was the best at what he did, but he was demanding too.

Victor sighed and tried to become even more motionless than he already was. It was hard in the August heat filling the small studio.

“Are you sure you don’t want something more flashy?” Pyotr asked after several minutes. “It’s an Olympic year, everybody wants flashy for the games.”

“And that’s why I don’t. I’m Victor Nikiforov, defending gold medalist. I don’t need to rely on glittery costumes or brash music to make the podium, my skating is flashy enough.”

The old man laughed. “At least I won’t be spending days sewing on crystals in intricate patterns.” He sat back on his haunches. “Ok, step down.”

Victor stepped down from the stool and walked around the costumer’s small studio. Half-finished dresses for the ladies hung off dress-forms, and original concept drawings were pinned to the walls.

Victor stretched and moved, putting the seams to the test and ensuring that he had the freedom of movement required. Once he was satisfied he stepped back onto the stool and allowed the old man to adjust the hems for where the pants had climbed his ankles.

Victor looked in the mirror as Pyotr worked. Black slacks clung to his legs, while the top was an open tuxedo style shirt with pleats and a wingtip collar. A small inset of black sequined fabric filled the ‘V’ from the open shirt. And the only other sequins were a sprinkling of almost imperceptible white ones along his shoulders.

Just enough to catch the light and not be overly glittery. It was understated, just like the music for his
short program.

His eyes drifted to the form his free skate outfit was currently hanging from. While it was a bit flashier, it was still one of the most understated costumes in the studio. It was dip dyed, from black at his ankles through silvery gray around his middle and white on the shoulders. The only other color was a sprinkling of royal blue sequins over the shoulders and upper chest. It had been hemmed and seemed to only be awaiting additional silver and white sequins to reflect the light.

“Done,” Pyotr declared, standing, his knees cracking. “As long as you don’t get any taller that’s where it’ll be hemmed.”

Victor examined himself and nodded. The look was good. Once he was satisfied he allowed the old man to help him out of the costume.

“When will they be done?” Victor asked, pulling back on a comfortable t-shirt and jeans.

“You have to pose in them for magazines in early September, da?”

Victor nodded.

“I’ll have them ready for pickup in a week, unless you want one more fitting.”

Victor shook his head. “No need, that felt good.”

Pyotr nodded, and as Victor made his way from the studio he watched the old man drag a stool over to one of the dress forms and start adding crystals to the blue dress hanging from it.

_____________________________

*Hold it up Yuri! Let me see.*

Embarrassment flooded the teen, but he held up his gold medal.

Victor had gone to bed early as soon as the scores from Poland were posted. He wanted to catch the teen before he went to bed himself.

*I’m so proud of you. I knew you would wow the crowds and judges.*

*I just hope I can do as well in Croatia.*

*How does it feel? It’s only your third international competition, and you’re wearing gold.*

*It feels good.*

*It’ll keep feeling good.*

_____________________________

The combination jump wasn’t perfect, but Victor had to switch gears to focus more on the programs without it. It was late September, and his first competition in France was only a few weeks away.

The quad by itself was solid, a fact that Yakov was begrudgingly pleased about. Even the coach knew that the new scoring system favored harder technical elements. Though he wouldn’t admit it, Victor knew that he had started to suggest that Georgi try to learn one.
As much as he still wanted to practice the combo, Victor also had to be careful about his jump composition during practice. Several magazines and television stations were conducting interviews, filming and watching the practices in order to excite the public about the games. If one of them were to catch the combo it would surely make any articles or news segments.

“Vitya!” Yakov yelled across the ice.

“Da?” Victor yelled back.

“Clean up your edges! You can’t rely on the quad alone. You need a complete program.”

Victor sighed. He acknowledged the coach’s demand and skated into the transition to his leveled step sequence to run it again.

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_Yuri! You’re going to the Junior Grand Prix Final!_

Yuri sputtered, and Victor was glad that the teen was alone in his hotel room.

_You can’t know that for sure Nicky. There’s still one more competition._

Victor had a hard time containing his frustration. _Yuri, you’re the gold medalist at two qualifying events. Right now you’re the only person with two golds, and I might be mistaken, but I think all the others with one have already competed in their second events. You’re going to the Junior Grand Prix Final._

Yuri sat on his hotel bed. “Junior Grand Prix Final…”

Victor let it slowly sink into the teen.

_It’s in Japan this year too._

Yuri fidgeted. _What if I don’t do good? I’ll disappoint my country._

_Yuri, just do your best. Ok?_  

_Yeah._

---

Victor looked up from his laptop when there was a knock at the hotel room door. He stood and walked over. He hadn’t ordered room service, and he knew Yakov would likely be drinking with other coaches the night before the short programs.

“Vitya!” Alexei cried as Victor opened the door, throwing himself into his brother’s arms. Chris stood behind him, chuckling softly.

“Lyosha? Chris? What are you two doing here?”

Chris smiled as the teens walked into the room. “Supporting you, what does it look like?”

Chris shrugged and flopped onto Victor’s bed. “I switched out my free day, and promised Josef I’d work hard when I got back. It’s only one extra day.”

Victor blushed. “I can’t pay you back though. There’s no way Yakov will let me go to Japan or Canada for your qualifying events.”

Chris shrugged. “Japan and Canada aren’t an hour flight from Geneva. We don’t plan to make Moscow either.”

Victor grinned. “It’s good to see you both.”

Alexei grabbed the remote. “What’s the movie selection like? I didn’t check it out in our room.”

“Don’t bother,” Victor laughed. “There’s nothing cheesy enough to make jokes at for two hours.”

“Hmm…” Chris mused before reaching for Victor’s laptop. He did a quick search and a moment later a video was full screen.

“This should do, it’s hilarious,” he said.

A moment later a famous American actor was waxing about the need of an evil laugh, and singing about finding love in a laundromat. There was a mention about the biggest bad guy being a horse.

Victor was thoroughly confused, but couldn’t stop laughing.

Victor skated to center ice, waving at the crowds. The arena lights reflected off the subtle sprinkling of sequins on his shoulders.

Victor took his starting position, and the gentle notes of his short program music started. He’d chosen simplicity as his theme, and wanted something that wouldn’t overshadow his mother’s harp in the free skate.

He’d ended up choosing a piece by the same composer Yuri had skated to during his junior debut. Ryuichi Sakamoto’s Aoneko No Torso was gentle and minimalistic. It left his mother’s piece as the more dynamic of the two.

Though the music was simplistic, his skating was anything but. He used the music as a base, and added the crescendos and climaxes with his skating. The crowd erupted when he landed his quad toe loop.

Victor was the final skater of the men’s short program, and he ended in first place.

Victor, Alexei and Chris went out for dinner that night after the ice dance portion of the event. The restaurant they chose offered a stunning view of the Eiffel Tower.

Alexei told him how he was rapidly picking up the piano as part of his theory and composition classes. He also felt that his own performances had improved in knowing more of the structure behind the music.

Chris told him how he’d added the business and accounting classes to his schedule, though his tutors
questioned the logic of it. He thanked Victor for the advice on hiring an accountant. It had lessened the load on him. Sponsors had started arriving in droves as he looked to be well placed to take the second Swiss spot at the Olympics. Lambiel was attempting to make a return after an injury that had originally been rumored to be bad enough to end his competitive career, but everybody expected the Swiss teen to deliver a solid performance as well.

The plucking of harp strings filled the arena; his mother’s interpretation of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach’s *Sonata for Harp in G major*.

A hush descended over the audience. The lively but simple sound, and the gentle tone of the instrument was something many would normally expect from a competitor in the ladies division.

Somehow Victor pulled it off, drawing on his experience at expressing both his feminine and masculine sides on the ice. Even his quad toe loop had a delicate grace that was unexpected in the mens division.

Unfortunately Oda edged him out for the gold due to a higher technical score based on jump composition, and a higher components score.

Victor was satisfied with silver. He was aiming to peak at the Olympics anyway. He looked up at Oda as they stood on the podium, and wondered when it would be Yuri there instead.

“No quads today,” Yakov ordered as Victor strode into the rink after his second place finish in France.


Yakov leveled him with a stare. “You were overscored and you know it. A drunken toddler would have a cleaner step sequence than you showed out there.”

Victor glared.

“I mean it Vitya. You got lucky, but you can’t be that sloppy in Vancouver. Not even a quad-triple combo can save edges like that. So get out there and fix them. No quads until I think that you can actually make your step sequence at least without deductions.”

“But I didn’t get any deductions!”

“And you should have! If I’d have been a judge I would have seriously marked down your score for your step sequence in the long program. You were overscored. Now deal with that and go make sure you’re not going to rely on generous judges the rest of the season.”

Victor’s scores came up within the week between the Trophee Eric Bompard and the Rostelecom Cup. It wasn’t much, but combined with a significantly higher base score on his long program he ended in first by a wide margin.

Victor was the first confirmed competitor for the Grand Prix Final.
However, that was only half the reason for the grin as he stood atop the podium.

The Grand Prix Final and the Junior Grand Prix Final had been combined into a single event only a couple years prior, which meant that for the first time he would be at the same competition as Yuri.

He’d finally have an excuse to meet the young man as Victor Nikiforov instead of Nicky.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

AAAAH VICTOR IS GONNA MEET YURI FOR REAL!!

Ok, so how did I get there? Yuri says in Ep 1 that the GPF was the first time he'd ever skated against Victor at his level, but in Ep 2 he said they'd barely ever spoken. Since he assumed Victor didn't recognize him in the "Commemorative photo" scene, it meant to me that they had spoken earlier in his career. And there we have how I can both stay in canon and have them meet at least a bit sooner. :-P

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

Also if you haven't seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: **Shared Gravity**. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Victor and Yuri are finally at the same competition at the same time! Victor is competing at the Grand Prix Final and Yuri at the Junior Grand Prix Final.

Chapter Notes

YAY!!! They have a chance to meet!

I've updated the In Our Dreams playlist to include Yuri's and Chris's pieces for this chapter.

If you've been enjoying this work please click the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Victor grinned as Chris stood on the podium for the fourth event of the Grand Prix Series. The Swiss teen had taken third during the NHK Trophy with a crowd pleasing performance, and Victor knew that his best friend was truly coming into his own as a competitor.

“Vitya!” Yakov yelled into the break room of the rink. “Has the skating in Japan ended yet?”

“Da! Chris took third.”

“Good. Now turn off the television and get back to the ice.”

Victor stood and pressed the power button on the television. He carried his skates rinkside and put them on at a bench just off the barrier.

“How’d your friend do?” Ivan asked, skating over to grab a water bottle.

Victor grinned. “He took third.”

“Too bad he won’t make it,” Ivan teased. “I took third in China, and I’m aiming even higher in America.”

Victor laughed. “I’d love to skate against the both of you there.”

Ivan smiled. “Better pick one of us. You’re confirmed and Oda is confirmed. Weir and Joubert are both in good positions to advance, and probably will. Lysacek still has one skate left, but he’s strong this year and will probably make it. That leaves one spot.”

“Hmm…” Victor teased as he finished lacing up. “I pick Chris then. I haven’t seen him since
summer and I skate with you every day.”

Ivan struck a dramatic pose. “I’m hurt Victor! I can’t go on, you’ve wounded me.”

“If you two are done goofing off…” Yakov bellowed from where he was watching the step sequence of one of the ladies.

Ivan sighed and struck off across the ice. “Back to work.”

Ivan tumbled to sixth place the following week at Skate America. Both he and Yakov were in a sour mood on their return to Russia. The coach had wanted two of his students in the final to show Russia’s strength going into the Olympics. And though he hadn’t said it out loud, Victor knew that Ivan was starting to think that he’d plateaued.

One of Victor’s female rinkmates had made the final, so that helped to buffer the coach’s mood, but Victor knew that he’d be worked extra hard to compensate.

He drilled his combination whenever time allowed. He still missed it occasionally, but he was confident that it would be solid by the time he skated in the Olympics.

It was only a few days after Ivan and Yakov returned that Chris took to the ice in Canada. His programs received as much audience enthusiasm as they had in Japan. Unfortunately he managed only a fourth place finish, and barely missed the final.

Victor didn’t have much time to grieve for his friend, as he sought out news on the Japanese Junior Nationals the day following Chris’s free skate.

As saddened as he’d been for Chris, he was jubilant for Yuri. Yuri took his second junior national title by a comfortable margin just a week and a half before his first Junior Grand Prix Final.

“Victor, did you see the news?” Alexei’s voice was excited as it poured from the speaker of his cell phone.

“I just got home Lyosha,” Victor replied, flopping onto his couch. “What news are you talking about?”

“Joubert had to withdraw!”

Victor sat up and planted his feet on the floor. “What?”

“Joubert hurt his foot and had to withdraw from the final!”

Victor stood and walked immediately to his computer. He turned it on and went to his favorite site for figure skating news. His eyes flicked back and forth as he read. Joubert had sustained a serious injury during practice which required surgery to repair. Christophe Giacometti called up to replace him.

“Chris is going to the final…” Victor breathed.

“I know!” Alexei cried. “I’m so excited.”
“Chris is going to the final!”

Are you excited Yuri?

It was a rare morning. Yuri wasn’t on the ice, instead he was soaking what felt like aching muscles in the onsen.

Excited about what?

You’re going to be at the same event as Victor. You’ll be able to talk to him.

Yuri yelped, and several men turned to look at him.

“Sat on a bruise,” Yuri explained weakly, bowing before turning his thoughts inward again.

I can’t talk to Victor!

Why not?

Because he’s Victor… and I’m me.

Yuri, you’re the top qualifier for the Junior Grand Prix. You’re not just you. You’re an incredible skater who has earned the right to be there.

But it’s not the same as skating against him, as being on his same level.

So? That doesn’t mean you can’t try to talk to him.

But he might not want to talk to somebody like me.

Somebody like you? Yuri, you’re incredible. Of course he’d want to talk to you.

I don’t know…

How about when you win?

What?

Will you talk to him when you win?

I… I…

How about just a hello?

Yuri was silent. But what if he doesn’t want to talk to me?

Why don’t you let him decide that, rather than deciding for him?

Victor realized that Yuri was too nervous to come to him on his own. He considered approaching the Japanese teen before the competition started, but quickly realized that he could also put unneeded pressure on the junior contender by making it known that he was watching.
No, he’d have to wait until Yuri had clenched his medal.

He’d learned that Minako and Yuri’s sister would accompany him to Tokyo, along with his coach. A part of him was sad that the teen’s parents couldn’t make it, but Yuri had explained that they would be holding a public viewing at the inn and would be watching and supporting him from home.

He would also be arriving much later than most of the competitors. Since the Japanese skaters didn’t have to deal with jet lag they were mostly arriving the day before official practices were to begin, rather than earlier to adjust.

Victor looked to his side as he packed, and noticed Makkachin staring at him. He knelt and scratched behind her ears.

“I’m finally going to meet Yuri as myself Makka.”

“Vitya!”

“Lyosha!”

Chris stood by with a smile as the Nikiforov brothers embraced in the hotel lobby. Afternoon sunlight streamed through the windows.

“How was your flight?” Victor asked the teens as they broke apart.

Chris smiled and leaned against his luggage. “About what you would expect when traveling halfway across the world.”

Victor laughed. “Not that mine was much shorter.”


“Sir,” Victor replied, shaking his hand.

“Call me Josef,” the coach said. “You and your brother are practically family to Chris. Alexei here already calls me Josef, so no reason to exclude you.”

“Josef then,” Victor said with a smile.

They stood there for a moment chatting, then coach Karpisek spotted somebody across the hotel lobby. “Celestino!”

Victor turned and saw Celestino Cialdini striding toward them. The coaches shook hands in greeting.

“Ciao ciao,” Celestino said.

“You’ve got a skater here in the ladies division right?” coach Karpisek asked.

Celestino nodded. “That, and I’ve got my eye on a couple of the younger competitors.”

“Oh?”

Celestino laughed. “You’ll have to try harder than that to find out who, maybe a few drinks can loosen my tongue.”
Coach Karpisek echoed the laughter.

Celestino noticed the assembled young men. “Victor, Giacometti… um…”

Alexei held out his hand. “We’ve met once before, but I don’t know if we exchanged names. Alexei Nikiforov. I’m Vitya’s younger brother.”

“I don’t think I’ve seen you skating, but I could swear that I’ve heard the name in relation to skating before,” the coach mused.

Alexei laughed. “No, I’m not a skater. I’m a cellist. I played the music for Vitya’s short program last year.”

Celestino’s eyes widened slightly. “That was you?”

Alexei nodded.

“Very impressive. You played well and your brother was able to craft an outstanding performance around it.”

“Thank you sir.”

“You boys should go on up and drop your luggage in your room. Have some fun exploring Tokyo before the competition gets started, or recover from jet lag,” coach Karpisek said.

“Yes yes,” Celestino agreed. “Enjoy your youth while I steal coach Josef here so that we can enjoy the nearest bar.”

Celestino quickly led the other coach to check-in.

“Don’t wear yourself out before the competition Chris,” coach Karpisek called over his shoulder.

The teens looked between themselves and grinned.

“Ok,” Victor said with a grin. “Let’s go figure out who brought the worst movie.”

They couldn’t decide who brought the worst movie, but by the next night it was determined that Chris had brought the strangest movie with the French film *The City of Lost Children*.

Victor blinked as he ejected the disk from the laptop. “I… I think I need to think.”

Chris laughed. “Yeah, it has that effect. Shall we go see what Tokyo offers at night?”

“Only if there’s food involved,” Alexei groaned. “I’m starving.”

Victor laughed. “Agreed, it’s time for dinner.”

They made their way to the lobby, but couldn’t decide what they wanted. They were about to ask the concierge for recommendations when Victor saw a familiar face walk into the hotel.

He’d seen coach Nakamura through Yuri’s eyes so many times that he’d lost count, and next to her walked a teen boy with glasses.

“Yuri…” Victor breathed.
“Vitya?” Alexei turned to look.

Victor grinned and he strode in the direction of the teen. Seeing him made it impossible to wait. He wanted Yuri to get to know him as Victor and not just Nicky.

Yuri’s eyes widened behind his glasses and he moved to hide behind his coach, a funny sight since he was almost as tall as she was.

“Yuri Katsuki, right?” Victor asked, grinning. “Competing in the juniors?”

“H… hai,” the teen stuttered. Victor didn’t know if Yuri looked more about to bolt, or faint.

Victor stuck out his hand. “Victor Nikiforov.”

Victor could practically see Yuri wondering if he was dreaming as he grasped the teen’s hand.

“We were just going to get dinner,” Victor said, gesturing at Chris and Alexei. “But we don’t speak Japanese. Why doing you join us? I bet you know some great places nearby.”

“I… I’m not from Tokyo…” Yuri mumbled.

Victor laughed. “I’m sure you’ve competed here though.”

“I… I…”

“We just arrived,” coach Nakamura interjected with a worried glance at her student. “Yuri needs to get settled into his room and rest before tomorrow’s practice.”

She turned and shot him a glance that said without words that he was making her student nervous and to back off.

Victor nodded, knowing not to press his luck. “I understand. Well have a good evening. We’ll be around for several days, so consider it an open invitation.”

“Ari… arigato gozaimasu,” Yuri said, bowing slightly.

Yuri walked back to where Chris and Alexei were waiting.

“What was that about?” Chris asked.

“I just thought he might want to join us for dinner.”

Chris smiled softly but said nothing.

“Concierge then?” Alexei asked.

Victor nodded, then was stopped by a hand on his shoulder. He turned to see coach Nakamura standing there.

“Were you serious about asking Yuri to dinner?” she asked softly.

Victor grinned. “Absolutely! He’s not going to stay in the juniors forever, and he might as well start making friends on the senior circuit now.”

She smiled softly. “He’s a big fan, and was likely overwhelmed. He’s incredibly shy.”

Victor smiled. “Well let him know I meant it. He’s welcome to join us anytime.”
“I will,” she replied with a bow.

She started to walk away, then turned. “Where are you headed, in case I can convince him to take you up on the offer?”

Victor smiled. “We don’t know. We were about to ask the concierge for some recommendations.”

She smiled. “Hand me your phone?”

Victor blinked, but unlocked the device and handed it over. A moment later it was returned with the map app opened and directions highlighted.

“That’s a good place nearby. Not too busy, and most of the foreign competitors won’t know it since it’s not in the tourist area. If you go there I’ll see about getting Yuri there too. I agree that he needs to take this opportunity and make friends.”

Victor smiled. “I hope we see him there.”

Coach Nakamura smiled and bowed before rushing off to where Yuri was waiting.

Yuri ended up not joining them that night, nor the following after the opening ceremonies of the event.

Chris moved aside so that Alexei could wedge his large sack of flowers and plushes between them on the floor as he took his seat for the start of the competition. Somehow between both Yakov’s and coach Karpisek’s dealings behind the scenes he had been allowed to join Chris and Victor in the competitor area of the stands.

Victor didn’t even want to think about what strings the coaches had pulled in order to get the teen access, but wasn’t about to complain either.

“Have something special for Yuri again this year?” Alexei teased as he reached into his bag to grab the Mickey and Minnie pluses that the current pair on the ice seemed to love.

Victor laughed. “Not this year. But I’m not hiding either. I do have a poodle plush for him though.”

“Isn’t poodles your thing Victor?” Chris drawled.

Victor laughed. “Maybe, but I think he’ll love it anyway.”

They watched the junior pairs, chatting away, then after a short break it was time for the junior men to take the ice.

As the top qualifier Yuri would be skating last.

Chris was as interested as Victor as they watched the men compete, and after the fourth skater Alexei spoke up.

“Why are you two so interested?”

“These are our future competitors,” Chris explained simply. “Some might stall when they get to seniors, but every one of them has to be taken seriously.”
Victor nodded.

“But their scores are so much lower,” Alexei countered.

“I’m sure some people thought that about Victor too,” Chris retorted. “Then the next year he snatched Olympic gold.”

“Right now these are the top eight junior skaters in the world,” Victor explained. “We’d be negligent if we didn’t study them.”

“Besides,” Chris elaborated. “Low scores here might not be a true indicator of skill level. This is the short program, and even if they can perform a quad jump, they aren’t allowed right now. They are in the long program. Not that I know of any juniors doing quads, most seniors aren’t still.”

“Even in the long program though the requirements are different,” Victor continued. “That changes the score. We don’t know what they’re capable of on the senior level until they get there, but learning about them early is the best way to try and figure it out.”

Alexei seemed to accept the explanation and turned his attention back to the skater just about to leave the ice. He waited until the music ended then tossed down a carefully sourced figure from the other Japanese teen’s favorite anime.

“How do you pick out such specific things?” Chris asked, peeking into the bag.

Alexei looked up and blinked. “Social media mostly. Most of the juniors have accounts. Not as many of the seniors, but there are a fair number.”

“Huh…” Chris said. “My publicist keeps saying I should make some accounts for fans to follow. But I’ve just got a locked down one for family.”

Alexei shook his head as he rummaged for whatever he’d chosen for the young Russian taking the ice. “You really should. I bet you’d have a ton of fans immediately, especially with your current programs.”

“Oh?”

Alexei looked up. “Do it before the Olympics.” He turned back to the bag and found what he was looking for.

“Before the Olympics?” Victor asked.

Alexei nodded. “You’ve seen his programs. They’re crowd pleasers. He’ll develop a good following if he capitalizes on it in that spotlight. He can continue to drip information even in the off season, and keep people engaged.”

Victor blinked, setting the information aside for later. Chris rubbed his chin, which had a sprinkling of hair on it.

The Russian teen put in a solid performance, but the Chinese teen immediately following caught both Chris’s and Victor’s attention.

“What’s his name again?” Victor asked.

“Cao Bin,” Chris said softly.

“We need to keep an eye on him.”
Chris nodded.

Victor’s eyes flicked up to the screen hovering over the rink. “He’s eighteen. Almost a guarantee that he’s moving up this season.”

“What do you two see?” Alexei asked.

“The full package,” Victor said.

“A mathematician,” Chris added.

“Mathematician?” Alexei asked.

Victor looked again and nodded as the program moved into its second half. “You’re right. He front loaded the lowest scoring technical elements, saving the harder ones for the bonus.”

The teen launched into a triple axel.

“His program components won’t be as high,” Chris said as he moved across the ice in a step sequence, “but they’re not going to be low either.”

Victor nodded. “Watch him Lyosha. He’ll rise quickly in the senior division.

Chris nodded in agreement. “We’ll have some decent competition in him for sure.”

Victor heard a commotion behind him. He turned to see two of his and Chris’s competitors had taken seats behind them.


“Japanese honorifics?” Takahashi asked, a half smile on his face. “I’m impressed.”

Victor ran his hand through his hair in embarrassment. He’d spent so much time in Yuri’s head that he’d started to automatically add them to some names.

“He’s going to be strong indeed,” Oda said with a smile, adding his input to the earlier conversation.

“What brings you two out so late in this portion?” Chris asked.

Takahashi grinned. “We decided we needed a better look at Katsuki since we’ll be against him in nationals.”

“What? What?” Victor asked, turning. “I thought he wasn’t moving up! Besides, the junior nationals already happened.”

Oda laughed. “The Japanese Skating Federation invited him to compete in both junior and senior nationals, and they’re really pushing for him to skate.”

Takahashi smiled. “I think they want him as an alternate for the Olympics, in case Oda, Kozuka or myself have to withdraw.”

Victor blinked several times. *Yuri had been invited to compete at the senior level already.*

“He still has to place for it,” Oda pointed out.

“The kid’s putting up solid scores,” Takahashi replied. “Maybe not at our level yet, but it’s just a
They’d talked through Bin’s scores, and through most of an American teen’s performance.

Then Yuri took to the ice.

“I do wish he’d have chosen more original music,” Oda said, regret tinged his voice.

“What’s he skating to?” Alexei asked.

“O Fortuna,” Takahashi sighed. “I hear that one so much every year that I never want to hear it again.”

“I don’t think we’ve met,” Oda said to Alexei. “Are you a skater?”

“Oda-san, Takahashi-san,” Victor said politely. “This is my brother, Alexei.”

The Japanese skaters bowed in greeting, and after a second Alexei returned the gesture.

The music started and all eyes were on Yuri.

“Not quite as good as what he put up at junior nationals,” Oda said as the scores were displayed, “but still respectable.”

“He’s nipping at your heels you know,” Takahashi joked. “His short program score isn’t that far behind yours.”

“And his program components will put yours to shame,” Oda retorted.

“Like you should talk,” Takahashi laughed.

Yuri was in third place going into the free skate.

“It’s a shame he wasn’t in first,” Alexei said with a sigh.

Takahashi laughed. “No, he’s right where he wants to be.”

“Huh?”

The Japanese skater smiled at the teen. “He’s not comfortable out front. But if he’s a couple spots behind he fights that much harder. He’s going to put up a strong performance tomorrow, just wait and see.”

Takahashi and Oda stood. Both men bowed. “Victor, Giacometti, we’ll see you on the ice tomorrow,” Oda said.

“Call me Chris.”

The Japanese skaters nodded then made their way from the stands.

Victor had to restrain himself. He’d spotted Yuri in the hotel lobby again. He wanted to ask the teen to dinner, to ask about him competing in the upcoming senior nationals. But as soon as Yuri spotted him he ducked behind a large potted plant.
“Are you sure he’s a fan?” Chris asked as they walked past. “He seems determined to avoid you.”

“You heard his coach, he’s shy,” Victor sighed.

“I don’t think shy quite covers it,” Chris said as they reached the doors.

Victor caught a reflection in the glass, Yuri was watching. He turned and waved. “Join us.”

Yuri ducked behind the plant again.

“Give up Vitya,” Alexei said as he headed outside.

Victor saw Chris swallow nervously as Yuri finished his skate the next afternoon. The ending notes of Stravinsky’s *Firebird Suite* echoed through the arena and the lights reflected off the orange, purple and blue of the teen’s costume.

“His free skate PCS score might be almost as high as mine,” Chris mused.

Victor sighed. “I really wish he were trying for the Olympics.”

“Do you think he could beat Oda, Takahashi or Kozuka?”

Victor sighed again. “Not at his level.”

“He has time,” Chris said.

Victor stood and made his way down to the barrier. “Katsuki!” he called across the ice.

Yuri’s eyes grew huge when he saw who was calling to him. He nervously skated over and accepted the poodle plush Victor held out.

“Somebody told me you are a fan,” Victor said just loud enough for Yuri to hear. “That was a very good skate.”

Yuri nodded mutely before skating toward the kiss and cry.

“He looked terrified Victor,” Chris said.

Victor laughed. “Shocked was more like it.”

Victor was jubilant when Yuri’s score held and he ended his portion of the event as the junior men’s gold medalist.

Victor, Chris and Alexei were discussing the results when a familiar voice bellowed up the stairs.

“Vitya, the junior men’s event is over. Get to the locker room and start preparing for your own skate.”

“Da,” Victor called back.

“You too Giacometti,” Yakov added.

“Yes sir,” Chris said and followed Victor down the stairs.
“Do your best Vitya!” Alexei called from his seat as he started rummaging for the things he was going to throw to the junior pairs competitors. “You too Chris!”

“We’ll be back for the ice dance originals,” Victor yelled back. “Save our seats.”

Victor and Chris were the last of the mens competitors to enter the locker room. Oda and Takahashi were already in their costumes and applying makeup. Weir and Lysacek were chatting off to one side.

Chris opened his assigned locker and removed his garment bag. As he unzipped it a bright pink sequined shirt was revealed, with a black sequined vest.

Victor looked at the ensemble and whistled. “Only you could pull off a costume like that Chris.”

Evan Lysacek looked over. “I dunno, I think Johnny could wear something like that and look good.”

Chris laughed as he started to undress. “There will be pink in your nightmares tonight.”

The assembled men laughed at the competitive banter before returning to their own conversations.

“Nervous?” Victor asked as Chris pulled on his dancer’s belt.

Chris looked up and smiled. “Blame me? It’s my first time up here.”

Victor smiled. “You’ll be fine. You’ve got two outstanding programs that are already proving to be a hit with audiences. Just enjoy yourself.”

Chris grinned. “Easy for you to say. The only reason you haven’t been here the past two years was because of your injury.”

“And he’s got his work cut out for him for it,” Lysacek called.

“Says the guy not performing any quads,” Victor retorted.

“Quads aren’t everything Nikiforov,” the American laughed. “Just wait, I’m going to win without them.”

After a few minutes of banter Victor finally turned to his own costume and pulled it on.

“Sit down Victor,” Chris said as he finished dusting a pink shimmer onto his face. “I’ll comb your hair.”

“I can comb my own hair Chris.”

“You can break your hair you mean. I’ve seen you you know, even the past few days you just run a comb through it and don’t bother doing it right.”

Victor sighed, he knew his friend was persistent when he wanted to be. A few minutes later his hair was pulled back into the black ribbon that he’d chosen.

“There,” Chris declared. “You aren’t wearing makeup this season are you?”

Victor shook his head. “Nope.”

“Ok then,” Chris said, “let’s go warm up.”
They both pulled on their team jackets and made their way to the holding area. They helped each other stretch as they listened to commentary on the junior pairs competition.

Victor caught a flash of the orange, purple and blue costume Yuri had worn out of the corner of his eye. “Excuse me Chris.”

Chris looked up and smiled. “You don’t learn do you?”

“Never,” Victor replied with a wink as he followed the Junior Grand Prix gold medalist into the locker room.

“Congratulations Katsuki,” Victor said from the doorway.

Yuri yelped and spun, the medal bouncing off his chest from the sudden movement. “Vi… Victor Nikiforov.”

Victor smiled. “I mean it. It was a good skate, you earned that medal.”

Yuri’s eyes widened. “Th… thank you. But it wasn’t as good as your Junior Grand Prix win. You had the highest score ever when you won it.”

Victor cocked an eyebrow. “Of course I did. I skated the first year of a new scoring system. The record has been broken since then. Your score tonight was higher than mine was.”

Yuri shook his head like he didn’t want to believe it.

“Come to dinner with us tonight,” Victor offered again. “Your part of the competition is over. You should relax and make friends with people in the seniors before you move up.”

“I… I can’t,” Yuri said, fidgeting.

“Oh? Why not?”

“My… my parents surprised me and came up to see me tonight. They’re taking me out to dinner already.”

Victor felt a flash of jealousy, and had to remind himself that it was the holiday concert season. Alexei was still there though.

“Tomorrow then,” Victor said with a smile. “We’ll celebrate our gold medals together.”

Yuri’s eyes went wide again. Victor was about to say something else when Yakov started bellowing for him.

“Vitya, stop harassing that kid and get back to warming up,” the coach called.


Yuri nodded mutely and Victor returned to where Chris was still stretching on a mat.

Chris was the first to take the ice, and Victor had to admire how much his friend had changed in only a few years.
Chris skated to the *Pink Panther Theme*, and the music suited him. He swayed to the music, showing off the body that he’d grown into. It was a fun piece, sexy and humorous at the same time.

The crowd erupted as the performance concluded, though Chris made a face once he reached the kiss and cry. He’d made a few mistakes that would cost him valuable points.

Victor spent a few minutes consoling his friend, then it was his turn to skate. He was fourth in the lineup, and a quick glance at the scores told him that there were some impressive numbers being posted.

His performance went well until his hand touched the ice as he landed his quad toe loop. After that all he could focus on was the deduction after months of drilling the jump. He ended the night in fifth place. He and Chris were the only skaters to not score in the eighties.

It wasn’t where he wanted to be. He knew that the chances of making the podium from a far behind fifth place was unlikely, but he would fight for it anyway.

Both Victor and Alexei tried to soothe Chris’s nerves at dinner that night. But the Swiss teen seemed intent on reliving every mistake. Finally Victor snapped. He stood and towered over the table.

“I didn’t do any better you know! This is your first time up here. You’re not defending anything! This is your chance to shine, without expectation. This is your time to show the audience who you are without them wondering behind your back if you’re still competitive.”

“Vitya…” Alexei looked up at his brother.

“I… I need a walk,” Victor declared. “I’ll settle the bill on my way out.”

Alexei nodded mutely while Chris gave him a pained look.

Victor paid, and made his way out into the street. He knew the direction of the motel, but the walk was short and he didn’t want to go there yet. He also had no interest in heading toward the stadium.

He ended up walking aimlessly, not paying attention to where he was going.

*I worked that jump so hard. It was perfect in practice. Then I went and put my hand down.*

*I’m not even twenty-one yet. I can’t be too old, but have I plateaued?*

It was dark, and Victor suddenly realized that he had no clue where he was. He stopped and took a deep breath. He could hear traffic, and knew that both the stadium and hotel were near a larger road. He set off in that direction, but didn’t recognize any of the landmarks.

“Great, first I bomb my short program, now I’m lost.”

Victor pulled out his phone and started inputting the hotel name into it.

“Nikiforov-san?”

Victor looked up to see Yuri several feet away, looking slightly terrified.

“What are you doing out so late?” Victor asked, looking at his watch. “I thought you were having dinner with your parents.”
Yuri nodded. “I walked with them to Harajuku Station. They’re taking a flight home tonight.”

“They can’t stay for the gala?”

Yuri shook his head. “They closed the onsen for the night, but it’s the family business so they can’t stay away long.”

“At least they came,” Victor said.

Yuri smiled. “I’m glad they were able to make it.”

There was a moment of silence. “Where… where were you headed?” Yuri asked timidly. “I see your map app open on your phone.”

Victor chuckled. “I actually got myself lost and was trying to figure out how to get back to the hotel.”

Yuri smiled shyly. “I’m headed there now… if…if you don’t mind walking with me.”

“I’d be honored,” Victor replied.

They walked in silence for a while, and Victor caught Yuri sneaking glances at him every few steps.

“Do you mind if I call you Yuri?”

“It… it’s ok.”

Victor smiled. “I’m sorry about tomorrow Yuri. I don’t think I’ll be taking gold.”

“Your skating is still beautiful.”

Victor smiled and looked down at the teen. He really hadn’t processed just how much smaller he was. He still had the round face of youth, and was about fifteen centimeters shorter. He hadn’t yet grown into his adult body.

“You just turned seventeen, da?”

Yuri’s eyes grew large. “How… how did you know?”

Victor smiled. “I would be negligent as an athlete if I didn’t pay attention to people who could become my competitors. You just won the Junior Grand Prix Final, which puts you in a good place to be competitive as a senior.”

“I’m not as good as you.”

“Your short program score wasn’t that far behind mine, and you were limited by harsher restrictions.”

“But your free skate is so far out of my league.”

Victor smiled again. “There’s time. Oda and Takahashi said you were invited to participate in the senior nationals this year.”

Yuri nodded. “They invited me last year too, but I declined.”

Shock coursed through Victor, Yuri had never told him about that. “Why would you do that?”
Yuri shrugged. “I wasn’t ready.”

“So you’ll participate this year, right?”

Yuri shrugged again. “I haven’t decided.”

Victor stopped walking and a moment later Yuri turned to look at him.

“Skate in senior nationals Yuri,” Victor demanded.

“But… Oda, and Takahashi, and Kozuka… they’re all so good. There’s no way I’ll win.”

Victor smiled. “It’s not always about winning Yuri.”

“But you just said you’re not taking gold tomorrow.”

Victor blinked and sighed. “You’re right, and I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“For making you think it’s all about winning. Sometimes you compete for the experience. I was trying to tell Chris that earlier.”

“Giacometti?”

Victor nodded. “He’s as frustrated as me about our scores. He wanted a better showing, and I want to prove I’m still relevant.”

“Of course you’re still relevant!”

“But I’m not in first…”

“But your skating is still beautiful!”

Victor smiled and winked at the teen. “So what makes you different? If I can be beautiful and not win, why do you hold yourself to a different standard?”

Yuri gaped at him and Victor realized that they’d reached the hotel.

“Vitya!” Alexei cried, running toward his brother.

Victor smiled. “Think about it Yuri. And watch me tomorrow, I’ll show you that even when you can’t win, that you can still fight.”

“I’m sorry Chris.”

Victor stood awkwardly in the hotel room that the three men were splitting. He realized how bad his outburst had seemed.

The Swiss teen looked up at him, eyes red, and Victor realized that he’d pushed his friend over the edge.

He didn’t know how to help, so he pulled a chair around, sat and faced his friend. “Let’s forget about scores. We’ll go out there tomorrow and give performances we love. Let’s give audiences a reason to
love us, even if the judges are harsher.”

Chris studied him for a moment, then nodded.

Chris dazzled the audience the next day, staying on the theme of secret agents by skating to the *Mission Impossible* theme. He popped several jumps, ensuring that he would remain in sixth, but when Victor met his eye coming off the ice he knew that his friend had felt the love from the audience.

Victor fought back, and put up a strong score. However it wasn’t enough to overcome his short program, and he ended the night in fourth.

Evan Lysacek, who hadn’t attempted a quad, stood on top of the podium.

That night Victor, Chris and Alexei waited in the lobby for a long time before Victor gave up on Yuri joining them for dinner.

“Thanks for coming Lyosha,” Victor said, hugging his brother at the entrance to the secure area of the airport.

“I wish I could stay for the gala,” Alexei replied, “but I have to get back. Exams are next week, and I need to make sure I catch up before then.”

“I understand.”

“I’ll try to make nationals though.”

“I’d like that. They’re in St. Petersburg this year, so you can even stay at my place.”

“Hell yeah! Party at Victor’s place.” Chris said. “My championships are next week, so maybe I can convince Josef to let me go before Europeans.”

Alexei laughed, then headed toward the security line. “I’ll see you in a few weeks Vitya!”

Victor waved, then headed back to the stadium with Chris. They wouldn’t be skating that afternoon, but they were still expected to put in their appearances during the banquet. It was a critical time to look good in front of officials and sponsors, with the Olympics only months away.

Victor was tired of putting on his fake smile for sponsors, and even moreso for officials. The sponsors were easier to deal with. He could thank them for their interest, politely show some of his own, then hand them the card for his manager under the pretense that they would need to continue discussion with them.

Victor knew he could make those decisions himself, but he preferred letting his manager handle the details so that all the information was kept neatly and without him worrying about loose strings.

The officials though, he wished he could escape those conversations. He was reminded of the
expectations, how it was an important year.

During a rare break Victor saw Yuri sitting uncomfortably at a table at the far end of the room. Most of the other junior competitors were eagerly hovering around sponsors, hoping that their skating had caught eyes.

Victor approached coach Nakamura. “Is he ok?”

She looked up at him and sighed. “He’s shy. I’ve tried to get him to talk to a couple sponsors, but he quickly closes himself off. I think we might have made one or two deals at least. I gave the details to his ballet instructor since she’s a family friend.”

Victor spied Celestino staring at him from the corner of his eye.

“What about scouting?”

Coach Nakamura’s eyes narrowed. “What about it?”

“You only coach juniors, right?”

“That’s right.”

“He’s moving up to seniors soon. He’ll be at the upper age limit for juniors after next season. He must have inquiries.”

She turned back to look at Yuri and nodded. “Five… so far. One came in after junior worlds, the other four since the season started. I expect more will trickle in over the coming weeks.”

“Does he know?”

“I’ve told him that the interest is there, but we agreed not to talk about it until after this was over.”

“Is he going to skate in senior nationals?”

She quirked an eyebrow at him.

Victor smiled. “Oda-san and Takahashi-san were talking about it.”

“I don’t know. I want him to, but he turned down the invitation last year.”

Victor nodded, thanked the coach and strode toward the table where Yuri sat alone.

“I missed you last night,” Victor said, taking a seat where he could look at the teen.

Yuri gulped, then squeaked, “I… I thought you only wanted dinner with me if you won gold!”

Victor stared for a moment, then laughed. “I asked you to dinner almost every night! Surely you had to know that I wouldn’t change my mind just because I didn’t make the podium.”

“I didn’t want to intrude…” Yuri said softly, blushing. “You were always with Giacometti… and that other man.”

“My brother,” Victor clarified.

Yuri tilted his head to the side. “Brother?”

Victor nodded. “Alexei. He’s two years younger than me.”
“I… I didn’t know you had a brother. You never said anything in interviews.”

Victor burst into laughter. “Nobody ever asked. Reporters tend to want to know about me, not my family.”

“Oh…”

Victor felt eyes on him, he turned to see Yakov glaring and a couple sponsors looking their way.

“Let’s get out of here Yuri,” Victor suggested.

“What?” the boy squeaked.

“I want to talk more, but Yakov is about to pull me away to schmooze to sponsors again. How about we go find some chairs in the lobby or near one of the other ballrooms and chat.”

Yuri looked for a moment like he couldn’t believe his ears. He nodded mutely.

“Great!” Victor stood, grabbed his sleeve and led the young man out of the ballroom. A few minutes later they were tucked away around a corner, where there was just enough traffic for them to be seen in case Yuri’s coach started to worry, but for Yakov to know to leave Victor alone.

“What are your plans Yuri?”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re approaching the age limit for juniors. You’ve got what, one season left?”

“I… I haven’t decided.”

“Don’t you want to move up?”

“Yes, but Japan has three champions already. I can’t compete.”

“So you’re just going to wait patiently for one of them to step aside? If you do that then somebody else will come in from behind you and take the empty spot.”

“Vic… Nikiforov-san?”

“Call me Victor.”

Yuri nodded.

“What do you mean, Vic… Victor?”

Victor smiled. “I mean that if you want to keep growing, if you want to skate at my level then you have to push. It doesn’t matter that Japan has three champions. You fight hard, you nip at their heels. You let them know through your skating that you’re going to take their spot from them if they screw up. If it’s not you, then somebody else will do it for you.”

“But I can’t compete.”

“That doesn’t matter. Work hard until you can. Make yourself better every season, every competition.”

“They’re still so young. What if it takes a long time for me to beat them.”
“Then it takes a long time.”

Yuri squirmed uncomfortably and Victor knew he had an opening.

“What do you want from your skating Yuri?”

Yuri looked up and blushed. “It… it’s embarrassing.”

“Try me.”

“I… I want to skate against you one day.”

“That’s nice, but don’t you want to beat me?”

Yuri paled visibly and waved his hands as if to ward off the words.

Victor smiled. “I’ll make you a deal.”

“What kind of deal?”

“If you promise to skate in your senior nationals in a few weeks, and give serious thought to moving up to the senior division, then I promise not to retire until you’ve skated against me.”

“What!”

Victor winked. “Think you can do that?”

“I… I…”

“Come on Yuri, I see the spark in your eyes. You’re ready.”

Yuri gulped, and nodded.

Victor grinned and whipped out his phone. He flagged down a random passerby and threw his arm over Yuri’s shoulder.

“Commemorative photo!” Victor declared. “A gold medalist and a fourth place finisher.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

Nope, no Nicky reveal, but they did interact a bit, and Victor got a commemorative photo. :-P

If you missed it I posted several short one-shots last week. Find them from my profile.

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

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Also if you haven’t seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: Shared Gravity. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Dec 2009 - Jan 2010 - After the Grand Prix Final Victor works hard to prepare for Nationals and Europeans.

Chapter Notes

Hey ya'll! New Chapter! Enjoy!

If you've been enjoying this work please click the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

_Congratulations Yuri!_

_Th… thank you Nicky._

_Your skating was so pretty. You deserved that gold._

Victor was sitting in his living room, a recording from the Grand Prix Final paused on his television. He’d been reviewing his performance, looking for errors, before Yuri had arrived. He had to bring his scores up before the Olympics.

_Nicky… is that Victor on your television?_

Victor’s eyes flicked back to his screen. _Ah, yes. I was reviewing the performances from the Final._

Victor felt a hesitation from Yuri.

_Yuri, it feels like you want to say something._

_I… I was just hoping that I could watch Victor’s performance. I know I saw it live, but I want to see it again._

Victor laughed, the noise echoing in his apartment. _Of course, but only on one condition._

_Wha… what’s the condition?_ 

_You have to help me critique the performance._

_I can’t do that! Victor’s skating is perfect!_ 

_But he came in fourth, which means it was far from perfect._
Yuri felt a bit uncomfortable before relenting. *Ok... I guess I can try.*

Victor decided to push. *You already know one way his performance could have been better, don’t you?*

*I... um... well... yes?*

Victor laughed again. *What is it?*

*His PCS scores were low, and I know he’s capable of more. He’s done better spins in the past, and more complicated step sequences. It feels like he’s pushing the technical elements instead, and I think it hurt him.*

Victor blinked, Yakov had said almost the exact same thing.

*Also, Yuri continued, some of his edges were sloppy.*

*So, what do I need to do in order to beat him?*

*Huh?*

*If I wanted to get higher PCS scores than what you saw from Victor at the final, what would you tell me to do?*

*But you’re the one who trains me! I can’t tell you what to do to improve!*

*Sure you can. You might not be a coach, and you’re younger than me, but you have an opinion. I want to hear it.*

Silence. Then Yuri’s thoughts so weak that they wouldn’t have even been audible as a whisper if they had been speaking face-to-face. *Figures. If I wanted to beat Victor’s PCS scores I’d drill figures.*

*Why figures?*

*Because he’s capable of more, but it wasn’t clean. If you’re going in with similar levels on the step sequence, clean edges would tip the scales.*

Victor mulled it over. Of course he’d trained figures when he was younger, but hadn’t devoted much time to them since his novice days since they weren’t a required competitive element. *Hmm... I’ll keep that in mind.*

Victor reached for his remote and restarted the program. He felt Yuri relax immediately at watching the Victor on the screen.

They watched both Victor’s and Yuri’s performances several times, critiquing back and forth, before Victor turned off the television. He’d study the other competitors later.

*So did you meet him?*

*What?*

*Victor. You were at the same event. Did you meet him?*

*I... um... yes?*
What did you think?

He’s different than I expected.

How so?

I thought somebody at his level would be closed off, but he kept trying to get me to go to dinner with him, Christophe Giacometti and I think Victor said that the other man was his brother. To be honest, it was overwhelming.

So did you go?

No. I was too nervous.

Did you talk to him at all?

A couple times. He got lost and I found him when I was walking back from the train station, and he found me at the banquet and talked to me.

What did he say?

He said that it’s not always about winning.

Anything else?

He… I… I told him that I wanted to skate against him, and he said he wouldn’t retire until that happened.

Oh Yuri, I’m so proud of you.

Nicky?

Yes.

Will you help me with my jumps over the next few nights?

Of course, but why?

I… I’ve been invited to compete in Japan’s senior nationals. I accepted, and I want to give a good performance.

Oh Yuri! That’s fantastic!

Victor pressed the buzzer and bounced on the balls of his feet in the cold of pre-dawn. His breath huffed out in little clouds over the edge of his scarf, and he was glad that his long hair added insulation around his ears.

As expected, Yakov appeared a few moments later and opened the door. He was always there early, especially in the middle of the competition season.

“What is it Vitya?”

“I want to practice.”
“I’m busy. Come back at the normal start time when I can supervise.” Yakov started to close the door.

“No jumps.”

Yakov paused.

“I promise. No jumps Yakov. I’m going to practice figures.”

Yakov’s eyes narrowed. “You never practice figures.”

“I need to clean up my edges. You said it yourself. So I’m going to go back to basics.”

Yakov growled. “Fine, you want to skate figures? Loop and Change Double Three are what you’ll be skating today. If you don’t remember what they’re supposed to look like there’s a book in my office. I’ll evaluate them myself to make sure you’re not trying for extra jump practice.”

Victor nodded and headed to Yakov’s office to refresh his memory on what the figures were supposed to look like.

By the third day Victor had started taking Yakov tea from Yana’s coffeeshop, as the coach arrived at the rink before the shop opened.

The tea helped.

By the fifth day Yakov had realized that Victor was serious, and met him at the door at their new arranged start time.

Every day Yakov would give Victor different figures to practice. Victor would trace them over and over on the fresh ice, and the coach would emerge from his office to evaluate them shortly before the other skaters were scheduled to arrive.

Ivan arrived early to practice a few days before nationals. Yakov had already unlocked the doors, and the skater strode in while the coach was still critiquing the figures.

“It’s better, but still shit,” Yakov said with an annoyed tone. “Your symmetry is off, and your lines deviate too much. Also, do you even know what a circle looks like? These are more ovals than circles.”

“I’ll do it again,” Victor replied.

“Victor? Coach Yakov?” Ivan asked from the barrier.

Victor turned and Yakov glanced over his shoulder from where he had been kneeling next to the figure.

Ivan stepped onto the ice and skated over. “Figures? Are they suddenly required again?”

“Hah! I wish,” Yakov scoffed. “If they were I would have skaters with better edges.” The coach stood and shuffled off the ice.

“Warm up for your programs,” Yakov ordered. “We’re drilling for nationals today.”
“Yes coach,” both men replied as they started laps of the rink, preparing their bodies for the strain of their programs.

“So why figures?” Ivan asked, doing backwards crossovers and keeping close to Victor.

“I lost points on PCS because my edges aren’t clean.”

“So practice your step sequence more.”

“I am, but what about next season? This is a better way to make sure my skating stays clean than drilling one program.”

“Hmm…” Ivan replied. “You have a point.”

Victor smiled.

“In the meanwhile,” Ivan jabbed, “Yakov’s right, your circles are shit.”

Victor knew even before his final pose that he’d clenched gold. He’d secured his ticket back to the Olympics. He’d come into the free skate with a comfortable margin, and had made no major mistakes. He brushed his hair off his shoulder where it had landed after his final spin, turned and waved to the audience as blue roses and poodle plushes rained down.

“Your edges were better,” Yakov said as he handed over Victor’s skate guards at the barrier. “But you should keep working your figures. You need to clean them up more before Vancouver.”

“Da.” Victor replied as he followed the coach to the kiss and cry. He took a long pull from his water bottle.

“It’s going to be you and Ivan,” Yakov said as they waited for his scores. “He was in first when you took the ice.”

Victor nodded, he’d expected as much. Ivan had always done well, but he’d seemed to have a strong couple years.

However Victor couldn’t help but notice that his rinkmate had also seemed to plateau. He hoped that being named to the Olympics would boost his performance to the next level.

The crowd erupted again as Victor’s scores were announced. He’d improved on his numbers from the Grand Prix Final, and was sure to be a strong contender in Canada.

Yakov huffed. “You were overscored again, though not by much. They didn’t dock you enough for your edges.”

Victor smiled at the gruff tone in Yakov’s voice. “Gold not good enough for you?” he teased.

Yakov growled. “Bring home the one that counts, then we’ll talk.”

Victor laughed. He was confident that he’d continue to improve until the games.
Yuri was crying, and Victor had no idea what to do. The teen was hunched over and hugging his knees outside the perimeter of the rink, and Victor could feel the chill of the ice seeping through the barrier at Yuri’s back.

_Yuri?_

_N… Nicky…_

_Are you ok?_

Yuri sniffled and buried his head on his knees.

_I’m not good enough._

_Yuri… what happened?_

_I… I’m not ready for seniors._

Victor forced himself to think. Yuri had competed in Japanese nationals at the same time as he’d competed in Russia.

_Yuri, this was your first senior level event… yes?_

Yuri nodded.

_Did you have any deductions?_

Yuri nodded again. _I fell on my triple axel in the short program, and after that I fell again on my flip._

_How about the free?_

Yuri shook his head.

_No mistakes in the free?_

Yuri shook his head again.

_So how bad was it?_

_I came in sixth._

Victor felt a rush of surprise. Given Yuri’s state he’d expected much worse.

_Six? Out of how many?_

Maybe it was a small field?

_Twenty-nine after one person had to withdraw._

More surprise.

_You came in sixth in your first senior event, out of a field of thirty… and that’s a bad thing?_

_Everybody expected more, I know they did. I knew I couldn’t beat Oda, Takahashi or Kozuka, but I think everybody wanted to see me named as an alternate to the Olympics._

_Yuri, sixth is very good. You’re not even officially in the seniors yet. I bet there are a lot of people
you beat who are wishing they had your skills right about now.

Victor won all his senior level events except the Grand Prix Final for his senior debut though.

Well you’re fine then.

What do you mean?

That wasn’t officially your senior debut was it?

But…

There’s a difference between competing in senior level events at home, and competing in them internationally. You’re not the first skater to be given that taste, and you won’t be the last.

Really?

Really. And your programs weren’t optimized for skating at the senior level. Once you make the jump the program components will change a bit and give you a better base.

Yuri sniffled.

Do you want me to leave?

No.

Do you want to skate?

Yes.

Good. You’ve still got to prepare for Junior Worlds don’t you.

Yuri nodded.

That’s the right attitude. Brush this off, and look ahead.

Look ahead…

Like to who you’re going to pick as a coach when you transition.

Yuri sputtered.

You’ll probably want to have a contract in the works by Worlds. That way you can use the momentum to announce who you’ll be training under.

But what if I’m not ready? What if I don’t win at Junior Worlds?

I’ll make you a deal.

Hmm?

You decide on a coach, and announce your jump to seniors after Junior Worlds, and I’ll help you learn a quad.

Really?

Really.
Chris buried his face in his scarf and stuffed his hands in the pockets of his heavy coat as they walked down a street in Tallinn. He mumbled something that Victor couldn’t understand.

“What was that?” Victor asked, his breath huffing out in little clouds above his loose scarf.

Chris pulled down his scarf just enough to speak. “I said you Russians are crazy. Alexei is the same way, I bundle up and he thinks it’s finally time for a light jacket.”

Victor burst into laughter as Chris tugged his scarf over his mouth again. “It’s not that big a difference is it?”

Chris glared, which made Victor laugh harder.

“Chris, you essentially work in an oversized freezer. You should be used to cold.”

Chris kept glaring, and Victor laughed as he led his friend into a nearby coffeeshop.

Chris didn’t unwind the scarf until a steaming cup of coffee had been placed in front of him.

“So Lyosha’s coming up right?”

Chris nodded. “He couldn’t take the whole week off so early in the term, but he’ll be here for the short program and free skate.”

“Shame he can’t stay for the exhibition.”

Chris nodded again.

“Nervous?”

Chris’s head snapped up and he looked at Victor before sighing. “Can you blame me?”

“You thought he was out for good last year after that injury, then he’s back.”

“Don’t remind me.”

Victor sighed. “Remember, you’re the one who got Switzerland two spots at the Olympics, not him. You earned your spot to compete.”

“Still, it was my turn to shine, and he had to come back for one more go.”

“Can you really blame him? This is the biggest prize there is.”

Chris hunched down in his chair and mumbled something.

Victor decided to change the subject. “What movies did you bring?”

Chris perked up. “I found a real gem, and old British comedy from the eighties, John Cleese is in it.”

“Oh?”

“It’s called Whoops Apocalypse. It makes fun of everybody. The US president in it is an idiot, the British prime minister is downright insane, and one Russian official keeps dropping dead and being replaced with doppelgangers. John Cleese plays the part of the devil.”
Victor laughed. “We’re saving that one until Lyosha joins us, right?”

Chris grinned. “Of course. It takes all three of us to thoroughly enjoy something as good as this.”

“What else did you bring?”


Victor nodded.

“And you?”

Victor grinned. “I’ve got another cult classic with Army of Darkness.”

“Ooh, good choice. What else?”

“A Tim Allen movie of all things, but it’s good, called Big Trouble.”

“Details?”

“Hitmen, shady businessmen, teenagers playing stupid games, and something that looks like a garbage disposal.” Victor winked at the end.

“I think we’re saving that one for Alexei too.” Chris declared.

Victor grinned.

Chris held his beer and scowled.

“You can make it up in the free,” Victor said, momentarily putting a hand on his friend’s shoulder as he took his own seat around the small table in the crowded cafe.

“He’s right!” Alexei added, taking a sip of his own beer. “You’re in fourth after the short program, only about twelve points behind Vitya.”

“You’re ahead of Lambiel, Chris,” Victor pointed out.

Chris sighed. “Only because he stumbled on his quad. He’s got a higher base in his free too. It’s enough of a difference that unless he messes up he’ll surpass me in the end.”

“The crowd loved you,” Alexei ventured. “You’ve captured something in these programs.”

Chris looked at his friend.

Victor smiled. “The ladies in particular seem to love them.”

Chris rolled his eyes. “The judges are the ones I need to impress.”

Victor laughed. “Yes, but the audience has a bit of a say there I think. Remember, there is always a bit of subjectivity in the scores, and humans have the ability to influence perception. A judge on the fence might just buy into an enthusiastic audience and have their opinion swayed in your favor.”

Chris huffed, but soon a soft smile appeared on his face.
“Look Chris,” Victor said. “I don’t know if you did it on purpose or not, but you’ve packed your programs with sex appeal, and the audience is eating it up. Use it.”

Alexei nodded.

Thunderous applause filled the arena in Estonia as Victor climbed to stand on the first place riser. He was handed a bouquet of vibrant flowers, and a gold medal draped around his neck. In a weird sort of deja vu, Stephane Lambiel stood just below him in second place, and Brian Joubert took bronze.

It was the exact same positions they had taken four years prior just before heading to the Olympics in Italy.

Victor hoped that it was an omen that he’d take gold again in Canada.

He spied Chris standing near the barrier, taller and much more confident than the boy from several years prior. Chris smiled wistfully, leaning his head on the palm of his hand.

After several photos Victor stepped down and skated to where his friend waited. “You ok?”

Chris sighed. “I guess fourth isn’t so bad.”

Victor smiled at his friend. “Don’t worry, you’ll be challenging me for gold before you know it.”

“Chris, Vitya!”

Both men turned to see Alexei waving from the stands.

“So they’re really going?” Chris asked as he stared at the ceiling in their hotel room.

Victor smiled. “Father had to call in some favors, but yeah. They’re going to be in the stands in Canada.”

“What kind of favors?”

“Like getting a concert series pushed back from its original intended schedule by two weeks favors.”

“That’s a big favor, and one that doesn’t happen at the last minute.”

“Apparently they started planning for me to be in the Olympics last spring.”

“Considering that they only made the free skate in Italy, I’d say it’s an improvement.”

Victor nodded. “I don’t think things will ever be great between us. Lyosha yes, but… Mama and
Father… there’s just still so much hurt. It’s better though, somehow it got turned around before it was completely irreparable.”

Chris smiled and turned over on the bed.

“I told them that Valentine’s day is off though.”

“Oh?” Chris teased. “Got a hot date?”

Victor laughed. “Gonna hang out with my brother and we’re going to celebrate my best friend’s birthday.”

“Am I invited?”

“Hmm… I’ll have to think about that.”

Chris laughed.

A comfortable silence fell between them for several minutes.

“Are you nervous?” Chris asked.

“Can you blame me?”

“I guess not, though I wouldn’t know how it feels.”

“I was seventeen,” Victor said, tilting back his chair to stare at the ceiling. “I took home an Olympic gold medal at seventeen. I’ve had a couple rough years since then, and I know I’ve got strong competition.”

Chris sighed. “Says the man who just snagged another piece of hardware.”

Victor turned his head and smiled. “But nobody from the Americas or Asia was here. You saw what happened in Japan. I was handily beat by a program with no quads. I’m just… a part of me wants to compare everything to what I was doing back then. It feels like I won so easily, and now I have to fight.”

“You do know it wasn’t as easy as your memory suggests, right?”

Victor laughed dryly. “I guess so. It was sheer luck that I made the team last time. But I don’t think Russia regrets it at all.”

“So what are you going to do?”

Victor turned his attention back to the ceiling. “The only thing I can. I’m going to fight to defend my title.”

“I’d expect nothing less.”

Victor faced his friend and grinned. “You better put up some good competition yourself. I want to see you wearing that silver.”

Chris laughed. “How about you put on silver and I’ll take gold.”

Another few minutes of silence.
“What time does your plane leave?” Victor asked.

“Early. You’ll probably still be dead to the world when I gotta head out.”

Victor nodded. “No time to spare. We just got in from the banquet, but sightseeing is off the table now that the competition is over.”

“We have weeks to prepare for the biggest event of them all. We can sightsee after.”

“Supposedly Lyosha is already looking into good day trips in and around Vancouver.”

“He does know we’ll be busy, doesn’t he?”

“We’ll be able to sneak a few days off I think, if we arrange interviews and sponsor parties properly.”

“Ugh, sponsor parties. I swear I feel like a piece of meat every time. What’s the price on my head this year? How much am I worth?”

“Luckily, it’s your second trip. You might be in Lambiel’s shadow, but you’re reliable. You’re climbing every year, and after he announced last year that he was retiring, just to come back for this… well the writing is on the wall. You’re about to be Switzerland’s best. Your going price will probably be a lot higher than it was four years ago.”

“Doesn’t make me feel any less like a piece of meat.”

Victor quirked an eye at his friend. “So says the man shaking it on the ice. I know I said it before, but you’ve got something in the sex appeal of your programs. The audience loves it. In fact, it might be a good angle. Talk to your managers, I bet they’ll agree.”

“Huh?”

“I’m just saying capitalize on it both on and off the ice. Get those sponsorships where they want to trot you out shirtless and in the tightest pants they can squeeze you into.”

“I’m an athlete Victor, not a model.”

“No reason you can’t be both. You’ve got the looks, use them to get more fans and keep Swiss figure skating in the spotlight after Lambiel retires for good.”

“And what model-type sponsorships are you doing?”

Victor heard the mocking tone in his friend’s voice, and laughed. “Three high-end clothiers, one perfume company and a shampoo line… for men. The ‘for men’ thing is weird, but it smells ok, at least until I get home and use my preferred brand.”

Chris burst into laughter.

“Ok, if you’re willing to do the model type stuff then I can at least look into it.”

“Do. Your athleticism has got eyes on you, but keeping them there after you eventually retire will be harder. If you’re known for good looks and have a fan base outside of skating you’ll be better set long-term.”

“Something from Yakov and your managers?”
“And school. It’s an interesting point in one of my classes, that good managers seek out sponsorships that are relevant now, while great ones look long term. We won’t always be relevant in our sport, but we can use it now to build our relevance elsewhere.”

Chris laughed again. “Ok, anything else professor?”

Victor grinned. “Work on your public face.”

“Huh?”

“You’re the new Swiss sex bomb, currently sixth best men’s figure skater in the world. You managed to escape notice last time, but I doubt it’ll be the case this year. Be ready with your public persona.”

Chris smiled. “Sex bomb?”

“Roll with it. I’m serious.”

“Ok, I’ll think about it.”

“Good. Now we should sleep so you don’t miss your flight.”

Victor stood and strode over to turn off the room overhead while Chris switched on the bedside lamps. A few minutes later they were enveloped in darkness.

“Victor?” Chris asked from the other bed.

“Hmm?”

“Are you excited?”

“Of course.”

“Me too.”

“Good.”

“See you in a couple weeks.”

“Da. Goodnight, sweet dreams, and I’ll see you in Vancouver.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

Next time, the boys head to Canada!

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

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Also if you haven’t seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: Shared Gravity. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Feb 2010 - Victor makes his second trip to the Olympic games!

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay, I know I was aiming for two chapters a week, not one chapter in two weeks.

My mojo was killed off, and anybody who writes knows that anything that comes from a dead mojo is just... bad. It took waaaay more effort than normal to get this chapter out.

Vic/OC Relationship alert: So a few people have actually guessed this next relationship properly (kudos!). But for those who didn't see it coming and don't want to be completely blindsided... yeah, Victor's next OC relationship starts about mid-chapter.

Also, because there is serious discussion in what will be skated to the next season. I've updated the In Our Dreams playlist to include the named pieces. So you can keep those songs in mind once they start prepping.

If you've been enjoying this work please click the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Victor felt good as the plane landed in Canada. He hadn’t realized it at the time, but upon reflection he could see exactly how stressed he had been before his first Olympic games. The way that he’d got in, the sudden influx of sponsors, and the insecurity surrounding his family had all converged at once.

For these games he was older, at twenty-one, and confident. His quad-triple combo was solid, and though Yakov insisted that he should have increased the levels of his step sequences and spins, he was sure that the technical scores for the jumps would surpass anything he might have lost.

The one thing Victor wasn’t looking forward to was not being able to room with Chris and Alexei. He’d been assigned a room with Ivan in the Olympic Village, and while he liked his rinkmate just fine he knew he would miss the camaraderie that he shared with his brother and the Swiss teen.

Not that Alexei would be there the entire time anyway. Victor sighed. His brother would arrive early in the day before the opening ceremonies, and leave again the day after the free skate. He couldn’t take more than the week off from school.

“What’s on your mind Victor?” Ivan asked as the car took them to the Olympic Village.

“Just wishing that my brother could be here longer.”
“You two hang out with Giacometti a lot, don’t you?”

Victor nodded. “Yeah. It’s nice to be able to unwind with Chris around competitions, and having Lyosha there is great.”

Ivan smiled. “For a while I thought you and Giacometti were an item, before Alexei started hanging out with the two of you.”

Victor blinked. “Why would you think that?”

“Cause you two were inseparable!” Ivan laughed. “Every competition that you were at together, you’d hardly be seen apart except when one of you was on the ice.”

Victor thought about it for a minute, then laughed. “Yeah, I guess we did tend to stick close! But we’re not together.”

“Ever want to be?”

Victor was silent for a minute. “I guess I’ve never much thought about it.”

Ivan looked out the window and the matter was quickly forgotten as the Olympic Village came into view.

“You’re glaring.”

“Am not,” Chris replied, staring at where Stephane Lambiel stood.

Victor looked at Chris, and for a second forgot how much his friend had grown over the years. When they’d met Chris had been a boy, and now he stood slightly taller than Victor.

“What’s up?” Chris asked at the sudden silence between them in the loud and crowded holding area for the athletes.

Victor smiled. “Just thinking how much you’ve changed since the last time we were at the Olympics together.”

“Well I’m not the only one,” Chris joked. “You used to be a string bean with long silver hair. Now you’re a taller string bean with long silver hair.”

“Platinum hair.” Victor grinned, and saw his friend’s eyes drifting to the Swiss flag-bearer again.

“Give it up Chris,” Victor scolded.

Chris grumbled. “Here’s here because of me, and yet he’s treated like the hero.”

Victor sighed. “You do know he competed in and won the Nebelhorn Trophy don’t you?”

Chris looked at Victor from the corner of his eyes. “Yeah? What of it?”

“It means that even if you’d done so badly last year that Switzerland had no assigned spots, he’d still be here. That was the qualifier. He was going to be here with or without your help. What you did was secure your own spot in addition to his. So stop sulking.”
“They didn’t have to let him carry the flag though.”

Victor rolled his eyes, recognizing that he wasn’t going to win the argument. “So what are we doing for your birthday? It’s the day after tomorrow, and you haven’t told either Lyosha or I what you want to do.”

Chris sighed, but gave in to the change of subject. “I was thinking going to Science World and checking out several art museums.”


“I thought so too.” Chris was silent for a few minutes. “So your parents are in the stands? They actually made it?”

Victor smiled and pulled out his phone. Alexei had texted him a photo earlier. “Yep, right next to Lyosha and your mom.”

Chris smiled. “I’m so glad she was able to make it.”

“You want to start later in the day on your birthday so you can have brunch with her?”

Chris laughed. “No, you’re invited. In fact she insisted that you and Alexei come.”

One of the volunteers started wandering through the assembled crowd, informing them that it was almost time, and they separated to stand with their own countrymen.

“Happy birthday Chris!” Victor and Alexei said in unison, raising their beers.

Chris joined in the toast before they drank. Ice hockey was on the television of the pub they’d found after leaving one of the museums that Chris had chosen.

“How’s it feel?” Alexei asked. “You’re nineteen and already in your second Olympics.”

Victor glared at his brother, but Chris smiled softly.

“It’s hard to believe in a way. Most people never reach this level, and I’m already here again.”

Victor smiled. “And it won’t be the last time!”

One of Chris’s eyebrows quirked up. “Oh really?”

Victor leaned forward on his elbows and grinned. “Your skating gets better every season. The only way I see you leaving the sport now is if you were so badly injured that it forced you out. And even then I’d expect you to fight tooth and nail to come back.”

Alexei nodded, and Victor couldn’t miss the look of happiness that crossed Chris’s face.

“So what are you going to do to beat my brother day after tomorrow?” Alexei asked with a grin.

“Hey!” Victor retorted.

Alexei turned to Victor and rolled his eyes. “You already have a gold Vitya. Now it’s Chris’s turn.”

“Hey!”
Chris started laughing, and Alexei joined in. A few minutes later they were all laughing around the small table, garnering stares from those around them.

Victor smiled as he took his place on the ice. The crowd was jubilant, cheers and shouts of ‘good luck’ in an assortment of languages filled his ears.

He wished he was skating later, but had drawn the tenth spot. However, that would let him join Alexei to see Chris’s performance, so it wasn’t as bad as it could have been.

Victor was jubilant when he stepped off the ice. He’d nailed his quad-triple combination, and felt good about the rest of the elements. His score was high, enough that he was confident he’d end the night near the top.

After a few interviews he made his way to where Alexei and his parents sat with Chris’s mother in the stands.

“That was perfect Vitya!” Alexei exclaimed.

Both Natalya and Dmitri nodded before standing to embrace their son. “Well done,” Dmitri said softly.

Chris’s mother smiled at him. “A fine performance, though I have to hope my Chris gets a higher score.” She winked, her green eyes glittering, and Victor couldn’t help but laugh at all the little habits Chris had picked up from his mother.

“Perfectly understandable Mrs. Giacometti.”

The woman rolled her eyes. “How many times do I have to tell you Victor? Call me Sophie. Mrs. Giacometti makes me sound old.”

Victor smiled and took his seat as an Italian skater a couple years his senior took the ice.

They bantered, Alexei, Victor and Sophie explaining things to Natalya and Dmitri as they waited for Chris to skate.

Finally it was Chris’s turn on the ice. His pink vest sparkled under the lights as he took his position for the Pink Panther theme. He slunk across the ice, sashaying to the jazzy tune and pretending to be sneaky at the same time. The result was hilarious and had the audience noticeably excited.

Then Chris landed a quad toe loop, and both Victor and Alexei stared at each other as the crowd went wild.

“What did you know?” Victor asked over the din.

“No!” Alexei had a look of sheer joy in his eyes.

The song ended, and the people were on their feet with excitement. With only a handful of skaters left the Swiss teen had set a high bar in terms of audience expectations.

When Chris joined them several minutes later both Victor and Alexei hugged him tightly.

“That was amazing!” Alexei grinned.
“The audience loved you,” Victor added.

By the end of the night Victor had firmly remained in first place, and Chris wasn’t far behind in seventh.

However Victor knew his work was cut out for him. Lysacek was on his heels, as was Takahashi. His quad combo had closed the gap since the Grand Prix Final, but just barely. He’d hoped to be several points in the lead, but low PCS had held him back. Even Chris had managed a higher PCS score.

The free skate was going to be the determining factor.

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Chris and Victor walked down the hall of the hotel, headed to Alexei’s room following their practice. It was the day between the short program and the free skate and they’d decided to go to an actual theater to make fun of the movies for once.

Neither Yakov nor Josef had been all that enthusiastic about them not making extra time for sponsor parties and media interviews, but the coaches had been placated with promises that they would make their appearances after the free skate.

Victor knocked, but there was no answer. After a second try he pulled out the card key that Alexei had given him.

“Probably in the bathroom,” Chris shrugged as Victor fought the lock.

“Or with Mama and Father.”

The door opened, to reveal Alexei sitting at the table in the room, his back to the door and laptop open in front of him.

Victor and Chris exchanged a glance before Chris noticed the thin cable going from the computer to the buds in Alexei’s ears. He made a face at Victor, and through creative gesturing wondered if the other teen was watching net porn.

Chris held a finger to his lips, and Victor knew from the look in his eyes that he was up to something. He mimed that Victor should grab his brother.

Victor nodded, and walked up behind the still-oblivious Alexei, wrapping his arms around him tightly and receiving a startled shriek for the efforts. At the same time Chris pulled the plug from the jack.

Victor and Chris had both been ready to tease Alexei mercilessly for whatever had so garnered his attention, but those thoughts were immediately swept away as jazz filled the room.

“Vitya!” Alexei cried, squirming until the older man let go.

Chris and Victor looked to each other as the piece came to an end. Both could read the desire in the other’s eyes.

“Mine!” Chris shouted at the exact same time as Victor yelled, “Dibs!”

“Chris? Vitya?” Alexei asked, looking between them.
“Ok, the only solution is to listen to the whole thing, then fight over it,” Victor said after a minute.

“Play it from the beginning,” Chris demanded.

Alexei blinked a couple times then slowly reached out and clicked the play icon.

A light and airy sound filled the room as the string quartet started. Victor’s foot tapped as he listened, he could already feel the movements in him. He looked at Chris and knew that the other skater was in much the same position.

“A jazz string quartet,” Chris whistled appreciatively. “Uncommon, but the sound is great.”

Victor knew he’d heard the piece before, but couldn’t place it with the instrumentation.

“Lyosha,” Victor purred. “What’s the piece called? Who’s it by?”

Alexei turned bright red. He ran his hand over the back of his neck nervously. “Take Five. It’s an old jazz piece from the Dave Brubeck quartet. I umm… well we had to pick a piece for one of my classes to turn into a string quartet. I’d never worked with jazz before, and it’s got an interesting time signature, and...” Alexei gestured at the screen.

Victor and Chris stopped their silent bickering through expressions to both turn to Alexei.

“You wrote this?” Chris sounded awed.

Alexei shook his head. “No, no no no,” he denied vehemently. “I just arranged it for strings.”

“Lyosha,” Victor purred again. “Can I skate to this?”

“No, let me!” Chris interrupted.

“What else do you have Lyosha? Maybe Chris will like something else.”

Alexei sighed and ignored both of them. Instead he searched in his music files for something else.

“This isn’t quite done,” he said, clicking on the file. “So it’s still the program’s piano. I haven’t gotten anybody to play it yet.”

Lone notes from the piano sounded and died, but instead of somber, the mid-range choices made them sound almost searching. Pinpricks of sound from the upper range almost like light in the distance, then a heavy chord from the lower end.

“It’s so… exploratory,” Chris said as little bits built.

Victor nodded. “Like looking for something at the bottom of the ocean, or deep space.”

Alexie bounced excitedly. “That was the sound I was going for! The emptiness of space, but the little things that start to accumulate to make it sound full of wonder instead.”

Little by little more built into the piece until Victor could see stars, nebulae, entire solar systems just waiting to be explored. He was so entranced that when the piece just, ended, he actually growled in frustration.

“Where’s the original? I need to hear the rest,” Victor demanded.

“This is the original,” Alexei said softly. “This is mine. It’s my final project for my beginning
composition class. A two and a half minute piece for piano.”

“Take it Victor,” Chris said. “I can see how much you want this one. I’ll take the jazz, it goes
perfectly with the other piece I was thinking of for next season.”

“Vitya?” Alexei asked. “Do you want this? Does it fit?”

Victor thought about it for a moment. “I’ll pair it with Holst. It’ll be perfect.”

Alexei nodded, not even needing to ask which piece. “Which movement?”

Victor laughed. “Jupiter, I think. You’ve built that exploratory tone, but there is such a sound of
discovery in Jupiter.”

Alexei nodded. “I agree.”

“It’s settled!” Chris declared. “Alexei Nikiforov’s debut as a composer will be next season!”

Victor took a deep breath. He was the final skater of the night, and he knew that it was going to be
close. Lysacek had delivered a flawless program, and though the American had been the first skater
in the final group, nobody else had managed to surpass him.

Victor had less than a point lead after the short program. It was all or nothing. It was between him
and Lysacek for the gold. Takahashi was going to take bronze while Lambiel would be fourth and
Chris fifth.

Victor skated, every element had to be perfect if he wanted to win. He drank in the applause, using it
to fuel his performance. He landed his combination, and by the time the final notes faded he knew
that he’d given the best performance he could.

Victor’s knee bounced from nerves as he waited in the kiss and cry with Yakov.

The crowd roared, and he looked to the screen.

His heart sank. It hadn’t been enough. His final score had him just over a point behind Lysacek.

Victor took a deep breath and put on his fake smile. He waved to his fans, but as soon as he was out
of sight of the cameras his face fell.

Yakov caught up with him as he headed to the locker room to freshen up before the medal
ceremony.

“You don’t need to say anything Yakov,” Victor said, disappointment sour in his chest. “I failed. I let
down Russia, you, and myself.”

The coach sighed. “So what are you going to do about it?”

Victor stopped and stared at the tunnel for several moments. “Another quad, I’d already been
practicing the salchow, but not devoting time to it.”

“And…?”

Victor sighed. “Get my spins to level four at least, step sequences too.”
Yakov grunted. “You can’t change the past Vitya, as much as I wish you’d listened to me. But you can make sure it doesn’t happen again. You’ll take back your title in Sochi.”

“Da.”

Victor leaned against the wall, a tumbler of vodka held loosely in his fingers. Athletes filled the room, grinding and dancing as they let loose following the medal ceremony.

Victor was tempted to leave. He would have rather spent time with Alexei, but his brother had already said his farewells and gone to the hotel so that he could sleep before leaving to catch his pre-dawn flight.

Victor watched his competitors and others, a writhing throng as the party continued.

Chris had attempted to cheer him up for a while, before realizing that Victor needed time to sort it out. Eventually the Swiss skater had been grabbed by the French competitor who wasn’t Brian Joubert, and had quickly become the center of attention on the dance floor.

“You don’t look happy Victor,” Ivan said, leaning against the wall beside him.

Victor sighed, still angry at himself. “A point and a half, that’s all it would have taken to beat him. I’m a failure.”

“I dunno, from where I’m standing your position looks pretty good.”

Victor started, then sighed. Ivan had fallen to thirteenth. “Sorry…”

“It’s ok. But you need to unwind and relax. The hard part is over. Let loose for the rest of the games. You can brood when you start prepping for worlds.”

Victor sighed.

“At least get laid. When was the last time you had sex? Six months? That girl you were with toward the end of summer? You know it’s a great stress reliever, and there are plenty of people here who would be willing.”

Victor sighed again. “I dunno…”

“What do you mean?”

Victor shrugged, the alcohol allowing him to voice thoughts he’d had for a while. “I… don’t know if I’m into sex. Physically it feels good. But…”

“But?” Ivan prompted after a moment.

“I’m just… so guilty after. It’s like I feel that I’m leading the girl on by just having sex, like there will be more expectations on me. I try to feel things, and when I don’t the sex just gives me a nauseous feeling.”

“Is it the same with men?”

Victor blinked several times before looking back to the writing mass of people in the center of the room. “I… don’t know. I’ve never been with a man.”
“Victor…” Ivan said.

Victor turned his eyes back to his rinkmate.

“Not liking or being interested in sex is fine. That’s your decision. But maybe try the other side before you rule it out completely. The problem might not be the sex, but who you’re having it with.”

Victor let his eyes roam, and for a moment thought Ivan might be onto something as he watched the men dance.

Victor sighed again. “I can’t do it.”

“Why not?”

“The thought of casual sex with somebody I barely know, or don’t know at all is just as bad.”

“What about me?”

Victor gaped. “We work together! What if something went wrong?”

Ivan sighed and leaned in so that only Victor could hear him. “I’ve plateaued under Yakov. I feel it, and he’s said as much. Only a few people know this, but after Worlds I’m moving to Yekaterinburg to train under a new coach.”

“So soon?” Victor asked, eyes widening.

Ivan nodded. “I’ve always liked you Victor,” he said softly. “But you didn’t seem to know what you wanted, so I gave you space. I honestly don’t see us meshing long term. But if you want to figure it out, with me, no strings attached and knowing that it’ll only be a month… “

Victor swallowed, his mind suddenly considering the possibilities. His lips parted as he looked at Ivan, and the older skater leaned in.

For a brief moment Victor considered the kiss, then melted into it.

Victor was pleasantly sore the next morning, but didn’t have a chance to dwell when both he and Ivan were awakened by pounding on their door.

Victor padded over and opened it to reveal an irate Yakov.

The coach strode into the room to see Ivan rubbing his eyes and sitting up on the bed. “What is it Yakov?” Ivan asked. “We don’t have practice, and I thought our interviews weren’t until this afternoon.”

Yakov took one look at the beds, one slept in, one not, and growled. “If you weren’t leaving in a month I’d kill you,” he spat at Ivan. He turned to Victor. “He told you that he’s leaving, right?”

Victor nodded.

“Well at least you won’t be moping around heartbroken, unlike Georgi. I swear that boy and his bad breakups…”

“What’s wrong Yakov?” Ivan sighed. “Or are we not allowed to sleep?”
Yakov turned to Victor. “We have a problem. Get dressed. I expect you ready in fifteen minutes. I’ll explain on the way to the media center.”

Victor blinked, then headed toward the shower. He could hear Yakov scolding Ivan even as he turned on the water and stepped under the spray.

Victor took twenty minutes to get ready, but he refused to go on camera with wet hair, and if they were going to the media center it meant cameras.

“What’s going on Yakov?” Victor asked as they got in a car to drive over.

“Something we need to put a stop to right now.”

“Huh?”

Yakov passed Victor several pages, different headlines on each. About half could be summarized with two words: ‘Nikiforov robbed.’ The other half seemed to champion the new scoring system and the way it had balanced artistry with athleticism.

Victor skimmed the articles and realized that his loss to Lysacek had ignited a firestorm of controversy almost immediately. The earliest articles had been posted the evening before, and more had poured in overnight.

“People are calling for you to lodge a complaint, but the Russian Olympic Committee and the Russian Skating Federation have already declined to do so on your behalf.”

“I can’t file a complaint though,” Victor argued. “The rules say I can only do it if there’s a mathematical error, even if I disagree with scores there’s nothing I can do about it.”

“That’s why we need to put an end to this now,” Yakov said. “People are starting to whisper of controversy, and I’m getting flashbacks to two-thousand two.”

Silence fell in the car.

“What do you want to do Vitya? You need to decide what you’re going to say. You were probably underscored by being so early in the short program. But Lysacek took advantage of the second-half bonus, which all but eliminated the difference between your quads and his triples.”

Victor sighed.

“Do you have my score sheets?”

Yakov nodded and handed them over, and Victor was glad that they were stuck in traffic as he reviewed them.

“Do you happen to have my short program scores from Europeans?”

Yakov rummaged in his bag for a moment before handing it over.

“My skating skills came up, but the transitions score tanked. Interpretation was also down.”

Yakov handed over the scores from his Europeans free skate without being asked.

“My transitions are down here too.”

Yakov nodded. “I didn’t see a big enough difference to account for that drop, in fact I thought they
had gotten better along with your skating skills.”

Victor sighed, the difference in transition scores alone was questionable.

“I’m going to walk the line,” he told Yakov as the car arrived. “The transition scores are questionable, and I didn’t make any mistakes to see such a drop from Europeans. But Lysacek had two clean programs with jumps in the bonus. I might have been underscored, but he wasn’t overscored. So I don’t think it’s a conspiracy.”

Victor took a deep breath. “I’m going to push for a look into how quads are scored.”

Yakov nodded. “A good middle ground. Some of the articles are saying that there are other inconsistencies, with some like your friend being overscored and others like Weir being underscored.”

Victor hissed a breath through his teeth.

“Vitya?”

“I… I don’t know if I should question whether I was underscored. I don’t want this to spread.”

“It’ll do that with or without your help,” Yakov sighed. “You were early in the short program, too early. All your biggest competitors were loaded into the second half. If the judges were being at all conservative with your scores to leave room for later that could have done it.”

Victor was silent as he got out. Yakov walked around the car and joined him. Victor took a deep breath and nodded as his coach stood at his side.

“What are you going to do Vitya?”

“I’m going to float the possibility that I was underscored, but that the base values of quad jumps are too low given their difficulty and that they should be reevaluated.”

“Lysacek?”

“Delivered a clean skate, a worthy competitor, and took advantage of the scoring.”

“Official complaint?”

Victor shook his head. “The rules say I can’t file one. If the ROC or RSF want to file one on my behalf I won’t contest it, but I’ll leave that to them.”

Yakov nodded. “It’ll do.”

People were staring as they walked toward the doors of the media center.

Victor took a deep breath, and tried to decide which mask to wear in front of the cameras.

Nicky?

Yes Yuri?

Do you... what... umm...
Victor sighed internally, he should have known that it would be weighing on Yuri.

*I don’t know Yuri. Victor was probably underscored in the short, but whether it would have been enough is impossible to say. For now it seems to be just as much a byproduct of the new scoring system itself.*

*Do you think Victor should have fought harder?*

Victor thought about it. A part of him didn’t want to linger, but he did feel that the quad should have carried more weight.

*I don’t know.*

---

Victor was glad for the combined presence of Chris and Ivan over the following days. He spent the days navigating the media and sponsor gauntlet with his best friend, and spent the nights tangled in the sheets with his rinkmate-turned-lover.

For the first time Victor enjoyed sex both during and after. The guilt that settled each time before was absent, and while he didn’t know if it was because he knew there were no long-term expectations, or that Ivan was a man, it was a welcome relief.

“I see the sex is helping,” Chris said casually over lunch one afternoon as they transitioned from media interviews in the morning to sponsor parties in the afternoon.

Victor promptly proceeded to spit out his soda in shock. “Chris!”

Chris’s eyes crinkled with laughter. “Come on Victor, you’re far too relaxed given the circumstances. I’d have figured it out even if I hadn’t seen you two kissing at the after-party.”

Victor felt his cheeks heat up, which made Chris laugh again.

“You’re also less stressed than you were when you were dating girls. I guess that means you finally figured it out. Welcome to the club.”

Victor blinked several times. “Figured it out?”

Chris nodded, putting his elbows on the table and resting his chin on threaded fingers. “I think everybody else realized it long before you did. You prefer men. Alexei will be glad to know you finally got yourself settled in your head.”

“Lyosha… knew?”

Chris laughed. “Well nobody knew, but we all suspected. The only one who seemed to think otherwise was you.”

“You’ve talked, about my preferences, with my brother?”

Chris grinned. “We do live in the same city and see each other regularly. He was worried when you never seemed happy with your relationships. When I floated the possibility he agreed that it made the most sense.”

“Could have told me,” Victor grumbled as he took another sip of his drink.
“Some things you have to figure out for yourself my dear Victor.”

Silence for a few minutes.

“Welcome to the club?” Victor asked, realization dawning.

Chris grinned again. “It was never a question for me. I prefer the D to the V.”

“Wow…” Victor let out a breath. “Does Lyosha know?”

Chris laughed again. “He knows, even had the privilege of refusing my charms.”

Victor’s eyes widened. “You tried to… date… my brother?”

“Tried and failed!”

Victor held his face in his palm. “It’s a good thing he said no, or I might have to kill you.”

Chris laughed. “You’d have loved it and you know it. Alas, Alexei says he prefers girls, and men everywhere weep because he’s as good looking as his brother and any man would be lucky to have either of you.”

Victor picked up a french fry and tossed it at Chris, who protested when it hit his forehead.

“I don’t know if it’s men, or that for the first time I know there’s no expectation,” Victor lowered his voice. “He’s moving after Worlds.”

“Look Victor. No-strings sex is great, but if you didn’t like sleeping with men you’d have figured it out pretty quick. You’re still sleeping with him several days later, so you obviously like it.”

Victor couldn’t find fault in the argument.

“You’ll probably know much better when you date a man who might have strings. But for now, enjoy yourself. You know where this relationship is, and isn’t going, and it’s probably a relief to not have those questions hanging over you.”

Victor nodded.

“Just make sure to fill me in on all the details.”

“No Chris.”

A part of Victor was relieved to see the Olympic venues fading behind him as the car took the Russians to the airport. His fingers were tangled with Ivan’s in the space between them, much to Yakov’s chagrin.

He knew that the controversy over his silver medal was far from over, but he decided that dwelling would be counterproductive. He planned to devote serious time to landing the quad salchow once back in St. Petersburg. He doubted he’d have it in time for Worlds, but was determined to have two quads in his programs the next season.

Chapter End Notes
Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

First: I'm so sorry to my Russian readers, I know you all wanted what happened in 2010 to be different here. But I think that Victor's line in episode four about winning without quads comes from this experience. Even though the quad scoring got better, he knows better than anyone that the right program can overcome that.

On that... I know things went down different, but I didn't want to drag this world's version of this for too long either. So letting the public outcry be the fuel and Victor tossing a couple well-lit matches rather than spreading it seemed the best way.

Second: I'm sorry to all of you who so lovingly shipped Chris and Alexei, but I'd always had other plans for Alexei than to get in a relationship with Chris.

But YAY, both Chris and Victor are skating to pieces Alexei worked on next season! As to Alexei's original music, I'll be providing visuals to describe it, and maybe hints of sound, but there won't be any pieces linked for them. If anybody wants to try and make their own music though given what clues I give, have at it and have fun!

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

Also if you haven't seen it yet, I have another multi-chap piece for Yuri On Ice that has A/B/O dynamics: Shared Gravity. Check it out if you like that sorta thing.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Yuri and Victor head to their respective Worlds competitions, each with their own goals in mind.

Chapter Notes

It's world's time again! Victor's fling with Ivan is pretty noticeable this chapter, though there are just references to behind the scenes smut and not on-camera smut.

If you've been enjoying this work please click the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Victor turned to dreamwalking every night as the controversy swirled around him. He kept appointments with Yuri, but otherwise tossed himself headlong into escaping from the pressure.

He found the most solace in people who knew no idea what he was going through: the grandmother who focused on the arrival of a new addition to the family as she crocheted a receiving blanket, the painter who poured their emotions onto the canvas with swirls of color. Children were a particular source of peace, innocently exploring and discovering the world, and the release he found in the simple act of coloring was something he clung to for hours into the day.

Ivan was another source of comfort. Victor spent most nights with the other skater, knowing that there was a time limit to their fling. While they made love often, it was the smaller things that impacted him.

Victor had always enjoyed the time spent with girlfriends, but in a platonic way. There had never been the spark of a future ignited within him.

With Ivan it was different. He knew it wouldn’t go anywhere, and even in the two weeks since their fling started he understood why the older man had said he thought there wasn’t long-term potential, but he could feel that under the surface there was something right about the situation. And it was because, simply put, Ivan was a man.

The dynamic was different. Sex required a level of trust on his part that he felt had been lacking with his female partners, the sensations were so much more intense. In the quiet moments they could hold each other without defined expectations of roles, sometimes Victor wrapping his arms around his rinkmate, and other times finding relaxation in the embrace of the strong man.

Victor learned things about himself with Ivan. He loved having his hair played with, and even pulled with aroused. He enjoyed blowjobs, both giving and receiving. He relished the sense of power in
reducing another man to a writhing, moaning, mess when they had sex.

Yakov wasn’t pleased with the situation, but was overlooking it because Ivan already had plans to move. Victor asked Ivan about it, and the older skater, who had been in the rink a few years before Victor joined, told him of a pair of skaters under the coach when he was just starting. When the man in the pair had called it off with the female skater mid-season both their performances suffered, and the tension in the rink was all but unbearable. It had affected everybody, and for several years after the coach had made it clear that dating rinkmates was out of the question.

After some consideration Victor saw the wisdom in Yakov’s hesitation, but still thought it unwarranted in their situation.

Nicky?

Yes Yuri?

Can… can I ask for your help?

With what?

I’ve narrowed down my choices for senior coaches to three, but I can’t decide. Can you take a look and give me your opinion?

Of course, but you’re asking your current coach for input as well, right?

Yes, she helped me narrow it down, but is as undecided on these three as I am.

Email me the details that you want me to know, that way I’m not looking at anything you don’t want me to see.

Ok.

When are you planning to announce?

At the press conference after Junior Worlds.

Cutting a bit close aren’t you? Don’t you leave for the Netherlands in a couple days?

Yes. But we’ve let them know to expect a decision within a few days. Since all three will be there we plan to finalize any details while we’re there.

Makes sense, but it just feels close.

I know. We kept getting offers until Coach Nakamura said that we had to stop accepting them so that we could focus.

Wow.

Yeah. Yuri paused and ran his hand over the back of his neck. It was all a bit overwhelming. I’m glad she put a stop to it.

Well send the information and I’ll take a look after my own practice and let you know tomorrow. Ok?
Victor smiled when he saw an email from Yuri waiting for him when he got home. He quickly opened it and downloaded the attached documents, whistling at the names. Yuri had indeed been scouted by some of the best.

He printed the information sheets and carried them to his couch to review.

The name that stood out immediately was Celestino, and a part of Victor was glad that the Italian-American coach had made the final cut. The man had a good reputation and would surely be able to guide the teen in a positive direction.

In addition to Celestino there was a well-known Canadian coach, and an up-and-comer from Germany.

Victor immediately dismissed the Canadian as a possibility. The man was good, but had a brash personality that would easily overwhelm the shy Japanese teen.

Victor then turned his attention to the German coach. She was still new, but had clear vision for her skaters. He’d skated against several of her students over the past several years, and all had been impressive.

Victor leaned back against a cushion and closed his eyes. He tried to remember his interactions with the woman. She had a fire within her, but most of her skaters had a determined streak that matched his own.

There was a knock at the door, and Victor smiled. “It’s open.”

He looked up to see Ivan walk in, the man having been held after practice for a meeting with Yakov.

Ivan walked over and kissed Victor. His eyes fell to the coach profiles as they broke apart.

“Yakov’s going to be devastated.”

Victor blinked, then laughed. “They’re not for me. You know Yakov is the only coach I’ve ever wanted.”

“Oh?”

Victor smiled. “It’s for a friend who has reached their limit with their current coach. These are the profiles of the ones they’re looking at.”

“Giacometti?”

Victor shook his head. “No, Chris is happy with Josef. Nobody you’ve heard of.”

Ivan picked up the papers, including the discarded profile for the Canadian coach. Victor was silently glad that Yuri had only sent over bios and highlights.

“This one was off to the side, already ruled him out?”

Victor nodded. “My friend is soft-spoken. I think that he’d wither with the heavy-handed approach.”
Ivan nodded and set the profile aside. “Good call. That man’s a bit much for me to be around, and I deal with Yakov on a daily basis.”

Victor burst into laughter.

Ivan looked between the other two. “Cialdini… he’s good. Consistently produces winners. Schäfer… hmmm.”

“Talk with her much, or her skaters?”

Ivan nodded. “A couple times. Had an on-again, off-again, thing with one of her students a couple seasons back. She’s good, but puts a lot of trust in her skaters, maybe too much.”

“Care to elaborate?”

Ivan shrugged. “From what Elias told me the ones who work hard and push themselves do well under her. She knows how to motivate people with drive. But the ones who are unsure of their own abilities…” He waved dismissively.

“I see…”

“Does your friend push himself, or does he need more guidance?”

Victor closed his eyes and thought of his interactions with Yuri. The Japanese teen was fiercely determined, but had a way of getting into his head and underestimating himself.

“You’re too quiet Vitya. Recommend Cialdini. He’s a good middle ground. He knows when to push, and when to trust. Every student of his I’ve ever met has spoken highly of him. There’s a reason you see him every season. I wish your friend luck though, he’s picky because he is such a good coach.”

“He’s been scouted. Celestino was one of the ones who approached him.”

Ivan’s eyebrows shot up. “Are you sure I’ve never heard of him? Are these others scouts as well?”

Victor nodded, and Ivan whistled. “Were there others?”

Victor nodded. “These were the ones that were left after he narrowed his options.”

“You friend has caught some eyes.”

Victor smiled and watched as Ivan set aside the papers. The older skater then knelt on the couch and crawled closer until they were kissing again.

“So what are we doing for dinner?” Ivan asked. “Are you cooking again, or are we going out?”

“I have a good variety of mushrooms for stroganoff,” Victor smiled and wrapped his arms around Ivan’s neck.

Ivan returned the smile. “How did I never know you were such a good cook before now?”

Victor laughed. “You never asked. But I’m surprised, I’ve brought food to the rink for people to share before.”

“It was too good, you had to have picked it up at a restaurant.”
Victor laughed again and brought his lover in for another kiss.

Yuri had the coach bios spread out in front of him on his bed, and Victor had to restrain his amusement at seeing his own face decorating the teen’s walls. Victor had been slightly disappointed when he’d learned that Josef had been one of the coaches who’d approached Yuri, wanting the teen to train with Chris and where he could interact regularly. But Yuri said he had his reasons for ruling him out and Victor decided not to push.

*Ready to go through them Nicky?*

*Let’s start with Tremblay.*

Yuri picked up the profile for the Canadian coach.

_The final decision is up to you, but I don’t think you’re a good fit for him personality-wise. He’s overbearing at minimum, and it only gets worse during the competition season from what I understand. More than once I’ve seen his skaters on the verge of tears before taking the ice as he reminds them of every little thing that they need to keep in mind. I think you probably already do that to yourself enough._

*Ok.* Yuri set aside the profile and picked up Celestino’s.

*Celestino Cialdini. Of the three, this is the one I suggest you pick. He’s good, consistently produces some of the best skaters in the world, and I think would mesh with your personality. He knows when and how to push, and when to let you make your own decisions._

*You think he can make me a good skater?*

*You’re already an excellent skater, but yes, I think he can really help you grow._

Yuri nodded and picked up the final profile.

*Amelie Schäfer. She’s new, but has some amazing skaters under her wings. I hadn’t interacted with her much though, so I asked a rinkmate about her._

*Oh?*

*He said that she relies on her skaters to bring their own drive and determination. Those who know how to push themselves do well, but the ones who can’t ignite their own flames seem to flounder. She would be my second choice, but you seem to underestimate your own abilities and I worry that you’d stagnate under her._

Yuri nodded again. *Thank you Nicky._

*So does that mean that you’re going to transition to seniors after Junior Worlds?*

*Mm-hmm. Coach Nakamura said it’s time._

*I agree._

*Nicky?*

*Yes?*
You said that you would teach me a quad.

I did, didn’t I?

Do you really think I can do one?

I’m sure of it. Your first triple was the axel, if you can do the hardest triple first, you’ll do fine on a quad.

Thank you.

So do you know who you’re going to pick?

I’m going to discuss it with Coach Nakamura, Minako-sensei and my parents first. But based on what you said I’m leaning toward Cialdini.

I look forward to knowing who you pick.

Do you want me to tell you before the official announcement?

Only if you want to, otherwise I’ll find out with everybody else.

It was the Friday after his return from the Olympics, and Victor was on the ice. He knew that somewhere in the skies overhead Yuri was on a plane on his way to the competition that started for him on Tuesday.

Victor wished that he could have let Yuri dreamwalk to him for some quads while he napped during the flight, but he was focused on his own skating. He was determined to redeem himself at Worlds. While both Lysacek and Lambiel had already withdrawn from the competition, Takahashi was still a threat, as was Chris, and Victor refused to take leave with anything less than gold.

He worked hard, trying to land the quad salchow that he’d only half-heartedly attempted prior to the Olympics. Though he doubted it would be ready in time he was determined to try and land it before then. He also poured over his score sheets, trying to find even the tiniest place to improve his numbers.

Victor still arrived to the rink early every day to skate figures, but Yakov didn’t evaluate them on a regular basis. Instead he found them relaxing, using them to warm up and tie him to the beginnings of the sport. It used to be a matter of painting a picture with the blades and had evolved into telling a story with the entire body, and he found a strange sense of comfort in the thought.

Victor came down hard on another quad salchow attempt, and promptly received a scolding from Yakov. “Damnit Vitya, at least use the harness until you can get the rotations.”

“I don’t have anybody to balance the end!” Victor called back.

“Georgi!” Yakov blared. “Go balance Victor until he gets it out of his system.” He then returned his attention to Victor. “Victor, you balance Georgi when you’re done. He needs to work on his quad too.”

“Yes coach,” both men called.

“Why am I on harness duty?” Georgi grumbled as he skated over and took the free end while Victor
situated himself in the device.

“Probably because I’d pull the ladies off the ice if I came down hard, and Ivan’s not here today.”

“Isn’t this why we have assistant coaches?”

One of Victor’s eyebrows rose and he gestured at the coaching staff. Yakov was too old for it to be safe, and the two assistants on hand that day were immediately out of the question. The woman petite even against some of the senior ladies skaters, and the man stuck watching the novice skaters as he recovered from a broken arm.

Georgi sighed and rolled his eyes. “Just don’t leave me completely exhausted this time. I’ve got a date tonight. This is the one I’m sure.”

Victor sighed as he made sure that the harness was tight. “Doesn’t she have a say in that?”

“Of course!” Georgi protested. “But I’m sure she feels the same.”

“It’s not a race,” Victor said as he struck off, Georgi pacing him. “You don’t have to be married with kids by your mid-twenties.”

“Says the man who seems pretty happy with Ivan.”

Victor lifted off, and felt the harness catch him before he could fall.

“You know as well as I that it’s a fling. He’s said as much too.”

“You’re happier though,” Georgi countered as they skated back to the starting point for the harness.

“Because I am happier. But I’m happier with myself too, it’s not just him. I know more about what I want in a partner. You don’t know what a weight it was to not know why my relationships never felt right.”

“You sure it’s not going to last?” Georgi pushed.

Victor was starting to get annoyed that neither Yakov nor Ivan had announced his departure yet. “Positive. Now, less talking, more jumping.”

Georgi rolled his eyes even as they started another jump.

Yakov left on Saturday to accompany one of Victor’s junior female rinkmates to Junior worlds. All the skaters clambered into the break room at every opportunity to check out the upcoming competition, the assistant coaches barely able to keep them focused.

Victor was torn. Yuri was near the end of the men’s short program, skating forty-fifth of forty-six. It meant that he would be skating right near the end of their practice.

Victor pushed hard, and ended up leaving early while most of his rinkmates shuffled back and forth between the ice and the television.

He wanted to be alone to focus on Yuri’s performance.

He arrived home with only a handful of skaters left. He collapsed on his couch and Makkachin
curled up with her head in his lap.

Then Yuri was on the ice, a determined look on his face, and Victor was captivated. The teen was radiant, and the music seemed to come from him.

The short program was over all too soon, and Cao Bin took the ice to finish the afternoon event. The standings had Yuri in third after the short program. His technical scores had been what kept him that low, with his PCS the highest of the night.

Victor smiled and pulled his laptop to perch it on his knees as he composed an email. He wished Yuri luck in the free skate, and promised to watch.

A few minutes later Ivan arrived, and for a few hours Victor allowed himself to just enjoy everything that seemed right in his life.

Yuri took gold, and Victor was ecstatic. He was even happier when the station aired the press conference that followed the medal ceremony.

Yuri looked nervous sitting in the middle, shorter than Cao Bin and the Russian teen who had taken bronze. Victor only paid a bit of attention as the other skaters answered questions, only noting that the Chinese skater was also planning to transition to seniors the following season.

Then the reporters descended on Yuri, asking him his plans for the upcoming season, and how he felt about his win.

Victor leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees.

“I’d like to thank everybody for their support up until now, especially Coach Nakamura,” Yuri started. “She has proven an invaluable ally in my skating career, guiding me to new heights and I credit her as much as family and friends in my being here.

“I am also planning to transition to seniors this next season. As Coach Nakamura only works with junior skaters I will now receive that critical guidance from Coach Celestino Cialdini. We have reached an agreement that will allow me to finish high school in Japan, with trips to his rink in Detroit during breaks, and I’ll move to the United States after graduation for training and college.”

Victor grinned, only partially listening to the rest of the questions.

Yuri was coming up to his level, and he couldn’t wait.

“Vitya!”

Victor grinned and stepped away from where Ivan had his hand at the small of his back as he spied Alexei and Chris in the hotel lobby.

“Lyosha! Chris!”

The trio embraced, and held the pose until Ivan’s chuckling came from behind. It had been a week and a half since Yuri’s win at Junior Worlds, and now Victor was set to try and take his own medal.
“It’s going to be weird with an empty bed,” Chris teased. “I’d gotten used to sharing the room with both of you.”

Victor laughed, and Alexei rolled his eyes.

“Just remember I’ll be in and out,” Alexei said. “I’m here now for the weekend. Then I’ll be back again Wednesday and Thursday, then again next weekend for Sunday’s exhibition.”

“It’s a shame you couldn’t take the whole week,” Chris said.

Alexei smiled, “Yeah, but it’s only a month and a half until the end of the semester. I just can’t afford to take that much time from school.”

“And you,” Chris said, turning his attention to Victor. “I can’t believe sleeping with your boyfriend is more important than hanging out with us.”

Ivan laughed. “Jealous?”

Chris rolled his eyes. “Of course. Who wouldn’t be when you’re talking about an ass like Victor’s?”

Both Victor and Alexei sputtered at the same time.

“I’ll make sure to leave him in skating condition,” Ivan teased, and Victor felt his face heat up.

“Let’s check in,” he said, dragging the older skater toward the counter.

“Dinner at eight in the restaurant,” Chris called. “I made reservations for four, so you can come too Ivan.”

“Thanks!” Ivan shouted back.

They ended up spending the weekend as a group, Chris and Alexei accepted the addition of Ivan easily as they toured Turin. However Victor could feel the air of disappointment as he returned to his room with Ivan rather than spending the night goofing off with his brother and Chris.

Victor knew his time with the older skater was quickly running out, and he wanted to spend as much time together as possible. Though they had decided to abstain from sex prior to skating, they still sucked each other off almost every night.

Victor had never felt so relaxed going into a competition. The physical release and emotional support of Ivan was part of it, but things were going good. He’d managed to land a couple quad salchows in practice, and if the practice before the free skate went well he’d been given permission by Yakov to try it. The furor over the Olympics was finally settling down, at least in the media, though the ISU had already announced that it would revisit quad scoring during their summer meeting.

Most importantly, Yuri was moving up to seniors. Victor knew that with his talent he’d rise quickly.

Yuri was on his mind when he stepped onto the ice for his short program. The music started and everything felt good. His first jump was clean, receiving thunderous applause.

He leapt into his flying spin, but something felt off when he moved to change feet. Then he was thrown to the ice.
The crowd was silent as the music continued to drift from the speakers, Victor blinked and sat up wondering what had happened. He looked to the skate that had been on the ice, and saw a large crack through the blade. He reached out and brushed the shavings off.

The crack remained.

He bent his leg to look closer, a timer in the back of his mind screaming as he only had so long to report the problem before he’d be automatically withdrawn.

There was definitely a crack in his blade. It was impossible, but there.

Victor pushed off the ice, limping a bit, as he made his way to the judges’ stand. He had a spare pair of skates in the locker room, and there were provisions for things out of a skater’s control. It would mean an automatic deduction though, probably the full five points by the time he managed to change his skates. It was five points he could hardly afford to lose, but he refused to give up without fighting.

He caught a blur from the corner of his eye, Yakov understood that something had gone wrong with the skates and ran toward the locker room to grab the spare pair.

Once Victor explained the situation he’d have three minutes to change his skates and resume the performance.

Victor approached the referee, and the judges crowded around. He explained that everything had been fine before the change of foot, but was thrown when the blade cracked.

Nervous chattering filtered from the stands. Nobody seemed to understand what had happened.

The referee agreed to a delay, then the medical director said that they wanted to examine him since he was limping. Victor said he just needed to change his skates, but the referee informed him that he would now skate last in the group, allowing the medical staff to evaluate him.

Victor agreed begrudgingly. It would at least give him beyond the three minute limit to change his skates.

Victor winced as he made his way to the exit. Yakov returned, huffing but with new skates, and a medic greeted him at the barrier.

The referee announced a technical delay and the next skater was called.

“What the hell happened Vitya?” Yakov demanded as they moved to a bench in the tunnel, just outside of the public eye. Ivan hovered nearby, yet to skate himself.

“My blade broke.”

Yakov glared, thinking Victor was joking. “Vitya, this isn’t the time for jokes. What happened?”

Victor pointed to the crack in the blade. “My blade broke.”

“What the fuck?” Ivan declared. “Is that even possible?”

“How the hell should I know?” Victor snapped. “But it happened.”

Victor winced as he unlaced the boot and pulled it off. His ankle was slightly swollen.

“I’m fine,” Victor protested as the medic had him rotate his foot and felt the movement in the ankle.
“Yakov, thanks for getting my other skates. They moved me to last in the group.”

He turned his attention back to the medic. “I’m fine. I’ll walk it off. It just twisted as I came down.”

The man ignored him and continued to have him move his foot.

Victor was getting impatient, drumming his fingers on the bench. He was painfully aware of time passing. He wanted to get his skates back on and be ready when called back to the ice.

“I can’t clear you to resume competition,” the medic finally said.

“What?” Victor yelled. He took a moment to breathe. “What do you mean you can’t clear me?” he demanded in a calmer voice. “I’m fine.”

The medic looked at him, sympathy in his eyes. “The swelling says otherwise. You’ve strained it. It’s not bad, and you should be back to normal in a week or so, but you’ll make it worse and risk greater injury if you go back out there. I’m sorry, but I can’t clear you.”

“I need a second opinion.” Victor saw Yakov nodding from the corner of his eye.

The medic sighed, and radioed for another person to check him out.

A second medic arrived a moment later, but took even less time than the first to make the same decision, pointing to the swelling as a definite sign that Victor was in no condition to skate.

Victor slumped against the wall as the medics made their way to the medical director.

“Go get ready Ivan,” Yakov ordered. “You’re early in the next group, and this group is almost done. You need to be on the ice for warm-up in a few minutes.”

Ivan glared.

“Go,” the coach demanded.

“It’s ok, go,” Victor said, knowing that the older skater was concerned. “You still need to skate.”

Ivan looked like he was about to say something, but nodded and strode to the locker room to put on his skates.

“Were there any signs of a flaw when you inspected them?” Yakov asked, obviously trying to placate Victor.

“Of course not.”

“Anything felt off in warm-up or practice?”

“No,” Victor seethed.

“Then there was nothing you could have done Vitya.”

Victor clenched his fists.

The music for the final skater in the group ended to rousing applause.

Victor heard his name over the loudspeakers, announcing that he’d been withdrawn from competition. He put his head in his hands.
“Vitya?”

Victor looked up to see Alexei and Chris standing in the tunnel.

“My blade broke,” Victor said, numbness setting in. He wouldn’t even have a chance to overcome what had happened at the Olympics. He was out.

Chris looked as if he was about to make a joke before he realized that Victor was serious.

“You’re not kidding, are you?” the Swiss teen asked.

Victor shook his head, gesturing to the skates on the floor. “See for yourself.”

Chris picked up the skate, and Victor was glad that he’d already skated his own short program so that it wouldn’t weigh on him.

Alexei took a seat on the bench next to him, and Yakov said that he needed to accompany Ivan to the ice. “Are you ok Vitya?”

“Yes… no…” Victor put his hands on the bench and gripped the edge until his knuckles turned white. “I don’t know.”

“Are you injured?”

“The medics say I have a sprained ankle.”

“Is it bad?”

“They think I should be ok in a week or so.”

Alexei hugged him. “You’re ok. That’s what matters.”

Victor’s phone rang, he hadn’t even realized that Yakov had handed it to Chris until the teen held it out. “It’s your parents.”

“Vitya, are you ok?” his mother asked as he took the phone. “The announcer said that you were injured, but you looked ok as you left the ice.”

“I’m ok Mama,” Victor said softly. “I strained my ankle when my blade broke, the medics refused to let me finish my performance.”

“Do you want me to come down there? I think there might be a train leaving soon.”

“You have a concert tonight, don’t you?”

“Yes, but I can call in a replacement if necessary.”

Victor took a deep breath. “No, stay and play. I’ll be fine. Lyosha is here, and I’ve dealt with plenty of strained ankles before.”

“You’ll let me know if you need my help?”

“Yes Mama.”

“Is Lyosha there?”

“Yes.”
“Can I talk to him?”

Victor handed over the phone, and even from the one-sided conversation he knew his mother was telling the teen to keep an eye on him and call if needed.

Yakov dropped a pair of shoes on the floor in front of Victor. “Go on up to the stands, Ivan will skate soon and you should cheer for him. We’ll deal with the press after.”

Victor nodded and pulled on the shoes, wincing as they pushed on his swollen ankle. Chris and Alexei accompanied him into the locker room to stow his skates, then they found their seats in the stands, ignoring the shouted questions of reporters.

Somebody did the math, and by the time the short program ended Victor had been informed by more than one reporter that the chances of a blade breaking during a performance was one in ten-thousand.

It didn’t make him feel any better, like he’d won the world’s worst lottery.

Ivan ended the night in eleventh, Chris in second.

Victor was happy for both of them, but couldn’t swallow the sour taste of disappointment. Instead of redeeming himself for what happened at the Olympics, he was relegated to the sidelines.

Chris took silver, standing on the podium at World’s for the first time. Daisuke Takahashi from Japan took gold.

Victor was proud of Chris, and knew that his friend had fought for and earned his medal.

Ivan ended in fourteenth, and seemed resigned to the fact that he was struggling. Victor started to understand why he was transferring to a new coach.

They celebrated that night, congratulating Chris on his performance.

Victor and Ivan commiserated in their shared misery after their return to the hotel, the older skater pounding into Victor until they were both exhausted and bodies thrumming with pleasure.

The media was relentless in the days between the free skate and the exhibition, asking Victor how he felt about his finish in the Olympics being followed by such an improbable occurrence as his blade breaking. He gave robotic answers, and wanted to return to St. Petersburg.

The only things that kept him in Italy were the thoughts of cheering for Chris during his exhibition skate… and seeing his brother again that weekend.

Sex with Ivan became almost frantic in the waning days of their fling. The older skater was set to move to Moscow only days after their return to Russia, not wanting to draw out his stay and desiring to get to work immediately.

Victor learned that Ivan’s apartment had been packed while they were in Italy, the movers already
taking his belongings to his new home.

When Victor learned that Ivan had planned to stay in a hotel he insisted that he stay with him, which Ivan immediately agreed to.

“Congratulations Chris,” Victor said, hugging his friend as the teen waited to take his place on the ice for the exhibition. “I expect to see you on the podium with me from now on.”

Chris grinned. “Just get used to your medals matching your hair.”

Victor rolled his eyes. “I’m going to go take my seat. Any hint of what you’re skating? You said you changed it from the Grand Prix series.”

Chris winked, “Only that I’m playing on something you said.”

Victor blinked. “I guess I’ll just have to see.” He eyed Chris’s outfit for signs of a clue, but the leather-look pants, button up shirt and hint of a mesh tank top didn’t give anything away.

Victor made his way to where Ivan and Alexei sat, and took his place between them.

Brian Joubert skated, then it was Chris’s turn. Victor saw that he’d added a hat to his costume.

Then the music started, and half the arena burst into laughter at the familiar tune, and the enjoyment only intensified as Chris shed layers along with the lyrics.

Chris was grinning as he came off the ice.

“ _I’m Too Sexy_ ? Chris, really?” Victor teased.

Chris grinned. “You told me to play it up.”

Victor laughed and hugged his friend. “Thank you. I think I needed that.”

“Good.”

They watched Takahashi skate, then spent their last night as a group in the hotel. Victor promised to visit Geneva in June, after Alexei had finished the semester.

The next day Victor and Ivan were on a plane bound for St. Petersburg, one more season over.
Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

Poor Victor kinda had it rough this chapter, but Chris skated to *I'm Too Sexy* so we had a bit of balance, LOL.

Slow burn getting to you? Want smut? I started another multi-chap that is pure Victuri smut. Check out [Private Photos](#).

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at [phoenixwaller.tumblr.com](http://phoenixwaller.tumblr.com)

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**Help Me Decide!** So we know next season Victor is skating to Alexei’s piece and Holst’s Jupiter, but the season AFTER that I’m stuck between two songs for the long program. I’ve posted the choices on my tumblr [HERE](#), but if you don’t have an account there let me know in comments which you prefer.

Something to keep in mind: the season this song goes to will be the first of the 5 year winning streak. So do you prefer Red Alert or Raindrops for Victor?
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

April - October 2010 - The months between seasons brings several changes with Yuri moving up to the seniors, a new rinkmate, a pregnancy and more.

Chapter Notes

Today's chapter is kinda all over the place, but I think I've come to accept that from summer chapters for now, LOL.

Also, I realized after I posted the last chapter that the whole blade breaking thing might just seem outlandish. But... it actually happened to a Russian skater, Artem Borodulin, at the 2010 World Championships. Borodulin had to withdraw too, because there was no way he could change his skates in the allowed time limit for technical problems.

I gave the incident a bit more drama, putting it in Victor's spin rather than him stopping coming out of a spread eagle (yes, I watched the video) and then adding the strain, but it was just far too good a random tidbit of actual figure skating history to NOT use when I'm trying to hold Victor back enough right now as we're getting sooooooo close to his 5 year streak.

So yeah... truth stranger than fiction and all that.

If you've been enjoying this work please click the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Victor consulted the recipe, squinted at it, tasted the sauce and added a touch more salt.

His mother had sent him a number of new cookbooks after the Olympics. His parents had gone to the US for several days between the opening ceremony and the men’s figure skating, and picked up several cookbooks with American recipes.

Victor hated converting, but otherwise liked some of the different flavors. Most of the ingredients were easy enough to find and it gave him some variety.

“What are you making?” Ivan asked, snaking his arms around Victor's middle.

Victor looked at the recipe title, and shrugged, The name was no help. “It’s a baked salmon with creamy mushroom sauce.”

Ivan peered over Victor’s shoulder at the cookbook and chuckled. “And you needed an American recipe for that? Don’t you know half a dozen creamy mushroom sauces off the top of your head?”
Victor shrugged. “It’s a different flavor.”

Ivan kissed Victor’s neck then moved to sit at the table. “I think I’m going to miss this more than I expected.”

“Hmm?” Victor asked, turning to look at the other man.

“This…” Ivan said, gesturing. “I know our personalities clash too much for anything long term, but I’ve really enjoyed what we’ve had too.”

Victor smiled and turned back to the stove. He stirred the sauce once more before pulling the fish from the oven and plating the meal, pairing the entree with some steamed vegetables. He set the plates down and took his seat before replying.

“I know what you mean… in both aspects. We do butt heads, and we’ve luckily avoided it since we started… whatever this is. It would only be a matter of time before it would go sour. But it has been nice.”

“I guess… it doesn’t have to fully end,” Ivan mused.

“What do you mean?”

“You take trips to Moscow on a regular basis, and we’ll see each other during competitions.”

Victor hummed.

Ivan was silent a moment, then sighed. “That makes it complicated though…”

Victor nodded.

“This is good,” Ivan said, changing the subject and gesturing at the meal.

“Thank you.”

Silence.

“Let’s… see where we are when we see each other again,” Victor offered. “You might find somebody. If we’re both available we’ll see how we feel about things then.”

Ivan nodded. “I think that makes the most sense. No sense in tying ourselves to each other when we knew from the start that this was a fling.”

Victor nodded. “Do you want me to come to the airport with you tomorrow?”

“No,” Ivan replied. “I think it would just make things awkward.”

“You’re probably right.”

Ivan smiled.

“Good luck. I expect to see you in Saransk for nationals.”

Ivan laughed. “No trips to Moscow planned?”

Victor waved his hand absentmindedly. “No, but between the Olympics and that damn blade breaking I expect there will be some.”
“That really was bad luck.”

Victor nodded. “Yakov had me send the skate to some lab so they could examine it. I think they’re trying to determine if there was a flaw in production, or if the metal itself developed a problem.”

“Were they a new alloy or something?”

Victor shook his head. “Not that I know of.”

“Probably a production flaw then,” Ivan concluded. “Going to sue?”

“I’d rather put the disasters of the season behind me. It’s not like I get a redo. But... “ Victor shrugged. “It might not be up to me. After the Olympics the Federation wanted a win, they might insist I take action as it effectively kept me from even reaching the podium.”

“The pressures of winning, huh?”

Victor sighed and ignored the question by shoving another forkful of food into his mouth.

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**How was your first training stint in Detroit?**

**Good,** Yuri replied, stretching in the ballet studio.

Victor could feel the fatigue in the teen. **Still jet lagged?**

**A bit. You’d think I’d be used to it by now.**

**You’re never really used to it. How long did you have again? You met Cialdini after he returned from Worlds, right?**

**About a week once he got back. I wish I’d had more time, but I had to get back for the start of the school year... and another commitment.**

**Oh?**

**I’ll tell you another time.**

**Ok. So when are you heading to the US again?**

**Golden Week, then again for summer break. There’s no reason to during Winter break as nationals are then, so he’ll come here instead and we’ll train in Nagano.**

**What are you going to do between visits to the US? Won’t it be hard without your coach there?**

**Not really. I only saw Coach Nakamura a couple times a week. This is less, but I’ve not had that consistency in the past so I’ve learned how to push myself. Besides, Yuuki-san will be around, and Minako-sensei. They’ve promised to record video of my skating and send it to Coach Celestino for him to evaluate.**

**As long as you can make it work.**

**We’ve already started working on my short program, and he’ll come out with a choreographer in June so we can start on the free. We’ve already picked out the music so it’s just a matter of getting**
them going. Since he won’t be here I’m glad for the extra time.

What are you skating to?

Scoping the competition?

Victor laughed. I love that confidence. I take it you’re feeling good?

Yeah. I feel like a have a bit of a buffer this year. Oda, Takahashi and Kozuka are all still doing good, even if Oda did fail to make the free skate in Turin. It’ll let me adjust to the higher level of competition without feeling like I’m letting anybody down.

Yuri walked over to a small boombox in the corner and pressed play. A familiar song immediately filled the space, and Yuri started to move.

Wagner?

Yes. I’m skating to Lohengrin for my short program.

Really?

Yeah.

What are you doing for the free?

Yuri paused a moment, waked to the player and reversed the song some so he could start a sequence again.

Holst.

Victor quickly had to put up a wall to prevent Yuri from feeling his shock.

What piece?

Mercury.

They were skating to the same song, just different movements. For a moment Victor wondered if he should tell Yuri, then realized that there was no way he should know what Victor was skating to the April before the season started.

He couldn’t say that he was skating to Holst either, because if they were the only ones it would give his identity away. He just hoped Yuri coped well when he learned that he was skating to the same music as Victor.

Mercury is a pretty piece. It suits you well.

That’s what Coach Celestino said, so I went with his suggestion.

I can’t wait to see you skate it.

“Vitya!”

Victor blinked and skated over to where Yakov stood at the barrier. “Da?”
“You’re still waiting for Lyosha to finish the music for your short program, yes?”

Victor nodded. “The final piece and performance is in two weeks, and he said that since it’s the right length it’ll just be a matter of recording and cleaning it up. I’ll have it in plenty of time, and I have the rough so I’ve started to choreograph both it and the free.”

Yakov waved. “Fine, but we’re going to spend this time on something else.”

“Huh?”

Yakov leaned on the barrier. “Technical scores are creeping up, but the next big breakthrough will be quads.”

“What do you mean? We already have quads.”

“Yes, but the only ratified quads are the toe loop and the salchow. We haven’t seen a new quad in over a decade.”

“There have been plenty of attempts. Takahashi just tried for a quad flip during worlds.”

“And every one has resulted in a fall, or been downgraded, and most often both.”

Victor was getting excited. He thought he knew where the coach was headed with the conversation, but he had to be sure. “What are you saying Yakov?”

“Keep drilling the quad salchow. I want you to land it this season in competition. But we’re going to add a new quad to your roster. Let’s ratify a new one. Make it yours.”

Victor’s eyes widened. “You were so against me learning quads before.”

“You weren’t ready. You are now.”

Victor grinned.

“Make no mistake Vitya. This will be hard, far harder than the toe loop or the salchow. This is new ground and you can’t look to anybody else to determine proper technique. You probably won’t have it this year.”

Victor nodded.

“Good. We’re drilling triples today: the flip, the lutz and the loop. We’re going to determine which of those you have the best speed, height and control on. That’ll be our starting point.”

Victor nodded and moved to an empty section of ice, excited that his coach thought he could land a new quad.

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_Yuri, do you have a harness here?_

Yuri shook his head, even as his eyes drifted to the ceiling of his home rink. _No, there is a handheld one that instructors use with the younger skaters, but not a mounted one._

_Shame. That would be a safer option if I’m going to help you learn a quad._
I saw one in Detroit during Golden Week. It looked awkward. I haven’t trained jumps in a harness in a long time.

You get used to it, and it saves you from a lot of really nasty bruises.

“Yuuuuri!”

Yuri turned and smiled when he saw Yuko standing at the barrier. He skated over. “Yu-chan!”

She leaned over carefully and hugged him.

She’s not skating?

Yuri glanced down to her stomach then back to her face.

“Silly!” she exclaimed. “I’m not showing yet!”

Oh!

There’s a reason you haven’t seen her for the past month. She’s married to Nishigori now too. Their ceremony was in April, right after I got back from my first trip to Detroit. The cherry blossoms landed on everybody the whole time and it was beautiful. Everybody jokes that it’s a honeymoon pregnancy though, cause the announcement was made to the families only a couple weeks ago. She says she’ll tell more people once she clears the first trimester.

Wow!

“How are you feeling? Is the nausea better?”

Yuko grumbled. “No, it’s getting worse. The doctor says it’ll be several more weeks before it starts to go away.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s ok! So tell me, how was Detroit during Golden Week?”

Yuri shrugged. “The rink is much busier than I’m used to. Coach Celestino introduced me to a lot of people, and so many who have placed at major competitions. I think three skated in Worlds.”

Yuko grinned. “I’m so excited for you Yuri. You’re really doing it. You’re going to face Victor on the ice one day, I just know it!”

Yuri blushed. “That’s not certain.”

“I believe in you Yuri!”

So do I.

“Excuse me…” Victor heard a small and nervous voice behind him.

Victor turned to see a young girl, probably eleven or twelve, standing there, bright red hair tied back. He knelt to be at her eye level. “How can I help you young lady?”

Her eyes grew wide in recognition. “You’re Victor Nikiforov!”
Victor laughed. “Last time I checked I was anyway. What’s your name?”

“M… Mila… Mila Babicheva.”

“That’s a very pretty name Mila. What are you doing at the ice rink today?”

“Mama brought me to talk to coach Yakov.”

“Oh really? Are you a figure skater?”

The girl nodded exuberantly. “I placed first in all my competitions last year, and next year I’ll finally get to skate in Juniors! Mama says that coach Yakov can make me an even better skater.”

*Twelve then.*

“He’s a very good coach. I’m sure he can make you an excellent skater.”

“Really?”

Victor smiled and nodded. “I should know. I’ve trained under Yakov for a long time.”

“And you took silver at the Olympics, and gold at the Olympics before that!”

Victor nodded. “That’s right.”

“If you say he’s good, then he must be the best coach ever!”

Victor laughed.

“Mila?” a woman’s voice sounded across the lobby.

“Mama! Look who I met! It’s Victor Nikiforov!”

“Where’d you go baby girl?” her mother asked worriedly, ignoring Victor for a moment. “You said you needed to use the restroom, but never came back to Coach Yakov’s office.”

“I… I got lost…” the girl said in a small voice, toes turning inward in embarrassment.

“Can I tell you a secret?” Victor said. Mila turned back to him and nodded. “I used to get lost all the time when I first got here. Yakov hid his office in a place so that only those who know how to get there can find him.”

The girl chuckled. “Really?”

“You got lost didn’t you?”

She nodded, and Victor turned his head up to smile at her mother. The woman returned the smile as Victor stood and strode across to the empty counter. He reached over, grabbed the phone handset and punched in Yakov’s office extension.

“What is it?” Yakov demanded.

“Settle down Yakov,” Victor laughed, “Or you’ll scare away your newest student.”

“Did you find her? Where is she?”

“She got lost, but managed to make her way back to the lobby. Her mother is here too.”
“Good, bring them both back to my office. We’ve still got a few things to sign.”

“Da.” Victor set the phone back down.

“Ladies?”

Both mother and daughter turned to look at Victor.

“Your new coach has asked me to escort you back whenever you’re ready.”

Mila chatted excitedly with Victor until they reached the coach’s office.

He was practicing his quad salchow when Yakov’s voice boomed over the ice. “Come over everybody and meet your new rinkmate.”

“Josef has you doing what?” Victor spit out his drink in shock. “Did I hear that right?”

Chris laughed as the three sat around a small outdoor table in Geneva, enjoying the late June weather. “Josef has me taking pole-dance classes,” he repeated casually. “Something about how if sexy is going to be my thing, then I need a deeper repertoire than flamenco and tango. He wants me to be able to move like I’m trying to turn on everybody in the room.”

“And how’s it working out for you?” Alexei teased.

Chris groaned. “My legs have never ached so much. I train every day, but the way my body moves on the pole is so new that I’m not accustomed to it.”

“Is it helping though? Can you feel the difference in your skating?” Victor asked.

Chris hummed. “When I think about it I do move different. It’s hard to quantify right now, but Josef says he sees an improvement in my,” he paused to make air quotes, “’sex appeal’ already.”

“I hope it works out for you then.”

Victor was about to say something else when he phone rang. He pulled it from his pocket and glanced at the caller ID. “Yakov? Why’s he calling? He knows I’m on vacation.”

Victor let it go to voicemail, but it started ringing again almost immediately. Then Chris’s phone started ringing as well.

The skaters shared a glance. “The assignments!” they cried in unison.

“Yakov!” Victor said as soon as he answered.

“Have you seen them?”

“No, I’ve been with Chris and Lyosha all day. When were they posted?”

“The announcement was about an hour ago.”

“Where am I going?”

“China and France.”
“Who am I against?”

“Kozuka and Joubert in China, and again in France.”

“We’re all three in the same two competitions?”

“Sometimes that happens.”

Victor sighed. “Ok. Thanks Yakov. I might try to head back a couple days early.”

“Enjoy your time Vitya, you looked good before you left.”

“Are you sure?”

“Da. I’m in the middle of the summer training camp anyway, so it’s a good time for you to be on vacation.”

“Thanks Yakov. We’ll chat more later.”

“Da,” the coach replied before hanging up.

Chris was still on the phone with Josef, and Alexei was looking between the two expectantly.

Victor grinned and opened the web browser on his phone, wondering where Yuri was going to be.

“Vitya?”

“The Grand Prix assignments were announced this morning.”

“Oh!” Alexei said as he pulled out his own phone to look them up.

Victor found the information and scrolled through. Please tell me I’m skating against Yuri.

Victor found Yuri assigned to two competitions. Japan had obviously added him to the NHK Trophy since they were allowed to as a host nation, and the teen’s single seeded assignment was to the Cup of Russia… against Chris.

Well, Yakov wouldn’t like it, but Georgi had been assigned there as well, and he could make the argument about supporting his rinkmate.

“Russia and Canada!” Chris declared. “You’ll come see me in Moscow, won’t you Victor?”

“Only if you come see me in France,” Victor teased back.

“I’m coming to both!” Alexei declared before urging the two skaters to move close together. He stood in front of them, opened an app on his phone and Victor heard the camera shutter sound before his brother wildly typed something out.

He walked over and glanced over Alexei’s shoulder to see an unfamiliar app open. “What’s that?”

“Oh!” Alexei grinned. “It’s Instagram. It’s only been out a few months, but is super cool. It’s made for photo sharing.”

The photo was good. Victor’s hair caught the light perfect as it draped over his shoulders, and Chris’s grin could light up a room. He read the caption under the photo. Grand Prix Assignments are in. #figureskating #VictorNikiforov #ChristopheGiacometti
Alexei waited until the photo posted, then scrolled through his feed. “See?”

Victor and Chris grinned at each other. “Where do we sign up?”

“Isn’t this an odd time of year for a new sponsor to show interest?” Victor asked as he listened to his manager speak.

“They’re responding to the determination that the blade breaking was due to a production flaw.”

“And the manufacturer has already apologized.”

“Yes, but the interested sponsor is their biggest competitor…”

“So you want me to drop the current sponsor, who made the skates that broke… and…?”

The man nodded. “The starting terms are just as good. They’ll provide skates, even in custom colors should you want something other than the standard silver. They’re also offering significantly more money than the current sponsor.”

Victor thought about it. The Russian Skating Federation had been rather upset over the whole incident and dropping them as a sponsor would probably make a few officials happy.

“What are the contract issues?”

“There are a few things, but between what happened, and how close we were to the end of the contract anyway I don’t see any huge concerns.”

They reviewed the details, and Victor called a few people he knew who used the other brand of skates for opinions.

Victor nodded. “Ok. We’ll switch after a trial period if I like the way they feel.”

“You need more speed Vitya!” Yakov demanded from the barrier.

Victor nodded. He and the assistant coach skated back to the starting point of the harness. They set off again, and Victor launched the flip, trying for four rotations.

The harness caught him from falling, and he cursed under his breath.

“Not even three and a half,” Yakov declared. “Pull your body tighter, reduce drag as much as you can.”

“Da.”

Victor ran the jump three more times before Yakov declared enough of it for the day.

Victor was frustrated, but he also knew that other skaters had been trying, and failing, for years. He couldn’t expect to miraculously land a quadruple flip within months of starting. But that didn’t stop him from analyzing his movements in his mind that night.
“How are they doing in there?” Yuri asked, peering over the barrier at Yuko’s round belly.

_They?_

_She’s having triplets._

_Really?_

_Yeah._

Yuko grabbed Yuri’s hand and pushed it against her belly. “I think they’re asleep right now, but maybe one of them will kick if you press.”

Almost on cue, the baby near where Yuri’s hand was got upset at being disturbed and kicked hard.

“Oh my goodness!” Yuri exclaimed, quickly retrieving his hand.

“I can already tell they’re going to be good jumpers,” Yuko joked. “That was a gentle kick!”

“That was gentle?”

Yuko nodded.

“They’ll be amazing jumpers then. Have you and Nishigori decided on names?”

Yuko blushed. “Promise not to laugh?”

Yuri nodded. “We’ve decided that since we both love figure skating, and it kinda brought us together, that we’d honor it.”

“Ok?”

“We’re naming the girls Axel, Lutz and Loop.”

Victor could feel Yuri suppressing his amusement, but the teen managed to not laugh. “I think they’re perfect names.”

“Really?”

“Really,” Yuri replied with a nod.

“Thank you Yuri!”

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Victor found a livestream for the NHK Trophy, glad it was the first competition of the Grand Prix series that year. He didn’t care that Yakov was bitching to him about coming in late to practice so that he could see it live as it aired in the morning.

He still had two weeks before his own season opener in China, and there was no way that he would miss Yuri’s first international competition as a senior.

_Soon Yuri! You’ll do great. You’ll skate against me and I’ll finally be able to reveal myself to you._
I can’t wait.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

Yay, so many little things happened, and we're in a nice position for the 2010-2011 season.

No, I really don't know if all the fallout of the blade breaking would have gone down like that, but it seemed reasonable to me. \0/

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

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Slow Burn too much? I've got a Victuri multi-chap that is pure smut. Read Private Photos
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Fall 2010 - Victor prepares for another Grand Prix Series. At the same time his time as a college student is quickly coming to a close and he finds that he needs to also make time for a final project.

Chapter Notes

Sorry it's been like two weeks guys. I hit some writer's block on this chapter, then once I got it cleared away this chapter JUST.KEPT.GOING... It's double my preferred length.

Lots of setup in this chapter though, so it's a good thing.

Finally, I've updated the In Our Dreams playlist to include pieces for this chapter.

Anyway, enjoy, and please whack that share button up above and let others find this story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Victor was thrilled. Yuri came in fourth at the NHK Trophy, and if he did well in Moscow he had the potential to make the final for his senior debut.

However, Victor didn’t have the luxury of time to celebrate Yuri’s achievements. His own first qualifying event in China was less than two weeks away.

Victor turned to face into the jump, and launched a perfect triple axel. His programs were good. He felt he captured the sense of wonder and exploration that Alexei’s music conveyed, and the overwhelming awe of Jupiter.


“Thank you,” Victor shouted back and made his way to the barrier.

“Where are you off to?” Georgi asked as he grabbed his water bottle.

“Interview and photoshoot.”

Georgi rolled his eyes. “Must be nice.”

Mila skated over and slid to a stop next to Georgi. She looked up and jutted out her chin. “Leave Victor alone Georgi.”

Georgi smiled and crouched down to meet Mila’s eyes. “Oh? Why should I do that?”
Mila scrunched her nose. “Because if you don’t leave him alone I won’t listen to you talk about your girlfriend for a full week!”

Victor burst into laughter. “That’s a pretty serious threat.”

“But Mila,” Georgi argued. “Aren’t you jealous? He’s leaving to talk to a reporter and get his photo taken since he’s so popular.”

“No.”

“Oh, and why not?”

“Because I’m going to work hard, and I’ll be popular too. So I’ll have plenty of articles of my own.”

Victor roared with laughter as he put on his hard guards. “She’s got you there Georgi.”

“Just you wait Victor,” Georgi shot back. “I’ll knock you off your pedestal.”

“Looking forward to it,” Victor replied with a wave. “In the meantime, I better get to the studio.”


“Yes coach!”

Victor headed to a bench to take off his skates, but looked up when he saw a smaller pair on the floor in front of him. Mila stood there, looking nervous.

“Yes Mila?”

“G… good luck.”

Victor grinned. “Thank you, but it’s just an interview and photoshoot, not a competition.”

Mila smiled shyly, and Victor got an idea. “Yakov,” he yelled. “Can Mila come with to observe? She’s done well in her events so far, and it’s probably good to get her used to the press before she moves up to juniors.”

Mila’s eyes widened.

Yakov was quiet for a few minutes. “Da.”

“No fair!” Georgi yelled.

“Get your own interviews Georgi,” Yakov replied, then turned his attention back to Victor. “No dawdling after the shoot. Her mother picks her up at five.”

“Ok!”

“I can really go with you?” Mila asked, awestruck.

Victor nodded. “It’ll be good for you to see what happens so that you’re ready when it’s your turn.”

Mila made a squeak of delight as she sat to remove her own skates.

“You’ll probably be bored,” Victor said with a laugh. “The interviews usually aren’t long, then it’s a lot of sitting around and getting prepped, then a lot of standing there and taking direction.”
Mila shook her head. “It’s ok.”

Victor smiled. “Ok. Go shower and I’ll meet you in the lobby in ten minutes.”

“Ok!” Mila said as she bounded off.

Half an hour later they strolled through the doors at the magazine’s offices and studio, where people praised Victor and wished him luck for the season. But he couldn’t help noticing how everybody fawned over Mila.

Victor shook hands with the reporter, Svetlana Lebedeva, and sat down for the interview, but cast a puzzled glance when she looked between him and Mila.

“You said Mila’s a rinkmate?”

Victor nodded. “She’s in the novice division right now, but will move up to juniors next year.”

Svetlana smiled. “Give me a few moments if you would, please?”

Victor nodded and watched as the reporter left the interview room.

“You?” Mila asked carefully.

Victor smiled. “She probably went to check on something, she’ll be right back.”

They chatted about what Mila was learning while they waited.

There was a knock at the door. Victor looked up to see Svetlana motioning to him.

“I’ll be right outside Mila.”

“Ok!”

Victor walked into the hall and closed the door behind him. “What’s up?”

“I want to shift the focus of the article.”

“Oh?”

“You’re good Victor, don’t get me wrong. Your face alone will sell magazines. But this is a fantastic opportunity. You’re not the future of Russian figure skating anymore, you’re the present.”

“Ok?” Victor cocked his head in confusion.

“Let’s talk a bit about your younger rinkmates and what an inspiration it is for the next generation to work with you.”

Victor’s eyes widened and he started to smile.

“I’ve already talked to Yakov. He thinks Mila there is the best of his current novice skaters, and would have chosen her for such a piece.”

“I love it! What’s the catch?”

Svetlana laughed. “It pulls a bit of the focus from you.”

Victor waved the concern away. “I’m pretty sure my press team will be ok with that.”
Svetlana nodded. “It’ll likely boost your image overall as a caring athlete who wants others to succeed.”

“I do!”

She laughed. “So I take it you’re ok with changing the article?”

Victor nodded.

“Great. I need to let Yakov know, and get permission from her mother. I’ll be just a few more minutes.”

“Ok,” Victor replied before walking back into the room.

“It’ll be just a few more minutes Mila.”

“Ok!” Mila bounced excitedly.

“What are you so excited about?”

“Just excited! I get to see a photoshoot for myself. Are they going to put sparkly makeup on you to match your costume?”

“Probably not. It’ll likely be simple makeup to make me easier to photograph.”

“Oh…” Mila pouted. “Oh well! I’m still excited!”

Victor laughed and they resumed their conversation until there was another knock at the door.

Svetlana walked in and took her seat again. “Thank you for waiting.” She turned to Mila. “Mila, would you like to be in an article with Victor?”

Mila’s eyes widened. “Really?”

Svetlana smiled and nodded. “My editor is ok with me shifting the article slightly, and adding in how Victor is helping Russia’s future top skaters. I’ve already approved it with your mother and Yakov, who both say the final decision is yours.”

Mila nodded enthusiastically and Svetlana laughed. “They thought you’d agree. One of your assistant coaches is stopping by your house to get your free skate outfit, and it should be here by the time we’re done with the interview, hair and makeup.”

Mila turned to look at Victor. “I really get to be in an article with you?”

Victor smiled. “Looks that way. I guess you’re getting more than a preview of how to interact with the press.”

Do you really think I can do it Nicky?

Of course you can, you’re a fantastic skater.

But… the Grand Prix Final… There’s no way I could compete. I don’t even have a quad yet.

Your performance scores are good though. You made fourth in the NHK.

But that was in Japan. I had plenty of fans.
You have fans outside of Japan too.

Really?

I’m a fan.

Yuri seemed contemplative as he took his place at the center of the rink. Celestino had sent one of the assistant coaches, Satsuki Muramoto, to Japan to be with Yuri during the Grand Prix series.

“You had a bit of wobble on the landing of your lutz,” the woman called. “Are you sure you don’t need a break?”

“One more runthrough,” Yuri replied. “I’ll take it after this.”

The woman sighed loud enough for Yuri to hear from his place at center ice, and Victor had to suppress his amusement.

What’s so funny? Yuri asked.

Guess I didn’t hide it well enough, just the way you’re not listening to your coach.

But I’m not tired yet.

Victor took a moment and just allowed himself to feel Yuri. Ok, I guess you really are good for one more.

Pfft, I know my own limits.

Yuri ran through his short program, the sounds of Wagner echoing through the rink from tiny speakers.

“Much better Yuri,” Coach Muramoto said when he finished. “I’ll send the video to Celestino, but you’re looking good to me. Are you ready to call it a day?”

“Can I work on my quad?”

The woman was silent for a moment. “You need a break, but we have time for you to have a break and still work on it for a bit after.”

“Great!”

Can you stick around Nicky? I’m still not getting it and I need your help.

For a bit.

Thank you!

Victor was thrilled with the article, Mila was thrilled with her first article, their managers were thrilled with the article. Yakov was thrilled that one of his novice skaters was getting positive press, but was uncertain whether Victor had planned it in advance or not.

What had started as a spur-of-the-moment decision to take Mila along had an almost immediate effect on Victor’s image. The public was enthralled by how much he wanted to see others succeed, and as
evidence they found old photos of him supporting rinkmates at competitions over the years.

Victor had to admit that Svetlana knew how to spin a story. Though he did have her tone down the whole ‘helping with younger rinkmates’ aspect, she still cast him in a light that framed him as an inspirational figure.

“Victor look!” Mila said, holding up her copy of the magazine, their images on the front.

The magazine had used Victor’s favorite photo from the shoot as the cover. He was in his short program outfit, swirling blacks and royal blues with hand sewn crystals creating stars and constellations across his body. A fan had blown his long hair out for a sense of movement. Mila was perched on one shoulder in her glittering lilac free skate outfit and skates, kicking out one foot. Both wore huge smiles as the photographer had kept cracking jokes during the shoot.

Victor smiled. “I’ll autograph yours if you autograph mine.”

Mila nodded enthusiastically, and Victor dug a marker from his bag. They exchanged copies of the magazine. Congratulations on your first article! he wrote before signing his name on the cover. A moment later Mila handed him back his, a childlike Thank you for taking me to the interview. -Mila scrawled on the front.

“We’ll autograph Yakov’s copy together later, ok?”

Mila nodded, but made a face when Victor stood and ruffled her hair. “Victor!”

Victor laughed. “Welcome to the big time kiddo.”

Mila blushed.

“Should have taken me too,” complained Georgi, though there was a playful tone in his voice.

“Get your own articles Georgi,” both Mila and Victor said at the same time before they burst into laughter.

Victor looked over his assignments. He was in the last year of tutoring for his bachelor’s degree, but was faced with a dilemma. He needed a final project to demonstrate understanding of what he’d learned in some capacity.

Most of his ‘classmates’ were working in groups, but he didn’t know anybody to ask. He’d been to the campus only a handful of times for necessary paperwork, and never in a class with other students. His tutors had worked with professors to craft his education to meet academic standards while allowing him the freedom to study around his training schedule.

Victor looked at the list of what other people were doing. Several were volunteering as assistant coaches with children’s sports teams for a season, a few were taking novice athletes around Mila’s age and crafting management strategies.

Victor thought back on the various classes. Coaching, PR, facility management… so many different aspects.

He knew the ice rink like the back of his hand. He could always ask Yakov and the staff to manage it for a few days under supervision.
Victor sighed and looked at the list of classmates again. Only three besides him were listed as undecided, and they were quickly approaching the deadline of when they’d need to announce their intentions of whether they were working alone or as a group, and what they would be doing.

In the ‘tentative’ column for two of the undecided people he saw something that caught his eye. Sporting Event. The pair was working together but hadn’t finalized their project yet.

Victor blinked several times, and an idea started to form in his mind.

He set aside the paper and opened his email client. He typed in the names and added the subject: Final Project: sporting event?

Hello Sergei and Vasily,

Though we’ve never met, I’m one of your classmates in the Sports Management program. I’m also on track to present a final project this year, but am undecided as to what I would like to do. I saw your idea of a sporting event on the class list and am intrigued. Did you already have something in mind, or was this a tentative thought? Would you be willing to include me in your group?

Thank you, and I look forward to your response.

-Victor Nikiforov

Victor set aside the computer and went to make dinner. He had just slid a pan into the oven when his phone chirped with an incoming email notification.

Re: Final Project: sporting event?


-Vasily

Victor sighed, he knew he should have expected that response.

Re: Re: Final Project: sporting event?

That would be me.

A minute later there was another reply.

Holy shit, I always thought your name on the class list was a joke! I mean we never saw you.

Victor quickly replied with a single word.

Tutors.

Victor was starting to think that he’d made a mistake when the other person in the duo replied.

Down Vasily.
Please excuse my friend Mr. Nikiforov. He’s a fan.

I think I can safely speak for Vasily when I say that we’re amenable to potentially working with you, though I would insist that we meet before confirming.

As to the nature of the project, while we’re both inclined to stage a small event of some sort, logistically it’s a hurdle for two people. On top of things like securing a venue and promotion, we’d also need to find athletes willing to participate. We had thought to focus on younger athletes, but felt that we needed a draw of a few bigger names to encourage an audience besides parents and family.

We were considering a different project as it might prove too much for just the two of us with no experience.

-Sergei

Victor breathed a sigh of relief at the measured response. He typed out his reply.

I agree that an in-person meeting would be a good first step.

As to some of your other concerns… I may be able to help if you decide I’m a good fit for your team.

I’m leaving for China in a couple days, and can only meet after training. Could you meet on such short notice, or should we postpone until my return?

The reply was almost immediate.

A meeting before you leave for competition would be preferable, since we need to have our project summaries in before mid-month.

You train at the Sports Champions Club, correct? I know a good coffee shop just down the road. We could meet there after training one day.

Victor chuckled when he recognized the address of being Yana’s coffee shop.

I’m well acquainted with that particular location. Tomorrow at 6 okay?

Another quick reply.

Tomorrow at 6 is fine. We’ll meet you there.

Victor smiled.

Good, I’ll email if anything comes up.

Email exchange finished, Victor breathed a sigh of relief. A sporting event seemed a much more palatable project than running the rink for a few days. He could have tried coaching, sure that Yakov would have been ok with him taking on a novice skater like Mila, but he worried that with his own competitions he wouldn’t have been an effective coach for somebody who still needed major skill development.

Victor set the laptop aside and reclined on the couch. Makkachin jumped up and laid her head on his torso. He scratched behind her ears as he recalled the important points.
They didn’t have any confirmed athletes, nor a venue, and hadn't even finalized a sport yet. All were areas in which Victor could help as he had the connections to make some things happen. He liked the idea of working with younger athletes as a way to show off their developing skills.

He hoped they didn’t argue against figure skating.

“Hi Yana,” Victor said as he strolled through the doors.

“Good evening Victor!” she called cheerily. “The normal?’”

“Sure.”

“Great. You’re a few minutes early, so I’ll let Sergei know you’re here.”

Victor looked around, but only saw a handful of businessmen sitting around the scattered tables.

Yana laughed. “He and Vasily are in the back doing some stocking for me. Sergei is my nephew. I’m sure I’ve told you about him.”

Victor blinked for several times. “Wait… he’s the nephew from Yekaterinburg? The one staying with you for school?”

Yana nodded, and Victor facepalmed. “I always imagined him as in high school.”

Yana laughed again. “Maybe that’s my fault. I still forget he’s in his twenties.”

Yana handed Victor his mug of tea. “Have a seat and I’ll get them.”

Victor smiled and moved to a table near the window. He set his bag on the floor and looked out at the headlights of passing cars.

“Victor?”

Victor turned to see two men his own age standing there. He stood and extended his hand.

“Vasily,” said the first, a blond man with hazel eyes and a sturdy build several centimeters taller than Victor.

Victor nodded and turned to Sergei, whose large brown eyes behind glasses and gentle face reminded him of Yuri, though he was also a couple centimeters taller than Victor.

“Sergei,” he said as he took Victor’s hand.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you both,” Victor said as they all took a seat.

Sergei placed his elbows on the table after Yana delivered tea for him and Vasily and studied Victor for several quiet moments.

Victor found that he couldn’t blame him, he would have done the same had the circumstances been reversed. He was asking to join in a final project, but none of his classmates had ever seen him.

“So? Tutors?” Sergei asked, breaking the silence.

Victor grinned. “Yes. My tutors worked with the professors to develop a curriculum that worked around my training schedule. You might be ahead on things from the past two months overall, but
I’m on track to finish sometime in the early summer after the season is over.”

“It must be hard to train all day then go home and study for classes that you didn’t attend.”

Victor nodded. “Sometimes, but we worked schooling into my breaks. So I get the lecture from the tutor at the rink, and work on the homework at night.”

“I’m surprised you continued to higher education,” Sergei said. “Is that normal?”

Victor shrugged. “It’s left to the athlete after minimum education requirements, but Yakov stresses that we all need long-term plans since most of us will retire before thirty. That’s one of the reasons that he insists the sports club keep tutors on staff. It gives us options.”

Sergei smiled. “I hope you’re not offended, but I asked the professor for this course about your work so far.”

Victor nodded. “Considering you’ve never seen me, it’s a reasonable precaution. The last thing you need is the celebrity classmate crashing your project for the grade but not being able to deliver.”

Sergei smiled softly at having his reasoning laid out so neatly. “Obviously he didn’t discuss your actual marks, but said that your work had been adequate and that it was probably a good idea to work with you if we still wanted to stage an event.”

Victor leaned forward. “So you’re still aiming for an event?”

“If we all think we can work together, then yes. Otherwise Vasily and I will come up with something different on our own.”

“Fair enough. So you mentioned younger athletes, did you have anything particular in mind?”

Both Sergei and Vasily shook their heads. “We’d decided to leave it open and see who would be willing to work with us, but we quickly realized that since we need to hold the event by late april in order to have it complete by the time final grades are due we needed to focus on either spring or indoor sports. We’d considered a track and field event as one of our best bets so far and working with several schools to showcase their athletes. We’re open to suggestions though.”

Victor hummed. A track and field event would be good, but he wondered what well-known names they could attract in order to draw a larger audience. He shook his head. He was overthinking it.

He was almost positive that Yakov would like to see an exhibition of the junior and novice skaters. Georgi was an up-and-coming name, just behind Ivan. He could also call on his former lover and see if he was willing to skate in an exhibition.

Victor facepalmed when he realized that he’d failed to include himself.

“Don’t even think about it,” Sergei said.

Victor looked up and blinked. “What?”

Sergei narrowed his eyes. “I just met you and can already see you’re scheming. We’re open to figure skating, we discussed it already as it was a likely sport for you to suggest. You can even put your name as a presenter since you have the name recognition, but you’d be on the sidelines the whole time. With only the three of us we need to all be focused on running the show, rather than being in it.”
Victor’s eyes widened slightly before he grinned. “Perfect!”

“Aw, I wanted to see him skate,” Vasily said.

“Graduate first,” Sergei said with an eyeroll.

Victor laughed, he liked the easy banter of his classmates, and how instead of counting on him to be the draw ordered him not to be.

“I can stay on the sidelines,” Victor said. “But how about I ask my rinkmate Georgi Popovich? He’s got a decent fanbase and regularly comes in as one of the best skaters in the country.”

Both Sergei and Vasily nodded.

“Do you have any leads on a rink?” Vasily asked.

Victor shrugged. “How big of an audience are we aiming for?”

“Few hundred?” Sergei offered. “Big enough to show we can handle it, but not so big as to be in over our heads.”

Victor held a finger to his lips. “Even for a small event we’ll need a staff. Lighting and sound, ticketing, marketing…”

Sergei and Vasily shared a glance, and grinned.

“I have a friend in the theater program,” Vasily said. “I bet they know somebody in need of some experience with a production for graduation.”

Sergei nodded. “I took a few extra marketing classes and have some contacts in the department. I don’t know what people in that field have for final projects, but if not a live campaign, this would be good experience for a resume.”

Victor looked between them. “So… we’re doing this?”

Both other men nodded.

Victor grinned. “Great! I’ll talk to Yakov, we’ll focus on novice and junior skaters, if that’s alright. That will keep the attendance lower, and we’ll toss in a couple larger names to flesh it out. I’ll start looking into rink space and timing once I’m back from China.”

“Are you sure you’ll have time for that around your own competition schedule?” Sergei asked.

Victor hummed. “What if I made initial contact, then passed it off to one of you for logistics?”

Sergei nodded. “I think that might be the best way to balance your training with the project at this stage.”

“Great!”

They discussed the project for a couple hours longer, deciding who would handle what before finally leaving the coffee shop long after closing.

Victor felt good, and was excited about the exhibition.
Arena lights reflected off the sequins of Victor’s costume, and applause thundered around him.

He was always excited for the first performance of a season, but this one was extra special. It was Alexei’s first piece as a composer. He wasn’t just skating for himself, or for his country, but was also showcasing the work of his brother.

He needed to show Alexei’s work in the best light.

The music started, gentle notes toward the low end of the piano, and Victor matched the tone in his small and questing movements. A chiming ring from the upper register like a star in the darkness.

Victor’s motions grew as the discoveries built to a crescendo, revealing the infinite wonders of the universe by the end of two and a half minutes. He held his ending pose, arms spread and face to the sky as the echo rang through the arena.

_Did they love it as much as I do?_

The audience roared to life.

Victor waved and picked up a poodle plush as he skated toward the barrier. Yakov handed over his skate guards and walked with him toward the kiss and cry.

“You’ve landed that quad salchow better in practice, and I know you could get a higher GOE on that sit spin.”

Victor smiled and waved to several fans.

“Are you even listening to me?”

“What? Of course I am Yakov. Clean up the salchow, and work on the spin.”

Yakov grumbled, but quickly quieted when the scores were posted. He’d skated a new personal best, scoring almost eighty points, and was ahead of both Kozuka and Joubert with only a few skaters left.

Cao Bin put up a respectable score for his first senior level event, but was unable to knock Victor from the top as he closed out the night.

Yakov patted Victor on the back as they walked toward the assembled press. “I know you want to know how your brother’s music was received. I just got a call from your press team. Social media is lighting up with people wondering about that piece, and the majority are calling it beautiful or stunning.”

Victor grinned.

“Focus on skating, and how you’ll stay strong in the free,” Yakov said as reporters approached. “Try not to gush too much about Alexei’s music.”

Victor nodded, put on his media smile and stepped toward the cameras.

Loose chiffon in striated colors billowed from Victor’s arms as he skated to center ice. The fabric had been dyed to match Jupiter, with reddish-orange lining on the inside of the cuffs to act as the famous red spot. The tan trousers were fitted, with a circular pattern running up the outside of the legs to symbolize the many moons of the giant planet.

Victor loved some of the photos of him skating in the outfit, his long hair seemed to only add to the
delicate beauty of the costume.

The music started, excited and questing. His movements kept a staccato feel as he built speed for his first spin.

Step sequence when the brass took over, choreographic to the gentle movement around the three minute mark. Jumps split fairly evenly between the first and second halves.

Overall it was a solid program, and it was reflected in the scores.

Unfortunately, Kozuka had edged him out, overtaking his lead from the short to take gold by less than a point.

Victor smiled and held up his silver medal, angry with himself for it being so close. He was greeted by his coach as soon as he stepped off the ice after the ceremony.

“Clean up the quad sal,” Yakov said. “You took a GOE deduction on the landing.”

“Da.”

“You’re only doing the minimum number of rotations on your spins, do you have the momentum to add?”

“Maybe if I build a bit more speed going in.”

“Let’s see if those changes will get you to gold in France.”

Victor nodded.

“It’s a good program Vitya. You can bring it up.”

Victor nodded again.

Victor didn’t know what to do, Yuri was pacing back and forth in his bedroom. It was Sunday in Japan, so he wasn’t concerned that the teen wasn’t on the ice, but the pacing was new.

Yuri?

Nicky! What do I do?

Victor was taken aback. What do you mean Yuri?

I’m… I’m skating to the same music as Victor.

So? People skate to the same music all the time. And you’re skating to different movements.

But what if people start comparing me to him. I’m nowhere near his level. My program will be a disappointment. What if they think I’m copying him.

Yuri… how can you copy him if you skated publicly first?

I don’t know, will people realize that?

Yuri. You’re overthinking this. It’s just music. It’s your interpretation that matters. Nobody will be disappointed if you skate true to yourself.
Yuri whined and continued to pace for several minutes until there was a scratching at his door. He opened it and Vicchan bounded in, jumping at his legs.

Yuri sat and the dog jumped into his lap and licked his face until he started to calm.

*Feel better?*

*A bit.***

*There’s nothing like a dog’s love for some perspective.*

*Yeah.*

*Vicchan doesn’t care that you’re skating to the same music as Victor, and he’ll support you no matter what... won’t he?*

*Yeah.*

*I’m the same Yuri. Your fans support you and see that you’re forging your own path. Anybody who wants to criticize over a music choice is being petty and not deserving of your attention.*

Yuri’s heart rate seemed to settle along with his nerves. Eventually Vicchan settled down for a nap in his lap.

*Are you making friends at your events?* Victor asked after several minutes.

*Huh?***

*Are you making friends? People who you’ll see at different events that you get along with and you can support each other.*

*I… um… I didn’t think about it?***

*You should try to make a few friends. It makes things better.*

*But... we’ll be competitors!*

*So? Victor and Chris Giacometti are practically tied at the hips during competition. They cheer for each other and even go sightseeing together. Then fight it out on the ice. They’re not the only ones. It’s ok to make friends and still be competitive with them.*

*Really?***

*Absolutely. Try saying hi to people in Moscow.*

*I’ll think about it.*

“Where’s Vasily?” Victor asked as he slid into the seat across from Sergei.

Sergei was silent as Yana placed a cup of tea in front of Victor, then spoke. “He’s sick. It’s nothing serious, but we decided that we didn’t want to take the chance of getting you sick in the middle of your competitions.”

Victor smiled and nodded. “Thank you. I have a fairly good immune system, but no reason to take risks.”
Sergei nodded. “So our project was approved, which means we really need to lay out what we need to do.”

Victor nodded. “Did your contacts in marketing and Vasily’s in theater pan out?”

Sergei nodded. “I’ve got a marketing major and graphic design major on board. Their advisors have approved their collaboration for their final projects. Vasily says he’s got a sound person and a light person who wanted to round out their resumes a bit before graduation and will do this for a share of the profits. I think he’s got a couple more in the wings if we need to worry about sets or props.”

Victor nodded. “That sounds good. Also, I spoke to my management team. They said that if we need we can consult the event specialist on staff.”

Sergei breathed a sigh of relief. “I was still a bit worried about getting in over our heads. It’s good to know that we have options for guidance outside of professors.”

Victor smiled. “They’re the ones who put me in contact with the smaller rinks, since we don’t need anything with seating capacity in the thousands.”

“I’m still shocked that you were able to get us in touch with a couple places before leaving for China.”

Victor grinned. “Well, we need to get some details finalized as soon as possible so that the kids have a chance to put together their programs if they decide to make new ones. Things like marketing can wait, but date and location are priorities.”

Sergei smiled softly at Victor. “You really want to show them in their best light, don’t you?”

Victor nodded. “Of course I do. They work hard but get so overshadowed by me and the other senior skaters. If we’re putting on a show for them I want them to feel good about their performances.”

“I have to say, you’re different than I expected from that first email.”

“Still surprised I’m not the celebrity who just wants to latch onto your project for a grade?” Victor teased.

Sergei laughed. “Yeah, something like that.”

“Chris! Lyosha!” Victor called, waving to his brother and best friend as they left the secure area of the Moscow airport.

Both men broke into huge grins at seeing him.

Victor embraced Alexei as soon as he was near enough. “Happy belated birthday Lyosha. I can’t believe you’re already twenty.”

Alexei smiled. “I’m still getting used to it.”

The trio headed toward baggage claim, chatting excitedly.

Victor spied a familiar long ponytail a few carousels down, and his eyes widened when he saw a mop of black hair.

Yuri...
“Excuse me,” Victor said as Chris and Alexei waited for the baggage to start arriving.

“Ok…” Chris said, a confused tone to his voice as Victor strode to the other carousel.

He knew better than to surprise Yuri, remembering how much he’d shocked the teen the year before. But his coach was fair game.

“Celestino!” Victor said cheerily.

The coach turned and smiled. “Hello Victor. What are you doing here? You’re not skating.”

Victor saw Yuri turn out of the corner of his eye then try to duck behind the collar of his jacket.

“The RSF added my rinkmate Georgi here after he was only seeded to one event. Chris is here too, I had to cheer for my friend while he’s in my home country.”

Celestino laughed. “I can see that.”

“Is that Yuri hiding behind you?”

Yuri yelped, and Celestino laughed. “It is.”

Victor peered around the coach, his long hair falling from his shoulders. “Good luck to you too Yuri.”

“Th… thank you,” Yuri mumbled.

Victor grinned and was about to ask Yuri to dinner when the teen bowed deeply. He blinked.

“I’m sorry,” Yuri muttered.

Victor blinked again. “For what?”

“I’m using the same music as you. I didn’t know.”

Oh Yuri…

Victor couldn’t help himself as he reached out and ruffled Yuri’s hair. He was surprised at how soft it was. “It’s just music, and it happens all the time that skaters use the same pieces. Don’t worry about it. Just go out there and show off your best version of it.”

Yuri turned his eyes up and a blush dusted over his cheeks. “Really? It’s ok?”

Victor grinned. “Of course it is.”

“See Yuri,” the coach said jovially. “I told you it was nothing to worry about.”

Yuri nodded sheepishly.

Victor grinned. “So will you be joining us for dinner this year?”

“Huh?” Yuri asked, eyes growing wide.

“Chris, my brother and I. The invitation is still open.”

Yuri shook his head vigorously. “I couldn’t intrude.”
Victor sighed. “Well the invitation is open if you change your mind. It’s good to relax before a competition.”

Yuri mumbled thanks and shrank in on himself again.

Celestino gave Victor a sympathetic look that said more than words could. *Thanks for trying.*

Victor nodded at the coach. “I need to get back to Chris and my brother. I’ll cheer for you Yuri.”

“Thank you,” the teen mumbled again.

Victor spared another glance before heading back to where Chris and Alexei were waiting.

*Please Yuri, open up to me as me. I don’t want to be Nicky to you forever.*

Victor could see the impact of the pole dance classes as soon as Chris started to sway to the jazz. The Swiss skater already had a silver medal from Skate Canada and was expected to do well in Moscow as well.

*Chris gold and Yuri silver. That would be perfect. We could all be at the final together.*

Victor smiled as Chris moved. The arrangement suited him perfectly, and Alexei grinned like a fool throughout.

“Does it feel that good?”

Alexei nodded. “Seeing him move to my arrangement is fantastic, though watching you two weeks ago was even better.”

“You’ll see me live next week in France.”

Alexei nodded again. “I can’t wait.”

“Will you be able to join us in Beijing for the final?”

Alexei shook his head. “Sorry, it’s finals week. There’s no way I can get away.”

“Finals…” Victor mused. “Does that mean a concert too?”

Alexei nodded. “I wish you could be there.”

“Oh Lyosha, me too. I’d love to see you play.”

There was a moment of silence. “Vitya?”

“Yes?”

“I… I’m going to try for the Tchaikovsky Competition.”

Victor’s eyes widened. “Really?”

Alexei nodded. “I haven’t told Mama or Papa yet, I wanted to tell you first. They’ve been pushing for it though.”

Victor threw his arms around his brother. “Oh Lyosha, I’m sure you’ll get in.”
“I’ll send in my application this spring, but I know I need to be prepping now.”

“Just let me know where and when you’ll be performing, and I’ll be there.”

“Cellists are here in Moscow next year.”

“I’ll look at the competition dates when I get home then and make hotel reservations.”

“Vitya!” Alexei protested. “I don’t even know if I’ll get in yet!”

“I can cancel the reservations, and better to get them now than later. But I won’t need to cancel, because you’ll get in.”

The music ended, and both Victor and Alexei cheered for Chris. Alexei tossed a Persian cat plush to his friend.

“A cat?”

“His mom’s allergic, but he loves them. He says he’ll probably get one when he moves out over the summer.”

Victor smiled, and cheered politely as Georgi skated to center ice.

“I know it was you who tossed the Persian plush,” Chris purred as he took a seat next to Alexei. “You’re the only one I’ve told exactly what type of cat I want.”

Alexei laughed and squirmed out of his friend’s embrace. “Consider it something to tide you over until you can get a real one.”

Chris smiled. “Thank you. Though you know you don’t need to throw tokens.”

Alexei shrugged. “I like to though.”

The crowd cheered and they were still bantering when the opening notes of Lohengrin wafted through the arena. Victor’s gaze snapped around to see Yuri on the ice.

Victor wondered if talking to the teen at the airport had been the right idea. He didn’t show the confidence he had in Japan. His movements were timid, as if he was afraid of making a mistake.

_Yuuuuuri, your program is so much more expressive than this. Where are you?_

The piece ended without Yuri making any mistakes, but his scores reflected how Victor felt. He’d been lost and overwhelmed out there.

“Vitya?”

Victor turned to his brother and smiled. “Shall we go get dinner after this?”

“Ok.”

Chris was silent, but Victor could feel his friend’s eyes on him.

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The music started, and Victor could see that whatever had brought Yuri down for the short program was still weighing on him. Rather than the winged messenger that Mercury was supposed to symbolize, he seemed more a penguin on the ice. Graceful in his own way, but not flying.
Maybe I shouldn’t have talked to him. I’ll have to email him as Nicky and try to find out what’s bothering him.

Despite the heavy feel, Yuri still skated beautifully. His step sequence was clean, and he had two level three spins and a level four.

Unfortunately it wasn’t enough, and Victor knew that Yuri wouldn’t make the final that year. He didn’t have time to feel sorry for the teen though, as Chris was in the same final group and was only a few performances away.

Victor kept hoping to see Yuri take a spot in the audience, but had to stop looking when the crowd cheered for Chris as he stepped onto the ice, wearing a black blazer with sequined green tie and lapels that matched his eyes.

Almost immediately the Swiss skater moved into his choreographic sequence, but Victor could see how it worked with the long intro of the jazzy piece. When the singing started he transitioned to build speed for several jumps and two of his spins.

Step sequence to the sax solo, then more technical elements to the singing again at the end, with his final component being the flying sit spin.

The audience loved it. It was smooth seduction on ice, and Victor cheered for his friend.

By the end of the night Yuri was in seventh, just one spot behind Georgi. Chris took gold and secured his place at the final.

After the medal ceremony both Alexei and Victor were waiting for Chris when Victor spotted Yuri trying to make a silent escape.

“Yuri…” he called.

Yuri turned to look at him, a pained sort of disappointment in his eyes.

Oh Yuri…

“Good luck at Nationals,” Victor finally said as he fought back the urge to reveal himself. He knew it wasn’t the time.

Yuri’s eyes widened slightly and he nodded before shuffling off.

“Vitya? Isn’t that the boy you went to Japan to see?”

Victor nodded at his brother.

“Why is he running away?”

Victor sighed. “I wish I knew…”

Victor was asleep, pleasantly buzzed after celebrating with Chris. But Yuri was awake.

Nicky.

What’s wrong Yuri? You’re in Moscow aren’t you? Shouldn’t you be asleep by now?

I don’t know if I can do this.
What? Sleep?

I... I made a fool of myself. Victor is in Moscow to support Chris... and he spoke to me, said he would cheer for me. I... I'm not ready. I'm not good enough to face him.

Of course you are Yuri.

But I'm not. He skates so beautifully, and he has two quads and I have none. He's amazing... and I know he was just being polite when he said he would cheer for me. But I was terrified I'd fail horribly.

Did you?

Fail? Yes. I came in seventh.

There were twelve skaters right?

Yes.

Sounds like you came in right around the middle.

But...

Yuri, Victor cut him off. I watched your performances. You didn't fall, you didn't make any big mistakes. In fact I can only point to one thing that kept your scores down.

What... what was it?

You didn't believe in yourself. You were so worried about failing that you skated scared, and it showed. Everybody falls, everybody makes mistakes. Don't be afraid of them, learn from them.

Victor doesn't make mistakes.

Everybody makes mistakes, including Victor.

But...

Trust me Yuri. Even Victor makes mistakes. If you want to face him though you have to believe in yourself. You'll never rise to his level if you convince yourself that you're not good enough. Can you do that Yuri?

How can he ever take me seriously now?

Same way he takes everybody else seriously. Show him your skating, the skating I know you're capable of. Look at this as a warmup, getting used to skating at the senior level, and come back next year stronger for it. Ok?

Ok.

"Again Vitya!" Yakov demanded. "We leave for France tomorrow. Don't make me regret allowing you to go to Moscow."

"Yes Coach."

Victor rounded the rink and launched his quad salchow. He felt the wobble on the landing, but knew
it was his best attempt that day.

“Stop!” Yakov called. “Take a break. We’ll work on bringing up the GOE of your spins after lunch.”

“Da.”

Victor skated to the edge of the rink, wiped his sweat, then tossed the towel over his shoulder.

“Aunt Yana sent this…”

Victor looked up to see Sergei standing just off to the side, a soft smile on his face and a steaming cup of tea in his hand.

Victor startled before smiling. He accepted the cup and took a sip, it was perfect.

“She said Yakov always works you hard right before a competition.”

“No harder than I work myself.”

Victor moved to a bench and started to unlace his skates. “I’m on my way to lunch. Do you want to join me?”

“Oh I don’t want to intrude.”

Victor paused then looked up. “The only thing you’d be intruding on is solitude. I think it’s ok.”

“Are you sure?”

Victor nodded.

Sergei smiled. “Ok… I think I’d like that.”

“Great. I need to shower, but can meet you in the lobby in fifteen.”

“Sounds good.”

Victor leaned on the railing of the hotel balcony looking out over Paris, hair streaming behind him. He’d been so busy between training and working on the exhibition that he hadn’t had a chance to really think of much else, but the moment of solitude allowed his thoughts to intrude.

He thought about Yuri, so light on his feet at the NHK Trophy, but burdened by the expectations in his own head in Moscow. The guilt weighed heavily on him. Would the Japanese teen have performed better if he hadn’t known that Victor was watching?

The thought pained him. He wanted to see Yuri succeed, he wanted to cheer for him as Victor, not Nicky, and know that the teen felt he deserved the praise. His skating was beautiful and Victor wanted the world to see it.

But in order to do that, he’d have to back off as Victor, and allow Yuri to come to him. If his very presence made Yuri that nervous, so anxious that he couldn’t do his best, then the only way to help him was to leave him alone.

Victor sighed heavily.
“Such heavy thoughts,” Chris purred as he wrapped his arms around Victor’s waist from behind and laid his chin on his shoulder. “Keep thinking like that and you won’t be able to fly tomorrow.”

Victor leaned his head against his friend. “How do you know what I’m thinking?”

“I don’t, but I’ve known you for a long time now. The way you’re draped over the balcony, the slump of your shoulders, and definitely that sigh. Those weren’t happy thoughts.”

Victor sighed again. “You’re right…”

“Care to share?”

Victor thought about it a minute. “Did you interact with Katsuki much in Moscow?”

“The kid from Japan?” Chris asked, a surprised tone to his voice. “No, he mostly kept to himself. Why?”

“I know he’s a fan of mine, and I’ve been following his career for a few years now. I tried asking him to join us for dinner again in Moscow. But he refused. Did he seem to be friendly with anybody?”

“He was friendly with anybody who talked to him, but if you mean a friend, then no.”

Victor sighed.

“Why are you so worried about him?”

For a moment Victor thought about it, about telling Chris everything: dreamwalking, Yuri, the way he was posing as another person in his dreams to help the other skater.

His mother’s warning about talking about his gift came back to him.

Victor shook his head. “Don’t worry about it. Are you ready to get some dinner?”

“Yes…”

“That was beautiful Vitya!” Alexei cried as he glomped his brother. “I can’t believe you used my music to make art like that.”

Victor hugged Alexei back. “I couldn’t have done it without your music Lyosha.”

Victor waved to Chris who was sitting in the stands, then the brothers made their way to the kiss and cry to wait for Victor’s scores.

“The landing of the quad sal was better,” Yakov grunted. “I don’t think you’ll take a deduction at least. Let’s bring up the GOE by the final.”

“Nothing about the spins?” Victor teased.

“The judges are blind if they don’t award extra points. You added rotations and a difficult change of foot.”

Victor grinned and clung to his brother as they waited for his scores to post.

Both Victor and Alexei cheered and hugged. Victor had brought up his scores several points for
another personal best at just over eighty-three points, widening his lead over Kozuka going into the free.

Chris leaned over Alexei’s shoulder and whistled. “How long have you been selling it?”

Alexei rubbed his neck as he thought. “About a week and a half? It took me a bit of time after Vitya’s skate in China to set up the artist stuff.”

“What are you talking about?” Victor asked, running a towel over his hair as he strode from the bathroom.

“Look how much money your brother had already made on your short program song.”

Victor peered over Alexei’s free shoulder. “I knew everybody would love it.”

“I put it up on YouTube and enabled ads too, for the people who want to listen but might not want to buy yet.”

“Seems like a solid plan,” Victor said as he stood.

“You’re arrangement of Take Five is also pretty popular, yes?” Chris asked.

Alexei nodded then closed the laptop, he turned to face both other men. He stood and hugged them both. “Thank you.”

Victor hugged his brother tight. “Of course, but for what?”

“You two believed in me, without question. Not only did you support my desire to become a composer, but you actively encouraged it. You took my music and showed it to the world. You made my dream your own, and made it come true. I might be just starting out, but people are already asking for more, and it’s because of you.”

Victor and Chris both hugged Alexei even harder.

Victor returned to St. Petersburg happy, with a gold medal in hand and his brother’s song becoming more and more popular by the day.

He’d managed to hold out the lead over Kozuka, even though the Japanese skater had brought up his own scores an additional few points.

He and Chris would face Japan’s top three skaters, and one from France in the final.

“Congratulations,” Sergei said softly as he took a seat across from Victor at the table.

“Yes!” Vasily chimed in. “Another gold for Russia’s top skater.”

Victor smiled. “Thank you.”

Yana set steaming mugs of tea in front of the trio, and ruffled his hair before returning to the counter to help another customer.

“So… good news,” Sergei said after a minute.

“Oh?” Victor asked.
“We finalized a date for the exhibition. Vasily and I knew it had to be after Worlds, but still early enough to be relevant. It’ll be April fourth, which is a Monday, but that should also keep attendance manageable since the venue is larger than we’d have liked.”

Victor leaned against his hand and laughed. “It’s still going to feel downright tiny to me.”

“Says the man who thinks a five thousand seat arena is on the smallish side.”

“Hey, it’s under a thousand seats. Meanwhile I just skated in front of a crowd of twelve thousand, of course it’s tiny.”

Sergei rolled his eyes. “Anyway… Is that date ok Victor, or do we need to move it?”

Victor hummed. “Worlds ends on the twenty-seventh of March, gives me a few days to get back and deal with the press. It’ll be tight, but I don’t think I want to let it get much later. We should use the momentum from Worlds, especially since I plan to bring home another medal.”

“That was our thinking as well. I’ll confirm with the venue,” Sergei said as he made a note on a paper. “Are you sure about handling the deposit?”

Victor nodded. “My accountant said I can handle it… he then promptly started badgering me about making a company under my own name so that non-skating expenses like this can be classified better.”

“We can see if there’s any money in the department budget to help,” Sergei offered. “I mean we need this to be successful to graduate, which would mean we could pay back from admissions.”

Victor waved the concern away. “Don’t worry about it. He’s been badgering me to form a company around my name for a while, so have my managers. It just was the thing that pushed me over that edge.”

Sergei sighed. “I just don’t want you to think we’re taking advantage of you.”

Victor laughed. “You two are doing a lot of work so that my training doesn’t take a hit.”

“So are you!” Vasily retorted. “You put us in contact with venues, and have started to pull together an athlete list…”

Victor smiled. “But you two are still doing more than I am. You’re visiting locations to strategize, talking to the other coaches to get kids that aren’t under Yakov to perform…”

“And we wouldn’t have any of that without the help you’ve given,” Sergei replied. “We’re a team on this.”

Victor smiled again.

______________________________

Victor stepped over and tugged Chris’s costume until it sat better on his friend. In return Chris brushed Victor’s hair and tied it back.

They heard hurried Japanese from the other end of the locker room as Kozuka, Takahashi and Oda prepared. They tried to engage the French skater, Amodio, but didn’t have much to talk to him about and quickly focused on themselves.

“I’m taking you down Victor,” Chris teased as he patted the Russian’s shoulder.
“Only if you mean down to that hot pot place we passed earlier.” Victor shot back.

There was a knock at the locker room door and an attendant poked his head in. “It’s time. Warmup in five minutes. Your coaches are waiting.”

The men all stood. Victor hugged Chris. “Good luck.”

“You too.”

Yakov fell in line next to Victor and Josef next to Chris as they made their way to the freshly resurfaced ice.

*Next year Yuri... I'll face you here next year... right?*

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

So... Svetlana... I'm turning her into Victor's version of Morooka, a recognizable reporter in the crowd who he knows is friendly. (also her name is the same as a Russian Special Olympics athlete. This wasn't planned, but I tend to google names now just to make sure since I once accidentally used the name of a famous author in one of my own works. And now you know.)

As to the exhibition, well I'm sure many of you have seen ShySweetThing's meta on Victor being a financial genius. (if not, click [here](http://archiveofourown.org/works/11371512), it's worth a read). I really liked some of the points she laid out, and I was at the point in the story where Victor needs to start making bank. Not to mention that it really fits with his major... and accomplishes some other goals. So I went for it.

And I'm so proud of Alexei, he's doing so well.

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at [phoenixwaller.tumblr.com](http://archiveofourown.org/users/phoenixwaller/profile)

Find my other YoI fanfics (including the still relatively new Private Photos on my AO3 profile at [http://archiveofourown.org/users/phoenixwaller/profile](http://archiveofourown.org/users/phoenixwaller/profile))

Looking for something new and ORIGINAL from me? I've started posting my novel, The Tower at [http://archiveofourown.org/works/11371512](http://archiveofourown.org/works/11371512). It's centered around Sheryl Callaghan, the newest contestant on the deadly reality game show of the same name.
“Congratulations Victor!”

Victor blushed as he walked into Yana’s coffeeshop to the cheers of his friends. “Guys, it was just a silver,” he said, trying to deflect some of the energy.

“Nonsense!” Vasily retorted. “You took a silver medal in a competition of the six best male figure skaters in the world. Seems a pretty good achievement to me.”

Sergei nodded. “I agree. There are thousands of figure skaters worldwide, and you put in a performance that earned you a silver medal. It’s not a small achievement.”

Victor took his seat at their normal table, draping his jacket over the back of a chair. “Still… Who would have thought Oda would have come out of nowhere to take gold? I’d had scores above him so far all season and I thought that Kozuka was the one to watch out for.”

Sergei put his hand on Victor’s shoulder. “It’s still early in the season through, right?”

Victor nodded. “Nationals in a few weeks. Europeans right after that, then Worlds in March.”

Sergei sat in the chair next to Victor. “So you have time to bring up your scores and take gold later in the season.”

Victor smiled softly. “Yeah, I guess I do.”

They spent a moment organizing their notes before Victor spoke again. “Ok, catch me up.”

Vasily leaned forward. “Sergei and I realized we’d need more people used to the production aspect. I had to drop your name…”

Victor waved off the concern.
“... but a couple of professors in the theater department gave their approval for this to count as a final project for their students. We’ve got two people on sound now, four on lighting, three on backstage support, two makeup, and a handful of people who are whizzes with the front of house stuff like ticketing and ushering.”

Victor grinned.

“My marketing friends have a couple poster mockups for us now that we know the dates,” Sergei said, pulling out a folder. “Though besides you as a big name on the production team, we probably need a few photos of skaters to give the posters some oomph.”

Victor nodded and looked over the layouts. After several minutes the trio had agreed on three favorites.

“I was thinking…” Sergei started. “That girl who was on the magazine cover with you…”

“Mila!” Victor added enthusiastically.

Sergei nodded. “She has recognition from that, and is just adorable. I think she’d make a good poster model.”

Victor grinned. “I’ll talk to her mother and Yakov about it.”

Sergei smiled softly.

Vasily leaned back. “This is a much bigger undertaking than we’d originally thought.”

Victor laughed. “I think it’s coming together nicely. I’m glad we’ve got production teams on hand though. It lets us be where we need to be, with the athletes. We need to make sure that they can warm up properly, and stay ready as they wait. Most will be used to it, but they’re ultimately our focus.”

Sergei nodded, then pulled another folder from his bag. “Vasily and I have been looking over the anticipated expenses so that we can work on determining ticket prices. We’ve got the rink fees, marketing materials, any props…”

“Medical team,” Victor added.

Sergei hit his forehead with his palm. “How could we forget that?” He made a quick note on the page.

Victor smiled. “The kids will have their own costumes, so unless we want to organize a group performance where they all need to wear the same thing we don’t have to worry about that.”

“Should we do that?” Vasily asked.

Victor hummed. “I think not. That way they can focus on their own performances. But maybe Yakov knows of a coach with a synchronized skating team that would fill that gap.”

Sergei nodded and made a note.

Victor reached into his own bag and pulled a piece of paper free. “While I was in China I thought about a few things of my own. I looked up decent rates for production and marketing staff, as well as what we should pay the skaters.”

Both Sergei and Vasily looked at Victor, confusion in their eyes.
“I thought the theater and marketing students were doing this to build resumes,” Vasily finally said.

Victor waved off the statement. “Paid work looks better than unpaid. If we’re smart about ticketing prices we’ll be able to pay everybody and make a small profit for ourselves.”

“We need to keep it low for families,” Sergei argued.

Victor nodded. “I thought about that. I think we can give each skater a ticket allotment, and still have plenty leftover to charge for. There’s enough seating to do that.”

Sergei sighed. “You’re right, there’s no reason to not fill all the available seats, even if it’s more than we’d originally planned for.”

“You’d also originally seemed to plan to do everything yourselves,” Victor argued.

“True,” Vasily said with a laugh. “Maybe for a track and field event that would have been possible, but this does take more.”

Victor shook his head. “You’d have always needed a staff, whether it was student volunteers or hired help. Just because you learned a lot of the basics from textbooks doesn’t mean you could be everywhere at once.”

Sergei sighed. “You’re right. I’m starting to see why the professor said that working with you would be good. You’ve brought the experience of having at least seen behind the scenes at an event like this.”

Victor smiled and squeezed Sergei’s shoulder. “Let’s discuss ticketing, shall we? That way we have that all ironed out by the time we get ready for the next phase.”

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Yuri felt stiff on the ice, and Victor could practically feel him vibrating with nerves.

*Yuri, what’s wrong?*

*Nationals are coming up.*

*And?*

*There’s no way I can win Nicky. I don’t have a quad. Kozuka, Takahashi and Oda are all putting up high scores. I can’t compete.*

*Yuri… breathe.*

Yuri skidded to a stop in the middle of his short program and took several deep breaths.

*Is Coach Celestino coming from the US for Nationals?*

*Yes. He’ll fly directly from the Italian Nationals, where he has another student. But it’ll be close, only two days of practice with him.*

*Where’s the assistant coach who’d been here during the grand prix series?*

*Germany. It’s time for their nationals too.*
I’m nervous Nicky. Everybody got used to me winning. But that was in Juniors. What if I’m no good at the senior level?

Yuri, you’re already good. You came in fourth at the NHK, and sixth in Moscow.

But I didn’t win them.

You will, I know it. Trust me Yuri, you’re amazingly talented. You’ll face off against Victor before you know it.

I’m so far from his level though. He’ll probably just laugh at me.

Victor felt slightly insulted at the suggestion. Has he ever laughed at you before?

No.

Then why would he laugh when you do face him?

Because it’ll be different then.

How?

It just will be.

The door opened and a large man strolled in. “Nishigori!” Yuri called excitedly.

That’s Nishigori? Victor couldn’t hide his shock.

Yeah, he stayed big.

Wow.

Yuri skated to the barrier. “How are Yuko and the girls?”

Nishigori smiled and pulled out his phone. “They’re all doing good Yuri. The girls are growing so fast and are just adorable.”

Yuri accepted the phone, then waited. “Nishigori… glasses?”

The older man laughed and grabbed Yuri’s glasses from the cart. “Sorry.”

Yuri perched the glasses on his nose then swiped through the photos of an exhausted Yuko surrounded by the three infants. Once he’d reached the end of the newest photos he handed back the phone and removed his glasses again.

“I’m sorry I haven’t been by very often.”

Nishigori clapped Yuri on the back. “You’re busy with training. Just don’t forget about us.”

Yuri smiled and nodded. He then paused and seemed contemplative. “Is the rumor true?”

Nishigori blinked then laughed. “Can’t keep secrets in towns this small. Yeah, it’s true. The transfer will happen sometime over the summer we think.”

Yuri looked across the ice then up to the rafters. “I can’t believe it. Yuko’s parents gave you two the
“Well... partially for now. They’ll be co-owners for a while. But they’re leaving management to us once the girls get a bit older. I’m already taking over some of it.”

“Can you handle it? I mean… You’re nineteen and Yuko is twenty. It’s a big job.”

“That’s why they’re easing us in. Yuko’s got classes still, though she’s cutting back. I’ve got classes too. But they think we can handle it.”

“Let me know if I can help? I mean… I know there’s not much, but maybe my junior worlds win still counts for something.”

“We’ll let you know!” Nishigori said with a laugh and another clap on the back. “I need to get back and relieve Yuko so she can have a nap. Come by and see us soon though.”

“I will.”

Nishigori waved as he left the rink.

Yuri took a moment to drink some water as he was already at the barrier.

_Nishigori seems mellower._

_Yeah, marrying Yuko calmed him down some, and he’s really grown up fast with the girls. He dotes on them, and it’s obvious that he loves being a father._

Victor was surprised to feel a twinge of jealousy as he thought of his own family.

_Nicky?_

_Yeah?_

_Can we work on the quad once Minako gets back?_

_Of course._

“Georgi, can I talk to you?”

Georgi skidded to a stop near where Victor was leaned against the barrier. “Need me to hold the rope for your quads again?”

Victor smiled. “Maybe later if you’re offering.”

Georgi rolled his eyes. “What’s up?”

“Have you heard about my senior project for college?”

“ Heard something about a project, but don’t know anything about it.”

“I’m putting on an exhibition with a couple of classmates.”

“Of course you are,” Georgi sighed. “Lemme guess, need makeup help?”
Victor laughed. “No! I want you to be one of the headliners.”

Georgi promptly choked on air. “What did you say?”

“Be a headliner in my exhibition.”

“What about you?”

“It’s my final project, and my major is sports management. I’ll be needed elsewhere.”

“So you want me to skate cause you’ll be too busy?”

“I want you to skate because you’re one of the best male figure skaters in the country, and we still need a headliner. It’ll pay, not a huge amount but a bit.”

Georgi chewed on his lower lip as he thought about it. “I need more details.”

Victor nodded. “It’s primarily a showcase for the younger skaters, novices and juniors, but with a handful of larger names to draw a crowd.”

“Who else you have?”

“Besides the kiddos? Last year’s fourth place in senior ladies. The show is small enough that I don’t think we’ll have the budget for any more big names.”

Georgi hummed. “What’s the catch?”

“My name is pretty prominent as a producer credit.”

“But you’re not skating?”

Victor shook his head.

Georgi nodded. “I’ll probably do it, but give me a couple days to consider.”

“Ok!”

Victor waved to the crowds in Saransk as he took the ice. Applause thundered through the arena, and grew louder when the announcer named the piece and the composer.

Russian audiences loved that he was skating to a piece composed by his brother, and sales of the music skyrocketed from fans wanting to support the fledgling composer.

Victor allowed the music to fill him as he skated, and before he knew it he’d turned in a flawless performance. Yakov only criticized a couple of things at the kiss and cry, then it was a stint through the media gauntlet.

Victor wanted to get to the hotel and go to sleep early. He needed to check in on Yuri. The day about to dawn in Japan was that of the teen’s free skate, and he wanted to reassure him before nerves had a chance to set in.

Eventually Victor collapsed on the bed, and rode the high of his performance to connect to Yuri.

Yuri paced in his own hotel room as the soft light of dawn filtered through the windows.
Yuuuuuri. Did you sleep?

Yes... No... Maybe? I laid down, but I can’t remember if I actually slept.

When is your morning practice?

Not for several more hours.

Bed. Now.

But I can’t sleep.

Doesn’t matter. Lay down and close your eyes. Your coach will get you before practice.

Yuri made a frustrated noise, but laid down.

You need to rest Yuri. And don’t worry so much. Your friends and family will support you regardless. Remember them, skate for them, and for you. Skate because you love it.

Yuri’s breathing evened and Victor felt the connection start to weaken.

Nicky?

Yes?

How did Victor do, do you know?

He’s in first after his short program.

Thanks...

Victor secured yet another gold medal at nationals only two days after his twenty-second birthday.

Somehow the win was overshadowed by Yuri’s inability to recognize his own achievement. The Japanese teen had come in fourth in his own nationals, right behind Takahashi, Kozuka and Oda; three skaters that even Victor seemed to trade places with on the podium.

If Yuri had a quad he would have been competitive with them. As it was he was still double digits ahead of the fifth place finisher.

However, no matter how much Nicky tried to tell him otherwise, the teen worried that he wasn’t good enough and that he was disappointing his family.

Eventually Victor was able to redirect Yuri’s anxiety into the dogged determination that he knew he was capable of. If he worried that he wasn’t good enough, then the only answer was to get better. They drilled the quad in the days after their respective finals, until Yuri at least had the rotations, even if he didn’t have the landing.

“I’m fine Yakov,” Victor argued as he fumbled with his skate laces. Even he knew how bad he sounded with a head full of snot.
The coach made a noise and pressed his hand to Victor’s forehead. “You’re not fine. Go home.”

“I can’t afford to miss a day of practice so close to Europeans. We leave in two days.”

“You can when I’m pulling you.”

Victor’s head shot up. “You can’t pull me!”

Yakov crossed his arms. “I can, and I am. The full symptoms haven’t hit you yet, but the way you’re stuffed up and that fever…. You’ve got the flu Vitya. Now go home before everybody else here gets sick.”

“But…”

“It’s going to get worse before it gets better. Trust me, at least this once. You’re in no condition to skate, and if you push yourself now you’ll only have less energy to fight this later.”

Victor started to protest, but instead ended up coughing.

“Listen Vitya, worlds is more important. You’re probably going to be out for a week or more, so go home now and start fighting this thing off before that turns longer. We’ll have to work that much harder when you get back.”

Victor clenched his fists, then relented as he started coughing again.

Yakov nodded as Victor pulled his skates off. “I’ll stop by your apartment tonight to check on you. And just in case you’re thinking of arguing… I’m going to my office now to have the RSF call up the alternate.”

Victor’s shoulders drooped as he removed his skates and put them back into his bag. He had to admit that he felt horrible, and with Yakov pulling him from Europeans he had no excuse for not resting.

Yakov grunted approval as Victor passed him in the lobby.

The sun was just starting to climb over the horizon as he walked back along the street toward his apartment.

“Victor?”

Victor looked up to see Yana. She was taking advantage of the clear weather to clean the windows of the coffee shop.

“Hi Yana.”

“Shouldn’t you be at the rink?”

Victor started to shake his head, coughed, then finally shook it. “Yakov sent me home, he seems to think I have the flu.”

The older woman stepped up to Victor, held her hand in front of his face, and when he didn’t pull back set the back of it against his forehead. “You’ve got a fever. And with that cough, he’s probably right. Wait right there and I’ll get you a peppermint tea, it’ll soothe your throat.”

Victor nodded and reached for his wallet.

Yana waved away the concern before he could pull it out. “On the house.”
Victor nodded again, and realized how quickly his energy was dwindling. He leaned against the wall while waiting for Yana, and accepted the tea gratefully when she handed it to him.

“Let me know if you need anything, ok kiddo? I’ve known you since you were a novice skater needing something warm to drink, you’re practically one of my own now.”

“Thanks Yana.”

“Go home, bundle up and get better.”

Victor nodded and trudged along the street toward home, craving the warmth of his bed more with each step.

Victor awoke to knocking on his door. He managed to dredge himself from bed, wondering who it was.

*Yakov has a key…*

Victor opened the door to see Sergei standing there, holding a large pot.

Victor blinked a couple times. “Sergei?” he croaked before wincing at how rough his voice sounded.

The other man smiled shyly. “Aunt Yana says you have the flu. I brought some soup.”

Victor didn’t know what to say, so he opened his door and stood aside so that Sergei could walk in with the pot.

Sergei took one look at Victor as soon as he set the pot on the stove and promptly ordered Victor back to bed with the statement that he’d bring soup once it was warm.

Victor instead decided to settle in on the couch for a bit and had turned the television to the local news when Sergei brought the soup.

“My little sister got sick all the time when we were kids,” Sergei said as he handed it over. “It’s not much, more chicken broth than anything, but I used to make this for her and it would always help her feel better.”

“You made this?” Victor croaked after swallowing a warming spoonful.

Sergei nodded and blushed. “Aunt Yana told me your parents live in Switzerland, and that you live alone. I hated the thought of you being all by yourself when sick.”


“Make sure to eat up, it’ll help you fight off the virus.”

Victor nodded and sipped another spoonful.

“Do you have containers in the kitchen?”

Victor nodded. “To the right under the sink.”

“I need to take back Aunt Yana’s pot, but I’ll portion out what’s left so all you have to do is reheat it
if I’m not here.”

Victor blinked tiredly. “If? You’re not leaving right away?”

Sergei smiled. “I told you, I hate the thought of you being by yourself when you’re sick.”

“But I don’t want you to get sick,” Victor protested. The warm soup in his belly was making him sleepy again.

“I had a flu shot. I should be ok.”

“I had one too.”

“Before your season started?”

Victor nodded.

“Since then you’ve been to China twice, France, Moscow and Saransk. You’ve been potentially exposed with thousands of people. Meanwhile I got my shot only about a month ago, and it was a second run vaccine that was more fine-tuned for the season.”

Victor made a face and the other man sighed. “Look. It’s my risk to take. I know you’re an athlete, but the flu still kills people.”

Victor frowned.

“I’ll wear a mask if it'll make you feel better.”

Victor was too tired and sore to argue, and relented at the minimal protection. His eyelids were heavy, and as Sergei moved back to the kitchen to put away the soup he fell asleep on the couch.

Nicky?

Sorry Yuri… I won’t be able to be around for a few days…

Are you ok? I can barely feel you.

I have the flu. I’ll talk to you again when I get better…

Ok…

Victor was so hot, the blankets were stifling. Then there was something cool and refreshing against his face. He managed to open his eyes. Sergei knelt in front of him, wet washcloth in hand.

“Are you ok?” Sergei asked.

“Hot…”

Sergei dabbed at his face with the cool cloth again before wringing it out, and folding it to place on his forehead.
Victor laid back against the cushions as the other man disappeared.

“Victor? Do you have any painkillers?”

“Bathroom vanity.”

Sergei returned a couple minutes later with two pills and a large glass of water. “Take these. It’ll help with the fever. I looked through your medicine cabinet, but you really don’t have much to help with the symptoms. I’m going to go to the pharmacist down the street and get some things for you.”

“You don’t have to…”

Sergei smiled. “You can repay me later.”

The sound of his door opening, and voices. Victor realized he’d fallen asleep again.

“You’re one of the people working with Vitya on his class project, da?” Yakov asked.

“Yes, sir.” Victor took a moment before placing the voice to Sergei.

“Thank you for being here with him. That boy is stubborn and I half expected to see him back at the rink this afternoon.”

“He’s been asleep most of the day that I could tell. Aunt Yana said he didn’t look great this morning, but I have the feeling it hit him hard and fast.”

“Probably been ignoring symptoms for a couple days. He’s never had the flu on my watch, but there have been several colds that he’s underestimated…”

Victor chuckled before falling asleep again.

Victor’s muscles ached, whether from being asleep on the couch or from the virus he couldn’t tell. He opened his eyes. The room was dark, moonlight streaming through the window. Sergei was asleep in a chair by the window, thin blanket draped over him.

Something about the sight made Victor’s breath catch in his throat. He watched the other man sleep for several minutes before he noticed a tremble, a shiver in the cool air that the blanket didn’t do much to fend off.

Victor carefully stood and made his way to the bedroom. He pulled a heavier blanket from the closet and carried it back to where Sergei slept. He draped it over the other man. He was about to relocate to his room when he saw the glasses precariously perched on Sergei’s nose. He plucked them off and set them on the side-table before they could tumble to the floor.

Victor thought about going back to bed, but the dried sweat from the fever made him feel gross. Instead he went into the bathroom and drew a steaming tub.

He’d just eased into the water when he heard a knock on the door. “Are you ok?”

Victor smiled. “Yeah, thank you. I needed a bath.”
“Let me know if you need anything.”

Victor thought about it for a minute. “Actually, some tea would be nice.”

“I’ll heat some water.”

Breathing the steam felt good, and the hot water soothed Victor’s aching muscles. By the time he toweled off he felt better than he had all day.

Victor wrapped a robe around himself and padded into the kitchen where Sergei was pouring water into a couple of mugs.

“I made your normal, black, extra strong, right?” Sergei asked as he passed over the mug.

Victor smiled. “Peppermint would have probably been better today, but I guess you haven’t seen that side of me. So this is perfect.” He took the mug and added a dollop of jam to it.

He carried the tea to the table and sat. Sergei sweetened his own tea and sat across from him.

“Thank you,” Victor said after taking several warming sips of tea. “You didn’t have to stay with me today, but I’m glad you did.”

Sergei smiled shyly. “I hope your boyfriend doesn’t mind.”

Victor blinked several times. “I don’t have a boyfriend.”

Sergei looked surprised. “Oh… sorry… I assumed. You seemed to call for someone named Yuri several times in your sleep.”

“Oh…” Victor rubbed the back of his neck, knowing that he owed his friend an answer. “Yuri… He’s not a boyfriend… he’s not even Russian.”

“Is he a skater?”

“Yes. He won all the big events last year as a junior, and I thought he had a lot of potential. I’ve tried reaching out to him since he seems shy, but he keeps running away. I was probably remembering that.”

“Is he good?”

“Well… yeah? I mean it’s his first year as a senior, but he’s consistently beating seasoned skaters. He seems lonely though. He needs a friend.”

Sergei studied him for several minutes before nodding. He then reached across the table and laid his hand against Victor’s forehead. “Your fever seems to have broken. I’ll head home in the morning, but is it ok if I come back after class and check on you?”

Victor smiled and nodded. “I’d like that.”

Sergei made a point to check in on Victor every day, something which Yakov made a point to thank the other man for as he left for Bern with Georgi. By the sixth day Vasily started coming by in the afternoons so that they could use the downtime to work on their project.
Victor was trying to ignore the fact that it should have been his free day between the short and long programs as he eyed the papers strewn across his coffee table.

Posters showed Mila in a layback spin, rhinestones on her costume glittering, red hair streaming behind her in a ponytail. Victor had to admit that the exhibition was going to be a great springboard to her junior debut.

“Ticket sales are strong, considering that the bulk of the skaters are young teens without a huge fan base,” Vasily said, looking over a spreadsheet.

Victor nodded. “It’ll probably pick up in a day or so.”

“Why do you say that?” Sergei asked.

“With me out, Georgi is expected to be the highest placing Russian male skater in Bern. His name will be more recognizable as a headliner.”

“Oh, good point,” Vasily said, marking something on a notepad. “I’ll track before and after sales.”

Victor nodded.

“When does Yakov want you back?” Sergei asked.

“He’ll be back from Switzerland on the first, but wants me to take it easy the first few days since it’ll have been almost two weeks since I’d last skated. So… it’ll probably be the seventh before I’m training full time again.”

Sergei leaned back into Victor’s couch. “I can’t believe it’s already almost February. We’ve only got two months until the show.”

Victor smiled. “It’s coming along well. The kids are so excited.”

“Are they?” Vasily asked.

Victor nodded. “You two should come by one free afternoon when they practice. It’s all they can talk about.”

“Also, Yakov told me one afternoon that he wanted to meet the third person,” Sergei added.

Victor laughed and leaned over to look at something in Sergei’s notes when his phone rang. He looked at the caller ID and grinned. “Excuse me a few minutes, it’s my brother.”

Both Sergei and Vasily nodded and Victor stepped into the kitchen.

“Lyosha!” Victor cheered when he answered.

“Hi Vitya, feeling better?”

“I am, thanks!”

“I know it’s late notice, but…”

“What is it?”

“There’s a concert I’d wanted to attend in the Netherlands. I’d thought it wasn’t going to happen, but I managed to get a deal on a set of four tickets. Chris is already in, so is my accompanist. I know it’s
farther for you, but…”

“When is it?”

“Next Friday, the fourth.”

Victor hummed then shouted into the living room. “Do we have any obligations for the exhibition next Friday?”

Sergei and Vasily looked between themselves before calling “no” in unison.

“I’m in, and I expect Yakov will have me on easy practice so getting out early for a flight shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Great. I’ll let Chris know and reserve the rooms.”

“Tell him good luck for the free skate tomorrow. I wish I were there with you guys.”

“We miss you too, but getting better is more important.”

“I’ll see you next week then.”

“I’ll email you the details so you can reserve your flight. See you next week.”

Victor was grinning as he returned to the living room.

“What was that about?” Sergei teased.

Victor laughed. “I’m going to the Netherlands for a concert next Friday.”

“Who’s playing?” Vasily asked.

Victor laughed. “I have no idea, but knowing how wide my brother likes to cast his musical net I’m sure it’ll be interesting.”

“Congratulations on your bronze!” Victor exclaimed as he glomped Chris at the airport.

Chris laughed. “Thank you, though I wish it had been gold.”

“Soon enough!” Victor replied. “You’re the new Swiss ace.”

Chris smiled. “It would have been nice to have snagged a higher spot on the podium in my own country though.”

Victor hummed in agreement. “I can see that.” He then turned to Alexei. “So, Lyosha… tell me more. I listened to several songs by Basement Jaxx, but I didn’t think the electro-pop style was something you’d find interesting.”

Alexei grinned. “Probably not on its own, but these collaboration efforts are fascinating. I mean… they’re marrying the music of a pop band with a full orchestra. I want to hear it!”

Victor laughed. “So where’s the fourth, your accompanist?”

“She’s back at the hotel getting ready.”
“She?” Victor teased, and his suspicions were all but confirmed when Alexei blushed.

“Oh that’s right…” Chris purred. “You haven’t met the lovely Fabienne yet. Your brother is quite smitten.”

“Chris!” Alexei protested.

Chris grinned devilishly. “I can’t blame him. I’d be smitten too if I liked girls. Alexei has good tastes.”

Alexei buried his face in his hands, and Victor could see red cheeks between his fingers.

“Is she the one?” Victor asked.

Alexei lifted his face and rolled his eyes. “I haven’t even asked her out yet. After the last one… I just… I want to take some time and not rebound.”

Chris nodded sagely. “He daydreams about her every time there’s a lull in the conversation.”

“Chris!”

Victor could immediately see why Alexei was taken with Fabienne. She was beautiful with a gentle nature. Chestnut hair draped over slender shoulders and the shimmering blouse over a long black skirt as they entered the concert hall.

The two musicians led, discussing Alexei’s improving piano skills, and what he’d put on his application for the Tchaikovsky Competition.

Victor hung back several paces with Chris. “I thought you were just teasing, but he really is smitten,” he said in a low voice.

“I just hope he makes a move before somebody else does. She seems interested, but it’s been several months that they’ve been flirting and there comes a point when a person has to wonder if it’s one-sided.”

“Where’d they meet?”

“School, where else? Apparently his old accompanist was moving, and she was looking to expand into it. She’s also been tutoring him on piano, so they spend a lot of time together.”

“Is she good?”

Chris shrugged. “I’ve only been able to make two competitions since he switched to her, but she doesn’t overshadow him and it seems to flow well so I’d say that at least it wasn’t a bad move.”

Victor nodded.

They stood in line, then were directed to seats about halfway down and off to one side of the stage.

Fabienne asked Victor what it was like to compete at the Olympics and in venues all around the world, and Chris complained that she could have asked him as she saw him more often. The more they talked the more Victor agreed that she’d fit in quite well.
Then a hush came over the audience as the orchestra took their seats.

The opening piece had a fanfare feel to it, and Victor liked the strong brass section. Then the second started with a mysterious feel. He recognized the song after several measures, and was surprised at how much it had been altered.

About halfway through the third piece Victor scrambled with his program, squinting to read the title in the darkness.

“Vitya?” Alexei hissed.

“I have to know the name of this piece.”

“Why?”

“Because I have to skate to it.”

Victor bought a special pass during intermission that would allow him to go backstage after the concert to talk to the conductor, band and orchestra members. He’d learned from the dim lighting that the piece was called *Raindrops*, and faintly matched it to the song of the same name from the original group.

The song was triumphant, building upon itself with small crescendos until it was an explosion of emotion. From the first notes he’d been able to feel it through him and knew that he needed it.

He also knew that it would be months before there would be an official release of the concert on CD. He just hoped that his name was worth enough to get an early recording so that he could practice.

Yakov grunted in approval from where he stood at the barrier. “Seems the downtime didn’t affect you as much as I’d feared. You’re still looking good.”

“I feel good too,” Victor replied cheerily. “Inspired even.”

“I know that tone,” the coach deadpanned. “Spill so you can focus.”

“I know what I’m skating to for my free skate next season.”

“Another piece by your brother?”

“No, though he’s going to make something along the same theme for the short. This was from the concert we attended.”

“When do I get to hear it?”

“Probably in May, once edits are done.”

“Focus on this season for now then. Run through your programs twice more, take a break then work on your quads. You’ve almost got the rotations on that flip, and I’d like to see you ratify it in the fall.”
“Are you ok Yuri?”

Stressed.

You don’t have any competitions coming up though do you?

Finals are soon, then I move to the US. I’ll have to take out loans for college.

You got in?

I finally got an acceptance letter.

Congratulations!

There’s just so much to do, and not enough time. Nicky I’ll be in a completely different timezone. Will you even be able to help me skate anymore?

Victor startled. He hadn’t thought about that.

We’ll have to see what your schedule is like once you get there.

Ok.

“If sales stay steady we’ll sell out a couple days before the show,” Victor told Yakov as he took a break for some water. “The kids will all get a nice chunk of exposure.”

“Between the article last fall, and her face plastered all over town, Mila is already a highly anticipated debut on the junior circuit. We’ve increased the difficulty of her performance to take advantage of it.”

Victor nodded. “She’s going to be a household name Yakov.”

“Da.”

Yakov’s phone rang. The coach glared at it, then sighed at the caller ID. “The travel agent… probably confirming our itinerary for worlds. Do I need to worry about you harassing Japanese skaters in their own country again?”

Victor sputtered at the accusation, but Yakov had already accepted the call.

“Da?” the coach said, stepping a few feet away, but he immediately stopped in his tracks. “What do you mean you’ve delayed our flights?” Pause. “What concern about aftershocks?” Another pause. “Of course I haven’t seen the news! We’re leaving for Japan in three days! I’m spending every spare second with my skaters!”

There was a longer pause, during which Yakov’s face first grew red, then concerned. “Spasibo…”

The tone in Yakov’s voice caused a pit to form in Victor’s stomach. He’d never heard it before.

“Yakov?”
“There was an earthquake Vitya… a big one.”

“In Japan?”

Yakov nodded. “It triggered a tsunami. They’re estimating deaths in the thousands.”

“When?”

“A couple hours ago.”

_Yuri…_

Victor gripped the barrier, hardly listening to his coach.

“Georgi!” Yakov called.

_I… I was with him this morning. We were working on his quad. Please Yuri, please be ok._

Georgi skidded to a stop, but quickly dropped his normal banter when he looked at his coach and rinkmate.

“We’re on standby for whether we leave for Worlds in a few days or not,” Yakov declared. “Japan just had a major earthquake and a tsunami. There is high probability of aftershocks. For now we’re going to wait and see.”

_Yuri…_

Victor was glued to his television, waiting for it to be late enough to go to bed and try to contact Yuri. Then he felt the tug on his consciousness and muted the tv.

_Yuri!!!! Thank god you’re ok. I was so worried._

_Nicky! Sorry I forgot to email. Today’s been crazy._

_I understand completely. You’re ok though? Your family, Nishigori, Yuko and the triplets? You’re all fine?_

,Yes, the affected area is on the other side of Japan.

Victor felt a sense of relief for the first time since he’d heard the news.

_Nicky, things will probably be crazy, between this and getting ready to move. I might not be able to email very often…_

_I understand Yuri. I’m just glad you’re ok._

The following ten days were spent almost in a daze. Victor and Georgi skated, running through programs that they didn’t know when or if they’d perform again. The venue in Nagano was declared sound, but travel advisories were issued. Three days after the earthquake Worlds was declared postponed with the possibility of being cancelled.
Ten days after the earthquake the ISU opened bids for a replacement venue.

On March twenty-fourth, three days after the original planned start of competition, it was announced that the new host city would be Moscow and Worlds would take place at the end of April.

“Are you ready Mila?” Victor asked, kneeling in front of the teen.

Mila’s eyes sparkled with excitement and she nodded.

Victor smiled. “Go take your place just off the ice then. One of the crew will let you know when it’s time to go on.”

Mila flounced off toward the ice as Victor stood.

“It was a good call slotting her just before the senior skaters,” Sergei said, looking over a clipboard. “A lot of people seemed to be looking forward to the girl on the posters.”

Victor smiled again and peeked out to see a full house. “How’re Georgi and Mariya looking?”

Sergei nodded again. “Vasily is with them now, both are stretching and keeping warmed up. He’ll bring them in once Mila takes the ice.”

“And the professor overseeing everything?”

“Seems thrilled. I keep hearing him muttering about students and professionalism.”

“As long as we all get passing grades.”

Sergei nodded.

Applause sounded through the rink, and a sassy pop song came on. Victor grinned as Mila’s personality shined through her skating.

Then Georgi skated his exhibition piece, and the ladies bronze medalist from nationals, Mariya, closed out the event to exuberant applause.

A professor approached Sergei, Vasily and Victor as the audience filed out of the rink. “Very well done boys. I’ll be conferring with my peers to see if they spotted anything amiss, but this has all the appearances of a successful project. The athletes were well prepared, their needs were considered as part of the show. All your materials and planning cast them in an excellent light. The event aspect was also expertly handled. If I hadn’t known that almost everybody behind the scenes was a student I would have assumed that this was a professional production from a seasoned team.

“I see no issues with you receiving a passing grade.”

The trio hugged as the professor walked away. Afterward they took their team out for an after-party. The theater and marketing majors had received similar praise from their own departments, and what had started as an idea in the fall had turned into a successful show.

After the party Sergei, Vasily an Victor had all ended back at Victor’s apartment to go over the final numbers.

Vasily fell asleep in a chair not long after, but Sergei and Victor continued to work until nearly
midnight.

Once they’d reviewed their numbers one last time Victor leaned back and stared at the ceiling. “It’s hard to believe it’s over. I feel like my schedule has gaping holes in it now.”

“I know,” Sergei replied. “All that preparation paid off though.”

Victor nodded. “I’ll miss this though. I’ve enjoyed hanging out with you and Vasily the past six months. We work well together.”

“It doesn’t have to be the end.”

Victor turned to look at his friend. “I know, but I bet you both have plans for after graduation.”

“Plans can be changed.”

“Hmm?”

Sergei leaned over and kissed Victor softly.

Victor’s breath caught in his throat at the unexpected action. He blinked as Sergei pulled away.

“Sorry…” Sergei mumbled. “I… That… was forward of me.”

Victor smiled. “I liked it.”

“Really?”

Victor nodded, and melted against Sergei as their lips found each other’s a second time.

“Vitya! I’ve made it through to the competition! I was invited directly to round one rather than the audition rounds!”

“I knew you could do it Lyosha!”

“You’ll come see me in Moscow still, right?”

“Of course I will. I’ve had the hotel booked for months.”

“I’m so excited Vitya.”

“You’re going to wow the judges and the audience Lyosha, I just know it.”

Victor looked at the current standings and took a deep breath. He knew what he had to do, and the thought of it caused a bit of terror to course through him.

He was in fourth after the short program; a tumble out of his triple axel costing him valuable points. He had to make it up if he wanted to medal and knew there was really only one way.

“I’m putting in the quad flip,” he said to Yakov as France’s Florent Amodio finished his program.
“Are you insane?” Yakov demanded. “You’ve only landed it a handful of times, and never cleanly.”

“I don’t need to land it. All I need are the rotations. I’ve had those down for a month thanks to the delay.”

“This is insane Vitya!”

Victor nodded. “I need the points if I want to medal.”

“So put in a perfect triple flip.”

“Even if I got a plus three GOE on the triple, it’s fewer points than a minus three GOE on a quad. I’ve got the rotations Yakov. Even falling on the quad gives me a higher score.”

“And what if you don’t get the rotations here? If it’s under rotated then you’re not ahead at all, and if it gets downgraded then you’re even worse off as it would be treated as a fall on a triple. You’re not the first to try you know.”

“I can do this Yakov.”

Yakov was silent for a minute. After Victor, Oda, Takahashi and Chris were all left to skate.

“Do it,” the coach declared. “You probably would have anyway. Just don’t come back here regretting it.”

Victor hugged the coach, then handed over his skate guards. He stretched by the barrier as girls carried off flowers and plushies.

“Watch your speed, pull yourself tight,” Yakov advised. “Try to minimize the damage. If you can manage to only put a hand on the ice that would be great.”

“No confidence in my landing it?” Victor teased.

“No when it’s not consistent in practice. We’ll fix that over the summer though.”

Victor nodded, and the announcer called his name.

“Make Russia proud,” Yakov called as Victor skated to the center of the rink.

Holst’s Jupiter filled the arena. The flip was right at the halfway point, after a series of spins. Victor cleared his head as he gained speed, then plunged his toepick into the ice and launched it.

One...Two... Three... Four...

Victor’s blade touched the ice, and he fought for the landing. He ended up putting a hand down right at the very end, but kept his free leg off the ice. He knew that the rotations were there. He finished the remainder of his program jubilant.

Victor’s knees bounced in the kiss and cry. The rotations had been there, but was it enough?

Thunderous applause sounded through the arena as the announcer declared that the judges had ratified the jump. Despite putting a hand down, Victor was the first man to land a quad flip in competition.

“Good job Vitya,” Yakov grunted beside him.
The scores were announced, putting Victor less than a quarter point behind Kozuka.

He paced as Chris skated, answered questions about being the first to ratify the quad flip when Takahashi took the ice, and paced some more as he waited for Oda to finish out the night.

Chris glomped him as the scores were announced. Victor had held onto silver, while Chris had earned a bronze.

He’d earned silver in his own country, and been the first man to land the quad flip.

The cheers were deafening as he accepted his medal.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

Whew, what a ride that chapter was. Quad flip, Victor and Sergei, Alexei doing so well...

Lemme know what you think in comments.

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

Check out my other YoI multi-chap fics Shared Gravity and Private Photos.

Also check out my original piece, The Tower at http://archiveofourown.org/works/11371512. It's centered around Sheryl Callaghan, the newest contestant on the deadly reality game show of the same name. Chapter 5 was just posted so it's a great time to jump in.
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Summer 2011 - Victor's in high spirits after ratifying the quad flip. The excitement only continues as a new face comes to the rink and Alexei competes in one of the world's most prestigious music competitions.

Chapter Notes

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**Announcement**

In Our Dreams will be on a short hiatus, until sometime in early September so that I can focus on a couple of other projects. So don't worry if you don't see it update for a couple weeks. It's not abandoned.

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Ok, now that that's out of the way...

Lots of little things happening in this chapter, and there's a lot of Alexei, everybody's favorite OC, LOL.

If you've been enjoying this work please click the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The building thunder of timpani sounded in Victor’s ears, and he pressed on the headphones to hear it better. Then there was a crash: cymbals, brass and winds. The note echoed and died, only to be replaced by the plucking of harp strings.

Timpani sounded again, low and rolling as if clouds were tumbling over hills. The strings came in, starting with the bass, through cellos, violas then the violins and upper winds.

Victor could feel the approaching storm in the music, could see it on the horizon with towering clouds. The thunder was punctuated with bursts of lightning. It built through two-minutes and forty seconds, a crescendo that, though it had an entirely different feel, led perfectly into Raindrops.

Victor released a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding as the piece came to an end. “Wow…”
“Well?” Alexei asked from where he was perched on Victor’s couch. He and Chris were staying with Victor for a few days after Worlds.

“Lyosha… it’s perfect.” Victor handed over the headphones and tossed his hair back over his shoulder.

“It’s called *Cumulus*. I know that cumulonimbus would probably have been a more appropriate title, but I felt it was cumbersome.”

The door opened, Chris and Sergei walked in carrying takeout and groceries.

Chris saw Alexei holding headphones and grinned. “If you don’t take Alexei’s piece I will. That’s an amazing piece of work right there. Did you listen to the full, or just the first movement?” he asked in English.

“Just the first movement,” Alexei answered, standing to relieve Sergei of a heavy bag of groceries.

“A bit slower?” Sergei asked shyly.

The three other men paused, and Victor smiled. He nodded. English was the shared language among all four, but since Sergei didn’t have the benefit of regular international travel he was less practiced than the others.

“I could try out the Russian that Alexei’s been trying to teach me,” Chris offered with a grin.

“And you’d insult everybody in the room,” Alexei shot right back. “For a man who’s already fluent in three languages, adding a fourth seems a monumental task.”

“To be fair,” Chris clarified, “I learned all three as a child, over several years. I’ve only been dabbling in Russian for a year or so.”

“What’s your third language?” Sergei asked.

“German,” Chris said simply. “It made sense as one of the official languages, and for the frequent trips to Bern.”

“Wow…” Sergei said softly.

Victor picked up on the tone and walked over to hug his boyfriend from behind. “What’s wrong?”

“Just a momentary feeling of inadequacy,” he explained in Russian before switching back. “I only speak Russian and a bit of English. You all speak several languages.”

“Alexei puts us all to shame you know,” Chris countered.

“How?” Sergei asked.

Chris started counting on his fingers. “Russian, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Finnish…” he paused. “Did I miss any?”

“Dutch…” Alexei offered, casting his gaze to the floor.

“So many!” Sergei cried.

“Well…” Alexei shuffled. “I kinda had to learn them. We moved around a lot. It’s only been since we moved to Geneva that we’ve stayed in one place for more than two years. I had to learn
languages fast in order to keep up my studies when I switched schools every year or so.”

Sergei sighed, and Victor kissed his shoulder.

“So Victor,” Chris drawled. “You need to listen to Alexei’s full *Cumulus*. You’ll wish that you could skate to more than just the first movement.”

Victor nodded as the group grabbed plates of food then moved to the living room to listen to the full sixteen minute piece.

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*Are you getting settled in ok?”*

Yuri looked around the small bedroom of his shared apartment. One of his rinkmates made noise in the kitchen and the smell of something like chicken filtered into the room.

Victor wasn’t used the bare walls. Every time he’d glimpsed into Yuri’s personal space his own face had looked back at him.

*I’m still getting used to things. The hardest right now is hearing and conversing in English every day.*

*You’ll get used to it.*

*I know…*

Victor knew that trailing edge and sigh.

*Spill Yuri.*

*I miss Vicchan. I wanted to bring him, but between the vet costs, and the quarantine… I couldn’t justify it, especially when I knew that I’d be gone for competitions often too. He whined so much when he realized that I was leaving. Mari says he still runs to the door and makes the yips he only used for me every time somebody goes to the family entrance.*

Tears were slowly sliding down Yuri’s face.

*You’ll see him again Yuri. You’re sure to be placed in the NHK trophy again, and you have to travel back to Japan for nationals. You can always look into bringing him to the US later too.*

*I guess you’re right. I… I just… Nicky… I miss everybody so much, but whenever I’d get stressed I could curl up with Vicchan and he’d just snuggle back. I could run my fingers through his fur and it always helped so much.*

*Oh Yuri…*

Silence fell between them for several minutes. Yuri curled up on his bed, exhausted from combined lingering jet lag and moving in.

*Do you know your practice schedule yet?*

*Celestino wants me to take as many late afternoon and evening classes as possible. He’d like to train in the mornings when I’m fresh. He plans to use the summer to drill programs so that I can handle the cut to practice hours come fall.*
I know the Grand Prix assignments aren’t out yet, but do you know if you’ll be in any other competitions this year?

I think Celestino is trying to get me into Nebelhorn or Golden Spin, but I don’t know yet. The JSF says they’ll make their announcements next month.

Do you have your music yet?

Dvorak and Paganini.

Do you like the pieces?

I guess. I don’t hate them.

Why not ask for something else if you don’t love them?

Celestino is a world class coach! He knows how to bring out the strengths of his students.

You can advocate for yourself you know.

I… I think I’ll see how this season goes.

Ok.

Yakov clapped to get everybody’s attention, then called them all over to the barrier.

Victor wondered what the coach wanted, then saw the little blond boy standing beside him, a scowl on his tiny face.

“Everybody, this is Yuri Plisetsky. He’ll be training with you all from today on. He just moved here from Moscow and is currently in the novice division.”

“Hi Yuri!” Mila exclaimed, quickly glomping the child.

“Get off!” Yuri cried, though the tint to his cheek gave away that he liked the attention.

Victor knelt to be at eye level. “Hello Yuri. I’m Victor.”

Yuri jutted out his chin. “I know who you are. I’m going to beat you when I get older.”

Victor laughed, loving the challenge. He smiled brightly as he turned back. “I’m sure you will. I’ll have to watch my back when you get to the senior division.”

Yuri made a noise and nodded.

Georgi shook Yuri’s hand, and the rest of the introductions were made. Then everybody returned to practice.

Victor’s attention next landed on the child as he took a break at the barrier.

Yuri gathered speed, and launched a perfect double axel.

Victor hummed in appreciation.
“He was serious about beating you,” Yakov said as he moved close. “That boy is fiercely determined.”

“Guess I’ll have to work hard to keep him from overtaking me too soon.”

“Don’t underestimate him Vitya. He’s ten and has three triples: toe, salchow and flip. He’s trying for a triple axel this season.”

“That would make him pretty impressive, especially for the novice division.”

“The only reason he’s not already trying for juniors is the age limitation. There’s nobody who can rival him in his age group. I honestly expect it’ll be the same in juniors. It’ll be several years before we see his full potential.”

Victor smiled.

“He reminds me of you Vitya. His family is in Moscow. He’s alone here and with too much talent.”

Victor nodded in understanding. “I’ll keep an eye on him Yakov.”

Yakov grunted then moved off to yell instructions at Mila.

“Congratulations Vasily!” Victor and Sergei cried in unison before hugging their friend.

Vasily hugged back. “Thanks guys!”

“Turns out you don’t need to be an athlete to make the Olympics,” Sergei joked.

Vasily laughed and they all took their seats, Victor and Sergei across from Vasily. Sergei’s hand rested comfortably at the small of Victor’s back as they continued talking.

“It’s going to be weird to move to Sochi after being in St. Petersburg my whole life,” Vasily said.

“But the experience will be invaluable for your career,” Victor countered. “You might be entry level, but you’re on the staff for the Olympics.”

“Do you know what you’ll be working on yet?” Sergei asked.

Vasily shook his head. “So many of the venues are still under construction, but they wanted to get some of the production aspects underway. I could be doing something as simple as helping to manage a venue, or I could be working on production teams.”

Drinks arrived and they toasted to Vasily’s job.

“How about you two?” Vasily asked after a waiter took their order.

Sergei smiled. “One of the people in Victor’s management firm managed to get me in with a rival agency who needed an entry level person.”

Victor grinned. “I’m well on my way for the next season already. I’ve got my music sorted and am refining the choreography.”

Vasily laughed. “Different leagues Victor. Are you going to do anything else with your degree
before you retire?”

Victor leaned on his hand and hummed. “I really enjoyed working on the show. I’m tempted to do more.”

“Really?” Vasily asked.

Victor nodded. “It was fun.”

“Were you worried about the grade at all?”

Victor feigned insult. “Of course I was! Am I not allowed to enjoy the homework though?”

“You’re being extra Vitya,” Sergei said, leaning in and mock whispering.

Victor gasped but immediately settled.

“You two are adorable you know,” Vasily said. “Here Sergei was so unsure about working with the celebrity classmate, now he’s dating him.”

Victor laughed. “I guess he finally approved.”

Sergei kissed the shell of Victor’s ear. “Indeed I did.”

Victor hugged Alexei, dressed in a black suit. Fabienne stood nearby in an ankle-length black dress. Both were about to head backstage for the first round of the cello portion of the Tchaikovsky Competition.

“You’ve got this Lyosha,” Victor murmured.

Chris stepped forward and shook Alexei’s hand. “You’re probably the only one here with Olympians from two different countries cheering for you. It just proves how great you are.”

“I don’t know if that helps or hurts my nerves Chris,” Alexei replied.

Fabienne took a couple steps over and wrapped her arms around Alexei. She kissed his cheek. “Does that help?”

Alexei blushed a vibrant red but nodded.

“Good,” she murmured. “Remember, I’m right there with you. You’re going to wow them.”

Alexei nodded, and the house lights blinked.

“That’s our cue,” Victor said. “We’ll see you after your performance.”

Alexei hugged Victor again. “Thanks for being here Vitya.”

“Of course.”

They watched as Alexei headed toward the backstage areas, then walked into the auditorium. Natalya waved, and Victor and Chris took their seats next to his parents.

“Thank you for being here for Lyosha,” Natalya said, looking over at Chris.
Victor smiled.

“[I wouldn’t miss it!”] Chris exclaimed.

“I know it means a lot to him,” she replied.

Chris laughed. “He comes to so many of our performances, coming to as many of his as possible is the least I could do.”

Victor nodded. “It’s hard not being able to be there more often for him.”

“You’re more than there for him,” Dmitri said, leaning over to look at his eldest son. “You gave his voice a platform. He’s being recognized as a composer at such an early stage in his career. You did that Victor.”

Natalya nodded. “Your father’s right. You might not be able to attend every performance, but you make sure his music is heard. That’s possibly even more important.”

Victor smiled.

“Now Vitya,” Natalya continued. “When do we get to meet your boyfriend? Lyosha spoke highly of him after he returned from worlds.”

Victor paled slightly. “I… uh…”

“He’ll be here for the third round,” Chris chimed in. “He couldn’t afford to take two weeks off. Victor’s been unable to shut up about it.”

“Chris!”

“It’ll be nice to meet him, but… Being here isn't going to impact your training too much, will it boys?” Natalya asked.

Victor shook his head. “Yakov made some calls. Chris and I have some secured time at a nearby rink.”

“It’s not the one Ivan trains at, is it?” Chris asked, draping himself over Victor.

Victor shook his head. “He announced his retirement after worlds. Dunno if it’ll stick or not, but for now he’s not training.”

“Well at least we won’t have to deal with that awkwardness,” Chris said. “Just having an unknown coach eyeballing us.”

Victor shrugged. “He’s supposedly an old friend of Yakov’s, and several of his novice and junior students are in St. Petersburg for Yakov’s summer thing, so they arranged it as a sort of trade.”

“You’ll have to translate when he starts screaming at me in Russian.”

Victor smiled. “I think I can do that.”

The lights dimmed, and polite applause sounded through the theater as Alexei strode across the stage with his cello. He would play unaccompanied for the first piece, then Fabienne would join him later.

One of the biggest competitions of Alexei’s career was officially underway, and Victor was excited for his brother to prove himself in front of his countrymen.
Victor hugged his brother during the intermission between contestants. Alexei had played for forty-five minutes, and to Victor’s ear had sounded amazing throughout.

“Good job,” Natalya murmured, hugging her son.

“You were a bit fast during the middle of the caprice,” Dmitri chided, then softened. “But I think you had more emotion for it, so hopefully the judges won’t dock you.”

Fabienne leaned against Alexei, and he wrapped his arm around her back. “I think I was more nervous than you were. I was terrified I’d make a mistake and it would reflect on your performance.”

Alexei laughed and kissed her cheek. “You were wonderful.”

“So when will we know the results?” Chris asked.

“Five days?” Alexei replied. “There were nine days in round one, and today is the fourth.”

Chris mock-clutched at his heart. “Oh my goodness, the nerves! And I thought the days between a short program and a free skate were bad.”

Alexei laughed, and tightened his arm around Fabienne. “Thank you all. Knowing you were out there cheering for me meant so much.”

“We’ll always be there for you Lyosha,” Victor said.

Victor launched the quad flip and nailed the landing. Chris applauded from where he stood at the barrier while the other students in the rink openly stared.

The coach at the rink muttered something about watching and hoping that one of his students would be able to do that one day.

“I’m going to go get some coffee,” Chris said.

“Will you manage ok?” Victor called as Chris skated toward the barrier.

“Coffee is an almost universal word my friend. I think I’ll be fine.”

“You remember where the place we got some at earlier is?”

“I’ll call you if I get confused.”

Victor laughed and watched as his friend strolled toward the exit. He then took a minute to pull his hair back again before rounding the rink.

Victor was preparing to launch the flip again when he felt the tug in the back of his mind that signalled Yuri. He quickly switched from the flip to a toe loop, the only quad that Yuri knew Nicky had.

Yuri? Are you ok?
Victor skated to the barrier and took a long drink of water. *Ok Yuri. Tell me what’s wrong.*

*I’m so homesick Nicky. I miss mom, and dad, and Mari, and Minako. I miss Yuko, Nishigori and the girls. I miss Vicchan so much.*

*Oh Yuri….*

Victor knew that if Yuri had been the one awake and he asleep that Yuri would have been crying. He didn’t know what to do for several moments before finally deciding on a course of action. *Can I tell you something?*

*What?*

*I moved for training when I was really young, and just like you my family was in another country. I was insanely homesick for the first two months, but I knew I wanted to skate. Do you know what I did?*

*What?*

*I found little ways to make my new place feel more like home. I asked my mom to send me a few simple recipes that I could make on my own that were my favorites. I played my favorite music. I explored as much as my coach would allow, I was so young that I needed supervision a lot for the first couple years. But the whole time I asked myself if I was willing to give up my dream to go home. Do you want to give up training under Celestino?*

*No…*

*Would he come with you to Japan?*

*He sometimes will do overseas training runs with his top skaters, but I’m not there yet. I know I still need more work than I can do on my own.*

*Is there a coach in Japan who would meet your current needs?*

Yuri paused. *No. I talked to them and I decided Celestino was better for me.*

*So what are you going to do?*

*I’m going to stay.*

*Ask yourself when you get homesick if it’s enough to give all that up, and find little ways to make Detroit your home.*

*I’ll try…* Yuri paused again. *Nicky… are you training?*

Victor paused, then remembered that the time difference meant that Yuri had only been able to feel him on the ice when he was in other countries. *I am.*

*Is this your home rink?*

*No. I’m on a sort of an extended vacation in Moscow. It’s long enough that I need to continue light training at a rink here in order to keep in top form.*

*What are you doing in Moscow?*
Have you ever heard of the Tchaikovsky Competition?
No.

It’s an international music competition. I know somebody competing, so I’m here to support him.

Wow, really?

Mm-hmm.

Victor pushed off from the barrier and started gaining speed. He launched a quad toe, to polite applause from the students training on the far side of the rink.

Celestino says my attempts at a quad are getting better. He thinks it’ll be next year before I have it though.

Keep working at it. I know you’ll have a quad, maybe two soon enough.

Victor felt Yuri start to fade. You’re exhausted Yuri. You should get some real sleep.

Ok....

I believe in you Yuri. I know you’re going to wow the world.

Thank you Nicky. Good night.

Good night Yuri.

Yuri faded out, just as Chris strolled back into the rink, carrying two cups of coffee.

“I have go juice!” Chris declared as he passed over one of the steaming cups.

“Oh Lyosha!” Victor cried, smothering his brother in a hug. “I knew you could do it!”

Alexei blinked at the announcement. He’d made the third round.

“You’re in the final six!” Victor continued.

“Congratulations,” Chris said, smiling softly. “So what’s the next round?”

“Two concertos with orchestra,” Alexei whispered.

“I’ll be right next to Chris and your family,” Fabienne whispered, kissing right behind Alexei’s ear.

“I know you’ll be great.”

Alexei slid an arm around her waist. “Thanks Fabie.”

The young woman blushed at the familiar nickname and buried her face in his neck.

They were headed to a nearby cafe to celebrate before Victor had to head to the airport to pick up Sergei. Then both Victor’s and Chris’s phones sounded alerts at the same time.

They exchanged a glance, reaching for the devices. It was near the end of June, and they knew the announcements were due.
Alexei laughed and paused. “We’ll go get a table.”

“Meet you there,” Chris replied distractedly as he waited for the page to load.

“Canada and France,” Victor said, grinning.

“Canada and Russia,” Chris said a moment later.

They realized they’d be competing against each other and laughed.

“Is it just be, or are there fewer spots this year?” Chris asked.

Victor looked again. “You’re right.” He read a note on the page. “Oh, yeah, they made it harder. There are fewer spots.. And apparently a minimum technical score.”

Chris scrunched his nose. “Are you going to take the third event?”

Victor looked again and saw an asterisk by his name for a third, the NHK Trophy. He quickly skimmed and saw that Yuri had been assigned to Russia and China.

“The money incentive is nice,” Victor replied after a minute. “But with fewer spots I think I’ll just focus on my assigned events and open it up for somebody else.”

Chris nodded. “Yeah. It’s not an amount to quickly dismiss, but I’d feel selfish taking the money and at the same time possibly bumping somebody from a critical second event, especially as they only count two.”

There was a beat of silence as Victor nodded.

“We’re kicking off the season in style!” Victor declared a moment later. “I’ll face off against you in Canada.”

“Just be prepared for my secret weapon,” Chris retorted with a wink.

“Oh? Do tell.”

“Then it wouldn’t be a secret!” Chris laughed as he headed to where Alexei waved at the end of the street.

“I’m nervous,” Sergei admitted as Victor adjusted his tie in their hotel room before dinner.

Victor blinked and looked up into his boyfriend’s eyes. “Why?”

“You’re a two time Olympian, your brother is a finalist in one of the world’s most prestigious music competitions. I grew up in Yekaterinburg, and so far the most impressive thing I’ve done is graduate college. How am I supposed to impress your family?”

“You already know Lyosha,” Victor laughed.

“You’re famous though, I’m sure your parents have expectations.”

Victor kissed the side of Sergei’s mouth. “Seryozha… Being with you is my decision, not theirs. As long as I’m happy that’s what matters.”
“Are you sure?”

Victor sighed and walked over to sit on the bed. “I wasn’t close to my parents growing up. I was training with Yakov, and they were always in some other country chasing the best solo work and playing with world-class orchestras. Months at a time would pass between phone calls.”

Sergei’s eyes widened slightly.

“I thought they hated me for the longest time,” Victor continued. “It’s better now, we finally talked about it a few years ago, when I was injured, but we’ll never be as close as most families. They know me, but they don’t. So I’m serious. My happiness is more important than your status, and I know that.”

“Vitya…”

Victor smiled at the other man. “I’m ok with it now. It hurt for a long time, and still does a bit. But I know where I stand with them.”

Sergei walked over and embraced Victor. Victor wound his arms around his middle.

“We should head down,” Victor said after a minute. “We don’t want to be late due to traffic.”

“Ok.” Sergei kissed Victor’s hair.

Victor was more nervous for Alexei than he’d ever been for himself. An orchestra was already seated and waiting for the soloist.

He sat between Sergei and Fabienne. Chris sat on the other side of Alexei’s girlfriend and his parents on the other side of his boyfriend.

Applause sounded through the auditorium as Alexei walked across the stage with his cello. He bowed and took his seat. Fabienne gripped Victor’s hand.

“He’ll be great,” Victor murmured to the young woman.

“I wish I was up there with him,” she whispered back.

“You’re here, and he knows it.”

She nodded as the lights dimmed.

The music started, and Alexei’s bow danced across the strings.

Several days later the group sat in the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall awaiting the results. Victor’s eyes flitted to the other contestants, then back to his brother. Anxiety twisted through his middle.

The results for the piano portion was announced first, then the violins.

Fabienne gripped Victor’s hand, her knuckles white, as the cello competitors were named.
She pulled her hand back and started sobbing in joy when Alexei was named the gold medalist in the cello section. Victor wrapped his arms around her and pulled her against his chest.

“He did it,” she sobbed. “He really did it.”

“He did. You both did.”

Yakov, Georgi, Mila and several other rinkmates joined Victor at the second gala concert for the winners, held in St. Petersburg. They’d known Alexei for years through Victor and wanted to show their support.

They went to dinner as a group after the concert, and treated the cellist as a member of their skating family. They welcomed Fabienne warmly, and several even met Victor’s parents for the first time.

Then it was time to get back to work. The summer was already half over, and with the assignments announced it was time for Victor to focus. Alexei and his parents visited the rink before returning to Geneva to see the early choreography for Alexei’s piece, then a sense of normalcy returned.

Where are you assigned Yuri?

Victor knew, of course, where Yuri had been assigned, but wanted to hear it from the teen directly.

*Cup of China and Rostelecom.*

*Fantastic!*

*I’m also being sent to Nebelhorn.*

*Oh Yuri, that’s great! All these competitions will only help you grow faster.*

*I just hope I get good enough to face Victor.*

*You’ll be against him before you know it.*

*Nicky?*

*Hmm?*

*Who do I need to look out for?*

*Can you pull up the assignments for me?*

Yuri turned to his computer and pulled up the listings. Victor studied it for a moment.

*I’m sure you know Oda will be one in China. You’ve also got one of the newer Americans in both events who is well positioned. Watch Cao Bin, especially in China. The home enthusiasm will likely fuel his performance.*

Victor paused to study the list again. *Chris Giacometti and Georgi Popovich will be strong against you in Russia. But I think you’re extremely well placed there. I expect you’ll be able to podium.*
Really?

I think so, though it would be better if we could get you a quad toe.

Celestino seems to think it’ll take me more time.

You’ve been trying for a while though. Yuri we were close before you had to leave. Can you get extra rink time in the evenings, when I’ll be asleep and can help?

I can try.

Yuri, if you can get the time, I’ll try to help you get your quad before the season begins.

Ok.

“Vitya…” Yakov said as Victor leaned against the barrier.

“Hmm?”

“Can you keep your emotion through those programs?”

“What do you mean?”

“They’re beautiful. The choreography is some of the best you’ve done. I’m giving you a lot of leeway because I see that it’s working, but I can’t help but see the elation in these programs. You’re riding a high right now, the flip, your new romance, Alexei’s achievements. I can see how they’re influencing you. It worries me, because if something goes wrong will you be able to keep it up?”

Victor hummed in thought. “Don’t worry Yakov! I know I’ll be able to keep it up even if things aren’t perfect.”

Yakov studied Victor for a minute then sighed. “Ok Vitya. I’ll trust you on this.”

It was a tiny ad in the corner of a magazine, but it was enough to catch Victor’s eye.

Tired of leaving your dog behind? Wish your best friend could join you wherever you go in the world? Introducing the pet-passport.

Victor looked over to where Makkachin napped in the corner of the room. His mind went to the times he’d gone to Geneva and had to leave the poodle behind. He turned his attention back to the ad.

Taking your furry friends to another country often involves complicated paperwork and extensive quarantine periods. The Pet Passport is designed for people who want to take their pets to distant locales without the fuss. Learn more at…

Victor pulled his laptop over and typed in the address. He knew that there was a possibility that it was a scam, but a bit of research would reveal that.

A few hours later he officially applied for Makkachin to be in the program. Several official websites
listed a country’s participation. It would mean quarterly vet checkups rather than annual, but after the first six months he’d be able to take Makkachin whenever he traveled outside a competition without worrying about the paperwork typically associated with animal travel. It was expensive, but as he thought of how much Yuri missed Vicchan he knew that it was the right decision.

The sound of blades scratching to a stop. Victor looked down to see blond hair and green eyes glaring back up.

Victor smiled and crouched. “Hello Yuri.”

“How old were you when you landed your first triple axel?” the boy demanded.

“I was twelve.”

“So I have until twelve to get it?”

Victor chuckled. “Trying to beat me?”

Yuri crossed his arms and nodded.

“Did you work on it during Yakov’s camp?”

“No,” Yuri scowled. “I wasn’t allowed to because I’m in the novice division and nobody else was ready yet. Only the juniors got to.”

Victor smiled. “How about you show me your axel, and I’ll tell you what I see. Then I’ll show you mine.”

Yuri scrunched his tiny nose, then moved away a bit to gather speed. He launched an attempt at a triple, but was short on the rotations. He came down hard, got back up and skated over.

Victor nodded. “Good try, we’ll get you on the harness soon I think, so you don’t get hurt. I think you need more speed though, and you’re not getting enough height. Spend more time in the gym working on your leg muscles so you can put more power into it.”

Yuri stared, then nodded. “Show me yours.”

“Ok,” Victor replied, standing again. He made a couple small laps to gain speed then launched it from a simple entry. He landed it with a crack that echoed.

Yuri nodded. “Ok.” He skated off.

Victor laughed as the child returned to the other novice skaters.

“What was that about?” Georgi asked.

“He’s determined to beat every achievement I ever had.”

“So you’re helping him?”

Victor shrugged. “I see a lot of myself in him. I needed an older role model, and if I can fill those shoes for him I will.”
A foreign rink flashed by, seating surrounding the ice, as Yuri gathered speed. Victor was so used to the Ice Castle that the Detroit rink was new to him. He forced his attention back to Yuri.

_You feel good. Little bit faster, and extra oomph in your thrust. Pull tight Yuri._

_Ok._

They passed a coated blur, Celestino staying late and humoring his newest student’s desire to learn a quad.

_You feel good Yuri. Take off right after you round the end._

_OK._

Yuri rounded the end, reached back and plunged his toepick into the ice.

It felt good, the familiar feel of flying. Victor knew that feeling, and everything felt perfect.

Yuri tumbled out of the landing, but the excited shout of his coach filled his ears.

“You got the rotations Yuri!” Celestino shouted.

_I… I did?_

_You did Yuri. I felt it. You were closer to the landing than you probably think too._

“You’ve improved drastically in such a short time,” Celestino praised. “I’m not going to make official changes to your choreography yet, but if you can land it consistently before Nebelhorn we’ll add it in.”

“Really?” Yuri asked, eyes growing wide in excitement.

“Of course!” Celestino laughed. “Why wouldn’t I let you skate your full potential?”

Yuri smiled. “I’m going to run it again coach!”

“Ok, there’s a bit of time.”

Yuri immediately started gathering speed for another attempt.

September arrived, and with it the pre-season press gauntlet. Svetlana asked for another spread of Victor with younger skaters, earlier than normal in order to build excitement for the junior and novice level events.

Mila was thrilled to join him again, and Yakov decided that Yuri would make a good addition.

The magazine came out just in time for audiences to get excited, and Victor made a point to attend the competitions of his young rinkmates.

Mila dazzled audiences in a green velvet dress with gold accents as she skated to selections from _The Lord of the Rings_, and took gold in her first competition of the season.
Little Yuri’s cold attitude immediately made sense in his selections of *We are Siamese* for the short and *Ev'rybody Wants to Be a Cat* for the free. He also earned a gold medal and Yakov rode the high from his younger skaters doing well as attention turned to the seniors.

Then it was time. The Nebelhorn marked the opening of the senior international skating season.

Victor and Yuri had gotten the quad to a shaky sort of consistency, and Celestino had allowed Yuri to put it in.

Now the Japanese teen needed to land it.

Victor wished he could be there in person, but had to settle for the live broadcast. He’d emailed Yuri the night before, wishing him luck, and now had to wait for the performances to start.

*Good luck Yuri.*

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

Everybody's favorite angry kitten has arrived! And Alexei is doing so good! And Yuri is about to try for a quad in a competition. Things are happening!

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

Check out my other YoI multi-chap fics *Shared Gravity* and *Private Photos*.

Don't miss my original work, *The Tower* at [http://archiveofourown.org/works/11371512](http://archiveofourown.org/works/11371512). Contestants have 8 hours to escape 24 story building. If they fail they die when the building collapses. Sheryl Callaghan is the newest contestant on the deadly game show.
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

Fall 2011 - Victor and Sergei's relationship develops through the grand prix qualifier events. Chris stuns audiences, and Alexei's newfound fame leaves him busy.

Chapter Notes

First off, sorry for being away from this story so long. Life got weird, and then I was on a deadline for my newest fic *Empty Ice* (give it a read if you haven't yet. It's an AU in which Victor in injured and in a coma only days after that fateful Grand Prix Final banquet, and features plenty of angst).

I'm hoping to be back to a more regular schedule now, though we'll see as it looks like the chapters might be getting longer on me.

If you've been enjoying this work please click the share button up above and spread the love.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Victor wondered if Yuri had chosen the right music. Dvorak’s *Romance* was pretty, but seemed a bit tame to him. He knew Yuri was capable of more.

However, despite his concerns, Yuri was well placed after the short program. A minor flaw with his combination jump had him in second.

Sergei joined him on the couch for the free skate, a bowl of herb-seasoned popcorn between them.

“So this competition is for skaters who are good, but aren’t at your level yet?” Sergei asked, a soft smiled on his face as his eyes darted to Victor.

Victor smiled and nodded before reaching over and running his fingers through Sergei’s hair. He pulled the other man into a gentle kiss. A faint blush dusted his cheeks as Victor pulled away.

“So if you’re not going to be against any of these men this year, why watch?”

Victor chuckled. “They could still do well later in the season. Then there’s the handful who are also participating in the grand prix series. So at bare minimum this is research.”

Sergei nodded, set the popcorn aside and moved closer so that he could tuck Victor against his side. Victor hummed and leaned into the warmth.

“So your season starts next month?” Sergei asked.
Victor nodded. “Mm-hmm… Canada, then France.”

“I wish I could come with you.”

Victor nodded again. “You got time off for the final though. You’ll get to see me there.”

Sergei turned and nodded. “I’ll be the loudest one cheering for you.”

“Might have to fight Lyosha for that role,” Victor teased.

Sergei chuckled and kissed Victor again. “I think that’s a challenge I’m willing to take on.”

They smiled at each other until Sergei brushed Victor’s hair off his shoulder so he didn’t trap it underneath his arm as he tugged him close again.

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**Congratulations Yuri!**

Victor could feel Yuri’s embarrassed pride as the young man fell into bed after the press conference went late.

*Did I really do that Nicky?*

*You did! You took gold Yuri!*

Yuri held his medal and ran his fingers over the edge. *It’s my first gold medal as a senior.*

*As beautifully as you skate, I can assure you it won’t be the last.*

*You really think so?*

*I know so Yuri. I believe in you.*

---

Yakov grunted in approval as Victor skated to the barrier. Victor grabbed his towel and wiped the sweat from his neck.

“You seem especially energetic out there today Vitya.”

Victor grinned. “I’m feeling inspired is all. There were a lot of fantastic performances at the Nebelhorn.”

Yakov huffed. “Just remember those same people are nipping at your heels.”

Victor laughed. “I’m excited about that! There was some serious talent and it’ll keep me on my toes.”

Yakov sighed, pinched the bridge of his nose and walked away. A few seconds later he was yelling at Yuri. “Yura! How many times do I have to tell you? Double axels only this year! I don’t care if triples *are* allowed in the long program. You don’t need a triple axel in the novice division!”

Victor chuckled and Yakov rounded on him again. “It’s not a laughing matter Vitya! Yura needs to learn there’s more to skating than just the jumps!”
“So show him Katsuki’s performance from last night. He only had one quad, and it had a shaky landing. But he still took first based on PCS.”

Yakov narrowed his eyes slightly before sighing. “You have a point. Yura! To the break room. You’re going to see that jumps aren’t everything.”

“Are you sure about this Vitya?”

Victor nodded as he stared at Yakov across the desk. “I am. I already discussed it with our management team. They just need your signoff since it’s unclear right now how this will affect my training schedule.”

Yakov sighed. “Anybody else I would put a stop to this, but you already proved last year that you could handle it. If you could put together a show for several hundred as a student, and with only other students as support, I can only imagine what you can do with a proper team behind you.”

“So you’ll ok it?” Victor leaned forward in the chair.

Yakov nodded. “On one condition. The show has to be after the grand prix final, but before nationals. Unless you want to do it at the end of the season again. None of this between nationals and Europeans, or Europeans and Worlds.”

Victor shook his head. “I was thinking mid-December. Get people excited for nationals.”

Yakov nodded. “You already know I’m going to suggest Yura and Mila represent their respective age groups.”

Victor nodded. “I’ll get Georgi a spot too, though I’ll headline this one since there will be a proper staff.”

“So you’re more a producer than organizer?”

Victor hummed. “Sort of in between. I like the organizing aspect, but I think backstage help can give me a lot of leeway.”

Yakov rolled his eyes. “That also gives you both a payment as a performer, and profit as a producer.”

Victor laughed. “I hadn’t even thought about that!”

Yakov grumbled as he turned to the computer on his desk. “I’m sending my approval via email. Also, since I know this will happen again, we’ll evaluate after the show. If your training doesn’t suffer then you won’t need to consult me moving forward.”

“Really?”

Yakov nodded. “I don’t want to be bothered with it every time you take it in your head you want to run a show.”

Victor grinned.

“Don’t forget to talk to your sponsors. There may be ways they can help with sponsoring the show or for advertising money. Since you’re producing give them the information first, then open it up for
other advertisers once they’ve passed.”

Victor nodded. “Thanks Yakov.”

The coach grunted. “Now get out of here before I change my mind.”

Mila squealed in delight and accepted almost before Victor finished asking if she wanted to skate in another exhibition. He had to get her attention to tell her that it was a bigger show and that there would be both a larger audience and more senior skaters.

Little Yuri turned out to be a bigger problem. “Why should I skate in your stupid exhibition?”

Victor leaned over the barrier and grinned. “Because I didn’t skate in my first paid exhibition until I was eleven.”

Yuri’s green eyes narrowed. “You’re paying?”

Victor nodded. “Da.”

“And you were eleven?”

Victor nodded again.

Yuri set his jaw. “Ok. I’ll skate in your exhibition.”

Victor grinned. “Great.”

Yuri scowled and skated off.

“So now you’re actively helping him beat your history?” Georgi asked, skating over.

Victor laughed. “He’s proud. I think it’s a job requirement for what we do. If I can play on it to get my way I might as well.”

Georgi rolled his eyes.

“Besides,” Victor said, lowering his voice so that only Georgi could hear him, “look at what he comes in wearing before he changes into practice gear. He’s being sponsored for his skills, but that’s all. He doesn’t have a big budget for things he needs beyond skating. Despite his pride, I could see it in his eyes. As soon as I mentioned that it was a paying exhibition he’d decided. Beating my history became his excuse to hide his need.”

Georgi looked over to where the Yuri was trying for a triple loop. “I noticed the worn clothes. I’d assumed he just liked to be comfortable.”

Victor shook his head. “His pants are a couple centimeters too short, so is his coat. I know he grew several centimeters since he came here, but he’s wearing his old clothes despite them being too small.”

Georgi sighed. “No wonder Yakov was so adamant. His skills are there, but you’re making room for the novices, aren’t you?”

Victor nodded. “They deserve the attention too, but the senior division skaters are the draw this year,
not the kids. We’re looking for venues that will seat several thousand, and ticket prices will be higher too.”

Yuri tumbled out of the loop, brushed himself off and set his tiny face to try again.

“He’s going to do good,” Victor said, “he just needs the support until he can stand on his own.”

Victor drummed his fingers on his desk as he studied the financial statement his accountant had sent. He leaned in, highlighted a few lines in the spreadsheet and compared them with sponsor contracts.

Victor sighed and leaned back in the chair.

Sergei walked over from where he’d been sitting on the couch and draped his arms over Victor’s shoulders, kissing his hair. “Everything ok?”


Sergei leaned over and peeked at the open spreadsheet. “I don’t think you’re going bankrupt.”

Victor smiled. “No. I’m stable enough. The competitions tend to pay for themselves as long as I win, and all my gear is sponsored, except for my costumes. Monetary sponsorships give me a pretty comfortable cushion.”

“That’s more than a comfortable cushion.”

Victor chuckled. “You’d be surprised. Figure skating is expensive. I could maintain my current lifestyle for several years with that, but long term that’s not enough... at least not if I was skating.”

Sergei hummed and rested his head on top of Victor’s. “So what made you suddenly decide to look at your finances?”

Victor sighed. “One of the kids at the rink. He reminds me of myself at that age, away and alone for training. Everything was skating. But I can see that he doesn’t have the financial support from his family that I did. I haven’t asked, but I get the sense that they don’t have much money and he’s getting government sponsorship for coaching and equipment.”

“Is he any good?”

“As long as he can keep it up he’ll be a force to be reckoned with.”

“Then don’t worry. You know somebody will spot his talent and he’ll pick up more sponsors.”

Victor nodded, but chewed on his lip anyway.

_Nicky! Are you serious?_

Victor chuckled. _Yes Yuri._

_I can’t accept this!_
Sure you can.

But…

Victor looked at the open textbooks littering Yuri’s desk. A photo frame with the autographed print he’d sighed sat nearby. Look Yuri, Victor’s going to be performing only a couple hours away. I know what it means to you to see him skate. You said you could carpool with your coach, but couldn’t afford the hotel room on top of travel for your own events.

But I can’t do anything to pay you back.

That’s why this is a gift. Victor sighed. Yuri, the room is already paid for. I can cancel it if you don’t want to go, but I’d rather you use it and enjoy yourself.

Are you sure?

Positive.

There was a moment of hesitation. Thank you Nicky. I’m excited to see Victor skate.

Victor felt a surge of satisfaction. Do more than just watch. You just won the Nebelhorn! Say hi, interact with him. You’re going to compete against him one day, so become his friend now.

I couldn’t do that!

Victor sighed, knowing it was an argument he was likely to lose.

Victor kept loose at the barrier, waiting for the scores from the previous skater to be announced.

“Control your speed going into the flip,” Yakov reminded as the crowd erupted into applause. “You’ve got the landing as long you don’t under rotate it.”

Victor nodded, listening but not.

Yuri was in the audience.

“Vitya? Are you listening?”

Victor blinked and smiled at Yakov. “Of course!”

“What did I just say?”

“That my friend Chris is rumored to have something big up his sleeve, and I can’t afford to lose points.”

Yakov grumbled and crossed his arms, but didn’t contradict.

“I’m here Yakov, and I hear you. I’m just getting into the mindset.”

Yakov sighed. “You know what you have to do. Go do it.”

Victor nodded, and skated to center ice as the announcer called his name.

He could see the music, stormclouds on the horizon with the timpani, wind carried on the strings.
Alexei’s music set a dramatic mood, he just had to skate to it.

The sound swelled, and Victor launched his quad flip with the crash of cymbals.

The audience roared their approval when he landed it and he used the momentum to go right into his step sequence.

His short program was over almost before he knew it. He blinked as he waved to the crowd.

Yakov huffed in approval as Victor stepped off the ice. “You were a bit shaky on the landing of your triple axel,” he grumbled as they walked to the kiss and cry.

“It’s the last jump Yakov,” Victor laughed. “Besides, it wasn’t bad enough to get a deduction.”

“We’re going to work on your endurance before France. I want that wobble gone by the final.”

Victor nodded. “Ok.”

“The scores please…” sounded over the loudspeaker.

Both Victor and Yakov turned to the monitor.

Victor blinked a couple times, then Yakov was pulling his hand up, making him wave at the crowd.

He’d set a new world record for the short program in his opening event of the season.

Victor stood and waved, then moved into the tunnel. There was one skater between him and Chris, and he wanted to cheer for his friend. He rushed through interviews, and promised more time after the short programs were over, then made his way to competitor seating.

Yuri was seated at the far end, as far from the entrance as possible, huddled into a coat.

Victor sighed. He wanted to talk to the young man, but the way his eyes flicked nervously told him that it wasn’t the time.

Victor took a seat close to the ice so that he could cheer for Chris.

Chris waved, a grin on his face as he skated to his starting position. Squares climbed his costume, large at his ankles and disappearing almost entirely on his shoulders into smooth gradient colors.

The music started, and Victor blinked. It wasn’t anything he could place, and even the instruments weren’t immediately identifiable. He leaned forward, as intent on the music as he was on Chris’s performance.

Drums, some kind of hit string, and a plucked string that wasn’t quite a guitar. A xylophone came in and the music built.

Victor could see the tension in Chris’s frame as he set up for a jump.

There was a pregnant pause, then Chris launched a lutz.

Victor counted the rotations, and screamed in enthusiasm when Chris’s blade kissed the ice. His best friend had just ratified a quad lutz.

Chris moved into the step sequence as applause continued to thunder around the arena.
Victor leapt to his feet as soon as the program ended, preparing to greet Chris and congratulate him. He turned to invite Yuri.

“Yuri!” Victor cried, “Did you…?"

Victor stalled. Yuri had left his seat.

Victor deflated. “Oh Yuri…”

Victor sighed and made his way back to the competitor area. Chris was fending off reporters when Victor ran up behind him and hugged him. “Chris! That was amazing! Why didn’t you tell me?”

Chris laughed even as reporters shoved microphones in their faces. “Tell my biggest rival that I was hiding a quad lutz? Victor, I love you as a friend but I still intend to win.”

Victor laughed. “I’m so proud of you!”

“That new record won’t be yours long you know. The quad lutz is worth more points than your flip.”

“I guess I’ll just have to learn a quad lutz then to even things out,” Victor teased in return.

Chris laughed and they continued the friendly banter for the sake of the reporters for several more minutes.

Victor didn’t see Yuri for the rest of the night.

“I wish Alexei could have come…” Chris lamented as he and Victor talked in the hotel room after the short programs were over. “He so wanted to see me ratify it in person.”

“Lyosha knew?”

Chris laughed. “Of course! I swore him to secrecy though.”

Victor laughed. “Figures he’d be the one to know.”

Chris sighed. “He says he won’t be there in Moscow either. He won’t see me land it until the final.”

“He’s wavering on coming to Paris too,” Victor added with a sigh of his own. “He’s so busy with school.”

“That…” Chris started, “And he’s still juggling his own newfound notoriety. Not only is he your composer, and insanely popular with it, but he’s riding his win in the Tchaikovsky too. He’s featured soloist in several performances.”

Victor smiled. “I miss him, but I love seeing him do so well for himself.”

Chris nodded. “Things are changing Victor, but in many ways they’re changing for the better.”

Victor laughed. His mind wandered to Yuri, and how he’d disappeared after Chris’s program. He sighed. “You know we set a new bar tonight.”

Chris’s tone became serious. “A world record, and a newly ratified jump both on the same night. I’ll
“admit it’s quite the way to open a season.”

“Ever wonder about those looking to catch up? How much pressure we just put on them?”

Chris sighed. “We all knew it was a matter of time. The technical component of the scores pushes us farther every year. Somebody would have ratified those jumps eventually. We just beat them to it.”

Victor nodded and flopped onto the bed. “So much has changed, even in the span of our careers. A part of me wonders if it’s too much too fast. Did you think you’d need three quads under your belt when you started?”

Chris laughed. “Let’s face it Victor, when I started I wouldn’t have even picked the music I did for this season. It’s unconventional, and under the old scoring one judge who preferred Beethoven to anything from the past century could have held me back. Figure skating is a different sport from what it was even ten years ago.”

Victor sighed. “You’re right.”

“Think back to those first skaters, tracing figures over and over. Imagine them seeing what we do. They wouldn’t even recognize it. The jumps, the choreography; it’s an entirely different skill than they had. Change is something that can’t be stopped. Those who want to compete will catch up, and eventually surpass us.”

Victor sat up again. “We’re pushing the limits of the human body, and I worry that we’re shortening the career-span of competitors too. It’s going to be harder for people approaching the upper end of the age range to perform at this level.”

Chris shrugged. “That sounds like life.”

Victor nodded. “You’re right.”

Nicky?

Yes Yuri?

Will I ever be able to compete against Victor?

Of course you will. Why?

He just set a new world record. Christophe Giacometti just ratified the quad lutz. I can barely land the quad toe. I’m just not good enough.

Yuri… there’s time. You just moved, and are now focusing more on training than you were before. You’ll get there.

Are you sure?

I’m positive. Now… were you happy to be there last night? Are you excited for the free skates?

I was so nervous Nicky. I shouldn’t have sat in the competitor seating. I think Victor saw me there in my puffy coat.

So? You’re a competitor in other grand prix series events. You’re allowed to be there.
He probably thought I snuck in.

Why would he think that? Yuri, you just won the Nebelhorn. He’s not stupid enough to not know who you are. Besides. You’ve talked to him before.

I’m not that memorable though.

Yuri… please stop underestimating yourself. You’re so much more than you give yourself credit for.

Victor hugged Chris. “Good luck. I expect to see you standing below me with a silver.”

Chris laughed. “Oh Victor, it’s you who’s taking silver today.”

Victor laughed. “There’s an advantage to being last you know. I may not be a mathematician, but I can adjust my program for scores too.”

Chris made a face. “Just wait Victor, your records are mine.”

Victor grinned. “I’m excited to see you try for them. Now get out there.”

Josef and Yakov stood nearby, exasperated looks on their faces as their pupils pushed each other while at the same time challenging each other.

“Vitya…” Yakov sighed.

Victor laughed and moved aside so Josef could give Chris final instructions.

“Go warm up,” Yakov said.

“I’m fine here,” Victor replied. “I’ll keep loose. I want to watch.”

Yakov sighed again. “Just don’t forget that he could take gold from under you.”

Victor laughed. “Don’t worry Yakov. I’m taking gold tonight.”

Yakov huffed and moved aside. Victor smiled and moved toward the barrier. He kept stretching as Chris started.

The song started with a collection of strings that once again Victor couldn’t place. He thought he heard a guitar with the wrong number of strings, and a shamisen. He made a note to have Chris show him exactly where he got his music.

Chris laced spins and jumps before starting the choreographic sequence. There was a beat of silence at the two minute mark, and that was when Chris landed the quad lutz for the second time in competition. Then the step sequence filled the bridge of the music.

The main melody returned, and he finished off with a series of spirals, spins and triples.

The audience roared their approval as tokens rained onto the ice.

Yakov huffed beside Victor. “He’s going to put up a strong score.”

Victor nodded and grinned. “He’ll make silver for sure.”
“Just don’t let it become gold. That lutz is worth more than the flip.”

Victor nodded. “I’m going to switch my axel to the back half.”

“What are you going to switch it with?”

“Either the triple lutz or the loop. I’ll decide which will have the cleaner transition swap out there.”

Yakov nodded. “You know what you have to do.”

Victor hugged Chris as he came off the ice, then waited with bated breath to see what he was against. Chris put up an impressive score, then it was Victor’s turn on the ice.

Victor took a deep breath as his name was called. He skated to center ice, closed his eyes and waited for the music to start. He thought of Yuri in the audience, and how many insecurities the young man still had about his own abilities.

Raindrops by the harp, tentative in the field, then the thunder of the full orchestra. Victor skated, letting the music wash over him.

The song was triumphant and energetic. It was his new beginning. He was the first to land a quad flip, his brother was gaining more fame of his own with each passing day, and Yuri had taken gold at Nebelhorn.

Things were going well in Victor’s life. He thought of the upcoming exhibition and of Sergei as he set up for the flip, and landed it to roaring applause.

He flit across the ice during his step sequence to the harpsichord, and immediately into his choreographic sequence after. He felt the burning in his legs as he prepared for his triple axel, and ended on his combination spin.

Victor waved and bowed.

*I’m right here Yuri. I’m real. Say hi.*

Victor picked up a couple poodle plushes as he headed toward the kiss and cry. He knew his scores would be good, and could tell by the jealous expression on Chris’s face that both men knew he’d taken gold.

“I’m beating you in the final Victor,” Chris challenged, even as he hugged him.

Victor grinned. “I guess I had better watch my back then.”

“You’re back, and my quad lutz.”

Victor laughed until Yakov dragged him over to await his scores.

Victor was still riding the high of his win, chatting with Yakov as they walked through the airport concourse.

“Vitya!”

Victor looked over to see Sergei standing in front of him, a large bouquet of roses held in his arms.
A wide grin split Victor’s face, and he ran to the open arms of his boyfriend. Sergei kissed his forehead. “Congratulations.”

Victor smiled and accepted the flowers as Yakov cleared his throat behind him.

“Sergei,” Yakov said politely.

“Good afternoon Yakov, sir,” he replied. “Congratulations.”

Yakov nodded. “I’ll let you two have some privacy. Vitya, you know which baggage carousel you need, right?”

Victor nodded.

“I’ll see you at the rink day after tomorrow.”

“Bye Yakov!”

Sergei wrapped one arm around Victor’s waist as they walked through the airport toward the baggage claim. “I watched your performances live,” he said, nuzzling his nose into Victor’s hair. “You were beautiful.”

Victor smiled and turned his face up for a kiss.

“Aren’t you supposed to be at work?” Vlctor asked when they separated again.

Sergei smiled, lips against Victor’s cheek. “Yes, but I had to come meet you. What kind of boyfriend would I be if I didn’t have flowers for you after a performance like that?”

Victor chuckled. “You have a point.”

“Are you up for dinner tonight, or are you jet lagged?”

Victor leaned in. “I could do something light, but not too late.”

“I’ll order from that little cafe you like while you get settled in. Makkachin will be happy to see you again.”

“Was she good for you while I was gone?”

“She tried to get into things she shouldn’t have. But otherwise was fine.”

They collected Victor’s baggage, then took a taxi to Victor’s apartment. Sergei placed an order while Victor collected a week’s a worth of dog kisses, then they cuddled on the couch, Victor nestled into Sergei’s embrace.

“You were stunning you know,” Sergei muttered against Victor’s hair. “I couldn’t take my eyes off you.”

Victor blushed. “Seryozha…”

Sergei turned red to match Victor. “I love hearing that name on your lips.”

Victor turned, reached up and threaded his fingers through Sergei’s hair. “Seryozha.”

They traded soft kisses until a knock at the door announced the arrival of dinner.
You’ve got this Yuri.

Yuri was gliding around the rink during his scheduled practice before the Cup of China. But Cao Bin is really good. So is Oda. Georgi Popovich is also one of the top skaters.

Don’t focus on them. You know what you need to do. You’re a beautiful skater. Just show me the same skating that you won the Nebelhorn with.

This is a higher level competition though.

Victor sighed. Yuri… You wouldn’t be there if you weren’t qualified. You’re there on your own merits. You have just as much a chance to shine there as anybody.

Victor felt Yuri’s continued nerves.

What’s your goal Yuri?

Yuri scratched to a stop at the barrier and grabbed his water bottle. I want to skate against Victor Nikiforov.

Good. How are you going to get there?

A moment of hesitation. Win?

That’s right. You have to make your own dream come true. You can do it. I know you can.

Yuri chewed on his lip and set off to practice his step sequence.

“So these men could compete against you in the final?” Sergei asked, handing Victor a steaming mug of tea.

Victor nodded and blew across the top of the cup. “Da. This is one of the qualifier events. There are a couple who will be determined tonight, but for ease of understanding figure anybody fourth place or higher is in contention.”

“They skated the short program yesterday?”

Victor nodded.

“Georgi was in first?”

“Da, but he’s been struggling on the back half of his free skate. I’ll be shocked if he stays there.”

“Shouldn’t you be rooting for your rinkmate?”

Victor laughed. “I should, but I have to be honest about where he’s at. He needs to balance his program better. He’s got as many jumps as possible loaded into the second half, but he doesn’t have the stamina for it.”

“Didn’t Yakov try to talk him out of it?”

“Of course. I bet he’ll reevaluate after this. I think he was trying to impress some girl, but last I heard
they were already having problems. He’ll come around once he starts focusing on skating again.”

Sergei tucked a strand of hair behind Victor’s ear. “And the others?”

Victor grinned. “Katsuki’s in second. He’s the one who won the Nebelhorn. As long as his nerves don’t get the better of him he should be able to hang onto a podium spot. Oda might be behind, but he’s a safe bet for the podium. I’d also keep an eye on Cao Bin and the Americans.”


“Just thinking how radiant you are when you talk about figure skating. You really love it, don’t you?”

Victor turned and smiled. He leaned in and tipped his head up for a kiss. “Of course I do,” Victor said when they separated. “I wouldn’t keep doing it if I didn’t love it.”

Sergei smiled. “I never see you more excited than when you’re thinking about who you’ll compete against. Your eyes are drawn to their movements, like you’re looking for things that will bring them down, but also the things that make them shine.”

Victor blushed. “Everybody pours their soul onto the ice. Me included.”

“And it’s beautiful, just like you.”

Victor buried his face in Sergei’s shoulder.

Sergei laughed. “What’s wrong?”

“You can’t just say things like that!”

Sergei shifted, lifted Victor’s chin and kissed him softly. “Sure I can, because it’s true.”

What’s wrong Yuri?

I failed.

You came in fourth. You didn’t fail.

I can’t make the grand prix final like this.

You know you’re still well placed. Do well in Moscow and you could still make it.

How do I compete against Christophe Giacometti? He’s got a quad lutz! I’ve barely got a quad toe on my best days.

Quads aren’t everything. You’re one of the few who get higher GOE on your step sequences and spins. That’s hard to do at level four. Your program components are always high too. Just deliver a solid program, that’s all you need to do.

“Lyosha!”
Victor ran across the lobby of the Paris hotel and crashed into his brother. Alexei laughed and hugged him back. Fabienne stood nearby, smiling and chuckling.

“I thought you were busy with school!” Victor said.

Alexei smiled softly, then started chewing his lip. “Umm… about that…”

Victor stood and stared at his brother. “Lyosha?”

“I won’t be able to make the final,” Alexei said with a sigh. “It’s just too close to finals and between that and the concerts I’ll be featured soloist at…” Alexei paused. “I’m so sorry Vitya.”

Victor felt like he’d been punched in the gut. He took a deep breath and nodded. “So you decided to come here instead?”

Alexei nodded. “It’s tight. I won’t be able to stay through the exhibition, but I had to show up and support you in at least one event.”

Victor smiled. “Thank you.” He turned to Fabienne. “Hello Fabienne, how are you doing?”

She smiled softly. “I’m well. I’ve also got several extra performances lined up. Seems being Lyosha’s accompanist was enough to get me noticed too.”

Victor smiled at the way her accent curled around Alexei’s diminutive. “I’m glad to hear that you also benefited from Lyosha’s win.”

Fabienne nodded. “We’ve been asked to do a couple pieces, just the two of us again. But we’ve requested to put those off until summer so we can focus on school.”

“That sounds like a reasonable request.”

“They do want one in February though,” Alexei added. “I think to keep interest high.”

“And Valentine’s day,” Fabienne added. “A small concert is a nice experience for a date.”

“True.”

They walked to the counter and Victor waited while Alexei and Fabienne checked in.

“It’s too bad Chris couldn’t come,” Alexei sighed as they headed toward the elevator.

“He’s busy preparing for Rostelecom,” Victor replied. “I can’t blame him. He said the landing of his quad lutz is still a bit shaky. He wants to clean it up before the final.”

“It didn’t look shaky in Canada, at least from how it appeared on television.”

Victor smiled. “We can feel it even when the cameras don’t always see it. If he says it’s shaky then it is.”

Alexei nodded.

“Congratulations on your win in Canada,” Fabienne said. “Your performances were beautiful.”

Victor smiled. “Thank you! Though I think Lyosha’s music is really the key.”

Alexei blushed crimson. “It’s just music!”
Victor laughed and held the door so they could carry their luggage into the room. As he watched them he realized that it would be lonely in his own room by himself after having shared with either Alexei or Chris so many times before.

“It’s gorgeous music Lyosha,” Fabienne replied. “The world knows it too.”

Victor turned. “Oh?”

She laughed. “His best sales so far are on the Cumulus suite. People heard the first movement, the one you skated to, listened to the full on YouTube and the sales started coming in. The university orchestra is considering a public performance of the piece.”

Victor grinned “Lyosha! That’s fantastic!”

Alexei blushed.

Fabienne laughed. “It gets better…”

“Fabie! No!” Alexei cried, fully embarrassed.

Fabienne grinned. “Yes.” Her eyes glinted with glee. “The orchestra your father is with… they want Alexei’s concerto.”

“Concerto?” Victor asked.

Fabienne nodded. “Next year for his senior project Lyosha will have to write a concerto. They’ve already expressed interest.”

“So, not this summer but the one after…”

She nodded. “He could be playing solo to his own composition!”

“Fabie! You’re going to jinx it!” Alexei protested.

She stuck her tongue out at him playfully. “He’s your brother, I think he’d be as excited as the rest of us.”

Alexei blushed, and Victor grinned.

“Lyosha! That’s amazing! I can’t wait to hear it!”

“Don’t say anything... Ok?” Alexei asked timidly. “I haven’t even told Chris yet. The only one outside the family and a handful of people at the top of the orchestra management who knows is Fabie. It’s still not finalized.”

“Oh?”

Fabienne nodded. “Your father is hesitant.”

“Not to mention it still hasn’t even been written yet!” Alexei added. “I’m still trying to decide how I want to theme it. I’ll need to start writing here in a few months at latest.”

“Why not?” Victor asked. “I mean… why doesn’t father want to play it?”

Fabienne shrugged. “I think it’s because he’s still relatively new as the concertmaster. He doesn’t want it to look like they’re playing the piece due to a family connection.”
Victor considered for a minute then nodded. “I guess that makes sense.”

“Papa didn’t even know until after the conductor and manager both approached me though,” Alexei sighed. “I think they were aware of the optics as well.”

“So are you going to do it?”

Alexei walked over and sat on the edge of the bed. Fabienne followed and draped her arms over his shoulders, kissing into the crook of his neck.

Alexei nodded after a couple minutes. “Assuming that Papa agrees, then yes. Though I will insist that they review a draft of the composition before finalizing their decision to ensure that it’s up to their standards.”

“Seems fair.”

Alexei smiled. “I’m still worried about jinxing it though.”

Victor laughed. “My lips are sealed. How about you two freshen up, I’ll go change and we’ll go get dinner.”

Alexei and Fabienne looked at each other, smiled then nodded.

Victor waited at the barrier for final instructions from Yakov. The weight of expectation was heavy on his shoulders after setting a world record in Canada.

“Focus on a clean program Vitya. You’re good on points as long as it’s clean. Cao Bin and Oda are going to be biggest ones to look out for, but your base program is worth more. There’s no reason to break your own record here.”

Victor nodded.

Yakov studied him for several seconds then nodded. “Go do your thing.”

Victor smiled. “Don’t worry Yakov. We’re taking home another gold.”

Yakov grunted in agreement and Victor set off. 

_You’re not here tonight Yuri, but I know you’re watching. Keep reaching. I know you can do it._

Alexei’s music started, and Victor thought about his brother’s successes. He smiled, knowing that they were supporting each other, even if they weren’t always physically there.

He realized that he owed Alexei an apology.

The song came to a close, and he listened for a familiar voice in the crowd as he waved.

“Vitya!”

Victor grinned and skated over. He leaned across the barrier and hugged his brother. “Wave to the crowd Lyosha. This is your moment too.”

“How?”
Victor grinned. “It’s your music. Give a wave.”

Alexei waved with a shy smile on his face. Victor laughed and pulled his arm up.

“Vitya!” Alexei protested, and Victor released him with a laugh.

“I’ll see you back at the hotel Lyosha.” Victor said as he skated toward an annoyed Yakov.

“I’m sorry,” Victor said, wrapping Alexei in his embrace.

“For what?” Alexei asked, squirming.

Victor released him and stepped back. “For being greedy. I was so disappointed when you said that you wouldn’t be able to make the final. But I ask more of you than I can give in return. I’m almost never able to make your performances, and I know you travel to mine.”

Alexei smiled softly. “Vitya… you’re my brother. I always want to be there for you.”

“And you are,” Victor said. He reached out and put his hands on Alexei’s upper arms. “Every time I skate to your music I know you’re there with me. Even when you’re not in the building you’re still there. Music is your voice and I can hear your cheering in every note.”

Alexei blushed.

“Lyosha. Be my composer. I want this to be the last season I skate to anybody’s music but yours.”

Alexei’s eyes widened, then he hugged Victor. “Of course Vitya!”

They hugged, laughing, and Victor felt a new lightness in his chest.

“So Chris is in first, and that kid from that first competition this season is in second after the short program?” Sergei asked, sitting next to Victor as the men’s free skate at Rostelecom started.

Victor nodded and settled against Sergei with a sigh.

Sergei kissed his hair. “You wanted to be there, didn’t you?”

Victor looked up and nodded. “Chris and I always try to make each other’s competitions when they’re close.”

“Yakov said no?”

Victor nodded again as he settled in again. “Chris is a threat with that quad lutz, and Yakov wanted me here and practicing rather than getting distracted in Moscow.”

“He doesn’t trust that two gold medals is good enough a start this season?”

Victor laughed. “Never enough. But it’s his job as a coach to watch out for my interests as an athlete.”

“That’s never stopped you from doing what you wanted before… if you believe him anyway.”
Victor laughed again and turned to the television as Georgi’s name was announced.

Victor chewed his lip. He had another reason for remaining at home rather than go to Moscow: Yuri.

He’d learned that his presence had a tendency to put the young man on edge, and the reaction in Canada proved that it was still the case. He wanted to see Yuri skate his best, and had slowly come to realize that the only way for that to happen was to keep his distance.


Victor nodded and focused on the television, where Georgi was rolling out of a fall. “He probably wasn’t going to make the final anyway, but that fall seals it.”

“Shame.”

Victor smiled. “Wanted to see two Russians in the final?”

Sergei chuckled. “Of course. But I had ulterior motives too.”

“Oh?”

“If Yakov had to watch him too then we’d be able to sneak off and explore Quebec City without him badgering you.”

Victor laughed. “We’d have to turn off our phones, and have Chris turn off his too.”

“What if we’re not with Chris?” Sergei teased.

Victor smiled. “Hmm, out of battery seems a convenient excuse. Maybe one of the ladies at the rink will get in.”

Sergei smiled and kissed him.

They lost themselves through Georgi’s score and another skater. Then Yuri’s name was called.

Victor turned back to the television.

“Ah, I thought we’d get to kiss until Chris skated,” Sergei teased.

Victor smiled. “Katsuki might make the final. I need to study his performance.”

“I thought he came in fourth in China.”

Victor nodded. “He did, but he’s positioned to podium here. If he does it might be enough.”

Sergei nodded and settled against Victor.

The music started, Victor smiling at the placement of Yuri’s step sequence with the dancing strings of the violin of Paganini’s Caprice No. 24 In A Minor.

Yuri’s program was clean, and he was assured a medal. The only question was whether it would be silver or gold, and Chris was the deciding factor.

Chris landed his quad lutz again, and ended the night in first, assured of a spot in the final.

Victor leaned forward and grabbed his notes off the coffee table. He sighed.
“What’s up?” Sergei asked.

“All Katsuki just missed the final.”

“So?”

Victor smiled. “I was hoping to skate against him.”

“Oh.”

Victor looked over his notes. “I’m in with the most points, then Chris. Takahashi, one of the newer American skaters and Březina from the Czech Republic are all tied for points, and Cao Bin from China rounds out the final six. Katsuki will be first alternate if somebody withdraws.”

Sergei kissed behind Victor’s ear. “I guess it’s time to start prepping for a trip to Canada.”

Victor turned and smiled. “I guess it is.”

Victor’s mind drifted to Yuri as he and Sergei kissed, and how close he’d come to their shared dream coming true.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate any comments, kudos or shares.

Yay Alexei! He’s doing so well. And Chris ratified the quad Lutz!

Head over to tumblr and yell at me about Yuri On Ice at phoenixwaller.tumblr.com

Find my other YoI fanfics on my AO3 profile at http://archiveofourown.org/users/phoenixwaller/profile

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