

Sing for me

Von Siberianchan

Kapitel 1:

Chapter 01

Dresden, May 1848

It would be all right, he told himself, looking at the building in front of him.

In the bright, clear afternoon air the Semperoper looked smaller than at night when it was alight with the soft glow of chandeliers, glistening against the darkness like a jewel bathed in the sweet air of late spring.

Yuuri drew a deep breath; last night, when he had looked at this place, it had appeared far more intimidating than now. It would be all right. He would do fine here. He could sing – sing well enough for the Scala at the very least and he was used to getting by with very little money, so the payment was no problem. He would probably try to find someone to share a place with, but Dresden was big and probably crawling with poor artists, looking for the same prospect. It would be all right.

His hand searched for the recommendation letter Maestro Celestino Caldini had written for him and with another deep breath, letter in hand, he wandered around the building towards a side entrance, leaving the grand staircase aside.

There was a bustle there, people entering and leaving all the time, and he waited a bit for a someone to slow down – and finally, finally a group of girls – ballet, probably, judging by their lithe physique and slim arms – bustled out, giggling.

Yuuri took a deep breath. "Excuse me!"

The girls stopped right in their tracks, turning to him, pale, thin faces questioning, noses upturned into a fashion that could have been almost coquettish if they hadn't been so young.

Yuuri was keenly aware that he was seized up and down and he swallowed. "I am looking for the director, if you could..."

"Music or dance?" one asked, cutting him off.

"Singing."

"Stage," another one just mumbled, before being grabbed and dragged away.

Yuuri looked after them, at least until one of them turned around, looking back at him questioningly. That was his signal to quickly turn around and scuttle inside.

From inside the Semperoper wasn't much warmer, at least not at the side corridor where he entered; the warmth would have to wait until he reached the main area, be it the great reception hall with its grand stairways and chandeliers or the corridors, rooms and closets of the backstage.

Operas houses by their very nature were a maze and it took three times of running

past the same bloody beam before Yuuri finally found a small door that opened and – miracle of miracle – he found himself looking at the auditorium, dark and only illuminated from the stage side.

Yuuri took a glimpse inside.

The stage emitted a soft, yellow candle light that illuminated the gilded carvings and stucco of the ceiling, the walls, the boxes for the noblest audience of this place. Here and there, red velvet gleamed like embers in a fireplace.

On the stage, some more ballet girls were dancing an elegant choreography to a simple piano arrangement of a part of Mozart's "Magic Flute" that Yuuri recognized as the introducing song of Papageno.

The song ended and the girls rushed off the stage amidst a man yelling, "You done finally, good, go, go, don't have all day!"

Their place on the stage was taken by a man and a woman.

Yuuri patiently waited for the rehearsal to end, enjoying the duet and dialogue in which the two went through the lines of the three ladies as well as the arias of Tamino and the Night Queen.

From down, there came an impatient "Again!" and so, they started again.

The woman was a perfect cast. Her soprano was clear and sweet like spring water, but there was a certain edge to it; she herself was a striking appearance with dark hair and a skin that didn't need the candle light for its dark golden shimmer. Perfect for the Night Queen, able to evoke both gentle, kind starlight and threatening, all-encompassing darkness.

The Tamino was her perfect opposite, flaxen hair tied back to reveal a very slender, long neck and a fair face that was both very sharp and determined yet at the same time amazingly youthful.

His singing was just as sharp and punctuated, pointedly and not at all befitting for someone stricken with love.

They sang through their dialogue before there was a rumble from the chairs. "Stop! Stop! Yuroshka, stop, stop, stop!"

The singers looked down.

Yuuri followed their gaze to a grizzly looking old man in a suit and jacket that definitely had seen better days.

"Tamino's in love! At once! In! Love!", he continued, "Sing with love, love, not like you try to... to... Sara, how would you feel if someone talked about you to your mother like that?"

The woman laughed, very melodically. "Like he's not in love and never has been in love before, but for some reason has to act like he is. Yuri is lucky that he's so pretty and so young. With someone less good-looking I'd be insulted. And with someone older, I would be too busy laughing to hit even one note." She cleared her throat. "On another note, if I showed someone a picture of my daughter and they sang like that I'd both feel insulted on her behalf and worried he might try to grab power from my hands instead of saving her as he was instructed."

"Yes. Yes, exactly. Yuri, sing more like in love! Sing as if you're happy to see her."

"Well, sorry if hitting the notes don't make it sound love-sick and happy, me singing it wrong certainly won't!" The man was a boy, Yuuri suddenly realized. Probably not older than 17, perhaps even younger. And he was singing Tamino.

He had to be amazing to sing such roles at this age, amazing talent, amazing charisma,

amazing willpower.

And amazing abilities of perception.

"Oi, Yakov, we got a visitor."

Yuuri felt a collection of eyes falling upon him and briefly wondered whether it was too late to run and get back to Milan. Celestino would probably take him back in, right?

The man stared at him with dark, hard eyes and waved, impatiently, for him to come closer. "You, what do you want?"

Yuuri tightened his grip around Celestino's letter. "I... I heard you are looking for singers... wait, no... I am one of your new singers..."

The cool dark eyes took him in and Yuuri desperately wished he had at least taken the time to straighten up his suit or comb his hair, do anything to appear somewhat civilized.

"Where you from? What's your name?"

"Y... Yuuri Katsuki. I... I'm coming from Milan. Got schooled at the Scala."

"Doesn't sound Italian to me. You don't *look* Italian."

If the ground beneath his feet decided to open up and swallow him, Yuuri would have been decidedly very, very grateful. "I am Japanese by birth."

"Oh, but from Milan?" the woman on the stage chirped and then continued: "Sono le strade piene di gatti ancora qui?"

Her accent was Veronese, but Yuuri still felt a wave of relief. "Solo se da gatti si intende chi non ha una casa e del lavoro e troppe bocche da sfamare – oh, aspetta, ho pensato che si stava chiedendo su Napoli!"

She laughed. "Oh, finally, finally someone who gets the joke." In a few years, she would make for a wonderful Pamina.

Mr. Feltsman, once again took a close look at him. "Good. Milan. Scala? Why you're here then?"

Yuuri swallowed hard. "Uh... Maestro Cialdini thought I might need a change and..."

A smaller stage had been his exact words, with an expression of sorrow and regret that still made Yuuri sick in his stomach. "He wrote ahead on my behalf and... uh, I also got this..." He handed the letter over.

Mr. Feltsman opened it and read it, brow carefully furrowed, while he gestured for Yuuri to come closer.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty and three."

"Your voice range?"

"Tenor."

"Countertenor?"

"Maestro Cialdini tried, but I was more suited to train towards bass."

Mr. Feltsman took a glance at him. "What were we practising just now?"

"Uh, Mozart's 'Magic Flute'. The Night Queen is just convincing Tamino to go and rescue her daughter Pamina."

The boy on the stage grumbled something that sounded somewhat like, "Well, everybody knows that."

He nodded. "Good. Yuri, come down, let him sing it. I wanna see how he can do. Just to check. You, up there. Did you warm up already? No, you got five minutes."

Yuuri stared at the man, the woman, the boy, as they all looked at him.

"Well, what you waiting for? An invitation? A personal coach? Brandy?"

Yuuri flinched and then slowly retreated to the stairway that led to the area behind

the curtain.

Finding a suitable spot he started warming up, singing octaves up and down, going higher and higher.

There was a throbbing behind his eyes, but he paid it no mind. His throat was doing its work, his voice was clear and powerful and he managed to jump about one and a half octaves without trouble.

Good. That was good.

He took a deep breath.

"Oi. Time's up, the old man's getting impatient."

Yuuri turned around to see the other singer standing behind him. Up close he looked even younger, with skin so fair that he could see veins underneath and hair like spun gold. If he ever smiled, he'd probably look positively angelic, but for some reason, Yuuri doubted that there was ever any other expression than some degree of disdain on his delicate features.

"Uh, yes. Thanks." He headed out, where the woman awaited him with a kind smile. She was extremely pretty, porcelain fine skin and eyes of a dark blue that was almost lilac.

"Sara Crispino," she smiled with a cheerfully mocking curtsy.

"Good! Are the introductions done with? Great, get to work! You, start at the *Dies Bildnis* verse, from top. Sara, you do the ladies again!"

Sara's face fell a bit, but then she took a breath. "As you say."

"Good. Georgi!"

The pianist, sharp-faced and angular, flinched. "YES!"

"You heard that! Third scene! Aria!"

"Yessir!" The man nodded sharply and started hammering on the piano.

Yuuri recognized the melody, humming a few notes before starting with Tamino's verse. "*Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön – Wie noch kein Auge je geseh'n. Ich fühl' es, wie dies Götterbild – Mein Herz mit neuer Regung füllt. Diess Etwas kann ich zwar nicht nennen!*

Doch fühl' ichs hier wie Feuer brennen. Soll die Empfindung Liebe seyn?" His voice did its job, good.

Sara listened intently as he went through the verse until the very end.

"Was würde ich! - Sie voll Entzücken. And diesen heißen Busen drücken, Und ewig wäre sie dann mein."

There was a moment of silence, only a quarter of a pause, in which he looked to her.

She offered him an encouraging smile before she started the spoken verses of the three ladies.

"Rüste dich mit Muth und Standhaftigkeit, schöner Jüngling! - Die Fürstin hat mir aufgetragen, dir zu sagen, daß der Weg zu deinem künftigen Glücke nunmehr gebahnt sey!"

Her declamation was full of pathos, very different from the cheerful chirping from before – well, she was acting, so that was normal, he mused, just as she finished, "Hat dieser Jüngling, sprach sie, auch so viel Muth und Tapferkeit als er zärtlich ist, o so ist meine Tochter ganz gewiss gerettet."

He jolted, widening his eyes. "Gerettet? Oh ewige Dunkelheit! Was hör' ich! - Das Original?"

They played through the entire dialogue in which the ladies gave Tamino a briefing about how the abduction of Pamina had gone along, firing him up for the quest, before Sara finished, announcing the Queen with a loud, dramatic "Sie kommt! Sie

kommt! Sie kommt!"

And in the next moment her voice seemed to switch, straight back to what it had been when Yuuri had listened in first.

Clear, and cutting-edge sharp she recited the verses in which the Queen introduced herself as a mourning, worried mother, before starting her aria. "Zum Leiden bin ich auserkohren; Denn meine Tochter fehlet mir, Durch sie ging all mein Glück verloren - Ein Bösewicht entfloh mit ihr!"

"Yes, yes, yes, Sara!" Yakov yelled and the piano died. "We know that bit, and we know you're in your position for a reason, yes!"

His gaze fell on Yuuri. "You, though... what parts have you performed so far?"

The excitement of the performance was wearing off. Yuuri swallowed. "No main roles. In Milan, I was mostly understudy... I... I sang the "Magic Flute" before. One of the three boys. And the first Armored Man... occasionally one of the slaves."

"Hm." Mr. Feltsman looked at him, sharply. "Let's be clear, if I said so you wouldn't find one moment of work here, I don't care whether you already got a contract promised and I care even less what your maestro has to say about you, because he showers you a bit too much with praise, considering your thin resume."

An almost deafening wave of nausea was rising in him. Suddenly the floorboards were very far away.

But well, it wasn't like he hadn't expected this. He should have known. It wasn't news, after all.

"Anyway, we need some new voices, and you're not half-bad. You have a place in Dresden?"

What? Yuuri stared at him.

"You deaf? Not good – no?"

Yuuri shook his head, quickly.

"Good. So, you got lodgings here?"

"Nothing permanent. A room in an inn," he admitted.

"Ah. Georgi, make sure he finds a place at your dormitories after we're done here," Yakov ordered.

The man behind the piano saluted, long-fingered hand against a temple with cropped, brown hair. "Yessir!"

"Good. You!" He turned to Yuuri again.

Yuuri stiffened. "Yessir!"

"Cut it out, that's only funny when Georgi does it. Be back at eleven, we'll be done here then."

"Yes." Yuuri swallowed the "Sir."

He waved his hand in the air. "Rehearsal for the chorus is at eight in the morning. Be on time. In two months we'll hold try-outs for Lortzing's "Wildschütz", so prepare yourself if you want a part in that."

Yuuri was about to nod again when he heard a soft "Tse" from behind the curtain.

The other singer stood there, looking at him with something like cool, hard contempt in his clear, bright green eyes.

What was wrong now?

Sara smiled. "It will be a bit confusing with two Yuris, right?" she chirped.

"Why?", the other drawled, but his eyes grew colder by another few degrees. "Not like he'll be getting any big parts anytime soon."

"Yuri, Sara, less gossiping, more singing! Yuri, you've heard how you should sing when you're in love?! More like this, will ya!"

There was some more grumbling from the boy who now rejoined Sara on the stage.

Yuuri slipped from the stage and away.

Eleven. That was in two and a half hours.

Enough time to take a look at this new town, this new place he would live from now on. Enough time to see whether it might in time even become a home.

In the end, he returned long before the pianist – Georgi, he remembered – was done. Since there was nothing else to do, he spent the time wandering the maze of corridors and crossroads and beams and lifts and cranes and doors, getting lost a few times, all the while mapping it out. After the thirteenth time, he had it mapped out somewhat – the dressing rooms for the ballet corps, male and female, strictly separated and probably chaperoned – the costume storerooms – the props room, next to it – the dressing room for the chorus, only one, so men and women probably changed in shifts.

The dressing rooms for the solo singers and the more prestigious the person, the more space between the doors and the fewer people had to share one room.

There were only four doors with only one name on them and one door was labeled "Yuri Plisetsky". That was probably the young one from before.

Didn't seem to friendly a fellow. That might not be good – life as a chorus singer or an understudy was hard enough without having any of the soloists hating you. Although in Milan it had rarely ever been the men who had started drama, that honour had usually belonged to the primadonna and the head ballerina. God help you if they for some reason both decided to hate you. Yuuri had watched a few young women leave the Scala because of that. But the leading ladies weren't the leading ladies for nothing, so the rest of the theater usually had suffered in silence and waited for the drama to blow over.

Yuuri could only pray that this boy wasn't interested in behaving like a primadonna, only because the actual one seemed a nice enough woman.

At least nice enough to consider him a landsman. Maybe it had been a while since she had had contact with an actual Italian and was now taking what she could get?

He listened to snippets of conversations floating around him, bits in German that he almost understood.

This language was confusing. Some words were actually familiar to his ears without him having to try too hard, but then they messed it up with too hard words, too many edges, too complicated verbs.

And still, Yuuri had managed to learn the language, at least well enough for everyday purposes. Celestino had insisted on him learning German years ago, considering how much German music and especially opera had grown in importance over the last few years.

Or maybe he had planned all along to send him away. It wasn't like Yuuri would be missed at the Scala. He couldn't even begrudge Celestino his decision to send Yuuri so far away. Quite a few of the German countries had a long and celebrated theater tradition and Dresden especially was proud to call itself a patron city of musical theater as well. Maybe Yuuri would find a spot for himself here. And in any case, he would not look more foreign here than he had in Milan.

He would feel glances and stares following him here as well and he would hear people whisper and laugh. Being a foreigner at least meant that there were things one would always and under any circumstances understand.

It had been quite too much very soon and thus he had quickly wandered to the inn in a

rather cheap and maybe somewhat dirty district on the other side of the river Elbe. There he had paid his rent for the room he had slept in last night and grabbed his few belongings before leaving, hearing the landlord mutter something about his bad manners.

Head bowed down, almost tucked in between his shoulder blades, he had arrived back at the opera and had slipped back in and wandered the maze, before returning to the curtains behind the main stage.

Rehearsals were still going on, but apparently, the parts for Tamino were through for today – on stage a bass singer as bass a singer could be and a soprano, probably in her thirties, went through the dialogue between Sarastro and Pamina.

They were good, Sarastro deep and filling and awe-inspiring – a wise and kind leader and protective father figure for the girl he had taken.

Pamina's sweet, flexible soprano wept her sorrow and her worries for her mother, occasionally broken by hopes for a better future with a lover she had yet to meet but was already enthralled with.

"Shit piece," he heard someone mutter beside him and as he turned, saw the tenor. Yuri Plisetsky.

Yuuri flinched. "Oh... sorry... I didn't know you were here..."

"This opera is shit," Yuri mumbled, as if he hadn't heard him.

Yuuri blinked at him. "It's a masterpiece."

"Doesn't mean it's not full of shit."

"You're singing the male lead."

The boy shrugged. "We all need bread, right?" he slowly blinked at Yuuri, his bright eyes hard and cold with something almost like fury. "Don't look at me like that. You tell me you love singing so much or whatever?"

Taken aback, Yuuri stood in silence, while he listened as Sarastro and Pamina came to an end.

"Yeah, yeah, all right! Elise, you get the lyrics into that thick skull of yours by tomorrow! It's not even like Pamina has that much text to begin with!" Mr. Feltsman bellowed.

Maybe where he was concerned, that constituted as a praise. The soprano was positively glowing when she left the stage. She shot Yuuri a vaguely curious look, but then she very likely decided that a new face was beneath her attention and wandered off.

Yuuri found that he could live with that very well.

"Yuri! Your scene with Johannes! Then we're done for today!"

The boy sighed, "Ugh, finally!" and then left towards the stage.

Yuuri listened to the piano smattering the melody and then the bass started delivering what were the Priest's lines. "Wo willst du kühner Fremdling, hin? Was suchst du hier im Heiligthum?"

Maybe this production had merged Sarastro and this priest into one. Or maybe the singer for Sarastro played the priest's part for now.

This time, Yuri had no trouble delivering the expected feelings. Tamino's distrust against the supposed villain was palpable and he didn't shake it off after he supposedly had started to believe his word.

"Stop! Yuri! Tamino is *not* sarcastic here!"

Yuuri on the stage took an audible, deep breath.

Yuuri just waited for him to start screaming. If he had screamed he would not have been surprised at all.

However, the boy did not scream.

Yuuri heard him breathe out and then, with an utterly fake tone of resignation sigh: "Yeah, true, he believes every single word strangers he doesn't know tell him and is extremely easily swayed to their cause. He probably wouldn't know sarcasm if it stood in front of him yelling his face off as he deserves for his idiocy."

From down below, a soft, long-suffering groan rose to them, then ended sharply and Mr. Feltsman said, "Again. From the top."

They started again and this time, Yuri acted on the conversion of Tamino, portraying him with the wonder and elation of watching a sunrise after a night's vigil. His voice was already mostly formed but still had retained that glass clear, aerial quality Yuuri was used to hear from chorus boys before they grew up.

"All right, good! Who's on stage tonight? Both of you? Good, see you then."

"See you!" the bass greeted before leaving for the curtain.

He took a quick glance at Yuuri. "New face?"

Yuuri quickly nodded. "Yes... uh... Georgi was supposed to show me the dorms."

"Chorus then? Well, welcome to Dresden."

"Thank you. ... Yuuri. Yuuri Katsuki."

The bass smiled through his thick, red beard and offered him a hand. "Johannes Erhard. And just in case you don't know yet – we're all stage folk here. We have each other's back no matter what. You got that?"

Yuuri didn't, but it was nice to hear it anyway. "Yes. Thank you."

"Oi, Johannes, if you have time to be a papa to any new nose around here, you have time for your wife too!" Yuri hissed. "Get home!"

Johannes Erhard laughed. "If your wealth of experience and wisdom accumulated in your long, long life says so, my dear boy – I will! See you tonight!"

And he wandered off as well.

Yuri sighed. "He's no good on stage if he's not well-rested and he knows it." He glanced to Yuuri again. "So. You know what's up after the "Magic Flute"?"

"Not yet." Yuuri had the distinct feeling this might change in the next few moments.

""Wildschütz". Comedy. Light-hearted. Yakov mentioned it before. You should try out for it. Easy to sing, you might even get a small spot."

"And what if not?"

"Then you're where you were before. Don't stare like that. Yakov likes the chorus stacked well enough that one or two singers absent won't be noticed. And in any case, no understudy ever suffered from a stint in the chorus."

Well, Mr. Feltsman surely had interesting ideas regarding how to manage his singers.

"And why would you want me to try out?" Yuuri asked. "There an understudy you wish a stint in the chorus upon?"

Yuri snorted. "The what? Does this look like Paris to you?"

"A few hours ago it most definitely didn't sound too French," Yuuri admitted. "So, why then?"

"I like to see how far people can get." His eyes were still sharp but the edge had come off a bit. "You gonna show me how far you can get, understood?"

This boy, Yuuri concluded, was a bit weird. But then again, he was singing lead tenor roles before he was even remotely in the area of turning twenty, so maybe being a bit weird was just another aspect of being gifted.

On the stage, the pianist, Georgi, was just closing the lid to the piano keys and stretching this back through, without doubt feeling rather sore after many hours of work.

He turned around and nodded to them. "Oh, you're here already? Great. See you tonight, Yuri!"

"Yeah, whatever," Yuri mumbled and then wandered off.

Georgi huffed a laugh. "Oh, to be young and innocent again, eh?" He gave Yuuri a wink that was entirely obscure in its meaning to him.

"Ah well. Come along, will you!"

Yuuri did and was lead into the spring-warm midday sun and through streets and alleyways, filled with laughter and screaming and talking and the rumbling of horse pulled carts.

An ever-flowing stream of German surrounded them, and a weird one as that, the usually hard and sharp edges of the language blurred and slurred and everything spoken in a high-pitched, almost painful sing-song.

Yuuri prayed he'd get used to it and quickly. Preferably before his ears started to bleed.

"So", Georgi turned to him, "don't mind me, but how did you get to Italy from Japan? Aren't they kind of closed-off?"

Thank goodness, he spoke Italian, although his accent was almost as thick as the porridge Yuuri had had for breakfast today.

"Si." Yuuri nodded. "Maestro Cialdini picked me up in Singapore and brought me with him to Milano when I was small."

"How old were you?"

"I don't know. Maybe three or four."

Georgi's face twisted into something that seemed to be understanding and he nodded. "So, you remember anything from there?"

Yuuri shook his head. "No."

Again, Georgi's face twisted, now into something like pity.

Yuuri looked ahead, just so he wouldn't have to look at it. "That's the Church of Our Lady over there?" he asked, nodding to one tall, time-darkened dome of sandstone.

"It is." Thankfully, Georgi picked up on the change of topic. "In case you ever loose your way in the city, head towards there and once you're on the Neumarkt, you should be able to find your way back to the opera."

Another corner, they stopped to let some carriages and carts pass and then crossed the street.

The dormitory turned out to be a broad, five-story building with a bright blue facade and a thin, tired-looking widow for an owner who made a humble living out of renting out beds and offering food for theater folks from behind a small desk with a thick, large book on it that looked very well-thumbed.

She looked at Yuuri closely, going so far as drawing up her oil lamp close to his face, despite the fact that bright midday light shone through the window and lightened up the birch wood panels on the wall and the bright, yellow tiles on the floor. "Where do you work?"

Did he work at the Semperoper yet? He had just introduced himself, he had no fixed position yet, he...

"Mrs. Haubener," Georgi sighed, "Really?"

"There's a way how things are done", the woman snapped. "So, speak, lad."

"Uh... Semperoper."

"Orchestra? Chorus? Don't look like ballet, do you."

"Chorus."

"Good, they at least behave." She nodded. "You pay your rent weekly. Breakfast is at

six. Supper at 8. Your rent is 12 Groschen. This includes seven meals, your choice whether it's breakfast or supper. Let me know in advance. Everything else you book on top."

Yuuri glanced to Georgi, but the man nodded and Yuuri decided to trust his judgement. "Good."

"Good. You got money to pay for the week? If not, you can start paying next week, but put two Groschen on top of it for six weeks, then we're good."

"I..." Yuuri's throat was tight. "I can pay."

"Good." She nodded, curtly, then held her hand out.

Yuuri quickly reached for his purse and counted up twelve Groschen into her palm.

"Good." Mrs. Haubener smiled as she pocketed the money and opened a book. "Your name?"

"Katsuki, Yuuri."

She raised an eyebrow and he spelled it out for her. "Sorry for that."

"Funny name." She made a note behind the name and closed the book again. "Before Georgi shows you to your room – you can come and go at your own leisure, there's always someone opening up the doors. But you won't bring women to your room. You will not come towards the girls' rooms. If you have a female visitor, you can receive them in the mess hall. No smoking in the room. If you violate any of these rules or if I hear too many complaints from the other tenants or if you can't pay your rent, I will kick you out at once, understood?"

Yuuri hurried to nod, although his head was still picking apart the last sentence, just in case he had missed anything on first hearing.

"Good. Georgi, you know where there's a free bed, you take care of him."

"Will do and thank you!"

"You up for dinner tonight?"

"Gladly. Sign him up for one too, my treat for the new guy."

Mrs. Haubener raised an eyebrow. "Well, you didn't spend all your meals for the week, so, fine." She looked at Yuuri. "You want breakfast tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Good." With a wave, they were dismissed and Georgi, grinning, headed for the stairway.

Yuuri followed him.

On each floor, there were two closed doors, left and right.

"Left are the women's rooms and Mrs. Haubener is serious, by the way, don't ever go there. I had a girl who lived there and we were planning to get married – I stayed here because it is cheaper than to rent a full apartment and we wanted to save for a house. We were only allowed to meet in the mess and only with a chaperone, so we usually went out or met at the Opera."

"Oh." That *were* quite strict rules if even engaged couples had to obey them. "Uh... you were planning, you said?"

Georgi swallowed audibly. "She..." He looked at Yuuri, quite misty-eyed. "She changed her mind. In the end, she found it more lucrative to marry one of the sponsors of the lead ballerina."

"Oh... well..." Yuuri tried very hard to find the right words, failed and thus, didn't say anything.

Georgi drew a deep breath. "Oh well. She will regret her decision in time, you will see. She will beg me to take her back. I am not entirely sure yet whether to forgive her then or spurn her."

This left Yuuri speechless for entirely different reasons. While they went up another floor, he left Georgi to his ramblings until he finally opened the door to reveal a corridor with yet more doors, three on each side.

Georgi wandered down the corridor and opened the middle door on the left. "Ah, I was right – there's room here." He waved Yuuri to come closer.

The room had six beds, one of them empty and obviously unoccupied. Next to each there was a small night stand, at the foot end of each bed a cask for clothes and other personal belongings.

The others were all showing various signs of general occupation.

"Three of them are in the orchestra – bit wild, those folks, take care when they offer you something – anything they call home made. The other two are singers, like you." Georgi slapped his back. "I'm sure you'll get along."

Yuuri nodded, slowly. "Yes... thank you."

"Well, I'll leave you to it. I'm one floor up, middle room to the left."

Again, Yuuri mumbled, "Thank you", and then he was left alone to unpack what he had with him. Not that it was much, three pairs of trousers, two shirts, one good shirt, four sets of underwear. One well-thumbed edition of Boccaccio's "Decamerone", which Yuuri carefully placed on his nightstand, running a finger over the back of the book. Celestino had used this very book to teach him reading, maybe a year or two after he had started giving Yuuri music lessons.

The memory brought a wave of homesickness that made Yuuri nauseous enough to sit down on the bed. Why had he ever thought this might actually be a good idea? It wasn't, it so definitely wasn't and he...

He took the book in his hands, feeling the familiar weight, the blue linen, once coarse, now softened by uncounted times of touching, the paper having lost the stiff freshness long ago, bending to his touch as he opened the book.

There was a sheet of paper inside.

Yuuri blinked, then picked it up and unfolded it.

Celestino's neat, flowing cursive stared at him in Italian and Yuuri smiled a bit. It *was* like him to write him a note.

My dear, little Yuuricino,

By now you have hopefully settled in in Dresden. Don't be too discouraged by Yakov Feltsman. He is gruff, but a good sort and he appreciates hard work. You are one of the hardest workers I have experienced in my life and you have more talent than you yourself believe. I do hope that Dresden will do you good and help you realize what you can do.

With lots of love and all the best wishes,

Celestino Cialdini

Yuuri dropped the note, taking in a deep breath.

Celestino had wanted him to go here and Yuuri had not protested. Celestino wanted him to be here. Now Yuuri was here. Celestino wanted him to succeed here.

Hopefully, he would.

With lots of love and all the best wishes, he had written.

That was some comfort at least. Celestino hadn't sent him away because he didn't care for him. Celestino wanted him to grow and change and succeed.

So, Yuuri would try his best.

So Yuuri would now consider Dresden the place to grow and change and succeed.

So Yuuri would now consider Dresden his home.

It would be all right.

