Nesting doll

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/660.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	General (non relationship-focused)
Fandom:	Arcane (2021)
Relationship:	Jayce Talis/Viktor (Arcane) - Background
Characters:	Viktor (Arcane), Jayce Talis
Additional Tags:	Angst, Dreams, Character Study
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-10-25 Words: 2,219 Chapters: 1/1

Nesting doll

by pulledporknoods

Summary

Viktor wakes up. Turns out he stayed up too late and crashed at his desk. Jayce fusses and tell him to leave early, which Viktor ignores. *What a weird dream*, he thinks, as he goes about the rest of his day, except—

Viktor wakes up again.

Notes

I had this mostly written and just sitting in my drafts, oops

See the end of the work for more notes

“—iktor. *Viktor!*”

Viktor jerks awake.

For a moment, he's lost. He knows *who* he is, but he's not sure *where* he is, or even when. He blinks open dry eyes, squinting in the light. The last thing he remembers is…. Viktor frowns. He can't remember. He tamps down on the fleeting worry and looks around instead.

Thankfully, he's in a place he recognizes, the only place that’s mattered—the lab. Sunlight streams in through their one window, bright and golden in the late afternoon. He's slumped over his crossed arms on the workbench, vest unbuttoned, cravat undone. Viktor groans and creaks upright, hoping his shirtsleeve wrinkles aren't pressed into his cheek.

He turns his head to see Jayce, who stares at him with mild concern. “Viktor, I keep telling you to leave early if you were tired!”

Viktor sighs, and memories of last night—this morning?—filter in. “You stayed as late as I did,” he points out.

Despite being early in their partnership, the two of them already developed an unfortunate habit of staying in the lab until ungodly hours, always trying to finish one more math problem, to soldier one more Hextech part. There were even times when the sunrise caught them by surprise. After all, what’s a few hours of sleep compared to a night's worth of breakthroughs? Viktor always says he’ll sleep when he's dead.

Jayce *humph*s at him, like he can hear Viktor's thoughts, but he doesn't lecture further. “Looks like it was a good nap, at least.” He gestures at Viktor's face.

Sure enough, his sleeve wrinkles *did* stamp themselves into his cheeck. He even has a bit of dried drool at the corner of his mouth. Viktor grimaces and tries to subtly scrub it off. Hopefully Jayce didn’t notice that.

Weirdly enough, it *was* a good nap. Normally sleep evades him, and naps are harder to achieve still. But this nap was deep and unmoored, like time had momentarily loosed its grasp, but more importantly—

“I had a very odd dream,” Viktor murmurs. He's not sure what the dream entailed, exactly, but even now, he can't shake a deep feeling of loneliness, pervasive and gnawing. He shakes his head after a moment. “I'm sorry, what did you need, Jayce?”

Jayce appears to debate asking about the dream, but in the end he turns to the mess of papers before him. “So, I tried the equation you suggested…”

Viktor scoots closer, bending his head toward Jayce. Purely to read Jayce's calculations, of course. Certainly not to stare intently at his partner's profile while the man talks him through his thought process.

“Oh! Wait—” Jayce stops talking to frantically scribble numbers. “I think I got it. I…yeah. Yeah!” Jayce turns and beams at him, and like always, the full force of Jayce Talis's smile makes something in his chest do a funny swoop. “Thanks, Viktor!”

“Of course,” Viktor replies absently, and he retreats to his side of the workbench to recover his wits.

They continue the day like that—sitting on their respective sides of the workbench, grinding out calculations. At one point in the evening, Viktor gets a strange wave of…not déjà vu, but almost…nostalgia. Like this was a life he lived once. He shakes his head to clear it. What a strange idea.

Still, it stays with him as he and Jayce lock up the lab in the wee hours of the morning. Afterward, Jayce walks him to his nearby apartment like he usually does. Yet when Jayce leaves him at the door of his building and walks off down the street, Viktor has the inexplicable, desperate urge to run after him, leg be damned. He stares after Jayce’s retreating figure as the urge ebbs.

Viktor makes a face. There's no way that kind of action would go over well. Even if he does have a growing infatuation for the man, he can’t go chasing him down the street, even metaphorically. They’re just coworkers, and more importantly, Viktor can't allow himself to be distracted like that. It would be unprofessional, and besides, men like Jayce do not end up with men like Viktor, no matter how nice Jayce is.

Inside his apartment, Viktor carefully situates himself in bed, now in a melancholic mood. In the dark, alone, he can't help but recall the strangeness of the dream, the oddness of the day. The moments where everything fit like a too-small sweater—familiar, but different.

What an odd feeling, Viktor thinks as he drifts off to sleep.

Viktor jerks awake.

At first, he's still stuck in the dream, the golden visions of their early days. Those days when their lab only held the two of them, hunkered down over a workbench, scribbling away at the nascent concept of Hextech.

The dream quickly disappears.

He jolts upright, coughing, hacking. The sound must loudly echo through the lab, but he can't hear it. He's too busy fighting for breath. His throat and lungs *burn*. Each cough drives spikes of pain into his already-raw throat; each breath he draws carries the faint hint of blood. He fumbles for the handkerchief he took to carrying.

“Viktor!”

Hurried footsteps. Jayce's familiar presence appears next to him. A large hand settles on his back, rubbing as the attack finally subsides. Viktor turns watering eyes on his partner, handkerchief still pressed to his mouth.

He didn't even hear the massive lab doors opening.

“I thought you were still at that meeting,” Viktor rasps. He coughs again, just to clear the remaining fluids from his throat. He checks the handkerchief—no blood, thank Janna. He doesn't want to know what Jayce will do if he ever catches Viktor coughing up blood. “The meeting with the, eh…pinched face man, yeah?”

Jayce chokes then laughs. “Viktor!” he scolds, but Viktor knows for sure that Jayce doesn't like the man either. Unfortunately, he's a possible investor, one with deep pockets.

“He was alright. You know how they are.” Jayce gives Viktor an tired look. “He talked a lot about his family, and how rich they were, like he personally made it all happen.”

“But did he commit to anything?”

Jayce sighs. “No.”

There's a moment of silence in which they both contemplate the state of the budget. Sure, the Council funds Hextech. They each receive a regular stipend as well as a general budget for things like employees and materials. But the Council likes to account for every cog and washer in the budget while also asking for the heavens. Even Mel can only do so much, which leaves Viktor and Jayce scrambling after investors and commissions whenever they have other projects.

Viktor shifts on his wheeled stool. “You want me to, eh, talk to him?” He waggles his eyebrows meaningfully.

That gets another laugh out of Jayce. “Viktor, no. You'll eviscerate him!”

Viktor scoffs. “I’ll do no such thing. I am not the sassy one here.” He points at Jayce. “You're lucky the public doesn't know about your attitude.”

“*My* attitude?” Jayce rolls his eyes.

There's a moment of silence where Jayce seems to realize what he just did, and Viktor gets to watch as he visibly clamps his lips together, desperately trying to suppress any reaction.

They both burst out laughing anyway.

They laugh long and hard, the stress of the last few days making them slightly hysterical.

Suddenly, the laughs turn to coughs, and Viktor curses his luck. He curses the gods and the universe at large as the joy of the moment slips away with every lung-rattling hack he makes. He hears Jayce, his voice distant but worried, probably asking him if he's alright. Viktor would answer, if only the coughing would stop.

Jayce says something frantic and walks off, and Viktor wants to reach out after him. *No*, he wants to say. *Come back, sit with me. I'll be fine if you just stay with me.* But he can't stop coughing long enough to catch his breath. Black creeps in at the edges of his vision, and Viktor succumbs.

Viktor doesn't jerk awake this time. Instead, he slowly opens his eyes to see the illuminated ceiling of his dwelling. Light the color of pale gold washes over space, catching on the edges of the living metal that forms his limbs. Viktor stares absently, hands curled in his lap as he floats high above the floor.

Once, he would be disturbed by this nightmare. He feels the echo of it still, the horror of a dream that felt so real…and uncertainty. Is he awake now? Or is this just another dream within a dream? He thinks he is awake, but he also thought as much in the previous loops. Maybe if he reaches out to the Arcane, to the telepathic web of his community—

His train of thought is broken by noise at the entrance of the room. There's movement in shadows of the entryway, before one shadow breaks away from the rest, and…

It's Jayce.

Jayce, his partner who he never saw after leaving him, that fateful day in the lab. Jayce, his partner who went through so much and and went against his wishes to make sure Viktor survived, but he never even came to search for Viktor in the days or months after.

Jayce, who looks…

"Viktor," Jayce rasps.

Viktor blinks in surprise, taking in the man. He hasn't seen Jayce in a long time, but certainly it hasn't been long enough for the man to get to the state he's in. Last time they saw each other, Jayce still looked relatively fine, if a little haunted and a lot angry. Now the man before him looks…shattered. His clothes are tattered, his hair unkempt, face covered with a wild beard. And the Mercury Hammer he drags behind him is covered in Arcane webbing, its shape twisted far beyond its original form. Viktor's brow draws together in confusion. He looks down at the gear in his hands. Arcane matter coats one side of it, shining up at him with iridescent colors. Those same colors cover the Mercury Hammer. It *definitely* hasn't been long enough for the Arcane to warp the Hammer into the state that it's in.

Viktor looks back up, Jayce's name on his lips. He has questions. But as Viktor watches, Jayce hefts up the massive weapon—and points it up at *him*. Viktor is taken aback. Surely Jayce doesn't mean to—

The Hammer butterflies open, its powerful Hex beam aiming straight for him. Belatedly, some distant part of him finally sounds an alarm. He didn't think Jayce hated him *this* much. They may have parted on strained terms, but surely—

There's a whining sound, then a surprisingly distant *boom*.

Viktor opens his eyes.

A familiar landscape greets him. He sits at the top of the Hexgates, the eye in the hurricane of the calamity. A faint breeze rustles his cloak, and the smell of ozone cuts through the faint

scent of grass. Viktor looks out to where the jagged ruins of Piltover stare back.

Viktor turns back to his companion. “Jayce,” he murmurs.

No answer. Jayce hasn't been able to answer for a while now. Even Jayce’s eyes, which used to follow him as he paced, now remain still. All Viktor hears now, all he ever hears, is silence. Viktor glances over his partner’s form, overgrown with moss and worn by time. He reaches out to the little patch of green which grows in the hollow of what was once Jayce’s head.

Recently during his wanderings, he found a flower in the exact shade of Talis red, growing out of the remains of some gods-forsaken alleyway. He wanted to bring it back to Jayce, to plant it where his partner can see—if he can still see—but the moment he touched it, Arcane webbing consumed the flower, leeching all the color from it. Afterward, Viktor didn’t leave the Hexgates for a while. In the end, he settled for adding more of the yellow flowers around Jayce. He hoped—still hopes—Jayce likes it. There was only so much his partner was able to convey with eye movements.

Now, when Viktor crouches in front of him (slowly, carefully, out of habit), Jayce doesn’t react. Viktor settles himself on the grass between Jayce, on the other side of the solidified shell of Arcane. “I had a dream, Jayce,” he says quietly. Viktor looks out at the deceptively peaceful grass, warmed by the only sunshine in the ruined city. “I dreamed about our days in the lab. Do you remember? When we had to chase down rich men to fund our little side projects.” Viktor lets out a little chuckle. “Those were simpler times, hm?”

Silence.

Another breeze comes through, rustling the unnaturally multicolored grass.

There is no answer. No more calls of “Viktor!” No more waiting for Jayce to notice him, no more big dreams of the two of them remaking the world. There is only this one green patch of grass, high in the sky, where the clouds finally part to let in the bright blue sky, and the sunshine streams down to warm old, tired bones.

Viktor sighs. He closes his eyes, lays his head on Jayce’s shoulder, and lets the Arcane pull him under once more.

End Notes

This was inspired by a real dream I had

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!