My Hero, Yuuri

by Abarero

Summary

At the age of 23, Yuuri Katsuki is certain he's just a dime-a-dozen hero that will never make a difference. Little does he know that the moment his path crosses with legendary hero, Victor Nikiforov, both of their lives will begin to change for the better.

Notes

Thanks for reading! Although this is based off the way that superpowers work in the series My Hero Academia, no knowledge of that series is required to enjoy this story.

Also, this story is structured like a shounen manga might be with the story being set in "arcs."

For binge readers, the arcs are the following so far:
Arc 1: Christmas Gifts (Chapters 1-11)
Arc 2: New Year’s Bang (Chapter 12-20)
Arc 3: Under Pressure (Chapter 21-33)
Arc 4: Valentine Blues (Chapter 36-current)
Chapter 1

It was the first time in my life I was thankful I was a nobody. I’d been training for so long to enter the yearly International Hero Trials that I’d long hidden my real identity deep down, under the mask and padding I wore on the outside. It was for the best. That way only I had to deal with my humiliation.

My name is Yuuri Katsuki. I’m 23 years old. For as long as I can remember, I’ve wanted to be a hero. I knew that not everyone got a quirk- that strange super power that manifested differently in everyone, but both my parents and my sister had all developed a minor quirk. Nothing fancy that could qualify them as a superhero, but genetically it seemed a given that I’d at least get something. And so, from an early age, I trained. I wasn’t sure what kind of quirk I’d end up with, so I tried a little of everything. My best friend Yuuko and her family ran the local gym so I’d go and make vain attempts at push ups and weightlifting. By the time I’d hit the age of 12- the age many people’s quirks appeared at- I was ready. It was my biggest wish for Christmas that year.

Instead, I got him.

The Christmas Tsunami. It was all over the news for months, and I’m sure I watched the original video footage of the event hundreds of times. The day a sixteen year old boy stopped a tsunami and was immediately awarded entry into the International Hero Union...

Victor Nikiforov, his long silver hair billowing in the wild wind as he calmly walked out on the shoreline, closed his eyes and gracefully moved his arms in rhythm with the crash of the waves. It was as if he was conducting some unseen orchestra, his arms moving to the unheard melody as he deftly turned the oncoming waves to ice. I was in awe. Never had I seen a hero move with such calm, such artistry before. And the effects were so strong, so powerful- that the next monsoon season was prone to spontaneous snowfall. It was extraordinary.

I made it my new year’s resolution the next year, and the years after that. That someday, I too would be a hero worthy to stand by his side.

Now, I was facing the horrible reality that that was never going to come true.

“Welcome back to the 2016 International Hero Union Grand Trial Finale! By the end of the evening,
we will have this year’s three representatives to the elite United Alliance Team. But first, let’s take a look at the current standings after yesterday’s battle simulator event.”

Yuuri took a deep breath, adjusting his mask. No matter how many times he tried to convince himself that no one would be able to tell who he was behind an elaborately painted fencing mask, his nerves always brought his doubts to the surface. No one knew that there was a plain, dime-a-dozen Japanese hero hiding under the persona of Hokusai Wave. Modified deep blue fencing gear and a mask painted with the famous painting he took his namesake from was all that he had of a secret identity, but it was some small comfort. At least this way no one could see the puffiness of his eyes and question if he’d been crying.

He was fourth after last night’s battle simulator, having taken down the robots they’d set up against the heroes in a time only 1.2 seconds slower than the third place entrant. But a frantic phone call from his family that morning confirmed what he suspected when he woke up.

His beloved dog had passed away of old age and he wasn’t home for him. He felt terrible.

“I’m sorry Vicchan. I’ll do my best for you,” he murmured quietly as he walked out onto the battlefield.

The final test was a disaster simulation, and Yuuri had done his best to prepare for working with the other five contestants. But he also knew that he felt emotionally raw, his anxiety more on edge and his heart racing far more than usual; things he absolutely did not want to deal with when on the same stage as his hero.

The announcer rattled off a countdown and within seconds the simulated city had experienced three explosions.

Yuuri closed his eyes, forcing himself to focus. “Okay, so they’re running a terrorist attack simulation. First, I need to find the epicenter and assess the damage. Second, I need to check for any secondary bombs. Third, I need to sweep the surrounding area for the bomber. I can do this. I can do this.”

He opened his eyes and his body sprang into action.
“Congrats, I guess.”

Victor had finally managed to get away from the press and make it down one of the back hallways of the arena only to be cornered by Yuri Plisetsky, rising junior’s hero. Since they were both coached by the same man, Victor had somewhat taken the teen under his wing.

“You guess?” he asked bemused.

Yuri scoffed. “Though I’m not forgiving Mila for losing to that dumbass from Canada. Ugh. And what the shit did that Wave guy from Japan do? Did you say something stupid to him and piss him off?”

Victor frowned. He wasn’t honestly sure what had happened with that entrant. After showing great agility and skill in the trial the day before, somehow after Victor had approached him the guy had locked up.

“I have no idea what happened. I just came up to him and asked what his quirk was so we could figure out how to move that steel beam best. But he completely froze up and then ran off.”

Yuri kicked at the ground. “Hmph. Wonder if the kid had some disaster flashback. That happened to that kid in the Junior League last year pretty badly. Would explain why he did jack shit the rest of the trial and completely tanked his score.”

“You’re a little young to be calling him a kid, you know.”

“I didn’t tank my score. That jerk better watch it because next year I won’t take it easy on him either.”

Victor laughed, knowing that despite his vitriol Yuri meant what he said in the best way possible.

“Someone’s staring…”
Victor looked up at the crowd lingering at the end of the hallway. Most of the people were leaving the venue, but one man was staring pretty obviously at him.

“Did you want an autograph?” Victor offered.

The man started, eyes wide, before hastily turning away. Victor’s smile fell.

“Guess it must be lonely at the top,” Yuri muttered.

Victor’s frown deepened. Sadly, whether he knew it or not, the teen wasn’t far from the truth.

The last thing Yuuri wanted to do was hang around the IHU headquarters in Barcelona even if his flight home wasn’t until the next morning. But his coach, Celestino, had made a rather valid point that it was at least necessary to make a brief appearance at the post-event party. Not only was it a good time to mingle with fellow heroes, but also sponsors and fans. Yuuri didn’t voice his thoughts aloud, but he was just so thankful he was a masked hero right now that could pretend to be a nobody. People like the new United Alliance Team, the three heroes so esteemed they didn’t even have a secret identity, wouldn’t be able to hide amongst the crowd. Yuuri on the other hand was decided, he’d go, let Celestino talk to a few people, then bow out before he had to interact with anyone important.

Plus, as much as Yuuri wanted to put his foot down and stay in his room, he knew how important it was for Celestino to talk to sponsors at events like this. And while Yuuri knew no sponsors would probably care about him, he didn’t want to deprive his best friend Phichit the chance to snag some good endorsements.

So he’d put on his best suit, tried to make himself look more presentable than he felt, and trudged himself alongside Celestino to the event.

He hadn’t planned to stay more than an hour, but while Celestino made the rounds to the sponsors, Yuuri had tucked himself into a corner by the drink table. He’d been on his third flute of champagne when Celestino returned, telling him he had to take a quick phone call with Phichit then he’d be back.

Yuuri wasn’t sure how much time had passed, his mind already a little fuzzy from the alcohol. Just
one drink more, then he should be back right? Yuuri suppressed a yawn. Hopefully he’d back soon and he could go to bed and forget the entirety of the last six months of his life.

The sooner he could forget about his brief encounter with Victor, the better.

Victor Nikiforov, superhero name Winter Monsoon, was the icon of the hero world. After becoming the youngest hero ever admitted to the IHU, he’d single handedly put such a dent in the influx of villains and troublemakers that it was often joked that he could put them all out of business. Of course, this caused a harsh backlash from the villain community; former adversaries beginning to team up to better their chances at going head to head with the ever stronger heroes. In turn, national hero unions immediately sought to team up with the United Nations to form a worldwide protection network, resulting in the formation of the United Alliance Team. At the age of 22, Victor was one of the first three members of the team. Now, at 27, he’d yet again placed 1st in the trials and earned himself a place on the team. To anyone else, it would have seemed like the man had it all.

But to Victor, it meant yet another year living at HQ and another boring banquet he’d need to charm his way through. Though he made sure to never let on, the job was beginning to take a rather hefty toll on him. Yakov had stressed it over and over to him, that if he even looked the slightest bit weak, it would spell disaster. If a villain could take down the Winter Monsoon, it would spell an end to the peace that the last five years had won them.

And so he smiled and carried on. Yet another banquet, yet another year to go. Nothing was going to change, was it?

“Victor, get your ass over here and film me kicking this guy’s ass!” Yuri’s voice cut across the small talk he’d been making with a few sponsors.

He flickered his eyes across the room to where Yuri had shed his dress jacket and tie and was beginning to...was he breakdancing? What in the world was even going on?

Victor made a few polite excuses and rushed over to the scene. Sure enough, Yuri Plisetsky had gotten himself into some sort of dance-off with…

He caught the glimpse of the man’s eyes, and he couldn’t help but feel he’d met him somewhere before. Yuri came over and shoved his phone into Victor’s hand, insisting that he record what was going on. Victor obliged.
A moment later, it clicked. Double-fold. The eyes— that was the man down the hallway that Yuri had seen staring at them. But the body—the way the man moved, that was definitely not just an average fan or sponsor. That was the same entrant in the trials he’d hoped he could have the chance to speak with. The one hero that ran when he spoke to him, Hokusai Wave.

Inwardly, Victor wondered if anyone else even realized who he was. It was always a bit strange with secret identities, but some people could easily see through them while others not so much.

“Someone’s got some sweet moves,” Christophe murmured closer to Victor’s ear than he would have liked.

“Chris.”

“Who’s the drunk?”

“I’m...not sure.”

Chris chuckled. “Yuri, who’s that kicking your ass?”

The teen swore as he fell, then glared over at Chris and Victor. “Some asshole who has my name.”

The two older heroes exchanged a bewildered look, but before either could question further, the man in question stood up and swerved in their direction, pausing to pick up the champagne bottle on the floor and knocking it back as if he was chugging water.

He was definitely drunk, Victor noted, his hair disheveled, jacket gone and tie askew, but still...wow, rather attractive. If he was correct about this being the man from earlier, then there had to be some glasses discarded somewhere as well.

“How much has he had to drink anyways?” Chris asked with a laugh.

Yuri, who had gathered up his jacket and was fuming silently beside Victor scoffed. “Who knows.
He bumped into me, I asked him who the hell he thought he was, and he said his name was Yuri too.”

“And somehow that led into a breakdance off?” Victor asked.

“Yeah well- he started it.”

“Looks like he’s ready for round two,” Chris noted, pointing toward where Yuuri had found his way back to the drink table.

“Is he here alone? I mean, did you see him come in with anyone?”

Both Chris and Yuri shook their heads.

“I’ll just keep him company then,” Victor stated.

Chris raised an eyebrow and Victor knew that the closest thing he had to a best friend was clearly reading more into it than he wanted him to.

Well, someone should at least keep an eye on him, right?

Victor wasn’t quite sure what to do, but nonetheless he walked right over to Yuuri’s side.

“Uh...hey, you doing okay?”

Yuuri’s head whipped around, his eyes widening as his gaze landed on Victor’s.

“You’re...you’re Victor Nikiforov…”

Victor smiled, gently. “Yes, that I am.”
Yuuri stuck out his hand holding his champagne glass before realizing the error and switching to his other. “Yuuri Katsuki. I am honored to meet you.”

His hand was warm, and a bit sticky, but Victor just grasped it firmly.

“The pleasure is mine.” And for once, Victor actually meant it.

Yuuri’s face flushed red and before he could do or say more, he knocked back another glass of champagne. “Sorry,” he mumbled. “Nerves.”

Victor laughed, light and honest. It had been awhile since he’d felt this open with someone.

“Are you here as a spectator, sponsor or… hero?”

Yuuri dropped his hand and for a moment Victor was afraid he’d said too much. It was always hard to tell how those with a secret identity wanted it handled after all.

But then he felt the firm grip of the hand on his tie as Yuuri tugged him down to his level, his breath warm against his ear and the sensation prickling at his skin. Was this guy coming onto him?

“What do you want me to be, Victor?”

He gasped. Never had his name sounded so... good. And sure, he’d had plenty of people flirt with him before, but well… he was never this interested in return. He reached up and slowly untangled the fingers from his tie, taking the hand into his own. “Whatever you want. But…” He trailed his fingers over Yuuri’s, feeling the rough calluses and scars on them. “I don’t think just anyone has hands like these.”

Yuuri smirked. “Ah, so you’re smart too. But then I knew that, I know everything about you…”

He’d pulled his hand free of Victor’s grasp, reaching up to press one finger across Victor’s lips.
“Can you keep a secret, pretty boy?”

Victor nodded, perhaps a little too eagerly. God, he’d do just about anything Yuuri wanted right now...

Yuuri smiled, languidly leaning in until his lips brushed against Victor’s ear. “You’ve probably heard of the hero of Japan… Well…” He trailed the finger off his lips and gently nudged Victor’s chin in his direction. “You’re looking at him.”

He leaned back, clearly curious as to Victor’s reaction to that statement. And he didn’t disappoint, quickly closing up the space between them and pausing only when his nose was alongside Yuuri’s, their lips only a hair’s breadth apart. “Then I have the pleasure of making your acquaintance, Hokusai Wave.”

Across the room, Chris finally hit the breaking point and yelled over. “Hey either invite me or get a room you two!”

Victor started to turn, ready to tell Chris off for interrupting, but before he could, he felt Yuuri’s hand on his wrist.

“Victor, get down.”

And before he could question why, the lights went out.

Nearby, he saw a small flicker of red dots go rolling by on the floor and immediately he knew what was happening. Someone had taken his guard down as a chance to attack. Shit.

Yuuri yelled from beside him. “Voltaic, get us some light. JJ get this bomb to Medusa. Physique, smash it. Everyone else, find the bomber.”

And although Victor knew they were probably as equally shocked as he was, the rest of the heroes jumped into action.

“Lights on!” Emil said, electricity still flickering between his arms and the ceiling.
“It’s…” The blur of the Canadian froze for a moment. Victor blinked and suddenly, there he was with his stupid pose, feet away from where he once stood. “JJ Style!”

Behind him, Sara Crispino held the bomb, her powers quickly turning it to stone before she tossed it across the room to Mila. And with her super strength, it was crushed in seconds.

Victor scanned the room to find Chris and Yuri both pinning down a person.

Chris, his arm aflame, held a black clad woman down. “I’m not going to go easy on you just because you’re a lady, got that? Don’t make the Smolder scar such a pretty face…”

Yuri, who had Michele standing behind him pounding his steel-hardened fist against his hand, held his clawed fingers inches away from a man’s throat. “You try anything and I shank you, got that asshole?”

Victor turned to Yakov in the crowd. “Call the authorities, we’ll keep things under control until they arrive.”

His coach nodded, as the rest of the crowd began to murmur amongst themselves. Immediately, Victor noticed how many phones were out.

“Also, I would ask that any footage of this is not given out. We have many members of our hero community here tonight without their masks and it would be a breach of the code of secrecy put out by the IHU to betray their trust by making their faces public. I thank you in advance for your understanding.”

The crowd seemed to take the hint and slowly everyone’s phones disappeared back into their purses and pockets.

Victor felt a shaky hand at his arm.

“Thanks.”
He smiled back at Yuuri. “What kind of hero would I be if I didn’t look out for my friends. If anyone is owed thanks though, it’s you. That’s some quick thinking in the heat of the moment. I owe you.”

Yuuri shrugged. “I’ll accept payment in the form of a dance.”

Victor blinked.

“From you. Once these scumbags are picked up.”

He turned back to the drink table and picked up another champagne glass, downing it as quickly as before. Victor was floored. How drunk was he and yet he still reacted faster than everyone else in the room?

*Does he have some sort of quirk that can stabilize his mind despite the alcohol?*

The doors burst open with a flurry of activity as the Police and Villain Suppression Force arrived and quickly escorted the two out. Reporters, of course, were not far behind.

“Okay, Yuuri. If that’s what you want. Let me take care of this first okay?”

He nodded and Victor turned to the familiar faces of the local action news reporters.

“Hello, I see you all wasted no time. Gotta have tomorrow’s headline, right?”

“Can you tell us what happened?”

“Who were they?”

“Which heroes did the saving? Are they the United Alliance Team?”

Victor shot them a winning smile. “Sadly, I cannot comment on specifics as we have several heroes
here without their masks on. Usually this banquet is a time of peace when we can all let our guards down and relax. I’d hate to infringe on their trust by speaking out of turn to the media, you know?"

The reporters mumbled in reply, but Victor pressed on.

“So for now, let’s just say that the heroes at the scene handled it efficiently and effectively and that there is nothing to worry about, okay? I’m sure the Police can answer all your questions about the two that were apprehended, so you’d better go catch up with them.”

And not about to be beaten by the other news channel crews, all of them quickly filed out after the authorities. Victor took a deep breath. Good, they hadn’t pressed for names. That could have been messy.

Behind him, the chatter had relaxed amongst the guests and the heroes were all complimenting one another on their work. But Victor noticed one was missing.

*Where did Yuuri go?*

He felt a tap on his shoulder.

“I believe you owe me a dance, Mr. Nikiforov.”

And honestly not sure what had come over himself, Victor called over to Chris. “Hey, find some music. Let’s lighten things up a bit.”

Chris shot him a look and Victor knew he was going to hear about this for days to come. But as soon as Yuuri’s hand slid down his arm, Victor realized he really didn’t care what everyone was else was going to think for once. This time, he just wanted to enjoy each and every second in Yuuri’s world.

And either Chris had finally humored him, or someone else had, because some sort of flamenco music started up. Victor never had the chance to see who, because Yuuri had taken him in his arms and swung him immediately into the dance.

“I see you’ve done this before,” he quipped.
Yuuri spun him out and stepped back. “Perhaps,” he said coyly. The smirk was full of utter confidence though.

Not one to be outdone, Victor yanked his jacket off and flourished it. Yuuri rose to the occasion, holding his hands up near his temple as if they were bull’s horns. Someone in the crowd, most likely Chris, let out a low whistle.

Yuuri rushed past, snagging Victor by the waist as he did and drawing him around into his arms. He swung him back then lifted him forward, their noses brushing against each other.

“Wow,” he gasped out. “You are good.”

Yuuri trailed his hand down his side, gripping the back of Victor’s leg and pulling it over his own. “I’m just getting started.”

He dipped him again and Victor wasn’t sure if it was the dance move or something else that made him feel so lightheaded. But something about Yuuri made him feel alive in a way nothing had ever done before, made his skin feel as if electricity was dancing across it every moment he was able to touch him.

A laugh bubbled up in his throat, surprising even himself, as Victor found himself spun around and once again face to face with Yuuri.

“You should visit sometime,” he said as he spun Victor out and back into his arms. “I could teach you a move or two.”

Victor chuckled. “Oh. Well then I should probably teach you something in return, hmm?”

Yuuri’s finger traced down Victor’s cheek, his hand coming to rest over his heart.

“You know, I’d love that. Victor…” He leaned in, the dance abruptly forgotten as he just pulled Victor into a gentle hug. “I would. It would mean everything to me to learn from you. It sounds stupid, but I’ve always admired you, you know?”
He blinked, the sudden switch from coy to shy causing his heart skip a beat. “Yuuri?”

Victor was certain his face had to be as red as Yuuri’s was.

“You’ve always been my hero.”

And in that moment Victor really wanted to say he’d jump on the next plane to Japan to teach Yuuri whatever it was he wanted. Because although he’d been told that so many times by so many people over the years, something about it coming from Yuuri made him feel completely different.

“I’m...I’m truly honored, Yuuri.”

He pulled back, placing his hands atop Yuuri’s shoulders and smiled. “Hey, you must be tired. Is there someone here with you or…”

Victor had to admit, he was somewhat disappointed when he heard someone calling Yuuri’s name at that moment.

“Yuuri? Are you okay?”

Ah, it was his coach.

“I’m sorry for the trouble. I left to make a call and then with the police and everything.”

Victor shook his head. “It’s been no trouble at all. Yuuri here is who we have to thank for the matter being handled so quickly after all.”

Celestino looked surprised, glancing at the disheveled Yuuri and back to Victor as if he surely had to be mistaken.

Chris, who had thankfully kept his comments to himself up to this point, came over and tossed an
arm around Victor’s shoulders. “Yeah that guy is the only reason this is still a banquet hall and not a crime scene. Though he’s had a lot to drink so make sure he’s prepared for the consequences in the morning.”

He nodded, giving his thanks to them for looking after his charge. Yuuri had gone rather quiet and for a moment Victor wondered if he was sobering up to the point he could perhaps offer a phone number.

“Um...has anyone seen my glasses?”

“Here,” Yuri grumbled as he walked forward with both Yuuri’s jacket and glasses in hand.

Victor raised an eyebrow and Yuri glared. “Well someone has to be the adult around here.”

Draping the jacket over his shoulders, Celestino nodded again to the gathered heroes. “Thanks again. I’ll make sure he’s taken care of tonight.”

They turned to go and Victor started to say something, but Yuri stopped him. “Don’t.”

Victor shot them one last look before turning towards the teen. “What are you…”

Yuri held up a crumbled piece of paper with a number hastily scrawled on it. “You owe me. Majorly.”

Victor laughed in relief as he yanked the boy into a hug.

“Ugh, get off me you loser!”

He’d give Yuuri some time to sort stuff out and then, well, he did need to learn how to dance. That was always a valid excuse, right?
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

I would like to apologize to Yuuri Katsuki, because sadly this time the banquet is not so easily forgotten. And to Victor Nikiforov, for Chris being Chris. Hope you all enjoy!

The shrill notes of the Hamster Dance were not the best way to wake up. Especially, Yuuri groaned and pressed a hand to his forehead, when you had a splitting headache.

Blearily he fumbled around the nightstand to retrieve his glasses and phone, his mind only partially acknowledging the glass of water and bottle of painkiller near them.

“Phichit, what time is it?”

His friend laughed. “I checked my time zones, you’re just sleeping in. It should be…” He thought for a moment. “10 in the morning? Maybe 11, but no earlier. What happened last night?”

Yuuri’s muddled thoughts slowly fell into place, providing him with where he was, why he was there, and all the baggage that went with that.

“Oh, yeah I screwed up really badly. I’m sorry, I know you were counting on the sponsorships Celestino snagged too.”

Phichit exhaled pointedly. “Yu-uriiiiii.”

“What?”

“What was the last thing I told you before you flew out, hmm?”

He pinched the bridge of his nose as if perhaps that would stop the pain in his head. “Uh…”
“I said, and I quote- Winning is not important. What’s important is…?”

Yuuri allowed himself a slight smile as the memory came back to him. “That I even made it this far. I know...I know. I just...” He sighed, knowing if anyone would understand the weight of losing a pet, it’d be Phichit. “Vicchan...didn’t make it. I couldn’t really focus after that, you know?”

Phichit’s warmth could be heard in his voice. It was like he was somehow giving Yuuri a hug although he was thousands of miles away.

“Yuuri...I’m so sorry. That dog loved you so much, so he would have been happy to know that you were out there being awesome, okay? I don’t think Vicchan could be mad at you if he tried.”

“I know. I just…” He swallowed down his tears. “I wish I could have been there.”

“Sometimes you’ve got to be other places. From what I heard, it sounds like you were needed in Barcelona as well. Who knows what would have happened if you hadn’t helped out last night?”

Yuuri’s thoughts stalled. Last night? What?

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I don’t know specifics, but from the way Celestino talked you must have done something pretty awesome last night. I mean, why else would the top two of the United Alliance Team be acting like you saved their asses?”

He sat down the phone. Glanced at the pill bottle and glass of water on the nightstand and with a sudden urgency, opened the bottle, poured out a dose and took it. There were only two times Celestino had left him this sort of thing on the nightstand. Usually, it was because he’d been crying so much he woke up with a headache the next day. Which well, that’s what happened, right?

But now blurry and disjointed thoughts from last night seemed to float around in his mind. Celestino had made him go to the after party. Shit.

“Yuuri?” Phichit called from the waylaid phone. “What’s up man?”
He scrambled to pick it up. “Phichit, what did Celestino tell you? In exact words.”

His friend sounded concerned, but was willing to humor him. “He told me that I didn’t need to worry about you. That the news reports couldn’t name names since lots of you at the party were unmasked, but that Victor Nikiforov and Christophe Giacometti both insisted that you were the reason the bomb didn’t go off. Said even Physique came over to you as you were leaving and thanked you. And...well I don’t know about you, but this doesn’t sound like something Celestino would make up.”

So quietly Phichit almost didn’t hear it, Yuuri mumbled, “I hate myself so freaking much right now.”

“Yuuri!”

“Phichit. I...I don’t really remember any of that. I’m not saying you’re making it up or that Celestino is but...”

The pieces clicked immediately for Phichit. “Oh man, were you drinking? You never let yourself get that wasted though. I mean, you’ve explicitly made me stop you before you get that bad. Multiple times. Yuuri...dude...”

“Is there any video of this? Like what did the news show?”

“Nothing. Apparently someone put their foot down since there were so many people out of uniform. The only thing I’ve seen is photos of the villains being led out to the police cars. No video outside of reporters standing in front of the building and reporting very censored information. There was a bomb attempt during the party, the heroes on site handled it, that’s it.”

“I cannot believe myself. Victor complimented me? Are you sure I’m not dreaming this?”

Phichit let out a small laugh. “Yeah, sorry, but this is all in the real. I can see if I can dig something up though. You know, I’m sure someone has something on their phone. And, well that’s kind of my thing so...”

“Don’t hack anyone’s phone, Phichit.”
“Hey. My quirk can’t do that. But - I do have a pretty good idea of where to find photos and videos from hero situations that aren’t widely publicized. Just because the media didn’t tell us anything doesn’t mean I can’t find something. You want proof, I get that. Hell, if I’d saved my idol’s ass I’d want it on video too. So, let me look around and see what I can find, okay?”

Yuuri sighed. “I can’t believe I apparently got drunk and saved Victor. God I’m so glad I have a secret identity right now…”

“Well, Mr. Wave- you finish resting then get on that plane back home. I’ll be in touch with more details as I find them, okay? In the meantime, Japan still needs it’s ace hero back.”

“I’m sure they’re doing fine without me.”

“Yuuri.”

“Right, I’ll be home soon. Thanks for everything, as always, Phichit. I’ll see you soon, okay?”

“You hang in there, okay? As for me- this is Freeze Frame signing off~”

And although he’d heard the phrase hundreds of times, as always, it still made Yuuri crack a smile. At least someone could laugh about the situation. As for himself, Yuuri buried his face back into the pillow and decided at least for an hour more he was going to pretend whatever happened last night didn’t happen. Ignorance is bliss, right?

“Hey, Romeo! Wherefore art thou that’s not where you should be on monitor duty?”

Victor blinked from where he was lying horizontally across his bed, his eyes flicking over to his computer. Ah, so he was about an hour late.

Chris, as always, knocked but did so while coming in the door. “Look, I’ve given you two free hours to do whatever it is you need to do to get your head back to where we need it.” He paused on seeing
Victor, who was in the same spot he’d left in him the night before. “Hey, JJ- bring the smelling salts. He’s still swooning.”

Victor grabbed the closest pillow and threw it at him. “I’m not swooning.”

He cocked an eyebrow. “And I’m not standing in your room. Come on, at least wank off like a normal person. Jeez.”

Another pillow slammed into his face. This one covered in a fine layer of ice.

“All right Queen Elsa, let’s go!” Chris said his flames flickering to life on his arms. “You know the Smolder is ready for you.”

JJ chose this moment to enter, looking rather bewildered as to why his two new teammates were looking like they were about in engage in a quirk-powered pillow fight. “What’s going on?”

Chris shrugged. “Lover boy here thinks just because he’s smitten it means he doesn’t have to work.”

“I said nothing of the sort.”

“Come on, Victor. This isn’t like you. Hell, the one time I hired you a hooker all you did was treat her to dinner and send her home with twice the payment for her trouble. And then when I tried a male hooker…”

“Okay, okay. We get the point,” Victor said, his eyes flickering over to JJ. “I’m sorry. I’m just…not used to this.”

Chris turned to JJ, clearly trying to win him over to his side of the argument. “Five years. Five years I’ve been trying to get him laid!”

“Chris leave JT out of this.”

“Uh… It’s JJ Style,” he replied, doing a pose.
“Yes. Sorry. John Kyle. Look Chris, he doesn’t need to deal with this on day one.”

“And I’m just saying that this is the most un-Victor like I’ve ever seen you. Do I need to call a doctor? Are you sick or something?”

Chris dropped the pillow and went over to press a hand to Victor’s head.

“Ah yes, there’s the problem.”

Victor blinked. “I’m not sick. I just…”

“Is your heart racing faster than usual?”

“Well yes, but…”

“Are you having trouble focusing?”

“That too, but…”

“Keep heaving out deep sighs for no particular reason?”

JJ smirked. “Oh, I see.”

Victor looked between the other two. “What’s going on? Am I really sick?”

Chris nodded gravely. “Yeah, it’s pretty bad. And love sickness is so hard to cure. You’d better call your new boyfriend up and tell him the news.”

Victor narrowed his eyes. “Chris…”
He held up his hands as if innocent. “I’m just telling you, this is the worst case I’ve seen. You’ve got it bad. Like Disney Princess I just sang a whole musical number about how in love I am—bad.”

The space between Victor’s hand on the bed and Chris’s legs suddenly turned to ice.

“Hey, don’t ice the messenger!”

JJ just laughed. “No offense, but have you seriously not had this happen before? I would think someone as popular as you are would…”

“Have had lots of someones?” Victor replied curtly. “Yes, that’s definitely what everyone wants to think.” The ice began to creep further up Chris’s torso as Victor placed a finger over his lips. “But not everyone throws themselves at every opportunity presented to them like some people do.”

“Victor, turn it off.” Chris warned. “You hate it when I have to get out of it on my own.”

Victor shrugged, idly picking up his pillow and tossing it to JJ. “Cover your eyes, kid.”

“Don’t make it sound so vulgar.”

Victor’s laugh was sharp. “That’s rich coming from you, Chris. Now, if you’ll pardon this Disney Princess, I have monitor duty to attend to.”

With that, Victor stood up, gave Chris’s shoulder a pat, then sauntered out of the room. Behind him, JJ immediately discovered the reason for the warning as Chris used his quirk to melt the ice and all his clothing underneath it. It was going to be an interesting day at the United Alliance Team Headquarters.

It had been three days since Yuuri had arrived back in Hasetsu and he’d spent every waking moment he could training. He’d talked Minako-sensei into giving him extra hours of fencing lessons, although she still insisted his form was perfect. Yuuko and Takeshi had let him into the gym late at
night when he couldn’t sleep and he’d spend hours working out and running himself ragged.

If he was too exhausted to think, then he wouldn’t have to dwell on the millions of stupid things he probably did or said in Victor’s presence. And the internal mantra of “at least I have a secret identity” had become so constant that he’d begun to mutter it under his breath between pushups without even realizing it.

“You won’t for long if you keep that up,” Takeshi said from beside him. “You okay, Yuuri?”

He offered a strained smile. “Fine. Just fine. Just…”

Takeshi patted the bench next to himself and waited for Yuuri to join him there.

“I get that you’re bummed about not making the cut, but don’t you think you’re going at it a little hard?”

Yuuri took the bottle of water Takeshi offered him and downed a good portion of it.

“I’ve...got a lot on my mind. Just...stupid stuff I don’t want to think about.”

He nodded. “Well remember that new kid is coming to meet you today, and I don’t want you to show up half-dead already. Yuuko said he’s really excited to finally meet you.”

Yuuri took a deep breath then leveled his friend with a look. “What would you do if you may have done something stupid in front of your hero?”

He looked surprised by the change of subject, but immediately seemed to catch on. “Hold on now, did you get to talk to Victor? I thought you said…”

“I did. I didn’t talk to him, from what I can remember.” Yuuri sighed. “But apparently I got drunk at the after party and I don’t know what the hell happened. Phichit’s been prodding around, but so far all he’s been able to confirm is that I did something that helped them stop the bomber faster than any other hero in the room. Which I honestly don’t even know how to digest that, let alone anything else.”
Takeshi gave his back a pat, perhaps a little too hard. “You’re overthinking things again, Yuuri. There’s a reason you’ve been ranked the top hero in the country for the last three years and no it’s not because there isn’t someone better. There’s a reason there’s a kid coming to meet you, because you’re his hero and he wants you to help him become one himself.”

“I just keep thinking about it though, and you know how it is. The more I think…”

“The more you worry and then you have a meltdown over it. Yeah, I know. So you’re drowning yourself in your work. Still isn’t going to solve the problem though. You’ve just got to accept that whatever happened happened and move on from it. Last I checked you don’t have a quirk that reverses time, so you can’t change it. Just got to move forward.”

Yuuri smiled. “Yuuko told me the same thing. No wonder you two work out so well together.”

Takeshi wrapped an arm around his shoulders and gave him a hug. “That’s because it’s good advice. The way I look at it you did something no one else in that room could. Even Victor Nikiforov. And if that doesn’t prove to you that you deserve to be on the same playing field as him, hell- I don’t know what will convince you.”

“Well, I sure have something that might,” a cheerful voice called from the doorway behind them. They both turned to see Yuuko beaming at them. “The recruit is here. Are you ready?”

Yuuri nodded. Celestino had talked to him about it on the flight home, how the Japanese Hero Union had contacted him about having Yuuri talk to a possible recruit. He wasn’t sure why at first, but after Yuuko had talked to the boy, it was clear as day. This teen had looked up to Hokusai Wave for the last three years. If anyone would get him to formally join the JSU, it’d be the man behind that name.

Yuuko stepped aside, letting the rather excited teen into the room. Yuuri stood up, and for a moment was afraid that the recruit would think Takeshi had to be the man behind the mask.

But the boy immediately zeroed in on Yuuri.

“Are you…I mean,” He bowed, perhaps a bit too far, “Hokusai Wave, it is a great honor to make your acquaintance. I am…” He looked up, his eyes sparkling with excitement, “Aerostat, but you can call me Minami.”
He held out his hand and Yuuri took it. “Minami. You can call me Yuuri. I’ve heard a lot about you from the JSU. So you have... a flight quirk?”

Minami nodded, perhaps a little too eagerly. “Yes! It’s nothing special but I can levitate for about five hundred kilometers. I wear out after that, but I’m sure I can do better in the future!”

Yuuri had to smile. That amount of distance was far more impressive than the boy seemed to realize. “Well, no need to rush. Although at some point you will want to try and push your limits. Why don’t we go talk in the gym for a bit. No one else is here that could compromise our identities.”

He nodded, turning to give thanks to Yuuko before following Yuuri into the gym.

Takeshi shook his head. “Maybe this will get it to sink into Yuuri’s head that he’s not some nobody from nowhere.”

Yuuko sat next to him on the bench and leaned over against her husband. “I hope so. Yuuri has such great potential, it’s sad that the one thing that’s holding him back the most is himself.”

———

“Victor, watch out!”

He barely had the chance to send a spray of ice in the direction of the attack before the villain hit. Hard. Victor skidded across the ground. He was going to feel that in the morning.

“Tch.”

“Leopard, you got this?” Chris called from further away where he was engaged with a second villain.

“The Leopard,” Yuri corrected him. He might only be a junior league hero, but he’d gotten enough acclaim that people could at least get his name right. He was training with the United Alliance Team because he’d earned that right after all.
“Right right. *The Leopard,*” JJ said with a laugh. “Leader of the...what was the name of your little fan club again? *The Leopard’s Prowl*?”

“Shut up *King JJ.*”

“That’s my name, don’t wear it out!” JJ sing-songed back at him. “Would you like to hear the theme song?”

“No!”

“Hey, less arguing more fighting the bad guys!” Chris called out. Victor still hadn’t gotten to his feet and the only reason the villain hadn’t reached him was because he’d wallked himself in ice.

The aptly named Crowbar wasn’t detoured long, easily morphing both arms into the bars of their namesake and smashing into the ice barrier.

“A little help here!” Victor called out.

Yuri frowned. “Since when did you need help?”

He sounded angry about it, but was still quick in his movements, easily darting in between Crowbar and Victor’s ice shield. He dodged a swing then raked his claws into the villain’s leg.

Having cat-like reflexes, eyesight and retractable claws could get him into a brawl but it was often a little harder to keep it up long against a villain with brute force like this guy. “Come on old man, get your ass up and back me up!”

A vein of ice shot across the ground and encased the villain’s legs.

“JJ, immobilize him!” Victor shouted.
The other hero shot a wink before dashing forward, his movement blurring before he was suddenly standing in front of the now quirk-nullifying handcuffed villain doing his usual namesake pose.

“It’s…JJ STYLE!”

Yuri rolled his eyes. He looked to where Chris had finally overpowered the other villain then back to Victor. Trying to act as nonchalant about it as possible, he walked over and offered a hand down to him.

“You’re pathetic.”

Victor smiled at him and took the offered hand, slowly getting to his feet. “Thanks. Sorry, I didn’t see them coming.”

Yuri dropped his hand immediately and crossed his arms. “What the hell is wrong with you? You get what little brains you have knocked out? You couldn’t destroy wet tissue paper with that sort of sad excuse for a fight!”

Chris walked over and gave Victor a look. “I’d defend your honor, but the fact is, the kid’s right. That sort of sloppy reaction time isn’t the Winter Monsoon I’m currently ranked 2nd behind. You need to stop daydreaming and concentrate before you get yourself killed.”

At that comment, Yuri glared at Victor harder. “Look just because I’m going to completely kick your ass off that pedestal you live on doesn’t mean you need to lay down and die first! Got that?!”

Victor had the decency to look somewhat ashamed of himself.

“All right, all right. I hear you, both of you, loud and clear. I’ll leave my analyzing of other fighting styles to simulators.”

Chris and Yuri looked to one another, as if the other might contain some sort of answer for what Victor was talking about. Instead, their fourth hero provided the key.

“Are you talking about those videos from the Final Trial you were watching yesterday? That guy did
have some pretty good moves, now that you mention it.”

Yuri growled before kicking Victor in the shin.

“You fucking idiot. Why don’t you just call him you loser?!”

Chris looked like Christmas had just come early and Victor was far too tired to deal with it. He held up his hands. “Now, let’s not be saying too much around our lovely villain friends…”

Swinging an arm over Victor’s shoulder, Chris just smirked. “Checking out some nice moves, eh?”

Victor ducked out from under Chris’s arm and walked pointedly towards the villains. “I’ll just wait over here until the Villain Suppression Force gets here. You all might want to assess any structural damage to the area so we can get an accurate tally for the UAT to reimburse the city with.”

“Yeah yeah, gotta get you back to HQ so you can go back to assessing a certain someone’s moves,” Chris muttered. An ice-packed snowball shot past his head.

Victor just smiled at them coolly. “Oops. My hand slipped. Silly distracted me.”

Chris started towards him and both Yuri and JJ had to hold him back. Luckily for all of them, the VSF showed up in their patrol cars then and they had to make statements and get the damages figured out. It wasn’t until they were on their way back to HQ that Chris finally got to talk to Victor.

“Look man, I’m giving you two weeks. After that, I’m texting him video from the banquet of you two sweet talking. If playing dirty is what it takes to get your head back in the game, then so be it.”

“Chris…”

“I’m worried about you, okay? You just about took a crowbar to the skull and last I checked, your magic snowflakes aren’t going to fix that.”

Victor frowned. He hated it when Chris was being reasonable. “Okay, I’ll do something. Just...give
“Two weeks. That’s it. Any more than that and there won’t be much of you left for your boyfriend to have.”

“He’s not my…”

“Yeah yeah, specifics. Look, you obviously like him and he obviously likes you. That’s all it takes. But someone’s gotta make the first move. And I don’t know about you, but if I realized I’d seduced Victor Nikiforov while drunk off my ass, I sure as hell would not be calling him up about it. You’re kind of a big deal, if you hadn’t noticed.”

Victor chuckled and he gave Chris a small smile. “Thanks, Chris. I suppose I’m still not quite used to having a sort-of friend to kick my ass into gear when needed.”

Chris threw an arm around his shoulder. “Aww, I’ve made it up to sort-of friend! I’m touched, Victor. Last time it was just rival/coworker!”

He gently elbowed Chris in the ribs at that. “I didn’t plan on getting stuck with you at HQ for five years.”

“Well someone’s got to try and knock you off that nice little pedestal. Might as well be someone as dashing and handsome as me.”

Behind them, Yuri made a gagging noise and JJ snorted.

“I heard that!” Chris yelled back, but the tension had broken. All of them snickering to themselves as they filled into the building. It was going to be a long night, it always was after a fight. But well, Victor decided perhaps having the unlikely group with him wasn’t the worst situation he could be in.

“Mari, I know it’s you.”
The coils of smoke that were trailing into his room halted, then slowly retreated. Slowly the door to his room slid open.

“You skipped dinner again,” she said leaning against the doorframe. “Mom’s getting worried.”

Yuuri offered her a forced smile, although he knew she wouldn’t buy it. “I’m fine. I promise.”

She stepped out of the door for a moment and Yuuri wondered if for once she was going to leave it at that, but instead she returned with a warm bowl of his favorite dish, katsudon. Her quirk-controlled smoke floated next to her with a set of chopsticks in its grasp.

“Yeah well what kind of sister would I be if I didn’t look out for you? It’s been a week, Yuuri. You can’t keep doing this to yourself.”

Yuuri dropped his eyes. “I’m fine.”

She plopped down next to him on the bed and shoved the bowl into his lap. “Then eat. And maybe then I might think about believing such a boldfaced lie.”

He sighed and looked around his messy room. He just hadn’t had the energy to clean anything, clothes and empty cups scattered about. The walls were adorned with poster after poster of Winter Monsoon, smiling in a way that Yuuri always thought didn’t quite reach his eyes. But maybe he was projecting. He did that when he was depressed. Hoping that maybe Winter Monsoon wasn’t as perfect as he seemed because how else in the world would he stand a chance of measuring up?

“Hey, it’s going to get cold,” Mari said, her smoke control reaching up to stick the chopsticks into the dish. “Eat up before I start force feeding you.”

Yuuri snorted. “You wouldn’t.”

She shot him a look. “If it meant keeping my baby brother from starving himself to death, then yep. Guess I would.”
He sighed and lifted up the chopsticks. “You’re terrible.”

“I might not be as cute as Vicchan and I’m sure as hell not going to slobber on you, but I can at least make sure you’re taking care of yourself.”

Yuuri found himself grinning before he could stop himself. “Yeah, I guess he’d be pretty worried about me right now.”

“Damn right he would,” Mari said with intensity. “So you’d better eat up before his restless spirit comes back to haunt you about it.”

He couldn’t stop the laugh that bubbled up at that, the weight on his shoulders dislodging as he did. Mari was right. He couldn’t keep beating himself up about this. Vicchan wouldn’t want that.

“Okay, okay, you’ve got me there! I surrender!” He said amidst laughter. “I promise Vicchan that I will eat this bowl and regain my strength!”

Mari gave him a hard pat on the back. “That’s more like it, Yuuri.”

He started in on his food, pausing with his mouth half-full to talk. “Hey, I didn’t tell you about what happened after the final. Apparently I got drunk.”

“Oh no…”

“Yeah, I know. Terrible planning on my part. But apparently, and Phichit has confirmed this with like three heroes that were there, I managed to stop a bomber that showed up. Can you believe that?”

Mari laughed. “Figures.”

“My luck is terrible.”

She nudged his shoulder. “Or maybe it’s not. I don’t know about you, but I’d be pretty impressed if some drunk guy showed me up and I was one of those big shots, you know? Was Victor there?”
Yuuri frowned. “Yeah...Though that’s the strangest part. Celestino said Victor was the one who told him I’d done this. Like...I guess he’s actually a really nice guy? It must not just be for show, because why else would he go out of his way to tell my coach that?”

Mari shrugged. “You’ve always said you thought he couldn’t be as shallow as some people think. What was that about that one interview? You bring it up all the damn time.”

He looked sheepish at her remark. “Hero Weekly, July issue, four years ago. I said that no one that loved their dog that much could be that bad.”

“Pretty sure you had a lot of other flowery words than that about it.”

“Shut up!” he muttered, but he was still smiling.

“I’m just saying, he’s the whole reason you insisted on this hero thing. And that’s a pretty great achievement if you ask me. To make my baby bro a national hero.”

He started at the sincerity, his eyes darting up from his food to his sister. “Mari…”

“Just promise me when you get that famous that you remember your poor simple quirked sister and send her some backstage passes to her favorite band’s concerts. Okay?”

And knowing the sentiment behind the comment was true, Yuuri couldn’t help but lean over to wrap his sister in a hug. “Thanks, I’ll keep that in mind.”

Mari smiled. “You’d better. I know where you live, Hokusai Wave.”

They both started laughing at that, the mostly empty bowl getting set aside as they started feebly shoving at one another. And Yuuri found no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t keep from smiling.

It was good to be home.
Chapter 3

It had been over an hour. Okay, so maybe it had been closer to two hours he’d been avoiding it. But this was something he was honestly not sure he was ever going to be ready for.

The email from Phichit sat in his inbox, the subject line reading out an excited “HOLY SHIT YUURI I GOT PICS FROM THE PARTY! YOU’RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE THIS!!”

The attachment icon taunted him. So this was it, this is how he ruined his life. Yuuri sighed and ran a hand up through his bangs, his glasses going askew as he did so. He had to do something. Sitting in his room in front of his laptop avoiding this email wasn’t going to end well no matter what it contained, he reasoned to himself. But at the same time, couldn’t Phichit at least give him a hint? Assure him that he didn’t have to fake his death and hide from the rest of the world for eternity?

Not sure if he’d still be up, but willing try anyways, he snatched up his phone and tapped open the ongoing text message thread between him and Phichit.

- Hey, you up? I could really use some indication of whether or not the email is terrible news or not. Help?

The screen stayed blank and Yuuri felt all hope that he could be saved washing away. Then the ellipse indicating Phichit was typing popped up.

But to his shock, the only thing that appeared next was a pin drop of Phichit’s location.

That’s when it hit him and he suddenly felt worried for another reason entirely, his mind already scrambling to get itself in order. Shakily he texted in reply and hoped.

- Phichit. If I don’t get a reply asap I’ll go ahead as planned

They’d developed a system for any situation in which they were in trouble- drop a location pin into a text and if there’s no response after five minutes, assume urgent help is needed.
He waited what seemed like an eternity, but no response came. The Five Minute Rule had gone into effect, Phichit needed help.

Taking a ragged breath, Yuuri looked again at the location given and felt his heart jolt. Oiso Beach, Kanagawa, Japan. The same beach Victor had stopped that tsunami on years before.

“Okay, okay. Don’t panic,” he muttered to himself. “Phichit’s in trouble. Someone’s clearly trying to bait Victor. But they don’t know about me. I’ve got to get to him.”

He glanced at the clock, it’s digital numbers listing out 1:57 am. He winced, but knew it was his only chance to get to his friend fast.

Hastily he pulled up his contacts and punched hard at the name Aerostat. The phone rang five times before a sleepy voice picked up.

“Hello?”

“Minami, hi. It’s Yuuri. I’m sorry, but I need your help.”

He could hear the teen scramble hastily up in bed. “Y-Yuuri? You need my help?”

Yuuri hated to get such a young hero involved, but there was no other way he was going to make it from Hasetsu to Oiso in time.

“Yes, please- at least one hero is being held captive. I don’t know by who, but they’re setting a trap for Winter Monsoon. As the heroes of Japan, it is our job to go and help in dire times like this in our country. I need you to get us to Oiso, I know it’s a little further than you’re used to but…”

“I can do it,” the small voice gasped out. He reiterated more passionately, “Hokusai Wave, I will find the strength needed to fly us there. You said it yourself, sometimes you won’t know your true strength until a disaster happens. But right now I’m furious, I’m scared...I’m excited. I want to help, Yuuri. Please.”
“How fast can you get here?”

He could hear the boy moving through his house, rummaging for what was likely pieces of a costume. “It shouldn’t be long at all. Ah...um, I know this is a terrible time but can you talk to my Dad? He’s not going to be happy if I run out in the middle of the night without telling him and I don’t think he’s going to believe me.”

Yuuri felt himself smile despite the circumstances. “That’s understandable, let me talk to him. I’ll see what I can do.”

The phone muffled Minami’s voice as he spoke, but Yuuri could tell he was waking up his family to tell them what was happening. After a moment, the phone was handed off and Minami’s father was on the line.

“My son is telling me you’re Hokusai Wave, is that true?”

“Yes Sir. I know you’re probably worried about sending your son out in a situation like this, but he’s the only way we can reach it in time. Your son has an amazing quirk and I humbly ask that you understand that right now we heroes have an important job to do. A good friend of mine is in danger and I’m afraid others will be as well. Please, Minami-san, I swear on my life that I will bring your son home safely.”

“Hmm, looks like my son’s hero is quite an honest fellow. All right, Hokusai Wave, I place my son in your hands. The rest of our family might be doctors, but we don’t want to ever have to use our skills to help our child. Please look after him.”

“Thank you for your understanding. I’ll make sure Minami keeps in touch with you during this and I’ll have him home as soon as possible.”

The man chuckled. “You’re a good man, Hokusai Wave. Japan is lucky to be in your care.”

With that the phone shifted back to Minami, who Yuuri could tell was having his first disaster rush as they called it amongst the pro-heroes. That sensation of excitement and danger and urgency cocktailed together with a heavy dose of adrenaline. “I’ll be there as fast as I can. Can I meet you outside the gym from the other day?”
“Certainly. I know you said you had a costume in process, is that ready? I don’t want your identity compromised on your first big job.”

He could hear the sound of a zipper. “Yeah, I think you’ll like it! I’ll see you soon!”

“Fly safely, Aerostat.”

“I will.”

As the phone call ended, Yuuri felt his own disaster rush hitting him with full force. He slid open his door and was halfway down the hall by the time Mari poked her head out of her doorway.

“Something up?”

He nodded. “Phichit’s in trouble. I’ll try not to be out too late.”

She smiled. “Stay safe little bro. You still owe me backstage passes.”

Yuuri shook his head. “Love you too, Mari.”

He turned, his legs speeding his walk up to a run as he neared the front door, but he paused at the last second. He was so used to having an eager dog following him when he dashed out of the house in matters like this. Looking down the hall towards where the shrine was kept, he smiled. “I’ll be home soon, Vicchan. Don’t worry.”

And with that, he rushed out the door towards the gym.

In the years Victor had lived at HQ, he’d only heard the alarm go off in the middle of the night about five times. Mostly because overnight matters were often handled by local heroes or law enforcement, but also because the worldwide threat level villains had pretty much all been locked away by
Victor’s work on the UA Team. That generally left severe natural disasters to be the reason an all-call for heroes went out.

But this time, something was different.

Usually at the alarm whoever was on overnight watch would go wake up the rest of the team. No one had come to him and it was only when Makkachin had started to howl at the incessant alarm that Victor had woken up fully. That’s when, through the blaring noise, he could hear voices outside his door.

“He deserves to know! He’s going to find out sooner or later and I don’t think it’s right not to tell him.”

“I’m telling you, JJ. He absolutely cannot go. This has trap written all over it! He’d be walking right into danger with open arms!”

He swung open the door and leveled the two with a look. “Can someone stop the alarm and tell me what’s going on?”

Chris started to say something, but JJ beat him to it.

“Inferno’s back, Victor.”

Victor gripped the doorframe tightly, and unthinkingly in his anger, it began to ice over. Inferno, the one villain he’d been so relieved after years and years to put into a high security prison and be rid of.

Chris frowned, he knew immediately what kind of baggage went with this villain.

“Victor, it’s a blatant trap. I can’t let you go. Your parents…”

The doorframe iced fully, spikes of it shooting outward and causing both of the other heroes to jump back.
“My parents died protecting me from that bastard,” Victor said, the frigidity in his voice as apparent as the ice manifested around him. “If he wants a fight, I’ll give him one.”

He started to stride forward, but was met with Chris firmly holding him back.

“I can’t let you do this. He almost killed you last time or do you not remember? He’s out for your blood, Victor. It’s not safe.”

Victor locked eyes with Chris and the hatred in his eyes seemed to shock him momentarily.

“Victor. You can’t be serious.”

“I’m going. This is between me and him,” he murmured, voice low and dangerous. “And this time I’m going to finish it for good.”

The alarm suddenly stopped and a door from down the hallway swung open, an older man striding in with purpose with Yuri, suited up in full Leopard gear, behind him. Victor frowned.

“Yakov.”

“Vitya, stand down.”

He stepped back from Chris at that, turning to his coach and protegee. “So that’s how it’s going to be, hmm?”

Yakov opened his mouth to talk, but Yuri was faster. He’d thrown a punch straight at Victor’s face and was only stopped by Victor catching it and encasing it in ice.

“Are you fucking stupid??” he yelled, yanking his fist away and slamming it hard against the nearest wall. The ice shattered. “Look I know that you’ve got a lot of personal crap going on, but think for a damn fucking second! He’s going to murder you like he almost did last time! Do you want to die?!”

Victor’s eyes flashed something unreadable and Yuri launched himself at him again in anger, this
time managing to catch him enough off guard that he successfully knocked him to the ground.

“You stupid son of a bitch!” he yelled, his fist narrowly missing Victor’s cheek and slamming into the ground hard. “If you die I’ll fucking kill you, you got that?!”

Victor sighed, trying to resist the urge to shove the boy off. He could see Yakov standing behind him and how worried his coach looked. And Yuri, in his own way, was worried as well.

Next to him, Makkachin whined and licked Victor’s cheek.

“Traitor,” he murmured to the dog, but the tension in his posture had eased.

“Vitya, you’re staying here under my supervision. We’re already working to assemble a team to go handle the matter. But this time, you must stay out of it.”

He leveled his coach a look. “You have two hours before I’m going whether you like it or not.”

Yakov sighed, knowing full well he meant it. He turned to the other heroes present. “You heard him, get out there and fix this now!”

“You still doing okay?” Yuuri asked the teen holding him aloft for what seemed like the hundredth time that night.

Minami nodded. “Yeah, as weird as it sounds, I feel like I’m beginning to understand my quirk a little better.”

Yuuri laughed. Leave it to the boy currently defying gravity to fly them to Oiso to continue to surprise him. Despite knowing already how much Minami admired him, it didn’t quite take hold until he showed up that night in his costume. It was in a similar deep blue to his own costume, the back of it designed to reflect another piece of art by the artist he’d taken his own superhero name from. Hokusai’s Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji featured the print adoring his own mask, The Great Wave off Kanagawa while Minami had fittingly taken the design of the kite flying above the Asakusa Hongan-ji temple for his own costume.
It’s not as if I can really say anything, Yuuri thought to himself. Part of the reason I chose my name is because Victor’s first heroic act was on a beach off Kanagawa. Still, I’m kind of embarrassed. It’s not like I’m that cool.

“Yu--I mean, Hokusai Wave?” Minami said, remembering this time to get into the habit of sticking to codenames while suited up.

“Hmm?”

“What’s the latest update? I can try speeding up again if you want.”

The situation; well it was an elaborate trap for Winter Monsoon, that much was clear. The villain, widely known as Victor’s archnemesis, Inferno had gone all out on this giant death trap. First he’d kidnapped three heroes after his escape from prison, then he’d taken them to the very beach where Victor first demonstrated his powers. And as if that wasn’t enough, he’d made sure to tauntingly position himself between the beach and the Oiso water park as if to say he wasn’t afraid to face the antithesis to his superpower. He might be fire to Victor’s ice, but he was giving Victor a seemingly easy location to battle.

*He’s toying with him and surely has some plan to turn it all against Victor.*

Yuuri pulled out his phone and flipped open the latest news feeds on it. “Apparently we’ve got video, just a second.”

Minami started to look down but thought better of it, instead going back to focusing on the horizon ahead of them. “Who’s gotten close enough to film it? News crews usually aren’t that desperate for a story.”

Yuuri winced as he took the info in. “He’s using...Phi- I mean, Freeze Frame. He’s using his usual livestream feed. That’s why Freeze Frame can’t fight him, Inferno took his phone. Though I suspect he still tried to put up a fight.”

His stomach lurched as he said that, the worry over his best friend gnawing away at his fears.
“Do we know who else got taken?”

“Yeah, hold on, I’m opening the feed up.”

Sure enough, on Phichit’s livestream was the very situation that the news had described. Inferno having set up the phone on a tripod to record what he was hoping would be a final showdown with Winter Monsoon. Behind him, Yuuri could make out a few blurry figures and he began trying to figure out who else was in trouble.

Phichit’s costume was easy to spot, looking like it came right out of a Japanese superhero show, which was partially his intent. He’d grown up watching them when they aired in Thailand, and fell in love with a show called GoGo Sentai Kingranger. His costume was part-homage, part-country pride, but it also was rather flashy in its reds and golds against the drab nighttime colors. He seemed unconscious, but much to Yuuri’s relief, clearly still breathing.

Tied up next to him, but also unconscious, was Caradoc in his usual ridiculous costume that looked like an evil witch straight out of a Disney movie. Yuuri was pretty sure the dark purple on his face was just his makeup and not bruises being as the theatrical Russian hero was rather known for it.

And the third was the Chinese hero, Pingzhang, his black and pink costume almost blending in with Cardoc’s black cape. He looked so small next to the other older heroes and Yuuri once again thought about the boy who was holding him aloft. They’re too young to be dragged into a mess like this. I hope this doesn’t scare them out of the hero business, but it’s certainly happened before.

He rattled off what the feed was giving in terms of info, trying not to sound too worried or scared. Yuuri already felt bad enough bringing the younger hero into this, and he didn’t want to alarm him with the scale of what was going on. But this wasn’t your usual hero situation and Yuuri knew it. This was a top tier villain trying to pick a fight with the world’s number one hero.

Guess he’ll have to settle for plain old me instead, Yuuri thought to himself. But I can’t just idly stand by when Phichit is in trouble. You come to my country and kidnap my best friend and think I won’t show up? Well then, I suppose I’ll show you.

“So do you have any plan for when we get there?” Minami asked, shaking him out of his thoughts.

“I’m working on something,” he mumbled. “Do you know much about Inferno, Aerostat?”
“A little, I’ve definitely heard of him and Winter Monsoon fighting before.”

“Inferno is…well, he’s been Winter Monsoon’s archnemesis for years. Not long after Victor’s power manifested, Inferno attacked him in his home. Victor lived but…his parents died protecting him. It’s been a bitter battle between them ever since. Last year, something happened. The news wouldn’t cover it, but they couldn’t hide that Victor looked pretty beat up even a month later. Whatever it was, it landed Inferno in jail and clearly he’d given Victor a pretty hard fight. All of us in the IHU thought that would be the end of it, but it looks like Inferno broke out. It’s why we can’t just rush in there. We’re going to have to figure something out, something that will get him to lower his guard even for a second, so I can get him down before he can conjure up a weapon. He can’t set his entire body alight in flame like Smolder can, he can only summon up weapons made of fire. That’s going to be the key, that small window of time between when he notices us and when the weapon forms.”

“Wow,” Minami sounded breathless. “You’re so good! I’ve read so many articles about how your ability to analyze other’s techniques has been crucial to your success, but seeing it in action. I’m in awe!”

Yuuri blinked. “Eh? It’s not that special, I mean, I’m sure plenty of heroes do that. It’s natural in any battle situation to try and size up your opponent and to look for openings. That’s all it is.”

He could practically hear the smile in Minami’s voice. “Still, it’s amazing how you do it. You’re definitely Japan’s ace hero for a reason!”

Uncertain what to say as his brain helpfully suggested more excuses as to why that wasn’t true, Yuuri finally managed to mumble out a quiet, “Thanks.”

“So, let me guess, you have an idea on how to get to him during that moment right?”

Yuuri paused, thinking of all the factors he knew were at play. Suddenly, it came to him.

“Well, I have this one idea…”

Much to the chagrin of everyone else, Victor had insisted on watching the live feed the moment it went up. Inferno, as expected, used the recording to personally request Victor show up and pretty much said anything possible to rile him up. It had gotten to the point that the chair Victor had holed
Chris, who had volunteered to stay with Victor because hey, you can’t fight fire with fire, was having a hard time keeping the other hero in the building. Even though Yakov didn’t have a high level quirk, Chris had a feeling he’d be doing a better job at keeping tabs on Victor. But, and they’d all agreed, if Yuri was going to go out with the Strike Team, then Yakov needed to be nearby. For a junior hero, jumping into a fight with a threat level five villain was pretty much unheard of, but they’d really not had many other options.

It had already taken them close to one hour to track down enough heroes with flight quirks that could get them there fast enough, and Victor was pretty ticked off that the majority of the chosen Strike Team ended up being other heroes sponsored by his coach.

But Chris had reasoned that since Georgi was one of the victims, it was understandable why Yakov wasn’t willing to trust that many others with the job. Outside of JJ, all the other heroes on the team would be someone either coached by Yakov currently- Physique and The Leopard- or in the case of Kazakhstan’s Shadow Knight, someone he’d trained when he was a child. It was a good team, Chris knew, but Victor wouldn’t be happy about it either way.

“They shouldn’t be much longer,” he tried, still getting very little out of Victor in response.

“He’s not going to wait much longer,” Victor shot back, his voice a steely measured tone. “He will give exactly enough time for me to get there before he starts lashing out.”

On the feed, the dark expanse of beach was only barely lit by the nearby streetlights giving it the feel of being straight out of a horror movie. The IHU had sent out notifications, updates constantly appearing on their phones, advising all heroes to not engage this villain and to let the Strike Team handle it. But as Victor noted, Inferno was getting antsy.

A dark gloved hand reached out for the camera and the angle shifted until it was a close up of Inferno’s mask. It was all black aside from a flaming skull painted on it and in the dark it looked especially menacing.

“Winter Monsoon, you know I’m not a patient fellow. I’d say you’ve got...about fifteen minutes to get your pathetic self out here before I’m going to have to start making a point.”

He sat the phone back on the tripod and stepped back, conjuring a bow and arrow out of fire. He
turned towards the three captured heroes and fired, the arrow bursting into the concrete above their heads.

Victor stood up and Chris grabbed his arm.

“They’re almost there, just calm down.”

“If he kills someone, if someone gets severely injured because I couldn’t go…”

“Victor…”

He jerked his arm from Chris’s grasp and swore, tossing a shard of ice out from his hand so violently it pierced into the wall.

“What?” he snapped.

Chris pointed at the screen. “What’s that?”

His expression shifted from dangerous to shocked in a millisecond as he looked to what Chris was pointing at. In the bottom of the screen, water had begun to edge its way into view.

“But he’s standing in front of the ocean, where’s it coming from?”

Inferno, too busy stomping about in the distance, hadn’t noticed it yet. But even in the dim lighting, it was obvious that he stood in front of the ocean, meaning the water was coming from the direction of the seaside road and town. Someone else was there.

“The Strike Team?” Chris suggested.

Victor’s eyes narrowed. “No, they shouldn’t be there yet.”
The steady flood of water continued, finally reaching where Inferno stood. He swore and turned abruptly around. “Who’s there?!”

He was answered by a shadowy figure swooping in from the left side, the painted fencing mask bright against the darkness and the glint of his fencing saber catching the lights as he sliced through a handful of water bottles. The water rained down on Inferno as the hero used his momentary shock to hit the ground, twist and throw a kick directly at his face. Inferno went flying, skidding into the sand yards away.

Victor dropped the phone clutched in his hand, his eyes wide.

Chris slapped him on the back. “Looks like your boyfriend doesn’t give a shit about IHU’s warning.”

But even that comment didn’t get a rise out of Victor, who’s eyes were glued to the screen in awe.

In the distance, another figure landed and quickly slid out of view behind the concrete ramp the other heroes were leaned against. Victor didn’t recognize the costume, but he was far too preoccupied with what else was going on to think much else about it. It was him. He had gone despite the IHU’s order. Hokusai Wave had gone to fight Inferno.

“Who the hell are you?!” Inferno yelled, getting to his feet. “I want Winter Monsoon, not some nobody!”

He rushed forward at the hero, summoning up a sword of fire and striking down. The hero easily dodged at the last second, his foot sweeping Inferno’s legs out from under him and sending him face first into the sand again.

“In Japan, it’s polite to bow first when meeting someone, Inferno,” he taunted, bowing himself.

Inferno darted up, his clothes now caked in wet sand. He conjured up a short sword and lunged forward. Hokusai Wave parried with his blade, bringing the hilt up to press into Inferno’s hand and locking the blades together firmly.

“I don’t have the time for you, small fry. This is between me and Winter Monsoon,” he growled out.
In a blur, Hokusai Wave ducked down, swept to the side and came up behind him, squarely kicking him in the back and sending him down once more.

“You’re not worthy to even breathe the same air as Winter Monsoon,” he said icily.

The fight was on. Inferno came raging up, creating a fire sword as tall as he was and bringing it down at Hokusai Wave’s head. It seared into the mask, starting to melt away the metal mesh that made it up.

“Get out of my way, bastard.”

“Winter Monsoon ga omae-tte kuzu to kakawatte te o yogosu koto wa nai,” he grumbled in Japanese, bringing his blade up to push back against Inferno’s attack.

“The fuck was that?”

“Datte, ore nante taosenai nara, omae ni wa “Winter Monsoon”-tte namae o yobu kenri sura nai.”

He strained against the fire sword, the upper part of his mask falling away as the sword melted through. The flame edged closer to the exposed eye and Hokusai Wave dropped down, sending Inferno falling forward over his back. He splashed into the wet sands, his fire extinguished. But his rage would not let him stay down. He yanked off his wet glove and wiped his hand against his long coat to try and get it dry. After a few sparks, he managed to create a thin flame whip which he immediately struck out with.

It hit Hokusai Wave’s leg, but he didn’t even flinch at the burn.

Instead, he reached down and grabbed the whip with his gloved hand, seemingly not having a single care that it quickly burned its way through to his hand. He yanked hard, dragging Inferno across the ground, the slosh of the water and sand around them putting out the flames once again.

He lunged forward in the seconds the fire was out, his blade stopping only after it pricked into the expanse of skin between Inferno’s mask and coat.
“Kitanai yatsume... Kare ni te o dasu tsumori nara, ore o korosu shika nai. Victor wa kakasenai sonzai dakara. Kono sekai ni wa hitsuyou. Ore ni wa hitsuyou. Ore ga iki shiteru kagiri, Victor no tokoro e ikaseru nante omou-na yo.”

“Look! Victor, look!” Chris’s voice snapped him from his intent focus on the screen, looking to where he pointed to movement in the background.

The shadowy figure had roused the captured heroes, and they were all starting to move. Sure enough, someone had given their phone over and Freeze Frame’s voice rang out loud and clear.

“Hey Inferno, SMILE!”

The flash of the camera combined with the quirk of the hero using it immobilized the villain momentarily, freezing him in position while the others sprang into action.

“Hokusai, cuff him fast!” Caradoc called out, his quirk manifesting a crow out of thin air that flew towards the screen. In its claws it held the bulky cuffs meant to nullify quirks.

“Caradoc’s up,” Victor murmured, his eyes sparkling no longer with hatred but in astonishment at all that had just occurred. “His power’s creations should hold at least until the Strike Team arrives.”

Hokusai Wave caught the cuffs that fell from the crow flying overhead, quickly rushing forward to wrestle Inferno into them. He wasn’t going easily, his free hand trying its best while wet to summon up something.

“Pingzhang, shields up!” Hokusai Wave called out just in time, the force field generating right as Inferno sent a malformed blast towards them.

He then turned, resorting to simply encasing his fist in fire as he punched forward in desperation.

Once again, Hokusai Wave caught it, his glove being eaten away by the flames as he clamped down the second cuff. The fire went out.
Hokusai Wave took a step back and the force field shifted, moving from protecting the heroes to encasing the villain. Inferno slammed on the clear blue bubble around him and yelled, but it didn’t budge.

Freeze Frame, whose helmet looked to be half-melted and cracked on the left side reached out for his phone and smiled.

“Hey, sorry for that interruption everyone! Don’t worry, we’re all okay.” He tapped the crack in his visor. “A few bruises and some burns, but nothing us heroes can’t handle. But boy am I glad for one hell of a rescue. You guys out there give up for the real hero tonight, and the one I’m very honored to be calling my best friend right now- Hokusai Wave!”

He threw an arm around his friend, the hole in the mask allowing everyone to see the surprised expression in Hokusai Wave’s visible eye at the praise.

“I’m just...you know, doing my job,” he said quietly. “It’s not right of some villain to show up to my country and think that no one’s here to protect it.”

Behind him, the unknown hero popped into the frame. “Yeah! You hear that villainous scum! Don’t you dare mess with the hero of Japan unless you want you have your ass kicked!”

“Aerostat!” Hokusai Wave protested, but Freeze Frame just laughed.

“Well from all of us, thank you. Really, Hokusai, thank you,” he reiterated, hugging him tighter. “Looks like the cavalry’s here, so for now- this is Freeze Frame, signing off!”

The feed flickered off and Victor turned his awestruck gaze towards Chris as if to ask him if he too had just seen what they’d seen.

“If you flip to the news, I bet they showed up the moment the Strike Team moved in. Those vultures can’t let a good story go cold, you know,” Chris remarked reaching for the TV remote and turning it on.

Victor’s eyes remained on the video feed’s page.
“Do you know Japanese?”

“Huh?”

“What he said, in Japanese, do you know?”

“No idea. Probably just telling him to fuck off.”

Victor pressed on. “Do you think if I ask in comments someone can translate it?”

“Dude, look- see Strike Team’s there, Inferno’s in custody. Does it matter?”

He looked over at the TV then back to the quiet feed. “He mentioned me, in each one of those sentences. I just…” He looked up, his smile small and lost. “I want to know.”

Chris sighed, running a hand up through his bangs. “What, you afraid he’s badmouthing you for not showing up?”

Victor’s eyes darted away and back, but he wouldn’t meet Chris’s eyes. “Something like that.”

He huffed but leaned over the laptop and started to scroll down the thread of comments below. “You know maybe he’s mad you still haven’t called him,” he joked trying to ease the tension.

Victor laughed but it sounded hollow. “He’d have every right to be mad at me, for both those reasons.”

Chris nudge Victor in the shoulder. “Stop being so hard on yourself. Sometimes you’ve got to know when to sit out of a fight. This is one of those times, okay? You’re not perfect, Victor, though sometimes I think you’re pretty damn close.”

“Far from it, actually,” he said somberly.
“Aha, there we go. Here’s your commentary, loverboy.”

He moved out of the way so Victor could see the screen. Sure enough, underneath a comment filled with more exclamation marks and emojis than he’d ever seen, someone had provided a translation of the comments.

_I couldn’t be prouder of our national hero, Hokusai Wave!!! For those wondering, he did sling some pretty sick burns at Inferno in Japanese, but I think I got the gist of them. Feel free to correct me if I’m hearing it wrong._

_Inferno: Get out of my way, bastard._

_HW: Winter Monsoon doesn't need to soil his hands with dirt like you._

_Inferno: The fuck was that?_

_HW: I said, if you cannot even defeat someone as lowly as I, then you have no right to even speak the name Winter Monsoon._

_Then after literally dragging him (I LOVE YOU HW!!!)_

_HW: You’ll have to kill me if you want to lay your hands on him, you filth. Victor is far too precious. The world needs him. I need him. And you’re a fool if you think I’ll let you anywhere near him while I still draw breath._

_WOW! Right out of a romance novel, right ladies?! Couldn’t be prouder to be a longtime HW fan right now!_
Victor looked over to Chris as if to confirm that he was reading it right. Chris just smirked and nodded.

“Yeah yeah, you owe him big time, Victor.”

He stood abruptly, his chair clattering to the ground. “I’ve got to go.”

“Wait, what?”

Victor turned to Chris and grabbed him by the shoulders. “I’m going. Okay?”

“Hey, the Strike Team has it taken care of, there’s no need to…”

“No,” he said, the smile unable to stay off his face for more than a second. “I’ve got to go to Japan and thank him in person. It’s the absolute least I can do right now. You guys can call Mila in to replace my position, I might be gone awhile, so I don’t want you to be short someone.”

He’d already started to move about his room, snatching up a suitcase and beginning to pack it. Chris couldn’t help but laugh.

“You’re crazy, Victor.”

He shrugged, head cocked to the side and expression downright happy. “You heard him, Chris. He needs me. And I’m not about to turn down a request from someone who just took down my greatest enemy. That, my friend, would be rude.”

Chris shook his head, muttering under his breath quietly enough Victor couldn’t hear.

“You know, being happy is a real good look for you, Victor.”

“Huh?”
“I said good luck.”

And Victor smiled back at that, warm and bright.

Chapter End Notes

An eternal and most grateful thank you to fushiginokunino @ tumblr for helping me get the Japanese wording just right. For those interested, here's the full of those lines:

1) ウィンター・モンスーンがおまえってクズと関わって手を汚すことはない。// Winter Monsoon ga omae-tte kuzu to kakawatte te o yogosu koto wa nai.

2) だって、オレなんて倒せないなら、おまえにはウィンター・モンスーンって名前を呼ぶ権利すらない。// Datte, ore nante taosenai nara, omae ni wa “Winter Monsoon”-tte namae o yobu kenri sura nai.

3) 汚いやつめ・・・ 彼に手を出すつもりなら、オレを殺すしかない。ヴィクトルは欠かせない存在だから。この世界には必要。俺には必要。オレが息している限り、ヴィクトルの所へ行かせるなんて思うなよ。// Kitanai yatsume... Kare ni te o dasu tsumori nara, ore o korosu shika nai. Victor wa kakisenai sonzai dakara. Kono sekai ni wa hitsuyou. Ore ni wa hitsuyou. Ore ga iki shiteru kagiri, Victor no tokoro e ikaseru nante omou-na yo.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Starting this chapter you'll be getting the "official" IHU dossiers of the heroes at the start of each chapter. Hopefully this will give you a better idea of the heroes and their powers until their focus in the story happens. Thank you all for kudos/commenting, hope you enjoy!

International Hero Union Official File

**Hero ID #:** VN1225

**Civilian Name:** Victor Nikiforov

**Superhero Name:** Winter Monsoon

**Masked Status:** Unmasked

**Associated National Hero Union:** Russian Hero Federation

**National Hero Ranking:** 01

**Quirk:** Ice Touch

**Range of Quirk Use:** Items that are touched (by any part of his body or breath) can be
turned to ice. Speed at which ice is created can heavily influence the shape of the output, ranging from spikes and spears at the fastest formation time to a flurry of snowflakes at the slowest formation time.

The morning after a tough fight was never easy.

Yuuri laid in his bed, his eyes blearily bringing into focus the collection of hero posters all around his room. His body felt heavy and he already felt the dread pooling in the pit of his stomach as the events of the night before trickled into his mind.

The Strike Team had seemed shocked to find that the fight was over by the time they’d arrived, the battered and burned heroes at the scene already swarmed by the group of reporters who had made it to the beach.

Yuuri’s mind was distant, and he was sure he’d mumbled out some usual answer about doing what was right, helping his friends and protecting his country. All he could think about at the time was that although Yakov Feltsman was there with the bulk of the world’s A-List heroes, there was one very noticeable hero missing from the group. Winter Monsoon had not come to the fight.

Shifting in his bed, Yuuri rolled over, his eyes picking out the small faded magazine clipping at the corner of his closet door. It was the first press photo that had leaked after the last fight with Inferno, and it was oddly strange how somber Victor looked in it despite having put away the villain he’d spent his life going after. They’d speculated for months that it was just him finding closure for his parents, but Yuuri had always wondered if there was more to it than that.

Phichit had teased him about it, but he could tell his friend meant well. “Sorry. You went through all that trouble and he can’t even show up, huh?”

Yuuri had argued back that he’d not come because of Victor. That he was there for Phichit, for the other heroes, for Japan. But, and he was certain his best friend knew this, he was, at the end of the fight somewhat disappointed that the one person who should have showed up hadn’t.

Being the best friend he was, Phichit didn’t seem to begrudge him this. He’d known why it was Yuuri had decided to become a hero, had seen him fight so many battles with a tenacity he was certain even Yuuri didn’t realize he had. Instead, he’d kept his arm tight around Yuuri’s shoulders,
helped him dodge any tricky questions from the reporters and made sure with certainty that he’d be okay flying back home.

“Phichit,” Yuuri had sighed, quiet enough no one could hear him use his friend’s real name, “you’re the one who got captured here, stop doting.”

He leaned over, their masks clattering together as they bumped foreheads.

“All the more reason I need to make sure you, oh great hero of the night, are taking care of yourself. I know how you overthink stuff after fights. You can’t fool me, HW.”

Yuuri had offered an awkward laugh at that, knowing that his attempts to hide his usual routine from Phichit would be in vain. Instead, he made sure Aerostat got introduced properly to the gathering of heroes.

“That’s one hell of a debut fight,” Pingzhang had told him. The two younger heroes were obviously hitting that point where the gravity of all that had happened was slowly sinking in. There was a jitteriness there that the older pros generally didn’t have anymore, excitement ebbing to the reality of what had happened.

Minami, for his part, was equal parts humble in regards to himself, but overtly proud of how Yuuri had fought. He was starstruck, Phichit had mumbled, and after the teen coaxed a smile out of Caradoc for complimenting his quirk, Yuuri found he couldn’t be too mad about it.

The Strike Team had mostly kept their distance, working with the Villain Suppression Force to get Inferno transferred from Pingzhang’s force field and Caradoc’s magic cuffs to the real cuffs and containment. Murmurs went amongst them about having to be sure that he didn’t escape again, and Yuuri could hear Victor’s name peppered amongst their quiet comments.

But he got that, that’s why he and Phichit were so close after all. In the pro hero world, your friends and your teammates under your coach often became one in the same. Some, by choice, as himself and Phichit had been. They’d both earned top marks in their classes and were able to apply to one of the elite Hero Academies in America. There was a reason America was considered the place to train as a hero, as so many big names, endorsements and icons of the early age when quirks first manifested came from there. And so, after being young trainees under Celestino in their youth, they’d embarked on their final studies into herodom together.
Yakov’s group wasn’t quite as open and bubbly as Phichit, and well, even Pingzhang and Aerostat were. But Yuuri could see their relief that Caradoc was okay, that the villain so infamous for his vendetta for their teammate Victor was back in custody. The youngest of their group, a rising junior star that Yuuri had been seeing more and more about lately, caught his eye and after an icy glare he abruptly stomped over.

“You.”

Yuuri had pointed to himself in confusion before replying, “Yes?”

The boy leaned in close, his piercing eyes shining bright through the black mask over them. “That was fucking stupid and if I didn’t think my too-nice team would get mad about it, I’d be punching you square in that stupid mask of yours to knock some sense into your empty head.”

The other Asian heroes had stepped in, all sounding far too kind to be equally threatening but still trying to give the boy a firm warning. We take care of our own, back off.

Yuuri, not sure why he felt it so important to impart an answer given the situation, had quieted them before reaching out and placing a gentle hand on the teen’s shoulder. He flinched, his glove mere tatters and the palm of his hand raw with the fresh injury.

“The Leopard, correct?”

He’d scoffed, and Yuuri took that as an okay to continue.

“Thank you, for your concern. But tonight it was more important to me that my friends were safe than myself. Someday, probably soon, you’ll understand.”

The Leopard had looked momentarily disarmed by the kindness before he jerked away. “Tch. I hate you bleeding heart heroes. Go get yourself patched up, dumbass, and stop lecturing me about your touchy-feely bullshit.” He paused, the slightest incline of his head towards the right. Quietly, almost unable to be heard, he mumbled out. “Medic’s by the van.”

Yuuri had gotten the medic to look at his burns, patch him up, and declare him safe for flight back home. He gave Phichit a big hug before leaving him with the IHU officials who were taking official statements, his friend’s smile a knowing one.
“It’ll all be fine, Yuuri. By the way, check your email. I promise, your life isn’t over, okay?”

He tried to reflect on that now, using the calm reassuring smile Phichit had given him as a fire to try and move himself out of bed. It was early morning when he’d gotten Minami dropped off to proud parents that had also insisted at tending to Yuuri’s injuries, both of them admonishing and praising his heroic deeds as they did so. When they wished him well and said they hoped that Minami could use his powers to help others in the future, Yuuri knew they were beginning to understand. Being a hero didn’t come without risk, but sometimes it was more than worth it.

Yuuri had caught an early train from Minami’s hometown to his own, his burns all at least feeling more itchy than painful after all the excess tending. As always, he was greeted warmly by his family with a large breakfast ready. Mari, who had stayed up to watch the fight live, was recounting the play-by-play to his parents, who as always looked so proud to have him as their son.

With a warm heart and a full stomach, Mari had shooed him off to bed and told him he wasn’t to get up until he felt like it.

It was about three in the afternoon when he’d stirred, reluctantly feeling the ache of every muscle that he’d abused the night before. Now, as the clock ticked closer to 3:30pm, he eyed his laptop warily.

He’d already seen the notifications flicker across his phone, one from the Japanese Hero Union sounding congratulatory while another from the IHU sounded more like a reprimand. Well, he had ignored the warnings they’d issued, even if he was halfway to the beach before they’d even sent out said warning.

But although those emails were already weighing on him heavily, it was the one from Phichit he was still the most concerned about.

“I promise, your life isn’t over, okay?”

He echoed Phichit’s words inside his head as if that might inspire some bravery. But the gravity of what he was about to open wasn’t lost on him either.

Ignoring the protests from his aching muscles and the pangs from his burns, Yuuri pulled himself out of bed and over to his computer. Right where he’d left it, his email was opened waiting for him to click on it.
He closed his eyes and clicked, the computer taking a moment before it loaded the pictures attached. Phichit’s words were an afterthought, the pictures doing more than enough to speak for themselves.

So apparently you did a little more than stop a bomber. Promise these aren’t shopped okay? Yes, some came from Smolder, but a few of the others aren’t, so it’s not creative staging either. As always, you’re a wild one when drunk, Yuuri.

Yuuri scrolled down the collection of ten images, his mouth falling open in shock. He was. He had. Shit.

“No no no no no no,” he muttered, scrolling down faster as if the ending might make the beginning look any better.

But no, if possible, they got worse.

Numbly, as if he needed something else to distract him from how warm his face felt, he closed out of the email and flipped to the other two awaiting him. JHU’s was formal, polite, and clearly thrilled that their #1 national hero had done the unthinkable and taken down such a notorious villain. They went on further, listing out more companies who wanted endorsements to noting that they were looking into bringing Aerostat on as a sidekick.

He flipped quickly to the second email, a firm and authoritative scolding from the IHU. Words like probation and first strike against you were lost as Yuuri’s thoughts caught up with him, a sickening wave of horror slowly dawning on him.

Shit. Of course this was going to look bad. If he was like that with Victor at the party and then he blows them off to go fight Inferno? Shit. This looks so bad. They could revoke his license and then...

“Yuuri, are you up?!” Mari’s voice sounded far more hurried than she usually would with such a question and Yuuri felt his heart slam into his throat.

“Y-Yes?”

His door slid open to his sister frantically blinking at him. “Up. Get in something nice. Now!”
Yuuri vaguely registered her nudging him out of the chair and towards his closet.

“What’s going on?!”

She leveled him with a serious look. “Just trust me. Important guest, you need to look somewhat presentable. No, I’m not messing with you. Promise. Just hurry!”

Mari darted back out of the room before he could press for answers and his brain immediately went to work trying to come up with them on their own. They weren’t good answers.

_Great. It’s probably some IHU official come to serve me the official warning. If I’m lucky, they aren’t going to take my license, but given what it looks like I’ve just done…_

He shook his mind of the photos from the party, trying his hardest to focus on anything but that. Digging through his clothes, he pulled out what he hoped looked presentable without trying too hard; clean pants and a nice blue sweater his mother always said looked good on him. It would have to do.

He paused briefly to look at himself in the mirror, running his fingers up through his bangs and wincing as he hit the bandaged area on his forehead. Well, it’s not like he could lie about not being Hokusai Wave with burns on both hands, his leg, and his forehead. Might as well just get it over with.

As he slid open his door, he spotted Mari waiting for him at the end of the hall.

“Come on, Yuuri!” she whispered with urgency. He’d not seen her this worked up since the last time she saw her favorite band in person.

As he brushed past her and turned, plastering on what he hoped was a neutral smile for the official, his eyes caught on a large brown poodle that was standing by the doorway receiving pets from his father.

_Vicchan? No, he never got that big, but it looks just like…_
His eyes scanned the room for an answer and sure enough, there it was, standing and shaking hands with his mother.

Victor Nikiforov was in his house. He wanted to scream.

Instead he managed an odd noise that sounded like a balloon deflating. It’s probably what was left of his sanity, he was certain.

“Yuuri Katsuki,” the Victor Nikiforov in his house said warmly, turning to him with a smile. And before he could choke out a response, the outstretched arms wrapped him in a tight hug.

“I’m so glad to see you!” Victor chirped, his voice measured and bright.

Yuuri was pretty sure that his soul was in the process of leaving his body, and only dragged himself back to attention when Victor’s warm breath tickled against his ear.

“Hokusai Wave, can we talk in private?” he whispered so low Yuuri felt it in his bones.

Not trusting his voice, or much of any of his motor skills at the moment, he managed what he hoped was a nod. His panicked expression caught Mari’s eyes as he pulled back from Victor and he found enough of a voice to talk to his family. It sounded so forced and he knew it.

“We’ll uh...be right back.”

Yuuri walked briskly towards the door, grabbing up his coat and sliding it on. Not sure where he was headed, his subconscious suggested that throwing himself into the ocean might be a good plan which directed him towards the beach. Distantly he heard Victor tell his dog, Makkachin, to stay inside.

The beach was muted in its winter colors, everything seeming just a tad dimmer than it did during the summer months. Yuuri led without looking back, his brain trying to organize his words. He stopped at the same point in the beach he always did when he was down and reluctantly sat. Absently he noticed Victor following suit, his long coat splaying out against the sand.
“Yuuri,” Victor started and Yuuri immediately blurted out all that was on his mind.

“Wait. I’m...Sorry. I think I’ve given you the wrong impression. I’m...I’m nothing special. I’m just lucky and I guess I was at the right place at the right time.”

Victor’s expression faltered and he looked confused. “What do you mean?”

Yuuri dropped his eyes to the sand. “Look, I know why you’re here. The IHU already warned me that I’d violated their warning. It’s...fine. First I bother you at the party and now I jump into a fight that wasn’t mine to fight. If they want me - or even, if you want me- to resign…”

Suddenly Victor’s next to him, his hands fumbling before settling on his shoulders. “Stop. Stop. Yuuri, you’ve got it all wrong.”

Yuuri blinked up at him. Then why was he…

Victor’s laugh was awkward and it’s the first time Yuuri thinks he’s ever heard that choked noise come from him in all the years he’s watched him from afar.

“I’m…” He leaned back, his hand reaching up to push his hair out of his face, “I’m the only one who should be apologizing here, Yuuri.”

“But-”

Victor reached out, pressing a finger against Yuuri’s lips. He shivered at the sudden contact.

“As Winter Monsoon, I came in person, to thank you.”

Yuuri choked out a noise at that, spluttering around the incessant finger against his lips. “T-Thank me? W-Why?”

Victor took his hand back, his expression somehow gentler than before. “You’re as humble as they say, Hokusai Wave.”
Yuuri felt the warmth in his cheeks and immediately darted his eyes away. *This cannot be happening. But...if it is...*

“A-And as Victor?” Yuuri said, his voice sounding small.

Victor’s expression shifted, Yuuri catching it as he flickered his eyes up to his face and back away.

In anyone else, Yuuri would assume that Victor was nervous. The way he swallowed sharply, the way he timidly licked his lips as if wary that what he will say could be a misstep, all things Yuuri knew normal people did when they’re in a corner. But from Victor it’s got to be something else, right?

“A-As Victor,” he began, and Yuuri’s certain he had to be imagining the hitch in his voice. “I want to apologize.”

When Yuuri still looked perplexed, Victor heaved a notable sigh.

“For not calling you up after the party.”

The words hung in the air between them and no matter how Yuuri’s mind tried to figure it out, it couldn’t. There was no way to take this but one way. He’s not reaching, it’s just…

“When I saw that it was you that had gone to fight him…” Victor cut himself off awkwardly and came at it again from another angle. “I was mad, furious even, and then...there you were.” He looked up at Yuuri, his eyes searching. “You’re making quite the habit of surprising me, Yuuri Katsuki.”

And Yuuri, probably one of the people on the planet most aware of how much Victor valued surprising people, how much he seemed to thrive on that emotion, gasped.

This absolutely cannot be happening.

He clenched his fist, hissing out in pain as he pressed too much against his burn. Well. The pain was
certainly real.

“Oh. Can I?”

Yuuri glanced up, staring at Victor as if he had to be some sort of hallucination. Even so, he’s vaguely aware of his voice replying, “Uh...yeah...” as he stretched out his arm to present his bandaged hand to Victor.

Victor gently took it in his own, his fingers feather light against the bandages as he unwrapped them. Finally he tugged it loose, the raw deep gash in Yuuri’s hand blistered and red.

Before he could ask what’s happening, he felt Victor’s fingers ghost over the burn, the cool frost of his quirk leaving a little layer of snowflakes over it. It was so gentle, so unlike the usual grand and bombastic uses he’s seen of Victor’s powers that it disarmed him completely.

“V-Victor?”

His voice was soft. “Does that help any?”

Yuuri nodded and before he could register what’s happening, Victor reached for his other hand to give it the same treatment.

“Both your hands then...” Victor’s eyes darted to Yuuri’s leg and then to his forehead. He knew, Yuuri found himself realizing. He knew exactly where Inferno’s quirk had hit him.

Something about that shifted Yuuri’s brain completely. What was previously disbelief coming around now to confusion and interest. Victor was here, in Japan. He’d come to thank him. And he’d clearly watched the fight close enough he knew everywhere Yuuri had been struck. It was information so odd that Yuuri’s mind couldn’t even refute it. He felt his heart hammering in his chest and he took a deep breath.

Victor finished his leg, letting Yuuri tug his pant leg back down before leaning forward to inspect the bandage atop his head.
Yuuri tried not to stare, but having Victor leaning so close to him made it hard. It was all he could do not to jerk away. He has such long eyelashes, Yuuri thought to himself absently, wondering how he’d never noticed such a thing until now.

Victor finally unstuck the bandage, moving carefully not to snag any stray hairs as he pulled it free. Then before Yuuri could even prepare himself for it, he felt Victor blowing gently at the cut, a little cloud of snowflakes fluttering down to catch on Yuuri’s eyelashes. He blinked trying to dislodge them as Victor was sitting back and smiling at him in a way that made Yuuri’s heart catch.

“It’s the least I can do,” he murmured so quietly the sound of the nearby waves almost swallowed it up.

Yuuri belatedly realized his hand had drifted up to his forehead and was experimentally tapping at the cut. Despite having a professional hero medic and two doctors do all they could, nothing seemed to pull the burn out of his skin like this.

“Thanks,” he replied, his eyes dropping back to the ground.

It fell silent between them, and Yuuri awkwardly shifted as if moving his legs might kick his brain into action. It was Victor who managed something first.

“I was quite impressed. You...handle yourself very well in battle. The water thing before he knew you were there? That was so smart. Is that...” Victor gestured but it was half-hearted, clearly searching for a way to put it that’s less forward but giving up. “Your quirk? The water?”

And it’s like a spell had been broken, all Yuuri’s anxiety and worries slamming back into his mind.

“No,” he mumbled. “We just...I just had the owners of the water park across the street turn on all their water sources. With three hostages, I wanted to make sure the fight was quick to prevent any harm.”

Victor’s eyebrow raised in shock. “That’s...that’s really impressive. Sorry, I don’t mean to pry, but...I can’t for the life of me figure it out. What is your quirk, Yuuri?”

Yuuri sighed. It was inevitable that he’d ask sooner or later, he supposed. But still, it’s not something he’d just told anyone. There’s a very good reason he’d insisted that the IHU keep it unlisted.
But this was Victor. Victor Nikiforov, *the* Winter Monsoon! The very flesh and body person that was why Yuuri fought so hard and long to be a hero in the first place. If anyone could be trusted, it should be him right?

Something about Victor’s expression softened, as if he were aware somehow that this was a touchy subject he’s walked into.

“You don’t have to…”

“I don’t have one,” Yuuri rushed the words out before he could decide against it. His heart lodged itself firmly in his throat and he felt like all the air was suddenly gone. This was it. He’s going to get the IHU involved, they’ll revoke his license…

“Wow.”

And something about the breathy way Victor said it dislodged his heart and sent it back down to slam into his ribcage. Against his better judgement, he looked.

Victor’s eyes were wide, but they didn’t seem to be angry. Just surprised. There was a faint dusting of pink across his cheeks and Yuuri briefly wondered if perhaps it was colder than it seemed. But something in Victor’s eyes, the blue so like the ocean during the summer, had shifted. As if he were suddenly seeing Yuuri for the first time.

“You’re...amazing,” he breathed out, his face suddenly bright with a smile.

“What?”

Victor shook his head, looking at Yuuri again with his head inclined slightly to the side. “The IHU should have you on the team instead of the rest of us. We wouldn’t stand a chance.”

Yuuri’s flailing before he realized it. Words stammered out. Hands waving in front of himself frantically. He’s not even certain what he’s saying besides something about “it’s not like that” and “don’t say that.”
It’s Victor’s sudden hand on his shoulder that stopped him, his whole body going still as he blinked up at him.

“I’ve always said that the IHU test doesn’t account for too many factors,” Victor began, bringing up his other hand to grasp Yuuri’s other shoulder. “But wow, Yuuri, you’re so much stronger than you give yourself credit for.”

“I’m not-”

“Ah ah,” Victor chided, but there’s an edge of playfulness to it now. He pointedly tapped Yuuri’s nose. “Let me be impressed. After all, I know I’d be utterly useless without my quirk. Looks like you can teach me something else besides how to dance, hmm?”

Yuuri opened his mouth, hoping something would come out, but found nothing and resorted to closing it again. Victor was looking at him in a way that Yuuri couldn’t quite read and it set him on edge. He darted his eyes away.

“Yuuri.”

He flickered his eyes up at that, but still couldn’t hold his gaze.

Victor sighed, heavily and sat back leaving only one hand pressed warmly into Yuuri’s shoulder. Seeming reluctant to do so, he finally pulled that hand away as well.

“I’m not certain how drunk you were that night, but…” Victor heaved another deep breath. “I’m going about this all wrong, I’m sorry.”

Yuuri blinked at the apology.

“What do you mean?”

Victor sighed, trying to compose himself. “Yuuri, I got on a plane the first moment I could after that
fight so I could come here. I know, you’re probably thinking it’s another one of Nikiforov’s random whims but... it didn’t feel right to thank you any way but in person.”

He waited until he was certain Yuuri heard him before pressing on.

“You’re the first person in a room full of elite heroes to stop a bomber, the first person to successfully launch an attack at Inferno that took him down quickly and efficiently. I know I’d offered at the party to train with you, but...I’m honestly feeling like I won’t be much help.”

Yuuri knew his shock must have been evident on his face because Victor frowned at that.

“You’ve told me something of a secret, about your quirk?” he asked, taking Yuuri’s slight nod for confirmation before continuing. “Then I suppose it’s time I told you one of mine.”

Victor stood up, brushing the sand from himself before reaching to untuck his shirt. Yuuri’s eyes darted away, but Victor’s voice brought him back.

“This was why the IHU wouldn’t let me come fight Inferno again.”

Yuuri looked up, his eyes widening as it fully dawned on him what he was seeing.

Victor was holding up his shirt, and along his left side there was...a wound? It was...it looked so painful. All taut skin and almost blue in tinge. Blue like...Yuuri’s eyes zeroed in on the muscles in the area. Sure enough, he could see the distinct line from what was okay and what was not. Frostbite? But how...

“Inferno tried that lovely large sword of his that got your forehead. Except aimed at my side when I didn’t have time to dodge.” Victor let his shirt fall back and he slowly sat back down, this time a bit closer than before. “Doctors said in times of extreme duress, a quirk can sometimes do strange things. Mine decided that the best way to keep that sword from slicing into me was to freeze my side. Entirely.”

“Victor…”
He laughed, but it was raw and hollow. “Yakov had to threaten every press member so many times to keep this news from getting out. Can’t have the world’s number one hero advertising that he’s damaged.”

Yuuri winced at the word. The way Victor talked about himself as if he wasn’t even a person, just a symbol.

“You’re making me feel like a symbol.”

“Victor,” he tried again, this time his voice steadier. “Isn’t there a way…”

Victor shook his head. “I’ve had every doctor imaginable look at it. They said in my panic I’d rerouted my blood flow, that it’s bad enough I can’t feel anything there but not so bad that we should amputate it off. Now I can’t even keep fighting for over an hour without getting tired. I’m so useless.”

He looked to Yuuri at that, his eyes looking so lost that Yuuri found himself reaching out instinctively, his hand barely brushing against Victor’s shoulder. But something about the touch seemed to bring Victor back, his eyes focusing sharply on Yuuri before dropping to the ground.

“You, you asked me the night of the party what I wanted you to be. Civilian, hero, sponsor...I left it pretty open ended. Now I think it’s my turn to ask that of you. You’ve done so much to help me, whether you’re aware of it or not. So Yuuri, what can I do for you? Who do you want me to be?”

Yuuri felt an ache throb in his chest again at the detached way Victor was speaking of himself. Victor pressed on.

“Sponsor?”

“No.”

“Friend?”

Yuuri hmmed. It wasn’t right. Victor shouldn’t be asking him this.

“A Lover? Or maybe a coach?”
Yuuri spluttered, his mind not liking the doors of opportunity either of those answers opened up. “Victor, stop!”

He waited until he knew Victor had obliged.

Taking a deep breath and levelling what he hoped was a firm but kind expression, Yuuri spoke. “I want you to just be yourself.”

It took a moment for any emotion to register on Victor’s face and for a second Yuuri was afraid he’d said something wrong. Then a look of complete surprise seemed to dawn on his face.

“Just...myself?”

Yuuri nodded. “I’ve...I’ve always admired you, Victor. And here you are baring yourself to me and I’m just clamming up. Whatever we end up being, I don’t want you to be anything but Victor, okay?”

He stated it with a confidence he didn’t quite feel, most of his thoughts being the internal version of a keysmash at the moment. This earned him a smile he hadn’t quite ever seen Victor have before. Almost...hopeful? No, that couldn’t be it…

“Okay.” He held out his hand, “I’m Victor. I can’t wait to get to know you, Yuuri.”

Yuuri felt a smile on his lips before he could stop it. His was probably hopeful, too.

“And I can’t wait to get to know you, Victor.”
Chapter 5

International Hero Union Official File

**Hero ID #:** HW1129

**Civilian Name:** Yuuri Katsuki

**Superhero Name:** Hokusai Wave

**Masked Status:** Masked

**Associated National Hero Union:** Japanese Hero Union

**National Hero Ranking:** 06

**Quirk:** Unlisted

**Range of Quirk Use:** Skills include agility, especially in footwork, and ability to react quickly to sudden attacks. Hokusai Wave often uses one of the fencing weapons (foil, saber, épée) depending on the villain he is fighting. Believed to also have martial arts and dance training to aid his agility.

Victor Nikiforov loved surprising people. Perhaps it was because he’d gotten his big break by doing something so flashy and grand that it ended up changing weather patterns for the next season. After that, well, he had a lot to live up to.

His parents had always assured him over and over, “Just do what makes you happy, Vitya. Be yourself and everyone will love you.”

It was easy to believe that when they were still alive.

But the downside of being famous in the hero world was that it attracted not only screaming fans but bitter villains as well. When a sixteen year old boy did what Victor had, it had made a lot of those kinds of people rather angry.
With a hair trigger temper and a quirk to match it, Inferno rose on the scene to become as notorious as Victor was famous. For a few years, they met match for match, blow for blow. If Victor did something heroic, Inferno would come up with something diabolical to match.

Yakov had warned Victor that going unmasked at such a young age was a great risk. But after two years had passed and everything seemed okay, he’d forgotten to worry about it.

That’s when Inferno hit his breaking point.

It was known as the St. Petersburg Massacre, an event only spoken of now in whispers and sorrow. Victor’s name was well known enough that Inferno had finally done the unthinkable and tracked him to his very home. The entire block of houses was destroyed in the fallout, killing over twenty civilians.

The last thing they’d said before they told him to run was, “Vitya, remember we love you. We always will.”

His parents stood and fought so Victor could escape to safety. Victor had never been the same since.

The hero world had changed as well. The IHU put in a requirement now that all heroes under the age of eighteen had to be masked. Secret identities became commonplace even amongst older heroes as well, all of them afraid that all it took was one person knowing who they really were to put those they loved in danger.

Victor seemed, to the public, to take it all in stride; so many interviews and people praising his bravery and courage. Victor smiled and kept up appearances, but something had died inside of himself that day with his parents. Yakov and his fellow hero teammates became like an odd family to him, but even so, it would never be the same.

They all loved Victor for who he was as Winter Monsoon. Found awe not in who he was but what he could do. The only thing that had made it worthwhile was knowing that by being strong, by continuing to fight and beat the villains back into submission, that no one else would have to suffer the same outcome.

Victor kept on surprising the world by continuing to be a symbol of peace, fighting for what was right and doing it with a casual smile on his face. But the world had begun to become rather
unsurprising to Victor himself. Each year it was the same, a few villains would cause some trouble, the United Alliance Team would go out and flash their smiles while they took them down, and all would go back to the way things were.

The same routine, week after week, year after year.

That was, until he came into the picture.

Yuuri Katsuki had danced his way into Victor’s life and had already surprised him countless times in the small amount of time since they’d met. And, much to Victor’s delight, he continued to do so even now.

A hero that had been on the public scene for three years and no one knew he was doing it without a quirk. That was far more surprising and noteworthy than anything Victor felt he’d ever done.

Like an artist suddenly inspired, it lit a fire of an idea in Victor. How was it Yuuri’s name wasn’t headlining all the hero news week after week? Even after the incident the night before, the emphasis was always on Victor ties to Inferno not on Yuuri’s victory over him.

So while he knew in the matters of dancing or fighting without using his quirk, he’d have to put himself in Yuuri’s hands to instruct him, Victor decided to do the one thing he knew he could do well. Public image.

The image of a confident hero, Yakov had told him when he was young, was the most important thing. If you could convince people that everything would be okay, even when things were at their worst, then you were demonstrating true heroics. Smile when you want to cry, laugh when you want to give up. There was a reason the top three heroes in the world were charismatic and confident and it wasn’t just because they were cocky.

“Yuuri, I want to help you earn a spot on the United Alliance Team,” he’d suggested as they walked back from the beach.

“R-Really?”

Victor smiled softly, reaching out to pet the bounding Makkachin who had finally gotten tired of waiting and come to find him.
“In return, I’d like to train with you. Dance, fencing, whatever else it is that you’ve got under your belt to make you the amazing fighter I’ve seen.”

“I-It’s nothing *that* special.”

Victor pressed a hand to his back, feeling the jolt of surprise as he did so. Yuuri jumped a few steps ahead and turned.

“Victor.”

“Yes?”

“Do you really think I can earn a spot on the team? I wouldn’t want to waste your time…”

“Absolutely!” he said. “And I wouldn’t suggest it if I wasn’t confident that it would be a success, so trust me?”

Yuuri fidgeted with his hands before taking a deep breath. A momentary flicker of confidence settled into his expression as he looked up. “Okay.” He bowed. “I put myself in your hands, Victor.”

Victor reached out, slowly taking Yuuri’s hand as he stood back up straight. He leaned forward in a bow and gave his hand the gentlest squeeze. “And I put myself in yours, Yuuri.”

They stood for a moment, Yuuri for once not darting away and Victor not yet wanting to let go either. Finally, to his surprise, Yuuri gave his hand a tiny squeeze back before pulling away.

*You’re just full of surprises, aren’t you Yuuri?*

And feeling more at ease than he had in a long time, Victor followed Yuuri back into his house.
Yuuri still couldn’t believe any of this was actually happening.

And if it wasn’t for the now-dull ache of his injuries and muscles, he’d still just assume he was having a rather elaborate dream. It’s not like he hadn’t dreamt of Victor before, but well…

This was somehow, as unreal as it seemed, happening. To him. Yuuri Katsuki.

He wasn’t sure he was ever going to wrap his mind around it.

And it didn’t help that Victor kept making the situation worse. Offering to train with him? Promising to get him on the UAT next year? It was really far too much to take in.

But, disbelief aside, Victor did seem genuine in his words. Yuuri thought of the injury- *so that’s why he was so low profile after that fight with Inferno* - and if he hadn’t already pushed aside the notion that Victor was just messing around with him, this had made it obvious. Victor was serious about everything he said, which was kind of hard to believe considering all that he’d mentioned.

“You done with your secret talk?” Mari’s voice from the doorway jarred him from his thoughts.

It was Victor that replied first, “So sorry for just dropping in unexpected, I kind of just did it without thinking.”

He laughed light and wholesome. Mari shifted her eyes to Yuuri and she cocked an eyebrow. Not about to let his sister make matters worse, he took this moment to promptly change the subject.

“My family and friends are all aware of my hero work, so no need to worry about that secret.”

Victor nodded.

“Well, we’ve got dinner with an extra place at the table, so I hope you’re up for it. It’s Yuuri’s favorite.”
Mari turned at that, and Yuuri nervously followed her in. Dinner. With Victor Nikiforov. In his house. Could this day get any more unreal?

“So what’s on the menu?” Victor asked.


Victor turned at that and smiled over at Yuuri. Yuuri knew his face had to burn scarlet given the way his sister was suppressing a laugh in the background.

“I haven’t had a sit down family meal in the longest time, so I’m very honored to be a part of this.”

Yuuri felt his heart lurch at Victor’s remark. He hadn’t even considered that all this- his family, his home- was something Victor no longer really had.


Victor didn’t seem to mind though, his coat going on the front rack and his shoes set next to Yuuri’s by the entryway.

Seeing them there, together, with his family’s around them, made Yuuri feel suddenly overcome with just how lucky he was.

“I’m going to warn you in advance, I’m terrible with chopsticks,” Victor added with a laugh. “Though perhaps I just need a better teacher.”

“I’m sure Yuuri can show you how,” Mari said.

Yuuri changed his mind. No, he wasn’t lucky, because he had an obnoxious sister who was clearly going to make this whole thing a fiasco.

“Mari...”
“Yuuri?” she mimicked, fluttering her eyes innocently.

“Be nice.”

She looked over to Victor. “Don’t worry. I’m always nice. Also, Mom and Dad aren’t that fluent in English, so I’ll be your translator for the night. Mari Katsuki.”

She held out her hand and Victor shook it.

“Victor Nikiforov.”

“I know,” she said, expression turning teasing. She leaned in and Yuuri started to go towards her to stop whatever it was, but he felt the little tendril of her smoke quirk wrap around his ankle. “Someone around here’s a big fan.”

Well...that could have been worse.

Victor laughed. “So I’ve heard.”

The smoke let go and Yuuri assumed he was off the hook.

“Yeah, you should see all the posters in his room.”

He was not remotely off the hook. And he was probably as red as Mari’s outfit.

“Mari!”

“Just telling the facts, little brother.”
Yuuri buried his face in his hand. This was going to be a disaster.

“I hope they’re at least flattering ones,” Victor said, but his expression was a bit teasing as well.

“Yes,” he answered unthinkingly. “I mean NO! I mean, I have no idea what either of you are talking about.”

Yuuri tried to look as convincing as possible, but he was certain his bright red face probably gave it away.

“Guess I’ll have to invest in some posters of you,” Victor said with a wink.

Yep. This was it. This was how he was going to die. In the hallway of his house, mercilessly teased into a heart attack by his sister and Victor fucking Nikiforov.

“We’ve got some extras if you want some,” Mari replied.

Yuuri just groaned and trudged ahead of them towards the dinner table, muttering quickly to his parents in Japanese as he sat down, “Please ignore everything either of them say. Please.”

It was worth a try.

After Mari and Victor settled at the table, Yuuri took a deep breath. He was just going to eat katsudon and do his best not to let Mari rile him up.

But of course, his parents were not exactly helping either.

After introductions went around, Hiroko had asked what was probably a fairly normal question. The problem was more what the answer was.

“So, how did you two meet?” Mari translated to Victor.
“Oh, at the party after the Final Trial.”

Mari shot Yuuri a look and he did his best to bury his face in his food to hide any possible indication of anything.

Victor added, “Your son is an amazing dancer, by the way.”

Yuuri about choked on his food. Mari darted her eyes from Victor to Yuuri and then back.

“Wait a second...”


But the more Yuuri tried to come up with something that would divert the subject, the more those blasted images Phichit had emailed him overrode his thoughts.

Mari laughed and he knew it was over. “Oh my god, I can’t believe you got drunk and seduced Victor Nikiforov. Yuuri, you sly dog!”

Yuuri put his head in his hands. Vaguely he was aware of Mari, through laughter, telling his parents. Toshiya laughed, and Hiroko turned to Victor and smiled.

“Oh Vicchan, that’s a Katsuki for you. Toshiya swept me off my feet the same way.”

Yuuri sunk into the table with a whine, “I don’t even remember any of this, okay?”

Amidst the noise of Mari translating back and forth, Yuuri became vaguely aware of a hand at his side timidly hovering as if it wasn’t sure if it was okay to touch him or not. He didn’t even register that it was Victor’s hand until the fingertips lightly brushed his arm.

“Yuuri?”
“Huh?” he replied without thinking. Maybe if he just closed his eyes this would all be over.

“I didn’t know. Sorry. Forgive me?”

He sat up at that, blinking to try and bring Victor into focus. He looked...well, sheepish was not a word Yuuri thought he’d ever use for Victor, but today was just that crazy apparently.

“It’s okay, I’ve...” Yuuri looked away, knowing he had to be blushing. “Seen enough pictures to kind of put things together.”

“You are a great dancer though,” Victor said and Yuuri had to dart his eyes to him to be sure he indeed was the one speaking. “Clearly we’ll just have to try it sometime when you’re sober, hmm?”

Yuuri felt his heart sputter. Whether Victor was just trying to be polite or not, this was just...

“I-If you want to. Apparently I owe you lessons after all?”

Victor’s expression if anything softened. “Which I still intend to take you up on. I mean, look at me, I’m still not quite getting these chopsticks right so you can imagine my dancing isn’t much better.”

Yuuri let a smile surface, reaching over before he could think about it much to correct Victor’s fingers on the chopsticks. “You’re holding it wrong, that’s why. You want this one against this finger,” he moved the first chopstick into place, “and this one here.”

He sat back and became vaguely aware that Victor was staring at him, his mouth a little slack and his cheeks a little pink.

Yuuri cleared his throat. “T-That should do it.”

He darted a glance at the rest of the table and he could see Mari hiding her grin behind her hand. Hiroko and Toshiya were just smiling at each other knowingly.

“Thanks,” Victor finally managed.
Yuuri darted his eyes away, knowing that staring at Victor was not going to stop his heart from racing at all.

“N-No problem.”

Victor had never felt so warm.

At first, he wondered if it was just due to the onsen he was soaking in. But no, it was a deeper feeling than that.

Despite his impulsive decision to move himself into their household, the Katsuki family took it all in stride. They did run a small inn with their onsen, but there was more to it than just common hospitality.

He saw it in the way they looked so proud of Yuuri when Victor explained, Mari translating, how the news coverage of the fight really didn’t elaborate enough how monumental Yuuri’s victory was. He felt it in the bickering between the siblings, Mari seeming to know just what buttons to push to get her brother going. He could hear it in the Japanese words exchanged as they figured out what room to set him up in.

Mari had even caught him off guard when she tugged him aside and thanked him quietly for being the person who had inspired Yuuri to be a hero in the first place.

Much like the onsen they ran, it relaxed him and filled him with a warmth that he couldn’t quite put into words.

“Is it helping any?”

He opened his eyes to spy Yuuri peering around the edge of the door to the onsen. It had been his suggestion to try it, hoping it might make his injury feel somewhat better.
Victor smiled, thoughtful. “Might just be wishful thinking on my part, but I think so.”

Yuuri’s expression softened into a smile, clearly hopeful as well.

“You should join me. This is normally a communal thing, right?”

Yuuri blanched, his hands flailing and his words coming out a jumble. “Yes, but no. No. I shouldn’t. I couldn’t.”

“Youri,” Victor sighed, “if you want me to help you get on the team, you’re going to have to trust me. I won’t bite, okay?”

The door slid closed and for a moment Victor was afraid he’d gone too far. He was learning that Yuuri had definite boundaries, and it was still a bit of a tentative dance to find out where the line was drawn each time. But, to his surprise, it opened a mere moment later.

“Go back to relaxing with your eyes closed or something while I rinse off, okay?”

Victor bit back a smile, but respected Yuuri’s wishes all the same. “Eyes closed until you say otherwise, Yuuri.”

He swore he heard Yuuri exhale in relief at that and had to repress a laugh.

Finally, after what seemed like several minutes, he felt the water of the onsen ripple as Yuuri slipped into it. He could hear him wince as his burns hit the warm water, and he almost reached out then to provide some relief with his quirk, but stopped himself.

He needed to do this on Yuuri’s terms.

“Okay,” Yuuri said quietly.

Victor blinked his eyes open. Yuuri had sunk in up to his shoulders.
“Your burns aren’t going to like you if you do that. Mind if I help them out?”

Yuuri seemed to process that, before letting out a small “Oh.”

He held up his two hands and Victor moved a bit closer so he could reach out and ghost his fingers over the burned patches of skin.

“Is there a reason you’re still a masked hero?” Victor asked, the question having been in the back of his head most of the day.

Yuuri seemed perplexed. “A reason?”

“With your current speed and agility, it’s like you're dancing as you fight. And most quirks could easily bypass the padding provided by the fencing gear, so, it just seems like it would be more practical to have something simpler.”

Clearly starting to relax himself, Yuuri shifted so he sat next to Victor, pulling his burned leg up to the water’s surface for a moment so ice could be applied before letting it go back to soaking as well.

The question had seemed to be something Yuuri hadn’t really thought much about, his brows furrowed together as he tried to work out an answer.

“I suppose I don’t really have a reason,” he said finally. “It was just what I had available to make an outfit from and it was functional so I stuck with it.”

“How do you know what the UA Team members all have in common? No matter the year?”

Yuuri blinked, then it dawned on him. “They’re all unmasked. Even JJ didn’t make the team until this year when he turned 19. And Physique got special permission to go unmasked at 17 due to her powers manifesting during a disaster that was televisual.”

“Bingo!” Victor said with a wink. “When I was younger, I thought that Yakov was just messing
with me when he told me this, but it seems to hold true. If you can convince people that everything will be okay, even when things are at their worst, that’s heroics. And what does that more than by baring your face, unmasked, confident smile visible? UA Judges look for stuff like that, stupid as it might seem. But my issues with their points system aside, it’s part of why press reporters always pick the unmasked heroes to talk to first if there’s a group. The mask might be for the hero to protect themselves, but it also inadvertently puts distance between the public and the hero. Freeze Frame is probably the most famous hero that’s masked, and well, he’s got so much personality to make up for it. Yuuri, you have the talent. What you need is the image to go with it.”

Yuuri nodded, seeming a bit lost in thought.

“I noticed your family, all of them have minor quirks, right?”

“Ah, yeah. Mari can control smoke, Mom can levitate small objects and Dad can heat up any sort of liquid.”

“When you were younger, did you ever think about what kind of quirk you wanted?”

Victor knew this had to be rough territory, but as selfish as it seemed, he needed to know this to understand where to take Yuuri next.

“Yeah. A little bit.”

“And?”

Yuuri bit his lip, seeming to consider his words before he spoke them. “I always liked the elemental powers. You know, like fire, ice, water?”

Victor smiled. “I’m going to guess you favored water, given your name?”

“Yeah and…” Yuuri darted his eyes away. “Someone left me with a pretty memorable impression in regards to waves. So…”

It took a second, but Victor realized that Yuuri was talking about him.
“Me?” he asked, sounding uncertain.

“You’re kind of a big deal, Victor.”

He took that in, not ever really feeling it quite like he did that moment. But something about the way Yuuri said it was less timid and more teasing than before. Victor smirked. “I had no idea.”

That earned him a laugh.

They fell into a comfortable silence at that, and finally Yuuri spoke up.

“Do you really think going unmasked would help me?”

Victor pressed a finger to his lips in thought. “That’s part of it. The other, and I apologize in advance for this, is that once the press figures out where in Japan I am...well, I have a feeling they might put two and two together considering the recent events.”

Yuuri’s eyes went wide. “Do you think they’d really?”

Victor nodded solemnly. “I can call in the IHU and see what protections I can put in place for you and your family, but otherwise...well, only other option would be for me to leave before they figure out I’m here.”

Yuuri’s expression shifted, flickering through a few different emotions before settling. There was the confidence Victor knew had to be in him somewhere.

“Stay. I can handle this. I’ve handled worse.” It flickered out like a candle, his flustered expression taking its place. “I mean, if you want to. That’s your decision. I can’t tell you what to do.”

Victor chuckled. “Yuuri.”
“What?”

Unable to help himself, Victor nudged his shoulder over against Yuuri’s. “I’m just following your lead, Yuuri. So, where to?”

He stood so abruptly that Victor almost fell sideways as the shoulder he was leaned against vanished. But it wasn’t in avoidance that Yuuri had moved.

“I have designs,” he said, that candle flickering back to life and burning strong in his eyes. “Costume designs. I have all kinds of notes on possible costumes that just never got made. We can find something there, I’m sure. Can you help me?”

Yuuri held a hand down to Victor and he took it, smiling.

“I thought you’d never ask.”

It had been about 10 years since Yuuri had thought about these things. About what quirk he might get. About what costumes he’d wear. Instead, as that year turned into the next, those matters had been shoved away while Yuuri had stubbornly pushed ahead anyways.

No need for a flashy costume if you didn’t have a flashy quirk to go with it. He’d thought. No need to draw any more attention to myself.

With attention came the dread that he would slip up, that he’d somehow reveal his weakness, that he wasn’t good enough to fight alongside real heroes. Attention wasn’t why he wanted to do this.

So he’d trained, skills he’d begun already under Minako-sensei’s teaching. She too was quirkless, but she had an Olympic Gold medal in fencing from back when quirks were still uncommon. Back before quirkless people became forgotten in the wave of the superhumans.

Now, sports were played with quirks. And many jobs didn’t quite require it, but they sure suggested it. Those without were left in the dust, forgotten relics of the time before.
But she was strong and she’d imparted her wisdom to Yuuri, desperate to prove himself whether or not he had a quirk. Even quirkless Minako could still win fencing bouts, despite turning her teaching focus to ballroom dancing instead. *Quirks don’t make you a hero,* she’d told him. *That’s something in your heart, quirk or not.*

But here was Victor. Victor - *the Winter Monsoon* - Nikiforov telling Yuuri he was talented. Implying that *he* could learn from him. Finding Yuuri’s lack of quirk not something to be pitied, but an amazing testament to how talented Yuuri must be.

It lit a fire that Yuuri had thought long extinguished. That hope that maybe if he tried really hard he *could* be Victor’s equal.

Sure, he’d tried for the UA Team. But he’d never considered becoming anything more than second or third best. But if Victor believed in him…

It made Yuuri feel like he could do anything he set his mind to, an exhilarating rush of excitement and hope. That almost childlike belief that anything could be true if only you wished hard enough.

He’d practically ran from the onsen, his yukata half tugged on and his mind just hoping, hoping that somewhere he still had them; still had those little scribbles of ideas he’d had when he was young.

Yuuri was digging in his closet by the time Victor caught up with him.

“So…I see she wasn’t joking about the posters, huh?”

But Yuuri was so focused, he didn’t even care. His fingers skimmed across the edge of something and he tugged at it, unearthing a binder covered in hero stickers. “Aha! Found it!”

He hurried over to his bed and plopped down, his fingers already flipping with purpose through the pages in the binder. Distantly, he noticed Victor sit down beside him, the bed shifting under the added weight.

“Come on, it’s got to be in here…” He was getting near the back and his vague memories of the drawings was all he feared he’d be left with. Then, tucked in the back pocket of the binder, was a handful of sketches.
“There!”

He yanked them out and rummaged through them, tossing some aside hastily. “Fire, nope, Ice, nope. Earth, Electric, nope. Flight.”

Finally he hit a handful of outfits colored in blue. “Water, here!” Yuuri shoved the pile into Victor’s hands, his eyes expectant. “This is all the water-related designs I came up with.”

Victor’s eyes darted to the papers tossed aside. “Were these...how old are these?”

Yuuri shook his head. “I don’t know. Ten, maybe a eleven or twelve years? It was before I gave up hoping my quirk would show up.”

For his part, Victor looked a bit apologetic for that. He began to look through them, only muttering or humming a bit under his breath as he did so. Like Yuuri had been, Victor was clearly searching for something specific.

Finally, he lit up.

“This one!” He turned the page towards Yuuri, his finger pointing to the front of the outfit. “But, you should have the design from your current mask on it here.”

Yuuri gently took the page from him, then stood, going to his desk and pulling out a pencil. Quickly, in lines far more steady and detailed than his 13-year old self’s original, he penciled the *Great Wave off Kanagawa* right above the teal swoosh that ran up the center of the bodysuit.

He wouldn’t say it aloud, but Yuuri found he wasn’t that surprised by Victor’s choice. Several of the designs in the mix were somewhat similar to Victor’s own white and light blue bodysuit, the skin tight spandex decorated in little snowflakes. This, out of all the designs, was the closest. Yuuri had designed it in the vain hope it would someday stand next to Victor’s and match.

Biting his lip, his nerves slowly resurfacing, he held out the amended design to Victor.

“Like this?”
Victor’s smile could have lit up the room. “Perfect!”

He reached out a hand and waited. Yuuri, heart thundering in his chest, took it. Victor gave a gentle squeeze.

“You okay with this? I don’t want to pressure you into it.”

“Yeah. I just hope everyone won’t be disappointed in what I look like under the mask.”

Victor shook his head. “They won’t be, Yuuri. I promise.”

He took a deep breath. “You sure?”

“Well, I can’t speak for everyone. But I, for one, am not disappointed. It’s a shame to hide that handsome face.”

Yuuri sputtered. “Okay, okay, no need to tease me.”

Victor, who still hadn’t let go of Yuuri’s hand, now used it to pull himself up to stand in front of him. Yuuri gulped.

“Yuuri.”

“Y-Yeah?” He darted his eyes away, but Victor reached up with his free hand to catch Yuuri’s chin. He turned him back to face him.

“Think of your old costume like an oyster, and you, the rare pearl that no one expected hidden inside. A pearl that, perhaps, doesn’t quite realize just how special it is yet.”

Yuuri knew he had to be blushing to the tips of his ears, his hand starting to tremble in Victor’s grasp as all his insecurities resurfaced full force.
“I guess that’s my job, then. To find a way to get you to realize it.”

Yuuri ducked his head forward, hoping it could hide all the emotions that just welled up to the surface from spilling out. Victor pulled his hand away.

“Yuuri?”

“Thank you,” he breathed in a voice so small he almost didn’t hear himself speak.

Victor dropped his hand, but tentatively moved it, reaching instead to pull Yuuri forward into a loose hug. He laughed nervously. “Hey now, I haven’t done anything yet.”

Yuuri exhaled a choked laugh. “Says the person who flew halfway across the world just to thank me.”

Victor chuckled. “Okay, okay. You got me there.”

They drifted apart, both of them letting a hint of a smile tug at the corner of their mouth.

“So, this design? You’re sure?” Victor asked, gesturing to the paper in his hand.

“Yeah,” Yuuri said, holding it up and looking at it. He could feel the confidence flare to life in his heart. He never felt more certain about something. “This is the one.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for all the support! I'm extra thankful for all of you who take the time to comment and let me know you're out there enjoying this.

I do have a piece of art I commissioned from the amazing hetteh-spegetteh@tumblr so you can get a look at what Victor and Yuuri's (new) costumes look like

http://hetteh-spegetteh.tumblr.com/post/157661845655/some-more-finished-
commissions-one-inspired-by
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

A little interlude courtesy the *best* best friends our leading men could ask for. Phichit, Chris- this one's for you~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

International Hero Union Official File

**Hero ID #:** CG0214

**Civilian Name:** Christophe Giacometti

**Superhero Name:** Smolder

**Masked Status:** Unmasked

**Associated National Hero Union:** Swiss Hero Federation

**National Hero Ranking:** 02

**Quirk:** Fire Body

**Range of Quirk Use:** All of his body can be ignited into flame, from his head to his toes. He usually favors using his fists, with his arms fully aflame or his legs, giving villains a fiery kick. In dire circumstances, he has been known to ignite his entire body, which unless he is wearing his specialty non-flammable costume, does leave him without clothing. Although not part of his quirk, he is the most likely of the top heroes to try and talk to the villain while he fights, usually in innuendo or euphemism.

“Oh thank god you’re not dead,” Phichit’s voice huffed over the phone dramatically.

Yuuri rolled his eyes. “I was up all night saving someone, so excuse me for sleeping in.”

Phichit snorted. “Yeah yeah, that explains why you didn’t call me earlier, but dude- it’s like eleven at night there. And given what I emailed you, you gotta admit, my concern for you is valid. You doing okay?”
Yuuri, who had honestly forgotten about the photos amidst everything else that had happened since then, sighed. “So... Victor’s here, Phichit.”

“No way.”

“Way.”

“Switch to video, I cannot believe what I’m hearing.”

Yuuri flipped his phone to Facetime and waited for Phichit to appear on the other screen. He deadpanned at him. “Happy now?”

“You’re not in trouble are you? I didn’t know Winter Monsoon made house calls.”

Yuuri darted his eyes across the room, as if he was still unable to fully grasp the matter himself. “It’s a long story, but no I’m not in trouble. He…” He paused, his brain still struggling to articulate the matter. “Look, it makes no sense to me either, but somehow Victor is in my house. Apparently not only did I do that at the party, but he saw the fight last night and wanted to come in person- his words, not mine- to thank me. Phichit, he ate dinner with us. We...we were in the onsen together.”

“Whoa whoa whoa, slow down there. Let me get this straight. Victor Nikiforov, the Winter Monsoon, is in your house?”

“In the largest guest room with his dog. Yep.”

Phichit blinked, but pressed on, “Okay, and he’s there to thank you and somehow you did what with him? I am talking to Yuuri Katsuki, right? You’ve not been body swapped have you?”

“Phichiin,” Yuuri hissed, “it wasn’t like that, okay?”

“So you platonically shared a bath. Right. With Winter Monsoon. That’s totally normal and believable.”
Yuuri groaned. “Phichit, I did not do anything remotely... unchaste with Victor.”

“But you wanted to? Because otherwise I’m going to have to assume you’re an evil clone.”

Yuuri didn’t need to say anything, because the amount of red that just flooded his face clearly gave Phichit the answer he was seeking.

“Oh thank god, you’re not an evil clone.”

“Phichit.”

“Yuuri.”

“Look this is extremely weird and I honestly have no idea what is going on, but Victor is in my house. He’s apparently staying. For awhile.”

Phichit looked to the hamster he’d just picked up and was gently stroking. “Are you hearing this, Rāat?” he asked the hamster. “Yep, agreed. Definitely going to need some proof on this one. Like Yuuri, I love you man, but this is a wild story. And if you can’t even believe what’s going on, you can imagine my disbelief. Plus, if he is there, I really need to talk to him.”

Yuuri huffed. “Phichit, what do you need to talk to Victor about?”

“Oh, you of course. Duh. You think after seeing those photos I didn’t want to march my way over to UA Headquarters and tell him what for? If he’s playing you, I will...well, not kill. Too messy, but definitely maim. Maim and frame someone else.”

Despite himself, Yuuri chuckled. “Here I am having a meltdown and you’re over there plotting how to kick his ass if he breaks my heart?”

“Best Friend Job number one, Yuuri. And this isn’t just any potential heartbreaker. You know that. I know that. So he needs to know that.”
Yuuri shook his head. “Phichit I honestly don’t think there’s anything going on to be worried about. He’s going to help me make the UA Team, that’s it.”

Phichit narrowed his eyes, and Yuuri knew he was getting more out of this than Yuuri was saying. But as always, he kept whatever he gleaned off the surface to himself, hiding it behind a knowing smile. “Uh huh. Well then, my talk with him will be brief. So?”

Knowing he wasn’t going to drop the matter, Phichit never did, Yuuri reluctantly stood up and made for the hallway. “Fine. But you owe me majorly.”

“Yuuri, you saved my life last night. I already owe you majorly. Trust me, I know. I’m working on it, okay?”

Yuuri couldn’t stop the grateful smile that crept onto his face. “Why do I put up with you?”

Phichit held up the hamster to his cheek and grinned. “It’s because we’re so cute. Look at us, Yuuri. So. Damn. Cute.”

That got a laugh out of him, and Phichit seemed relieved to have finally cracked Yuuri’s shell. As much as Yuuri found some of Phichit’s teasing a little much, he had to admit he wouldn’t choose another best friend if he had the chance. And it was true. Even if Phichit had called up and said Victor was suddenly at his house, Yuuri would expect some sort of proof of that too. It was just...out there. Hell, his last twenty-four hours were so surreal he kept pinching himself to make sure he wasn’t dreaming it.

So now, as weird as it was even to think, he was outside what was now Victor’s room in his house. He was about to knock when he heard Victor’s voice call out.

“Yuuri, that you?”

“Yeah, can I come in?”

“Sure.”
Yuuri held his phone face out so Phichit could take it in, the guest suite of Yu-Topia filled up with boxes and sitting on the bed with his laptop and dog, was none other than Victor Nikiforov.

“Holy shit, you weren’t kidding.”

Victor overheard the comment and held back a laugh. Yuuri sighed, “See?”

“Flesh and blood, I promise,” Victor remarked in the background.

“Victor, sorry to bother you but someone didn’t believe me about you being here.”

Victor shrugged. “Well, I’m kind of a big deal. Or so I’ve heard.”

He leveled Yuuri a look at that and Yuuri had to bite back a laugh. He’d only been there since the afternoon, but he was already so different than what Yuuri had expected.

“Victor, this is my best friend, Phichit. He would like to possibly threaten you now that he has proof that you exist and aren’t some figment of my imagination.”

“I’m not threatening him! Only if he gives me reason to!” Phichit’s voice sounded from the phone.

Victor laughed. “Okay, okay. That sounds fair.” He slid the laptop towards Yuuri. “You can check over the specs my designer sent back before we finalize it. It’s looking pretty classy, if I do say so.”

Yuuri’s eyes darted to the laptop where a professional variation of his new costume design was on the screen. His eyes lit up and he looked to Victor incredulously. “Is that…”

Victor nodded. “Give it a final once over while I talk to this very familiar sounding voice on the phone.”

Yuuri looked to Phichit, giving him a stern glare. “Be good, okay?”
“Yes Mommy,” he echoed.

Reluctantly, he handed the phone over to Victor who took it and walked out into the hallway to speak. Victor, as always, sounded as charming and poised as he did in interviews. But, as Yuuri sat to look closer at the laptop, he could hear his voice grow quieter. It took all his willpower not to get up and eavesdrop. But, he was just going to have to trust that Phichit wasn’t being too hard on him.

Before him was the costume design, now drawn up by a pro designer. By Victor’s designer. It was amazing- little details that Yuuri would have never thought of himself seamlessly worked into the design or well, way out of his meager budget. But Victor had waved those concerns aside earlier when Yuuri had expressed them. “Consider this is a thank you gift, for giving Inferno what he deserved.”

First was the gloves. These were high-density impact absorbing foam gloves, much thinner than his usual fencing gloves, but with reinforced material on the palm to help him grip the weapon tighter. The material was waterproof and non-flammable and Yuuri rubbed at one of his injured hands at that, realizing that Victor had made sure that it wasn’t going to happen again.

Next was the suit, which was less surprising, not because it was underwhelming, but because Yuuri had known for years all the fancy fabrics and materials that Victor himself used to make his suit tough but sleek. It might look like a wetsuit, but in that thin layer of fabric was enough shock-absorption foam and durability that it could take a serious beating. All the pro heroes that had made it really big had this as part of their wardrobe, and it showed. With notations about reinforcement at the joints, the fabric’s ability to absorb or repel most kinds of elemental damage, and the little addition of small changes to suit the hero who would be wearing it. In Yuuri’s case, the back design’s teal swoosh also doubled as a sheath for whatever of his fencing weapons he had with him. There was a reason the brand Herotek had been the topline of outfitters for the previous UA Teams.

And last were the shoes. Yuuri gasped as he saw them, for they were his dream shoes. The Adidas Fencing Pro line, custom colors and...Yuuri squinted at the notations below them. Fencing Pro 20. For the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, have a shoe fit for a hero.

He felt his throat go dry. Victor had said something about a sponsor but...this was far more than he was expecting. It made the terrifying idea of changing his image a little less terrifying. He would be different, but with all this he could be so much better. Victor was right, there were certainly times his bulky gear had been a problem, but this streamlined everything.

So in awe was he, that Yuuri didn’t notice until he sat back down on the bed that Victor was quietly waiting behind him.
“Phichit says goodnight. He didn’t want to interrupt your...how did he put it? Oh, your ‘fanboying over your new duds.”

Yuuri shook his head at the remark, especially coming from Victor, and reached to take back his phone. He turned to sit facing Victor on the bed. “I hope he wasn’t too hard on you.”

Victor tilted his head to the side, as if he was trying to analyze something. “You inspire a lot of loyalty, did you know that?”

Yuuri blinked. “Me?”

“Last night, that new kid was the same. I could see it even through his tinted helmet.”

Yuuri looked down at his lap, unsure of what to say.

“Yuuri, what happened at the Final Trial?”

He shot his eyes up to Victor’s face, his expression hard to read. It was like he was trying to work out a puzzle but he knew he was missing pieces. Yuuri glanced back down.

“You mean why did I mess up so bad?”

Victor shook his head. “I’ve seen what you look like in a real fight, Yuuri. Even during the first phase of the trial you weren’t as polished as you were last night. Whether you realize it or not, you made that fight with Inferno look completely effortless. But at the trial something was off.”

Yuuri sighed. “When I overthink things, I tend to...kind of freak out. I know, that’s something only junior heroes struggle with, but mine’s been with me my whole life. Even in real fights it happens sometimes too. Last night I was just...I was too pissed off or worried about the other heroes to think. I’m always better when I act first think later. Minako-sensei has told me that for years, but it’s not like I can just turn my head off.”
Victor’s expression softened, a flicker of understanding seeming to shift in his eyes. “Ah. So you had something heavy on you that day of the trial, I take it?”

“My dog.” He looked over to Makkachin, happily snoozing on the edge of the bed. “He was old, and I knew he didn’t have much time left. I just wish I could have been home for him.”

Yuuri’s not aware he’d started crying until he saw Victor’s hand hovering beside his face. Victor had been surprisingly aware that Yuuri couldn’t always handle the attention, his body often jerking away before he was even aware. But this time, Yuuri let himself melt forward into Victor’s touch.

The soft fingers against his cheek, brushing the tears away, didn’t match the tone of Victor’s voice.

“The IHU’s system is severely flawed and for you to have to suffer during a pointless demonstration while under such pressure…”

He huffed, clearly trying to keep his anger in check and focus on Yuuri’s situation.

Yuuri sniffled, uncertain what to say. “Sorry,” he mumbled.

The finger that brushed his cheek this time lingered, Victor’s thumb rubbing a slow circle at his temple before he pulled away.

“You have nothing to apologize for, Yuuri. I highly doubt I could have even participated in that situation myself.”

Yuuri choked out a hollow laugh. “Yeah, well. I’m sadly used to trying to fight while my head’s a mess.”

“And we’re back to why I think you are stronger than you give yourself credit for.” Yuuri looked up at him at that, but Victor leveled him a look. “Yuuri, don’t say it.”

“What?”
“Whatever it was you were just thinking. Don’t.”

Yuuri darted his eyes away, not used to having someone so unfamiliar already picking up on his habit of self-depreciating himself.

“And here you thought me talking to your best friend would be a bad thing.” Victor sighed. “Yuuri, look. I don’t want to force you to do anything you don’t want to, but I also see that you have outstanding potential. You’ve been fighting for three years without a quirk and have gone unnoticed not because what you’re doing isn’t amazing but because the IHU sets the standards. And their standards are smiling for cameras and doing flashy things no one expects. Trust me, I’m not the only one that’s tired of their way of doing things, and I’m doing what I can, but in the meantime- we have to play by their rules if you want to make the team. So I guess what I’m asking is, knowing this, is this still something you want?”

Yuuri let that weigh on him, things he’d already known to some degree now being called out and pulled into the open. Being a hero wasn’t just good deeds in the eyes of the IHU, it was a performance and they were an audience who wanted to be entertained. Could he do that? Could he put himself out there the way they wanted him to?

He felt a little smile tug at the corner of his lips. There was one little thing he’d not told Victor about his motivations last night, namely that he’d hoped that Victor was watching. It had given him a way to focus, to not overthink, and to keep his mind on the job that needed to be done. Most of the times when he fought, he’d be lucky if the local news wrote about it two days after it happened. But last night, Yuuri knew he was being watched. He didn’t think about the millions of people surely watching the feed, but instead had hoped that one particular person had tuned in.

Much to his surprise, Victor had. And somehow he’d been impressed with what he’d seen to the point he’d shown up on his doorstep.

If Yuuri could do that once, could he do it again? Could he keep doing it until he made the team? Keep fighting like Victor had, despite his injury?

He glanced up, the expression on Victor’s face hard to read. Was he worried? Afraid that Yuuri was going to say nevermind and send him home?

But Victor had everything Yuuri could have dreamed of ready- a costume fit for a UA Team hero, and unknowingly perhaps, his support. Could that really be all he needed to do this?
“Ah!”

Victor started, but Yuuri reached out and put his hands firmly on his shoulders.

“Victor!”

“Y-Yes?”

“If you’re with me, I can do it!”

Victor’s eyes lit up. “Really?”

Yuuri nodded vigorously. “So you can’t give up either, okay? We’re in this together!”

He couldn’t see Victor’s reaction, but more felt it, as Victor excitedly toppled him over in a hug. Beside them, Makkachin started awake as they fell off the bed into a tangle of arms and legs.

Yuuri laughed. “I’m going to guess that’s a yes?”

Victor sat up, leaning down over Yuuri and smiling wide. “Oh no, I take it back now. Totally changed my mind.”

He snorted, shoving feebly at Victor’s arm. “No take backs.”

“Phichit’s right, you have a nice smile when you aren’t holding back.”

Yuuri felt his face heat up, his brain slowly clicking into place where he was. On the floor, with Victor beside him, his arms on either side of Yuuri’s head. But somehow, at moment he still couldn’t push down the laughter bubbling in his throat.

“I’m going to kill him,” he said trying to sound serious and failing terribly.
Victor smiled and Yuuri realized that the same thing could clearly be said about Victor. A comment he must have said aloud, given the way Victor’s expression froze and his cheeks pinked.

“W-What?”

“Same to you,” Yuuri managed, propping himself on an elbow and poking at the corner of Victor’s mouth. “Did you know you have dimples?”

Yuuri hadn’t, and he’d definitely seen his fair share of pictures of Victor smiling. But not like this. No, this was different.

Victor sat back, taking Yuuri’s hand with him. “Well. I do now.”

Makkachin, clearly feeling as if he was missing out, bounded over in between them demanding attention as well and both of them found they couldn’t help but oblige. It wasn’t until a few moments later that they both realized they were still holding hands and awkwardly pulled apart.

“So- the costume? Did you like it?” He asked standing and moving back to the laptop on the bed.

Yuuri’s thankful Victor can talk, because he still felt a bit breathless. Somehow, he managed to find his footing. “Yeah. It’s amazing. Is that...the Adidas thing?”

Victor smirked, clearly proud. “I told you I had a sponsor that was very interested after I told them I was in contact with the Hokusai Wave and I was looking to upgrade his gear. Technically this model won’t be on shelves for over a year now, so you’ll have to give them any feedback.”

“This is insane.”

“Time zones are in our favor here, it’s far earlier in the day back in Europe. If you’re okay with all of it, I could have one ready for you in a day or two.”

Yuuri’s eyes widened. “Really? That soon?”
Victor shrugged. “I may have used my influence a little. But, we can’t have the press banging down your door without you ready for them. I’m having some people post fake sightings of me in other places in Japan tomorrow, so that buys us a day, but I doubt we can hold out much longer than that.”

Yuuri looked down at the ground, the whole thing suddenly weighing on him heavily. This was it. This would change everything.

“Yuuri?”

He looked up to find Victor with his head tilted, observing him again.

“Y-Yeah?“

“I’ll stay with you, as long you need me to, okay? I think I can benefit from this partnership as much as you can, so like you said- we’re in this together. Promise.”

The weight dislodged at that, Yuuri’s confidence back firmly in place.

“Okay. Let’s do this.”

It had been awhile since Victor had felt so off due to timezones. But while the Katsuki household all seemed to settle and sleep around midnight, he was still acclimated to Barcelona’s time, which was telling him it was mid-afternoon.

But, it gave him time to think about everything that had happened since he’d spontaneously come to Japan.

Amidst sending out texts and emails to sponsors, costume designers and companies to ensure that Yuuri’s new costume would be ready, he’d also sent out a rather strongly worded email to the head of the IHU demanding that any and all warnings or restrictions placed on Yuuri be removed.
He was Japan’s hero, and it was right of him to make a move to stop a villain on his home turf. As always the IHU favored who it favored and ignored the rest, something Victor was determined to change.

Meeting Yuuri, understanding his situation and knowing that he was only being ignored by the hero world because they were turning a blind eye, only fueled Victor’s already half-cooked idea to overhaul the entire UA Team concept, structure, and most of all- the selection process.

The IHU would probably be less than pleased to know that Victor had been compiling ideas for a massive change to their way of doing things for at least two years now. And he knew he wasn’t the only one of the top tier that was less than pleased with it.

And that, for the first time since he’d arrived, reminded Victor of Chris. Chris, who had been chasing Victor’s popularity since they both hit the hero scene and had, somehow, mostly due to his persistence, become somewhat of a friend.

Chris who had knowingly violated IHU orders to let Victor leave to go to Japan, trusting that Victor would stick to his word and not go anywhere near Inferno.

*Best friends have an important duty, so I’m sorry for the lecture, but Yuuri deserves the best. So I’m going to tell you all the important stuff he’ll not say for himself and in return, you remember that if you break him in any way- be it heart or body, I will find you and destroy you. Okay?*

Phichit’s words came back to him at that and Victor smiled to himself. But the serious tone definitely reminded him that he was dealing with an unmasked hero who was very much worried about his friend.

Even now, the list that he’d given Victor for thought wasn’t hard to remember.

1. *Do not toy with Yuuri’s affections. If he’s trusting you, that’s big. Yuuri doesn’t like to let people close, he’s afraid they’ll see how weak he is and judge him for it. If he’s let you close, know that it is a privilege and don’t take advantage of it.*

2. *Second, he will try and say he’s not strong, that he’s weak or worthless. He’s been fighting without a quirk in a world that’s told him those things about quirkless people and he has anxiety as a cherry on top. Don’t let him tear himself down. Your money or influence mean nothing if you cannot support him when he’s like this.*
And last, if you can weather the worst of him, you get rewarded. When Yuuri doesn’t hold back, whether it’s in his smile or in his fighting, it’s magic. He can light up a room or change a fight in a second. The only thing that’s holding him back is himself, remember that.

It was almost strange to Victor, to realize how many people in Yuuri’s life were fighting for him, whether he knew it or not. He was surrounded by support, from family, from friends, from other heroes. All of these people knew what Yuuri was capable of and did their best to tell him that.

At first it had intimidated Victor a little, to feel like his help would be forgotten amongst those who’d known Yuuri for so long. But, whether he liked it or not, Victor knew he had one thing going for himself that the others did not. He was Victor Nikiforov, the Winter Monsoon, and although that meant very little to himself at times, he knew the weight it carried to those elsewhere.

Victor knew the spotlight would find him sooner or later, so he prepared Yuuri for the fact that this time he’d be in that spotlight too.

*If you’re with me, I can do it!*

Yakov had warned Victor so many times since his injury that he was going to be scrutinized, analyzed and observed. Not just the press, but the villains of the world too. And perhaps that’s why Inferno had tried what he had, knowing that Victor was weak and wasn’t able to fight like he used to.

But if Yuuri wanted him to fight by his side, well, Victor was more than willing to risk it. He’d already told the IHU he wanted extra funding given to the Japanese Hero Union and to the local Villain Suppression Force teams. He knew the risks, perhaps too painfully well, to going unmasked. This time he wasn’t going to let it come to that. He’d put himself at risk before he let anyone in this town suffer.

*So you can’t give up either, okay? We’re in this together!*

Somehow, Yuuri could tell that Victor was burnt out and on the verge of giving up. Which was something only a few in his life did know, none of which because he’d told them so. He thought of the young Yuri, the child handpicked by Yakov to take his place when the time came.
Sorry Yakov, looks like the world’s just going to have to put up with me hanging around a little bit longer.

He picked up his phone, knowing that avoiding contacting his most likely irate coach was something he’d have to do sooner or later. But instead his eyes caught on the screen as a call came up.

Ah, it was Chris.

“You know, technically I should be asleep?” Victor said as a way of answering it.

“And technically, I should be in trouble, but apparently you just told the IHU to ignore it.”

He could hear the appreciation in his voice.

“By the way, there’s a very angry kitten here.”

Victor thought of Chris’s cat, who had become rather fond of hanging around Makkachin. “Really?”

“Not her, no- the kitten, should I say.”

“Ah.”

“So did you actually find the nerve to do as you planned or are you just hiding out from your furious protegee and coach?”

Victor chuckled. “Well, no ridiculous love confessions like you’d suggested.”

“Aww, but some of those were great.”

“But-” he paused, sounding rather proud of himself for actually following through on his plans for once, “I am currently at the Katsuki residence and you should probably keep your eyes on the news
in the next two days.”

Chris laughed. “So how is he? Your prince charming?”

Victor rolled his eyes. By this point he’d heard it all. “Chris.”

“Vic-tor.”

He could hear the knowing look in Chris’s voice.

Victor sighed. “You know most people tend to keep their private lives private?”

“Pfft,” Chris laughed loudly. “You’re Winter Monsoon, Victor, you don’t get to have a private life. None of us do.”

“Don’t remind me. I’m already worried they’re going to be at the front door in the morning.”

Chris chuckled. “You’ll handle it, you always do. Our favorite famous Ice Queen.”

“If I could ice you through the phone, I would be doing so right now,” Victor noted. Chris just laughed again.

“For serious though, everything okay? Do I need to come and charm anyone? I could use a vacation.”

Victor snorted. “I have a feeling the IHU will want you there, considering I just bailed on them.”

“And I’ve spent years ignoring 99.9% of what they tell me to do, as have you. So? Give me a hint or something, I’m dying over here.”

Considering that presumably Yuri and Yakov had shown up with Mila, he realized Chris’s comment
was probably not much of an exaggeration. But what could he say? Yuuri’s lack of quirk was not knowledge to be shared, even Phichit seemed a bit surprised that Yuuri had told him already, and well, what else was there to tell?

“Victor, look, I know that this is probably one of the stupidest and most selfish things you’ve done.”

Victor started to interrupt, but Chris shushed him.

“And I know a lot of people you care about are pretty damn pissed at you right now. I get that. But, I’m on your side, so don’t shut me out too, okay?”

It was odd, Victor realized, to have someone like a friend.

“We’re reworking Yuuri’s hero image,” he started tentatively.

“Please tell me you’re getting that mask off him, because it is a crime against humanity to hide that face.”

Victor laughed at that, his nerves settling. “You know I’m not a fan of going unmasked, but it’s the way to make the team. And that’s what he’d like to do.”

“Oh shush, you want to look into his beautiful brown eyes. You cannot lie to me, I know how you get around that boy.”

Victor felt his face heat up, not used to having actual relationship fodder for Chris to tease him about. It also didn’t help that Chris was right as well.

“Okay, so due to IHU favoring unmasked heroes and perhaps a little of personal taste on my end…” Chris snorted, but Victor kept his poise. “Hokusai Wave will now be unmasked, and sporting the usual Herotek bodysuit.”

Chris whistled. “You’d better lay claim before someone else does, Victor. Katsuki was dangerous enough plastered in a dress suit, but this is going to be a bombshell. I don’t think there’s been an unmasking this big in ages.”
“Not since the Crispino Twins, I believe.”

“Yeah and that drama was more about them splitting up as a team unit than the unmasking. Everyone else has just been the standard, I’m past the age requirement stuff.”

Victor felt a tinge of worry as all that he was asking of Yuuri was fully dawning on him. It was amazingly brave, to do this. He’d have to make sure Yuuri knew that.

“You doing okay?” Chris asked, clearly concerned over the silence on the other end. “And don’t just say you’re fine because you don’t want to talk about it, okay?”

“It scares me how good you’ve gotten at reading me, Chris,” Victor muttered.

“Someone had to put up with all your whining last year when you were bedridden for weeks. And your coach and protegee both can only take so much of you.”

“Whereas you came in with three bottles of wine, if I remember correctly.”

He laughed. “Yeah those didn’t last long. You needed it though.”

Victor fell silent again and Chris cleared his throat.

“Look, you can either talk to me or I’m just going to have to hop a plane to Japan myself to come check on you. Trust me, everyone else might see this is yet another one of your crazy whims, but I know there’s more to it than that.”

“I hate it when you’re right,” Victor mumbled.

“So, what’s up?”

Victor sighed, his mind trying and failing to put his thoughts in some order. “Just worried. Worried
I’m making a horrible mistake.”

“Victor. You can’t beat yourself up over your parents the rest of your life, you know that. Plus, if all the scrambling around from the officials here didn’t already tip me off, I have a feeling you’ve done everything possible to make sure there’s no trouble. I know you wouldn’t unmask someone unless you felt it was safe.”

“He’s got a wonderful family, Chris.”

“Look, you know well enough if any big bad makes a move us here at HQ will be the first to know. I know it takes the IHU some time to issue any alerts to the rest of the hero world, but hey- I was never one for playing by the rules. If I hear anything I think you need to hear, I’ll let you know right away. That help?”

Victor thought about that, knowing all eighteen of the violations of protocol that leaking classified info entailed. That amount of trouble Chris was willing to risk...

“Don’t get yourself into trouble on my behalf,” he said, but his tone wavered a little.

Chris, thankfully, did not remark on Victor’s choked up words. “Hey someone here at HQ has to piss the big shots off by doing what they please and since you aren’t here, I guess that’ll have to be me. Plus if I overheard Yakov yelling right, apparently your lovely letter to the IHU mentioned your usual suggestions for them to pull that stick out of their ass, so hey. One more step in the right direction, if you ask me. All heroes should know if there’s a villain on the move.”

“Thank you,” Victor said, his smile fond. “I never expected to have you as a friend, yet here you are.”

Chris chuckled. “Wow, I’m touched Victor. I’ve finally made it up to just friend.”

“Shut up.”

“Let me know when you go on your first date, okay? I expect updates. And sappy pictures on your instagram.”
Victor couldn’t help but laugh at that. “Not asking for much, are you?”

“Oh and best man at the wedding!”

“Now you’re getting ahead of yourself,” Victor warned.

“Fine fine, make sure to mention how amazing I am when the press comes a knocking,” Chris added, his grin obvious.

“That, I might be able to oblige.”

“Nighty-night Victor. Sleep so your darling Yuuri doesn’t have to deal with you being a grump in the morning.”

Victor couldn’t stop the smile at that. “Goodnight Chris, don’t get into too much trouble without me there.”

“Oh don’t worry. I will.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay, Russians and Adidas aside, those are the top of the line fencing shoes and they do release a new model every summer Olympics. So :)}
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Japanese Hero Union Official Rankings:

1. Hokusai Wave {Quirk: Unlisted, Location: Hasetsu, Kyushu}
2. Yuki Onna {Quirk: Blizzard, Location: Sapporo, Hokkaido}
3. Denki Gai Rangers - team of five {Quirks: Technology Manipulation, Location: Akihabara district Tokyo, Kanto}
4. Yashikirin {Quirk: Overgrowth Forest, Location: Sendai, Tohoku}
5. Uzushio {Quirk: Whirlpool, Location: Tokushima, Shikoku}

Former Notable Heroes:

- Golden Samurai {Quirk: Midas Touch, Location: Kanazawa, Chubu}
- Kabuki Keren {Quirk: Flicker, Location: Kyoto, Kansai}
- Momotaro {Quirk: Animal Communication, Location: Okayama, Chugoku}

“Well, this is it.”

Yuuri took a deep breath and looked at his reflection in the mirror. They’d spent the previous day putting everything together, Victor calling in favors left and right to get Yuuri what he needed as soon as possible. And somehow, it had all come together in a twenty four hour span. Today was the day that Hokusai Wave emerged as a new hero.

Yuuri almost didn’t recognize himself in the mirror, the sleek Herotek suit hugging tight to his body in a way his previous attire never did. It made him self-conscious about how it accentuated every slope and curve of his figure, but he couldn’t take it back now. If Victor could wear something like this, then he could too, he told himself. He placed a hand over the wave emblazoned on his chest and couldn’t help but feel a little bit excited. It was different but...he definitely looked like a top ranked hero now.

Overall, the only thing that looked the same was his face- his hair slicked back out of his eyes and his contacts in. Victor had told him it was a nice look, and thinking back on that remark only made him blush.

It was practical, that’s what it was. You couldn’t wear a fencing helmet with glasses without risk of injury and there’s no way to push your hair out of your face with a helmet on. He’d protested the
remark, but Victor’s knowing smile never wavered.

Yuuri wasn’t sure what to make of that, wasn’t sure what to make of Victor at all to be perfectly honest. Somehow he was both exactly what Yuuri had expected and yet nothing like it at all. He was surprising, managing to completely turn Yuuri’s life on its head in a matter of hours. Calling in favors from every big name in the hero industry, setting up his own press conference—those were things Yuuri expected from the world’s top hero.

What he hadn’t expected was how incredibly human Victor was under that fame and well-placed smile. The Victor that felt useless, that thought he was damaged, that talked about himself as if he was just a symbol of peace and not a flesh and blood person with feelings beneath it. Yuuri didn’t quite know what to do with that Victor.

For years Yuuri had thought he was projecting his own feelings onto the posters and article clippings that adorned his room. It made sense, to try and find a weakness in that perfect smile or those piercing blue eyes, to try and reason that he was also a flawed person. It made Yuuri feel like perhaps it was possible to meet him on an equal playing field, if Victor too wasn’t quite as perfect as he seemed. But now that he’d seen behind that, seen Victor’s expression as he spoke so harshly about himself, Yuuri couldn’t feel anything but regret.

He wanted to be equal to Victor, but he would have never wished his own insecurities on his worst enemy.

And ever since their talk on the beach, Yuuri couldn’t help but notice the different sides Victor presented depending on his audience. To the IHU, he was smug and scolding, never holding back harsh words even if he said them with a smile. To sponsors or big names in the industry, he was charismatic and poised, a habit that seemed to slip into a lot of his nature. To fellow heroes, that charisma turned playful, talking to them as if they were drinking buddies even if they’d never spoken before. But then, when he was talking with Yuuri’s family or Yuuri himself, there were those brief glimpses past that. This was a Victor that laughed until he was holding his sides, that talked in quiet voices and frowned when he thought no one was looking. Most of all, it surprised Yuuri how many smiles Victor had that he’d never seen before at all.

Yuuri looked at the poster on the wall closest to him and reached out to place a finger over Victor’s cheek. *He has dimples, right there. But only when he’s smiling away from the cameras.*

Somehow knowing this hurt, but Yuuri couldn’t quite place why.

“Yuuri, can I come in?”
He jerked his hand back at the voice and looked to his door.

“Ah, Minako-sensei, come in!”

The door slid open and as way of greeting, a fencing saber was tossed in his direction. Yuuri caught it and flourished it in greeting, bowing to his instructor. She bowed in return, both of them unable to keep from grinning.

“Can’t believe I leave town for a few days and you’re over here being courted by Victor Nikiforov,” she remarked, stepping over to place a hand on his shoulder.

Yuuri rolled his eyes. “Sensei...it’s not like that.”

“Uh huh. Says the boy who just got the world’s number one hero to drop everything and show up on his doorstep. I saw that fight, Yuuri. It’s no wonder Victor was impressed.”

Yuuri dipped his head forward in hopes it might hide his burning cheeks. “I was just lucky, that’s all.”

She slapped him on the back, perhaps a bit hard. “That was skill, Yuuri. You’ve come a long way, but you’re finally getting the recognition you deserve.” She frowned. “Oh don’t give me that look. You’ve earned this, Yuuri. Be proud.”

He offered a nervous smile. “It’s all a little surreal, to be honest.”

Minako laughed. “Well, imagine my surprise when Hiroko texted me and said I needed to come home for your big event. It’ll be a big change, but we’re all more than willing to support you.”

Yuuri sighed, his nerves still unsettled. “Do you think it’ll be okay?”

“I think there’s no way Victor would have suggested it unless he knew it would be. Like I know he’s a little over the top, but I think he’s aware of the risk. Plus, you’ve already intimidated your
opponents pretty well, if I do say so.”

When Yuuri just stared at her blankly, Minako continued.

“Yuuri, you just took down one of the most infamous villains with ease. I highly doubt many villains are going to want to risk messing with you right now, especially with Victor here.”

“After an intimidating tactic, it’s rare for anyone to rush headfirst into an attack. They’ll at least sit back and try to gauge their options first,” Yuuri recited from memory.

Minako smiled. “See, you know what I’m talking about. And by then, I’m pretty sure the JHU will have every security measure imaginable in place. You can keep this town safe, Yuuri. All of us believe that.”

The thought, especially having it spelled out before him, was a bit daunting. But something deep down made Yuuri truly believe it. He could do this. He could keep everyone safe. Everyone always underestimated him and he, as always, would use that against them. This would all be okay.

He took a deep breath, trying to let the confidence seep into all of his being. He was going to need it.

“Okay. Let’s do this.”

Victor wasn’t used to being nervous. At least, not like this. Not over someone else.

But in the blink of an eye, he’d poured all his resources into making sure Yuuri’s unmasking press conference went as smoothly as possible. He had to beat the press to the matter, because it was easier to put on a show and provide information as a pre-prepared script than to subject themselves to a bombardment of questions. Too much nosy prodding by the press could cause loads of trouble for Yuuri, and Victor was certain that arranging this himself would keep most of that at bay.

But he still worried. Worry he hid amidst over-the-top gestures that seemed more for show than for safety. No one would think much of Victor having a flashy conference filled with all the top heroes of Japan, but to him, it was a safety net.
Villains, though they tried so hard to be mysterious and surprising, had rarely been able to surprise Victor. Inferno was the one exception to that, and he’d already insured that he was under lock and key with extra surveillance to be safe. But they’d gotten particularly daring as of late; first the attempt made at the party after the trial and then Inferno’s attempt at a trap for Victor.

Inwardly, Victor suspected that like Yakov had warned him, his weakness was showing just enough that they felt they could push back. With Yuuri now in the picture, this only made Victor more concerned.

If they were lucky, Yuuri’s easy victory over Inferno would be warning enough, but Victor knew that sooner or later, someone would try something.

He’d rerouted so much extra funding to the JHU, making sure the heroes of Japan and their official union were well equipped to monitor and handle any villain movement. He’d gotten Chris to delve into IHU files and get him the last known whereabouts and movements of any of the top one hundred villains that weren’t already locked up.

Victor had done everything imaginable but it still felt like it wasn’t enough.

It wasn’t like him to have to worry about someone else and somehow it set his usual confidence on edge. He forced a confident smile anyway.

“Victor? I’m ready when you are.”

Victor took one more look in the mirror and walked over to give Makkachin a quick pet before he turned to the door. He had to be strong and confident, otherwise the villains would see it as an opportunity. And now, more than ever, he had a lot more to lose if they did.

Outside the front of Yu-Topia, the crowd of locals had gathered as Victor had expected. Yuuri tensed when he saw them, and Victor reached out to place a hand on his shoulder. For once, instead of jerking away, Yuuri seemed to ease back into it.

Victor looked to the outfit, its blue and white colors complementary to his own. His tense smile eased as Yuuri turned to face him.
“Hey, Victor…”

“Hmm?”

“Stay beside me, okay?”

He felt the slight tremor in his body as he said it, Victor knowing immediately that this was something Yuuri didn’t ask just anyone.

“Okay.”

And as Yuuri walked forward towards the light from the doorway, he did so with a newfound confidence in his step.

Victor had pulled out all the stops for this press conference, calling in all the big name heroes of Japan of past and present and not telling the press much more than he had a surprise for them. Yuuri wasn’t used to being the surprise and he knew his nervousness showed.

But somehow, the large gathering began to feel more and more protective rather than intimidating. With the press held off back at the gateway to Yu-Topia, their courtyard acted as a mingling place for all those personally invited.

Yuuri couldn’t help but smile as Yuuko’s triplet daughters rushed around securing autographs and photos of all the gathered heroes. Takeshi had stopped to give him a pep talk before going off to ensure they weren’t getting into too much trouble.

Nearby, his family stood talking with Minako, their faces all proud smiles.

“How? a voice asked from his left. Yuuri turned and had to hold back a gasp at who it belonged to.

“How’s You’re Golden Samurai!”

Yuuri most definitely did not say his catchphrase along with him, and definitely didn’t have to stop himself from doing the poses either.

The hero bowed. “It’s an honor to meet you, Hokusai Wave.”

Yuuri bowed in return. “No, Sir, the honor is all mine. There isn’t a hero in Japan that didn’t grow up hearing of your heroic deeds in Kanazawa.”

He chuckled, the golden streak in his graying hair catching the light as he did so.

“I’m proud to have left it in such capable hands. When I retired, I was worried that no one would be worthy to take my place. Between you, and this lot,” he gestured to the other gathered heroes. “It’s in great hands. That fight against Inferno was something, my boy. You did our country proud.”

Yuuri knew he had to blushing in embarrassment, but he managed to find his words. “T-Thank you.”

“Ojisan, don’t hog the man of the hour.”

Turning to look, Yuuri noticed another iconic hero of Japan’s past: Kyoto’s Kabuki Keren, Golden Samurai’s protegee and former top hero of Japan.

“I’m not hogging anyone, he’s free for all you to come and talk to. You’re just being nice because I’m old.”

Kabuki Keren rolled his eyes, but turned to Yuuri with a grin. Unlike the older hero, he’d donned his costume for this event, the theatrical makeup making his expressions amplified tenfold.

“Hokusai Wave, it’s great to meet you, kid.”
He held out a hand and Yuuri took it. “Same to you.”

Within seconds, the rest of the heroes had crowded around to make introductions as well. There was Okayama’s Momotaro, who had retired a year ago but still had that ever boyish face beneath his mask. The second ranked hero of Japan, Sapporo’s Yuki Onna, pressed a kiss to Yuuri’s cheek leaving a red lipstick mark, and Sendai’s Yashikirin, ranked fourth, used her tree-like powers to give him a hug.

Tokushima’s Uzushio, the fifth ranked, shyly gave his hand a firm shake. And as expected, the ever dramatic Denki Gai Rangers, third ranked, from Akihabara insisted that Yuuri take a group photo with them for their webpage.

When Victor had mentioned bringing in some other Japanese heroes, Yuuri wasn’t sure why that was necessary. But now, surrounded by them, he began to understand why. Not only was this a historic moment for him, but for the JHU and its legacy as well.

From the gate, he could hear the crowd reacting as Victor stepped out to start his speech.

Golden Samurai placed a hand on Yuuri’s shoulder and he turned to him.

“Come on, my boy. Let’s go show the world just what we’re made of. We’re all in this together.”

Words of agreement and encouragement surrounded him, from not just his family, but his country’s own heroes.

It meant a lot, perhaps more than Victor would know.

“Okay, so I’m certain you are all wondering why I’ve called you here today,” Victor’s voice spoke over the the crowd. “And, I’m certain some of you have heard the rumors that I’ve resigned from my post at the UAT. That is due, largely in part, to a little situation that happened a few days ago. Inferno, as you all know, made a bit of scene here in Japan. Much to my dismay, the IHU would not allow me to come and handle that fight. Much to my surprise, someone else did appear and handled it with a grace that I myself am in awe of.” There was a murmur amongst the crowd at that, and Yuuri could tell Victor was working them up to the grand reveal.
“You see, while the IHU ranks its heroes based on arbitrary factors, I prefer to look at what a hero has done to earn that rank. As you know, my history with Inferno is a lengthy one, and my fights with him were often long and involved. That’s why, when I witnessed this hero efficiently and effectively putting Inferno in his place, I decided to come to Japan. Because while Inferno believed this place to be an empty playing field, he too bought into the lie that the IHU has given us. A hero does not have to be highly ranked to do their job and do it well. And Japan is a country in capable hands, both past and present. When you talk of Japan, I want you to remember that it is defended. Not by one, but by many skilled heroes that have been forgotten by the IHU.”

Yuuri watched as the group of heroes filed onto the stage beside Victor. Fans from the crowd yelling out or cheering when their favorites appeared, and everyone turning to a respective silent murmur when Golden Samurai took the stage last. Victor began to introduce each of them and Yuuri felt his nerves bubbling up anew.

Once he was finished with them, it was his turn. This was it.

“Breathe, little bro,” Mari said from beside him, her arm resting around his shoulders. “You’ve got this.”

He offered her a tense smile. “I hope so.”

“I know so,” she said, giving him that knowing look she always did.

Yuuri couldn’t help but crack a smile. “Thanks.”

“Who I’m about to present before you today is a name you should know, but a face you should not. A hero who rightfully has earned his rank as the top hero of Japan. And a hero that I owe immensely for ensuring that Inferno was recaptured before anyone could be seriously harmed. I present to you, Yuuri Katsuki, formerly known only as the Hokusai Wave.”

With a slight nudge from Mari, Yuuri found his footing and made his way forward. Soon enough, he nervously took the stage and made his way to Victor’s side.

His vision filled with flashes of cameras and reporters all scrambling to get the best angle and he tried his best to offer up a small smile.
Victor put his arm around him, resting his hand at his hip. He gave the slightest nod and handed over the microphone.

“T-Thank you, everyone.” He waited for the applause to die down, hoping that the words he’d prepared would come back to him in that time. But as the crowd settled down, his mind remained blank.

Victor gave his side the slightest little squeeze, the warmth of his hand a calming reassurance amidst the turmoil of his emotions. He could do this.

“It is my sincere hope that standing before you today, no longer behind a mask, conveys a message. When Inferno came to our country’s shores, he seemed surprised to find that anyone was here to defend it. I am here, today, to tell you this.” He took a deep breath, his confidence gaining. “Japan is protected. By myself. By all these and many more amazing heroes you’ve probably never heard of. We are not your battlefield and we will not sit by if you come here to cause trouble. You have been warned.”

He felt Victor’s hand reaching up to take the microphone back as the rush of courage slowly ebbed away. The roar of the crowd was a distant sound in his mind, his heart seeming to hammer so loud in his chest that he couldn’t hear much over it.

But as Victor began to answer a few basic questions- yes he’s stepped down from the UAT, yes he’s training with Yuuri, yes he feels like Christophe will be a fine team leader- Yuuri realized his hand had not left his side.

He smiled to himself at that and steeled himself for any questions the reporters tossed his way.

“Mr. Katsuki, can you show us a demonstration of your quirk?”

“Mr. Katsuki, are you planning to try for the UAT next year?”

He was about to answer, or well, divert attention as Victor had suggested if his quirk came up, when suddenly he felt the hairs on his neck prickle.

Before he even registered anything else, he jerked Victor aside and drew his blade. The steel saber rang out as the claws clashed into it, Yuuri finding himself face to face with a familiar masked hero.
“You.”

“The Leopard.” He met the green eyes over his blade. “This isn’t really the best way to go about greeting someone, you know.”

“Tch.”

The boy disengaged from his attack, standing back and pointing at Victor.

“You are supposed to be in Barcelona training me, Monsoon.”

“Last I heard you were to be in Barcelona too, but well...here we are,” Victor replied, his demeanor oddly cool.

The cameras, ever ready for any action, were eagerly filming the whole interruption.

“You promised me, Victor. You fucking owe me! So get your shit together so we can go back now!”

Victor shrugged. “Can’t do that. I’ve got plans here.”

“Then un-plan them! We’re going back!”

Yuuri glanced between Victor and the young hero, his nerves kicking in. Of course, Victor staying was too good to be true. Of course, he’d have other important things to do elsewhere. Of course, someone more important needed Victor.

But Victor looked oddly thoughtful for a moment before smiling. “We’ll have a duel!”

“What?!” The Leopard yelled.
Victor glanced to Yuuri and shot a wink. “For my hand. You can use your quirks and everything and whoever wins gets me to do whatever they wish.”

The boy shifted his glare to Yuuri. “Fine. I’ll kick his ass. Name the fighting style.”

Yuuri blinked, finally pointing to himself. “Really? You want me to choose?”


Inwardly, Yuuri had to repress a smirk. He’s completely underestimating me.

“Okay.”

Victor looked concerned for a moment before it eased into another of his forced smiles. He looked at the young hero. “I don’t want to hear any complaints if you lose. Are you sure about this?”

“Bring it on,” he sneered.


The crowd ooo-ed. The Leopard didn’t seem fazed.

Victor, on the other hand, was leaning down on the edge of the stage. Below him were the triplets, all grinning like Christmas had come early. Finally he returned to center stage and with a flourish he announced.

“You heard it right here, we have ourselves a Christmas Day Duel! Get yourselves here to Hasetsu Japan or watch live on TV as junior’s hero The Leopard faces off against Hokusai Wave in his hometown! Winner dictates whether I stay here to train or return to the UAT in Barcelona! Who will it be? Tune in to find out!”
The reporters began all trying to relay their opinions on the sudden turn of events and even the other heroes gathered began to talk amongst themselves.

Victor put an arm around The Leopard’s shoulders, which he angrily pushed off. He pointed at Yuuri.

“Get ready to have your ass kicked, Puddle!”

Yuuri looked to Victor, who looked far too excited about everything.

“Does he have a place to stay?” Yuuri asked, noticing the boy going over to where his luggage was sitting behind the crowd.

Victor’s smile softened. “He might be more open to the offer if it didn’t come from me.”

Yuuri caught eyes with Minako-sensei in the crowd and nodded towards him. He already knew the boy would need some lessons to even follow the basics of a fencing bout so he might as well get used to the local instructor. She caught on and turned to speak to him.

Unlike with them, he clearly tried to hold back his anger somewhat in front of her, his eyes darting over towards Yu-Topia when she pointed him in that direction.

Before he could protest, Yuuko appeared at his side and took his luggage from him, smiling reassuringly as she headed towards Yu-Topia. The Leopard, trying not to scowl at the women too much, reluctantly followed them.

Yuuri looked to Victor then to the young hero. Could he outpace him without a quirk? Could he keep Victor here?

He sighed, turning and going back towards his house himself, not noticing the confused look Victor shot him as he turned away.
Yuuri had avoided him the rest of the day, and as the sun went down, Victor found he couldn’t ignore the matter much longer. Perhaps it was Yuri, brash and cocky, showing up out of the blue. But, Victor worried, it could also be a lot of other things.

“Do you know where Yuuri might be?” he’d asked his sister.

Yuri rolled his eyes. “Probably cowering in fear somewhere.”

Victor pointedly ignored his comment and waited for Mari’s reply.

“Well, if he’s stressed, which after today I bet he is, he’s probably at the gym or Minako’s place. She’s got a small training space in the room above her snack bar. Do you want me to tell you where?”

He had her give him directions to both locations, and bundled himself up for the cold. Yuri just glared at him.

“You know maybe he’s just avoiding you and doesn’t want to be found, ever consider that?”

He forced a smile. “I may not be your coach, Yuri, but if you expect me to train you at all, your attitude is going to have to change.”

Yuri opened his mouth to retort, but Victor cut him off.

“You haven’t won yet, Yuri. Just keep that in mind.”

And before he could say more, Victor gave Makkachin a quick pat and turned to leave. The last thing he needed was his already on edge nerves to be further provoked by an angry teenager.

The night was cold, just enough that his breath came out in little puffs of air before his face, as he followed the written instructions he had. Minako’s place was the closest, so he went in that direction first.
He found the woman running the bar but no Yuuri in sight.

“Sit. Have a drink,” she urged him. He started to protest, but she leveled him a commanding look.

Victor sat and waited as she slid him a drink.

“Yuuri’s probably at the gym, so there’s nothing to worry about.”

“But-”

“Give him a little longer to cool off, Victor. He’s had a hell of a day.”

Victor looked down, his worries surfacing as he studied the drink in his hands.

“You know, when Hiroko told me you’d showed up I thought she was trying to pull a fast one on me. Instead I get a textful from both her and Mari-chan telling me that you’re at their place. I can’t imagine how Yuuri must have felt.”

He threw back part of the drink, glad to feel the kick of the alcohol in it. It seemed he was going to need it.

“I’m afraid, perhaps, I may have pushed him too far.”

“If you’re talking about his new look, that’s not what’s got him upset.”

Victor looked up to her, confused. She topped off his drink and poured one for herself.

“Yuuri might not seem that way, but he’s got an impressive competitive streak. He hates the idea of losing. When he came home from the final trial, he wouldn’t talk to most of us more than he had to and kept training to keep his mind off things.”
Victor took that in, his mind slowly putting all the pieces he’d been given together.

“Then Inferno showed up.”

“Yep. He’s not really recovered from one loss, not finished beating himself up over it, and then all this happened. Now that there’s a chance he could lose again, I think that’s all come up to the surface. He’s got a lot riding on this match, more so than perhaps you even know.”

Victor sat his glass down and gave her a searching look. “I’d like to. Truly. Whether he understands it or not, this isn’t some game to me. I’m certain that he has what it takes to win this duel. I wouldn’t have suggested it otherwise.”

“You told him that, hmm?” Minako countered.

Immediately, Victor dropped his eyes. “No.”

“There’s the problem then.”

It fell silent between them for a moment, not a sound but the chinks of ice as it melted in their glasses. Finally, Victor took his glass and threw back the remainder of the drink. Minako sat her glass down.

“Yuuri’s got a lot of pride, Victor. But he’s got a lot of anxiety too. The world’s not exactly been his best friend or encouraged him the way it should. So, those of that do see that potential, well…it’s up to us to try and get through all the walls he’s built up. He won’t always listen, won’t always take praise the way he should. He attributes his raw talent to luck more often than I’d like to count.” She sighed, her eyes looking far away. “But he’s been so determined since he was young to be a hero, and he’s not let anything stop him from that. Whether he’s dancing, fencing or fighting...Yuuri puts his heart into what he does. He always has.”

Victor offered her a warm smile. “Thank you, Minako. I feel like I know Yuuri a little better now.”

He stood up and started to reach for his wallet. She shook her head.

“It’s on the house as long as you take my advice with it. Communicate. Don’t just think something
and hope he gets the hint. Even if it’s obvious.”

He inclined his head in a slight bow in gratitude. “Duly noted.”

As he turned to go, she called out to him.

“Side door of the gym, there’s a key under the mat. Chances are he’s the only one awake there right now.”

Victor waved over his shoulder. “Next time the drink’s on me, Minako. You name it.”

She laughed. “All right, but I’m going to hold you to that.”

“I would expect nothing less.”

It was the gust of cool air that alerted Yuuri to the presence of someone else in the gym. He’s not even sure what time was, having lost track hours ago and not being bothered enough since to find out. It could be Yuuko, if it’s closer to morning than he thought it was. But it’s more likely it’s Minako, stopping by on the way home from work to make sure he’s at least eaten for the day.

So it came as quite the surprise when the voice that called across the gym was neither of the expected ones.

“Yuuri?”

It’s Victor and he’s not sure whether it’s Mari or Minako or both of them he had to blame for him knowing where to look.

He wiped the sweat from his brow on the sleeve of his sweatshirt, the baggy sleeves ruched up above his elbows, before rearing back and throwing another punch at the bag. Maybe if he didn’t say anything Victor might go away.
“Yuuri? I know you’re in here.”

He punched the bag again. He’s not really in the mood to talk with Victor right now, but it’s looking like he’s not got the option to avoid it. His mind was a mess of emotions and he hoped that whatever Victor came to say didn’t cause any of them to spill out. That’s the last thing he needed.

“Hey,” came the voice far closer to him than Yuuri expected.

He whipped around, surprised to see that Victor was only an arm’s length away. How did he get so close so quietly?

“Sorry, I didn’t want to startle you.”

Yuuri realized he must be scowling, the look on Victor’s face falling as he met his eyes.

“Yeah, what is it?” He winced at the tone, already out of his mouth before he could take it back.

Surprisingly, Victor only eased his posture at it.

“Look, you have every right to be mad at me.”

He opened his mouth, trying to find the words to convey the jumble of things he wanted to say, but unable to do so, he resorted to frowning instead. He’s not mad at Victor. He’s just…

“Can we talk?” Victor asked, looking quite apologetic already.

Yuuri eased his stance, taking a deep breath as he did so. “Yeah.”

He followed Victor over to the nearest bench, and watched as he picked up his water bottle. Without even the slightest move, he iced up half of the liquid and handed it over.
“There. Nice and cold.”

Yuuri couldn’t help but crack a smile.

“Show off.”

Victor patted the space on the bench next to him and waited for him to oblige. Yuuri sat and took a drink.

“Thanks.”

“It’s the least I can do,” he replied. “Especially since I have a feeling I might be partially to blame for your need to practice this late.”

Yuuri frowned, still not quite sure how to articulate his emotions on the matter.

“I’m not mad,” he managed. “Just…”

“Not happy I set you up for a duel?” When Yuuri didn’t respond, Victor continued. “Neglected to mention that I firmly believe you’ll win said duel?”

He blinked, not sure he’s hearing Victor correctly.

“But he’s...Yuri is your protegee right? That you apparently promised to train?” It felt strange to him to use his own name about someone else. But, well, he wasn’t making the same fuss about it that Yuri did over dinner.

Victor sighed, reaching up to run a hand through his hair. “It’s more like an arrangement.”

Yuuri knew he had to look to confused, but what Victor was saying made no sense. Of course this boy had a good chance to win! He had been touted as closest thing the hero world had seen since
Victor’s own debut.

“Yuuri…”

He blinked at his name, Victor’s tone growing softer.

“It’s an arrangement meant for a situation in which…” Victor took a deep breath and leveled him with a meaningful look. “Well, in case I’m no longer in the picture.”

Yuuri stared, the implications of that clicking into place.

“He’s...you…”

Victor nodded solemnly. “I’m meant to pass on what knowledge I can in case I become unable to fight anymore. Not my idea, just so you know. But, well...when you’re laid up in bed for weeks you get to the point that you’ll agree to some things just so your coach will stop freaking out.”

“He’s meant to be your replacement,” he murmured.

Victor offered a small resigned smile. “Precisely.”

Yuuri looked down, his eyes focusing on the chunk of ice floating inside his water bottle. He thought of the blue skin on Victor’s side and what he’d told him that day.

“Then why?” he asked, looking up and studying Victor’s expression as if perhaps it could answer all the questions swirling in his head. “Shouldn’t you just go back? Why even make it a contest?”

“Because a certain someone...told me not to give up,” he remarked, his expression softening around the edges.

Unthinkingly, Yuuri’s hand drifted up and clutched at the front of his shirt. You mean...me?
Victor smiled, gentle and warm. “So, I’m not going to give up. On myself or on him.”

“Victor…”

He reached over, hesitating a moment before placing his hand atop Yuuri’s hand.

“I already think you have what it takes to win, Yuuri. You’re not weak. But, if it’ll help you focus, I’ll train with you these next few days. Whatever you think you need to work on to feel more comfortable for the match.”

“Don’t you think that’s a little unfair?” Yuuri asked, but his smile had already brightened across his face.

Victor shrugged. “He’s got one of the best quirks out there, you get me to help you train. Seems like a fair trade off.”

Yuuri snorted. “You are most definitely, a show off.”

He gave Yuuri’s hand a gentle pat before grabbing it and pulling him up. “Oh you haven’t even seen me showing off. Get your stuff, I’ll show you showing off!”

Yuuri laughed, but did just that, gathering up his bag of things and turning off all the lights before they left through the backdoor. The moment they were outside, Victor nudged his shoulder.

“Okay, eyes closed.”

Yuuri gave him a look and Victor nodded, encouraging him to do so. Finally he did and he felt Victor’s arm slide around his shoulders.

“Now this, is showing off.”

Before he could open his eyes, he felt it, the gentle fall of something cold and slightly damp against his cheeks. So light and airy was it, it was almost like the air itself was kissing him.
Slowly, he blinked his eyes open; a small gasp escaping his lips as he saw exactly what Victor had done. Right above them, and only them, was an abundant flurry of snowflakes.

He grinned over at Victor, a laugh bubbling up as he spoke, “You...are ridiculous.”

Victor gave his shoulders a squeeze and Yuuri found himself leaning into his touch. Just a little.

“Feeling better?”

Yuuri sighed, the weight of all his worries gone for now. “Yeah.”

Victor leaned his head down atop Yuuri’s as the snow continued to flutter around them.

“Then let’s go home.”

Chapter End Notes

FYI: Golden Samurai’s catch phrase lists off the 8 virtues of Bushido.

Thank you all for reading! Each comment and kudos means the world to me and keeps me writing on my rough days. Thanks so much!
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Thank you, each and every one of you for commenting or leaving kudos. It means the world to me, truly.

If you're interested in keeping up with me and every once in awhile getting me rambling about this fic, feel free to find me on tumblr with the username Abarero :)

International Hero Union Official File

Hero ID #: TL0301

Civilian Name: Yuri Plisetsky

Superhero Name: The Leopard

Masked Status: Masked

Associated National Hero Union: Russian Hero Federation

National Hero Ranking: 01 (Junior League)

Quirk: Feline Physiology

Range of Quirk Use: Quirk gives user enhanced balance, flexibility, eyesight, speed, strength, and agility. Also can transform fingernails into claws, which are retractable. This is considered one of the higher level quirks, as it enhances multiple abilities at once.

He’d been lying awake for…well, the clock said thirty minutes, but it felt more like two hours.

But it was the early hours of the morning and for a moment, Yuuri found himself left alone with his thoughts. Usually, he’d begin to worry and it would spiral out of control from there. This morning though, something was different. After waking up, his mind had drifted back to last night. At first, he couldn’t place the feeling, knowing that his heart was racing, but it wasn’t due to nerves or anxiety this time.

Yuuri’s mind flickered back to Victor’s arm snug around his shoulders and head resting atop his own.
He pressed his hands to his cheeks, which were warm and probably red, his heart still racing.

_Ah, that’s what this is._ Yuuri thought to himself as he broke into a smile. _I’m happy._

Turning, he buried his face in his pillow as if it might somehow stifle his giddy smile. But it wouldn’t. He just kept thinking of Victor, of all the kind things he’d said and done for him, and grinning more. Finally, he took a deep breath and tried to level his thoughts.

Deep breath in. _I’m going to win this duel._

Deep breath out. _And I’m going to find a way to help Victor._

_You can do this, Yuuri._

He reached over for his phone, rolling his eyes as he spotted the giant list of articles Phichit had linked him to. Apparently, much to Yuuri’s embarrassment, the surprise of how “attractive” the elusive Hokusai Wave was had dominated the majority of superhero news the previous day.

As Victor had predicted though, being unmasked seemed to immediately change the IHU’s tone in regards to him. He’d gotten a formal apology from them in regards to the Inferno incident, and they’d mentioned something odd about him being the first to collect points for this year’s UAT competition. He wasn’t sure what that meant exactly, knowing he’d have to ask Victor about it, but as the news articles had also noted, this made him an instant favorite overnight.

_Everything You Need to Know about the Next Hot Hero: Hokusai Wave_

SuperNewsWeekly - 18 hours ago

_Winter Monsoon Thankful to Hokusai Wave for Putting Inferno “in his place”_

IHU Press - 19 hours ago

_The Leopard vs. Hokusai Wave! Live Christmas Morning!_

Japan Hero News - 15 hours ago

_Move Over Crispino Twins: Are Winter Monsoon and Hokusai Wave the Next Big Heroic Team-Up?_
Yuuri closed out of the window before he could read any further, already knowing that Phichit would give him more than enough details about all of the articles. He switched over to his other text, one that Minako had sent him late last night.

They’d decided to let Yuri train with her separately, Yuuko volunteering to act as his training partner so Yuuri didn’t have to. This meant he’d be able to maintain some element of surprise when it came to his fencing technique, but he was still concerned over countering Yuri’s speed.

Yuuri had kept meticulous notes on most of the hero world, knowing that if he was going to be on the UAT he’d need to know how to best work with various quirks. Since The Leopard had been getting so much press, Yuuri already had a substantial list of information on his quirk and its abilities.

He texted this to Minako and asked her what she thought he should focus on. Noting, after a moment, that Victor had also volunteered to help.

- Good. I may have told him where you were last night, but I take it he took my advice.

Yuuri blinked. Victor hadn’t mentioned talking with Minako and for a moment he was concerned.

...what advice?

- To tell you that he believes in your skills. I figure another one of us trying to get it into your thick skull couldn’t hurt.

He had to laugh at that, because bless Minako-sensei, she tried. But it was true, Victor telling him he believed he could win, that he wasn’t weak...it lit a competitive fire in him that he’d not had in quite some time. Like he wanted to prove to the world that Victor was right about him, that he was worth him stepping down from the UAT.

Thanks. So any ideas? I feel like fencing drills aren’t going to help me counter his quirk that well.
He’s got the agility of a feline, so you need to counter his speed and footwork. Your reaction time in épée bouts has always been fine, but you know he’ll advance aggressively when he fights. You’ll need to be able to defend while retreating and find an opening.

Yeah I thought the same. I figure I’ll be fighting most of the bout moving backwards against his constant attacks.

...does Victor dance?

Yuuri blinked at the question. While it wasn’t uncommon for Minako to blend her two strengths, using the agility of dance footwork to better her fencing footwork, it still hadn’t crossed his mind as a possibility until now. His mind did helpfully supply a reminder of the images Phichit had sent him from the after-party though and he about threw his phone in frustration.

Because I’m going to guess a feline’s agility has nothing on a Paso Doble.

He hated it when she was right about things like this.

Victor wasn’t quite sure what to expect that morning. Yuuri had at breakfast asked if he had something suitable to train in that wasn’t his Herotek suit, which was an odd question. Perhaps he needed something else to wear under fencing gear?

Whatever the reason, Yuuri seemed pleased when he said he did, and seemed to grow rather quiet while hiding a blush as best as he could with his bowl.

They’d sent Yuri off to train for a bit that morning, Minako giving him the basics before he would move to the gym with Yuuko to practice. As much as Victor had a lot he wished to talk with Yuuri about, he’d managed to avoid Victor much of the morning. It unsettled him and he worried that perhaps he’d still not resolved the matter from last night.

But at lunch, Yuuri resurfaced and seemed in a better mood. Mari teased him about something in Japanese, and Victor couldn’t catch what it was about, but it earned a look. Yuuri had pointedly looked right at him, then back at Mari, before turning crimson and doing his best to shift the
conversation elsewhere.

And so, Victor found himself heading alongside Yuuri to Minako’s place in an odd sort of silence. Whatever Yuuri was embarrassed about seemed to still be there, as he kept giving Victor odd glances and blushing as he looked back away. But he wasn’t sure how to broach the topic without possibly making the situation worse.

The last thing he wanted to do was make the matter worse.

As they reached the stairs leading up to the spacious room above Minako’s bar, Victor almost stopped Yuuri a moment to ask if everything was okay. But, he found he couldn’t go through with it.

Victor had never been good at communicating his emotions well and as much as Minako told him to he couldn’t bring himself to do something he thought would only upset the balance.

Coming down the stairs, was Yuri and Yuuko.

“Monsoon,” the boy practically growled out, “you here to help the Puddle try and beat me?”

Victor plastered on what he hoped was a confident smile. “Oh I’m certain he doesn’t need my help for that. I’m just here to support him however he needs me to.”

Yuri curled his lip, shifting his ire to Yuuri.

“Hey, Puddle.”

Surprisingly, Victor noticed that Yuuri wasn’t nervous. No, he looked steely as he glared back at the boy.

“The Leopard.”

“*The* Leopard,” he corrected.
Yuuri shrugged. “Titles are earned, Leopard.”

Yuuko stifled a laugh and Victor felt his mouth gape open. This was a completely different Yuuri than he’d encountered before and it brought back memories of the tense conversation that he’d had with Inferno during their fight.

Even Yuri seemed a bit surprised by the retort.

“What?” he sneered.

“If I’m going to be a puddle to you, you can be a leopard to me. Victor chose to come here, and if I have to beat you to keep him here, then so be it.”

Yuri looked to Victor, his eyebrows raised. “I see your smartass attitude is wearing off on him.”

But Yuuri just held out a hand. “Yuri, may the best hero win.”

Victor wasn’t quite sure what emotion flickered through Yuri’s eyes before it was quickly replaced with a smug confidence, but something about this seemed to put him on edge.

_Imagine that. The little kitten is afraid, it seems._

He took Yuuri’s hand and clenched it. “May the best Yuri win.”

Yuri shook his hand hard before jerking away and brushing past. Yuuko stepped up behind him and whispered to Yuuri.

“He’s already had the body cord yank him down about three times. Don’t worry, Yuuri.”

His expression softened into a smile at that. “Somehow I’m not surprised. But, try and help him as best as you can, okay?”
Yuuko nodded, pumping up a fist. “I’ll do my best.”

She started down the stairs after Yuri before pausing. “Hey, did you need your lamé? Yuri had borrowed it but…”

He shook his head. “We’re training the other angle, so he can borrow whatever of my fencing gear he needs.”

Yuuko’s eyes widened before glancing to Victor. “Does he…”

Yuuri bit his lip and dipped his head forward. “Oh he knows.”

The look she shot Victor was something akin to a knowing mother’s pleased with the outcome of something. She gave Yuuri a pat on the shoulder. “Good luck then.”

And before Victor could interject and try to ask what they were talking about, she had brushed past and was gone.

He turned to Yuuri and tilted his head, a silent question.

“You do know I can dance, right?” There was mischief in his eyes and Victor had to repress a laugh.

He shrugged, trying not to smile too much.

“Had absolutely no idea.”

Yuuri laughed and Victor found he couldn’t help but follow suit. It was nice, to see Yuuri relaxing about this.

He followed him up the remaining stairs, the door opening to a large room with wood flooring. It
was definitely a perfect size for its purpose, just long enough to fit a fencing strip and wide enough to accommodate a pair of dancers. Minako was finishing putting away fencing gear as they entered and Victor turned expectantly to Yuuri. He glanced to the bag at Victor’s side.

“There’s changing rooms over there. Then we can get warmed up and uh...go from there.”

Minako gave him a smile. “Heard you did ballet years ago?”

Victor leveled a smile. “Oh yes, awhile back.”

He tried not to let his expression shift, knowing that with thoughts of ballet came thoughts of his parents. He’d stopped when they’d died and never gone back to it since.

“Luckily, you’ve got the easier role here. But Yuuri needs to up his footwork speed if he’s going to counter that kid’s. If I can best some of the best fencers with quirks without one, then Yuuri shouldn’t have a single problem.”

Victor shifted his eyes to the display of trophies and awards in one corner of the studio. In the center was an Olympic gold medal.

“I’d have more of them too, but they started allowing quirk usage in sports between that Olympics and the next. Could only manage a bronze the next time.”

He glanced back to her. “I’d say without a quirk, a bronze is pretty spectacular.”

She shrugged. “Would have had gold again if there were better quirk use regulations in place. But well, you know how it is. The flashier the better, right? Gold medalist just outright froze their opponents, like that takes an ounce of skill.”

Victor felt a pang of remorse. He’d already come to understand the disadvantages that Yuuri had faced to some degree, but he’d never thought how those little oversights could add up. It seemed it wasn’t just the IHU that played favorites.

“Well, that’s just…”
Yuuri let out a resigned sigh. “Don’t get her started, Victor. Yes, it’s unfair. But apparently the suggestion to just put inhibitors on everyone wasn’t interesting enough. The sporting world is no different than the hero world now, it’s all about being lucky enough to have the right quirk.”

He hung his head, shaking it. “I’m sorry.”

Minako gave him a forceful slap on the back. “Don’t beat yourself up over it. Just means us boring quirkless people have to work a little harder. And if your protegee is anything to go by, I’d say right now we’re the ones you have to watch out for.”

Victor offered a smile. “Yes I heard. Something about a body cord?”

Minako had to bite back a laugh. “In electronic fencing, you have a cord that goes from you to the end of the strip. If you yank too hard, it’ll yank you hard right back.”

He had no problem imaging Yuri barreling forward only to have the cord yank back and deposit him on his ass.

“Checks and balances, I suppose?”

She laughed. “Oh it checked him all right. But enough about that, let’s get you two started. Go get into something more fitting to dance in, ballet boy.”

Victor nodded, catching Yuuri darting his eyes away as he turned to go into the other changing room. Was he nervous? Perhaps a little awkward since he didn’t remember the dance at the party? Victor hadn’t meant to make him nervous by offering to help. He went into the changing room, pulling on a black Herotek top and matching pants, before returning to the studio.

Minako’s expression had shifted, and for a moment Victor couldn’t figure out why. Then the door to the other changing room swung open.

Victor could have had a cord jerking him to the ground, he was so floored. He’d thought Yuuri was attractive before now, certainly, but this was on a completely different level.
The hair slicked back and the missing glasses, that he’d seen. But the rest... wow. He was wearing a tight black top without sleeves, half of it sheer mesh, the other half adorned in what looked like shards of glass over black fabric that clung close to his skin. This tapered down into a black angled skirt that cascaded from his knees to the floor, a slit cut up the right side to his hip and red fabric lining that drew your attention right to said slit. Victor knew he’d be lying if he tried to convince anyone he wasn’t staring.

Yuuri cleared his throat and he managed to drag his eyes up to his face.

“I know I can’t really pull something this flashy off, but it’s best if I dance the second part to work on my footwork for the match.” He nervously rubbed the back of his head, somehow making him all the more adorable.

Victor looked to Minako, pleading with her with a glance to say something and give him some time to formulate words.

“Yuuri is neglecting to mention the fact we won first with our Paso Doble two years ago for a reversed partners challenge. Though my matador outfit doesn’t look near as good.”

Yuuri’s eyes hesitantly sought out Victor’s and he knew he had to say something because he was waiting. But how did he put this into words? How could anyone?

Swallowing hard, he crossed the space between them, his hand shakily reaching out to nudge Yuuri’s chin up.

“Hey.” He waited until Yuuri’s eyes shifted up to his own. Ah, there. “You are...the most stunning surprise, do you know that?”

“V-Victor...” Yuuri dipped his head again, but Victor caught his cheek, gently nudging his face back up.

“I’m serious, Yuuri. You’re... beautiful. It’s like...every little thing about you makes me think that more and more.”
The wide eyes shifted and it was as if Victor could see the words clicking into place and settling behind the warm brown surface of his eyes. Shock. Disbelief. Then finally…

He closed his eyes, pressing ever so slightly into Victor’s touch, the hint of a smile pulling at his lips.

“If I’m dreaming, don’t anyone wake me up.”

Victor felt a laugh bubble up. “Yuuri…”

Yuuri’s hand drifted up, hesitating a moment before laying atop Victor’s on his cheek. “Victor…”

“Hmm?”

He slid his eyes open, his smile soft and warm. “Thank you.”

And although they drifted apart only to follow Minako’s instructions, each step of the dance drawing them closer and closer again, Victor found that the warmth in his chest didn’t drift away at all. If anything, it grew. Stronger and stronger.

Yuuri somehow managed to put his feelings towards Victor aside. Or well, that’s what he kept telling himself at least.

It was the second day of their dance training and Yuuri was pretty sure that sooner or later Victor was going to realize how badly he was crushing on him. Mari helpfully pointed out that the posters should have tipped him off, but Yuuri did his best to argue that there’s a difference. Plenty of people had hero crushes- idolizing a specific hero for their accolades and not necessarily anything else. To Victor the posters might mean nothing more than that Yuuri admired him, which he’d already told him such so that wasn’t much of a secret anyways.

But Yuuri had definitely applied the other type of crush to Victor long before he set foot in Hasetsu. A fact that he was beginning to realize must be glaringly obvious. Mari and even Minako had both countered that they didn’t think he was the only one with a crush, but Yuuri waved that off. Yes Victor was being nice to him. That didn’t mean anything.
And as much as he wanted to read into every lingering touch or kind word, he also knew if he did it would just end up eventually breaking his heart. No, it was best if he buried what he felt deep and hoped for the best. He could be Victor’s friend, that was an honor enough. No reason to upset the balance and hope for anything more.

Yuri, had in a way, been a welcome addition to the household. Because as much as part of Yuuri wished to have Victor all to himself, he also knew that would only make his problem worse. No, best to have Yuri present as well.

Which is how he found himself, after a day of dancing in Victor’s arms, somehow in the onsen again with him. And well, Yuri as well.

“So Puddle, I finally got Yuuko to tell me about your training. Dancing huh?”

Yuuri shot Victor a helpless look before sinking further into the water. “Laugh all you want, but it helps.”

He snorted. “If you say so.” He shifted his smug look to Victor. “On Love: Eros is it? Do you even know what that is, Victor?”

Victor blinked, quickly shrugging off his momentary shock. “That is the name of music we’re dancing to.”

“And?” Yuri pressed. “How can you dance to something you don’t know jack shit about?”

He turned with a smile towards Yuuri. “Yuuri won first place with it before, right?”

Yuuri flinched. He did not want this conversation to be happening. Not now. Not ever.

“Y...yes?” he managed.

Yuri laughed, sharp and smug. “Hah! Okay Puddle, then you answer me. What’s going on in that
head of yours to capture ~ eros~ ?”

He sunk deeper into the water. “Um…”

“Come on, you have to have something as inspiration right? Capture the mooood?”

Yuuri was currently thinking about all the possible martial arts moves he could use to pin a certain Yuri Plisetsky down with. Maybe he could get him to back off then…

“I bet I know…” He grinned, his eyes glinting and his teeth sharp.

*Shit say something say something.*

“...katsudon,” he mumbled.

Yuuri roared with laughter, but it was better than the alternative. Yuuri glanced over to Victor, hoping he could say something to change the subject.

But Victor had just abruptly stood up. “I think I’m going to go try that new ramen stall that opened up. You two have a nice night without me bothering you, okay?”

The smile he offered was perhaps the coldest Yuuri had seen from him.

“Victor, wait…”

It was too late. The door slid closed and Victor was gone. He turned his ire towards Yuri, who looked surprisingly apologetic.

“Jeez, what a drama queen. Don’t let it bother you, Puddle. He’s always like this.”

*No he’s not*, Yuuri thought frantically. *Not with me, he hasn’t*…
“Hey.”

He snapped his eyes back over to the boy.

“Look. I uh…” He looked awkwardly away before coughing. “I take ballet too, so uh.”

Well, this was a first. Yuri Plisetsky, sorry and trying to make Yuuri feel better. He smiled.

“It’s good for agility, isn’t it?”

The boy nodded. “I’m still gonna kick your ass though.”

Yuuri laughed, but he felt a bit of his worry ease for the moment. He started asking about what drills Yuuko was working with Yuri on, suggesting a few others for him to try.

By the time he went to bed, he almost had forgotten that Victor still hadn’t come back yet.

Almost.

He’d noticed the food stall that morning as they’d gone to Minako’s studio. It had just opened, having signs saying such in English even, and Victor had almost asked if Yuuri had wanted to go with him.

Well. Now he was glad he hadn’t done so.

His chest twinged as he thought back to the conversation. Minako was right, clearly he’d needed to be more clear about his feelings because obviously Yuuri didn’t feel the same.
I must be making him feel so awkward.

Victor knew he wasn’t anything close to an expert on the matter, but what he did know made things pretty obvious. He certainly wasn’t thinking about food while dancing with Yuuri after all.

He sat down at the stall, the man running it starting up at his sudden customer.

“I’ll take a bowl of whatever you think is best and whatever you have to drink with the highest alcohol content.”

The man hesitated and for a second Victor was worried he only spoke Japanese. But then his face broke into a smile.

“You-You’re Victor Nikiforov!”

He blinked.

“I’m so honored to meet you!” The man stuck out a hand, which Victor took and gave a shake.

“Wow, I can’t believe it! Winter Monsoon at my little stall! I’ll fill your order with endless bowl and drink privileges on the house.”

“Thank you,” Victor chuckled, his smile easily coming up to mask his actual mood. “You have great English, are you from around here?”

He shook his head. “Just got back from a hero school in America, actually. Name’s Masahiro Noble. I’ve got family here and there, so I’m back here now helping out with the business.”

He nodded, took a hearty swig of the drink placed before him and was relieved to immediately feel the kick of alcohol.

“Hero school huh?”
Masahiro shrugged. “Yeah, didn’t quite work out. You see my quirk...it’s a bit.” He sighed. “It’s a mental quirk, nothing flashy. You know how it is, if it’s not flashy no one cares.”

Victor frowned over the edge of his glass, his eyes focusing on the dish Masahiro was preparing.

“Is it really that bad?”

He frowned but tried to bounce back with a smile. “Yeah, I got great grades. Top of my class. But the IHU doesn’t care. I can’t even get officially certified by them, can you believe that?”

The glass was suddenly empty and Victor sheepishly held it up for a refill. He offered what he hoped was a sympathetic smile.

“I’ve not exactly been on great terms with how they do things, as you might know.”

“I’ve heard that. There’s been quite the buzz about you taking a liking to the Katsuki boy after all, and well...he’s been off the IHU’s radar for years.”

He slid the bowl across and paused to fill up Victor’s glass.

“You’re lucky you have such a great quirk, you know? Sometimes I just wish I had something with a little more... something.”

The ramen was great and Victor found himself wondering if he should try to help the man out. Well, it’s not like the IHU wasn’t used to him suggesting things.

“I can put a word in for you, if you’d like?”

Masahiro flushed. “Oh gosh no! I couldn’t ask that of you.”

“It’d be no problem, I promise.”
He shook his head. “No, no I mean it. I mean totally go out there and vouch for the other little guys, but I think my hero days are over.”

Victor sighed, watching as he turned to pour himself a drink. With a smile he toasted towards Victor.

“Really, Mr. Nikiforov. Being back here’s made me rethink the whole hero thing. I admire what you all do, but I just don’t think I’m cut out for it.”

“Why?”

He sighed, long and heavy. “Well, see there’s this girl I like. But last I spoke to her, she wouldn’t have anything to do with me as long as I still wanted to be a hero.”

Victor set his glass down, perhaps a little too harshly. The alcohol had definitely made it to his stomach before his food and he was beginning to feel it. “Why not?”

Masahiro gave a sad smile. “It’s too dangerous, you know? If I went unmasked, any and everyone I cared about could become a target. I mean, that’s why you’ve stayed away from dating, isn’t it? After what happened to your parents?”

His heart sank. He’d heard Christophe lament the matter many times, but it had never occurred to Victor that it could really impact a relationship that seriously. He threw down the rest of his drink, happy to have the burn of it to distract himself from all the thoughts trying to come to surface.

Like how it was his fault his parents had been targeted. And now, it would be his fault if someone went after Yuuri or his family.

Victor’s lips thinned as he thought of Yuuri, smiling, and how easily someone could now take that away because of him.

He slid the empty glass over for another refill.
“Yeah, no dating for me.”

“That’s so rough, man. Like admirable and all, but kinda sad, you know?”

Victor sighed. “It’s for the best.”

Masahiro continued on, about how he couldn’t just give that up for a hero gig that wouldn’t amount to much and about his family and friends. But Victor’s thoughts were far away.

*I shouldn’t get close. It’s for the best.*

Yuuri knew something was off when Victor was late to join him at Minako’s the next day. He’d come home late, not that Yuuri had stayed up listening for him to, and slept in. It was pretty clear he was slightly hungover as well.

But that didn’t compare to their practice together. Even Minako had to keep correcting their positions because Victor kept drifting too far apart and Yuuri felt his heart sink a little more each time she did.

At first, Yuuri thought it had to be what he’d said. But surely Victor knew he wasn’t serious about that, right? Yuuri frowned, his mind providing an endless supply of reasons why Victor had suddenly changed.

Most of them all pointed back to one of two things. Either Victor knew Yuuri had a crush on him, was incredibly awkward knowing this because he didn’t feel the same, and was trying to politely give a hint. Or Victor had finally realized that it was clear that Yuri would probably win the duel and he’d be returning to Barcelona soon.

Either way, there was no lingering touches or overly kind words. Just stiff smiles and normal niceties.

Yuuri resigned himself to it. Perhaps it was for the best. No reason for him to get attached if Victor was going to be leaving soon. And if he didn’t feel the same, well that would spare them both the awkwardness of trying to deal with that.
When evening came, Yuuri found he wasn’t that surprised when Victor opted out of joining the family for dinner and instead went off to the ramen stall again.

Yuri, on the other hand, was livid. He pulled Yuuri into his room after dinner to have a “talk.”

“What in the hell is up with Victor?”

He blinked. “You don’t know?”

The boy kicked the nearest object, his suitcase, and upended it into the room. Clothes scattered everywhere, but he didn’t seem to care.

“How the hell should I know?”

Yuuri looked away. “Aren’t you...don’t you know him pretty well?”

Yuri scoffed. “I know he’s a fucking idiot, that’s what I know.”

He angrily sat down on his bed, scowling about until he realized Yuuri was still standing. He pushed some of the strewn clothes aside and nodded to the spot next to him. Yuuri, bewildered by the boy’s sudden kindness, did not hesitate to take him up on it.

“I mean,” he sighed, trying to find a way to word it well, “you share the same coach, right?”

“And?”

“And you’ve been training with him for a while?”

Yuri stared. “And you think being around him makes his dumbass decisions make any more sense to me? Like hell I know what’s going in that stupid head of his!”
They fell silent a moment and Yuuri started to stand to go. Clearly, neither of them had any idea what was going on.

“Hey Puddle.”

“Leopard?”

He allowed himself a small smirk at the lack of his usual “The.”

“Good. You haven’t completely failed me too.”

“What do you mean?”

Yuri huffed, dragging a hand down his face. “You know, Yakov is like...so majorly pissed off right now? First Victor up and bails on his job to come here, then I found out and followed. Because whether he gives a shit or not, it’s my career on the line.”

Yuuri frowned. “What do you mean?”

Yuri narrowed his eyes, clearly trying to gauge what he could and couldn’t say to him. He settled for the middleground. “If Victor’s sitting out of the UAT, I’m supposed to be taking his place. But he’s fucked that all up now because he had to run off to you!”

He hung his head and was about to apologize when Yuri cut him off. “I’m…”

“Don’t.” He leveled a glare. “It’s his fault for ignoring what he needs to do before he’s out of time to do so. If he wants to run off and live with you forever after then- fine, whatever! But now what was supposed to be my big year before officially joining the IHU on my sixteenth is going to be nothing.”

Yuuri blinked. “You think they won’t be interested if he doesn’t train you?”
“Press wasn’t told hey look at this kid, he’s awesome. They were told, look at him, he’s the next Victor Nikiforov. Without him…”

He felt a pang of concern for the boy, finally realizing exactly why he was so insistent that Victor return to train him. “Without him, I think the IHU would be stupid to ignore such a talented young hero.”

He snapped his gaze up to Yuuri’s, eyes wide in shock. Yuuri offered a smile.

“I can’t speak for everyone, but from what coverage I’ve seen, you’re no Victor. Your technique is completely different, and your presence is too. I’m sure you have plenty of fans that feel the same, Yuri. No one’s comparing you to him.”

The boy said nothing and Yuuri sighed.

“And I’m sure any of the UAT would be more than willing to train you, if you asked.”

“Tch. Like hell I’m letting Smolder or JJ tell me what to do.” He crossed his arms. “But...well I guess Mila’s okay.”

“Yuri, you’re going to be great hero, with or without Victor there to help you. Don’t doubt yourself.”

He snorted. “Yeah well listen to that advice yourself, dumbass.”

Yuuri chuckled. “Okay, I had that coming.”

“Seriously, I don’t know what you see in him. You could do so much better.”

He blushed. Ah, so Yuri had figured it out. Well, he was a sharp kid. “You noticed, huh?”

Yuri leveled him a look. “Are you fucking serious? I think everyone in the world probably knows with the way you two have been at it.”
Yuuri shook his head. “Ah, I don’t think Victor…”

“Oh are you fucking kidding me?!” He threw his hands up and dramatically flopped back on his bed. “Nevermind, I take it back. You two idiots deserve each other. You can be monumentally stupid together.”

Yuuri opened his mouth again to correct him, but he wasn’t having it.

“Look stupid, Victor doesn’t do this kind of shit for anyone. Hell, I’ve never seen him get like he is with you. He likes you, Puddle! God are you blind?!”

“But today he’s been…”

“Yeah he’s fucking shit up, because he probably doesn’t want you to get hurt. Hell, he barely even has friends because he’s always worried that someone will pull an Inferno on them. But Inferno hasn’t got shit on you! If he tries something, you can just kick his sorry ass again. Ugh, why is Victor such an airhead.”

He let all that sink it, and despite his brain doing its best to counter it all with theories as to why it was clearly something else, it made sense. It made a lot of sense.

Yuuri stared down at the scowling boy who was lying with his arms crossed glaring at the wall. There would be absolutely no reason for him to lie about this. If anything, he should be trying to get Yuuri upset to throw to match in his favor.

Which meant...he wasn’t lying.

“I think...I need to talk with Victor.”

“No shit, Sherlock,” Yuri snapped. He tossed a stuffed tiger at his head but Yuuri caught it easily. “I don’t want to win just because you two can’t communicate like fucking adults.”
Yuuri smiled, handing the toy back over to him. “Thank you, Yuri. I needed that.”

“Yeah well…” he huffed, clearly not sure what to do with gratitude. “Then get your shit together and give me the best damn fight you’ve got in you, got that?”

Yuuri nodded, standing and giving the boy a smile. “I’ll do my best.”

Talking with Masahiro was an eye-opener.

It wasn’t that Victor didn’t care about quirk discrimination, but more that he’d been somewhat sheltered from the brunt of it. He knew something about the IHU’s methods didn’t sit right with him. Now, with all he’d begun to learn, he was beginning to pinpoint all the reasons why.

Masahiro was a jovial man, full of smiles and more than willing to talk Victor’s ear off about his life. But as he did, it became painfully obvious to Victor that there was a lot of other problems in the hero world outside what he was aware of on the surface.

First was the matter of training, unless a coach saw you in the junior level and snagged you up before someone else, there were waiting lists to get one. The better your coach and the more famous their current lineup, the better your chances. Masahiro had a schoolmate that even got caught up in a scam where someone was pretending to be a coach just to take the upfront payment and run. If you really wanted to make it big, you had to save up enough to go train in America or one of the few newer hero schools that had recently been built in Europe. Most of Asia, Eastern Europe and the entire Southern Hemisphere had no options but to pay thousands to do so.

All that hassle, and then, it was still possible like Masahiro to not even make the basic cut. Unless you were lucky or someone basically pre-approved by the IHU like Yuri was, there was still the possibility that the IHU would deny your hero license. Often for very small inane reasons too.

Disagreements between the national level unions and the IHU were common. Apparently, though he’d been unaware of it, the JHU was in an uproar over the IHU’s attempt to reprimand Yuuri for his actions. Masahiro said it was all the local news could talk about the day after, how the IHU had turned its back on Japan.

Even outside the hero world, quirk discrimination was a major problem in most lines of work. Years
of experience or a degree often counted for nothing if someone else had a quirk that fit the job better. And, to hear Masahiro talk, all of this was still far better to deal with than those that were quirkless.

“In the older generations, it’s not as big of a deal, you know? Like there’s about half with, half without. But starting in your generation and mine, well, it was like one or two kids in a class of thirty that would be left out. “ He took a drink, shaking his head. “I’ve even heard of several cases where the quirkless kid got so badly bullied, well...lots of suicides, even.”

Victor, who had drank quite a lot already, reached for the nearest bottle and filled up his glass.

To think that Yuuri had dealt with all this, only to come in sixth place and basically get ignored for all his effort. It made Victor feel sick. His alterations to the IHU’s system would barely scratch the surface.

“It doesn’t help that we’ve got so many great heroes dying on the job too. Some people are even saying that quirks appearing is going to be our downfall. Sometimes I wonder if they’re right. Seems like all the good people left are, well like you, you know?”

Victor blinked. “Me?”

Masahiro nodded. “Lonely. Can’t even keep anyone close without fearing that they’ll get killed off. It’s terrible. Like you’ve devoted your life to being a hero so now you can’t have anything else. Some repayment that is.”

He swirled the liquid in his drink around before downing the rest of it. Somehow the more they drank, the more serious their conversation had veered. And now, it was beginning to be a checklist of Victor’s own problems. He might be the top of the hero world, but that was not that great a place to be. It was more like...

“Like a shackle, huh?”

Victor blinked, realizing he must have mumbled his thought aloud. He gave Masahiro a small resigned smile. “To be perfectly honest, sometimes it feels that way.”

“You’re a good man, Victor. But I don’t envy you, you know? I think not making the cut was a rude awakening for me, but maybe it’s for the best. You might get all the fame and fortune, but at what
cost? I’m afraid it’s one I’m not sure I’m willing to pay.”

He stared down at his empty glass, but couldn’t find it in him to get another drink. He’d already long lost count of how many he’d had.

“I’m sure your quirk is amazing. But well, I can’t say my line of work is meant for everyone.” Victor stood, his head swimming, but stubbornly determined to carry through with the motion. “I’m gonna head back now, but...well, I’ll talk to the IHU. Can’t do much, but I’ll try.”

Masahiro gave him a warm smile. “Winter Monsoon, you’re the best for a reason, good sir. Have a good night, okay?”

He thanked the man, paid his bill (which Masahiro still heavily discounted), and did his best to navigate the streets back to Yu-Topia. His heart was heavier than usual, and he couldn’t even pick out which of the millions of reasons why. How had he been so blind? He’d already tried so hard for years and where had that gotten him?

Lonely. Can’t even keep anyone close without fearing that they’ll get killed off. It’s terrible. Like you’ve devoted your life to being a hero so now you can’t have anything else.

Masahiro’s words kept echoing in his mind, Victor turning them over and over. It was terrible. Over ten years, and what did he have to show for it? A half frozen side and an empty feeling that he was missing something important in his life.

His eyes caught the entrance to Yu-Topia and he thought of how he’d now brought Yuuri into the spotlight too. Victor frowned.

While somehow he’d been resigned to his own situation, the idea that Yuuri would be facing the same did not sit well with him at all. Yuuri, who was quirkless, who didn’t get handed everything on a silver platter, who had worked so incredibly hard to get where he was.

I can’t do this to him. I can’t. Yuuri deserves better than this.

Victor slid open the door and slouched against the archway to kick off his shoes. His head was pounding already as he navigated the hallways towards his room.
“Victor?”

He looked up, catching sight of Yuuri’s wide eyes in the dark hallway as he stuck his head out his door.

Victor’s heart clenched. He couldn’t do this anymore.

Yuuri had been unable to sleep, once again lying awake and listening in hopes he could hear Victor come back. Finally, right as he was about to doze off, he heard the front door slide open and footsteps.

He jolted awake and rushed to his door.

It was Victor, clearly quite drunk, stumbling aimlessly down the hallway. He was just about to slide his door closed, hoping if he was quiet enough he wouldn’t notice, but that’s when he caught sight of Victor’s expression.

He looked...heartbroken. And for once, Yuuri was certain he wasn’t just projecting.

Yuuri spoke before he could think to stop himself.

“Victor?”

Blue eyes flickered up, looking lost until they finally caught his eyes.

“Yuuri…” He breathed, stumbling the last few steps between them, and falling forward.

Yuuri darted forward to catch him, managing to get under his arms before he could hit the floor. He helped him up.
“Are you okay?”

Victor shook his head. “Not really.”

Yuuri glanced from where they stood down the hall to Victor’s room, trying to figure out how to get him there.

“Can I stay?”

He blinked. “What?”

Victor tilted a head towards Yuuri’s room. “Please?”

Yuuri opened his mouth, trying to find the words to respond, but coming up with nothing. Victor dropped his gaze, settling his head on Yuuri’s chest as he wrapped his arms around Yuuri tight. Well, it’s not like he could make it down the hall like this. And something was clearly wrong…

“Okay, okay. But you’ve got to tell me what’s going on.”

He did his best to steer them into his room, but Victor was more clingy koala than any sort of help in the matter. Yuuri finally managed to detach one arm, and Victor flopped back onto his bed.

“What are you…”

Victor yanked Yuuri down beside him, pressing into Yuuri’s side once he landed.

“Victor!”

“I’m sorry,” he mumbled.
Yuuri was about to reply, but Victor clutched him closer and it resulted in more of a tiny squeak.

“I’m sorry, Yuuri.” He sighed heavily. “I’ve ruined your life.”

“Victor, what are you talking about?”

He shifted until he could peer up at Yuuri, his eyelids heavy. “I don't want you to end up like me.”

Yuuri blinked. Victor pulled him closer.

“You've worked so hard, harder than any other hero. And I've unmasked you and put you and everyone you care for in danger.”

“Victor, I was aware of the risks. I wouldn't have agreed if I thought it was too dangerous.”

He squinted up at Yuuri, as if trying to gauge the sincerity of his words.

“I promise. I'm not mad at you and I don't think you ruined my life. Quite the opposite, honestly…”

Victor sighed, the tension easing out of his shoulders. He shifted, moving to rest his head on Yuuri’s chest.

Yuuri immediately became acutely aware of how his heart was pounding.

“Yuuri…”

“Y-Yeah?”

“I don't want you to ever be lonely, okay?”
There was a sharp intake of breath and Yuuri tensed. Victor sleepily nuzzled closer, his hand clenched in Yuuri’s shirt. He remained silent.

For a moment, Yuuri thought he’d fallen asleep already, but he shifted once more, words breathed out in a whisper.

“...don't leave me.”

Yuuri gently brought his arms up, settling them loosely around Victor’s waist. He smiled, trying to pour all his affection for this man into his words.

“I'm right here, Victor.”

And perhaps it was his imagination, but at those words, he thought Victor had smiled too.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

International Hero Union Official File

**Hero ID #:** FF0430

**Civilian Name:** Phichit Chulanont

**Superhero Name:** Freeze Frame

**Masked Status:** Masked

**Associated National Hero Union:** Hero Association of Thailand

**National Hero Ranking:** 08

**Quirk:** Temporary Photographic Encapsulation

**Range of Quirk Use:** Quirk has the ability to temporarily freeze anything captured in a photo by the user for a short amount of time. User has decided to mostly use it in selfies, capturing any villains attempting to approach him from behind, but it can be any photo he takes that activates the power.

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Yuuri was, regretfully, not a stranger to the current situation. Although, usually he was the drunk clingy one.

Unsure what else to do when he woke up and discovered that yes- *this was legit happening* - he texted the one person he knew would understand.

*Hey Phichit, remember those few times during school when I used to get drunk and I'd be so depressed you didn't have it in you to kick me out of your bed?*

- ...okay I'm really curious as to where this is going, but sure I'll bite. Yes, I remember having to hug you until you fell asleep. You'd get so clingy and sad I couldn't help but stay with you.

Apparently I'm not the only person with this problem.
He waited. Sure enough, Phichit caught on.

- ....No way, are you serious man?!

Yuuri snapped a photo from his angle, the unmistakable silver haired head resting on his chest. He sent it.

_That or this is one very weighty dream._

- **OMG. YUURI!!!!**

_help_

- _Okay okay. Victor is in your bed, just stay as calm as you possibly can in this highly compromising scenario. How did you even fall asleep like this? Like aren't you freaking out?! I'M FREAKING OUT._

_Oh I'm freaking out. But currently my worry is muting that so let's figure out something before I think about this more and panic kicks in._

- _Okay. Holy shit. Okay. So he was drunk. And depressed? That doesn't sound like Victor._

_He was afraid unmasking me was going to ruin my life. Said he didn't want me to end up like him. I'm guessing he's worried about my family._

- _Shit. Okay that's valid stuff._

_Yeah._

He sighed, the puff of his exhale causing Victor to shift and pull him closer. Yuuri’s finger trembled over the letters, his mind still replaying the last two things Victor had said to him with perfect clarity.
“I don’t want you to ever be lonely” and “don’t leave me.” He said that to me. Phichit...help.

- Okay okay, you gotta be calm. Yuuri, you’ve got to figure out what he remembers. If he’s like you, it might not be much.

Okay, then what?

- Tell him what happened. With as much detail as you can remember. I know that always makes you feel better, to kind of go over what had you upset and explain it away.

Okay. I can do this.

He paused, thinking about it.

Nevermind, no I can’t. Phichit I can’t do this.

- Yuuri it’s fine. Just don’t panic. Stay calm. It's going to be fine.

I think he’s waking up. Phichit. Shit shit shit. How am I supposed to do this he’s...VICTOR. I...

Yuuri never had the chance to finish, quickly stuffing the phone under his pillow and trying to relax back the way he was. He was going to die.

There were three things Victor was acutely aware of upon waking up.

First, was that although there was something warm he was cuddled up with, it was most definitely not Makkachin.
Second his head was pounding, most likely due to the fact he’d drank too much the night before.

And third, someone had just put their arms around his waist.

Victor already suspected he knew the answer, knew where he would have subconsciously wandered while drunk, but at the same time part of it wasn’t adding up. Namely, what had he done or said to get Yuuri to not only let him stay but...well, allow him into his bed.

That was a sobering thought and Victor could already think of far too many things he could have said or done to result in this outcome. Well, might as well do what damage control he could…

Shifting, he slowly pulled back from the warmth of Yuuri’s side, his eyes darting up and somewhat surprised to find a pair of brown eyes open and peering down at him. Yuuri flushed bright red, and Victor wondered if he did the same.

“I...I was just about to wake you up,” Yuuri managed, his hands jerking back from where they were around Victor’s waist.

Victor sat up, the blankets tenting over where they’d been nestled together. But, well, thankfully both clad. Victor let out a sigh of relief.

“I’m...” He paused, trying to find the words. Unlike Chris, who had told him countless tales about waking up with someone and not remembering the specifics of how he’d gotten there, this was something painfully new to Victor. “Sorry. I’m afraid I’ve put you in a terribly uncomfortable position.”

Yuuri’s eyes were focused on something far away, as if he was trying to think about anything but Victor next to him. “It’s fine. It’s not like I didn’t impose on you when I got drunk, so…”

Victor shook his head. “Yuuri, this is a bit different.”

He said that, yet he still hadn’t gotten up or left the bed. It was as if he wanted to linger as long as Yuuri would allow, afraid that this might be the last time he did.
“Are you okay?” Yuuri asked, and his voice had an odd tone to it. Victor realized, with a pang, that it was worry.

He hung his head. “Dare I ask what I said to make you worry so?”

Yuuri’s gaze flickered over to him and he caught the surprise in his expression before he turned back away. “Victor…”

“Because sadly, I can remember nothing but fleeting thoughts and all I know is that it somehow led me to you.”

Yuuri remained silent, clearly trying to find a way to phrase what he needed to best. Victor offered what he could.

“Did I ask to stay with you?”

He nodded, his cheeks pinking as he shifted his gaze even further away.

“Did I offer any reason why? I hope I didn’t force…”

“No!” Yuuri turned his head around, his eyes flickering with intensity. “No, you...you were worried about me.”

Victor blinked.

“You thought you’d ruined my life.”

Victor dropped his gaze, studying the small gap of space between them. “Because I unmasked you.”

“And I told you last night, but I still mean it. You haven’t ruined my life. I know the risk and I’m okay with it. I’m not mad at you. Far from it, actually.”
He brought his eyes up, the quake in Yuuri’s voice making him yearn to reach out but still uncertain if he should.

“Then how did I…” He gestured to the bed. The gap between them suddenly seeming far smaller than it was.

Yuuri glanced down as if the proximity of Victor to him had been something he was still unsure of. He swallowed, bracing himself. “You...um said you didn't want me to be lonely. Then...” He brought his eyes back up, and they were shining with an emotion Victor couldn’t quite place. “You asked me not to leave you.”

Victor tilted his head, as if suddenly seeing Yuuri in a completely new light. Something had...shifted. He couldn’t place what but, the air seemed different all of a sudden.

“Then it seems a thank you is in order, as you did just that. Didn’t you?”

Yuuri blinked, his cheeks still flushed pink. He darted his eyes away again as he mumbled a reply, “As if I could have... “

He didn’t need to finish the statement for Victor’s breath to catch. As if I could have left you. He played the phrase over again in his mind, his chest suddenly too tight.

His hand moved before he could stop it, coming to rest on Yuuri’s shoulder. He gave a gentle squeeze, trying to pour every bit of meaning into two little words.

“Thank you.”

And when Yuuri’s face softened into a smile, Victor dared to hope that he understood all that he left unsaid.

The door slid open with as much force as possible and Yuuri closed his eyes. Of course someone would walk into his room now. Perhaps if he pretended this wasn’t happening, it wouldn’t be.
“Hey Puddle, where the hell is….Oh goddamnit Victor. What are you doing here...Ugh no nevermind, I don’t want to know!”

Victor pulled away, turning to stand up. Yuuri felt the cold gust of air as it crept into the space Victor left behind.

“Yuri…”

“He came back drunk and was upset,” Yuuri cut in before he could think better of it. “Nothing happened.”

Yuri looked from Victor to Yuuri then back. His glare sharpened.

“You are a fucking idiot. Are you trying to ruin your life?”

Victor, for his part, flinched. Although, perhaps that was just due to how loud Yuri was.

“Yuri…”

“Don’t you Yuri me!” he snapped. “Two nights now and what? You push us all away and pretend it didn’t happen? That’s what happens next right?”

Yuuri blinked. *Going right for the throat isn’t he?*

Victor opened his mouth, but Yuri didn’t let him speak.

“Look, I’m not going to stand by and watch you fuck everything up okay? I…” He shook his head. For a moment, Yuuri thought he saw a bit of worry flicker through his sharp glare. “Yakov’s worried sick. You’ve pissed off most of the people who give a shit about you, you know that?’”

Victor’s expression was apologetic. “Okay, okay. I’m sorry. I’ll call Yakov.”
“And?” Yuri pointed to Yuuri. “What have you told him? Anything?”

Victor’s sighed, resigned. “He knows.”

Yuri looked surprised. “Really?”

Victor ran a hand up through his bangs. “He knows about the injury. And the severity of it.”

“Congrats Puddle, you’ve made it.” Yuri quipped. “You get to be one of the lucky few that know Winter Monsoon is a fucking massive idiot.”

“I think I may have been able to figure that out on my own, to be honest.”

Yuuri clamped a hand over his mouth, not realizing that he’d said that aloud. But somehow, the comment dislodged the tension in the air, both Yuri and Victor relaxing their postures.

Yuri snorted.

“Okay, I probably deserved that,” Victor said with a laugh. “But Yuri, there’s a reason I can’t just go around telling everyone.”

“No shit. But maybe think about, oh I don’t know, fucking talking to the people in your life instead of drinking your problems away dipshit! You’ve kept him up two nights now with your bullshit, so if he loses because of your stupidity how am I supposed to feel about that?!?”

Yuuri caught Victor’s glance, apologetic and worried, and bit his lip. It really wasn’t his place, but at the same time, Yuri was fighting right now for his sake.

“Victor…”

He waited until they both turned to him.
“I’d like to change the stakes of the duel.”

Yuri opened his mouth to protest, but Victor shushed him.

“Since, as Yuri has noted, you have made the last two days difficult for both of us unintentionally, I feel it’s only fair if you offer the loser a small reward.”

Victor raised an eyebrow.

“The winner gets you to go or stay where they want. That’s going to draw lots of press no matter who it is. But I feel for the loser you should, say, maybe make sure they get some nice press without your name attached? Whether we like it or not, we’re both in your shadow, Victor. And only you really have the power to change the media’s view of that. Whoever wins gets to keep the media’s attention by default, but the loser will lose that. This makes it a bit more fair, no matter the results.”

Yuri looked as close to as touched as Yuuri thought the boy might be capable of, and Victor’s expression softened into a smile. They understood. Good.

“If that’s alright with you, Yuri?”

“Tch. Fine. If Puddle wants a little press when he loses, that’s fine by me.”

He started for the door, but paused and turned to glare at Victor.

“But no more stupid bullshit out of you, got that?! I want to win without feeling guilty about it!”

“Understood.”

He slid open the door and turned to point at Yuuri. His smile barely hidden behind a sneer.

“I’m not going to go easy on you, Puddle. So I expect you to bring it, okay?”
Yuuri nodded, smiling. “If you insist.”

Victor made some further apologies to Yuuri then excused himself to go get dressed. He wasn’t expecting Yuri to still be waiting in the doorway to his room, brooding as only he could with his arms crossed and scowl firmly in place.

He cocked an eyebrow. “You have something more to yell at me about?”

Yuri snorted. “He’s too good for you.”

“I know.”

He waited until Victor stepped closer, dropping his voice to ensure no one overheard him.

“After you fought Inferno, when Yakov was yelling at you about it on the way to the hospital. You turned to me and told me something. You said, ‘What Yakov doesn’t understand is that sometimes you go into a situation knowing that the risk is high, but you still don’t let that stop you. Because, if you achieve your goal, then it’s all worth it. Don’t ever let someone tell you something’s too risky.’”

Victor’s eyes widened.

Yuri rolled his eyes. “Take a fucking risk, Victor.”

And before he could reply, Yuri had turned into his room and closed the door. Victor shook his head, a smile tugging at his lips. It was never good when Yuri Plisetsky was making sense.

The rest of the morning went by fairly normally, although Victor couldn’t help but notice Mari shooting him glances and muttering something in Japanese to Yuuri that made him blush. By the time they made it to Minako’s studio, Yuuri even seemed to be a lot more relaxed than Victor had seen from him in the previous days.
“What’s got you in such a good mood?” He finally asked as they were doing their warm up stretches.

Yuuri blinked, clearly surprised Victor had noticed, before muttering a reply, “It’s nothing.”

Victor nudged him with his knee, bumping it over against his. “I promise I won’t laugh, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

That got a smile out of him at least, before he dipped his head forward and his bangs shifted down in front of his eyes. “I don’t want you to take it wrong, that’s all.”

Victor gave what he felt was pleading look in hopes he could pull it off. Somehow, it got Yuuri to cave.

“Okay, okay. Stop with the puppy dog eyes,” Yuuri said with a laugh. He took a deep breath and leveled him with a solemn glance. “It’s just nice, to um...know you get depressed sometimes too.”

He raised an eyebrow and Yuuri continued.

“I’ve uh...kind of had major anxiety issues most of my life. It can get pretty bad sometimes and I always get embarrassed about it later. I usually isolate myself, but sometimes I just get drunk and clingy...so...it’s stupid, but I feel like I know you a little better now.”

Victor scooted over on the floor until his shoulder brushed against Yuuri’s. He gave him a small smile.

“And here I am feeling bad that you had to see me like that.”

Yuuri’s expression was so understanding, it was as if he didn’t need a single word to say “oh I’ve been there too.” Instead, he bumped his shoulder gently against Victor’s, a smile tugging at his lips.

“You don’t have to be perfect, Victor. It’s like I told you before, just be yourself.”
He blinked. “Flaws and all then?”

Yuuri nodded, his expression almost fond, as if he couldn’t believe Victor had to ask.

“Flaws and all. If you have to put up with my issues, I guess it’s only fair I have to put up with yours.”

Victor felt a laugh bubble up at that, the sincerity of it almost overwhelming. With nothing but humble honesty and a wry smile, Yuuri Katsuki had singlehandedly done something no one had in quite some time.

He got Victor to put his guards down. All of them.

As they practiced that day, with each sur place and each chasse, Victor talked about himself. How it had been on a trip to Japan to meet a potential sponsor that led Victor to the beach that fateful day. How much he loved his mother’s cooking and how much he loved to hear his father sing. He talked about how he loved the way music was everywhere— in the birds, in the waves, in the movements of dancers. How he took ballet and loved every grueling moment of it, pushing himself to always try harder and harder to master the next technique. And, how all of that changed when his parents were killed.

Yuuri listened, his hands gripping a little tighter, his holds a little firmer, as if he was trying to provide what little comfort he could while they went through the dance steps.

Victor continued on, about how his coach and all of the heroes under Yakov’s care had become some odd little family for him. How he was already feeling burnt out before getting injured and how that seemed to be the final straw. And finally, how Yuuri had caught his attention at the party and made him realize there was so much more out there that he was missing out on.

“Ah, just a second. Minako-sensei?” Victor had brought a halt to their practice, his eyes turning to their instructor.

“What’s wrong? That fallaway reverse turn was perfect.”

Victor smiled to Yuuri, who he still held in position, before turning back to her.
“Can we change the final pose?”

Minako blinked, her eyes darting to Yuuri then back.

“The final pose?”

Victor let go of Yuuri, stepping towards her with purpose. “I know it’s a common theme for a paso doble to end with the first dancer throwing the other partner away, but…” He looked over to Yuuri who seemed to be realizing what he was suggesting. “If I was a bullfighter, and I’d just won over the most beautiful person in the room, I don’t know if I’d be so quick to push them aside. I’d think I should pull them closer.”

Minako chuckled. “So instead of dropping him and walking off, what do you suggest?”

He turned back to Yuuri, slowly turning him while holding behind his head, then dropping him down in a dip with a slide of his leg. He felt the little gasp of breath as Yuuri dipped, his forehead leaning down to press against Yuuri’s.

“A top spin, followed by a neck drop, with you sliding down to meet him? That’s rather dramatic, don’t you think?” Minako asked, but she seemed amused.

Victor who still hadn’t moved from the pose, smiled at Yuuri. “I like dramatic. What about you?”

The skin beside his eyes crinkled as he tried to fight back a laugh himself. “Victor…”

“What? Too much?”

Yuuri nudged him until he pulled him up from the dip, then he reached out to reposition Victor.

“Spin in, hook leg, pivot turn, drag, then neck drop with you sliding to meet it?” he asked, a smirk tugging at his lips.
Victor chuckled, looking to Minako. She shook her head but motioned for them to do it anyway.

Yuuri took Victor’s hand and she counted off the beats. He spun in, throwing his right leg up over Victor’s hip and hooking it there. Victor grabbed his knee and his back, supporting his weight and pivot turning them with a drag before he reached up behind Yuuri’s head. This time, Yuuri was ready for the neck drop, and as if to make the whole thing even more dramatic, he threw his right arm out and arced it gracefully as Victor slid down to meet him.

Minako was clapping. “Okay, you win. That’s so ridiculous think most judges would give you an award just for it alone.”

Victor couldn’t keep the smile off his face. And it seemed, for Yuuri, the same was true. Noses bumping as they did, they both laughed. They were ridiculous. But happy, Victor thought as his nose bumped into Yuuri’s again. Ridiculous and happy, he rather liked that.

Yuuri was beginning to wonder how it was even possible to fall more for Victor each day, but somehow he kept falling.

“Phichit…”

“Yuuri…” His friend echoed on the other end of the phone. They’d been at this impasse for a few minutes now.

“I just…”

He’d been trying to articulate everything from that whole day, but he kept finding himself at a loss for the words to do so. How could he even begin? It was as if his whole world had suddenly changed overnight, his crush shifting from that of one reserved for an idol to something else. Something deeper than that. Victor wasn’t perfect but somehow that made him even more perfect to Yuuri.

“I’m so gay, Phichit.”
He laughed. “Pfft. Tell me something I don’t know.”

“It’s different than before.”

“Hmm?”

Yuuri sighed, his deep breath only serving to remind him that his bed even still smelled of Victor. His heart clenched.

“Before I just...I liked the idea of Victor, what I thought he was like or what we knew he was like from interviews.”

“And you thought he had a killer bod.”

He huffed. “Phichit…”

“What? You did. I can recall many conversations about how much you loved Herotek for their work on that suit and I don’t think that was coming from a fashionista standpoint.”

“Okay, but he still has said bod. Not that I’m noticing it or anything.”

“Uh huh.’

“But...he’s so much more than that. He’s a lot more...I don’t know…”

“Normal?”

Yuuri wrinkled his nose at that. It sounded wrong to put Victor under that bland description. No, Victor wasn’t normal. But he was...human. Uniquely human. With his own flaws and shortcomings, his own little personal quirks and mannerisms that no one else had. To know that Victor struggled with his own issues, it meant the world to Yuuri.
If Victor could go be the greatest hero of all time with those setbacks, then Yuuri felt the same could be said of him. Victor was no longer some graven image, perfectly sculpted and devoid of anything but the masks he was forced to wear. No, Victor was Victor. The person who couldn’t stand the ending to a famous dance style because it meant one of the two dancers was left discarded. The person who got drunk because he was worried that he was possibly dooming someone else to suffer the life he had. The person who, Yuuri realized, had captured his heart in a way the previous Victor never could.

“He meets me where I am,” he offered in explanation.

Phichit sighed. “I have no idea what that’s supposed to mean, but damn does that sound romantic.”

Yuuri laughed. “Phichit. He’s just...there aren’t the words.”

“No I get you. I feel that way when I’m trying to explain how amazing my hamsters are.”

“Phichit!”

“What? My hamsters are amazing. You can keep your Victor.”

*Your Victor.*

He didn’t exactly hate the way that sounded.

“I’ve got to win the duel. There’s no other option.”

Phichit laughed. “Oh Yuuri, you’ve already won that duel. Trust me. That kid won’t know what hit him. You might not like to consider this, but you’ve been head to head with quirks that outpace mine and made it look super easy. Just don’t let your anxiety get the best of you and you’ll be fine.”

Yuuri frowned and as if already knowing he was about to retort, Phichit added.

“Yuuri. Even if somehow you lose, which you won’t, the fact is I don’t think Victor’s just going to
forget about you. All you have to do is go out there and give it your best. Don’t worry about anything else.”

“As always, the voice of reason.”

“Hey, someone’s gotta be. Plus, I believe in you. And I’m pretty sure Victor does too. Now you’ve just got to believe in yourself.”

Yuuri sighed. “Okay. You still thinking about coming for it?”

“If I can, you bet I’ll be there. Though I think your little sidekick Aerostat has already rallied your fanclub for it.”

He rubbed his forehead. “Yeah, Minami said something like that. It’s really not necessary.”

“Hey if other heroes are going to play favorites then we can too. Shadow Knight seems pretty confident that Leopard can beat you, but even Physique said she thinks it’ll be a close match. The hero world is buzzing about it, Yuuri. And a lot of us are on your side too.”

“Thanks. I guess I’ll see you then?”

“Yep. One more day! Though I expect videos of this fancy dance you two have been perfecting. Tell the triplets to record it for me. I insist.”

“Fine. But I don’t think it’s that fancy.”

“So says the man who has multiple ballroom dancing medals. And I don’t think Victor is holding you back.”

“Okay, if you insist. I’ll see you on Christmas.”

“You bet. Just go with the flow, HW. You’ve got this.”
“Thanks, Phichit.”

They said their goodbyes and Yuuri rolled over on his bed burying his face in the pillow. His heart picked up pace as he thought about what the next two days had in store. One dance and one duel. He could do this, couldn’t he?

It was the day before Victor’s birthday, and for once after many years of it not being the case, Victor was excited.

Today they’d dance their final Paso Doble. And tomorrow, the two Yuris would face off to decide whom Victor would be training with.

Victor knew who he was rooting for, and he knew today was a key to making sure that happened.

When Yuuri had informed him that Phichit had requested video, Victor might have gotten some ideas. Perhaps a few too many ideas. But, within a few hours, it had all come together. Minako had sent her previous matador costume off to a tailor, who had taken it and turned it into something Victor could wear opposite Yuuri’s already stunning outfit. And Yuuko and Takeshi were more than willing to help set up their gym to accommodate some stage lighting to help set the mood.

Yuuri had insisted it wasn’t necessary, but Victor could tell it excited him just a little. A stage set just for them. It would be perfect.

And so Christmas Eve, the Katsuki family and friends gathered in the Nishigori’s gym for what would be their final performance of this dance. Yuri had loudly protested the idea of attending, but Victor could see him sitting with the others as well.

“Victor…”

He turned to the man standing beside him, who was wringing his hands and looking somewhat lost. Victor reached out and took one of Yuuri’s hands, giving it a slight squeeze.
“Hey, what’s up?”

Yuuri shook his head. “Just the usual nerves. It always happens.”

Victor pulled him into a loose hug, his lips brushing against the gelled hair atop his head.

“You know what I always do when I’m nervous?”

“You get nervous?” Yuuri asked, but there was a hint of mischief to his tone.

Victor chuckled at that, “Kind of hard to not when you know the world is watching your every move.”

“All right then, impart your wisdom, Winter Monsoon.”

He pulled back from the hug so he could look into his eyes.

“Focus only on who you must. Who are you dancing for, Yuuri?”

Yuuri blinked, a sudden understanding flickering across his expression. He allowed himself a smile.

“I know who.”

Victor cocked an eyebrow, but Yuuri wouldn’t answer. Instead he pressed his hand, palm flat, against the bare expanse of chest where Victor’s jacket hung open.

“Don’t take your eyes off me.”

“I promise,” Victor replied, certain Yuuri could feel his heart hammering under his hand.
Yuuri smiled, slow and languid. It was as if the moment he donned this costume he gained a certain confidence he wouldn’t have normally. But well, Victor knew all about playing a role when needed. And what Yuuri needed was confidence that he could win tomorrow.

“Ready?” he asked, holding out a hand.

Yuuri pulled away from him, settling his hand in Victor’s; it still a bit warm from his chest.

“Ready.”

They walked out onto the gym floor, all dark lighting outside a single spotlight that followed them to position.

“Yuuri!”

“Victor!”

“We’re ready when you are!”

The triplets called out to them, one at each side of the gym armed with a phone. Leave it to them to find a way to make this even fancier.

They nodded and the music began.

*Drag step apart, turn and flourish.*

Victor kept his eyes focused on Yuuri, determined to not look away for a single moment. Yuuri met his gaze with a relaxed confidence.

*Alternate spanish line, flamenco taps. Spin in. Sur place.*
He saw the flutter of the red and black skirt as Yuuri turned towards him, his hands going up to cup his face and letting it linger there for a beat before Yuuri’s hands against his chest pushed away. Yuuri turned, one, two, spins around and Victor followed. Their hands met again and Victor pulled Yuuri into his arms. They turned together, arms out in perfect position.

Fallaway reverse turn. Chasse cape. Copa.

One turn, two, Yuuri dipped backwards as they chasse. Then up again and spun in and out. With the final spin, Victor released his hold on Yuuri’s hand, and once again the matador followed his prize.

Yuuri turned, a flourish of black and red, the lights glinting off the diamond patterns on his front. Victor rushed to him, once again reaching out to cup his face and pull him close. Two steps in place, then twist out into another Spanish line.

Inside turn. Promenade into Inverted Coup de Pique.

Yuuri spun back into Victor’s arms, their arms moving in unison as they moved back into position. Promenade. One pair of hands outstretched in a loop, Yuuri’s hand warm on his shoulder and Victor’s snug against his back. This next part was the fastest, and Victor knew it’s only because it’s Yuuri pulling him along that he could keep up with his fast footwork.

Like a tango- arms forward, side facing side- but your footwork is intricate. You swivel in and out towards your partner, never letting go as your feet carry you forward as fast as they can.

Victor had to have Yuuri work over this part again and again for him to keep up, but somehow he did, and right as they parted for another walk and turn, he saw Yuuri’s smile. You did it. Yuuri told him without speaking a single word. Even if he was growing tired, he’s compelled to follow Yuuri.

Travelling left foot variation. Outside turn. Inside turn with drag.

They moved together, weaving back and forth as they reached out and held far too briefly the back of each other’s head. Yuuri did an outside turn as Victor dropped to one knee, he stood as Yuuri did an inside turn, dragging his foot in. Then down the floor they went in a travelling spin before they parted once more.

They drew closer again, Yuuri took Victor’s hand and with the momentum of it threw a high kick before turning out. He turned back in, Victor holding him to his side for all too brief a pause.


The final part. Minako went over again and again how important trust was for this move. How if during that brief drop Victor at all lost grip he could drop Yuuri. But his grip, hand crossed over hand, with Yuuri was tight and Yuuri drop slid without a moment’s hesitation. He slid between Victor’s legs, twisted, then was pulled back forward and twisted outward. Previously, Victor would leave Yuuri on the ground. But it had changed now. He pulled Yuuri up to his feet and caught his expression. Eyes half lidded and looking as seductive as hell, Yuuri darted a tongue out to lick his lips. Victor felt his heart crash into his rib cage and he had to resist the urge to just kiss him right there.

Yuuri did a spin in, his leg moving up to hook over Victor’s hip. Victor took hold of his knee, his other hand supporting Yuuri’s back as they pivot turned with a drag. His hand behind Yuuri’s neck, he did the final drop and slid down to meet him. Their noses brushed together, both of them breathing heavily as they held their final pose.

Victor heard the applause, but it was a distant thought. Yuuri closed his eyes and leaned up until his forehead bumped into Victor’s.

“You didn’t look away,” he breathed out against Victor’s lips.

He laughed. “As if I could.”

Yuuri opened his eyes and actually looked somewhat surprised by this. Reluctantly, though his back muscles were definitely telling him to do so, Victor pulled Yuuri up. He let his arm linger around his waist, and Yuuri didn’t seem to mind.

“So...who were you dancing for?” Victor asked quietly.

Yuuri ducked his head forward, his cheeks going red. “Do you really have to ask?”
Victor looked perplexed for a moment before he caught the look Yuuri was giving him. “Me?”

Yuuri bumped his shoulder over into Victor’s. “As if it would be anyone else.”

He circled his other arm around Yuuri’s waist, leaning down until his head rested atop Yuuri’s. There was so much he wanted to say, all the multitudes of emotions coursing through his veins, but he couldn’t find the right words to even begin to express them. And when Yuuri leaned back just a little into his hold, Victor hoped that maybe, somehow, Yuuri had still understood him, without a single word at all.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you as always to each of you who take the time to kudos or comment (like mega mega thanks for that!) for each chapter. It keeps me going from week to week.

The Paso Doble I based most of the flow of theirs on is the following: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbEEZdCu9ao

With the Ending changed to this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePps0mg6Q9I&feature=youtu.be&t=123

with Victor's position more like this: https://youtu.be/txD2QjCT9lA?t=89
Chapter 10

On Dancing, Duels, and Why Hokusai Wave has Already Won

Hero Herald - Real News, Real Heroes - December 24th, 2016

This Editorial comes to us from Medusa herself, Sara Crispino.

I’m sure by the time you’ve clicked this article, you’ve already seen the video (What Video? This one right here!) of the sultry paso doble that Hokusai Wave and Winter Monsoon performed today in Japan. Could I spend the next few paragraphs waxing poetic about it? Oh most definitely. But what I’m here to do is to lay down some hard facts. Simply put, The Leopard might as well start packing his bags, because this dance shows for certain what I already knew- Hokusai Wave will win tomorrow’s duel.

Now you might ask, Sara why do you think that? As some of you might know, I was at the recent United Alliance Team finals with none other than Hokusai Wave himself. And after seeing him in person, I was already pretty sure that he had what it took to be a top ranked hero. Many of you might note that he ended up ranked last of the six of us, but I’d like to focus instead on why he easily could have put us all in our places.

Humble to a fault, Hokusai Wave, has been on the hero scene for three years now; although it was only within this last year that he really garnered a worldwide following. He’s Japan’s best kept secret, and thanks to Winter Monsoon’s recent press conference, that secret is out. What he lacks in flashy and dramatic quirk usage, Hokusai Wave more than makes up for with lighting fast reflexes and good old-fashioned strategy. In fact, now that the secret is out, I’m free to tell you of a prime example of that, and yes- it’s something before he fought Inferno.

Though news agencies were prohibited at the time due to several of the guests being out of uniform, the potential bomb threat at the UAT Final after-party was handled- you guessed it- mainly thanks to the quick thinking of none other than Hokusai Wave. Not only did he act quickly, but he immediately was able to instruct every other hero in the room. None of us had to even think, the bomb had barely hit the floor and there he was, giving us exact instructions on how to stop it. It was over within seconds.
Interviews after the Inferno incident cited the wise decision of flooding the nearby water park to aid in slowing Inferno’s reaction time, and all the heroes involved in the matter could not speak higher of the man who had Inferno back in jail before Japan even woke up for the day. The fact stands, two times now a group of elite heroes has paled in comparison to the solo work of Hokusai Wave.

And this, along with that sexy little dance routine, is why I’m certain that The Leopard might as well give up now. The Leopard might be one of the new wave of advanced multi-enhancement quirks that kids these days are popping up with. But the fact is, Hokusai Wave is a master out of his element. He can stop a bomb in the middle of a party when most of us didn’t even know what was happening yet. He can fly halfway across Japan and kick Inferno into the sand in a span of less than thirty minutes. But his dance, something those close to him have stated he has as a hobby to help maintain speed in his footwork, is just one of the arts he has mastered.

We’ve seen him dance, and if the explosion of news articles on the video or the massive view count (close to 4 million last I checked!) told us anything, it’s that if he’s skilled at it, he’s going to mop the floor with you. Personally, I’ve not seen him fencing outside of his hero work. But I think it’s safe to say, if he can fence as well as he can dance, I highly doubt there’s a soul out there that could beat him.

You can tune into Hero News Network at 11am JST for the duel tomorrow morning (that’ll be live at 4am IHU time, or in the evening for you North American folks!) and I have a feeling that Hokusai Wave will prove me right.

“Yuuri, someone’s here to see you!”

Yuuri darted up from his bed, crossing to his door as fast as possible. He might be a mess of nerves and anxiety at the moment, but he knew one quick fix for that. And thankfully, his flight arrived early that morning.

“Yuuri!” Phichit’s warm voice called out as the door slid open.

“Phichit, I’m so glad to see you!” he said enveloping his best friend in a hug.

“Live and in person, Freeze Frame aims to please.”
Yuuri laughed, the tension in his shoulders already starting to ease.

“I’m headed back to the kitchen, do you two need anything?” Mari asked.

Stepping back from the hug, Yuuri turned to his sister. “Are you sure you don’t need my help?”

She shook her head. “Crowded enough already, little bro. You just relax okay?.”

“Fine, fine.”

Phichit gave him a questioning look, but he waited until Mari had left before speaking up.

“What’s all the fuss for? Your family usually doesn’t go to this amount of trouble for Christmas.”

Yuuri ducked his head. “Um. Phichit...don’t you know what today is?”

He blinked. “Christmas?” Yuuri shook his head. “The duel?” He shook his head again and Phichit sighed. “Okay, okay. You are giving me that look that means I should know something but clearly I don’t. What’s up?”

Yuuri sighed. “It’s uh...Victor’s birthday. We thought we’d surprise him.”

Phichit grinned, throwing an arm around his shoulders. “You are too adorable, do you know that?”

“Phichiittt.”

“What? Seriously, you are so over the moon it’s precious.”

Yuuri felt his face burn red, but huffed in resignation. “I’m just being nice, okay?”
Phichit laughed, flopping down on Yuuri’s bed. He paused and took in a deep breath. “Well, I can’t tell if this smells any different or not.”

“Phichit!”

“Sorry, sorry. But really? A surprise party when you’ve got how many other things to worry about today?”

Yuuri crossed the room and sat down beside him. “It’s…it’s a way of saying thanks. For everything he’s done. I honestly don’t think he realizes I know it’s even his birthday. Yuri, oh- The Leopard, even said Victor usually doesn’t do much for his birthday.”

Phichit frowned. “That’s not right. You’d think he’d be having fancy parties with all his money and friends.”

“Apparently, well, Physique usually tries to put together something small. Mostly Yakov Feltsman’s heroes? But sometimes, people are busy since it’s Christmas and Yuri said often he ends up getting drinks with Smolder and that’s it.”

“And so you, kind-hearted you, decided to do something about that?”

Yuuri met his friend’s look. “Victor deserves it.”

Phichit reached over and ruffled Yuuri’s hair. “Well, if you hadn’t already won his heart I’d say this would do it.”

“Phichit, it’s not…we’re not…”

He leveled him a look. “Yuuri, I saw that video. Hell, didn’t you look at the news…oh wait, you…” Phichit gave a nervous laugh. “You never check the news if you’re anxious, so you don’t know, do you?”
Yuuri’s eyes went wide and he warily reached for his phone. “What did you do, Phichit…”

He held up his hands in innocence. “Wasn’t me, I promise! But you know how excited those triplets get about bumping elbows with the hero world. And…so, there might be a new video from last night on the Nishigori Gym YouTube channel.”

Yuuri had just tabbed open his news feed and was trying to digest all the headlines as he scrolled down.

TOO HOT TO HANDLE! Hokusai Wave's Sultry Salsa!
HeroBuzz - 7 hours ago

Hokusai Wave Turns Up the Heat with His Dancing
SuperNewsWeekly - 10 hours ago

Hokusai Wave Seduces More than Winter Monsoon with This Steamy Salsa!
Plus Ultra Post - 11 hours ago

On Dancing, Duels, and Why Hokusai Wave has Already Won
Hero Herald - 12 hours ago

Paso DAMN. Winter Monsoon Melts For Hokusai Wave's Dancing.
Fanatic Fever - 12 hours ago

Dancing With the Heroes?! After Hokusai Wave and Winter Monsoon's Paso Doble, Producers are in Talks with New Show Idea.
American Hero Network - 12 hours ago

Wave and Monsoon Show-Off Fancy Footwork in Video
Japan Hero News - 13 hours ago
“It’s not a salsa, why do they keep calling it that?”

“Of all the things, that’s what you’re freaking out about?”

“No, but if I think about anything else I’m going to really freak out.” Yuuri breathed out, his shoulders already tensing up.

“Okay okay, bad move on my part.” He reached over, slowly rubbing Yuuri’s shoulders. “Sorry, I wouldn’t have brought it up if I thought it would upset you. Breathe, Yuuri. It’s nothing bad, I promise.”

He took a deep breath, closing his eyes and willing all his apprehension back.

“Here, I’ll give you the highlights. Oh and Medusa’s article. That one is solid.”

“Phichit…”

“Hmm?”

“Do people really think I’m trying to seduce Victor?”

Phichit leaned over, wrapping an arm around Yuuri’s shoulders and tugging him closer. “Nah. I think it’s pretty clear that whatever it is you’ve got going on, it’s a two way street.”

Yuuri dipped his head forward. “People keep telling me that, but...I don’t know, it’s hard for me to tell. Like maybe I’m just wishing he felt that way. Maybe I’m seeing something that isn’t there because I’d like it to be.”

Phichit leaned his head over atop Yuuri’s. “I’d bet on my hamsters- yes, I’m that serious- that it’s not just you. Yuuri, he looks at you like you’re the greatest thing on Earth. Which is pretty true. Except for like, me and my hamsters that is.”
Yuuri allowed himself a small snort before he sighed, leaning over into Phichit.

“And if I lose today, then what?”

“Okay, one- you aren’t going to. Two, I guess I can tell you about my little surprise. But only because I really like you and want you to cheer up.”

He pulled back smiling over at Yuuri. Yuuri blinked.

“As a big thank you for saving our butts the other day, I may have set up something a little special for you.”

“Phichit, you didn’t…”

“Hush hush! I insist. Hell, Caradoc insisted. And you know how he is. So, New Year’s Eve- you and your plus one, coughVictorcough, are cordially invited to our exclusive little party. Pingzhang’s gotten us this great place, that super tall skyscraper with a fancy restaurant up top in Beijing. So, why don’t you invite Victor hmm?”

“You mean, like...as a date?”

Phichit shrugged. “Usually that’s what a plus one is, but it can be for a friend too if you don’t want to rush things.”

Yuuri looked down at his hands, the scars from his burns almost gone and mostly thanks to Victor’s constant fussing over them. He clenched his fists, the pain no longer even there unless he put a lot of pressure.

“O-Okay. I’ll uh...think about that.”

Phichit smiled knowingly.

“Good. ‘Kay, so before this party here gets kicked off, you’ve got to let me read you Medusa’s
For Victor, December 25th was just a day.

It wasn’t that Yakov or some of his teammates didn’t try, but Victor never wanted them to turn down celebrating the holiday with their own families just to fret on him. More often than not in the last few years, he’d mostly spent it with Makkachin and Chris would insist on taking him out for drinks that evening.

And so, especially given the fact he’d placed a certain duel that day, Victor woke up expecting nothing out of the ordinary on his behalf.

“Victor, breakfast is ready!”

He rose, giving Makkachin a pet and a promise of a walk after breakfast, before heading down the hallway. Immediately, he could smell a vast array of foods, definitely more than the usual Katsuki breakfast involved.

Yuuri waited at the end of the hall, his expression tentative. In his hands, he held a wrapped box.


Victor came to a stop, his eyes widening. The box was gently pressed into his hands and he looked down to it in surprise before blinking back up at Yuuri.

“F-For me?”

Yuuri nodded, his cheeks pinking. “But wait to open it until after the duel.”

He regarded the package once more. “You didn’t have to get me anything.”
“I know.” Victor darted his eyes back to Yuuri. “But I wanted to.”

Victor opened his mouth, but found he couldn’t quite find any words to say.

“Come on, everyone else is waiting.”

Still dazed, he followed Yuuri, his breath catching as he noticed the room, decked out in decorations with a banner that read “Happy Birthday Victor” hanging right in the middle.

He looked to Yuuri who just smiled softly. “It’s a little rushed, but I hope you like it.”

He loved it. He felt like snatching the man up and swinging him around in his arms, he was so touched. But, he couldn’t find a single word to say.

“Victor?” Yuuri realized something was up and paused.

“Sorry I’m just…” He choked on his words, fumbling for a moment for some poise. Finally he managed to reach out, his hand on Yuuri’s arm grounding him. “Thank you. Really. I’m...very touched.”

“You haven’t even seen all the food yet,” Phichit called out from the table. “Yuuri stop hogging him.”

Reluctantly, they pulled away from one another. Victor turning to fully take in the bountiful table before him and all the familiar faces around it. He greeted Phichit, who insisted on pulling him into a bone-crushing hug. Yuri scoffed in the background and Victor suspected he’d already done the same to the younger hero.

“Okay, so food’s full of options because well, it’s your birthday and we wanted to spoil you. I say ‘we’ but I really mean Yuuri, because you can bet he’s totally the mastermind behind this little party.”

“Phichit!”
“Hey, I helped too!” Yuri cut in before looking somewhat embarrassed that he’d admitted it.

But, now that he looked, the table had a wide variety of both Japanese and Russian foods. Victor looked to the young hero and gave him a smile. The boy ducked his head and muttered under his breath in Russian that Victor was an idiot. Victor’s smile simply widened.

Mixed in between the Japanese foods he’d grown to love was some of his favorite breakfast foods from back home, blinis and syrniki beside oyakodon and miso soup. He had a feeling Yuri had probably called up his grandfather for instructions on how to make the Russian foods on the table.

“Thank you, all of you. I’m very grateful, honestly.”

Yuuri patted the seat next to him and Victor happily took it. Phichit shot him a wink but played innocent the moment Yuuri whipped his head around to look at him. Victor had to bite back a laugh.

He tried a little of everything the table offered, the conversation flowing from Japanese to English to Russian at times without anyone blinking an eye. It had been a long time since Victor had felt this welcomed, this at home somewhere. Yuri had scolded him, in Russian thankfully so no one else could understand, that he was being a sap. But Victor didn’t really mind if they did know.

It was so rare for something to completely surprise Victor, but Yuuri....Yuuri kept finding ways to do just that.

“What’s in the package?” Yuri asked quietly, his mouth half-filled with toast.

“A present I’m not supposed to open until later, apparently.”

Yuri glanced over at Yuuri then back to Victor. “Hm. You called Yakov yet?”

Victor raised an eyebrow. “No, why?”

He wasn’t about to go into the fact he was honestly worried he’d pissed the man off to the point he
didn’t want to hear from him.

Yuri glared at him as if it should be obvious. Victor sighed.

“I’ll call him later, promise.”

“You’d better.”

Victor thought about it a moment. It was strange that Yuri would bring up Yakov, considering the duel in a few hours time. If he was to win, Victor would be getting on a plane the next day to go right back to where Yakov was waiting to yell some sense back into him.

He paused, his eyes darting from Yuri to Yuuri. Well. It seemed that both Yuris were out to surprise him today.

Although he didn’t say a word, Yuri must have realized that his pleased smile meant he’d caught on because he promptly shoved him in the arm.

“It’s not over yet, okay?” he snapped. “I’m just saying. If.”

*If Yuuri wins, you want me to call Yakov to smooth things out, don’t you?*

“If,” he echoed, fairly certain he had correctly parsed the message. “If, then yes, I will call him.”

Yuri hid a relieved smile in his next bite of food and Victor was in far too good a mood to call him on it.

“Is the food all okay? I’m hoping the Russian to English to Japanese translating got everything all right,” Mari called over to them, clearly sensing the odd tension.

Victor smiled, nudging to Yuri to say something as well. “It’s wonderful. Truly.”
“Y-Yeah, well my Grandpa knows his stuff. So of course it’s amazing!”

“He means it’s wonderful and thank you for translating,” Victor added, earning himself an elbow in the side.

Mari stifled a laugh, glancing between the two of them.

“If I didn’t know better, I’d think you two were related what with the way you bicker.”

Victor blinked, glancing down to the boy. While it was true that Yakov had begun to coach Yuri at the young age of ten, Victor had never really thought about how his constant presence in the boy’s life might be perceived. Now that he thought back to it, if he wasn’t at HQ and even sometimes when he was, it seemed that anytime Yakov was there, Yuri was too.

“Ugh, who would want a sibling as annoying as him?” Yuri sneered. But, there was an edge of something different to it than his usual retorts.

Mari just gave them a knowing smile.

Victor thought of the upcoming duel, to the change of stakes that Yuuri had requested, and it suddenly clicked. Yuri, who had grown up in his shadow. Yuri, who had come all the way to Japan to try and get him to come back and train him. Yuri, who would be turning sixteen in a few months and officially admitted to the IHU.

While he was still certain that Yuuri would find a way to win today, Victor now finally understood why it was Yuri was so driven to do the same. He was trying to prove himself worthy. To put himself on the playing field where Victor and Yuuri were.

Victor chuckled. “I suppose that makes me the stupid one and you the talented one then, hmm?”

“O-Of course!”

He wouldn’t mention how he caught the smile in Yuri’s eyes before he replied. No, let him have this one win today, Victor decided. It was only fair.
The Nishigori’s Gym was packed full of people, probably the most they’d had in years. One end was sectioned off and had been turned into a fencing strip, complete with the scoreboard and electronic scoring lights along the sides. Yuuri sat off to the side, pulling on his shoes- his new, Adidas Fencing Pro 20 shoes- and was trying to keep himself calm. Victor had to go off and talk to the HNN reporters that were covering the event, and he felt a distant *something* missing without him there. He tried not to think about it, not to think about what he was going to do if Victor had to leave.

“You’ve got quite the fanclub here, Yuuri,” Minako said from beside him.

Yuuri sighed, looking out to the section of the crowd full of them. Minami, in full hero costume, was leading them all in chants as if it was some sort of cheer club.

“Don’t remind me. I told Minami he didn’t have to.”

“Yeah, well it’s better than having nothing with the Leopard’s Prowl or whatever they’re called over there. He’s got a pretty loyal fanbase for someone who’s not even official yet.”

Yuuri frowned. He’d noticed the group as he’d come in, mostly girls around Yuri’s age and their parents. He couldn’t really begrudge them, Yuri Plisetsky was very talented for a hero his age and the press hadn’t been exactly silent about him.

But right now, he needed to focus. He couldn’t let himself sit and contemplate stuff like this without his mind taking it too far and spiraling itself down into a mess he couldn’t pull out of. That was the last thing he needed today.

Phichit, who had suited up simply because he insisted that people *knew* Freeze Frame was rooting 110% for Hokusai Wave, was liveblogging from where he was in the crowd. Yuuri had to shake his head.

It was nice, to have him here. Phichit had been with him since their preliminary training courses back during middle school, each of them earning the top marks for their countries and attracting Celestino’s attention. He was the first person outside of immediate family and friends that knew Yuuri was fighting without a quirk and he’d been incredibly supportive of it since. And right now
with worry swirling around his mind in an ominous cloud, it was Phichit’s little waves and knowing looks across the gym that kept him grounded.

Because as much as he wanted to lean on Victor, Yuuri knew if he leaned and Victor left, his fall would be even harder.

“Yuuri! They’re ready whenever you two are,” Victor called out as he walked towards where they were waiting on the benches.

Yuuri darted his eyes away, because the last thing he needed was a distraction. And dammit, Victor was far too good looking in tight jeans with a marbled blue suit jacket and lilac dress shirt to not be a distraction.

He felt his hand settle on his shoulder and raised his eyes, trying not to let it them linger too long on the way up.

“Hey, you doing okay?” Victor’s voice softened as he crouched down level with Yuuri.

Yuuri forced a smile. “Trying.”

“Anything I can do to help?”

Yuuri caught Phichit’s look from the crowd and he already knew what he was trying to say. Yuuri took a deep breath. It was worth a try, right?

“So uh...I don’t know what your plans are going to be like after this, but…” Yuuri bit his lip, worrying it between his teeth.

“Yuuri?”

He closed his eyes and took another deep breath. He could do this.

“O-On New Year’s Eve, do you have anything planned?”
Victor blinked. “No. Why?”

Yuuri opened his eyes, and he was ready. He could do this. He could win this duel.

“Um...Phichit’s throwing a party to thank me for the other day and uh…” He darted his eyes away, rushing out the last of his words. “I was wondering if you’d like to be my plus one?”

Victor dropped his hand and for a moment, a terrifying moment, Yuuri feared that he was going to decline. Instead, he placed his hand atop Yuuri’s and gave it a gentle squeeze. “Oh Yuuri, I’d love to.”

He waited. Waited for him to add a “but…” or to somehow politely decline. But that never came.

Yuuri looked up, blinking in shock. “Really?”


A nervous laugh slipped from Yuuri’s lips as he let that settle over his beating heart. Victor was going to come with him. No matter what happened today, this wasn’t the end.

“Hey stop giving him an unfair advantage, Victor,” Yuri snapped from nearby. He’d finished his drills with Yuuko and was dressed in the fencing gear ready to go.

“I’m doing nothing of the sort,” Victor reassured, giving Yuuri’s hand another squeeze.

“Tch. Whatever. You ready, Puddle? Let’s get this over with.”

Yuuri, feeling more at ease than he had in days, nodded. “Yeah. Let’s do this.”

Victor gave his hand one last squeeze, then started to pull away to go back to the HNN reporters. But Yuuri stood, pulling Victor back in and wrapping him in a hug. He rested his head on Victor’s
shoulder and held him tight.

“I’m going to give it my best, so please watch me. Promise?”

Victor pulled back, giving him a warm smile, dimples and all. “Of course. There’s nothing I’d love to do more.”

It was Minako this time that stepped up and cleared her throat. “Victor, I sadly cannot let Yuuri fence while you’re still glued to his side.”

They parted with an awkward laugh at that, Victor’s hand trailing down Yuuri’s arm and giving his hand one last squeeze as he pulled away to go.

Yuuri turned back to Minako, her smiling a knowing one, as she handed over his épée and helped him get it plugged into his body cord. It was a bit odd, being back in the blue and black fencing gear that had been his hero uniform for years, but now it was just that. Fencing gear. It was strange to think about that, about everything that had changed since then.

He could hear Victor now talking to the cameras as the live broadcast started up. Yuri had already donned his fencing helmet to keep his identity secret, and the two of them walked onto the fencing strip. Minako and Yuuko stepped up to attach their body cords to the reels at the end of the strip and each of them tested their electric épées to ensure they were connected properly. Sure enough, the bright green and red lights flashed and with that, they were as ready as they were going to get.

Yuuri did his usual fencing salute- to Yuri, to Minako who would be their judge, and to the crowd. This earned him a loud cheer. And he could see, that Yuri was now doing the same in a less fancy flourish. It seemed Yuuko had taught him well.

Yuuri pulled on his helmet, the iconic Hokusai Wave painted on the front, and fitting him like a second skin. This would be wonderful stage for what would likely be its final appearance, given his new unmasked status. He would have to do it justice.

“En garde!” Minako called out. Yuuri dropped into position.

“Prêts?” She waited for them to nod that they were ready.
“Allez!”

And as Yuuri anticipated, The Leopard wasted not a second after to attack. He tried to parry, but it was too slow, and he saw the flicker of the red light indicating Yuri’s point across the strip.

Too slow. He’s going to move fast, I’ve got to be ready.

They settled back into position, and Minako gave out the calls once more. Right as the last syllable of “Allez” sounded, Yuuri moved this time to parry and managed to snag Yuri’s blade just in time and push it away.

But, there Yuri was with a remise, carrying through on his attack parry be damned. The red light flickered again. It was 2-0.

Yuuri walked back to his position, his heart thundering in his chest. He needed a strategy and he needed it now. Knowing that the boy was going to attack fast wasn’t enough. Yuuri shifted his position, shifting his weight between his front and back foot.

He waited for the call.

“Allez!”

Yuuri moved forward, his arm extended and ready to beat the parry into Yuri’s oncoming attack. Sure enough, there it was. But this time, Yuuri shifted from his front to back foot, bringing the back foot forward and with it, extending his blade. His point connected with Yuri’s shoulder, the green light flickering on as Yuuri moved swiftly to the side to avoid any chance of a remise.

2-1. And that might be the last flèche he could do for awhile lest Yuri catch on.

He felt the blood rushing in his ears as he walked back to position. He had to keep surprising Yuri. That was going to be the way to win, as no amount of speed could counter what the boy’s quirk gave him. He was going to have to surprise him fourteen more times in order to win this.
“Allez!”

He lunged immediately on the call, Yuri a second after, and the hits landed one, two. Green shone first and red second, 2-2.

Either Yuri was slowing up or reconsidering his tactics. Yuuri decided either way, it would be best to take this one on the defensive.

“Allez!”

Sure enough, Yuri didn’t immediately attack this time. First a feint, which Yuuri read easily and countered. Then a beat. Yuuri saw a shift in Yuri’s footwork and knew the next would be an attack. He wasted not a second in launching his own.

The lights went off simultaneously, 3-3.

They’d barely taken any time off the clock, and Yuuri began to wonder if they’d even hit the three minute mark at this rate. He couldn’t count on it. He’d have to think in these brief moments between points.

“Allez!”

Again Yuri hesitated, a beat, then a feint, a second feint. Yuuri saw him shift his hand just slightly and he knew the attack would come next. He launched his own. They hit simultaneously, 4-4.

As the first minute lapsed into the second, they’d only managed to keep each other neck and neck, 5-5 then 6-6, now 7-7 and 8-8. They’d fallen into a pattern, Yuri trying to bluff with feints and beats, Yuuri waiting until he noticed him shift to attack, then both of them launching an attack and trying to beat the other. So far, they’d only managed more simultaneous touches.

Yuuri could tell that Yuri was wearing out faster, his body not as conditioned to the repetitive nature of fencing bouts as his was. If there was a time to take a risk, it was now before the score got any closer to fifteen and Yuri redoubled his efforts to outpace him.
“Allez!”

Yuuri stamped his forward foot, appelle, then in that briefest second when he noticed Yuri react, he advanced, following through with a lunge.

Yuri parried at the last minute. Hard.

The tip of Yuuri’s blade snapped and the épée fell from his hand. Minako called a halt to the action as Yuuri went to retrieve his blade.

He frowned, the metal tip cleaved in two by the force of the boy’s defense. But, at least this gave him a minute to pause while they got him another blade.

“Yuuko, get me the other Russian one,” he called over to her.

Yuri, who had gotten to pull up his helmet part way while the broadcast went to a commercial, snorted. “What the hell are you talking about, Puddle. I’m right here.”

Yuuko, who knew exactly what he meant but was clearly out to torment him, played dumb. “Oh, which one did you want? This one?” She pointed to Victor.

Yuuri had to resist the urge to throw his helmet at her as someone- probably Phichit- let out a low whistle from the audience.

“The Russian grip!” he clarified.

But that twinkle of mischief was still in her expression as she went over and grabbed Victor by the arm.

“You want to grip a Russian?”

Yuuri was going to die. He drew his arm back, about to lob his helmet at her, but she’d already hustled Victor over to him and shoved him in his direction.
“Here, hold onto this one while I go get your épée.”

Victor looked torn between laughter and confusion. He swept the bangs out of his face.

“So...what’s this about you needing a Russian?”

Yuuri was going to scream. Why did everyone in his life seem to enjoy conspiring to embarrass him in front of Victor? He huffed.

“The...The handle on the épée, there’s different types and...I um.” He could feel his face heating up. “I favor the pistol grip type called the Russian grip.”

Victor reached up, tucking a stray strand of gelled hair back behind Yuuri’s ear.

“I am going to have to make sure Christophe never finds this out, or neither of us will hear the end of it.”

“You...what?”

Victor let out a nervous laugh. “Oh nothing. Just thinking ahead.”

Yuuri blinked up at him, letting all the implications of his statement settle into place.

“Although if you need a temporary Russian to hold onto, I’m more than willing to volunteer.”

Was he...was Victor seriously flirting with him? Yuuri let out a nervous laugh. Okay...so that just happened.

Not about to decline the offer, Yuuri hesitantly reached out with his ungloved hand. Victor met him halfway, his fingers quick to entwine with Yuuri’s and give him a reassuring squeeze.
“Better?”

Yuuri hated to admit it, but yes, yes it was. Victor grounded him in a completely different way than Phichit did. Phichit made him feel safe and reassured. It was calming, gentle, it gave him peace.

But Victor was electric. It made Yuuri feel alive, made him feel like he could accomplish anything if only Victor was there to support him. It grounded him, but also pushed him forward. As if just by being there, it was his way of saying, “I believe in you, Yuuri. You can do this.”

And it wasn’t that Phichit didn’t tell him those very things, but...it was different somehow. Just like Mari and Yuuko and Phichit each had their own way of comforting Yuuri when he was down, Victor had his own. And the result was different because of that.

Victor made him want to fight and win.

Yuuko returned, Russian grip épée in hand, and helped Yuuri plug it into his body cord before tucking the excess cord up his sleeve. She shot their joined hands a glance, but thankfully didn’t say anything.

“You need anything else?”

Yuuri felt the thrum of his heart, a steady beat that he could dance to if he wanted. Dance...that’s right, that’s where he had the advantage over Yuri. Footwork. Counter speed with intricacy.

He gave Victor’s hand one last squeeze before pulling away.

“I’m good. Thanks.”

Victor gave him a warm smile before he returned to the reporters and cameras as they set up to begin filming again. Yuuri pulled back on his helmet on noticing Yuri already had and resumed his position on the strip.
“En garde. Prêts? Allez!”

Yuri had returned to his first strategy, rushing forward immediately for the attack. But Yuuri had already known it was coming, noticing the tell-tale shift in his posture moments before the final call was out of Minako’s mouth.

He jumped up, the point of Yuri’s blade narrowly missing his chest as he turned his own blade downward and drove it into the boy’s back. The green light flickered to life.

8-9. The crowd went wild.

*Well. If fancy footwork is what they want....then wait until they see what else I've got.*

Yuuri took his position again, watching as Yuri settled into his own. He’d try another immediate attack, hoping to get the points evened immediately.

“Allez!”

He jumped forward, immediately pushing himself into a lunge. Yuri’s attack hit. Green and red again. 9-10.

Yuri was getting more agitated and his posture was slowly slipping. Yuuri knew he’d keep pushing the straight up attack at least once more.

“Allez!”

Sure enough, he darted forward, Yuuri stepping back to avoid the hit and pushing his own arm forward. His point clipped into Yuri’s shoulder. Green light on. 9-11.

But Yuri’s blade hadn’t stopped yet and the sudden jab made him lose his grip just slightly. It skimmed Yuuri’s outside hand, the metal hot as it slid over the bare skin of his ungloved hand.

“Halt!” Minako called.
Yuuri shook his hand out. “It’s fine! It’s barely bleeding.”

Minako stepped towards him, clearly about to come see if it was indeed “fine” but she was overtaken by Victor who seemed to rush up from near the crowd towards him. Yuuri didn’t even register him moving until he felt the hand lifting up his injured one to inspect it.

“Victor, really, it’s fine.”

Victor gave him a look and pulled the fancy looking silk handkerchief out of his suit pocket. Before Yuuri could protest further, he’d wrapped it around his hand and tied it off in a small knot.

“Can’t have you bleeding all over the strip, right?”

Yuuri couldn’t help but smile at him. “Okay, I suppose that’s true. Thank you.”

Victor lifted the hand up and placed a gentle kiss on the handkerchief over the cut. He rushed back over to the cameras before Yuuri could even process what happened.

It was electric. Just like Victor. And it coursed like lighting through his veins and left butterflies in the pit of his stomach.

Four more points. This would be over before they even hit the three minute mark. He was going to win this.

He turned to Minako, reassuring her that he was fine and really he didn’t need a real bandage. She just shook her head and shooed him back into position.

“En garde. Prêts? Allez!”

Yuri hesitated again, and they fell back into the pattern from before. A feint, a beat, and attack. Yuuri met it. 10-12.
He was going to need something else to get through. Continuing like this would be too risky.

“Allez!”

Yuri raced forward, the light flickering red before Yuuri had even moved. 11-12.

In his desperation, his quirk was pushing him faster than before. This wasn’t good. He needed a counter to it and fast.

“Allez!”

Again he blurred forward, Yuuri barely having the chance to parry. He dragged his blade down Yuri’s, hoping the odd sound would deter his remise. It didn’t. Green and red at the same time again. 12-13.

He was going to have to make two more moves, faster or better than Yuri’s. Immediately, two crazy ideas came to mind. He’d have to risk it.

“Allez!”

Yuri immediately moved, Yuuri quick enough to step away in time. As he did so, he wrapped his arm around his head, his blade coming down over his shoulder and piercing Yuri’s exposed back. Green light. 12-14. Thank you Chamley-Watson for your crazy move. The crowd went nuts.

Yuuri didn’t even have to look this time to know that Yuri would put his all into this last move. He would have no chance to dodge it but one. No inquartata would cut it, there would be no way he could step aside in time.

He clinched his left hand, the soft silk of Victor’s handkerchief gentle against his palm. If they thought his Paso Doble was something, then they’d better be ready for his Passata Sotto.

“Allez!”
Yuuri let his front foot slide out from under him, his back doing the same as he effortlessly slid down into the splits. Yuri, attack already in play, had no chance to stop the sharp jab that came from below him. Green light on. 12-15. The crowd erupted into cheers.

He’d won the duel. Victor would stay.

He yanked off his helmet and tossed it aside. Pressing a kiss to the bell guard on the handle, he inclined his blade out until it pointed directly at Victor. As if to say...

_For you._

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again, always and every time, to those of you to take the time to comment. It truly means a lot!

If you want to see some crazy awesome fencing moves, check out Chamley-Watson's iconic move that ended up named after him. Also, yes fencers are sometimes so extra they do a Passata Sotto by dropping into the splits. XD
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The crowd was deafening, the acoustics of the gym making them all the louder. And so, at first, he almost didn’t hear the quiet voice beside him.

“Hey.”

Yuuri turned, looking up to the offered hand.

Yuri had his mask tilted up, and there was something Yuuri couldn’t quite place in his expression. It wasn’t anger or frustration, but perhaps resignation. Resignation and something else unreadable.

Yuuri took the hand, allowing the boy to help him to his feet. They shared a brief look before they both moved to unhook their body cords, Yuuko coming up to collect their blades from them.

“You know…” Yuri said quietly. “That wasn’t too bad. For a Puddle.”

Yuuri smiled. “And it seems The Leopard isn’t half bad either.”

And perhaps it was the sentiment and the ever important ‘The’ returned to his name, but Yuri Plisetsky looked particularly touched at the words. He buried it quickly under a scowl but his embarrassment still shone in his too-pink cheeks.

Yuuri sighed in relief. Without a single word, they’d come to an understanding and appreciation for one another. Yuuri would have to make sure Victor fulfilled his end of the bargain.

As if summoned by mere thought, Victor came towards them and enveloped them each in a one armed hug.

“I’m so proud of you! Both of you.” He stressed the point, looking at both of them.
He reached quickly into his jacket pocket, pulling out Yuri’s black mask and handing it over. It was now that Yuuri realized that Victor was standing protectively between the boy and the cameras.

“Tch. Stop fussing. You're worse than Yakov.”

Victor smiled, soft and gentle, as if he was endeared by the boy’s usual gruff rebuttal.

“Ugh. Don’t look so happy about it. You’re pissing me off!” Yuri snapped as he tied his mask on.

Not about to be detoured, Victor reached up and ruffled his hair.

“Five years has gone by too fast, hasn’t it? You’ve grown into a wonderful hero, Yuri.”

The angry retort died on Yuri’s lips, the statement silencing him in shock. Unsure, he glanced to Yuuri as if he could somehow explain why Victor was suddenly getting all sentimental.

Yuuri chuckled. “I think he’s going to miss having you around to yell at him. I’m not that good at it.”

Yuri snorted, the uncertainty leaving his posture as he shoved Victor slightly. “I’ll make sure to call him up and yell at him for old times sake.”

“Oh Yuri, so mean!” Victor said with a fake pout. The three of them lapsed into laughter.

Yuuri suddenly felt another arm coming around his shoulders, and sure enough there was Phichit grinning at him through his tinted visor.

“Hey, if we’re all going to stand here and hug, I want in.”

“No more hugging!” Yuri protested.

But before he could escape Phichit’s arm, he’d already been pulled in and hugged.
“Damn you two. I think they’re just going to replace the word hero with the name Yuri at this rate. You guys are insane.”

“Ah, I think the HNN reporter wants to talk. We’d better stop hiding over here,” Victor mumbled.

“Hey, The Leopard, can I get you on my vlog tonight before I head home?” Phichit asked as he finally escaped his hug.

Yuri glared over at Yuuri, as if already knowing it was his prodding that had done this. “Really?”

“Really! I can pester HW here whenever, but getting to talk to you right before you hit the pro level is quite the honor.”

The boy turned away, towards the cameras, trying to hide his smile. “Fine, whatever.”

The three older heroes just shared a smile amongst themselves before following him.

Yuuri wasn’t sure when Victor’s hand slid into his, the action seeming so fluid and natural that it didn’t even register at first. It’s not until his fingers entwined around Yuuri’s, his grip gentle over the silk handkerchief, that Yuuri felt his heart catch.

*When did we become this close?*

His heart racing, and his mind following after in a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions, Yuuri found he couldn’t quite pinpoint an exact moment. It was as if they were walking side by side, and somehow, without even realizing it, they’d fallen into the same rhythm as the other. Steps in tandem, without even planning to, somehow meeting each other in the middle every step of the way.

“Yuuri?”

Victor’s voice at his shoulder drew him out of his thoughts, and he blinked over at him. “Y-Yeah?”
“They’re asking what you plan to use your win towards.”

Yuuri turned toward the blinding stage lights, the reporter smiling as she held the microphone towards him. He dropped Victor’s hand and took it from her with a resolute confidence.

“With Victor’s help, I’m going to make the United Alliance Team as the top ranked hero!”

The crowd erupted in cheers, but it all seemed distant to Yuuri.

All he could feel was his pulse thrumming in his ears and Victor’s arm coming up to wrap around his shoulders. Warm and reassuring.

Proposed Alteration to the IHU Scoring System. (To be used in place of preliminary trials)

Pro or soon to be pro (will become eligible by November 30th) heroes that are registered members of the IHU will accumulate points from December 1st until November 28th. The final trial will allow the twenty top ranked heroes as of November 28th to compete against one another for the positions available on the United Alliance Team. We are currently accepting submissions of suggestions for events to be held at the final trial and encourage all competitors to submit a selection they deem fair and accurate gauges of a hero’s talent.

Points will be tallied based on the following grading system. We ask that all heroes submit reports of all incidents they are part of to the new tab of the IHU app. All information submitted will be vetted against reports from civilizations and local law enforcement.

Capture Points (CP) will be awarded in the value of 200 for a capture of a villain and 100 if you assist another hero in their capture.
*Rescue Points (RP)* will be awarded in the value of 100 per rescued human or larger animal, 50 per smaller animal, and at a max value of 500 per large groups.

*Bonus Points (BP)* will be awarded in the value of 200 in disaster scenarios in which you stop or immobilize the active threat (examples: bombs, out of control vehicle, natural disasters). A 50 point bonus is given to any hero that performed the majority of the task solo and without aid.

*Degree of Damage (DoD)* will be dictated by the Enhanced Fujita Scale and is to calculate damage caused by the hero on the scene. It will be waived in situations threat level three or higher. We encourage all heroes to avoid excess damage when possible.

*Threat Level (TL)* will be a scale of one to five. Level 1 is a petty crime or an incident causing minor or no damage. Level 2 is an armed crime, basic quirk user or incident with moderate damage. Level 3 is an advanced quirk or potential for severe damage. Level 4 is multiple minor villains, villains with at least ten incidents deemed serious or the potential of damage to be large scale. Level 5 is a villain who has killed anyone before or has the potential for total destruction of the area.

Incident Points will be tallied with the following formula:

\[
((CP+RP+BP)-(DoDx20)) \times (TL) = \text{Total Points}
\]

We ask that any and all questions be forwarded to our new Hero Liaisons Officer, Hayami Masumi.

If Victor were completely honest with himself, he was terrified.

He’d looked for the ramen stall on their way back from the gym, only to discover someone else working there. It was Masahiro’s mother and after a few translated words from Yuuri back and forth to her, Victor was able to learn that Masahiro had apparently worked things out with that girl he’d liked and had moved closer to where she lived.

That set Victor partially at ease, although he wished he had an opportunity to consult the man on what he was about to present.
Instead, he politely requested all the heroes present, whether it was the young boy that Yuuri knew or his friend from Thailand, come and pass judgement on what he hoped was an improvement to the IHU system.

But if Masahiro had truly taught him anything, it was that he was not as informed on what was going on in the hero world as he thought he was.

And so, scared that he was about to insult his peers by sheer ignorance on the matter, Victor brought them all to his room and tried to steel himself for what he hoped wouldn’t be a disaster.

“All right, I’m sure you’re all wondering why I’ve asked you here. As you might know, I’ve become increasingly aware of the flaws in the IHU’s system for the United Alliance Team selections. So, I’m using what weight my name carries to pressure them into changing it. I’ve....I’ve got a basic draft prepared, although the IHU has already implemented parts of it, but I realized that I would like input from all kinds of heroes. Junior heroes, masked heroes, heroes without a flashy quirk- all the many kinds that the IHU often forgets about. I want you most of all to evaluate this and see if it makes the system any better than what it was.”

Minami, the young teen Yuuri was working with at the behest of the JHU, was practically vibrating with excitement. Victor knew that the hero world was still very new to him and he hoped that this didn’t take away the shine of it too much.

“So the IHU said something to me about having already earned points?” Yuuri piped up, seeming a bit nervous to do so.

Victor nodded. “That’s the part they’ve already implemented, but I will have them roll it back immediately if any of you feel it’s not right.”

“Wait, so there’s no preliminary trials?” Phichit asked, passing Victor’s laptop along to Yuuri and Minami.

“No. Heroes earn points based on their day to day work. For example, you stopped that armed robbery a few days ago, which earned you 500 points. The top twenty heroes at the end of next November will be allowed to complete in the Final Trial.”

“I...this says I’m in first, Victor.”
Everyone in the room turned to Yuuri.

“The points system started the day after the final. You stopped that bomb and you took care of Inferno who is a threat level five villain.”

“I’m…in second? But I’m not official age yet,” Yuri looked to them in disbelief.

“But you will be by November. Junior heroes shouldn’t have to wait another year just because of when their birthday falls. As long as you’ll be sixteen by November, you can start earning points already. Most junior heroes are interns with pro heroes or working with their preliminary license to stop smaller crimes. I thought they should be able to earn points as well.”

The room fell into silence and for a terrifying moment, Victor thought he’d gotten it all wrong.

But then Yuri grinned, giving Yuuri a shove in the arm. “Watch out, Puddle. I’m going to destroy you!”

“Do I have points?” Minami piped up, excitedly moving over to the computer.

“Wow, I’ve never been ranked this high this early in the season!” Phichit noted smiling.

The excitement in the room was palpable and Victor caught Yuuri’s glance. He tilted his head in an unspoken question.

“Victor…” Yuuri looked around at the other heroes present. “You listened to everyone, didn’t you?”

He shrugged. “I tried. What’s the verdict?”

“What if someone tries to fake an incident for points?” Phichit asked with a frown.

“Any tampering like that will result in disciplinary action from the IHU. The focus is on doing our jobs as heroes, helping people in need first and foremost and minimizing quirk damage to the surrounding area when we can. Last year in the second trial, both Yuuri and Tiempo were slower at
The fourth task but they both didn’t cause any damage to the area. It was an unarmed purse snatcher and some heroes tore up half of the fake city block over it. We need to think of the big picture. Unless the threat level is over three, damage to the area isn’t necessary.”

The heroes shared a look amongst one another and Victor braced himself for their decision.

“I love it,” Yuuri said quietly. “And not just because of my current rank, but because it’s fair.”

“Agreed,” Yuri muttered. “Much better than having us put on some show for ratings.”

“And no favoritism towards unmasked, just who does the job correctly,” Phichit added, his smile infectious.

“I might have just signed on with the JHU recently, but...this seems much better,” Minami added, glancing to Yuuri to see if what he’d said was okay.

Victor let out the breath he wasn’t aware he’d been holding. “Okay. So it’s good?”

They all nodded. Victor let out a nervous laugh.

“I might be able to make a difference after all,” he murmured quietly.

Yuuri must have heard, because he sat down next to him on the bed and his hand reached out for his.

“Victor...I think I speak for everyone here when I say that what you’re doing, using your name to make things better for the rest of us, well...that’s why you’re such a good hero. You care.”

“How could I not?”

The others exchanged a look, and Victor realized that all of them had surely been overlooked by someone before. Victor knew even he was at fault for that in the past, but not anymore. He wanted to earn his title not have it given to him. Meeting Yuuri, understanding why Yuri was upset, all these little things added up and changed how he looked at the world.
“Well...if you have any suggestions, or know anyone that does, please- contact me. I want this to be a better system for all of us, not just a few of us.”

“You’d better start working harder if you want to catch up, old man. We’ve all got more points than you right now.”

Yuri’s expression was smug, but there was a hint of a smile on his lips. Victor knew why and subconsciously, he pressed a hand to his side. Yuuri noticed, his hand tightening its grip.

“I...I do have some catching up to do, don’t I?”

Everyone laughed and Victor felt the unease slowly unfurl from his shoulders. Here he was trying to build a better world for the other heroes, but he’d neglected to think about his own place in it. He’d already written himself out of the narrative in his mind, already thinking that this would have surely been his last year on the team.

But now…

He felt the new yet familiar weight of a hand over his own, Yuuri’s thumb rubbing small little circles absently over his knuckles.

Now everything was so different.

“Which reminds me, I do have a probably very angry coach to call. And, if I heard correctly, you have an interview to vlog, don’t you Yuri?”

There was murmuring as they all talked amongst themselves, fileing out one after another. Yuuri lingered.

“I should go see Minami off.”

He said such, but made no sign of moving.
Victor sighed, bringing up his other hand to press over Yuuri’s.

“You do. I feel sometimes we forget how much some of our younger heroes look up to us. I fear I may have been nothing but a bad influence to someone, you know.”

Yuuri gave his hand a squeeze, slowly getting to his feet.

“I think you’re too hard on yourself, Victor.”

He pulled his hand away to go and Victor had to resist reaching for him to bring him back. Calling Yakov would be so much easier with him here, but…

“Come back once you’re done?”

Yuuri paused at the door, blinking as if surprised by the question.

“I uh, have a present to open after all.”

He blushed and darted his eyes away at the reminder. “Oh. Yeah. I’ll um...not be too long.”

Victor nodded and he wondered if he could muster up the courage to make the phone call without him there. But he’d already been avoiding it too long…

He reached over, burying his hand in Makkachin’s soft fur as he tabbed open his contacts and pressed Yakov’s name. It took a few rings, but finally he answered. Victor had to resist dropping the call.

“I’m going to guess Yuri told you to call.”

Victor sighed. It was scary sometimes how well Yakov knew him. “Perhaps. But I did, didn’t I?”
He let it lapse into silence, his nerves prickling as the moments ticked by.

“Hm. I can’t say I’m happy about today’s results.”

Victor opened his mouth to respond, but he’s still too uncertain. What can he do? He’s not going back to the UAT. Even Yakov couldn’t make him.

“I am,” the words leave him before he even processed them. He floundered to recover. “Although I suppose you’re not happy that your new top hero lost, so that’s understandable.”

He can hear Yakov huff out a sigh of frustration. “Vitya…”

Victor’s heart tightened at the familiar name. Yakov had been like family to him since his parents had died, and as much as he wanted to please the man, he also knew that staying in Barcelona would slowly kill him.

“I’m not happy, Vitya, because I’ve got half my team in Spain, the other in Russia, and you’ve gallivanted off to Japan after leaving me to clean up your mess! I can’t be flying halfway across the damn globe every time one of you idiots needs me.”

Makkachin started up at the yelling and Victor shifted the phone while he tried to calm the dog down. For a moment, he was certain he’d misheard.

“I suppose I’ll be mailing you a gift this year.”

The days of apprehension and guilt cascade off Victor like a waterfall, rushing away and dashed out by the rocks below. Maybe Yuuri was right. Maybe he was being too hard on himself.

“Yakov…”

“You seem happier, Vitya.”
Victor considered that. Was it really so obvious that he could tell even from the photos and videos?

“I am.”

“Hm. Well. Perhaps this is for the best then. Just don’t come crying to me if it doesn’t work out, I’ve got enough of that drama from Georgi right now and I’m not putting up with anymore of it, you hear me? I can only handle one Georgi!”

Victor chuckled. “Understood, coach. I take full responsibility for wherever this takes me.”

“Good. About time you took responsibility for something! And don’t push your limit! You aren’t as young as you used to be and that injury could put you out of commission for good. You can’t keep making goo-goo eyes at your boyfriend if that happens.”

It dawned on Victor, as almost an afterthought, that without explaining anything about Yuuri to him, somehow Yakov understood. He made him happier, made him want to keep fighting, made him want to live again in a way he hadn’t felt like in years. And although they’d not used any sort of term to define whatever it was between them, Victor wondered if perhaps Yakov’s assumption wasn’t too far off base.

“I know. I’ll take care of myself.”

“Hmph. That would be a first.”

Victor decided perhaps that was deserved.

“I don’t know when I’ll be able to come out there, so don’t get into too much trouble. And don’t forget to call me either, Vitya.”

He laughed, his worries gone.

“I will. Talk to you later, Yakov.”
“Have a nice birthday, Vitya.”

The phone call ended and Victor exhaled, all his tension leaving him. Yakov might be miffed, but he seemed to understand that this wasn’t just Victor running off on some crazy whim. It might have been impulsive, but this was something Victor knew in his bones he needed to do. A horizon he was willing to chase and see where it led him.

And so far, it was looking to be the best thing he’d ever done with his life.

In the safety of the Katsuki household, Minami had taken off his helmet and was now seated with Yuuri at their front table. The boy was, as always, extremely over-excited about it all.

“And then, when you did that jump? And hit him in the back? So cool!”

“Ah, once again, valid fencing move,” Yuuri replied, playing it back down. He really didn’t see what all the fuss was about.

Minami was not about to be detoured from showering him in praise.

“But you knew when to use each one for best impact, that’s what’s awesome!”

Yuuri rubbed the back of his head. If anything, Minami sometimes exhausted him because he was so overly impressed by everything he did. Yuuri hoped that his younger self had never been this intense about Victor, but he had a feeling he might have. Which was particularly odd to him now.

He felt the gentle silk against his hand still and it all seemed so surreal.

What did Victor see in him? He’d gotten lucky a few times. It could happen to anyone.

“Yuuri?”
He snapped his attention back to the teen. “Ah sorry, I kind of spaced out a second.”

“It’s fine. I’m sure you’re tired.” Minami didn’t seem fazed, his smile soft and kind. He nervously cleared his throat. “I know it’s not really my place to be asking but, is there something going on with you and Winter Monsoon?”

Yuuri blinked.

“You don’t have to answer if you don’t want to,” Minami rushed out, clearly worried he’d crossed the line.

He found himself answering without thinking. “Maybe. I’m not sure. I’m...I haven’t put a name to it. I’m afraid to, to be honest.”

Minami, who he was certain was probably as red as he was in the face, nodded.

“It’s like...what if I try to make it something it isn’t? What if I’m wrong? And so I’m just kind of...avoiding it.”

The boy rubbed his cheek. “Maybe you just have to jump.”

Yuuri stared at him, confused. “What?”

“M-Maybe...it’s...When I learned my quirk, I was really safe. Almost too safe. I didn’t want to try something and fail. For the longest time, I wouldn’t try levitating any higher than I thought I could survive a fall from. That’s...that’s when I read what you said in that interview.”

His mind raced to recall what the boy was talking about, but there had been too many interviews for Yuuri to keep track of what he’d said at each one. Most of the time, he was so on edge he didn’t even remember what he said after.

“Three years ago, when Kabuki Keren retired, people were worried that we had no stand out hero. That’s when the JHU ran that article on you. You’d just come back from the academy in America and there had been that incident with that bank hostage situation.”
That Yuuri remembered. It was considered his formal debut onto the hero scene.

“They asked you,” Minami continued, “how did you know when to lunge at the robber? How did you know that you’d be fast enough to dodge the bullet? And you told them, ‘Sometimes you don’t know. You just jump and hope.’ And that. That stuck with me. I remember running to the top of my parent’s hospital, knowing that if I couldn’t use my quirk in time I wouldn’t survive the fall, and I jumped. Jumped and hoped.” He looked up to Yuuri, the admiration in his eyes burning strong.

This wasn’t some blind attachment to someone because of their fame. No. Minami was inspired by him, much like Victor had inspired Yuuri. It resonated with him on a level deeper than some passing fad.

*I feel sometimes we forget how much some of our younger heroes look up to us.*

Victor’s words came back to him then, as if to prove the point. Even now, Victor was the wind that pushed him forward.

He reached out, placing a hand on Minami’s shoulder. He hoped his smile and expression were enough, that they could even begin to express how touched he was by the boy’s unwavering faith in him.

Minami must have understood, for it seemed he could only return the gesture by one of his own, wrapping Yuuri in a hug a little too tight.

“Thank you, for believing in me, Yuuri.”

Yuuri chuckled. “No, Minami. Thank *you* for believing in me.”

Minami was sent off with more thank yous, another hug, and a promise that Yuuri will find time to train with him some. The boy could not have been happier and it was infectious, all Yuuri’s worries weighing just a tad lighter on him.

His heroics had generally lived by that philosophy, jump first, hope for the best. It’s everything else in his life that suffered the constant stress and strain of his anxiety dissecting every moment and
causing him to overthink it all.

Sometimes he wished he could be as brave over mundane things as he was in the heat of battle.

Knowing that avoiding the matter would certainly not make it any easier, despite his inner monologue trying very hard to convince him just that, Yuuri reluctantly plucked up his nerves and returned to Victor’s room.

He raised his hand to knock, but somehow Victor already knew he was there.

“Yuuri? Come in!”

If he didn’t know better, Yuuri would think he had a quirk that allowed him to know when it was him outside his door. As it was, it just set off a flurry of butterflies as he tried to reason why Victor always seemed to know it was him.

He slid the door open to find Victor seated on his bed, his present sat next to him. He looked like a child waiting for the permission to tear into the wrapping. It was positively adorable and Yuuri had to resist the urge to laugh.

Victor Nikiforov, the Winter Monsoon, was excited to open a present. From him.

It was wonderful and terrifying all at once.

“Well, can I?”

The wave of uncertainty- the oh he’ll think it’s stupids and the he’s not going to like its- had no chance of a fight. Yuuri was pretty certain if Victor looked at him like that and asked anything he’d immediately agree if nothing more than he couldn’t bear to think of causing that bright smile to falter.

Not trusting his voice, he nodded.

Victor excitedly tore into the paper, both haphazard yet somehow methodical in his approach. When
the bare box slid out into his hands, Yuuri felt his breath catch.

Victor flickered his eyes up, the excitement giving way to something else that Yuuri hadn’t seen before. It was piercing yet somehow, reassuring. As if he was saying, without a single word at all, *don’t worry I know I’m going to love it.*

He slid the box open and his eyes went wide. Yuuri swallowed, waiting with baited breath for the reaction.

Victor’s smile had softened into something gentler, a fondness and tenderness that Yuuri hadn’t seen from him before. No, that wasn’t right, he had. But then that couldn’t be right, because the only other times he’d seen it was when Victor was looking at *him.* He floundered for another name to put on it.

“Th-There’s a note,” Yuuri heard his voice say, nary above a whisper.

Victor reached into the box, sliding out the card and opening it. The moment his eyes finished their sweep of the words, he looked up to Yuuri, eyes shining as if they were wet.

“Keep dancing. Keep fighting. I believe in you,” he said with such reverence that Yuuri felt his heart skip a beat even if they were the very words he’d written there.

Yuuri’s about got the words “I hope you like it” out of his mouth, but Victor moved faster, the box spilling to the floor with the ballet shoes tumbling after it. Then Victor was embracing him, his breath warm against his ear.

“I don’t even know what to say,” he murmured, voice choked. “Yuuri. Wonderful Yuuri.”

He pulled back, eyes shining and bright. “Thank you. For the best birthday I’ve had in a very long time.”

Yuuri shyly dipped his head forward, just enough that his bangs fell into his eyes and shadowed them. The tightness in his chest felt like it was about to burst with joy and he tried to, amidst his overwhelming emotions, find some words in response.
“I hope leather instead of canvas is okay,” he managed, immediately regretting letting the words out of his mouth.

But Victor just chuckled, his smile curving up and his dimples quite noticeable.

“Of all the things... Yuuri, Yuuri.” He shook him slightly, but gently, as if he were trying to jostle the worries out of his head. “I love it. Everything about it.”

He took Yuuri’s hands and pulled him over to sit next to him on the bed. Victor picked up the ballet shoes almost overly gentle, as if he was afraid they might disappear if he looked at them too long.

“How did you know exactly what I wanted without me telling you?”

Yuuri blinked. “You just… there was something when you were dancing, especially when you were going over steps by yourself. Like you'd forgotten how much you'd missed it. Even Yuri said you always got this look when you'd watch his practices. When you told me why you stopped, I understood, but at the same time I thought… they wouldn't want Victor to stop something that he loves.”

Yuuri looked at his hands in his lap, not sure how else to explain that he could just tell. Tell that all Victor needed was a push, a little something to say, it's okay you can keep going.

“You'll practice with me, right?”

Yuuri nodded. “I assumed as much. Now that you don't have to go back…”

“...and what if I'd had to go back?”

He darted his eyes up. “I didn't let myself think about that.”

Victor smiled. “Neither did I.”

They fell into a comfortable silence, Yuuri certain his heart was beating abnormally loud but not sure
how to silence it. *I should just go for it. Jump and hope.*

Victor’s phone buzzed and he frowned as he read off the notification. “Oh no.”

“What's wrong?”

“Chris. I'm guessing a certain someone’s livestream caught our little exchange. Now we'll never hear the end of it.”

Yuuri sighed. “Phichit… As if this morning’s news wasn't bad enough.”

Victor blinked, his eyebrows furrowed in concern. “Oh. I'm sorry, you're really not used to the constant invasion of privacy courtesy our reporter friends, are you?”

He huffed, his words spilling out, “They couldn't even get the dance right. And there were all these crazy implications…”

Victor tensed up. “Ah. Does that bother you?”

“What bothers me is that you're the first person I've ever wanted to hold onto and while I'm trying not to panic over you possibly leaving me, they're going on about how I'm just out to seduce you like it's some game or something!?”

Yuuri’s mind caught up, his cheeks blooming crimson as his chest constricted around his heart. He’d just… *Shit.*

Victor looked stricken, his eyes wide and mouth hanging open. Yuuri felt his heart sink and started to stand to leave.

Victor caught his wrist.

“Do you mean that?”
He could take it back. He could lie. But no, Victor's piercing blue eyes wouldn't allow it. He nodded mutely. He'd jumped and now he'd have to live with it.

Yuuri wasn't expecting the tremble in Victor's hand, his pulse thrumming through where his fingers gripped his wrist. Unable to stop himself, he darted his eyes up.

Victor had gone very still, but as much as every fiber in Yuuri's body was trying to pull him down, convince him he'd ruined everything, one tiny shred of hope held fast.

It was in the racing of Victor's heart, beating so fast Yuuri thought it might outpace his own. In the dusting of pink that spread across his face, the slight quake of his hand as he slowly slid it down to take Yuuri's into his own. Victor exhaled and it was as if both of them finally breathed for the first time.

"Definitely my best birthday. Hands down."

He was smiling, dimples and all, and Yuuri was pretty sure his own smile must have been just as wide.

"R-Really?" he asked, because he just could not fathom that this was actually happening.

Victor reached his other hand out and captured Yuuri's in it, their fingers twining together. "Although," he dipped his head forward, his bangs mingling in with black hair as he let his forehead rest against Yuuri's, "I am thoroughly seduced as well."

And perhaps it's the ridiculousness of it all, or the crashing wave of euphoria enveloping them both, but they both burst into laughter at that.

"There was no seducing!" Yuuri protested weakly.

"So you unintentionally seduced me?"
“With my salsa or tango or whatever other wrong dance they named.”

The laughter overtook them once more, both of them swaying together as if in a slow dance, hands sliding up arms, settling one here on a hip or one pressed against a chest.

Yuuri felt Victor’s heart beating underneath his hand and couldn’t help but lean in, resting himself there happily.

“I can’t believe this.”

“What? Me or the fact they don’t know the difference between Latin dances?”

“You. Liking me.”

He felt Victor’s hand, warm against his back as it rubbed a slow circle there.

“And here I am bewildered that somehow you like me, despite the fact I’ve been nothing but trouble all week.”

Yuuri poked him in the side. “You haven’t been trouble.”

“Okay, I’m pretty sure you just think that because you like me. Because I’d bet money that most people would think having me show up unannounced and moving into their house, then volunteering them for a duel and getting stupidly drunk twice would qualify as trouble.”

He snaked his arm around Victor’s waist and let it settle there, his cheek still pressed to his chest.

“I may be slightly biased.”

Victor snorted and before they knew it, they’d started laughing again, Yuuri’s cheeks and sides aching from how much he was smiling and laughing.
It took them a moment before they could stop, but when they did, Victor’s hand stilled on Yuuri’s back.

“Do you want to watch the inevitable disaster that is the *Heroics Tonight* coverage of yesterday?”

Yuuri thought about the show, notorious for its rumors and over exaggerating of everything. Normally, he wouldn’t even want to think about whatever it was they said, but somehow, the idea of watching it with Victor sounded...fun.

“Okay. But you owe me a dollar for every time they say I seduced you.”


They piled onto Victor’s bed, sitting back against the headboard and settling the laptop in front of them. Yuuri could already see all the outrageous headlines as Victor scrolled down the news page for the link and it was only due to his pure happiness that it didn’t faze him for once.

That, and perhaps the fact that Victor was settled against his side, his arm snug around his shoulders.

“Hey Victor?”

He paused in his scrolling. “Hmm?”

“Should we tell them?”

Victor tilted his head. “Tell them?”

Yuuri felt his face heat up. “That we’re...um boyfriends now?”

He must not have been the only one who felt the little thrill of excitement as he said the word, because he could feel Victor slightly tighten his arm around his shoulders.
“Boyfriends, huh?”

“I mean...if that’s okay?”

Victor leaned in, his head resting down against Yuuri’s and his other arm coming up to loosely hug around his neck.

“Friends and family, yes, I think so. But as for the press, well…”

He moved back slightly, pointing to the headlines from the day.

“And deprive ourselves of this hilarity? I think not.”

Yuuri chuckled. “Does that one say Winter Monswoon?”

Victor grinned. “Yuuri Katsuki’s boyfriend doesn’t have near the same ring to it after all.”

And his heart warmed to the point he was sure it would overflow and burst, Yuuri laughed. Jump and hope for the best, huh?

Well. Perhaps he should jump more often.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you as always for all the comments, kudos, reblogs and support! This and the beginning of next chapter pretty much wraps up the first arc of the story and we're headed towards the second!

Also, yes you will get some of the hilarious news article titles next chapter. Promise :)
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Winter Monsoon!

*Hero Buzz - 6 hours ago*

Exclusive behind the scenes photos capture Winter Monsoon flirty and smitten with Hokusai Wave.

Hokusai Wave Continues to Stun, turning his seductive moves from dancing to fighting

*SuperNewsWeekly - 5 hours ago*

Winning today’s duel in more ways than one, the Japanese hero taking the world by storm showcased his flexibility and flourish, much to the enjoyment of fans and fellow hero, Winter Monsoon.

Get a Grip! Hokusai Wave Favors a Specific Russian for His

*Plus Ultra Post - 5 hours ago*

Freeze Frame's live video catches flirtatious banter between Hokusai Wave and Winter Monsoon.

A Lady's Hero's Favor

*HeroNewsNetwork- 5 hours ago*

Not many would paint Winter Monsoon as a damsel, but he certainly played the part when tending to a duel-related injury at today's duel.

Like a Cat to Water: Wave easily defeats Leopard

*The Galax Gazette - 4 hours ago*

Whether sweeping Winter Monsoon off his feet or fighting off an angry kitten, Hokusai Wave shows why he’s currently the world’s number one ranked hero.
Has the Ice Finally Melted?

*Just One Life Journal - 4 hours ago*

After years of dodging relationship questions, it seems Victor Nikiforov, the Winter Monsoon, has finally found a man worth fighting for.

Freeze Frame's exclusive video interview with The Leopard

*Hero Herald - 20 minutes ago*

Our favorite vlogging hero gives us a down-to-earth glimpse at the feisty feline hero looking to make his pro hero debut next year.

It was strange to think that the European hero world was just now waking up on Christmas morning, and those that hadn’t woken up to watch the event live would just now be getting the news.

And now that Victor was really taking in all the photos and videos of the last forty eight hours, he was beginning to see exactly what all the fuss was about.

It might as well have been written across his face, that he had fallen hard for Yuuri Katsuki.

Somehow he’d danced his way into Victor’s life and coaxed out that scared teenage boy that he’d left behind when his parents had died. The one that loved to dance and spent every moment filled with life and love. Yuuri didn’t want him to just be Winter Monsoon, some perfect hero who smiled perfect smiles for the cameras, and so he’d carved his way into the walls of ice that held that perfect smile in place. He found him, drunken mess and flawed and imperfect, and somehow that only made him want to hold Victor closer.

It was something Victor couldn’t quite comprehend. He’d spent so long trying to be what everyone else wanted that it never crossed his mind that someone would want him for who he already was. But Yuuri, *wonderful Yuuri*, did.

*You're the first person I've ever wanted to hold onto.*
He wove those words into his heart, carving it right next to the *I want you to just be yourself* and *I believe in you* that were already there. Yuuri was the most delightful surprise Victor could have ever asked for and although he was scared that something would try and take that away, he decided that he’d rather risk and fight to keep it than never have.

The press might laugh at the simplicity of *Yuuri Katsuki’s boyfriend*, but those three little words were enough to make Victor feel like he could do anything.

Arm tight around Yuuri’s shoulder and just basking in the feel of his heartbeat mingling with his, Victor found he was paying more attention to Yuuri than the show. Then again, the *Heroics Tonight* coverage of his and Yuuri’s paso doble was an expected hilarious mess. He could only imagine what a field day they were going to have with today’s footage.

“Can you believe that such a seductive hottie was hiding behind that mask?”

“Apparently Winter Monsoon knew.”

“Okay, that’s another dollar,” Yuuri noted with a laugh. He’d gotten less tense as the show went on, his apprehension giving way to laughter and eye rolling at the worst of it.

“Wow, okay, you are up to like eighteen and we’re only halfway through this episode…”

Yuuri settled back against him, his hair tickling Victor’s chin. “And they’ve only showed clips so far, so it’s only going to get worse.”

Victor chuckled. “They’re saving the best segment for last, can’t blame them.”

Yuuri pinked at that, but merely stifled a smile and gently elbowed Victor in the ribs. “Oh hush.”

There was a light rapping at the door, followed by a familiar voice.

“Hey Victor, is Yuuri in there?”
“Yeah, come on in.”

The door slid open, and for his part, Phichit only looked somewhat surprised. It was amusing to try and read the silent conversation he was clearly having with Yuuri via expression alone. Yuri, on the other hand just glared as usual.

Yuuri at first at tensed up, and Victor feared he would jerk away. But instead, he took a slow deep breath, and ever so slightly shifted closer. Victor thought his heart might burst from it, this little tiny moment in which Yuuri stayed close as if to say, yeah, it’s what you think.

Phichit finally laughed. “Well, congrats you two. And here I was afraid I was going to have to stage an intervention before I left town.”

Victor shot Yuuri a look at that, both of them simultaneously trying to fight back a blush and smile at the same time.

“About fucking time, Victor,” Yuri, as always, was far more blunt.

“Actually, he asked first,” Victor clarified.

Yuuri’s blush deepened. “Victor…”

Yuri, for his part, looked surprised. “Huh. Well, I hope you know what you’re getting yourself into, Puddle. He’s a handful.”

Clearly thinking about some of the implicative comments from the show they’d been watching, Yuuri looked over to Victor and both of them broke into laughter.

“Oh, great. They’re both crazy,” Yuri muttered.

Phichit on the other hand just snapped a selfie with them in the background.

“Phichit!”
“What? I’m wearing my tinted glasses, and you my friend are now unmasked and totally a-okay to have stuff like this posted to my Instagram.”

Yuuri huffed, but Victor could tell he wasn’t truly mad. “Phichit...your livestream is why we’re in this mess.”

Phichit looked mocked scandalized. “Oh my! Are you telling me that I did somehow help the happy couple?”

Yuuri groaned and buried his face in his hand.

Victor gave him a tiny nudge. “It kind of was that comment about Chris seeing his livestream that got it kicked off, you know…”

“I know, I know!” Yuuri darted his eyes up. “Okay, you can post it if first, I get to approve what you caption it and what it's tagged and second, you have to suffer through the rest of this terrible show with us for the trouble.”

Phichit cocked an eyebrow. “What are you watching?”

“Heroics Tonight,” Yuuri replied, clearly knowing that would get the reaction it did.

Phichit made a long-suffering groan. “Oh Yuuri, not HT. You know I’m still at war with them!”

On sensing Victor’s questioning look, Yuuri turned to him. “They keep stealing his vlog content and then not crediting him. I believe lawyers are involved now.”

“Well, you could always not post the picture…”
Yuuri’s little smug smirk was positively adorable. Victor grinned. It was nice to see Yuuri, of all people, in such a mischievous mood.

The dilemma was real for Phichit though, who was clearly weighing his options. Behind him, Yuri rolled his eyes.

“Okay, is it yesterday’s or today’s episode? Because you know they’re going to steal my vlog content for today’s if Smolder’s already giving you two crap about it.”

“Yesterday.”

“Ugh fine, I guess since it’s not my stolen footage I can lower myself to watching this atrocity. Oh, that gives me an idea…”

He typed something on his phone then crossed the room to Yuuri’s side, holding it over for him to inspect.

“Does this meet your approval, oh Mr. Wave?”

Yuuri bit back a laugh, then glanced up at Victor. “What do you think?”

Sure enough, there was an image of him and Yuuri laughing, his arm snug around Yuuri’s shoulders and Phichit close to the camera peering in the side with a hand over his mouth as if scandalized.

freeze+frame: Hey @heroicstonight even @hokusaiwave + @wintermonsoon can’t take you seriously. #arenttheyadorable? #onlygoodthingaboutheroicstonight #ithasgivenushisblessedimage #credittherealartistsyouthieves!

Victor chuckled, a warmth blossoming in his chest at seeing actual photographic proof of how happy he was. “I think the last tag is my favorite,” he managed.
Yuuri snorted and Phichit looked to him.

“Fine, you can post it. But you’d better get ready for about twenty minutes of suffering with the rest of us.”

Phichit turned his phone back around, finished up posting it and then sat down on the bed beside Yuuri. Victor noticed Yuri slowly making his way over until he was standing beside the bed with his arms crossed. Clearly he wanted to be a part of whatever this was.

Victor looked around at their little ragtag group and had to smile. This was a birthday gift in and of itself.

Phichit sighed. “Okay, let’s get this trainwreck over with.”

It was after their rather late lunch that Yuri stopped Yuuri in the hallway with a look and an incline of his head towards his room.

Yuuri gave Phichit a look, his friend going to wait in his room, and followed after the teenager. The room was mostly packed, all Yuri’s belongings that he’d brought with him crammed back into his animal print suitcase.

He watched silently as Yuuri came in the room and slid the door behind him. At times like this, Yuuri could really see how the feline mannerisms of his quirk affected even the slightest of things, like his stare, piercing and scrutinizing all at once.

“...that was a good fight,” he mumbled after a significant silence.

Yuuri blinked then eased into a smile. “You did incredibly well for someone who just learned all the rules. You made me fight for every last point, I hope you know.”

“Of course I did,” he scoffed. But his eyes, which had slightly widened at the remark, said something different. He was grateful for the compliment.
“Did you...have something to talk about?”

Yuri paced back and forth, clearly trying to work out something. He nodded towards the bed and Yuuri slowly went over to sit down. Once he had, Yuri huffed out a sigh.

“I’m not good at this kind of shit, but the stupid asshole won’t look after himself, so someone has to.”

Yuuri could tell with that unique blend of anger and fondness that he had to be talking about Victor.

“And you’re going to be stuck with him, so there’s stuff you should know.”

Yuri stopped his pacing and crossed his arms. There was an apprehension in his eyes that wasn’t there earlier and Yuuri wondered if he was trying to decide how much he could be trusted with. Both him and Victor had already told him far more than the general public would ever know about Winter Monsoon.

“First,” he started, voice clipped, “when Inferno finds his way back...and don’t look at me like that, that bastard has broken out or had help breaking out of every damn place we’ve stuck him- when he comes back, you cannot let Victor fight him alone. No matter what he asks of you.”

Yuuri’s eyes widened. “Why would he...”

“Because, that villain has taken everything from him. His parents, his long hair, his home. He won’t say it aloud, but I can see it written all over his face every time he looks at you. He’s terrified you’ll be next.”

The little gasp that escaped Yuuri’s mouth managed to surprise even himself. It had never occurred to him that his value would be that strong.

“Yuuri,” and the weight of the boy using his name for once snapped him to attention, “promise me, you won’t let him fight Inferno alone.”
“Of course. I would never imagine…”

“No, you listen to me! He will beg you, plead with you, you have to stand your ground or he’s going to get himself killed.”

Yuuri was beginning to wonder all that this boy had been through to talk this way, to know this much about Victor.

“I promise,” he replied, firm. “I won’t leave his side no matter what.”

Yuri exhaled, and it was as if he could see the weight of that worry go with it. Something had happened between Victor and Yuri that had caused this. Was it that last time Victor fought Inferno and got hurt?

“I hope the dumbass has reason enough not to be a fucking idiot now, but…”

“I promise. Yuri, I won’t let him fight Inferno alone.”

Those words seemed to be what he wanted to hear, the boy practically collapsing onto the bed next to him when he heard them. But it wasn’t that that shocked Yuuri, but rather the quiet words he heard him mumble.

It was something hard to decipher, but Yuuri caught two words and held them close. *Save Victor.*

Afraid to be in the dark, he dared to ask. “What was that?”

Yuri blinked up at him, clearly surprised he heard. He cocked a grin. “Hmph. I said you might save his sorry ass after all.”

It wasn’t what he said, but Yuuri got the message that he wasn’t going to repeat those exact words again. He wasn’t sure what it was Victor needed saving from, whether it was keeping him from fighting Inferno alone or something else, but Yuuri knew one thing for certain; he’d do whatever it took to save Victor, no matter what that entailed.
Yuri started rattling off reminders then, probably to change the subject. It ranged from the expected (“Make sure his article for me is good and not half-assed”) to kind of important (“He has some ointment for his injury that he can use if it’s really bothering him, so make sure he does.”) and by the end had Yuuri wondering if Yuri had just heard Yakov ranting about all these things so often he figured someone ought to make sure Victor was actually doing them.

“You can always come visit, you know?” Yuuri offered, figuring this way perhaps the boy wouldn’t be so off put by the idea.

“Yeah, well, I’m going to be pretty busy becoming the world’s number one hero, so I might not have time to come babysit.”

Yuuri chuckled. “Well, the offer stands. You’re always welcome here, Yuri.”

That seemed to strike a chord, causing the boy to turn his head and scoff quietly. Yuuri politely didn’t mention the momentary look of relief that had flickered across his features.

“I guess. I mean, Yuuko and the triplets did want to see how I was doing…”

It was the best he was going to get.

“Thank you,” Yuuri mumbled, the quiet words even seeming to surprise himself.

“What the hell for?”

Yuuri stood and gave him a small smile. He had a feeling Yuri knew, but he’d say it aloud anyway.

“For everything. A good fight and good advice.”

Yuri rolled his eyes. “Yeah yeah, whatever.” He shooed him towards the door. “Go dote on your boyfriend, Puddle.”
Yuuri tried not to let the little thrill of the word overtake his features, but he knew it was a losing battle. He didn’t think he’d ever get tired of hearing that word connecting him to Victor.

“Thanks again, Yuri.”

And as he turned to leave, he could see the little smile that Yuri had behind his back.

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- **Chris: Call me, unless you two are busy that is ^._~**

Victor had rarely let the matters of the press broadcasting his whole life trouble him. Even when it resulted in Chris taunting him about it, it didn’t often bother him like this. But something about his relationship, even though it was incredibly new, with Yuuri made that different.

It was a mixture of concern for Yuuri, as he clearly wasn’t used to the press breathing down his neck every moment of every day, and just a general feeling that this one thing was something special that he really didn’t want twisted into something else.

He’d seen enough comment threads that amounted to wondering if all Yuuri was to Victor was a good fuck, and it had made him see red. Jealous fans had attacked supposed partners of his before, even if they were nothing but rumor, but it had never made him this angry. From Chris, at least, this was expected.

Chris, also, sadly would probably be the best advice in regards to how to handle it as well.

So, as much as the last thing he wanted on his irritable nerves was more ribbing, he decided to see if perhaps this so-called friendship with Chris would hold true.

“Oho, so he does remember I exist!” Chris had joked upon answering the phone.

Victor just sighed. “Chris, I’ve been busy.”

“Oh have you now?”
Victor rubbed his temple, feeling the beginnings of a headache brewing. “I’ve gathered you’ve seen enough news reports that I don’t need to recap it for you.”

Chris chuckled. “Oh Victor, I don’t need to even read the reports. I take it you’ve gotten your prince, hmm?”

He appreciated the lack of other implications. “As everyone apparently knows already, though I’ve stated nothing official.”

“Victor,” Chris said, his voice growing softer, “this doesn’t usually bother you. What’s up? Trouble in paradise?”

It was never good when Chris was being more reasonable than the reporters were.

“Just a little concerned. I figured, if anyone, you might have some advice.”

He could hear the cork of a bottle being popped and the pouring of a glass. Probably one of the wines Chris often favored. “Ah, I understand. It’s not like you, Victor, to have someone you want to protect.”

Victor wanted to argue back, but he found he couldn’t deny that. So many of his feelings could be defined as nothing but his yearning to protect Yuuri, from everything, whether big or small.

He sighed. “It never used to bother me when the press came after me with their crazy fake stories and rumors, but now…”

Chris hmmed, clearly taking another sip of his wine. “Now you actually have someone and you don’t want them to go through that. It’s adorable.”

“Chris.”

“I mean that sincerely, Victor. I may never miss the opportunity to remind you that he favors Russian
grips, but I’m also happy for you. You’ve needed someone.”

Victor wasn’t sure how to process that.

“So is he getting death threats? Or is it just the angry commenters?”

But as expected, Chris did indeed know what to do in this situation.

“No death threats...I...that happens?”

“Oh, you’ve been so sheltered, poor baby. Don’t worry Elsa, let it all go and tell fairy godmother Chris what he can do to help.”

The joking princess terms, something Chris had thrown at him for years, eased his tension some.

“What can I do so people stop leaving...those kinds of comments?”

“What, the he’s just for sex ones?”

Victor wrinkled his nose, as if just thinking about the comments put a bad taste in his mouth. “A little more vulgar about it, but that sentiment. It’s incredibly insulting.”

“Victor, that’s the point. These people, they think they have a chance with you and now that someone else is in your life, they’re threatened. So they have to villainize him.”

“There is nothing remotely villainous about Yuuri Katsuki,” Victor stated firmly. “And I’d like to make it clear that this isn’t just some fling.”

He could hear Chris refilling his glass again. “That’s on you then, and how public you want to make this. Because if you go the mystery no official statement angle, people are going to make assumptions. And generally when they do, they’re going to be assholes about it.”
“Do you...do you think fans of his are talking like this about me?”

Chris sighed. “Victor, being an unmasked hero means a lot of things. But mostly, it means that whether you like it or not, people are going to invade your privacy. You’ve either got to make clear statements or deal with the fallout.”

Victor sighed.

“Okay, okay. Don’t do that. You’re supposed to be happy, it’s your birthday and you actually have someone special to spend it with. So let’s get this crap dealt with so you can go back to doing just that.”

Victor was beginning to regret all the cruel things he’d ever said about Chris. Because, as much as he hated to admit it, when he was at his worst, Chris was often the one there to pick him back up.

“What should I do, Chris?”

“First, you gotta give me the facts, because I may have a sixth sense about things but I’d rather hear it from the source. What’s your status with him?”

Victor felt his pulse race and licked his lips as he answered. “We...boyfriends. That’s it.”

“You haven’t kissed him yet, have you?”

Chris, as noted, did seem to have a sixth sense about things like this.

“N-Not exactly.”

“You two are precious,” Chris said, but it was clearly meant well. “Okay, so the thing you need to think about now is the angle the press will take literally everything when you are together. So, latin dancing where loverboy gets all spicy and gives you that wicked come-hither? That’s going to get you sex comments. Because, really Victor, have you watched that video?”
Victor had, at least what *Heroics Tonight* had shown of it, and yeah he could...kind of see Chris’s point. To be perfectly honest, it’s not like his own mind hadn’t gone there.

“Okay, okay. Point taken.”

“Honestly, you are a stronger man than I am, because *damn* I would have jumped him after that. If you ever get tired of him, Victor, let me know.”

“I’m going to pretend I didn’t hear that.”

Chris just laughed. “Okay, number two, the whole knight and damsel thing? Much better. Keep to stuff your Disney Princess self could have in their movies, okay? It’s hard for the press to twist that much, and honestly, it’s fucking adorable. I’m pretty sure Yakov about choked while Mila was getting all touched. Even the grip thing isn’t too bad, because honestly most people aren’t as creative as I am when it comes to finding ways to make that sexual.”

“Chris…”

“Just telling the facts, Victor. And trust me, I’m saving all the best ones for when I’m around you two in person just so I can witness you both turning into little blushing schoolgirls.”

“I’m touched, really,” Victor deadpanned.

“Hey, I’ve been waiting years to tease you about someone you liked. Cut me some slack.” Chris paused to take another drink before continuing. “Okay, last one. Freeze Frame’s instagram photo, now this here is where I gathered the most information, because let’s face it if I had Katsuki in my bedroom I would not be wearing that much clothing or inviting other people in.”

“Chris, you’ve made your point.”

“And you are kind of jealous, which is precious. Let me look at that which I cannot have, I promise I won’t touch. At least not much.”

Victor shook his head. Chris was Chris. There was nothing else to it. Some things about him would
just never change.

“I’m just saying, you two went from super formal unmasking press conference to a dance that might as well be sex with clothing on. People are going to make nasty comments when that happens. Just be more careful from now on, okay?”

“Duly noted, Chris. Thank you.”

“Hey, I owe you. That new Hero Liaisons Officer is...well, let’s just say I hope he’s ready to liaise because damn. If you see anything torrid about me in the papers, let’s hope it’s true. That’s all I’m saying.”

Victor laughed, a lot of his worries slipping away. “I’m not sure how you’ve spent half of this conversation making jokes at my expense but still somehow gave solid advice, but well. Thank you for being the friend I never expected, Chris.”

“Wow, look at you, talking about emotions and everything. That boy has changed you, hasn’t he?”

Victor felt a smile tug at his lips, thinking about how so many things would have been different had Yuuri not found just the key needed to get behind all his locked doors. It was refreshing to feel like someone wanted you to for you, not something else.

“I hope so, Chris. I truly do.”

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“Phichit, if today is just a dream, please don’t ever wake me up.”

He was lying horizontally across his bed with Phichit beside him, and had in as many words as he could manage, caught his friend up on what had happened between him and Victor.

“I don’t know, after that HT coverage, I’d personally like to forget today.”

“Phichit...”
He rolled on his side and reached over to give Yuuri a small pinch.

“Ouch.”

“Not dream~ing,” Phichit sing-songed.

Yuuri sighed. “I don’t know if I’ll ever believe it.”

“You currently have a $200+ designer pocket square wrapped around your hand that Victor Nikiforov put there himself and kissed. I get that having a tiny handkerchief that costs that much is so unbelievable it may taint the whole picture, but Yuuri, my man, you are living the dream, believe it or not.”

As expected, Yuuri’s mind latched onto one part and clung to it. “Oh my god, I probably got blood stains on this and it costs how much?”

Phichit laughed. “I can’t believe you. Victor wouldn’t care, Yuuri. He probably has a whole suitcase just full of $200 pocket squares.”

Yuuri held up his hand, which he’d refused multiple times that day to bandage with a normal bandage. Something about having it there, that tangible little piece of silk, was grounding him that this was reality. He’d just beat one of the best quirks in the world and Victor liked him.

“Wait, how do you even know that it costs that much? Are you just making it up to mess with me?”

Phichit shook his head. “Yuuri, you know Victor’s fansite does outfit breakdowns for him.”

Yuuri knew that. Yuuri had looked at that site almost daily for years, and had definitely no reason not to believe that Victor indeed owned something this expensive. But still, he couldn’t help but grab up his phone and pull up the website. There was Victor’s outfit, Tom Ford’s Men’s Spring/Summer 2015 Look 26, and sure enough, there was a picture of the very handkerchief wrapped around his hand with a price tag of $235 associated with it.
“It’s for formal soirées,” Phichit said in a mock-pretentious voice.

Yuuri snorted, finally caving to his laughter. He rolled towards Phichit, who had lapsed into laughter as well.

“I can’t believe this,” he said holding up his hand, “$235?”

“Yep.”

He was laughing so hard, tears were prickling at the corners of his eyes. The whole day caught up with him in a rush, all the pent up anxiety and stress being swept away in a wave of elation as all his happiness filled up the void where the *I’m going to loses* and *Victor doesn’t like mes* had been pushed out.

Yuuri buried his face against his friend’s chest and let out a sigh. “Phichit, I’m so happy.”

Phichit hugged him. “You deserve it, Yuuri. You always have.”

And for just this once, Yuuri thought that maybe this time he could believe it.

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It had, by far, been his best birthday.

Victor had already felt as if his heart would burst, but by the time he curled up with Makkachin that night to sleep, he couldn’t help but feel like he had indeed changed. Even at dinner, Yuri had seemed a little warmer towards him. And, without even realizing it, every time he reached out there was Yuuri to meet him.

The day had been filled with friendship and laughter, good food and family, and Yuuri’s hand warm and clasped in his own.

Even his worries and anger couldn’t compare.
They’d woken up the next morning, and without really meaning to, somehow he found his room filled with laughter as Yuuri, Yuri and even Phichit gathered around to watch the latest *Heroics Tonight* with him.

It was a nice way to say goodbye to friends, even if Phichit said he had to call his lawyers again over stolen footage.

As Yuuri and Phichit said their goodbyes, Yuri stood awkwardly before Victor and glared.

“I’ve already submitted information for your article, so it’s just up to them to finalize it,” Victor tried.

“Tch. It better be good.”

It lapsed into silence and Victor stepped closer, his voice dropping to a whisper as he placed a hand on Yuri’s shoulder.

“Go enjoy being a kid a little longer, Yuri. You’ve got big things waiting for you, but you don’t have to rush into them.”

“Yeah well, I’ll have more time now that I’m not having to babysit you.”

Multitudes of words passed unspoken between them and Victor finally sighed. He needed to be better about a lot of things and this was a good place to start.

He pulled the boy into a hug, his words so quiet they could barely be heard. “Thank you, for taking care of me. Go live your own life, Yuri.”

The boy tensed, but after a moment, eased. “Idiot,” he muttered, but Victor could hear in his voice that he was touched.

They parted awkwardly and Victor tried for a smile. “Don’t give Yakov too much of a headache, he only has so much hair left and apparently Georgi’s had a messy breakup again.”
Yuri shrugged. “Yeah well make sure you call him so he doesn’t take it out on the rest of us.”

It was the closest they were going to get to their real emotions on the matter, Victor decided.

“Don’t do anything stupid,” he snapped as he moved towards the taxi that had come to take them to the airport.

“Same to you,” Victor offered.

Compared to Yuuri and Phichit’s animated and emotional goodbyes, it seemed like nothing. But Victor knew that neither of them were quite used to this openness and it would be something they’d just have to work on going forward. He wished the boy nothing but the best and hoped that perhaps he too might now be free from the shadow of Winter Monsoon.

There was a gentle nudge at his hand and within a moment, Yuuri’s fingers had intertwined with his.

“I’m going to miss him. Even with the attitude problem.”

Victor chuckled. “And he’s possibly the nicest to you, too. I have a feeling that our paths will cross again this year, now that he’s your biggest threat to your number one rank.”

Yuuri’s hand tensed and Victor stroked his thumb in a small soothing circle.

“I’m not used to this.”

“What?”

“Being the one to beat. So...I guess it’s good I’ve got you here to help me, huh?”

Victor laughed. “I don’t know what help I’ll be, but I’ll try.”
It fell silent between them again and Yuuri drifted closer, his shoulder brushing into Victor’s.

“Victor?”

“Hmm?”

“I uh... had Minami talk with his family. They’re doctors. I didn’t mention specifics, but they said hydrotherapy for post-frostbite situations for about thirty minutes a day is a good way to regain mobility of that area. And the advised temperature is about the same as the onsen so...”

Victor blinked and Yuuri clearly took his momentary silence as a bad thing.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said anything. I think they thought I was asking for myself, since I was working with you, but...”

He reached out, his body moving before he even registered it. It isn’t until his fingers brushed against Yuuri’s bangs, pushing them back, that he felt his thoughts catch up with him. There, nestled along Yuuri’s hairline was the small scar that was still left from his injury. He’d helped heal that, and here was Yuuri, trying to return the favor. Trying to find a way to keep him fighting.

Victor leaned down, his lips gentle as they placed a soft kiss to the scar.

“V-Victor!”

He pulled back, his expression as soft and warm as he felt. “I don’t know what I did to deserve you, Yuuri.”

“Y-Yeah, well... I feel the same about you.”

Victor tugged him into a hug, both of them laughing over nothing in particular. Yuuri’s hand pressed against his chest then stilled.
“Oh, I need to get your handkerchief back to you,” he remarked on noting that his hand was lacking it.

“Keep it, I’ll buy you a suit to match it.”

“Victor, that’s not…”

“No, really. For our...for New Year’s Eve. It can be a late Christmas gift.”

Yuuri gave him a look, clearly trying to tell if he was being serious or just joking about it.

“You can help pick it out?”

“For...our date?”

Victor hadn’t been able to get the word out, but Yuuri, with that little mischievous glint in his eye, had put it out in the open. New Year’s Eve, their first date.

Victor chuckled. “Yes. For our first date, can I please buy you a nice suit?”

Yuuri’s blush deepened, but he gave the slightest of nods in reply. Victor felt his heart sing.

“Okay, let’s go pick it out then! I was thinking something from the 2016 James Bond line, nice and classy, look 4 with the blue? It’d match my eyes.”

Yuuri chuckled. “I thought you were going to let me pick it out.”

“Of course, but I may have some suggestions.”

He grabbed him by the hand, and pulled him back towards the house, both of them smiling and laughing. It was as if nothing in the world could bring them down from where they were.
Happiness was a good look for Victor Nikiforov.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you as always to those who support this work in any way, be it via comment, kudos, reblogs or likes!

If you're interested in seeing Victor's extra clothes, I posted about it here: https://tinyurl.com/lm4eelv

Next arc gears up next chapter, hope you're all ready for it!
Chapter 13

International Hero Union Official File

**Hero ID #:** PZ0117

**Civilian Name:** Guang Hong Ji

**Superhero Name:** Pingzhang

**Masked Status:** Masked

**Associated National Hero Union:** Hero Association of China

**National Hero Ranking:** 14

**Quirk:** Force Field

**Range of Quirk Use:** User is able to generate a force field that can act as a either a shield or bubble around the user or it can trap a target of the user's choosing. This force field is strong enough to reflect most types of attack, but can only be maintained as long as the user can hold it. Currently, Pingzhang can hold a force field under duress for up to twenty minutes.

The week that followed seemed to pass in a blur.

Yuuri spent most days going with Victor to Minako’s place, where they brushed up on their ballet skills and began to work on fencing together. Victor was positively radiant and Yuuri couldn’t help but feel like maybe, just maybe, he had something to do with it.

It was a strange but wonderful feeling.

And like suggested, he made sure Victor spent at least thirty minutes a day soaking in the onsen, something he always insisted Yuuri join him for; an activity that was becoming more and more of an ordeal, if he was perfectly honest with himself.
Because before, he could easily shove his thoughts aside because Victor was some untouchable that he couldn’t have. Now that he and Victor were dating, well… he’d found his eyes straying far too often and with his family around, it made for a bit of an awkward dance.

Mari had joked that she was sure they’d have fun in China because they’d finally get some alone time, but Yuuri’s mind was beginning to think that she couldn’t be more right. It was never good when he was agreeing with his sister’s teasing.

But, as he’d pointed out to Phichit, you couldn’t blame him, right?

It’s not every day your idol shows up on your doorstep, moves in and then you end up dating. When it was spelled all out like that, even Yuuri found that it was too ridiculous to be true.

Then Victor’s hand would catch his or his arm would snake around his shoulders and there’d be this little jolt of excitement, a little moment where he realized, *but this is happening.*

He didn’t think he’d ever get tired of being reminded of that.

While they’d spent much of their previous dance training talking about Victor, he’d insisted this time that he learn all he could about Yuuri. What was his past like? How and when did he decide to be a hero? How had he coped when he really truly realized that he’d never get a quirk?

Victor’s questions never daunted him, instead each one seemed to tie the little strands between them ever tighter. A story about his dog, which he had embarrassingly admitted was named after Victor, had led into Victor talking about how he’d gotten Makkachin. Back and forth they traded, little stories, little anecdotes, little memories. And with each bit of his own self he gave away, Victor gave something in return.

He learned that Victor’s mother used to use her quirk to paint, her control of water blending with paints to make beautiful watercolor images that were so vividly recreated by Victor’s account of them. Victor learned how he’d met Phichit, both of them meeting when they acquired the same coach and began their journey into heroics together. Back and forth, give and take.

Never, in all his years, had Yuuri felt like someone hung on his every word the way Victor did. Even when he was silent, the pauses as he tried to articulate an answer in his mind, Victor patiently waited as if he had nothing he’d rather do more. It almost scared him, how much it seemed Victor liked him. Yuuri’s mind picking it apart, tearing it down and trying its best to damper his feelings.
But it couldn’t. He was scared, perhaps, because the more he realized how much Victor seemed to like him, the more he realized just how he’d fallen in return. This was no longer a distant crush on an idol or an infatuation with someone he found attractive. They’d exchanged so much of themselves in every word, in every touch, in every breath, that Yuuri felt as if he was drowning in an ocean awash with his feelings for him.

Yuuri could never pinpoint any exact moment when he truly fell in love with Victor, the only thing he knew was that he had. Irrevocably.

The cynical part of himself tore into that feeling with insecurities and doubts. It pulled him back when all he wanted was to throw himself into Victor’s arms and stay there. But somehow he’d convinced himself, that it was best to take it slow and see if it amounted to anything before he let himself go; before he just lost himself in Victor completely and then got left behind.

He hoped Victor took his tepid reactions as shyness, or at least realized it wasn’t that he didn’t want this too, it was that he was scared to want it the way he did. When Victor had most likely innocently suggested he stay in his bed a night after they watched a show together, Yuuri had to bolt for the door. Because if he’d stayed, he wasn’t so sure he could keep it innocent.

And so, tangled through the threads they wove, there were these little snags of uncertainty. Yuuri knew it was his anxiety making a mess of things, the way it always did, so he did his best to untangle the snags when he could. For every time he pulled away, he made sure the next time he lingered just a moment more. Hot and cold. It was probably making Victor hate him, he worried at his worst.

But as New Year’s Eve drew ever closer, Yuuri knew he couldn’t keep his mess of emotions at bay much longer. Jump and hope. That’s all there was to it. He was going to have to do his best and hope that he’d been reading the signals right. That Victor wanted him the way he wanted Victor.

Perhaps with Phichit there to cheer him on, he could find the nerve to move this forward.

After the four hour flight to Beijing, they’d gone to get their belongings settled at the hotel before heading to the restaurant. Yuuri had just gotten their things settled down in the room before shooting a text to Phichit to let him know they’d arrived.

We’re here. Just got to the hotel. Which, by the way, I am so not okay with the room arrangements.
Oh sorry, did you want a single bed?

Phichit!

Hey all of us aren’t made of money like Victor is. I’m splitting with Georgi, if that makes you feel any better. So no I didn’t just give you and Victor the same room for fun, though I’m not discouraging that.

Yuuri found he was simultaneously frustrated and relieved. His nerves were shot since Victor nuzzled up to him and napped on the plane, leaving him to spend roughly four hours dwelling on everything. So of course, when he’d arrived and they’d been given a single room with double beds, he’d suspected Phichit was in his own way, trying to help out.

He wasn’t sure how to feel now that it wasn’t the case.

Sorry. I’m a mess. Can I talk to you before we go over there?

What’s up? You’ve been on edge since I left you. Is everything going okay?

I think I’m ruining everything. I keep panicking every time he tries to…I don’t know, make a move? He might not even be doing that, it could just be all in my head. I’m overthinking everything as usual.

Breathe. Deep breaths. Also, you are dating. You’re kind of past the making a move stage, aren’t you?

I mean like. Ugh this is so embarrassing. Can’t I talk to you in person?

I’m at the airport with Guang Hong waiting for Leo to get here. Well, and Georgi is sulking somewhere nearby and I should probably make sure he’s not getting into trouble. Apparently his girlfriend cheated on him and he’s a wreck.

Not what I want to hear right now, Phichit.
• Not that it is in any way indicative towards any Russians who are currently dating cute Japanese boys named Yuuri.

Thanks >_>

• Is he in the bathroom? Can you step out and like call me or something?

He’s taking a shower. I’m trying not to have a meltdown. Phichit, what am I supposed to do?

• Okay, spell it out to me. I cannot read your mind. Explain what you’re freaking out about and I’ll do my best to explain that you are wrong. We’ve got this.

I think, though it’s probably just me wishing it was the case, Victor keeps trying to...urgh, advance the relationship?

• Like...define advance?

Remember that slang from America? That first, second, third base thing?

• Oh god, yes. That was stupid, but if it works, lay it on me.

I think Victor’s at bat and wants to try and get anywhere from first through third and I keep dodging it.

• How am I just now hearing about this?!

Because I just had four hours to nitpick everything in the last week on a plane ride.

• Okay, that’s...very you.
Phichit...

- So if he’s making a move, why are you dodging? Don’t you want that? You are Yuuri Katsuki, right?

That’s the stupid part. I really don’t have a reason. I’m just panicking.

- Yuuri, you are the only person I know that would spend years talking my ear off about Victor then panic when he’s making a move on you.
- And yeah, I know that’s just how your anxiety works and that SUCKS.
- But you’ve either got to let it happen or do it yourself.
- Because unless you aren’t you, then I KNOW you want this.

....I was kind of leaning towards the latter. Because, then at least he has the chance to back off if I’m wrong? IDK. Nothing makes sense anymore. I just think I love him too much. It’s like he’s the sun and if I get too close I’m going to get burned.

- Okay, you are not a Greek tragedy, though points for eloquence.

Phichit.

- Yuuri, you gotta just take a risk. Let things happen naturally. Go with the flow. ETC. You’re dating Victor, stop overthinking this and just go get your man. He’s right there!

But what if...

- STOP. NO. Don’t even go there. You never like it when you go there.
- No but what ifs.
- Just don’t think about it and be yourself.
- Drink some champagne until you feel less panicked.
Phichit that’s never a good idea.

- I don’t mean enough to get drunk. Just enough to ease your nerves. It’s New Year’s Eve, get some at the restaurant and just let it chill you out some. You always self-destruct when you let yourself overthink.

That’s true I guess.

- Look, just get yourself all dolled up in that fancy new suit Victor got you and meet us at the restaurant. I’ll keep an eye on Victor tonight and if I at all think he’s making a move on you, I’ll let you know somehow. Okay? Is that fair?

Yeah. I just don’t want to be reading it wrong and mess this up, you know?

- That’s valid. So I’ll tell you what I see and then you can go from there, how’s that?

Thanks Phichit. I feel a bit better now.

- Good! I’ll see you there soon, okay?

See ya!

Yuuri heaved a long sigh, trying to let all the chaos in his mind out with it. Phichit was right. He needed to stop overthinking everything and just...go with it. Maybe a glass or two of champagne wouldn’t hurt. Just enough to stop him from worrying, that’s all he really needed and it wouldn’t impair him otherwise. It was the closest he was going to get to turning off his anxiety for the night after all.

The click of the bathroom door sounded and Yuuri glanced over, immediately regretting his decision to do so.

Victor was wearing one of the hotel’s provided robes, the terry cloth hanging loose about his chest and his hair still damp. Yuuri noticed a stray drop of water on his neck and his eyes followed it as it trailed down his chest and...
He snapped his head back up, hoping his burning cheeks didn’t give him away.

*Stupid. It’s not like I haven’t seen him in the onsen.*

“I think you still have time to shower if you want to before we go.”

Yuuri nodded, not trusting his voice at the moment, and stood to gather what he needed for the bathroom. The moment he shut the door behind himself, he slumped back against it.

The bathroom was still fogged and it smelled of Victor’s expensive shampoo and Yuuri hated himself for knowing that scent like a memory already. As was becoming a habit, his blood flow had pooled in all the places he’d rather it didn’t, his face being the least of his worries.

He needed to do something before he let this drive him insane.

Victor knew he was far from an expert on the subject of relationships of any kind.

He’d long ago realized that it was safest for everyone if he kept them at a distance, and so he’d done just that. The three people closest to him after his parents death only got there after years of slowly chipping away the wall he’d built between them. Even then, it wasn’t until he got injured that they really seemed to realize something serious was wrong. Chris had, surprisingly, been the most perceptive. While Yakov and Yuri would often ignore a forced smile or flippant remark, Chris never let Victor do so without at least calling him on it.

But the fact was, Victor had let no one close since his parent’s death. Even if asked to name a close friend, his answer would always be his dog. It was safer that way, he told himself again and again. Safer for them.

And so, right under their noses, he fell apart.

By his third year on the team, the monotony was stifling and he felt like he was more robot than
human some days. He played the part they wanted of him, perfect hero with a dashing smile and charming wink. But the moment he was alone in his room, that smile would disappear for hours and hours at a time. It began to feel like Winter Monsoon was a costume in and of itself, hiding all the imperfections under a shiny veneer and practically perfect in every way.

By the fourth year, the veneer had cracked, ever so slightly. He started to make mistakes, started to let a little of his self seep out when the cameras weren’t watching. Chris had taken to showing up at his door with a bottle of wine and enough determination to at least get Victor to sit and drink with him if nothing else. And with persistence and alcohol on his side, Chris would finally get Victor to speak aloud some of the problems that had been troubling him for years. It was then that they both started to seriously work together to overhaul the UAT system.

But it wasn’t until Inferno’s attack that things got really bad. By the end of that, for better or worse, Yakov and Yuri became two of the only people that knew how severe the injury was he sustained. For the injury to his body was only half of what Inferno damaged that day. So Yakov had insisted that Yuri train with him, and Victor was never quite sure if it was supposed to help him or Yuri. He never had the courage to ask. Even at his lowest, he still wanted to keep them at a distance. To keep them safe. To keep the walls up and the world out.

They could have Winter Monsoon, but Victor Nikiforov was not making many appearances.

So when at the banquet a handsome Japanese hero captured his heart, Victor wasn’t sure what to do with that. Wasn’t sure how he could just call him up and even attempt to explain that there was so much life in him and it made Victor feel alive too. For the first time in so many years.

Inferno, as always, made the decision for him.

And so, he’d somehow found himself on a beach in Japan with Yuuri, telling him what only a few people knew.

The walls might be up for the rest of the world, but Yuuri Katsuki had just the key to walk right in. Be yourself, he said. I believe in you. You’re someone I want to hold onto.

He just kept surprising Victor, time and time again. And all Victor wanted to do was give back what he could, even if it meant he had to tear down his own walls with his bare hands.

He was scared. Scared of letting himself have this, scared that letting someone this close could only
spell disaster. But he was willing to take a risk, just this once.

Because if anyone in the world was worth a risk, it was Yuuri.

But now those fears had manifested in a different form, Victor’s inexperience in letting someone so close painfully obvious, at least to himself. He could charm a lady reporter with a smile and a wink, but that was as Winter Monsoon. As Victor? He was nervous, blushing and honestly sometimes just downright overwhelmed by his feelings for Yuuri.

Like a wave, Yuuri had swept over him and pulled him under, submerging him in emotions and leaving him floundering for some way to articulate them. Sometimes he feared he was coming on too strong, for Yuuri would hastily pull away or leave the room. Chris had been trying his best to advise him, but clearly what worked for Chris was not the method for Victor.

But Yuuri ebbed and flowed, one moment distant, the next pulling Victor to him with a confident smirk. Victor might not feel like Winter Monsoon, but there was definitely a Hokusai Wave in Yuuri. And Victor knew with time, he’d learn how to swim his ever changing waters.

And so, somehow, Victor had found himself in China, waiting in their hotel room for Yuuri to finish getting ready for their first date. A fact that, despite the attendance of four other heroes, seemed to make Victor more nervous than ever.

He tabbed open his text thread with Chris, and decided if anyone could get him through this without messing it up, it would be him.

We’re here. I’m so going to mess this up somehow, Chris. I just know it.

- Relax. You’ve got a group of people with you.

That’s what I’m afraid of. They expect Winter Monsoon, who was as of last year, voted the World’s most eligible bachelor. Not...me.

- I’m still mad they didn’t award me that, just so you know. Also, I highly doubt they’re going to care how you act, Victor. Remember, you’re sitting with a bunch of masked heroes. If anyone can appreciate a stark personality disconnect when the costume is off it’s gonna be those kids.
Well and Georgi...

- And we can’t all be that theatrical 24/7 Victor. Don’t even think of trying it.

I think Yakov would kill me if I did.

- Look, just be yourself. Which I know, is nowhere near as naturally attractive as I am, but is attractively one thing- genuine. And trust me, just about anyone will go crazy for that honesty thing. You still planning on giving that expensive ass pin?

Do you think I shouldn’t? Is it too much?

- Hell no. Spoil your boy. It’s about time you spent your money on something besides yourself and your dog.

Okay. I think I can do this.

- I’m rooting for you. And if you start freaking out, just text me and I’ll tell you what to do.

Right. Thanks Chris.

- Remember, don’t eat apples from strangers, don’t trust guys named Hans, and I guess since it’s New Year’s Eve you can stay out past midnight as long as you aren’t wearing any glass slippers.

Victor snorted, Chris’s usual teasing putting him even more at ease. He was about to tease back, but the bathroom door opened and his train of thought promptly went elsewhere.

Namely to how he was in no way prepared for how attractive Yuuri looked in the suit he’d bought for him.
It had been the one he’d suggested first, his mind immediately knowing that the crisp lines of the cut and the rich blue would be perfect for him. Yuuri had protested it when he heard the price, but Victor insisted. As Chris had noted, it’s not like he’d spent his money on anything but himself and his dog for years.

It made the small little brooch settled in his pocket seem a little much, he was sure. But at the same time, he’d worn a snowflake brooch for years on his suits and he thought it was only right Yuuri have something indicating his superhero namesake as well.

It wasn’t that overkill, he supposed. It was only blue titanium with a round rose gold border. Although, the crest of the wave was made up of thirty five white diamonds, but they were fairly small diamonds.

He reached into his pocket and felt his fingers brush over the design, a perfect recreation of the namesake Hokusai Wave.

“Does it look okay?” Yuuri said quietly, his eyes downcast. Clearly, he’d taken Victor’s silence for something it wasn’t.

“You look absolutely stunning,” he replied. He was rewarded with warm brown eyes darting up to meet his, a shine to them that wasn’t there before.

“...Oh.”

Victor had to refrain from shaking his head. Only Yuuri would react that way to such a compliment. He stood from the bed and crossed to meet him, his hands settling lightly upon his shoulders.

“Does it fit all right?” he asked, mostly so he had a reason to run his hands down the seam, trailing from shoulders down to his wrists, where he tentatively took Yuuri’s hands.

“It’s perfect, honestly. I’m just not sure how well it suits me.”

Victor reached up, tipping his drooping chin upwards until his eyes raised up. He gave him a smile.
“I’m serious, you look wonderful, Yuuri. And I’m not just talking about the suit, but…” he lifted his hand up to tuck a stray piece of gelled hair back behind Yuuri’s ear and the earpiece of his glasses, “the whole package.”

Yuuri’s cheeks pinked and Victor wondered how much he too must be blushing. Before he could talk himself out of it, he reached into his pocket and pulled out the brooch.

He swore Yuuri let out a little gasp as the glint of gold and blue came into view, but perhaps he was just hopeful. He held it out, palm up, waiting for Yuuri to take it.

“I thought you might need a little something else for it.”

“Victor…”

Well, he didn’t sound mad. His fingertips ghosted over design and Victor found himself rambling to hide his nerves.

“I uh...usually wear a snowflake brooch when I’m wearing a suit, so I thought perhaps you’d like something as well and Garude Paris had an entire Hokusai line and...well,” he cleared his throat, “I thought you’d like it.”

Yuuri picked it up, wrapping it gently in his hand and pressing it over his heart. His smile made every penny of the three thousand dollars it cost more than worth it.

“Thank you. I love it.”

“May I?” Victor asked, extending a hand.

Yuuri nodded, handing it back over and allowing Victor to pin it to his lapel. He had barely taken a step back when suddenly, Yuuri moved forward, wrapping him in a hug.

“Really. Thank you.”
Victor smiled against his hair, the smell of his hair gel already something he knew well. He brought his arms up and returned the embrace, settling into the familiar warmth that was Yuuri’s arms.

Chris was right. He could do this. Tonight was going to be fine.

To call the place a restaurant, as if it was just that, would be to do it a disservice. Beijing Tower, with its large golden dragons at the base, and its restaurant two hundred and twenty-one meters from the ground, was a spectacle.

The tower looked as if it had a beautiful golden lantern hanging from it, the large windows of the observation level glinting in the night sky as it revolved slowly around, giving those seated within a complete view of the city. Yuuri was already thoroughly impressed before they even made it up the elevators to the dining area, and by the time he reached their party’s table, he’d probably excitedly pointed out some new detail to Victor at least five times.

For his part, Victor too seemed to be equally excited.

“Ice sculptures at the buffet and fish tanks?” Victor shook his head, but he was all smiles. “I thought you said Phichit was worried about money.”

Yuuri, who had brought that up to ease his nerves about sharing a room, rubbed the back of his head. “Guang Hong apparently got some discount because he helped rescue some bigshot who owns this place.

“Ah.”

“There they are!” Yuuri waved across the room towards Phichit and the others.

They quickly crossed the space and was met with a hug from Phichit. “Look at you, hot stuff!”

Yuuri gave his shoulder a gentle shove. “Oh hush.”
“No really, Victor, I give you my word as Yuuri’s best friend- thank you for buying him a suit that fits him.”

“Phichit!”

“Your other suits are too big in the shoulders and your pants aren’t tight enough.”

“I don’t want my pants tight!”

Victor just laughed. “Well, I can’t say I’m complaining.”

Yuuri froze, turning to Victor with widened eyes. But he just tapped a finger to his chin and gave him a wink.

“I told you, you look stunning.”

Phichit nudged Yuuri back at that, and raised his eyebrows meaningfully.

Yuuri promptly changed the subject.

“And we should probably properly introduce ourselves. Victor, this is Guang Hong Ji. He works here in China. You know Georgi, of course. And…”

He’d met the American a few times, but it was mostly in passing during the UAT trials. All he knew from Phichit was that he and Guang Hong were close and so he’d been invited.

“Leo de la Iglesia,” he finished, extending a hand with a warm smile. In a whisper he added, “Or Tiempo, if you prefer.”

Victor took his hand, shook it and then turned to do the same with Guang Hong. Georgi gave Victor a knowing nod and Yuuri couldn’t help but notice that he’d shot a look at him when he did so.
They settled themselves at the table, and Yuuri noticed immediately that Guang Hong and Leo both were pretty obviously staring at Victor. He bit back a laugh. Only a month ago, he would have been the same, starstruck in the presence of the Winter Monsoon.

Now, well...he wasn’t sure how he’d gotten to where he was now. There, with Victor as his date and wearing a fancy suit that Victor had gifted him. It was so strange to think about it, so he did his best to not do so. It only caused his nerves to bubble to the surface, and that was the last thing he wanted right now.

“Okay,” Phichit announced loudly. “We’re getting some champagne to celebrate Yuuri saving our sorry asses. Guang Hong, I think you’re the only one that leaves out. You okay with that?”

Guang Hong nodded. Leo piped up, “I’ll stick to the orange soda with him. I’m still not legal back home.”

Yuuri gave Phichit a look, but let his friend go about casually getting him a glass anyways.

Although, after having the oddball group raise a toast in his name, Yuuri had to admit he was pretty thankful for that little rush of alcohol against the grating insecurities rattling around his mind.

They fell into some idle chatter, clearly waiting for the waiters to come and get orders taken before they started talking at all about their hero work. Once their meals had arrived and their waiters had disappeared around the corner to another table, Guang Hong finally broke the ice.

“Um...Mr. Nikiforov?”

He smiled gently. “You can call me Victor. We’re all in the same line of work, so no need for formalities.”

Guang Hong’s posture eased at that. “Oh. Okay. Victor? I just wanted to say, I really admire what you do. And it’s an honor to meet you.”

Yuuri couldn’t miss how genuinely touched Victor seemed at the sentiment.
“I hear your work is what we have to thank for this lovely location for our party. That’s pretty impressive, as defensive quirks can be quite tricky to master at such a young age.”

The boy blushed at the compliment, but earned an I-told-you-so elbow in the side from Leo.

“Oh. T-Thank you.”

“And Leo?” Victor asked. He looked up. “I want you to know that I think you should have placed higher at the second trial. Your caution during the fourth task should have earned more points than the excess damage those who achieved the goal faster did. Part of the changes I’ve suggested to the IHU were because of their poor scoring of you during that trial.”

Leo blinked, mouth agape, until Guang Hong returned the elbow to his side. “I’m...wow. Thanks. You’re not exactly what I expected, if you don’t mind me saying. In a good way, of course.”

Victor seemed embarrassed by the sentiment and Yuuri couldn’t help but find his expression at it positively adorable. It was nice, to see Victor more at ease around his peers.

There was a loud sniff, and as expected, everyone’s attention shifted to Georgi.

Georgi was, well a mess was a nice way of putting it. Apparently he’d intended to come with his girlfriend, Anya, but he’d found out she’d started seeing someone else. His eyes either had a dark puffiness around them from his usual Caradoc makeup or from crying, Yuuri wasn’t sure.

“Ah, and I doubt you have anything nice to say to me, Victor. You never do.”

Victor sighed. “Georgi, I will tell you what I always have. You have an amazing quirk and if you could just focus, I think you’d be one of the best out there. I mean that.”

He seemed to consider this. “It is hard to find your inner calm, when your heart is shattered into pieces. See, even you shine brighter with love in your heart.”

Victor about choked on his drink. “Georgi…”
“Hush. You cannot lie to me about matters of the heart. It's a good look for you, Victor. If only I could be equally blessed.”

Yuuri downed the rest of his glass on seeing Phichit once again shooting him a look out of the corner of his eye. Okay, so maybe, just maybe, other people could see something. But, still…

“So, any praise for me, since you’re handing it out, Victor?” Phichit teased.

Yuuri inwardly breathed a sigh of relief. If he had to sit here and listen to Georgi speculate about Victor and love, he might just die of embarrassment.

“You mean aside for my eternal thanks for being Yuuri’s number one supporter all these years?” Victor teased back, clearly also relieved for the shift of subject.

Phichit laughed. “Okay, you got me there.”

“But, with the new scoring in place to balance things out, I will say. I do believe you have a good chance of making the team if you devote yourself to your work as passionately as you did this last year. I don’t think there was a single major incident in your whole country that went without your help and that is exactly what every hero should strive for.”

It was a rarity, but Victor had somehow found just the way to render Phichit speechless. He gaped, then turned to Yuuri with a grin.

“Oh I like him, you’d better keep him.”

Everyone at the table laughed at that.

And perhaps it was that, or the sips into his second glass, but Yuuri felt all the nerves and worries slowly unfurling from his shoulders. To see Victor amongst his friends, to see how sweet he could be to them, somehow made all the things he’d said to Yuuri mean all that much more.
Because he could tell each and every word he told them was the truth, and if that was so, then perhaps all the things he’d told Yuuri were equally true.

His hand drifted up to his lapel, his fingers gently clasping the brooch where it rested over his heart.

To have been given something clearly so valuable, but made in the iconic wave of his heroic namesake, was something Yuuri thought he might not ever be able to articulate in words. It made his chest swell with a warm mixture of happiness, pride and love. He glanced over at the little golden snowflake, its gemstones all a glitter, where it rested over Victor’s heart.

It was silly to think so, but Yuuri felt like somehow it was like having a piece of something linking them together. Tying his heart to Victor’s. One little snowflake and one little wave, each sparkling in the lights as if they were sending messages back and forth.

As if to say, I’m here. Right beside you. Always.

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It was right as Georgi had started in on another poetic ramble about lost love that Victor heard it. A very distinct sound and something he’d grown very accustomed to hearing coming from his own phone over the years.

Namely, the alarm that United Alliance Team members heard when the IHU had an emergency.

But the alarm wasn’t coming from their table and Victor knew it had to mean someone who was on the UAT was there in the restaurant.

“Excuse me a moment, I’ll be right back.” Yuuri shot him a worried look and he gave a smile back. There was no need to worry anyone else until he could figure out why he could hear this alarm.

His eyes scanned the cluster of people dining at other tables and finally, he noticed one just almost out of eyesight, where a brown haired man sat with another man; one with a rather distinctive blonde-brown undercut. And although the alarm had stopped, he knew that was the table it came from.
He crossed the room as swiftly and nonchalantly as possible and could see the gentleman’s eyes widen with recognition.

Before he could say a word, Victor put a firm hand down on a familiar shoulder.

“Well well, what are you doing here?”

Chris, at least, had the dignity to look surprised. “Oh Victor, wow, small world huh?”

“Chris…”

He laughed. “Okay, you’re totally not going to buy that we were just in the neighborhood, are you?”

“No.”

“Hayami was here on business?”

Victor flicked his eyes up to the other man. Well, Chris had said he found the new Hero Liaisons Officer attractive...

“Try again.”

Hayami, for his part, was just shaking his head. Victor suspected he knew that Chris’s plan was going to fail.

“Well, okay. I really wanted to make sure you were doing okay, didn’t have plans for tonight and decided- why the hell not?”

“So you’re spying on me?”

Chris sighed. “Victor, spying makes it sound bad. I’m here on observation to ensure that a certain
date is going okay.”

Victor crossed his arms, but found he honestly couldn’t be that mad. It wasn’t every day you had a friend willing to fly halfway across the globe just to eavesdrop on your date.

“It was going quite well, as I’m sure you’ve noticed while watching. But I happened to overhear a certain alarm and I know exactly what that means. So…what’s going on, Chris?”

Chris frowned, clearly not happy to discover that’s why Victor found him.

“It’s nothing.”

“Chris, that alarm is never nothing.”

“…there was a villain breakout.”

Victor’s breath caught.

“Don’t freak out, it’s not him.”

He exhaled in relief. “Oh. Then who?”

“They haven’t given specifics yet, just what facility and how many. It was a lower security place, so we’re not talking anyone over level two probably. I’m not worrying about it and neither should you.”

Victor frowned. Something, a tug in his gut that he knew meant he could just sense something was wrong, told him this wasn’t something to be ignored.

“Chris, Hayami- nice to meet you, by the way, sorry for the circumstances- why don’t you come join us at our table? That way if there’s any important further alerts all of us here can be aware.”
Chris sighed but stood up as he did so. “It’s probably nothing, Victor.”

Victor knew that ‘nothing’ never set him on edge like this.

“Let’s hope you’re right.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all as always for supporting me! <3 I hope to be able to keep on schedule next week and still update, but if I'm unable to it's because I've got a convention and I'm sewing last minute cosplay lol. Things will definitely be back on schedule no matter what by the 24th-25th. Thank you for your patience!

Also, here's this sweet tower in Beijing. Seriously super cool place that I totally put on my bucket list of places to go someday:

http://www.ebeijing.gov.cn/Elementals/eBeijing_Neighbourhood/t1142207.htm

And the brooches:
https://tinyurl.com/l2hpn25
Sorry for the delay, but we're back now and hopefully back on schedule going forward. Thank you all, as always, for all your support!

Also, check out this amazing piece of art that I got from Sidhe! https://sidhedraws.tumblr.com/post/161025077165/my-hero-yuuri-comission-for-aboreros-au

International Hero Union Official File

**Hero ID #:** TI0802

**Civilian Name:** Leo de la Iglesia

**Superhero Name:** Tiempo

**Masked Status:** Masked

**Associated National Hero Union:** United States Hero Association

**National Hero Ranking:** 10

**Quirk:** Acoustikinesis

**Range of Quirk Use:** User is able to solidify sound waves, using them as everything from projectile weapons to shields. The louder the sound, the larger the manifestation of it in solid form.

There had been something uneasy in the way Victor had excused himself from the table, a hint of worry that had spiked suddenly that Yuuri couldn’t pinpoint the exact reason for.

He wouldn’t consider himself an expert on Victor and his mannerisms, far from it actually, but he was pretty certain that something had happened to drive a wedge of worry into Victor. Yuuri tried to keep up with the table’s conversation, but he found his eyes drifting in the direction Victor had gone.

Something wasn’t right.

“Yuuri, what’s up?” Phichit whispered, not wanting to interrupt Georgi’s lament.
He brought his eyes back to his friend, offering a small smile. “Just worried.”

Phichit huffed. “About Victor? Because I honestly think you have nothing to worry about there.”

Yuuri blinked.

“Come on, he’s head over heels for you, Yuuri. He offered you a bite of food off his fork and I thought Georgi was going to swoon because it was so romantic.”

Yuuri chuckled. He’d almost forgotten his other worries, but if the amount of times Phichit’s eyebrows had disappeared up under his bangs was anything to go by, those concerns were indeed nothing to worry about.

As crazy as that was to even consider.

“I...Okay, you’ve got me there. I really do not have an argument against that.”

Phichit reached over, his fingers tracing the outline of the brooch gleaming on Yuuri’s chest.

“And, I still haven’t had the chance to ask about this.”

Yuuri could feel the warmth creep into his cheeks, a little tendril of pride mixed in with his embarrassment at having attention drawn to it.

“It was a gift,” he managed, not really sure how else to express all that it meant to him.

Phichit seemed to glean a hint of it though, his smile softening and his tone a little less teasing. “I’m going to have to get myself a Russian boyfriend. I think I could stand to be a little spoiled.”

Yuuri snorted. “I hear Georgi’s available,” he whispered.
Phichit seemed to consider this for a moment before quietly whispering back, “Boy’s gotta work on his eyeliner skills first.”

They laughed together, all Yuuri’s worries long forgotten. Or, at least, momentarily so.

“Hey, is that Smolder?” Leo’s voice cut in.

Yuuri and Phichit quickly turned around, and sure enough, a very familiar person was walking alongside Victor and another man. Yuuri’s heart promptly lodged itself against his ribcage, the air suddenly seeming far too thin to breathe.

Why was a member of the UAT here now?

Victor seemed to notice his piercing stare, and the question attached to it, for he looked up at that and offered a smile. It was forced, Yuuri noted.

“So, guess who had to eavesdrop on our little party because they, as always, cannot stand to be left out…”

Leo and Guang Hong were starstruck all over again, and Phichit had already started snapping photos. Georgi offered a melancholy wave.

Their surprise guest flashed a smile, all charisma and charm. “Sorry sorry! It’s not the same at HQ without Victor around and I figured I’d surprise him by dropping in. Is it alright if I crash your little party?”

Phichit grinned back. “Photos are going on the internet, but I highly doubt the Smolder cares about that.”

“I’d say make sure you get my good side, but that’s every side I have to offer,” he replied with a wink.
Yuuri, still feeling unsettled, darted his eyes back to Victor and the other man with them.

“Oh, sorry, this is Christophe Giacometti, who I’m sure you all know as Smolder. And Hayami Masumi, our new Hero Liaisons Officer with the IHU.”

“A pleasure to meet all of you,” Hayami said giving them all a smile.

Yuuri bit his lip, then before he could stop himself, went ahead with what was on his mind, “Is everything alright?”

He asked them all, but his eyes focused solely on Victor.

Victor’s smile wavered, finally falling to a more neutral expression. “There was a breakout at one of the holding facilities…”

Yuuri stood abruptly from his chair and found himself at Victor’s side before he even realized he had moved. Yuri’s parting warning rang in his head.

“Did he…”

Genuine relief eased its way onto Victor’s features, his hand reaching out to catch up Yuuri’s in its grasp. “No, it wasn’t his facility. Mostly level two and under villains, but a few others. Thankfully Chris is here now, so if the IHU issues any warnings we can all actually get them.”

Yuuri let his worry slowly settle back into his chest, the tension coiling tight and still waiting as if it knew something else had to be coming. He knew Victor could sense it too, could feel his tense muscles through the hand he held. A single level two villain wouldn’t dare try something with the current array of heroes present, but a group of them might.

“Wait, there was a warning issued?” Phichit asked, looking at his phone perplexed.

Victor frowned. “Not to us. Just the UAT. Apparently the IHU doesn’t think we’re important enough.”
Chris seemed surprised to hear this as well. “Hold on, they still haven’t sent out a wide alert?”

All the heroes at the table looked to their phones, but there was nothing. Chris sighed.

“Shit. Victor, this is worse than we thought.”

“I know,” he replied, his hand tightening its hold on Yuuri’s as if it was all that was keeping him calm. “I suspected that the UAT was given some information first, but a villain breakout should not be classified to just the team. Every hero should be notified in events like this.”

Hesitantly Leo spoke up. “It happened with the Inferno incident as well. We had no information, just a notice that we shouldn’t do anything or we’d get in trouble. If the guy hadn’t been livestreaming it, I wouldn’t have had any idea what was going on and…” He trailed off as his eyes locked with Guang Hong’s. “I would have come to help if I’d known. I would have been there.”

An uneasy quiet settled over the group, Yuuri certain that each of them was trying to digest this information. The IHU was keeping intel from them. How could they be anything but outraged?

“Looks like I’m going to have some work to do when we get back to Barcelona,” Hayami said solemnly.

“Okay, okay. Let’s put business aside for the night,” Chris stated firmly. “I’ll keep you all up to date on whatever the IHU doesn’t tell you guys and Hayami will get this fixed first thing when we get back. We aren’t putting up with their bullshit anymore.”

He crossed the gap between them and threw an arm around Yuuri’s shoulders.

“If I’m not mistaken, we’re here to celebrate you, am I right?”

Yuuri felt the twinge in Victor’s grip and silently wondered if he was trying to resist the urge to shove Chris away. But, that would be ridiculous.
“Something like that,” he replied quietly.

Chris chuckled. “Oh you are cute.” He glanced across to Victor and grinned. “I’m incredibly jealous of you, just so you know.”

That finally got Victor’s expression to crack, a warm smile settling on his lips as he very gently prodded the arm Chris had around Yuuri.

“Then hands to yourself, please.”

He pouted melodramatically. “Someone doesn’t like to share…”

“Chris…”

He gave Yuuri’s shoulders a lingering squeeze before finally withdrawing his arm. Yuuri bit back a smile himself, but Phichit was shooting him the most knowing look. The iconic Chulanont-I-told-you-so look.

Yuuri found he really couldn’t argue this at all. Somehow, though he really had no idea how in the world it could be possibly happening, he had the attention of the top two heroes.

No, he corrected after a moment, they weren’t the top two anymore.

It was strange enough to think about Chris and Victor fawning over him, but adding in the fact that the top ranked hero in the world was currently himself was almost too much. He’d swear it was a dream, but Yuuri doubted even his dreams would be this wonderful. Maybe that’s why he had a sinking feeling that something was going to go wrong…

His anxiety could never handle a good thing happening without promptly reminding him that something terrible was bound to happen next.

“Yuuri,” Victor’s soft voice cut into his thoughts.
He glanced up, Victor’s expression gentle and reassuring.

“No matter what happens, we’ll handle it, okay? Let’s not dwell on it.”

He could tell that Victor was trying to convince himself of his own words, could still feel the tension in his grip. But somehow in sharing it aloud with Yuuri, it made both of them believe it a little more.

“Okay.”

They settled back down, Chris and Hayami pulling over a small table and adjoining it with the rest of the group’s table. Slowly, they allowed the tense atmosphere to fade away, everyone chattering and in good spirits.

Phichit seemed to realize that Yuuri was still a bit on edge and finally reached over to tug on his sleeve.

“Come with me to the bathroom.”

“What, why?”

He leveled him a look.

“Okay, okay.” Yuuri turned to the table. “We’ll be right back.”

On noticing him stand up with Phichit, Chris shot Victor a look. Yuuri had a suspicion that he wasn’t the only person about to get an earful from a friend.

Phichit steered him past other tables, the elaborate buffet table, and around the corner from one of the fish tanks. There wasn’t anyone seated nearby and it left them mostly alone outside the waiter bustling past from time to time.

As always, Phichit cut right to the chase.
“Okay, talk to me. What’s going on? Both you and Victor are far too tense and are not enjoying this all of a sudden.”

Yuuri ducked his head. “It’s nothing.”

Phichit threw his hands up in the air. “It’s nothing. Please, Yuuri. You know I’m not going to buy that. Define this ‘nothing,’ okay?”

He sighed, trying to put his odd mixture of emotions into words. “Don’t you find the fact Chris is suddenly here a little weird?”

“Considering that this is the guy that flew halfway across the world last year enter a swimsuit contest last minute just to show-up the person who cheated on him, no not really. He’s pretty...over the top, Yuuri.”

Yuuri frowned. “I’m probably just overthinking things. Trying to find something wrong so I can make myself miserable, so when Victor decides that we shouldn’t date further I can blame it on the fact I was being distant all night instead of me actually trying and then…”

“Stop, stop, Yuuri, stop!”

He took a deep breath, trying to calm himself.

“Yuuri, come on,” he said softly, his hands coming to rest warm on his shoulders. “I’m not going to let you self destruct. I care about you far too much to let you do that, okay? So let’s get this dealt with so you can go back to having an amazingly unforgettable night.”

“I just feel like there’s something wrong. I can’t justify it. But, Victor’s tense too and it’s either because he is uncomfortable with me or he thinks something is off as well.”

“Well, I can tell you it is definitely not the first one. I don’t think I’ve seen Victor look this content in ages, despite the fact his face is like 99.9% of video footage taken of heroes. And trust me, I know my hero videos. If I wasn’t having to watch my camera angles for Leo and Guang Hong’s sake I’d be liveblogging this whole thing just so I could get this rare footage of Victor fucking Nikiforov
being madly in love with my best friend out there in the world. Yuuri, if you think something is
wrong, because that’s your gut instinct as a hero- okay, that’s cool. We’ll root whatever it is out. But
I can tell you, there is nothing wrong on the Victor front. I give you my word.”

Yuuri let that sink in, trying to wrap his mind around it. If all the alarms and warnings screaming in
his mind weren’t because of Victor, then it could only mean something indeed was wrong. And it
meant that Victor was probably on edge because whatever it was bothered him as well.

He closed his eyes, trying to calm his thoughts so he could focus.

If the problem wasn’t Victor, then what was it?

Hayami was a natural at his job, already asking for suggestions from the others and letting each of
them fully explain their job, their ideas, and their hopes for the IHU going forward. It really put
Victor at ease, knowing that at least someone in the IHU was actively working to turn things around
for the better.

As Yuuri followed Phichit away, Chris promptly slid over into the open seat beside Victor.

“So...please tell me I’m not the reason the mood just went sour between you two. It was not my
intent to ruin your date,” he murmured.

Victor shook his head. “No. I can’t speak for Yuuri, but I’m just worrying about everything else right
now.”

Chris sighed, leaning closer to Victor and keeping his voice low. “Yeah, I’m pretty pissed off over
this selective warning bullshit too. Like, I knew we were getting some favoritism, but this is worse
than that. As it is, even the heroes near the facility don’t know, yet we do. What good is that
supposed to do?”

“It’s supposed to keep the UAT in the limelight even when other heroes could have easily stepped in
and handled it. It’s...” Victor sat his glass back down, the outside of it frosting over with his touch.
“Infuriating. Here we are with three heroes who could have easily been seriously injured by Inferno,
but the only people who even knew were thousands of miles away. This is life or death, we can’t be
playing favorites at times like this.”
“I never asked, how did Katsuki know?”

“Phichit,” he replied, his eyes darting over to the seat the man had vacated “They’d devised a system to warn one another if the other was in need of help.”

Chris sucked in a sharp breath. “So if Katsuki hadn’t acted immediately, some of these guys with us…”

“Might not be alive.”

“Shit.”

“The strike team would have possibly been too late.”

They both fell silent at that, their eyes skimming from Phichit’s chair over to Georgi and Guang Hong. It was sickening to think that due to some stupid internal favoritism, one if not all of them might not be here.

“At least Hayami’s amazing,” Chris offered. “And I’m not just talking about looks.”

Victor allowed a hint of a smile at that. “I’m glad I did at least one thing right.”

“Victor…”

“No. Really. It shouldn’t have taken me this long to realize how many problems there are. I should have noticed sooner.”

“It’s hard to see it when you’re in the thick of it, Victor. We were blind, sure, but the IHU is why we were kept that way.”

“I suppose.”
“Stop blaming yourself, okay? You’re doing your damnedest to fix every little thing that we find out is fucked up. And hell, I know there’s been talk of favoritism with the new system since you and Katsuki are so close, but like I said in that interview two days ago- there’s no denying that your system is fair. Katsuki is ranked first because he’s earned that spot. I haven’t seen anyone else kicking threat level fives in the face lately.”

It fell silent between them for a moment, the only conversation being Hayami still fielding ideas from the others at the table. Victor sighed.

“Anymore news from the IHU?”

Chris reached in his pocket and pulled out his phone. “No, but I can ask if it’ll make you stop worrying.”

Victor hated that it was nagging at him so much, but perhaps it was just what Yakov had drilled into his mind repeating itself over and over. They are always watching you, Victor. Every move. Always be prepared for an attack.

“I…”

“Say no more. I’ll put in a detail request right now. You, on the other hand, loosen up and have fun. It’s your big night out, live it up.”

Victor looked back in the direction Yuuri had gone and was surprised to see him returning right then with Phichit. He offered a soft smile and Victor couldn’t help but smile back.

“I should have known you were coming back with the goo-goo eyes someone’s making,” Chris quipped to Yuuri as he slid back out of his chair.

Yuuri bit his lip, and Victor wondered if he was trying not to laugh. It was adorable.

“Miss me?” he teased.
Victor was sure his heart skipped a beat. “Maybe.”

Phichit sat back down across from Yuuri and laughed. “It was barely any time at all, you two.”

Yuuri darted his eyes back away at that, but the little smirk on his lips was all Victor needed to know he was also a little bit happier now that they were both near again.

It was strange. To feel like having one person close made everything better just by their being there. The worries and frustrations that had been enveloping him were quickly pushed aside, replaced by a warmth and calm. Victor had never had something like this, a person who he felt he could return to in order to find himself.

It was nice.

“Oh, not to derail things, but Leo I need your mad skills,” Phichit spoke up. “I want all the info on prisoner transfers from that facility in the last two days.”

Victor’s eyes darted up, looking to Phichit then to Leo. But it was Yuuri who spoke up first.

“Phichit found some videos and we think we’ve got a lead on our escapees.”

Chris let out a low whistle. “Damn, fuck the IHU, we’ve got our own little squad here. What have we got? Because I still haven’t heard back.”

“It was Yuuri’s idea,” Phichit began, causing his friend to blush at the attention. “He asked if I could find any video of what happened. And well,” he held up his phone with a grin, “have I got you covered there.”

Everyone at the table leaned in to get a closer look, even Georgi seemed to snap out of his despondency some at the unfolding mystery before them. Sure enough, there was CCTV footage from both the facility’s security feeds and some close by locations that were also monitored.

“That time stamp…”
“Ah, good catch, Guang Hong,” Phichit said pausing one of the videos. “This was from two days ago, when a smoke bomb went off.”

“Someone got out before today?” Chris asked, clearly shocked. “Why didn’t the IHU tell anyone that?”

“They probably wanted to clean up their own mess and keep it quiet,” Hayami muttered. “A lot of people in the security sector feel like their work has been upstaged by heroes and they consider it a matter of pride to handle incidents like this themselves.”

“A smoke screen would not cause damage, but,” Georgi said with flick of the wrist, conjuring up his own little wisp of smoke, “is often used to distract others from a true intent. It is the veil that hides the truth, one that we must pierce in order to find our answers.”

The group all nodded their agreement at that.

“Two days ago, there was a prisoner transfer,” Leo said, his fingers quickly skimming over his phone. “They left the facility ten minutes before the time on the footage.”

“So if the smoke bomb is the distraction, what was it distracting from?” Guang Hong asked.

“There was an actual bomb today, and that’s what allowed several prisoners to escape,” Yuuri began quietly. “But, what if that was also a distraction? What if they wanted the IHU to focus on the large escape and hopefully not notice that someone else got out two days ago?”

They fell silent, but as he let that settle in his mind, Victor suddenly realized exactly what was being hidden.

“Did the prisoner that was transfered ever arrive at the other facility?” He murmured.

Leo was frantically typing away on his phone, his brow furrowed. “I cannot find any record of anyone receiving a prisoner two days ago. One left, but no one took that prisoner in.”
Chris swore. Phichit held up a cropped image from the grainy CCTV footage.

“This is our escapee. Can anyone recognize him?”

Suddenly, Victor felt Yuuri’s hand grasp at his sleeve. He looked over to him.

“From the banquet,” he said quietly. “The bomber from the banquet.”

Chris and Victor looked closer, realization dawning on both of their faces.

“That’s him.”

“But where is he now?”

Yuuri’s hand slid down until he could clasp Victor’s hand. He was tense, but eyes were piercing.

“Here.”

There was quite an array of expletives and exclamations at the claim, but Victor found he couldn’t find one reason to doubt Yuuri’s intuition.

“How?”

“Why here?”

Yuuri glanced over to Hayami. “They know we’re here, because I’m going to guess you told some people at work where you were going tonight.”

That, on the other hand, Victor was not prepared for. Was Yuuri seriously implying that someone within the IHU was actively assisting the villain?

“I did, but why would that get back to this guy?”
Yuuri frowned. “I thought it was strange already when the bomber made it into the banquet. You know everyone is screened very tightly at events like that, but he still made it in. So I’m going to guess he has some connection that allowed him to slip past.”

“And he’s headed here because we’re here, right?” Victor added.

He nodded. “He wasn’t a villain that I was familiar with from before, had any of you encountered him?”

No one had.

“So revenge then?” Chris asked.

“That’s my guess,” Yuuri stated. “Or because he wants to attack as many heroes at once as possible and so he’s targeting gatherings where our guards would be down.”

“Should we evacuate the place?” Phichit asked.

Yuuri shook his head. “I suspect if he broke out two days ago, whatever he has planned is already in place. And I bet this time, he was smart enough to make sure all the exits are blocked off.”

“We can’t just wait until he tries something though, there’s civilians here,” Guang Hong noted.

“I think the best course of action is to try and figure out what he has rigged up, keep everyone safely away from it until we verify the ways out are blocked, and then find another way to get everyone evacuated. We have a different set of heroes here than last time, and that’s going to be a weakness on his end. I hate to say it, but it might be best if we split up for a moment,” Victor explained.

Everyone looked to Victor and he could feel Yuuri’s hand tighten its grip.

Quietly, Yuuri replied, “I agree. Victor?”
He looked to him, ready to follow wherever he lead.

“I want you and Chris to go check the stairwell.”

Victor blinked. He wanted...to split up? Why would he...

“I think he’s going to keep an eye on the three of us,” Yuuri noted, pointing to himself, Chris and Victor. “So we need to split up. Also, you two have the best chance of handling anything that might be laid out to block the exit there.”

“You wouldn’t rather go with him?” Chris offered.

Yuuri shook his head, looking to Victor with a resolute calm. “I’ll go with Phichit to the elevators, Georgi- find a way to get Leo and Guang Hong up to the observation level above us without using the stairs or elevators. And Hayami, I want you to talk to the staff and see if there’s been anything suspicious noted. We’ll all meet back here or phone someone if we discover anything.”

One by one, everyone stood and gathered with their group to leave, all of them talking amongst themselves. Victor stayed seated, still staring at Yuuri as if he was suddenly lost.

He sighed, giving Victor’s hand a squeeze. “No matter what happens, we’ll handle it. I’m counting on you, okay?”

Once again, Yuuri was there with reassurances and confidence when Victor felt he needed it the most. Echoing his own words back with soft smile and a gentle look as if he was trying to get Victor to understand that this decision was not because he wanted to separate, but due to the necessity of the circumstances.

Victor somehow found his footing, rising to stand alongside Yuuri, their hands still clasped tightly together. “Okay. Don’t be long.”

“Okay.”

He started to pull away, then at the last moment just as their fingertips had mere centimeters left that
they touched, he rushed forward. Enveloping Victor in an embrace and pulling him close.

“Stay safe,” he murmured so quiet Victor almost didn’t hear it.

Victor hugged him back. “You too, Yuuri.”

If Yuuri had doubted Victor’s affections before, he found that he couldn’t now.

Maybe it was in the way his fingers lingered as their hands drew apart, trying to cling to those last few precious centimeters of contact. Or perhaps it was that pleading expression, a mixture of confusion and hurt, when Yuuri suggested he go with Chris the opposite direction. Even as they drew away from their embrace, it seemed like Victor wanted to hold on all the more.

So despite how many warnings and worries clouded his mind, on one thing it was certain. Victor truly did like him. It was a terrifyingly wonderful thought.

And perhaps this realization was why it was so incredibly hard to tell Victor to go the other way. Yuuri had a feeling, though how much of it was his anxiety and how much was intuition he couldn’t tell, that if this bomber was here he was after one person.

Him.

The news both before and after his unmasking had made it very clear that it was Yuuri’s quick thinking that thwarted the bombing at the banquet. If the bomber wanted to get revenge, it was easy to single out his target.

Phichit seemed to know, though he didn’t say anything until they were safely out of earshot.

“You know you could have gone with him, right?”

Yuuri frowned but didn’t reply, just kept rushing faster towards the elevators at the center of the tower.
“Yuuri,” Phichit finally stopped him. “Yuuri, come on, talk to me.”

He sighed. “If that bomber is here to get revenge, then I don’t want anyone else to get hurt. This is between him and me.”

“So you sent Victor away?”

“The bomb in the stairwell will be enough to damage it but it should be something Victor could withstand by using his quirk to shield them. Chris can then melt their way out once the debris settles.”

“And you’re walking straight into a trap? Am I supposed to let you?”

“Phichit…”

“Am I?”

The piercing look from Phichit was not one that Yuuri often saw, but he knew that it was rather serious if he did. He huffed.

“I’m hoping I’m wrong, Phichit. But if I’m not, then I’d rest easier knowing he’s safe. Your quirk can pause events long enough to get yourself to safety, but Victor can’t. And…well I knew neither of you would let me go alone.”

This seemed to appease Phichit some, as the tension in his posture eased. He threw his arms around Yuuri’s shoulders and leaned his head in, their foreheads bumping together.

“I’m not letting you do this alone, okay? Don’t you dare think I will.”

Yuuri nodded. “I know. I…I can’t say a lot, but I have my reasons for worrying about Victor, okay?”
“You mean aside from the part where you are madly in love with him, right?”

He laughed at that, the tension ebbing away. “Yes, although I suspect that’s part of it as well.”

“You, you know why you’re an amazing hero?”

Yuuri blinked, confused by the sudden question. “What?”

“Because you always think about the big picture, always worry about everyone else, put people where they’d be able to best help out. You’d make a great team leader, Yuuri.”

“Well, I don’t know about that…”

Phichit gave him a look he knew all too well meant that he should just accept the compliment and not overthink it.

“Thanks. I try.”

He gave his back a pat before he turned away, facing towards the elevators. “All right, ready to do this?”

Yuuri shrugged. “As ready as I’m going to be.”

They made their way down the hallway, finally entering the main foyer where the elevator was. Everything seemed in order, which only made Yuuri more on edge. He had the distinct impression that someone was watching them.

He gave a slight nod with Phichit to indicate this, and they both scanned the room one more time before turning towards the elevator.

Yuuri punched the button and was surprised when the doors opened right away as if they had been waiting for him. There, seated in the middle of the open elevator was a package. Yuuri and Phichit exchanged a look. Well, there was their suspicious package, but it wasn’t going to be this easy, was
Yuuri walked towards it, Phichit following, stepping from the landing into the elevator. He’d just crossed over the small gap between floor and elevator when he heard it, the slight metallic grating coming from above him.

He glanced up, his eyes catching immediately on the barrel of a gun jammed in the gap above between the landing doors and the top of the elevator car.

A gunshot rang out.

“Phichit, freeze now!”

Yuuri saw the flash of Phichit’s camera go off and used that brief moment to shove his friend back out of the elevator and into the hallway.

The elevator doors slid closed.

Yuuri slammed the button to open the doors, but there was a grinding noise and a dull metal thud in reply. He could hear who he could only assume was the villain on the roof of the elevator car laughing.

*Shit.*

He scrambled for the doors, his fingers seeking purchase on small lip of metal between them. But no matter how hard he pulled, they wouldn’t budge more than an inch or two.

“Phichit! Phichit!”

Yuuri slammed on the doors.

“I’m okay!” He heard the voice call back. “I froze the bullet in time!”
Yuuri felt slightly calmer on hearing that. “Okay. Phichit, can you open the doors?”

He could hear him mashing the button, then like he had, trying his best to muscle the landing doors open. It wouldn’t budge.

“Yuuri, it’s stuck.”

“No,” he said slumping against the door. “He was on the roof of the car, I think he tampered with it somehow.”

“Shit. Is that really a bomb in there?”

Yuuri looked across the elevator to the package; slowly and unsteadily, he got to his feet and walked closer to it.

It was a paper bag with two handles, and inside was what was clearly a bomb, its digital timepiece reading a countdown of one hour and some seconds. Yuuri looked to his phone. It was just past eleven. The bomb would go off at midnight.

He was about to relay this information to Phichit when his eyes caught sight of the small note attached to the handle of one of the straps.

Yuuri reached out and started to tug it loose, thinking better of it when it caused the bag to rattle. Instead, he crouched beside it, a shaky hand resettling his glasses on his nose.

_Hokusai Wave, I know it will be you that finds this._

_Only you were smart enough to outthink me before, and only you stand a chance of finding this early on. If I’m right and you are reading this, then know that I have made sure that all methods of escape from the elevator have been destroyed. You can try them all you want, but the door restrictors on both the car and the landing have been broken and I have done the same to the top emergency hatch. You have only one chance to_
survive- be smart enough to defuse my bomb. Unlike you quirk-having bastards, I might only be an engineer, but I’ve made this bomb just for you. Don’t worry, I’ll keep your friends busy while you try and figure it out.

Let’s see how smart you quirked heroes really are.

Happy New Year.

-Countdown
Chapter Notes

I thank you all for putting up with my terrible terrible cliffhangers! Enjoy~!

International Hero Union Official File

Hero ID #: GP1226

Civilian Name: Georgi Popovich

Superhero Name: Caradoc

Masked Status: Unmasked (though always with heavy makeup)

Associated National Hero Union: Russian Hero Federation

National Hero Ranking: 09

Quirk: Reality Warper

Range of Quirk Use: Quirk enables user to conjure out of thin air anything he is able to dream up. Due to his theatrical nature, this often manifests in over the top ways. Many speculate that if he was under less emotional upheaval that with proper focus, he could potentially have one of the top quirks in the entire world.

There was an ice cold feeling of dread in Victor’s stomach.

It felt as if every step he took further away from the direction Yuuri went, the more worried he became. Chris noticed it right away, his sudden grip on Victor’s arm already alerting him to the fact that there’d be no getting out of this conversation.

“Victor, hey talk to me.”

He paused, hoping his face didn’t betray any of the emotions that had come over him.
“Yes?” The chill of his ice seemed to seep even into his words.

“Okay, Victor. You need to calm down.”

“I am calm.”

Chris gave him a look, the usual one he did when he knew Victor was bullshitting him.

“Look, you gotta admit if Katsuki’s thought this far ahead on what move that guy’s gonna make, he’s probably put us all right where we need to be. Which I get it, it’s hard. You aren’t exactly used to having someone you so fiercely want to protect, are you?”

Victor was certain his mask of calm shattered at that. As always, Chris saw right through it and called him out.

“Chris…”

He loosened his grip on Victor’s upper arm, giving him a pat before pulling his hand away. “But villains will prey upon that and use our emotions against us. You know I’m not the only hero who’s had a civilian they were dating get dragged into a fight. And with both of you being heroes, it’s pretty much inevitable that villains will use that to their advantage. Splitting up, while it sucks, might be best until we have a better idea what’s going on.”

Victor considered that, trying to weigh the logic against the countless inner alarms going off in his mind. While he could see exactly what Chris was saying, he still felt the strongest desire to turn around and go after Yuuri. Chris was right, he’d never had this sort of thing to deal with before.

Maybe that was because the last time someone he truly cared about had told him to run, he had. He’d regretted that decision every day since then, his parents and their brave smiles still something he could see so vividly in his mind even now.

“Victor, let’s just go check on the stairwell. Then if you want to go after him, I won’t stop you. I’m worried about Hayami as well. He’s not got a quirk and he’s no hero either. Yuuri’s gonna stand a better chance than him if stuff gets dicey.”
And although Victor knew that Yuuri too was quirkless, he had to agree that he was going to be far readier to handle a situation than a regular civilian. Yuuri’s lack of quirk if anything, Victor felt, made him stronger. It made him think about situations from a completely different angle than all the quirked heroes and it meant that in trying to think ahead, he had gotten impeccably good at predicting the next move an opponent would make.

At that, a moment of realization came over Victor. If Yuuri was reading the villain’s moves right, then he’d put everyone where they could best handle whatever he expected to be there. Victor looked to Chris, his mind now whirring with a new train of thought.

“There’s going to be a bomb in the stairwell,” he stated, his confidence in Yuuri’s intuition above all else.

Chris blinked. “Wait, what?”

“He sent each of us where we could handle the outcome. There’s three people that can quickly stop or shield sudden debris- myself, Guang Hong and Phichit. There’s one of those in each group.”

“So you think there’s a bomb in each of those places?”

“Yes. As he noted, the guy’s been out for two days so everything he has planned is probably all ready to go.”

Chris frowned, crossing his arms. “Then why haven’t they gone off yet?”

Victor thought that over, his mind quietly urging him to try and think about this the way Yuuri would. Yuuri would analyze the villain’s mindset and predict what he had planned.

“I bet they’re staggered,” Victor said as suddenly as the thought came to him. “I’m guessing two of them are smaller, to create panic, then one big one as a finale.”

“So who’s got the finale?”
He knew the answer, but he hesitated to say it.

“Shit. He took it, didn’t he?”

Victor sighed, his voice sounding shaky even to himself. “I-I believe so.”

Chris swore, running his hand up through his bangs. “Well fuck, that explains why you’re freaking out. Let’s get this stairwell bullshit dealt with then get back to Katsuki ASAP. If we’re lucky, we’ll get the drop on the guy, but I have a bad feeling he’s been keeping an eye on us all and is probably about to make things a little more exciting.”

“As always, I hate it when you’re right in these situations.”

That seemed to lighten the mood, even if very slightly. Chris cocked a grin

“Let’s go fuck shit up, Queen Elsa. Mr. Bomber isn’t gonna know what’s hit him once this group of heroes is done with him.”

And feeling a little more confident that they could indeed come out on top, Victor replied, “All right, Sailor Mars, I’ll be counting on your backup.”

Chris blinked, a smile slowly spreading across his face. “You’ve given me a nickname!”

Victor averted his eyes, suddenly feeling as if his spontaneous decision to tease back had backfired. But there was Chris’s arm snaking around his shoulders and giving him a loose hug.

“I owe Katsuki a drink, perhaps five. He’s been the best damn thing for you, you know that?”

At that Victor couldn’t help but smile. “He’s the best thing I didn’t ask for, but I’m so very lucky to have.”

“Can’t argue that. Let’s get this dealt with so you two can go back to your date.”
Victor nodded, trying his best to hold onto this little thread of confidence.

As they made their way towards the stairwells, they passed by the other three heroes preparing to go upstairs to the observation deck. Georgi’s melancholy seemed to have been put aside for the moment, his powerful and versatile quirk already hard at work. Victor knew, for Yakov had told him it thousands of times, that if Georgi could ever find some sort of focus, he’d be perhaps one of the strongest heroes out there. Problem was, he tended to let his personal emotions cloud his judgement.

Victor thought of his own heart, racing not because he was running, but because he was still so strongly yearning to be back by Yuuri’s side. He couldn’t afford to let his emotions get in the way in a dire situation like this.

“Victor, Chris!” Georgi called over. “Did you wish to suit up or are you unmasked heroes going for the suit and tie look tonight?”

He glanced to Chris, who was trying to stifle a laugh at seeing Georgi had already used his abilities to don his usual superhero gear; which meant he looked like he’d walked right out of a fantasy novel in purple wizard robes with a cloak made of thousands of black feathers.

Georgi had the power to conjure up whatever he pleased, and of course he made sure not a single detail of his ridiculous outfit was missing, even the rather dramatic use of eyeshadow. Although, Victor realized as an afterthought, it was thanks to his work that Guang Hong and Leo, two masked heroes, were able to don their costumes and masks before possibly getting outed.

“I think we’ll be fine, Georgi,” he replied. He’d never been extremely close to the other Russian hero, but he found himself oddly glad to see that someone he knew was well-trained in disaster situations would be with the two younger heroes of the bunch. “Just a heads up, I suspect there’ll be a bomb waiting for you up on the observation deck.”

He could see Leo and Guang Hong exchange a look at that. It was odd to see a group of heroes all in such vastly differing costumes. Perhaps it was due to all his years on the UAT, where everyone favored the sleek fit of the HeroTek wear. As it was, Guang Hong’s outfit was the closest to that, his black suit highlighted with a few accents of hot pink and his helmet most likely a repurposed motorcycle one. Leo, on the other hand, looked like he was ready for a rave. Cat-eared headphones with speakers inset in the ears, a boombox backpack and sneakers that also seemed to be packing their own speakers. The LEDs that flickered on all of his outfit matched the beat of the music the restaurant was playing overhead, Victor able to see the range of sound in both the shirt’s lights and the corner of the blue-lit visor Leo wore. It was him and Georgi, with their outfits completely lacking any sort of padding that Victor worried most about sending into range of a bomb.
“How big a bomb?” Guang Hong asked. “Because unless it’s large enough to take out the whole tower, I can probably handle it.”

Victor couldn’t see his expression through the black tinted helmet, but he had the distinct impression that the young hero was giving him a piercing stare, as if daring him to underestimate him. He chuckled. There were many things he needed to learn about the hero world, and perhaps, not underestimating his peers due to worry would be a good place to start.

“Sorry, I don’t mean to come across as if I’m giving out orders,” Victor tried. “We just realized Yuuri’s sent one person with shielding or pausing quirks to each location and suspect that’s why. I didn’t want anyone to get a rude surprise.”

That seemed to appease him, Guang Hong turning towards Georgi and Leo at that. “I want to try and find it immediately when we get upstairs, Leo use your sound to find it in the room. Georgi, conjure up some way to evacuate the people there. I’ll shield our side of the room just in case.”

Leo nodded, flipping a small switch on his arm band that caused a miniature keyboard of lights to flicker on. He punched in a few codes, glancing over to Victor as he did so. “Wanna know where your bomb is before we go?”

Victor looked over to Chris, both of them pleasantly surprised at how resourceful their young heroes were.

“You can do that?” Chris asked, but he was all smiles. “Shit and here Victor and I just have elemental powers. We’re missing out.”

Leo just smiled, warm and bright. “It’s not about what your quirk is, it’s all about how you use it. I spent years thinking mine was something else before I realized it wasn’t air but sound that I could control. Now, well…” He finished keying in another strand of numbers, his whole LED look suddenly flickering from soft blue over to green. “Let’s find ourselves some bombs in this place.”

*Ping. Ping. Ping.*

The sounds coming from Leo’s speakers sounded a lot like a submarine’s radar systems, and Victor realized that he was literally using it to trace the bombs with the small little waves of green that rippled out from it. After a few moments, Leo’s LEDs shifted to a orange and he pointed above
“There’s one up on the observation deck, far end, but there’s no people near it at this time. There’s one in the stairwell, in between this level and the observation deck. It seems the most likely to go off soon, the vibrations I got back from it seemed harsher.”

*And Yuuri?* Victor wanted to ask. Though he already knew, he wished he didn’t.

“And there’s one more in the elevators. I believe Yuuri or Phichit is with it right now, the other waiting by outside the elevator. I think it’s bigger than the other two.”

Chris swore. Victor sighed. “Thank you, we suspected that might be the case. Let’s split up now and see what we can do to contain the two smaller bombs, then we need to immediately get to the elevators. Georgi, once you get the deck evacuated, go ahead and get the rest of people out of here just in case.”

He nodded. “I will conjure up a beautiful elevator made of gold and engraved with dragons.”

Victor decided for Georgi that was probably pretty low-key.

“Guang Hong, Leo—be careful. I say this not because I don’t think you can handle it,” he clarified, “but because I fear if our bomber is still around, he’s going to go after you two first. He’s underestimating you, so don’t let your guard down for even a moment.”

That seemed to hit the correct chord with the two younger heroes, both of them giving each other a look before nodding firmly back to Victor.

The more his pulse raced, the clearer his mind’s picture of the bomber’s plan became. Yuuri had seen it all, hadn’t he? He was probably trying to disable the large bomb at that very moment, knowing and trusting that he’d sent his friends to handle the smaller two.

Georgi, who was finishing up a golden elevator that magically materialized and solidified, looked over towards the two younger heroes.
“Come, the call of adventure beckons to us. Let us bravely go forth and fight.”

“Good luck,” Leo called to them as they turned and entered the newly made elevator.

“He even went to the trouble of giving it floor levels,” Chris noted, pointing to the ornate numbers above the elevator doors that showed it ascending up a floor.

“Georgi, as you may have noticed, never does things halfway.”

Chris snorted. “Oh I noticed all right. A feather cloak, really?”

Victor turned, heading towards the stairs. “He can make you one later if you really want one.”

He laughed at that, both of them finally reaching the stairwell and preparing themselves to enter it. Even knowing where the bomb was still didn’t tell them how or when it would detonate. They just had to be ready for it, whenever that was.

“You ready to do this?” Chris asked.

Victor nodded. “Yeah. Let’s do this.”

Sometimes Yuuri hated it when he was right.

Especially when it meant that he was sitting stuck in an elevator with a shoebox holding a bomb.

Phichit had done what he could to try and pry the doors apart, but whatever the villain had done to it meant they weren’t moving. This left two possible actions, neither of which Yuuri was looking forward to.

On one hand, he could send Phichit away. They’d already tried their phones, and someone in the
building was sending out a jamming signal. Phichit was certain he could have Leo counter it, but that meant he had to somehow get to Leo, who should be upstairs.

Sending Phichit away to get Leo also had another positive side, namely Georgi’s quirk. It didn’t matter if the doors to the elevator wouldn’t move if you could just make them disappear with a thought.

It was that, or risk it by trying to disarm the bomb himself. A bomb he knew the maker made intentionally to stump someone.

“I’ll just try and disarm it.”

“Yuuri, please. I’ll find some way to Leo and Georgi, we’ll get you out of there and then Georgi can toss that thing in a black hole for all I care. I’m pretty sure he could do that if he wanted.”

There were a lot of things he didn’t want to admit to Phichit. He didn’t want to say that he felt bad for the villain, because he knew what it was like to be quirkless in a world that was all about quirks. He didn’t want to admit that he took it as a matter of pride to try and disarm this bomb either. The logical part of him said to send Phichit for help, but he hated feeling like he needed a quirk to solve this problem.

“Phichit…”

He could hear the shift outside the doors.

“If you go, I’m still going to try and disarm this thing. I don’t…” he sighed. “I don’t want to give up and rely on someone who has a quirk to save me, okay?”

He could hear his friend sigh at that, his head thudding softly against the doors. “Oh Yuuri. This isn’t the time to be prideful.”

“I know.”

“Well I know there’s no talking you out of something when you’ve set your mind to it, so I guess all
I can say is be careful. I care about you lots, okay?”

“Call me once Leo gets the jamming signal out. I won’t try anything drastic until then, okay? Timer still says I have forty five minutes.”

He heard Phichit shift against the doors, as if he was trying to hug him through them. “Hang tight, okay? I’ll be back in a flash, then if you want to try and disarm that thing once we get you out of there, sure. But until I’m back, don’t do anything crazy okay? You’ve got a very wonderful best friend and a boyfriend out here to think about.”

Yuuri felt himself smile at that little reminder. “Okay Phichit. I won’t do anything crazy. Be safe, I think he’s probably still in the building and armed.”

“Trust me, I’m in Selfie Defense Mode and ready to rumble. I’ll be right back.”

He could hear Phichit slowly, almost reluctantly, pull away. His footsteps retreating until he could no longer hear them.

Yuuri let out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding. There was another reason he’d hesitated to send Phichit away. Namely, that now if he tried to disarm it and messed up, he didn’t have to worry about it harming anyone but himself.

He shook his head, trying to jostle all the anxious thoughts from it. That was always his weakness, allowing himself to overthink things. And being stuck in an elevator alone for awhile was only going to feed those fears.

Yuuri darted his eyes back over to the bomb. He’d carefully torn away the bag, exposing what appeared to be a plain brown shoebox. The only thing visible on the outside of it was a small digital timepiece on the top of the box and four screws, one in each corner. He was certain it had some way of telling if the bomb was jostled or tilted in any way, and he thought that just opening the lid seemed far too simple and easy.

Unthinkingly, he reached up to clutch at his chest, a pang of anxiety already spiking into him with that usual sharp yet dull ache.

That’s when his fingers brushed over the brooch.
Like a lightning strike, an idea flashed in his mind. Hastily, he unpinned the broach, opening it until the sharp clasp was pointed outwards.

He looked to the bomb. He’d promised Phichit he’d wait. But…

A loud explosion sounded from somewhere on that floor, and Yuuri felt the air leave his lungs. Victor had found the second bomb. Victor, who he hoped fiercely had been fast enough to shield himself from the blow.

Hands trembling, and his mind overwhelmed with terrible what ifs, he brought the brooch up to his lips and delicately kissed the wave on it as if somehow his fervent wish would protect the person who wore a snowflake brooch so similar in design.

Then he steadied his hands, moved towards the bomb where it lay on the floor of the elevator, and held the sharp pin out towards the digital timepiece.

“I can do this,” he murmured to himself.

He stabbed the point down into the plastic edge of the clock and hoped beyond hope that he’d not made a grave mistake.

The unsettling thing about knowing where a bomb is, is that you still have no control over whether or not it detonates. Victor knew this. Knew that he and Chris had faced similar situations before and that there was just no way to ever truly prepare yourself for it.

It always came down to a mere split second. A mere moment in which you were fast enough or you weren’t. Unlike Guang Hong, Victor couldn’t carry his shield with him. He had to go up the stairs, hands ahead of him, ready to use his quirk at the slightest hint that an explosion was incoming.

Of the three Yuuri had partnered with the others, both Victor and Phichit had to rely on lightning fast reflexes to trigger their quirk in time. Phichit, by nature of how his quirk worked, was far more adept at this than Victor was. Same with Guang Hong. Their quirks needed the user to constantly be in a hyper aware state ready to use their power in the blink of an eye.
Victor, though he was loathe to admit it, was the most disadvantaged of the three. For not only had his injury made it harder to keep fighting for extended periods of time, but it also made his quirk sometimes a little slower than before. And in the current circumstances, a little slower might be the difference between a protective shield of ice or bomb shrapnel to the face.

But Yuuri had believed in him, had trusted that he could do this. It meant far more than perhaps Yuuri knew to Victor.

And so, as they came upon the landing between the two floors where a rudimentary pipe bomb lay in wait, Victor felt his quirk react before he’d even processed that they’d somehow triggered it to explode.

A thick wall of ice rose from nothing, stretching from the bottom of the stairs above them to the step they were on. The shrapnel pierced into it, larger pieces coming closer and closer to making it through.

The final piece as the smoke around them settled, had lodged itself right in front of Victor’s face. The piece of metal long and hard enough it had stabbed through the ice, its tip piercing into Victor’s cheek.

He sucked in a sharp breath.

“You okay?” Chris queried from behind him.

He winced as he tried to move. “It’s not too deep. Melt the ice down and we can get it out.”

Chris fired up his power, his hands easily turning their shield of ice into water. The piece of metal fell away, and Victor could feel the warm blood running down his cheek.

“Here, let me cauterize it so it won’t keep bleeding,” Chris murmured, ignoring the puddles of water at their feet to move beside Victor. He reached up and touched his finger to the cut. “You ready?”

“Yes,” Victor replied. Chris had helped him like this before, and while it definitely hurt, it was better than bleeding until they could find a way to treat it.
Chris heated up his fingertip just enough, smearing across the opening in Victor’s skin and sealing it back shut.

Victor swore.

“That the only injury?” He asked.

“Yeah, the ice caught the rest.”

It fell silent between them, both of them taking in the remains of the stairs. It had been a strong enough bomb to completely shatter the landing, the remains of it falling down onto the stairs below it. As it was, there was now no easy way to get upstairs to the observation deck. Just a gaping hole where the connecting steps should be.

“I hope Georgi and the kids are doing okay. Theirs should be next up, right?”

Victor rubbed the remaining blood from his face with the back of his hand, the skin there still warm and raw feeling. “Probably within the next five to ten minutes, I’d say.”

“Should we try and get up there?” Chris asked, gesturing to the damaged stairs.

“Not unless we have to. I could make some steps, but ice stairs aren’t exactly easy to climb.”

There was a sound behind them, and they both turned, quirks at the ready.

“Hey, are you two okay?!” The familiar voice of Phichit called out from below.

Victor felt the thoughts of his own situation become rather distant as he realized that Yuuri wasn’t with his friend.

“Where’s Yuuri?” He asked.
Phichit frowned. “Stuck in an elevator with a bomb, and the villain has jammed the phones so I had to come to get help.”

“Do you think I can melt into there?”

He shook his head. “Might be risky, apparently the bomb had a special note with it saying it was booby trapped. I need to get to Leo to get the phones unjammed, then I need to get Georgi to Yuuri ASAP. That bastard only gave it an hour timer and it’s probably about half gone by now.”

Victor had gone very still, his heart feeling as if it had stopped beating. He felt numb.

“Victor. Hey, Victor!”

Chris shook his arm until he snapped back to attention.

“Look, I know you’re freaking out, but if Phichit is going to get to Georgi the one of us with the creating not freezing or destroying quirk is going to have to do something.”

A resolute calm seemed to fall over him, and although he normally would have found the task of recreating the missing stairs and landing a daunting task, Victor set himself to it quickly.

Yuuri was counting on him. He needed to do this, no matter how much it made his side burn and ache, as fast as he could. He was overtaxing himself, but Victor couldn’t care less at the moment about himself.

It seemed as if everything was moving too slowly, his quirk lagging or the ice not solidifying fast enough. Every second seemed to take minutes to tick by, each finished stair only driving him to make the next one twice as quickly.

He knew Chris was aware he was pushing himself too hard, but he also seemed to understand exactly why he was. He said nothing to dissuade Victor from his work.
After what seemed like hours, a narrow spiral of ice-made stairs snaked from the remains of the lower staircase to the upper stairs.

“Go, quickly,” Victor huffed out, his breath seeming to come in shallow gasps.

Chris came over and put a supporting arm around his shoulder. “Go on, Phichit. We’ll catch up with you.”

He nodded, ascending the ice stairs as quickly as he could without slipping from them. Once he was out of sight, Victor swore and grasped at his side.

“Go on, Chris. I’m going back for Yuuri.”

“Victor, you’re in no shape right now to be fighting.”

He shook his head. “I’m not fighting. I’m going back for Yuuri. Please.”

Reluctantly, Chris pulled his arm away, his hand giving Victor’s back a final pat.

“Promise me you won’t overdo it trying to ice yourself into that elevator, okay?”

Victor remained silent, his piercing eyes darting up to stare Chris down. He knew Victor couldn’t and wouldn’t promise that.

“Fine, be stubborn. Just don’t kill yourself. Yuuri wouldn’t want that.”

And knowing that to be very true, he found that was something he could agree to. “I’ll be careful. I know my limits.”

“Good. If you see Hayami, tell him once I get upstairs we’re sending the magic golden elevator down to get everyone to safety. Then we’ll head right for you and that elevator, okay?”
Victor nodded.

There was a moment’s pause between them, Chris finally giving him a small smile. “Good luck, Victor. See you on the ground.”

“Thank you, Chris. I don’t deserve a friend like you.”

It was his way of saying goodbye, just in case.

Yuuri really, really, hated being right.

He’d pried the small digital timepiece out of the box lid, and immediately he realized how close he’d been to triggering one of the many traps the bomb had. Now as he peered into the box using the light from his cellphone, he saw just how well this had been planned out.

First, there were some wires running up to the screws in each corner, something Yuuri suspected would complete the circuit and set off the bomb had he tried to unscrew any of them. Next to that he noticed in the hole where he’d pulled the timepiece free that there was a thin layer of what appeared to be foil lining the box. If he’d tried to stab or drill into it, that would have probably also triggered the bomb going off.

He could make out a small 9-volt battery and tried to take in all the things around it that seemed to serve some function or another. To one side of it was a tube that had a pendulum hanging in the middle. He couldn’t see far enough to confirm, but he suspected that tube was also lined in foil and if the pendulum was jostled, it would also trigger the bomb.

Next to that was something he wasn’t sure the purpose of at first. It looked like a round rubber ball, but there was a long rod extending from it. That’s when Yuuri remembered that the bomber expected him to have a quirk. Had someone like Victor tried to fill the box with ice to jam the circuits, Yuuri realized that ball would be raised up, causing its rod to strike the battery.

He identified what he guessed was the detonator and the duct taped bundle it was inserted into had to be the explosive. There didn’t seem to be any way to disconnect the two without possibly triggering one of the other traps.
Taking a deep breath, he looked again to the small clock in his hand. It read out twenty five minutes. Time was passing far faster than it felt like, and the crushing anxiety in his chest felt like it would smother him at any moment.

There were five wires going from the clock into the bomb. One of them had to be a way to stop it, but deciding which one would be difficult. And if this villain was going for stereotypical supervillain in a movie bomb, which he clearly seemed to be, there was a good chance picking the wrong wire would possibly set it off as well.

Above him, another explosion rocked the building. The second bomb had gone off.

Yuuri clutched his phone tighter, waiting now with baited breath for a call. Minutes ticked away like hours, the time suddenly stretching out longer and longer as he waited.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the phone rang.

“Yuuri, Yuuri are you still okay?”

He laughed, relief bubbling up at hearing Phichit’s voice. “I’m the one who should be asking you that, silly.”

Phichit was out of breath, but he was okay. They were all going to be okay.

“We’re all okay. Guang Hong took a bullet though, but Georgi’s getting the last of the civilians out of this room right now.”

Yuuri felt his breath catch. “Is Guang Hong all right? What happened?”

“Just like when you and I hit the elevators, someone was watching us approach that bomb. Guang Hong shoved Leo out of the way and took a deep graze to his outer arm. Bomb went off then and hero that he is, Guang Hong still managed to get his force field up to protect us all in time. Villain then promptly used the smashed windows up here to fucking parachute to safety. I almost had Georgi conjure up something to go after him, but I know the civilians are priority.”
He took a deep breath at that. “Yeah, I bet he’ll stay close. He wants to see this last one go off I’m sure.”

“Yuuri,” Phichit said, the worry back in his tone tenfold. “We’re going to head over there ASAP. Just got the last elevator load from this floor out, then we’re going to get the next floor and then we’ll be right there.”

He glanced back to the timer in his hand. Somehow, another five minutes had passed.

“I-Is Victor there?” He found himself asking before he could stop himself.

There was a moment of silence on the other end, “He uh...apparently, Chris said he went back for you.”

Yuuri felt his heart stutter to a stop at that. He only had twenty minutes and if he messed this up then…

“Phichit, promise me you’ll get to safety.”

“What?”

“Don’t waste your time coming back for me. There’s only like...twenty minutes, Phichit. You gotta get the people out of here and get yourselves to safety.”

“Hold on, I’m not leaving you here!”

Yuuri sighed, his entire body tense. He had to make sure the people he cared about were safe. He couldn’t risk tugging wires that might blow the whole place up if Phichit or the others or…

“Yuuri! Yuuri are you in there?”
It was Victor. He was outside the elevator.

“Victor, just a moment I’m on the phone with Phichit!” he yelled back.

“Phichit, please. I’m begging you, get to safety. Victor’s here and I can’t stand the thought of losing both of you. Please, I don’t know if I can save you both.”

“Yuuri…”

“I sent you and him away because I wanted you to be safe. If I mess this up, Phichit…” A shaky sob escaped his throat and he hated himself for it. “Please, I can’t risk anyone’s life but my own.”

“We have time, we can…”

“No, Phichit please! Please promise me you’ll get everyone out including yourself. Please don’t stay for me.”

“Yuuri.”

He was crying now, there was no stopping it. The thought that he now held his own life in the balance with his friends and Victor’s…it was too much. He was terrified. If he could just get them to both save themselves…

“Promise me, Phichit. Please.”

“I’ll be safe,” he replied and Yuuri hoped that evasive angle in answer didn’t mean anything.

“I love you, okay? You’re the best friend anyone could ever have, Phichit.”

“Same to you, Yuuri. Now diffuse that bomb and meet me on the ground, okay?”
“O-Okay,” he managed. The call ended and he felt terrible.

The bomber was after him, not anyone else. Why did he have to come after everything Yuuri loved? He looked again to the time. Fifteen minutes.

A delayed text came through now that the jamming signal was gone. It was from Mari.

- I know you still have an hour to go, but Mom and Dad and I wanted to wish you Happy New Year! Don’t have too much fun with your boyfriend ^.^~

Hands trembling, he sent a reply.

- Happy New Year to you all as well. Love you lots. Always will. <3

He felt sick.

Suddenly, he heard a crash of ice outside the elevator doors. Victor was trying to break in.

“Victor!” He called out, his voice raw and hoarse.

The ice slammed into the doors again, this time a small crack maybe a few inches wide opened. Through the small gap, he could see Victor.

He was a wreck. His hair was disheveled, his tie askew and there was what looked like a smudge of dried blood on his cheek. His blue eyes were piercing as he tried to catch his breath, his hand clutching at his side.
“H-Hey, did you miss me?”

Yuuri felt the tears well up again at that, but he bit his lip and tried his best to stay calm. “Maybe.”

Victor turned his arm sideways, and carefully slid it into the gap between the doors. Without a second thought, Yuuri took his hand.

“I uh overheard what you said to Phichit,” Victor said, his eyes never once leaving Yuuri’s. “You wanted us both to be safe, so I’m sorry but I can’t do that if it means leaving you.”

Yuuri was pretty sure he started crying again, but right then he didn’t care.

“Victor, please. There’s still time for you to…”

He tightened his grip on Yuuri’s hand. “I’m not leaving you, Yuuri. Whatever happens, I’m staying right here with you.”

Yuuri felt the hitch in his breath, trying and failing to push it away. “You….you could die, Victor.”

He forced a wry smile at that. “I know.”

“Victor, please there’s only....” He looked to the clock ticking away in his hand. Ten minutes.

“I don’t care,” Victor interrupted, leaning his head against the doors in between them. “Without you, I wasn’t really living. Without you, I don’t think I could.”

Yuuri leaned his head forward, cursing the thick doors between them. What Victor’s said didn’t make any sense. There’s nothing special about him and he’s definitely not worth dying for. But he sees it in his eyes, that Victor meant every single one of those words, to the core of his being. It’s terrifying but somehow, it made Yuuri feel calmer.

His phone pinged as a text crosses its screen and Yuuri found he didn’t have it in him to pull away from Victor. He read the message from Phichit on the screen.
Everyone was safe. Everyone but... He clutched Victor’s hand closer, feeling as if he’d never truly appreciated how warm it was before now.

“Victor, I’m going to try and figure out how to stop this. I’ve not got much time, but I’m going to try.”

“If anyone can, it’s you Yuuri.”

Shakily, he looked to the wires on the back of the clock. He traced each one, following it from there into the bomb, trying to see where each one led.

Victor remained silent, but supportive. Every time Yuuri tensed up, he gently squeezed his hand again.

It was hard trying to hold Victor’s hand and do this, but the idea to let go of Victor’s hand never once crossed his mind. One by one, he traced the wires. With five minutes left, he had ruled out the green wire. It seemed to run from the timer to the battery, but it also might be boobytrapped so he left it alone.

Four minutes left and he outruled the yellow wire. It went from the timer to the detonator only.

Three minutes left. The black wire felt softer than the others and with a closer look, he decided it was a fake.

Two minutes. This left two wires. One red and one blue. The bomber had definitely watched too many movies.

“Yuuri, it’s almost midnight,” Victor said softly.
“I know. I know. I think I’ve got it, but I don’t want to pull it until the last minute in case it’s the wrong one.”

Victor gave his hand a squeeze.

“I trust you, Yuuri.”

That was probably the scariest part, Yuuri thought. That Victor trusted him to make the right choice even though he really had no way to tell which of the remaining ones was right or wrong. He looked to the brooch where it lay on the floor, he wouldn’t have gotten anywhere had he not had that with him. It was just luck. Just like it always was.

Yuuri sighed, the minute now becoming seconds.

But there had been plenty of times he wasn’t lucky, that things had gone wrong. Loads of times. As the seconds ticked by, it was as if his mind decided this was the perfect time to replay every mistake he’d ever made.

Ten seconds.

So many things he could have done differently. So many times he’d messed up.

Nine seconds.

He’d always messed things up. That’s why he was so afraid with Victor. Afraid that he’d mess this up too.

Eight seconds.

And now it was looking like he had. Because of course, the moment things started going right in his life, everything had to become terrible.
Seven seconds.

He had to be stuck in a life or death situation, without any way to escape. And worst of all, Victor was with him.

Six seconds.

Victor, who he loved with every single fiber of his being. Loved more than life itself. And he wanted to stay. Refused to leave him.

Five seconds.

Yuuri was crying now, his hand trembling over the wire he’d chosen.

Four seconds.

He had no real reason to pick one color or the other. It was just luck.

Three seconds.

But if he was wrong… “Hey, Victor?”

He clutched his hand tighter.

“Yes Yuuri?”

Two seconds.

“If this is the last chance I have, I want to tell you.”
One second.

“I love you.”

And he pulled the wire.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

I apologize for the terrible cliffhangers and hope this addition will make it all worth while. Thanks as always for all the support!

BEIJING TOWER BOMBING [LIVE NOW]

freeze+frame

Started Streaming December 31st at 11:55pm China Standard Time

“Okay kids, do not try this at home.”

[The camera angle readjusts, turning towards Beijing tower. Smoke is coming out the top corner of the building’s observation level.]

“Hello everyone! How’s your New Years Eve going? Hopefully better than mine. This is Freeze Frame, broadcasting live from Beijing Tower in China, where somebody set us up the bomb. Sorry. Bad jokes happen when my nerves are shot.”

[The camera pans down the building, finally stopping at the base where a cluster of people stand by the large golden dragons.]

“As you can see by the lovely collection of heroes here, we’ve got quite the situation. We’ve got Smolder, rocking that burgundy suit, Tiempo, Pingzhang over there with the medics. He got shot, but he’s only going to need a few stitches. And, here’s my new buddy, Caradoc. Who, along with me, is about to do something spectacularly stupid and reckless.”

[The camera moves back up to the building.]

“You see, we’ve got Hokusai Wave and Winter Monsoon trapped in there with a bomb about to go in...oh four minutes now? And we’re about to go try and get them out of there in time. So yeah. If
you’re squeamish you might want to hold off watching since there’s about a fifty/fifty chance this could get really messy.”

[The camera goes back to Caradoc, who is standing at the base of one of the golden dragons seated out front.]

“So! That disclaimer aside, Caradoc is about to get us back up there and hopefully to our friends in time!”

[Caradoc sweeps his cape out behind him and then begins bringing the statue of the golden dragon to life. Slowly, each part of the dragon animates and it stretches, sweeping up in the air before settling at Georgi’s feet like a large shiny puppy. He turns and beckons towards the camera.]

“Our ride awaits, Freeze Frame! Let us make haste and hope time is on our side tonight!”

“Aaaaaand we’re about to ride a dragon. I can check that off my 2016 bucket list just in time now! Three minutes to spare!”

[The camera moves closer towards the dragon. Caradoc gestures towards it and it jostles a moment as they both climb on and get seated. Suddenly, they’re airborne, the long golden dragon swimming fast up through the air and the camera growing ever closer towards the windows of the dining room level. Caradoc sweeps up his cape to shield them.]

“Hold on!”

[The view goes momentarily black, lights blocked out by the cloak Caradoc holds in front of them. Glass shatters around them loudly then they’re inside the dining room, their magical ride moving swiftly past tables and chairs towards the center of the tower.]

“One minute, Caradoc! We’ve got to run!”

[The dragon skids to the ground and the two heroes disembark in a flash, both of them now running down the hall. Finally at the end of the hallway, an elevator comes into view. In front of it, surrounded by ice, is Winter Monsoon.]
“Victor!”

[He turns towards the camera at his name, his eyes shining as if they were wet. It’s now apparent that he has one arm crammed through a narrow gap into the elevator. He offers a shaky smile.]

“You’re too late. Someone already saved us.”

[The camera jerks up towards the elevator.]

“Yuuri! Caradoc get us in there, now!”

[There’s a blur of black and purple to the left and Victor reluctantly stands and backs up slightly to allow him room. With a wave of Caradoc’s hand, the elevator doors flicker as if they were nothing but an illusion and disappear. Seated on the floor of the elevator is Hokusai Wave, his arm outstretched as if he’d been reaching out towards Victor and his eyes on the blue wire in his hand. He turns towards the camera, his face blotchy and streaked with tears, but he’s grinning wide.]

“I did great, right?”

[Before anyone else can move, Victor has closed the space between them. He falls to his knees beside Yuuri, his arms enveloping him as he pulls him close, their lips crashing together in a kiss.]

The camera pans away, turning towards Caradoc, who stands with a hand over his heart looking thoroughly touched.]

“And it is marvel he outdwells his hour, for lovers ever run before the clock.”

“You heard the man. Love wins. Suck it Countdown, we’re coming for you next!”

Victor moved before he even processed what was happening. The moment his eyes fell on Yuuri—wonderful, beautiful, talented Yuuri—he felt himself move towards him as if drawn in by a magnetic force. They crashed together and Victor’s heart sang out—he’s alive he’s safe he’s saved us oh Yuuri
wonderful perfect Yuuri I love you too - as their lips met.

He tried to commit each and every strand of hair underneath his fingertips to memory, the little gasp of surprise that was swallowed up in their kiss, the way Yuuri was solid and real and alive in his arms. It was as if he were starved for air and suddenly, he’d come gasping to the surface, relief washing over him and newfound appreciation for every little breath they took together burning in his chest.

When they drew apart, Yuuri’s eyes widened in surprise and Victor’s voice found itself before he could even think.

“This was the only thing I could think of to surprise you more than you’ve surprised me.”

Yuuri softened at that; eyes fluttering slightly closed, the smallest little crinkles in the corners of his eyes, and the gentlest of smiles.

“Really?”

They were frozen in the moment, the rest of the world and its troubles long forgotten. All that mattered was in his arms, safe and sound.

“Okay, you can all hate me for it later, but I think we’d all be a lot happier if you continued somewhere else away from the bomb,” Phichit’s voice cut in.

Yuuri blushed a beautiful shade of pink and Victor was certain he probably matched it.


That earned him a snort from Yuuri, and Victor tried to commit each nuance of his expression to memory. As if it were choreographed, they moved together to find their footing, Yuuri pausing only a moment to reach down and pick up his brooch off the floor. He handed it to Victor as they stepped outside the elevator.

“You saved me.”
Victor shook his head. “I did no such thing. It was your skills that saved us all tonight, and I won’t let you forget it.”

Unable to really stop himself from emphasising his point, he pecked a kiss to Yuuri’s forehead while he repinned the brooch onto Yuuri’s lapel.

“Okay, okay. Let’s get on the dragon and get to the ground. Who knows if Countdown can remotely set this thing off now that he knows it’s not gonna blow on its own,” Phichit interjected.

Yuuri blinked. “Dragon?”

Victor looked to Georgi. “You made a dragon?”

He preened at the attention. “I breathed life into a statue and it nobly carried us into battle.”

Victor shook his head, rather unsurprised by how over-the-top their emergency transport was.

But Yuuri had gone quiet, his eyes narrowing in thought.

“And this dragon can fly wherever you want, right?” he murmured.

“Of course.”

Yuuri bit his lip, then turned towards the others.

“Countdown’s somewhere nearby, probably on a building top he can watch from.”

“Do you think you can find him?” Phichit asked.
He nodded. “Yeah, I think so.”

Intent on his mission, he turned back towards the restaurant, the rest of the heroes following in his wake. Victor kept close, only coming to a stop at his side when he’d reached the windows.

“There’s a road to that side, water there.” He squinted at the blinking lights. “There, past the red roofs. What’s that building?”

“I think that’s the hospital we drove past,” Victor offered.

Yuuri tensed and Victor found himself reaching out without even realizing it. As his hand settled against his shoulder, he spoke.

“We need to get over there. Now.”

He turned hastily, took a few steps forward, then paused. Without a word, he reached out and clutched the sleeve of Victor’s jacket.

“Stay close to me,” he murmured. “I…”

Words seemed to fail him, but Victor could hear every unspoken word in each beat of his heart. For he too felt them with the same intensity.

*I’m afraid of losing you.*

“I won’t leave your side,” Victor said quietly.

Yuuri began to reach forward with his other hand, hesitating just a moment before he pressed it over Victor’s heart.

“Y-You’re really here, r-right?”
“Of course I…” He paused, sensing the wariness in Yuuri’s eyes. With such force it almost caused him to take a step back, the realization of his question finally hit him.

He thought he was…oh Yuuri. No. No, you’re still very much alive. All of us are thanks to you.

Victor reached out, wrapping Yuuri in an embrace and holding him as close as he could.

“Yuuri,” he said softly, feeling the slight tremble from him. “It’s okay. We’re all safe. I promise.”

Phichit too seemed to realize something was wrong, hovering just over Yuuri’s shoulder as if waiting for a moment with him. Victor nodded and he could see him switch off his livestream. Within seconds, Phichit had come up behind Yuuri to hug him as well.

“Sorry Yuuri, you’re stuck with us.”

There was a noise like a mixture between a laugh and a sob that came from Yuuri, the slight tremor in his body slowly ebbing away. Victor could feel him clutching closer at his chest and he too held him tighter.

“I’m supposed to be mad at both of you, you know,” the muffled voice came from amidst the group hug.

“Mad? At me? That never happens,” Phichit noted pulling back as if to get a better look at this supposedly mad Yuuri.

“Both of you were supposed to get to safety,” Yuuri sighed. “But neither of you listened.”

Phichit gave Victor a look before shrugging. “I’m stubborn. I don’t know what his excuse is.”

Victor pulled back, nudging Yuuri’s chin until he looked up and met his eyes.

“I believed in you.”
At that Phichit threw up his hands, heading towards where Georgi awaited by the rather long breathing statue of a golden dragon. “He’s just trying to get on your good side, Yuuri!”

“I think it’s working,” Yuuri replied, a warm smile tugging at the corners of his lips.

Victor smiled back. “Good.”

It was hard to believe any of this was happening.

He’d stopped the bomb in time. Phichit and Georgi had shown up with a dragon. Victor had kissed him.

And perhaps it said a lot about his current state of mind that the dragon seemed the most plausible of those three things.

The closer the time had inched towards midnight, the more his anxiety seemed to spike and Yuuri was certain that clearly he’d pulled the wrong wire and this was all some final dream.

Things had been going too well in his life, and obviously the universe would set that right by turning his life into a disaster. That seemed logical enough.

But he could feel his own traitorous pulse so loud in his ears he was sure everyone else could hear it too; as if it were screaming at him that he was alive, hoping it could get through the walls of doubt he’d built up. And his lips still felt the lingering press of Victor’s lips against them, a sensation he felt to his very core, that seemed to light fire to his veins and beckon to be kissed again.

Could he feel this alive if he’d died? That, he wasn’t sure about.

Then there was Victor, somehow, miraculously, knowing just what doubts weighed him down. Phichit too. Both of them just understanding exactly what fears he was fighting and doing their best to drive them away.
Relief poured over him, radiating out from where he could feel Victor’s heart beating with his own, and washing his doubts away. He was alive. Victor. Phichit. *Everyone* was safe.

They could win. They were almost there.

The magical dragon could, indeed, fly them wherever Georgi directed it. And so the four heroes, seated in between the dragon’s large scales, headed for the rooftop of the nearby hospital where Yuuri was certain they’d find their bomber. With his excess worries out of the way, Yuuri immediately came up with a plan.

“Phichit, contact Leo. Quickly. Ask him if he can figure out where on the rooftop the villain is at.”

“On it!”

“Georgi, can you fake a dire injury? I want to land at the helicopter pad and act like that’s why we’re on the rooftop to get his guard down.”

“I can easily imagine such pain and agony, for I need only think of my broken heart and ah- oh yes, such pain! It is if I am dying!”

“Victor,” Yuuri continued, feeling the slight clench of Victor’s grip around his waist at his name. “While Georgi distracts, I need you to use Leo’s information to ice our villain before he can run or blow anything up.”

“Okay.”

He felt the thrum of adrenaline coursing through him, and let the wave of confidence it triggered settle over him. This was Yuuri in his element, a hero ready to fight back with everything he had and not about to let the villain just walk away from ruining his date.

“Oh and Victor?”
“Hmm?”

“Don’t ice him all the way. I want to talk with him while we wait for the authorities to pick him up.”

“Are you sure?”

“He left a lovely note for me, so I want to repay the favor with a personal reply.”

Victor leaned in towards him, his breath warm against his cheek as he whispered in his ear. “I’ll be right there beside you. If he tries anything…”

“Then I will gladly let you turn him into an iceberg.”

Phichit whistled. “Oh boy, he’s really pissed you off, hasn’t he?”

“Ruined my best friend’s party and my date? Yeah, I think I might be a little pissed off.”

In front of him, Phichit burst into laughter. When he didn’t hear the same from Victor, he turned slightly to try and glimpse his expression.

He was shocked to find Victor looking at him with an almost reverent fondness, a small smile playing on his lips, and his eyes focused solely on Yuuri.

“W-What?” he asked, suddenly worried he’d done something wrong.

“Just when I think you can’t make me fall for you any more, you find a way.”

Yuuri was very glad that Victor was holding onto him, because he promptly lost his grip on Phichit and almost slid sideways in surprise. No matter how many times Victor did or said something like that, there was still no way Yuuri could ever prepare himself for it.
Flying through the sky on a magical golden dragon? Sure. Victor Nikiforov, the Winter Monsoon, falling in love with him? Utterly crazy.

“Okay, we’re about to land. You ready for this?” Phichit called back to them.

Yuuri could see he’d started up his livestream again and something about knowing that millions of people were watching and counting on them only fueled his motivation to succeed. He took a deep breath.

“Yeah. Where’s Countdown at?”

“To the left of the landing pad, behind that there,” Phichit pointed towards a shadowy area just outside the lighting that lit up the rooftop.

“Victor, the moment we land…”

“I’ll send him a greeting,” he replied, clutching Yuuri a bit tighter as he did so. “Then we can go talk to him.”

Yuuri nodded.

“Georgi, cue the theatrics,” Phichit said as the front of the dragon touched down.

He did just that, the loud melodramatic cries of “Oh the pain! The agony!” hopefully enough to hide their true intent.

As the back of the dragon finally skidded to a stop on the landing pad, Victor took his hand.

“On three, jump.”

They counted it silently but still managed to synchronize their timing. The moment Victor’s feet touched the rooftop, ice shot out from where he landed, shooting across the distance between them and their target in the blink of an eye.
Yuuri heard the quiet swear in the darkness, and he knew Victor’s ice had found him.

“Freeze Frame, get the local authorities up here as soon as possible.”

“Got it!”

He turned towards Victor and gave him a nod, then without a word they started to run towards where hopefully their villain awaited them.

It was dark, but there was just enough light to see the path of ice Victor had made, the surface of it sparkling in the night. At the end of it, there was the same man they’d seen captured at the party weeks before. Victor had iced him up to his shoulders, but as Yuuri had requested, stopped there.

Out of breath, but not about to let that stop him, Yuuri walked closer to him. He was an older man, with greying hairs streaking through brown. He glared at them.

“How did you do it, boy? Tell me. What magical power was too good for my bomb?”

Yuuri felt a pang of remorse at his bitter tone. It scared him how much he understood, how much he knew what being quirkless in a world that had become increasingly quirk-driven was like.

Yuuri let go of Victor’s hand and stepped forward, his voice low. “No quirk. Just luck.”

That seemed to surprise the villain and he studied Yuuri’s face as if trying to see if he was lying.

“Really. Had I used a quirk, I would have probably set it off. Instead I took the timer out and tried to find the right wire to remove. It took right up until the last minute, but I took a risk and yanked the blue wire. It was luck that beat your bomb, not a quirk.”

The villain blinked in surprise, clearly not expecting to have a hero speak to him in such a way.
Victor started to step forward, but Yuuri motioned him back.

“Can I ask why?” Yuuri asked, stepping closer to him. “You went to a lot of trouble to do this, and I just can’t understand why.”

To Yuuri’s surprise, he laughed.

“Why? Do I need a reason to hate what the world has become? To hate you pompous quirked heroes? That’s why. I wanted to prove that you don’t need a quirk to be powerful. If I’d succeeded tonight or before, perhaps people would respect us more.”

Yuuri shook his head. “Then, I’m sorry to say, you picked the wrong person to go after.”

“Yuuri…” Victor tried to step forward again, but he held out his arm to stop him.

He had to make him understand. This wasn’t about someone being more powerful because of a quirk.

“People will always find a reason to think themselves better than others. Quirk, no quirk, it doesn’t matter. If you’d succeeded, all you would have done was make people hate you. And perhaps even, hate quirkless people more. Did you think about that?”

The man’s eyes went wide.

“I don’t know what caused you to feel this way, so I cannot say I completely understand your feelings, but I know what it’s like to feel like you aren’t good enough. Sure, some people get quirks that make life easier, but not all of us do. Some of us have to work, every single day, to feel like they even have the right to stand beside the rest of the world. And most days? I don’t feel like I deserve it either,” Yuuri sighed, running a hand up through his bangs.

“Look, clearly you’re very skilled. You said you were an engineer and I’m going to guess you don’t do that anymore. Probably because someone with a quirk that just happens to fit the job came and took it from you. I think that would make anyone mad. To feel like all the hard work you’ve spent your life on doesn’t matter anymore, that someone with some magical power can just do your job for you when you had to actually work for it.” Yuuri shook his head, knowing far too well how frustrating that could be.
“But endangering the lives of others, even if they are terrible people, won’t earn you any friends. It won’t make people be kinder or respect you any differently. People were terrible to one another before quirks, and they’ll continue to be. You can’t change that. All you can do, as hard as it is, is believe that all your hard work is worth it. That someone out there will appreciate it for what it is instead of how you did it. So, please, reconsider. I know it’s hard to trust that someone out there cares, but I promise you, someone does. I mean, if I wasn’t worried I was going to die, I probably would have been really impressed that you made such a complicated bomb.”

The man sighed, the tension leaving his shoulders. A bemused smile tugged at his lips as he turned towards Victor.

“Does he always lecture the bad guys?”

Victor, also seeming somewhat amused now, shrugged. “Only when he thinks they’ll listen.”

He turned his gaze back towards Yuuri. “You make quite the argument, Hokusai Wave. Thank you.”

There was a flurry of activity as Phichit and Georgi arrived with the authorities, all of them escorted back out through the hospital after Georgi sent the dragon back to where it belonged. Waiting inside the hospital was the rest of their party, Leo and Chris standing inside an ER wing where Guang Hong was receiving his stitches. Hayami, although clearly tired, was doing his best to fend off the reporters trying to get in.

“Winter Monsoon, can we get a comment?”

“Hokusai Wave, is it true you stopped the bomb?”

“Are you two dating?”

Victor, was sadly, very used to the throng of reporters surrounding him. But he could tell that Yuuri, on the other hand, was not.
Not really caring what they’d presume about their relationship, Victor put his arm around Yuuri’s shoulders and pulled him to his side. He could already see all the cameras flashing around them.

“I told you, we will have a press conference tomorrow!” Hayami shouted over the noise. “Now either leave or you will not be permitted entrance at the conference.”

That seemed to get their attention and Victor found himself eternally grateful for Hayami’s efficient handling of the situation. The sea of reporters reluctantly parted, allowing the four heroes to pass through towards the curtain that they knew blocked the others from view.

Phichit turned back at the last moment, grinning at all the cameras. Now that his tinted glasses and hat were back on, he wasn’t wasting a moment in the spotlight.

“Don’t worry, viewers at home already got all the best footage on my livefeed. You all can wait a day and let us get some rest.”

He shot them a wink and Victor had a repress a laugh at the expressions of the reporters at that. As the curtain was pulled back, they could finally see Guang Hong resting on a bed surrounded by the other heroes.

“Yuuri, you’re okay!” Guang Hong called out, sitting up immediately.

Leo and Chris seemed equally relieved.

“Hey is everyone okay?”

“What happened?”

Victor was about to reply when he felt Yuuri pull out from under his arm. He was about to protest when he realized what he was up to. Crossing the room and stopping at Guang Hong’s side, Yuuri bowed in his direction.
“I am so sorry, Guang Hong. Due to his vendetta against me, you inadvertently got hurt.”

Guang Hong shook his head. “Yuuri, it’s okay. He was aiming at Leo and I just...jumped. Unthinkingly. I should have used my quirk, but…”

He trailed off, his eyes darting over towards Leo.

“I just reacted. I need to be better in the future.”

“Oh, okay,” Phichit cut in. “No more apologizing or kicking ourselves over what’s been done. We’re all here, we’re all safe, and our bomber is in custody.”

Victor turned towards the curtain, then before he could talk himself out of it, he quickly threw up a wall of ice. “Sorry Hayami, I think we’ve earned a little more privacy than that curtain is giving us.”

He sighed. “I’ve been trying to get them to back off since we got here, but they’re relentless. At least now we can talk without them running it as tomorrow’s headline.”

Looking around at the group, Victor could tell the majority of them weren’t used to this much press. Only Chris seemed unfazed by the attention.

“Is Guang Hong going to be able to leave whenever we’re ready?” Yuuri asked quietly.

Hayami nodded. “We’ve mostly been waiting for word from you before we try to get past the press to your hotel. Although now that we’ve got them walled out, perhaps you should fill me in on what has happened so I can prepare any statements to give up until the press conference.”

Victor returned to Yuuri’s side, sliding his arm around his waist.

“I’ll do that. I think everyone else is pretty tired.”

Yuuri nudged his shoulder over into Victor’s. “You’ve got to be tired too.”
“Hush. Let me tell them how amazing you were, okay?”

Yuuri’s cheeks pinked at that, and he dipped his head down. “Victor…”

“Sorry, only the facts. But there’s plenty of everyone else pitching in too. This was a team effort. We couldn’t have achieved this without everyone here playing their part.”

And so, despite Yuuri’s quiet protests that Victor was exaggerating, Victor began to recount the whole situation to Hayami. Phichit added in what had happened at the elevator before Victor had arrived, while Leo recounted what had occurred on the observation deck. Slowly the pieces of the puzzle came together, everyone praising Guang Hong’s quick thinking and Yuuri’s bravery. Even Georgi got a fair amount of praise for his work enabling them to evacuate everyone in time.

Everyone had done their part.

“Okay, so what’s with the hashtag I saw trending along with Freeze Frame online?” Leo asked.

Phichit grinned, as if he was particularly proud. “Oh, you mean #lovewins? That’s thanks to these two.”

He nodded in the direction of Victor and Yuuri. It was only now, that all the chaos had settled, that Victor fully realized exactly what had been caught on Phichit’s livestream.

“Oh my god,” Yuuri had buried his face in his hands. “You were filming that?”

“Oho what’s this?” Chris chuckled, already on his phone. “Ah there it is. We’ve already got gifs of it on twitter.”

Victor was sure he was probably red to his ears. They’d not even had the chance to talk about that yet, and now he was worried that perhaps he’d gone too far. Yuuri often had boundaries and what if in the heat of the moment he’d crossed that?
“I think it’s beautiful,” Georgi murmured. “A sign that this new year shall hopefully bless us all with the love we deserve.”

Hayami, sensing the unease, turned to Victor. “They’ll probably be expecting some sort of statement on that as well. So, just let me know what you decide.”

He nodded, but he couldn’t help but worry that he’d definitely done something Yuuri was going to be uncomfortable about.

They’d have to talk about it when they got back to the hotel. Along with the other thought that had been nagging at his mind all night.

Victor needed to know that his heart and intentions were inline with Yuuri’s before they took this any farther.

Victor had been oddly quiet on the way back to the hotel. Yuuri hoped he was just tired, but his anxiety had returned to remind him all of the other things it could possibly be. And he didn’t like any of the possible options it came up with.

But as the group filed into the hotel’s elevator, Victor suddenly shifted. And although they’d spent both the walk and car ride hand in hand, the protective way Victor had moved to wrap his arms around Yuuri from behind made his worries start to fade.

“You two going to be okay tonight?” Phichit asked from beside them. “I know it’s been a stressful night.”

Victor spoke up first. “I think we’ll manage. We have each other, that’s what’s important.”

Phichit’s warm smile practically lit up the elevator at that. Yuuri could see that sparkle in his eyes, and knew this was his way of politely saying “I told you so.”

Georgi let out a touched sniff.
As the elevator opened, Phichit came over to wrap Yuuri in a hug before stepping out to his floor. “Hey, if you need anything, you just call okay? Don’t try to act like everything’s okay when it’s not.”

He nodded mutely. If anyone would notice that Yuuri was off, it’d be Phichit. He might not coddle Yuuri over his mental health, and sometimes he might come across a little pushy or go overboard in his excitement of livestreaming and forget that not everyone appreciated having their every moment broadcast to the world, but on the overall he was always pretty aware of when Yuuri was upset. And he for sure realized that being stuck in an elevator with a bomb for an hour had most likely taken a toll that wouldn’t be visible on the outside.

What he didn’t expect, was Victor. Victor who if anything, held him closer, before speaking up.

“I know we’re both tired, but we’re going to talk some things out before we we sleep. I think it might for the best.”

That seemed to put Phichit at ease, glad to see his best friend was in good hands after a harrowing night.

“Sleep well you two.”

“Goodnight, Phichit. Georgi.”

That left them alone in the elevator, the others all departed to their respective floors.

“Yuuri?”

“Hmm?”

“What’s wrong?”

Ah, so he had noticed it. His involuntary answer of ‘nothing’ died on his lips.
“Don’t let go of me until we’re off the elevator.”

If he thought it was ridiculous, he didn’t let it show. Instead, he pressed closer, his breath warm against Yuuri’s head.

“Okay.”

That simple little word, the warmth with which it was said, was all Yuuri needed. He turned in his arms, burying his face against Victor’s chest. It was stupid, he knew it. He’d been watching the numbers of the floors tick by, hoping that nothing caused it to stop, listening to every little noise the elevator made and telling himself that it was over again and again.

Victor’s arms came up to softly rub circles on his lower back and he focused on that, on the warmth of his arms, the cool press of his snowflake brooch against Yuuri’s cheek.

When their floor finally arrived, Victor gently nudged him. “Come on, let’s get you to bed.”

He kept his eyes pressed closed, allowing Victor to gently lead him out of the elevator. The moment he felt the floor beneath his feet again, he let out a shuddering breath.

“We’re almost to our room. Just a little more,” Victor reassured him, his voice soft and comforting.

They somehow made it there, Victor only pulling away to find their key and get them inside. Once safe in their room, it was as if the dam holding back Yuuri’s emotions finally broke.

He clutched tightly at Victor. “Stay with me tonight, please.”

Yuuri could see the momentary shock in Victor’s expression out of the corner of his eye. But something else shifted then, although Yuuri wasn’t quite sure what. He pressed a kiss to Yuuri’s forehead, his voice soft and low.

“Go get into something more comfortable and wash up, okay? Then we can talk and get some
He nodded, feeling as if his limbs were suddenly lead as he pulled himself out of Victor’s warm embrace. The room felt too cold without him, and it took all his willpower not to melt back into his arms. He stumbled to the bathroom, and while he was examining his reflection and washing his face, Victor knocked softly and handed in his pajamas.

When he opened the door, he found that Victor had somehow shoved the two beds together and changed into his own pajamas. He gave him a nervous smile.

“Is this all right?”

Yuuri almost felt like crying, Victor was trying so hard. He shook his head, a little smile tugging at his weary expression.

Yuuri closed the space between them, instinctively reaching out again to Victor and burying himself against his chest. It was silly, he knew it. But with all his emotions crashing around him, this was the one place he felt best.

“I just want your heartbeat next to mine,” he murmured so quietly, he was certain Victor wouldn’t even hear it.

But he did.

“Oh.”

He smoothed his hand over the loose shirt Victor wore, soft with age and wear.

“Please?”

Victor exhaled, a laugh caught up with it. “Oh Yuuri, of course. Whatever you want.”

Yuuri pulled back a little, peering up at him through his bangs. “Are you sure?”
“I… shouldn’t I be asking you that?” Victor countered.

They both started snickering at that, finally both beginning to laugh over nothing at all.

“And here I felt bad because I have apparently started a hashtag,” Victor managed after a while. “I’m sorry, I know…”

Yuuri put a finger to Victor’s lips and shook his head. “You don’t ever need to apologize for that, Victor. I can’t think of any other way I’d rather end up a hashtag than that.”

“Really?”

He looked so pleasantly surprised, that Yuuri really couldn’t help himself. Victor. Happy. Because of him.

Yuuri found himself moving before he could talk himself out of it, his lips hesitating only a breath away as he brought his hand up to gently cup Victor’s face.

“I love you,” he breathed out, as if he needed to say it a million more times just to hear it said. To hear it while his hand was warm against Victor’s cheek and Victor’s hand was warm against his hip. To feel that little jolt of what he knew now couldn’t be anything but happiness from Victor as he smiled softly back. To take those three little words and erase how terrified he’d been last time he’d said them.

“Oh good,” Victor murmured soft and slightly teasing. “Because I love you, Yuuri.”

And perhaps it was ridiculous, but Yuuri thought that maybe he could disarm a thousand bombs just to hear those words again.

He closed the space between them, pecking a firm kiss on Victor’s lips before pulling back and grinned wide. They were both smiling like idiots, practically giddy with relief. Somehow they managed their way over to the bed and under the covers, both of them laughing and unable to keep a smile from their faces.
Finally, their tired bodies reminded them that they’ve been through hell and needed to sleep. Yuuri settled his head on Victor’s chest, his heartbeat a soothing melody in his ear.

“You feeling better?” Victor asked after a moment.

Yuuri hummed. “I have no idea what you see in me, but right now I’m too tired to question it.”

Victor chuckled. “Ask me again when you’re not tired and I’ll give you a list.”

“A list?” he replied, incredulous.

“A very long list,” Victor asserted. “It covers everything from you being the most beautiful man on earth to you actually putting up with me. It’s very thorough.”

Yuuri tried to hide his blush by pulling up the covers over his head, but Victor stopped him.

“Victor!” he whined.

“Let me see my adorable boyfriend’s face, okay?”

That seemed to do the trick, earning him a deeper blush as Yuuri peered back up. “What did I do to deserve you?”

Victor shook his head, pressing a kiss to the tip of Yuuri’s nose. “I keep asking myself the same thing.”

And feeling warm and fuzzy and filled to the brim with love, Yuuri settled himself back against Victor’s chest and finally fell asleep.

All in all, in a way, it had been a wonderful night.
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Gosh I say this every chapter, but I mean it. A thousand times, thank you all for your support, comments, kudos, reblogs, whatever you've done to support this! It's your support that's kept me writing after rough days and weeks. Thank you so much!

I'm taking a poll to see what else involving this universe readers would be interested in, so feel free to vote for any/all of the following you'd like to see:
https://tinyurl.com/y87zzvdx

Victor used to love the snow. He loved the kisses of dampness as the snowflakes touched his face, the way the world around them was blanketed in white. He’d play for hours upon hours out in it, never really feeling just how cold he was until his parents called him in. They’d bundle him up and give him hot chocolate and he’d sit with Makkachin in front of the fireplace watching the marshmallows slowly disappear into his drink.

It was strange, he knew it, to love the cold the way he did.

Ice and snow were like second nature to Victor. He’d use it to turn his mother’s water into flurries mid air, both of them laughing as it sprinkled down upon them. His father couldn’t even keep count of the times he’d find Victor in the bathtub surrounded by miniature icebergs and frozen tundras.

“You’re our own little winter pixie, Vitya,” they’d tell him.

“Our elegant ice prince.”

“Our brave snow king.”

But, like the ice and snow he loved, the slightest hint of fire would destroy everything.

The fire. Inferno.

It had been snowing that day, blankets of white covering the city and making Victor yearn to go and
explore. Even at eighteen, the winter air called out to him.

But Inferno had been waiting for him. Right outside his own home, waiting for him to come out to play.

“Vitya, run!”

“But Mother…”

“Vitya, please. Run for help!”

“I can fight him. Please…”

“No. Go. Now!”

Tears clouded his vision, his parents standing before him and daring that hateful man to try and reach their beloved son.

He wanted so much to stay. To fight. To do whatever it took to keep his family safe.

Makkachin barked at his ankles.

“Victor! Grab him and run! Please!”

His mother’s voice was like a slap in the silence of the snow covered street. His father turned to meet his eyes, his blue as piercing as his own.

“Please, Vitya. Please. ”

He tried to move forward, but a wave of water rose up to block him. He held his mother’s gaze.
“Vitya, remember we love you. We always will.”

And he ran.

Tears blinding his vision and Makkachin trembling in his arms. He ran as fast as he’d ever run before.

“We love you,” echoed in his mind over and over.

“Hey, Victor?”

“Yes Yuuri?”

“If this is the last chance I have, I want to tell you.”

“I love you.”

It was white. Painfully white. Like the snow.

“Victor! Victor wake up!”

Victor snapped his eyes open, his mind still racing and his heart rate right behind it. He shuttered, the chill of the blankets around him being pulled back causing goosebumps to prickle on his skin. He felt like he was burning, but he was so so cold.

A warm, gentle hand tenderly pressed to his cheek and he slowly brought the room into focus.

“Shh, it was just a dream. Victor, it’s okay. It was just a dream.”
His voice was but a murmur, but Victor could feel it to his bones. Like a warm drink after too long out in the cold, soothing and sweet.

“Yuuri?” His voice, on the other hand, sounded like he was choking on ashes, harsh and mangled.

Yuuri rubbed his thumb across his cheek before slowly pulling away. “What do you need? Water? Some space? I can…”

“You,” he managed.

Yuuri blinked and for a moment Victor wondered if he’d said it too softly.

“I just need you,” he reiterated, reaching out and finding that Yuuri had already moved to meet him.

Victor curled in towards his warmth, feeling incredibly raw and vulnerable. Of course, his memories would draw the comparison. Of course it would remind him he wasn’t allowed to have this without fearing he could lose it.

“I’m right here, Victor,” Yuuri murmured quietly. He pressed a soft kiss to his hair. “I’m right here.”

He let out a shaky breath.

“You were so brave. I should’ve been with you,” Victor whispered, pressing his hand over Yuuri’s heart and feeling as if he might cry in relief from feeling his pulse answer back.

Yuuri drew in a gasp, clearly not expecting Victor’s worry to rest with his well-being.

As wonderful and brilliant as Yuuri was, he somehow couldn’t see just how much he meant to Victor; didn’t seem to realize he’d opened up Victor’s heart to something he never thought possible, a someone he could call home.
He drew another breath, his whole body slowly easing back into calm in Yuuri’s arms.

But before the calm could settle, guilt bubbled up in its place.

If anyone should be upset after last night, it was Yuuri not him. Yuuri who, without a quirk, had done more to save everyone than just making some ice. Yuuri who now had the extra stress of having to deal with the one person he'd asked to lean on being completely useless and having to lean on him instead.

Reluctantly, Victor began to pull away.

“Victor?”

“I'm fine. I'm sorry for worrying you…”

He began to sit up, hoping he could go and make some vain attempt to compose himself in the bathroom. But Yuuri's piercing brown eyes caught one look at his face and promptly reached out to stop him.

“You're not fine, Victor.”

He forced a smile. “Just a bad dream, really. I'm okay now.”

Yuuri shook his head, his eyebrows furrowing. “Victor, please. You don't need to hide from me.”

His smile fell.

“If you don't want to talk about it, I can respect that; but don't try to pretend you're okay when you're not.”

Victor allowed himself a shaky breath. Of course he was already making a mess of this. Of course.
Yuuri's other hand reached out, but he stopped himself before it could touch Victor's face.

"You don't need to be perfect for me, Victor," he murmured quietly.

"I shouldn't…"

"Shh," Yuuri hushed him, a finger pressed against his lips. "It's okay. I'm a wreck too. It wasn't exactly a stress free date, you know?"

Victor breathed out a laugh at that, his nerves settling just a tad.

"Maybe just a bit stressful…” he managed, easing back down.

Yuuri reached out immediately, cupping Victor's face in his hands.

"I suppose the good thing though, is that now I know that you feel the same way I do."

Victor melted into his touch. "Oh Yuuri…was there ever a doubt?"

Yuuri chuckled, soft and low. "Trust me, I had plenty. But...there's something about almost dying that suddenly puts your life in a completely different focus. And it's really hard to try and convince myself it can't be true, when you were willing to stay there holding my hand, no matter what awaited us. I may not understand why, but I cannot deny you for some crazy reason like me that much."

"Oh I like you very much," Victor replied, closing the gap between them. Their noses brushed together and suddenly the calm he'd been seeking blanketed over him like a layer of freshly fallen snow.

Without a word more needing to be spoken, they met each other once more in the middle. Their lips pressed languidly together, slow and searching, questioning and answering. Tongues moving in a conversation without a word, a give and take, an ebb and flow.

*I'm here. You're safe. I love you. Welcome home.*
Victor’s heart had never felt so full, it was as if it was spilling over with an outpouring of love.

The vestiges of sleep beckoned them back, so reluctantly they parted. But they stayed curled close, arms wrapped tight around one another, legs tangled together and hearts beating as one.

They had each other. It would all be okay.

And safe in Yuuri’s arms, Victor fell into a sleep free of all the chains his past bore, only waking up next when there was a sharp knocking at their door. Tousled and groggy, Victor blinked an eye open.

“I don’t want to get up,” Yuuri mumbled from where his face was tucked against Victor’s neck.

He couldn’t help but laugh silently to himself as Yuuri wiggled just a smidge closer as if that would somehow protect him from waking up.

“Hey you two lovebirds, rise and shine!” Chris’s voice called from the door. “It’s eleven and I have food as a peace offering for disturbing you.”

Victor was equally reluctant to pull away from the warmth of Yuuri’s arms, but a grumble of a stomach- perhaps Yuuri’s, perhaps his own- made its point known.

“Yuuri,” he murmured, pressing a kiss to the expanse of neck closest to him.

That got a reaction, Yuuri bolting back with eyes wide and face scarlet. Victor had to resist the urge to laugh at how adorably flustered he looked.

“V-Victor?”

The surprise and wariness in his expression slowly gave way, and Victor realized that in his sleepy state he must have forgotten what had changed since last night. Slowly, understanding came, and with it, the shine of his brown eyes. He smiled, a mixture of relief and pure happiness caught up in it.
“Victor,” he said, now with an affection to it that made Victor’s heart skip a beat.

“Good morning, beautiful.”

Yuuri’s expression shifted into one of pure awe, and before Victor could register it, he’d been wrapped in a fierce hug.

“Victor,” he murmured, his face buried against his neck again. It was astounding all the little different ways he could say it, and Victor felt a small leap of excitement in his chest when he realized there were certainly thousands of more ways he could hear it.

He could hear his name flowing off Yuuri’s lips for every moment for the rest of his life and he was certain he’d never tire of it.

Yuuri pulled back, holding Victor at arms length and examining him as if still trying to grasp the reality of the situation. With a lopsided grin, and a tilt of his head, he finally found his words.

“I truly must be the luckiest man in the world.”

Victor shook his head. “No, I am.”

Both of their grins spilled over, laughter bubbling up and wrapping them in a blissful happiness.

There was another knock at the door. Victor had almost forgotten.

“We should probably get that before Chris gets anymore ideas,” Victor said, starting to get out of the bed.

“Ah, just a second.”

Yuuri leaned up, pecking a firm kiss to Victor’s lips before settling back. His smile was a little
mischievous. “Sorry. I couldn’t help myself.”

Victor pressed a hand over his heart. It was taking all his willpower not to fall back into bed with him.

“Yuurrriii. Not fair.”

“You’re feeling better, I hope?” he asked, voice a little quieter.

Victor blinked. He hadn’t even thought about that since he’d woken up again. He gave a smile and nod. “Thanks to you.”

Yuuri shook his head. “You were there for me last night. I’m just returning the favor.”

And something about the way he said made all the lingering guilt that had pooled in Victor’s chest disappear.

“You are making it very hard not to just crawl back into your arms, I’ll have you know.”

Yuuri blushed at that. “Victor…”

He picked up Yuuri’s glasses off the nightstand and handed them over, pressing a kiss to Yuuri’s head as he did so.

“I suppose we’ll just have to sleep in tomorrow to make up for it.”

Chris knocked again. “Victor, don’t make me melt the door handle off!”

Victor shook his head, crossing the room to the door. “I start walking slower every time you knock again,” he taunted.
Yuuri snorted.

Finally, he unlocked the door and found Chris waiting with a cart of breakfast for two.

“Sorry,” he whispered with a wink. “It’s business or I’d let you enjoy each other’s company longer.”

Victor sighed. “Well, now that we’re awake?”

“Two things, which I’d best not be speaking about in public areas.”

Victor let Chris file in, following behind him with the cart.

“You pushed the beds together? Victor, that’s precious,” Chris exclaimed.

He had to resist the urge to “accidentally” ram the cart into him.

“Chris…” he warned.

“Sorry, sorry. Morning Yuuri, I come bearing food and nagging, I apologize for the latter.”

Yuuri blinked, looking to Victor for clarification.

“I have no idea, to be honest. But it’d best be something good,” he replied, leveling Chris with a look.

He held up his hands in innocence. “Hey now, I haven’t even been that bad yet. Though I can be if you’d like?”

Victor handed a tray over to Yuuri, bringing his own over and sitting back down next to him on the bed.
“So, what’s up?” he asked, his smile perhaps a tad on the warning side.

Chris sighed. “You’re no fun, Victor. But I suppose I can be good this one time. But it’s a limited offer.”

“Chris.”

“Right right. So, first off. Press conference is at four. We’re meeting up in one of the hotel’s meeting rooms at one to go over anything and everything. Hayami’s already called up all the big shots at HQ and told them off this morning. I can take your suits and get them dry cleaned since I doubt you’ve packed much else fit for a media conference.”

Victor nodded. “All right, that’s fair. I think most of us were expecting to fly home tonight.”

It only hit him after Chris cocked an eyebrow that he’s referred to Hasetsu as ‘home.’

But for once, Chris didn’t taunt him. His smile softening as he replied, “Sorry, we had to change that. We’ve extended everyone’s hotel here a night, and can upgrade your rooms if you need to. We’ve also set up a private dinner for tonight, since yours last night was so rudely interrupted.”

Victor blinked. He wasn’t sure who thought that up, but he truly suspected that it might have been Chris. He’d surely been aware how excited Victor had been, after all.

“I’m going to take a guess the IHU is now covering our bill?” Victor asked.

Chris grinned. “Yep. It’s the least they can do for this fuck up. Okay, number two, and Victor don’t get too pissed off at me for this. But I gotta get an honest answer on how you’re holding up. You pushed yourself pretty hard last night.”

Victor could feel Yuuri’s worried gaze on him and he immediately felt bad for causing it. It wasn’t that he was keeping it from Yuuri. It was that, in the sea of emotions last night had been, he’d honestly forgotten. All he could worry about last night was Yuuri. His own condition wasn’t that important.

He let out a sigh, meeting Yuuri’s hand with his own and giving it a squeeze.

“I’m sorry, I completely forgot. I was so worried about you, it didn’t even cross my mind.”

Chris had gone to rummage in Victor’s luggage. “Please tell me you packed your medicine at least.”

“Small fuchsia bag on the inside pocket,” he replied.

But Yuuri’s grip had grown tense. “Victor, what’s going on?”

He let go of his hand and tugged his shirt up. Well shit, that’s worse than I expected.

His injury and the edges that met the rest of his body were all varying shades of white and yellow, as if it had been bruised. It had been painful, but he’d honestly been too preoccupied to really think about it. But the amount he’d used it in an hour was far more than he could really push it anymore…

“I think it’s getting worse, Victor,” Chris said quietly.

Victor kept his eyes on Yuuri, hoping he could somehow make him understand that this wasn’t in any way his fault.

“I...I didn’t realize it got this bad…” Yuuri murmured.

“Short bursts of activity don’t affect it, but extended use is beginning to be more of a problem,” he managed. “I might be down to forty-five or thirty minutes now.”

“First,” Chris said pressing a pill bottle into Victor’s hands. “Take your damn medicine. You always forget and that’s not going to make it heal any faster.”
“It’s not going to heal, Chris,” he snapped.

They’d had this conversation far too many times since he’d gotten hurt.

“And how about this, you need to worry about yourself so you stop worrying him, okay?”

He could have slapped Victor and it would have shocked him less. But Chris had cut right to the heart of the matter. Before, Victor had no reason to try and fix himself. He’d resigned himself to being a broken toy soon to be replaced by Yuri Plisetsky.

But now…

Victor turned back towards Yuuri, his heart breaking on seeing the concern etched onto his features.

“I’m sorry, it seems I’m doing nothing but causing you trouble, Yuuri.”

Yuuri shook his head, his eyes looking as if they were on the verge of tears. “No Victor. You’re in pain and you need to take care of yourself. It only troubles me because I care about you and I wish I could do something to help.”

“Would you believe me if I told you, all you need to do is stay with me? That’s all I need to keep fighting with all my might,” Victor replied, a tremble in his voice.

He reached over, clasping Victor’s hands with his own.

“I would. Because you’ve always been the reason I could keep fighting.”

They shared a smile at that, soft and unsure, new yet somehow it permeated deep into his heart. He couldn’t give up anymore, Yuuri was counting on him.

“Okay, so I’m leaving now. Yuuri make sure he takes that medicine and I’ll see you two at one.
Don’t make me come get you, okay?” Chris remarked, heading for the door, both of their suits swung over his shoulder from their hangers.

Victor managed to pull his gaze away from Yuuri long enough to give Chris a well-earned smile.

“Thank you, Chris. I owe you.”

“You know my favorite wines, I’m just saying.”

And with that, Chris shut the door behind him.

Yuuri really, truly, couldn’t be that mad at Phichit.

He’d given them enough time to finish breakfast and get dressed in something casual before, like Chris, dropping by their hotel room. He’d even texted first.

It’s just that, to be perfectly honest, Yuuri had a lot on his mind.

Something had shifted between him and Victor. Their relationship had barely found its footing, then suddenly they’d been thrown into the thick of it. And somehow, miraculously, it had come out stronger for it.

It wasn’t just that they’d finally kissed. It was that being pushed to that terrifying point they had the night before had now pushed them to speak more openly. There was no more hesitation, because each and every single moment was so incomprehensibly precious. As Yuuri had told Victor, there was something about almost dying that suddenly put your life in a completely different focus.

Victor was willing to die by his side, and there was literally no way his mind could twist that into anything but what it was.

He might not understand what Victor saw in him, why he’d feel so strongly he’d be willing to risk everything for him; but there was no denying that Victor was there, holding his hand, when that
bomb could have gone off at any second.

All his fears, his uncertainties, had been washed away in a torrential downpour of irrefutable proof that Victor loved him.

Even his worry that Victor would regret it in the morning had been for naught.

It was as if each second past midnight that they’d continued to live, their bond had been forged stronger, their threads only further intertwined.

And Victor, Victor, was afraid that his emotions would somehow trouble Yuuri. As if finding out Victor’s nightmare had been about him hadn’t made Yuuri only want to hold him tighter. As if seeing how he’d ravaged his body hadn’t made Yuuri want to kiss every inch of skin that was pulled taut and discolored due to his injury.

Everything, from the way Victor clung to him in distress to the way he’d teasingly asked for a kiss in reward for taking his medicine, only made Yuuri love him even more.

It really was no wonder Phichit was so surprised by Yuuri’s mood. Even Phichit, who’d known him forever, had never seen Yuuri so loved and in love.

“Yuuri!” He’d enveloped him in a hug the moment the door had been opened, his arms lingering just a tad longer than usual.

“Hey, Phichit,” he replied before pulling back. His smile was soft and fond, and Phichit echoed it.

“You look incredibly well for someone who almost died,” he teased.

Yuuri shrugged. “Kind of hard to stress about it when I’m preoccupied with better things. It’ll probably hit me later when I don’t want it to.”

Phichit reached up and ruffled his hair. “Well, here’s hoping it doesn’t come back to bother you. You’ve got enough to deal with. I mean,” he gestured towards Victor, “I think this has your hands pretty full.”
Yuuri felt his face heat up at that. “Phichit!”

“Wow, even Chris wasn’t that lewd,” Victor remarked.

Phichit just grinned. “I happened to have a PHD in Anxietious Yuurious and right now, he’s definitely in the safe to be teased mercilessly zone. So, I’m going to enjoy it while it lasts.”

Yuuri gave his arm a shove. “So mean.”

“I’m just teasing you because I care,” he noted.

Yuuri knew that for a fact. But it also meant he could dish it back out. “I know. I take it the stress of last night drove you into a Russian’s arms too, hmm? Since you seem to know how well they handle.”

Victor snorted, in a very un-Victorlike way, and started laughing so hard Yuuri thought his dimples might just stick in place. Phichit opened his mouth and closed it, shaking his head and wagging his finger at him.

“Ohhh you’re getting crafty, Yuuri. I’ve got to keep my eye on you.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” he replied with a grin.

Phichit matched it. “Good. The world’s a better place with you in it. And I think we all can agree on that.”

And although Yuuri had definitely had his share of moments where he’d felt the opposite, this time he could indeed, wholeheartedly agree. If nothing else but for the fact that Victor’s dimples needed to be a more common appearance and he seemed to hold the key to get them to appear.

“Don’t worry, I’m not planning on being trapped with a bomb anywhere anytime soon,” Yuuri replied.
Victor, who honestly was a bit like an expectant puppy, reached over and gave Yuuri’s arm a slight tug back towards the beds.

Phichit quirked an eyebrow, and Yuuri couldn’t help but shake his head.

“Come on, we can talk a bit before the meeting right?” Yuuri offered.

Phichit nodded. “Yeah, I was mostly worried about you, but I guess considering, I might as well address the second matter.”

Victor had pushed the beds back apart, as they’d mostly taken to laying side by side on one of them, so Phichit sat across from them. Victor draped over Yuuri’s side, his arms settling around his waist.

He’d apologized for being clingy a little after breakfast, but Yuuri had assured him that he wasn’t bothered by it at all. Both of them didn’t need to say it, but it was clear that they kept seeking one another out with fingertips, arms and lips, as if to remind themselves that they were still alive.

“Is everyone else okay?” Yuuri asked, his worries rearing their ugly head.

Phichit smiled reassuringly. “Guang Hong’s doing fine. Doctor even said there should be minimal scarring, although Leo’s reassured him that if it does scar it’ll make him look badass. Georgi’s actually gotten an influx of fans to his superhero social network sites, which has perked him up a little. Of course, my footage is the second most watched video in less than twenty four hours; only eclipsed by a certain someone’s viral ice tsunami from ages ago, so we’re all pretty much all every news site is talking about.”

“I can only imagine what they’re coming up with considering the lack of us holding a press conference yet,” Victor noted.

“Actually, Hayami must have done something because they’re all sticking to the same facts, what’s in the footage I’ve released, and they’re actually crediting me.”

“Chris better watch out, the quickest way to Phichit’s heart is when you credit his videos right,” Yuuri teased.
Phichit snorted. “Okay, that’s a lie. Quickest way to my heart is with hamsters.”

“Ah yes, the proper credit is second quickest way.”

He laughed at that, leveling a look over at the pair of them. “Yuuri, I’m so happy for you. I hope you know that. Seeing you like this, with the man of your dreams by your side. I feel like a proud mother and my baby’s all grown up and dating Victor Nikiforov and everything!”

“Phichit!”

“I’m the man of your dreams?” Victor asked, but he was clearly teasing.

Yuuri leaned back into his embrace, looking up over his shoulder at him. “I thought that was obvious. I mean, you saw the posters right?”

Victor blinked, cheeks going pink. “Oh.”

Yuuri couldn’t resist pecking a kiss to his nose. “Although I like the real one even more.”

“Yuuuurriiii.” Victor whined, burying his face against his neck. He had the impression, based on Phichit’s amused expression, that he was doing his best to hide how flustered that’d made him.

It made a warmth bubble up in chest, filling him with an emotion he couldn’t name anything but love.

“Wow, you two,” Phichit remarked. “That reminds me, Yuuri what’s the plan in regards to that for the press? I mean, there was kind of a hashtag and everything. But I know you’re not exactly a fan of having the press all up in your business.”

That, Yuuri hadn’t thought about.
He could imagine the internet comments already. People in such denial that Victor was taken that they kept swearing based on the angle that they’d only hugged. Those big Winter Monsoon websites full of people blaming Yuuri for him leaving the UAT and moving out of the spotlight. There would definitely be a lot of people probably not so happy about it.

“Yuuri, whatever you decide, I’ll be fine with that. I just want to do what’s best for you,” Victor reassured.

But at the same time, Yuuri honestly wanted to run it as headline news. Tell the whole universe, he didn’t care. Let him be hated as the man who took Victor from the world.

“I’m not going to bring it up, but I’m not going to deny it either,” he asserted. “I’ve spent enough of my life hiding behind a mask, I don’t want to hide anymore.”

Phichit looked incredibly proud. “That’s our Hokusai Wave.”

Victor pressed a kiss to his cheek. “That’s my Yuuri.”

*My Yuuri.*

It was silly, but those two words made him feel like he could take on the world single handedly and win.

Before he could talk himself out of it, he motioned towards his phone. “Hey, Phichit. Can you take a picture for me?”

Phichit seemed surprised by the request.

“Are you sure you’re not body swapped?” He teased.

Yuuri nodded, grinning. “Code phrase is imagine stacking a dwarf hamster on a syrian hamster on a eurasian hamster.”
“Well, well, you are the real Yuuri then.”

Victor shifted, clearly confused. Phichit laughed.

“I take you’ve not had the enjoyment of facing off against the villain Volte-Face?” he explained. “We ran into him back when we were training in Detroit. Trust me, never hurts to have a plan for it.”

He hummed thoughtfully at that, “Yuuri, we’ll need to come up with one too then. Never know when we’ll be up against something like that in the future.”

And as silly as it was, it made Yuuri’s heart leap. Victor was still fighting, even with his injury. He had every intent of continuing to fight by Yuuri’s side. It was stupid and reckless and honestly made Yuuri love him all the more.

“Okay. Phichit, can you take a picture of us?”

“Yuuri Katsuki wants his picture taken, mark the date, for this is a monumental occasion,” Phichit replied.

Yuuri shook his head, trying to find a way to articulate his thoughts. “As an unmasked hero, I think it’s important. To show everyone that we’re okay no matter how bad last night was. I mean, the heroes who can always smile no matter how much they’re hurting, they’re the strongest ones I know.”

Phichit gave Yuuri a million watt smile at that, knowing how much Yuuri had always admired his upbeat personality in the face of adversity.

But there was one other person, who Yuuri had come to realize did a lot of smiling when they surely had to be hurting…

Victor had buried his face into the crook of Yuuri’s neck, and so quietly he could barely make out his words, he heard him whisper. “How did I live without you, Yuuri?”

“Because you’re strong, Victor,” he murmured back, pressing a kiss to the side of his head.
It took a few moments for Victor to compose himself, but finally, he pulled back with a genuinely brilliant smile on his face ready for the camera.

And perhaps he was incredibly biased, but Yuuri thought that Victor’s smile in the resulting picture they took might just be the most beautiful of all.

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**freeze+frame:** @hokusaiwave + @wintermonsoon are both all smiles today despite the banging party we had last night. Thank you to all you awesome people for the support! #newyears #lovewins

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They’d made their way downstairs to one of the hotel’s meeting rooms off from the main lobby. Much to Yuuri’s relief, the press had been kept out of the hotel itself. This was especially a relief to Guang Hong and Leo, who, although they had visors or tinted glasses to use during press conferences they didn’t want to suit up for, wearing it constantly could be annoying.

Phichit was one of the few masked heroes that seemed completely relaxed in tinted sunglasses and sometimes a hat, but Phichit was also the most popular masked hero for a reason.

After meeting Victor and talking with him so much, Yuuri really began to understand how important the role of unmasked heroes was. It wasn’t that the masked heroes weren’t amazing in their own right, but there was a certain reassuring feeling in knowing that the hero protecting you had enough confidence that they went around unmasked.

It came with its downsides, as evidenced by Victor’s habit of forcing smiles and charisma whenever the cameras were rolling. Yuuri was certain he couldn’t ever be that good at faking it, no matter how much he wanted to. But, perhaps that was for the best.

Victor had definitely suffered because he’d hidden so much from the world. Yuuri thought it was shocking that Victor had kept such a serious injury out of the media to the degree he had, for although he’d kept up with every scrap of news about Victor after that fight with Inferno, even Yuuri didn’t suspect something to this degree was the problem.

There was a small group of fans, Yuuri included, that were certain, despite the press’s attempts to say
otherwise, that Victor was not happy. He looked too somber for someone relieved of a burden, but it was clear now that in capturing Inferno he’d sacrificed a great deal.

And yet he still smiled.

That one tabloid photo was perhaps the only one Yuuri could recall in which Victor wasn’t smiling or clearly acting for whatever photoshoot it was. He’d seen thousands of pictures of him, but Victor securely kept his emotions in check in all of them.

It was only now, that whatever walls Victor had up had come crashing down.

Each emotion he wore so vividly, Yuuri wondered how long it had been since he’d let himself laugh and smile and cry like this. There were still those moments, like that morning, when he tried to hide it. As if ashamed that he was feeling what he was.

But the fact still remained, that Victor was far more alive now than Yuuri had ever seen him before. And, as odd as it was to consider, he suspected that perhaps he’d played a part in that.

So in a very strange way, Yuuri felt like he was navigating the new territory of being unmasked with Victor too. For although Victor had never been masked, there were so many sides to him that the world had never seen before.

It made Yuuri feel a little braver. This was new for both of them, letting the world see them like this.

But Yuuri felt that with Victor beside him, he had nothing to worry about.

“Yuuri, do you have a quick moment?” Hayami asked, coming up to them just as they opened the door to the room.

He blinked, unsure. “Yes, what’s wrong?”

Hayami glanced to Victor. “This is uh...involving classified matters. Is he...?”
Yuuri knew there was only one thing of his classified on the IHU files.

“He knows.”

He seemed relieved to hear it, and Yuuri wondered if he was concerned given his own state as a quirkless person currently dating someone with such a flashy quirk.

“Okay. Well, I’ve heard back from the authorities in regards to how Countdown received our location.”

Yuuri tensed, and Victor was quick to reach out and grasp his hand. He gave it a squeeze.

Hayami ran a hand up through his bangs. “In the presence of an honesty quirk, he stated that it was given to him anonymously both times. Which means, someone in the IHU is actively seeking out villains and providing them with this information.”

Victor shifted. “Shouldn’t all of the heroes here be aware of this? It’s a serious breach for any hero in the IHU.”

“Yes, they will be informed. That’s not why I pulled you aside.”

Yuuri could feel his pulse quicken. He had a sickening feeling he knew why now.

“After Chris and I compared a list of the people privy to our destination, we’ve found it to be only IHU members with the highest of clearance levels,” Hayami said quietly.

“You mean…” Victor was livid, Yuuri could tell. But it was nothing compared to the white hot rush of horror that coursed through him.

“Yuuri, whoever is behind this and the previous attempt, is fully aware you don’t have a quirk.”
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Victor was furious.

Honestly, the only thing that was keeping him from booking the next flight to Barcelona to personally ensure that none of these people brought harm to Yuuri was Hayami’s calm logic.

He’d reassured them that he had a plan in place that he’d explain in the meeting with the others. Yuuri, despite clearly being upset, had only managed to ask him one thing.

“Are you going to contact any other heroes who are also in situations like mine?”

Leave it to him to realize that in the thousands of registered IHU heroes, he was clearly not the only one harboring such a secret.

Hayami had reassured him that would also be explained, and his posture went from tense to trembling slightly. Victor had pulled him to his side, and even now as they took their seats in the meeting room, he had yet to let Yuuri go.

He could see the concerned look Phichit shot across the table, and Victor gave a slight nod towards Hayami at that. He knew, even if he didn’t directly state it, what Hayami told them would convey to Phichit what the problem was.

Once he got Yuuri seated, Victor grabbed up the nearest chair and promptly sat it right next to him. The others could think what they wanted, now more than ever, Yuuri needed his support.

“All right, I’m sorry for all the rearranging of your schedules, but we’ve got a lot to address that is not going to be released to the press,” Hayami began. “First and foremost, I want to go over what is going on with the breach of information from the IHU.”

Victor could see everyone sit up a little more at that, even Leo and Guang Hong’s usual soft looks replaced by an intense gaze.
“Under the surveillance of an honesty quirk, Countdown confirmed that he received the information about our location from an inside member of the IHU. As to who that is, they apparently gave it to him anonymously both times.”

There was a boiling undercurrent to the room, and Victor knew it was only a matter of moments before it hit the breaking point. He gave Yuuri’s hand, which he was holding in his lap, a gentle squeeze.

“Chris and I only gave where we were going to a handful of higher ups; meaning there’s a few problems to figuring out who is the informant. First, all of those higher ups have full clearance to classified information, all the records on villains and heroes easily available to them.”

At that, Phichit understood, standing hastily as his chair clattered to the floor.

“Are you serious? That’s going to put so many heroes in grave danger!”

Hayami nodded solemnly. “I understand. But, right now we still don’t know if this IHU member gave this information out knowingly. There’s many villains out there could easily manipulate it out of them, and of course, they could have resorted to blackmail. Right now, we must operate under the assumption that the person who provided the information might not be the one who is personally handing it out to the villains.”

“Trust me, if it was about going to those higher ups and busting heads until we got an answer,” Chris cut in, “Victor and I would be there as fast as the next flight would get us there. But Hayami’s got a point and a plan, so I’ll gladly follow behind him.”

He shot a wink, and for a moment Hayami’s serious composure wavered. He cleared his throat before continuing.

“I’ve made a few contacts outside the influence of the IHU this morning. Thankfully, perhaps, the IHU has a rather unreliable and unorganized set of records, previously filing most of this paperwork with HR. As such, we’re starting our own Records Department, which will be headed up by none other than Yakov Feltsman’s ex-wife, and The Leopard’s current ballet instructor, Lilia Baranovskaya.”

Now that got Victor’s attention. If anyone would whip things into shape and find their informant, it’d
be none other than her.

A few of the other heroes looked somewhat unsure, so he spoke up.

“I take it having an ex-KGB agent playing secretary is going to be our plan of action then?” Victor asked.

That got the room buzzing with murmured chatter.

Hayami sighed. “A factor yes, that I hope does not leave this room. To the IHU, she’s just a ballet teacher who is as meticulous in her recordkeeping as she is her teaching. As you note, that will be our plan of attack. She’ll gather information until we can single out where the intel is coming from.”

Phichit eased back into his chair at that, and even Yuuri seemed to take a deep breath, as if knowing that they were fighting back, even in an underhanded way, made everyone feel better about this.

“Until then, we are not going to pressure the IHU to adjust their notification system for fear that they realize we are onto them. Instead we are developing our own,” Hayami continued. “I’ve had the best tech quirk users out there working on it since this morning, and hopefully it’ll be up and running by tomorrow at the latest. This will be a phone app with all the features a hero needs to do their jobs. You will be able to search within a certain area for other heroes with a specific quirk, receive alerts when anything is called in to the local authorities, and be notified on any villain movement as soon as it is reported to anyone. Most importantly, it will have an emergency request feature that will alert all heroes nearby that you are in a situation and requiring immediate assistance.”

“Wait, so this is basically like a social media app, but focused on hero work?” Phichit asked.

“Basically,” Hayami replied with a smile. “If you need a flight quirk nearby, this app will help you find that person. And if the villain is using Facebook or any other app with a GPS locator, it will know that location and be able to track it. If other platforms can tell you where your great aunt is eating lunch, it’s about time we have something for heroes to do their work with.”

That seemed to set off a flurry of excitement in the room, everyone slowly smiling at one another. Even Yuuri had sat up, his eyes finally focusing on the conversation.

“You took everything we told you last night and made it into an app, didn’t you?” Yuuri asked
Hayami returned a gentle smile. “It’s my job to make sure you all can do yours effectively. Getting to actually talk with you really helped me understand what issues you were facing. So this is all thanks to your input. Please don’t forget that. I couldn’t have known what to do without you. The Hero Network is for heroes, by heroes.”

It was as if the tension in the room was suddenly removed. They had a plan. They had someone who actually listened to them and was doing their best to accommodate them. All the uncertainties that worried them paled in comparison to this knowledge that they were fighting back; as if the IHU could tell thousands of heroes to stop using an app without losing the majority of their roster. Sure, it was passive-aggressive, but Victor wondered if that’s exactly what they needed right now. He’d already taken the forward attack route and only gotten so far.

“It’s our own little union,” Chris noted with a smirk. “They wanted Hayami to work with us and unify us, well, here’s what the bastards are going to get.”

Victor was exceedingly thankful that he’d selected Hayami out of the plethora of options for the position. He’d chosen him specifically for his prior work in workers unions, and as hoped, he was exactly what they needed. The IHU wasn’t going to control them anymore.

“Okay, okay, we still have more to go over,” Hayami cut in over the excited noise. Even he seemed to be in better spirits now.

“Yeah you’ve kept the press pretty tight lipped for once, so they’ll want a lot out of us,” Phichit noted.

“Outside the obvious, what do you think they’re going to ask us?” Guang Hong asked.

Press conferences were still something rather new to him, Victor realized. To a lot of the present heroes even. As much as he felt like he’d spent the last four years either fighting or at a press conference, Victor didn’t quite realize until last night that most heroes weren’t really used to throngs of reporters and cameras waiting for them around every corner. It might have been his reality, but even Yuuri who was undisputably the biggest Japanese hero, mostly had been limited to a few interviews with local news.

He gave Yuuri’s hand one last squeeze before standing. “I think I can probably cover that much, if
you don’t mind, Hayami.”

He nodded. “I’m certain you and Chris have far more advice on that than I do. I can postpone their questions, but I can’t say I’m very skilled at answering them.”

“You’re doing your job spectacularly, so that’s what’s important,” Victor began. He looked over towards Chris. “Feel free to add anything you think I’m missing out on. We’ve suffered through enough of these, but like I pay attention after a certain point.”

Chris laughed at that. “And you think I do? I think it's a given we just start answering on auto-pilot after a while.”

“Right.” Victor looked to the others, those far less used to this sort of attention. “First off, don’t let them bully you. If there’s anything they ask you don’t want to answer, don’t hesitate saying so or letting someone else take over.”

“And trust me, someone will always ask weird questions of you,” Chris added. “They might all want the same facts about the situation, but they also want to have something juicy to run as a headline that the other reporters won’t have.”

“We all know what happened and can recount that easily, it’s these oddball questions that will be mixed in and throw you off guard. Georgi, I wouldn’t be surprised if they bring up Anya, given that she declined to comment about it earlier today.”

Georgi sniffed, his eyes getting misty. “I know. I have watched the clip thousands of times, trying to find the meaning in her cold-hearted reply. But alas, I cannot understand it.”

Victor offered what he hoped was a reassuring smile. “You can always tell them that what’s going on with you two is personal and leave it at that.”

“Do you believe a heartfelt message to her might change her mind, Victor?”

Not having it in him to crush Georgi’s hope, he nodded. “It doesn’t hurt to try.”
“Yeah and he won’t be the only one getting relationship questions,” Chris noted. He shot a look down the table at the rest of them.

“He’s right, although I highly suspect a certain hashtag might be their focus,” Victor managed. He was probably blushing. Yuuri certainly was. But they’d already made their decisions on the matter. “Guang Hong, they’ll definitely target you as well, since you took a bullet for Leo.”

His face went pink as he blinked over at Leo. “T-They will?”

Victor nodded. “Just reply that you were doing what any hero would in that situation. You don’t have to answer them directly, just remember that.”

“I’m going to guess I might get something similar?” Leo asked.

“Most likely. A question about how do you feel about what he did that for you or something similar. Although even if you say you were touched by his brave actions, that’s still not confirming anything. Just don’t let them get you frazzled and you’ll be fine.”

It continued like that for a bit longer, Victor pointing out all the things each one of them might get asked and giving suggestions for how to answer it. When finished, he sat back down and Yuuri leaned over against his shoulder.

He blinked down at him in question.

“You’re so sweet,” Yuuri finally managed quietly, his face going pinker. He tried to hide it against Victor’s sleeve. “Thanks for looking out for all of us.”

Victor was certain his own face had to be just as flushed as warmth flooded his chest. “I’m just trying to help.”

“Well, you’re doing a very good job.”

He really didn’t know what else to say to that. So he simply rested his head over against Yuuri’s.
Yuuri really hated press conferences.

Even when a local reporter would catch him after an incident and ask a few things, it always made him so incredibly nervous. As if he was suddenly aware that everyone was listening to him, and clearly he was going to say something wrong and then everyone would hate him.

Something about having a camera pointed at him, usually set his anxiety spiraling into every possible bad scenario it could come up with.

But there had been some strange exceptions to that; exceptions that Yuuri was beginning to realize had one thing in common: Victor.

He didn’t care that Inferno was using Phichit’s livestream to air the battle. Hell, if anything, the fact that he knew Victor was probably watching only made him fight twice as hard.

And last night, once again, knowing that Victor was there with him, watching him, pushed him forward in a way nothing ever had before.

Usually Yuuri had done his best to stay off of Phichit’s livestreams, even if he wasn’t always successful. But last night? It fueled his fire, knowing that thousands of people were counting on them to finish the job.

So what if it caught Victor kissing him. Didn’t that just make them more human? To see that even the top heroes could be reduced to tears and thankful kisses after a harrowing battle?

He understood why Victor felt smiling for the cameras was important, but perhaps being quirkless, Yuuri knew how important it was to see heroes not just as some sort of god-like superior being. It was important to be human too. And now that he was unmasked, Yuuri thought that maybe he could help everyone understand; you didn’t have to be some sort of super hero to be a hero. You could just be some quirkless nobody who wanted to do the right thing.
Anyone could be a hero. That was the message he wanted to send.

Hayami had begun the conference by giving a full rundown of the course of events. Yuuri could already feel the reporters zeroing in on him, especially given how much Hayami kept mentioning him.

Victor reached under the table and gave his hand a gentle squeeze.

And although it caused his heart to race so loud it was drumming in his ears, he felt all his nervous energy slowly melt away.

“It is due, in part, to the events of last night that we have added an addition addendum to our UAT scoring system. After input from the heroes involved, we have now added three more point categories. First, a score of 100 points will be awarded in situations where a hero provides protection for other heroes or civilians. As noted, Pingzhang’s quick thinking was a great asset to ensuring that no civilians were injured last night.”

Guang Hong, who along with Leo and Phichit had all fully suited up for this, was most likely blushing underneath his helmet.

“Second, 100 points will be awarded in cases where a specific skill is provided that heavily assisted the mission. Such as Tiempo’s sound wave tracking enabling the heroes to quickly locate the bombs and the bomber.”

It was Leo’s turn to blush, although his visor did little to hide it.

“And last I was heavily encouraged to add this last category by the heroes involved due to the exceptional work demonstrated by Hokusai Wave.”

Yuuri tensed at his name.

“For any hero who is deemed by the other heroes present to have provided leadership necessary for the mission’s success, we will be awarding 500 points.”
Yuuri looked towards the others, honestly speechless. They were all smiles. Victor pulled him over into a hug and he let out a nervous laugh against his chest. They’d done that, for him.

Victor leaned back, his smile so proud that Yuuri thought he might just kiss him right there.

But Hayami wasn’t finished. “We have added these new points to any previous incident where they apply. The displayed image shows what our current ranking is. The top five are as follows: in fifth with 1,400 points, is Winter Monsoon.”

He blinked at it and Yuuri thought the little surprised gasp he made might just be the cutest thing ever. Here was proof that he wasn’t useless, for the world to see. Yuuri could only imagine how much that meant to Victor.

“In fourth despite currently only operating on the junior level, is The Leopard with 1,550 points.”

Oh Yuri had gotten more points since last time. Yuuri smiled. He too was fighting so hard to make his place in the world.

“In third, there is a tie between Pingzhang and Freeze Frame, both at 1,600 points.”

They both reacted in complete shock, and Yuuri couldn’t help but lean over to give Phichit a one-armed hug. They both deserved it, Yuuri knew that all too well.

“In second, mostly in part to his spectacular efforts last night, is Caradoc with 2,600 points.”

Georgi was even more surprised, and Yuuri thought he might just start crying with joy over it. Instead he hugged the two nearest heroes, Chris and Phichit, before offering the audience a small bow.

“In first place, to no one’s surprise given his outstanding work so far, is Hokusai Wave with 10,100 points.”

Yuuri was positive he had to have misheard the score; certain that there’s literally no way he could be that far ahead of everyone.
But he didn’t have time to dwell or second guess, because within moments all the heroes around him had reached over to shake his hand, given him a hearty pat on the back, or in the case of Phichit and Victor, crushed him in an excited hug.

Distantly Yuuri was aware that Hayami was about to open the floor to questions and he tried his best while shielded in their arms to find his composure. He took a deep breath. He could do this.

“Okay, we will start taking questions from the press now.”

Yuuri could already heard the cacophony of voices yelling out, catching his name or Victor’s more often than not. Hayami tried to find some semblance of order, noting down the questions he heard and then presenting them the heroes to answer one by one.

To Yuuri’s immense relief, he started with someone else. But as they answered, his mind replayed all the questions he knew would be expected of him to address.

_Hokusai Wave, tell us about this bomb?_

_How did you disarm the bomb? Did you use your quirk?_

_Winter Monsoon, what is the relationship between you and Hokusai Wave?_

_Hokusai Wave, are you and Winter Monsoon romantically involved?_

_Hokusai Wave how did you know which wire to pull?_

While Georgi was giving a rather long and emotional plea to Anya, Yuuri did his best to try and prepare his answers in his head. But the more he thought about it, the more his pulse raced. And the more his pulse raced, the harder it was to think.

Distantly, he realized they’d shifted the questions to Guang Hong and Leo, both of them responding the way Victor had advised them to and leaving it that. Yuuri wished he’d thought to talk this out
better with Victor, certain that he would have been able to help him put his words in order.

They’d just been so distracted with everything else.

“All right, we have a series of questions now for Hokusai Wave,” Hayami’s voice cut in through his racing thoughts.

Shit. He was out of time to think.

“First we have several about the bomb itself you disarmed and how that was accomplished. Can you give us an idea of what was going on during that time for you?”

Yuuri took a deep breath, his leg bouncing with nerves under the table. He used his hand to steady it before forcing himself to look out at the audience.

“You mean outside wishing I wasn’t stuck in an elevator with a bomb?” Yuuri managed.

It earned him a room full of laughter, and that buoyed up his courage. He’d seen plenty of interviews with Victor, handling every single question like a pro. He could do that. He could be a confident hero now for all those people watching.

“First, I just want to note some things about this bomb. Let’s just say if I wasn’t about to die, I would have been really impressed with the work that went into this.”

The audience chuckled again and it fueled his bravery.

“There’s so much focus on quirks and what they can or cannot do now that I feel like we forget what life's like without them. This bomb was made by human hands, not a quirk, and you could tell. No quirk could have made something so intricate. It had all these...traps, little ways if you weren’t careful it would set it off. The bomber’s note pretty much dared whoever tried to disarm it to do it without a quirk, and I quickly realized that he’d made sure that most quirks would have failed.”

The room fell into a reverent silence at that, Yuuri’s voice becoming stronger.
“There was foil lining the inside, so if you stabbed into it in it would blow. It couldn’t be moved about without a pendulum inside hitting a trigger, and it couldn’t be filled with something like ice or water because there was a little flotation device that would hit the battery if you did. I honestly was very lucky that I didn’t set it off even opening it. I used this,” he said placing his hand over the broach glittering on his lapel, “to pierce into the plastic around the digital clock. And then after realizing that there was no other way, I decided to try and pick out which wire to yank. There were five.”

He took a deep breath, steadying his voice.

“I had to narrow it down one by one, but I was running out of time fast. Victor,” he glanced to his side, a soft smile on his lips, “was there with me, outside the elevator. He could only get a small crack open, but it meant the world to have him there with me. I’d tried to get both him and Freeze Frame to leave, but they were both too good of heroes to abandon me. I don’t think I can ever express how much that meant.”

Yuuri could feel Phichit’s gloved hand on his shoulder and Victor’s warm hand against his leg. It was strange, how until that very moment he really hadn’t thought about how much love and support surrounded him. From his friends, from his family, and now too, from Victor. Love was all around him and it gave him the strength he needed.

“It came down to two wires, one red and one blue. There was honestly no way I could tell them apart. I know someone asked how I chose, but I have to admit, it was luck. I’ve felt exceptionally lucky lately, because a hero I’ve long admired went out of his way to show up and thank me for what I’d done.”

He looked to Victor, and the touched expression on his face was so soft and gentle. Yuuri hoped the cameras were getting it, because he’d never seen Victor look like this at any press conferences before.

“I really don’t understand what caused the winds of fate to start blowing in my favor, but I honestly can’t explain it any other way. In my country, there’s a belief that two people who fate draws together are linked by a red string of fate. And when I had mere seconds left to live, that’s all I could think of. So I just couldn’t bring myself to break that red wire, because somehow I felt that if I did…”

Yuuri didn’t realize he’d still not looked away from Victor. Didn’t realize that words were just pouring out from his heart, raw and bared. All he could think about was how lucky he was and then suddenly, Victor moved.
There was a brief moment, as Victor’s hand slid warm against his cheek, when Yuuri’s brain finally caught up with the words that had just spilled out from his mouth. But then Victor was kissing him and he really didn’t care what he’d said to get that reaction out of him. He melted into it, brown eyes wide when Victor pulled back and rested his forehead against Yuuri’s.

Well, so much for not bringing up their relationship, Yuuri thought to himself. Then he was smiling and laughing quietly, Victor’s beautiful expression worth every word.

Victor managed to pull his gaze away first, offering the flashing cameras a wide smile with his dimples right there on his rosy cheeks.

“And he has the nerve to act like he’s the lucky one,” Victor teased, his hand reaching over to take Yuuri’s, his eyes drifting back to him again. “My heart didn’t stand a single chance.”

“Victor…” Yuuri muttered, his nerves prickling again.

“I honestly don’t think it’s possible not to fall in love with Yuuri,” Victor said softly, but Yuuri’s certain the microphones can still pick it up. “I hope people can see that now the way I can.”

And perhaps it was the tender look in his eyes or the way he leaned over just a little against Yuuri as he said it, but Yuuri could believe that. Just a little.

Maybe there was a little something special about him, not just luck.

“Yuuri do you mind if we talk about something before we go to dinner?”

He could see him tense at it, and quickly clarified.

“It’s nothing bad, I promise,” Victor amended. While it was certainly weighing on his mind, that wasn’t the reason.
Yuuri seemed to ease at that. “Okay.”

Victor crossed the hotel room, sitting on the edge of the bed and waiting for Yuuri to join him. When he had, he let out a deep breath.

“I have, um, something of a secret I’d like to tell you.”

Yuuri blinked. He was probably wondering what beside his injury would be such a well-kept secret. But even that was common knowledge in comparison to this.

“You’re familiar with how quirks are inherited, I assume.”

He seemed a little wary of the topic, but eased at Victor’s gentle tone. “Somewhat. I know based on my mother’s ability to levitate small objects and my dad’s ability to heat water, Mari got control of smoke that can move small things and I thought perhaps I might get something related to steam or water based on that,” Yuuri paused. “Just like everything else, it’s a composite of what each parent has. If a parent is quirkless, then the child will either get a similar quirk to the parent with one or be quirkless as well.”

Victor nodded. “I ask because, well, I’ve never mentioned it. I just couldn’t find what felt like the right time to bring it up, and before I knew it, well...to be perfectly honest I never expected to be in a relationship where it would matter.”

Yuuri’s brows furrowed at that, and Victor could only imagine how his mind was starting to put the clues together.

“Yuuri, my father was born quirkless. Just like you.”

His eyes went wide.

“Really?”
Victor nodded. “And therefore, I’m sure you can figure out part of the rest.”

Yuuri opened his mouth, closed it and seemed to think for a moment. Then his eyes went wide once more, and he stared at Victor as if seeing him for the first time.

“Your mother could control water. Then, your quirk…it’s not just ice, is it?”

“It’s not,” Victor replied, a smile curling his lips. Part of his burden was now shared and he could already feel the relief coursing through his veins. He held up a hand and out of thin air, he created a small little cloud of steam. Within seconds, it began to drizzle little raindrops onto their laps. He flicked his fingers, all the droplets turning to snow. “Although, I have to admit, I really do favor the wintry parts of the water cycle most.”

The shock on Yuuri’s face slowly eased, his eyes narrowing in worry. “I… why are you telling me this?”

“Two other living persons know, and one of them is not my coach,” Victor replied. There was so much to this, but he had to be clear. He wanted Yuuri to understand why he felt it was so important to share this with him. “Yuri, is one. Sadly, due to my last fight with him getting rather messy near the end, Inferno is the other.”

It meant more than he could ever express that at Inferno’s name, Yuuri’s first instinct was to reach out to Victor, his hand settling over Victor’s where it rested in his lap.

“How…” he asked, so quiet Victor almost didn’t hear it.

“After he almost sliced my side in two. When he realized I’d frozen myself to stop it, he drew the sword back. I was in shock, my body was in pretty terrible pain from what I’d done, and I couldn’t move. It was then that Yuri came back, despite my asking him not to. Thankfully, he got my attention in time to react. But, in my utter desperation, I finally used what would be strongest against Inferno. Water.”

“All these years, you’ve been fighting him with ice when you didn’t have to?”

Victor at least had the dignity to look ashamed at that. “I’d never intended it to become such a secret. But when the world wanted a Winter Monsoon, I was afraid that if I didn’t fit their image of that…”
Yuuri’s expression shifted, understanding and sympathy suddenly washing over him. “So you played the part they wanted.”

“Precisely.”

It fell quiet between them, and as much as Victor wanted to leave it at that, he knew he couldn’t. He’d torn the bandage off old wounds, and he had every intention to bring every bit of it to Yuuri’s attention. Because, if there was anyone in the whole wide world Victor trusted to find a way to fix him, to heal all that he’d kept buried, it was Yuuri.

“And now, I can’t take back what I’ve started. It’s been too long and with the IHU situation now, the last thing the world needs to have more distrust issues with heroes. But if anyone deserved to know, it was you. You who have asked me to be nothing more than myself.”

Yuuri lifted his hand from Victor’s, raising it up to reach out and gently cup the side of his face.

“Thank you for trusting me,” he murmured.

Victor let out a nervous laugh. “Yuuri, you have no idea how amazingly special you are, do you?”

His cheeks pinked “Well, someone keeps making a point to tell me even if I think he’s ridiculous.”

“No really, Yuuri,” he reached out his own hand and settled it lovingly against his cheek. “I never dreamed I’d have this. Ever.”

He didn’t say that he was certain he’d probably die alone. Didn’t say that he’d never imagined a future where he grew old and gray with someone by his side; that he was certain he’d take his family’s secret to his grave. This wasn’t the time for such heavy thoughts.

This was a Victor who was willing to die by his side last night and now he wanted to show he had every intention of living by Yuuri’s side for every day going forward.
“Yuuri,” Victor could feel the tremble in his hand and suspected it was in his voice as well. “There’s one more thing I want to tell you.”

He gently patted his cheek before nervously pulling back away. This was far too important for him to mess up.

“Yes,” Yuuri replied, eyes just as trusting as before.

“My family, they... they call my quirk the Mother of All Oceans. Partially, because it was passed from mother to child. But also, because a mother is so giving. When one of my ancestors with a quirk that controlled the elements of the water cycle had a child with a man they believed to be quirkless, their daughter was the first to get this strange quirk. It’s believed, that man did have a quirk after all. One that he passed to his daughter as well. And one that has also been passed down to me.”

Victor reached out and took Yuuri’s hand, clasping it tightly in his own.

“Yuuri, you’re probably the bravest and most amazing hero I’ve ever met. I know you have trouble believing that, but I want you to know that it’s true. You’re so amazingly talented, no one would ever dream you’ve done it without a quirk. And honestly, you don’t need one to be this incredible either. But...the true power of my quirk isn’t that I can control the water cycle. It’s that I can give it to anyone I want to. Just once.”

He took a deep breath.

“Like my mother gave it to my father, I can share my quirk with you.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you as always for the support! And for putting up with this being the arc of cliffhangers.

■■■■■■ | Sorry

In better news: here’s a master post of info, visuals and everything else related to this fic and world here: http://abarero.tumblr.com/fanfiction
Yuuri felt as if his mind was spinning. What Victor was saying didn’t make any sense at all! He stared blankly at him, trying to wrap his mind around it. But the more he thought, the more questions came to mind. Like Victor said his father was quirkless, but all accounts of the incident with Inferno said that both his parents had fought him off with water; which meant that something about this...quirk, somehow enabled that? But how...

Victor took his silence badly.

“Yuuri, this isn’t about you being quirkless,” he assured, retracting his hand and fistimg it in his lap. “I...how can I explain this…”

Yuuri felt the withdrawal of warmth, his hand suddenly cool without Victor’s holding it.

“...share? I don’t understand, Victor.”

Victor stood, his movements frantic as if he were searching for something to come to his aid. Finally, he seized a notepad of paper and a pen from the end table and began to draw something out.

“Think of my ability to use my quirk like a tank of gas,” he tried, sketching it out. He drew two figures next to it. “If my mother was using a ¾ of a tank, then my father would only have ¼ to power his. Like...it isn’t giving you my quirk, it’s sharing it. I never thought I’d ever have anyone I trusted with my life enough to ever use this, but...”

His hand was back now, warm but trembling.

“Here you are.”
Yuuri blinked down at their hands, then back to the paper where it sat across Victor’s knees.

It was strange. When he was younger, Yuuri was certain he would have done pretty much anything to get a quirk. He was an anomaly according to doctors, after all; the only one in a whole family of quirks who didn’t receive one.

But he’d fought so incredibly hard to get where he was without one.

“If…” he took a deep breath, trying to word it right, “if I shared it with you, wouldn’t it make it harder for you to use your quirk?”

Victor’s expression softened.

“There was a reason I was the only one of my family to take up hero work, Yuuri. In serious situations, it could easily leave one of them quirkless. But, that’s why I feel okay asking you. Even though I have every intention of continuing to fight.”

He brought his other hand up, it shakily finding its way to Yuuri’s cheek.

“You, I know you can hold your own without a quirk. Honestly, I think you’re stronger for it. But, after last night, I can’t help but think...what if there comes a time when I cannot be there with you?”

Perhaps it was the sincerity of his gaze, or the slight way he curled his hand closer against his cheek as he said it, but suddenly Yuuri understood. This wasn’t about him being quirkless at all. Victor… Victor was scared. Scared to lose him.

Victor dropped his hand from Yuuri’s cheek, and for a moment he was afraid Victor had taken it all wrong. But then he moved it to the brooch shining on Yuuri’s lapel.

“It’s… a gift, like this was. I almost didn’t have the nerve to give you this, and when you told me you were able to use it to stop that bomb, all I could think was… thank goodness I gave it to you. Because maybe you would have found another way, but I just…”
Yuuri moved then, reaching up and wrapping his hand over Victor’s where it rested over his heart.

“You’re scared.”

“Terrified, actually,” he replied quietly.

And that, that, Yuuri understood so well. He’d felt that way himself last night when he couldn’t get Victor to leave him; would have done anything to have ensured Victor was safe.

For Victor, who had already lost so much in his life, the fear must have been even worse.

“I honestly don’t care if you never use it at all,” Victor continued, a quake in his voice. “I just never again want to feel as helpless as I did last night. To feel like I could have done something and didn’t… I could never live with myself after that.” He took a deep breath, clearly trying to steady his voice.

“Yuuri, you’re… my entire world. And this is my humble way of trying to protect you, no matter what life has in store for us.”

And it’s so raw and unguarded, it’s as if Victor had poured out his entire heart before him as evidence that this was so. This was the Victor who’d clearly had a nightmare about losing him that very morning. He didn’t think Yuuri was weak at all, that had nothing at all to do with it. This was about Victor’s heart and how desperately he wanted to keep Yuuri safe.

There’s a flicker of a thought in Yuuri’s mind, that little voice saying, “if the situation was reversed, you’d feel the same way.” And it was true, so painfully true.

Yuuri would gladly give up every bit of his strength to protect Victor. This was, in its own way, Victor’s way of doing just that.

He slowly, gently, threaded his fingers together with Victor’s; both their hands still resting over Yuuri’s heart. Yuuri glanced down at it, marveling yet again at how he’d gotten here.

He thought of the press conference, his own words coming back to him. He didn’t know why the
universe had suddenly brought Victor into his life, but he truly lacked any other explanation for how this had come to be. Maybe it really was fate, as silly as that sounded. Why that very morning, as the sun had begun to rise and Yuuri had found himself with Victor in his arms about to fall back asleep, he’d made the traditional new year’s morning wish. *Give me Victor’s time, if only for now.* Maybe, something out there, listened.

“So…” he began quietly, hoping his words wouldn’t fail him now. “Wouldn’t this mean you’re kind of stuck with me?”

Victor nodded, a timid smile tugging at his lips. “I think I’d be okay with that.”

“And… as long as you were fighting at full strength, I’d still be quirkless wouldn’t I?”

“You only need to borrow my power if you absolutely have to, Yuuri. You’re perfect already, just the way you are.”

And it’s that assertion, Victor honestly, truly, meaning each of those words, that made the decision suddenly easy.

It wasn’t giving Yuuri a quirk, it was Victor’s quirk being there for Yuuri if he ever needed it. A little piece of Victor, always there, watching over him, just in case.

“A-Are you sure about this?”

His nervous worries finally pricked at him with uncertainty. What if Victor changed his mind? What if he regretted it?

Victor let out a nervous laugh, “Shouldn’t I be asking you that?”

“I… just, what if… you find someone better?”

He tugged his hand out of Yuuri’s grasp, bringing both of his hands up to cup Yuuri’s face.
“What if you do?”

Yuuri eased into his touch. “Victor, I could search the whole wide world. There’s no one better than you.”

Victor leaned in, his bangs brushing against Yuuri’s forehead.

“And I’m certain that there is no place I’d rather be than by your side. No one else will ever come close.”

His heart flooded with emotion, as if a dam had broken free and spilled it unrestrained into his body. It pulsed through every vein, into every part. Washing every single possible doubt away.

“Oh, Yuuri breathed out. “I think you’re absolutely crazy, but okay.”

“Absolutely crazy about you, that’s a fact.”

“You’re ridiculous,” Yuuri countered.

“But you still love me,” Victor replied.

Yuuri smiled. “Yes. Yes I do.”

Victor shifted, pecking a kiss to the tip of Yuuri’s nose. He smiled, soft and gentle.

“Just tell me when you feel ready, Yuuri. No rush, all right?”

Yuuri appreciated the sentiment, truly. But he also knew with time, he’d surely pick it apart and come to the conclusion that Victor could do far better if he waited. He needed to jump while he still had the courage to do so.
Jump and hope. He could do that for Victor.

“I’m...as ready as I’ll ever be, Victor.”

“Are you sure? There’s no undoing it as far as I know.”

Yuuri nodded. He could let this one little part of Victor and his family live on with him. He was okay with that.

“Yeah. I’m sure.”

Victor kissed his forehead. “I really,” he kissed one cheek, “do not,” he kissed the other cheek, “deserve you, Yuuri Katsuki.”

Yuuri felt a smile tug at his lips. “Well, now you’re going to be stuck with me.”

He smoothed his hand over Yuuri’s cheek, drawing a finger across his bottom lip as he did so. “Guess so.”

Victor hesitated, as if giving him one last chance to change his mind. But Yuuri had made his decision. He nodded.

“Then I, Victor Nikiforov, have the incredible honor, of sharing this with you,” he said softly.

He closed the space between them, their lips pressing together. And as if carrying the power of those very words on his tongue, the moment Victor slipped it into Yuuri’s mouth, he felt a strange feeling course throughout; as if a wave had washed over him, leaving him a little different, but yet still the same. Yuuri brought his hand up to cradle the back of Victor’s head, hoping that he understood all the words he couldn’t find a way to say.

*Thank you Victor, for looking after me.*
Victor couldn’t believe any of this was happening.

He clearly remembered his mother and grandmother pulling him aside on his sixteenth birthday to tell him that there was more to his quirk than it seemed. It was the family secret, one that had been passed down five generations now that Victor had inherited it. They’d impressed upon him the importance of making sure the other person was “the one” beforehand, stating that there was no way to take it back. A quirk that could be shared, with express intent and transfer of DNA.

It was romantic, Victor thought. Like something out of a fairytale or Disney movie. A quirk that could be shared through true love’s kiss. At the time, it was a wonderful thought.

But with age came wisdom and perhaps, the reality that life wasn’t some fairytale. It’d be hard for him to share a quirk if he was going to continue his hero work, his father had told him. A point that became painfully clear when his parents tried their best to fend off Inferno. If his mother was fighting with a wave, then his father was left nothing more than trickle to defend with.

Victor blamed himself. Even moreso when his otherwise healthy grandmother seemingly died of grief.

He was left alone with a quirk that had lost part of its purpose; for who could he even think of burdening with such a thing? If Victor loved someone, it put them at risk. And the double edged sword of his quirk meant that if he wanted to fight, they’d be left powerless.

Victor came to the conclusion that his family’s quirk was destined to die with him.

Maybe it was years of Chris calling him a Disney princess, but when Yuuri swept him off his feet at the banquet, Victor felt his belief in all those childish fantasies slowly resurface.

Perhaps there was a dashing prince waiting for him after all.

For how else, but fairytale magic, had he found himself falling in love with someone so intrinsically perfect for him?

Someone born without a quirk, yet completely capable of fighting without one; who even already
had a water related hero namesake.

When Yuuri said he felt that there was a red string of fate tying them together, Victor knew he couldn’t deny what he’d been thinking any longer.

*He’s the one*.

Before he could allow himself to be plagued with doubts, worries that he wouldn’t be enough, Victor did what he never thought he ever would; he sat someone down, explained his quirk’s true power, and offered it up.

He’d expected a polite decline at best and outright rejection at worst. Victor had already feared he’d become annoying clingy since last night, but as always, Yuuri surprised him yet again.

This was a Yuuri who had brought him calm when he’d been awoken with a nightmare. A Yuuri who, after getting practically tackle-kissed by Victor in the middle of a press conference, had managed to laugh and then level the reporters a look while coyly saying, “And there’s the comment I’m sure you were all wanting about our relationship.”

Yuuri who, for whatever reason, loved and trusted Victor enough that he’d accepted the quirk he had to share.

He’d lapsed into laughter, peppering Yuuri’s face with little kisses as they fell back against the bed. The life that Victor had thought never possible, was now here in his arms, warm and full of love.

“If we’re late to dinner, it’s only going to make them talk, you know,” Yuuri remarked, but there was a glint of mischief in his eyes.

“Well, then we’ll just have to make sure we’re up to something worth talking about, hmm?”

Victor had expected a blush and perhaps a feeble attempt at pushing him away. But something in Yuuri’s expression had sharpened, as if considering what Victor had said as a challenge.

He’d leaned in, his breath warm against Victor’s ear.
“A few minutes wouldn’t hurt, right?”

Victor was about to agree, but Yuuri pressed a kiss to the juncture between his jaw and neck, and suddenly words didn’t seem all that important anymore.

Yeah. A few minutes would be fine.

Yuuri really, truly, wasn't sure what had come over him.

He still wasn't sure what had caused the surge of uncharacteristically forward comments he'd made at the press conference, but it was as if the adrenaline from the night before had never quite dissipated. Instead it had been left to coil in his veins, bottled lightning itching to strike.

He’d almost died. He was pretty sure he wasn’t going to be able to use an elevator any time soon without having a panic attack. And Victor was having nightmares about losing him.

So what if the whole damn world knew they were together. So what if he was about to be fifteen minutes late to dinner because he’d made the impromptu decision that making out with Victor was more important. Yuuri had hit the point where he was beyond caring what people thought and he was going to live in that moment as long as that confidence hung on.

“Ah, there they are!” Phichit’s voice called out across the restaurant as they finally arrived.

For a brief moment, Yuuri hoped they might not comment on it. But well…

“Yuuri, are you wearing Victor’s shirt?” Phichit asked as they moved closer.

Okay, adrenaline was officially gone. Clearly he’d used what was left of it to…well…cause the delay. He was pretty sure his face was scarlet.
“Toothpaste attacked his and we were already running late,” Victor explained.

Yeah, that might have been because they’d gotten distracted in the bathroom after changing back into their casual clothing. But really, Yuuri reasoned, he’d kind of spent most of his life dreaming about kissing Victor and well, the opportunity to do so had finally arrived. Who could blame him for seizing the moment?

Chris, who Yuuri could already tell by his expression was just brimming with a knowing smugness, quirked an eyebrow. “I can see you faced a plethora of interesting delays, hmm?” He tapped his neck pointedly.

Yuuri saw Victor’s hand drift up to that very spot on his neck and…

Phichit gaped. “Yuuri Katsuki I cannot believe you!”

Nevermind. Yuuri took it all back. Put him in the nearest elevator with a bomb please, it would be far less on his strained nerves.

“Ahhh, young love,” Georgi remarked, toasting his glass in their direction.

Well, at least Victor seemed equally flustered, Yuuri noted as he caught a glimpse of his face. Then again, he had left a rather noticeable...mark on Victor’s neck.

Yuuri buried his face in his hands, letting his feet guide him towards his seat. It was then he finally took in the restaurant, his eyes blinking twice before he could process what was before him.

It was all in Japanese decor, and the group was seated in a small private room with cushions lined up in front of a small bar where a sushi chef was hard at work. He was so accustomed to the habit of taking off his shoes when entering such a place that he’d done so unthinkingly. Now, it fully hit him, that they’d gone out of their way to find such a restaurant in Beijing. Probably for him.

He sought out Hayami, who was seated on the far edge near Chris.

“I just noticed, this restaurant it’s...traditional Japanese?”
Hayami smiled, tilting his head towards Chris. “Someone insisted you’ve earned it after all you’ve been through.”

And although he didn’t know him that well, and he was still somewhat worried about that little smirk Chris had, Yuuri couldn’t help but feel immensely grateful.

Something familiar on his stomach after everything they’d been through sounded amazing.

“Figured you might be up for a taste, as I’m sure Victor’s already gotten his fill,” Chris teased.

“Chris,” Victor warned.

Yuuri looked to Leo and Guang Hong and silently mouthed an apology. He really, truly, did not mean to turn the topic of the night into this.

As he sat down next to Phichit, he felt his hand reach over and grasp his arm.

“I owe you like, ten drinks, okay?”


Phichit sighed, dropping his voice to a whisper. “Dude, I am very certain I have at some point bet something along the lines that you would not have the nerve to do that,” he made a noticeable incline of his eyebrows towards Victor’s neck, “and you’ve just won it tenfold because, Yuuri, dude. How. It’s Victor.”

And for a brief little moment, Yuuri felt a smug little retort of “yeah, so?” echo in his mind.

Clearly, almost dying had broken him and now he was just...doing all kinds of stuff that he would have never ever had the nerve to do before now.
He reached up to rub at his collar, the soft texture of Victor’s striped shirt strangely comforting to him. As was the warmth to his right; Victor’s dress shirt, that he’d resorted to wearing with jeans, brushing gently against his bare arm.

“Apparently almost dying snapped something in my brain, Phichit,” he murmured back, voice low. “I don’t know. It’s like...it’s not as risky as disarming a bomb, so why not?”

Phichit’s smile was warm. “I’m proud of you. You’re all grown up and disarming bombs and giving Victor Nikiforov hickeys.”

“Phichit!” Yuuri hissed.

“No really, I’m serious. I’m proud, okay? You’ve really opened up since Victor came into your life, and I’m happy. Because dammit, the world deserves to see this Yuuri that you usually keep all guarded and secret. I can’t be the only one that knows that you get up to stupid ballsy stuff when the mood strikes and hell, you’ve needed that confidence to go get what you want for a long time. Even if you still blush all the way to your ears when you get embarrassed.”

Yuuri sighed, knowing that his blush was probably doing just that, but there was a fondness to it now. “How is it you know precisely what to say to get me to do exactly that?”

Phichit grinned. “Best friend secret. It’s actually my superpower, shhhh.”

Yuuri shoved his arm, but he could feel the happiness settling in his chest like a warm blanket.

“Yuuri?” Victor asked, clearly not wanting to interrupt.

Phichit gave a nod towards him. “Go forth and dote, my daring hickey-giving friend!”

Yuuri rolled his eyes before turning around to Victor, a smile already tugging at his lips just by looking at him.

“What is it?”
Victor pointed to the menu. “I figure you’ll know what I like best out of the options, so...can you order for me?”

And before he could let himself get delightfully giddy about that, Yuuri cleared his throat and placed the order to the chef for both of them.

“Victor,” Chris called down the table. “I’m texting you all the stuff Hayami isn't letting me say aloud because there are children present.”

Victor sighed. “That’s really not necessary.”

“I know, but watching you two turn into matching blushing teenagers is really fun.”

He turned to Yuuri and they shared a small resigned smile at that. Okay. So their friends were not going to let this go anytime soon. At least they were in this together?

- *Was it really toothpaste on his shirt? ^.^*
- *Also is Katsuki really that wild sober? Because if so I'm super jealous :P*

Yuuri caught the text notifications as they flickered across Victor’s phone screen and had to repress a groan of frustration.

Victor sighed, flipping his phone face down and powering it off.

“Hey no fair!” Chris protested.

Victor leveled him a look, but it didn’t seem to faze him any.
“Fine, kids cover your ears,” Chris yelled down the table.

Guang Hong and Leo exchanged a worried look.

“Chris…” Victor warned again.

Hayami just shook his head, and Yuuri had a feeling he’d given up trying to stop him.

“First off, pillow princess, I need to know specifics on how you got that bite mark on your collarbone, and then…”

“Ohmygod,” Yuuri breathed out, burying his face in his arms.

Phichit gave his back a pat, that was probably supposed to be half-consoling and half-congrats for causing it.

“Chris, look, I know that Hayami’s been too busy covering all our asses to take care of yours…” Victor began.

Yuuri peered out of his huddle of shame, just in time to catch Guang Hong and Leo both looking torn between bolting from the table or staying to watch the fallout. Clearly, this was not the one-on-one time with their hero idols they were expecting.

“…please tell me you didn’t have a quickie, because really Victor, you deserve better for what’s probably your first go at it,” Chris continued, completely undeterred.

“Why are you so worried about my sex life? Afraid hero work isn’t going to be the only thing you’re coming in second to me in?”

That seemed to strike a nerve, Chris gaping for a moment before turning to Hayami.

“He wounds me. As if I would ever come second.”
“Okay!” Phichit interjected. “And that is more than enough info for all of us, thank you very much.”

Yuuri felt a timid tap at his arm, and he peered warily up at Victor.

And there he was, with the bright pink dusting of a blush arching over his cheekbones and trailing down to his neck.

He was positively adorable.

Yuuri quickly clamped a hand over his mouth, hoping it would hide the smile that was edging itself onto his lips unbidden.

“You?” Victor managed, voice a little breathless. He was clearly worried the topic had upset him.

Yuuri shook his head. “Sorry, it’s fine. I mean, it’s not fine but it’s fine and wow you are really adorable right now.”

He slammed the hand back over his mouth, knowing that if he wasn’t already just as red as Victor, he surely was now.

If possible, Victor pinked further at the comment. But there was a little sparkle of something in his eyes as he leaned down towards where Yuuri was burrowed into his arms.

“If you are trying to get me more flustered, Yuuri Katsuki,” he said, reaching a hand over to push Yuuri’s bangs out of his eyes.

“I just thought we should match,” he managed.

Victor’s semi-serious look faltered at that, giving way to utter amusement. He smiled now, wide and touched, before wrapping himself around Yuuri in a hug from above.
“I’m joining you in the fortress of solitude then,” Victor murmured back, laughter in his voice.

“Is it a fortress of solitude if we’re both in it?” Yuuri countered, but he too could feel the laughter building in his chest. He was all smiles now.

They probably looked ridiculous. Yuuri huddled with his face in his arms, and Victor now doing the same around him. He could feel Victor’s breath warm against his ear, the tickle of his hair sliding between his glasses and skin.

“Hmm. The enclave of embarrassment then?”

“Oh I live in that enclave,” Yuuri joked.

Victor snorted. “Mind if I move in?”

“I suppose…” he drawled out, “I did apparently leave a bite mark, after all. It’s the least I could do.”

“Ah. I was going to ask you later to continue where you left off on that.”

“Victor!”

He chuckled. “Unless you’d rather I return the favor?”

Yuuri’s reply got muffled by his arm.

“What was that?”

He sighed, shifting until he could sort of see Victor’s face through the dim lighting in their little cavern of arms.

“...I’d uh...be okay with that,” he finally stammered out.
Victor grinned, pecking a kiss to the shell of his ear and earning a shiver out of Yuuri for the effort. “You’re adorable,” he said quietly.

“Shut up.”

“You are.”

“Yeah, well so are you.”

That earned him that little strained smile and what Yuuri was certain had to be blushing cheeks even in the poor lighting.

“Hey, weirdos,” Phichit said, nudging Yuuri in the side. “Hayami’s put a ban on talking about certain topics for the rest of the night, you can come out and eat now.”

“Do we have to?” Yuuri asked, half-joking.

“If you don’t, I’m going to eat all your food and get sick, so you’d better.”

Yuuri caught Victor’s eye, both of them trying and failing to repress a goofy, giddy grin. Victor caved first, Yuuri following suit.

He grinned up at Victor. “I think I like the enclave much better than the fortress.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because you’re in it with me.”

Victor’s grin softened into a tender smile at that as he pressed the gentlest of kisses to Yuuri’s forehead.
“Well next time we both inevitably get embarrassed together, we’ll have to visit it again.”

“Okay.”

And somehow, knowing that, made all the embarrassment completely worth it.

By the time they were ready to leave, both Yuuri’s stomach and heart were full. Filled with good food and lots of love.

After Yuuri and Victor’s food had arrived, Victor’s excitement over everything ended up getting most everyone else at the table to try something off the “Yuuri selected menu,” although Chris opted to have Yuuri suggest one of the sake offered instead.

Phichit, Guang Hong and Leo had begun to compare notes on what social media sites had been saying about the incident, Phichit’s videos being the pinnacle of it all. He may have preened a little (okay a lot) at all the fuss the media had made over it. Yuuri was certain he wasn’t going to hear the last of “Freeze Frame has better cinematography than last year’s Oscar winner” any time soon.

Leo explained that even the usually America-centric hero media in the states had been gaga over it. Everything from the major networks to his local station covering it, according to his abuela who he’d spoken with earlier in the day.

And Guang Hong, although half embarrassed to do so, tried to explain why Chinese social networks had a second hashtag trending alongside #lovewins.

#ǎikūshǐlàn

Or, as he’d explained, they were saying Victor’s devotion to stay there even if the bomb may have gone off, was such an undying love that it would last until the seas ran dry. Yuuri, and well, Victor as well, both heavily considered going back to the enclave of embarrassment again after that explanation.

Georgi was in a much better mood than when he’d first arrived, the flurry of attention and current second place ranking doing wonders to boost his morale. Also, according to Chris at least, he’d
received several offers to replace Anya if she didn’t come around.

Hayami, at least after a few glasses of sake with Chris, even finally let his rather serious business air down a little, joking around with the rest of them and even flirting back and forth with Chris.

Chris, well, Yuuri still wasn’t quite sure what to make of him. After having his first choice of topic shutdown for the night, he’d pretty much found every other way possible to try and get Yuuri or Victor or both of them flustered without bringing it up. But, by the time he’d had a good portion to drink, he’d come over and started going on about how he was so glad Victor finally found someone and how glad he was that someone was Yuuri.

Even though it had gotten rather late by the time they parted ways in the hotel hallway, Yuuri couldn’t help but feel like despite all they’d been through, everyone was going to leave Beijing in much better moods.

“Yuuri?”

Victor’s soft voice the moment they’d shut the door to their hotel room caught Yuuri off guard, his mind a whirlwind of warm happy thoughts.

“Hmm?”

He shuffled his feet, eyes downcast. What was he so nervous about?

“I know we’re both really tired, but...I wanted to make sure it was okay before I just assumed…”

Yuuri blinked. Then he noticed the way Victor’s eyes had moved over to the separate beds. He appreciated Victor’s awareness that he couldn’t always quite handle the attention, but now...now that was very different.

“Thank you, but...I think I’d much prefer if you stayed with me, if that’s all right?”

Blue eyes so bright in the dimly lit room flickered up to him, brimming with an emotion Yuuri found he couldn’t call anything but love. He bit back a smile, trying his best to play it cool.
“But…” Victor froze. “On one condition…”

He looked to Yuuri expectantly. “Yes?”

Yuuri dipped his head, knowing he couldn’t keep his composure if he continued to watch Victor.

“I’m really comfortable in this shirt, so uh...I might just sleep in it, if that’s okay?”

“Yuuuuriiii!” Victor trilled, launching himself at him and practically tackling him in a hug. “Of course you can!”

“Okay, okay!” he replied, laughing. “Let me go get ready, pick whichever bed you think looks more comfortable.”

Victor nodded and he managed to pry himself away, reluctantly though, to make his way to the bathroom.

Once confronted by his own reflection, Yuuri blinked for a moment. He didn’t look much different, but something definitely felt different. He mulled that over in his mind as he slid out of his jeans and into his pajama pants, finally pausing with his toothbrush stuck in his mouth as it dawned on him.

He sorta. Kinda. Had a quirk. And he still hadn’t tried it out at all.

Yuuri flipped on the sink and stared at the water. How was this supposed to work? He’d read up a lot on quirk usage, but that had been so many years ago it was kind of murky in his mind.

*It’s like learning to walk, you’ll just know.* Mari’s words come back to him.

He held a hand out towards the water and thought *I’ll pull the water to my hand. I can do that.*

Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath and concentrated hard. He felt the muscles in his arm brace,
as if they knew something was incoming it had to catch, and he darted his eyes open just in time to see the water rushing towards him.

He lost his focus immediately and the water fell. Right onto his pants.

“Yuuri, are you okay?” Victor called.

Yuuri blinked. Then before he could think anymore of it, he began to laugh.

“I’m fine, I’m…” He shrugged off his pants, deciding Victor’s shirt would be long enough. “I’m terrible at using a quirk apparently.”

“What?”

Yuuri opened the door, the cool air hitting his legs and momentarily making him self-conscious about his decision to go pantless.

But Victor’s warm, light laughter was not directed at Yuuri’s looks.

“Oh my, I think we might have to practice some. What did you try to do, summon the whole sink?”

Yuuri looked over to the mess of water. “I guess, I don’t know how this works?”

Victor just smiled, a flick of his wrist gathering up most of the water on the floor and arching it gracefully back into the sink.

“We can practice some in the onsen or at the beach late when no one else is around,” he offered, reaching a hand over to Yuuri. “I at least want you confident enough that you can use it in an emergency.”

“Okay.”
Yuuri took Victor’s hand, then leaned into him.

“Thank you. I should have said something earlier, but...I honestly don’t think I really believed it until now.”

Victor brought his arm up around Yuuri, heading back towards the bed where the sheets had been drawn back.

“No, thank you for being someone I could entrust this too, Yuuri.”

They shared a smile at that, both of them not sure what else they could do to convey all that this meant to them. As Yuuri slid into the sheets, Victor hesitated a moment.

Yuuri blinked.

“Would you...I mean, I don’t want you to be uncomfortable, but...” Victor’s eyes darted to where Yuuri had hastily pulled the sheets over himself.

And feeling that little rush of daring, that little well it's not as bad as disarming a bomb echoing in his mind, Yuuri blurted out what he was thinking before he could stop himself.

“Well I’m not going to complain if you want to even the stakes and go pantless as well.”

Yuuri bit his lip, but the only thing that kept him from taking it back immediately was the brilliant smile and peal of laughter that got from Victor.

And maybe he did it to make Yuuri feel better about how self-conscious he obviously was, but it meant the world to Yuuri that he politely asked him to turn away before he slid out of his pajama pants and under the covers as well.

“Is that better?” he asked.

Yuuri nodded, shyly scooting over until he was nestled under Victor’s arm. He knew there weren’t
enough words to say everything he wanted to say.

How could you begin to tell someone how you were in love with everything about them?

“How feeling better tonight?” Victor asked after a moment.

Yuuri turned towards him, wrapping his arm across Victor’s chest.

“I think I much prefer being in bed with you as opposed to stuck in an elevator with a bomb.”

And after another flurry of laughter, and a few kisses for good measure, they found themselves dozing off into a blissful sleep.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay, it's been a bit of a rough week for me. Next week I'm also trying to get a few oneshots for YuuriWeek posted, but it shouldn't affect this story's update. Thank you as always for the support!

Victor was used to waking up early.

Perhaps it was having a dog that loved morning walks, Makkachin almost always making sure he was up before too late and insistent even if he’d had a late night before. Timezones didn’t seem to matter much, for it was as if his body clocked an exact eight hours of sleep before prompting him to awaken.

For once, he didn’t mind it at all.

It seemed Yuuri, on the other hand, was not a naturally early riser. His body was fully relaxed with the vestiges of deep sleep, hair mussed and jaw slack as he drooled a little onto Victor’s chest. Sometime in the night, he’d curled closer, legs tangled in with Victor’s for warmth, and Victor’s shirt he wore riding up to where the slightest expanse of Yuuri’s back was exposed.

It was quite possibly the most beautiful sight Victor had seen in his entire life.

Silly as it sounded, he felt it clench at his heart in a way nothing else ever had. A pleasant warmth settled in his chest and a fond smile on his lips. How had he been so incredibly lucky?

Was it the universe finally giving back after so long of taking everything else? For as strange as it seemed, this was the first time he could honestly feel any gratitude towards Inferno. If he hadn’t staged that little incident, Victor wondered if he would’ve ever have had the nerve to reach out to Yuuri again. But, as Yuuri so eloquently put it, perhaps fate had bigger plans for them; leading them back to one another so they could find the part of themselves they’d been missing for so long.

Victor had always thought fairy tales and the like idealized love, at least a little. Now, he thought perhaps they weren’t even close to describing all the wonderful things love could be; for he wasn’t sure if there were words that even existed that could truly capture the way he felt.
He’d absently began to thread his fingers gently through Yuuri’s hair, earning himself the softest little hum from Yuuri as he nuzzled closer. Victor had to resist the urge to kiss him, his chest bursting with love. But Yuuri was content and he’d done more than enough to earn himself a restful night’s sleep.

And so he watched, perfectly happy to just smile down at him and watch him rest. The sun crept higher in the sky, but Victor paid it no mind. All that mattered now was Yuuri.

The buzzing of his phone on the nightstand made a valiant effort to gain Victor’s attention, but he merely reached over to silence it. It could wait. The world could wait until Yuuri felt like awakening, couldn’t it?

A few minutes ticked by in blissful silence.

Then the shrill notes of the hamster dance song blared from Yuuri’s phone. Groggily, as if partially in a haze of sleep still, Yuuri shifted. Victor reluctantly reached over for the phone and answered it.

“This is Victor, speaking on behalf of Yuuri. How can I help you?”

Phichit’s warm laughter echoed through the phone’s speakers. “I cannot believe this. Victor is answering his phone for him. He’s still asleep isn’t he?”

Victor looked down and sure enough, he’d slept through it. “I take it he’s not a morning person?”

“That’s an understatement,” Phichit replied, “but at least now he has you to answer his phone for him. Usually I have to call him like five plus times until he finally registers the noise and answers.”

“I’m guessing this is important?” He tried not to sound irritated, but he also figured if Phichit was aware of Yuuri’s sleeping habits he wouldn’t disturb him for just anything.

“Yeah, sadly you’ve gotta wake him up. Chris tried calling you, because it’s actually Hayami here that needs to talk to him, but you weren’t answering. Nice to know you’ll answer Yuuri’s phone but not your own.”
Victor knew he was surely blushing at that, not that Phichit could see.

“I tend to think Chris calling me is isn’t as important, to be perfectly honest.”

“That’s fair,” Phichit replied. “Oh, but he’s making a face at you. I think you hurt his feelings.”

“He’ll get over it.”

Phichit snorted. “Okay, so serious stuff time. We’ve got some magazine people here that want to get a shot of Yuuri outside the tower suited up before you fly back. I think they’re fishing for an interview as well, but I’m not sure all the specifics.”

“Ah.” Phichit was right, this was indeed something only Yuuri could make the decision on. “Give me a second to see if I can I wake him up.”

“I’m not going to tell you he’s definitely dreamed about having you kiss him awake.”

“Then I’m not going to let him know you suggested it then,” Victor replied, a little flutter of butterflies in his stomach at the thought.

Phichit chuckled and Victor sat the phone down on the bed as he leaned over towards where Yuuri was blissfully asleep.

“Rise and shine, sleeping beauty. You have a phone call.”

He nudged his nose against Yuuri’s before closing the remaining space and pressing his lips gently to Yuuri’s. Sure enough, he stirred. His pretty eyelashes fluttered, finally blinking open to his warm brown eyes.

He smiled and Victor decided he had to take back his former thought. This was the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen.

“Did you call me a sleeping beauty?” he asked, his voice still a bit rough with sleep.
Victor leaned his forehead down until it brushed against Yuuri’s.

“Because you are one,” he replied.

His cheeks bloomed a dusting of pink at that, and Victor yet against amended his thought. No. Smiling, blushing Yuuri, with his head on my chest. That’s the most beautiful thing in the world.

Yuuri seemed too tired to argue the point, although Victor could see the flicker of surprise cross his features. Instead he just pressed a smidge closer.

“You’re beautiful,” Yuuri murmured.

Whatever words had been on his lips fell away, Victor certain that perhaps Yuuri wasn’t the only person blushing in surprise. Yuuri’s languid smile tugged directly at Victor’s heartstrings.

“Hellooooo, be mushy later. Important talking to Phichit now!” a voice called from the waylaid phone.

They both broke into silent laughter at that, shooting one another shy little smiles as they tried and failed to break eye contact.

“Don’t make me send Chris up there!” Phichit tried again.

Victor huffed, picking up the phone. “Okay, okay.”

Yuuri nuzzled his face in the crook of Victor’s neck, as it would somehow allow him to evade the topic.

“He’s your friend,” Victor said, holding the phone towards him.

“Not anymore,” Yuuri teased, mischief in his eyes.
“I heard that!” Phichit called out.

Yuuri finally took the phone, but before putting it up to his ear, he leaned up and pressed a slow, lazy kiss to Victor’s lips.

It was official, Yuuri Katsuki was going to be the death of Victor in the best way possible.

[A posed photo in front of Beijing Tower. Front and center is Hokusai Wave, his blue and white herotek suit complemented nicely by Winter Monsoon who stands behind him, hands looped around his waist. Further back on the stairs stands an array of heroes. To the left stands Pingzhang and Tiempo, back to back, both looking skyward. To the right, Caradoc poses dramatically with the golden dragon. Below him is Smolder, seated leaning back as if he’s lounging on the stairs, while his head rests against the legs of the only non-hero pictured, Hero Liaisons Officer, Hayami Masumi, in a crisp suit.]

**New Year, New Era**

- *I think what I’d like most for people to take away from this, is that quirks don’t always make things easier. Sometimes, we’re just normal people who have to take a risk in hopes that we can help others.* - Hokusai Wave

They say with the new year comes the opportunity for change, and nowhere is that more apparent than in the array of heroes that stand before me at the foot of Beijing Tower in China. It’s January 2nd and with these new faces come, what they hope is, a new era of heroics.

“While the focus in the past has been on who had the best showmanship in judged contests, now we’re working towards a system where heroes are awarded for what their name implies—heroics,” says Hayami Masumi, the new Hero Liaisons Officer at the IHU, talking of the new scoring system that shall apply towards the United Alliance Team selection process. “We want the best heroes, those that have put their lives on the line to help others, and that isn’t always necessarily going to be who looks best on camera,” he adds. “It’s a work in progress, but we’ve had nothing but positive feedback from the hero community. It’s become a team effort, heroes across the world pitching in suggestions and information to make things happen that’ll benefit everyone.”
“It’s been long overdue,” remarks none other than Winter Monsoon, Victor Nikiforov. “The previous ways suited the entertainment industry more than the people and that’s not what most of us became heroes for.”

“It’s definitely encouraging me to step up my game,” says the UAT’s Smolder. “I’d like to be known as a hero because of what good I can do and not just my pretty face.”

These two former top heroes might be lower ranked now, but both assure me they couldn’t be happier. “At a time when we have heroes running around with sponsorship logos on their uniforms like walking billboards, I think it’s an important reminder that we’re not just doing this for the fame,” Victor adds. Smolder concurs, “Fame might be something that comes with the territory, but at the end of a rough battle it’s not why I want to keep fighting. I think I speak for most heroes when I say that I feel like my advanced quirk is a blessing and my way of giving back for getting blessed with it is by using it to help others.”

This sentiment is no more apparent than with the new faces that have suddenly become household names; a group of friends who had their party interrupted by a villain set on revenge that had fame thrust upon them over night.

“I’m still honestly kind of in shock,” admits Freeze Frame, Thailand’s top ranked hero and worldwide internet favorite. “Like I had no idea that my video would blow up like this.” Although he’s livestreamed many battles before now, the viral video he posted moments before the clock hit midnight is well on its way to becoming one of the most watched online videos of all time. “I’d just never really thought about how serious hero work was until I saw this,” writes one commenter online. “I have mad respect for heroes who risk their lives for their friends,” says another, “that’s a level of bravery I think all of us should aspire to.”

And it’s a level of bravery that is no better embodied than by the current top ranked hero, Hokusai Wave of Japan. After crashing onto the scene weeks ago when Inferno showed up on the coast of Japan, Hokusai Wave has been nothing but humble in person. “I’m just doing my job,” he’s reassured news cameras and reporters, citing the protection of friends and civilians as his ultimate goal. An admirable nature that’s captured the attention of many people, most notably Winter Monsoon.

“Yuuri’s what all heroes should aspire to be,” he says fondly, “a brave man who’s put the protection of others before himself time and time again.”

It was gratitude and admiration that Winter Monsoon says first brought him to Japan, but it was the genuine honesty and courage of Hokusai Wave that kept him there. “I’m a different person, a better person, for having him in my life,” he tells us. “(laughs) Truly, I couldn’t help but fall in love with him.”
It seems he’s not the only one, as even I find that the more time spent around Hokusai Wave, the
more I come to adore him. For example, this was originally to be a solo piece about him, but he
insisted that he wouldn’t participate unless everyone was included. “I couldn’t have done any of this
alone,” he notes. “It’s high time that the hero world accepts and encourages teamwork in a crisis
situation. It should be one for all, not all for one.”

Hokusai Wave seems to truly live by this principle not just preach it. “He wanted us to evacuate the
building without him,” Caradoc, current second ranked hero from Russia, remarks. “He didn’t want
to put even fellow heroes at risk when there was a chance the bomb might go off.”

“The entire evening he went out of his way to ensure that everyone else could safely escape,” adds
Tiempo, who hails from the west coast of America. “It was his quick thinking that made sure we all
had someone who could protect us from the smaller bombs set to go off sooner.”

Civilians credit the work of China’s own hero, Pingzhang, with his quirk force field and Caradoc’s
quirk creating an escape elevator with their safety. As Hokusai Wave noted, it was truly a team effort
to get all fifty-seven people inside the tower out unharmed, the only injury being that of hero
Pingzhang who took a bullet while pushing Tiempo out of the way.

“I didn’t even think to use my quirk,” the young hero remarks. “My only thought was to make sure
Tiempo was safe.”

It’s this camaraderie and friendship that has been a rare sight in the hero world before now, but it’s
something these heroes hope becomes more common. “It’s about time we have heroes helping out
their fellow heroes instead of trying to upstage them,” Freeze Frame says. “Stop focusing so much on
who has what fancy quirk and who has how many points and just do your job as a hero.”

“I’ve always said it’s not about what your quirk is, it’s all about how you use it,” says Tiempo. “I can
fight without any visible quirk if I want, but I’ve gotten in the habit of making it visible just because
during the UAT Trials if you don’t have something showy you lose points.”

Hokusai Wave, who like many heroes has chosen to keep his quirk a secret, says it’s a safety
precaution. “If your enemy knows what your weakness is, it’s easier to exploit it. This bomb maker
knew the quirks present and worked to ensure all of us would be equally helpless. Had we used a
quirk, there’s a good chance that bomb would have gone off.”

“It’s a wise move,” says Smolder. “I mean, if someone wanted to come after me, they’d just need
water. There’s a downside to having your quirk be so apparent too.”

A fact that is perhaps no more apparent than Winter Monsoon’s eternal nemesis being fire to his ice. “I think what I’d like most for people to take away from this, is that quirks don’t always make things easier,” Hokusai Wave notes. “Sometimes, we’re just normal people who have to take a risk in hopes that we can help others.”

It’s a new era of heroics, one that’s hoping to return to what the true meaning of hero really is. And with heroes like these before me, I have a feeling we’re well on our way to just that.

They’d just switched trains at Meinohama station, settling onto a seat on the Chikuhi line headed for home, when Victor excitedly shoved his phone over into Yuuri’s hands.

“Look, the article’s up! I think you’ll be happy with it.”

He skimmed it over, pleased to see what had made the cut out of all the comments he’d given. It’d been nerve wracking at best to have a big name magazine like HERO suddenly want to do a feature story, but somehow with Victor there it made it seem less terrifying than usual.

It was clear this wasn’t the first time Victor or even Chris had met this reporter, both of them talking to her casually about her family and asking how her daughter’s application to a hero academy in Europe was going. Yuuri was relieved at having them there; the older heroes with the newer ones, even Hayami, made it far less intimidating for him.

Plus, while he might have his room wallpapered in photos and articles that focused on no one else but Winter Monsoon, Yuuri didn’t want the efforts of everyone else to be pushed aside in favor of him. The reporter had been surprised at first by his request, but by the end of the interview she seemed to understand why it was so important to Yuuri that the whole group be in the spotlight.

“There you go, breaking hearts again,” Phichit had teased him after. He always insisted that people liked Yuuri, but he was certain he was just exaggerating. He was just Yuuri, after all.

But somehow, although it was still surreal to him, “just Yuuri” had somehow captured the attention of not only the world, but Victor. Perhaps the sudden fame would be more surprising if he wasn’t
still trying to wrap his mind around Victor’s affection for him. As it was, even on the flight home, he’d just found himself in a reverent awe. Sometimes he’d just find himself staring at Victor or at their joined hands, as if trying to process that it was still happening.

It was like he was still waiting to wake up and have it all be a dream.

Then Victor would give his hand a squeeze or light up with a smile and Yuuri knew that surge of happiness in his chest couldn’t be anything but reality. It was strange, but somehow Yuuri - just Yuuri - had been enough to get him here.

“Excuse me,” a young teenage girl had stopped by their seats and was shyly peering over at them. “I don’t mean to bother both of you, but I just wanted to say I really admire you.”

Victor lit up at that, immediately holding out a hand and presenting a wide smile. “Thank you...?”

“Mai.”

He turned to Yuuri with a smile, which Yuuri found himself echoing. “Mai-san, thank you,” he said quietly.

She nervously shook Victor’s hand before taking Yuuri’s. Before she let his go, she bowed her head towards him. “It is such an honor to meet you, Hokusai Wave. I hope one day I can be a hero just like you.”

Yuuri felt Victor slide a reassuring arm around his shoulders and he eased into his touch.

“I look forward to working with you in the future then,” Yuuri replied, earning a smile and blush from the girl in response before she hastily pulled away with more thank yous.

“You’re going to inspire so many people, Yuuri.” Victor murmured, low and gentle.

“I...you really think so?”
Victor pressed a soft kiss to his cheek. “I know it. You’ve inspired me, after all.”

Yuuri felt the warmth of that settle on his heart, wrapping it up in layers of awe and affection. He turned to Victor, burying his face in the crook of his neck as if the safety of it might push away all the uncertainties trying to surface in his mind.

Victor reached up, his fingers gently threading into Yuuri’s hair. He didn’t need to say anything, unspoken words of reassurance and love already present in his actions in a way even Yuuri’s mind couldn’t twist or deny. He felt the tension ease from his shoulders, the doubts that were trying to edge to the surface stifled before they had a chance to fully form.

Minutes ticked by without notice, Yuuri matching his deep steady breaths with Victor’s. That morning after Hayami had explained what the reporter had in mind, Yuuri had felt the usual grip of panic and anxiety flare up. Interviews and photos always made him nervous, but now that he didn’t have a mask to hide behind, it had only gotten worse.

It had been Victor’s calm soft voice, the steadying hands that had wrapped around Yuuri’s waist, that had given him something to focus on beside the rising swell of panic. He still had to weather the storm, still had to fight through the waves of anxiety as he answered the reporter’s questions and posed for photos, but there was a beacon of light that kept him from shutting down completely. Like a lighthouse in a storm Yuuri found Victor had somehow become a place where he could regroup.

“All thirty more minutes until home,” Victor murmured quietly and Yuuri could almost cry at the way Victor’s accent curled around the word “home” as if he truly thought of it as such.

He hummed an acknowledgement of the statement, not sure if he could reply without sounding overly touched. But Victor, who was becoming ever more aware of Yuuri’s emotional state, leaned back and pressed a kiss to his forehead.

“You feeling a bit better now?”

“Yeah,” he managed. “Thank you.”

And Victor, bless him, seemed surprised at that. Yuuri reached up, his fingertips brushing the bangs out of Victor’s eyes.
“It helps. Having you with me,” he attempted to explain, pressing his hand against Victor’s cheek. “After...after that night, you’ve stayed with me. And it helps, probably more than I can ever put into words.”

Victor melted into his touch. “I can’t begin to imagine everything that you’re going through, Yuuri. But always know, I’m right here. You’re stuck with me now, remember?”

He winked at that and Yuuri couldn’t stop the smile that crept onto his lips. Sometimes, Victor was...well, kind of a dork. Yuuri stifled a snicker.

“Was it the wink? Too much?” Victor teased back.

“Just be yourself,” Yuuri replied, his fingertip tracing down his cheek to dip into the dimple that had appeared there. “That’s the Victor I like most.”

This once again, seemed to be something too much for Victor to bear, for his cheeks flushed pink before he leaned forward to bury his face against Yuuri’s shoulder.

“Yuuurriiii,” he whined.

Yuuri was pretty sure he could hear that and every other intonation of his name from Victor’s lips every day going forward and he’d never tire of it.

They lingered in one another’s embrace for a while longer before it seemed that both of them were feeling better. Yuuri took to resting his head over against Victor’s shoulder, just watching the scenery blur past, until another of Yuuri’s custom ringtones started up and Victor raised an eyebrow as he shuffled to answer it.

“My coach,” Yuuri explained. “It’s the ending theme to a game called Portal.”

Understanding dawned on Victor’s face, easily connecting that with the hero-turned-coach Celestino’s hero name and quirk, Portal.

Yuuri answered and was met with the usual greeting from his coach. “Yuuri, ciao!”
“Celestino, hello.”

“I know you’re probably pretty tired after everything. I can’t believe I was tied up in Detroit while my two best heroes were out there working so hard.”

“You have students to train,” Yuuri reassured him.

“Which doesn’t mean I can completely ignore both of you. Look, you’ve made quite the name for yourself since Winter Monsoon showed up there. I’ve got a huge influx of potential sponsors, interview requests, and even some magazines wanting to do photoshoots with designers. I can forward all of those too you, but I know you’re not usually a fan of the latter.”

Yuuri felt the apprehension rising back in his veins. He was going to have to get over this somehow but…

“There’s three I don’t think we can turn down though, as they want Victor with you.”

He blinked, looking over to Victor who must have at least somewhat overheard based on his expression.

“O-Okay, so what are those? I can turn down a few if I do a few, right?”

Celestino sighed. “Yuuri, you gotta take opportunity when it comes, okay? Even if we say no now, unless you stop winning, they’ll just come back later and ask again.”

“Can I?” Victor asked, reaching for the phone.

Yuuri nodded, handing it over. He wasn’t sure what Victor could do to change Celestino’s mind though.

“Hello, this is Victor speaking. I have a few suggestions, just something to think about.”

“Go on,” he replied, but Yuuri could hear the curiosity in his tone.
“You can only do so many interviews without repeating the same facts over and over, so choose a few with publications that aren’t going to twist Yuuri’s words to make some fake drama out of it. You know what types I’m talking about.”

Celestino sighed. “Oh trust me, Freeze Frame has sued about half of them for stealing his work.”

“See! Now the list is already shorter,” Victor said, charisma at its peak. “Sponsors are great, but don’t stoop to selling out. Draw the line at unreasonable demands, Yuuri’s not the type to go all King Canada you know?”

Yuuri had to repress a laugh at that. No, he was far from being JJ, who sported more advertisements on his uniform than a Nascar driver did.

“No, but he’s got to take the money before the winds shift again and…”

“Yuuri’s going to be a top hero for quite some time, Celestino. You’ll have plenty of opportunities in the future,” Victor cut him off, his tone firm.

Celestino had always, always, known that Yuuri couldn’t hold the public’s attention for long. And for the longest time, Yuuri had agreed. He didn’t have it in him, to be the top hero.

But Victor, Victor, believed in him. Believed he did have what it took to reach his dream.

“Hmm. Well, I can’t say you don’t know what you’re talking about, but…”

“If he doesn’t, I’ll cover any expenses he needs covered, how about that? I’m more than willing to put money on it.”

The line went silent, and Yuuri for a moment was worried that perhaps Victor had crossed a line. But suddenly, he heard Celestino laughing.

“Yuuri’s got himself in good hands with you, doesn’t he?”
“Forward him all the information and I’ll help him decide what’s worth his time. I’m a pro at this, after all.”

Victor handed the phone back over to Yuuri, as if he knew what he’d said was final. Yuuri fumbled with it a moment before speaking.

“Celestino, I...I hope that’s okay?”

He laughed again. “I think you’ve got yourself a nice coach there to help you out while I’m busy with the next generation. Can’t say he’s inexperienced when it comes to this.”

Yuuri felt the weight of worry lift off his chest. “Thank you. I’ll be in touch, Celestino.”

“Let me know if you need anything, Yuuri. I’m proud of you, okay?”

And feeling more excited and confident about all this than he ever had before, Yuuri wished his coach goodbye and turned to give Victor a warm smile.

_Maybe with Victor...I can do this._

It had been a long time since Victor had a place to call home.

For although he’d lived a fair amount of places since he was eighteen not a single one of them created such a yearning to return to them as this did. Before it had always been just returning to Makkachin, for there was never anyone else waiting at home for him.

This time, that was different.

They’d barely began to step out of the taxi that had brought them to the onsen entrance and there was already yelling from inside. Minako, who Victor suspected may have been waiting outside, reached them first.
She pulled Yuuri into a fierce hug and he’d barely had the chance to register that before the Katsuki family came running into view.

“Yuuri! Victor!” Mari called out to them, Makkachin leaping at her heels.

One by one, they approached, all of them wrapping Yuuri in a loving embrace, his mother pressing a kiss to his cheek and his father ruffling his hair. Victor couldn’t understand what they were saying in Japanese, but he felt he could guess.

He stepped to the side, giving Makkachin a hug and hoping he wasn’t intruding too much on what was clearly a family moment.

“Victor, get over here!” Mari yelled.

He blinked, shock clearly on his face. But before he could even begin to register the invitation, Minako had grabbed him by an arm and pulled him over.

He stumbled next to Yuuri and was promptly doted on as well.

“Vicchan, we were so worried about you boys,” Hiroko murmured, her English a bit stilted. She made up for it with a bone-crushing hug.

He looked to Yuuri, honestly at a loss.

“Thank you for taking care of our Yuuri,” Toshiya said, his hand warm on Victor’s shoulder and his fatherly smile expressing all the other things he knew his English couldn’t manage.

“Dad…” Yuuri muttered, but he was still smiling.

“Yes, thank you for making sure my stupid idiot brother wasn’t going to die alone,” Mari said, her bluntness earning a swat from Minako.
“Mari!”

“I probably deserved that,” Yuuri sighed.

“Damn right you did. I still can’t believe you texted back and didn’t tell us what was going on. Mom about had a heart attack when it came on the news!”

“I’m sorry, I was a little preoccupied with you know- a bomb!”

Victor knew Yuuri had reassured him that he’d texted his parents to let them know he was okay that night, but it sounded like they’d had quite the scare in the meantime.

“Vicchan,” Hiroko’s voice caught his attention again and he looked down. She smiled at him with a warmth he was sure only a mother could have. “Thank you.”

She put all her heart into those two simple English words, but Victor could feel the all-encompassing love that came with it. Thank you for loving my son. Thank you for being there for him. Thank you for bringing him home safe.

Victor swallowed back a lump in his throat. “I hope you have Yuuri’s katsudon ready, because I think he’s definitely earned it.”

“Of course we do,” Mari cut in. “Extra large, as always.”

Yuuri flushed pink at all the fuss.

“And we can move what Yuuri needs to your room too, if you want Victor.”

Victor knew now his cheeks had to be equally red.

“Mari, oh my god!” Yuuri groaned. “Not in front of….”
“Yuuri, it was Mom’s idea.”

Yuuri and Victor both blinked over at Hiroko, who smiled at them innocently. “I just want you both to be happy.”

Victor opened and closed his mouth twice before turning to Yuuri, who had buried his crimson face in his hand.

“Well, I guess Mari had to get it from someone,” Victor finally managed.

Yuuri lost it at that, trying and failing at stifling a laugh before just letting it go. Warm and carefree. He smiled over at Victor, then at his family.

“I’m so glad to be home.”

“Me too,” Victor replied. And for once, he truly meant it.
Chapter 21

Yuuri was, sadly, not a stranger to this.

His email being filled with over a hundred offers? That might be new. But his body's reaction being to burrow under his covers and try not to panic, that wasn't new.

Being home and finally in the familiar four walls was all it took before the cascade of anxiety and worry broke the dam holding it mostly at bay. He'd fought off a few bouts of it since that night, but it appeared he wasn't going to avoid a panic attack completely. He pressed his hands over his eyes, the light suddenly too bright and painful for him to cope with. His chest had already begun to ache with a familiar pain and he did his best to try and breathe.

He was going to disappoint Victor.

Of all the spiraling thoughts, that was the one he kept coming back to and kept finding himself more and more worried about. Because, the longer he thought about it, the more ways he could disappoint Victor only made themselves more apparent.

He couldn’t handle being unmasked.

He couldn’t cope with the idea that someone wanted him in a swimsuit issue.

Victor had acted so confident when he’d talked to Celestino about Yuuri’s prospects for the future, but what if he couldn’t live up to that?

What if he was just a complete and utter disappointment?
Victor would wise up and leave, that’s what would happen.

Yuuri drew a ragged breath at that, his chest even tighter than before. He tried to argue it away, but no amount of logic was penetrating the panic that had set in. He was going to disappoint Victor and he would leave. Yuuri felt hollow.

“Hey, I’m coming in,” Mari’s soft voice seemed distant and he knew as long as he didn’t say anything, she’d take that as an okay to enter.

He felt the bed shift with her weight as she sat down beside him.

“I had a feeling I might find you here, I could see the fight or flight look in your eyes when Victor mentioned the sponsors and whatnot over dinner.”

Yuuri curled in further on himself, words still not something he felt up to. He knew Mari understood that.

She laid down beside him, talking as if it was totally normal to hold a conversation with someone who was more blanket than person at the moment. Probably because she’d done this many times before.

“And hey, I get that. You’ve made some pretty drastic changes in your hero life lately, and it was bound to catch up sooner or later. I’m guessing almost dying didn’t help that any. But you know what?”

She paused as if it was an actual two-sided conversation, waiting until Yuuri shifted slightly in acknowledgement before continuing.

“I happen to know that my little bro, he’s been dreaming of being a hero like Winter Monsoon since he was a kid. He collected every magazine cover, article. Hell, I even special ordered him stuff from Russia for his birthday one year.” Mari laughed to herself.

“He told me once, it wasn’t the fame that made him want to be like him, it was what he did with it. He helped people, he inspired people, he did good. My little bro worked his ass off to be the same,
and you know what? There’s kids out there right now without a quirk or without a flashy showy one thinking- hey, maybe I can do this. If Hokusai Wave can stop a bomb without a quirk, then maybe I can be a hero too.”

Yuuri had gone very still, his heart hammering itself back to a normal beat.

“It’s not fame that you should focus on, Yuuri. It’s what you’re going to do with it.”

Mari turned then, slowly peeling back the covers until she could tell that Yuuri was definitely listening.

“And you know what? I bet you’re going to do something amazing.”

She gave him a smile at that, soft and comforting. Yuuri sniffled, giving her a watery smile in return as he uncurled one of his arms to reach out to his sister. She pulled him over into a loose headlock, lightly ruffling his hair.

“You feeling a bit better now, hero?”


“Want me to send Victor in with a glass of water? He’s probably worried about you.”

“He’s also not going to put me in a headlock,” he teased back; his own little way of showing Mari that she’d succeeded in talking him through an attack.

She ruffled his hair again before pulling away and sitting up. “Water, Victor, anything else?”

Yuuri shook his head. “No, thank you. You...really helped.”

Mari cocked a smirk. “I might not be a hero, but I do happen to know a thing or two about helping my little bro out when he’s beating himself up over nothing.”
“I appreciate it, as always.”

Mari stood and crossed to the door before pausing. “If any of those sponsors involve band tickets, you know where to find me.”

Yuuri smiled. “I’ll make sure Victor makes a special note of that.”

“Good.”

Mari slid the door open and stepped out into the hall. To Yuuri’s surprise, it sounded like Victor had been waiting outside until he knew it was okay to come in. Yuuri felt his heart pick up pace at that, because even if it seemed small to everyone else, it meant the world to him that he was respecting his space even in a time like this.

As promised, Mari made sure he was armed with a glass of ice water before he made his way in. He gave Yuuri a small smile, but he could see that he was worried. It warmed his heart, to see those little details in Victor’s expression and to know that they were for him.

“Hey.”

Yuuri rubbed under his eyes, hoping to make himself even the slightest bit more presentable.

“Sorry, I just…”

Victor moved then, and he was at his side in a second, hands hovering, waiting until he knew Yuuri was okay with it. He nodded his permission and Victor pulled him into a tight hug with one arm, the other jostling the cup of water as he did so.

“Don’t apologize, it’s my fault for unloading all of this on you all of a sudden. I forget that not everyone is used to this sort of thing and how stressful it can be.”

Yuuri blinked. He wasn’t expecting that. Victor pulled back, setting the glass aside on the nightstand.
before settling himself on the edge of the bed.

“That’s why I want to help you, because I’ve been there and I know it can be really overwhelming to deal with. I just don’t want you to feel like I’m coddling you, okay? So you just ask me for help, and I’ll give it.”

“Okay,” Yuuri breathed out. There was a warmth pooling his chest now, a comfort that only Victor and his implicit care for the matter could have brought about. Victor was trying so hard not to make a misstep and upset Yuuri, and he really, truly appreciated it.

“But, don’t feel like you have to wait for me to say something when you know something’s wrong, okay? Sometimes I...it’s hard for me to ask for help. That’s why Mari just lets herself in when she knows I’m like that, because we have an understanding. An understanding I want to have with you as well.”

He raised his eyes to Victor’s, wanting to make sure he was perfectly clear.

“Victor you...you don’t have to ask to touch me, or to comfort me or anything like that. If I need to be alone, I’ll let you know. Otherwise, I want you here. I always want you here.”

Victor’s eyes widened. Then, as if the words finally clicked into place in his mind, he reached out and pulled Yuuri over towards him, gathering him into his lap.

Yuuri could feel the heat in his cheeks, but he felt so much better here that he pushed that aside. It was like his cocoon of blankets, except it was Victor. Victor wrapped around him protectively as if he’d personally stop anything that tried to get through.

He nuzzled his face under Victor’s chin, his arms coming up to loop around his neck.

“Can we just stay like this for a while?”

“Whatever you need, Yuuri.”

Yuuri curled closer, his breathing finally settling back down to a normal rhythm. Mari was right. It
was important that he put himself out there, showed others that heroics wasn’t just about flashy quirks anymore. This wasn’t just for him, it was for all the kids that would come after him.

Yuuri could inspire them the way Victor had inspired him.

It was a daunting thought, but also, a little bit thrilling. It was his dream after all, to someday be a hero he felt was worthy to stand alongside Winter Monsoon.

A dream that maybe, was a little bit closer than he thought.

Fame, and all the joys and pitfalls that came with it, was something Victor was rather accustomed to. Once he’d made his big break, it created a tsunami of offers for sponsorship roles, television and magazine interview requests, and all kinds of other things. At first, Yakov had led him through it all, but as he grew older and Yakov became a more and more desired coach, it finally resulted in most of the PR management falling to Victor himself.

Yakov had suggested hiring someone for the job, but Victor realized by then that it was kind of nice to have some control in terms of his life. And having the power to accept or deny requests wasn’t something Victor really wanted anyone else in charge of. Plus, outside of hero work, Victor really didn’t have much else that took up his time, so replying to countless emails wasn’t a strain on him at all. In fact, he knew it was partially why he had such good rapport with companies now that he could contact them out of the blue to help put Yuuri’s new look together.

So he felt confident that he could handle this for Yuuri and help him get through it all.

“It’s the less glamorous side of hero work,” he’d joked with others often. Chris and him had running bets involving specific reporters that they hated talking to or photographers that always caused problems.

Now the tides had turned, and the world had found a new hero it wanted to focus the cameras on.

He never said it aloud, because Victor didn’t want Yuuri to believe that it was only his presence that had changed things; but Victor suspected that maybe, just maybe he’d done something great when he’d reworked Yuuri’s image.
Yuuri had told him Celestino had called him a coach, and Victor felt there was something just right about that title for him that he’d never quite considered before now.

He truly enjoyed helping Yuuri because he was Yuuri and well, why wasn’t the whole world fawning over this amazing guy? But also, he’d gotten so much gratitude from Leo, Guang Hong and even Georgi, for helping them navigate what was a tricky press conference loaded with awkward questions. And that felt good, felt right in a way Victor had never felt before.

While he felt his work as a hero was becoming lackluster and uninspired, somehow helping other heroes out made him feel alive again. He had years and years of experience in something most coaches only had peripherally, could understand the problems a hero faced because he’d faced them again and again himself.

Some coaches, like Celestino, had been heroes in the early age. And Victor found that when Yuuri recounted what training he and Phichit had received, he was honestly somewhat jealous of it. Yakov might be an amazing coach, but he’d never been a hero the way Celestino had.

And now that Victor thought about it, he realized there was a difference between the heroes he knew had been coached by ex-heroes, something that those with normal coaches often lacked. Yakov, Chris’s coach Josef, both of them had focused so much on rankings this and ratings that. They were in it for the UAT results, something that was obvious by the fact that they’d both been on the team for years.

Yuuri, Phichit, they knew how to utilize teamwork to get a job done. There was less focus on being the UAT picks and more focus on being a true hero, something that Victor realized his training had lost along the way.

Just like coaches directed other athletes, Victor had been trained to focus on winning the competition. It was why he’d never felt like he could ever use his quirk, his real quirk; because Yakov had lectured him so so often about image and how he could lose the public’s favor if he changed it too much. Colloquially, he was Winter Monsoon because that’s what he’d created- snow during monsoon season. But deep down, Victor had chosen that name because while he loved the winter elements of his powers, he knew he could create a monsoon too if the situation called for it.

But then somewhere along the line, he’d gotten caught up in maintaining his image to the point that he denied himself things. He never used anything but ice, he put on fake smiles and charisma for the press time and time again, and he’d never allowed himself to maintain any relationships outside of professional ones.
It was a risk to their safety because of who he was. And it had never once occurred to him to take a step back from the spotlight so he could have these things until now that he had.

So, in strange way, Victor felt like helping Yuuri had helped him as well. While he’d unmasked Yuuri, so the world could see the beautiful soul that was hiding under all that padding, Yuuri had in turn peeled back all the layers of image Victor had built up around himself and asked him to be nothing more than “Victor.”

And although Yakov had told him that image was everything, the response to this new Victor was anything but negative. His fansites wrote lengthy articles about how this was a side of Victor they’d never seen, comments on Phichit’s viral video had said things like “they’re so human” and “it’s nice to see heroes can be scared too,” and countless acquaintances had contacted him since to say not much more than that they were happy for him.

It was why, Victor felt it was the least he could do in return, to help Yuuri navigate the PR side of things. Because although he was beginning to have his doubts about some of the things Yakov had taught him, he knew from his own experience that there was a certain finesse to handling this sort of thing.

So he’d waited until Yuuri had calmed down some, then suggested they go take a soak in the onsen before tackling the lengthy list of emails he had. He’d already seen at least the requests that had involved him as well, but he had a feeling that it was the sheer number that was the primary reason for Yuuri’s panic.

For now though, that could wait. It was time for Victor to coach Yuuri on something else, even more important; his newly acquired quirk.

“Cup your hands like this, then when I hand you the bubble of water just think about holding it, okay?”

Yuuri furrowed his brows in concentration and nodded. “Okay.”

Victor drew up some of the onsen’s waters and shaped it into an orb. Then slowly, he handed it over to Yuuri’s cupped hands.

It burst the moment Victor let go.
“I’d say it’s easy, but it’s not. A lot of it is involuntary reaction, almost like when your arm reacts to an object being thrown at you. But when you have to think about using it, it can be hard. So maybe, close your eyes?”

Yuuri nodded. “Think that might help?”

“We’ll find out,” Victor replied, waiting for Yuuri’s eyes to close. “Okay, so pretend I’m about to hand you...something solid—like a frog or ball. Just wait until you feel the pressure of it and don’t think about anything else but holding it.”

Yuuri took a deep breath. “You are handing me a rock. A round smooth rock that is wet with water…”

Victor smiled, pleased to see that Yuuri had come up with his own object that made more logical sense. Not saying a word, he moved the handful of water over, letting it settle in Yuuri’s hands.

It held.

“Open your eyes, Yuuri.”

He blinked them open, then down at the bubble of water still sitting easily in his hands.

“I did it.”

“You’re a natural,” Victor reassured him.

“No, you’re a good coach,” Yuuri replied, smiling bright. “I don’t think I could have done it so easily if you hadn’t tried it another way.”

Victor felt his heart swell at that, and dipped his head a bit in embarrassment.
“Can I try moving it?” Yuuri asked.

Victor nodded. “My mother told me it’s like painting in the air, use an imaginary paintbrush and draw the water along with it wherever you want it to go.”

“That’s really beautiful,” he replied.

“She was an amazing woman.”

“I wish I could have met her,” Yuuri replied. “Your parents...they were such great people, I’m sure of it.”

Victor cocked an eyebrow. Was it from how he talked about them in interviews?

“I mean, they raised you, and you’re so amazing...”

He trailed off with a blush and a dip of his head. Victor thought his heart might burst from the surge of emotion that coursed through him.

Yuuri offered a smile. “I’m not very good at watercolor, but...” His eyes drifted closed and slowly, he pulled the water out before him, sweeping it into a wide arc in the air before letting it flow back into the onsen. “I do know something about moving like water.”

“That was beautiful,” Victor breathed out. “How did you know how to move the water?”

“I taught myself Jeet Kune Do off of Youtube,” Yuuri replied with a nervous shrug. “Looks like that might come in handy.”

And Victor laughed, because of course. Of course Yuuri would teach himself an entire martial arts style off of Youtube and act like it was nothing.

“Okay, okay. Try pulling out a small bit of water then, show off.”
Yuuri nodded, closing his eyes. Sure enough, he was moving the water all right. But…

“Uh Yuuri…”

He blinked his eyes opened to find the majority of the onsen water hovering in the air above them. It broke his concentration and it rained down on them, both of them bursting into laughter.

“So we’re going to have to work on that, I think,” Victor finally managed.

Yuuri snorted. “You think?”

“We’ll practice later, I think we’re both wet enough for now,” Victor added with a wink.

Yuuri went scarlet buried his face in his hands. “Victor…”

“You feeling better now?” he asked, hoping to change the subject so Yuuri didn’t dwell on it.

“Yeah. I’m not sure I’ll ever feel used to using a quirk though, it’s…strange.”

Victor scooted closer and put an arm around Yuuri’s shoulders, drawing him closer. “Well, some of us can’t fight very well without it. You do what feels right for you, Yuuri. My quirk is only there to help you if you need it.”

“I know. But I hope you’re always there with me instead.”

Yuuri stated it so casually, that it took a moment before it fully settled around Victor’s heart. He wanted him there, always. It had surprised him when Yuuri had told him earlier that same thing, I want you here. I always want you here, had given him permission to be close to him without preamble; but hearing it twice in the same day? It was almost too much.

“I hope so too, Yuuri. Because there’s nowhere else I’d rather be than with you.”
The combination of being at home, the onsen and Victor, was like a comforting balm on Yuuri’s frazzled nerves.

With the onsen robes hanging loose on their shoulders, Yuuri was finding that his thoughts had been veering sharply elsewhere. Especially since Victor couldn’t seem to keep his jinbei tied shut.

But as much as Yuuri really wanted to do something about the amount of skin Victor was showing, he also knew that he couldn’t put off dealing with the emails forever. Because it’d be far too easy to do just that.

Instead, he excused himself to gather some belongings from his room that he thought he might need or want before padding down the hallway to Victor’s room.

Victor was reclining against his pillows, lazily carding his fingers through Makkachin’s fur. He looked radiant, and Yuuri felt himself overcome with a wave of thoughts ranging from how badly he wanted to kiss him to well... other things. But it had been awkward enough when Mari noticed the fading hickey on Victor’s neck and he was already positively mortified that his mother was suggesting he move into Victor’s room.

_Maybe they could go somewhere nice for Valentine’s Day?_ he mused to himself.

Victor had finally noticed his staring and looked up. “Hey.”

Yuuri shook his head, hoping to knock his thoughts out. His face was probably red. Yuuri quickly crossed the room, settled his things in a nearby chair, and then turned towards the bed with his laptop in his arms.

“Come here,” Victor said quietly, his hand outstretched. He must have noticed the worry starting to overtake Yuuri’s emotions.

He crawled across the bed and barely had a chance to sit his laptop down before Victor had pulled him close and pressed a kiss to his forehead.
“Don’t you worry your pretty little head,” he practically cooed.

Yuuri giggled to himself, the tension slowly easing from his shoulders. Since when had Victor gotten this good at reading him? He’d just been so aware of his moods, and had always done his best to try and help Yuuri out of them. It meant a lot.

“Okay, Coach Victor,” he countered in a sweet syrupy voice.

Victor ended up both bright red and laughing at that and Yuuri felt his worries drifting away. This was new, for both of them. But they’d get through it.

“Okay, okay. Get comfortable, this is going to take a bit. But, well, I hope I can help make it less stressful for you.”

Yuuri nodded, closing his eyes for a brief moment as if to steel himself for it. Then he moved, settling on Victor’s right side after giving Makkachin a few scritches. Victor wasted not a second in leaning over against him, his hair tickling Yuuri’s ear.

“You good to go?”

“As ready as I’m going to be.”

“Okay. First things first, do you know if Phichit or any of the others have gotten any requests?”

Yuuri blinked, then reached for his phone, scrolling back up the text thread he had going with Phichit.

“Yeah, he mentioned something earlier today because of course Phichit’s kept in touch with everyone and had to text me the moment he heard anything.”

“That sounds like him.”
Yuuri smiled. He’d been so glad to hear that his friends had gotten some sponsors out of this fiasco as well.

“Okay, so...Samsung, Red Bull and 7-Eleven all gave Phichit offers. Leo’s apparently got some of the makers of his gear involved? Like the companies behind his headphones and backpack boombox. Guang Hong got something from Nike and 7Up and Georgi he’s not heard back from yet.”

Victor nodded. “Okay, so we can automatically pass on any of those brands or their direct competitors. You don’t want to do a Sprite ad opposite Guang Hong with 7UP for example, so if you want to keep that as a possibility we can tell them that we’re up for it later in the year.”

That made…a lot of sense. “Is that why you always did collabs with the UAT or had different products?”

“Yeah, it would look bad if the members of the UAT got dragged into a brand war, so we would all wait at least six months between advertising for competing brands.”

Yuuri thought of the various ads of Victor’s that he probably had pinned on his bedroom wall. It was odd to think that so much thought and care went into each of them.

“Wow, I never thought about that, but you’re right. It could cause problems.”

“Exception is sport or hero brands. Those there’s just such a high demand for heroes to front that it’s a given that heroes are going to possibly end up doing competing brands.”

“Like you did a Nike ad and an Adidas one right?”

Victor seemed momentarily surprised that Yuuri could recall that, but he didn’t seem to think it was weird. He was more...impressed?

He laughed, “I almost forgot about that, since I only did one Nike ad.”

Yuuri blushed, but Victor pressed a kiss to his temple.
“But you’ve got a crazy memory, so I’m not surprised you remember that.”

Yuuri still felt a tad embarrassed by it, but he quickly changed the subject.

“So do we need to find out Georgi’s? I mean, he’s ranked second right now so I’m sure he’s got a lot of requests too.”

Victor gave him a knowing smile. “Yuuri, no one was going to get the amount of attention you did. This isn’t just about Beijing, it’s about that fight with Inferno too. You’re experiencing what is called in the hero world, a PR tsunami. A phenomenon named specifically after the one I stopped on Christmas. Otherwise, most brands wait it out to see who’s ranked where later in the season unless they’re previously high ranked. But if you do something that’s really heroic, you can capture the whole world’s attention overnight. That’s what you’ve done since then. You’ve kept surprising everyone again and again, and they all can’t look away.”

Yuuri looked down, suddenly feeling a flash of insecurity. It was so strange to go from masked nobody to top hero in the blink of an eye, but he had. Victor was right, in the modern hero world the only thing that could compare to this sudden shift of attention to a specific hero...was him.

That was far more intimidating that Victor probably realized.

“Yuuri,” he said softly, his hand seeking Yuuri’s out and wrapping it in his warm grasp. “You deserve it, don’t you dare think otherwise. The only thing I did was show the world that Hokusai Wave was just as beautiful outside as he was inside. The rest was all you.”

Yuuri managed a shaky laugh, before looking up at Victor in half-disbelief and half-awe that yeah maybe he was right.

“It’s really hard to argue with you when you make it sound so sweet.”

Victor just grinned, leaning down to peck a kiss before pulling back with a smile. “I’m just telling the truth, you know.”

Yuuri blushed, but he didn’t turn away. “And somehow, you make me believe it.”
They fell into a moment of silence at that, both just smiling and basking in each other’s warmth. But Yuuri hoped Victor understood how much it meant to him, that he said these things and truly meant them. It gave Yuuri a burst of courage when he was just about to start picking away at his accomplishments again.

“Also, I know what two companies Georgi’s working with because he texted me excited that finally someone was appreciating his aesthetic. I highly doubt you’ll have a problem if he accepts Estee Lauder and RussianCupid.com, right?”

Yuuri chuckled. “No, those are all Georgi’s.”

Victor pulled away a moment, creating a basic formal reply to decline all the offers that they’d so far decided against. He’d wisely made it basic enough that they could just copy paste it into everyone they turned down, outside a few that Yuuri said maybe later on like the Sprite deal. Then it was a matter of going through the remaining ones, which was still a lot.

“Okay, first off, I’m taking a few of these out because they’ve treated heroes like shit in the past and you deserve better,” Victor stated, quickly sorting those out. Then he selected another group. “And these will still allow you to accept at a later time, so I’m going to suggest they contact again in six months.”

It was getting more and more bearable for Yuuri to look at his overflowing inbox.

“Okay, so now it comes down to a few factors. First, any personal preference you already have towards one of the brands. It’s always best to go with something you like already as it makes sponsorship with them a little less awkward. I also see a few in here which seem to be fencing-specific? They’re probably excited that there’s a hero out there to be the face of their gear, so you might consider those as well. And then, there’s some time-sensitive ones that pretty much need to be done this month or they might not ask again. Fashion and television work on very tight scheduling and if they’re asking for you, they probably want it now rather than later.”

It was still a bit overwhelming, to try and take this all in. They were able to make a few personal preference based calls, but the rest they were going to have to look at one by one. Yuuri knew that it was a lot, but he felt like there was no way he could make this decision alone.

“Victor, would you mind suggesting what you think I should do from what’s left?”
Victor blinked, clearly surprised by the question.

“I trust you, and I think you have a good idea of what would be best. You’re my coach now, remember? Celestino’s left this to you.”

“I…” he hesitated for a moment, his eyes searching.

“Please?”

And Yuuri wasn’t sure if it was his tone or his associated expression, but Victor caved. Immediately.

“Okay, just give me a second to see what’s actually feasible…”

He leaned forward, sorting through the remaining emails and making notations in a side window. Finally, he seemed to have narrowed it into two groups.

“These I’m going to hold off on, they aren’t time sensitive and most of them will probably still be interested whenever you have spare time in the year ahead. These just don’t seem like a good fit for you, they want you to be more stereotypical hero and not yourself and I don’t think you want that.”

Yuuri nodded, his heart starting to race in anticipation of what Victor had chosen.

“So, I’ve got it down to ten. Which I know, sounds like a lot, but these I think are all great offers that you don’t want to miss out on. On the plus side, we pretty much get to travel all over the world for it?”

“That sounds...nice.”

Victor smiled then, clearly still a bit nervous for Yuuri’s reaction, but still excited. Yuuri felt the same.
“First is Hero Herald. They’re probably the most hero-friendly and down to earth publication and I know they’ll not try to spin any words in your interview into something it’s not. They were also open to having me be a part, which means I could be there with you during the interview to help ease your worry.”

Yuuri felt a smile creep onto his face. “Okay, that sounds good. I’d definitely like you to be there, if you don’t mind.”

Victor beamed. “Of course. I’d love to!” He turned back to the email for it, and was already writing out a reply. “They also said they can send a reporter here which is good, because the rest is going to be a lot of travel.”

That sounded a little bit...much? Yuuri wasn’t sure. Did heroes really travel that much for PR? Well, Victor surely had, if his collection of posters and articles was anything to go by.

“Next one, and I think you’ll like this. Kit Kat wants to do a commercial with you and their regional variant. The strawberry flavor for Fukuoka? They want to showcase the region and you together, which is great. It helps regional tourism out a lot. They uh...also wanted me to be involved.”

Yuuri could already picture the sort of commercial they were aiming for, as he’d seen plenty with an obvious couple vibe to them that showcased the sharing of the two wafer bars. But Victor was right, it would be nice to do something that would help tourism in the area. Hasetsu and the surrounding area wasn’t exactly high on most tourist’s lists and if he could help the locals out even a little, that would be a great way to thank them for all the support they’d given him over the years.

“That sounds great, I think it’ll be a nice way to give back to the community,” Yuuri said, deciding that he’d discuss the probable couple-tone to it once he’d seen that’s what it was for sure. “And really Victor, if they want you there, of course I do.”

He smiled as he sent out another reply, then he was onto the next. Adidas was a given, having already been behind Yuuri’s new shoes, but they were wanting him to come and do a photoshoot they could use in promotional material. Then there was Gatorade Flow’s new Blackberry Wave, great for PR since it connected directly with his hero name. Two designers wanted Yuuri to wear some of their new fashion for the season, and Victor had already figured out how to work them into the others on the list. Michael Kors for the Hero Herald article, and Alexander Queen for the Vogue photoshoot. The Late Show in New York City wanted to do a spot, especially a bit where Yuuri got to fence against the host of the show. It sounded kind of fun, and he found himself agreeing easily to that as well.
But as Victor got to the last two, even Yuuri could sense some hesitancy.

“The last two are, well... they’re amazing offers, really. But uh... are you okay with posing shirtless?”

Yuuri felt all his insecurities back with a vengeance.

“W-What?”

Victor tried his best to explain. “Leon Paul, they’re a fencing equipment company from what I can tell?”

“Yeah.”

“So they want something that shows off the equipment and looks good in an ad. You know how much they love doing sports ads with shirtless heroes, after all.”

Oh Yuuri knew all right. He owned every single one of those ads that Victor had done.

But him? He wasn’t suited for that sort of thing. No way.

“The other is, well it’s Sports Illustrated. They’re offering a spot in their swimsuit issue and have a brand of swimwear wanting to sponsor you. Apparently they have a Hokusai Wave print? Here, there’s a picture.”

It was a speedo, just under another brand name. Yuuri froze.

“Oh no no no, I can’t wear that.”

“Why not?”

“Why not?” Yuuri felt his voice starting to veer into the hysterical. The panic had returned in full
force. “Why not? No one wants to see me in that!”

Victor blinked. “What?”

“Swimsuits like that are for attractive people, not plain boring people like me.”

“You, are you serious?”

“Of course I’m serious!”

Victor’s mouth gaped open then he closed it with a frown. “Yuuri, what are you talking about? You’re incredibly attractive.”

“You’re just...just...” he struggled for a word, his arms flailing in an attempt to make his point, “...biased. Because you know me.”

“No, I thought that the first time I laid eyes on you.”

“Drunk me doesn’t count! I’m...I’m not me then.”

“I’m not talking about how you act, Yuuri. I mean when I first saw you, I thought you were incredibly attractive. Before you said a single word to me.”

Yuuri blinked. There was no way....

“And here I am, terrified that I’m going to look like a mess with my side covered in tons of makeup next to you.”

Yuuri felt his heart sink. He replied, his voice small. “I...didn’t know you’d be in it too.”

Victor sighed, running a hand up through his bangs. “They want both of us. Proven franchise,” he
muttered gesturing to himself, “and the next big thing,” he finished, gesturing towards Yuuri.

“Victor…”

“Sorry. It’s just I feel like it’ll draw more attention if I decline. Why wouldn’t I want to pose with you? I don’t want them to come up with some tabloid bullshit about troubles in our relationship just because I’m worried I’ll look bad.”

Yuuri closed the distance between them, his hand reaching out to gently cup Victor’s face. “Do you...really think I’m attractive?”

Victor chuckled. “God yes. The most attractive man I’ve ever seen.”

Yuuri felt his cheeks burn at the comment, but he held fast. “O-Okay. I’ll do it. But…” He reached out with his other hand, gently settling it against Victor’s injured side. “I have a favor to ask in return.”

“Anything, Yuuri. What is it?”

“Don’t cover it up all the way with makeup.” He saw Victor’s eyes go wide and knew that terrified look in his eyes far too well. “Victor, I promise. I’ve...followed your career pretty closely. And, there’s really no shame in someone having an injury due to their hard work. Hell, for years your fansites have speculated that they’ve clearly had to photoshop injuries out because there’s no way you’ve gone this long without something leaving its mark.”

He let his fingers ghost along Victor’s side, a soft smile on his lips that he hoped was enough to convince Victor he wasn’t making this up.

“It’s proof that you’ve lived, Victor. That you’ve survived. Not something you need to pretend isn’t there.”

“Yuuri, I…”

“Just enough makeup that it looks like a normal scar, not frostbite. That’s all.” He trailed his hand
around Victor’s waist, pulling him closer. “Plus, guys with scars are super sexy, I hear.”

The apprehension in Victor’s eyes dissipated at that, a smile tugging at his lips whether he even realized it or not. “I think you’re biased.”

Yuuri pressed against him as he settled his other hand on the small of Victor’s back.

“It’s okay to be nervous. Trust me, I will be. But, if it’s for you, I’ll do anything.”

Victor melted into him at that, his hands coming up to clutch at Yuuri’s shirt.

“Okay. If it’s for you, I can do it.”

Yuuri let out a nervous laugh. “We’re going to look terrible.”

But Victor just looked up at him with such affection, he thought his heart might burst from the sudden overload of it.

“At least we can look terrible together?”

And just like that, Yuuri was laughing. Victor too. Tangling together until Yuuri thought there was not a single gap between them.

He kissed Victor, slow and with all the love he could pour into it. Then Yuuri pulled back and smiled up at Victor.

“You’re going to be beautiful.”

He smiled back.

“So are you.”
It had never really, truly, occurred to Victor that his life hadn’t been normal.

Or at least, a normal hero life.

All the heroes around him, or those he heard about in the media time and time again, all seemed to be dealing with similar problems. Villains with grudges, having to worry about anything you did ending up in some tabloid, cameras and reporters constantly in your face. The biggest names in the hero world all seemed to have faced these same problems at one point or another.

But, what he was now realizing fully, was that he’d only been given a view into the lives of the chosen few the media lavished their attention on. UAT members, the ever competitive American heroes who’d skipped out on the IHU to focus on the lucrative hero business in their own country, other big name stars who’d somehow made it into the spotlight- all of them were different than your average hero.

Fame was indeed a beast all its own.

The more famous a hero? The more likely they had an archnemesis. The more well-known? The more likely the hero’s family or loved ones had been attacked. Those that the world had chosen to be the poster images of heroes worldwide had a life very different from that of most heroes.

Only now, only because of Yuuri, was Victor now seeing just how different life outside the glaring spotlight was.

Even after the deluge of sponsorship, interview and other requests, there was still not quite the media presence in Yuuri’s life that Victor had experienced in Barcelona. They’d holed up there the moment the IHU called it home, and it meant that there wasn’t a single place a hero could go in the town without the press breathing down their necks.

Hasetsu, on the other hand, was a quiet little seaside town.
Even now that the world’s top hero was based here, it wasn’t like the area was equipped to become a media hub. And so the press had to play by the rules of asking first, instead of just diving into their personal lives. It was a fact Victor was becoming eternally grateful for.

But, on the other hand, it meant that outside the more recent incidents that had made the news, Victor really had no idea what hero work Yuuri normally did. In a large city, there was always crime to be dealt with; but there was no way Yuuri became Japan’s top hero by stopping small crimes in a sleepy sea village.

There had to be something big that the media had missed.

And when Victor awoke in the middle of the night to find Yuuri gone from their bed, he had a strange feeling the two might be connected.

It was before dawn by a few hours, the sun not even a speck on the horizon yet. Victor had been dreaming about something he couldn’t quite remember when he woke up; left instead with just that odd feeling he’d get that there was a prickle of nerves working on his injured side. Ghost pain, the doctors had told him again and again; sensation where Victor knew there wasn’t anymore, something that he knew often accompanied his more unpleasant dreams, so it was rarely a good sign.

That’s when he realized that Yuuri was gone.

It had panicked him at first, sent a pain he could definitely feel right into his heart. The bed was cool enough that Yuuri had been gone awhile, and Victor’s groggy mind jumped to all the worst conclusions. But Makkachin seemed too calm for it to be anything nefarious, and after making his way to the hallway to see if he’d gone back to his own room, Mari had quickly put the rest of his spiralling worries to rest.

“If you’re looking for him, he’ll probably be back after dawn and ready to sleep the morning in.”

Victor blinked. Was he upset? Had he gone to train?

“He...I mean, is there a reason he didn’t wake me?” Victor tried his best not to let his hurt seep into his words, but had a distinct impression given Mari’s expression that he’d failed.

“Sometimes when he’s got a lot on his mind, it helps him to go off on his own.”
The lost feeling that was starting to envelop him must have been obvious, for Mari’s expression softened.

“Trust me, he’s not meaning it to slight you in anyway, that’s just how he is. Even with people he loves. Used to drive mom nuts when he was younger, but now, well he can take care of himself.”

Victor took that in, trying to wrap his mind around it. Perhaps it had been due to the fact he’d really had no one but Makkachin, but it was hard to understand that being alone made things better.

And maybe something in his face betrayed his inner conflict, because before he realized it, Mari’s hand was on his shoulder.

“He won’t be mad if you go after him. Surprised maybe, but not mad. If you need him, that’ll be far more important to him than anything else he’s got on his mind.”

*If you need him.*

Victor swallowed. Was he really that transparent?

“Okay. Uh...any idea where to start?”

Mari smiled, but she didn’t seem to think less of him for it. She said there was a slim chance he’d gone to the gym to train, but she suspected given the gear he’d taken with him, he was headed for Minako’s place first.

So, like he had around Christmas, Victor once again found himself navigating the nighttime streets of Hasetsu to Minako’s bar. He arrived just as she was closing up for the night, but didn’t seem all that surprised to see him.

“I have a hunch you’re not here to talk to me,” Minako joked.

Victor offered a smile, but it was forced. His mind was still far too on edge.
“Sorry, Mari said you might know where Yuuri is.”

Minako reached back under the bartop and pulled out a glass, scooping ice into it and nodding at Victor to sit. He took a deep breath.

“I won’t keep you long, promise. But I haven’t had a chance to talk to you alone since you two got back from China.”

Victor blinked, first at Minako, then down at the drink she’d poured out for him. She laughed, sharply, and gave his shoulder a hard slap.

“Victor, don’t look like you’re some kicked puppy. Yuuri’s not mad at you, so let’s just talk for a second, okay?”

That eased his shoulders a little, and he reached for the glass.

“A-About what?” he asked, trying to sound calm but most definitely still not calm.

Minako shook her head. “You really have no idea, do you?”

He sighed, taking a drink. He could think of thousands of reasons, but as to which she spoke of, he had no idea.

“Sorry, no I don’t.”

Minako chuckled. “I wanted to thank you, Victor. I might have been wary at first, when you just came here out of nowhere, as to what your intentions were. But, as they say, actions speak louder than words. Our Yuuri is stubborn. He sometimes can’t see just how much he means to people, so he does things like trying to get them to leave him to die alone. But you stayed. For him. And whether you realize it or not, you’ve completely changed him because you did.”

Victor dropped his eyes to the counter, his heart starting to hammer so loudly, he was sure she could
“I’d do it again, if it ever comes to it. I’d die a thousand times for him,” he finally managed, his voice quiet but firm.

Minako’s hand settled on his shoulder and he started up, his eyes wide as they brought her into focus.

“And I think he knows that, Victor. Because Yuuri’s anxiety might wreak havoc on most things that bring him happiness, but it’s not got a fighting chance against conviction that strong. You’ve given him the strength to believe that, which is an amazing thing. No matter how stressed the rest of his life is making him, now he’s got you to make him smile again. So thank you.”

Victor wasn’t sure what he could ever say to that. His heart too full, bubbling over with so many emotions. So after a breath shakier than he would have liked, he replied with the only thing he could.

“And here I feel like I’m the lucky one, to have someone like him in my life to make me even feel like smiling.”

Minako was hugging him over the counter before Victor could even realize that his eyes had started to well up with tears; as if it had finally, truly, just hit him how much Yuuri meant to him. How much better and worth living his life was now, because of him. And how scared he’d been ever since they got back that something, anything, was going to take this away from him.

It was a normal life. A family, a home, a someone to love.

It was everything Victor thought he’d never be allowed to have, everything he thought he’d sacrificed years ago in becoming a hero. As if it was some faustian deal in which he’d exchanged happiness for fame, Victor had resigned himself to a lonely life. And now that he’d had the opposite? He wasn’t sure he could ever be alone again.

Minako was quiet, cleaning up the empty glass and giving him a moment to compose himself. It wasn’t until she finished that she spoke again.

“Yuuri’s probably out doing a night patrol. You can probably find him down along the port checking on the boats coming in. Although, if you want to join him, I’d suggest you suit up first.”
Victor’s shock must have been apparent, because before he could question it, she reiterated.

“Though I’d be careful in that white outfit of yours, it’s hard to blend into the shadows if you aren’t used to it.”

He almost asked her what he could expect, what was happening at the wharf that would warrant him to be in his uniform; but something stopped him.

He’d let Yuuri surprise him once more.

“Thank you. For the drink, talk and well...everything.”

Minako gave him a smile. “If you need someone to talk to, don’t hesitate to come by. Although, I’d say next time the drinks are on you.”

Victor chuckled at that, glad to have something spurring himself back into movement.

“I’ll keep that in mind. Though I have one favor before you close up.”

She raised an eyebrow as Victor took off his long coat and began to unzip the lining. Inside in a hidden pocket along the back, where he always kept it just in case he’d need it while out, was his herotek suit.

Minako laughed and pointed him around the corner. “Second door.”

Victor nodded, then he was rushing there, excitement already pulling him forward. He wanted to know, what was it Yuuri did to earn his rank and Victor had a feeling he was finally going to find out.

Herotek suits were made to stand out.
No matter the colors, be they light or dark, the purpose of the design was always to catch your eye. Light colors that stood out starkly against dark backgrounds like buildings, dark colors always given a dash of vibrant color to pull your eyes to the hero wearing it. Great if you were playing hero for the cameras, not so great if you were trying to do your job.

Yuuri had almost gone back and pulled out his old gear, the dark blues and blacks easy to blend into the night with. But there was that nagging question, that maybe he wasn’t cut out to be a famous hero, that stopped him. He’d been mulling it over and over since they’d finalized their plans for all the press, media and photoshoots; and he’d found himself unable to sleep with it all rattling around his head.

He hated pulling away from Victor, the comfort of his arms almost enough to keep him in bed; but he also knew he’d been slacking on doing what he as a hero was supposed to do. His night patrols had started when he’d returned from Detroit; not because he particularly thought there’d be crime in Hasetsu that needed nightly monitoring but more because it gave something for his restless mind to focus on besides his own thoughts.

Sometimes he’d do nothing more than pick up litter, clean up trash dogs had gotten into or other small tasks. Other times he’d make sure rowdy drunks made their way back home safely.

But he hadn’t become Japan’s top hero by doing community service.

It had started in Fukuoka, Yuuri’s fame from the bank robbery garnering him enough attention that the police had called him to come assist with the yakuza in the region. Yuuri spent a good part of 2014 fighting with members from one the region’s five groups, the Kudo-kai, the Taishu-kai, the Fukuhaku-kai, the Dojin-kai and the Namikawa-kai. He hadn’t exactly made friends with them, and needless to say, they knew roughly where Hokusai Wave lived. It wasn’t long before trouble from them started to show up in Hasetsu, half the time just a disturbance to lure Hokusai Wave out into a fight.

Then 2015 came, and with it, the crime that went on under the nose of most people in Japan. Whether it was one of the new more “normal” people who’d turned to a life of crime or one of the yakuza groups, it brought a lot of unfriendly business to Hasetsu port. And although Yuuri had the police silence the news on the matter, the fact was he’d been kept busy. Very busy.

Because the number of gold smuggling cases had jumped from 2014, which had a mere eight, to one hundred and seventy seven by 2015. It only got worse in 2016, spiking up to two hundred and ninety four. And though the media might be silent on specifics, the fact was that the majority of those very cases passed through Hokusai Wave.
Armed with nothing more than one of his trusty blades, he’d faced off with the Kudo-kai’s machine guns and hand grenades, the Dojin-kai’s AK-47s and revolver canons, and the array of quirks employed by the Taishu-kai, Fukuhaku-kai and Namikawa-kai. Often the other smugglers would have a least one advanced quirk user to protect the gold they carried, and Yuuri had spent many nights picking off members of a smuggling party one by one until they were all unconscious and ready for the police to come pick them up.

It was strange, and probably didn’t make sense to many others, but something about fighting such crazy fights was rather cathartic for Yuuri. He was so used to fighting against the worries and problems his own mind came up with, that it was sometimes just really nice to punch a yakuza member in the face or to bring a smuggler down with one of his blades. Having something solid to vent his frustrations on was calming, in an odd way.

So he’d found himself once more at Hasetsu port, moving as quietly and quickly as he could from one dock or wharf to the next, counting the boats there and making sure it was a vessel that he knew was supposed to be there.

The bright white and blue of his costume had made it harder than usual at first, Yuuri having to hide in the splashes of light against light colored buildings instead of in the shadows like he prefered. In the shipyard, he found a stray tarp and he decided to borrow it for now, using it as a dark cape to help him shield his movements from sight.

He was almost finished with his route when he noticed a lone fishing boat that had been moored at a dock that he didn’t recognize as one of the local boats.

Ah, so there was some trouble tonight after all.

The ship was quiet, its crew of five all resting after what had been a long journey from South Korea. They’d pulled into the port rather late, hoping no one noticed a stray fishing boat hidden on the docks amidst the rest until they could hand off their cargo to the contact that was coming to meet them.

They never noticed that someone untied their ship from the dock and pushed it back out into the water, too tired and dozing far too deeply to hear the rustle of the wind against a tarp they never had on the deck.

It was almost adorable how at ease they were, so certain that no one was around to notice them.
The door to the wheelhouse slid open noiselessly, silent footsteps crossing to the ship’s navigation system, switches and knobs flipped and turned.

“O-Oi! We’ve got company!”

The words had barely left the man’s throat before a tarp was thrown over him, the base of a saber’s hilt brought sharply against his head.

“Sorry,” Yuuri muttered, letting him fall unconscious to the ground.

There were footsteps on the bridge, voices calling out what Yuuri could only assume was their pilot’s name. He swiftly backed against the wall, waiting as the shadows danced across the room, the figures peering into the wheelhouse and exclaiming when they saw their pilot on the floor.

The door swung open sharply and a man entered.

“Who’s here?” he asked, his hands starting to glow with a quirk’s power.

The green glow was either going to be an energy or acid quirk, and Yuuri wasn’t about to wait until he could discover which one it was. He jumped out from the shadows, saber slicing in a downward arch against his back and earning him a hiss of pain from the man.

He wheeled around, the glow growing from his hands as he reached for Yuuri’s blade. Ah must be acid, Yuuri decided. Or at least an energy force strong enough to break metal.

Yuuri dropped down, bringing the backside of his blade against the man’s shins and causing him to topple over his back. He slammed into the control panel with a crack and Yuuri moved, knowing he only had mere seconds before he could regain his bearings.

He threw down his blade, dropping into a stance and waiting for the man to turn back towards him. As he did, Yuuri made a quick jab to his eyes and man cursed, blindly reaching out towards him. But Yuuri was too fast, already using his forward momentum against him by ducking to grab his knee, using it to flip the man over and onto his back. He groaned in pain as he fell atop the pilot, and before he could recover, Yuuri brought his saber’s hilt down against his head.
He fell unconscious atop the pilot. Two down.

The commotion in the wheelhouse had finally earned the attention of the remaining three crew members, two at one door and one at another. They seemed to think they had some sort of advantage, Yuuri trapped in the middle between them.

“Who are you?” One growled at him.

“No one of consequence,” Yuuri shot back.

Yuuri lunged then, aiming his saber’s point precisely at the gun in one of the men’s hands. It snagged it perfectly in between the trigger and trigger guard, and Yuuri flipped it up into the air and deftly caught it.

At that, one of the men behind him fired a shot, and Yuuri ducked, throwing the gun in his hands up into the air at just the right angle that the bullet hit its barrel, shattering it into pieces.

Yuuri drew one of his other blades from the sheath on the back of his costume, and he quickly swapped it out with the saber in his hand. Right as the man fired again, Yuuri brought up the guard of the epee to bounce the bullet back towards him. It whizzed right by his head, barely missing his cheek.

All three men darted forward then, and Yuuri used their distracted focus on him to slam his heel hard against the hilt of his saber on the ground, flipping the blade up and right into the oncoming legs of one attacker. He stumbled, cursing in pain as blood trailed down the front of his leg.

With one preoccupied, Yuuri made quick work of the remaining two. He turned to face one head on, drawing his elbow back with a sharp movement and arching it upward until he heard it crack against flesh and bone behind him, the sudden pain of having his chin slammed up into his mouth causing the second man to fall down in agony.

That left one, who was coming straight for him, gun aimed exactly at Yuuri’s heart.

He fired on seeing his crewmate go down, and Yuuri moved his blade as if he was defending against a fencing move, dropping into quarte position and parrying the bullet as if it was an opposing blade.
It sent the bullet back towards the gun, smashing into the barrel and shattering it too beyond use.

While the man gaped down in shock at what remained of his weapon, Yuuri jumped up in a perfect fleche and brought his elbow down hard on the man’s head. He fell to the ground as Yuuri landed, and he looked to the two remaining men who are both clutching their injures.

“What do you yield?”

They both held up their hands, trembling.

It didn’t take Yuuri long to gather the five men together, three unconscious, one with a bloody leg and another now missing a few teeth. He threw the tarp over their heads, tightening them in a bundle and tying them up. He then turned back to the ship’s controls and navigated the boat over to the landing point near the planetarium.

As he was tying the ship off at the dock, he could see the flicker of lights from the guard at the planetarium and Yuuri waved back towards him. It was nice to know that even if it was small, the civilians of Hasetsu were always so helpful and supportive. And knowing that the guard had noticed him, Yuuri knew that the police were surely already on their way.

He was just about to head back towards home when he noticed something strange over at the yacht docks, a ship that hadn’t been there before and a blurry white figure standing nearby. And although he was tired and really have would liked to go crawl back into bed, Yuuri turned towards the other docks and started to run.

Victor had faced off against countless quirks over the years, many being so deadly and powerful that it had taken the full UAT team to restrain them.

But nothing like that could prepare him for what he was walking into.

He’d seen a strange group of men walking down towards the docks, and knowing suspicious activity when he saw it, he’d followed. They’d just started talking to a man on one of the fishing boats docked there, when he heard shouts of Japanese aimed in his direction.
Shit. They saw me.

Victor threw up a wall of ice, but it easily shattered under the spray of bullets. He barely dodged it in time, rolling on the ground until he was safely behind another boat. He could hear the bullets lodging into the fiberglass and the sound of more yelling.

Victor had faced off against a lot of crazy quirks, but he’d never been caught up in an old-fashioned gunfight like this. Especially one with a freaking machine gun. Who the hell even had one of those just laying around?

He heard the voices drawing closer, the sound of wood cracking and splashes of water. Glancing up, he saw that one of the men was using some sort of strength quirk to literally rip the dock out of the water. They’d cut off his way back to land and left him isolated on the docks with them.

Okay, so there’s what? Six of them? And one of me. And they have at least two machine guns and a least one quirk user.

There was more shouting, and by the tone of it, Victor could tell they were taunts intended to lure him out. He sent a trail of ice down and into the water, snaking it under a few boats and coming up beside them on the docks. He slid it under them and was glad to see it sent a least one sliding into the water.

But apparently instead of falling for his bluff, they resorted to another method of flushing him out of hiding. Namely, firing indiscriminately into the boats around them and waiting until they hit something.

Victor was so, so fucked.

He began to weigh his chances if he dove into the dark water when he heard footsteps approaching, a familiar voice yelling out in Japanese.

“Yariyagatta na, ketsumedo yarou!”

“Dare ni mono wo ii-agatterun da?” one of the men yelled back.
“Tobokeru no wa yose,” he replied, walking calmly up the docks.

The group of men all started swearing loudly as they saw Hokusai Wave step into the light, and Victor could barely catch a glimpse of him before everyone moved.

Gunshots were fired, wooden planks were ripped up and thrown and Yuuri dodged them all with ease, deflecting some bullets off his blade and back at the men. As they tried to recover, he stepped back and ran, jumping over the damaged hole in the dock and landing with ease in front of them.

Victor started to run towards him, using their distraction to close the space between them.

But Yuuri had already cut into the group, the five men surrounding him. He dropped down, sweeping the legs out from two of the men, and using the surprise of their fall, one toppling into the water, to slash one of the guns from another man’s hands. The quirk user reared back with a punch, but Victor was near enough now that he could fight back too, using the water below the docks to throw a wall of ice in between his punch and Yuuri.

Yuuri shot a smirk over at him and stabbed his blade down into the wooden dock. Then with a look that Victor knew was his way of saying, “Cute. Now watch this,” Yuuri used the blade to help launch himself up into a jump.

His legs kicked out and aimed perfectly, landing square on the chest of each of the two men. The force knocked them both into the water. Leaving them with one unarmed gunman and the quirk user.

Victor reached his side, breathing heavily, with a smirk curling at his lips. He was not about to let Yuuri have all the fun; and while gunfights weren’t his style, he’d had his fair share of quirk fights to give him the advantage there.

As the quirk user ripped up another plank, ready to smash it down on Victor’s head, a large wave arched up over the dock and crashed down onto his head. Then as if the wave itself had a grip on his ankle, it dragged the man back down into the water with it.

Victor was grinning, wider than he ever had before during a fight, and his heart was racing with a feeling he’d never had before.
The thrill of using his quirk, his true quirk, willingly during a fight.

Yuuri turned to the last standing man, pointed his blade at his chest and leveled him with a glare.

“Doko ka itchae yo.”

The man promptly ran himself right off the dock and into the water with his fellow gang members.

And Victor was laughing, so hard his side had started to ache and his cheeks started to as well.

“I have no idea what you said, but I have to admit,” he finally managed, amidst gasps of air, “that was kind of hot.”

Yuuri’s cool and collected demeanor shifted at that, his face blooming bright with a blush and his eyes wide.

“Oh my god, are you seriously flirting with me right now?”

Victor cocked an eyebrow. “Can you blame me?”

Yuuri’s eyes drifted down, then they slowly swept up Victor’s figure, a smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth by the time he reached Victor’s eyes.

He sheathed his blade along his back and crooked a finger in Victor’s direction.

“Come here.”

Victor closed the space between them. And the moment he was within arms reach, Yuuri grabbed the front of his uniform and yanked him into heated kiss. It was shorter than Victor would have liked, but both of them were too winded for anything longer. Even after they pulled apart, they lingered close, just breathing in each other’s breaths.
Slowly, Yuuri released the grip on Victor’s suit, and he stepped back as he trailed his hand down Victor’s chest.

“Police should be here soon, let’s get back to shore before one of these guys decides they’re up for a round two.”

Victor shook his head. “Is this what you do? Fight...who are these guys anyway?”

“Yakuza,” he replied. “And they weren’t too happy about you interrupting their little drug deal there.”

“Yuuri, they had machine guns,” he said emphatically.

Yuuri chuckled at that, the two of them crossing the little bridge of ice Victor made to get them back.

“People without advanced quirks get creative.”

“Machine guns, Yuuri! I thought I was going to die!”

He was being melodramatic, but Victor couldn’t help it. This was nothing like all the fights he’d been through. People who could turn their heads into sharks? Sure, fine. Guys who could make giant fire swords out of thin air? Why not. But machine guns? Really? That was just...

Yuuri’s fingers were warm as they brushed against his hand, clasping tight as their fingers tangled together.

“I guess machine guns don’t seem that bad after that time with the rocket launcher.”

And Victor came to a halt, staring at Yuuri and trying to tell if he was being serious. Victor was pretty sure he was, but that’s just…

“A rocket launcher?”
“I think the police confiscated that one, but they could have gotten a new one. Kyushu’s got some of the most... intense yakuza groups.”

“Well I guess that answers my question about how you became Japan’s top hero in such a seemingly quiet little town.”

Yuuri shook his head. “I’m just doing my job, Victor. And when the police asked for help with their yakuza problem in Fukuoka, I helped. Now they like to come down here and cause trouble just to mess with me.”

“How have I never heard about this before now?”

“Well, I told the news not to mention it…”

“What?”

“Well, the yakuza has a lot of influence in some areas and I didn’t want any news channels or reporters getting threatened. Plus, if there’s no news, then the others that I haven’t dealt with before don’t know what they’re getting into when they decide Hasetsu’s a nice place to cause trouble.”

Victor could hear the sirens approaching, a flurry of tires screeching to a halt just past the planetarium. Yuuri, Yuuri, was acting like this was all no big deal! Just a day in Hasetsu! Fighting off groups of people with machine guns! And rocket launchers!

“I am so in love with you,” Victor breathed out, the overwhelming feeling too much to keep to himself.

Yuuri paused at that, blinking over at him. “Wha-”

“I’m serious! I’m in awe, Yuuri. You really don’t realize how incredibly talented you are, do you?”

“It’s not that big of a deal…”
Victor came to an abrupt stop, putting his hands firmly on Yuuri’s shoulders and looking him in the eye. “Yuuri, listen to me. You’re an amazing hero. Like, I cannot even begin to put into words how impressed I am. And I’m so damn proud of you, okay? Don’t ever forget that.”

And somehow, for once, the words seem to register. Yuuri’s eyes widened, then a soft smile crept onto his lips.

“Okay,” he murmured. “I won’t.”

They walked over to the police cars, and Yuuri began to fill the police in on what happened. And although it’s in Japanese and Victor’s no where near that good at it yet, he’s pretty sure from the sound of it Yuuri’s been in two fights tonight.

Sure enough, a group of police officers broke off from the group and headed further down the wharf area to another boat docked there. They emerged moments later with a bundle of five men tied up.

“More yakuza?” he asked Yuuri quietly.

“No, just gold smugglers.”

“Busy night, I see.”

And that soft smile was back, as if Yuuri was once again basking in Victor’s praise. It was adorable, and he couldn’t stop himself from putting an arm around his shoulder and pulling him close.

“Let’s go to bed, I think we’ve earned it.”

Yuuri chuckled at that. “I don’t know, I think I could go for another round.”

Victor nudged his shoulder. “Oh hush. Not all heroes have crazy stamina like you do, okay? And to be perfectly honest, I’d much prefer you to be in that bed with me.”
“O-Oh.”

It fell quiet between them a moment, and Victor finally asked what had been bothering him all along.

“Why’d you leave earlier? Was there something wrong?”

Yuuri came to a halt, the street lights illuminating his face.

“I’m just worried about all this press stuff and I couldn’t sleep. You looked so peaceful though, so I didn’t want to bother you…”

“Yuuri, you’re never a bother to me, okay?”

“So you want me to wake you up at three in the morning so we can go get shot at?”

Victor stared, before realizing that Yuuri was teasing him.

“If you want to go out and get shot at, yes I’d much prefer if I was with you. If nothing else,” he reached over and tapped Yuuri on the nose, “I enjoy the view.”

And with that, the blush was back on his cheeks.

“I’m beginning to think you had an ulterior motive in changing my hero uniform…”

“I can’t say the thought didn’t cross my mind,” Victor replied with a grin.

Yuuri opened his mouth and closed it, clearly not expecting his taunt to be true. He shook his head.

“You really mean that, don’t you?”
Victor brought his hand up to cup Yuuri’s face, leaning down until his forehead pressed against Yuuri’s.

“It’s fitting that the wave design now covers all of you, because your body is a work of art.”

Yuuri looked torn between kissing him and laughing, finally caving to the second and laughing amidst choked out words.

“Oh my god, you... dork!”

Okay, okay, he probably deserved that. That was a pretty cheesy thing to say, after all. But he did mean it!

“I’m serious!”

“And so I am!” Yuuri shot back, grinning now as if he couldn’t be happier. “I cannot believe that the Winter Monsoon just said that! That was so bad.”

“Aww, I’ve been saving that one for the right moment though…”

And maybe it was his pout. Or maybe Yuuri just couldn’t resist the urge to kiss him any longer. But that earned Victor a kiss pecked to his lips and Yuuri happily lacing their fingers back together as they turned back towards home.

“I’ll forgive you, but only because I’m in such a good mood,” Yuuri muttered.

But Victor could tell that cheesy or not, somehow, even just slightly, Yuuri believed him.

And that, was victory enough for the night.

Chapter End Notes
Yariyagatta na, ketsumedo yarou! - Now you've done, you assholes!

Dare ni mono wo ii-agatterun da? -- Just who the hell do you think you're talking to?

Tobokeru no wa yose. -- Don't play dumb with me.

Doko ka itchae yo. -- Get out of my sight.

It's kind of amazing how easy it is to find curses/swears in other languages online.

Also, while the quirks here are made up, the gold smuggling problem and the yakuza of Kyushu (yes even that rocket launcher!) are all based on real-life. Sometimes reality is just strange enough it fits right in with a superhero story.
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Oh gosh, I am so sorry for the sudden unexpected delay in chapters; real life was suddenly very terrible but I'm hopefully back on track now, so sorry for the wait!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Victor loved surprising people.

It was something Yuuri had known for years, the one trait from the Winter Monsoon smiling from posters and winking on cameras that seemed to carry over to Victor himself. And, although he really didn’t quite understand how, Victor claimed it was Yuuri who had so far done most of the surprising.

As if Victor showing up on his doorstep or falling in love with him wasn’t a complete and total surprise.

But whatever it was he had planned today, Yuuri could tell there was a childlike mischief twinkling in his eyes that meant he was up to something.

It was the day that began what Victor had come to call PR January, an apt title being as it looked as if they were going to spend most of the month fulfilling requests for interviews, sponsors, photoshoots and everything else they’d signed up for. But Yuuri really wasn’t sure what about the Hero Herald article could be so exciting that Victor was already in such a good mood about it.

With a blush, Yuuri wondered if it was merely the outfits they’d offered to model for the magazine’s photo; a pair of matching Michael Kors sweaters that read “LOVE” across the front. That little factor definitely had Yuuri smiling to himself ever since he put it on that morning.

But whatever it was, Victor wasn’t letting on.

“What’s got you in such a good mood?” he’d asked, going for nonchalant.

“Oh, nothing really,” Victor had replied with a smile that said that there was definitely something he was keeping from him.
Yuuri had poked him in the side. “Does nothing have a name?”

Victor had laughed at that, but although he admitted that yes he was excited for something, he refused to even hint as to what it was.

When Mari called to them that the reporter had arrived, Victor had practically ran downstairs to meet them. And it wasn’t until Yuuri rounded the corner and saw exactly who was there that he finally understood what Victor had been so pleased about.

Yuuri might have gasped. And he definitely had to blink a few times to make sure he was seeing what he thought he was. But the hero and their notable blue hair were definitely there. Victor’s grin was victorious, as if he knew that this was going to elicit such a response.

“I might have requested that they send one of their best reporters,” Victor said with a knowing smile.

Okay, so Victor knew he was a bit of a big fan of certain heroes; and while a lot of that attention went to Winter Monsoon, there was another pair of famous heroes that he’d always admired.

The two other members of the original UAT, a pair of female heroes from America, who had gone on to remain the top ranked heroes of their country ever since. When he was younger, it had been Yuuri’s dream that maybe someday, he and Victor could be as iconic a duo as Comet and Faunaa were. A superhero duo and power couple in all senses of the word, the two heroes had revolutionized the hero world in their home country. The first heroes to start their own hero agency, a trend that had swept their nation, Cheetah Heroes United was as respected as the IHU itself.

And now one of the two heroes behind that was standing in his house.

He turned to Victor, mouth agape. “Now I know why you’ve been so smug this morning!”

Victor’s grin just widened. “It was my turn to surprise you, so I may have called in a bit of a favor.”

The female hero just chuckled, “Don’t worry, he didn’t have to twist my arm much. I’ve been dying to meet you, Hokusai Wave.”
Comet, *THE Comet*, was dying to meet him.

She crossed the space between them and held out a hand with a grin.

“Faunaa wanted to come too, but there was a nature reserve in Africa that had a fence malfunction and needed help tracking their animals back down. She’s so mad I’m getting to meet you before her.”

Yuuri somehow managed to get his hand steady enough to reach out and give her hand a shake.

“I am so incredibly honored. I’m not sure if I could have handled having all of the original UAT together in one room, to be honest.”

Comet laughed at that and shot Victor a look. “Looks like we’ll have to make plans for the future then, huh?”

Victor returned to Yuuri’s side, his arm already finding its way around Yuuri’s waist and pulling him close.

“I don’t know, two power couples in one room? We might break the internet with that news.”

Yuuri felt his heart stutter to a halt. Did Victor just call them a power couple?!

Comet grinned. “Sounds like a plan to me. But right now, it’s business time. I’ve got my photographer set up out front, then we can get to the interview.”

Victor pressed a soft kiss to Yuuri’s temple, before asking him quietly, “You ready for this or do you need a moment?”

He shook his head. “I’m good. I’ve got you.”
Yuuri reached down and entwined his fingers with Victor’s. He gave his hand a squeeze.

And although he could feel the nerves prickling at him, the warmth that had settled around his heart seemed to put a damper on them for now.

Maybe he was a little closer to his dreams than he thought.

Maybe with Victor beside him he could handle all this press stuff he usually hated.

Because something about having him there, feeling his pulse beating in time with his own, made Yuuri feel far less apprehensive than he usually would be.

And deep down, he hoped that maybe, just maybe, his presence could help Victor worry less about how the press would judge him for his injury. It was the least he could do to even begin to show Victor how grateful he was for everything he’d given him.

“You’re awfully quiet. Are you sure you’re okay?” Victor said pausing just inside the doorway.

Comet was talking with the photographer as they tried to decide exactly what sort of pose and angle of the building they wanted in the shot and Yuuri turned to Victor with a smile.

“I’m just thinking,” he replied, but at Victor’s concerned expression, Yuuri clarified. “Good things,” he said, reaching up to tap Victor on the nose. “I promise. Just stupid sappy good things.”

Victor raised an eyebrow, trying not to grin. “Oh? And what sort of stupid sappy good things?”

Yuuri stifled a laugh.

“I’m about to be interviewed by one of my idols, but thankfully I’ve currently got the sweetest boyfriend so I’m not near as nervous as I should be. You might have heard of him- Winter Monsoon?”

Victor beamed, the little dimples around his eyes and cheeks showing as if an exclamation of just
how happy the comment had made him.

“Never heard of the guy,” Victor managed before they both burst into laughter.

Comet walked over then and her smile was fond. “I can’t believe after all these years someone finally figured out how to crack his shell,” she remarked, her eyes on Victor. “This is the best I’ve ever seen you, Snowflake.”

She’d reached out to ruffle his hair, her fondness for her old teammate apparent, when suddenly she stopped with her eyes alight.

“That’s it! For the picture!”

She reached out and took Victor’s hand and then turned and did the same with Yuuri’s.

“Let’s show the world how happy you’ve made this man, okay?”

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**Hero Herald - Real News, Real Heroes - January 6th, 2017**

[candid-like photo of Victor and Yuuri, both wearing matching “LOVE” sweaters as they smile and laugh mid-snowball fight]

**Life, Love and How Hero Work Brought Them Together**

By Comet

Hokusai Wave broke onto the international hero scene three years ago during what the Japanese Hero Union referred to at the time as simply a “minor bank hostage incident.” It was notable not only for being his first hero work after returning from training in America under Celestino “Portal” Cialdini with fellow hero, Freeze Frame (see Freeze Frame’s YouTube channel if you’re interested in some of their early work), but also for Hokusai Wave bravely throwing himself between a civilian and a bullet. While the bullet was deflected by his blade and only clipped his shoulder, this supposedly “minor” incident was merely a hint as to what Japan’s and now the World’s top hero had...
in store for us in the following years.

Since his recent viral incidents have finally brought attention where it was due, Hokusai Wave has had countless articles written detailing his hero work up until now. (We prefer the fact-based and unbiased JHU dossier on him, which you can see on their English site here, but that’s how we roll). But to give you a quick recap, the reason you’ve not heard about incidents in Japan is because this one hero has been working so hard to make it that way and has, for the safety of the press, kept it a quiet affair. Local yakuza groups refer to him as if he was a natural disaster, using terms like storm bringer, typhoon and tsunami when discussing him, apt considering he’s done more to curb their activities in a month than local law enforcement has been able to do in years. But to those who know him personally, Yuuri Katsuki is nothing but kind and humble, a true hero for the people.

I was recently given the honor of sitting down with Hokusai Wave at his home along with perhaps his biggest fan, and current boyfriend, Winter Monsoon.

**Comet:** Okay, so let’s face it everyone’s been talking about you and specifically you two as of late. Care to let me in on how these two great heroes found one another?

**Winter Monsoon:** (laughs) Can I say fate without it being cheesy?

**Hokusai Wave:** No, that’s really cheesy.

**WM:** Okay, so it was fate (HW rolls his eyes at this) and luck and both of us being in the right place at the right time.

**HW:** We met at the Hero Trials after-party, formally.

**WM:** And he rode in on a white horse, stopped the bomb and swept me off my feet…

**HW:** (laughs) Victor!

**WM:** Okay, so he only did two of those. I’ll let you imagine which.
HW: Anyway! I returned to Japan and life was getting pretty much back to normal when Inferno showed up.

WM: The only thing I will ever be grateful to him for, by the way.

HW: Freeze Frame was able to contact me and let me know the location he was holding them hostage. Honestly, that night is kind of a blur for me. I had enlisted the help of a junior hero, Aerostat, to help get me to Oiso and between that and my worry for my friend… Well, I’ve seen the video since and uh…yeah, I was pretty pissed off.

WM: It was amazing. And I say this as someone who’s fought Inferno countless times, what he did was not as easy as he made it look, let me tell you.

Comet: Which is why you came to Japan, am I correct?

WM: Well I had to thank him in person after that! Then we got to talking and we decided I’d help him do whatever it took to make the UAT next year. It was honestly the least I could do.

Comet: You made the comment earlier that you’re his acting coach now, right?

WM: I spoke with Celestino and with his current obligations in America, we realized that no one was around to help Yuuri tackle the current press onslaught, which had only gotten worse after the incident in Beijing. Being as I had experience with PR, I offered to help.

HW: He’s been wonderful. I don’t think I could have done it without him.

Comet: Now I’m certain most of our readers have seen the video from Beijing and the press conference as well, but care to say any more about your relationship?

HW: I’ve been blessed with a lot of support and love in my hero career, but I didn’t really start to think about it until everything that’s happened recently. Victor and I, we’ve each been fighting our own battles, even out of uniform, before now. And I know I always had this feeling like I was fighting alone. But…since Victor arrived, things have been different. I was finally able to realize that there was love all around me, from my family, my friends, my hometown. Now that I know that love, I’m stronger for it. Victor’s given me the courage to do so many things I never thought I could,
and I don’t know if I could begin to describe all the emotions I have for him with something as simple as “love.” But that’s what I’ve decided to call it, because no other word can even come close.

**WM:** How am I supposed to follow up after that?

**HW:** (laughs) Victor!

**WM:** Okay, okay. Well, those that have known me closely probably know that I’ve been kind of focused on hero work for the last ten years of my life. Which is all well and good, but I realized in meeting Yuuri, that I’d forgotten to live outside of my work. Life, Love- I’d been neglecting those L-words severely. Yuuri’s life and love have taught me about a brand new world I’ve never known before. I thought that I could only find new strength on my own, but Yuuri changed that and really inspired me to keep fighting. If you feel like you’re seeing a different side of me now, you owe it all to him. He’s changed me, heart and soul, for the better.

**Comet:** Well now, I have no idea how to follow up either of you!

(everyone laughs)

**Comet:** But, I think I speak for everyone when I say that it’s wonderful that your hero work brought you two together. It’s a tough job, doing what we do, and it’s always much easier when you have someone you trust and love right there with you.

**WM:** For me, I’ve felt for the longest time that hero work has taken a lot from me. And this time it’s given back, and it’s wonderful. It truly is.

**HW:** Being a hero like this, has always been a dream of mine. And It’s always been a dream too big for me to reach alone. But now, with Victor, I feel like maybe together we can reach it. He’s made the impossible possible.

**Comet:** Well, I wish both of you the best. Thank you again for talking with us!
In some way, opening up was a refreshing change of pace.

Victor was so used to going through interviews with a smile and a nod, saying what he knew he was expected to and keeping any troublesome matters such as his own feelings out of it.

That hadn’t been the case with the *Hero Herald* article, and to put it mildly, people had noticed.

“Ya know, I used to think you were some sorta snob? No offense,” Airess, the Fukuoka heroine who’d dropped by to eavesdrop on their commercial filming commented casually.

She’d honestly hesitated only a moment before dropping easily into conversation with Victor on the sidelines as Yuuri shot the first part of the scene.

And Victor had to admit, having a fellow hero approach him as an equal instead of some *super* hero was kind of nice.

“None taken,” Victor replied with a smile. “I could see how interviews in the past might have given that impression.”

“Who’dve guessed that Katsuki-san would be the one to bring you around, huh? I mean, you have seen him fight, right? He’s a *beast*. The yakuza here are terrified him, though they won’t admit that.”

Victor chuckled. “We had a run in with a few recently. I heard something about a rocket launcher?”

Airess shook her head, reclining back on the chair she’d created out of air itself. “Oh that wasn’t nothing! You know they’ve got their own special tattoo they get if they manage to actually make him bleed, right?”

Victor about fell from the chair she’d summoned for him onto the ground at that.

“What?”

Airess giggled. “Katsuki-san is humble to a fault, bless him. But yeah, there’s a special little wave
design they get to show off they’re one of the few that’s managed it. I had a real charmer with one bragging about it once to me. Thankfully for me, he was already in custody. I couldn’t do that crazy dodging stuff that he manages.”

She gestured to where they were filming in the street before them, a group of actors playing yakuza to Yuuri’s Hokusai Wave for a dramatic action scene opening. It was the fourth time they’d had to redo the shot because Yuuri had moved too fast.

“If you’re trying to get me to fall more in love with him, it’s working,” Victor joked.

Airess snorted, the puff of air she let out solidifying into a little loop. She twirled it around her fingertip.

“Oh just wait for your lines, Katsuki-san’s going to lose it,” she remarked with a smirk.

Victor blinked. “Is my Japanese that terrible?”

Airess bit back a grin. “Oh it’s fine, it’s just your accent...well...it’s adorable. Really. He’ll love it. I promise.”

Victor wasn’t quite sure about that, but the producer and crew had been so busy working she’d been the only person he’d been able to practice his lines with today. And before hand, Yuuri had been so nervous about his own part that Victor had resorted to asking his mother and father for help rehearse his own part.

“Victor, they’re ready for your part now!” Yuuri called over to him.

Victor took a deep breath. Well, here went nothing.

The premise of the Kit Kat commercial was fairly simple, although Yuuri had expressed concern that they were planning to begin airing it right before Valentine’s Day. It wasn’t the first time the company had a couple as the focal point of their commercials in Japan, Yuuri had noted. Apparently being part of that couple was a bit nerve wracking for him.
And so Victor had reassured him countless times that he’d worry about his lines another time and instead focused on Yuuri. They danced. They fenced. They practiced Yuuri’s quirk in the middle of the night. Anything to keep his mind from dwelling on the press events they had planned.

Now, as they were ready to shoot the scene, Victor worried that perhaps he should have run his lines by Yuuri at least once.

As the scene began, Yuuri had just finished defeating the yakuza and Victor was approaching to congratulate his effort.

"Sogan yokatta!" Victor said cheerfully as he entered the scene.

Yuuri blinked, seeming a bit shocked, but it didn’t seem...bad?

“Daijobu desu ka?”

Yuuri shook his head, a soft smile curling his lips. “Hai, daijobu desu.”

“Okashi o douzo,” Victor said, offering the Kit Kat to him.

Yuuri took it and took a bite.

Victor’s nerves had finally settled and he wondered why Airess had been so certain Yuuri was going to take note of his accent?

“Suki desu ka?”

“Watashi wa kore ga suki desu,” Yuuri replied, offering the remaining piece to Victor. “Wakeaou.”

Victor sat down next to him, leaning over against his shoulder as he took a bite. “Oishika!”
That’s when he noticed it. The slight twitch as if Yuuri was trying not to laugh.

He closed his eyes and leaned closer. “Gabai ureshika!”

“Gabai hazukashika…” Yuuri muttered.

The director yelled stop. That wasn’t the right line, was it? Victor paused and blinked over at Yuuri.

“What’s wrong?”

Yuuri’s cheeks were flushed pink and he bit his lip as if hesitant to explain.

“Is my Japanese really that bad?” Victor finally asked, smile falling into frown.

To his surprise, Yuuri dipped his head down, his face blushing a deeper red.

“No, no it’s perfect actually, it’s just…” Yuuri glanced over at the crew and gathered crowd. He offered Victor a shy smile. “That’s not standard Japanese, that’s...it’s what the locals here speak. It’s slightly different.”

Victor stared. “So I’m...doing it right but I’m not?”

Yuuri sighed, reaching over to his hands on Victor’s shoulders. He leaned in until his forehead bumped against his.

“You’re speaking the rural Japanese of my hometown, Victor. So I’m kind of majorly embarrassed, but I’m also really touched, to be honest. It’s...cute.”

“Oh.”

Victor knew he had to have turned quite red at that.
Yuuri let out a nervous laugh. “Let’s film the last part, okay?”

Victor nodded and they shifted back into position, leaning against one another.

The director gave them a countdown and then they shot it once more.

“Oishika! Gabai ureshika!”

This time, Yuuri relaxed against him, his cheek brushing against Victor’s shoulder.

“Kimi ga iru dake de boku wa shiawase dayo.”

*I’m happy with you by my side.*

And at that moment, Victor couldn’t agree more.

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**Do Heroes Help or Hinder? Questions Raised After Alps Avalanche Disaster**

SuperNewsWeekly - 5 hours ago

After fatalities in avalanche, some say delay, disorganization and ego made the heroes on the scene more trouble than they were worth. Local authorities are now investigating on eyewitness reports that first heroes on the scene, Medusa and Atlas, wasted critical time by arguing first and rescuing second.

**The Leopard Hailed as Stand-Out Hero After Crispino Twins Flop**

Plus Ultra Post - 4 hours ago

A junior hero is being praised for his focus and compassion after refusing to get caught up in the in-fighting amongst pro heroes at the scene of Friday’s avalanche. While the UAT tried to bring organization to the chaos, The Leopard wasted not a moment of time before diving into rescue operations. He’s being credited with saving over fifty lives, including that of a mother cat and her kittens, trapped in the rubble.
United Alliance Team Proves Its Worth Following Avalanche

IHU Press - 4 hours ago

Physique (now ranked 3rd), King JJ (6th) and Smolder (5th) rose to the occasion, bringing not only an end to the fight that had broken out between fellow heroes, but a sense of teamwork and organization the rescue efforts had been lacking before their arrival.

UAT Scoring System Altered After The Leopard’s Astounding Rescue Count

HeroBuzz - 3 hours ago

Hero Liaisons Officer, Hayami Masumi, spoke with press this morning and said that The Leopard’s rescue efforts would not be overlooked. The scoring system previously had a 500 point cap on rescue points, allowing for up to five persons to be rescued. Input from other heroes at the scene, and the gratitude of many of the over fifty lives saved, have now changed that cap to 2,500 points.

The Leopard Leaps into 2nd Place With Outstanding Rescue Effort

HeroNewsNetwork - 3 hours ago

After yet another alteration of the UAT’s new scoring system, The Leopard skyrockets into second rank after a threat level 4 avalanche in which he rescued over fifty lives. This brings him within only 250 points of Hokusai Wave, who is currently in first. Other heroes on site at the disaster have easily taken their places in the top ranks, bumping previous second rank hero Caradoc to 4th and the previous heroes ranked 3rd through 5th out of the top five completely.

Maybe, if he was lucky, they’d all call and cancel. It wasn’t like he was going to hold the top hero spot much longer, so clearly they’d realize that and back out, right?

Yuuri sighed.

His emotions were a mess and he was supposed to be packing for their trip which would go from now until pretty much the end of January. Needless to say, he hadn’t done much more than sit on his bed and stress out about everything.
He was so proud of Yuri, the news lauding him in praises and not once bringing up Victor to do so. The Leopard’s Prowl Instagram was full now of photos of Yuri with the cat he’d rescued and subsequently adopted and he looked happy. Well, as happy as Yuri Plisetsky could look in a photo, that was.

But on the other hand, now Yuuri found himself wondering if this little glimpse of fame was all he was meant to have. And like most of his depressing thoughts, one tended to lead to the next, and before he knew it he was worried about everything from being called a fraud to Victor leaving him.

It wasn’t that he believed Victor to be fickle, but more that he couldn’t fathom how he could hold anyone’s attention for more than a little while. Victor deserved far better than Yuuri could ever offer him, after all, and he worried constantly that Victor would realize this and come to regret what he’d done.

_He wasted this amazing quirk on me and I can’t even maintain it for more than a few seconds._

Victor had reassured him that everyone struggled with their quirks at first, but Yuuri feared he was just being kind. Yuuri couldn’t control it at all, stuck at either a weak trickle or a massive wave with no inbetween. He’d been avoiding practicing with it in the last week, and he was pretty sure Victor had begun to notice. The ranking change had only made him want to avoid it more.

But it was frustrating on a level he wasn’t sure Victor understood. Sure, everyone struggled with it at first; but maybe Yuuri wasn’t ever supposed to have a quirk. Maybe his body just couldn’t handle it so it was broken when he tried.

Maybe he should just apologize to Victor for wasting his and everyone else’s time.

Clearly, like Celestino had warned, the winds had shifted and they were no longer blowing in Yuuri’s favor.

The worst part of it, was in a way, Winter Monsoon. Previously, when Yuuri felt his worst, his posters, his beloved limited edition silver age costume WM hoodie, and all the little things he had about Winter Monsoon were what he used to pull himself out of it.

Winter Monsoon always managed to remind Yuuri why he did this and why he loved this.
But now, Victor was a part of that picture, and it complicated things. It was hard to feel inspired when the real flesh and blood person was right there frowning at you. Hard to cuddle into his worn hoodie and pretend it was Victor’s arms comforting him when Victor was somewhere else in the house.

It scared Yuuri to realize that in having Victor become part of his life, he’d lost the mythical Winter Monsoon that had been there to drive him forward in the past.

Mari and Minako-sensei had both picked up on Yuuri’s declining mood, urging him to talk about it with them or Victor. But Yuuri didn’t feel right just complaining about his situation to Victor.

Victor, who was in 7th place and trailing by over 2,000 points in the ranking between him and 6th place.

Wouldn’t be rude to ask him for help?

At least Victor had a legitimate reason for slipping down in the ranks this year. While Yuuri? This was the best he’d ever done. If anyone should be working to reassure the other that they were still a worthy hero, Yuuri truly felt it should be the other way around.

He was probably being a terrible boyfriend on top of everything else.

“Yuuri, I don’t think either of us is going to like it if you let your thoughts to continue like this,” Victor’s voice said quietly.

For a brief moment, Yuuri thought it was just his imagination, doing like it always did. That’s when he heard the footsteps and his bed sank with the added weight of someone sitting down next to him.

He blinked up at Victor, who was frowning down at him. Ugh, he probably looked horrible right now, face blotchy from crying and burrowed into his hoodie like a turtle afraid to leave its shell.

Victor reached down and brushed aside his bangs, his frown deepening.

“I was hoping if I gave you some space you’d feel better, not worse.”
“Sorry,” Yuuri muttered.

“What are you sorry for? If anyone should be apologizing, it’s me for not noticing you were upset sooner.”

“I didn’t want to bother you.”

Victor sighed, lying down next to him and gathering him up in his arms.

“The only thing bothering me is that you’re upset and I don’t know why.”

Yuuri huffed. “It’s not important.”

“If it’s bothering you, then it’s important enough,” Victor stated firmly. He let go for just a moment, reaching up instead to cup Yuuri’s face in his hands. His thumbs swiped gently over his cheeks, any remaining trace of tears swept away. “I must be a terrible boyfriend if I let whatever it is upset you this much before doing something about it.”

Yuuri felt his chest grow tight at that, at the way Victor winced as if he truly felt that he was the one at fault here for not intervening sooner. It was silly, that both of them were beating themselves up over being a bad boyfriend over nothing.

He shook his head.

“No, I’ve been avoiding you because I didn’t want to upset you. I guess that kind of backfired.”

Victor’s expression softened, gentle around the edges, as if he’d somewhat suspected this to be the case and yet still, somehow, was here; holding Yuuri as if there was nowhere else he’d rather be in the entire world.

“And I’ve been at a loss as what to do about it until your sister practically shoved me in here and told me to figure it out. What do you need, Yuuri? What can I do? I feel completely helpless but I hate
It was raw, completely honest and something about that resonated with Yuuri. Wrapped around him and made him feel like despite his spiraling thoughts, despite the fact he had no clue what he needed to make them stop, that Victor being there would be enough to fight them back into the dark corners of his mind they’d crawled out from.

Winter Monsoon had, like always, found a way to pull Yuuri back up again.

“I’m just worried about everything,” he began, the words tumbling from his lips before he could stop them. “Worried that everything up until now has been some sort of fluke and that the universe is about to right itself and I’ll go back to being a nobody again.”

“Oh Yuuri…”

“Most of all, I...I just don’t want to disappoint you. I can’t figure out your quirk. I’m scared you’re going to see how painfully boring I am and just...wise up and leave.”

His breath hitched and Yuuri tensed, his brain finally catching up. He hadn’t meant to…

Before he could stammer out an apology or attempt to brush his words under the rug, Victor drew him closer, his arms tight around him and his breath ragged as he let out a huff of a laugh.

“I can’t leave you silly,” he murmured, soft and low. “No one else will put up with my hick Japanese.”

Yuuri snorted a laugh at that. It was as if a great weight had just shifted off his shoulders and Victor hadn’t done anything but…

Be himself.

Honest and true and maybe, a bit of a tease.
“Victor…”

“I know telling you you’re overthinking things isn’t that helpful, but you are. Because I most definitely do not find anyone who nonchalantly fights off yakuza armed with machine guns boring.”

Victor drew out the last syllable and punctuated it with little butt of his forehead as if to drive it home. Yuuri felt another little giggle bubble up at that, his lips tugging more and more up into a smile.

“I understand worrying about the rankings, because I’ve been there. But I also know someone as talented and tenacious as you won’t sit by and let someone take that top spot without a fight. Chris is ranked above me, Yuuri. I can’t even remember the last time that happened, but I’m not going to let it stay that way. I refuse to. And I know deep down, you feel the same. Why?” He leaned back, his hands firmly settled on Yuuri’s shoulders as he gave a warm smile. “Because I was about to quit before you inspired me to keep going. So this is me telling you, I believe in you, Yuuri. You can figure out that quirk. You can be the best hero this world has ever seen. I know you can.”

At that the laughter spilled from his lips, a mixture of relief and hope swirling in its wake.

“And here I thought you didn’t know how to cheer me up?” he teased.

Victor’s smile was soft, a bit surprised and perhaps a little relieved as well.

“I guess both of us are a little better at this than we think, hmm?”

Yuuri smiled at that, his heart feeling light.

“Ah.” Victor pecked a quick kiss to his lips before beaming. “There’s my beautiful Yuuri’s smile.”

And what little doubts and worries remained were washed away at that, his heart too full and warm to hold anything but happiness and hope.

He pecked a kiss back.
“And there’s my Victor’s beautiful smile.”

The little flurry of nerves at his own words was quickly pushed aside, as Yuuri had to stifle another laugh.

Because Victor had gone incredibly pink, the dusting of blush seeming to trickle down his neck and under his shirt.

He buried his face down under Yuuri’s chin, and Yuuri could feel the slight tremble in his hands as they clutched at his back.

“Gabai ureshika,” Victor murmured quietly.

*I’m so happy.*

Yuuri just clutched him closer, content to spend as long as Victor wanted curled up in his arms.

“Me too.”

Chapter End Notes

Japanese is as follows (those with a * are distinctly Saga-ben, which is the dialect around Karatsu Japan). Major thanks to this site for helping me write that correctly and to regularchery@tumblr for helping with the rest of it!

Sogan yokatta! (That was amazing!*)

Daijobu desu ka (Are you all right?)

Hai, daijobu desu. (Yes, I’m all right.)

Okashi wo dozo (Please have some sweets)

Suki desu ka? (Do you like it?)
Watashi wa kore ga suki desu. (I love this!)

Wakeaou (I'll share.)

Oishika. (It's delicious!*)

Gabai hazukashika (I'm mortified/embarassed*)

Gabai ureshika! (I'm so happy*)

Kimi ga iru dake de boku wa shiawase dayo. (I'm happy with you by my side.)
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Terribly sorry for the delay. Hopefully I'm back on track mostly now. Thank you as always for your patience and support!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was strange how often he’d begun to text Chris.

True, as opposed to previous years they weren’t seeing each other daily. And it just so happened that Chris tended to be the closest thing to an expert Victor knew when it came to relationship advice.

There was also the matter of just how much information the IHU was withholding, which had sadly made up more of their texts than Victor or Chris would have liked. Hayami was doing his best, but Lilia had told him not to pursue a few issues until they had a better idea of where their leak was coming from. Which while frustrating, made sense; they didn’t want to accidentally give their problem a means of escape. So in the meantime, Chris did his best to pass along anything that wasn’t being made public.

And so, a strange mixture of information, frustration and relationship questions and tips went back and forth between them. Something that Victor realized was probably the closest correspondence he’d ever truly maintained.

Which brought him back to why he needed relationship advice in the first place. Because the last thing Victor wanted to do was somehow ruin the first real relationship he’d ever had by making some stupid mistake that’d be obviously avoided by anyone with more experience. It almost scared him how out of his element he felt at times, but he’d made little time for friendships in the past let alone anything else.

And he really, truly wanted to change that.

Yuuri deserved the world’s best boyfriend and Victor hoped that with some effort, he might come somewhat close.

*Chris, I want to do something special for him while we’re traveling.* Press related business seems to
really stress him out and make him nervous, so what can I do to stop that?

- Well, I can’t say I have much experience in the stressful/nervous PR department. I mean, I’ve modeled for what? Like three lingerie companies?

...I meant what could I do as his boyfriend to help him?

- What do you usually do when you’re stressing out on PR trips?

Shopping mostly? But I’m not sure that’s really his thing. And I want to avoid too much of it being out in the public, because you know the paparazzi will ruin that. It was hard enough when we went out to get drinks.

- Think that’s bad? Try going anywhere with J “Mister let me proclaim my identity to anyone and everyone” J. I think Mila’s about to throttle him if Plisetsky doesn’t beat her to it.

Um. I was thinking...maybe something more private? Less chance of that if it’s behind closed doors, right?

- ...

- ...

- ...Victor. Are you asking me for sex advice?
I...suppose that fits the criteria.

- OMG YOU ARE. I take back most of my taunting about ranks, okay? Like seriously Victor, you can ask Auntie Chris about anything and everything about sex, okay? Let me email you some links. GOOD links that won’t give your computer viruses if you just start googling things.

...you are far too excited about this.

- Better to ask me than to try and figure it out on your first go and kill the mood. Also, no sex on the airplane. Not advised for beginners.

Chris.

- Victor. Look, joking aside, I want you to be happy. You’ve been miserable these last few years. But now that prince charming has come to whisk you off your feet, you deserve to enjoy it. You both do. That’s why I’m going to make sure you have what you need to make sure that happens.

I’m not rushing things, am I?

- You told me you’re both worried about these photoshoots showing off what you’ve got. So, honestly? Best way to get over that is to feel loved in your own skin. Get frisky. Share showers. You don’t need to jump under the sheets right away. But I think both of you could use some TLC, especially in that self-esteem department, before it’s plastered across millions of copies of Sports Illustrated. Give me Katsuki’s number and I’ll hook him up with this too.
WHAT NO? You can’t just text him out of the blue and bring this up!

- Victor please. I am the MOST LIKELY person to randomly text someone about sex in the entire world. Let me live up to my reputation as the hero world’s go-to on sex advice. I’ve written columns for Cosmo. Me texting your boy right before Valentines is nothing.

At least attempt a normal conversation first before just springing this on him.

- Well there goes my plan to just text him that you’re desperate and horny and to please do something about it because I cannot listen to you lust after him anymore.

Please do not make me fly to Barcelona just so I can kill you.

- Don’t you fret, princess. I’ll be a good girl and work my way around to the point. You guys are flying out tomorrow right?


- I’ll text you those links later. You just focus on enjoying your time together, okay? Don’t worry about anything else.

Okay. Thank you Chris. I’ll try.
Their schedule had been packed as tight as possible, something Yuuri had requested in hopes that less downtime meant less time to stress out over it all. Starting January 17th and running until the 26th they’d be either overnight at one of their destinations or on a flight between them. Victor, who Yuuri suspected had some sort of surprise planned considering Chris texted him out of the blue, highlighted the parts of their itinerary that were open and told Yuuri to decide on anything in the city he wanted to do, no price too much and no questions asked.

Yuuri had decided on a few things, but like Victor, he was keeping it secret. Two could play that game, and Yuuri was determined to give Victor back as much as he gave.

He’d already gotten Phichit’s computer skills to track down a makeup artist that Victor had lost contact with, a surprise he’d already told Victor about in hopes it would help ease his worries about his scar.

And Victor had already revealed one of his suprises when he discovered that they could easily make a detour to allow Yuuri to participate in a fencing tournament in Scotland.

It’d become a bit of a game, each of them trying to figure out just what the other had up their sleeve. And it was a lot more fun to speculate about that than worry about everything else.

So before either of them knew it, they’d arrived in Chicago for the first stop on their schedule. And like Yuuri had mentally prepared himself for, they were instantly mobbed by the press the moment they set foot in America.

Victor was truly a pro when it came to this, navigating the paparazzi with ease and running through the airport terminal hand in hand with Yuuri as they laughed and ran towards their waiting ride. By the time they’d reached Gatorade’s headquarters to hash out all the technical stuff, it was already all over the American media that Hokusai Wave and Winter Monsoon had landed.

“Are you sure you want to go now?” Victor gave Yuuri an odd look, and he supposed he deserved it. The had paused in the lobby on their way out, and Yuuri had suggested a bit of a change in their plans.
“Let me enjoy this until it goes from kind of cool to terrifying,” he replied.

“Oh, if you’re sure. The aquarium did say we could tour it after hours if you’d rather.”

“I’m sure the anxiety will kick in later, so I want to enjoy this while I can. Let’s go eat real deep dish pizza and go to the aquarium like normal people.”

Victor smiled at that, bringing up Yuuri’s hand to his lips and pressing a kiss to Yuuri’s knuckles.

“You are far too handsome to be a normal person, so I hope that doesn’t cause any problems.”

Yuuri snorted a laugh. “You’re the one that keeps waving at every camera.”

“They always think they’re so stealthy. Like yes, I notice you totally not suspicious person with a large high-quality camera that’s been following me three blocks.”

Yuuri laughed again. “Okay, pizza, aquarium?”

“As you wish,” Victor replied giving him a bow.

Yuuri stared, finding he really couldn’t help but reach out to poke the whorl of Victor’s hair.

Victor froze. “Is it getting that thin?”

“No! No it’s fine! Perfectly fine!”

He stumbled forward as if wounded. “You’ve found my weakness…”

Before he could slump to the ground in his dramatics, Yuuri swept his arms under him and lifted him up in his arms.
Victor’s blue eyes went wide and there was a blush high on his cheeks as he blinked up at Yuuri.

Yuuri swallowed down his nerves, leaning down to press a kiss to the same spot he’d poked. “It’s beautiful like the rest of you, okay?”

It was entirely worth the whole thing for the way Victor’s face flooded with color and he tried to hide it against Yuuri’s chest.

“No fair, Yuuuuuuuuuuuuurrrrriii!”

It was kind of wonderful, being in love.

The local pizza restaurant seemed somewhat surprised to have two well-known heroes just show up and ask for a table, but outside the customers and staffers approaching their table to ask for a photo or autograph, it was a fairly normal lunch.

And although they’d scheduled the photoshoot at the aquarium after hours, they didn’t seem to mind that Hokusai Wave and Winter Monsoon showed up a few hours before that to enjoy it along with the rest.

It had been after probably the hundredth person or more had approached them, everyone being very kind and apologetic about interrupting them, that they came across someone unexpected. This time, given the outfit, it seemed that a fellow hero had arrived.

“Hokusai Wave, I can’t believe you’ve made it so big!”

Yuuri felt like he should recognize the hero, but all he could remember was his voice. It sounded oddly familiar.

Thankfully, the hero took that pause on his part to introduce himself to Victor. “The name’s Aquatico! I trained for a year with Portal, so I had the honor of brushing elbows with this guy here.”
As he held out his hand, the reddish brown webbing between his fingers stretching as he did, it clicked in Yuuri’s memory.

“You’ve grown so tall,” Yuuri managed. “I almost didn’t recognize you.”

Aquatico grinned, his teeth sharp. “Fish genetics apparently! I’m supposed to keep growing as long as my organs can support me.”

Yuuri smiled. Advanced quirks were getting crazier by the year.

“Do you work here at the aquarium?” Victor asked, nudging a bit closer to Yuuri.

“Yeah, they’ve got a few of us heroes on staff with water or aquatic-related quirks. They actually called me in to help out with your photoshoot tonight, since I’m one of the dolphin trainers. Also I might have let them know I was dying to see you again!”

Victor’s arm snaked around Yuuri’s waist and tugged him closer.

“It’s great to see you again. I’m guessing you’re no longer masked then?” Yuuri asked, noting the lack of one.

“Yeah. I was just waiting for eighteen like most people. It’s got nothing on your unmasking though. I’ve always told you you’re too good looking to keep hiding under a mask.”

Yuuri ducked his head in embarrassment. “I keep hearing that but I’m still not quite so sure.”

“That’s why I’m here to remind you,” Victor cut in, pressing a kiss to his forehead.

“Victor…”

“Well, I’ll let you two go and I’ll see you later then?”
They waved Aquatico off and Yuuri blinked up at Victor who still hadn’t withdrawn his arms from around his waist.

“Are you okay?”

Victor frowned, then he blinked in shock.

“Wait, do you not realize how much he was flirting with you?”

Yuuri blinked. “What? He wasn’t…”


Yuuri sighed, but pulled his phone out of his pocket, Victor’s arms still not letting loose, and tabbed open his thread.

Hey Phichit, we just ran into Aquatico from Detroit. He’s gotten way taller. Like six foot now or something.

- Oh man I remember him! Does he still have that crush on you? Pretty sure he was plotting to whisk you away to Atlantica if he had the chance.

He stared. Aquatico? Little- okay he wasn’t little anymore- Adrian? Since when?

Victor’s voice was warm against Yuuri’s neck as he murmured in his ear, “Told you.”

Suddenly, a lot of things made a lot of sense.

“Is that why you suddenly got so clingy?” Yuuri teased, leaning back into Victor’s arms.
“Whatever are you talking about?”

Yuuri tilted his head back and pecked a kiss on the tip of Victor’s nose. “I think he might have gotten the hint I’m taken.”

That got a smile out of Victor and Yuuri smiled back. It was so strange and yet so endearing to know that even Victor felt insecure and felt like he needed to reassure himself that what they had was something real.

They made their way through the rest of the aquarium, stopped at random intervals by excited fans asking for photos or autographs. Even in America, where it seemed like you couldn’t walk a few feet without bumping into a hero, somehow Yuuri was still something notable.

And yes, okay, it was sort of intimidating. Because that sort of pressure wasn’t something Yuuri was remotely used to. But, seeing the kids light up as they recognized him and Victor? Young teens stammering out that they wanted to become a hero too? That kind of made it worth it, stress and all.

As the aquarium closed up for the public, they were approached by the PR agent working with them from Gatorade that they’d met earlier that day.

“Did you enjoy the aquarium?” she asked with a smile.

“Polly, yes, thank you!” Victor replied cheerfully.

She laughed. “Well, sadly now we’ve got work to do. But at least it shouldn’t take too long. We’ve got our crew getting the lighting and location set up right now, so once you change we should be ready to start.”

Yuuri nodded. What had started as one photo for a print ad had become a last minute commercial shoot. Victor had seemed somewhat shocked when Yuuri had agreed to it, but he knew this was just the calm before the storm. And his anxiety was like the waves out in the ocean heading closer and closer to the shore, ready to crash down upon him when he least expected it.

Celestino’s comment still lingered in the back of his mind. That little reminder that this might not last
Yuuri felt that way two-fold; about the fame that had come suddenly to his doorstep and the person that had brought it there. He wasn’t sure how long either of them were going to stay, but perhaps even if it was terrifying to put himself out there, it was better than not treasuring these precious moments before the winds shifted away.

And if this was to be his one last final bow before he returned to being a nobody, Yuuri was determined to make it count.

The aquarium’s Oceanarium where they held their shows was now set up for filming and photography; extra lighting brought in, cameras moved into position. The main shot was to be of Yuuri standing out on the small island the trainers used during the shows and Aquatico was going to instruct the group of pacific white-sided dolphins to jump behind him for a dramatic image.

Now that he’d had it pointed out, Yuuri couldn’t help but notice how much Aquatico was focused on him. Phichit had teased him for quite a bit after Yuuri had told him he’d never noticed before now.

But Yuuri really didn’t see what a young, attractive African American teen would have seen in someone like himself five years ago. Yuuri, in all honesty, didn’t understand what anyone saw in him.

“Hey, are you doing okay?” Victor had come up beside him after the director finished explaining what they were doing for the commercial shot.

“Victor?”

“What is it?”

“What about me is attractive?”

Victor blinked, clearly a bit surprised by the question.
“Like...give me specifics. I’m...I’m trying to see what it is everyone else sees in me.”

Victor’s expression softened at that, his hands coming up to rub soothing patterns up and down his arms.

“You have these beautiful warm brown eyes,” he began, pressing a kiss next to one of them, “and when something makes you happy, they light up...just like that.”

Yuuri felt his chest grow tight at that, a relaxing warmth settling around his frazzled edges.

“What...else?” He licked his lips, his throat suddenly dry.

“Hmm. You have a well-toned body, and when you do a fencing lunge? I swear I lose any chance of a point then because of how beautiful the muscles on your back look during it.”

Yuuri felt a nervous laugh catch in his throat. “You’re losing points staring at my ass?”

“It’s very distracting. Just ask Aquatico, he’s been staring at it this whole time.”

He shook his head, his face warm and his heart light.

“And?”

“This list could go on for hours and I’m pretty sure they want to keep filming you.”

“Okay, one more,” Yuuri murmured, his nerves unable to fight back against the gentle happiness that was washing over him.

“Your Herotek suit? Really showcases all your best assets...like…”

“My butt?”
Victor chuckled. “Yes that. And your strong thighs.”

He trailed a hand down from Yuuri’s arm and danced his fingertips across his leg. Yuuri felt a shiver down his spine and he was suddenly very much wishing that they were alone.

“And of course, your stunning face. Which, with glasses or without, I always find myself unable to look away from its beauty.”

Yuuri dipped his head down at that, his cheeks warm. Finally he darted his eyes back up to find Victor just looking at him, reverently, as if he truly did mean every single one of these things.

“Just so you know, I’m going to return this favor before your first photoshoot with me whether you like it or not.”

Victor blinked. “Really?”

Yuuri nodded, firmly. “Of course. I have a list of my own that I have to condense, after all.”

He shot Victor a wink at that, and before he crumbled to the embarrassment of doing so, Yuuri pulled away and quickly got himself back into position so they could line up the shot. But Victor’s words stayed with him, fire in his veins, bringing his confidence to life as he took his place.

And, if he was perfectly honest with himself, his butt did look pretty good in the photos of him lunging.

The Late Show with Punch Line

January 18th, 2017

“My next guest has been making some big waves in the worldwide hero rankings with his quick thinking and unique style, and so it’s my great honor to welcome Japan’s top hero, Hokusai Wave!”
“Well, it’s great to have you here, Hokusai Wave. You’ve certainly made quite the splash lately.”

[The audience laughs at the joke. Hokusai Wave smiles.]

“Well, you know. Just going with the flow.”

[The audience laughs again. Punch Line grins.]

“Speaking of that, I heard that’s where you were yesterday?”

“Yes, I was in Chicago to shoot some new advertising for Gatorade Flow’s Blackberry Wave.”

[Punch Line reaches down and pulls up an image from under his desk.]

“I may have gotten permission to let everyone see the results of some of that. Quite dramatic. I like the dolphins.”

[Hokusai Wave smiles.]

“It was wonderful working with the Shedd Aquarium for the project.”

“I heard you had a bit of a date there before hand?”

“Yes, Victor and I toured it before we set up for the shoot. It’s a wonderful aquarium.”

“So what’s it like, dating Winter Monsoon? Rumor had always been that he’s a bit icy in person.”
“No, not really icy. Not outside the quirk at least. I’ll admit, I was pretty intimidated at first. Like everyone else, I’d always admired him, so it was a little overwhelming having him suddenly in my life. But, well I probably wouldn’t be here tonight without him. He gave me the courage to go unmasked and he’s been incredibly supportive. I’m not sure where I’d be right now without him.”

“Audience awws over that and Punch Line presses a hand over his heart. He turns after a moment towards the offstage area.

“I see he’s over there right now watching over your precious cargo. What do you say we have him bring it on out?”

“Sure.”

[ Winter Monsoon enters to applause from stage right, carrying in his arms Hokusai Wave’s three weapons of choice. He places it down on the couch next to Hokusai Wave before turning to the audience and giving them a wave. As he starts to turn back, Hokusai Wave catches his hand. They lock eyes and Winter Monsoon gives a warm smile, followed by a gentle squeeze of Hokusai Wave’s hand, before pulling away and heading back offstage.]

“And that folks was your brief cameo. Sadly I don’t have the airtime for both of these two, so we’re going to talk a little more with our current top hero. Yuuri, why don’t you tell us all a bit about your fighting style?”

[He seems to relax at this, his fingertips reverently tracing down the edge of the blades beside him.]

“Well, it’s a mix of a couple of things. Mostly fencing, with a dash of ballroom dancing…”

“That I’m sure we’ve all seen, right?”

[The audience cheers in agreement. Yuuri looks somewhat embarrassed at that, but continues on.]
“Some martial arts, specifically Jeet Kune Do.”

“So just some good ole swashbuckling basically? Like a karate pirate?”

[Yuuri laughs.]

“I’m sure someone’s going to make a movie with that now. But yeah, I suppose it’s a little like that.”

“Okay, so tell me about your weapons of choice here. You told me when we spoke earlier, you’ve named them.”

[Hokusai Wave picks up the first blade, looking a bit sheepish as he does.]

“Yes, each of the blades has its own name to fit its purpose. Since fencing weapons can definitely do some damage but aren’t actually sharp, I have three weapons I use specifically for hero work. Each of them is based off the swords that led to the three types of fencing disciplines.”

“This one definitely looks like something I’d see in *The Three Musketeers*.”

[He holds up the blade, its hilt an intricate spiral of metal that sweeps around the handle.]

“This is a classic rapier sword. It’s styled after one that dates in the 1580s, so more like the musketeers’ grandfathers. Its name is Takumi, which means Skillful Sea. It’s for the more intricate maneuvers. Like if the villain has a blade or stick, you can use the hilt’s design to catch their weapon in it and spin it out of their hands.”

[He hands it over to Punch Line who looks it over and then brandishes it towards the cameras.]

“I’m definitely feeling the grandfather musketeer thing. All for one and one for all!”

[The audience applauds. Hokusai Wave picks up the next blade, which has a curved black guard on its hilt with small holes in it.]
“This is a dueling epee, styled after one from the 1890s. Its name is Masayoshi, which means Righteous Justice. The guard’s design can not only catch the tip of an opponent’s weapon, but I can also use it to deflect projectiles while using the holes to watch for more. Basically, it’s great to send whatever the villain’s attacking with right back at them.”

[He hands it over to Punch Line who holds it up so the camera can see the guard.]

“I can see it’s got a lot of dents from doing just that. Bullets? What else? What’s the strangest thing you’ve deflected with this?”

[Hokusai Wave seems to think a moment before grinning]

“Okay, it’s going to sound crazy, but bees.”

“Bees? Seriously?”

“It was this villain’s quirk and yeah, an angry horde of bees. It was pretty surreal.”

[Punch Line shakes his head before sitting the blade down crossed with the other one.]

“Okay, the last one’s the baby, right?”

[Hokusai Wave picks up the last blade, this one with a curved arch over the handle in deep blue and a wrapped tassel hanging from the hilt. Unlike the first two, which were narrow blades, this one curves like a katana.]

“Yes, this is the baby. This is an actual 1900s Japanese Kyo-Gunto Police Lieutenant's sabre. It’s name is Arainami, Raging Wave. It can do the most damage and is the sharpest of my three weapons. It was a gift from my fencing teacher when I was first IHU certified and has been a lifesaver, quite literally, many times.”

[He starts to hand it over, but Punch Line holds up his hands to stop him.]
“I think I’ll let you keep that one then!”

[The audience laughs.]

“But, I was thinking- would you be up for some swashbuckling? You know, karate pirate style or fencing style, whichever you prefer.”

“Certainly. Although we should probably use the dulled fencing blades instead.”

“Is that a threat?”

[Hokusai Wave shrugs.]

“I just don’t want anyone to get hurt.”

“Ooookay. You heard it everyone. We are going to DUEL! Right when we come back!”

[The shows cuts to commercial break before returning. The talk show stage has been rearranged to accommodate a basic fencing strip and both Punch Line and Hokusai Wave are geared up in fencing attire.]

“Welcome back! Now we’ve put on special padding so hopefully we won’t get hurt. First to what?”

“Five points?”

“Okay. What rules?”

“Don’t leave the fencing strip. Quirks are okay. First to hit gets the point.”
“And we’ve got this fancy system to count that right?”

“And we’ve got this fancy system to count that right?”

“Yep. When the tip of a blade impacts to the target area, which will be anything neck to waist.”

“Yep. When the tip of a blade impacts to the target area, which will be anything neck to waist.”

“Oh good, I was worried about the family jewels hanging down there!”

“Oh good, I was worried about the family jewels hanging down there!”

[Audience laughs.]

“Aren’t you ready for this?”

“Aren’t you ready for this?”

[Hokusai Wave laughs.]

“Shouldn’t I be asking you that?”

“Shouldn’t I be asking you that?”

“Hey now, I might not know a lot about fencing, but I have watched *The Princess Bride* a lot of times, so clearly I’ve got the advantage here!”

“Hey now, I might not know a lot about fencing, but I have watched *The Princess Bride* a lot of times, so clearly I’ve got the advantage here!”

[The audience laughs again as they both move into position.]

“Start on the count of three, all right?”

“Start on the count of three, all right?”

“Bring it!”

“Bring it!”

“One, two, three!”

“One, two, three!”

[Hokusai Wave moves lighting fast, his blade easily hitting Punch Line square in the chest.]

“That’s one!”

“That’s one!”
“Just wanted to let you have at least one point, Hokusai.”

“Ready? One, two, three!”

“Almost had you that time!”

“Okay, sure.”

“Let me count it down. Maybe that’s what I need. Ready? One, two, three.”

“Don’t think the countdown was your problem.”

“It was the weapon. I’ll get you this time! Ready?”

“All right, try it.”

“One, two, three!”

[Even with the larger weapon, Punch Line can only manage to get a hit a second after Hokusai.
Wave has secured his hit. Blue light first with the point. Punch Line switches back to the original blade.]

“Okay, fourth time’s the charm.”

“Sure. One, two, three!”

[This time, as Hokusai Wave goes to parry, Punch Line’s blade comedically distorts, snaking around the other blade and then reaching out to poke into Yuuri’s chest. Green light goes on and the audience roars, partially with laughter.]

“You should’ve tried that trick first.”

[Punch Line shrugs.]

“Quirk only works when it’s funny. And that, was funny!”

[Hokusai Wave chuckles, clearly unable to disagree.]

“Ready for my last point?”

“Pretty confident, eh?”

“Unless you have something else up your sleeves?”

[Punch Line reaches to tug open his sleeve, a plethora of oddball objects like a slinky, a few doves, a handful of playing cards, and another giant foam sword. He shrugs.]

“Nope. Nothing up these sleeves.”

[The audience laughs again and Hokusai Wave does as well.]
“Ready then?”

“Let’s do this!”

“One, two three!”

[Punch Line manages to parry Hokusai Wave’s first attack, but in his shock that he’s done so, he misses Yuuri’s remise attack. It hits and Punch Line staggers back as if mortally wounded.]

“Ah, you’ve got me... “

[His quirk activates, and it suddenly appears as if he’s sprung several little leaks, bright red liquid spurting out of each hole. He stumbles to the ground and throws a hand up over his head.]

“The Dread Pirate Hokusai Wave got me at last...and I have but one thing to say to that...”

[Punch Line suddenly springs back to life, and with a grin he reaches over and offers Hokusai Wave a handshake.]

“Thank you, Hokusai Wave. It’s been a great honor to have you here tonight and well, I think I might be able to survive the mortal wounds you’ve inflicted on my ego.”

[Hokusai Wave laughs, as does the audience.]

“Oh I hope so. I did use a dull blade after all.”

“True true. Anyways, let’s all give it up for Hokusai Wave! Thank you again for coming by and on behalf of America, I want to wish you the best of luck, good sir!”

[They finish their handshake and both turn to the audience, Hokusai Wave giving a wave to the audience and camera, applause and cheers from the crowd deafening. The show credits begin to
“Wow, I had no idea your quirk could do water too!”

Victor offered what he hoped was a passable smile. “Well, you know- ice and fire don’t mix that well…”

“Tell me about it,” Mellie replied, a New York hero whose quirk enabled her to bring drawings on paper to life. Along with Victor, they’d taken up trying to stop the fire on one end of the apartment complex while the fire department worked on the other end.

While she’d clearly known the limits of her quirk, creating a team of little firefighters with a hose that they’d connected to the closest hydrant and keeping them far enough away that no sparks fell upon their paper-bodies, Victor had slipped up.

It was probably because he wasn’t expecting to have his dinner interrupted by the Hero Network app notifying them that urgent assistance was required a block away. Despite Victor’s protests that New York had enough heroes to handle it, Yuuri had insisted they go as well.

“It would look bad if we didn’t,” he’d countered when Victor tried to argue it again.

Victor couldn’t counter that.

But while Yuuri had rushed inside to use his blades to cut down doors and help people escape, Victor had been left outside to help try and stop the fire. Which, well, what was he supposed to do with ice that would remotely help? Let it melt?

He shook his head. Mellie could probably tell she’d caught him off guard, because she’d gone silent. Then again, it was pretty clear that he normally used only ice to fight, even when fighting next to a fire quirk user like Smolder, even when fighting against a fire quirk villain like Inferno.

Obviously, anyone would realize that Victor suddenly using water, was extremely strange.
The press, as always like vultures to the kill, were already filming away.

And Victor had decided it was more important to try and help people than to try and maintain his image.

He just wasn’t so sure he was ready for the fallout from that decision.

Yuuri had smashed out another window, drawing their attention to it as he flagged down one of the two heroes helping him get people down from the upper floors. One, Madame Marvelous, had made stairs out of the air itself, and was using it to carry people down.

The other hero, Paloma, had a flock of pigeons and doves at her command, using them to carry people down in their beaks and claws.

Of course, Victor was going to feel useless in comparison. All he could do was use his quirk’s full potential or he’d just end up standing around feeling even more useless.

Usually, in the past, when situations arose with fire, he was the leader of a team. People expected him to stand back and call the shots as opposed to jumping in to help.

And well, with Inferno, it had become a matter of pride that he beat him with what should be weaker against his quirk.

But this? This time he felt like if Yuuri, who had no quirk, could willingly jump right into the fire, then he should at least make some effort, even if it meant smashing the carefully crafted lie he’d lived all of his life.

He could already hear some of what the press was saying behind his back, and inwardly, he tried to come up with something- anything- to say to them if they actually had the nerve to come over and ask him about it.

“So...is the water thing…” Ah, so Mellie hadn’t bought what he’d said after all. “Is that Hokusai Wave watching out for you?”
Victor blinked.

Of all the possible things he’d come up with, that had never once crossed his mind.

It was kind of romantic, to be perfectly honest; but he knew he’d be doing a disservice to Yuuri and his talent to take this lie and run with it.

He shook his head.

“No, but that’s definitely a sweet thought,” Victor replied, his smile softening. “It’s…”

Why was it so incredibly hard, to say that it was his quirk?

Was it because he knew the cameras were rolling and knowing their technology they were probably picking up the majority of what was being said?

Was it because he’d become so accustomed to lying about it that even now it still seemed surreal to use his quirk in its truest form?

Mellie seemed to glean her own answers from Victor’s silence.

“Oh, it was your parents, wasn’t it?”

Ah. So much for maintaining any sense of poise. Whatever attempt he’d made at trying to hide his reaction, he obviously didn’t do a very good job.

“Sorry, I didn’t realize…”

And perhaps that was part of the reason, wires of truth in the barbed lie he’d been wielding. Water had been part of who he was back then, even if he didn’t use it to fight, because he’d used it around the house. Impromptu water-gun fights without guns with his father. Watercolor painting with his
That had all come to an abrupt stop and somehow with it, part of Victor had too.

The words tumble out of his mouth, quiet and unsure, before he can even begin to wrap his mind around all the emotions swirling in his chest.

“Recently, someone told me to just be myself. I think, I may have taken it to heart to quite a degree.”

She smiled at that.

“I’m guessing that someone is Hokusai Wave, huh?”

Victor nodded, his face easing back into a smile.

Mellie pulled out her sketchbook, and quickly drew up a small little bird. With a breath of air, she brought it to life and it perched on her finger.

“Can you go see how Hokusai Wave is doing inside, little guy?”

The paper-bird nodded, and made right for the opening in the rooftop that Victor and Mellie’s firefighters had just put out the flames in.

“Thank you,” Victor murmured quietly.

She offered a smile back.

“Can’t have you worrying anymore, you’ll get creases on your forehead.”

Victor pouted, reaching up with his free hand to rub at his head. “Is it that noticeable?”
Mellie giggled. “It’s sweet. Don’t worry about it.”

The press, as always, saw the break in action as their chance; and before Victor could even register it, there were the cameras shoved right in their faces.

“How Winter Monsoon, our viewers at home are dying to know about this new water aspect of your quirk! What would you like to say on the matter?”

Nothing. Victor thought, feeling oddly hollow at being put on the spot like this.

And knowing, knowing, that anything he said was going to shatter the image he’d crafted into pieces, he found himself standing like a deer caught in the headlights unable to move.

What could he say?

What would Yuuri want him to say?

Victor took a deep breath and closed his eyes as if to brace himself against what he was about to do.

I guess this is goodbye, Winter Monsoon.

Chapter End Notes

If you’d like a look at Yuuri’s three blades, I’ve posted about them here:

http://abarero.tumblr.com/post/166134754415/so-in-chapter-24-of-mhy-which-is-just-waiting-on

Also, I’m gearing up for the bigbangonice and I’ve got to keep it somewhat secret until December, but I’ve got a writing-related twitter here: https://twitter.com/AbareroWrites which is private so if you’re interested in keeping up with that and anything else writing related for me, feel free to add!
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Hopefully back to weekly updates. I hope you're all still enjoying and thank you for sticking with me in these last few rough months!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Yuuri was extremely thankful he had his blades with him.

After filming the episode at the Late Show, he’d told Victor he wouldn’t mind walking through part of Central Park to the restaurant they had planned for that evening. Victor had fussed about the bag with his blades, offering to have it sent back to the hotel by courier, but Yuuri felt the weight a comfortable reassurance.

Perhaps Victor wouldn’t quite understand what it was like to be disarmed and quirkless, for although Yuuri could certainly make do without a blade of some sort, he’d built the bulk of his fighting style around them. If he was going to end up fighting some advanced quirk, he’d much prefer to be doing so with at least his blades to assist him.

So swung over his shoulder, resting across his back, was an extension of who Yuuri was as Hokusai Wave; the blades so much a part of him at times that he missed the weight of them in his hands if it had been too long between fights. It was something he didn’t expect Victor or anyone with a quirk to ever understand, but for Yuuri, his blades were his quirk. As much as Victor’s quirk became a part of his everyday life, so had the three blades that Yuuri had named and carried with him into battle time and time again.

When the Hero Network App flashed a notification across their phone screens during dinner, it wasn’t even a choice in Yuuri’s mind. He was a hero. He went where the trouble was and brought the people to safety and the villains to justice. Victor had seemed somewhat upset that he’d insisted they go, but Yuuri decided once again perhaps it was just that difference between them. Victor was used to delegating tasks to a group of heroes, Yuuri was used to handling everything alone or with only one or two allies if he was lucky.

He’d wasted not a moment when they’d arrived at the scene, having already changed into his uniform at the restaurant, rushing head first into the building with his sabre drawn. If Victor was mad at him for it, well, they’d have to discuss that later. Right now, people needed help and for Yuuri that was the number one priority, overriding anything else in his mind, even the doubts about Victor and his disagreement on the matter.
Paloma, a heroine that seemed to be able to control certain types of birds, had yelled out to him when he smashed out the first window. “It’s nice to have you helping out, Hokusai Wave! Welcome to New York!”

He offered her a smile as he passed the child from his arms into hers, the birds slowly coming to grab bits of the little boy’s clothing in their beaks and claws as they lifted him up and ferried him safely to the ground.

“Thank you! I’m going to check every room so keep an eye out for when I smash a window out,” he said, already feeling breathless with so much smoke in the air around him.

“Gotcha! Madam Marvellous has been getting people off their balconies, so I’ll let her know to keep an ear out for the windows smashing. We’ll get the people down to the ground once you get them safely to us.”

“Thanks!” he replied, rushing back into the room and calling out as best he could through the smoke for anyone left behind.

After punching out what was probably the eighth or ninth window, Yuuri met the other heroine at the scene.

“You doing okay in there, Hokusai?” Madam Marvellous had asked as she helped him get the elderly woman safely from window ledge to flattened quirk created air-step.

He nodded, rubbing the back of his hand across his forehead and coming back with mostly sweat and soot.

“I’ve got one more floor and then I think the firefighters have gotten the other wing, right?”

She nodded. “Yeah, they’re finishing up checking its top floor right now. You’ve done as much as a whole team of them all by yourself. No wonder you’re the top hero in the world.”

Yuuri shrugged. “Just doing my job.”
Madam Marvellous laughed. “Sweetie, you’re doing the job of like ten people alone. Give yourself some credit, okay?”

She shot him a wink as she began to make her descent with the woman and Yuuri just shook his head.

Was it really that impressive? He wasn’t so sure. Someone with a time-pausing quirk like JJ could probably do it faster. And The Leopard definitely had an advantage in both agility and speed.

There were plenty of heroes that could do better, Yuuri decided.

But, at the same time, there was a little voice that wondered. Could they?

Madam Marvellous said he’d managed the same sweep of the building as fast as an entire trained firefighting team. Wouldn’t they have people with quirks that would be ideal for this situation? And what did Yuuri have? Well, three very hot to touch blades that were, thankfully due to his new Herotek gloves, not burning his hands at least.

He shook his head. He had one more floor to go before he could sit still and dwell on anything like this. Swapping his epee out once more for his sabre, he made his way back through that apartment and up through the stairwell.

One more floor then everyone would be safe. He could rest then.

He’d almost made it through all the top floor apartments when a little paper bird flew in through the hole in the roof where water had just extinguished the flames. Yuuri blinked, but the bird flew over, landing on his hand and then unfurled into a sheet of paper.

On it was written the following:

“Winter Monsoon is looking pretty worried about you, so I wanted to see if you were doing okay. Thank you so much for helping out, you’re awesome! - Mellie”
He smiled at Victor’s hero name, his fingers absently trailing over it. He had one more apartment to check, then he’d be right back down there with Victor again.

Rolling up the piece of paper, he stuffed it down a sleeve and pulled it back up to protect himself from the flames that he could already see licking the bottom of the last apartment’s door. He pulled out his epee, aligned it just right with the doorknob, and kicked it exactly where he needed to get the knob to snap off and door to swing open.

This apartment looked pretty ravaged by the fire, but he wasn’t about to give up hope for finding anything in there and getting it out safe. Room by room, he swept the area, searching around all furniture for any hiding children or animals, and in every closet. It was in the last room, on the very top shelf of the largest closet, that he found a very scared cat.

“It’s okay, I’m just going to get you to safely,” he said softly, trying not to startle it.

But even after he managed to get his hands around it, it wriggled loose and went back to huddling where it had before. Yuuri crept closer, and that’s when he realized that what the cat was huddling on wasn’t a fur hat or scarf, but kittens that their mother was protectively guarding.

He looked around and spotted a hat box, quickly throwing the hat out and slowly lifting the kittens one by one into the box. Now when he lifted the mother, she went willingly, knowing her kittens were safely with them.

Arms full, he managed to use the hilt of his epee to crack the window just enough he could yell out.

“A little help here!”

Within seconds both Madam Marvellous and Paloma had come into view.

“You okay?”

He nodded. “I’ve got a box full of kittens but their mom won’t go anywhere without them. We need to get them down all together.”
Paloma nodded. “If you can get out onto the air-step Madam Marvelous has here, I can get you airlifted down with them in your arms.”

“Okay, let’s do that.”

Using his elbow, he smashed out the rest of the glass until there was enough space for him to get out with his arms full. He was suddenly very thankful that the Herotek designers had allowed enough stretch in the back sheath for his blades that all three could easily fit, because there was no way he could do this without his arms free.

Once out onto the ledge, he slid down to the air-step and waited. Sure enough, a large flock of pigeons and doves came flying down, surrounding him and lifting him up by bits of fabric clutched in beaks and claws.

On the ground below, he could see a large crowd of people, who were all applauding him loudly. This might not be why Yuuri did this, but after all he’d just fought through, it was certainly a nice bit of gratitude in return.

The moment he was safe on the ground, he ensured the cats all got to the firefighters so they could be checked for smoke inhalation and breathing problems, then he slouched against a nearby car.

It was odd, he thought for a brief moment, that the slew of reporters hadn’t swarmed him. But, he wondered if perhaps Victor’s icy stare at them as he approached had anything to do with it.

“Are you okay?” he asked, finally reaching Yuuri’s side.

Victor, for his part, looked exhausted, and Yuuri immediately felt the worry spike that Victor had once again overdone the use of his quirk.

“I should…be asking you that,” he managed between deep breaths.

That got a smile out of him, and Victor reached out and pulled him against his chest. He chuckled.

“You’re a bit smoke-scented, did you notice?”
Yuuri snorted. “I had absolutely no idea.”

Victor fell quiet after that, and Yuuri wondered if perhaps his injury was bothering him but with the press hovering nearby he didn’t want to risk showing it. After a few moments though, Yuuri couldn’t help but ask him again.

“Are you doing okay?”

“Yeah,” Victor replied quietly.

Yuuri frowned.

He’s lying…

Winter Monsoon: Can He Be Trusted?

Fanatic Fever - 1 hour ago

After the shocking revelation that Winter Monsoon has been not using his true quirk, many theories have arisen online in regards to what else he could be hiding. Whether it’s tabloids or fansites, many feel that this sudden change coinciding with his abrupt leave of the UAT and interest with Hokusai Wave is not coincidence.

The most prevalent theory, which has has been traced to a thread started by a fan member of Winter Monsoon’s forums, is as follows.

There’s a lot of coincidences here that I think are adding up. I hate to be the one to say it, but I think Winter Monsoon is using Hokusai Wave. He got tired of the IHU not letting him do what he pleased on the UAT and he picked the last placed hero from the final trials to use as his poster boy. Of course Wave got to Inferno first, because Monsoon probably tipped him off! That way he had the excuse to go to Japan and start this campaign against the IHU. We’ve all followed Monsoon long enough to know that he’s extremely charming and he often uses that to his advantage, so what’s to say he
hasn’t pulled the wool over Wave’s eyes on this? I think any fan of Winter Monsoon would fall head over heels if he showed up to woo them, so it’s not like he had to try hard.

But there’s just something fishy about the same bomber appearing at the UAT after party and their private party in Beijing. And it’s pretty fishy that every time something goes wrong, Wave just happens to be there.

Personally, I don’t think Wave has any idea he’s being used. Monsoon wants to show that his “new” method of the UAT is better and he’s using Wave to prove that point by making sure he’s in the right place at the right time to get these points. It’s becoming pretty clear that this is Monsoon’s mutiny against the IHU and he’s got the perfect pawn wrapped around his pretty finger to make sure he comes out looking better.

The fact that he suddenly has two quirks or the ability to regulate between water and ice and he’s never used it before I think says the most. Why else would you hide something that important from your employers unless you were planning on turning on them? There’s countless times before now he could have used that quirk, but suddenly some random simple apartment fire is the right time and place? I don’t think he’s fooling anyone anymore. That was a power move and he’s trying to play it off like it’s no big deal.

Well, I for one, am not buying it anymore.

Many fans have expressed concern now for Hokusai Wave, and others hope that Winter Monsoon will make further statements to put these rumors to rest. For now though, many are calling for this to mark the end of Winter Monsoon’s career.

For once, Victor was eternally thankful that Yuuri avoided the news when he was stressed.

It gave him at least the overnight flight to Paris to try and figure out what he could do to fix this without getting Yuuri involved. What else could he say? Apparently what he’d said hadn’t been enough to stop this from spiraling out of control.

“For various personal reasons, I’ve just not used the water part of my quirk before now. That’s all.”
Perhaps, in retrospect, it did seem somewhat avoidant.

Of course fans knew he’d faced plenty of situations where he would have benefited from using water over ice, and suddenly just doing so out of the blue was definitely strange.

How could he make them understand that he was afraid? Afraid they wouldn’t like him anymore if he showed his true colors? And that until Yuuri, no one had ever given him reason to believe that people could like him for who he was.

Even Chris, the closest thing Victor even had to a friend before, had seen the news. And his reaction? Concern, because he thought it was somehow related to Victor’s injury. That’s how deep this lie went. To the point that even his coach and closest teammates had no idea.

It really was no wonder that it looked so bad from an outsider's perspective.

But Victor really, truly, had no idea how he could begin to fix this. He’d expected that people might distrust him, that he’d prepared himself for. But this? This belief that his feelings and relationship with Yuuri were all a big lie? He couldn’t stand that at all. It made him sick to even think it.

Yuuri, who was already stressed enough with everything, most definitely did not need to know that thousands of people were now doubting that Victor cared about him at all.

“Are you okay? You’ve been really tense since we boarded the plane…”

Victor started to force a smile but stopped himself. It wouldn’t matter, Yuuri would know it was faked. It came out more a grimace.

“Just not feeling well, that’s all.”

Great. Now he was lying to Yuuri too. Victor wanted to cry. This was the absolute last thing he wanted.

Yuuri’s gentle hand pressed to his cheek as worry flooded his expression.
“Anything I can do?”

And Victor felt so lost, so helpless, that he found himself leaning over into Yuuri’s touch, his eyes downcast if even they too might betray him. He just wanted this to go away, to go back to being himself and not worrying that everything he did was going to be twisted into some sick distortion where he was somehow cold-hearted enough to harm a single hair on Yuuri Katsuki’s head.

What would Yuuri do? He asked himself this once more, and this time, he found the answer he wanted. Yuuri, Yuuri, would do the same stupid thing! He’d withdraw, even though those that knew him would be able to tell something was off. He’d try to act like he was okay, even though it was clear he wasn’t. And most of all, he wouldn’t ask for help because he wouldn’t want to bother anyone else.

Yuuri would try and fake it, just like Victor always did.

There was a strange relief in this knowledge, as if knowing that Yuuri’s mind would trap him the same way Victor’s did made it a little easier to see that trap. To avoid it, to know that there was only one sure fire way to escape it.

When Yuuri withdrew, he’d given Victor permission to come right in. Thrown the doors of his heart wide open and said, here I trust you with this. Please. Help me when I can’t ask for help myself.

He needed to trust Yuuri with his heart the way Yuuri had trusted him.

“There think I messed up,” he murmured before he could stop himself. “And I don’t know what to do.”

Yuuri’s fingers were soft as they leaned Victor’s head over until it rested on his shoulder. Tender and kind, just like his eyes.

“Do you want to talk about it? You don’t have to, but…”

“They know, Yuuri. About the water part of my quirk. It was all over the news.”
Yuuri shifted, his hands warm as they took Victor’s hand and clutched it tight. “I’m proud of you,” Yuuri whispered as their fingers intertwined. “That took a lot of courage, I’m sure.”

And he’s not being patronizing, but genuine. Completely and totally genuine. It took Victor’s breath away.

“Media’s having a field day and I’m not…” he floundered for the words, “I’m...not looking so good anymore.”

“Did you make any comment on it?”

“Mm.”

“Let me guess, they twisted your words like you warned all of us to watch out for?”

Victor blinked, then looked up at Yuuri and blinked once more. In his panic, he’d done exactly what he’d advised all the younger heroes not to do. He’d gotten frazzled and given an answer he knew would be easy to twist.

The slightest little tug curled at the corner of his lips.

“Okay, you got me there.”

Yuuri leaned over and pressed a soft kiss to his forehead. “You’ve been so busy worrying about me, you forgot to worry about yourself.”

“I just...I panicked.”

“Have you considered just telling them the truth?”

That, to be perfectly honest, hadn’t crossed Victor’s mind once. Could he do that? Just outright say, look I didn’t want to disappoint people? To admit that he’d messed up?
“You’re human, Victor. It’s okay to let them see that. You don’t have to be perfect.”

_But I want to be_, Victor’s mind countered. He was about to voice his concern, but Yuuri beat him to it.

“If people only like Winter Monsoon for being superhuman and without flaws, you don’t want them as your fans, Victor. A true fan would be touched to see that you can make mistakes just like they can.”

“What about you?” Victor asked, his eyes as questioning as his voice.

Yuuri’s expression softened, his eyes fluttering closed a moment as if he was going okay, you caught me.

“Victor,” he began, eyes still closed and voice quiet, “everything I’ve learned about you since you’ve come into my life, has only made me love you more. Because suddenly, you weren’t some untouchable paragon of perfection up on a pedestal that people like me could never dream of reaching. You make mistakes. You struggle with self-esteem. You’re flesh and blood like the rest of us. So I can say, without any hesitation,” he opened his eyes now and they were burning bright with intensity. “that if asked who I think the most admirable hero out there is? I’d answer you, every single time.”

“Yuuri…”

“I’m going to guess the press will be waiting for us when we arrive in Paris, so…I’ll be right there with you, Victor. Just be honest and the people who matter will understand.”

A blanket of warmth curled around Victor, a comfort that he never knew he needed until Yuuri had first given it to him. That feeling of being loved, flaws and all, and knowing that you were stronger for it. He turned as best as he could in the plane’s seats, wrapping his arms around Yuuri and just taking it in, that all enveloping feeling of love that he’d longed for every day since his parents had died. And Yuuri, wonderful Yuuri, just gave it so openly, his arms wrapping around Victor tight and holding him close.

“Thank you,” he murmured into Yuuri’s chest, unable to find any words beyond it to even begin to capture all he felt. “I’m sorry.”
“Stop that,” Yuuri muttered, giving the back of his head a poke. “I’m the master of feeling down on myself, so I already know all your tricks, okay? Let me be there for you the way you’ve been there for me.”

Yuuri’s fingers were soft, a bit unsure, as they smoothed against his hair. Victor melted into his touch, easing into his arms and just letting himself not doubt that he had every right to be there.

“How are you so perfect?” he asked, voice muffled.

He felt the sharp intake of breath as Yuuri snorted out a laugh.

“Far from it.”

“You are to me.”

“Well,” Yuuri turned him slightly until he raised his head a little and looked up. “You’re perfect to me. So try not to worry about it, okay?”

With that, Victor let what remained of the person he tried to be fall away. He didn’t want to be that person anymore with his faked smiles and hollow heart. He only wanted to be himself, just the way he was, because that Victor was the most important of all.

That Victor was Yuuri’s Victor.

And he no longer wanted to be anyone else but that.

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**Hero and Fan Community Rallies Behind Winter Monsoon**

Hero Herald - 3 hours ago
In the mere hours since the viral “letter” against Winter Monsoon was posted, the entire worldwide hero community has risen to arms in his defense. Everyone from former UAT teammates, fellow heroes under coach Yakov Feltsman, to heroes close to Hokusai Wave have made a swift and unified rebuttal against the letter’s claims.

“If you’re looking to villainize a hero, you’ve picked the wrong guy to go after,” UAT teammate of many years, Smolder noted. “This is a guy who’s almost gotten himself killed multiple times to save lives and you’re trying to make him out to be some attention-seeking prick. Why don’t you try doing our jobs before you sit around and judge how we do it?”

“Winter Monsoon has endangered himself in many situations all to fit an image you forced on him,” Physique added. “From the moment we become heroes, the media calls the shots on how we do everything. Because if we don’t play by their rules, we get slandered.”

This is something Physique has dealt with first hand after the scandal last year regarding her ex-partner ending up in the hospital; the media quick to call for quirk inhibitors for those with strength-related quirks despite multiple eyewitnesses and the ex-partner all saying that she didn’t use her quirk.

“You expect heroes to fit some perfect mold, and yes- the IHU and their judges are at fault for that,” Hokusai Wave’s best friend and former training partner, Freeze Frame stated on his liveblog about the situation, “And this is what happens. Maybe Winter Monsoon is changing things at the IHU for a reason- because they are unfair and biased. I think if we can trust anyone to fix it, it’s him. He’s been on the team since day one and he’s personally ensured that the input of thousands of heroes has actually been listened to by the people in charge.”

“The pressure of media image can be a lot,” Canadian hero, King JJ, noted. “I know Winter Monsoon hasn’t always seen eye to eye with me in regards to our media and sponsorship roles, but I think this is something we can all agree on. Currently, being a hero is not just constantly risking your life, it’s also trying to look good so you can live up to all the press surrounding your name. Many of us have made personal sacrifices because of that.”

Heroes ranging from former UAT teammates Comet and Faunaa, to perhaps most surprisingly, even often-critic of his style, The Leopard, all echoed similar sentiments.

“If you think the Victor you’re seeing now is the fake one, you’re so fucking wrong!” The Leopard stated, after personally seeking out press members to make the statement. “He’s spent years trying to play by your rules and now he’s finally letting himself be himself. Let the man live! Hasn’t he fucking earned at least that?”
“Do you all just get bored every few years and create drama for drama’s sake?” Faunaa asked. “A few years ago, he was dying. Before that he was secretly working for the villains. Now he’s manipulating his boyfriend. I’d say I’m surprised, but I’m sadly not.”

“I’ve seen Victor fake a thousand smiles at sponsorship functions and boring press events,” Comet continued, “And the smiles you’ve seen lately when he’s with Hokusai Wave are the real ones. He’s a man in love, let him be.”

Alongside the hero community, many fans have also sought to reach out in support. The message board on the Winter Monsoon fansite where the letter originated has crashed due to server overload, but in the hour before that it was filled with angry rebuttals to the letter and calls for moderator action to remove the poster from the community.

“He’ll always be our Winter Monsoon,” a fan member by the name of MonsoonGurl02X stated. “Nothing can change that.”

“Only clickbait news sources make headline news out of crazy fan theories,” a fan under the name HokusaisBabe replied to the original Fanatic Fever article before comments there were disabled. “You are a disgrace to real news sources. You and everyone else running with this story as if it’s fact.”

Even the main thread on Reddit in regards to the matter is filled with more sympathy than belief in the theory.

“In a world where so many heroes are just in it for the fame and fortune, it’s truly sad to see the real heroes being called out as fakes,” user n1ghtm@re’s top-ranked thread on the matter stated. “Winter Monsoon has given up so much to be who he is, if anyone deserves our respect and honor, it’s him. He’s lost his family, had his hair singed off his head, and has even said in interviews before now that part of the reason he didn’t date was his fear that someone would get hurt on his behalf. He’s one of the good guys left out there and it’s about time we started acknowledging that.”

While countless news sources have attempted to backpedal any sort of editorial remarks on the matter, others are fueling the fire by opening debates on the theory or analyzing so-called evidence for it. Amidst this chaos though, it seems that the hero and fan community are mostly all in agreement on one thing: we stand behind Winter Monsoon.
“Well, you’ve all certainly been busy since we left New York, haven’t you?” Victor had coolly addressed the crowd of reporters that awaited them at the airport terminal. “Would you like me to make an actual comment on the matter or would you rather make something else up yourselves?”

Yuuri sighed and gave his shoulder a slight nudge.

As angry as Victor was about the situation, it wasn’t going to get resolved without him making further comment. Yuuri suspected he knew this as well, but it was clear he wanted to be as honest with the press as he could. Which, rightfully considering some of the things Yuuri had found out had been written about them, started with him being very clear that what they’d done was uncalled for.

Some of the reporters had enough dignity to look at least somewhat ashamed.

Victor smiled then, but it wasn’t warm. It was icy, just like the Winter Monsoon they wanted.

“Well that we’ve got that out of the way, would you like my comment on my quirk and its abilities?”

Only a few reporters dared speak up, most opting to nod instead. If Victor’s intent was to try and scare them into not stooping to the levels they had, it seemed to be working.

Yuuri mirrored Victor’s behavior whenever he was nervous, stepping close to his side and resting his hand against the small of his back. A flicker of warmth sparked across his eyes, before he turned them coolly back towards the cameras.

“As many of you know, my parents both had the ability to control water. If you’ve ever made it through basic science classes, you’d know that water works in a cycle. Part of that cycle is water. Another part, and the aspect I tend to favor, is ice. Just so we’re clear, I can make the water vapor or steam part of the cycle as well. For various personal reasons, which I will explain in a moment, I’ve chosen to mostly use ice and that’s what I’ve spent most of my time as a hero training and using.”

He took a deep breath here, and Yuuri could tell that his anger was giving way. “The water aspect, was something I only used at home with my parents until very recently,” Victor said with the slightest tremor in his tone.

Yuuri spread his fingers against his back, a small but hopefully, supportive gesture. Victor’s voice grew a bit stronger.
“I didn’t use water to fight. Water was for painting with my mother. Water was for playing games with my father. It was never my intent to hide that part of myself, but losing my parents changed many things about me that I’m only now able to handle effectively. I wanted to be a good hero. I wanted all of you to respect me and I...I was afraid. Afraid that if I wasn’t the ice quirk user you thought I was, you’d not like me as much anymore.”

He paused then to compose himself, and Yuuri moved his hand up higher, resting it now right between his shoulder blades. Right behind his heart, which was hammering so loud.

“I’m not perfect,” Victor breathed out, a weight seeming to sink off his shoulders as the words left his mouth. “I make mistakes just like everyone else. I can see now that not using my quirk to its fullest potential is one of those mistakes. I hope that you can understand that and forgive me. And I hope, most of all, that I can still be a hero that’s worth looking up to. I’m trying to be a better person than before, and thanks to him,” he turned towards Yuuri then, his expression finally warmed fully, his smile gentle, “I’m getting there. But like everything, it takes time.”

Victor turned then, placing his hand on Yuuri’s shoulder as he looked back to him once more.

“Now, if you’ll excuse us both, we’d very much like to have some time to ourselves before our other commitments today.”

The charm was back now, at full force, as he gave the cameras a wink. It didn’t surprise Yuuri at all, that after all that, the crowd practically parted for them and let them walk to their waiting ride in peace.

The moment they were settled in the backseat, Yuuri reached out and pulled Victor over into an embrace, kissing the top of his head as he did so.

“Winter Monsoon, the bravest hero I know.”

Victor snorted a laugh.

“Not true.”
“True,” Yuuri asserted, pressing another kiss to his cheek. “Hokusai Wave told me so.”

The smile spilled across his features at that, all the emotions he’d held back dancing across his eyes as he buried his face in the crook of Yuuri’s neck.

Finally, after several minutes had ticked past, Victor replied.

“Well. I guess if he told you so.”

Yuuri felt the worry lift from his heart at that. He knew far too well what weathering an emotional storm like Victor just had was like, and just like Mari always did for him, he knew the moment Victor could tease back it meant the storm had finally gone.

But even so, he held him close as their driver took them into the heart of the city, stroking his hair gently and tracing absent circles against his back.

Winter Monsoon was now, truly, unmasked.

And Yuuri couldn’t be prouder.

Chapter End Notes

The biggest villain in Arc 3 of MHY is self-doubt. Probably the scariest villain because we’ve all faced it. That feeling that you aren’t good enough, that the people you love deserve better, that if you aren’t perfect you’re useless. All of these issues compounded by the messages we get in the media telling us if we don’t look or dress a certain way we’ll never be “pretty” or “handsome.”

Sometimes, we truly are our own worst enemy.

This chapter, this arc, is for all of us fighting these sorts of fights every day with ourselves. It’s probably one of the hardest battles because it never truly stops. So, here’s to all of us fighting the good fight! You’re a hero too. Don’t forget that.
Chapter Notes

This chapter is like all fluff, which hey, they’ve been through a lot so I think they’ve earned it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There was a distinct ache in Yuuri’s chest when Victor finally left his arms.

Standing in the hotel lobby waiting for Victor to get them checked in, it hit Yuuri in a rush; that lack of Victor’s presence beside him, even if for a moment, prickling at his senses as if suddenly hyper aware of something amiss. Yuuri willed his anxiety back as best he could, his mind already holding back a dam of thoughts he was trying not to think. It was a raw feeling, and the lingering members of the paparazzi that were still snapping photos through the glass windows at the front of the hotel weren’t helping it any.

Desperate for a distraction, Yuuri dug his phone out of his pocket and finally took in the flurry of notifications on the screen he’d been ignoring since they’d arrived in Paris. His family sending their love to Victor, Phichit linking to his new vlog along with a long winded rant about the press and internet trolls.

But what caught Yuuri’s attention amidst the rest, was the series of texts from Christophe Giacometti. Having the Smolder text him once was already odd enough, but this...this was something else.

- Hey I know you’re probably still getting settled in, but I figure I have a better chance of getting through to you than to Victor right now.

- Ice Queen loves to get all withdrawn and close people out when he’s upset. Doubt he can resist your charms though, so you can still get through to him.

- And while Victor might be the expert on handling the press normally, when it comes to drama and scandals, I must say I have him beat.

That, Yuuri knew for certain, was a fact. Smolder had been involved in so many relationship or scandalous exposés that he’d ended up releasing a for-purchase sex tape at one point just so those leaked lost any potential value.
So here’s some advice that I know you at least will listen to.

If you don’t want them to use it against you, make it as public as you can. I’ve gathered from Victor that you don’t like the press breathing down your neck and I get that. As much as I love it sometimes, I hate it too.

But the press will make up what they can’t get on film. Which is the problem.

Arranged appearances and interviews can be faked, and have been faked by celebrity heroes before.

Basically no one’s going to believe it if they can’t get it candid.

Which sucks and not in the fun way.

(I highly suggest the fun way btw ¬‿¬)

(no really. I emailed you links. Victor can thank me later (^з^)-☆)

Yuuri was about to back out of the message at that, his face already burning and his mind already providing mental images he really didn’t need to be thinking about right now, but the last bit caught his eye so he trudged on.

So you want to kill these rumors fast, and probably give Victor a needed image boost along with shifting the topic quickly to better things, then get out of that hotel some and live it up for the cameras.

I know this is a nightmare for stress levels so schedule some private time too.

Hayami and I will do what we can on this end of things, but if you can get Victor out and smiling again, that’ll help even more.

Good luck!

The words had barely settled in his mind before Victor’s voice tugged him back to the moment.

“Sorry that took so long, apparently the lady at the counter is a fan and was seeing if management could upgrade our room considering everything going on.”

Yuuri blinked. He’d thought that Victor had been gone awhile, but he thought perhaps it was just him overreacting.

“Everything okay?” he asked, his hand trailing down Yuuri’s arm before reaching his hand, giving it a slight squeeze before intertwining their fingers.
His mind was a whirl of thoughts, but at Victor’s touch he finally found his focus.

“Yeah. I was just catching up on texts. Everyone sends their love,” he said with a smile. He’d leave out the details for now.

The flicker of uncertainty in Victor’s eyes was gone at that, replaced instead by a warmth that Yuuri could feel settle around his heart. He was still hurting, Yuuri knew, but the outpouring of support was definitely helping. But even so, as they made their way into the elevator, Victor didn’t hesitate to wrap his arms around Yuuri protectively and nuzzle against the back of his head.

“You still smell like that fire,” he murmured, nose buried in Yuuri’s hair.

Yuuri sighed. “I was only able to take a quick shower before we left for the airport and I can’t see if it’s black because it’s bits of soot or because it’s my hair.”

Victor chuckled and the warmth slipped down Yuuri’s spine to pool low in his stomach.

“I’ll wash it for you when we get up to the room.”

He could feel Victor tense after he said it, as if he realized the implications that lay hidden in what he’d surely meant as an innocent comment. But Yuuri’s mind couldn’t help but flicker back to Chris’s text and the top article he’d linked after the fact. It was probably the tamest of the links sent, but something about his simple and to-the-point Cosmo article was making far too much sense in Yuuri’s mind at the moment.

_It should come as no surprise that sex releases a flood of endorphins plus a cocktail of other feel-good brain chemicals, like the love hormone oxytocin, which makes you feel all warm and fuzzy. “It's cheap therapy” Smolder says, “and fun for everyone!”_

“Only if you let me return the favor,” Yuuri replied, hoping his voice sounded more smooth than his jittery nerves on the inside.

They’d bathed together in the onsen multiple times, so something like this should be okay, right?
Before Yuuri’s panic could set in, the elevator opened and he let his feet pull himself forward, Victor trailing behind. He was barely able to get the door shut behind them and take in the beautiful decor of the room before Victor’s hand lightly brushed against his arm.

“Hey,” he murmured, his hand coming up to press against Yuuri’s cheek. “I still haven’t thanked you properly for earlier.”

And although his heart was racing and mouth felt dry, Yuuri held his ground. He could do this, for Victor. He’d find the nerve he needed.

Yuuri turned, pressing a kiss to Victor’s palm before breezing past him towards the bathroom. He could feel Victor’s eyes following him, and as he reached the door, he turned back and let a little smile curl at the corner of his lips.

“Coming?”

Victor’s eyes were wide, a dusting of pink blossoming on his cheeks as he hastened to follow.

Yuuri tried not to focus on anything, vaguely registering the marble furnished bathroom long enough to decide for a shower over a bath, then letting himself undress without thinking. If anything was going to stop him right now, it’d be himself and he didn’t want that.

The shower was warm and felt great after a cramped night sleeping on the overnight flight. But it didn’t compare to the heat that coursed through him when Victor stepped in behind him and closed the glass door to the shower.

Already, Yuuri could tell the atmosphere was completely different than their times in the onsen together; the air thick with an electricity that had never been present before like this. He closed his eyes, willing himself to relax; a trick he thought for a moment might have worked, until Victor’s hands tangled into his hair. He exhaled a pleased sigh at that, his body leaning back into the touch as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

“You’re too tense,” he noted, fingertips beginning to massage gently at his temples, “though I suspect after the last twenty four hours I’m probably no better off.”
Yuuri could feel the brush of Victor’s skin against his own, craving it as if it was air itself with a sudden urge of need; how he wanted to turn and kiss him, to remove the spaces of air that still fit between them.

“That’s why I’m returning the favor,” Yuuri heard his voice respond, not even registering the words. He let himself lean back, Victor’s chest pressing against his back and drawing another hum of satisfaction from him as his thumbs rubbed circles at the nape of his neck.

“You’re too good to me, Yuuri Katsuki,” Victor replied, quiet and low; a rumble almost swallowed up by the rush of the shower.

“Mm, says the person who apparently gives the best massages in the world.”

Victor chuckled at that, the reverberation echoing in Yuuri’s bones, before sliding his hands down onto Yuuri’s shoulders.

“I suppose I had to be good at something.”

And Yuuri knew that move, knew how often he’d done the same. A joke perhaps to some, but also that feeling that maybe you weren’t great at anything else, because you were in a place that made you believe that. He turned then, all his inhibitions forgotten, as he slid his hand down Victor’s bared side, letting it rest over the injury that seemed to haunt Victor everywhere he went.

“Victor,” Yuuri could see his eyes go wide as he let his fingers fan out against the taut skin, “when I say I love you, I mean all of you.”

Victor opened his mouth, and sensing the protest, Yuuri cut him off.

“All of you,” Yuuri reiterated, his other hand going up to press against Victor’s chest over his heart. “Every imperfection you see in yourself is just another part of the Victor I love. And I know it’s hard to believe that, I can still hardly believe you even like me at times, but I do.”

The last word barely slipped off his tongue before Victor’s kissed him, open mouthed and desperate, as if he hoped that all the words he couldn’t say would somehow transfer over. Yuuri felt his back press against the cool marble, Victor’s fingers tangling in his hair; and there was an urgency to their kisses that wasn’t there before. A building crescendo, a heated exchange of something no words
could ever convey.

It wasn’t until Victor began to trail his kisses, open mouthed and hot, down Yuuri’s chest that his mind finally caught up with it all; a burning yeaming coursing through his veins as each caress set off another flurry of fireworks. The cool marble at his back contrasted sharply with how hot he felt, each nerve sparked into a fire at Victor’s touch.

“Victor…”

Blue eyes peered up at him through fine eyelashes, and something in Yuuri’s gaze must have been magnetic, because it tugged Victor back up to his level; his kisses searching for something just out of reach.

It was somehow everything and not enough; he wanted more, he needed more.

He edged closer, his knee sliding up between Victor’s legs. They both froze

Yuuri’s mind crashed through, immediate panic kicking in that he’d gone too far, that Victor didn’t want this, all of the doubts slamming into him and chilling him to the core.

“Yuuri,” Victor managed.

It sounded strained and Yuuri winced, ready to accept what he’d brought upon himself.

“свать.”

And that definitely sounded like he was swearing. Victor pulled away and offered Yuuri a lopsided smile.

“I’m going to hope whoever’s calling has a very good reason for it,” he said, pausing to press one last kiss to Yuuri’s lips. “Ты такой красивый, моя любовь.”

As Victor opened the shower door and grabbed up a robe, Yuuri could hear the incessant ringing
from the other room. How long had it been ringing? Yuuri honestly wasn’t sure.

His hand drifted up to his mouth, his lips still tingling with the feeling of Victor’s last kiss as his heart began to slow itself down to a normal pace, his thoughts finally settling as well.

*So. That...that just happened.*

Victor wasn’t quite sure what had gotten into Yuuri, but he had to admit he kind of liked it.

Okay, correction. He very much liked it and was not at all happy when he’d heard the hotel phone ringing nonstop in the other room. Considering he’d been very clear that the hotel wasn’t to allow just anyone or anything to bother them, Victor knew it had to be someone sort of important.

But still, pulling away from Yuuri was pure torture.

“Is everything okay?” he asked coming from the bathroom.

Victor drank the sight of him in, his hair still damp and tousled, his cheeks still rosy pink and well, the expanse of chest between the folds of the robe were enough that Victor could see where he’d left marks on his skin.

It took every bit of willpower not to snatch him up and steer him towards the bedroom so that they could finish what they’d started.

“Apparently some representatives from HeroTek dropped by with a little surprise,” Victor replied, trying not to sound too frustrated by their timing.

“Oh.”

Although, at least it seemed like he wasn’t the only one currently damning their timing.
“Come here,” he said, holding out his arm; and once Yuuri was within range, he pulled him close, eliciting a soft gasp from him that almost broke Victor’s resolve. Victor breathed him in, the smell of soap and shampoo mixed with that scent that was distinctly Yuuri that he’d grown so terribly fond of.

“I can already see those little worried creases on your forehead,” he murmured, his hands rubbing down Yuuri’s arms in reassurance. “So I want to make it clear that I’m only doing this because it’ll look bad if we blow them off and not because anything that just happened, okay?”

Yuuri blinked, dipping his head forward.

Victor reached out, tipping his chin back up. “Hey. Look at me,” he said, waiting until those warm brown eyes flickered back up to him. “After what was quite possibly one of the worst nights, you’ve already made my day.”

His eyes dropped down again, the uncertainty still there in the set of his brow. “Okay.”

“Yuuri.”

Victor waited again, this time Yuuri’s eyes coming back up with even more emotions flickering in his eyes. He was so incredibly uncertain right now, and Victor could already imagine all the thoughts that were spiraling in his mind.

“Do you want to know what I said to you? Is that it?”

There was a flicker of an answer to that in his gaze, and Victor’s heart ached at knowing that Yuuri’s anxiety had already begun to take hold of his thoughts again.

“I said, well besides swearing because it was really the worst possible time for a phone call,” Victor paused, waiting to make sure he had Yuuri’s full attention, “You’re so handsome, my love.”

Yuuri’s eyes shot wide as color flooded his face.

“Then...why...”
Victor knew his own cheeks had to have reddened now.

“Because my thoughts were so preoccupied with you I couldn’t remember it in English.”

“Oh.”

Yuuri’s blush had crept up to his ears now and Victor couldn’t help but pull him into an embrace, drawing him close and just letting their beating hearts communicate instead of attempting to find the words for what he wanted to say. Something must have gotten through the static, because Yuuri pulled back with a smile tugging at his lips.

“Okay, but...I still need to return the favor...later.”

Victor grinned, pressing a kiss to Yuuri’s forehead. “I’m going to hold you to that, you know.”

And there was that spark of confidence flickering again in the depth of Yuuri’s eyes as he leaned in and pressed a heated kiss to Victor’s lips before pulling away.

“Oh you did not just try and pull a kiss and run,” Victor retorted, rushing after him.

Yuuri grinned back, making it into the bedroom before Victor caught him around the waist and tackled him to the bed. They were both laughing, worries and anxieties now forgotten.

“We’d better get going soon,” Victor tried, although Yuuri’s kisses trailing down his neck were a rather convincing argument.

“I know, I know,” Yuuri said with a huff.

But there was a glint of something mischievous in his eyes and Victor instinctively reached up to the base of his neck where Yuuri’d just kissed.
“Did you just…”

Yuuri shot a look over his shoulder. “Can I wear that shirt of yours?”

Victor blinked.

Yuuri Katsuki was definitely up to something.

“The striped v-neck? I suppose, but why?”

At that the shyness crept back, for just a second. “I like it. It’s comfortable.”

He’d already dug the shirt out of Victor’s luggage and he had to laugh.

“Oh, I’m taking my hoodie,” he replied with a smirk.

Slowly, the pieces began to click into place. A text from Chris, knowing Chris had Yuuri’s number now too…the advice that if they didn’t want rumors they needed to be open about things.

Yuuri was trying to flaunt his relationship with Victor as obviously as he could. Victor’s shirt, a Winter Monsoon hoodie…and now that Victor got a better look, there was definitely a hickey on the side of Yuuri’s neck that was going to be visible.

He wanted to comment on it, but at the same time he hesitated. Yuuri could be incredibly focused on something, but the littlest thing could knock him out of that mood and his anxiety would creep back in. It would be better to just wait and let Yuuri continue to surprise him.

“I’m jealous, I need a Hokusai Wave hoodie,” Victor retorted.
“Victor!”

“What, I’m serious. Someone needs to make one so I can own it and wear it.”

Yuuri paused, his hoodie half-yanked over his head and his shirt askew. “Would you really?”

Ah, there was the anxiety again. Just like that little voice of doubt always prickled at the back of his mind, Yuuri too fell victim to it.

“I’d be wearing one right now if I could be.”

Victor spotted the little hint of a smile that Yuuri tried to hide in the flurry of movement as he finished pulling his hoodie on and he found himself smiling as well.

*Well, what shall you surprise me with next, Yuuri?*

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Yuuri Katsuki was, most definitely, up to something.

And even the surprise of how beautiful and fancy their meeting room ended up being didn’t deter him from trying his best to play it cool. If this was what he thought it was about, Victor was definitely in for a surprise.

Because maybe after Victor had seen his Winter Monsoon hoodie and he’d worked up the courage needed to believe he was worth it, Yuuri had replied to that HeroTek email that he’d been ignoring about doing a line of fan apparel for Hokusai Wave.

It’s why he was so shocked that it was them showing up with a surprise out of the blue, half-frustrated at their timing and half-excited that he was about to do this without Victor finding out until this moment. The fact that Victor had teased that he wanted a Hokusai Wave hoodie danced about in the back of Yuuri’s mind, a hopeful little fantasy that he wasn’t sure quite yet if it would come true.

“Hokusai Wave, a pleasure to meet you!” The HeroTek representative said crossing to give his hand
a shake. “Winter Monsoon, it’s good to see you again!”

“Tim, to what do we owe the surprise visit?” Victor asked.

Tim looked to Yuuri then back to Victor, a knowing smile on his face.

“Ah, so you haven’t told him yet?”

Yuuri shook his head. “I figured it’d be a nice surprise that I managed to do one PR thing myself.”

They all laughed at that, but Yuuri could feel Victor’s arm reach around and give his waist a squeeze. When he looked up, he could see something he really couldn’t call anything but pride in Victor’s expression.

“Well, then it’s my great honor to show you and Winter Monsoon, the first wave of designs in our new fan apparel line.”

Tim reached into a duffle bag adorned with the company logo, and began to pull out an armful of blue and white items. It was completely worth it for the surprised gasp that Victor let out the moment the design on the items became apparent; the three fencing blade types in silhouette with a small wave crest in the middle adorning some while others used the iconic painting behind Yuuri’s hero namesake.

“First line will have shirts, jackets, hoodies, track pants, and a water bottle. There will also be a limited edition silk jacket, limited to one thousand for the first design.”

Victor just looked at Yuuri incredulously. “When did you do this?”

“Before we left,” Yuuri replied, suddenly feeling rather embarrassed on seeing all the items with his hero logo on it. “They’d emailed me about doing a possible line and I gave the go-ahead before I could talk myself out of it.”

Victor reached across the table and laid a hand across the silk jacket.
“Please tell me I can keep this one.”

Tim laughed. “Of course, any of this you can take with you if you’d like. I just wanted to let Hokusai Wave give the final okay in person and when I heard you’d be in Paris today, I decided to drop by.”

Yuuri had buried his face in his hands, because the more he looked at the items the more embarrassed it made him. Would people even want this stuff?

“I’m wearing one of everything here I can fit into today,” Victor asserted.

“Oh my god, really?”

“If you get to wear my merch then I get to wear yours,” he retorted.

Yuuri found he really couldn’t argue that, as much as he wanted to. “Is it okay? Be honest, Victor.”

Victor sat up at that and put on what Yuuri could only assume was his best impression of his coach Yakov, given the stern and semi-serious look he was trying for. He studied each item closely, held it up and turned it around to take in all the angles.

“Make the design a bit more off centered here so it doesn’t get interrupted by the natural crease of the fabric around the inseam,” he noted in regards to the pants, “also for the second line of shirts, maybe something with solid blue on the sleeves and then the base of the shirt with the design in white? It makes it look a little fancier. Oh and I love the embroidery on the v-neck shirt, so perhaps a polo with the logo embroidered on it too? Then with summer coming up, you could go for some seasonal options like swimwear and tank tops.”

Tim seemed to take all this in and Yuuri had to fight back a grin. Although he’d clearly started out trying to think like his own coach, Victor still did it in a way uniquely him.

“You always have the best eye for fashion, Winter Monsoon,” Tim replied with a chuckle.
“Well I’ll accept only the best for Yuuri,” he replied with a wink. “When does this line launch?”

“As soon as we have the go ahead. We were just waiting on the final approval on the design.”

Victor turned then to Yuuri, his charismatic press-friendly smile softening into a natural one. “What do you think, Yuuri?”

Yuuri let his eyes skim over the items once more, fully taking in that he was doing this one last time before turning to Victor.

“If you think they look okay, then I’m good with it. I trust you.”

“Tim it looks like you’ve got your next best selling fan line ready to go then. I hope you don’t mind if I do some indirect advertising today, so I’d launch it as soon as you can.”

He shook his head at that, smiling at them both.

“I’d say we should release something that says number one fan on it, but I have a feeling you’ve both already won that title.”

Victor put an arm around Yuuri at that, giving his shoulder a squeeze.

“Youh sorry, that job is officially taken for both of us. But if you ever want to do a joint image line like you did for Comet and Faunaa, I’d be more than okay with that.”

Yuuri felt his cheeks heat up at that, but all the same he could already envision it; The Winter Wave line, snowflakes and waves and all in their iconic shades of blue and white.

“Maybe later this year on that one?” Yuuri offered.

Maybe after a year Yuuri would be able to believe that it was actually happening.
Tim grinned. “I’ll let the head designers know they need to start brainstorming ideas. As for now, I’ve already taken up enough of your time, so I’ll let you two get back to your day.”

He gave them both a parting handshake, and Victor left with most of the merchandise still clutched in his arms.

“Do we have plans for today?”

Yuuri thought back to all the possible Paris tourist things he’d originally shrugged off for fear of drawing the press into it, his mind honing in on a few and arranging them in the perfect timeline to fit as many as possible in before their Vogue photoshoot that night.

“Yeah. Are you going to change first?”

Victor grinned wide. “I’m going to have to take back my comment about wearing the HW hoodie though, because I’m definitely wearing the limited edition jacket over the v-neck shirt with embroidered logo instead.”

Yuuri fought back a smile, finally caving to it and letting it spill over his features in a wave of happiness.

Somehow, with Victor, all the things that used to scare him weren’t so scary anymore.

And somehow, Yuuri wanted to make things easier for Victor after all the drama the night before.

He hoped what he had planned was enough.

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**Winter Monsoon and Hokusai Wave Spotted Smitten in Paris**
SuperNewsWeekly - 3 hours ago

Tourists and locals near the Louvre this afternoon were treated to a surprise appearance by none other than Hokusai Wave and Winter Monsoon, who arrived in Paris this morning, strolling arm in arm while wearing fan apparel for the other hero.
Wave and Monsoon Find Amore in Paris
HeroBuzz - 2 hours ago

Sporting not only one another's merchandise, but a matching set of hickeys as well, the duo seemed in good spirits after the overnight drama over Winter Monsoon's quirk when they stopped in Pierre Herme for chocolates and macaroons.

“They Couldn’t Be More in Love” - Winter Monsoon and Hokusai Wave in Paris
Plus Ultra Post - 1 hour ago

After taking the power couple on one of the hour long tours via horse carriage, their carriage driver (who wished to remain anonymous) says that “they couldn’t be more in love;” making the shocking claims of last night seem more and more like a bad dream.

LIVE NOW - Monsoon and Wave at Eiffel Tower
Hero News Network - 5 minutes ago

Winter Monsoon and his beau, Hokusai Wave, brought their own kind of magic to the Eiffel Tower today where a local tourist has begun live streaming footage.

If Victor thought Yuuri’s HeroTek gear was the biggest surprise, well, he would be terribly wrong.

While he’d given Yuuri the option to pick out whatever he wanted to do at each stop, he never would have expected him to choose something so blatantly in the public eye as their day so far. It was as if Yuuri was, in his own way, offering a rebuttal to that letter’s claims; daring someone to see them in the open like this and claim it was a lie.

Every time he’d start to hesitate or Victor would feel the slightest tremor in his hand, Yuuri just forced a smile and pulled Victor closer; a clear message to the world that there was nothing to hide in this relationship.

It was incredibly bold, and Victor knew, was something Yuuri’s courage could only carry so far. But somehow, with Victor’s hand clutched tightly in his own, he found the strength to go on. Proudly flashing smiles at the cameras and waving to the paparazzi trail that followed.
It made Victor all the more glad he’d planned what he had for later in their trip, because as much as he’d expected to be the one shouldering the burden and stress; for the moment it was Yuuri who was doing that for him.

And every time he asked Yuuri, “Where to now?” Victor gave his hand a squeeze, trying to tell him that if he needed to retreat back into the safety of privacy, that that would be okay too.

The carriage ride had been Victor’s suggestion, mostly because he felt that it would at least give them some privacy and a bit to recharge after spending their entire lunch with cameras all around.

Yuuri had practically melted into his side the moment they were in motion, away from the cameras finally, and let out a heavy sigh.

“You don’t have to do this,” Victor had reassured him. “If you’re feeling worn out, we can go back to the hotel after this.”

But Yuuri, with that stubborn confidence blazing bright in his eyes, shook his head.

“No. This should be enough. I just wanted some alone time with you, and I guess you noticed.”

The honesty of it startled Victor at the time, surprised that it wasn’t the safety of the hotel that Yuuri needed but just Victor. Just Victor was enough and that was so much for his heart to take in.

How had Yuuri become his strength without him ever realizing it?

He knew he’d done what he could to be supportive for Yuuri, but somehow, until now it never quite hit him how much he’d come to lean on him for support in return. The stress of having his quirk revealed in the manner it had was a tipping point, finally sending him over that edge and Yuuri was there to catch him. Now he was the one carrying Victor along instead.

*I thought the only way to get stronger was by myself. How foolish I’ve been.*

They complimented each other’s weaknesses, drawing strength from one another even in the simplest of moments, driving each other to be stronger in turn.
If you’d told Victor the quickest way to make Yuuri unafraid of the press was to have a PR meltdown himself, he wouldn’t have believed it to be so. But here they were.

Where he ebbed, Yuuri flowed; a constant wave of support there to carry whoever needed it most at the moment.

And so, he let Yuuri lead him, ever watchful to make sure if he needed a moment alone again he’d be there to make sure it happened.

“Come on, Victor. Don’t tell me you don’t know how to ice skate!” Yuuri called over to him.

They were on the ice rink on the Eiffel Tower itself, and Yuuri was grinning at him as if they were the only two people in the whole world at the moment.

“I’m not used to doing it with actual skates,” Victor retorted, getting to his feet with a slight wobble. “I usually just make my own.”

Yuuri shook his head. “Doesn’t that get cold?”

Victor shrugged. “I never noticed if it did. Then again, I usually made the ice rink myself in my backyard.”

Yuuri’s hands found Victor’s at that, and he tugged him close; smiling up at him with a warmth that Victor was certain could keep him warm for months.

“Well some of us can’t do that, so I guess you’ll have to deal with rental skates.”

“Aww, but I haven’t got to do anything flashy in hours. And you know, I absolutely love to show off.”

Yuuri chuckled at that. “Uh-huh. I think you’re just feeling left out because I’ve picked out all the best things to do today.”
“I’m just saying, I think it’d be a bit more romantic, if it was…snowing!” He held up his hand, then burst it open on the last word, snowflakes starting to fall out of nowhere.

And as much as Yuuri tried to fight back that childlike wonder in his eyes, he finally let it win out, smiling over at Victor with a gentle expression he knew was meant only for him.

“I suppose that does make it a bit more romantic,” he replied, nuzzling in against Victor.

“Only a bit?” Victor asked, feigning hurt.

“I might be a bit biased towards it, I mean, you have seen my hoodie right? I’m kind of Winter Monsoon’s number one fan.”

“Funny you should note that,” Victor replied, looping his arms around Yuuri as he started to skate along beside him. “Because I happen to know that guy.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah he’s Hokusai Wave’s number one fan. I mean, he’s even got this limited edition jacket that hasn’t been released yet.”

Yuuri’s smile was fond at that as he leaned his head over against Victor’s shoulder with a little sigh.

“You okay?” Victor whispered to him, wrapping his arms a bit tighter.

“As long as you’re with me, I will be,” Yuuri replied, pressing in closer.

And hoping that Yuuri knew how true it was, Victor replied.

“Then I’ll always be right here.”
Pictures of the hoodie, jacket and HW logo can all be found here:

http://abarero.tumblr.com/post/166598358250/as-chapter-26-goes-through-the-final-beta-heres
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

Thank you as always for all the wonderful comments! It makes my entire week <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yuuri was exhausted by the time they returned to the hotel room.

His entire body was tense down to his muscles, a headache was brewing, and his irritability was slowly creeping up on him. Victor insisted they return to the hotel after dinner, and Yuuri knew it was because he was picking up every warning signal that Yuuri was long overdue to get out of the public eye.

“Let’s get freshened up before your photoshoot, okay?”

Victor worded it in a way that made it seem so logical, that made Yuuri feel better about caving to his body’s instinct to hide; and it wasn’t until they were back in the room and Victor was coaxing him into the bathtub that it fully hit him, his nerves raw and mind flooded with all the worries he’d held at bay.

But Victor was right there.

“Mind if I join you?”

Yuuri blinked, taking in the ample bathtub now filled with bubbles.

“I suppose I do owe you for earlier…”

“Yuuri,” he waited until Yuuri looked up at him. “This isn’t about that. I want you to be able to relax, so right now, what do you need?”
Yuuri let that settle around him, a comforting reassurance amidst the anxiety spiking through his thoughts.

“All I need is you,” the words slipped out of his mouth before he could process them. He knew Victor couldn’t take away his anxiety, couldn’t magically make him feel worthy, but still...having him near made Yuuri feel like he could fight twice as hard against the worries that plagued him.

And maybe it was a bit of imagination on his part that Victor seemed a bit breathless and touched by the statement, but maybe...maybe it wasn’t. He reached out, his hand damp against Victor’s where it rested on the edge of the bathtub, and somehow it grounded him. Made him believe that maybe, maybe Victor felt the same.

Victor leaned over, pressing a kiss to Yuuri’s forehead, before stepping aside to undress. Yuuri tore his gaze away, his cheeks already burning warm and his heart hammering away in his chest.

“Do you want me to sit in front of you or…”

His mind reeled with mental images of all kinds of various positions, and deciding it was better than the alternatives, he nodded, pulling his knees up to his chest. Victor settled in front of him, the water sloshing about as he settled, before leaning back and giving the side of Yuuri’s leg a gentle tap.

“Put your legs up alongside me, you can’t relax all scrunched up like that.”

Yuuri did, the slide of his skin against Victor’s legs underwater causing him to grow suddenly very hot, his heart racing so loudly he was certain they could hear it a country away.

But as if it was nothing, Victor slid back against him, his shoulders resting against Yuuri’s chest and his hair tickling Yuuri’s chin.

“Is this all right?”

Yuuri felt like his veins were on fire, overwhelmed by the press of Victor against him; each bit of skin that touched against Victor alight with a burning feeling that only caused his heartbeat to race ever faster.
“Yuuri,” Victor’s voice rumbled low, a sensation Yuuri could feel through his back. “Relax. It’s just me.”

He could feel Victor’s hand press over his where it rested on the edge of the bathtub, his fingers working to unclench the fist Yuuri’s hand had balled up into.

_That’s part of the problem_ , Yuuri thought to himself. Did Victor really have no idea what effect he had on him?

Victor drew his hand into his own, then pulled it over sliding it against his chest and resting their joined hands over his heart. Yuuri tensed up for a moment, his fingertips hyperaware of their press against Victor’s skin; but that’s when the thrumming in his ears gave way just a moment, just enough.

Yuuri’s eyes went wide and he stilled as if he surely had to be wrong; but no, there were two distinct heartbeats, both racing just as fast and loud.

Victor let out a breathy laugh. “Okay, I’m doing terrible at the relaxing thing too.”

The tension broke at that, Yuuri snorting out a laugh and grinning wide, his other arm coming up to wrap around Victor.

“It’s just me,” Yuuri muttered, incredulous.

“There is no ‘just’ about you, Yuuri,” Victor retorted, leaning his head back so he could look up at him. “I almost don’t want to share with all the people who are going to buy these magazines with you on the cover.”

Yuuri’s heart clenched at that, his emotions pooling deep in his gut and brimming with shock and awe. He spread his hands flat against Victor’s chest, one sliding down to rest protectively over Victor’s injured side.

“I could say the same about you.”
Victor squirmed at that, settling more back against Yuuri as if he couldn’t stand the space between them any more than Yuuri could.

“Maybe…” Victor turned suddenly, twisting his torso until he could press his hand across Yuuri’s chest, right over his heart. “I should sign my name in permanent marker right here so people know you’re taken.”

“Victor!” Yuuri laughed now, his nerves rippling off as if they were shaken loose by each laugh.

“And then,” Victor shifted back, placing his hand over Yuuri’s where it laid on his injured side, “you can write yours right here so everyone knows I’m taken too.”

Something about that, the way Victor said it with breathy awe, like he couldn’t believe it any more than Yuuri, shifted something in Yuuri’s chest. A silent challenge to his brain, going well if you can’t believe it, then maybe I should prove it?

“Hey, sit up a second so I can wash your hair.”

Victor blinked, but did so, practically melting when Yuuri’s fingers curled into his hair. Yuuri smiled at that, leaning forward to press a kiss to the nape of Victor’s neck.

“What’s this scar from?” he asked, drawing his mouth against it. Victor tensed at his touch.

“Hmm, I think that’s from my first year on the UAT. There was that villain that was Guillotine something…”

“Ah, Madam Guillotine,” Yuuri remembered, the villain quite ridiculous yet rather formidable at the time.

“That’s the one. Off with your head! Sheesh she was a weirdo.”

Yuuri chuckled, his fingertips slowing as they brushed against a scar hidden under Victor’s hair.
“And this one?”

“Got thrown through a window by Brawler three years ago.”

Yuuri parted his hair there, pressing another kiss to it. He could see another scar there, trailing along the back of Victor’s head, and gently he trailed a flutter of kisses down its length.

He didn’t need to say a word, knowing that scar was from when Inferno had scorched off his previously long hair.

“Yuuri…”

“Hmm?” He began to work the shampoo into Victor’s hair, pausing only a second to press another kiss to a scar near Victor’s shoulder blade.

Victor didn’t even wait for him to ask, replying automatically as his lips pulled away.

“Great White, there’s a couple from his shark bite attack there.”

Yuuri sought each of the little white stars on Victor’s skin out, pressing another kiss to each one.

“Yuuri…”

He scooped up a handful of water, letting it rinse out the shampoo before he reached for the conditioner. Something about this, about tending to Victor like this, made Yuuri feel incredibly at ease. Relaxed in a way he never would have thought possible given all his mind had spiraling through it. But there was something intimate, almost domestic, about washing his hair; and it wrapped Yuuri’s heart in a patchwork quilt made of love, trust and devotion, bringing a gentle calm to his nerves.

“Almost done,” he reassured and Victor chuckled.

“Okay, okay. But when you’re done…”
Yuuri hummed a reply, “I told you I had to return the favor.”

He wondered absently if Victor felt the same earlier, if the same sense of warmth curled at his every fiber the same way. Victor let out a sigh.

“You’re spoiling me, Yuuri. I’ll never be able to go back to washing my hair myself.”

And although Yuuri’s heart jumped at that, he found he couldn’t really disagree.

“Okay, I’m finished now. What is it?”

He wasn’t expecting Victor to sit up, turning around until their legs tangled together between them and he was grinning over at him triumphant.

“Victor…what…”

“Close your eyes, okay?”

“What?”

“Trust me, okay?”

Yuuri took a deep breath and let his eyes drift closed. The moment they were, he heard the water slosh and felt Victor’s hands smoothing across his chest, and each time he caught upon even the slightest little scar or imperfection, he’d pause then press a kiss to it.

“Victor…”

“Let me guess, was this one from a yakuza with a rocket launcher?”
Yuuri chuckled. “No.”

“This one?”

“Nope, but getting warmer.”

“It’s not this one, this is from that gunshot graze during your first case back in Japan, right?”

And although Yuuri knew that the robbery was in the news, there was still something about Victor knowing that little pucker of white skin on his arm was from that that coiled something warm and pleased deep in his chest.

“Yes.”

“Oh, wait, I bet I know.”

Yuuri heard the drain to the bath at that, and although he knew that meant the privacy of the water was slowly trickling away, he willed himself calm. Victor had asked for his trust and he intended to give it. Wholeheartedly.

“Aha, I think I’ve got it now.”

At that, he felt Victor’s arms scoop under him, lifting him up into cradled arms. His eyes went wide in shock, but Victor didn't seem to mind. He’d pressed a kiss to the expanse of skin above Yuuri’s hip.

“This one?”

Yuuri frowned.

“No...no those are just stretch marks,” he grew quiet, suddenly feeling very embarrassed by them. He’d had several periods where he’d eat when depressed and he’d then have to work the weight back off when Minako or Celestino noticed it.
“Nah, these have to be from a rocket launcher. They look like lightning kissed your skin and you just shrugged it off.”

Yuuri looked up at Victor then, knowing his eyes had to be wide with some mix between awe and horror.

“Pretty badass, if you ask me,” Victor replied with a wink. “Lightning marks.”

Yuuri crumpled against him at that, burying his face against Victor’s chest and letting out a mix between a laugh and a choked out sob.

Victor only put him down a moment, coaxing him into one of the fluffy white bathrobes, before sweeping him back up in his arms and carrying him back to the bedroom. He could barely sit Yuuri down on the bed before Yuuri’s looped his arms around his neck and pulled him down with him.

They kissed until they were breathless, Yuuri’s hand sliding under the robe to smooth once more against Victor’s side. Meanwhile, Victor reached up, cradling Yuuri’s face in his hand and pressing his forehead down against his, their damp hair mingling together.

“You’re beautiful,” they both said simultaneously.

Yuuri knew he was surely as surprised as Victor, eyes wide and cheeks dusted pink; but just as the words seemed to settle around them, their truth following suit, they both broke into a timid smile.

That little flicker of confidence, that little spark of Victor’s belief in him and his trust that Victor wasn’t just saying it to be kind, burned strong in Yuuri’s heart; a torch he carried into the murky darkness of apprehension that rose up around him as he got dressed in the first of the outfits for the photoshoot

He looked at his reflection.

“What do you think?” Victor asked from behind him.
Yuuri allowed himself a hint of a smile, leaning back into Victor’s hands that had settled on his shoulders.

“I look good in blue,” he finally managed, smile blooming across his face. “It matches your eyes.”

Victor seized him in a hug from behind at that, pressing kisses all over the side of his face.

“So handsome and so sweet,” he professed.

And for once, Yuuri thought, maybe he was right.

VOGUE presents...

HOKUSAI WAVE

On the set of the February cover shoot, the rising star of the hero world talks to us about finding himself now that he’s unmasked.

“We’re here in Paris, at the Louvre, at night. So there’s all this,” Hokusai Wave, dressed in a fitted gold suit, gestures behind him, “the lights, all golden, and the glass pyramids out front all lit up. It’s...it’s kind of intimidating, I have to admit.”

[the video flashes to behind the scenes footage of the shoot, starting with Hokusai Wave dressed in a blue Alexander McQueen suit and armed with his fencing sabre. He poses with the blade pointed towards the camera, as if he’s challenging someone to come duel.]

“Well my experience on camera before now is mostly being in the background of Freeze Frame’s videos, so you know. Very professional. Definitely in no way prepared me for this,” he says with a laugh. “It’s very fancy. The Louvre is fancy, they’ve got me all dressed up fancy. They’re posing me with some actual works of art and I’m...yeah, so very intimidated.”
“The great thing about a fencing mask is that it makes you look exactly like everyone else in a fencing mask. You give your insecurities a mask to hide behind, put a blade in your hand, and it’s easy to find your confidence,” he says, holding a fencing mask fondly in his lap. “Now I’m trying to find that same confidence without the mask, and it can be a struggle some days.”

“I trained with one of the heroes probably the most confident in front of the camera and now I’m dating someone who’s done…” He counts something off on his fingers. “Twenty-seven Vogue photoshoots, if you count all the international editions.”

“Wow, have I really done that many?” a voice that’s very distinctly Winter Monsoon’s calls over.

Hokusai Wave laughs. “Yes, why do I know this and you don’t?” He shakes his head. “So yeah, I’m surrounded by support from people who are way better at this than I am. It’s honestly probably the only reason I’m as calm as I am.”

“Working with Hokusai Wave was a dream. Honestly. He’s quite possibly the sweetest man on earth.”

“He’s very humble, so we really had to get him to channel that inner confidence,” SnapShot continues, “and I think it really shines through. I’m pretty sure this is the Hokusai Wave a villain sees
a few moments before he slices them down. There’s just such grace to his strength, an artfulness that you don’t always see in heroes, and I think the Louvre was a perfect location to really capture that about him.”

[the video goes to a shot of him lunging mid-air with a crimson red cape billowing in the air behind him.]

“So the story behind this shoot is that there’s a beautiful girl, but two guys have their eyes set on her and it results in a duel for her hand,” Hokusai Wave explains. “And my character is completely confident in his dueling skills and knows without a doubt that he’s going to win the girl.”

[the video shows a close up of Hokusai Wave in a gold suit, holding out a rose to a figure mostly off frame, except for their arm and the back of their dress, which is embroidered in an intricate design.]

“And there’s kind of a funny story in there, because the lady model who was going to do the shoot with us had a personal emergency and they needed someone who could fill her spot. Turns out, Winter Monsoon was a perfect fit for that dress.” Hokusai Wave smiles at that. “You can’t see his face in the shot and they’ve got this silver wig on him with little ringlets, but that’s him. He looked beautiful.”

“You look beautiful,” Winter Monsoon calls from off-camera. Hokusai Wave blushes and buries his face in his hand.

[the video shows them lining up the final shot. The duelist victorious, with the girl in his arms. Hokusai Wave’s golden suit bright against the shadowed background, the “girl’s” dress cascading in black ruffles to the floor. Behind them is the sculpture of Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss, the couple's pose a reversed version of the statue.]

“So uh...I guess I can say I’ve been a Vogue cover model now. Which is kind of ridiculous to even think about, but well,” he gestures around him, “here I am. I feel like I’m still trying to figure out what kind of hero image I have, but I suppose this is a start. You know, maybe I’ve got a little of that confident duelist in me after all. I guess we’ll find out.”

They were just finishing packing up near the statue of Psyche and Cupid when they heard footsteps approaching quickly, something Victor had a feeling wasn’t going to be good news.
Sure enough, two security guards came into view, crossing the room and coming to a stop in front of Victor and Yuuri.

“I’m terribly sorry to bother you two, but we need your help.”

Victor blinked. Well, so much for getting back to the hotel at a decent time tonight.

“What’s wrong?” Yuuri asked, his eyes already snapping into focus.

“We’ve got all the guards already looking, but we think it’s a quirk user. It’s got to be, because the glass case hasn’t been tampered with and no alarms have gone off at all.” The guard paused, taking a deep breath. “It sounds crazy, but the Mona Lisa has just disappeared.”

Victor glanced over his shoulder at the Vogue crew, shooting them a wink.

“I hope you don’t mind if I borrow this dress while we go find a missing painting.”

Yuuri had already retrieved his other blades, improvising by using the gold jacket he was wearing as a sheath and tucking two of them in through the back of the neck, the high collar keeping them from sliding.

He turned back to the group of people. “SnapShot, can you go with security to wherever their CCTV is? With your camera-focus quirk, you might be able to find something that normal eyes would miss.”

The photographer grinned, handing her camera to her assistant. “I’ve never played hero before, but I suppose there’s a first time for everything.”

Yuuri grinned, turning then to the security guards. “Can one of you go with SnapShot? I’ll also need one of your radios so she can contact us if she discovers anything.”

They both nodded.
“And you, can you stay here with the rest of the crew? I’d hate for something to happen to them if something got out of hand.”

The guard blinked. “Are you sure you’ll be okay on your own?”

Yuuri nodded. “Victor and I can handle it. We’ll radio for backup if we need it. I assume the guards have already panned out to look?”

“The building’s in lockdown right now, but as I said- it just disappeared. For all we know, the person who took it can do that too.”

Yuuri asked them a few more questions, gathering information about what areas were definitely not a possibility, getting directions from their current location to the room where the Mona Lisa usually was displayed, and asking if they’d noticed anything strange earlier in the night.

It was then that Victor caught their first hint, something Yuuri clearly noticed as well, because the moment the guard said it, they shared a look of understanding.

“The last few nights, there’s been something weird happening on the first floor. Lights going out, shadows seeming like they’ve moved. We thought that the guard on duty was just tired, but now a few of us have seen at least one of the things.”

“Good thing we’re headed there first,” Victor stated, hitching up the dress in his hand. “Ready Yuuri?”

“Yeah. Let’s go.”

And with that, they took off in a run towards the stairs to the first floor.

The hallways were dark once they moved out of the areas they’d been doing the photoshoot in, the other guards they passed informing them they’ve put the first floor on blackout in hopes it will get the villain to let their guard down and make a mistake. Yuuri seemed to be pleased by that decision, and once they’re out of earshot, Victor made note of it.
“I’m guessing it’s the fencing, but I must say, I am still so completely impressed by how you analyze the situation and plan everything out so quickly.”

Yuuri blinked over at him. “I’m not…it’s nothing special.”

Victor shot him a wink. “Humble as always, my Yuuri.”

Yuuri skidded to a stop at that, turning on Victor with a bit of a smirk tugging at his lips.

“And what about you? How are you running in those heels?”

Victor chuckled. “Practice.”

Yuuri snorted. “I suppose they aren’t as intense as those ones from that Victoria Secret ad.”

At that Victor’s cheeks pinked. Oh he remembered that, Chris having to nag him for a few weeks before he decided what the hell and did it. The Fire and Ice spread, his shoes being a pair of white lace up thigh high boots with their stiletto heels fitted to laser-cut ice skate blades. It was definitely...intense.

“Oh yes, those.”

Victor caught up Yuuri by the hand, the two of them laughing as they made their way on the first floor. He’d gotten so focused on pondering how it’d be nice to see Yuuri in a similar ad campaign that Victor almost didn’t notice the shadow shift behind them.

He paused, Yuuri coming to a stop next to him.

“What’s wrong?”

He stared. No, he was seeing things.
“Nothing, but I think we might want some light,” he said, pulling his phone out and flipping the flashlight on.

Their radio crackled and Yuuri came to a stop, Victor following suit.

“Hokusai?” SnapShot’s voice called through it.

“Right here, what’s up?”

“Well, this sounds crazy, but there’s definitely something off in the Egyptian antiquities wing to your left.”

“Something off?” Victor asked.

She laughed. “I can’t even see it exactly, but there’s something in those rooms that is catching my eye. Almost like the shadows are moving.”

Victor swallowed down his nerves.

“Okay… that’s not creepy at all.”

“We’ll go check it out,” Yuuri replied, starting to turn in that direction.

“Good luck you two, I’ll let you know if I spot it again.”

The radio crackled off again and Victor quickly closed the distance between him and Yuuri, drawing up next to his side and sweeping the flashlight around their surroundings, the glare of the flashlight flickering back off the glass display cases and throwing shadows around the room.

“I feel like I’m a bad horror movie,” he muttered.
“Is it a bad movie if it’s successfully scaring you?” Yuuri replied, a hint of a laugh in his voice.

Victor pouted. “Oh hush. If anything jumps out at us, you’d better beat me to it because I’m just going to close my eyes and throw up an ice wall.”

Yuuri took his hand and clutched it tight. “Winter Monsoon is not a horror movie fan. I’ve learned something new today.”

“Yuuuuu-rriii.”

“You’ve fought off some of the worst villains in history, Victor. How in the world…”

“That is totally different than the supernatural, Yuuri.”

Yuuri paused and leveled him a look. “Quirks are supernatural.”

“Quirks are real and tangible, but there’s… things that aren’t.”

He looked torn between laughing at Victor and consoling him, the decision made for him when the flashlight hit on a shadow beneath a statue in the room and it clearly moved.

Victor glued himself to Yuuri’s side.

“Victor it’s probably a quirk user, you know that,” Yuuri said, but in doing so he also wrapped his arm around Victor’s waist and tugged him a bit closer.

“Uh huh and they clearly know that moving freaking shadows are terrifying.”

“Okay, so no machine guns, no rocket launchers and no moving shadows. Anything else you don’t like?”
“Being alone in the pitch dark.”

For a moment Yuuri seemed to be trying to decide if he was serious or not, his expression finally easing into a comforting smile.

“Well, I’m not going anywhere. So, that won’t be an issue.”

Victor’s worry eased just a little at that, a small smile tugging at his lips. Yuuri leaned over and pecked a kiss to his forehead.

“Every new thing I learn about you just makes me love you more, you know that?”

Victor felt his heart stammer to a halt at that, tightening in that pleasant way that made him feel so warm and loved. It was going to be fine. Yuuri was right there.

The radio crackled.

“There is something in the next room, the one with all the sarcophaguses. There was something that looked like a flicker of white for a second before it went dark again.”

Victor took a deep breath. This was going to be okay. He was going to be fine.

“Oh,” SnapShot’s voice crackled through the radio again. “Okay so there’s something...oozing out of the stone sarcophagus near the wall. Looks like smoke or fog or…”

“Nightmare fuel?” Victor added dryly.

Yuuri sighed. “Okay, you both have been watching too many horror movies.”

“I don’t know, Hokusai. This is pretty creepy stuff,” SnapShot clarified. “I think whatever it is wants to scare you guys off.”
Yuuri looked over to Victor, giving his hand a squeeze. “I guess we’ll have to disappoint it then.”

And although everything was inwardly telling Victor to run the opposite direction and not look back, something about Yuuri’s gentle smile and warm hand made it seem a little less terrifying.

Yuuri began to move forward, Victor’s hand still clutched tightly in his own, and as they made their way through the doorway into the next room, Victor’s flashlight and phone turned themselves off.

He clung to Yuuri’s side.

An eerie green light started to glow from the sarcophagus, which definitely looked like it had fog spilling out of the crack between the lid and the base.

“Hello?” Yuuri called out.

“Don’t talk to it,” Victor hissed.

“Look, we’re just trying to find a missing painting. Can you help us?”

Victor looked over at Yuuri incredulously. Who tried to reason with a ghost?!

The sarcophagus lid shifted, the grating stone pausing only when a large crack had opened up and something thin and white slipped out, hovering in the air a moment before it began to float towards them.

“Victor,” Yuuri whispered under his breath. “Put a puddle in its path.”

And although he really didn’t know why one little puddle would be able to stop this ghost-demon-whatever, he knew he trusted Yuuri more than anything.

A small puddle materialized on the floor, and the moment the spectral being crossed over it...it slipped. Yuuri moved then, rushing forward and moving as if he was going to catch the ghost from its fall, his blade clattering to the ground.
Sure enough, the ghost began to solidify, landing with a thump in Yuuri’s outstretched arms.

Victor felt his racing pulse begin to ebb and his phone’s flashlight flickered back on. It was a boy. No more than maybe eleven or twelve in age. Yuuri set him back on his feet easily.

“Are you okay?”

The boy looked terrified.

“I’m sorry,” he finally managed quietly. “Please...please don’t hurt me.”

Victor crossed the remaining space between then, leaning down to the boy’s level.

“No one’s getting hurt here. But I must say, you have quite the quirk.”

The boy frowned, his eyes darting to the floor. “I hate it.”

Yuuri blinked. “You hate...your quirk?”

The boy looked to him as if it should be obvious. “Who would want a quirk like this except a villain?”

Suddenly, a lot of things started making sense. Victor gave the boy a smile.

“So that’s what you’re trying to be, is that it?”

He nodded.

Victor sat down before him, nodding to the boy to do the same. Finally, he obliged.
“I’m going to guess some so-called friends of yours told you that?” Victor asked and the flash of hurt in the boy’s eyes was enough for him to get an answer. “That’s terrible. A quirk doesn’t make anyone a villain. You know what makes someone a villain?”

The boy shook his head.

“A quirk doesn’t make anyone a villain or a hero by default. People without quirks can be heroes and people without quirks can be villains. It’s about what’s in here,” Victor said, pressing a hand over his heart.

“Your quirk is really advanced,” Yuuri added. “Was all of that your doing? The shadows, the fog, the lights and the ghost?”

He nodded, then clutched his hands together. “My quirk is able to make me a ghost and able to do things like a ghost would. I thought...I thought a hero would never have a quirk like this…”

Victor reached over and placed a reassuring hand on the boy’s arm.

“If you want to be a hero, that’s all it takes. Strive to do good things, help others...don’t let anyone tell you you can’t be a hero. That’s a decision only you can make.”

“B-But I took the painting. I’m going to be in trouble, right?”

Yuuri shook his head. “Right now, the only people that know that are us three. And I’m not going to tell anyone as long as it gets put back. What about you, Victor?”

Victor smiled. “I think we can keep it between us three heroes.”

The boy looked surprised, but Yuuri had picked back up the radio and had called out with a message.

“We’ve got a boy here who says he knows what happened to the painting. He’s been trying to scare
the intruder off with his quirk.”

The boy’s eyes went wide.

“Is the intruder still in the building?”

Yuuri smiled. “No. He apparently can walk through walls though, so I’d get something to nullify quirks to put in your walls for extra protection. The boy didn’t get a good look at him, but we’re going to go put the painting back now. It’s safe.”

Victor got to his feet and held a hand down to the boy.

“Are you ready to be a hero and help us put the Mona Lisa back?”

The boy began to smile at that.

“Yeah.”

By the time they got everything resolved at the Louvre and ensured the young boy got home safely, it was rather late when they arrived back at their hotel.

His muscles suddenly reminded of all the walking, and skating, and posing he’d done that day, Yuuri couldn’t wait to crawl under the blankets and sleep for awhile.

“How early is the flight?” he’d muttered mostly into the pillow.

“I just rescheduled it so we can sleep in a little, it leaves around eleven.”

Yuuri sighed, mostly relieved but also somewhat wishing he could sleep in more.
The mattress dipped as Victor sat on the edge of the bed, his hand reaching out to gently tug Yuuri’s glasses off his face before he nuzzled under the covers and pulled Yuuri over towards him.

“I take it I’m not the only one a little peeved we didn’t get back sooner?”

Yuuri blinked up at him. “Why?”

Victor’s cheeks went a deep shade of pink, and after a moment, Yuuri’s mind caught up with it. His eyes went wide.

“You mean…”

Victor gave a nervous laugh. “I very much enjoyed the day, except for the wondering around in the dark Louvre with possible ghosts part, but…” He bit his lip, then slowly met Yuuri’s eyes. “I hope I’m not the only one who wished we hadn’t gotten interrupted this morning.”

Yuuri swallowed hard.

“You...you really wanted to? With me?”

Victor’s expression softened at that, his hands sneaking up under the shirt Yuuri was sleeping in to idly trace patterns against his back.

“Oh I definitely wanted, Yuuri,” he murmured quietly.

Yuuri let out a soft gasp.

He pulled back then, a flicker of worry in his eyes.

“Though I don’t want to rush you, so…”
Yuuri shook his head, his words finally catching up with his mind. “I thought it was just me.”

Victor tugged him closer at that, their legs tangling together and his breath tickling against Yuuri’s ear.

“I want you, Yuuri Katsuki. And if we’re lucky, before this trip is over, maybe…”

Yuuri lifted his eyes up, a smile tugging at his lips.

“Maybe?”

Victor pressed a lazy kiss to his lips before nuzzling his nose against Yuuri’s and pressing as close as he could.

“No, I definitely want to show you how much I love you.”

And although his pulse was racing and his heart felt like it might burst from it all, Yuuri managed a sleepy but very content reply.

“Okay. I’ll...I’ll show you my love too.”

Chapter End Notes

And here’s all the Alexander McQueen outfits mentioned this chapter:

http://abarero.tumblr.com/post/166935755055/heres-all-the-alexander-mcqueen-outfits-mentioned
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

Terribly sorry for the massive delay. Real life has been quite stressful lately. But hopefully that’s all settled down now and we can get this show back on the road! Thank you as always for your amazing support! I couldn’t do this without you~!

Fanart this chapter by the amazing poikas!

“Don’t you two have a plane to catch?”

The Parisian heroine, Fury, launched another burst of rainbow flames towards the villain causing the disturbance; the villain swung his cane and met it with a flock of shadowy moths made of smoke.

Victor laughed, laying down a slope of ice against the building. “Technically, yes. But well, we go where the job needs us.”

“A little bit more, Victor,” Yuuri said from beside him. He was trying to reach the second floor balcony the villain stood on.

Fury shook her head. “It’s nice to see that the famous heroes aren’t just all talk. I have to admit, even though I knew you were in town I didn’t expect you to answer the Hero Network notification for assistance.”

Yuuri gave her a warm smile, and Victor felt his heart swell just at the sight of it.

“I go where help is needed, even if it does interrupt my breakfast,” he replied, eyeing the slope of ice once more. “Plus it looks like this guy is quite the handful.”

Fury shot another burst of flames at the villain, but was met again with his attack of moths. She sighed. “He’s a regular. He mostly stirs up trouble at various fashion houses, but someone always manages to post his bail so we see a lot of him around.”

“I’m not sure what I like more, the cane or the weird mask,” Victor noted. He was definitely going
for the sleek supervillain look with his base costume looking to be a modified purple suit.

“Okay, that’s enough. Just put a foothold in a foot or so from the top,” Yuuri said, stepping back and waiting. He did as asked and without a second’s hesitation and Yuuri rushed forward.

Victor watched him, his blue and white suit blurring as he ran, his feet seeming to barely touch the iced slope before he was vaulting off the foothold and onto the balcony. His blade - it was the sabre, Victor knew it by the glint of its polished edge - moving so quickly that had Victor blinked he would have missed it.

The tip of the blade leveled at the villain’s throat.

“Do you yield?”

He held up his hands.

“Turn around, hands behind your back!” Fury called out.

Slowly he did so, and the moment his hands were close, Fury used her quirk to create a rope of white flames that held his hands as if they were tied.

Yuuri lowered his blade.

“Well, that definitely made it a faster fight than usual. You top heroes know your stuff,” Fury said, turning to Victor. “Usually this guy has our top heroes around to deal with him, but I guess they had something else going on this morning. So thanks for the assist.”

“And thank you for holding him here by yourself. We couldn’t have done it without your support either.”

The complement seemed to surprise her, but slowly a wide smile spread across her face.

“You know they say don’t meet your idols, but well. You two are the exception I suppose.” She
stuck out a hand and Victor took it. “It was an honor working with you, Winter Monsoon.”

Victor smiled back.

“The honor was ours.”

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**BREAKING NEWS BULLETIN: UAT POINTS SHAKEUP IN BARCELONA**

“This is Hero News Network with a breaking news out of Barcelona. We go live to our reporter on the scene, Press Anchor!”

“Thanks Jill,” Press Anchor replies, the sun glinting off his rose-tinted glasses. As he turns to follow the action behind him, you can catch a glimpse of him using his quirk to control the camera that hovers before him in the air. “As you can see behind me, we’ve got quite the scene here as a fight has broken out between the UAT’s current top ranked hero, King JJ, and the junior hero-slash-intern at the UAT, The Leopard. The villain that had begun the matter has already been taken in by the authorities, but these two have remained in a heated verbal fight since.”

It pans back to the newsroom. “Can you give us any idea of what has caused this disagreement?”

“From the look of things, Jill, it’s all about the rankings. There was a new villain appearance, an easily forgettable magnetism quirk user, that pales in comparison to the fight that has broken out over who shall be collecting the Capture Points for him. The Leopard seemed to be making a final attack when King JJ used his quirk to pause time and he rushed in to finish it.”

“That’s a difference of a hundred points, right?”

Press Anchor nods, his camera focusing and zooming in even further on the argument behind him. “Which in the scheme of things, might not look like much, Jill. But, that difference of a hundred is what either puts The Leopard finally ahead of Hokusai Wave or not. If awarded with the assist, he’d still be in second and knowing Hokusai Wave’s penchant for hero work while traveling, it might be the closest The Leopard will get to overtaking his lead.”
“The last time he was this close was after the avalanche earlier this month, am I correct?”

“Yes. The Leopard had come within two hundred and fifty points of Wave at that point, and then lost ground almost immediately when Hokusai stopped mid-dinner in New York City to help with an apartment fire and racked up a tidy 2,600 points overnight. The Leopard has been chasing him ever since, scraping up small handfuls of points here and there to try and keep pace, a feat he says it hampered by the fact that the UAT members with him are all out for their own points. Here’s a bit of the conversation I had with the young hero moments ago.”

The camera clicks and rewinds the taped footage, airing it now for the HNN viewers.

“There seems to be a bit of a problem here, heroes. Care to fill us in?” Press Anchor asks approaching the group.

“He stole my capture!” The Leopard yells, pointing at King JJ. “I can’t beat that stupid Puddle if he keeps stealing my points!”

“Hey now, I’m just trying to stop the villain before…”

“You knew I was about to rush him!” The Leopard cuts JJ off. “You did it last time too! I can’t get any damn points with you *BEEP*ing vultures around!”

“Leopard, we’re here as a team,” Physique interjects. “No one’s trying to steal anyone’s points.”

“If you haven’t noticed kid, you’re the one trying to get all the points he can around here,” Smolder adds. “You’re the one who spent last week hunting down every pickpocket in the ten miles around HQ.”

The Leopard huffs then turns to Press Anchor. “Hey, listen here! This point system is faulty as *BEEP*. Of course Victor’s going to give his precious little Puddle the leader points every *BEEP*ing time. No one here can ever agree on who earns those points! Unless I go solo, I lose points just by working with these losers. We need to make the points system fair and right now it’s not at all!”

“Y- Leopard, you know that’s not true,” Physique tries again. “But sometimes you don’t earn the leader points because the group decides it goes to someone else, just because you don’t agree doesn’t
“Kid, you need to look at the bigger picture here,” Smolder says with a sigh.

“I am,” The Leopard snaps. “And right now, unless Monsoon starts pulling his weight he might as well sit out and stop awarding his boyfriend *BEEP*ing leader points for covering his ass.”

The footage ends, going back to the current of Press Anchor standing several feet in front of the arguing group.

“As you can see, Jill. We’ve got some pretty serious accusations being thrown around here. Especially given the recent matter with Winter Monsoon, it does make one wonder how fairly the points can be awarded in the matter of those romantically involved. I spoke with hero liaisons officer, Hayami Masumi, and he said even his current relationship has been brought up despite the points technically being awarded by a panel of IHU judges. This was his statement on the matter.”

An audio clip plays, Hayami sounding slightly more frazzled than usual.

“All points submitted must undergo evaluation by a team of judges that was formerly employed judging the trials. If they feel any points are not earned, they will and have deducted them. If there is any question of who earned what points, eyewitness civilian accounts are factored in to help decide. Winter Monsoon may have been the one to propose this system, but he is not handling the awarding of points. And neither am I. Allegations that myself or Monsoon are unfairly giving out points to someone we happen to be dating are simply not possible in the way the current system works unless we call the judgement of the panel into question as well.”

“Do you feel there might be a better way to handle the awarding of points that might make everyone happy?” Press Anchor’s voice on the recording asks.

“As we have been since the implementation of this system, we are open to suggestions for improvement. As it is, we have to trust the points submitted by each hero to be as accurate a tally as possible and have the judges attempt to adjust them where it is deemed necessary. The concern being raised that the judges on the panel are allowing favoritism to influence their decisions is something we are taking very seriously.”

“Do you think that Winter Monsoon’s popularity might be causing some judges to sway points the way he would want them?”
Hayami sighs. “In both recent matters, even the one this morning, at least one other hero was present at the scene with Winter Monsoon and Hokusai Wave. And in both, the decision to award Wave the bonus five hundred leader points was a unanimous decision. I suppose if you’re trying to make him out to be an instigator, you could say that his popularity might warrant some sway; but personally I highly doubt that to be the case. I think Victor would be very upset if this system was being used unfairly as that was his whole reason for seeking to revamp it”

The footage pans back to the current, Press Anchor wearing a deep frown.

“Well, that’s what we’ve got going on here, Jill. Depending on the decision that will be made by the IHU panel, we would have a complete shakeup of the top three heroes. King JJ will definitely make his way into third, but as to who will be first and second, the call will still have to be made.”

“Thank you, Anchor. While we’ve been talking, we had one of our HNN agents catch up to Hokusai Wave and Winter Monsoon as they arrived in London. Here’s their take on the matter.”

The camera focuses on Winter Monsoon, whose glare could definitely be seen as icy, but before he can speak, Hokusai Wave steps in between him and the camera.

“I believe the heroes on the scene did what they deemed best to ensure that the villain was handled quickly and perhaps that meant one may have stepped in when another wanted to, which can understandably be upsetting when you’ve worked that hard. So if all this is about is one hundred points then The Leopard can have five hundred of mine if it’ll resolve the matter. The important thing here is that everyone is safe and that the villain was apprehended before any injury or damage occurred.”

Winter Monsoon steps up behind Hokusai Wave at that, wrapping his arms around his neck and giving him a quick hug before looking to the camera.

“I really don’t think I could have said it any better. Now if you’ll excuse us, we’re already running a bit late. For now, I have faith that Mr. Masumi and the IHU officials will handle this matter to everyone’s satisfaction, especially in light of Yuuri’s most gracious offer.”

A heavy weight had settled in the pit of Yuuri’s stomach.
He’d been forcing smiles and shrugging off Victor’s worries all morning, but it had finally, truly, caught up with him in a way he could no longer ignore at all. His nerves were raw, and his mind was flooded; it was as if a dam had broken and the debris of all his stress had finally washed fresh into his thoughts. The anxiety, and all it brought with it that he’d been doing his best this trip to avoid, had finally come. He was probably, most likely, about to lose his spot as the top ranked hero. Victor’s scoring system was being called into question because Yuuri had been outshining him and well, of course that seemed wrong and out of place. In what world would a plain, dime-a-dozen hero from Japan have a chance of ranking above Winter Monsoon?

Yuuri looked at himself in the bathroom mirror and his frown deepened.

He’d promised to give Victor a pep talk before the photoshoot, and here he was wallowing in his own pity. Maybe he should just call this whole thing off, apologize to everyone for wasting their time, and go home.

“Yuuri?” Victor’s voice was laced with worry and Yuuri could hear the press of his hand against the door between them.

“Hmm?”

“Can I come in?”

Yuuri stared back at his reflection once more, as if it could provide him an answer.

“Please?”

There was something in Victor’s voice, something Yuuri couldn’t name, that pulled at his heart and had him opening the door before he could talk himself out of it. Before it could close, he found himself enveloped in Victor’s arms.

“Stop it, whatever you’re thinking. It’s not true,” Victor’s voice whispered into his ear.

“Victor…”
“I’m not good at this, Yuuri. I don’t know what to do when you get like this, but I can’t...I can’t just let it happen either.”

There was something raw and completely unguarded in his tone, and Yuuri found himself fisting his hands in the front of Victor’s shirt at that, as if he wanted to protect that vulnerable side that Victor had let show. He tensed up unthinkingly.

“Do you want me to leave?”

The question caught Yuuri by surprise, a momentary panic piercing into his heart before he could register he simply meant to leave the room. But that second was enough, for Victor to feel him go rigid and to see the heartbreak and horror flicker across his features.

“Oh god, Yuuri- no, no I don’t mean it like that,” he said, his hands shaky as they found their way up to his cheeks.

It was only now, as Victor’s thumb brushed the tears aside, that Yuuri realized he’d begun to cry.

“I’ve been worrying about how everything I do is reflecting on you, wondering if I’m holding you back,” Yuuri felt the words rush out of him. “Wondering if you want to leave…”

“Of course I don’t.”

“I know!” Yuuri choked back a sob, his tears flowing freely now. “I know that and yet, it doesn’t stop me having those thoughts.”

Victor looked as lost as Yuuri felt. “Then what do you want me to do?”

Yuuri brought his hands up then, shakily grasping Victor’s where they trembled against his cheeks, and settling them on his shoulders before reaching out to cup Victor’s face.

“Just have more faith in me than I do that I can do this. You don’t have to say anything, just stay by
He could see the shock cross Victor’s eyes, the blue of them seeming to shift for a moment as the words settled over him. Then, as if the first ray of sunlight had found a crack in the clouds after a storm, a small hint of a smile tugged at each of their lips.

Victor moved first, his hands coming up to cradle Yuuri’s head as he pressed a fervent kiss to his forehead before he dipped his head lower and tenderly kissed away the last of Yuuri’s tears. A laugh bubbled up in Yuuri’s throat at that, and he flickered his eyes up then to meet Victor’s.

“Thank you.”

“I love you.”

Their words collided and that only seemed to tug their lips even more into a smile. And feeling as if there wasn’t a word more he could say, Yuuri reached out and fisted a handful of Victor’s shirt in his grasp before tugging him down for a kiss.

When they parted, both of them were smiling wide.

Victor reached a hand up to brush Yuuri’s bangs aside before leaning his head down until it rested against Yuuri’s.

“Feel better now?”

“Yeah.”

And it was true. Somehow, all that had been bothering him, was once again locked back away in his mind where it couldn’t trouble him for the moment. Sure, he was still nervous and he knew that wasn’t going to magically go away. But his mind had shifted it, taken his worries and rerouted them into a strong, burning urge to prove them wrong.

He’d show the world that he was worth Victor’s love.
Or, well, he’d try.

By the time they’d arrived at Leon Paul’s headquarters, all the fencing talk with their staff had kept him pretty at ease, a false sense of security that had forgotten about the most important fact.

They wanted him to pose shirtless.

Makeup artists had slicked his hair back and he was feeling cold and uncomfortable by the time they’d finished covering him in foundation. Desperate for a moment to process everything, he excused himself into the nearest changing room.

Victor was doing surprisingly well, what little nerves he seemed to have had been covered up by his charisma and natural charm the moment they stepped into the building. As much as Yuuri knew that it wasn’t the real Victor feeling that flippant and relaxed, he still found himself somewhat jealous that Victor could slip into a mindset that even remotely allowed him to feel at ease.

If Yuuri could go out there and fake any amount of confidence, it’d be a miracle.

Settling his glasses onto the bridge of his nose, he frowned at his reflection.

Victor looked amazing in the fencing breeches and light blue lamé, both of them hugging his curves and making him look like some sort of model. On the other hand, Yuuri’s hips were notably wider, and his waist most definitely didn’t give off that hourglass figure that Victor’s managed.

And, most of all, he didn’t have anything to cover all the imperfections across his chest.

Victor had gone on, giving compliment after compliment since they’d left the hotel. But somehow that still couldn’t penetrate the wall of self-doubt Yuuri had built around himself.

“Yuuri?” Victor’s voice called through the door.

“I...I just need a minute.”
Or an eternity. It’s not like he was getting any better to look at.

“Okay.” Victor paused, then sounding wary, spoke once more. “Um. This might sound strange but, Chris wants to talk to you.”

Yuuri blinked. Why would he want to talk to Yuuri?

“What?”

“I asked him for tips for photoshoot jitters and he says he’s gotta talk to you, but he’s pretty sure he’s got a way to help you.”

Not sure what Chris could say that Victor hadn’t, Yuuri decided it wasn’t like it would make him feel any worse than he already did. Slowly, he cracked the door open and took the offered phone from Victor’s hands.

Victor gave him a small smile as he closed the door again and spoke into the phone.

“Um, this is Yuuri.”

“Hey,” Chris sounded much softer and well...normal, than he usually did. “Victor’s been worried about you, and I may be sort of a pro when it comes to photoshoots sans clothing, so…”

Well, Yuuri knew that was probably true, at least.

“First off, close your eyes. I can’t work my magic otherwise, ‘kay?”

There was that hint of flirtatious charm that Chris usually exuded, and Yuuri took a deep breath and figured- well, might as well try.

“Eyes closed?”
“Yep.”

“Okay. So I’m gonna tell you a story. Because whether they lay it out for you or not, every photoshoot has a story. And this one’s got an amazing story, so just listen close. Okay?”

“Okay.”

Something shifted in Chris’s tone then, as if he was aware of some sort of secret that he was simply bursting to let loose.

“There once was a very talented fencer. That’s your part, of course. And this very talented fencer had his eyes set on becoming the best in the land. So he entered a tournament in which the best of the land could earn a chance to dance with the princess at the ball, for there was no higher reward than that. Much to the fencer’s surprise, he easily defeated the strongest of the kingdom’s men and found himself awarded with entry to the ball.”

“What does this have to…”

“Ah ah ah, just hold on a bit. You’ll see where this is going,” Chris reassured him. “Because you see, this fencer was afraid that without his mask to hide him, that perhaps he should decline the offer. Why? Because this was one beautiful princess, with eyes of sapphire and hair of silver.”

Immediately, Victor came to Yuuri’s mind. It seemed silly to cast him as a princess, but he was definitely beautiful with eyes that would outshine a gemstone and hair that shimmered just so in the morning’s early light.

“But the fencer also knew he could truly insult the princess’s honor if he declined, so he went to a fairy godmother and asked for a magic spell. And do you know what she told him?”

Yuuri hesitated a moment, his mind still caught up on its previous subject matter. “What?”

“She said, ‘close your eyes. I can’t work my magic otherwise.’ So the fencer did as told and waited. He heard not a single movement nor sensed any sort of magic fairy dust fall upon him, but after what seemed like ages, the fairy godmother spoke again. ‘There. All done. You’re now the most
handsome man in the kingdom. There’s no way the princess won’t fall in love with you right away.’ The fencer opened his eyes, but he didn’t feel any different. ‘But aren’t I the same?’ he asked her. ‘Ah ah ah,’ the fairy godmother chided. ‘Don’t think like that, or it’ll break the spell. You see, this is a powerful magic but it’s easy to weaken it with doubt. The more you believe in the spell, the better it works. And whatever you do, don’t stay longer than an hour, because then it will break for good.’

Chris paused a moment. “Still following?”

“Yeah. Go on. What happens next?”

“The fencer went to the ball and as the fairy godmother told him, he was the most handsome man there. The princess was immediately smitten, even before she approached him or took his arm. She was shocked to discover that the man behind the mask was just as beautiful as his artful skill with his blades. And so the two danced the night away, the fencer easily losing track of time and finding himself ever enchanted by the girl’s beauty. So enchanted was he, that he didn’t notice until the clock began its chime of the next hour that he had no more time left.”

“This sounds an awfully lot like Cinderella,” Yuuri cut in.

“Let me finish first, jeez.”

“Okay, okay. Chris, how does it end?”

Chris took a deep breath and continued. “Before the fencer could leave, the chimes had come to their stop and he knew the spell had clearly disappeared. ‘Don’t look at me,’ he asked of the princess, trying to pull away. ‘Why? You’re so handsome, I can’t keep my eyes off of you.’ The fencer was shocked. But no matter how he examined himself, he truly felt he looked the same as always. For you see, he didn’t need to do anything but believe in himself to make the spell work.”

Yuuri sighed, he suspected it’d be something like this. “And the moral of the story is that if you believe in yourself it’ll all be fine. Which would be nice, but I can’t just do that. That’s the problem.”

“Ah ah ah,” Chris retorted, using his fairy godmother voice. “I’m not done yet. Here’s the real magic part, you ready for it?”

“Sure.”
“This is a true story. Although in the original, the fencer was drunk and the princess was a superhero.”

The pieces settled into place one by one. “W-What?”

“Yuuri, you have no idea how much Victor was smitten with you at first, do you? Even after that one night. And how did you look then? Well, aside from smashed, the same as you do now.”

“Chris, I know Victor thinks I look okay…”

“Yuuri, Victor will not shut up about how attractive he thinks you are. He’s gone on for at least thirty minutes about your eyes alone. He’s not just saying it to make you feel better, okay? You, Yuuri Katsuki, are the man he fantasizes about at night. And a little fairy godmother told me that’s been the case since before you two hooked up.”

Yuuri about dropped the phone at that, heat flooding his cheeks.

“Chris...you mean…”

Chris chuckled. “Okay my handsome fencer, open your eyes now.”

Yuuri did.

“Did my magic spell work?”

Yuuri blinked, eyes raking over his reflection in the mirror. And well, maybe Chris had some sort of magic confidence-giving power after all, because...damn. It really did seem like it worked.

“Just remember any time you worry about any part of you that Victor wants you, just the way you are.”
And maybe it was the way Chris intoned the word, but this time Yuuri really did drop the phone.

Chris just laughed.

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† † ≡ WINTER*MONSOON † † retweeted

British Museum @britishmuseum 2h

Along with his heroic namesake, we are proud to announce our upcoming exhibit: ‘Hokusai: beyond the Great Wave’ opens 25 May 2017 ≡ Book your tickets now: http://ow.ly/9tap307R2Uu

† † ≡ WINTER*MONSOON † † retweeted

British Museum @britishmuseum 2h

Two treasures in one place! Thank you to @wintermonsoon for helping us put @hokusaiwave and his namesake print in the same room today!

[ image of Yuuri standing in his hero uniform beside the woodblock print from which he took his hero name. ]

† † ≡ WINTER*MONSOON † † retweeted

Hokusai Wave ≡ @hokusaiwave 3h

@wintermonsoon surprised me with a special treat at @britishmuseum this afternoon! I can’t believe I got to see one of the surviving The Great Wave off Kanagawa woodblock prints!

‡ ‡ ≡ WINTER*MONSOON ‡ ‡ @wintermonsoon 4h

It’s okay if you’re swooning, my Yuuri makes me feel that way too (ง’̀-'́)ง

‡ ‡ ≡ WINTER*MONSOON ‡ ‡ @wintermonsoon 4h

Here’s what’ll be their new ad image before all the text and lighting edits!!!! @leonpaullondon @hokusaiwave
Victor stands in front, hand on his hip and other reaching back to grab around Yuuri’s neck. He’s wearing white fencing breeches and a light blue lamé jacket, leaving his arms bare. Behind him, Yuuri holds his blue epee blade across Victor almost possessively, the hilt resting over Victor’s heart and the tip flexed in Yuuri’s other hand. Yuuri’s clad in only white fencing breeches, with the suspenders up. They both look stunning and fierce.

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Very honored to help @leonaullondon advertise their new #LeonPaulColors line. Thank you to @wintermonsoon for agreeing to appear with me in this campaign! ♥️
Victor wasn’t sure what Chris had said to Yuuri, but it had worked.

After what seemed like forever waiting, Yuuri finally emerged from the changing room with a blush high on his cheeks and a smile on his face. He’d darted his eyes down as he handed over the phone, and Victor had asked, “Dare I ask what he said?”

In return, all he got was those beautiful warm brown eyes flickering up to meet his with a slow, almost sultry air to them. Yuuri pursed his lips, then before Victor knew it, he’d grabbed him by the front of the lamé and yanked him down into a kiss. Yuuri then whispered a quiet, husky “love you” before sauntering towards where the cameras waited for them.

Victor stared after him, watching his hips sway and wishing so so badly that they were alone instead of surrounded by at least twelve other people.

Apparently, whatever magic words Chris had said had worked incredibly well.

It didn’t help that he had to spend the next hour or so with Yuuri draped over his back, the sheer lamé doing little to prevent the heat from his skin seeping through. And then, before they could go back to the hotel, he’d arranged for the British Museum to unite hero with namesake which took at least an hour more.

By the time they’d finished dinner and made it back, Yuuri was exhausted. And as much as it frustrated Victor, he knew Yuuri had a fencing tournament the next day, so staying up late for any reason was pretty much out of the question.

He’d settled instead for giving Yuuri a massage after he’d showered, his skin still warm and pilant as he sprawled across their bed and let Victor’s hands work their magic. It was so incredibly hard not to allow their roaming kisses deepen into something more and Victor ached with both his mind and body by the time they’d reluctantly parted.

“You should probably get some sleep,” he’d managed somehow, getting Yuuri into his pajamas and
under the covers before he could derail it into something else.

But even after kissing him goodnight, and the soothing sound of Yuuri’s calm breathing filled the room, Victor could not will himself to sleep. He felt like a wire, coiled tight yet denied release of the tension; his mind as restless as his body and his thoughts not aiding the matter in the least. The blaring noise of the Hero Network notification came like a welcoming song, one that Victor hastily silenced lest it wake Yuuri from much needed slumber.

He swiped the notification open, the app pulling up the location and details of the request. It wasn’t far, the in-app GPS signal indicating only what appeared to be ten or so blocks. And it promised at least two advanced quirk villains for him to vent his energy on.

As he began to sit up, a flicker of the memory of that night he’d woken up without Yuuri shot through his mind. Yuuri would want him to wake him, surely. But he needed to sleep and counting Victor’s acceptance to report to the scene, the app indicated at least two other heroes headed out. They’d be fine without a fourth.

Victor took a deep breath, and leaned down to press a gentle kiss to Yuuri’s temple.

“Please forgive me, love. But you need to sleep.”

He rolled out of bed then, quickly and quietly slipping out of his pajamas and into his uniform. Then, before he could step out the hotel’s door, he paused and rushed back into the room. In the dark, he was able to find himself a pen and paper, and hastily scrawled out a note.

*Yuuri. Just went out to help with an incident. Please forgive me for not waking you, but you need your sleep. Love, Victor.*

Then he raced from the room, his fingers tabbing open the app and directing him where to go, he began to think about what approach to take to the matter. The app hadn’t given specifics about the quirks of the villains, simply stating the usual “The quirks seem to be advanced and can cause moderate damage. Approach with caution.” And even the fellow heroes gave him their names, but not any idea of what quirks they had.

Hmm. That was definitely something they needed to change on the app. It was so important to know as much as you could about what skills you had and what the villains had on their side. That was part of what working at the UAT had trained him well in, planning for a group attack against known
assailants.

But this was all unknown.

As he paused to catch his breath, about five blocks still to go, he felt a tug at his heart.

Yuuri would know what to do even without knowing their quirks. He was so incredibly good at working under pressure and Victor wondered if he realized just how much of an asset that was. And for the first time, in all his years of hero work, Victor was truly feeling wrong going out alone. He’d never relied on his teammates before, always knowing if he didn’t work twice as hard and do things four times better that he’d lose the perfectly crafted life he’d built for himself.

This time though, he didn’t care about that.

He almost turned back. Almost pulled out his phone and called him. But something stopped him.

Yuri’s statement on the news. Those piercing cat-like eyes glaring out from the screen as if he knew Victor was watching.

“Right now, unless Monsoon starts pulling his weight he might as well sit out and stop awarding his boyfriend *BEEP*ing leader points for covering his ass.”

The last thing Victor wanted was for people to think Yuuri was getting some sort of favoritism for working with him. So as much as he hated to admit it, Yuri was right. He had to stop leaning on Yuuri to carry him, injury or not.

It was time he proved that Winter Monsoon was still a top hero in his own right.

He just hoped Yuuri would forgive him in the morning.
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

As always, I am so incredibly thankful for all your support!

Victor was really, truly, going to have to get them to change the app.

Upon arriving at the scene, he discovered that the two other heroes were there but, well, they were both junior heroes. Which, not to discredit their skills, would be fine usually. But usually they weren’t dealing with two threat level three villains.

One, who seemed to be going by the name Subterranean, was basically a human mole. With the ability to dive in and out of the concrete as if it was dirt. Something that Victor was sure he could probably easily deal with himself, but as it was, he had the other villain to deal with.

A spire of ice shot up from the ground near his feet, and Victor was able to dive out of the way just in time.

Another ice quirk user. Of course. Which given that one kid had water power and the other had plant power, meant only Victor with his full quirk ability could even begin to counter her.

“What’s your name again?” he asked the white clad woman who was leveling him a deadly glare.

“They call me Ice Queen,” she retorted, icicle spears crashing down on Victor’s location.

He managed, in the nick of time, to force the ice back to water. It rained down around him.

“Funny, I have a friend that calls me that.”

Victor didn’t want to admit it, but this was going to be difficult fight. Ice quirk against water cycle, it was almost a stalemate. And the two juniors were kept quite busy trying to either flood the moleman out of his tunnels or dodging his attacks by using their vines to swing out of his reach into the nearby
“Overgrowth,” Victor called out to the boy, “Watch out, he’s coming for that tree!”

The boy nodded, pulling the girl into his arms again and swinging them to another tree just before the previous one shattered from underneath. As Subterranean emerged, bits of tree flying upward around him, Liquidation sent a deluge down onto him pushing him back down.

“You really shouldn’t be multitasking,” Ice Queen sneered, the ground under Victor’s feet suddenly speared from beneath with large ice shards. He narrowly avoided one to the leg and found himself pinned in between the others.

“I’d like to be sleeping,” Victor shot back, his fingertips brushing over the nearest ice shard and turning the whole cluster of them back to water. “And I’d also like to be less wet, but here we are.”

She began fiercely lashing out, icicles coming from above and below, as she shot small bits of hail at him directly. All Victor could do was throw up ice sheets of his own to block, the sound of ice shattering echoing in the night.

As he slid backwards, he threw up a curved wall, the ice arching over him as if a protective wave had erupted out from the pavement. It was all he could do and yet he still hit the ground hard on his back, his bad side getting the brunt of it and sending daggers of pain into him.

“Shit.”

“Winter Monsoon, are you okay?”

Liquidation summoned up a wave of her own and knocked Ice Queen back, buying them a few moments of time.

“Yeah. Thanks.”

The girl bit her lip, her eyes somber beneath her mask.
“I’m sorry I can’t revert the ice like you can. I wish I could help more…”

Victor shook his head. It wasn’t her fault that her powers could only move existing water not create any, and the last thing he wanted was multiple heroes at the scene beating themselves up about their inability to do things right.

“You’re doing great. I think you’re starting to wear Subterranean down some.”

She stared at him, clearly shocked by the compliment.

“I mean it. You two are doing a great job against two really tough villains, so don’t worry okay? You’re doing fine.”

Liquidation nodded, a small smile on her lips. “Thank you. That means a lot coming from you.”

Winter Monsoon is an icon. A symbol of peace that cannot ever show any sign of weakness.

The words of his coach echoed in his mind, a harsh reminder of why he was so stupidly determined to do this by himself. He had something to prove. To Yuri Plisetsky. To those people who thought he was just some manipulative faker. And most of all, to himself.

If he couldn’t handle this, then maybe he should sit things out.

As he slowly got to his feet, his side throbbing around the edges of the scar in a way that felt like it was freezing from the inside out, he felt the slight vibration from where he had his phone tucked in the pocket of his uniform.

He knew already who it would be.

And as much as he wanted to ignore it, he knew he couldn’t do that. Not to Yuuri.

He pulled his bluetooth out of its pocket on the back of his gloves and set it in his ear, his eyes already sharply scanning the area for the next attack.
“Victor, what’s going on? Where are you?”

He grimaced at his tone, trying not to let too many emotions show on his face as Ice Queen walked closer to him again.

“Sorry. I didn’t want to wake you.”

She threw a shard at his feet, then as he dodged that, speared another down from above. It just missed Victor’s arm.

“I know I can’t really say anything, because yes I did that to you, but…”

“But you’re mad at me. It’s understandable.”

He threw shards of his own in her path, hoping he could at least keep her at a safe distance.

“I’m not mad at you, Victor. I’m worried.”

Victor sighed. That was almost worse. At least he did something that would warrant Yuuri being mad, but worried? He didn’t want to cause that at all. He didn’t want to be injured to the point that Yuuri or anyone else felt like they had to worry about him at all times.

He should be able to handle this by himself. He was Winter Monsoon, right?

Ice Queen slid a sheet of ice across the ground, and Victor couldn’t keep his balance. As he fell backwards, he managed to throw a hand back behind him; hoping for a nice pile of snow but not fast enough. It was mostly ice instead.

He gasped out in pain as he hit it.

He expected perhaps Yuuri to yell at him, to demand to know where he was. What he hadn’t
expected was the quiet and almost inaudible little voice that seemed say something, probably a swear in Japanese, before saying softly and firmly.

“I’m coming whether you like it or not.”

He hung up before Victor could even make any attempt at a reply.

Yuuri’s finger hovered over the Hero Network app, the button next to the incident for “request backup,” something he almost felt like he should use.

But he knew it was bad enough that he was coming to Victor’s aid and knew, perhaps far better than Victor did, exactly the type of trouble one could get into trying to prove themselves.

It had taken Yuuri a few situations where he’d overdone it and one impassioned and worried rant from Phichit before he’d understood that there was a difference between proving yourself and putting yourself in danger. No one is underestimating your skills, Yuuri. But you cannot save the whole world by yourself and you need to realize that it’s okay to ask for help too.

To be truthful, it was still something Yuuri struggled with a lot. He didn’t want people to think he was weak, to make assumptions about his talent if he called for help with a seemingly easy villain. Perhaps that was why he was so incredibly worried about Victor now, because he understood exactly what feeling like that and carrying that burden was like.

That one little comment from Yuri and of course, of course, Victor was going to do something stupid like this. And Yuuri knew that no amount of reasoning was going to cut it, so he really had no choice but to just go there against Victor’s wishes. Because it wasn’t that he doubted that Victor was capable, not that he thought his injury made him weak, but because he loved him and wanted him safe. A hero’s job wasn’t easy, and it was sad that the nature of the fame associated with it turned it into a competition, but when heroes like JJ and Yuri were fighting over who got points and Victor was left feeling like he had something to prove, Yuuri knew it was because they all felt like they had a reputation to uphold. Teamwork became an afterthought.

Deep down, if push came to shove, every single hero appreciated working together with others. It might make the fight less showy and solve the problem sooner, but that was good wasn’t it? That meant instead of wasting time dealing with a villain you could spend it with someone you cared about. That was part of why Yuuri had come to love fighting alongside Victor so incredibly much,
because if they could help one another and go back to bed together sooner, wasn’t that better?

It was hard to both understand how Victor felt and to know that he was wrong.

Yuuri had finally gotten close enough he could see the fight off in the distance, a gathering of onlookers watching from behind a news truck that had camped out. It figured, even in the middle of the night, they were always ready to find tomorrow’s headline.

“Ah, it’s Hokusai Wave!” a voice in the crowd called out, drawing their attention around to him.

Yuuri slowed his running to give them a small wave and the reporters caught his eye. He gave them a sheepish smile.

“Sorry I’m late, a certain loving boyfriend of mine thought I needed to sleep.”

There was a chorus of awws and “that’s so sweet” and the like and Yuuri had to fight back a blush. The last thing he wanted was the media trying to use Victor running off ahead of him as some reason to act like they were fighting.

Once past the media barricade, Yuuri noticed the Villain Suppression Force waiting by the sidelines as well. Which was never a good sign. If they were here but the villains still weren’t under control yet…

Yuuri quickly surveyed the scene before him, the whole pavement torn up due to Subterranean’s burrows, two trees looked like they’d been smashed to pieces by lightning, and the far edge by nearest building was an ice labyrinth with so much snow and ice surrounding it it looked like Antarctica had just appeared in the middle of London.

He made for a small alcove of ice as fast as his legs would carry him.

As he ran past, he saw two younger heroes working to route the flow of the water from a nearby fire hydrant that had been burst open. One, skillfully streaming the water from there into the broken concrete, creating a series of little rivers all across the intersection. The other, was using sturdy looking vines to pull the large pieces that remained from one of the trees into place.

“You two doing okay?” He asked, pausing long enough to draw close to them.
The boy nodded. “Yeah, Winter Monsoon came up with a great idea to try and catch this guy, so he’s holding off the crazy ice lady while we set it up.”

The girl smiled at Yuuri. “I can’t believe I can now say I’ve fought alongside Winter Monsoon and Hokusai Wave. My mom’s gonna be so proud.”

Yuuri felt a little swell of pride at that, returning her smile.

“Well, I have faith you’ll both get this guy. I’m gonna go make sure Winter Monsoon doesn’t need any help.”

The two younger heroes seemed surprised, but flattered that he wasn’t sticking around to make sure they could do it by themselves. Yuuri knew that Victor wouldn’t trust them with anything he didn’t think they could handle, so right now, Yuuri was far more worried about him than anything else.

Drawing his sabre, he stabbed it into a sheet of ice and used force to crack it, diving into the little ice cavern it had blocked off. Because Yuuri knew, after years and years of watching him, that when Victor was holding out against a villain, he would always create a complex series of ice around him. A maze that only he could navigate, and he’d wait at the heart of it and lure the villain right into his trap, pulling all the ice in on them once they got in far enough.

Winter Monsoon’s tunnel walls had two types, tall flat sheets of ice that were meant like a house of cards, to fall in just when he needed them to, and small curved tunnels that looked like waves frozen on a beach. Anyone who ever studied Victor’s methods knew the second was the best way to get to the heart of the maze without springing the trap.

But, well, Yuuri wasn’t sure how many people analyzed Winter Monsoon to quite the degree he did.

At each bend or turn, Yuuri would pause, the deluge of hail from the villain becoming non stop as he grew closer and closer to the center. It looked like she was hoping to flush Victor out from further away, but Yuuri knew that wouldn’t work. It never did. Only Inferno, who could burn his way out, had ever escaped from this sort of trap in all the battles in which Victor had used it.

So following the icy waves, weaving in and out and around all the spears of ice that had been throw into the maze from above, Yuuri finally found what he was looking for.
“Hey, sorry I’m late.”

Victor gave him an attempt at a smile, but it came out more a grimace.

“I’m sorry, you must be furious.”

Yuuri shook his head, climbing down into the small little cavern where Victor was working to create more ice from.

“No, I told you, I’m just worried.” He leaned down and pressed a kiss to Victor’s forehead. “Now what can I do to help you, Winter Monsoon?”

A flicker of emotion seemed to ripple across Victor’s features- shock slowly replaced with that touched smile Yuuri had only seen when they were alone together.

“I was hoping to finish this up before you got here, but this Ice Queen decided to play the long game. Which, well...” Victor pressed a hand briefly over his side and that’s when Yuuri realized the shine on his outfit wasn’t water. It was frost.

“Victor you’re...”

“Shh, I know, I’m overdoing it,” he said, reaching out and taking Yuuri by the hand. Slowly, he pulled him close, until Yuuri sat behind him with his arms wrapped protectively around his waist. “But thankfully, I can hold out a little longer if I could just get warm.”

He eased back into Yuuri’s arms at that, the severe chill of his body making Yuuri clutch him tighter instinctively.

“I know it’s kind of advanced quirk use, but you can speed it up if you want,” Victor offered and he sounded so tired. “I usually would use one hand to create ice and another to sublimate the ice into vapor off of my body so I could keep fighting. Since I got injured though, I’ve only got enough energy to do one thing.”
“How?” Yuuri asked, pressing ever closer. Victor was so cold. How could he fight like this?

Victor sighed, his eyes growing heavy. He was going to give himself hypothermia at this rate. Yuuri suddenly regretted that he hadn’t worked harder at trying to understand Victor’s quirk.

“I don’t know how to explain it. It’s just like… you have different settings on a microwave. Some are half power, they’d turn the frost to water, which given the air around me right now would just refreeze. So you have to use the higher setting, skip past water and go right to steam. A little of it will frost back on me, but not as much.”

Yuuri closed his eyes, his hand splaying its fingers over the muscles on Victor’s side, which even with his uniform over them, felt even more taut than normal. He had to control the power of this quirk. He had to find a way to help Victor now.

A shatter of ice punctured into the ice above them, raining it down onto them. The villain was getting closer. Victor needed to have enough strength to spring his trap.

But thinking about a microwave and steam and water…it just didn’t help. No matter how Yuuri tried to think about it, he couldn’t wrap his mind around what he needed to do.

“It’s a lunge not a thrust, Yuuri,” Victor said, voice a little firmer now, as if even just having Yuuri there had given him enough warmth to fight a little longer. “In fencing. It’s a lunge.”

Immediately, Yuuri understood. The power he’d use to thrust was enough to get it to water. He needed to lunge.

Pulling Victor closer, Yuuri smiled against the shell of his ear. “Looks like you’ve been paying attention to more than my backside during fencing practice.”

Victor chuckled. “And it looks like you just needed the right analogy.”

Yuuri’s eyes shot open at that, and sure enough, the frost was disappearing off Victor’s uniform and there was no water left behind. There was no way he was melting it with just his body heat that fast, so he had to be…
“If you want to go back to bed now, use your new trick to surprise our incoming visitor. She’s above two or three sheets in front of us now. A little fog would be a nice touch.”

Partially giddy with relief and partially, feeling that tug in his gut that he’d begun to understand was this shared quirk at work, excited that he’d done it, Yuuri held one arm out alongside Victor’s.

“Ready?”

“Yeah.”

Ice Queen’s spear shattered the sheets in front of them, and she raised her arm ready to strike down at them.

Victor shot ice forward and as he did, Yuuri turned it into vapor, a thick misty fog coming in between them.

“Now, pull the ice towards us. Just like you would an opponent’s blade.”

Together, they gave it a tug, and the rows and rows of ice sheets toppled inward like dominoes, crashing down on the villain before she could manage a counterattack. If it was like most of Victor’s traps, the force should be enough to knock her unconscious.

Victor turned his head, pressing a kiss to the tip of Yuuri’s nose.

“Thank you.”

Yuuri leaned his head in, resting it against Victor’s as he gave him a gentle squeeze.

“We should be thanking you. All I did was make a little steam.”

Victor turned in his arms at that, pressing a slow, languid kiss to his lips. Then he pulled back, his eyes searching.
“So, definitely not mad?”

Yuuri nuzzled his nose against Victor’s with a smile.

“No. Except maybe a little bit at Leopard for making you feel like you had to prove something in the first place. Although, I will say this was a pretty nice rebuttal.”

Victor broke into a smile at that.

“You think so?”

“Your ice labyrinth technique is one of the coolest hero moves in the world, Victor. You haven’t used it since last year against Geomancy and that was before your fought Inferno.”

Victor’s eyes lit up at that, but he didn’t say anything more, simply tucked his head over Yuuri’s shoulder and hugged him close.

“Let’s get you back in a warm bed, okay?”

Victor nodded. “Only if you’re coming with me.”

“Of course. There’s nowhere else I’d rather be than with you.”

At this rate, Yuuri was going to get very little sleep.

After talking with the authorities, the news crew and then making it back to the hotel, both of them were dead tired. However, Yuuri insisted he wasn’t going to sleep until Victor soaked in a hot bath awhile, so he obliged.
In turn, Victor had insisted he join him.

He hadn’t expected to discover that a slightly chilly Yuuri who was a bit sleepy was perhaps even cuter and cuddlier than normal.

“And another thing,” Yuuri continued on his ramble, “That idea you had for Liquidation and Overgrowth? That was amazing. Having her lay out water across the concrete so she could use it as a net as he emerged? So smart. You go on about me thinking ahead, but that was the same thing! A net of water to catch him, then as he broke out of that, using the vines to slingshot a net of vines around him? He ended up dangling from a tree like a cartoon villain in a rope trap!”

He giggled a little to himself at the thought.

Yuuri was also, apparently, the type to ramble if he was trying to keep himself awake.

“Those two said so many nice things about you to the news reporters too.”

“Well, I doubt they were going to say something bad…”

“Vic-tor,” he emphasized the name by nuzzling in closer, his chin hooked over Victor’s shoulder from where he sat behind him. “Let me tell you did a good job even if you hurt yourself, okay?”

Victor let out a resigned sigh. All he could worry about was Yuuri being upset with him and once that was out of the way, all he could do was regret ever leaving him behind in the first place. It didn’t help that his aching muscles and chilled skin only made him grumpier about the situation.

But Yuuri wasn’t having it.

“Look, I acknowledge that what you did was pretty reckless and kind of stupid. But,” Yuuri punctuated this with a sloppy kiss to Victor’s cheek, “I would have possibly done the exact same stupid thing, so I can’t really berate you for it.”

“Yakov would. He would go on and on….”
“Yakov isn’t here. You need to stop letting his rants influence every little thing you do, Victor. You can make mistakes. And as long as you acknowledge that going at it alone was silly and you don’t plan on doing it again, then there’s nothing to worry about.”

Yuuri hand drifted lower then, resting right over Victor’s injury and brushing the top of his hip bone. He seemed to realize the proximity immediately and quickly pulled it back up higher.

“Victor,” he murmured, words almost muffled as he muttered them against his shoulder, “you’re a good hero. It doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks. You are an amazing hero and so many people, myself included, look up to you.”

“Yuuri…”

“And anyone who really cares about you isn’t going to think any less of you because you’re injured. What you just did was amazing and yeah, your body is probably going to hate you for it tomorrow, but the important thing is that you weren’t hurt severely. It’s okay to ask for backup instead of pushing yourself until you break.”

Victor shifted then, bringing a hand up to place over Yuuri’s on his side, his fingers slowly closing around his hand and clutching it tight.

“It’s hard to. I’m not used to…having to ask for help. It makes me feel like…”

“Stop. Nope. Don’t go there.”

Victor turned then, eyes wide.

Yuuri gave him a knowing smile.

“If you aren’t going to let me sulk about myself then I’m sure as hell not about to let you do it either. You’re not weak. You just have less energy and because of that, you’re having to rethink how you battle. That doesn’t make you weak or useless or anything like that. Remember, what helped you tonight wasn’t anything but your quirk. It just used my energy to work.”
“I don’t know if I’d put it like that.”

Yuuri huffed. “Victor. You built that trap. You told those kids how to build theirs. All I did was help you tip that first domino over so it all started tumbling in. The rest was all you.”

He busied himself studying his fingertips, and frowning at the way they’d begun to wrinkle in the water.

“We should probably get to sleep…”

For the moment, Yuuri seemed to agree. Shifting until he could pull the drain and then stepping out to wrap himself in a towel before coaxing Victor out into another. But as Victor got out of the tub, Yuuri’s settled his hands once more on his shoulders.

He looked up and was met with a piercing stare.

“Victor, I know everything’s been kind of shitty lately. People being jerks about your quirk, Yuri saying stuff he shouldn't. I get how that’s probably made you feel like you’ve got to step up and make a point. But you don’t have to make that point alone. I may want to be the top hero, but I want to do that at your side.”

Blue eyes went wide as the words settled around him.

“It’s the most fun I’ve ever had being a hero, Victor. Fighting alongside you. And if you’ve got something to prove, then I want to be right there with you to help prove it. Just like I know you’ll be right there for me.”

And Victor couldn’t find a single word, his arms enveloping Yuuri in a hug and his breath catching as he pulled him close. Slowly, he reached a hand up, brushing aside the little stray hairs that had stuck to Yuuri’s forehead; then he kissed him there, then his cheek, then his lips, slow and searching, trying to put all the words he couldn’t find into his action.

When he pulled back, a few words finally bubbled to the surface.
“Okay. Together then?”

Yuuri smiled warm and proud.

“Yes. Together.”

Victor seemed to be a little more believing come the morning.

And, much to Yuuri’s bafflement, far more awake than anyone had any right to be this early. Victor had been quoting bits and pieces of articles and headlines to Yuuri their entire trip to Scotland, his smile seeming to only grow brighter and brighter. Even mentions of him possibly being tired or injured, for once, hadn’t been spun negatively by the media and Yuuri found himself for once much happier after hearing the news than he usually was.

Winter Monsoon STORMS back onto the scene!

Battle-worn Winter Monsoon held up by Hokusai Wave so he can finish the fight!

_Instead of taking the points for himself, Wave held up a tired Monsoon so he could finish what he started, setting an example for heroes everywhere that teamwork should be more important than points._

_Following in the steps of the worldwide loved Comet and Faunaa, Winter Monsoon and Hokusai Wave seem to be forgoing the focus on points and instead worked together to best one of England’s more notorious villains, Ice Queen._

Junior heroes on the scene said it was truly inspiring to see two of the top heroes in action. “Winter Monsoon was so kind and supportive in person,” Liquidation said to reporters at the scene. “Both of them put their faith in us to handle one villain, despite us being junior heroes. It meant a lot to us, to be treated as equals.” Overgrowth also couldn’t stop from praising the pro heroes, “I don’t think I will ever forget this night. To be treated just like any other hero on the scene by Winter Monsoon and Hokusai Wave made me feel like all the work I’ve put into being a hero isn’t in vain after all. It’s really inspired me to keep fighting even harder going forward!”
“Oh, well.” Victor suddenly got rather quiet and his cheeks had grown red.

“What now?” Yuuri asked, his brain not awake enough to tell by his reaction if it was something good or not.

Victor cleared his throat and held his phone over to where Yuuri could read it, his finger highlighting one sentence out of the article.

*Onlookers said Wave showed up later than Monsoon with his hair tousled and seeming a bit out of breath. One even remarked that it seemed like the two might have had their evening’s activities interrupted by the villain outbreak.*

Well. It was at least better than them thinking they were fighting? Yuuri could feel his own face growing warm, finally darting his eyes away from the sentence. It was incredibly weird to see some tabloid speculating about his and Victor’s sex life.

“Sorry, I know you’re not used to this kind of publicity,” Victor began but Yuuri cut him off with a finger over his lips, quickly replacing it with a peck from his lips.

“As extremely embarrassing as it is, I’m just glad they didn’t think we were fighting or something stupid like that,” Yuuri mumbled, feeling like his neck was beginning to burn along with his cheeks.

“Your hair was only partially slicked back and you had your glasses too.”

Yuuri tried to think back on it, but he really couldn’t remember. He was too worried at the time to think about much outside getting his uniform on and getting to Victor.

“It explains the text I got from Chris this morning at least. I just thought he was being weird.”

Victor blinked. “Oh no, what did Chris say? Do I need to talk to him?”

Yuuri shook his head, pulling out his phone and holding it out so Victor could see, because well he
certainly wasn’t about to say it aloud.

*No plane sex I don’t care how much you want to bone, you’ll regret it later.*

Victor sighed, dragging a hand down his face. “And I thought his to me was bad.”

Yuuri stifled a chuckle at that. It shouldn’t be funny, but well...not everyone had some weird friend texting them sex advice.

“Dare I ask?”

He pulled it open and held it over.

*If those villains interrupted you two finally getting some I’m going to punch them into next year. I have worked too hard (pun totally intended ^._~) for this. Let my best friend get laid! Please he could use it!*  

Yuuri found himself mimicking Victor’s earlier motions, his hand sliding down his face until it settled over his mouth.

“You know,” he finally said after a moment, “I always wondered if Smolder was like this in person or if it was just for show. Now I’m regretting ever wanting to know.”

Victor chuckled at that. “Well, at least I managed to get back at him. I called him this morning when I couldn’t get a hold of Hayami.”

“Oh yeah, you said you were going to call about altering the app’s data while I was in the shower.”

He put an arm around Yuuri’s shoulder and leaned his head over against him.

“Yeah. I found out why Hayami wasn’t answering his phone. And Chris is not a morning person, so...I think we’ll have to consider this payback for now.”
Yuuri had to smile at that. It was nice to see Victor in a better mood, and even if he had to sacrifice what little sleep he might have gotten on the plane, it was worth it all to see Victor smiling like this.
Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

On this wonderful Christmas Eve, I just want to thank each and every person who's read this story and commented or kudos or liked or reblogged. Every time I update I'm overwhelmed by your kindness and this story wouldn't be on its 30th chapter (!!!!) without your support. Thank you all!

Watching Yuuri Katsuki during a fencing bout was much like watching a moving work of art.

Victor had gotten better, much better in fact, at following the action in a match. He could put names to actions now, and had gotten especially good at remembering the ones Yuuri favored. Plus, seeing Yuuri fence against not only skilled fencers but quirk users was much different than watching him against Yuri.

For unlike Yuri, the fencers here knew exactly how to use their quirk to an advantage instead of only beginning to have the basics of it. That was one thing Yuuri was most excited about when Victor told him about the Stirling Sword- it was a fencing tournament that catered to both fencers and fencers with quirks. Each entrant would face each opponent twice- once with a quirk inhibitor, once without. It made the advancement of the brackets rather interesting, and meant that the ones that advanced had to be skilled in both methods of fencing.

Yuuri had faced mostly quirk users with types of speed enhancements, but they'd been easily beaten. And even the opponent with an invisibility quirk that made the match appear as if it was Yuuri against a floating blade didn’t stand a chance.

The only opponent that he seemed to find daunting was a girl with a flight quirk called Jenny Bird, so it didn’t surprise Victor at all that after all the brackets culminated, they were the two finalists.

The final round was divided into two parts, the first seven points had to be quirkless. Then whoever had the lead got to choose whether they wanted to keep the eighth point quirkless or switch over immediately to using their quirk. The final seven points would be with quirk.

Victor could tell by the pleased smile on Yuuri’s face that he was enjoying himself immensely and he couldn’t help but steal a moment of his time before he began his final bout.
“I’m guessing you’re awake now?”

Yuuri had been stifling a yawn and he gave Victor an eyeroll before he stood up beside him.

“How everyone is a natural morning person like you. But I suppose having a lot of people trying to stab you tends to wake you up some.”

Unable to resist, Victor immediately pulled Yuuri into an embrace.

“How- Victor!”

“I’m glad you’re having fun. I’ve been worried about you.”

Yuuri eased into his arms at that. “I’m..I’m doing okay.”

“You’ve really been looking after me,” Victor began, his hands sliding down Yuuri’s back until they settled around his waist. “Even though I’d promised I’d be the one doing that this trip.”

Yuuri trailed his hand down Victor’s chest at that, letting one dip lower and press against his side.

“I like worrying about you.” Yuuri shook his head. “Sorry, that came out wrong. I don’t like you having things that upset you or hurt you, but...I feel like at least I’m being a good boyfriend when I can take care of you.”

“Yuuri…”

He sighed, clearly trying to find his words. “I mean, what I’m trying to say is, I don’t want a relationship that’s just you taking care of me. It’s gotta go both ways. Both of us are...kind of bad at trying to hide our emotions when things are bothering us. We try to bottle it up and pretend like everything’s fine when it’s clearly not. And…”

Yuuri leaned back then, his eyes piercing as they met Victor’s. “Even now, you know something’s off with me, don’t you?”
Victor’s gaze softened at that. “It seems to be getting better, but I can tell you have something on your mind that’s bothering you, at least.”

He hung his head forward, resting it against Victor’s chest as he let out a soft snort.

“A lot of little somethings. Mostly stupid stuff that I know shouldn’t bother me, but it does.”

“Ah,” he replied. “Can I do anything to help?”

“You are helping,” Yuuri asserted, wrapping his arms around Victor’s back and nuzzling in closer. “Just by being here with me, you’re helping.”

Victor pulled him just a smidge closer at that, as if erasing the space between them might help even more.

“I’m glad. Because, I like worrying about you too.”

He didn’t need to say anymore than that, because he knew Yuuri immediately understood. It was something that made Victor feel like he was doing this relationship thing better too. Victor leaned in and pressed a kiss to Yuuri’s temple.

“Is there anything you want to talk about? Or is this enough?”

Yuuri huffed out another sigh, as if now that his guard was down he could finally let all the sighs out.

“I think stabbing things is helping some of it.”

“Okay, and the rest?”

Yuuri pulled back at that, looking up to Victor with something new in his eyes. After a moment, he
leaned in, capturing Victor’s lips in a slow, searching kiss.

At that, Victor understood what the other problem was.

Yuuri was worried about him.

Which, to be fair, was understandable considering how hard he’d pushed himself last night. But aside from a nagging twinge in his side in the muscles around the injury, there wasn’t much else that could be done. Yuuri had already done everything he could- made sure Victor got warmed up in a bath immediately after the battle, made sure he took his medicine before they fell asleep, and he’d even offered that morning despite clearly being exhausted himself to carry some of Victor’s luggage.

“I’ll be okay,” Victor reassured him as he leaned back from the kiss, resting his forehead against Yuuri’s. “Just no ice labyrinths for awhile, I think. At least not until this pain goes away.”

“Are you sure?”

“I wouldn’t say no to a massage when we get to Germany this evening. Especially if it comes with a helping of kisses.”

Victor gave a wink at that and Yuuri snorted out a laugh, despite his cheeks flushing pink.

“Okay,” he replied after a moment, smiling wide. “I think I can arrange that.”

And although they finally had to part so Yuuri could prepare for his bout, that little smile stayed on his face up until the moment he went to pull his mask on.

Even without her quirk, Jenny Bird was extremely light on her feet.

Yuuri had a feeling after their first bout that he’d probably be seeing her again in the finals, having already begun to think out strategy and methods to counter her techniques. As it was, without a quirk, Yuuri had a slight advantage. With one, she did.
All he needed to do was get the lead by the seventh point so he could pick quirkless for the eighth.

With one less worry prickling at his mind, he felt a bit looser than he did last time against her. And it was true, stabbing something did help him work through the other frustrations and issues that hovered in his mind.

“Allez!”

*Like what was Yuri thinking starting this crap with JJ and dragging Victor into it?* Yuuri retreated from Jenny’s advance-lunge with a esquive, sidestepping the attack and issuing one of his own. Green light on. 1-0. Yuuri went back to the line, his thoughts simmering as he did. *Why bring Victor into it at all? Wasn’t that what Yuri wanted to avoid?*

“Alllez!”

Jenny was faster this time, her attack landing at the same moment Yuuri’s did. It was 2-1.

*Or perhaps that was Yuri’s problem. He was still uncertain where his place was with Victor still in the picture. He’s been told he’s the replacement, but there’s no one to replace now that Victor’s still fighting. He feels threatened.*

“Alllez!”

Jenny tried for a beat, hoping to bait Yuuri into an attack. Another beat. Then another. Then she leunged suddenly, Yuuri barely having the time to parry it and slide into an in-quartata out of the way. They disengaged and stood at an impasse for a moment.

*If you feel threatened, then you just need to shine on your own. Make your own story. Make it where they can’t ignore you.*

Yuuri darted forward with a sudden lunge, catching the outside of Jenny’s arm. Green light on. 3-1.
Yuuri’s thoughts shifted then, his own place in the picture now being scrutinized by his mind’s usual attack of irrational thoughts.

“Allez!”

*Just like I can’t let myself slip too far in the rankings. Without arranged battles, I could have weeks or months where I only earn a few points.* Yuuri tried advancing on Jenny, only to have his blade parried back every time he tried for a point.

*If I’m going to have a chance, I’ve got to give it everything I’ve got against these quirked heroes.*

She tried for a point, but Yuuri caught it with his blade. He made a circular transfer, moving the point out around in a circle before countering the attack with one of his own. But she recovered just as fast. Both lights went on. 4-2.

*Yuri and the UAT have the advantage, being in a high traffic city with lots of villains looking to make a name for themselves by fighting the big names. But I can’t get hung up on points either. I’ve got to do my job first and foremost.*

“Allez!”

Jenny gave a stomp, the momentary distraction catching Yuuri off guard. She scored as he tried to recover. 4-3.

*And I’m nothing compared to those heroes. Just some quirkless fencer.*

He took a deep breath, not about to make that mistake again.

“Allez!”

She tried for a beat, but he was ready, parrying right off it and into a riposte as he advance-lungered back at her. Green light on. 5-3.
A quirkless fencer who thinks he has a chance at being the top hero or holding Victor’s attention for more than a few months. What a joke.

“Allez!”

This time, Yuuri stomped out an appel. But it didn’t shake her. She attacked. Yuuri parried. He attacked, she parried. They disengaged and each took a step back. There was a beat. Another. She was trying to bait him into a parry, he could tell. She wanted to use her feather light steps to launch a riposte. But he wasn’t going to allow that. He could see it now. Little tells, the shift of weight from one leg to another, and he easily avoided the lunge, flicking his blade as she dove past and tapping her on the back for a point. Green light on. 6-3.

It’s a fluke. Just luck. Luck that’s going to run out.

“Allez!”

Jenny took a slow step forward, and then before Yuuri could catch it, followed it up with a lunge. A tempo patinando. Red light. 6-4.

“Yuuri! Ganbaranba!”

Yuuri blinked, Victor’s voice ringing out over the cheers of the crowd and the noise of the room. Victor. Cheering him on in Yuuri’s home dialect.

“Allez!”

But maybe, I can hold onto that luck a little longer.

Yuuri dropped a hand to the strip, dodging under Jenny’s blade in a slightly less flashy passata-sotto. Green light. 7-4. He’d get to choose the next point’s type.

The referee turned to him. “What’s your choice?”
Yuuri looked to Victor, smiling brightly at him, those dimples there that had become an increasingly common thing.

“With a quirk.”

The crowd, not knowing Yuuri’s weakness, just cheered. But Victor knew, his blue eyes wide as he looked to Yuuri with surprise.

*But it’s not disbelief*, Yuuri reminded himself. *If anything, Victor believes in me more than I do. He knows I can match quirks with pure skill. He’s said so countless times!*

Yuuri waited as they took off the quirk inhibitors on both the competitors, then he turned back to his opponent.

*Only I know I have this weakness. If an opponent doesn’t know your weakness, then it’s not a weakness. It’s your strength. You know something they don’t. Use it to your advantage.*

He could hear Minako telling him those words, and for a moment, he wondered if she ever realized how much they’d mean to him outside of fencing.

Jenny was preparing to counter a quirk Yuuri didn’t have.

“Allez!”

Then Yuuri was going to have to show her that he didn’t need a quirk to do this at all.

He rushed towards her, hoping she’d take his lunge as him using some sort of speed quirk. She did, floating up out of the way of his blade in a way that meant she wasn’t expecting him to be able to stop quickly. Yuuri shifted his lunge into a pass backwards, reversing his footwork and using his blade to catch her leg where it hovered in the air. Green light. 8-4.

*Having a quirk isn’t always an advantage.*
Yuuri could hear Victor’s cheers over the rest and he felt his heart swell.

*Maybe that’s exactly what the hero world needs to shake things up. A quirkless hero that doesn’t play by their rules.*

“Allez!”

This time, Jenny tried for a lunge; using the momentum to flip into the air in an easy cartwheel. Bringing her blade down from above, she was expecting Yuuri’s quirk to not have a chance to counter it.

*A quirk has limitations. My only limit is myself.*

He caught the blade with his own, binding it and shifting it from fourth position down into the eighth; extending his arm and lunging just then to finish his attack. Green light. 9-4.

Jenny seemed to realize now that her assumptions about his quirk weren’t working out, the two of them falling back into a pattern of waiting each other out and trying to bait an attack out of them. All it got for them was double touches. 10-5. 11-6. 12-7. 13-8.

That point seemed to be the warning Jenny needed, and much like she had during their last quirked match, this time she pulled out all the stops. A passata-sotto where she followed through by floating up at the last minute. 13-9. A dodge of Yuuri’s blade in which she nimbly jumped up and hovered right above the tip before striking down with her own. 13-10. She was clearly using her quirk more, seeming to float just out of reach of Yuuri’s attacks. 13-11. 13-12. Finally, she tied it up. 13-13.

Two more points.

Yuuri took a deep breath, his eyes seeking out Victor’s in the crowd for a brief moment.

*I need to push past my limits. I need to go beyond the beyond.*

“Allez!”
Yuuri moved in a flash, whipping his arm around his neck and executing a perfect Chamley Watson that struck a point into Jenny’s back before she could realize he’d even moved. Green light on. 14-13.

_I gotta push myself through this. Push past all my doubts and worries. Plus ultra. No more holding back. I’m going further than I’ve gone before. Just watch me._

“Allez!”

Even though Yuuri was fencing épée, where the flèche wasn’t against the rules, he knew no one would consider a flunge during an épée bout. He launched a jump up from his front foot, and Jenny tried to use her quirk to come up and counter it. Quarte parry. She tried a quick riposte, and Yuuri pushed it further. Counter seconde parry, and his riposte just clipping her wrist before his feet finally hit the ground again. Green light. 15-13.

Yuuri let out a whooping yell as he disengaged. Pumping his fist and feeling his heart swell with pride. He did this. That last bout against Yuri wasn’t just luck. He beat a skilled fencer with a quirk. With nothing but his own skills.

He could be a top hero without a quirk too.

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**Breaking News: IHU Press Conference**

“In the shadow of the recent points drama, the IHU has come forward today with amendments to the system that hope to resolve this matter in the future. Here’s Hayami Masumi, Hero Liaisons Officer, on the new changes.”

“Much like sporting events, we are now implementing a few changes to make sure the issuing of points is considered fair by all parties involved in the altercation. Heroes engaging in in-fighting with other heroes during an incident are now subject to disciplinary actions. At the first incident in which this happens, the IHU will issue the hero a yellow card that will deduct 10% of the points earned at that incident. If there are any repeat incidents with a hero causing drama again, they will be issued a red card and will lose 50% of the points earned during that incident. Heroes accumulating three red cards will be withdrawn from the UAT selection process.”
Hayami shifted some papers, then offered the crowd another smile.

“We hope that neither of these will need to be used, of course. For heroes who feel they were unfairly shorted points or that another hero was unfairly awarded points, we now have a form for the hero to contest the matter. Any incident with contested points will undergo evaluation by a panel of IHU judges after looking at any camera footage and hearing any reports from other heroes or civilians at the scene. The recent incident with King JJ and The Leopard has begun this process already and we will withhold the awarding of the capture points until the panel has come to their decision. As always, we encourage heroes to work with their fellow heroes first and foremost.”

“What about the claim that you’ll lose points if you team up with other heroes?” a reporter called out from the crowd.

Hayami just smiled, confidently leaning back towards the microphone.

“Right now, our top hero in the world has been involved in multiple incidents with many heroes involved and he seems to be holding onto his lead despite that. For anyone who needs further proof, you can see on the screen the calculated points that worldwide famous Comet and Faunaa would have if they were entered into the UAT selection process. As you can see, they easily make second and third rank despite working often with each other or local heroes. We currently cannot see any evidence that teamwork hinders a hero earning points.”

When the audience remained silent, Hayami continued.

“That all being said, on behalf the IHU, we would like to commend Winter Monsoon and Hokusai Wave for their professional manner while working with two junior heroes. Both of the young heroes have contacted us to make sure we knew how grateful they were for the faith and trust these two pros put in them, and we hope that they serve as an example to pro heroes everywhere that working with even junior heroes does not necessitate grandstanding. We hope to see more teamwork and leadership from the UAT hopefuls this year and kindly remind them that we have still not finalized the selection process. As it stands, it is very likely that teamwork and the ability to work with other heroes without problem will be a point that the judges consider heavily in their selection.”

The screen went back the HNN reporter at her desk.

“As you can see, it seems the IHU has had quite enough of the behavior of some of their hopefuls. The earlier incident with Crispino twins and now this recent one only seeming to mar the image that
the UAT hopes to uphold as a paragon of teamwork and hope for the world’s peoples. I have a feeling we can expect to see a better effort from all the hopefuls after these new rules and comments.”

The layover in Amsterdam was a disaster.

Usually, they’d been in and out of the airports as quickly as they could; mostly just having to deal with the throng of reporters and fans as they came and went. But this time they had an almost two hour layover and it meant the screaming crowds were now even more in their personal space.

Victor usually hated crowds like this, although no one would be the wiser considering how good he’d gotten at smiling and interacting with fans. It wasn’t that he didn’t appreciate the outpouring of love from fans, it was those handful of really pushy fans that were the problem.

Most fans were good, kept themselves at a respectable distance, and only got closer to pose for photos. Sometimes, someone would ask for a hug; but at least they asked. But there was that handful that seemed to think that being a top hero meant they were public property.

For as much as Victor loved those shy fans that asked for a hug, he’d been on the receiving end of far too much affection he didn’t ask for. He’d been groped, he’d been kissed, in fact the few times he’d been practically bowled over with a hug were the better of the times.

Chris had always been able to laugh such situations off, but for Victor it shook him to a degree that was noticeable at least to those who knew him. He wasn’t used to it, to having anyone touch him, and it was as if it was his body’s natural reaction to recoil at the touch he wasn’t expecting.

So when a bubbly woman proceeded to plant herself in Victor’s lap and move in for a kiss, Victor’s instinct kicked in before he could stop it.

“What the hell was that for?” she sneered from where she’d been deposited on the floor. “You think you’re too good for someone like me? Is that it?”

Victor’s eyes had gone wide, the shock probably etched on his face and his hand trembling.
“Look, you can do better than some Asian boy,” she spat out, struggling to get to her feet. “He’s not worthy of you and you know it.”

Victor clutched the arm of the chair at that, his mind going white with anger. He wanted to strike out, but he knew he couldn’t, the ice crackling from where he gripped the chair.

It’s then that Victor saw the blur of motion from his side and before he knew it, Yuuri was between them. But instead of confronting the woman, he had his back to her, his worried eyes focused on Victor and Victor alone.

“Are you okay?”

Victor looked up to him, knowing his expression could tell Yuuri what he couldn’t find the words to say.

Security officers converged on the scene at that, leading the woman away as she yelled out more horrible things that Victor’s mind could barely process.

Yuuri knelt in front of him, his hand slowly and gently settling atop Victor’s. The ice stopped immediately. He slowly gripped his fingers around Victor’s hand, his voice quiet.

“Come on, let’s step over here for a second.”

Victor willed himself to stand, letting Yuuri pull him along until they found a small alcove devoid of people. The moment they reached it, Yuuri paused and slowly brought a hand up to Victor’s cheek.

“Are you okay?” he asked once more.

“How dare she say that about you, I.”

Yuuri shook his head. “Victor. Are you okay?”

He could see the news now, Winter Monsoon attacks an innocent fan. Why isn’t he grateful for the
“Victor.”

At the touch of Yuuri’s other hand on his cheek, he shuddered. Yuuri started to pull away, but Victor stopped him; his hand coming up to press over Yuuri’s and hold his hand where it was.

“Sorry,” he said, a ragged breath escaping. “It’s not you. I just…”

“Freak out when someone tries to touch you?”

Victor looked up, searching Yuuri’s eyes for the answers. He gave a resigned smile.

“It’s okay. I’ve done it before too,” Yuuri clarified. “A girl tried to comfort me with a hug when Phichit got really injured back during our training. I...kind of shoved her away. Celestino didn’t understand. He thought I was upset and taking it out on the wrong thing.”

He drew a step closer, his eyes flickering between the space and Victor’s face as if trying to make sure this was okay.

“So if you want some space, I’ll understand.”

Victor closed his eyes, trying to calm his thoughts enough to decide what it was he wanted. He clutched Yuuri’s hand tighter.

“Stay close to me,” he murmured, voice low. “I…”

How could he begin to explain? After he’d lost his parents, Victor had resigned himself to a life without physical affection. He’d detached himself from it, his hugs for fans often feeling mechanical and stilted to him. Even when he’d asked Yakov a few times when he was desperately upset for a hug, it just felt...cold. Victor decided that the warmth was gone with his parents and he’d pushed his feelings about it deep down inside, knowing that his image relied on him seeming warm and open with fans.
But Yuuri had changed that. Every tiny brush of Yuuri’s fingertips, every press of his lips felt like breathing again after holding his breath for far too long. At first he thought it was just natural, just the way his body reacted to being so close to someone who attracted him. But the longer he’d been with Yuuri, the more he came understand that he’d missed this warmth, desperately.

With Yuuri, every touch was never enough. The chill having taken hold of Victor deep in his bones, frostbitten and numb like his injured side. And slowly, Yuuri was taking that chill away.

So of course, it shocked him to feel that ice cold chill rush through his veins at her touch.

For as much as Makkachin kept him luke warm, it wasn’t until Yuuri that Victor knew what being truly warm actually felt like. His memories of his parents were too distant now to bring any warmth at all. Of course he’d panicked. He didn’t want to feel that chill ever again.

“Shh, you don’t need to say anything,” Yuuri murmured, slowly and gently reaching out and waiting for Victor to curl in against him.

It was only there, wrapped in Yuuri’s loving embrace, that Victor felt once more at ease. He let out a shaky breath and Yuuri only held him closer.

“This is going to be all over the news. I shouldn’t have pushed her.”

“Victor.”

“It’s going to look bad.”

“Victor she’s honestly lucky that all that happened was getting shoved on the floor. If I’d had my blades…”

Victor blinked up at him at that, just now sensing that protectiveness in his tone.

“Yuuri…”
He huffed. “I’m just saying, I react quickly when angered and it really could have been worse. She assaulted you, Victor. If the media tries to paint it any other way, they’re scum. Your personal boundaries are more important than any stupid image you have to uphold, okay?”

Victor nodded, still not able to find the words. Finally, he managed.

“Thank you.”

Yuuri shook his head, pressing a soft kiss to Victor’s forehead.

“Are you going to be okay?”

Victor could feel it now, Yuuri’s gentle warmth settling around him like a blanket against the chill. It helped, perhaps more than Yuuri knew, just by being there.

“Yeah. Just...stay close. I need you.”

The surprise flickered across Yuuri’s eyes in an instant; worry and finally understanding cascading in after.

“Okay,” he said softly, immediately wrapping his arm around Victor’s back protectively as they stepped out of the hug. “I’ll be right here.”

And he was, his arm never leaving Victor once until they had to board the plane; it drifting away only briefly to be replaced by the press of his hand against Victor’s back. Whether he fully understood that what Victor needed was that touch, that reassurance, Victor wasn’t certain. But he gave it, wholeheartedly. The entire flight to Nuremberg, Yuuri never pulled away entirely, his left arm sometimes wrapped around Victor’s shoulders, other times, just holding his hand and rubbing little circles with his thumb.

It wasn’t until they arrived at their hotel and made it up to their room that Victor finally felt warmed enough he could pull away.
“If you want to shower, go ahead. I just want to lay down for a bit.”

Yuuri narrowed his eyes. “Don’t go searching out the news, okay? You’ll only regret it.”

Victor frowned to himself. While Yuuri was perhaps a master at avoiding any and all possible news, Victor had been trained to watch it closely. Yakov’s words ringing in his head. _Do not let yourself get caught off guard by reporters. Always keep up on the news. Always be informed on what they’re saying about you at all times. You’ll make a fool of yourself otherwise and your name will end up in the headlines for all the wrong reasons._

“I know,” he murmured in reply.

And after fussing about the room, obviously trying to give Victor a chance to call him back, Yuuri finally drifted off to the bathroom. As Victor listened to the fall of the shower, he felt that nagging worry gnawing away at him inside.

It wouldn’t hurt to just check one source? Something mid-range, equal parts accurate, equal parts drama. That should at least give him a basic idea of how bad it was.

Before he knew it, he’d pulled his laptop out and was pulling up the Heroics Tonight clip on the matter.

“After an incident this evening in Amsterdam, fans of Winter Monsoon have spoken out in droves to reassure the world that they’re ‘not all like that.’”

“A point I can see them wanting to make after what happened. Another fan at the scene caught the altercation on video and we have that footage now.”

Victor fast-forwarded through it, not sure he could deal with seeing it again.

“Yeah wow, that was harsh!”

Victor winced. There it was. Here’s where that drama spin on the story came in.
“It’s really out of character for Victor to react this way to a fan, isn’t it?” the male reporter pointed out.

The female reporter shook her head. “Perhaps, but that was definitely crossing the line in terms of getting in someone’s personal space. If someone did that to me, I’d probably react just the same.”

“Really?”

She leveled the man a look. “Winter Monsoon has been the picture of poise under a lot of circumstances that would make normal people balk. But now there’s the fact he’s romantically involved, and that definitely factored in here.”

The male reporter seemed to finally catch on. “That’s true I suppose. It was definitely a brazen move on the fan’s behalf.”

“Brazen is a nice way of putting it. What she did was uncalled for, and what she said was even worse. It honestly goes to show you what kind of person Wave is that he didn’t even seem to react to what she said but instead turned to Monsoon.”

“That was definitely kind of a power move on his part. No better way to show her that it didn’t phase him at all.”

“Victor,” Yuuri’s voice cut in sharply as he reached out and turned off the clip. “Don’t.”

He wasn’t mad, but incredibly worried; the weight of it all seeming to settle in his brow.

Victor blinked up at him, the bathrobe hanging loose around him and his skin still radiating warmth from the shower.

“Sorry. It’s just a habit at this point for me.”

When that seemed to only further worry him, Victor reached out, tugging him down until he was
laying on top of him. He could see the surprise flicker across his eyes for a moment before the worry came right back. Victor frowned.

He reached up, brushing the damp bangs from Yuuri’s face. “But it is still bothering you, isn’t it?”

Yuuri’s eyes darted away. “I...It’s not like I think you feel that way about me.”

Victor sighed. “But what the heart knows is sometimes hard for the mind to accept?”

The emotions that passed over Yuuri’s eyes then spoke volumes. It seemed, Victor had found the problem.

“You may not believe me, but I mean it. I quite often feel that I’m not worthy of you.”

Yuuri’s eyes went wide at that. Shock. Then after a moment of hesitance, a reluctant understanding. He shook his head.

“That’s ridiculous.”

Victor cupped Yuuri’s face, waiting until his eyes finally met his own.

“And that’s how I feel about you thinking it too.”

“Victor…”

He leaned up then, pressing a soft kiss to Yuuri’s lips before laying back again.

“Do you know how impossibly beautiful you are?”

Yuuri’s cheeks blossomed pink at that, his head shaking.
“I’m not..”

“You,” he pressed a kiss to the tip of his nose,”are,” he finished pecking another to his lips. “A really famous hero told me so.”

He got the slightest bit of a laugh out of him at that, barely audible and mostly in the little incline of his head and the little puff of air he’d exhaled from his nose.

“You, my beautiful, handsome, Yuuri,” he murmured, fingertips tracing down the slope of his neck and dancing over his collar bone a moment before he leaned his whole hand in, flat against Yuuri’s chest. He let out a little gasp.

“My Yuuri,” he continued, his hand sliding up to push the robe off a shoulder. He trailed his fingertips now over that little scar from the robbery. “Who makes,” he leaned into to press a kiss to another scar by his collarbone, “all his scars look sexy.”

“Oh come on, I do not,” Yuuri retorted, but his disbelief was mostly swallowed up by the laughter in his voice.

“Mm, do too,” Victor continued, dipping his other hand down the front of the robe, his fingertips trailing down until they caught the little stretch marks along his sides. “I’m pretty sure it’s only gods who can say they’ve shrugged off lightning the way you have, after all.”

That seemed to do it, Yuuri’s laughter breaking forth as he brought his head down against Victor’s chest.

“You are ridiculous,” he managed amidst laughter.

“I speak only the truth,” Victor asserted.

Yuuri sat up then, attempting to glare at him, but it was lost again as his composure crumbled and the giggles started to sneak back out. Victor just kissed him, then smoothing his hand further along Yuuri’s side, he kissed him once more. Deeper, longer.
And suddenly, everything finally registered in Victor’s nervous system. Their position. The way the robe cascaded off Yuuri’s shoulder. His hand alongside his back, only centimeters away from his incredibly perfect butt. And, most of all, the amount of friction that had seemed to build in the middle of things, which the knot on the robe and the strain of Victor’s jeans were definitely not helping.

He trailed open mouthed kisses down Yuuri’s throat before going up to once more seek out his mouth, Yuuri’s tongue trailing along the roof of his mouth in a way that Victor felt all the way down. And Victor’s hand followed suit, slipping down over soft curves and earning himself a breathy gasp from Yuuri in response.

“Is this okay?” he managed, finding himself to be rather breathy too.

Yuuri nodded, his cheeks flushed high and his eyes sparkling with something new.

“More than okay,” Yuuri breathed out. “Don’t stop.”

Victor kissed him again. Then once more. Heart racing to a crescendo and Victor feeling as if something was just out of reach.

And that something was most definitely not the damned Hero Network notification alert sound going off from two phones on the bed stand.

They pulled apart, both of them looking not to pleased about it.

“I’ve created a monster app,” Victor huffed out, inwardly cursing the day he even considered such an app that could just go around interrupting people’s days.

“We could ignore it,” Yuuri tried.

Another alert sound went off.

“Or not. That’s the emergency backup sound, isn’t it?”
Victor closed his eyes. He was a professional hero. That was his job. That needed to come before everything else. But why did it have to be now?

Yuuri sighed, dropping his head against Victor’s chest.

“We should go do our jobs,” he grumbled out.

“Yeah. I know.”

But well, Victor wasn’t going to let all of this go to waste. Especially the fact his hand was still perfectly situated over Yuuri’s butt. He gave it a squeeze, earning a squeak of a noise from Yuuri and bright red cheeks.

“Victor!”

“Consider it my erection’s dying request,” he managed with far more of a straight face than he ever expected.

But it didn’t last, both of them trying to outlast one another and finally, snorting out laughter as they fell into a tangled heap of limbs. During which, somehow, Yuuri managed to sneak an arm around Victor’s waist and return the favor.

“Yuuri!” he yelped out.

“And that was mine’s dying request.”

They managed a few moments of stoic silence before the laughter overtook them again. Finally, with tears of mirth in their eyes, they got up from the bed and went to dig out their uniforms.

But there was something warm and fluttering in Victor’s chest now. A new warmth. And a warmth that Victor had a feeling had only begun to grow between them.
Chapter 31

It’s been one year since I began My Hero, Yuuri and I’m still in disbelief that I’ve written this much over the course of a year on a single ongoing piece.

By the time midnight strikes in my timezone tonight, I’ll be at 31 chapters, 180,000+ words and about 1/3rd into the third arc of the story out of seven. There’s still a lot more to come (it’s a shounen adventure series, of course it’s going to be long lol) and I’m eternally grateful to every person who’s taken the time to comment, send me asks, given it kudos or liked/shared a tumblr post for it.

Thank you all for your ongoing support! Here’s to the next year of Hokusai Wave and his adventures!

It wasn’t until he sat down on the tram and pulled his phone out of the pocket on his uniform that Yuuri noticed the message nestled on the notification screen under the Hero Network App alerts.

**Phichit:** Tell me where in Amsterdam I gotta go to teach this bitch a lesson. Yuuri don’t you dare let what she said get to you! ■ ▼ ■

He tabbed open the message, smiling a bit to himself at his friend’s worry.

*You can’t hurt a fan. And trust me, I’m trying my best not to let it bother me. Right now I’m more frustrated at the timing of a certain app again >*

*If that app cockblocked you again, I’m going to have to stage an intervention!*

*I’m beginning to think we’re cursed.*

*Well, you’ve been dreaming of it forever, so better to wait and make it count!*

*That’s not what this is about!!!*
You’re telling me you haven’t always wanted to bang Victor? Who are you and what have you done with Yuuri Katsuki?

Phichit. Srsly.

Okay okay, positive thoughts. Like, the fact you’ve been how close how many times now? At least you can’t say it’s all in your head like you tried to the first time. If he keeps putting the moves on you, you clearly aren’t the only one wanting it.

Only mildly helpful...

How about this: if you don’t get some by Valentines, I’m gonna contact Smolder and we’re going to do night patrol outside whatever hotel or place you’re at so you don’t have to worry about work.

It said something that Yuuri was beginning to think that was going to be the only way it ever happened. He let out a huff.

“Is that Phichit texting you? What time is it there?” Victor’s voice cut in.

“He’s up early, clearly because he sensed that I was having a crisis. Or at least, that’s going to be his story when I ask him why he’s up so early.”

Victor snorted. “You’re having a crisis?”

Yuuri felt his face flush. “N-No.”

A moment passed before Victor’s cheeks went pink as well. “Oh. That crisis.”

“...Yeah.”

“Chris is threatening to have Hayami turn off the app in whatever town we’re in next and I told him that while I appreciate the sentiment…”
“Job first,” Yuuri muttered.

Victor snaked his arm around him at that, trailing his fingers down his side before settling over his hip. Yuuri shivered and it wasn’t from the cold.

“Although you are making it terribly hard to wait, I’ll have you know.”

Yuuri’s cheeks burned warmer at that, but he wasn’t about to let Victor get off that easily. He set his hand on Victor’s leg, far higher up than usual and had to bite back a smirk when he felt Victor tremble at it.

“I think the wait will be well worth it,” he murmured rather quietly.

Victor tugged him closer at that, his mouth pressing right along the top neckline of Yuuri’s uniform as he spoke. “What did I do to deserve you?”

Yuuri leaned into his touch. “I keep asking myself the same thing.”

They remained like that for two more stops, the tram car and the stations mostly empty this time of night. Finally, Victor pecked a soft kiss to Yuuri’s neck before pulling back.

“Okay, we should probably see if the app updated and will give us any details about what we’re getting ourselves into.”

*I’ll think about it. Gtg*

He texted one last message to Phichit before taking a deep breath and allowing himself to focus. Whatever the situation was, the original hero on the scene called for backup almost immediately, so it wasn’t going to be something simple that was for certain.

“Did Hayami get them to update the features already?”
“No, but it seems that my comments to the reporters in London gave some heroes the idea. The first hero on the scene, Schützin, used the notes function to fill us in.”

Yuuri glanced over at the incident page on the app and sure enough, the hero had given a basic rundown and put in that she needed as much backup in the area as possible.

Schützin (archery skills) first at scene. Seems to be a two person villain group using their quirks to steal the animals at the zoo. One has some sort of unlocking quirk and the other is pretty much playing some sort of flute and controlling the animals. Any nearby assistance please! Especially need someone with any quirk that could help us regain control of the animals!

Yuuri exchanged a look with Victor, and it was clear both of them knew they’d be at a loss when it came to using their skills to bring the animals under control. But as they did, a small message bubble popped up on Victor’s screen.

Victor clicked on it and the message thread opened up to another hero. It was addressed to all the heroes reporting to the scene.

Siren: Hey I’m coming from up north so it might take me a bit, but if you can hold them down until I get there, I can get the animals back where they belong.

Schützin: Great! I’m just monitoring right now until backup arrives. But we’ve got two incoming, whose ETA should get them here soon.

Victor smiled over at Yuuri and typed a reply.

Winter Monsoon: We’re on a tram from the Sheraton Carlton, I think we have about two more stops until both myself and Hokusai Wave should be there. Where at the zoo can we meet you, Schützin?

Schützin: Okay wow, I mean I saw that you indicated you were coming but I’m honestly not gonna believe it until I see it in person. You guys are awesome for taking time out of your trip to help out! I’ll wait by the zoo’s main entrance for you. Thank you!!!
**Siren:** OMG. I didn’t notice who else had replied since I did. I’m so honored to be working with you WM and HW! Major fan!

**Winter Monsoon:** Are either of you the local hero? I think it might be best if you call the shots since I’m not sure how to navigate your zoo.

**Schützin:** Well, that would be me. I’m totally okay following orders if you two have a better grip on things.

Victor turned to Yuuri with a smile before replying once more.

**Winter Monsoon:** I’ll let you call the shots then. You *are* the archer! ^.^

**Siren:** ...yep. Best reason to get woken up in the middle of the night. WM is making quirk puns.

By now, Yuuri had pulled out his phone and had tabbed open the thread as well.

**Hokusai Wave:** He’s probably got more where that came from too. Don’t get him started.

**Schützin:** If you two insist! (and trust me, I’ve heard so many archery puns, so I’m more than ready for it!) If HW and I can distract the two villains, I think WM has a chance of finding a way of capturing them without deactivating whatever is controlling the animals.

**Hokusai Wave:** Are we talking like a literal Pied Piper here? Or something more like Faunaa with music?

**Schützin:** Definitely seems more like the first. Each animal enchanted gets this weird blue glow and then just lines up to get into their getaway van.

**Siren:** I might be able to reverse that. I’m inflight there now (thank you local flight quirk
user!) but if there’s any large statue or something I can control that would make it easier. I could just use it to pick the animals back up and put there where needed.

**Winter Monsoon**: How large do you need?

Yuuri blinked over at him and Victor grinned.

**Winter Monsoon**: I’ve built a pretty big ice-giant once before. Would that help?

And Yuuri knew exactly what incident Victor was talking about. He’d used it to take the blows from a villian with a gigantification quirk. But at the same time, he’d already overdone it the night before.

“Victor, are you sure? You’re still sore from last night, aren’t you?”

He gave a smile that was impossibly warm.

“I’ve got your love to keep me warm,” he sing-songed back at him.

All worries died on Yuuri’s lips, his heart suddenly feeling too tight and overflowing. He offered a wobbly smile.

“Is that really all you need? Be honest with me.”

At that, Victor’s expression went as serious as his dimpled smiling face could. He nodded.

“I don’t need to fortify it to take any blows, so if it just needs to have arms and function as a giant for Siren to do her work, I can make it with snow instead of ice. It’s a little easier on me.”

“So we’re going to build a giant snowman? And then enchant it to put the animals back?”

Victor beamed, his smile seeming almost heart-shaped.
“Yep.”

Yuuri shook his head.

“God I love being a hero,” he muttered and the smile tugging at his lips didn’t disappear until they’d arrived at the scene.

Maybe it had been the recent message from Phichit. Maybe it was that old advice from Yakov that if you didn’t like what the news was saying about you, you made a bigger story take focus.

Whatever the reason, after they got there and Schützin gave them a run down of everything that was going on, Victor decided that perhaps he’d show those UAT members what real teamwork looked like.

Schützin had already laid out a great attack strategy and when Victor asked if there was an easy body of water for him to use, since that would be less strain on his already aching side, she was quick to revise the plan to factor that in. That was one thing Victor had learned over the years while working with the UAT, and something he was certain some heroes would disagree with it; but if there was a local hero able to take the lead it always made it an easier fight.

Part of it was repeat villains, local heroes more likely to be accustomed to certain villains and familiar with all their tricks. The other part was knowledge of the area. While the UAT could pull up data on their phones, it was always faster to have someone there who already knew the answers. Schützin knew the layout of the zoo without a map, knew the closest police and villain suppression force offices and had already called and put them on standby.

Now that he really thought about it, it was something that really did disadvantage UAT members. Victor only knew Barcelona as well as he did because he was on the team for years, but he’d already noticed that part of the UAT’s problems lay in the newer members not wanting to listen to those who’d become familiar with the area. While JJ might have the advantage in his home country of Canada, it was going to be better to defer to Chris or Mila and their knowledge from being previous team members. It was part of what made Cheetah Heroes United such a successful agency, the fact that Comet and Faunaa never hesitated in working with any local heroes instead of trying to upstage them.
Victor thought about the changes he’d thought over for the UAT, and now he was wondering if perhaps another big change might be necessary. What if instead of being a team, they were an agency? It would allow the top heroes to work in their home countries, providing leadership and organizing the heroes of the area instead of making a special team that sat in one office in one city waiting for trouble. Earning the top three spots then would put money and resources into local and national heroes instead of just focusing on Barcelona.

“Victor, are you ready?”

They’d been sneaking quietly through the zoo towards the area where the big cats were housed. Their open enclosures had ample water for Victor, and the villains getaway van had parked right in front to allow them to work on enchanting the big cats out.

And if Victor was going to livestream this fight like he wanted to, he was going to have to think about the UAT and its future at another time.

“Yeah. Get me over by the Tiger enclosure and that water will help me make a good sized snowman.”

Schützin laughed quietly to herself. “This feels like it’s something right out of a comic book.”

Yuuri smiled. “It reminds me of the Sentai Rangers shows and their often oddball plots. It’ll make for an interesting livestream, that’s for certain.”

“Well, you two work your magic and I’ll build us a snowman. I’ve got Siren on bluetooth keeping me up to date on her ETA, so I can signal when she’s dropping in.”

“Let’s do this then,” Yuuri said, reaching out and grabbing Victor’s hand. It was his job to get Victor where he needed to be before helping Schützin distract the villains.

Victor gave his hand a squeeze and smiled back. “Ready whenever you are.”

Schützin nodded. “Go on my signal,” she lined up her bow and arrow, aiming with perfection at the front tire of the villain’s van. The arrow shot and the tire blew out as it hit. “Go!”
Yuuri ran hand in hand with Victor, Schützin raining more arrows down on the van, methodically taking out the tires one by one before starting to aim at the villains themselves. In the chaos, Victor got in position and with a pecked kiss, Yuuri rushed off.

Victor, his heart light, began his livestream. “Hello everyone who’s awake! We’ve got ourselves an adventure tonight and I wanted to share the fun.”

He turned the camera towards the action, catching Schützin’s skill and Yuuri’s combining; an arrow ricocheting perfectly off Yuuri’s sabre and redirecting to shoot right past the approaching villain’s face.

They weren’t sure if his quirk could also control humans, so they weren’t going to risk it. It was Yuuri and Schützin’s job to keep him from playing his flute until Siren arrived.

“We’re at the zoo here in Nuremberg Germany, with local hero Schützin, myself and Hokusai Wave here to stop some villains who seem to be pulling a Pied Piper with the animals.”

Directing the camera at the big cats, still glowing blue but having stopped where they were outside the van, he zoomed in a bit further to catch the action.

“We’ve got a hero incoming that’s going to help us put all these animals back where they came from, but in the meantime we’re going to hopefully distract the villains as much as possible.”

Another arrow whizzed by, and Yuuri moved his blade behind his back just in time to deflect it, the arrow once more keeping the villain from using his quirk.

“Oh and I’m making us a very large snowman to help out,” Victor added, turning the camera to where he’d begun to turn the water into snow. “So we’ve got a nice little team here tonight.”

Yuuri rushed in fast, doing his best to to get up in the villain’s face. Victor kept the camera focused on him, although it was hard because he moved so fast, knowing that the plan here was about to really hit. Sure enough, right as Yuuri swung his blade, the villain jerked his arm up; Schützin’s arrow flying true and perfectly slotting itself into the villain’s flute, sending it flying into the Lion’s enclosure.

“Winter Monsoon, I’m about three minutes out,” Siren’s voice cut in.
“Great. I’ll have Schützin send up the signal so you can find us and I’ll have a nice snow giant ready for your quirk to use!”

Victor smiled at the livestream camera. “Things are about to get even better, but right now I’ve got to get a message to the two doing all the hard work out there.”

He pulled up the text window quickly and sent one to Yuuri.

At the vibration, Yuuri knew it was time to signal Schützin; flourishing his blade in a fencing salute and letting her know that it was time to send up some fireworks.

And fireworks, well more like a flare, it indeed was.

Schützin lit the flare and sent an arrow with it up into the sky, following it up with another arrow which hit the first, sparking the flare into a burst of flame in the sky.

“I see you, incoming!” Siren said.

The villain, who was trying to get his partner to help him into the lion enclosure so they could retrieve his flute, looked up at the flare.

And in the shadow of it, a flight quirk user dropped another hero down onto the scene, her uniform fluttering in the wind as he plummeted towards Victor’s snowman.

Turning the camera fully now on the action, Victor grinned. Sure enough, Siren did have a quirk that was going to help out, her voice singing out in a beautiful aria that brought the snow giant to life; its large snowy hands reaching out and snatching her out of the sky.

She sang out once more, and the snow giant began to move. It was time for phase two of the plan.

Victor began to run towards Yuuri, his side twinging a bit with an ache that had definitely gotten a little bit worse from last night.
“Monsoon, make a slope into the enclosure!” Schützin called out.

He saw exactly what she meant, quickly sliding the ice out across the group and arching it up. Yuuri hit it running, flipping with practiced skill down into the enclosure. And just in time too, for the villains had just made it to the flute.

But before they could active the quirk once more, Yuuri rushed in, using the fine blade of his rapier to snag the flute onto it and then launch it once more up into the air. Schützin was ready, her arrow hitting it dead on and shattering it.

“Do you yield?” Yuuri asked, leveling his blade at the villains.

They exchanged a look, and then seeming to notice both Schützin and Winter Monsoon standing outside the enclosure ready to strike, slowly put up their hands.

Schützin didn’t waste a moment, quickly fitting her bow with a handful of arrows and letting them rain down. They each hit perfectly, snatching bits of the villain’s clothing and pinning them both to the ground.

Victor turned the camera back to Siren, who was continuing to her song to control the snow giant, using the large hands of it to pick up the enchanted animals and put them back into their enclosures.

“Monsoon, can we put a divider in the lion’s enclosure between the villains and the lions to hold until the VSF gets here?” Schützin asked.

He nodded, ignoring that stiffness in his side and quickly building a small ice wall around the villains. Siren noticed and quickly returned the lions to their enclosure. Yuuri waited with the villains, but he caught Victor’s eye and seemed to change his mind.

“Hey Siren, can I have a lift?” he called out and within seconds she’d used her powers to lift him out and back beside Victor.

Without missing a beat, he quickly settled against his side, his arms wrapping around him tight.
“Hey,” he murmured quietly, clearly not wanting to say much with the livestream still going.

But Victor understood all he needed too from his expression alone, easing himself into Yuuri’s arms. “Hey yourself.”

The warmth from Yuuri, Victor decided, was perhaps the best medicine he could ask for when he was hurting like this. And without a word, Yuuri had known that and come to his side.

It made his chest feel tight in giddy sort of way and he turned the camera back to Siren’s clean up so he could lean over and press a kiss to Yuuri’s lips.

And he was pretty sure he wasn’t the only one smiling into the kiss either.

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**Hero News Network: Live from Germany**

Attempted zoo animal theft thwarted. Unprecedented awarding of points to whole team.

“We’re live here at the Nuremberg zoo where the local VSF and police are finalizing their work at the scene. Two villains looking to sell zoo animals into the exotic animal black market trade were taken into custody after they were brought down by a team of four heroes at the scene. IHU officials say that in a previously unheard of move, they are looking to award all four heroes for the rescue points and capture points due to all four insisting it was a team effort and that none of them could have succeeded without the help of the others.”

The reporter turned to the dimly lit front of the zoo behind her and waved over two heroes.

“If we could get a word here, Winter Monsoon. Hokusai Wave.”

The two exchanged a look before crossing over to the reporter.

“Thank you for your time. Many viewers at home were surprised to see you livestreaming this
incident, Winter Monsoon. Any particular reason you made the choice to do so?”

“A couple of reasons. We’d just heard from Freeze Frame, so that definitely put the idea in the back of my mind. But also, I had a feeling that the IHU would encounter the point dilemma they are currently in. Our plan was made as a fully team mission, no element of the capture or rescue could have worked out if anyone hadn’t played their part. It’s why I hope the IHU honors the request to award all the points outside the leader points equally.”

“Leader points that I am under the impression are not going to either of you, am I correct?”

Victor nodded. “That’s correct. It was in our best interest to put ourselves in the local hero’s hands for this, as Schützin had specific knowledge that those of us from outside the area would not. It was thanks to her familiarity with the zoo’s layout that we were able to execute this plan so efficiently. I feel that this is something UAT hopefuls can learn from the hero agencies in America, because local heroes will always have an upperhand that those coming in to assist will not.”

Hokusai Wave spoke up at that. “It’s something we’ve really come to understand during our recent travels. The importance of local heroes and their expertise in a situation can really help make the mission run smoothly. I know there’s things I know about my hometown better than an outside hero would, and that’s something we’re really seeing hold true no matter where we go.”

“I take it this is part of why the group was insistent in having the points awarded equally?”

“We couldn’t have stopped the villains or gotten the animals back safely without everyone’s help,” Victor noted. “I can build a snow giant, but it took Siren’s quirk to use it. It was Hokusai Wave and Schützin’s skill with arrow and blade that enabled us to disarm and capture the villains quickly as well. It was a great example of a true team at work and I hope that’s something the IHU recognizes as well.”

“We’re hoping it also encourages other heroes to do the same going forward,” Hokusai Wave added. “Rely on your fellow heroes and together achieve the objective. I think that would also stop a lot of the dispute over points if the group is awarded for the points instead of trying to decide who truly captured or rescued what.”

“This definitely does sound like it would be an ideal method going forward. As you noted, a lot like the hero agencies system, it allows and encourages teamwork. Is that something you hope the IHU considers during this overhaul of the UAT selection process?”
“Most definitely,” Winter Monsoon replied. “Just like I hope all aspects of hero work move towards more emphasis on teamwork instead of focusing on one or two standout heroes. Like right now, I think the two of us have said enough, but I’m sure Siren and Schützin can give you more thoughts on the matter.”

The reporter blinked, then quickly thanked the two before turning to the camera once more.

“I’ll be right back after this break with our other two heroes at the scene.”

“Yuuri, I promise I’m fine.”

“Nope, not listening. Get in the warm bath and I’ll stay with you and make sure you don’t fall asleep.”

Victor pouted, but Yuuri was not wavering. He’d noticed that Victor could definitely be a little lax in treating his injury, but even if he was tired they needed to make sure it was taken care of properly.

And Yuuri knew from how cold Victor’s skin was to the touch that he definitely needed some sort of warmth to get him warm again.

“I’m so tired, I’m not sure I can make it there,” Victor murmured, dramatically flopping against Yuuri’s side.

Well, Yuuri could take care of that.

So before he could think about it more and talk himself out of it, he’d swept Victor up into his arms and carried him into the bathroom. He settled him on his feet and then began to coax him out of his uniform.

Sure enough, once the zipper came down low enough, Yuuri could see the skin around his injury had gone white with the re-exposure to the cold. His hand was inside the suit and against Victor’s side in an instant.
“Y-Yuuri!”

Slowly, he rubbed along the edge of the injury, trying to warm it up so it didn’t go into shock at the heat of the water. He’d texted Minami after last night and asked him to get information from his parents about treatment for long time frostbite injuries and now he knew exactly what to do to keep Victor from hurting any more than he had to.

He leaned into the touch and Yuuri couldn’t help but smile. Despite his complaints, he wasn’t really that mad about it. More just tired and frustrated at his own body’s lack of resilience.

“Guess I’m getting that massage after all, huh?”

“Something like that,” Yuuri replied. “But I can’t do a standard massage on you, it could aggravate your injury. Slow and gentle like this is okay though.”

Victor turned at that and Yuuri blinked up at him. His eyes had gone wide with something Yuuri couldn’t place, and after a moment it hit him. He was touched.

“I’m beginning to think you know more about what my body needs than I do,” he said quietly.

“I may have looked into it so I could help you,” Yuuri replied, voice just as quiet.

Within a blink, Victor had enveloped him in his arms, his lips brushing against Yuuri’s ear as he spoke.

“Thank you,” he breathed out. “I’ve...I’ve…”

“Been too frustrated to worry about it? I get that. When I twisted my ankle once, Minako had to threaten to deny me lessons so I’d stop trying to use it.”

Victor sighed. “Problem is I kind of have to use my quirk.”
Yuuri pulled back and gave him a look. “No more ice, for at least a few days. Okay?”

“But…”

“What if we need it?” Yuuri cut in. He’d already expected that. “That’s why you’re going to teach me how to do snow and ice so you can rest properly this time.”

He sighed, but leaned forward into Yuuri’s arms.

“God I love you.”

Yuuri chuckled. “Okay, then we need to make sure you’re warm enough the bath water won’t be too hot. Anywhere feel cold or numb still? Beside the obvious?”

And maybe it was the fondness with which Victor looked at him, or the almost shy hesitance with which he pointed out the few parts of him that still retained the chill, but Yuuri found himself moving to kiss the spot instead. Well, he supposed as his lips skimmed over the spot along his upper side, he was technically getting it warmer.

Victor practically melted into the kisses, as they danced feather light against his side. And Yuuri found he couldn’t be too mad when Victor had clearly gone through the actual problematic spots and was now just picking places in which he wanted a kiss.

Yuuri pulled back from a rather passionate one to his supposedly chilly lips and gave him a look.

“Okay, I think you’re good for the bath. Plus, I think we’re both too tired to let this go anywhere else.”

He huffed at that but relented, giving Yuuri one last peck before stripping his uniform the rest of the way off and moving to get into the bath. The moment he got settled, he reached his hand out and wiggled his fingers.

“Hey, I should probably keep this hand not in the water warm. Got any ideas?”
Yuuri let a small smile dance across his lips, closing the distance between them before taking the hand and bringing it up to press kisses across Victor’s knuckles.

“I’ll keep your hand warm, how about you tell me in theory how I can make ice or snow. I think that should keep both of us awake enough.”

Victor began by telling Yuuri about the first time he’d made it snow, which was mostly by accident. He’d been practicing his quirk and a spray of water was headed towards his mother’s painting she was working on. Somehow, in the panic, he managed to change the water droplets into snow that fell to the ground before it could damage the painting.

Yuuri entwined his fingers with Victor’s, his thumb lazily rubbing against Victor’s hand.

The first time Victor had managed ice, it was because he was determined to make an existing icicle into a sword so he could play with it. And one by one, story by story came back to him, and Yuuri decided he’d get the specifics about the quirk another time. It was more important to allow Victor this, this quiet moment in which he could reminisce about his parents and childhood.

“I see you’ve found a way to make sure I’m warm both body and mind, hmm?” he said after awhile, the bathwater finally growing cold.

“Still got to get you into bed and make sure you stay warm,” Yuuri replied with a smile.

He helped him out of the bath and made sure he got dried and into his pajamas before he could get chilled again. Then he got him in the bed, piled already under the extra blankets Yuuri had insisted on after last night.

But it wasn’t until Yuuri got under the blankets as well and Victor nuzzled in against him that Victor decided he was properly warm. Yuuri had to fight back a smile at that, letting his fingers rub circles across Victor’s back.

“You know,” Victor began, voice low. “I’m completely serious.”

Yuuri blinked. “What?”
“When I say your love keeps me warm.”

He pulled back at that, blinking at Victor in the dark hotel room and trying to decide if he was being serious.

He was.

Yuuri’s cheeks burned warmer at that.

“Then I guess it’s up to me to make sure you stay that way,” he replied quietly.

Victor nudged his leg in between Yuuri’s and drew him as close as he could, settling his head against Yuuri’s chest.

He let out a soft sigh, his body completely relaxing as he did.

“Goodnight, my love.”

Yuuri felt his heart skip a beat at that. And feeling that rush of daring himself, he replied.

“Goodnight, darling.”
It was an incredibly long flight from Germany to Australia.

Over the eighteen hours, Victor spent much of the time thinking on the trip so far, perhaps more than he should have. He simply didn’t have the heart to disturb Yuuri who had dozed off against his shoulder, and he couldn’t sleep himself. Plus there was certainly a lot to think about.

For although the trip had started out being about building up Yuuri’s image and getting him through the chaos of the press; it had somehow become about Victor and his image as well. In building Yuuri’s image, Victor could see how years worth of training to maintain a specific image wouldn’t do. Yuuri refused to be anything but genuine, holding only his quirkless status as a secret. Somehow, someway, the universe had begun to force Victor to confront the same.

More than one article had talked about how they were seeing a new side of Winter Monsoon, how things had really changed since he moved to Japan and Yuuri had entered his life. And they weren’t wrong.

Because at the heart of the matter, it was Yuuri’s insistence that Victor be nothing more than himself that enabled Victor to allow his carefully crafted image to shatter away piece by piece.

It was hard. Painfully hard. And Victor still had a thousand and one doubts that he’d somehow ruined everything, that somehow yet another crazy person would twist it all into some conspiracy about him. To be perfectly honest, he was scared.
Victor had built up so much of his career entwined with little white lies about himself that it was terrifying to slowly tear that down. To let people know his quirk wasn’t just ice and snow. To finally let himself react to an unwanted touch with a shove. And now, well, to let everyone know he was injured.

Even if the Sports Illustrated issue didn’t publish immediately, enough photos from the shoot were sure to make their way online. And Victor knew right away what everyone was going to be talking about.

The large scar on his side, something he’d been told he couldn’t reveal because it was tantamount to sending out a worldwide message that he was weak and an easy target for villains looking to snuff out the hopeful message his presence brought the world.

He’d been worried enough about the coverage of the incident in London, the images clearly showing Yuuri holding him up in support. It wasn’t like Winter Monsoon to need help and while the hero world didn’t say anything about it, Victor wasn’t so sure the villains hadn’t noticed.

Winter Monsoon was a symbol, one that had been around since he came onto the scene and one that he knew many villains would love to crush. He was a symbol not only of the era of peace that the United Alliance Team brought about, but to aspiring heroes as well; providing them with an image they too sought to match.

Even Yuuri had admired Winter Monsoon long before he knew anything about Victor.

But at that thought, Victor blinked; staring down at Yuuri’s head rested against his shoulder. Suddenly, a smile tugged at his lips; for he knew what Yuuri would tell him if he was aware of the internal crisis taking place.

He’d be proud of Victor, as he had been. Reassuring, and still looking up to him and admiring him for who he was.

In fact, he’d probably start in on some ramble about how the hero image didn’t really solidify until Victor came on the scene. How it was him that popularized HeroTek suits and elemental powers and the idea of an invincible hero that could not sustain harm. Even Comet and Faunaa, despite being widely loved, never conformed to some set image; something Victor knew Yuuri would be quick to point out.

“What are you smiling about?” Yuuri asked, voice still laced with the vestiges of sleep.
Victor shifted, letting his head lean down to press against Yuuri’s.

“You.”

Yuuri blinked at that. “Really?”

“Really. I was contemplating how you’d probably give me a rundown of popular hero images and how conforming to them didn’t always correlate with success.”

He could see the concern flicker through his gaze at that, slowly the pieces of the puzzle clicking into place. “Victor, if you were upset you should have woken me up.”

“You looked so content, and we didn’t get a full night of sleep last night so…”

Yuuri pressed a finger over his lips. “So, I still want to be there for you. Trust me, I’m an expert at using long flights to overthink my life and depressing myself. Talk to me?”

“I don’t deserve you,” Victor murmured.

He let out a little huff at that. “Okay, first thing. Yes. You do. You deserve to be happy, Victor. And before you try it, this trip isn’t just about you helping me. It’s about us. And us goes both ways when it comes to supporting one another.”

Victor bit back a remark that he definitely felt Yuuri was doing more helping, that he wasn’t giving back enough himself. He was in a bad place mentally and Yuuri knew exactly what that was like and wasn’t going to let it override rational thought.

“Now you said you wanted a rundown of how popular hero image doesn’t always equate to success, right?”

Victor allowed a timid smile at that. “I think it might help me rationalize this.”
Yuuri smiled back at that. “Okay, then that’s what I’ll do.”

And it did help. Truly. For Victor had only thought about what Yakov had told him, how he needed to worry about this or that. Yuuri, who was quirkless and never dreamed of going unmasked, had countless amounts of knowledge on how plenty of heroes didn’t fit the “image” and still got by just fine.

Freeze Frame, who Yuuri knew personally had worried his masked status would hold him back, going on to be the most followed hero on every social media site.

Comet and Faunaa both refusing to wear traditional HeroTek suits, instead using everyday common pieces of clothing to make up their looks.

Smolder’s countless media scandals that he’d faced while still maintaining his number two rank over the years.

One by one he listed them off, many of them parallel to Victor’s own recent issues; JJ’s injury going into the last UAT season, the scar on his lower back such a non-issue to him that he put his tattoo over it and flaunted it in photoshoots, the split of the Crispino twins from a duo into two single heroes and how everyone doubted that their quirks would be effective without the other.

By the time they landed in Australia, Yuuri had listed off over fifty examples of nonconformity with the so-called perfect hero image and had left no room for doubt in Victor’s mind.

“How about feeling incredibly blessed to have you in my life to keep me from being a walking disaster?” Victor shot back, a smile tugging at his lips.

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“Victor..”

He wrapped his arms around Yuuri from behind and rested his head on his shoulder. “I feel very loved and thoroughly schooled on the media image of heroes in the past several years, so thank you for both.”
“I’m glad. Although I can’t promise I won’t have a similar meltdown before tomorrow morning…”

Victor pecked a kiss to Yuuri’s cheek at that. “Then I’ll be there for you like you were for me. As you said, support goes both ways.”

Yuuri smiled at that, soft and gentle. “Yes, yes it does.”

Their meeting with Adidas in Germany seemed like ages ago by the time they touched down in Australia.

And perhaps it was because somewhere during that flight between the two, something had shifted; something hard to explain had changed between him and Victor. For up until now, there had always been a part of Victor that he’d been holding back; a hesitance to let the Victor Yuuri had come to know show outside quiet moments between them. But as the trip progressed, slowly, steadily, all those parts of Victor began to shine out amidst the parts of his perfect image he’d chipped away.

Winter Monsoon was finally not just some carefully crafted persona that Victor put on with his costume; but had become exactly the man Yuuri had always loved in some way or another.

Victor, of course, worried about Yuuri. He’d gotten so hung up on the idea that it was his job to support Yuuri this trip that he’d forgotten that Yuuri was more than willing to support him in return. It was new, to have someone to rely on, and it was as if both of them were only now really becoming comfortable with doing just that.

Ignoring the flocks of reporters waiting for them, Victor had given them a wave before pressing a kiss to Yuuri’s cheek and telling him, “Race you to baggage claim.”

Were they two pro heroes just about to blow off a bunch of reporters? Yuuri blinked once before Victor started to run.

Well. It definitely looked like it.
Ignoring the stares of the crowd, the throng of reporters trying and failing at keeping up with them, Yuuri ran after Victor, easily overtaking him.

He called after Yuuri, “No fair, I’m old. You’re supposed to let me cheat!”

“Heroes aren’t supposed to cheat, Victor!” Yuuri yelled back to him, laughter in his voice.

It was as if for once, Victor didn’t care at all what anyone thought, simply letting himself be the Victor Yuuri knew from their times alone together. It made a warmth blossom in Yuuri’s chest, a feeling that settled over him just as warm.

The past could keep their picture perfect Winter Monsoon with his smiles that never quite reached his eyes.

This one, this Victor was Yuuri’s and finally, the world was going to see just how amazing he was as himself.

By the time they were alone again, Yuuri felt as if his heart couldn’t hold all the emotions that were coursing through him. Victor had hinted at a surprise, but this was definitely far more than he’d expected.

“So...do you like it?” Victor had asked quietly as they stepped from the car.

Yuuri let an incredulous laugh slip loose, smiling over at Victor with all the warmth he could no longer keep inside.

“You found a hotel that’s got treehouses in the rainforest?”

“Just for you,”

It was ridiculous and Yuuri was pretty sure he fell in love with Victor all over again at the gesture. The balcony had a hammock that Victor and him spent the few remaining hours of daylight tangled up in, both of them idly watching the birds and other animals that scurried through the trees around them.
As the rays of sunset filtered in through the branches around them, they worked together to make dinner in the kitchen; both of them equal parts mischievous and doting.

“So, what should we make?” Victor had asked nonchalantly.

Yuuri bit back a grin. “Well, it seems like whoever stocked our fridge was thinking about making only one specific dish, considering that’s what we have ingredients for.”

He tried to play coy. “Oh, and what dish might that be?”

“Victor…”

“Hmm?”

His smile finally winning out, Yuuri wrapped his arms around him and pressed a gentle kiss to his cheek. “Thank you.”

Victor turned to peck a kiss in return to Yuuri’s forehead. “Although, I may need a little help because I’ve only had Mama show me one time how to make it.”

Yuuri’s heart overflowed with love at that. Victor had asked his mother how to make him katsudon. Victor calling his mother Mama… If there were any lingering doubts left about Victor’s feelings for him being true, this snuffed them out with force. He might not understand why, but somehow Victor Nikiforov, the Winter Monsoon himself, was madly in love with Yuuri.

“We can make it together then,” Yuuri managed, his throat a bit tight with emotion.

As they prepared the meal, they teased and flirted, joking around as if this little domestic task was just another normal part of the day. And that gave Yuuri just enough of a push to let the words tumble from his mouth before he could change his mind.

“Victor…”
“Hmm?”

“I uh, know we haven’t really made concrete plans after we get back to Hasetsu, but…”

He waited a moment until he knew he had Victor’s undivided attention.

“I have a suggestion.”

A beat of silence passed and Yuuri took a deep breath before continuing.

“Can we go someplace special for Valentine’s day? Just you and me?”

Victor’s arms were around him in an instant.

“Yuuri, I’d love to!”

“Really?”

“Of course,” he retorted, tapping Yuuri on the nose. “Who else would I want to spend that day with?”

Yuuri smiled at that. “Well, I thought maybe you wanted a quiet day with Makkachin…”

Victor pressed a firm kiss to Yuuri’s lips at that, then followed it up with one on each cheek.

“No, sorry, you’re stuck with me.”

He laughed at that. “Good.”
And although it was nowhere as good as his mother’s cooking, the dinner they made together seemed to fill up his heart along with his stomach; allowing himself to lapse into a relaxed state that he would have previously dreamed impossible considering what tomorrow would bring.

“Hey,” Victor murmured quietly as they finished cleaning up the dishes and putting them away. “Maybe we should try on our swimwear for tomorrow? Get ourselves a little more comfortable with it?”

For the first time, it truly seemed that Victor was allowing himself to worry about something other than Yuuri. Certainly, his suggestion might help Yuuri, but he could tell by the nervous dart of his eyes and the slight tremble in his hands that Victor was just as nervous about it all.

“Yeah, I think that’s a good idea.”

The nerves had trickled down Yuuri’s spine as he walked over to his luggage to pull out the small scrap of fabric that was all he’d be wearing for the cameras the next day. It mingled with the warmth and comfort the food had brought and made his stomach churn with anxiety.

Racerback cut Sluggers, which was an Australian brand that cut their swimwear much like a speedo. They had a Hokusai Wave print and had jumped at the opportunity to have Yuuri model them; Victor’s pair in a matching blue toned print.

“Blue Techno is one of those prints that just looks like it's meant to get wet,” Victor read from the tag attached to his, a hint of something flirtatious in his tone.

“Is that why they chose it to go with my wave?” Yuuri shot back, his nerves now cocktailed with a rush of something else.

“Meet you in the shower to find out?”

Yuuri shot a glance at his phone, as if daring it to interrupt them this time. “Yeah. Just a sec.”

His heartbeat thrumming in his veins, Yuuri tossed his clothing aside and pulled the swimwear on, any nervousness about his appearance in it suddenly overridden by the image of Victor waiting for
him as the shower turned on.

Yuuri entered the bathroom to find Victor studying his reflection, his eyes tracing along his side as if he could make it look better than it did. As he walked up behind him, Yuuri caught the first glance of himself as well.

“You look beautiful,” they both said at once.

A little nervous laughter bubbled up at that, Yuuri closing the space between them to wrap his arm around Victor’s side as he leaned his head down against Victor’s shoulder.

“I’m serious. Even with this. You’re stunning.”

Victor turned then, his gaze drinking Yuuri in, his hands trailing down Yuuri’s side until he snaked them around his waist and rested it against his lower back.

“You have deadly curves, Yuuri Katsuki. And those thighs? They’ll be the death of me, I’m sure.”

Yuuri let out a snort of disbelief. “Victor..”

He gave Yuuri’s ass a gentle squeeze at that, something sparkling in his eyes beside the feigned innocence. “I’m serious. You’re going to stun the world with your handsome looks, no doubt about it.”

Yuuri pressed forward against him, his hand sliding down his chest until he could feel the taut muscles of the injury under his palm.

“I might be able to believe that, if...if you’ll believe that this is going to impress the hell out of everyone.”

“Yuuri…”

He let his hand dip lower, sliding a few fingers under the waistband and over Victor’s hip as his
“Scars are…” he splayed his hand across it as he spoke, “incredibly sexy. It shows how strong you are.”

“Ah, is that so?”

The disbelief, the doubt, all those worries had been pushed aside; replaced by the thrum of electricity that ran between them, each touch, each press of skin to skin, only driving them forward.

And like two magnetic forces that could not be kept parted for long, their lips crashed together in a heated kiss; fingertips trying their best to commit each slope and curve to memory as they somehow navigated their way into the shower.

The water was warm, but Yuuri was certain his blood was running warmer; the two of them only coming to a pause when Victor let out a sound that was definitely more of a wince than a gasp.

Yuuri pulled back from where he had Victor pressed against the shower wall, his eyes searching his expression for answers.

“Your side?”

Victor nodded. “Yeah.” He sounded breathless, but there was a spark of something burning in his eyes. “I don’t think I can handle anything too strenuous right now, but…”

“But?”

“Maybe...something a little less so?”

Yuuri felt his throat go dry. The pause had been just enough to allow his nerves to resurface again. “W-What did you have in mind?”

Victor edged closer to him, his fingertips toying with the edge of the waistband along Yuuri’s hips,
pressing a warm hand to Yuuri’s bared chest.

“Touch me.”

“I’m pretty sure I’ve been doing that,” Yuuri countered.

Victor’s lips tugged up into a smile at that, his hand moving from Yuuri’s chest to reach down and grab his wrist. He brought Yuuri’s hand to his hip. “You’ve missed a spot.”

It was as if molten lava had pooled in Yuuri’s gut at the words, his own body leaning into Victor’s touch as if it was also seeking out that same caress. He swallowed. Hard.

“Well, so have you,” he managed, sounding far more confident than he felt.

“So have I,” Victor replied, letting his fingers dip even further under the waistband. “We should remedy that, shouldn’t we?”

And Yuuri wasn’t certain if it was his mind or his body that suddenly overrode all his thoughts with only one. Less talk. More action.

He’d pulled the swimsuit down to Victor’s knees before his brain caught back up, and by then, well…

Victor had gotten suddenly quiet, a rosy pink flush trickling from his cheeks down to his chest. He licked his lips, then slowly, reached down to slide them off the rest of the way; his eyes never once leaving Yuuri’s.

Then, after hanging them on the knob to the facet, he returned his hand to Yuuri’s hip.

“May I?”

Yuuri was pretty certain his brain had short circuited, his veins on fire and his traitorous body seeking out Victor’s touch before he could say a thing. But despite every part of his mind trying to
decide if this was an elaborate fantasy or not, he knew from the warmth in Victor’s hand alone it wasn’t.

He nodded. And after a moment, Victor slid it down his legs and off; hanging it along with his own on the faucet knob.

It wasn’t that he hadn’t seen Victor naked before, and it certainly wasn’t the first time he’d caught Victor looking at him. But somehow it felt incredibly different, at this moment; as if it was the first time they’d both been brave enough to bare everything.

“Hey gorgeous,” Victor murmured with the hint of a smile.

Yuuri smiled. “Hey handsome.”

And it was like a spell was broken, both of them melting together as if they couldn’t spend one more moment without the other’s touch. Each of them drunk on the breathy gasps they drew forth, both of them unable to tear their eyes away from one another for even a second.

Pressed together tight, neither of them able to last too long; the simplest touch enough to drive them right to the edge and over it; Yuuri leaning back against the wall and holding Victor against him as they both tried to breathe themselves back down to earth.

Victor rested his head against Yuuri’s chest and peered up at him through his damp bangs; his smile gentle and fond.

“God, I love you.”

Yuuri smiled back, knowing he probably looked just as breathtaking and in love as Victor did.

“I love you too.”

Millaa Millaa Falls was a gorgeous location for the photoshoot.
Not that Victor was paying much attention to anything but Yuuri, but when he did, he definitely saw why they selected the location. They’d headed out rather early to get the area set up, so they could start shooting right when the light hit just against the waterfall. Victor and Yuuri changed in a small pop-up tent once the time drew near, and perhaps he was imagining it, but Victor seemed to think Yuuri held himself with more confidence than he had before.

Much to Victor’s relief, Yuuri had managed to get him back in contact with perhaps the hero world’s most respected makeup artist and he’d happily agreed to come help Victor out.

“What have you two been up to that got you all bruised up like this, hmm?”

Victor blinked, a blush slowly blooming across his face as he got the implication. “Adam, no.”

“Not into that kind of thing? That’s fair,” he continued, his quirk helping him blend the foundation across the injury and contour it so it still captured the scarring underneath. “But your current natural glow is telling me there was definitely some rocking in the treehouse last night.”

He buried his face in his hands at that, knowing he had to be blushing even more.

“I’m not answering that.”

“You don’t need to sweetie,” he said patting Victor on the cheek. “Nature’s glow up is something a pro like me can spot from a mile away. And both you and one Hokusai Wave both happen to be sporting one without my magic fingers even laying a hand on you.”

“And this is why I cannot handle you and Chris in the same room together,” Victor muttered.

“The power of Smolder and Glamazon in the same room together is such a powerful force mere mortals cannot usually handle it. Turn a little to your right, I’ve got some more shading here to do.”

Victor did so, his eyes catching Yuuri’s gaze on him. Without a word, somehow he knew and headed towards them.
“How’s it going?” Yuuri asked as he reached Victor’s side.

“Good. I think?”

Adam nodded. “It’s just taking a smidge longer than I’d like, because waterproof makeup does not blend as easily as I’d like it. But I’ll have this looking more natural and less bruised in yellow and white in a few more minutes.”

Yuuri gave Victor a warm smile. “You doing okay?”

“Better now that you’re here.”

“Victor…”

“You look amazing, by the way,” he said, reaching out to push a stray hair back with the rest.

“I feel better,” he muttered quietly. “Like...I don’t know. I just feel more confident than I expected.”

Victor could see Adam smirking as he worked, and knowing if he gave him the chance he’d start back in about Nature’s glow up or something, he quickly replied.

“Yeah, I know what you mean. I’m glad though. We’ve had quite the trip.”

Yuuri smiled. “I think it was good for both of us.”

It was true. This trip had been stressful at many points, but in the end, it brought them closer together both literally and figuratively. Something had shifted, but Victor felt good that it had.

“I think so too.”

By the time Adam had finished up the makeup, it really wasn’t discernable that his injury was
anything but an old scar. He’d told Adam the bruises were a new and unrelated injury, but he had a feeling that he could probably tell by skin moisture or texture that it wasn’t exactly true. It was the only lie Victor had decided he still needed; because advertising that he was pretty much limited in his quirk usage was just asking for trouble.

Plus, although he’d been cynical about it in the past, Yuuri’s attentiveness to it and belief that there was certainly a way to at least improve its condition had finally rubbed off on Victor. As silly as it sounded, he too had begun to hope for some sort of miracle.

He knew once they were back home in Hasetsu that he’d have to make sure Yuuri was able to handle his quirk better, that nagging feeling that Inferno could be waiting for them something Victor wasn’t sure he’d ever be able to shake. But he’d decided to ask Yuuri to help train him to fight without a quirk in return. If his quirk gave out, if it was too much for his body to handle, then Victor would find another way to keep fighting; he’d train just as hard as Yuuri had if it meant he could still stand by Yuuri’s side.

Gone were the days of worrying about his image, stressing and trying to keep up appearances because that’s what a hero did; all that hollow noise inside his head had been filled instead with a burning determination to live up to what Yuuri saw in him.

To be Yuuri’s Victor, that was the only important “image” for him anymore.

“Hey Adam, if I leave my phone with you can you get some pictures during the shoot? I’d like to have some on my personal camera.”

Adam gave a far too innocent smile. “Of course.”

Victor rushed over to Yuuri’s side at that, both of them making their way over to the outcrop of rocks behind the waterfall. As they set up for the first pose, Victor took Yuuri’s hand and gave it a squeeze.

“You ready?”

Yuuri leaned over and pressed a kiss to Victor’s lips before pulling back with a smile.

“Yeah. I am now.”
wintermonsoon

“Hello Victor’s Instagram followers,” Adam says facing the camera with the photoshoot clear behind him. “Glamazon here and Victor unwisely handed off his unlocked phone to me, so get ready to watch some quality content.”

The camera jostles a moment, the muffled wind echoing over the audio before he finishes zooming in on where Victor and Yuuri are seated behind the waterfall.

“So let’s see how long it takes before they get completely distracted from the shoot. Oh,” he focuses the camera on Yuuri leaning in to kiss Victor. “Well, that certainly didn’t last long. Then again, with them both looking so fine, it is really a surprise they can’t keep off each other?”

The directors call out instructions for the first shot, instructing them both to lounge across the rocks like they’re comfortable or something.

“Yes, because nothing says relax like a bunch of somewhat pointy volcanic rocks,” Adam notes. “Sure we get to see all the goods from head to toe on display, but at what cost I ask you. I mean, there’s some valuable real estate on the backsides of these heroes that are getting the rough end of things.”

The video story shifts to the next story in the feed.

“This time it looks like our cameraman is getting the short end. That’s him out in the water right in front of the falls, so he can get that upward shot of them standing there,” Adam points out.

The director calls out something about how Victor and Yuuri look “too dry.”
Even on the shaky video, you can clearly see Victor try to nonchalantly put his hand behind his back as he uses his quirk to shift the flow of the waterfall until it’s raining down on Yuuri and just missing him.

“Victor!” Yuuri calls out. “No fair, you get in here!”

He reaches over to grab Victor by the head, pulling him into the downward spray as well so they’re both getting drenched. Both of them are laughing and smiling by the time Victor’s quirk stops and the waterfall goes back to normal.

The camera shifts until Adam’s in the screen again with them behind him. “Are you all seeing these two? I swear I’m getting cavities just standing over here, they’re just that damn sweet.”

The video story shifts to the next story in the feed.

“Well, as you can all see, this shot is focusing on some prime assets,” Adam says, zooming the camera in on it.

Yuuri’s down in the water and Victor’s giving him a hand to climb up, the director making sure Yuuri’s at least out of the water enough that his swimwear and subsequently his butt is visible.

“Talk about your product placement, damn.”

The camera shifts until Adam’s in the frame once more. “I would like to go on the record that I’m fully aware a certain Hokusai Wave is beyond taken at the moment, but I can still appreciate the gifts God has given him.”

The video story shifts to the next story in the feed.

“Okay. So. As you can see,” he zooms in on the two. Yuuri currently holding Victor around the waist and talking to him quietly as they set up the next shot. “The moment the cameras stop, they can’t keep their hands off each other. They’re like those little plushies you see around Valentines with a magnet in them. You try and pull them apart and they just click right back together again.”
The moment the director calls out the next instructions, you can see how they both reluctantly pull apart. The two of them standing in the pose for a few shots until they’re given the okay again to move.

As noted, they go back together immediately.

“See? Magnets, I tell you. Magnets.”

The video story shifts to the next story in the feed.

“They’re doing solo shots right now, so you can watch whoever’s not in the picture standing off to the side looking at their bae like they’re God’s gift to mankind. Seriously, look at Victor.”

The camera shakes a little as he zooms in to where Victor is standing. He’s got a hand pressed over his mouth and eyes are practically sparkling.

“I gotta get me someone who looks at me like that,” Adam says coming back into the frame. “Like I think that might be the new standard for romance. Get you someone who looks at you the way Victor looks at Yuuri Katsuki.”

The video story shifts to the next story in the feed.

“Last shot, which means last story before I hand back Victor’s phone and pretend nothing happened.” Adam grins before feigning innocence. “I mean, he did say to take pictures. Which I’ve been doing. I’ve just you know, provided the whole story here not just snapshots.”

They’re trying to get a dramatic shot of them standing under the waterfall and kissing, but one or both of them always starts giggling and they have to start over again.

“It’s the water,” Victor claims. Adam’s eye roll to the camera shows he’s not buying it.

“Yeah, it’s a bit distracting,” Yuuri adds.
The director sighs and suggests that Victor use his quirk to freeze it or something then because they’re running out of good natural lighting.

Finally, they manage it.

“Oooh, I like this. It’s so dramatic. And I live for the dramatic.”

The two stand under the waterfall kissing, but Victor’s frozen the falls so all around them is just a circle of icicles frozen in midair.

Once the director yells that they’re finished, the two pull back, eye each other with a grin and then promptly try to throw the other into the water below. They both fall in at the same time, laughing and splashing one another.

“The duality of man. Dramatic and yet seconds later, we have these two dorks giggling like schoolgirls.”

The camera follows them a bit more as they swim ever closer and finally Adam faces the camera one last time.

“Well, I hope you all enjoyed the fun. They’re quite the pair, aren’t they? I’m signing off now so hit me up at @glamazon if you enjoyed the commentary. Bye bye now!”

Yuuri had come to understand that photoshoots were their own kind of exhausting.

He’d thought that sitting still that long while photos were taken couldn’t be that taxing, but it really was more than that. Yuuri had a fair share of photoshoots this trip, but this was definitely the most intense of them.

Victor, who’d been through plenty of shoots like this before, clearly knew what to expect; and after doing a little bit of sightseeing that afternoon, they returned to their treehouse hotel for a couples spa package he’d booked.
They’d spent a lazy evening after that and now were soaking together in the corner bathtub in a sea of bubble bath.

“I wonder if we can get some company to make plushies of us as like cute animals or something.”

“You mean the magnetic ones?” Yuuri asked with a laugh. The Instagram videos were trending in just about every social media site and for once Yuuri didn’t feel the least bit stressed about it.

“Of course. The question is, what animals would they use? Like I guess for mine it might be like an arctic fox or polar bear or…”

“A harp seal. Those fluffy white ones?” He suggested. “Then I could be a sea otter or another kind of seal?”

Victor lit up with an idea, his arm around Yuuri’s shoulder jostling him a bit in his excitement.

“A gray seal. Then they’d each have a little hoodie with our logos and you could say they seal it with a kiss!”

Yuuri turned to Victor and managed perhaps a second or two before bursting into laughter, Victor following suit.

“I like it,” he finally managed, tears of mirth in his eyes. “It can be part of our joint line.”

Victor leaned his head down against Yuuri’s, his voice quiet. “I’d like that.”

As they slowly leaned towards one another to share a kiss of their own, the HeroNetwork App notification blared from both of their phones.

Yuuri just smiled, a gentle warmth still settled over his heart. “Looks like we’ve got a job to do.”
Victor smiled back, nuzzling his nose against Yuuri’s before he replied.

“Yeah. Let’s go be heroes.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay but honestly, who doesn't want to stay at these treehouse hotel rooms in Australia?

And swimwear! HokuSurf and Blue Techno
Chapter Notes

Okay, so officially moving this story to biweekly updates until my life chills out enough that weekly isn't near impossible. I figure it's better to plan on biweekly and then have a surprise weekly update than the other way around, so. Also, hello end of Arc 3! Hope you enjoy the wave of feels!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Winter Monsoon- Severely Injured?!

Fanatic Fever - 7 hours ago

The latest photos of the iconic hero have raised some questions about a large scar covering much of his side; leading to speculation as to what sort of injury the iconic hero has been hiding.

Rough and Rugged: Monsoon Sporting Sexy Scar in Latest Photos

HeroBuzz - 6 hours ago

Preliminary photos from the *Sports Illustrated* shoot have the internet abuzz with fans going gaga over Winter Monsoon’s new mystery scar. As theories ran rampant as to the cause, most fans gushed over the hero’s rugged appearance.

Monsoon Confirms Injury due to Last Fight with Inferno

HeroHerald - 5 hours ago

In a phone interview, Winter Monsoon confirmed that the large scar he was seen sporting in the latest pictures out of Australia was indeed a result from a fight with his known archenemy, Inferno. “Quirks have made amazing advancements in medicine, but they can’t fix everything,” he remarked. “All heroes have scars, both literal and figurative, that we have to carry with us going forward.”

20 Famous Heroes Who Won’t Hide Their Scars

Just One Life Journal - 4 hours ago
Nobody’s perfect. And even though photoshopped magazine covers and movie posters would have us think otherwise, there are heroes who don’t mind sharing their flaws with the world; a list that now includes beloved hero Winter Monsoon.

**Freeze Frame Brings Down Smuggling Kingpins**

Hero News Network - 3 hours ago

Armed with only his cellphone and his courage, Thailand’s top hero performed a daring rescue of forty-seven animals from animal smuggling kingpins with advanced quirks late Friday evening. The three man team, which has been eluding authorities for years, was captured by the hero as they attempted to bring a shipment of live pangolins from Malaysia through Thailand.

**Daring Rescue Caught on Film!**

Plus Ultra Post - 3 hours ago

Thai hero Freeze Frame was liveblogging as usual when he encountered notorious animal smugglers with high level quirks; and not wanting to risk them escaping, he bravely took on the three man team solo.

**UAT Hopeful Tiempo Praised for Relief Work in Mexico**

American Hero Network - 2 hours ago

American hero Tiempo was one of the few international heroes to immediately answer the call for help after the late Friday evening earthquake in Mexico. Cheetah Heroes United’s disaster response team welcomed the UAT entrant and stated that they wished more UAT hopefuls would offer up assistance when there was an area in crisis. “Tiempo was the only UAT hopeful in the Americas to contact us immediately when we stated we were sending out a relief team, and we hope the UAT places higher emphasis on disaster relief and not just fighting villains in its selection process.”

They were a three hour flight from the actual problem.

At first, when Yuuri had pulled up the app, he’d asked Victor if they could even make it there in time.
Victor had been skeptical as well, at least until he saw the name of the hero who had sent out the assistance request.

Faunaa.

And if Victor knew anything about his former UAT teammate, it was that she wasn’t about to ask for help in a radius further out than necessary. Sure enough, the details on the Hero Network app stated that any and all heroes within distance would be brought to the scene by a Cheetah Heroes United helicopter. They’d simply put in their coordinates, suited up and waited until the helicopter came; hovering above their treehouse and sending down a ladder for them to climb up.

They were met by Lannee Lee, one of the quirkless techs that worked for CHU, and she quickly filled them on the situation. There was a tropical cyclone headed towards Australia and it happened to be headed right towards the beach where the endangered loggerhead turtles laid their eggs. Faunaa, of course, was already at the beach helping out the rangers there with her partner Comet. But she’d sent out an all call in a wide radius hoping for any and all heroes with special abilities that might come in handy.

Yuuri was talking with one of the heroes they’d already picked up who went by Coriacea and could control lightning; something that would definitely come in handy if they were dealing with the storms that preceded a cyclone making landfall.

Victor knew Faunaa had hoped his own quirks ability with water would be helpful as well.

And perhaps that’s what started his thoughts spiraling downward, that little reminder that even people he knew and trusted like Faunaa hadn’t known so much about him. In fact, before that day, he could think of hundreds of heroes that had absolutely no idea that Winter Monsoon even had a small injury let alone a scar that took up most of his side.

He’d had his reasons, reasons that at the time had seemed sensical and wise that he felt seemed shallow in retrospect. As much as he appreciated Yakov’s abilities coaching him, it was only now outside of his influence that Victor dared to be upfront and honest about himself to the media.

And like Yakov had warned, not everyone took it well. Victor had spent the afternoon trying and failing from reading news article after news article on the matter. Yuuri had finally taken his phone from him, insisting that it was best to let the hype die down before stressing himself out over it. Victor had always been a bit concerned by Yuuri’s avoidance of the news, but today he’d
appreciated it tenfold.

It turned out, of course, that Yuuri’s method actually worked far better.

“Hero news goes in cycles, Victor. And I’ve followed news on you for years, so I promise I’m not just saying this to make you feel better. But the fact is, the first few hours are packed with crazy rumors and hot takes on the matter, then they comment on fan reaction and finally some genuine source like Hero Herald steps in, states the facts, and the rest have to calm down because it makes them look silly if they don’t. By later tonight, your scar is going to be old news.”

By the time Victor had checked the news after dinner, that had been exactly what his newsfeed looked like. Sure, Freeze Frame and Tiempo’s noteworthy accomplishments definitely helped change the topic, but even the articles after Hero Herald’s went up seemed to be complementary and supportive in tone. It was, despite being something he was still inwardly panicking about, old news.

Victor knew old news could and would potentially rear its ugly head again. He’d seen it time after time happen to fellow heroes when there was a slow news day and they were all desperate for a story. But he also knew that with time, the stories lost their impact and that no one really cared about the rumors much anymore.

Like even though it plagued a good part of their UAT year, rumors about Comet’s possible eating disorder would be laughed at as ridiculous now. And Faunaa had taken the terrible comments made about her build and started a plus sized hero line that catered to all the heroes that major companies thought didn’t fit their image.

This was, perhaps, a good change.

He’d no longer have to wear shirts while he went swimming, which definitely resulted in plenty of rumors as it was. And it had definitely made other heroes with visible scarring instantly just a bit more popular, because if Winter Monsoon was cool enough to do it, then that made it somehow okay.

“No photoshop,” he’d insisted with the editors for *Sports Illustrated*. “I want to look like myself.”

And somehow, knowing that the unedited photos from the shoot that had been posted online were not going to be much different than the final product did make Victor feel better. They could see his scar, just like they could see the scars that Yuuri had. They were heroes and their job came with
some dangers, there was nothing to be ashamed of for showing that.

“You’ve been awfully quiet over here,” Yuuri said, shifting in his seat to lean back over to where Victor was looking out the window. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah,” Victor murmured quietly. “Just thinking.”

“About?” Yuuri asked, his eyes searching. Victor could already see the worry starting to build in the tension of his brows.

“About how I’m very glad that I met you,” he replied, his words slipping out before he could think. “Because you’ve made me happy to just be myself.”

Yuuri’s arms were around him in a second.

“Then I suppose I should thank you for helping me feel better about myself too, hmm?” he whispered.

“You’re amazing,” Victor chuckled. “It’s about time you realized it.”

Yuuri pecked a kiss to his cheek.

“And so are you. So it’s about time you realized it as well.”

Victor smiled at that, his heart swelling with a warmth that filled him to the brim.

“Okay. We can be amazing together then.”

Yuuri’s smile seemed just as warm.

“I’d love that.”
By the time they reached Mon Repos beach, the winds had already begun to pick up.

The Cheetah Heroes United team at the site had begun work already, helping the rangers at the site begin to move turtle nests on parts of the beach that the heavy surf and bigger waves were starting to erode away.

Like Yuuri had always heard of the hero agency, it was hero work at its finest. Everyone working together, using their quirks to aid one another and not worrying about who got what points. It was amazing to see in person, and he had to admit, he was kind of freaking out just a little bit about actually getting to be involved in a CHU mission like this.

They’d barely set foot out of the helicopter when a blue and yellow blur darted up from the beach to where they stood. It was Comet and she was grinning.

“I told Faunaa you’d come,” she said, acting like it was nothing that she’d just ran such a large distance in the blink of an eye. “She’s down on the beach making sure all the turtles, whether in or out of egg, know that help is here for them. She’ll be thrilled to finally meet you, Hokusai Wave.”

Yuuri sheepishly ducked his head. “I’m thrilled to finally be meeting her, so…”

Comet just laughed. “Well, you two already have waterproof wear right? If so, you can head on down there and find Faunaa so she can give you instructions. I’ll have to catch up with you because I’ve got to get our lightning hero into place before this storm really starts to get fun.”

She gave them a wave before darting over to where Coriacea was standing, the younger hero clearly just as starstruck as Yuuri felt in the presence of a legend. And he could already see Lannee Lee helping direct the other heroes they’d picked up towards where there were wetsuits available for anyone who wanted one.

“You know, Yuuri,” Victor remarked, his arm casually wrapping around his waist. “This is what I hope to someday make the UAT like. Able to mobilize a full team with specialized quirk users for the situation the moment it's needed, having the resources available to provide transportation there for local heroes willing to help. Ever since they dropped off the UAT and started this up instead, I kept thinking to myself...maybe they had the right idea.”
Yuuri gave Victor a nudge with his shoulder. “And now you’re working to make that happen. But I agree, having this sort of team would be amazing.”

As they made their way down to the beach, various other heroes waved over to them and they waved back. The beach itself was already full of people, rangers and heroes working to move the turtle eggs further up the beach.

“Victor! Down here!”

Yuuri’s eyes followed the voice and sure enough, right there standing in the middle of things was none other than Faunaa herself; the shorter heroine clad in her trademark greens and seeming not to care that she wasn’t wearing anything waterproof. Knowing her and Comet, they’d jumped into help the moment they got there.

“Hey Faunaa, I heard you needed some help,” Victor shot back with a smile.

Finally they made their way over to her and she immediately zeroed in on Yuuri. “Hokusai Wave, I’m incredibly honored to meet you,” she said holding out a hand.

Yuuri blinked then nervously took it. “Um. Yeah. Me too.”

She gave his hand a hearty shake before smiling up at him and Victor. “World needs more heroes like you, Hokusai. I’m glad to see you making the top of the UAT’s rankings. Maybe with someone like you in charge they’ll finally change things.”

“Well, Victor’s trying…” Yuuri managed.

“I heard,” she replied, looking over at him. “Our little ice princess is all grown up. I’m proud of you, Victor. I always knew you were a good kid.”

Victor even seemed a bit bashful under her praise. “I’m trying to be better, Faunaa. I feel I’ve got a lot of previous mistakes to make up for.”
She sighed. “Don’t be so hard on yourself, Victor. Out of all of us, no one’s been under the amount of pressure you have, being the media’s darling. The important thing is that you’ve learned from it and now you’re doing the right thing. That’s why I’m proud of you.”

“Thank you. That means a lot coming from you,” he replied quietly.

“And hang onto this one,” Faunaa continued, nodding towards Yuuri. “You’re not going to find a better partner or better hero than him. I might forgive him a little for turning down my offer if I know he’s with you making the IHU better.”

“Your offer?” Victor asked, blinking over at Yuuri.

“When I was about to leave Detroit I received an offer to work for Cheetah Heroes United,” Yuuri said quietly.

“Which he turned down because, if I remember correctly, he was determined to make the UAT with you.”

Victor looked from Faunaa to Yuuri at that, and he knew he had to be bright red already.

“Really?”

“Really,” Yuuri muttered, wondering if the damp sands could swallow him up. “It was years ago so…”

“But it looks like you’re already one big step closer to your goal, right?” It was Comet, who had darted up and was now standing next to Faunaa as if she’d been there the whole conversation.

Victor just reached down and took Yuuri’s hand, giving it a squeeze.

“I have to admit, I’m kind of glad I met you before you made the team. Now we can really make the team together.”
Yuuri blinked up at him, his chest suddenly tight with emotion. How could he explain that he’d only hoped back then to even be just another hero on the team, that it would have been enough to just work with Victor?

And now, well...they really could make the UAT together.

“Victor,” he said taking him by the shoulders, his heart racing in his ears, “let’s do it. Let’s make the UAT together and make your dream of what it could be like a reality!”

Victor’s eyes went wide and before Yuuri could process anything else, he’d wrapped him in a tight hug.

“Okay,” he replied; and Yuuri thought he sounded a little choked up. “We’ll make it together, Yuuri. I promise.”

They lingered together for a few moments, both of them just smiling and holding the other close. Finally, Faunaa cleared her throat.

“I hate to interrupt, but this storm isn’t going to wait, and we need to figure something out soon if we’re going to save this beach.”

Victor turned then, a sudden steely look overtaking his features and making him look exactly like those posters Yuuri had looked up to for years and years. But this time he turned, his eyes meeting Yuuri’s and his lips curling up into a gentle smile.

“I think I have an idea.”

“Okay, so here’s the plan,” Faunaa said speaking to the gathered group of heroes, rangers, and quirkless members of the CHU team. “Coriacea is going to be our lightning rod; she’s going to catch and redirect any lightning coming near the beach. Moultero is going to provide those of us on the beach with skin sheds that we can use to gather up any eggs or hatchlings we find. Winter Monsoon is going to put up an icewall to shield the beach from the waves until the cyclone moves further down the coast. If you find any hatchlings during this time, I want flashlights skyward with a blue light. Comet will come to you and get the hatchlings to further down the beach where there’s no wall in the way of them getting out to sea.”
She paused then as if taking in some input from an unheard voice. Victor figured it was some of the
turtles buried under the sand.

“I’ve got about two clutches that may hatch during this time, and possibly a third or fourth. They
haven’t decided yet. We need to get them into the surf so they can get under the waves. I’ll be
moving down the beach and pointing out the locations of nests. Some of the rangers also have these
spots marked so if I’m not near you, ask one of them for details. We are just going to move them a bit
higher on the beach so any heavy tide remainders from the cyclone don’t wash their nest away. If
you have any questions, please direct it to my head of operations, Lannee Lee and she’ll get me the
message. Are there any questions?”

“What about Hokusai Wave?” one of the younger heroes asked from the back.

Victor gave Yuuri’s hand a reassuring squeeze. He was asking a lot of him, he knew it. But he also
had complete faith that Yuuri would be able to handle it.

“He’s giving me support,” Victor spoke up. “I won’t be able to get the wall up in time without him.”

He left it vague enough that he was certain everyone merely assumed Yuuri’s unspoken of quirk did
something like speed up actions or give some sort of mental or physical boost unseen. What none of
them could know was that it would be Yuuri, with Victor’s help, that built this wall.

“Everyone good?” Faunaa called out. “Okay, let’s go. We’ve got maybe thirty minutes max. Let’s
move people!”

As everyone moved off towards where they were needed, Yuuri gave Victor’s hand a tug.

“Are you sure about this?” he asked quietly. “I’ve not even made ice once before.”

Victor pulled him over against his side and rubbed up and down his arm, trying not to jostle his
blades that were sheathed against his back.

“Faunaa wasn’t lying when she said I’m not going to find myself a better partner or a better hero than
you, Yuuri. If anyone can work a miracle here tonight, it’s going to be you.”
Yuuri took a deep breath, and Victor leaned closer, thinking perhaps he’d have to talk him through this a little bit more. But as Yuuri looked up, eyes burning with a determination that Victor had only seen from him in the heat of fencing bouts or the middle of a fight, Victor knew he’d made the right choice.

“Okay,” he replied, only the slightest hesitance remaining in his voice. “If you think I can do this, then I’ll find a way.”

He leaned over and pressed a kiss to Yuuri’s forehead at that.

“That’s my Yuuri.”

They headed down to the water hand in hand and suddenly, Victor brought them to a stop.

“Just a second. We should take our gloves off for this. One less layer for the quirk to travel through could make a lot of difference if we’re short on time.”

Yuuri nodded, pulling off his gloves and tucking them in the utility pocket in the side of his suit. Victor did the same and without a word, their hands drifted back together and their fingers intertwined.

“Guess we’ll find out how waterproof these suits are, huh?” Yuuri said quietly.

Victor chuckled, glad to see he was at least joking a bit despite what was certainly a lot of stress. “Guess so. Ready?”

Yuuri traced his finger along the stretch of fabric that ran across Victor’s palm, his suit basically providing him with fingerless gloves underneath his real gloves.

“Yeah.”

As they began to walk out into the dark waters, the force of the waves was already quite notable and
Victor quickened his step. They waded out until they were about waist-deep and Victor brought them to a stop.

“Okay, this should be far enough. First, we need to brace ourselves so we don’t slide or get pushed back by the waves.”

He hadn’t figured out quite how to do it, but Yuuri moved, directing him until he was standing in front of him with Yuuri wrapping his arms around from behind. Before Victor could ask him about it, Yuuri drew his epee and pierced it into the sand in front of them, grabbing onto the hilt.

“Isn’t that going to damage it?” Victor asked.

He could feel Yuuri shrug. “It’s been through worse. Plus, if we do this right, it shouldn’t be submerged long.”

Victor wrapped his hands over Yuuri’s.

“Okay, first let’s start with your breathing. Just calm it down until it matches mine.”

Yuuri nodded, slowly steadying his breaths until they breathed in unison.

“Good. Now we’re going to part the water around us so we don’t accidentally freeze ourselves. Think of it…” Victor paused, trying to decide how to best describe it to Yuuri, “like when you’re fencing and you use this,” he tapped the curved dome at the top of the hilt, “to push back against an opponent. You’re pushing the water away from us.”

It took a few moments, a few false starts in which the water started to retreat but then rushed back in, but after that it began to steadily withdraw.

“You’re doing good. Just a little more, then we’re going to hold it there.”

Victor could feel it starting to cave in and quickly pushed it back up with his quirk. He could feel it now- that give and take, the way his ability flowed between both of them; the different way it felt when it was Yuuri and not him controlling the action.
“Okay, so I’m going to hold that water back until you can put up a small wall of ice in front of it.”

“How?” Yuuri asked, and he sounded a bit strained. “Tell me how.”

Victor clutched his hands tighter over Yuuri’s at that.

“Let go, I’ll hold it.”

He did, Victor could feel it before he saw it, and he pushed the water back by himself.

“First, close your eyes and breathe with me, Yuuri. Just breathe.”

He waited. One deep breath, in and out; then another.

“I told you steam is like a lunge, right?”

Yuuri nodded, the tension in his arms already relaxing.

“Water is a thrust. So ice,” Victor said starting to bring the frost to his fingertips, hoping the chill of it would somehow help Yuuri along. “Ice is delicate. Ice is graceful. It’s like a ballet dancer with their fluid movements and grace and poise. But,” he let the ice grow, trailing down the blade of the epee to the exposed sand beneath them, “it has the strength of a fencer. Perhaps that’s why I love it the most. Graceful and strong, just like you.”

He could feel Yuuri rest his head against his back, his arms hugging around Victor tighter in response.

“Ice is the delicate bladework you’re so good at, Yuuri. It’s the way you take that fluidity and grace and strength and make the blades dance. It’s the blaze of fire you set in my heart, that feeling of something grand and expansive yet beautiful.”

For a moment, Victor fell quiet, unsure if anything he was saying made sense. But suddenly, he felt that tug inside that he knew went with his quirk and felt the cold frost he knew wasn’t from himself
prickle against his bare fingers.

“Yuuri…”

“Shh. I’m concentrating,” Yuuri murmured back, pausing just a moment to press a kiss to the back of Victor’s neck.

The pull grew stronger at that, as if something had sparked to life the moment they touched, and suddenly the frost blossomed in a burst; shooting down the blade and across the sand until it reached where Victor held the water at bay.

He watched in awe as the crystals formed, slowly at first, but growing ever faster, like the wall of water he held back was suddenly painted over in snowflakes. At that, Yuuri shifted one of his hands suddenly, letting go from the hilt with his left hand to put his hand over Victor’s and thread his fingers protectively over it.

The gentle pull became a strong tug at that, as if suddenly the spark burst into a flame, now beginning to burn even stronger and stronger.

Victor could hear the crackle as the ice formed, could see it as the water grew more solid, could feel the way the quirk pulled at him; but he knew it wasn’t his power that was controlling it. Victor’s knew the familiar swoop and tug of his own power, but this was something different; a rushing wave of strength that wasn’t his own. It was Yuuri’s.

He glanced over his shoulder, just about to to say something supportive, to let Yuuri know what it was he was doing, when he spotted Faunaa on the beach yelling towards them and pointing.

Victor turned his head back just in time to see the large wave that was headed towards them and he knew unless he used all of his strength there would be no way to freeze it in time to stop it.

“Yuuri, listen,” he could already feel the doubt starting to affect him, could feel the way the pull lessoned as Yuuri saw the incoming wave. “We’ve got one chance to freeze it over. I can only use about half of my strength with my injury, you need to be my other half.”

“Victor…”
How he wanted to turn in his arms and hold him and tell him how proud he was, reassure him that no matter what he’d be proud of all that Yuuri had managed to do already. But there wasn’t time. There wasn’t any time but one moment left.

“I believe in you, Yuuri.”

And like a surging tsunami, something that was powered at least fifty percent if not more of Victor’s strength, Yuuri rose to meet him. Victor leaned back into Yuuri’s arms, held his hands a little tighter, and used all the strength he could manage to join it.

Like a shot, an array of ice spread out from where they stood, shooting outward and upward; meeting the oncoming wave with one of their own.

It stopped the wave right as it crested, freezing it solid and leaving only small droplets of water to trickle down over its edges, turning immediately into icicles.

Victor turned around the moment he knew it had been stopped, tears prickling at his vision not enough to stop him from taking in the beautiful man that stood behind him who was smiling at him with his most beautiful smile.

“I did great, right?” Yuuri managed, breathless and seeming a little choked up himself.

And remembering the last time he’d heard those words from Yuuri and unable to to think of anything else that could remotely convey how he felt at that moment, Victor tackled Yuuri to the sand in a kiss.

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**Hero News Network: The Mon Repos Beach Miracle**

"Tonight, on a stormy beach in Queensland Australia, a miracle happened. And the iconic image you see before you now will be one for the history books."
"Captured by one of the Cheetah Heroes United team members, this image truly captures the amazing show of heroics that happened here tonight. When faced with a tropical cyclone bearing down on them, the Big Four as they’re now being called, didn't shirk from their jobs and instead faced it head on."

"We're talking thousands upon thousands of lives that were saved here," Faunaa says. "This beach is incredibly important to survival of the endangered loggerhead turtles, and when only one in a thousand might survive to adulthood, the idea of letting this beach get flooded away was just not an option."

"As always, it was a team effort," Comet adds. "Our crew and the local rangers wouldn't have been able to safely remain on the beach during the lightning strikes if not for Coriacea's ability. And Moultero gave the literal skin off their back to help us gather up eggs and turtles and get them to safety."

"Of course, Winter Monsoon and Hokusai Wave were the literal lifesavers tonight," Faunaa continues. "That was a twelve or thirteen meter tall wave and had they not stopped it, I can hardly imagine the damage and possible loss of life that would have occurred."

The camera pans back to the newscaster.

"Earning an unheard of 10,800 points for their miraculous work, Winter Monsoon has now moved into second place, just bumping out The Leopard by 1000 points. Adding to his already impressive lead, Hokusai Wave holds his first place position with a lead of 12,400 points. Winter Monsoon insists that what he accomplished would have been simply impossible without Wave’s help."

“I can’t give public details, but I want it known that this was something we accomplished together. There would be no way I could have achieved this in time without his help,” Winter Monsoon says firmly. “The IHU is aware of the circumstances and has awarded points based on their judgement call of the matter.”

“When contacted about it IHU Official, Hayami Masumi, had this to say.”
“Due to reasons we cannot disclose that would possibly put a hero in danger, we cannot comment on the specifics. But the panel of IHU judges were all given proof of this and the information from multiple eyewitnesses at the scene before they decided on awarding both Monsoon and Wave the same amount of points. For those that are doubtful, I would like to note that a similar circumstance occurred in London in which Wave can be visibly seen holding Monsoon during the fight.”

The shot returns to the newscaster.

“When asked to comment on the matter, Hokusai Wave was his usual humble self.”

“I’m just doing my job,” Hokusai Wave remarks. “In situations of crisis, it’s what a hero does- put themselves between the lives at risk and the danger in hopes they can stop it in time. Luckily, we managed to do so tonight.”

“More interviews with all the Big Four and other heroes at the scene will be on after this break.”

They were completely exhausted by the time they made it back to their hotel.

After holding the icewall in place until the eye of the cyclone moved further south, they’d been bombarded by news crew after news crew as one of the CHU team’s pictures went viral.

Yuuri had lost count at this point of how many interviews with how many reporters he’d actually done. He was pretty sure he told them all the same thing and he knew at least Victor’s secret had been kept safe.

It had been Yuuri’s first worry after he heard Victor get off the phone with Hayami, when Victor had assured him that he’d given enough proof that they should award the points fairly.

At first, he’d feared that in his desperation, Victor had disclosed that they now shared a quirk. But at the same time, he had a feeling Victor wouldn’t betray his trust like that and saying such a thing could easily cause problems given his actual quirkless state.

But Victor, somehow amidst all the things happening, had figured out a way to tell the truth without
actually telling the truth.

“I asked them to review footage from London,” he’d said quietly as they rested in one of the tents the CHU team had brought with them. “I said, as you’re all now aware, I have a severe injury on my side which limits my own abilities. If I hadn’t had Yuuri’s literal physical support and warmth, I could not have made that amount of ice without freezing myself as well.”

It was true, in a way. That had certainly been the case in London. And it was definitely something that could be seen if they closely reviewed any video of that incident.

“Is telling them that really okay?” Yuuri had still worried though.

“Yuuri, I’d rather risk telling them I’m injured than put you at risk. If we’re lucky, the information doesn’t go the route the information that bomber got did. If it does, then we’ll have a much narrower list of suspects for who’s leaking it.”

It was a fair argument Yuuri supposed. But even as they crawled under the covers something still nagged at him about it.

“I wouldn’t have minded if you got all the points, Victor,” he’d muttered quietly.

But Victor let out a heavy sigh as he did. “Yuuri, it’s not about the points.”

That surprised him, and Yuuri blinked up at him in surprise. “What?”

“It’s not. Even if I had all those points, you’d easily retake the lead again with something else. But I couldn’t live with people thinking you were just standing there doing nothing while I did something amazing. I’m tired of people treating you like you’re just some accessory to me, and I was afraid if I didn’t come down firm about this, that’s what this would become. Top hero Monsoon and his boyfriend Yuuri.”

Yuuri stared, eyes wide and heart thundering in his chest. He’d never thought about it, but here Victor was, worrying about him in such a way.
“What you did was a miracle, Yuuri. You’d never used a quirk like that, even with water or steam you’d not. But just like every other hero who had that breakthrough moment, your body answered the call when it was most needed. Your innate strength and inner power were enough to use my quirk at probably sixty percent if not seventy-five percent power which meant I didn’t even have to strain to help out. See?”

He tugged up his shirt at that and sure enough, the injury looked no worse than it did before.

“You were my other half, Yuuri. And I want the whole world to know it.”

Yuuri found himself thinking back to when it happened, that strange feeling inside as the ice sped its way up the wave and froze it solid. He’d barely had time to even comprehend that he’d done much of anything before Victor had kissed him, tears in his eyes.

But now he understood why Victor had been so happy.

Tears pricked at the corner of his eyes and before he could reach up to brush them away, Victor closed the space between them and brushed them away with his thumbs.

“Yuuri…”

“Thank you,” he managed, his voice thick with emotion. “For telling me this. I had no idea…”

Victor’s eyes went wide.

“Really?”

Yuuri shook his head. “I thought maybe I helped a little bit. Maybe if I tried a little harder your side wouldn’t hurt you tonight.”

“Oh Yuuri.”

Victor pulled him close, his breath warm against his ear.
“Yuuri, sweetheart, if I’d been able to tell the truth, I would have taken less points than you. Because I knew, I could feel, that I was only helping so much. Making sure you were respected and seen as my equal was the least I could do.”

Yuuri’s tears spilled over at that, his hands shaky as they fisted in the back of Victor’s shirt and held him closer.

He’d turned down Faunaa’s own offer to work for Cheetah Heroes United on the hope that someday he might be good enough to even make the team with Victor Nikiforov, the Winter Monsoon.

But deep down, Yuuri had known that what he’d really wanted, was to be seen as Victor’s equal. More than anything else.

It was a dream he never thought would be possible.

To one day stand next to Victor on equal ground.


“It’s because I’m so happy, Victor.”

He pulled back at that, his blue eyes bright in the moonlit night.

Yuuri gave him a watery smile.

“Thank you. I don’t think I can even begin to tell you how much this means to me.”

“Yuuri…”

He reached up at that, his hand a little unsteady as he pressed it against Victor’s cheek.
“I’m going to work hard and make sure that your risk in telling them about your side isn’t in vain. I’ll earn my spot as top hero without a quirk, and together we can make the UAT a team to be proud of.”

Victor melted into his touch, his own eyes misting up with tears.

“Faunaa was completely right. Best hero and best partner, Yuuri Katsuki.”

Yuuri closed the space between them. “And all yours.”

And even though it tasted of tears, Yuuri thought this might be their sweetest kiss yet.

Chapter End Notes

Designs for my girls, Faunaa and Comet are up here if you haven’t seen it already.
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

And we're diving right into the plot of Arc 4!

February arrived before they knew it.

It seemed only moments ago that they’d returned home to Hasetsu after spending the majority of January traveling, the slow pace of the day to day at the onsen nothing compared to their previous daily itineraries. Yuuri was relieved to finally have all that press nonsense behind him, gladly settling back into his sleepy seaside town that didn’t have reporters lurking around every corner.

Victor reminded him he’d surely get offers for sponsorships or photoshoots in the future, but for now at least, they were a thing of the past.

But the thing about not having each day packed tight with a press schedule and airplane flights and photoshoots, was that it meant the days seemed to blend together into weeks without much discernable happening in between. Even the yakuza groups nearby had not been causing too much trouble; and so outside practicing with Victor, Yuuri wasn’t getting much in the way of hero work done.

Which was good, Yuuri thought, if nothing else but it meant Victor had no choice but to rest and not strain his injury any further. Yuuri had been vigilant about making sure he was taking his medicine, was taking regular baths in the warm onsen waters and allowing him to give him gentle massages. Victor insisted he didn’t need all the fuss, but Yuuri reminded him that he liked doting on him and that seemed to make the matter better.

All in all, February was looking to be a nice break from all the chaos of January. The most nerve wracking thing so far being trying to plan out their Valentine’s Day without spoiling the details. Victor had offered to do the planning, but Yuuri wanted this, wanted to do this special thing for Victor and without his help or money. With all the sponsorship and photoshoot fees, he had plenty to choose a nice hotel in a big city with plenty of amenities that would be perfect for a special night.

He should have known, should have heeded that little anxious voice telling him over and over something was going to go wrong. But he’d pushed it aside and planned everything trying to remain blissfully unaware of the nagging feeling that this was not going to go as planned.
And when at 12:27pm on February 12th there was a 5.6 magnitude earthquake in Kachang China, Yuuri had practically thrown his phone when the notification had gone off.

Within an hour, the IHU had issued a statement that in response they’d be asking the top six ranked heroes to go to the site to assist with rescue efforts. Apparently, they hadn’t taken kindly to Cheetah Heroes United calling them out and wanted to put an end to the articles since then that had implied that the IHU did less helping and more posturing.

Yuuri was midway through angrily packing what he needed out of his room when he heard the soft knock on the doorframe and turned to find Victor offering him a small smile.

“Hey, mind if I help you?”

The large black duffel bag that Yuuri had suggested in lieu of Victor’s designer luggage was about half full already.

“I guess,” he muttered.

Victor quietly crossed the room, dodging the piles of strewn clothing on the floor, and settled on the floor next to Yuuri.

“I was serious about rescheduling Valentine’s Day. We don’t have to do it on the actual day for it to count. Just being with you is enough for me.”

Yuuri let out a long sigh. “I know, I know I just…” he ran a hand up through his hair, tugging at it a little as if that could pull the irritation out of his head with it.

Victor’s hand on his back was so soft he almost couldn’t feel it. He seemed to be a bit unsure how to handle Yuuri’s current mood, but bless him, he was trying so hard.

“I’m just frustrated. I feel like the universe is doing it just to spite me.”
“Yuuri, it’s not doing it to spite you.”

He could feel the brush of Victor’s legs as he sat behind him, the warmth even through his pants enough to set Yuuri’s veins crackling with electricity. It had been like this ever since they’d gotten back, because as much as his body kept wanting, the idea that his parents were just a few rooms away was positively mortifying. Instead, it had been left to simmer in his nerves, like lightning itching to strike yet not having any outlet to do so.

Yuuri was certain counting down the days until their Valentine’s Day plans was all that was keeping him sane. And now, well...so much for that.

That ridiculous concept that someone could just throw someone down and ravish them was now sounding more and more appealing. And the press of Victor against his back was definitely not helping the matter.

He scooted out of Victor’s reach, only to be met with the shock and hurt in big blue eyes.

“Sorry. It’s not you. I mean, it is you. But it’s not you that’s the problem.”

Victor just stared. Then timidly, he asked, “sorry, I don’t follow. What’s the problem?”

Yuuri wanted to scream.

Instead, he scrambled to his feet and paced in the small expanse between the wall and his bed.

“You’re driving me crazy, that’s what,” he muttered, realizing after the words tumbled free how bad they could come out. “And yes, I mean that in that way. Like the fact we have a flight in an hour is about the only reason I’m not doing something about it right now.”

Victor’s cheeks were painted deep pink in seconds.

“Oh. Sorry. I didn’t mean to..”
“You don’t have to mean to, Victor. Just being yourself is enough for my entire body to go haywire.” Yuuri let out another sigh, but with it, and his previous rant, seemed to go a lot of his momentary frustration. “Sorry. I don’t mean to take it out on you. But I was really looking forward to Valentine’s.”

Victor seemed to sense the shift in Yuuri’s mood, immediately scrambling to his feet and pulling him into his arms. “Is it good or bad that I’m equally frustrated about that?”

That got a smile out of him. “Good. At least we can suffer together.”

Victor let his arms slide down around Yuuri’s waist, a smile tugging at his lips as he leaned his head down against Yuuri’s.

“I’d say at least we have a five hour flight to China, but I think we were heavily advised against that.”

And that got a chuckle out of him. “Yeah. Guess I’ll have to settle for now.”

They had a few minutes, right?

Yuuri put a hand against Victor’s chest and gently pushed him back until he toppled down onto the bed. A smirk tugged at Yuuri’s lips at the sight of him there, cheeks already flushed pink and eyes roving up Yuuri’s figure.

Settling a knee on either side of Victor, Yuuri leaned down over him and quickly closed the space between them; his hands immediately going up to tangle in Victor’s hair and his mouth quick to press a searing kiss to Victor’s lips.

After that, all he could register was the feel of Victor against him, the taste of him on his lips, the warmth of his skin against his skin. He could so easily lose himself here in Victor’s arms, all sense of time long forgotten.

“Yuuri! Your ride to the airport is here!” Mari’s voice echoed from down the hallway.
He pulled back with a jerk, his breathing heavy as he darted his eyes towards the doorway.

Sure enough, before he could move, Mari had pulled the door open. It said a lot for his sister that she didn’t even seem the least bit surprised, the sight only managing to get her to cock an eyebrow at them in acknowledgement.

“So. Your ride is here. Hi Victor.”

Victor, who seemed equally breathless, stammered out a reply. “Uh...hi Mari.”

She smirked and turned to go at that. “I’ll let them know you’ll be a few minutes.”

Yuuri swallowed hard, then turned to blink down at Victor.

He offered up a sheepish smile. “Sorry. It seems I distracted you with my dashing looks again.”

And that, frustrations momentarily forgotten, earned him a peal of laughter as Yuuri shoved him playfully back down.

“You’re terrible.”

“Terribly in love with you.”

Yuuri pecked one last kiss to his lips at that before he sat back up.

“Feeling better?” Victor asked.

He nodded. “Yeah. Thanks.”

“I’ll keep that in mind the next time you’re frustrated that apparently you prefer the hands on approach.”
Yuuri snorted out another laugh. “Yeah. My hands on you.”

And as much as he felt incredibly embarrassed by the statement three seconds later, he did have to admit that he was feeling much, much better by the time they left for the airport.

The moment they stepped off their plane from Shanghai to Xishuangbanna at 9pm that night, both their phones were ringing off the hook.

“It’s Phichit,” Yuuri murmured, holding his up.

“Okay, let’s both sit down somewhere and deal with whatever’s going on,” Victor replied. All his phone was noting was that it was an IHU official line. Which didn’t sound good.

So as he settled in an airport chair next to Yuuri, who was cheerfully answering the call from his friend, Victor warily answered his own call.

“Uh...hello?”

“Victor, this is Lilia. Do you have a moment?”

Victor’s heart lurched in his chest. This was not the person he wanted to be receiving a call from out of the blue.

“Yes. Is everything okay?"

“Would I be calling you if it was?” She paused and Victor could feel his pulse begin to race. “But it’s not about Mr. Katsuki. At least not specifically.”

Victor let out a breath at that. “Oh. Okay. You had me rather worried for a moment there.”
He could imagine the stoic expression on her face as she replied. “Apologies. But this is an IHU matter and Hayami’s putting out enough fires at the moment and needed someone else to reach out to you.”

Suddenly, his worry shifted; wondering what could have changed so much during a five hour flight.

“In the IHU’s attempt to both appease the worldwide community by sending out aide but not sparing any excess expenses to get either of the teams there, we’ve encountered a bit of a problem. Air China’s limited internet access and lack of any cell phone usage on the flights has resulted in the top six heroes basically being out of our range of contact for the extent of their flights.”

“What happened?”

“There was a second earthquake in Myanmar around 7pm local time. 5.9 magnitude and substantially more damage than the first. We have arranged for an overnight sleeper bus to take you from your location at the airport to Tachileik in Myanmar tonight as their airport is unable to take incoming flights. It’s a six hour drive. The UAT team won’t arrive to Beijing until 6am.”

Victor looked over to Yuuri at that, and seeing the worried look settled in his brow, he had a feeling he too was aware of the news.

“Okay, so what about here in China? Are we just blowing them off?” Victor had tried to keep the frustration out of his tone, but he had a feeling the heads of IHU would do just that. Ignore the plight of one disaster and go to the one with more damage just because it looked better in the press.

“Other top fifteen heroes are being asked to step in. Although this time, the IHU has invested in a more timely method of getting them there. We’ll also be dividing the UAT between locations once they arrive.”

“Guess it made it a little inconvenient for them that the top two heroes aren’t on their precious team.”

He hadn’t meant to state his thought aloud, but well, there it was.

Lillia chuckled. “Perhaps. But Hayami insisted that it was critical that you and Mr. Katsuki remain
paired, so be sure to thank him later for his troubles.”

Victor felt a hint of a smile at that. “I will most definitely thank him for that. Is there anything else we should be aware of?”

“Off the records,” she began quietly. “I would like to make note that your recent appeal and the nature of it has yet to spread from the judges to anyone else. I’ll keep monitoring it and Mr. Katsuki’s matter, of course. But, for now, you may at least know that outside myself, Hayami and the panel of five judges, the true nature of the matter is still not common knowledge here at HQ.”

“Thank you,” he replied. “I’m extremely glad to hear that.”

“Hayami should be in touch with you by tomorrow morning at the latest. And Victor? When the press inevitably calls the IHU out on this, don’t hold your tongue.”

Lilia Baranovskaya was telling him to piss off the IHU? Well well, how things had changed.

“Okay, but if Yakov calls me up to yell at me about it, I’m telling him you gave me permission.”

He knew she had to be smirking at that, especially considering the confidence with which she replied.

“It will be interesting to see what he says to that. Take care, Victor. And do keep Mr. Katsuki around, he’s done more for your motivation than anything Yakov ever did.”

And knowing that she couldn’t be anymore correct, Victor assured her he would. For as long as he could.

__________________________

It was the first time since New Year's that they couldn't sleep in the same bed.

Victor had insisted that they could both just cram into one of the narrow "beds" that the bus
provided, but Yuuri knew they'd regret it in the morning.

Instead they chose beds across the aisle from each other and even that small amount of distance, those maybe fifteen inches between them, felt like a chasm to Yuuri. It was a painful reminder that he'd come to expect Victor there beside him and that if Victor ever left, he'd surely take most of Yuuri's heart with it.

His mind was wide awake with such thoughts, the darkness of the night seeming to coax all the doubts and worries out into the open to prey upon his insecurities. Ever since this whole ordeal began, he couldn't avoid that nagging feeling that maybe the universe was ruining his plans because it was warning him not to get his hopes up.

Logically, he knew Victor wouldn't leave; but his mind never cared about logistics when it was intent on a mood like this.

Yuuri let out a heavy sigh of frustration, hoping he could shake the thoughts from his mind, and he was surprised he heard Victor shift in the bed across from him.

“Can’t sleep either?”

It was dark, only the dimmest of lighting from the moon filtering in through the windows, but somehow Yuuri was able to find Victor’s eyes.

“Yeah. There’s too much on my mind,” Yuuri muttered.

He could hear Victor turn and suddenly felt his hand gentle reaching out for him in the dark.

“You’re too far away,” Victor said quietly. “I don’t think I can sleep without you closer.”

Yuuri’s heart slammed to a halt at his words and for a moment he wondered if he’d imagined it.

Victor let out a derisive little exhale. “The idiots at the IHU thought they could split us up for this little humanitarian performance they have going on. What a mess would I have been then? I can’t
even sleep without you close to me.”

Eyes went wide as the words settled around him, Yuuri’s pulse jolting back, each beat of his heart echoing over and over, “he can’t stand the distance either.”

Fingertips gently traced up Yuuri’s arm, searching with a desperation Yuuri knew he couldn’t be imagining. Finally, they found his neck and quickly, Victor brought his hand up to cup Yuuri’s cheek.

“I don’t care if it’s completely ridiculous and you think I’m silly for it, but whenever we get there, I’m not sleeping anywhere but with you. If the cot or sleeping bag isn’t big enough then I’ll sleep next to you on the ground.”

Yuuri let out a nervous laugh, suddenly, overwhelmingly overcome with emotion.

“Victor…”

“I’m serious,” he huffed. “Laugh if you want but I…”

He trailed off when Yuuri turned his head and pressed a gentle kiss to his palm before nuzzling his cheek back into his touch. A gentle warmth settled over him, wrapping him in a reassuring embrace and flooding out all his bad thoughts.

“Is it strange to say I miss you when you’re less than a foot away from me?”

Yuuri could feel the little jolt of surprise as it made its way down Victor’s arm and he could see wide blue eyes shining out in the night’s darkness.

“Not at all.”

“Good. Because I miss you.”

“Yuuri…”
“Did they really try and split us up?”

Yuuri could imagine the roll of Victor’s eyes at the reminder of the IHU’s stupidity.

“Apparently we have Hayami to thank for them not doing so. They’re probably pissed off and trying to punish me for speaking out. Well, after today’s mistake, I’m certainly not going to be the only one pointing out their problems.”

Rolling the rest of the way onto his side so he could face Victor completely, Yuuri reached out until he found Victor’s face and gently pressed his hand against his cheek.

“Was that why you were so upset earlier? You’d said you didn’t want to talk about it at the time, but if you want to now…”

He could feel the brush of Victor’s hair against his fingers, even something as simple as that seeming to give him a sense of calm and relief that he didn’t have before.

Victor let out a sigh. “Yeah, that was most of it. As I said, Lilia at least reassured me that both our secrets are still secret, but that was about the only good news I got.”

“I still can’t believe they expected Phichit to get on a jet to Myanmar when he was already trying to deal with some of the damage done in his country. Especially since scientists are saying any of the neighboring fault lines could go within a few days.”

“You, these are the same people that didn’t think to ask the top ranked hero in China to help out with the problem in China until after they decided to send us all elsewhere. They’re just trying to put the big names in front of the cameras. They don’t actually care about rescuing people.”

Yuuri frowned. He’d suspected as much, given the fact that they’d been put on a commercial flight rather than using one of the three IHU jets to get them there faster.

“Okay, let’s just forget about them for right now,” he said, hoping he could believe it himself. “We’re going to go help people. I don’t care if there’s a single person watching. We can show people that there’s still some good heroes out there.”
At that, Victor turned to peck a kiss to Yuuri’s hand. “I love the way you think, Hokusai Wave. It’s very, dare I say it, heroic?”

He practically giggled at his tone, deep and husky as if he was trying to be seductive about it. Well, Two could play that game.

“Well, Winter Monsoon,” he started, trying his best for sultry. Yuuri thought it sounded ridiculous, but that was probably the point. “I happen to be a hero, after all.”

Victor shifted closer at that, as if he could gain even a centimeter or two more in closeness.

“How wonderful. You see, I happen to be one as well.”

Yuuri scooted closer now too.

“My my, how dashing.”

“Mmhm. Quite noble.”

It fell silent a moment and that was all it took before they both let out little huffed laughs, clearly trying and failing at holding them at bay.

Victor regained his composure first and Yuuri could hear the rustle of blankets.

“Youri?” he sounded a bit nervous, a little unsure all of a sudden.

“Yeah?”

“I need you,” Victor whispered, his voice breathy and raw. “So stay close to me, please?”
Yuuri moved before he even realized it, quickly crawling out of his bed and crossing the aisle to slide in next to Victor. It was cramped, but somehow, infinitely more comfortable. It was the least he could do after hearing such a heartfelt plea.

“I’m right here, Victor,” he murmured, wrapping his arms around him.

And he realized, suddenly, impossibly, that perhaps he hadn’t been the only one who’d been kept awake by worrisome thoughts.

Victor clutched him closer and relaxed into his embrace.

“Our muscles are going to hate us tomorrow,” he muttered.

Yuuri snorted out a laugh. “Yeah, but I think it’s still probably worth it.”

“Yes. Absolutely worth it.”

Slowly, as the road wove onward and the night grew darker, they found themselves finally able to let their eyes drift closed and their bodies rest.

And much to their relief when they arrived to the tents that the rescue organizations had set up for them, they found that pushing two cots together worked just fine.

Perhaps, Victor thought as the early rays of sunlight filtered through the tent flaps, he’d taken for granted what he’d come to have with Yuuri. At least, that’s what he told himself to excuse the excessive clingy feelings he had that had bubbled up to the surface last night.

But it really hadn’t quite hit him until that night how much having Yuuri beside him meant, how much it seemed to set him at ease.

The fact the IHU couldn’t see that, or didn’t care about that, just made his blood boil. For once, after all the years of work he’d given in their name, he had found something he wanted to hold onto. Had
found a reason to keep fighting despite the fact his body was holding him back.

He shouldn’t have been surprised by their attempt to pull them apart, but it unsettled him all the same. If even Lilia could see how much Yuuri had improved Victor’s life, then why couldn’t they see it as well? Or maybe they could, but they wanted to prove a point by reminding him that despite all the bad press Victor gave them that they still called the shots as long as he kept his name in the pool for the UAT.

That had been perhaps his biggest worry. If he continued to speak out, if he kept forcing them to change their ways, could they force him and Yuuri apart?

The doubt had been enough to keep him wide awake and it was only once Yuuri’s arms were safe around him that he’d been able to sleep at all.

Part of Victor wanted to just tell them to fuck off, he didn’t need them anymore the way he used to need them. Sure, he’d given up most of his life so far at their beck and call, but they’d provided him the closest thing he’d had to a home all the same. As Yakov always said, he might be acting like a rebellious teenager about it, but he was still their favorite at the end of the day.

Had leaving them to go to Yuuri changed that?

Victor honestly didn’t care how they felt about him, except for the fact that it might damage Yuuri’s chances at the UAT. And as long as Yuuri wanted to make the UAT, Victor knew he’d do whatever it took to stay right there beside him on the team. Which meant, he needed to find a way to make a point that this whole situation had been a planning disaster without directly doing the finger pointing.

He hadn’t come up with much, becoming far too distracted running his fingers through Yuuri’s hair or watching the steady rise and fall of his breathing, but he knew something would come to him sooner or later.

And the morning tremors of a nearby earthquake not only jostled Yuuri awake, but gave Victor just the answer he needed to his problem. By the time the shaking had stopped and everyone’s phones started blaring off notifications again, Victor had made his decision.

He had already sent off two texts and was on the phone with Hayami in minutes.
“Hey, sorry, I know you’re probably busy with like a million other things,” Victor said, pressing a quiet kiss to Yuuri’s cheek as he groggily rubbed his eyes.

“We just had a 6.5 earthquake in northern Thailand, Victor. I’m definitely a little busy right now,” Hayami managed, still sounding fairly cordial despite his obviously frazzled state.

“That’s exactly the reason I’m calling you. I’d like to let you know that Yuuri and I will be heading there to help Phichit with the damage in his country. I’m under the impression the UAT will be arriving here in Myanmar soon?”

“Mila’s been requested to stay in China and help lead the group assigned there,” he replied. Then he let out a heavy sigh. “But they’re not going to allow the situation in Thailand to go without a UAT member. They’re already arguing about how to divide them up.”

Victor had to repress a contented sigh as Yuuri sleepily brought Victor’s hand up to his lips and pressed a kiss to the top of it.

“Then I’ll make the decision for them. Tell them we’re already headed to Thailand and that I’ve asked Chris to join us. By the time they decide who to put in front of what cameras lives could be lost. They’ve already wasted valuable time getting us here.”

Hayami let out an incredulous little laugh. “Well, that definitely would solve one of my problems. They aren’t going to like that you’ve just decided for them though.”

“I may have heard about their plan to send Yuuri and I to different locations, so this is the least I can do to repay them.”

“All right. Anything else, Victor?”

Victor bit his lip, the plan slowly coming together in his mind. “I’ll text you a list of who to send where, Hayami. Tell them you pulled names from a hat or something. But promise me you won’t make any press statements excusing anyone’s behavior in this situation. The only way we’ll get them to change is if forces outside of us make them.”

He let out a sigh at that. “Okay. I hope you know what you’re doing, Victor.”
“I hope I do too, Hayami. Hang in there.”

“Same to you.”

Yuuri blinked at him. “What’s going on? I only caught part of it.”

“We’re going to Thailand to help Phichit. They just had an earthquake nearby the area he was already at, so I’m going to guess they need all the help possible right now.”

He sat up at that. “What about here?”

“The UAT is enroute,” Victor said and then after a moment hesitance, he continued, “And without us here it will be very interesting to see who steps in as a leader in this situation. Especially since Mila will be in China and Chris with us.”

Yuuri seemed to catch on, his eyes widening just a bit. “You’re hoping they get into another fight, aren’t you?”

Victor gave a hesitant smile. “Not hoping per say, but expecting yes. The only way the IHU is going to change is if the world makes them. And the world will be watching every move the UAT members make in this crucial time.”

He dropped his eyes at that, a frown pulling at his lips.

“What about the people here, Victor? They still need help and if they get into a fight again…”

At that, Victor held up his phone’s notification screen. The top message from a group text with Comet and Faunaa.

*Did you already reach Myanmar? We’re headed that way with our relief crew, but any feedback on where the help is most needed would be great.*
Victor pulled the thread open so Yuuri could see the reply he’d given.

_We got in pretty late, but Myanmar definitely needs more help than China. Their government seems to be less organized to handle these situations. Most of the people on the ground here right now are international teams where even the airport we stopped at in China was already bustling with Chinese teams headed towards the villages most affected._

At that, Yuuri finally met his eyes.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to doubt you, but after everything with the IHU…”

“You needed to make sure I hadn’t let my anger get the best of me,” Victor finished. He reached out at that, and took Yuuri’s hand. “Which I very much appreciate.”

He blinked up at him in surprise.

“Truly, Yuuri. I know your heart is always in the right place, so I knew you’d keep me in check. If you still think this is too risky and that it will endanger any lives, let me know and I’ll call Hayami back and change it.”

Yuuri paused, clearly seeming to think the matter over. “No. I think no matter where the UAT is placed, there’s still a potential that an argument could break out. There’s just a lot of heroes in that group that have something to prove, so the best case scenario is making sure there’s extra help in that location so it makes up for what time they waste fighting amongst themselves.”

“Exactly. If nothing else, I know Faunaa and Comet will step in and stop them before they waste too much time. But it will hopefully get the IHU to reconsider some of their actions, because it’s their attitude that’s causing this sort of unheroic behavior in the first place.”

“I agree with that,” Yuuri replied. Then he reached out and took Victor’s hand, giving it a squeeze. “But I am curious why you aren’t just calling them out yourself. It’s not like you to be scared of them.”

At that, Victor dropped his eyes; his heart suddenly too loud in his ears.
“Victor?”

“It’s because of you.”

He could feel the surprise as Yuuri’s hand tensed where it held his in its grip.

“What?”

“I don’t care what they think of me, but I don’t want them to hold it against you. The fact they even considered separating us…”

Suddenly, Yuuri’s arms were around him and his voice was warm against his ear.

“I...thank you. For looking out for me.”

Victor wrapped his arms around him in return.

“I don’t want anyone to come between you and your dream of making the team, Yuuri. And if that means I have to bite my tongue, then I will. Because you’ve worked so hard for it. If anyone deserves to be on that team, if anyone can make that team actually mean something again, it’s going to be you.”

Yuuri pulled back at that, a fiery blaze of determination in his eyes, as he met Victor’s gaze.

“And you’re going to be there with me, okay?”

Victor smiled at that.

“Of course. There’s no place else I’d rather be.”
“Do you have a helmet?”

After an earthquake, one expected to have a few aftershocks; it was just a fact of the situation. And, as Victor was discovering, the more time he spent around heroes not on the UAT, the more he realized just how blind he’d been to the problems around him.

“Uh…” Victor looked warily towards Yuuri, who thankfully offered him a reassuring smile.

“I packed two, don’t worry. I didn’t notice one with your gear so…”

Victor let out a nervous laugh. “Yeah, I uh…don’t have one.”

Phichit, who had asked the innocent question that had spurred this whole matter, crossed his arms and leveled Victor a look.

“Seriously? You didn’t have any PPE on the UAT?”

He bit his lip, suddenly feeling like he was a rookie hero again. He’d been sheltered, so much that even basic things like this left him floundering to find his footing again.

“I know this is going to across very stupid but…what’s PPE?”

Phichit turned his wide eyed gaze towards Yuuri, and being as they hadn’t suited up yet the shock apparent on both their faces was unmasked.
“Personal Protective Equipment? Aka. what anyone with two brain cells would bring to a disaster mission?”

“Phichit,” Yuuri interceded. “I don’t think…” he searched Victor’s expression and frowned. “The UAT has never had them. At least not on any mission I’ve seen covered.”

He blinked at that, his mouth gaping open. “Holy shit...you’re right. They’ve only used whatever the local rescue team provided.”

Victor let out a heavy sigh. “I see we’ve found yet another issue with the UAT that I need to tell Hayami about. I’m sorry, as Yuuri said, we’ve never been issued anything of the sort. When we’ve been sent to deal with matters like this, we were given some gear from the local rescue teams but often we just…”

“Went without,” Yuuri finished with a grim look. “I never thought about how unsafe that was until now, but...they’ve basically been sending you into danger completely helpless.”

Phichit turned with purpose at that and started rummaging through the supplies he’d brought with him. One by one he began to hand over what should have been provided.

“Goggles, so you don’t get debris in your eyes. Face mask, so you don’t inhale the fumes,” he turned and took the helmet Yuuri held out. “And helmet so nothing can fall and knock you unconscious. The UAT usually skips out on this because it masks their precious unmasked hero team in the face of the cameras. But honestly, Victor, they’ve been putting you in danger every time. You’re all lucky you haven’t gotten hurt.”

Victor sank down onto the nearest cot, his face in his hands. After a moment, he felt the gentle touch of Yuuri’s hand gripping his shoulder.

“Victor, it’s not your fault you didn’t know…”

“But I should have noticed!” he shot back, perhaps a bit more angrily than he’d intended for Yuuri took a step back. “Sorry, I’m just…”

“Rightfully upset?” Phichit offered.
Victor grimaced. “Let me guess, you’ve been trained on this?”

“With Celestino?” Yuuri asked quietly. “Yeah, it was all part of our disaster training camps. Honestly, by his standards I’ve been slacking. That fire in New York…”

“It’s probably my fault,” Victor muttered. “You’re used to having your mask and I…”

Suddenly two firm hands settled on his shoulders. “Victor, stop. This isn’t your fault.”

He peered up through his hair at that and gave a wry smile. “Perhaps not directly, but indirectly…yes, I do feel it is. Because I always thought it was unsafe but I never said anything.”

It fell silent in the small tent at that and Victor could feel the sweat from the heat rolling down the back of his neck.

“I know everyone has this image of me as someone who had no problem telling the IHU what I thought, but I fear there’s been too many times I haven’t. Yakov always scolded me for complaining too much, saying that if I pushed it too far they’d kick me off the team.”

Yuuri reached down and took Victor’s hands from where he’d laid them in his lap. He gave them a squeeze.

“Victor, you’re human. It’s okay to make mistakes.”

But I don’t make mistakes! It took every ounce of willpower to hold his tongue, the shame of it all coursing through his veins. How many people had he let down? How many people had been at risk because of his inaction? His mind seemed to spin with the rush of panic that had overtaken him.

But Yuuri must have seen it in his eyes, for without a word more he closed the space between them and enveloped Victor in his arms.

“I know you’ve been wanting to show the world how much the IHU needs to change,” Yuuri began
quietly, “but the thing about change is... you can’t just fix one small crack, you have to remake it entirely. Change is about being open to that. Like when you asked me to become unmasked…”

Victor slowly pulled back at that, his eyes feeling unfocused until they found Yuuri’s and held his gaze firm.

“Just like you couldn’t just take me out of my fencing mask and stop there. I had to change, I’m still changing ever so slightly even now. But it’s for the better, I’m remaking what I was into an image I’m proud to call my own.”

Yuuri paused at that, reaching up to press a hand to Victor’s cheek.

“You’ve changed me, Victor. You’ve taught me to see all the love around me and to let it in. And that’s why I have complete faith that you’ll find a way to change the IHU to make it better too. Because just like you saw me struggling and trying to find my way, you can help them find their way too. You’ve got the power to change the entire hero world if you just believe you can.”

Victor blinked back the tears threatening to fall, quickly standing and pulling Yuuri to him in a tight embrace.

“Thank you,” he breathed out, suddenly feeling like an enormous weight had gone from his shoulders. “For believing in me.”

Yuuri leaned back and pecked a quick kiss to the tip of Victor’s nose.

“I’m only returning the favor.”

And there was such affection and gratitude in Yuuri’s eyes that Victor felt it burn his heart with a small flame of belief, the little flicker trying its best to overcome all the wreckage of the perfect image Victor had been shattering away piece by piece.

Yuuri believed in him. There was nothing more he needed but that to fuel that fire. It might seem near impossible for one person to change so much, but somehow he’d find the way. Yuuri had changed him, had opened his eyes to a completely different world outside the shelter of the UAT, and now it was time he made the UAT and IHU change as well.
He’d already meddled enough with the team’s division between the the three incidents, placing each hero where they needed to be in order to bring light to the leadership problems the UAT was trying to ignore. Now he just had to keep at it, keep finding ways to drag every skeleton out of the IHU’s closet and into the limelight.

They might not listen to Victor, but if there was one thing the IHU cared about more than anything else, it was public opinion.

“Phichit?” he spoke up after giving Yuuri a warm smile, “can we make sure we have some PPE ready for Chris when he gets here? I’d like to make sure at least this team is properly taken care of and protected.”

Phichit grinned at that and gave Yuuri a quick slap on the arm.

“And you said you were never good at pep talks, Yuuri. I think perhaps you’re better at it than you realize.”

And Yuuri just smiled bright and proud back up at Victor. “I may have learned from one of the best.”

Victor blinked and with a sudden flood of warmth in his chest, he realized that Yuuri was talking about him.

“If you keep this up, I’m probably going to start crying,” he warned, half-teasing, half-serious. “I’m still getting used to this loving supportive boyfriend thing.”

Yuuri, perhaps sensing the truth hidden in those words, only held him closer; winding his arms up around Victor’s neck and pulling him tight into a hug.

Heart full, Victor held tight, knowing that whether Yuuri realized it or not, something had definitely changed already.

 Somewhere along the line, at some moment he couldn’t quite pinpoint, it had become crystal clear to Victor that his strength was no longer his quirk.
His strength was Yuuri.

“Yuuri, are you going to tell me what’s wrong now?”

They’d spent most of the morning going building by building, making sure electricity, gas and water were shut off, and checking for anyone injured. By the time Christophe had arrived, the humidity was already stifling and Yuuri was sure even without looking that the temperature with it was probably pushing over ninety fahrenheit.

But there had been something else simmering in Yuuri’s mind, something that by now had probably boiled over to the point that Phichit knew he had to say something.

He’d insisted after they finished off that block that they take a rest in one of the nearby recovery tents to get rehydrated and cooled down as best as they could. Yuuri had hoped perhaps that with everything else going on, Phichit wouldn’t notice. It figured he was too good of a friend to not notice.

“It’s nothing,” Yuuri muttered, waving his hand dismissively.

Phichit crossed his arms. “Nothing usually doesn’t make you mad, just depressed. And something has definitely made you mad.”

Yuuri sighed. “It’s nothing important,” he tried again.

When Phichit plopped down in the chair next to him, Yuuri knew already he’d lost the argument.

“You’re not the kind of person to let something unimportant affect your hero work, Yuuri. So spill. What’s going on?”

He clenched his eyes closed as if he could just magically will this conversation away.
“Can we talk about it later?”

Phichit gave a huff. “No. You’ve already diverted too many conversations with that in the last month. I feel like we barely talk anymore.”

Yuuri could feel his heart starting to pick up pace at that, the panic slowly seeping down his spine.

“This is about me telling Victor to go with Chris and the other rescue group across town, isn’t it?”

He must have winced, or done something slight that Phichit knew by now was a reply in the affirmative, for he could hear the sharp intake of breath as Phichit tensed beside him.

“Please. Talk to me Yuuri. I’m not mad, I’m just...well I’m frustrated. I feel like you’ve been avoiding my questions about things for a while and now you’re freaking out because I decided it’d be best if we split up into two teams that were already used to working together?”

“That’s not it,” Yuuri forced out through gritted teeth, the panic already beginning to take its hold.

“Then explain to me what it is, because I’ve been letting you slide with ‘things are fine’ for longer than I should have by now.”

It was true, Yuuri knew that. The whole time he’d been traveling, Phichit had been amazingly supportive and he’d done nothing but give him half-assed replies and vague statements like that. He might have been fine many of those times, but without details a text reading “everything’s fine I promise” could certainly come across otherwise.

He’d intended to sit down and have a long phone call with Phichit once he’d made it back home, but...he’d kept putting that off. Because the more he thought about his trip, the more it seemed like anything worth talking about had already made the news. And everything bad that had happened? The idea of even remotely revisiting some of that made Yuuri feel sick.

So he did what he always did when the idea of a conversation seemed stressful, he procrastinated on it and hoped it would go away.
It’s not until he felt Phichit’s arm tentatively wrap around his shoulders that Yuuri realized how badly the panic had set in, his breathing hitched and his heart seeming to be beating twice as fast.

“Hey, hey...I’m not mad, Yuuri. Just calm down and let’s talk this out, okay? Just like old times. Just deep breaths and unload whatever it is you’ve got weighing on those shoulders of yours.”

Yuuri gulped down some air, hoping it might somehow settle his nerves, and tentatively opened his eyes. As he’d expected, Phichit didn’t look mad at all, just worried. Sometimes, that was almost worse.

“It’s complicated,” he finally managed.

Phichit gave his shoulders a squeeze. “Okay. That explains why you’ve avoided talking about it before now. So let’s just start with what’s bothering you right now. I didn’t peg you for the clingy type, but something about the arrangements seemed to upset both you and Victor.”

“It’s the IHU,” Yuuri grumbled. “They’d tried to split us up and send us to two different locations for this.”

Phichit’s eyes went wide. “Are you serious? Yuuri, why didn’t you say something?”

“Because you were making a good decision. And Victor and I had already agreed we’d let local heroes make the decisions unless they seemed like bad ones. It wasn’t a bad decision, just...”

“Salt in the wound?” he offered.

“Yeah.”

He tugged him closer at that, pulling Yuuri against his side. “I’m your friend, Yuuri. Please communicate with me when stuff like this happens and I’ll understand, okay?”

Yuuri sighed. He’d heard that a million times by now, probably. Sadly, it didn’t seem like he was getting any better about it.
“I just hate bothering…”

“Yuuri,” Phichit punctuated with a shake, “it is not a bother. Even if you just want to spend two hours ranting about how much you hate the IHU or something. That’s what friends are for.”

“Okay…”

Phichit sat back at that, placing his hands on Yuuri’s shoulders and nudging him until he looked up.

“Promise me, Yuuri. Okay? Promise me, you’ll tell me anything important like this instead of worrying about it bothering me, all right?”

Yuuri gave a tiny nod. “I will. I’m sorry, Phichit.”

He gave Yuuri’s cheek a poke. “Come on, cheer up. Don’t make me get out the MitchiriNeko March video and make you watch the cute marching cats until you stop moping.”

Yuuri gave a hint of a smile at that. “I think we have better things to be doing right now, as calming as that video is for me.”

Phichit nodded. “Yeah. You’ve got some ranting to do, mister. I expect to be thoroughly ready to fly to Barcelona and punch some assholes by the time we’re done talking today, got that?”

That got the smile he’d been trying for.

“Okay.”

“Anddddd, I’ll even let you tell me all the mushy things about Victor you want and I promise I won’t make fun of you for at least a day.”

“Phichit!”
“What? I’ve been waiting for you to finally get your man, let me live.”

And although Yuuri still felt like there was a million and one worries clawing at the back of his head, for the moment, Phichit had managed to push them away.

“A week. Or I’m not talking.”

Phichit threw up his hands. “You are asking a lot of me, but because I love you so much, I guess I can refrain from it for a week.”

Yuuri stood up at that, giving his friend a sudden hug as he did so, and earning him a surprised laugh.

“Thank you.”

And Yuuri knew he didn’t need to say why for Phichit to understand.

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Disastrous Behavior in Myanmar:

How the IHU hopefuls made the dire situation even worse.

SuperNewsWeekly - 1 hour ago

It was a recipe for disaster this morning in Myanmar, and no we aren’t talking about last night’s earthquake.

After sending their top heroes on commercial flights, the IHU continued to dim its own shine by teaming up two heroes who absolutely refuse to work together. United Alliance Team hero King JJ and junior hero with the UAT, The Leopard, have already clashed before today when lives were at stake. But much like their ill planned flights, continued pressure on the two to resolve their differences has only resulted in more fallout.
Added into the mix were the ongoing issues between former teammates Medusa and Atlas, the once iconic Crispino Twins once more putting their arguments before their duty. Eyewitnesses at the scene claim it was only thanks to the intervention of Cheetah Heroes United leaders Faunaa and Comet that the matter was resolved.

“It was complete and utter chaos,” a source working for one of the rescue operations on site told us. “The moment the matter of deciding who would lead the group of IHU heroes came up, a fight broke out. Voltaic was doing his best to try and keep the four apart, but he was fighting a losing battle.”

While King JJ and The Leopard argued their current track record should speak for itself, the Crispino twins each argued that their age and wisdom was more important in a leader. It was only a matter of moments before even they turned on each other and began to argue as well.

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” another source at the scene told us. “Here we have people trapped in buildings or devastated because their entire house is rubble. And what do the so-called top heroes do? Get in a pissing contest over who’s better.”

Many rescue teams at the scene were unsure what they could do when the fight broke out, but a technical specialist from Cheetah Heroes United made the call that saved the day.

“I think we were all afraid of stepping into a fight against people who had such powerful quirks,” CHU staffer Lannee Lee stated. “But I knew that something had to be done, so I got ahold of Comet and Faunaa immediately. They were across town working with our translators to speak with the locals so we could get an idea of how many people were missing or unaccounted for. I hated to pull them away from it, but what else could I do?”

It was this call our sources on site tell us that finally put an end to the infighting.

“I’ve rarely seen Comet and Faunaa look this pissed off, but you could tell they were not happy to hear what the emergency was,” one source told us.

“I couldn’t overhear everything that went on, but one of them- Comet or Faunaa I’m not sure. I could have been both, you know since they tend to finish each other’s sentences. But someone clearly told the group ‘It isn’t our job to babysit you, so either shape up and work together or go home.’”

It’s this comment that’s been making the media rounds since the story broke and it’s become a
rallying cry for those who feel the IHU has brought some of this on themselves.

“When you vote for and promote heroes the way the IHU does, it encourages this sort of behavior,” Reddit user n1ghtm@re pointed out. “They’ve always favored the heroes that look good over those who do good. Faunaa and Comet got out when they saw what it was like on the inside and now Winter Monsoon has too. The good heroes—those that are good people—are one by one distancing themselves from the UAT and I think that speaks volumes for what it’s like on the team. The IHU needs to take those words and actions from their former leaders to heart—these children need to shape up and work together or go home. The world doesn’t need any more fake heroes.”

When contacted for a comment on the matter, IHU hero liaisons officer Hayami Masumi stated, “There are absolutely no excuses for the behavior exhibited today by the team of heroes dispatched to Myanmar. That is the only statement I can make at this time, as directed by the IHU board. They will be holding a meeting today to evaluate the actions taken by senior members of the IHU staff in the handling of the flights and upon return from Myanmar, they will be assessing each of the heroes involved in the matter on a case by case basis to decide if they will remain a member of the IHU. They wish it to be known that we have heard the public’s outcry at this incident and our handling of it and that it will be addressed in a timely fashion.”

In the meantime, fan forums around the world all seem to be echoing the same words over and over.

“Fake heroes go home.”

“You know, it’s kind of nice to not have a news crew breathing down my neck,” Chris remarked as they sat down. They’d finally made it into the shade of the nearby Buddhist temple that had opened its doors to the displaced people and rescue teams in the city now that the aftershocks had seemed to have died down somewhat.

Victor slid down against the wall and let out a sigh of relief as the cool stone of the walls pressed against his back.

“Yeah, it’s been like that back home.”

Chris quirked an eyebrow at that and Victor, fighting back a blush he knew was winning out, quickly amended.
“Yuuri’s home. Hasetsu. Even the lure of both of us there isn’t enough to get the amount of press we had in Barcelona. It’s...nice.”

He could see Chris trying and failing at hiding a knowing smirk, but perhaps it was the heat or just the abnormality of their situation, that stopped him from pointing it out. Either way, Victor was grateful.

“I’ll admit, I was a bit surprised when I got here and you were sticking me in all kinds of safety gear. The old Victor would have never done that.”

“The old Victor was wrong,” he noted sharply. “You know after that building explosion? Back when...oh it was when Youling was on the team.”

“2015,” Chris added.

“Yes. Cao Bin had that invisibility quirk and we thought he’d gotten trapped in the building when it collapsed? I almost said something after that, but...I didn’t.”

“Why not?”

Victor sighed. “I was scared, as stupid as that sounds. I’d gone to the board the year before about Mickey leaking out villain escapes to his sister remember? And they’d come down on him pretty hard. I felt terrible.”

“Oh yeah, I remember that. You woke me up in the middle of the night asking me how you were supposed to apologize to him for it.”

“I only brought it up because I thought it was stupid that information was classified only to our team! If Medusa hadn’t helped us, who knows what would have happened during that fight.”

Chris snorted. “IHU bastards of course just saw it as a reason to remind him that only the UAT get to be special.”

“But now…” Victor ran a hand up through his bangs, the heat sticking it with sweat to his forehead.
“I don’t know. I have a lot of regrets.”

They fell silent a moment as one of the volunteers came by and handed over water bottles to them. Victor took a long drink, the water slipping down his throat and pushing back the bitterness that had boiled up in his veins.

“It’s good to have regrets,” Chris said quietly after a pause. “It means you’ve learned something and you’re going to do better about it now. I might have joked about how the goggles and helmet masked my beauty from the cameras, but when that beam fell in that office building? I was thankful you’d insisted on it.”

Victor blinked, then looked over to try and decide if Chris was being serious. By all appearances, he was.

“Now if only I could get the IHU to change their minds so easily,” he muttered, the plastic of the bottle in his hand crunching as he squeezed it tight.

“You know, it’s not your job to change them.”

“No. But it’s my obligation. Comet and Faunaa have said plenty of things that should have gotten them to reevaluate themselves, but they just brushed it off that they were trying to make them look bad so CHU would look better. Maybe if I’m still one of their top heroes, maybe they’ll listen this time.”

He felt a hand grip his shoulder at that and turned to find Chris giving him an odd look.

“I don’t know what’s gotten into you this year, Victor; but, I think I’ll be one of many happy with the outcome. And I’m not just saying that because Hayami has thighs you would not believe on someone without a quirk.”

Victor raised an eyebrow at that and he had to bite back that he could easily imagine someone quirkless with amazing thighs. Not that anyone specific named Yuuri Katsuki came to mind or anything.

“So aside from Hayami…”
“Who is just as amazing at his job as he is in my bed…”

“You still think this is the right thing to do?”

Chris let go of his shoulder at that and gave his cheek a gentle pat.

“You’re adorable, Queen Elsa. You should know better than to ask me to be your moral compass.”

“Chris…”

He held up his hands at that.

“Okay. Joking aside. I’ve told you before and I guess you need to hear it again. But this is the last time I’m ever saying it, so don’t you forget it.”

Chris took a deep breath and then looking a tad embarrassed to do so, darted his eyes down to the ground.

“I look up to you, Victor. Always have. And as much as I’ve always wanted to kick you out of that number one spot, it’s because I respect you as a person and a hero. I wouldn’t bank my career on trying to chase after something meaningless.”


The last time Chris had told him this was when he was recovering after his fight with Inferno and he’d cynically mentioned that maybe he should just give up. Then Chris had gone and admitted that it was because of meeting Victor when he was younger that he’d even decided to become a hero in the first place.

Chris. Yuuri. So many heroes had put their faith in Victor over the years.
And now, despite how much he felt like he’d changed, that faith in him didn’t waiver from the ones who mattered the most.

“I owe you,” Victor finally replied, hanging his head.

“Nah. Pretty sure Hayami fulfilled all the times you’ve owed me. Now it’s just a friendly reminder.”

“From someone I’m very proud to call a friend,” Victor returned, a soft smile curling at his lips.

Chris gave his shoulder a light punch. “Don’t get all sentimental on me now. We don’t want some news scandal trying to act like I’m coming between you and Yuuri.”

Victor snorted at that. “Don’t give them any ideas. They’ve done enough without help.”

“Fair, fair. You feeling better about being detached from your life support now? You were looking kind of wistful for a few hours there.”

He pulled out his phone at that, relieved to see that service had finally begun to work in the area and that Yuuri’s text was on the main screen.

*Phichit has promised me that he’ll make sure we get a bed together tonight. We might have to share a tent with him and Chris, but I told him as long as I’m with you I’ll manage. See you soon <3*

Victor couldn’t hide the warm smile that spilled across his face at the words and that little heart at the end.

“I told you I was pissed because of the IHU,” he replied, somewhat distracted.

“And because you’re a little clingy and can’t spend half a day without a certain *someone* glued to your side,” Chris countered. “Which is totally understandable considering before him I think the only thing you’ve ever even shared a bed with is your dog.”
“What’s wrong with that?”

Chris leveled him a look.

“Makkachin’s a wonderful dog, you know.”

“And before a certain Wave washed into your life, you were kind of sad and lonely, you know.”

Victor felt his eyes darting back to his phone and to his thumb pressed lovingly over the little heart. He let out a sigh.

“I’m not telling you you’re right, so we’re just going to change the subject and move on with our day.”

Chris leaned over enough he could see the message, then he sat back with a satisfied grin.

“Okay new subject, how much of a mood killer is having me and Freeze Frame in the same tent? Like I know we’re encroaching on the sacred holiday of Valentine’s already, so if you guys really need some alone time…”

“Chris…”

“I’m just offering.”

“And I’m just saying it won’t be necessary. Just having him with me is enough.”

Chris put a hand over his heart at that.

“Oh my god, you’re so adorable.”

“Chris.”
“Like that’s utterly precious!”

“Don’t make me turn you into an ice sculpture.”

“Fine fine. But just so you know,” he replied pulling out his phone and starting to type furiously.
“I’m totally telling Freeze Frame right now so we can both enjoy teasing you two.”

“Chris!”

Although Victor tried his best to ice the hand before the fingers could finish typing, Chris ignited the back of his hand in just enough time to get away with it. He was now giving the most innocent look.

“Oh look, he texted back.”

He held it up so Victor could see the reply.

Oh my god. That’s exactly what Yuuri said. That’s so gay you two!

And as much as Victor knew he had to be bright red in embarrassment, there was a pleasant warmth in his chest at knowing Yuuri felt the same way as he did.
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

Sorry again for the delay. Real life has been kicking my butt. Hopefully I can keep this semi-on-schedule in the next two months as I work on two big bang projects as well, but if not- my apologies upfront for the wait. As always, thank you all for taking the time to support this story with comments, kudos, reblogs or recs. I appreciated every single one of them so much.

If you do want to keep an eye on what I'm up to- feel free to follow me @abarero on tumblr and @accioabarero on twitter!

Even now that the sun had set, the air was thick with heat and humidity, making the tent full of four rather stuffy and sticky. Chris had threatened to sleep in the nude if they didn’t find some way to get some air circulating in there and either wary of him holding to it or just as equally fed up with the condition, Phichit had gone to see if there was anything to be done about it. The temperature might have been much, but it still hadn’t stopped Victor from curling up close against Yuuri the moment they got their two cots pushed together as best as possible; something Yuuri found himself oddly thankful for as well.

“How you two are so close with so much clothing still on in this heat is an impressive feat, let me tell you,” Chris remarked.

“You know, most people have a sense of privacy?” Victor taunted back. “You might have heard of it before, though I’m pretty sure the concept is foreign to you.”

Chris snorted at that. “And I’m just saying the sight of Katsuki’s abs in this trying time would be beneficial to everyone.”

Yuuri, who’d mostly been enjoying Victor’s presence and listening to the two bicker like siblings, turned to bury his face in the crook of Victor’s neck at that comment. “Oh my god, we are not talking about this.”

“Sweetie, they don’t call you Hokusai Babe for nothing. You’ve got quite the package,” Chris continued, with a wink that Yuuri didn’t see but could still somehow feel tacked on to the end of the sentence.
“Okay, new topic!” Phichit said entering with a grand flourish as the tent flap fluttered with a seeming breeze behind it. “A couple of local construction companies have loaned their ventilation fans to the park to try and keep all of us in this lovely little humidity soaked tent city from dying of heat stroke. It’s the best we’re going to get, so please,” and he pointedly shot Chris a look at this,”be grateful and remain somewhat clad in thanks.”

He rolled his eyes, but at least for now, seemed to be keeping his shirt on.

It fell into a momentary silence as the gentle breeze from the fan filtered its way across the tents and snuck up under their edges to blow blissful air into their stuffy confines.

Phichit visibly eased where he sat on his cot and closed his eyes to soak it in. “Much better. Though this is hardly the worst heat I’ve dealt with.”

Immediately, Yuuri knew exactly what he was talking about. “Yeah that summer in Detroit was pretty bad. Didn’t help that our tents weren’t exactly ventilated at all.”

“Oh, when was this?” Chris asked, clearly less familiar with the duo’s previous exploits than Victor, who much to Yuuri’s embarrassment, had gone back through Phichit’s youtube footage.

“First year we trained in Detroit,” Phichit answered. “Celestino got our hopes up with this hype about a big job for a few months from April to June, then it ended up being kind of a mess.”

“I don’t know if I’d call it a mess,” Yuuri cut in. “But it definitely could have been better. Neither of us had any fancy suits yet so I was just in my fencing gear and Phichit had this...like a bunch of…”

“I think it was a motorbike helmet with like American football padding? It definitely did not look remotely cool at all. But you know- we were young and the American hero world is kind of intense, so we made do. We did odd jobs and volunteer work mostly, and what we made extra went towards getting our actual costumes made.”

“Is this why there’s no video of this?” Victor asked. “Because I don’t think I’ve seen anything with Yuuri pre-his black and blue outfit.”

“That’s because for once Phichit was too embarrassed to post something,” Yuuri replied.
“That was not the image I wanted people to think of when they thought of Freeze Frame, so I waited until we got version one of my suit, which looks kind of plain compared to my current one, but at least it wasn’t just some kid in padding and a t-shirt.”

“So what happened this eventful summer? Because I want details. It’s not like you both don’t know everything about my illustrious career given that the cameras are rarely far from the UAT whether we like it or not.”

“Chris has a point. We didn’t have to record footage, someone always did it for us.”

Yuuri noticed the little frown that seemed to tug at Victor’s lips at that and he nuzzled back into his arms as if to remind him that things were different now. And if Yuuri had any say about it, the amount of cameras involved in their lives would be minimized as much as possible.

Before Yuuri could let himself get too flustered over the fact he’d just thought about Victor and his relationship on such a scale that included the term “lives,” Phichit had begun to tell the story.

“Trust me, this is way better in retrospect than it was at the time. Here we were, all hyped for this big volunteer job, and guess what? We get to live in tents and protect a river from poachers.”

“That sounds pretty intense, to be honest,” Chris noted.

“Poachers of lake sturgeon,” Yuuri clarified. “So we were glorified fish guards.”

Yuuri could see the amusement creep into Chris’s face at that and had a sinking feeling Victor probably had something similar had he turned around in his arms to see him.

“As Faunaa would note, all lives, even those of animals, are the responsibility of heroes,” Victor sagely put in and Yuuri felt his nervously racing heart start to ease its pace.

Although he might look back on this time as embarrassing and silly, it was true that Yuuri had followed Victor’s career through the eyes of the cameras from the moment he stopped that tsunami onward. Perhaps, even if the idea made his heart a little fluttery at the thought, Victor was just as excited to learn a little about who Yuuri was in the past too.
“A point I will give her, but...seriously Victor. We were babysitting these fish in a cheap tent from Wal-mart and outfits made out of odds and ends. It was far from the high point of our careers,” Phichit said with a sigh. “Like just imagine me running around in football padding chasing after some fisherman with my phone as my weapon. It probably looked like such a joke.”

“Yeah and I just looked like some overzealous fencer who never took off his mask and was half afraid I was going to break the blade Minako had given me before it was even a year old. We were quite the pair.”

“At least you have the memories?” Victor offered, but Yuuri could detect the slightest hint of a laugh in his tone.

Before he could think better of it, he turned in his arms to give him what he hoped was an exasperated pout.

“Victor, really. Let’s not sugar coat it. About the only thing we got out of it was our friendship,” Phichit said with a huff. “Nothing quite like suffering together to make your friendship grow stronger. Plus, like I could stop being friends with Yuuri then, he’d be able to blackmail with some secret footage of me in this getup. Much easier to be friends.”

Despite all attempts to be irritated about it, Yuuri let a snort escape at Phichit’s melodramatic way of putting it. It was true, they definitely forged their friendship those months together; Phichit determined to draw Yuuri’s shy and reserved personality out into the sunshine his protests be damned.

“Oho, I have found a news article!” Chris said triumphantly as he looked up from his phone. “Detroit thanks a pair of heroes in training for catching a pair of poachers hoping to make it rich on the black market with caviar from the endangered sturgeon living here. The two rookies working under Portal hail from Asia and have been watching the river during these crucial months to prevent this very theft.”

Phichit let out a shriek at this and quickly jumped up and tried to get the phone out Chris’s hands before he could continue any further; something Chris was more than ready to defend by lighting up his arm blocking him up with flames.

“No quirk, that’s not fair!”
“All’s fair in love and war,” Chris sing-songed back as he got up and continued to hold the phone out of Phichit’s reach.

Before anyone could even see the motion, the flash of Phichit’s phone camera went off and a second later, he was clutching Chris’s phone in his hand with a look of relief on his face.

“Hey, I thought you didn’t want to use quirks.”

“All’s fair in love and war,” Phichit shot back with a smirk. “Plus, this is hardly as bad as you’re making it out to be. We’re like blurry dots in the background of the arrest.”

He held it out then for Yuuri and Victor to see before tossing it back over to Chris who caught it and plopped back down on his cot with a sigh.

“Spoil-sport. I really had you two going for a minute there.”

Yuuri relaxed, for although he was far less embarrassed about his appearance than Phichit was, he was basically embarrassed on Phichit’s behalf of the situation; and although blackmail had never crossed his mind, they definitely had a pact not to ever give out any photos from that summer.

It was Victor now that seemed to be putting on a pout, and with a very theatrically pitched voice he sighed. “And here I thought you had some vintage Hokusai Wave picture that had never seen the public eye. Don’t get a fan’s hope up like that!”

He playfully threw a handful of snow Chris’s direction and the two of them made eye contact only a moment before they both started laughing as well.

Before Yuuri could really tell who even started it, Chris and Victor began to tell little anecdotes from their years on the UAT, as if they were doing their best to return the favor to the two younger heroes for sharing their past aloud. There was a different warmth than usual that settled in Yuuri’s chest at that, for there was the warmth that seemed an almost constant presence with Victor so near now mingling with that of his feelings of friendship for the other two men in the tent.

It was by no means home and definitely not how he wanted to spend the evening before Valentine’s
Day, but in an odd way, it was nice to be with friends sharing stories and laughing too.

It hadn’t been how Victor had expected to spend the morning of Valentine’s Day.

But after news had finally reached the four heroes in Thailand about the drama that had occurred in Myanmar, Victor felt a personal responsibility to do something about it as soon as possible. It had been his idea to set up Yuri along with King JJ in hopes the two might settle their differences; but he’d never accounted for the Russian roulette spin of the Crispino twins and their ever stormy relationship triggering such disastrous fallout.

Whether it was just guilt or a feeling of indirect responsibility for Yuri’s growth as a hero, he knew he needed to spend his morning making a rather important phone call. And so, that’s how he found himself sending Yuuri off with Phichit while he sat on the phone with Chris’s boyfriend instead.

Hayami, despite what was probably a massive headache due to the recent events, was cordial and kind as always.

“Victor, really, you had no way to know that it would blow up like this. Please, let’s not focus on who is at blame here. We’ve got enough speculation about that already and that’s not going to help any of us at this time.”

He sighed, the weight of his worry pushing his shoulders down until they seemed to sag under the strain.

“You’re right. What we need is action to change it. And while I know we’re both already quite busy, I want to fix things now before they get any worse.”

Hayami let out a soft sigh, clearly hoping Victor wouldn’t hear it. “I hope you have better ideas than I do at the moment, because I’m really not sure how to handle this without choosing sides.”

Victor had thought about that. Had spent so much of that morning, as the lightest little hints of the dawn crept up over the horizon, threading his fingers through Yuuri’s hair as his slept and using the calming feeling that came with the mere presence of the other man to hold his worries at bay long enough to think objectively and find a solution.
“We won’t choose sides. We put all the heroes involved into a mentorship program in which they must spend a few weeks training exclusively with a trustworthy hero, with focus on teamwork and communication, before they are allowed to work again. Then we let them go back to their jobs and hopefully they’ll have learned their lesson.”

“Well,” and Victor could already hear the relief in his tone, “that does indeed sound like something everyone involved might agree to; because outright suspension only punishes and doesn’t fix the underlying problem.”

“Exactly. I want JJ to work with the other UAT members; I’ve already talked to Chris about some specifics and I know Mila will be up to it as well. The Crispino twins I want sent with Leo and Guang Hong- they might be young heroes, but they are both already very good when it comes to teamwork and communication and I think it’ll benefit all four of them in the long run.”

Hayami let out a soft chuckle. “Please don’t tell me you stayed up all night figuring this out.”

“No,” Victor admitted honestly. “But I did spend a few hours this morning trying to figure out how to fix this. I feel like I created this problem, whether you or anyone else feels that way, I do. So it’s my job to fix it. Yuri, of course, I’m going to ask to come train with Yuuri and I. He’s been rather obstinate in training before, but I feel like that time he spent here did seem to get through to him. And he’s the youngest, so it’s even more important that we set the right example for him going forward.”

“I can’t say it for certain, but I do think the board of directors will be pretty happy with this solution. It gives good press rather than continuing to drum up more bad press.”

At that mention, Victor knew he had one more issue he wanted addressed immediately, even if it would take even more time away from the hours he could spend with Yuuri.

“Hayami, there’s something else I want to deal with as soon as possible.”

“What’s that? This is pretty much the only urgent matter on our end that I’m aware of.”

“That’s because it’s not been made an urgent matter and I’d like to do something about it before it ends in someone getting seriously hurt. I want the IHU to step up and offer more assistance to heroes when it comes to giving them the gear they need to do their jobs safely.”
The line was silent for a moment and for a second, Victor was afraid the call had disconnected. Finally though, Hayami spoke once more.

“This is about the helmet and stuff isn’t it?”

At that, Victor couldn’t help but smile. After Chris had joked about it covering his beautiful face, Victor had teased him that Hayami would surely still find him attractive. Now, he was pretty sure that the selfie Chris had taken had been sent after all.

“I take it Chris mentioned it?”

There was a sudden lightness to his tone, something beyond his usual kindness that Victor realized after a moment was just outright affection for the other man.

“He can be a bit of a diva, can’t he? But truly, and I told him as much, I’d rather see him covered up like a construction worker than in the hospital with a life threatening injury. Cheetah Heroes United has been protecting their team for years, it’s definitely far past the time the IHU should do the same.”

Victor felt a smile starting to pull up the corners of his lips. While he didn’t expect he’d have to argue the point much with Hayami, he also hadn’t expected him to be so quick to agree.

“I’ve done some shopping around and I think we can get HeroTek to come up with a design that includes a helmet with a rotating visor and facemask. That puts all the pieces together so it’s easier to grab and go and also, then we can get them to customize the design to suit the hero it’s for.” Victor had already thought about how they could paint Yuuri’s in waves and perhaps sprinkle a few little snowflakes on it just well...because. And Victor’s own could be a frozen wave. A little bit of one another shared, even if it was subtle, just like their quirk.

“HeroTek I’m sure would jump at a deal with the IHU, so it’s more getting the board to shell out the funding for it.”

But that, Victor had already found the answer to as well. “There’s a lot of funding right now going out to media networks to garner their coverage, which isn’t necessary. The media will go where there’s something to cover- and hero news is almost always front page news no matter what. Use that funding to provide every IHU enlisted hero with this helmet and…” And this was where he was a bit uncertain, but something about Phichit’s story had stuck with him as well. “See if we can get a deal
with HeroTek to use their gear for heroes just starting out. Use it as advertising space or something, you know?"

Hayami caught on right away. “Oh, like JJ does? Sponsor names on the uniform itself?”

“Yes, that’s what I was thinking. Like race car drivers and whatnot. Until the heroes have their break, they’re often left with coming up with their suit on their own with their own funds. In exchange for being a walking advertisement for HeroTek, they get a base uniform.”

“I don’t know how you’ve come up with all this in the what time is it there- maybe ten am?”

“Yes, about ten.”

“Okay, so maybe like four or five hours if you woke up early?” He sounded honestly very impressed.

And Victor had to admit, he wasn’t sure how he’d been able to find the answers so easily either. At least, not until he thought about it now.

“Yuuri put his faith in me, it was the least I could do.”

The fondness was back in Hayami’s tone now when he replied.

“A little support from those we care about can definitely make a big change, can’t it?”

Victor’s smile was now softly sitting on his lips and a gentle warmth had spread through his chest at the mere thought of how much Yuuri believed he could do this.

And now there was an obvious fondness to Victor’s voice as well.

“It makes a world of difference, to have his support. I honestly don’t know how I managed without him in my life.”
Hayami’s smile could be heard over the phone when he spoke again.

“I know the feeling. We’re both really lucky, aren’t we?”


The tension from the day before was gone now as Yuuri and Phichit fell easily back into their usual banter now that they’d partnered up again. Victor had apologized but insisted he needed to call Hayami and sort things out before anything else went wrong and Yuuri knew nothing was going to ease him of the guilt he felt until he did something.

It’s not like Victor or anyone would have expected it to spiral so quickly out of hand.

But as they walked back from the small village they’d been helping at, the sun already starting to make its descent for the evening, the universe had one more little surprise in store for them.

It wasn’t the first of the aftershocks, nor the worst, but something about the way it hit seemed to rip the concrete road apart at its seams. Yuuri had but one moment to try and steady his balance before seeing Phichit slowly begin to drop beside him.

At first he thought he’d merely fallen, but that wasn’t it at all. The crack in the road had opened right underneath him and Yuuri had but one second of panic before he quickly acted to pull him up to safety.

An action he’d done with a tug and a pull inside as he yanked the moisture out of the humid air and into a small strand of water that he used like a rope to haul him back up to solid ground.

Yuuri felt the relief wash over him at feeling Phichit’s hands against his arms as he steadied himself, but suddenly a look of shock and hurt washed over Phichit’s face.

With a jolt of horror, Yuuri immediately realized the problem. He’d used the quirk. Victor’s quirk.
front of Phichit, who had known since the fateful summer in Detroit, that Yuuri was quirkless.

Phichit stepped away from him, his eyes wide.

“...since when do you have a quirk?”

And Yuuri’s heart fell. Because what could he say? He couldn’t lie and tell him he’d always had it! Phichit had been one of the few who even knew; Minako, Celestino his family and now Victor the only ones outside a few higher ups at the IHU itself.

But on the other hand, he couldn’t tell him about a secret Victor himself needed to keep.

“I…”

“Look,” Phichit snapped, voice short and terse. “Let’s get back to the tent and then we are going to talk. And I don’t want you to even think about trying to tell me everything’s fine right now, because it sure as hell is not fine.”

They fell into an uneasy silence at that, the tension infinitely worse than it had been the day before when Yuuri had been miffed about having to split up from Victor. That time his anger wasn’t directed at Phichit and right now...Phichit was perhaps the most angry he’d ever seen with him.

Time itself seemed slow and oppressive, every minute more they walked the thicker the air between them grew until even the humidity’s weight seemed miniscule. By the time they finally did the reach the tent, Phichit had finally caved and started in on his rant.

“I know you’ve got a lot of great amazing things happening in your life right now, but I think this is definitely something I shouldn’t have found out about later! What do you even have to say for yourself?”

They barged into the tent, both Chris and Victor giving them worried looks at Phichit’s raised voice.

“What’s going on?” Chris finally breached the silence.
But Phichit had had enough. “Why the hell does he have a quirk?!”

He turned his gaze directly at Victor, as if somehow he knew that this sudden quirk had something to do with the sudden appearance of him in Yuuri’s life.

Chris, of course, looked even more confused. “Uh...we all have quirks.”

Victor’s lips had gotten really thin, his eyes flickering between Phichit’s glare at him and Yuuri’s worried face.

“He doesn’t. He never has. Until now. So I want to know what the hell is going on that made my best friend have a quirk without me knowing about it!”

Victor stood at that and Yuuri offered him an apologetic wince. He never wanted to put Victor in this situation, had been trying so hard to never let such a thing happen when the media covered things; but somehow in his panic he’d acted without thinking and slipped up.

“Victor, I’m sorry. I just…”

He held up his hand to stop Yuuri from talking and for a moment Yuuri thought he might truly be mad at him too. It figured, at this rate he was going to spend Valentine’s without a best friend or a boyfriend.

“I’ll explain everything, if everyone would just calm down a second,” Victor said, that forced polite tone that Yuuri had heard during so many interviews easily masking over whatever he was really feeling.

Phichit gave a huff and crossed his arms before sinking onto his cot and sharpening his glare at Victor.

“Of course. You would be the one to know first.”
Yuuri gasped at that, the sound escaping his lips before he could stop it. But he never wanted this, never ever wanted to hear Phichit sound so hurt and jealous and know it was all his fault.

“Yuuri,” Victor turned to him, his face still a perfect mask, “Do I need to ask Chris to leave?”

He tried to search through the overwhelming rush of anxiety and panic that seemed to drown him in his shock to find an answer to what he’d been asked and decided that honestly, Chris finding out would be the least of his problems right now.

“No. It’s fine,” he replied and even to himself, his voice sounded small and lost.

There was a flicker of something that crossed Victor’s expression, something Yuuri almost hoped was the sympathy that he sought, but it was just as quickly covered up by that practiced mask of indifference.

“To answer Chris’s question first,” Victor began, voice seeming calm and modulated, “until very recently Yuuri has been fighting without access to any sort of superhuman abilities or quirks.”

To his credit, Chris looked impressed, but the look on Phichit’s face had only grown more upset, and Yuuri found he couldn’t even be happy about that at the moment.

“And as you all know thanks to media coverage, I have some aspects to my quirk that I have until recently kept a secret. The matter at hand is a family secret, to be specific, so Yuuri I’m sure was unable to answer your questions because he didn’t feel it was his place to speak about them.”

There seemed to be a bit of a shift in Phichit’s eyes at that, as if a bit of the sting had been lessened, at least towards Yuuri.

“That being that I am able to share it with one person, so now Yuuri also has access to my quirk should he come to need it as it seems he did today.”

Phichit looked between Yuuri and Victor, seeming to consider this a moment before settling his ire back in Victor’s direction.
“And you figured no one but you needed to know about this? That it was just never going to come up with someone like his supposed best friend?”

For a moment, the composure Victor had seemed to shatter, dropping his head to hide it as best as he could, but it still lingered in his voice when he replied.

“I’m sorry. I really did not think the matter would come up. Yuuri vowed to only use it during emergencies.”

“We’re heroes Victor, we’re surrounded by emergencies!” Phichit shot back, still clearly upset by it all. “Sooner or later, I was going to find out. And honestly? This was the worst way for it to happen.”

“I understand that now,” he replied with that poise once more, “And I’m sorry that I didn’t realize it sooner. All I can do now is offer my explanation and an apology.”

“That I’m going to have to think about.”

And oh did Yuuri’s heart hurt! To think just a day before how they’d all been laughing together and now because of his stupid mistake, it had come to this. Phichit mad at him, Victor probably too.

The tension in the air was finally at the point that Yuuri felt like he’d choke on it if he stayed in there any longer; he needed to get away from this and now.

“I’m sorry. Phichit, Victor. I’m sorry. You don’t have to forgive me, either of you. But I want you to know that at least. I’ll leave you both alone now.”

Before he could talk himself out of it, he turned and fled from the tent, not stopping even when he heard them shouting his name after him.

Chris had already made it out of the tent and Victor had moved to follow when Phichit stood and intercepted his path.
“Victor, we need to talk.”

Phichit’s voice was still clipped and short, and although the hurt had seemed to go from his eyes, in its place came an anger that seemed to permeate throughout his whole body.

“Okay,” Victor replied quietly, stepping back and returning to his cot to sit.

For a moment his chest felt too tight, like a bottle too filled with emotion to hold back even a bit more without bursting. He took a steadying breath and offered what he hoped was a neutral expression.

“What do you want to ask?”

“Look I...I’m not sure how to put this, so I’m just going to get this out and then we can go from there.”

Victor nodded in agreement before Phichit continued.

“So this quirk of yours can only be given to one person in your whole life? Is that correct?”

“Yes. I’ll not be able to give it to anyone else or take it back from who I’ve given it to.”

A spark of anger seemed to flicker through Phichit’s eyes at that. “So what? You waited for some charity case to come along? Some poor quirkless hero who looked up to you that you could help?”

“What? No, it’s not…”

“Because Yuuri was perfectly fine without a quirk! He doesn’t need your pity or anyone else’s okay? I know you probably feel pretty damn proud of yourself for this but…”

Victor stood up at that and there must have been something icy in his expression because Phichit cut himself off and leveled him a look.
“Tell me I’m wrong,” he challenged.

“You’re right. Yuuri was perfectly fine without a quirk.”

“Then why the hell did you give him one?!”

They both paused then, breathing heavily and staring each other down as if trying to collect their thoughts amidst the haze of anger that had clouded over them.

“Because I was selfish, okay?” Victor snapped back, and for a moment Phichit looked triumphant in his fury, but he continued before he could intervene. “Because after I couldn’t be there with him when that bomb was about to go I panicked! You’re right, he doesn’t need a quirk, but that’s why I could give mine to him!”

A small hint of confusion edged into Phichit’s eyes at that and Victor pressed on lest he lose what ground he’d gained.

“My parents died because they shared a quirk! They couldn’t fight at their full strength if they both were using the power and they died because of it!” Victor could feel the frost start to crackle at his fingertips, his anger always spilling out of him when he was truly upset. “So I never planned to give it to anyone because I wasn’t about to leave someone helpless at the worst possible moment. But that’s the thing- Yuuri isn’t helpless without a quirk! You know this, I know this. He’s just as capable as the best quirk users out there without a quirk at all!”

He paused to take a breath and shake off the thin layer of ice that had started to work its way up his arm.

“This isn’t because I pity him, it’s because I admire him. I know how strong he is and how powerful he can be without help from anyone else. So I thought, maybe I can share my quirk with him and not risk him getting hurt. If something terrible were to happen and no one was there to help, he’d have one more tool at his disposal to save himself.”

Phichit’s expression had changed by now, no longer taken over by anger or worry, but instead something else was surfacing, ever so slowly.
“Look, you want me to prove it to you? You want to know how important this is to me? Fine,” Victor huffed out, his own emotions still flowing strongly. “I’ll tell you the one thing I haven’t told Yuuri if that’s what it takes. You want to know?”

He yanked up the edge of his shirt and looked down at the injury along his side.

“Want to know how I got this? Well, the last time I fought Inferno I went into the fight never intending to walk back out alive. If Leopard hadn’t come when he did, that’s probably the way that fight would have ended too. I didn’t have a damn reason to keep on living at that point and figured, why not? He’s already taken my parents from me, might as well let him finish the job.”

Phichit’s eyes had gone wide now, the realization of what Victor was confessing quickly washing over his features.

“Victor...you…”

He turned from him, ashamed at himself for how low he’d come. “Happy now? So sorry if I’m a little selfish and decided if the universe tries to take him from me then I want to do everything in my power to save him. Because without him, I couldn’t go on. If he wants to break things off at some point, I’ll find a way to cope. But if Inferno or anyone else tries to take his life, then he can have my quirk if that’s what it takes to keep him alive. That’s the only thing that matters.”

Victor was so caught up, he didn’t even notice Phichit move until his arms came to wrap around him in a hug and his voice was soft by his ear.

“I’m sorry. I had no idea…I just thought…”

“You were worried about Yuuri and wanted to protect him. I think perhaps I understand that better than anyone else might,” Victor leveled.

Phichit gave him a squeeze and pulled back with a tentative smile. “I’m sorry I misjudged you, okay? I’ve just had to deal with Yuuri’s quirkless secret for so much of my life that this seemed like some sick joke. I thought that someone couldn’t see how amazing he already was.”

Victor gave a hesitant smile back. “Trust me, I wouldn’t give this quirk to anyone I wouldn’t feel confident could fight twice as hard without it. I’d never risk their life like that after what happened to
my parents. Yuuri *earned* this because he’s strong enough to fight even harder than I can without a single superpower. Hell, he even surprises me when he does use my quirk.”

There was a look of curiosity at that, and Victor’s guard had been down long enough he found himself sharing one more secret without a moment’s hesitation.

“That wave in Australia? The one that made all the news outlets? *That* was Yuuri. My injury puts a strain on me every time I use my quirk now, and I’d already overdone it to the point I wasn’t even sure I could give 100% without severely hurting myself. But even though he’d never even tried to make ice before, had only managed frost, *he did that* with only the littlest of help from me.”

The pride in Phichit’s smile was brilliant and Victor suspected his own might be just as bright.

“Well, now we’ve really messed up. Neither of us are ever going to be top hero at this rate, we went and gave Yuuri a quirk.”

That seemed to be the moment that the tension broke, all the misunderstandings and worries and frustrations washed away as they found the one common ground they both felt very passionate about- Yuuri.

“A quirk I’m afraid he’s going to never want anything to do with if we both don’t track him down and sort this out,” Victor replied with a frown. “I have a feeling he thinks both of us are mad at him.”

“I was,” Phichit said quietly, as if already regretting how big of a fiasco this had become. “Because I feel like Yuuri’s been keeping more secrets from me since you showed up and I didn’t know why. I get the impression after all you’ve told me, it’s simply because he’s a good boyfriend who doesn’t want to ruin his relationship with you.”

“Well, he shouldn’t have to have problems with your friendship over it. I guess since I’m just not even used to having a sort-of best friend myself, I didn’t realize how it might strain your relationship.”

Phichit gave him a pat to his arm at that and another smile. “Seems like we both messed up a little here. Now let’s go find Yuuri and let him know that we’ve gotten everything settled before he has a meltdown. I think he’s probably been on the verge of one since this happened.”
And knowing that if there was anyone he could trust with all that he’d shared, it would be the person who’d long been Yuuri’s most trusted friend, Victor gave Phichit a hesitant hug which he returned far more enthusiastically than it was given.

“Friends now?” Phichit asked with a smile as they pulled apart.

Victor nodded with a smile of his own. “Yeah. Friends.”

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