

# Sing for me

Von Siberianchan

## Kapitel 2:

### Chapter 02

It was anything but all right, no matter how hard Yuuri tried.

He had wandered Dresden a bit more, but it had been a short stint. Acutely aware that people stared at him, his features, his smaller stature and his distinctly not-Western complexion, he had managed only two or three streets before the stares had driven him back into the dormitory.

By the time of his return the place had started to crawl with people coming from their morning work or already heading out for the evening performances, the foyer was overrun with dancers and musicians and artists talking amiably or curtly to each other. Nobody had paid Yuuri any attention, thank goodness.

He had met up with Georgi for supper, listening to him chattering on and on about which chorus boy had done this and that and which ballet girl he was intending to woo this year, so he could marry her, so his former betrothed would see how well he'd be doing without her and then she'd regret everything and try to reconcile with him.

He didn't say much, partly because Georgi certainly revelled in having someone who listened to his ramblings.

Partly it was because Georgi was talking fast and with that thick accent of his, so Yuuri had to focus all his attention on understanding what he was saying.

Probably the biggest reason was that Georgi was, in fact, a little bit scary with the way he talked and Yuuri most certainly did not want to encourage him.

It was bedtime for him soon after – Mrs. Haubener handed him a blanket, sheets and a pillow, all clean and smelling faintly of lavender and all smooth and tinted the softest shade of yellow with long years of use.

So, in the empty room, he made his bed and laid down, closing his eyes, trying to catch some sleep.

It proved to be a tough exercise.

Dresden was a loud city night and day, full of the rumble of the carts, the clapping of hooves, the chatter and laughter of people and the shatter of glass.

Even after pressing the pillow over his ears, the sounds still intruded on him and followed him into his dreams.

Morning came too early and as he rose, he saw five other tousled heads rising, blinking, looking around and then stumbling out of their beds to get dressed.

The other men blinked at him. "New face, eh?" one commented. "Where you work?"

"Chorus," Yuuri mumbled and then hurried down, before they could stare at him any

more or ask questions or generally try to talk to him.

Downstairs a maid servant handed out trays with bread and butter and cheese and porridge and strong, black tea and made a mark behind his name on a list.

He ate in silence, taking notice of the fact that Georgi wasn't coming down and scanning the many, square tables of the room that was serving as mess hall. Everyone down here looked just as tired as Yuuri felt and the tea did only so much to alleviate his troubles. Also, down here in the mess hall with them all groggy from what likely had been far too short a night, the gender segregation was almost nonexistent, men and women eating in peace at the same table, sometimes in bleary silence, sometimes with a side of friendly banter or bickering, before they got up, carried their dishes back and then left, possibly for whatever line of work they were keeping themselves fed and housed with.

Yuuri cleared his plate in silence before doing the same.

The Semperoper was waiting.

Life was waiting.

Work, however, wasn't waiting, so he better hurry, because really, there were a lot of things he would rather face than an angry Yakov Feltsman right at his first day there. Being thrown off a cliff most definitely or being run over by a horse cart most definitely would have been a far more delightful prospect.

With his life being the way it was, it was likely he would be very late nonetheless, due to some circumstances he could not foresee, or he would be laughably early, waiting in the corridors - or worse, in front of the building - because nobody would let him in just yet.

Well, being too early was better anyways. He could spend the time bracing himself for the day to come, for strange new faces, for questions, for unknown material, for finding himself a position in the chorus, for Mr. Feltsman.

Miraculously, the door was already open and he could go inside to follow long, yellow-dark corridors towards the stage.

Each step took him closer and he still didn't feel too ready to face what lay ahead and...

But there it was, the stage, the auditorium, and there was Mr. Feltsman, already sitting in one of the chairs close to the orchestra pit.

Of course. Of course the one case Yuuri would have considered the worst – directly after being late – had to happen. Being the first to arrive was almost as bad as being dead last and only because being the last meant more eyes to stare at him.

He took a deep breath and came out into sight. "Good morning."

Mr. Feltsman looked up. "Ah. You here. Good. Warm up." He waved and then turned back to the newspaper he was reading.

Yuuri started with some breathing exercises, widening his lungs, then loosened his lips and tongue by making hissing, chortling sounds and blowing raspberries before finally getting to his vocal cords, moving his voice up and down in even, uninterrupted glides, before singing scores and then slowly moving on to simply three-tone melodies.

When he was done, Mr. Feltsman had put his newspaper aside and was watching him intently.

Yuuri tried his hardest to hold his gaze, but at the end he had to avert his eyes.

"Tenor, right?"

"Uh, yes. Last time I checked... just now..."

Mr. Feltsman raised an eyebrow and it occurred to Yuuri too late that he might not

appreciate cheek. Well. Too late. But maybe it wasn't too late to slink away to a corner and die, in a potentially less painful way than what Mr. Feltsman might do to him. But Mr. Feltsman did nothing that might have pointed towards the impending, painful termination of Yuuri's life.

Instead, he reached to the seat next to himself and grabbed a small folio. "There!" He lifted his arm and threw the thing for Yuuri to run after and catch it.

When he opened it, he found sheets of music.

"You got around fifteen minutes before most of the others arrive. Go through it and see what you already know. Practise the rest with me afterwards."

Yuuri leafed through the songs. "I... I think I'm good..." he admitted. "I mean, I know them from Maestro Caldini..."

"You sing any of them on stage?" Mr. Feltsman asked. Then he corrected himself: "Sang."

"Some of them," Yuuri admitted. "*Nabucco* I never performed because I was considered too young, but I practised and studied it."

"With whom?"

With Celestino, Yuuri wanted to say, but that would have meant Mr. Feltsman thought of him as some sort of genius, deserving of such intense tutelage. Which he was not. He wasn't bad per se or he would not even sing in chorus or even a small solo role. But he most definitely wasn't what Mr. Feltsman would expect. And Celestino had practised these songs with him in private, for their own mutual amusement, so he had been lenient with him and...

"Nobody. Alone."

"Ah." Mr. Feltsman crossed his arms. "So, *Va, pensiero* too?"

Yuuri nodded. "Yes."

"Good." He leaned back in his chair, looking up to Yuuri expectantly. "Well. Let's hear."

"What... no..."

Mr. Feltsman let out something like a growl. "You say no to me?" he asked, face twisting up. "You say no to me?! To me? You?!" He had risen from his chair, staring at him.

Yuuri's stomach churned.

"So! You sing now or not?!"

The nausea was getting worse by the second and still, Mr. Feltsman was staring at him.

So, finally, he nodded.

"Ah, fine. You need piano?"

Yuuri shook his head. "I... I gonna do myself." Why was his German leaving him, right now when it would have been really important to appear at least somewhat confident.

"As you will, but hurry up."

He stepped closer to the piano that was half-hidden behind the curtain, sheets of music in hand, and then he was out of Mr. Feltsman's line of sight.

This was good.

Yuuri actually managed to calm down his breathing, deepen the draws of air he took and settle his nerves, just a little bit.

It was enough so his fingers didn't tremble when they touched the piano keys, playing the first few beats that lead into the song, before his voice set in. "*Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate; va, ti posa sui clivi, sui colli, ove olezzano tepide e molli l'aure dolci del suolo natal!*"

Somewhere along the singing he dared to come back out on stage, doing his best not to think about Mr. Feltsman sitting down there in his chair, looking at him with was most definitely was utter disapproval.

Instead, he focused on the song. "O mia patria sì bella e perduta! O membranza sì cara e fatal!" He would not allow himself to think too much about Milan anymore. He was here now. He was here.

It ended with "che ne infonda al patire virtù." and Yuuri let out a deep breath of relief after a second.

"Good." Mr. Feltsman nodded. "The rest of the songs in the repertoire? You know these too?"

"Uh, yes." Should he sing these too? Knowing would have been nice.

"Good."

There was not much more time. Yuuri already heard footsteps, many, many of them, and they all were light. Chorus singers were young, most of the time, hoping to rise through the ranks in time, becoming someone's understudy and maybe even lead singer themselves at some point. Those who didn't flourish when they grew older could either stay or try and find some other employment, maybe as a private music teacher or as a performer in a smaller theatre. Most stayed small, with small names, small incomes, small lives.

Yuuri had never dared to dream of anything big.

But here they were, the other singers, looking at him, some smiling, some gaping, all as if the Prima Donna herself had declared it proper and reasonable to practise with them.

"Oh. Morning," he mumbled, trying to smile at them.

They smiled.

"That sounded great!", some of them commented, "From what I've heard!", before they took their designated places.

Yuuri relied on Mr. Feltsman's cues to join the tenor singers.

They positioned themselves, the other tenor singers happily taking Yuuri in their middle, because "it makes you flub less as a new starter", as one boy cheerfully explained.

Practise went on and it was... it was all right.

Yuuri found he liked the voices surrounded him and that he could sing along quite nicely with them.

Practise went along quite nicely, in fact, after they had warmed up and Yuuri actually found himself having fun singing with others, hearing their voices, singing with them, melting with them into the same song, following Mr. Feltsman's instructions and corrections after each piece.

It wasn't until eight o'clock that any of them heard another set of steps and then an annoyed, "Oi, Yakov, you wanna keep them for the whole day?!" from a young tenor voice that, in Yuuri's that Yuuri would always connect with flaxen hair and eyes too sharp, too smart and entirely too brash for their age.

Only then the spell was broken. Only then Yuuri woke up again, realizing that he was on stage, surrounded by dozens and dozens of people.

He looked around. Next to the curtain Yuri Plisetsky leaned against a beam, arms folded across his chest, a dour look on his face. "We wanna start, y'know?"

"Yeah, yeah. Good! Chorus, dismissed! The schedules for next week's evening performances hang on the board, check them up!" Mr. Feltsman waved at them and they broke formation.

"You sing really well," a young man said, next to him, smiling.

"Uh. Thanks." Yuuri managed to pull up the corners of his mouth. "Mr. Feltsman is pretty demanding, right?"

"Yes, but that's what makes us good." The man grinned. "I am Johannes."

"Yuuri." They shook hands while heading off the stage.

"Katsuki!"

Yuuri flinched and turned around. "Yes?!"

"One of the tenors has called in sick, so you're filling in for him tomorrow in the chorus. For the rest you'll check the board."

Yuuri's stomach once again dropped. That was... unexpected. He nodded, slowly, before following the others off the stage, along the corridors to the group changing room. They didn't have to change today, but Yuuri had already seen yesterday that the board with the schedules and announcements was next to the door of the changing room.

His name was somewhere in the middle of the tenor part of the list. Behind it were dates and the names of operas or singspiele.

Yuuri was scheduled for five evenings. That meant three different performances.

"As I said," Johannes grinned, "demanding job here, but that's what makes you good."

Yuuri nodded. "It's not worse than the Scala."

"Oh right, you're from Milan." Johannes looked him up and down. "You don't look Italian, mind you."

Yuuri raised an eyebrow.

"I guess you hear that a lot?"

"And I am familiar with the concept of looking glasses and able to apply this knowledge in my everyday life, yes." But still, Yuuri found himself smiling as he said this.

Johannes grinned. "Yeah, okay, admittedly, the only person in this whole opera who looks Italian is La Crispino, so, I guess we're in the same boat here."

Yuuri laughed. "Yes, seems like it."

They moved aside so the others could have a glance on the board as well.

"So, you've got time today, what you gonna do?" Johannes asked.

"Don't know. Maybe I'll take another look at the town, yesterday I didn't see so much. And practising. You?"

"I am on stage tonight, so I guess I'll rest at home. My sister always complains I'm too exhausted."

Yuuri nodded and smiled. "Good, then."

"See you tomorrow." Johannes turned, waving, and then he wandered off.

Yuuri looked after him for a bit before turning his attention back to the board.

For a few more moments he studied it and then turned away, making a mental note to bring a pen and paper with him tomorrow, so he could write it down properly.

It was still so early in the day. Performances did not start until five or six and would go on until as late as 11. Thankfully, chorus singers were generally not required to partake in any social after-functions, so Yuuri would hopefully not have to worry about lacking sleep.

"So?"

He turned around to find Yuri Plisetsky standing behind him, staring.

"Uh. Hello. Again," Yuuri mumbled, trying not to sound too disturbed about the fact that the boy was here, in front of the changing room, instead of the stage where he was supposed to be practising.

"Yakov's busy with Sara and Mila," Yuri mumbled. "Sara's understudy."

Yuuri nodded.

"So." The boy folded his arms in front of his chest. "You gonna try out for the *Wildschütz*?"

"I don't know yet," Yuuri admitted. "This *is* my first day here and it seems the opera already has its pick on solo singers, so..."

"So, you're afraid?" Yuri's eyes darted up and down on him.

"What?" Yuuri blinked.

Now his eyes narrowed. "You afraid you gonna suck?"

"No, not... not really, I..." Yuuri found himself looking for words. "I mean, I simply don't think I'm gonna do too well, so, maybe I should focus on improving in general... I could do better next time?"

"Ah." Yuri took a deep breath. "So you don't wanna suck, so you don't try at all? Okay, we can shorten this period of anxiety." He took a step closer to Yuuri and Yuuri found himself walking backwards. He hit the wall. "If you think so, you suck, end of story. We don't need suckers here, we need folks who are good and who can sing."

The boy stood now directly in front of him, staring him in the eye. Yuuri wasn't sure whether he had ever seen so much disgust directed at him.

"Get out then, we don't need you!" And with that, he turned around and stomped off. Yuuri stood and stared after him.

What the hell had that been about?

What...

He stood there and then he realized he was shaking his head. That was really weird.

He didn't know Yuri and the boy didn't seem like having taken a liking to him. Pretty much the opposite, at least compared to the other people Yuuri had at least attempted to engage so far.

Maybe it was his youth.

Or maybe he was simply a brat (which, admittedly, was a side effect of him still being so young. It would get lesser with age then. At least, Yuuri hoped so).

But still.

He found it strangely hard to turn around and go down the corridor to the door. His feet were heavy, slowed down.

He paused, close to the door.

So, basically, this child called him a coward because he was hesitant about a tryout.

Yuuri shook his head. Well, if that was a reason to call him a coward, then fine, really, that was fine.

But still. The boy had declared him unfit to sing because of this. And maybe that was the case to some degree. Someone too afraid for a tryout was certainly not fit for a solo spot at the center stage.

But this little brat apparently thought he could chase him out of the chorus. Before Yuuri had even made a place for himself here. The very idea left a sour taste in his mouth.

Again, he shook his head while his feet started walking again, turning, going back, to the stage.

Yuri Plisetsky was still standing there, behind the curtain, looking out on the stage.

"So," Yuuri sighed in something that probably was defeat, but for some reason did come out quite un-defeated, "You got the scores and a libretto for the *Wildschütz* or what?!"

Considering small parts rarely ever had any solo numbers of a length to speak of, practising the big and important roles was inevitable when preparing for a try-out. The "Wildschütz" had only one big tenor part and that one had quite a few solo verses, so, more than enough material to take his pick from. The thing itself was a light-hearted opera buffa, so at least nobody would expect any gravitas in his presence. Gravitas very likely would have killed that sort of performance anyways. In that way, Yuri Plisetsky was right. Yuuri would have no trouble with a role like the Baron Kronental.

Leafing through the libretto for a suitable piece to sing, he had had chuckled quite a few times; light-hearted as it was, the humor was just outright *vicious* at times, with one young bride happily poking fun at the age of her middle-aged groom right in the beginning.

The story continued with circumstances threatening the wedding, dressup, crossdressing, going into hiding, mistaken identities, and utterly strange love situations.

And Yuuri had thought Italian opera could go over the top. Leave it to the Germans to blow it up even more. Also, leave it to the Germans to attempt and make allusions of incestuous adultery funny.

It resolved in some happily married love matches in the end; none of them incestuous or adulterous, so far.

There were smaller practise rooms in the back of the building and Yuuri made it his habit to go and find himself a free one after morning rehearsal and practise there for two hours or so.

The music was fun and energetic and easy enough to play if the lead melody was all one was trying for anyways.

Singing was a bit more tricky with these energetic, fun things that sounded so nice and easy, but were anything but.

Yuuri got into the routine of starting with a scene between the Baron and his brother-in-law, the Count of Eberbach, discussing how the unmarried Baron had snuck in under the disguise of a stable boy and had already started flirting with the Counts wife – who was also his sister. He sang the Baron's parts, only humming along whenever the Count had a line.

Once this was finished, he moved on to one of the first longer verses of the Baron in which he declared himself smitten with a supposedly poor young woman. "Ja, ich muss die Holde sehen, Und sie sprechen ganz allein; Weiss nicht, wie mir ist geschehen, Wunderbar nimmt sie mich ein. Möglich, dass dies Mädchen eben Krönet meiner Wünsche Streben Und mir dann versüsst des herben Lebens Pein!"

Yuuri almost pitied the poor fellow for this, but it was just too much fun to sing, his voice rising and falling along the lines. At this point, he always heard himself how the passion of an instant infatuation replaced the light, flighty way he had performed until then.

When one day he had finished his warm-up and straight up went to these verses of infatuation, the passion was already there.

That was good. He could recall emotion when needed. This was very, very, very good. He then would move on to the second longer verse the Baron had, one he sang together with the Count, expressing their shared disbelief that their equally shared, poor, low-born sweetheart was engaged to a middle aged, homely school teacher. "Nein, es ist kaum zu glauben, Dass dieses Monstrum hier Imstande wär', zu rauben Der Mädchen schönste Zier! Und diese Rosenwangen, Sie sollten vor Verlangen Für

diesen Alten glühen? Erdrosseln möcht' ich ihn!"

The disbelief and anger were no problem either. Good. Yes, that *was* really fun to sing and Yuuri found himself looking forward to these few hours every day, in the morning, during rehearsal and when performing.

Occasionally, when he was almost done with singing through the baron's parts and his voice was warm and flexible and easy, the notes coursing through him and leaving him in a sweet flow.

His days slipped into an easy, familiar routine of rehearsal, practise and on most evenings, performances, during which he wrote a short letter, informing Celestino Cialdini of his safe arrival in Dresden and at the Opera, his good health and, after a moment of hesitation, the upcoming tryouts. These sort of things were what Celestino loved to hear, so Yuuri gladly provided.

He would usually chat with Georgi (at least on days the man wasn't obsessing over his former fiancée) as well as with Johannes and some other men from the chorus, sometimes after performances they would try and find some place for dinner in a group.

It most definitely helped Yuuri improve his grasp on German, to sit and listen to them exchanging stories and throwing good natured jabs at each other, even though he would never make sense of this mash up of accents they featured.

"Yuuri, you know any fun stories from the Scala?" Johannes one day asked, cheerfully chewing on a bit of potato dipped in curd. Their favourite dinner at the inn Seidelhof was wonderfully cheap and filling – hence its status.

The atmosphere was good – the performance of "Faust" tonight had gone off without a hitch. The solo singers had performed flawlessly, nobody in the ballet had had even the slightest misstep, everyone in the chorus had been on note. Which was how things should be, but rarely ever were. It was opera, there was always something happening causing minor drama and they had to work around it.

Which made for good stories they liked to share and pass around in a good mood.

And the mood was good. Mr. Feltsman had praised them. At least Yuuri had the feeling that his "like that tomorrow, folks" was a praise, considering the reactions of the other singers.

"Uh..." Yuuri quickly stuffed a piece of potato into his mouth to chew on and regretted it immediately since steamed potatoes had a tendency to be hot when coming fresh from the kitchen.

He desperately tried to roll the bite in his mouth without actually touching it with his tongue, grabbing for his beer to ease the pain a bit.

The hurt and the subsequent cooling made the beer actually almost drinkable.

"Urgh." Yuuri swallowed. "Now that's a story, a singer who dies of a hot potato and awful alcohol."

Johannes laughed. "I tell you, you will get used to beer."

"I do hope not before I can afford proper wine again." Still, the beer was cold and his mouth was still hurting a bit, so Yuuri took another sip. "Anyway, it's funnier when it happens to the director of the opera and involves some meatballs, spitting and the primadonna in her brand new, yellow dress. For a moment I thought she'd join the ranks of the ghosts haunting the Ducale."

There was a round of laughter and finally someone said: "You got many of them there?"

"Ghosts?" Yuuri rolled his eyes. "Every department has their own stories. Sometimes up to ten or so. It's become a competition of sort, whether ballet or singers or

stagehands are better at creeping each other out."

"You got so many ghosts, send them over here!" A boy, Thomas laughed. "We got only one and he's been here for only a few years!"

Considering all the technology a stage demanded, the endless corridors, the ever present bustle of people, it wasn't hard to mistake a gust of wind for a moan or the creaking of floorboards for steps. And of course, when people left out sweetmeats to appease a ghost or two they would disappear.

Celestino had always made a show of laughing at these superstitions and secretly sprayed Holy Water on corridors and in rooms that were considered particularly haunted.

"One ghost? In how many years?" Yuuri inquired.

"Yes and a quiet one at that," Johannes grumbled. "Worst we've noticed was some rustling of curtains during a dress rehearsal. Send some of yours over, Yuuri, it would liven things up a bit."

Yuuri chuckled. "Maybe I can write Celestino to repeat the meatball incident, then we'd have one fresh and full of energy."

One of the other men snorted. "I would love to bear witness!"

"Yeah, with La Crispino it's kinda hard to do," Johannes sighed. "She always wears so dark colours."

"Let's face it, she would laugh at it and spit something on your shirt in revenge."

"So she's always so nice?" Yuuri asked.

"Yep." Johannes shrugged. "Dunno how she got to her position with being so nice and all, but I'm certainly not complaining. What was the yellow dress primadonna like?"

Yuuri spiked another piece of potato on his fork. "Her name is Angelique Farbenieu."

"Oh shit."

"Yes. She was at the Ducale when I was ten or so and she always complained about me being there." Yuuri puffed out his chest, throwing his head back. "Stage is not a place for children!" he then called in a thick, false french accent.

Around the table there was a round of eyeroll and occasional laughter.

Yuuri shrugged and then made an effort to speak casually, which was quite a feat considering the stilted nature of German. "She was less mean to me when I offered to walk her poodle for her. Even paid me, quite well too. And the dog was good. But to the rest of the folks, no. She was not nice."

"Rarely a primadonna is," one man commented, "And La Crispino... I wouldn't be surprised if she decided to have seen enough of this world and return to heaven."

"Or Verona," Yuuri countered. "Which is close enough."

There was some laughter at the table and Johannes asked "Aw, why, you already miss the Italian beauties?"

Yuuri smiled at the jab. "More like the wine. And the absence of this awful beer."

His singing was secure these days, he could rely on his voice and he wasn't alone here. Two weeks passed and then the third, and Yuuri had to admit that it was far less horrible than he had at first feared. The Crispino was as kind and sweet to him as to anyone else, Yuuri made an effort to not cause trouble for any other singer and Yuri Plisetsky very pointedly did not even look in his direction, which Yuuri wasn't too sad about.

So when Mr. Feltsman ended their practise for the day with "Good then – those who want to try out for the "Wildschütz" stay!" Yuuri didn't at first realize what this meant. He stayed, after all he wanted to try out and Georgi behind his piano looked pretty

cheerful about that, packing away one stack of sheet music to replace it with another. It sank in only after a moment, when some of the solo singers strolled in and sat down in the red cushioned chairs.

One of them was Yuri Plisetsky and in stark contrast to the days before his eyes now followed every step Yuuri took.

It was more than slightly unnerving.

Mr. Feltsman greeted them with a curt nod before sitting down himself. "Good, welcome to the tryout for the male roles for Lortzing's *Wildschütz*, yaddayadda, you all are warmed up, so we can start with the bass. Anyone trying out for Baculus?"

No reaction whatsoever.

Yuuri glanced around, but none of the faces around him he could associate with the admittedly quite small bass section of the chorus.

"Nobody, eh? So, Pancratius neither?" Mr. Feltsman sighed. "Katsuki, you said you were trained to sing baritone?"

Yuuri flinched. "Yes..."

"Bass?"

Yuuri almost didn't dare to shake his head as he was stared down not only by Mr. Feltsman but by the other chorus members and by the solo singers down in their chairs as well.

He swallowed and then mumbled: "No. Baritone yes, but most definitely not bass."

Mr. Feltsman sighed. "Fine then. Johannes!"

Mr. Erhard, one of the bass singers here and the Sarastro in the current staging of the "Magic Flute" if Yuuri remembered correctly, sighed deeply. "Fine, Yakov, but you explain this to my wife. Or better, Yuri does."

"What?!" Yuri Plisetsky turned his head around, eyebrows raised until they almost disappeared under the strands that were insistently falling over his brows. "Why would I do that?!"

Mr. Erhard shrugged. "She adores you. You have the highest chance of not getting dismembered with a frying pan and a scrubbing board."

Mr. Feltsman sighed and The Crispino laughed. "I'll bring some wine to calm her nerves, Yakov and Johannes hold her down and me, Elise and Yuri deliver the news?"

Mr. Erhard sighed. "That might actually work. Thank you."

"We have a tryout here. Plan your tea parties some other time," Mr. Feltsman rumbled, before adding, "But count me in." He looked back onto the stage. "Good, no bass, what a great start, next time we have vacant spots in the chorus, remind me to hire more bass singers! Next role. Baritone. Count Eberbach! Baritone!"

Yuuri tried to slink away.

"Katsuki, I said Baritone, are you capable of singing Baritone or not?!"

Yuuri flinched, once again. He was, he was very much capable of singing baritone; Celestino had been immensely proud when he had realized how versatile his protégé's voice was and had put great effort into training him to utilize it to its full effect.

"If... from the first act, the thirteenth scene," he mumbled. "But I haven't prepared anything, I mean..."

"Either you prepared something you can sing," Mr. Feltsman snapped, "or not. Decide now. Sing or shut up."

Yuuri swallowed. "The *Diese Holde* verse," he finally said. The verse the count sang expressing his desire for a supposedly common girl, just before the baron voiced a similar desire.

Mr. Feltsman made a short gesture and Georgi started playing and –  
It was so far. The emptiness was filling Yuuri's ears, blocking everything, numbing the piano, numbing the mumbling that was arising around him.  
His whole body had went cold.  
He could not even open his mouth, he knew the words, he knew he had to set in, now Georgi was already on the second line, he...  
Yakov sighed. "Stop. Next."  
The world around Yuuri shifted, the auditorium angled and he saw the stage curtain moving to him.  
Boxes and beams and levers and his line of view lowered and Johannes looked at him. His mouth moved, but it took Yuuri a while until he could make out the words.  
"You don't look too good – are you ok?"  
"I..." Why was his voice so hoarse? He hadn't even sung...  
He hadn't even sung.  
Yuuri heard voices from the stage. Talking. Mr. Feltsman gave critique pointers. Someone else started singing.  
"You should have insisted on not singing Baritone, if you weren't prepared for that," Johannes said.  
Yes, he should have, he should have, he should have, he should have - and he hadn't.  
"It wasn't right of him to ask you to sing a baritone part," Johannes continued.  
But Yuuri had agreed and had given a music direction to Georgi, so...  
"I'm sorry..."  
"No, don't apologize..." Johannes sighed. "It's... maybe you can sing again when you're calmer?"  
They both knew that this was not going to happen. Yakov Feltsman made no exceptions.  
He glanced to the stage. "I am up now. You stay here, yes?"  
Yuuri nodded.  
More singing, more and more and always the same few pieces, solo verses and arias of the baron, music he had studied and worked on and prepared himself for.  
What was he even doing here? Why had he thought that he could do this?! This wasn't even the first time, he couldn't even claim that this had never happened before, because oh, it had, it had happened, way too often, and Yuuri knew, and still he had tried.  
Just... why?  
He heard steps coming closer, very light, carefully set and measured.  
"Well," Yuri Plisetsky said, "at least we have yet to explore all the ways you can suck. Can't say much about that if you don't even sing."  
Yuuri didn't look up.  
"What the hell was that about?!"  
He flinched and a small, distant corner of his mind noted that this was in fact the first time that Yuri Plisetsky had indeed yelled at him. Or that he had heard the boy yell at all. Quite some self-control, considering the ever-simmering anger that lingered in every move of his, in every glance he cast around, in every slight tilt of his head.  
He had definitely better self control than Yuuri.  
His eyes were burning, his cheeks hot and then he heard Yuri Plisetsky yelling again.  
"What the hell, are you crying now?! What?"  
And he wanted to stop, he really, he didn't want to cry at all, but it wouldn't stop, the tears would not stop and...

"What the hell are you even doing here?! What was that, I have heard you practising that shit, you should have been fine one way or another, why did you..."

"Yuri."

Oh. Mr. Feltsman. Great someone else to yell at him. Yuuri's hands started to move again, digging for a handkerchief, keeping his head down.

"Elise is here, you four can get started now, go through your parts. If Claus, Thomas and Maria are early, you can practise the dialogue between Papageno and Tamino."

The boy huffed, but Yuuri heard him walking away in carefully measured, light steps. Which wasn't much of a relief, considering how Mr. Feltsman was staring down on him now.

"You come into my office with me."

Oh, that was it, he would be now officially told to please leave and find another employment. Maybe another line of work entirely. Probably in less polite terms, this was Yakov Feltsman he was talking about.

The man led him through the maze of the backstage to the more organized hallways in the back of the building.

His office door was small and unassuming and only a small nameplate denoted its occupant and his relative importance to the house. "Director for musical performance affairs" did sound grave indeed.

The interior, in contrast, was spartan and lived-through, the desk big and stable, but without ornament and white paint slowly chipping off of it. Same went for the cushionless chairs and the shelves containing thick ledgers and books.

He let Yuuri in. "Take a seat."

Yuuri did so.

Mr. Feltsman went around the desk and sat down, folding his hands on the desk. "Johannes made sure the other chorus singers took the exit on the other side from the stage. Remember to thank him for that."

Yuuri nodded.

"That happened before?"

"Y..." Damnit. "Yes." He finally managed to look up. "I'm sorry..."

To his surprise, Mr. Feltsman didn't look angry or even disgusted. His face, in fact, was about as kind and gentle as it could get, stern as it was. "I see. What did Cialdini say about it?"

"That I had no reason for this, that I just needed more confidence, but..." Yuuri shrugged, there was nothing to add, but he wanted to, at least for himself.

Mr. Feltsman nodded. "Speak of the devil, you've got mail." He reached into one of his drawer and pulled out an envelope, handing it to Yuuri.

The handwriting that said "To Yuuri Katsuki, at the Semperoper in Dresden" was unmistakably Celestino's.

Something in Yuuri's stomach lurched, far more than it should have at a letter from his guardian.

"He sent it here since he couldn't figure your address. You should write it to him, can't take your letters forever, I'm not a mail man."

Yuuri swallowed.

"Take today and tomorrow off. I'll have someone fill in for you tonight."

"What..."

"You're a mess," Mr. Feltsman stated. "And I doubt you'll be fine by tonight. And while the chorus tonight is big enough for one missing voice to not be noticed, one singer freezing up on stage is not so easy to hide. Or crying. Don' get me started on the

crying. Could go on for days. Also, it makes the other singers nervous. Do yourself the favour. Get some sleep. Come back the day after tomorrow. There'll be other auditions this year."

So he was not being fired.

Yuuri sat very still, while his brain was racking over this new bit of information. He was not being fired. He was, in fact treated with an almost worrying amount of kindness.

"I am really sorry for the inconvenience," he mumbled.

Mr. Feltsman waved. "Just go and get some rest."

Yuuri swallowed hard and then got up. "Thank you. And... and I am sorry."

"I know." Mr. Feltsman nodded. "We'll see how to work on this. See you."

This was a dismissal and Yuuri thought it might be better if he did as he was told now. With soft steps he left the office and closed the door behind him.

With soft steps he wandered the hallways.

With soft steps he found himself backstage, listening to the soloists going through their parts before leaving again, looking for one of the empty rooms.

Mr. Feltsman had told him to go and sleep and get some rest, but going back to Mrs. Haubener's house would mean that he'd inevitably run into one of the other singers. Yuuri wasn't so sure he could stand this right now, not now, not like this.

So there he waited.

For a while he sat there, on the floor, next to the piano, holding Celestino's letter in his hands.

He didn't really want to read it. He already could tell what it said, but as long as he didn't read it, he didn't have to face it.

There he sat, staring at the wall or at the ceiling. Or the piano, listening to the bustle outside that went on and on for some time.

The piano was warm in his back, a strong, firm support to lean against, to wait and sit and wait and hold the envelope.

It went quiet at some point, both outside the room and inside Yuuri's chest.

They would start preparing the stage for this evening's performance.

In an hour or so, he assumed by looking out of the window, the soloists would come and get dressed into their costumes. In another hour the chorus singers would arrive and do the same. At the same time, the ballet dancers would arrive. They would all get ready, warm up and go over some key lines a last time.

And then the audience would be let in, first those on the cheap front seats, dressed in their best for a nice evening out. Not at all fine clothes, but respectable, dark linen dresses with high necklines and a hint of lace here or there. Clothes very similar, but the fabric just a little more expensive than what a respectable woman of the upper middle class would wear during the day.

Of course, a woman wearing a dark, modest dress as her best was most definitely not upper middle class. Just as the men wearing what for others was a daytime suit for an opera date were at best low-tier clerks and more likely lowish-tier craftsmen or maybe factory workers.

They sat just in front of the stage, with a poor view on what was happening above their heads, cheapest seats for the largest, but poorest component of their audience. Behind them, with a gap separating the seating group, was the smaller, fortunate group of well-to-do shop owners, traders, the occasional teacher, maybe even the odd knight and count.

At last only the highest-paying patrons of the opera would take seat, the richest bourgeois of Dresden, some courtiers and their ladies from the royal court, on very

special occasions the king and his immediate family, although Yuuri had heard that this last prominent audience member would only appear on opening nights for a new staging and only for a few select favourite pieces at that.

Yuuri had never seen the curtains to the royal box drawn back.

He would not see it today either, considering how Mr. Feltsman had insisted on not seeing him here for the next few days.

Here, there would be silence, only utter silence.

So, maybe now it was safe to open the letter now, now nobody would hear him, just in case he would cry or make another too-loud noise he didn't want anyone to hear.

He stared at the envelope.

Celestino's handwriting greeted him, smiling almost, and it made his stomach churn.

Slowly, he tore open the envelope at the side and reached in.

It was only a short note, thank goodness. What it was, was enough to clench up his throat.

*Yuuriccino,*

*I am glad to hear you are well and that you are trying out. This alone makes me proud.*

*With love,*

*Celestino Cialdini*

Maybe Celestino hadn't expected him to succeed, but was simply giving him praise for effort. He would not be disappointed by his failure. He was expecting it to happen, plain and simple.

Or maybe he had been hoping for Yuuri to get a part. Maybe he was looking forward to finally say, "See, I knew you could be something if you just stopped being scared all the time", and now he would not get to say these words and be annoyed by it.

He had meant well with his note. Yuuri knew that. He could see it in the swing of his writing, a little loopy like the smile he had on his face when Yuuri had managed to do something right for a change.

He had meant to encourage him or let him know that it was alright if he didn't get a solo part but that didn't change the fact that right now, Yuuri was desperately fighting to draw breath again.

Just why? Why was he like this? Why couldn't he be different, why, why, why...

A strangled, choked-up noise filled the room and it took Yuuri a moment to realize that it was his own voice, coming out in a low whimper, that soon turned into a series of hard, wrecked sobs.

At least he could keep it low. At least, after some time, he stopped, breath harsh and lungs burning.

It would be best to wait until the performance had ended and the performers had left the building. Then, when only the stagehands were left, he could slip out and go back home, get to bed, get some sleep.

He already knew he'd feel like starving the next day – he had had breakfast today, but that was about it. But right now, he was too empty to feel hungry, even though his stomach was painfully cramping. Crying tended to take it out of him, especially when it went without tears.

He had messed up. He had messed up big time and anyone else but Mr. Feltsman would have very likely fired him. Hell, he had thought Mr. Feltsman would fire him.

Still, here he was.

Yuuri took a deep breath. There would be other auditions. He would mess them up as well, very likely, but there would be other auditions.

For now it was over.

He ran a hand over the claviature before pressing down, letting the tones rise and linger in the air, then another few, weaving a melody, humming along.

His voice wasn't even remotely warmed up, but still, he sang that damn piece that he had failed to perform before, just so he could say he had done it today, at least to himself.

"Diese Holde dort zu sehen Und zu sprechen sie allein, Mich im Tanz mit ihr zu drehen, Soll mir eine Wonne sein. Eurer Wohlfahrt nur zu leben, Ist mein Trachten, mein Bestreben, Wird stets meine Sorge sein!"

The lines of the Count came out a bit wobbly, his voice not sung smooth enough for him to hold the baritone all the way through, but it was still a decent performance, nothing to earn him a solo spot, strained as his voice was.

He continued tinkering out the melody until he reached the thing he had actually wanted to sing. "Ja, ich muss die Holde sehen Und sie sprechen ganz allein...", he went on.

Singing in Baritone had been a grossly insufficient warm-up and he felt it. Even in tenor, his singing voice struggled and strained against his throat. Hitting the notes was a challenge like this, but miracle of miracles he did it, singing the blasted thing all the way through, although he didn't even remotely feel like someone experiencing love – or at least some form of infatuation – and having his whole life brightened by it. But still. Singing. No mistakes. That was worth something. His fingers tapered over the piano for a bit, playing bits and pieces of the "Wildschütz", before ending up on yet another piece sung by the baron, confessing his love to the supposed commoner who caused him so much emotional suffering. "Von meiner heissen Lieb' allein Red' ich zu deinem Herzen. Wirst du noch ferner grausam sein, Erwachen alle Schmerzen Auf's neu in mir! Nicht trag' ich mehr dies Leben; preisgegeben Fühl' ich mich der Verzweiflung wieder; Ein tötend Gift oder Blei, einerlei, Gift oder Blei, was es auch sei, Soll mir willkommen sein, Zu enden meine Pein."

The fact that the young woman he so desperately implored to marry him was his actual intended, and not some low-born and already engaged girl, didn't change the fact that he was most definitely not a role Yuuri would ever like to sing.

His fingers still flitted over the piano when he was done with the part, moving up and down and he didn't even notice that he had switched the major key, until his fingers made the familiar melody materialize in the room.

"Va, pensiero," his voice started to mumble, a whisper at first, "sull'ali dorate; va, ti posa sui clivi, sui colli," and slowly, it found its step into the melody, "ove olezzano tepide e molli l'aure dolci del suolo natal! Del Giordano le rive saluta..."

It was a wrecked, broken attempt at the song, but it still helped a bit

At the very least, Yuuri sighed, he would be able to relate better to such mournful songs, if he ever got a chance to sing them again.

"Del Giordano le rive saluta, di Sionne le torri atterrate..." His voice was harsher than usual when he sang this choir piece, rougher. Or maybe *he* just felt rougher. "O mia patria sì bella e perduta! O membranza sì cara e fatal!" It certainly didn't fit with the mournful, resigned longing the Jews expressed for their long lost home.

He wanted to go home. He just... he just wanted to run and go back and be somewhere where he could be okay, where he might fit in without always sticking out, where people would not stare at him for his eyes and his face and his skin and...

"Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati, perché muta dal salice pendi?" The words came out in a strangled sob. "Le memorie nel petto raccendi, ci favella del tempo che fu!"

He was so weak. No wonder he couldn't perform properly, no wonder he was a failure,

no wonder Celestino had sent him away. He couldn't even sing properly.

"O simile di Solima ai fati traggi un suono di crudo lamento, o t'ispiri il Signore un concerto che ne infonda al patire virtù."

The last few verses were choked out and Yuuri sank down to the floor, curling up next to the piano.

It wasn't until the small hours of the morning that he got up and moved and snuck out.