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## Village Secrets

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### Summary

Delphine, having trained as a figure skater all her life meets an American snowboarder when she is accidentally given a room in the wrong Olympic Village.

## Chapter 1

Every time she felt the chill of the ice, it was the same experience. She felt the cool wind fluttering past her and the thrill of excitement, her heart beating in time with the music and the movements that she'd done so many times they were almost automatic. After picking up enough speed and a well-timed turn she was now soaring backwards, her body preparing itself as she felt the power in her legs uncoil. One skate dug into the ice and launched her up into the air, but something was wrong. From the moment her skates left the ice, the rotation was incorrect. She could feel the normal control she had seep out and she lost sight of where she was. Gravity pulled at her and she forced her limbs to cooperate, but it was futile. Her skate touched the ice again but inertia still had a grip on her and she spun once more and suddenly she was falling. She was falling and she felt the rush of cold air accompanied by the immediate feeling of regret mixed with the loss of Olympic gold right before her head impacted the ice in a loud crack.

With a jerk, Delphine would have jumped out of her seat had she not been seat-belted in. "Merde." She looked around, swallowing the panic that had overcome her entire body. It was the same nightmare she'd had every night for the past month since she'd been selected. Her eyes darted around the cabin of the plane, her hands gripping the arms of the first-class seat.

"Ça va?"

Looking to her side, her coach was looking at her through eyes heavy with sleep. She nodded. "Je vais bien ." With a half-hearted wave, she signaled the stewardess. "Une petite bouteille d'eau, s'il vous plaît." When the small bottle of water was delivered, she quickly drank it down before picking up the packet she had been reading over. She'd been to Russia about half a dozen times in the past year. This time it was different. She would be representing her country. She looked to her right to see her fellow countrymen who were speaking quietly as they watched a video on a tablet.

The Olympics.

She'd been working her entire life for this moment. Every restless night, every 15-hour training day, this was what she was working towards. Now she just had to get through the next two weeks. Two weeks of press conferences, trainings, and competitions that would be seen all over the planet.

"Merde."

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"Merde." This had to be maybe the tenth time that word had escaped her mouth as she took in the sight of the room.

"What the hell is this?"

Delphine turned to Isabelle, a shorter but well-toned woman with dark skin and large inquisitive eyes who was one of the ice dancers she had been sharing ice time with. "Well, this was unexpected." Delphine stepped up to one of the twin beds, kicking it slightly before lifting her suitcase onto the padded surface. There was an odd scent in the air and she doubted the bedding was clean despite the fact that the building was new. Unzipping the large bag, she pulled out a soft blanket, holding it to her nose so she could breathe in the scent of jasmine and coffee. "I am sure Monsieur Allard will get this straightened out in the morning." They had left the older Frenchman downstairs yelling into his cell phone, knowing that nothing would be settled before the next morning.

Isabelle moved to the window, pulling back the curtain to reveal the night sky. There were scenes of construction everywhere, piles of lumber and tools here and there, but worst of all was the snow. "We are not supposed to be here. This is the wrong village, Lait!"

She wrinkled her nose at the nickname the woman had given her in the last month. Shrugging out of her coat and quickly pulling on a knitted sweater, Delphine joined the woman. They could see people walking around, laughing and joking. "Well, I'm sure the scenery is better here." As if on cue, there was a soft snap and the curtain fluttered to the ground. She wanted to laugh, but she was frankly too tired. Upon landing they had been rushed to a press conference before they were whisked off to get their room assignments. Sochi was...almost unbearable. The city was filthy, the streets cluttered with trash and stray dogs. There were police everywhere armed with large guns and bad attitudes.

To top it all off, the complete disorganization was revealed when they were informed they had rooms in the Mountain village. The athletes were split up among three villages, and while the other skaters and similar athletes were assigned to the coastal village, somehow they had been given rooms in the same area as the skiers in the village 30 minutes away.

"This is such a shitstorm."

"Oui." Delphine sighed before going to the bathroom, only to be faced with two toilets sitting right next to each other. "Hmmm, Isa...I do not think we are this close."

Sticking her head in the room, the shorter woman smirked. "Non. I think we can take turns like normal people." She rolled her eyes and went to unpack her own suitcase.

With a shake of her wavy blonde hair, Delphine set out her toiletries on the counter, turning on the water. "What the..." She turned off the faucet and stopped the flow of yellow water, looking at her reflection that was segmented by a large crack across the center of the mirror. "This is the moment I have been working for all my life." It was almost a mantra to remind her of exactly what she was doing.

When things didn't seem like they could get any worse that night, there was a loud crash that came from outside their room.

Isabelle opened the front door, seeing someone laying in the middle of the hallway and two other women leaning against the wall laughing hysterically.

"Shiiiiit." The woman rolled over, rubbing her forehead. "These sons of bitches need to clear these damn cables."

"Come on, Niehaus." One of the laughing women spoke in English as she helped her fallen comrade up. All three were wearing matching, hideous sweaters adorned with the American flag. They passed just as Isabelle closed the door.

"What is going on out there?" Delphine asked, pushing her suitcase off the bed. She picked up the three one liter bottles of water she'd had in her travel bag and brought them to the bathroom

The darker woman shook her head as she began to strip out of her clothes, pulling on warmer pajamas. "Stupid clumsy Americans."

"Well, tomorrow everything will be fixed and we can get some ice time." Slipping under the covers, Delphine took a deep breath, wincing as she felt the springs of the mattress through the thin material of the sheets. "Let's get some sleep." With a final prayer that her dreams would be clear, Delphine reached up and turned off the lights.



## Chapter 2

Delphine inhaled slowly, the crisp air burning her throat slightly as she stretched her limbs. It was still dark but the sky had started to take on a pinker tone. At home, she was used to being the only one awake this early. It was something she did no matter if she was having a rare day off, or a day full of practice. She looked forward to the quiet serenity every morning as she warmed up her body, preparing her mind for the long day.

A group of about 15 athletes jogged past Delphine and she sighed softly. Apparently she wasn't the only one awake. This was definitely going to be different. Here she was surrounded by thousands of athletes who took as much pride in their bodies as she did. With a shake of her head, she fell in about 50 feet behind the group, keeping a slow and steady pace. The feel of the gravel crunching beneath her running shoes was one that was very familiar and she allowed herself to let go and enjoy the moment. She may be in the wrong village, but she was there and she was competing in the Olympics.

*"This is an outrage!"*

*Delphine winced as Monsieur Allard threw the phone against the wall and it shattered into three pieces. She shook her blanket out and folded it for maybe the tenth time since the heated conversation had started.*

*With a heavy sigh, the French coach pulled out one of the metal chairs that were provided, facing the blonde with a solemn look on his face. "They cannot move us." He growled slightly. "There are not enough rooms in the other village." He shook his head, looking down at his hands in disgust.*

*"How will we practice?" Delphine knew there was no way practice would be denied them. She wasn't one to panic even when it seemed like the odds were piling up against her.*

*"Transportation will be provided for you every day, but you will have to stay here at night."*

*Delphine looked around the room with a pensive look. It was, however, not the worse room, from what she had heard. She had seen some pictures of missing floors and holes in walls. "Perhaps this is a good thing? It will be nice to not have to worry about running into the other competitors on the off time." She put on a half smile. "I'm sure it will be ok." She pulled a pair of shoes from her suitcase. "I am going for a run."*

Delphine looked up as a runner dashed past her, red dust kicking up slightly from the running shoes. She had no intention on over-working herself. She didn't have any access to the coastal village today as they worked out a system to get her group to and from practice and competition, so she planned on looking around the village today. She was so busy thinking about the possibilities of how to spend a rare free day that she didn't notice the runner that came up beside her, slowing to match her pace.

"Hey!"

Flinching slightly, Delphine turned her head to see a shorter woman running beside her, shaggy red hair sticking out from the edge of a beanie. "Bonjour."

"Oh hey, you're French." The woman grinned as she ran. "Do you speak English?"

Trying not to get too irritated, Delphine nodded. "Oui."

The woman laughed the sort of laugh she would see in those movies that made fun of the North Americans. "That's great! I'm Bekka Peterson, team Canada."

"Delphine." Knowing she would be sharing the running track with this woman for the next two or three weeks, she tried to be polite, but she wasn't going to encourage the conversation when she was just trying to warm up in peace. To her horror, two more runners caught up and matched their pace.

"Hello, ladies." A tall man with a gleaming smile and a solid body arrived. "Is good day for run, yes?" He spoke with an accent that was as thick as his eyebrows.

Delphine sighed, realizing there would be no peace to be found. Maybe the next day she would wake up earlier. It wasn't long before she was surrounded by a group of about 10 people, conversation being passed around despite the fact that she had not encouraged any of it. They had run about 2 Km when she finally got a break.

"How about a race?" Leave it one of the American women to suggest, her long blonde braid flopping around as they ran. "Last person has to buy a round tonight!" And with that she took off down the track.

Much to Delphine's relief, the entire group took off after the American woman, leaving her alone to her thoughts once again.

"They act as if it's not all free."

Delphine turned to find one of the group still running with her. The short woman reached up and straightened her glasses, pushing back one of her brunette dreads behind an ear as she turned to meet Delphine's glance with a smile that filled half her face. She couldn't stop herself from returning the smile. "I would not know. I just got here last night."

"Oh!" The woman laughed. "Well then, you should let me show you around." Her breath came out in large puffs of white, showing signs of her tiring. "I'm totally a pro at finding stuff now."

The woman's laugh was infectious, unlike the Canadian's, and Delphine responded with a chuckle. "Maybe you can help me find the cafe this morning?"

"Of Course!" Caught in her excitement, the woman stumbled slightly. "Whoa!"

Delphine held out a hand to steady the woman, slowing to a stop. "Ça va?" At the woman's confused look she corrected herself. "Are you alright?"

"Oh! Totally. I don't really run a lot." She grinned cheekily. "My coach makes me run every day and I absolutely hate it."

Looking down, Delphine noticed she was still holding the woman's hand. She felt the blush raise her cheeks as she switched it to a handshake. "Delphine, France."

"Cosima, USA...obvs." She pointed to the American flag that was plastered all over her running gear.

Delphine tilted her head in amusement. "Enchanté."

Cosima's eyes lit up in response. "Enchanté."

## Chapter 3

Delphine looked around the eating area in awe. The room was about half full with athletes donning flags of all the participating countries. She tried to find any of her fellow skaters but imagined they had found a gym somewhere or were taking the rare opportunity to sleep in.

"So they have pretty much anything you could ask for." Cosima rocked on her heels as she pointed a few stations out. "I don't know if you're a light or heavy eater. Personally I'm rocking the high carb, high-protein diet. Snowboarding makes you burn through a lot of energy. What sport are you anyway?" She let her eyes linger over the woman's longer frame, noting the slim yet well-toned muscles.

Being in the constant spotlight, Delphine was used to people looking at her with judging eyes, but she couldn't stop the blush that worked its way onto her cheeks. "Figure Skating." Delphine bit her lip as the shorter woman's eyes snapped up to meet hers in confusion. "I know, I'm in the wrong place, but there was a...how do you say...fuck up." She shrugged as they grabbed trays and neared an omelet station.

"Man, how are you going to practice? We don't have a rink here." She waved at the chef and pointed out about half a dozen ingredients, licking her lips as she watched as everything was put together in a pan to cook.

Delphine politely declined the eggs, instead opting for some warm cereal. "They are making arrangements for transportation for my team and I." She watched as the shorter woman began loading her tray with an assortment of items including wheat pancakes, turkey sausage and an assortment of fruits. Delphine picked a few of the fruits herself, glad when she found they had her preferred protein milk brand. She cast a longing look at the coffee station. It had been months since her last cup of coffee and she could still taste the last cup she'd had. With a shake of her head, she followed the shorter woman.

"I guess that's cool." Cosima led them to an empty table, waving off a few protests from two separate groups that were calling for her attention. "At least you get to party with us cool kids." She laughed at her own joke which strangely brought a smile to Delphine's face. "Ok, so you're a figure skater. You're from France. I don't really follow figure skating much. Is this your first Olympics?" She made quick work of cutting up her pancakes, carefully measuring the sparse amount of syrup she poured on it. "We were all in a big camp together last Olympics and I don't remember you, but that shouldn't be a surprise since there are thousands of us." She grinned.

Mixing just a dash of honey into her cereal, Delphine took a test bite before responding. "Non, I did not compete in the last games. France does not send many athletes for figure skating." She shrugged, not really wanting to get into the details of how hard she had tried, and how disappointed she had been 4 years ago. With a shake of her head, she shook off the morose feeling the memories brought back to her. "So this is not your first Olympics?"

Hastily swallowing her mouthful of pancakes, Cosima shook her head. "Nope. This is my third Olympics. I was just a kid pretty much in Turin. Ended up in 5th place but I got the silver in Vancouver." She beamed with pride. "This is probably going to be my last try though so I'm going all out."

Delphine rose an eyebrow, trying to connect the woman who'd tripped on an even running track with someone who might win an Olympic medal. "You are still young. Why not continue?" She instantly regretted asking when she watched the woman's smile disappear. "I'm sorry I don't mean to pry."

"No no!" Cosima waived her hands. "It's cool, it's just..." She paused to think about an answer, sucking some syrup off her fork. "I know I can't do this forever. I just want something more." She shrugged. "I'm almost done with my masters and after this is all done I'm going to throw myself into school and get my phd." She played with her fruit a bit as she got a lost look on her face. "I've been in the spotlight my whole life and I'm looking forward to the break."

It wasn't until later that day that Delphine understood the full meaning of that statement. They had parted after a few hours of walking around the different features of the village. Cosima was off to practice and Delphine headed back to her room. After admiring all the improvements that had been made to her floor and room, which included clear water from the pipes and new drapes, Delphine pulled out her tablet and curled under her blankets, laying on her stomach as she googled her newest acquaintance. She couldn't really understand why she was doing it, maybe so she could have something to talk about when they met for dinner at the agreed time. She had met many athletes during the tour, but the short brunette from northern California was the only one she really had any interest to get to know.

When Cosima said she'd been in the spotlight her whole life, she wasn't kidding. From the day she was born, there were news articles about her. She was part of a set of identical quadruplets and there were features of the girls growing up until they turned into teens where there were less group photos and more singles of the apparent snowboarding prodigy. Even as a young child she was hitting the more expert slopes, more at ease on snow than on solid ground. She was known as Grasshopper on the slopes as was displayed on the board made for her by her sponsor which sported a bright green grasshopper across the top.

Watching the many videos was somewhat a surreal experience. She'd never cared much for snowboarding. It was a very masculine sport in her mind, one practiced by the ruffians of the slopes. Watching Cosima was anything but masculine. It always started out the same way, with a wiggled swagger up to the edge before she stuck her tongue out at the camera. She was compact and nimble, apparently wowing the spectators with how high she got in the air during jumps. Delphine winced along with the crowd as she watched the previous Olympics where Cosima didn't make it all the way through a flip and ended up crashing during her second run, leaving her in second place. She held her breath as the woman laid there, staring up at the sky for a long 30 seconds before finally standing up, shaking her head and sliding to where the American in first place was waiting with open arms and she was surrounded in a group hug of snowboarders.

There was a quick knock before the bedroom door opened and Isabelle sauntered in. "Bonjour Lait!" She crashed onto the edge of Delphine's bed, looking over her shoulder. "Why are you watching snowboarding?"

Delphine quickly minimized the video player, instantly knowing that made it seem like she was covering something up. But she wasn't...was she? "It is just interesting. I was talking with one of the snowboarders today."

Isabelle laughed. "The American!" She stood up and began stripping out of her normal clothes, donning her ballet gear. "I saw you two at breakfast this morning. You looked very...friendly." She grinned as she slipped on a hoodie.

The way the woman said 'friendly' made Delphine instantly defensive. "Don't be absurd, Isa. We were just talking. She showed me around the village." She watched the woman slipping on a few more layers. "Where are you going?"

"To the gym. You should come with me. They have a bar there so I am going to make something useful of today." She grinned as Delphine slipped out from under the covers. As she changed, Isabelle picked up the tablet, clicking on one of the videos. "Delphine...do you prefer women?"

She smirked when the blonde froze. "It's just I have not seen you enjoying the company of anyone, let alone romantically."

Delphine slid her sweater over her head before taking the tablet from her and stashing it in her bag. "I do not have time for romance." She shook her head and tucked her ballet shoes into the pocket of her hoodie. "I've been working up to this moment since I could walk. I will not let anything get in the way." The last thing she expected was the laughter that burst from the woman.

"Oh Lait, you are so sweet sometimes." Isabelle grabbed her own shoes, gesturing for the blonde to proceed her on the way out. "As someone who has been to the Olympics before, let me clue you into a few things. First, you will have a lot of free time. " They entered the small elevator, feeling it jerk slightly before it started descending. "You can choose to practice and work yourself to death in the gym every day, but it won't help and it won't change how you do in your performance." When the elevator dinged, she led the way towards the gym. "Second, what happens in the Olympic village..." She stopped to admire the Swiss bobsledding team that walked by. "...stays in the Olympic village." She finished with a wave to the last man in the pack who was looking her way.

With a furrowed brow, Delphine shook her head before following the woman into the gym.

## Chapter 4

Stepping off the metro, Delphine cringed at the amount of activity that was going on. It had been a whirlwind of activity the past few days. She had finally gotten some ice time, but skating while the other Olympians studied her every move had been very intimidating. It had taken her almost the entire first practice session to get used to being watched so closely, not used to feeling so out of place on the ice. She had had several training sessions since then and was pleased with her performance so far. Between practice and training in the gym and interviews, her days were usually bustling with activity. At night she found that, just like Isabelle had suggested, she had a lot of free time. Her roommate was always pressuring her to come out with her and celebrate with dancing and drinks. She would always decline, not really one for crowds and loud places.

Oddly enough, she found the moment of the day she looked forward to the most was the morning run when she'd meet Cosima at the running track along with a few other athletes she'd begin to know by name. After a few laps they would have breakfast together before parting ways for their respective practices and dedicated work outs. In the evening after Isabelle had left for her night of debauchery, they would meet for dinner, unwinding and teaching each other about their sports, laughing as they each tried to remember the names of the different maneuvers.

At the moment, Delphine was torn between what she should do. It was the night of the opening ceremony and the athletes were in complete party mode. She had to skate the next day, her Olympic debut, but she knew there was no way she could get any sleep. While she knew she would be alone in her room for most of the night since Isabelle had a tendency to sneak back into the room in the early hours, the entire village seemed to be up and about. In addition to the pure racket that was happening, her stomach was fluttering with the nausea of anticipation. While it wasn't the main event she had been preparing for, the team competition was still a big deal. Maybe it was even a bigger deal because her performance didn't just affect herself, but it also affected the other skaters she'd traveled with.

"Delphine!"

Hearing the familiar voice, Delphine saw the familiar brunette running over to her. The woman had stripped out of her ridiculous American sweater and was sporting a simple dark blue jacket, her dreads being held at bay by a matching fleece headband that covered her ears. "Bonsoir, Cosima." Delphine felt a different flutter, one more like butterflies that she began to equate with being around the American. She found herself pulled into a hug by the shorter woman and she barely had time to react before the woman was pulling away.

"Wow, gray is not your color." Cosima teased, tugging on the sash of the gray jacket that Delphine was forced to wear.

"It is not so bad." Delphine lied, knowing just how bad it looked. It wasn't flattering for anyone, but then again most of the countries had awful uniforms for the opening ceremonies. "I like your boots." Even in the crowded area she could still smell the lingering scent of the woman's perfume.

Cosima lifted a leg, sporting the black and red boots that were stamped with the American Olympic Team logo. "I know they're pretty kick ass." She tugged on the woman's arm, towards the building that they both resided in. "You should change. I found something totally amazing that you should see."

The butterflies fluttered again as she allowed the woman to tug her into the elevator. She could feel the warmth of the woman's hand still on her arm even through the thickness of her coat.

Stopping at the door she knew belonged to the blonde, Cosima grinned. "Ok, so get changed, don't forget your jacket, and I will be back in 5 minutes. Be ready to go."

"What? But..."

"5 minutes, not a second more!" Cosima called out as she began to jog down the hallway.

Delphine slipped into her room, not surprised to find it empty. She only took a brief minute to gather herself before she quickly stripped out of her country's uniform and into her warmer village uniform, zipping up the soft jacket. She checked her reflection in the mirror before running a hand through her hair and nodding. There was a quick knock on the door and Delphine hurried to answer it.

"Come on, we have to go." Cosima looked around nervously.

Delphine nodded as she quickly locked the door, following the woman who was shouldering a bulging bag and walking quickly. She heard a yell behind her and was about to stop when Cosima laughed.

"Oh shit, Delphine run."

Acting instead of reacting, Delphine followed the quickly dashing woman who was suddenly at the end of the hallway, jabbing at the up button. The yells were getting closer as the doors opened and Cosima pulled her in the elevator, quickly hitting the top floor button.

When it was obvious they were safe, Cosima laughed, leaning against the elevator wall. "Holy watershed, I thought they were gonna catch us."

"Why were they...?" The question died on Delphine's lips when the brunette offered her half the spoils, an unopened bottle of red wine. "You stole this?" She looked at the woman in disbelief but knew there was no way she could be upset. The woman just looked so proud of her accomplishment as she pushed up her glasses, wrinkling her nose.

Cosima grinned mischievously. "The Italians always have this killer wine at their parties." She twisted off the cap of the bottle she held, taking a quick sip, leaving a dark red stain on her lips that she licked away with the tip of her tongue.

Delphine shook her head, concentrating on weighing the pros and cons of taking a drink. She had to skate the next day, but she also wanted to enjoy the night. How often would she be able to have this experience in her lifetime? She looked at the shorter woman who was leaning against the wall, reading the bottle's label. How many more moments would she have to share with the tiny American that had the ability to remove all her skating anxiety and replace them with a new anxiety she was completely unused to. Making her decision, she unscrewed the bottle, taking a sip. It was bold and rich with hints of cloves and smokiness. It was rather delicious and she took a second sip, feeling almost savage-like to be drinking from the bottle like this. It was like she could hear her mother's voice chastising her for being such a heathen. She caught the brunette grinning widely at her and returned the smile. "Where are we going?"

"It's a secret." Cosima replied as the elevator stopped on the top floor. There was a low pulsing sound that could be heard from a distant room and she rolled her eyes before leading the way.

With a furrowed brow, Delphine watched as she pulled out a key to unlock a set of double doors which led to a dark room. "Where did you get that key?"

Cosima gave her a sly look. "If I tell you, I'd have to kill you." She grabbed the blonde's hand to pull her into the room.

Delphine was too busy focusing on the woman's hand wrapped around her own and almost tripped over her own feet. She felt her cheeks flush in embarrassment as she met the gaze of the shorter woman's hazel eyes.

"You ok?" Cosima asked, a hint of amusement in her eyes and mouth.

"Oui." Delphine nodded, taking another sip of her wine. She didn't know why she felt so nervous all of a sudden.

"Hold on."

Delphine watched as the woman disappeared into the darkness for a moment before turning to the wall of windows. They were in a room at the top of the building, high enough to see the entire village. She grinned as she watched the people below until her attention was drawn to the room lighting up. A laugh slipped from her lips at the sight of the rotating disco ball shining tiny points of light around, illuminating the dozens of bean bags littered about the floor. "What in the world?"

Sipping her wine, Cosima navigated around the bean bags. "They were still working on this room, but it's supposed to be open to everyone tomorrow." She kicked a pair of bean bags closer to the window, gesturing for the blonde to sit. "Sorry I turned the heat on but I don't know how long it will take to make a difference." She unshouldered the bag she had, removing a fleece blanket and offering it to the blonde as she sat down. "I thought you could use a little peace and quiet. You have to skate tomorrow right?"

With a nod, Delphine wiggled around on the beanbag to be at an angle where she could see both the woman and out the window. When the American sat down, they were touching just slightly and Delphine wondered if she would even need the blanket. "It must be nice to have made it through your qualifications. You do not have to compete in the semi-finals, correct?"

Cosima nodded, taking a sip of her wine. "Nope, but I have to go cheer. One of our teammates didn't qualify so she has to compete." She looked down at the bottle in her hands, tracing the cursive letters. "God I wish I could smoke a joint right now." Her hands fidgeted as she looked to the blonde who gave her a disbelieving look. "I have ADHD and it calms me down. This clean living shit is great for my athletic side, but my brain is crazy right now." Her free hand came up to try to assist with the illustration. "It's like there are a thousand things going on in my brain right now. I'm thinking about how I did at the qualifying and I'm mostly pleased but all I can think is how the angle on takeoff wasn't right and I'm not picking up enough speed to get the full rotation I needed and my edging is not where I want it to be and I really want to kiss you right now but I don't even know if you'd be interested in me like that and I don't want to ruin this friendship we've started but are we even friends because when this all ends I might never see you again and ..."

Delphine didn't know when she had decided on her course of action. No, that was a lie. From the moment she heard the words *I really want to kiss you* she was already in motion. One moment she was sitting there watching the brunette stumble through words and the next thing she knew her lips were pressed against the American's. There was a moment of shock from both women before Delphine felt the woman's lips curve into a smile and the kiss was returned.

## Chapter 5

*"Do you prefer women?"*

Isabelle's question rang through Delphine's mind as her hands came up to cup the woman's face, tasting the bold red wine on soft lips. No, she didn't prefer women. She had never romantically kissed a woman before and she had never wanted to.

No, she just preferred Cosima. She preferred the smiling lips and the arm that slipped around her neck, pulling her closer. She preferred the way her nose bumped clumsily against the woman's glasses, and the giggle that it elicited. She could feel the woman's other hand sliding up and unzipping the front of her jacket, replacing warmth for an even more intense heat. She pulled back slightly, her breath ragged as she leaned her forehead against the brunette's, a hand pressed against the woman's collar, pushing her back gently and feeling the rapid heartbeat. "I um..." She leaned back and shook her head with a laugh. "I don't..."

Cosima pulled back almost immediately. "Oh...God...Did I just..." She pulled her hands back, wringing the fingers together. "I'm so sorry I shouldn't have..." She stopped and her brow furrowed as she replayed the interaction in her mind. "Wait...you kissed me."

Delphine laughed, reaching out to caress the woman's cheek again. "I did. I've just never..." She looked away, shaking her head.

"Oh." Cosima grinned, capturing the woman's hand and intertwining their fingers. "Yeah I figured that. No worries." She bit her bottom lip, raising an eyebrow. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Looking down at the intertwined fingers, Delphine gently rubbed her thumb along the woman's knuckles. "Non. I've just never thought of bisexuality for myself. I know that sexuality is a spectrum, I just..." She pursed her lips, not sure with what she wanted to say. "This is just..."

With a playful roll of her eyes, Cosima wiggled closer, releasing the woman's hand just so she could caress her jaw. "Ok so obviously talking is going to be a problem for you." She placed a delicate kiss on the woman's lips before leaning back. "Do you trust me?"

"Oui. I just don't know if I'm ready for..." Delphine blushed.

Cosima grinned, taking the blanket from the woman and shaking it open. Moving even closer to the blonde, she settled it to cover both of them. "We don't have to do anything you don't want to." She pushed a bit of blonde hair behind the woman's ear. "Just so you know, I would totally not object to more kissing."

There was a short laugh that emerged from Delphine as she leaned forward to comply. They stayed that way for over an hour, trading kisses and sips of wine between laughing over the various nations' uniforms and the antics of the opening ceremonies. They had begun sharing stories about previous competitions when Delphine decided to come clean. "I have a confession." She had her head tipped to the side as Cosima was brushing feather-light kisses along the curve of her shoulder.

"A confession like you're not a natural blonde, or a confession like you're really from Montreal and secretly living among the French?" Cosima joked, breathing in the scent of Delphine's perfume.

Delphine chuckled. "Non. Nothing like that, although I'm not a natural blonde." She gave the

woman a wry look. "On that first day we met, after you left for practice, I searched for you online."

"Yeah?" Cosima grinned, leaning back to take a sip of wine. "You were totally into me from the start. I knew it."

With a roll of her eyes, Delphine pinched the woman's side. "You are incorrigible."

"Obvs." She snuggled closer to the woman. "No, but that's oddly romantic, and totally encouraging. So tell me about me. Did you find my horrible website that my manager set up?"

"Well..." Delphine felt the woman's hand slip around her waist and cleared her throat. "You're one of four identical quadruplets, but you're the only athletic one."

"Well..." Cosima lifted a hand and wiggled it. "Kinda. We're all athletic, I'm just the only professional athlete."

"Mmmhmmm." Delphine recalled everything she could remember. "You live in San Francisco and you're a student in biology."

"Actually it's Evolutionary Development." Cosima interjected.

"If you'll stop interrupting." Delphine pinched her again with a smile. "Everyone says that you are going to win the gold." She leaned her cheek against the woman's temple. "It must be nice for people to believe in you so much."

Cosima shrugged. "It's a double edged sword. Their belief turns into disappointment pretty easily when you don't deliver." With a sigh, she closed her eyes, absorbing the warmth coming from the woman. "I googled you too. "

"Oh?" Delphine gave her a smirk, knowing that she did not have as much praise as the American did. In fact there were quite a few people that were upset that she was selected to go to the Olympics.

"I saw a few of your videos. You're a crazy good skater. I didn't understand any of the talking." Cosima shrugged. "It was all in French, except for wikipedia which was very descriptive with your birthday and helpfully informing me that you were participating in the Olympics this year."

Delphine laughed, brushing her lips against the woman's forehead. "I'm sorry I do not have as much publicity as you. I spent all my time training with a private coach." She closed her eyes thinking about the next day. "I should get some sleep." She really didn't want the night to end, but she knew she had to be rested for the next day. "I wish I could just spend all day with you."

Cosima tipped her head up, meeting the blonde's lips in a kiss she felt all the way to her toes. Her fingers curled around the soft material of the woman's jacket as she fought the urge to start undressing the blonde. When she pulled away, they were both breathing heavily. "Me too." She commented before moving to stand. She offered her hand to the blonde and helped her up, quickly gathering the stuff she'd brought. "So do you get to practice at all tomorrow?"

Capping the bottles of wine as she watched the woman fold and pack the blanket away, Delphine nodded. "Oui but it's not a real practice. It's more of a warm up time before competition." After everything was locked up, they rode down the elevator in companionable silence. "So..." Delphine unlocked her door, smiling at Cosima. "I'll see you on the track in the morning?" She asked hopefully, biting her bottom lip.

Cosima nodded, her eyes focusing on the woman's lips. "Of course." She rocked on her heels

momentarily.

"Fais de beaux rêves, Cosima." Delphine leaned forward, very lightly brushing her lips against the American's. "Sweet dreams." She translated with a smile. Closing her bedroom door behind her, she was left with the vision of that lopsided smile as she leaned against the door, her own smile fading as she took in the darkness before her. The empty room was almost a death sentence in comparison to the delicious warmth of Cosima's body pressed against hers. Every blink brought with it a vision of dreads and hazel eyes, her body already missing the arm that had been draped across her midriff. There was no way she was going to be able to sleep. "Merde." She whispered to herself as she turned and opened the bedroom door again, not expecting the brunette to be leaning against it.

"Shit!" Cosima cursed as she fell backwards and landed with a grunt.

"Cosima!" Delphine quickly knelt beside her. "I am so sorry. I did not realize you were there."

Cosima couldn't contain her laughter as she laid on the floor, covering her face with a hand. "I am one smooth mother fucker." She shook her head in disbelief.

"What?" Delphine's brow furrowed as she helped the woman stand. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah yeah yeah." Cosima waived her off. "I'm good. I was not expecting that."

Delphine closed her bedroom door, flipping on the lights so she could look the woman over. "What were you doing?"

With an embarrassed grin, Cosima childishly scuffed the floor with her boot. " Maybe I was just enjoying the moment before I moved on to my lonely ass room with my crazy roommate who talks to her boyfriend on the phone all night." At the woman's disbelieving look, she shrugged. "Or maybe I'm a little drunk and maybe I was swooning a little bit." She rubbed at her cheeks, feeling the heat radiating from them.

Pushing the hands away, Delphine cupped the woman's face before suddenly pulling her forward, crushing her lips against the American's. She heard the woman's bag drop to the floor and clumsily fought with the woman's jacket, pushing the offending material off strong shoulders.

"Are you...sure...you want to...do this?" Cosima asked between kisses, her hands already removing the layers the blonde wore, already having kicked off her own shoes. "I mean...I'm sure...I do..." She couldn't stop her hands from pushing back material, her own clothes falling to the floor.

"You talk too much." Delphine commented as she pushed the American onto the bed, stopping any other questions with a searing kiss.

## Chapter 6

So many sensations and Delphine was lost in them all. Her heart was beating a thousand beats per minute and her blood was boiling with desire.

"You are so beautiful."

Delphine could feel the heat of Cosima's words as they passed her ear followed by lips that moved slowly down her neck. Their bodies were intertwined, a thigh slipping between her own as she moaned softly. It was different, the soft yet firm feel of the woman's body sliding against her own. It was like nothing she'd ever felt before and she craved more.

Hands...Delphine closed her eyes and she was overcome with exhilaration. Hands...lips...the delicious heat of the woman's tongue. Those soft and talented hands explored every inch of her body one agonizing moment at a time, caressing her ribs, sending a chill down her back. She could feel the smiling lips as they traveled a slow and tantalizing path down her body, kissing, licking, tasting, stopping at her breasts that ached in desire. Those strong fingers traced a path down her side, nails gently raking over her skin and leaving a path of fire as she tangled her fingers in the woman's dreads.

For a moment she felt the heat of the American disappear before she felt lips softly grazing her inner thigh.

"Delphine!"

Jumping slightly, Delphine opened her eyes and winced when her vision was filled with the aggravated face of Monsieur Allard. "Pardon?"

"Where is your head, Delphine?" He gave her a disapproving look.

Suddenly back in the present, Delphine waived him off. "Je suis désolée." She took a sip of her water, rotating her shoulders. After a long day, she was next to skate. She was trying to ignore everything that was going on around her, and her memories of the night before were a pleasant distraction.

There were no words to describe what she was feeling. It had been a rather awkward morning when she woke up that morning to Cosima curled up against her side and Isabelle standing over them, arms crossed over her chest. "Not a word." She had commanded at her roommate, switching to French in the event that Cosima would wake up.

Isabelle had smirked. "Non. I wouldn't dream of it." She had said before leaving.

Peeking down, she had found hazel eyes half-opened, watching her. Several kisses later and they had decided on skipping their normal run.

As if on cue she felt her phone vibrate in her jacket pocket and she retrieved it, finding a text message from none other than the shorter woman.

*"The camera loves you. You look fantastic. Good luck."*

Delphine looked around to see cameras and found one facing her. She winked at it quickly but did not have time to respond as she was escorted out of the room.

Delphine slipped out of her jacket as she took a look around the room once more before she took a

deep breath. The ice was her second home. She had probably spent an equal amount of time on the ice as she did on dry land in her life. As the scores of the previous skater were announced, she tried to drown out the noise, gliding over to where Monsieur Allard was waiting for her.

"You look distracted. Are you here?" The older man spoke to her, his words sharp despite the smile he gave the crowd.

"Oui." Delphine smiled.

"Remember, this is only the Olympics." He gave her a pointed look. "Don't forget to smile." He pat her on the hand.

Delphine took a deep as her name was announced over the loudspeaker. As she circled the rink one last time and ended up in the center of the ice, she took her starting pose and exhaled. When the slow and haunting music started, her body was moving of its own accord, the choreographed movements already burned into her mind from previous competitions.

*"What are you skating to?" Cosima was sitting on the bed in her underwear and a long-sleeved shirt, her knees folded up against her chest as she watched Delphine move.*

*Delphine looked up from her position on the ground where she had been stretching. "La Petite Mort by Coeur De Pirate." She smirked at the American's confused face. "I am not a fan of skating to classical music. Coeur De Pirate is a singer in France that writes the most enchanting songs. We cannot have lyrics in the songs so it is an instrumental piece, shortened for the short program."*

*Cosima's brow furrowed. "So...la petite mort." She spoke in her American accent that made Delphine smile. "Isn't that what you guys call an orgasm?"*

*With a snort, Delphine got off the ground and moved to the bed, leaning in for a kiss. "You Americans and your sex, sex, sex." Another kiss and she smiled. "Non, it is a song about a woman who loses someone she loves deeply and how it is like a part of her dies as well. She regrets how it is too late to tell this person how much losing them hurts."*

*There was a heavy silence before Cosima responded. "Orgasms are less sad." She said before pulling the blonde in for another kiss, one that was deeper, one that seared itself into Delphine's mind.*

Delphine smiled as she landed a jump, the cold air invigorating her as she transitioned into a spin, holding the spinning pose easily as she moved.

*"Don't you get dizzy during those spins?" Cosima was watching one of her previous competitions.*

*"Do you get dizzy when you do your crazy flips? At least on skates I'm only spinning one way. I've seen your jumps flipping and spinning at the same time." Delphine pointed out.*

*"Point taken." Cosima stuck her tongue out.*

She went through the choreography, the music guiding her movements as she set up for another jump. Every jump was hit and every move was graceful, but the audience was simply politely clapping. It was expected though, since most of the crowd would be cheering for their Russian starlets. Most skaters hated not getting a response, but she had a solution. She could hear the voice that was always light with a smile as Cosima repeated the different names of the jumps.

*"Triple toe. Triple Loop." She paused as her face scrunched up, trying to remember the next move. "Triple Sow Cow?"*

*Delphine had laughed. "Non. Salchow."*

One last jump landed and she was spinning again. The combination spin was the one that landed her in the Olympics, her years of ballet offering flexibility and grace some of her peers lacked. Another rotation and she slowed, stopping in her ending pose, her breath strained slightly as she took her bows. Finally there was applause and cheering, the loudest coming from her team in their designated box, the French flag being waived enthusiastically.

With a smile she made her way to the exit where she was greeted by Monsieur Allard. She was surprised as she was pulled into a hug before she could even snap on her guards.

"Magnifique!" Monsieur Allard exclaimed as he helped her into her jacket.

Dropping onto the bench she was told to, she smiled at the camera, barely hearing the words Monsieur Allard was telling her. She never liked waiting. Having to sit there smiling, waving at the camera when really she wanted to hide until the end of the night.

Finally the voice on the speakers called attention and her eyes went up to the scores. The moment her scores posted, she felt the relief flood her and the cheering from her team. 63.58. That put her in first place but there were still four skaters to go. She grinned widely and gave a thumbs up to the camera before it panned away to the current skater. She instantly reached for her phone where she found several text messages from friends and family and one she was interested in more than the others.

*"!!!!!!!!!"*

That about summed up her own feelings at the moment.

## Chapter 7

There was a knock on the door and Delphine leaned out of the bathroom, her hands in her hair. "Could you get that?"

Isabelle pulled open the door and a smirk instantly covered her face. "It is the American." She called out in French, stepping to the side and gesturing for the shorter woman to enter. "She is cute, Lait. Very tiny but she has a pretty face. You have good tastes."

Cosima looked between the two women, wondering what was being said. "Umm...hi...I'm Cosima." She offered her hand to the dark-skinned woman.

"Bonsoir, Cosima." Accepting the hand, Isabelle smiled widely. "Isabelle. It's a pleasure." She spoke in English before switching back to French. "She has very strong hands."

Delphine shook her head and shooed the woman away. "Oh shut up, Isa." She stuck her tongue out at Isabelle.

"Save your tongue for your new girlfriend." Isabelle commented in French, grabbing her jacket. "I'm going to get drunk and find a bobsledder to fuck my brains out so I do not have to think about those assholes." She took a deep breath. "Enjoy your evening." She switched to English for the American before exiting.

Cosima gave Delphine a questioning look. "That was weird." With a flourish she presented a handful of flowers to the woman. "I thought you could use some cheering up." She grinned widely. "I might have stolen them from the front of the dining hall."

Accepting the flowers, Delphine laughed softly. "Thank you but I am ok. No cheering up needed." She looked around and settled on a takeout cup that Isabelle had brought back. It was going to have to do as a vase for now. "I was happy with my performance, and coming in third was not a disappointment."

Fidgeting with her hands, Cosima rocked on her heels. "I loved your skating. It was amazing!" She bit her bottom lip. "I'm sorry about your team mates though. That was pretty crazy."

Delphine sighed softly, running a hand through her blonde hair. It had been a long night. The team competition required scores from three different performances in order to continue on. There was the short dance which Isabelle was part of. She skated the ladies short. Then there was the pairs free skate program. While both hers and the short dance had went successfully, the French pairs team had had a disastrous night on the ice, falling more than once and dropping their combined scores too low to proceed. That left her a week and a half to prepare for her singles competitions. "It is what it is." She commented, pulling the shorter woman to her.

"Hey." Cosima greeted the blonde again, slipping an arm around the taller woman's neck. "You know, you are amazing to watch, even if it was on tv." Tensing her arm, she pulled the woman down to her, smiling as the blonde's lips pressed against her own.

The kiss was soft and slow, ending with Delphine's forehead pressed against the shorter woman's. "You have to compete tomorrow, non?" She caressed the woman's face. "You should get your rest." Even as she said it she was unzipping the woman's jacket, pushing it off her shoulders.

Cosima chuckled. "Non." She mocked. "I can get plenty of rest before I hit the slopes." She kissed a path down the woman's throat. "I've got a lot of time before I need to get any shut eye."

She felt hands slipping under her shirt, pulling it up and off. She began peeling off the blonde's clothes, pushing her back towards the bed. "What time do you practice tomorrow?"

Landing backwards on the bed, Delphine pulled the woman down onto her, laughing as the rest of their clothes were shed, replaced by the warmth of skin against skin under the quilted blanket. "I don't." Her hands danced over the woman's muscular body, slipping around to hug her tightly. "I was thinking about you all day." The confession slipped from her lips as the woman's hands began to travel over her body. "All I could think about was your body..." She brushed her lips against the woman's lips. "Your mouth..." She arched her body into the woman's touch. "Merde...your hands." She moaned as a hand slid between her thighs, just barely grazing her skin. "Cosima..."

"I was thinking about you too." Cosima kissed a path down the woman's chest, feeling the strong heartbeat against her lips. "Watching you and not being able to touch you." She circled the nipple with the tip of her tongue, kissing the flesh as her fingertips slid through slick folds. "Especially now knowing what you feel like." She grinned at the loud moan she was rewarded with. "Especially knowing what your lips tastes like."

Delphine moaned again as she pulled the woman up, kissing her deeply. Her tongue slipped out to brush against the American's and just barely contained a whimper as she gave herself over to the wave of desire and pleasure that rooted from strong and nimble fingers.

Much later, Delphine was curled against Cosima's side, tracing a tattoo that was on the woman's forearm, a dandelion blowing in the wind. "Are you scared?"

Cosima chuckled. "Scared? Of snowboarding? No way." She ran her fingertips through blonde hair. "If I win, I win. If I don't, I don't." She shrugged. "Are you normally scared?"

Delphine thought about that. "I normally get really nauseous, but I wasn't this time." She bit her bottom lip. "I wasn't lying earlier. All I could think about was you." She blushed, which she also found funny since she was currently naked and had no excuse for feeling embarrassed. "I'm surprised I didn't fall on my ass, all I could think about was last night."

"I'm totally an inspiration." Cosima joked.

Delphine sighed softly. "Yeah." In reality, it was completely true. She had watched a replay of her skate, and it wasn't anything close to her normal routine. Skating had always been a performance for her, and emotion was one of her weak points. She believed that emotion limited technicality and left too much room for mistakes. Maybe she had been wrong. Watching herself skate, she could see her own emotions in her face, even if there was a sense of disconnect. She had lost herself in the skate and it was better than she'd ever performed.

"What are you thinking about?"

Putting a smile on, Delphine shook her head. "Nothing." If one night could affect her skating so much, what would happen now? "I'm starving. Will you join me for dinner?" What was it about the tiny American that distracted her so much? "After a shower of course?" At the woman's laugh they slipped out of bed. She found knowing hazel eyes watching her as fingers intertwined with her own, pulling her towards the bathroom. Was it a good or bad thing? She had a week and a half to work it out.

That suddenly prompted a new train of thought.

What would happen when the Olympics were over?



## Chapter 8

"Delphine!"

Looking up from the cup of tea she was drinking, Delphine smiled politely at the tall man who was waving her over. Mikey was one of the American snowboarders that had joined them in their morning run, usually very serious and quiet while working out, much to Delphine's approval. He was currently surrounded by a group of about 20 athletes who had commandeered a large section of the stands, talking and laughing amongst themselves. "Bonjour, Mikey."

"Hey, you got a ticket! Sweet!" He gestured for her to sit with them.

Delphine nodded as she accepted his offer, staying on the edge of the group where it wasn't as rowdy.

*It had been a surprise that morning. She had woken to Cosima sitting beside her on the bed, watching her sleep. She was fiddling with an envelope in one hand as she reached out the other to straighten the woman's blonde hair. "Good morning, sleepyhead."*

*Delphine had smiled brightly. "Bonjour, Ma Cherie." She captured the woman's hand, brushing her lips across the back of it. "Is it time for you to go already?" She tugged on the beige parka that hung from the woman's frame.*

*Cosima nodded, her dreads already braided back so as to be as compact as possible. "Yeah, have to get some warm ups done before the actual competition." She looked away, a slightly uncertain look on her face, one Delphine never saw on the woman's face.*

*With a furrowed brow, Delphine sat up. "Are you ok? I thought you don't get nervous." She looked at the envelope in the woman's hand. "What's that?" To her surprise the envelope was handed to her and she found a single ticket inside.*

*"I don't know if you'd want to go or anything, don't feel like you have to, but if you wanted to come watch..." She looked around, not wanting to see the look on Delphine's face. "I mean it's totally cool, it's up to you..."*

*Reaching out with gentle fingertips to turn the woman's chin to look at her, Delphine smiled softly. "I'd love to." She pulled the woman to her, sharing a soft kiss.*

"I'm sorry, what was that?" Delphine shook her head as she focused on the conversation again. The group was a pretty diverse one made of several different countries. The friendly conversation that drifted around the group helped to pass the time as they waited for the snowboarding to begin. Around them, the seats were beginning to fill in, the area getting loud with excitement.

"Delphine?"

Turning towards the sound of her name, Delphine blocked the sunlight as she focused on the woman next to her. "Cosima!" She stood up quickly before her brain kicked in. Everything was wrong. No glasses, no dreads, and her smile was tighter, hidden almost. If that wasn't enough, the bangs were a sure give away. "You're not Cosima." She blinked when another woman looking very similar but with blonde streaks in her straight brown hair popped up.

"This her?" Blonde streaks spoke with a lopsided grin, pulling at her scarf. "Normally they freak out more." She looked Delphine up and down. "Shit I owe Cos twenty bucks."

"Obviously." There was a smirk from Bangs as she offered her hand. "I'm Alison. Forgive us for the possible confusion my siblings love to instill in people." She smiled as the handshake was returned. "Cosima told us to look out for you."

Delphine gave her a surprised look. "She did?"

"Always the proper one, our Sis." Blonde streaks offered her own hand. "Sarah." She turned when there was a laugh behind her.

Delphine caught sight of blonde hair and a child's laughter as the last of the four sisters arrived.

"There's my monkey." Sarah laughed as the girl reached out to her from her place atop her aunt's back. "This is our sister Helena, and my daughter Kira."

"Who's that, Mommy?" Kira peeked out from her spot against Sarah's shoulder. "She's pretty."

"She's alright, I guess." Sarah commented with a snuffle. "This is Delphine, a friend of your Aunt Cosima."

Delphine laughed at the comment as she held out a hand to the small girl. "Enchanté." As it turned out there were a few more introductions as the entire Niehaus family arrived. She couldn't help but wonder what Cosima had told them as her parents greeted Delphine cheerfully. She stored each face away with the memories of what Cosima had told her about them.

*"My dad is a biology professor at Berkley. My mom 's a pediatrician." Cosima was stretching after their run. "My sisters, well for sharing an egg we're all pretty different." She laughed an almost internal laugh, obviously having used the remark before. "Alison is a housewife with two kids. Sarah was always the rebel and she kinda ran away when she hit 18, running off to England with a drummer from some rock band. She ended up getting pregnant and everyone was surprised when she showed up at home with a baby girl."*

*"I bet." Delphine sipped from her bottle of water as they began the trek to the dining hall. "What about the other sister?"*

*Cosima sighed softly. "Helena." She grabbed a tray and handed one to Delphine. "She still lives at home, doesn't really work or anything." She waved at the omelet cook, pointing out her selections. "She hangs out with Sarah the most and she's great with Kira."*

*"So it's just the four of you?" Delphine offered the shorter woman a bowl of yogurt and saw that the woman had froze, a far off look on her face. "Cosima?"*

*"Yeah, sorry." She shook her head and gave the woman a half smile, accepting the yogurt and adding fruit to her tray. "We had another sister." She led the way to what was becoming their usual table. "Beth. She was a year older. She died when we were young, a car accident."*

*Delphine reached out to cover the woman's hand. "I'm sorry."*

*Cosima looked down at their joined hands and gave her a smile.*

The cheer of the crowd brought Delphine back to the present. The screens were displaying information and she could hear the chanting of the crowd as the event began.

"Do you know much about snowboarding?" This from Sarah who had taken the seat next to her, her daughter sitting in her lap, waving an American flag.

Delphine shook her head. "Non, I watched a few videos but I don't know how it's scored or

anything. This does not look like the videos from the last Olympics."

"Aunty Cos is the best snowboarder ever!" Kira explained, her hands spread out and moving in a motion that was very familiar to the French woman.

Sarah laughed, in a surprisingly unfamiliar tone. "That's right, Monkey." She turned to Delphine. "It's a new event, this one. Cosima's main sport is the half-pipe but this is more like an obstacle course." She pulled out a pamphlet for the event that had a map of the area, pointing out the various obstacles. "There are rails and stuff that they get scored for making tricks off of, and then there are three jumps that are worth the most points."

Delphine nodded as she followed along. She could detect a faint English accent on the woman's words and guessed it was from the time the woman was overseas. The crowd cheered as the first athlete appeared on the screen. She wore the same beige snow gear Cosima had donned that represented the United States.

"That's Jamie. She's really good." Kira commented, waving her flag.

Watching as the woman took off, Delphine was careful to pay attention to everything that was going on. From the bottom of the course, they couldn't see the moves, but everything was playing on the large screens. It wasn't until the last jump that she could see the snowboarder launch into the air, twisting in impossible directions.

"That was a good run." Sarah commented, her jaw squared and her brow furrowed in contemplation.

Now with a frame of reference, each run went by quickly. Delphine watched each one carefully, mentally comparing each to the one before, trying to figure out the scoring method. Apparently more rotations during a jump were good, and falling was bad. That was really all she could decipher.

"There she is!"

Delphine looked up at the huge screen upon Kira's scream. Her face was hidden almost completely by a pair of bright green goggles, her feet secured to the board.

"Looks like she's in a good mood." Sarah smirked, casting a sideways glance at the blonde.

Delphine blushed slightly. The camera showed Cosima grinning brightly as she conversed with her coach, her hands moving as she spoke, illustrating whatever she was talking about. The coach shook his head but still had a smile on his face as he pat the woman on the shoulder. Delphine bit her bottom lip nervously as she watched the short woman wiggle her hips till she was at the starting point, sticking her tongue out with a grin before pushing off.

## Chapter 9

Delphine didn't know when she had started holding her breath. Maybe it was from the moment the woman began sliding down the white snow, or maybe it was the first leap onto the red rail, inertia working to keep her sliding forward along its length. Her emotions were all over the place.

Watching the previous women had been one she could look at from an educational standpoint, but with Cosima she had a mixture of feelings. On one side she could feel the excitement running through her body, the same excitement she felt when she herself competed. On the other hand, she remembered watching the video from the last Olympics when a bad spin had sent the woman crumbling to the bottom of the half-pipe. Either way it was like she couldn't breathe, not until the woman was safely to the bottom of the slope and the run was over.

"Here comes the first jump." This was Sarah to Kira who was cheering on her lap.

The words did little to comfort Delphine as she watched the woman moving swiftly towards a sloped wall of snow. Her eyes doubled in size as she watched the woman launch into the air, making it look very easy as she reached down to get both hands on the board as she rotated in the air one and a half times, landing opposite her normal stance.

"Stomp it out, Cos...Yes!" Sarah cheered.

Delphine was sure she would have cheered, but her lungs were beginning to burn from holding her breath. She couldn't risk it. She couldn't risk breathing until Cosima was safe.

"Go, Aunt Cos!" This came from Kira just as Cosima hit the second jump. "Go go go!" The girl yelled as her aunt launched into the air, reaching to grab the nose of her snowboard as she spun two and a half times, landing in a puff of snow. "Woo hoo!"

It was almost over. Delphine was feeling slightly lightheaded and her heart was pounding in her chest as she watched the camera close up on the woman, the look of determination behind the goggles and the cocky smile on her lips as she headed for the last jump, the one they would all be able to see without needing the cameras. Watching as the woman took to the air, Delphine was mesmerized.

*"Merde." Delphine blinked as she stopped near the doorway of the gym. Part of the gym was sectioned off to have three large trampolines and one of them was currently being inhabited by a compact form doing impossible flips in the air. She watched as the woman curled into a ball, flipping over so quickly she couldn't even count the amount of times she flipped. Coming down, the trampoline sprung the small form back up and her body kept a straight form as it flipped and corkscrewed at once before she landed on her back on the trampoline with a laugh that brought a smile to Delphine's face as she found herself gravitating towards the trampoline.*

*"Delphine!" Cosima laughed as she clumsily crawled over to the edge before sliding to the floor.*

*Still unused to the building attraction that she was feeling, Delphine kept her eyes locked with the American's gaze. It had been so hard not to stare at the shorter woman's defined muscles that were gleaming slightly with sweat, especially since she was dressed only in a sports bra and very tight and very short workout shorts. "You're incredible. Is this always part of your training? I've never seen anything so amazing."*

*Cosima blushed a bright red that started at her shoulders and rose up her neck and up to her cheeks. "Some snowboarders do it, but it's rare. For me it was just...my mother insisted that gymnastics would both tire me out and work out my clumsiness." She was breathing hard from*

*her workout and looked around for her water. "Little did she know it just built up my endurance and make me cocky."*

*Delphine offered the woman her own water, and she was rewarded with a lopsided grin and a brief brushing of fingertips as the woman accepted the bottle. "You? Cocky? Unbelievable." She laughed as the woman stopped mid sip. "Well, it's no wonder in your videos you always look so flawless when you jump."*

The height Cosima got off the ramp was both incredible and frightening, her tiny form twisting in air in two different directions as she spun two rotations at the same time as her body flipped over, her body compact and poised, not a single flaw.

"Holy shit." Sarah stood as she watched her sister's form right its way up and managed to pull her body around one more time for three complete rotations. As her snowboard hit the slope, the smile on her face was evident even without looking at the camera's close up.

There was a loud cheer that sounded from the crowd as Cosima thrust both arms into the sky in celebration as she came to a stop right in front of the cameras. Delphine exhaled in relief finally, clapping with the crowd as she watched Cosima being embraced by the other snowboarders. It was obviously a spectacular run from even the view of the other athletes as she watched Cosima being praised by the other women. For a brief moment, the American's hazel eyes found hers from the distance and not knowing what else to do, Delphine gave her a thumbs up. Cosima laughed before casting her eyes to the screen that would display her score.

Another loud cheer broke out through the crowd when the score posted. 95.0. That put Cosima in first place. "Go Auntie Cosima!" Kira yelled in excitement, cheering with the rest of the Niehaus family.

"That was amazing!" Delphine remarked to Sarah as they took their seats again and the next snowboarder began her run. "That is a good score, yes?"

Sarah nodded. "It's bloody amazing." She laughed. "The gold score for the men's run was 93.5. She's got a great chance at a win here." She looked at her personal score card. "There are two more first runs and then everyone gets one more run."

Delphine nodded as they watched the current snowboarder miss her landing just slightly, having to use her hand to steady herself. "So she has to do this one more time?"

"You got it."

Taking a deep breath, Delphine nodded again, sipping her tea nervously.

"Don't worry! Auntie Cosima is the best there is!" Kira supplied.

Despite her smile, Delphine was a wreck by the time Cosima's turn came up again. Competition was fierce and Cosima had been knocked down to second place by a quarter of a point by one of her fellow Americans. No other score came close, but Delphine knew how easily things could change. With the two women that followed Cosima, it was possible that she wouldn't medal, even with her amazing first run.

When the camera panned to Cosima at the top of the course, she had a more serious look on her face. She was shaking her head at her coach who looked like he was trying to convince her of something. As if sensing the camera, she put on a smile and pat him on the shoulder, ignoring anything else he said as she moved to the starting position. She stuck her tongue out just slightly before a determined look came on her face and she pushed off.

Delphine didn't hold her breath this time, but that didn't mean she was any less nervous. It was funny really, that during her own competition she didn't feel an ounce of worry as she took to the ice, but watching Cosima spin off one of the last of the rails and head towards the first jump was making her nauseous.

Cosima took to the air, her body pulled tight into a ball as she grabbed her board with two hands, flipping twice in the air with a single rotation. As she straightened and landed, the nose of her snowboard caught in the snow, pitching her forward. The camera caught the loud crack of her helmet shattering against the slope as her body tumbled down the hill.

"No no no." Delphine shot to her feet as she watched the screen showing the medical crew as they rushed to the unmoving form. Looking to her side, her eyes met the completely terrified look in Sarah's eyes, as she hugged Kira to her chest.

## Chapter 10

Delphine's hands shook as she pushed a lock of her blonde hair behind her ear, the orange glow of the setting sun lighting up the room in an eerie color. She was sitting in her room, curled on her bed, sipping from the near empty bottle of wine. A tear slipped down her cheek as she looked at the label, the Italian writing scribbled across the front. Cosima was right. The Italians did have the best wine. She rested her cheek against her knees, her mind replaying the scene that had happened that morning.

*Everyone was in a state of shock as they stared at the screen. The crowd was quiet as they watched the medics circle the crumpled form, blocking the camera from seeing what was going on.*

*"Come on, Cos. Get up." Sarah whispered, still holding Kira tight.*

*"Please, God. Please, God." This from Alison who was wringing her hands together, staring up at the screen.*

*Delphine wrapped her arms around herself, watching the screen for any sign of movement from the American. "She's going to be ok." She didn't know if she was saying it to reassure the woman's family, or if she was trying to convince herself. She watched as the medics strapped the short woman to a stretcher. "Cosima..."*

*"Excuse me." A man appeared in the stands and began speaking to Cosima's parents. "They sent me to get you. Please follow me."*

*"Where are they taking her?" Alison quickly stood up.*

*"Ma'am." The man nodded. "They are taking her to the hospital. If you come with me, I can take you there."*

*"Oh God." Alison began gathering her stuff.*

*"Are you coming, Delphine?" Sarah looked questioningly at the blonde.*

*"Delphine?"*

Jumping slightly, Delphine looked up as Isabelle sat on the bed beside her.

"Are you alright, Lait?" Isabelle wrapped her arm around the blonde's shoulder. "I heard about this morning. Have you heard anything? Why aren't you at the hospital?"

Delphine shook her head. "They won't let me see her." She wiped at her eyes angrily. "Fucking Russia and it's bullshit politics. They say it's because I'm not family but they fucking let her coach in." She took a long sip from the bottle until there was nothing left, letting it drop to the ground. "I haven't heard anything in hours." She lifted her phone that showed no new alerts. Sarah had texted her a few times, but the news was sparse. Cosima was conscious, but there were a lot of tests that were being done.

Isabelle took the phone from her, setting it on the bedside table before disappearing into the bathroom. She brought a damp washcloth and wiped the blonde's tears away. "I think we should go break into that fucking hospital."

Looking up at the woman, Delphine could see she was serious. "We can't do that, Isa." She shook

her head, but her heart knew it wouldn't take much convincing. "I don't want you to get in trouble. There is so much security, we will get caught."

"No we won't." She reached out and straightened the woman's blonde hair, giving her a reassuring smile. "Fuck those assholes if they think they can keep you from seeing her." She stood up and pulled Delphine up off the bed. "Come on, grab your coat and I'll find a way to get you in there."

Not sure of what else to do, Delphine grabbed her jacket, and detoured into the bathroom.

Isabelle slipped her own jacket back on and opened the bedroom door, screaming slightly when her exit was blocked. "Holy shit!"

"Shit sorry." The short woman spoke as she jumped back slightly.

Hearing the voice, Delphine quickly emerged from the bathroom. "Sarah? What's going on? Is Cosima ok?"

Sarah looked between Delphine and Isabelle before nodding. "Yeah...she's ok." She smiled brightly, taking a full step back. The space she vacated was suddenly filled by another sister.

"Cosima." Delphine took a half step forward, barely restraining herself from scooping the woman into her arms. Her eyes drifted up to the bandage on the woman's temple. "You're ok?"

Noticing the woman's hesitance, Cosima gave her a lopsided smile. "You could at least give me a hug, I've had a pretty crappy day." She joked.

Delphine didn't need to be told twice as she pulled the woman into a hug, unable to stop herself from breaking down as she inhaled the scent of the woman's perfume, trying to ignore the mixed in scent of the hospital.

"Hey hey hey." Cosima closed her eyes as she hugged the shaking woman, soaking in the warmth of her body. "I'm okay." She Ran her fingers through blonde hair. "I'm okay."

Sarah cleared her throat. "Ok, so...I just wanted to make sure she got here safely. I'm gonna head back."

Delphine pulled back, wiping away the new tears that had started falling. "I'm sorry, I just..." She shook her head, unable to voice what she was saying.

"I get it." Cosima cleared her throat before turning to her sister and hugging the woman quickly. "Thanks, Punk."

"No problem, Geek." Sarah grinned. "Let us know what you decide, ok? Get some rest."

"Let me walk you out." Isabelle spoke up as she edged out. "I was going to go find something else to do anyway."

Delphine gave her a grateful look as she watched the two women walk away. "I was so worried." Closing the bedroom door, she couldn't resist pulling the woman to her in a kiss. She felt hands slip around her waist and it was the most delicious thing she had ever felt in her life. Breaking off the kiss, she rested her forehead against the woman's. "Are you really ok?" She looked into the woman's hazel eyes, seeing a slightly dazed look. "You weren't moving...they wouldn't let me see you..." She shook her head and stepped away, wiping her tears angrily.

Cosima moved over to the woman's bed, glad to be sitting down again. "I know. I know." She

tossed her jacket on the nearby chair, but not without a wince. "They were all talking in Russian and they wouldn't let me use a phone and it was test after test after test." She shook her head and sighed softly. "They wanted to keep me overnight but I managed to convince them to spring me." She held a hand out to the woman, pulling her to the bed. "I knew you must be freaking out."

With a heavy sigh, Delphine sat facing her. "Are you ok?" She asked again.

Nodding, Cosima's hand went up to her bandage. "Just a knock on the head. " She reached her arm out, pulling the blonde to her. "I was knocked unconscious, but I'm ok. I'm fit as a fiddle...a slightly bruised fiddle, but I'm all good." She reached out and pushed the blonde's jacket off her shoulders. "So...I hear I won a silver medal?"

Delphine laughed at that, nodding as she allowed the woman to peel away her clothes. "You did." She reached her own shaky hands out, removing the woman's jacket, noting every wince and cataloguing them away to chastise the woman later. "Not bad for an American." She joked.

Chuckling, Cosima lifted her arms so the blonde could remove her shirt, hearing the woman's gasp as she saw the bruise on her torso. "It looks worse than it is." She tipped the woman's chin up, leaning forward and kissing her softly.

Pressing the woman back onto the bed, Delphine couldn't stop herself from running a hand gently over the purplish mark that went from the woman's ribs to her hip on her left side. "It was so scary, Cosima." She looked up to see hazel eyes watching her intently. "Seeing you fall..." She kissed the woman's lips. "When you weren't moving.."

Reaching up, Cosima caressed the woman's cheek. "I know. I'm sorry."

"No you don't know." Delphine shook her head quickly. "Merde, You don't understand." She looked down at the bruise again. "All I could think was how close I was to losing you."

"I know." Cosima pulled her down and kissed her. "I'm here." With a bit more effort than she was used to, she rolled the blonde onto her back, covering the longer body with her own. "I'm right here."

## Chapter 11

"What did Sarah mean?" Delphine traced a path around the edge of the woman's bruise, careful not to press too hard. It was a dark shade of purple and she imagined it was going to take some time to heal. Looking up, she found confused eyes staring at her. "When she was leaving, she said for you to let them know what you decide. Decide about what?"

Cosima was toying with a lock of blonde hair and shrugged. "I still have an event." Adjusting her position, she rolled onto her uninjured side to face Delphine. "I'm glad I won the silver in slope-style, ecstatic even, but it's not why I'm here." She ran her fingertips up the woman's arm. "I came to compete in the half-pipe."

Delphine sat up almost instantly. "You cannot be serious." The look on the woman's face was one that said she wasn't joking. "Please tell me you're not serious." She gave the woman a disbelieving look.

With a wince, Cosima sat up, capturing Delphine's hand. "Delphine..." When she pulled it away, Cosima sighed heavily in frustration. "Hey, come on. I've been working on this most of my life. I can't just give up now because I fell." She reached for the blonde again.

Slipping out of bed, Delphine pulled on a t-shirt and a pair of sweatpants, disappearing into the bathroom. She didn't want to argue, but just the thought of Cosima getting hurt again was causing a pain in her chest. From what she remembered in the videos, there was a lot more jumping which was a larger risk of getting hurt. She returned to the room, pacing.

"Delphine, I don't want you to worry, but I have to..."

"I know, I know." Delphine cut her off as she ran a hand through her hair, trying to rid herself of the sudden anxiety that was coursing through her veins. "I know you have to do this. I just..." She shook her head, still pacing back and forth.

"Will you come here please?"

Delphine grabbed a bottle of water, taking a long sip before looking over at the bed. There was no way she could resist a pouting, injured, and naked Cosima. With a disgruntled huff, she sat down and offered the water to the American. "You didn't see it. I know you were the one that fell, but you weren't there in the stands watching it." She looked down at her feet, trying to find the words to explain what it was like. "You weren't moving and all we could see was the medics surrounding you. It was the hardest thing I ever had to watch."

Cosima was quiet for a minute, taking a sip of water as she gathered her thoughts. "You're right. I'm sorry." She tugged on the edge of Delphine's shirt, setting the water on the nightstand. "I don't know what you were seeing. I'm sure it was pretty scary." She didn't get a response and pursed her lips. "I can tell you it was pretty scary, waking up strapped to a stretcher, not really sure what had just happened." She waited until Delphine looked at her. "It took me like 2 minutes to stop panicking and remember the fall. I know everyone saw it, not just in the stands, but people across the globe, my family...and then I was embarrassed."

"What?" Delphine gave her a disbelieving look. "What were you so embarrassed about?"

Rolling her eyes, Cosima laid back down in bed and pat the sheets, grinning when Delphine huffed once more before slipping under the quilt again. She snuggled up to the woman's warm body, nuzzling the soft curve of her neck. "Well there I was, this super bad ass snowboarder, like

supposedly the American poster child, trying to impress this super sexy blonde in the stands, and I'm tripping over myself and eating snow the first time she sees me compete." She laughed when the blonde playfully slapped her arm. "Talk about embarrassing."

Delphine sighed softly when an arm draped over her stomach and lips brushed against her neck. "I was very impressed by your first run." She turned to look at the woman and found her lips captured in a kiss. All the tension she had been harboring seeped out of her as she enjoyed the lazy exploration. After a moment she broke off the kiss, caressing the woman's face. "I'm so scared of it happening again." Looking into hazel eyes, she traced soft lips with her thumb. "Do you think it's possible to love someone after only knowing them for a week." She didn't know why she was saying it. It was something she'd been thinking about for the past few days, even before their relationship had turned physical. There was just something about being with the American that felt more intimate than any relationship she'd ever had.

Reaching up, Cosima pushed Delphine's hair behind her ear, tracing the line of her jaw. "Well, scientifically speaking, studies show that the medial prefrontal cortex is capable of suggesting an ideal mate within as little time as 0.2 seconds. Accompanied with the deductive powers of the rostromedial prefrontal cortex, the body can release the hormones like oxytocin and dopamine that people associate with love." She licked her lips when she noticed the amused look Delphine was giving her. "From personal experience, no, I don't *think* it's possible." She smiled softly, letting the answer hang in the air for just a moment before adding "I *KNOW* it's possible." She pulled the woman forward for another kiss, her hands slipping around the firm waist and under the woman's shirt.

With a chuckle, Delphine pulled back. "Did you really just geek out on me?" She allowed the woman to pull her t-shirt off, reveling in the warmth of the woman's body against her own.

Cosima gave her a knowing smirk. "Hey, science is sexy." Her hands slipped over smooth hips, dragging the woman's sweatpants as well. "Let's make crazy science." She whispered against the woman's breastbone, tasting the slight saltiness of her skin.

## Chapter 12

"Oof!" The wind was knocked out of Delphine as she botched the landing on a double axel, sending her sliding on her behind across the ice. "Merde." She shook her head in disgust and pushed herself up, trying to rid her mind of the distracting thoughts that were coursing through her brain. There was a sharp whistle and she turned to see Monsieur Allard gesturing for her to come over. "Fuck." The American word that Cosima had a favor for slipped out of her mouth.

"Delphine. Explain to me what is happening. That is the third time you've fallen in an hour!" The veins on his temple pulsed as his face contorted in anger, obviously trying not to shout at the top of his lungs. "Where is your head?"

Delphine drained half of the water bottle that was on the wall beside her coach. "I'm sorry." She wiped her face with a towel. "I did not get much sleep last night." She knew the excuse was flimsy, but she didn't really want to explain the real reason. She couldn't stop thinking about Cosima's fall.

"Do not apologize." He gave her a stern look. "Just stop falling."

Delphine nodded, pushing off the wall and starting another circle around the ice, taking notice of where the other skaters were on the ice. She could see a few skaters in the stands, watching her and talking amongst themselves. Occasionally they would laugh and look at her, and smirk. It seemed to be happening more so today than at any other practice and she summed it up to the fact that she was missing half of her jumps. She tried to block it out, to block everything out, but the one thing she couldn't block out was Cosima.

*"I have to go." Cosima was laughing, trying to pull away from the safe-haven the bed provided.*

*"Non." Delphine had the woman pinned down with half her body, her leg wrapped firmly around the shorter woman's. "Can I not convince you to stay?" This was nothing more than a whisper as Delphine nuzzled the woman's neck. She felt the shudder course through the American and knew it wouldn't take much.*

*It was still dark out and after a whole day of lounging around and being subjected to Delphine's assistance in "healing", Cosima was set on getting on the mountain again. That is, of course, if she could shake her lovely personal nurse who was set on forcing her to rest one more day.*

*But one more day wouldn't work for her. Staying in bed the day before, she'd lost half of her prep time. She now only had one day's worth of practice to see if her injuries would stop her from competing. Instead of fighting, Cosima used the last ounce of resolve she had to caress her cheek, her eyes turning serious. "I have to go."*

*It worked. Delphine let her hand slip over the bruise that was beginning to fade around the edges, obviously healing. The cut on the woman's forehead had healed already and just had a small band-aid on it. Delphine closed her eyes, but was assaulted with the vision of Cosima's fall. "Promise me you'll be safe?"*

*Cosima rolled their joined bodies over so that she was now on top, no longer getting any resistance from the blonde. "You know I will." She brushed her lips against the blonde's. "Hey." She waited until the woman's eyes opened and looked up at her. "I love you."*

*It was amazing how three tiny words could hold such power over someone. Delphine had heard them before, from previous suitors trying to get more of her attention. They had always been used*

*as a tool against her, from the first time she heard them in grade school, when she had fallen for a boy's honest eyes and irresistible charm. She had fallen for them in college, fleeting romances she thought would withstand the pressure of her school and training schedule. She'd begun to say them less and less, each mistake tainting her view on the words. Looking up at soft hazel eyes that looked past all the pain and bullshit of her past, she couldn't not feel the same. She had been so puzzled to find that despite trying to avoid these situations, she knew she was lost the first time she'd laid eyes on the short American that fated morning on the running track, when a series of unfortunate mistakes had led her to being at the wrong camp, but on the correct path. "I love you too."*

Delphine felt her skate hit the ice as she landed the jump, the cold air whipping past her. There was a loud buzzer that meant the end of their practice and she smiled as made her way to the door, accepting the blade guards from her coach.

"Good. Next time, less falling, more doing." He held out her jacket for her.

Delphine immediately reached for her cell phone, smiling when she found a text message.

*Still alive, but this half-pipe is kicking my ass. I may need you to kiss a few bumps when I see you.*

She felt like she was on an emotional roller coaster. She didn't know whether to be happy, scared, or aroused.

*Be safe and I'll kiss anything you want.*

She nodded, trying to lessen the anxiety she felt in the pit of her stomach. Looking up, she found Monsieur Allard watching her. "Sorry did you say something?"

The older man grunted. "You should go back to your room and get changed. You have an interview in an hour."

"An interview?" Delphine thought back to her schedule. She wasn't aware of an interview.

"Oui." The gruff man looked out onto the ice, not looking at the blonde. "There have been many questions, Delphine." After a long moment, he turned and faced her. "What is this American to you?"

The question came from around a blind corner and Delphine blinked. "What?"

"I'm not stupid, girl. I know the types of things that happen here, but you cannot let it distract you." He shook his head, pulling out a copy of an American paper.

Delphine accepted the paper and was surprised to see herself in the picture. It was a story on Cosima's accident, and sure enough there was a photo of her in the waiting room, crying into her knees that were tucked against her chest, being comforted by Sarah. She rolled her eyes at it. Why America always had to focus on such trivial things when Cosima was injured, she didn't know. "She is..." Delphine paused as she thought of what to describe Cosima as. Her girlfriend? Her lover? Someone she could no longer live without? "She's a very good friend."

Monsieur Allard nodded. "And that's exactly what you will say." He paused. "Did you think that no one would notice the family bringing you along to the hospital?" He shook his head with a sigh. "Look, I don't care who you bring to your bed, man, woman, sheep, I don't care. Just remember that you worked on this your entire life, and your reputation and career...as well as my reputation and career...are on the line." He looked sternly into the hazel eyes to make sure she was paying attention. "Get your head in gear."

With a heavy sigh, Delphine folded the paper and tucked it in her jacket pocket. She wasn't exactly sure what Cosima was going to think of it.

## Chapter 13

"Bonne après-midi, Mademoiselle Cormier." The tall and slim woman offered her hand to Delphine, her smile beaming as the blonde accepted it. "Thank you for coming, my name is Angelique Prevot. I must say that I am a big fan."

Delphine returned the smile, taking the seat that was indicated, taking note of the camera man and the bright lights. "Thank you. That is very kind of you to say. Are you enjoying the games so far?" She asked politely.

"Yes, very much so." The reporter took her own seat, preferring to keep the interview as casual as possible. She adjusted her jacket and pulled out a stack of note cards that had small writing scribbled across its surface. "Are you enjoying your time here?"

"Well..." Delphine wiggled her hand. "It's had its ups and downs." She fought the urge to run a hand through her hair, having had her look approved by the make-up woman that was standing against the wall of the room.

The reporter signaled the cameraman to start filming. "So, Mademoiselle Cormier..."

"Delphine, please."

"Pardon. Delphine, this is your first Olympics, correct?" At Delphine's affirmative nod, she continued. "As a first time Olympian, how would you rate your time here so far?"

Delphine smiled, knowing the simple questions were always a way to lay the foundation to the questions she didn't really want to deal with. "Well, it's definitely been an experience. As an athlete, this is the highest mark there is to hit, and I feel very blessed to be able to represent my country in something that I completely love to do. I would say it's one of the best experiences of my life." It was an answer very similar to one she'd given in previous interviews, but she didn't care much.

The interviewer nodded. "And you've been doing a great job so far. We were all mesmerized by your performance during your team skate. There are many who believe that your performance was one of the best we've seen from you."

Another nod. "I believe it was very successful. I was completely happy with it."

"Were there any contributing factors to this particular skate that had such a dramatic effect on your performance?"

*Cosima.* Pursing her lips to keep the response back, Delphine took the moment to seem as though she was thinking. "My coach, Monsieur Allard, is very good at what he does. We have been working very hard to find the flaws in my skating and we've been working on improving every element." It was a textbook answer, and she swore she could see the woman's eyes narrow just slightly at the answer. "He has been a great coach. I've been working with him for years now and I can honestly say I was quite a mess on the ice before we met."

"Yes well, bravo on his part." The woman gave Delphine a more serious look. "It's been a very busy Olympics but I did manage to catch your practice session today. You seemed to be having a little trouble landing your jumps. Is this something that we should be worried about?"

*Merde.* Delphine felt her smile waver slightly as she answered. "Non. Everyone has an off day."

"There are some who are also afraid that your magnificent performance, and it was quite stunning, was something of a fluke."

The lights of the camera were suddenly feeling very hot and Delphine could feel a small rage building in her stomach from the insinuation. "Well there's nothing to worry about. There are many things that contribute to a good performance: skill, practice, being well rested, and especially being very focused." She paused briefly, trying to choose her words carefully. "I will admit that my mind was a little distracted today." She weighed the pros and cons of where she could direct the interview, and decided to bite the bullet. "It has been a rather long couple of days. A friend of mine was injured recently and it has been on my mind quite a bit. While it has been distracting, I was able to pull it together by the end and I believe that going forward it should not be a problem."

"A friend." The reporter flipped through her note cards that she had in one hand. "Would that be the American snowboarder, Cosima...Newhouse?"

"Niehaus, and yes." Delphine nodded, shifting slightly in her seat. "As most of the world saw, she did end up falling in her last run the other day and had to be carried off the slopes. I was very concerned for her safety."

"Did you know Mademoiselle Niehaus before the Olympics?"

Delphine knew the next line of questioning and where it was going. "Non, I met her the first morning here at the village."

The woman nodded. "Yet, a recent picture has surfaced of you quite distraught over the accident"

Delphine shrugged, giving off an air of nonchalance despite the fact that really her instincts were to stand up and leave the room.. "I imagine I reacted as anyone would upon seeing a friend injured and not knowing if they were ok." She paused briefly before continuing. "We have gotten to be quite close since meeting. She is a great person and anyone who knows her has been quite worried."

"So she is just a friend." The woman smirked. "Rumor has it that she is more than just a friend."

Delphine sighed softly.

*She had returned to her room to find Cosima sitting in the hallway, sporting a black eye and a million-dollar smile. "Hey gorgeous."*

*"What do I tell them?" Delphine was sitting on the edge of her bed, the article in her hand after having shown it to the woman.*

*Fingers caressed her jaw, tipping her head up so she could look up at the American who was standing in front of her.*

*"What do you want to tell them?" Cosima leaned down to kiss her softly, meaning to be more tender and reassuring than anything else.*

*Delphine shrugged, a move that was very unnatural for the woman's usual confidence.*

*"Delphine." Cosima sat down beside her, twining her fingers with the blondes. "I've been out of the rainbow closet for years, but I know what it's like. If you want to say we're just friends, that's fine. If you want to say we're more, that's fine too."*

*Leaning against the woman's shoulder, Delphine looked at their joined hands. "But what are*

*we?" She brought the back of the woman's hand up to her lips, brushing her lips across the soft skin. Reaching out she carefully caressed the woman's face, mindful of the new bruise. "What am I to you?"*

*Cosima tilted her head to the side, giving her a look as if the answer was obvious. "Everything."*

"Madam Prevot..." She smirked as the woman's eyes narrowed again at the title. Delphine crossed her legs as she took a more relaxed position. "You would think that a woman in your position would not be so susceptible to rumors and gossip spread between competing entities." She picked up one of the water bottles that was resting on the table near her seat, unscrewing the top and taking a sip.

"So you're saying it's just rumors?" The woman rose an eyebrow.

Delphine smiled. "I'm saying you shouldn't listen to rumors. As a species you would think that what's more important is to focus on the person that's hurt. Here we have a previous medal winner, an Olympic athlete with no intentions but to represent her sport and country, and she is injured to the point where she has to be carried off the slopes, and we are so focused on stories and rumors. Cosima is a remarkable person and it was a very traumatic moment for not just myself, but for others as well. It's a miracle she wasn't hurt more than she was."

The reporter looked at Delphine as though she were weighing her own options.

Delphine just smiled.

## Chapter 14

"What are you thinking about?"

Delphine stopped the slow stroking of her thumb against the woman's stomach, looking up to see hazel eyes watching her. Shaking her head, she buried her face in the woman's shoulder. She had been deep in thought, her mind turning to morose thoughts even as she absorbed the warmth radiating off the American's body. How could she tell the woman what she was thinking? The very thoughts sent her mind in a depressing spiral. She couldn't imagine actually voicing them.

"Hey." Cosima tipped the woman's face up to look in her eyes. "What's going on?"

After coming back from the interview, she'd told the woman about her responses.

*"You said what?" Cosima was sitting on Delphine's bed, again stripped down to just a t-shirt and her underwear, causing Delphine to guess that the woman spent a lot of time at home dressed just the same. "My my my, Mademoiselle Cormier. You are full of surprises."*

*Delphine had been checking over her skates when the French words tumbled cheekily from the American's mouth. It hit her right in the gut and it took bare seconds before she was pressing Cosima back onto the bed. "Say that again."*

*"Mademoiselle Cormier." Cosima repeated, putting as much of a French accent into the words as she could. "Madem..."*

*Delphine cut her off with a kiss, hearing a muffled giggle from the woman as hands began exploring skin.*

Now they were wrapped up in each other, their legs a tangle of limbs and blankets, a light glistening of sweat still on their skin. Delphine didn't want to say the words out loud. She didn't want to ruin the moment. She wanted to commit each breath the snowboarder took to memory. She wanted to breathe in the scent of the woman's shampoo, the scent of her sweat, the scent of her sex, and the mixture of them all that still lingered in the air. The scent teamed with the gentle beating of the woman's heart created the perfect memory of the perfect moment. It hurt because she knew it would all end soon.

Cosima ran a hand through blonde hair, sorting the curls. "Please tell me what's wrong."

With a sigh, Delphine brushed her lips along the woman's collarbone, trying to distract the woman. She wanted to distract her own mind from the thoughts that threatened to break her. Her hands slid along the muscular torso, mindful of the still healing bruise, caressing and teasing as she moved to meet the woman's lips. To her surprise, the kiss was not returned and she found a gentle grip on her wrist stopping her touches.

"Delphine." The voice was soft and calm, yet demanding and persistent. "What's going on in your head?"

She didn't know when she started crying, but all she knew was that she couldn't stop. She felt the sobs wracking through her and they just kept coming. She knew that Cosima must be confused, hell she was confused herself. She was sure the last thing the American wanted was to be coddling an inconsolable mess the night before her competition.

Cosima caressed the woman's bare back, trying to rub soothing patterns in the soft skin. "Shhh." She wasn't 100% sure what was going on, but she continued to run a hand through the woman's

blonde hair and her other running up and down her back. "It's going to be ok." She wasn't blind. She knew what their biggest problem was, and she just guessed this had something to do with that.

It felt like an eternity before she could gather her wits. "I'm sorry." Delphine angrily wiped away her tears. She couldn't believe she let herself lose control like that. She sniffled, hiding her face in her hands. "Merde."

"Hey." Cosima pushed the blonde hair back, her hands circling the woman's wrists and trying to pull them away from the woman's face. "Talk to me, please."

Delphine looked up, into the woman's eyes, seeing the genuine concern there. It only made her heart hurt more. "Your last event is tomorrow." She set her head down on the woman's shoulder. "We haven't talked about when you were leaving." She sighed softly, more of a whimper really, fighting the urge to cry again.

"Oh." Cosima tilted her head to look into red-rimmed eyes. "Is that what this is about?" She dramatically rolled her eyes. "Delphine, if I were leaving in a day I would have told you." Cosima grinned as she sat up and reached for her bag, tugging it over, forcing the skater into a sitting position.

"What? What are you doing?"

Pulling out an envelope, Cosima handed it to the blonde, grinning as she nuzzled the woman's bare shoulder.

"Cosima...I already have the ticket for tomorrow." Delphine protested but opened the envelope. "Why would you..." She let her words fade off as she looked at the tickets. Ladies Single Figure Skating. It was a ticket for each night of her event. She let her eyes look up at the woman.

"I'm not leaving yet." Cosima caressed the woman's cheek, wiping away a tear that fell. "I would never deprive us of these days together." She grinned cheekily. "Plus...I hear you skate like crap when you're worried about me."

Delphine smacked her arm gently. "Merde! Shut up!" She laughed and set the ticket on the bedside table before pulling the woman forward for a kiss, this time getting no resistance. "You are such an asshole." She pressed against the woman, her tears forgotten. "Such an incredible asshole." Her hips settled between strong thighs that pressed against her sides. "You are everything to me." Her lips pressed against the woman's, she smiled, caressing the soft cheek as she pulled away, looking into hazel eyes.

"Je t'aime, Delphine." Cosima whispered softly, as though speaking them too loudly would send Delphine into another crying fit. "Je t'aime."

The woman's American accent completely brutalizing her native language brought a big smile to Delphine's face and she placed a soft kiss on the woman's nose. "Je t'aime, Cosima." She brushed her lips over the one bruised cheek. "Je t'adore." She felt the woman's hands sliding down her side, one slipping between their joined bodies. She fought the urge to close her eyes, instead looking deep into hazel eyes that were inches from her own, feeling them staring into her soul just before lips captured hers, swallowing the moan that would have otherwise filled the air.

## Chapter 15

They were in Cosima's room, her roommate already up and gone for the day. With just over an hour left before the brunette had to head to the slopes, Delphine was laying on her stomach on the American's bed watching Cosima who was most of the way through a yoga routine, much to Delphine's bemusement. She could see the beads of sweat collecting on the woman's skin as she moved her body in an odd position, holding it for a set duration of time. She found it very out of character that the woman who was always on the go, always moving, always in action, would choose something so calm and still.

Then again, Delphine couldn't complain. With the American only in a pair of form-fitting workout shorts and a sports bra, every time she switched positions, Delphine could see the smooth movement of toned muscles. While relaxed, the compact form offered a delicious softness that Delphine appreciated, but when she was working out and her muscles tensed, her body became a well-sculpted personification of strength.

"I can feel you staring." Cosima commented, her eyes closed and her voice breathy.

Delphine at least had the decency to blush. "Sorry." She pushed herself into a seated position, crossing her legs and resting her elbows on her knees. "I was just thinking."

"Do I want to know about what?"

"Isabelle told me that a lot of athletes spend all their free time at the Olympics having sex." She looked down at her fingers that were picking at the blanket on the bed, a flutter making itself very evident in her gut. "I did not understand before...but I think I do now."

Cosima snorted as she pushed her body up off the floor. "Oh you do, do you?"

A smile tugged at Delphine's mouth. "Oui." She looked up to see the shorter woman standing there watching her with her hands on her hips. "You are breathtaking." She gestured for the woman to come closer.

Raising an eyebrow, Cosima moved over to the bed, grinning as she reached out and her fingers intertwined with the blondes. She felt herself being tugged onto the bed and resisted. "I'm all sweaty."

"I know." Delphine tugged a little harder until the woman was kneeling in front of her on the bed. "I'm trying to commit everything about you to memory, even the you that is all muscles and sweat."

Cosima caressed the woman's cheek, looking into hazel eyes that stared back at her. She could see the sadness in the woman's eyes and her brow furrowed.

Suddenly it was a fight to hold back the tears as Delphine's hands slid up the woman's sides, creating a physical memory to go with her mental one. She felt the muscles in the woman's abs tense as she leaned forward for a kiss. She memorized each movement. She memorized the smell of sweat and sweetness that was Cosima. Brushing her lips along a shoulder, she memorized the salty taste of her skin. Allowing herself to be pushed backwards, she memorized the feeling of the woman's weight as she was pressed against the bed.

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"Delphine!"

Her name was shouted by a group and she couldn't help but smile. She waved her hand at the family as she navigated the stairs. "Bonjour!" This time she was greeted by hugs and smiles by each of the Niehauses, making her way down the line to the seat that was saved for her.

"You're looking a lot better." Sarah smirked as the blonde sat down.

"I feel better." Delphine smiled. "Nervous, but definitely better."

"Yeah." Sarah laughed as she gestured to her family who was a lot more sedate than it used to be. "This lot here are the same." She shook her head. "Look at that little shit, just soaking up the attention."

Following the woman's pointing finger, Delphine caught sight of the short American being interviewed. Cosima had a big grin on her face, her hands flying through the air as she explained something. The woman looked confident and radiant. "I don't know how she does it. I would be so nervous."

"Well she's good at what she does." Sarah shrugged. "The way I see it, she either falls or she doesn't. Best we can do is cheer and make sure she sees us smile so she doesn't get nervous."

From her time with the snowboarder, Delphine knew she was overflowing with confidence. She breathed it, and depended on it to get through her day. Looking at the woman, Delphine nodded, completely understanding what she was saying. "Yes, but it is still hard."

Sarah pat the blonde on the shoulder. "Hey, this is her last competition at least. I doubt she'll ever stop, but at least the pressure is off." She chuckled. "You should see her on a real slope, though. Talk about scary."

Delphine looked from the American to the half-pipe that was in front of them. This was exactly like the videos she'd seen from the previous Olympics. She was so nervous for the woman, but she had tried to put up a brave front. This was the American's last Olympics. She felt her smile waver. Would she ever get to see Cosima on a real slope? The woman lived completely on the other side of globe from her and it was a discussion they constantly skirted around. They only had a week left together and just the thought of their inevitable separation sent a spike through her chest, robbing her of her breath.

"What's a babe like you doing in a place like this?"

Delphine jumped slightly, turning to find a laughing woman. "Cosima!" She couldn't believe she had been distracted to the point that she missed the woman joining them.

Laughing, Cosima wiggled her fingers in greeting to her family. "Hey guys." She smiled brightly as she was pulled into several hugs.

Her hand covering her heart, Delphine took a steadying breath as she watched the woman conversing with her siblings. She had not had a chance to see the woman interact with her family, except for that short moment with Sarah, so it was almost a surreal experience.

"Yeah, I totally qualified so I get to sit and watch the semi-finals with you guys." Cosima responded to her parents questions, stretching slightly, dressed in her snowboarding gear. She gave a high-five to her niece and accepted the praise from her family.

When the American looked her way, Delphine smiled brightly. When the American wiggled her way between her and Sarah, she nudged the woman. "Excuse you, I was having a pleasant conversation with your sister."

"Oh really?" Cosima grinned, sticking her tongue out slightly. "You like her better than me?"

"Oi! Delphine and I are best buds now." Sarah commented, pushing her sister slightly. "Right, Frenchie?"

Pursing her lips, Delphine nodded quickly. "Oui. Very best." She agreed, laughing at her partner's narrowed eyes and suspicious look even as a cheer sounded as the semi-finals began.

## Chapter 16

It was on the last jump of the American's first run that nearly scared Delphine out of her seat. After having sat through jumps from all but Cosima and one other athlete, the brunette had a glorious run, grabbing more air than most of the other snowboarders, her compact frame flipping and spinning in impossible directions and with scary speed...until the last jump. So far she had been landing everything perfectly when Delphine felt her heart stop. As Cosima was coming down from the last jump, maybe it was the fear of her last fall, but she landed slightly off balance, her board too far ahead and she slid momentarily on the seat of her pants before pulling herself up to a stand.

"Shit." Sarah cursed, shaking her head.

"Damn it!"

Both Sarah and Delphine turned to look at Alison who had been quiet the entire competition.

"What?" The suburban housewife looked defensive.

Delphine watched as Cosima slid to the padded seat, waving at the crowd as she gave them a tight-lipped smile. She recognized the look of disappointment on the woman's face and felt an ache in her chest, wishing she could pull the woman into a hug. "That is bad, correct?" She asked Sarah.

"Yeah." Sarah nodded. "She'll get a deduction for falling, usually big enough to knock you out of the running, but she has another run, so there's still hope for her to get the highest score."

Looking up at the screen, Delphine frowned as the score was revealed. 85.5. She watched as Sarah scribbled the score down. "That is not so bad. She is in third place."

"Yeah, but the best scores are always in the second runs. She's not going to medal with an 85."

Judging from Cosima's face, Delphine knew it was true. The woman gave another quick wave before being ushered away. "She looks so upset." There was something about the look on the woman's face that tore at her heart. This was her last attempt and despite the woman trying to play it off as not a big deal, she knew how false that was.

"She's going to win." Kira nodded, chewing on a pretzel she was sharing with Helena.

Delphine leaned forward so she could see the girl. "You think so."

Kira nodded again. "Yep." She smiled brightly.

Despite Kira's reassurances, Delphine found herself getting more nervous as the athletes competed. Sarah had been right. Cosima was now knocked down fifth place by the time her turn came up. Currently in first place was her teammate, another American who was seated on the padded bench next to the current second and third place athletes. She looked up at the screen that showed Cosima already strapped to her board, chatting with the two men at the top of the slope. She had a grin on her face as she playfully rocked back and forth on her board. To say she looked confident was an understatement.

She looked good.

Delphine couldn't help smiling when the woman stuck her tongue out at the camera.

"Little shit."

Delphine turned to look at Sarah, seeing the proud smirk on her face as she watched her sister hop forward and head towards the half-pipe.

*"Why do you do that?"*

*"Hmmm?" Cosima was putting away her freshly cleaned clothes, having already been yelled at by her roommate for not being the tidiest person.*

*Delphine turned the tablet to the American, displaying Cosima with her tongue sticking out.*

*Cosima rolled her eyes dramatically. "Cause I'm a little shit."*

*Raising an eyebrow, Delphine tilted her head in question.*

*"My sister, Sarah, calls me a little shit all the time." Cosima shoved her clothes in the dresser, ignoring any sort of order before closing it. "We had this fight once when we were like 12 or 13. ..13 definitely. I had lost a competition for the first time and I had thrown myself into snowboarding and my grades had started slipping for like the first time ever in my life." She waved her hands as if to explain how rare that was. "My parents started telling me that if my grades continued to fall, they'd make me give up snowboarding." She shook her head. "So me, being the little kid that I was, I started yelling and crying and locked myself in my room. Sarah, unfortunately was in there at the time." She laughed bitterly. "Now, she wasn't the best sister back then. She was starting to go all punk and she was turning into an asshole. So she, in all of her grand wisdom, says I should give up snowboarding because I was already smart and I couldn't be both smart and a professional athlete."*

*"That's absurd."*

*Cosima nodded. "Obvs. So I told her I'd make it to the Olympics one day and she'd feel like an ass." She shrugged. "Everyone thinks I'm just trying to be cute...or defiant, but really I'm just teasing Sarah."*

*"You are incorrigible." Delphine smiled, nudging the woman's shoulder.*

It was good to see that Sarah took it with ease. She watched as Cosima hit the half-pipe, using the first jump to gather height and speed. "I guess you can be smart and athletic after all, no?"

With a surprised look, Sarah laughed, nodding. "That little shit always has to be right."

Both women watched as Cosima launched off the other side, using the height and speed to grab the nose of her board, rotating twice before easily landing, heading towards the opposite side. Delphine was watching every move, looking for any signal that she was losing control, but it was quite the opposite. As the woman launched off the half-pipe, it looked almost easy as she grabbed the center of her board, flipping over once as she rotated in the air, landing expertly.

Sarah was quiet as well, watching closely and mouthing words that Delphine could not hear. The rest of the Niehauses were ranging from nervously watching to outright cheering when the American launched into the air, grabbing the tail end of the board as she spun around once, twice, three times and landing flawlessly.

Delphine was amazed as the woman used her compact form and strength to get higher than any of the other athletes. She watched as the snowboarder did a simple double rotation, obviously trying to pick up speed for her last jump.

"Do it, Cos."

Sarah's voice rang in Delphine's ear just as Cosima launched off the half-pipe, her fast-moving form held tight as she reached down and grabbed her board, her body rolling with the movement and flipping not once, but twice as she rotated three times. Delphine nearly covered her eyes, not wanting to see the form crashing into the half-pipe. She was glad she didn't, pleasantly surprised as the woman's snowboard made contact with the slope, and the American remained standing. There was a loud cheer from the crowd and a "Holy shit" from Sarah as Cosima thrust a victorious fist into the sky and slid to a stop at the bottom of the slope.

The crowd was almost unbearably loud, cheering for the American. Cosima had removed her snowboard, waving at the crowd as she nervously watched the scoreboard. Time seemed to tick by slowly as the screens replayed the last jump in slow motion just before they cut to a close up of Cosima who waved at the camera just before the score was posted.

92.25

Cosima fell to her knees as a cheer sounded through the crowd once more. That put her in first place with only one more snowboarder to go after her. If nothing else, she would leave with not one, but two silver medals.

Delphine watched as the short woman was pulled into a group hug, the woman who was now in second place patting her firmly on the back. Cosima looked dazed as she looked up at the screen, watching the replay of her run as they waited for the last snowboarder.

When the last snowboarder started her run, perhaps Delphine should have been paying attention, but she wasn't. She was busy watching Cosima who was sitting on the padded surface, her feet swinging back and forth childishly as she watched the screen. There was genuine interest there as she watched her competitor in her run. When the final athlete slid to a stop beside them, Cosima hopped down to give the woman a friendly hug, congratulating her on a successful run.

Delphine had to admit she was beyond nervous as Cosima leaned against the padded surface beside her American teammate as they both waited for the score of the last snowboarder. The women were both grinning, chatting profusely, both knowing they would get medals, but not sure what rank. It seemed to take forever as they sat there, heads turned towards the scoreboard.

90.5

There was a loud cheer as Delphine watched the brunette close her eyes momentarily, a huge grin spreading across her face just moments before she was pulled into another group hug with the other medal winners. To her right, the Niehauses were hooting and cheering, waving their American flags in obvious pride. She watched as Cosima and her team mate were handed American flags, having them draped over their shoulders. It was the woman's last Olympics, and she was taking home a gold medal.

"Come on Delphine." Sarah wrapped her arm around the blonde's, tugging her toward the barrier.

Delphine was not quite sure what was going on until she was pressed against a bar with the crowd at her back, watching as Cosima ran up to their small army of people, first getting lost in the her parents' hug. She could see the tears in their eyes as Mrs. Niehaus roughly kissed the snowboarder's cheek before hugging her again. Next was a group hug from her siblings, four identical yet different women locked in a tangle of heads and arms.

At last Cosima stopped in front of Delphine, a slight hesitation in her moves. The short woman was being pat on the back and side by everyone, but Delphine could see the American wasn't

paying attention.

*"So what are we doing?"*

*Delphine was kneeling down, tying her shoes. "Hmmm?" She slipped on her jacket and pulled the zipper up, watching as the American shrugged on her parka. "I thought we were getting ready for you to win a gold medal."*

*Cosima rolled her eyes, pulling the woman to her for a quick kiss. "What are we doing about the whole gay thing. If I qualify, I can sit back and watch the semi-finals with you." She reached up and fixed the blonde's collar. "We haven't spent any time really in public together with cameras and stuff."*

*Truthfully, Delphine hadn't thought much about it. "Well...my manager wants this to be a secret for now." She picked up the fleece headband from the nightstand, fitting it around the woman's head before pressing her forehead against the woman's. "Our relationship can be anything we want."*

*Cosima grinned at that, leaning in for a kiss.*

Reaching out and capturing the snowboarder's face between her hands, Delphine smiled as she pulled the woman to her, her lips crushing against a smile. She didn't care who was watching or that they were surrounded by hundreds of people. She didn't care that every camera in the area was on them. Everything faded away and all she could feel were the lips pressed against her own, returning the kiss.

When they finally separated, Cosima was grinning widely as the blonde's forehead pressed against hers in a moment that was all their own. She felt a tugging on her jacket and rolled her eyes. "Guess I did ok, huh?" She tried to wave off her coach who was yelling above the cheering, trying to get her attention.

Delphine gave the woman one more kiss. "Not bad for an American." She joked. "Go get your medal."

"Okay." Cosima laughed as she allowed herself to be pulled away and sucked into a crowd of reporters and officials.

The sudden absence of the shorter woman brought a wave of awareness over Delphine as she felt eyes on her. "Merde." She whispered, as if a sudden realization of what she just did came crashing down on her. As if sensing her distress, an arm settled around her shoulder. She looked up to find familiar but very different hazel eyes watching her knowingly.

"Come on, Casanova...back to our seats." Sarah's voice was filled with amusement as she pulled the blonde back to the bleachers.

Taking a seat, Delphine let her eyes scan the area, seeing more than one camera seeming to be focusing on her. "That did not go as I planned."

Sarah only smirked. "Definitely one way to burst out of the closet."

Delphine looked from Sarah to Cosima who was being interviewed. "Shit."

## Chapter 17

The electronic music beat loudly as the lights flashed, reds and blues pulsing with the moving bodies. The lyrics were words the French woman didn't understand, but the beat was sensual and energetic. Normally, Delphine would feel overwhelmed. After years of ballet and other disciplines, she loved to dance, but she didn't like crowds and avoided club scenes. Usually so many bodies in close proximity to her left her paranoid and anxious. She probably would have felt it, if it weren't for one particular warm body moving against her. Watching Cosima dance was...indefinable. For someone who had trouble walking in a straight line when not attached to a snowboard, she moved with sensuality and grace, as if the music were a natural part of her rhythm. The woman would move against her, then away again, then close again. Feeling the strength of the American's body moving in tempo with the music, her desire was mounting. Lips grazed her own and she could taste the alcohol on them.

She didn't blame the brunette. It was a celebration. While Delphine didn't partake beyond a few sips of wine, she knew that the shorter woman had had a fair amount more than that. As the arm slid around her waist pulling her closer against the moving form, no she didn't blame her at all. A day ago, she had been intimidated, worried even, about what the world would think of their secret relationship that was not so much a secret anymore. Now, as she felt the woman's lips traveling down her throat, she didn't pull away. She tipped her head down to capture the lips in a kiss that sent chills through her body.

Leaning back and swaying with the music, Cosima's face was lit up with a bright grin. She twitched her head towards a more open space near the window and slipped her hand into the blonde's, pulling her away from the crowd.

Delphine was thankful for the reprieve as she fanned herself with her free hand. "This place is definitely different when full." They had returned to the upstairs lounge which was now full of dancing bodies and celebrations. The beanbags had been tossed around the edges to make room for dancing and were now home to couples in various stages of inappropriate behavior. She leaned back against the bar that went across the entire windowed area, watching as Cosima moved closer to her, pinning her against the bar with a hand on either side of her.

Cosima grinned, her nose scrunching. "If I'm not mistaken..." She leaned forward for a kiss, tasting soft lips. "This is where you kissed me the first time."

Wrapping her arm around the shorter woman's neck, Delphine smiled against her lips. She could feel the heat radiating from the American and she craved more. "Well, we were seated." She responded with her own kiss, tongues brushing in gentle exploration. "We should go." She whispered, leaning her forehead against the woman's. "Somewhere more private."

Misinterpreting, Cosima blinked. "Shit...sorry...I didn't mean to...in public..." She mumbled, looking slightly horrified.

Rolling her eyes, Delphine wrapped her fist in the woman's top, pulling her forward for another kiss. "Shut up, you silly American." Another kiss and she smirked. "This place is far too public for what I want to do with you." She watched as realization dawned on the woman's face, accompanied by a doozy grin as she was pulled towards the exit.

Luckily they were the only ones in the elevator. Delphine found herself pressed against the wall as lips kissed a path down her throat. She bit her bottom lip to keep from crying out as a firm pressure traced the center seam of her jeans, sending a jolt of electricity through her body. A ding sounded and they were stumbling clumsily down the hall towards Cosima's room that was

thankfully empty.

"Merde." Delphine growled as she was pinned to the door, hands everywhere and in not enough places. She lifted her arms over her head and allowed the brunette to pull her shirt up and off, seeing it flying off into the dark room. Her fingers were tangled in the woman's dreads, pulling the American tight against her body as nimble fingers fought with the clasp of her belt.

Cosima laughed as she finally got the clasp open. "Ok...Holy Watershed...you are not allowed to wear this stupid belt again." She wrinkled her nose, sliding hands into the woman's jeans and between the woman's underwear and hips. Her hands caressed every inch of the path down the woman's legs as shoes and pants were removed. "You know..." Cosima paused to brush her lips across the woman's legs. "You have really sexy knees." She ran her fingertips up the muscular calved, pressing a cheek against the woman's knee. "Really sexy."

"Come here, ma cherie." Delphine pulled the woman up, tugging off the shorter woman's top and letting it drop to the ground. "You are breathtaking." She pulled the woman forward for another kiss as her fingers undid the bra that was added to the pile. It wasn't long before the American's jeans and underwear were added to the pile. With a smirk, she walked backwards towards the bed, tugging the woman with her.

Cosima didn't let the bed stop her forward movement, continuing to inch forward and causing the blonde to squeak in surprise as they were tumbling onto the bed together.

Inching backwards till she was in the center of bed, Delphine grinned as the woman stalked her, hovering over her like she was ready to pounce. Delphine couldn't resist reaching up to caress the woman's cheek, her thumb tracing soft lips in reverence. There was nothing but happiness in the hazel eyes that were clouded by alcohol and desire. "I love you." It was a whisper, as if the saying the words too loud would shatter the moment, but loud enough to break through the silence in the room. She watched as the American's face lit up even more, a grin on the lips she wanted to kiss.

As if reading her mind, Cosima pressed her lips against Delphine's. She allowed herself to be pulled tight against the blonde's body, her hips settling between the woman's thighs as teeth raked against her bottom lip. "I love you too." She managed to whisper before her lips were captured in another kiss and wandering hands sought out warm places.

## Chapter 18

"This is so exciting." Cosima set her tray down on the table across from Delphine. She grinned as she eyed her hamburger and fries, taking a deep breath of the aroma and nearly squealing in delight as she took a big bite. The sound that came from her was almost inappropriate. "Oh my god, it's amazing."

Delphine looked at her in disbelief. They were sitting in the cafeteria of the Coastal Village for a change. With the snowboarder done competing, she was no longer restricted to the mountain village, allowing her to explore further while Delphine was in practice. "You are very silly."

Cosima stopped mid-bite. "Hey, do you know how long it's been since I had McDonalds? Over 10 years!" She took another bite of the big mac. The fast food offered in both cafeterias went mostly ignored the first half of the games, but now that more of athletes were done competing, there had actually been a line. "Oh my god, retirement tastes so fucking good."

"You're going to make yourself sick eating hamburgers and ice cream." She tossed a carrot at the American.

"Nu-uh." Cosima waved the sloppy sandwich in the woman's direction. "You know you want ze amburger." Cosima mocked in a very bad French accent, ducking another carrot that flew her way.

"I do not sound like that, nor do I want your hamburger." Delphine shook her head, wiping her mouth with her napkin.

"You know there's a ton of bad things you would eat and drink if you were able to." Cosima happily sipped at her cup of coke, feeling the delicious burn coursing down her throat. "What would it be?"

There was no need to even think about it. Coffee, her mind spoke, remembering the last cup she'd had, the bold and bitter taste of it and the warmth that spread through her body. She smiled brightly when Isabelle dropped her tray onto their table, sitting beside her. "Hello Isa. How was practice?" She ignored the knowing smirk that was on Cosima's face.

Isabelle shrugged. "You know how it is, same shit every day." She looked at the American's lunch and cringed. "Really?"

Cosima grinned before taking another big bite.

Concentrating on her own meal, Isabelle shook her head. "It is no wonder Americans have such a trouble with obesity. That is nothing but ill-treated meat products zapped under a heat lamp." She took a bite of her salad, taking a moment to concentrate on chewing. "What I wouldn't give for some boeuf bourguignon and a nice bottle of Pinot Noir." She looked down at her salad with a new look of distaste. "Not this fucking rabbit food." She shook her head. "And fucking whole wheat pasta. If I don't have another serving of whole wheat pasta I'll die happily."

Delphine smiled. "I would love to just sit in a cafe with a nice cafe au lait and a book with no practice to have to worry about." She shook her head. "But the caffeine makes me jittery." She smiled at Cosima and shrugged.

Just then, a group of Russian skaters walked by, eyeing the tables and saying something in Russian that no one at the table understood. One of the women grimaced as she looked from

Delphine to Cosima and back to Delphine, turning to find a table as far away from them as possible.

Delphine's shoulders slumped in response.

"Ignore them, Lait." Isabelle shook her protein shake vigorously. "They're all just fucking jealous because the only love they get is from the sticks shoved up their asses."

Casting an unsure glance at Cosima, Delphine found sad and understanding eyes watching her. With a tight-lipped smile, she reached out and wiped a bit of orange sauce off of Cosima's chin. "You're a mess."

There was a long quiet moment before Isabelle cleared her throat. "So...how did Monsieur Allard react?"

With a heavy sigh, Delphine stabbed at her salad. "How do you think he reacted?"

*The sound of a cell phone splitting against the wall echoed through the empty locker room and Delphine flinched, wondering just how many cell phones her coach was going to go through this trip.*

*"What were you thinking, Delphine?" The older man was breathing heavily, having just gotten off the phone.*

*Delphine shrugged, not really knowing how to respond. "I wasn't." She didn't have the response he was looking for. Her father had warned her of the trials and tribulations of the Olympic path. He had warned her that as a public figure, everything she did would be under examination. She could hear his words in her head, telling her to watch every step she took because she was standing on ice, each step having the potential of cracking under the weight of her decisions. "I wasn't thinking at all."*

*"And that is your problem." The man shook his head. "You don't think. You don't think about how this looks for yourself, for your sponsors, for France!" He sat down in front of Delphine, taking a deep breath. "Look, I can't tell you how to live your life. I am not your parents. I am not your manager. I am your coach. " Putting his hands on her shoulders, he gave her a pained look. "Please...stop and think for a minute before you make life-changing decisions."*

*And it was true. Delphine hadn't thought about any of that. She didn't think about her sponsors, the companies that paid for her equipment and allowed her to train almost all year round. She didn't think about the backlash she would get. Frankly, when Cosima was with her, she couldn't help but live in a tiny bubble that included just the two of them, their biggest problem being when the Olympics ended and they were forced to go two separate ways. "I'm sorry." And she was sorry. Not for choosing Cosima, no she could never be sorry for that. She was sorry for ignoring her duty as an Olympian which was to represent her country with honor and pride. Her phone had been ringing non-stop since their kiss and she had just turned her phone off, ignoring the world for one more day.*

*Monsieur Allard took a deep breath and sat back, looking at his ringing phone and hitting ignore. "I'm going to be calling your manager and your parents." When Delphine's head shot up, he rose an eyebrow. "It is my job to make sure that you are in the best skating condition. It is less than one week now before you have to compete and I am cutting you off." He reached into the plastic bag he had brought, handing her a phone. "You haven't been answering your phone, which is good. Don't. Turn it off, hide it in a drawer. I am the only one with this number."*

*Delphine's brows came together in confusion. "I don't understand." She looked at the phone in*

*her hand, nothing too advanced but at least had a keyboard for texting.*

*"You are officially cut off from the rest of the world. If there is a negative reaction, I'm not going to let it affect your skating." He shook his head. "They cannot pull you from the Olympics for being gay, so we're not going to worry about sponsors or Olympic commissions or anything. No more missed practices. No more missed trainings or work outs." He handed her a schedule. "I don't care if you are shitting out rainbows and hearts with this new lesbian experience of yours, but I'm not going to let you flush years of hard work down the toilet with it."*

*Her mouth open in surprise, Delphine didn't even know how to respond to that.*

*"A fucking American." He shook his head. "You couldn't have gotten involved with someone from France?"*

"Pfft. Has he seen the French snowboarding team?" Isabelle cringed. "So, you can't talk to your parents or anything?"

With a shake of her head, Delphine tore open her milk, taking a long sip. "I haven't talked to them all week really." She saw Cosima watching her, shoulders tense despite trying to look unphased, and gave her a small smile. Despite having talked in length about the American's family, she hadn't given much information about her own. From the inquisitive look on the shorter woman's face, she knew they would end up discussing her family sooner than later, but what did she really have to say? She wasn't close to them like Cosima was. She was an only child of a baker and a school teacher. She didn't have an army of supporters printing her name on tacky t-shirts and waving flags.

"So...he doesn't want you to end the relationship does he?" It was a question that Cosima was wondering, but Isabelle was the only one who dared to voice it.

"Non. Apparently he thinks Cosima is good for my skating." Delphine quickly shook her head before looking at Cosima, seeing the form almost instantly relax in relief. "He did give me more trainings and work-outs to focus on over the next week. Looks like I've gotten things scheduled for most daylight hours." Delphine watched as, with the word daylight, Cosima's lips twitched into a half-smile, her intentions very obviously showing her intentions for the evening hours.

Looking between the two, Isabelle shook her head. "All this time trying to find a way for you to tap into the emotional side of skating, Lait, and all it took was a good lay."

Delphine's head shot up so quickly to look at her fellow skater, it was amazing she didn't get whiplash. Her eyes were full of horror as a blush spread over her cheeks. "Isa!"

Cosima just smirked before taking another bite of her hamburger, humming softly in delight to herself.

## Chapter 19

"Merde." Delphine collapsed on the bed, her arm thrown over her eyes. "I'm so exhausted." She felt the bed move and hands removed the duffle bag strap from her shoulder that she had collapsed with. "I am sure Monsieur Allard is punishing me with all these work outs."

"Well...training is important." Cosima placed the duffle bag on a chair before sitting on the floor in front of the woman, beginning to untie her shoes.

Uncovering her eyes, Delphine looked at the American who had a thoughtful look on her face as she tried to untie the knot in her shoe laces. "What are you doing?"

Cosima looked up over the frame of her glasses, a small smile tugging on her lips. "Apparently domesticizing myself."

Her brows contracting at the word, Delphine sat up, watching as the woman removed her shoes and put them neatly to the side. "Translation please." There were many times in the past two weeks that she'd been stumped by the woman's language. The American had a tendency to use a lot of words she was sure the woman had made up completely, but usually she could decipher what she was talking about.

With a smirk, Cosima moved into a kneel, ending up just inches from the woman's lips. After a brief moment, she looked down, pushing the blonde's jacket off her shoulders and folding it neatly, setting it on the quilt. "You know...doing girlfriend type things." She slowly dragged a fingertips down the length of the woman's arm before removing her watch, setting it on the bedside table.

Delphine thought about that word, girlfriend, for a moment before it dawned on what the woman was saying. "Ah. Copine."

"Copine?" Cosima repeated, leaning forward and bracing herself with an arm on either side of the blonde's thighs.

"Oui. Ma petite copine." Delphine closed the distance and kissed her softly. She brought her hand up to caress the woman's jaw but was surprised when the American pulled away.

"Petite...is that a short joke?" Cosima smiled before she stood up with a grunt, wrinkling her nose at the blonde. "You need a shower." She pulled a small bottle from her pocket and set it on the bedside table. "And if you're good, I can help you with a massage before your muscles start to tense up." Pulling the woman to her feet, there was no resistance from Delphine as she began to tug her layers of clothes off. She soon found nimble fingers beginning to remove her own clothes and she gave the blonde a look. "Hey. You're the one that needs the shower."

Delphine gave her an innocent look as she undid the woman's belt. "Oui, but I am just so tired." She tugged the woman's shirt up and over her head. "I may need help. I wouldn't want to slip and fall."

"Uh huh." Removing her glasses, Cosima chuckled, pulling the blonde with her into the bathroom, reaching in to turn the water on before tying her dreads up and out of the way. She rose her eyebrows up at Delphine who was watching her. "Stop." She laughed as a hand ran up her side. Stepping into the shower, gesturing for the blonde to get in. After a moment of bumping elbows and near slips, Cosima grinned, watching as the water cascaded down the skater's body. Clearing her throat, she reached past the woman for the loofa and body wash. With determination,

she began working up a lather, starting at the woman's shoulders and gently scrubbing the woman's skin. "Your shoulders are like... really tight." She commented as she felt the tense muscles.

"We were doing some light weights today in the gym." Delphine looked over a shoulder at the shorter woman, raising an eyebrow. The American looked very determined as the constant scrubbing across down her back was sending chills through her body.

Cosima just returned the look with a smile that was all teeth and tongue. "My day was so boring without you today." She watched as the soapy bubbles traveled down the length of the blonde's body. "I totally just laid in bed watching videos of ice skating and kittens...and ice skating kittens." She laughed.

"What?"

With a shrug, Cosima took a step forward, feeling the warmth radiating off the woman's body. She slipped her arms around her abdomen, beginning a gentle scrubbing of the toned muscles. "I dunno. I just really missed you." She brushed her lips against a shoulder.

After an agonizingly delicious moment, Delphine looked down as she noticed the rough scrubbing had turned to slippery caresses. At some time, the American had dropped to loofa, instead sliding soapy hands over her body. Part of her mind wondered if she should mention it, but as hands slipped up her chest and over her breasts, she leaned back against the shorter yet solid form, biting her bottom lip as she covered one of the woman's hands with her own, pressing it closer.

"I don't know if this is actually getting you any cleaner." Cosima commented, gently biting the slope of her neck. Her free hand slipped down the center line of Delphine's body, passing her belly button and trailing a path of fire down pale skin.

Moaning softly, Delphine turned in the woman's arms, surprising the brunette who now found herself pinned to the cool tile wall. "Getting clean..." She braced herself against the wall with one hand as she caressed the brunette's face, running her thumb over the still bruised cheek bone. "Is that what this was about?" She asked, leaning forward to capture the woman's lips eagerly.

Cosima pulled the woman closer so their bodies were flush against each other, gasping in shock as a thigh slipped between her own, water and soap preventing any resistance and surprising her with its sudden presence.

"Sorry." Delphine laughed.

"No no...it's good." Cosima pulled her face forward again for another kiss. She moved to wrap her leg around the woman's hip but was met with slippery flesh that held no grip and her leg clumsily slipped back down.

Delphine fought the urge to laugh again, especially at the frustrated growl that vibrated against her lips. She decided to help the shorter woman, slipping her hand down to lift and brace the woman's thigh against her hip, sufficiently pressing herself closer to the heat radiating from the woman's core.

As the thigh pressed closer, Cosima moaned. She felt the one leg holding herself up buckle slightly and nearly slipped if not for the arm that suddenly slipped around her waist. She yelped slightly at the pressure that was applied against the bruise on her side.

"Merde." Delphine moved her hand. "I'm sorry, Cos..." She was cut off by a laughing kiss.

Breaking off the kiss, Cosima laughed. "Ok...maybe we should take this somewhere else?" She

reached past the blonde, shutting off the water. She grabbed the large fluffy towel and began drying the blonde off.

The towel against her already hyper-sensitive skin left a wake of desire in Delphine that she could barely tolerate. Instead, she pulled the woman to her, kissing her deeply as they walked backwards towards the bed.

"The blankets!" Cosima laughed as their wet forms fell onto the bedspread.

"Don't care." Was all Delphine said as she covered the brunette's body, her hips settling between strong thighs and nimble fingers began an invigorating exploration.

## Chapter 20

"Tell me about your family."

Delphine looked down at the brunette who was curled up against her side, her fingertip tracing circles around her belly button. "My family?"

Pushing herself onto her elbows, Cosima faced her. Without her glasses or signature dark make-up, Delphine could see the resemblances to her siblings. "Yeah, like your mom and dad...do you have any brothers or sisters?" She tilted her head. "Do you have any pets? A cat maybe?" She grinned, her tongue poking out from between her teeth.

"No, I was an only child. I don't have the time for any animals, just a poisson..." She wrinkled her nose at the word and the woman's confused look. "A fish." She added. "Cyrano."

"Cyrano?" Cosima laughed and it was like the room got a bit brighter. "That's a fantastic name." She stretched slightly. "I've got a ten year old tortoise named Supreme Chancellor Jean-Baptiste McDarwinpants."

Delphine blinked, her brain trying to wrap itself around the sentence. "Pardon?"

There was another laugh and Cosima hid her face. "Yeah well we were a household of preteen girls. We all wanted to contribute to the name and we were all pretty nerdy. Supreme Chancellor is a Star Wars reference on behalf of Alison. Jean-Baptiste is the first name of the main villain in the movie Fifth Element on behalf of Helena. You can guess where Darwin came from and well Sarah just felt like mutilating my part of the name. So... Supreme Chancellor Jean-Baptiste McDarwinpants."

"That is the silliest thing I've ever heard. Must take forever when you call to him." Delphine rolled out of bed, slipping into a t-shirt that stopped a little higher than mid-thigh and just barely contained her modesty.

"Well...he's a tortoise. He doesn't respond to any name. He just sits around in the yard at my mom's eating lettuce and orange slices." Cosima laughed as she slipped into the t-shirt Delphine tossed at her, watching the blonde disappear into the bathroom. "I think that now I have more time I might get a dog." She looked down at the shirt, grinning at the French flag that was now prominently displayed across her chest. "I think I'll get my ass kicked if I step out of here wearing this."

"I can't have you sitting around my room naked." Delphine smirked as she stared at her reflection, pulling her hair into a loose bun. "Isa should be back soon."

Cosima slipped on her glasses as she pulled over her cell phone, taking the opportunity to check the text messages she found. Unlike the blonde who was cut off from the rest of the world, she'd been bombarded by texts and calls the past couple days. Thankfully there hadn't been any negativity from what her best friend back home had dubbed The Kiss Seen Around the World. "So you haven't told me about your parents." She called out in a distracted tone as she sent out a few quick responses.

Leaning against the doorway, Delphine watched as the American fiddled with her cell phone. Her fingers were twitching, wanting to log into one of the social networks she normally visited. She hadn't had her real phone in over two days now and she never thought she would miss it so much. Not knowing what the reaction the world was having was weighing on her and she sighed softly.

"What do you want to know?"

Looking up, Cosima smiled brightly at the sight of the blonde leaning against the doorframe. She couldn't resist snapping a picture, grinning broadly at the wry expression she caught on the woman's face. "I don't know. Are they still together? What do they do? Are they like super religious and will want to have the gay demons exorcised from you when you get home?" She said it with a playful tone that barely covered her nervousness. "Are they going to be in the crowd watching you?"

Grabbing her tablet, Delphine sat on the bed beside Cosima, leaning back against the wall. "They are still together. They're not overly religions, but I don't really know how they will take it." Resisting the urge to pull up one of the social apps, she instead pulled up her online photo account, bringing up a picture of herself with her parents. "I got them tickets but I don't know if they are coming." She shrugged. "They are always quite busy and don't have a lot of money." She pointed to her father who was taller than herself. "My father is a baker. We were a lot closer when I was younger. I would spend every day after school in his shop, helping him with preparing the dough for the next day." She gave the American a sad smile. "I stopped having time for that the more I got into skating." With a shrug she flipped to a picture of her mother. "Maman is a school teacher for small children." Delphine blushed when older pictures of her as a child started to appear, letting the American take the tablet and just watching her flip through pictures.

"Oh my god, look at you." Cosima squealed as she got to a picture of a young Delphine covered in paint, her mother patiently cleaning the paint off her cherub cheek.

. "My father is very...basic." She reached for the English word...not sure if she chose the right one. "Maman is more an artist but teaches for the money." She shrugged.

Cosima gave the blonde a stealthy grin before emailing herself a few of the pictures.

Delphine just rolled her eyes. "I don't think they will be upset about you." She pulled her knees up and leaned her forearms across them. "They never really pried into my relationships. I think my father will be upset about the...the spectacle."

Looking up, Cosima pursed her lips for a moment before leaning in for a kiss. "I'm sure they'll be too distracted by your shiny gold medal to think about the spectacle." She grinned.

Delphine tilted her head in acknowledgement. "Perhaps." She smiled as she watched the woman flipping through the photos, the American's eyes lighting up as she went through the assortment of old photos. "You are very beautiful." It was a point-blank statement of fact and Delphine noticed the look of shock in the woman's eyes. Everyone refers to the American as cute...adorable...and she can definitely be those things. With her hazel eyes peering up at her through her dark lashes, Delphine felt the pang in her chest at the woman's beauty.

"I think between the two of us, we know who would win the beauty contest." Cosima smiles, but it's a half smile that's coy and withdrawn, nothing like the normal confidence she displayed. "But, thank you." She chewed on her bottom lip, looking down at the tablet in her hand.

Reaching out, Delphine curled a finger under the American's chin, tipping her face up and pressing their lips together. She felt the woman's lips part as an exploring tongue emerged to deepen the kiss.

As if having perfect timing, the room door opened.

Isabelle stopped two steps in, not as surprised at the near-naked women making out as she probably should have been. "Do you two spend all your time together in bed?" She dropped her

practice bag on her bed with a loud huff.

Laughing softly, Cosima turned to wave at the skater. "Hey."

"Always so fucking cute I want to throw up." Isabelle muttered as she disappeared into the bathroom. "Why the fuck is there water everywhere?"

Delphine hid her face behind a hand, laughing.

## Chapter 21

"Are you nervous?"

The voice came out of the darkness, rousing Delphine from the semi-consciousness she was floating in and out of. She looked down and could barely make out the features on the American's face. "How can I be anything but happy when I have you here?" Maybe it was the half-conscious state, or maybe it was because it was past midnight, but for some reason that was the answer that emerged. There was an extended silence after that, giving her a moment to think about what she had said. Was it too much? Did it make her seem clingy? She was about to say something else to correct the situation when she heard a snuffle and she swore she could feel a wetness against her chest where the woman's head was resting. "Cosima?"

A laugh and another snuffle. "Yeah, sorry." She felt the woman roll away and a chill rushed against her side as the bed shifted and Cosima disappeared into the bathroom. She frowned, sitting up in bed and switching the light on. Cosima's roommate had already left to return to the states two days ago, but Delphine still felt exposed and reached for Cosima's sleeping shirt that hung off the corner of the nightstand. She hugged her knees to her chest as she waited patiently for the woman to emerge.

It was much longer than she thought it would be and she felt her heart sink at the sight of red rimmed eyes and an unsure smile. "You didn't have to get up." Cosima's voice was shaky and emotional as she didn't return to bed, but instead leaned against the doorframe of the bathroom.

"Come here." Delphine held up a hand to the woman. There was a hesitation for a long moment until the woman pushed off the doorframe and came to the bed, sitting on the edge. "What is going on, ma chérie?"

"I feel like an asshole. You have to skate tomorrow and I'm crying like a baby." Cosima rubbed at her eyes, sighing softly when she felt the blonde move and settle behind her, warm thighs pressing against either side of her own and an arm wrapping around her waist as a chin rested against her shoulder. "I don't want to unload my shit on you."

Delphine thought about that, brushing her lips across the bare shoulder blade. "I can assure you, Cosima, that nothing you tell me would be worse than the thousand scenarios my mind would come up with if you don't tell me."

Cosima nodded, leaning back slightly. Her fingers covered the hand that was splayed across her abdomen. "Fair enough." There was a pause as she gathered her thoughts, thinking about where to start. "I'm worried about what's going to happen." There was another pause and a shuddered breath. "I don't want this to end and I'm worried that after Sunday, it will."

Swallowing audibly, Delphine rested her cheek against the woman's shoulder, breathing the scent of Cosima's skin and tightening her hold in a hug that was almost desperate. She knew exactly what the woman was feeling. She'd been hiding from having to deal with it herself for the past week. She knew they would have to talk about it eventually, but she was happy living in the blissful moments that lust and new love lent. "I don't want it to end either." She sighed, trying to think of what they could possibly do. "I know it will be hard, but if you are willing to give us a try, I would really like that."

Cosima sniffled. "I'm pretty sure you've ruined me for anyone else. In case I haven't told you yet, you're like totally amazing." She shook her head slightly. "We have two completely different lives on two completely different sides of the planet." Her eyes closed as she soaked up the heat from

the form behind her. "I'm going back to school and I'm probably going to have to find a job and you're going to be in France training."

"I don't know what I will be doing after this, Cosima. What if I don't medal? I don't think they will send me again next Olympics." It was something that was weighing on her. She didn't want to mention how the next two days really were going to either make or break her future in skating.

"You're going to medal. There's no doubt in that." Cosima sighed. "You'll be stuck in a rink somewhere in France for the next four years preparing."

Delphine laughed. She turned her head to brush kisses along the rim of the American's ear, nibbling the soft skin and feeling the woman take a deep breath. "You know, just because I am a French skater does not mean I have to train in France." She felt the woman's body freeze, and quickly continued. "It would not be the first time a skater did that."

"You mean..." Cosima's voice drifted off as if she was too scared to continue, and maybe she was.

With a nod, Delphine nuzzled the woman's neck. "In fact, there are a few very prestigious training centers in California, one of which a past French Olympian trained at."

The thought was almost too real for Cosima. She had spent the past two weeks expecting to have her heart broken when they eventually parted ways. Never had she imagined that the woman would look into finding possible solutions. She couldn't imagine even the possibility of what the woman was suggesting. "You know..." She gulped as her fingertips lightly began to trace the fingers that were pressed against her stomach. "France has some of the best snowboarding spots in the world." She nibbled nervously on her bottom lip before adding. "I've always wanted to see what the slopes at Chamonix were all about."

Despite the feelings that Americans all seemed to share, Delphine never found the French language to be very sexy. It was guttural and sounded very harsh at times. Hearing it completely marred by the snowboarder's horrible American accent, Delphine had never heard anything sexier. "Will you teach me to snowboard at *Chamonix*?" She whispered with her lips pressed against her earlobe, correcting the pronunciation.

Cosima smiled, her tongue poking out from between teeth. "I don't know. I hear it's pretty intense. We might have to go somewhere else, like *Serre Chevalier*." She let the r roll off her tongue, knowing full well that it was very incorrect pronunciation. She looked down as the hand that was pressed against her stomach slipped up to cover a breast, sending a thrill of anticipation through her.

"I don't think you even tried on that one, ma chérie." Delphine squeezed the soft flesh, her other hand scratching lightly along the inside of the American's thigh. She gasped as the shorter woman spread her thighs, forcing Delphine's open as well. "I want to make as many memories as possible." She whispered, her fingertips tracing the length of Cosima's center with just the barest of touches. "I want to memorize the way you feel, mon amour." As her hands and lips traveled a path of reverence, she could feel the sting of tears in her eyes. She knew that her future would hold many sleepless nights, but tonight she couldn't bear the thought of wasting a moment on sleep.

## Chapter 22

Cosima had never been to an ice skating competition before, so she was mildly surprised when she realized it was nothing like snowboarding. The outdoor venue of her event left for a more laid back party atmosphere that she and her fellow athletes would crowd on the bleachers, leaning back against each other and laughing. At snowboarding events, there was a complete lack of organization or areas separated by country as this one seemed to be. There was obviously a section which was highly dominated by the Russian fans. That was obvious by the red flags and signs.

That of course posed another question. Was she supposed to sit with the Americans? Now, Cosima was normally very patriotic, at least in public. That was the role that they all played as Olympians. The Olympics were born of pride and representation for your country. Love, on the other hand, didn't give a damn what country you were from. Despite her country of origin, Cosima felt no connection whatsoever to the American figure skaters. The only ones she knew of were the ones that scandals normally revolved around.

"Decisions, decisions. Where exactly will the American traitor sit?"

Cosima jumped at the voice in her ear and spun around. "Sarah!" She pulled her sister into a hug. "What the hell are you doing here? Who else is here?"

Sarah laughed as she slung her arm over the snowboarder's shoulder. "What? I'm not good enough for you?" She started pulling the woman with her towards the area she had already commandeered to sit in. "It's just me. This ticket was bloody expensive considering I probably paid three times what they originally went for and had to trust a shady guy in a hood. Figured you would need someone to sit with since this lot can be a little uptight."

Cosima was relieved to see they were sitting in an area that was more a muddling of the smaller countries. Being as early as they were, they got seats in the front row, closer to the barrier and she wondered if Delphine would be able to see her in the crowd. She looked around the crowd and was again reminded of how strict and uptight figure skating was.

"This looks like a tough crowd, yeah?" Sarah offered her a bottle of water.

"Yeah." Cosima sipped her water. "It's nothing like the slopes that's for sure."

There was a silence between them as they people watched for a minute, everyone starting to fill in the seats. Cosima was idly playing with her phone, reading through some of the text messages she'd ignored the past few days.

"So...how did she take the whole sponsor fiasco?" Sarah spoke as she chewed on a pretzel that magically appeared out of nowhere. Cosima couldn't help but wonder what else the woman had in her purse.

"She doesn't know anything about it." Cosima sighed heavily. It's not that she wanted to lie about it. It's not that she enjoyed keeping things from the French woman, but she had agreed to not talk about it. Delphine had regretfully complied with being cut off from the world at the suggestion of her coach, and frankly she wasn't going to ruin that. "Her coach cut her off so she could focus on her skating."

"What?" Sarah gave her a confused look.

"Yeah, took away her cell phone, told her not to read any news or log onto facebook and stuff." Cosima scrunched her nose as she accepted a bit of the soft pretzel.

"That's pretty crazy." Sarah dusted the loose granules of salt from her lap. "Then again, this whole thing is crazy."

Cosima found it funny really. She didn't expect at any time that she would go to the Olympics, find love, become a part of an international lesbian scandal, and be ok with it. "You're telling me."

*"You know, you look pretty hot with your hair up like that." Cosima commented as she laid on the bed, watching as Delphine applied a liberal amount of hairspray to her hair that was put up on a pony tail.*

*Delphine had paused, looking at her reflection before shaking her head, beginning to apply a light dusting of make-up. "I look like an uptight and frigid ice princess."*

*Cosima had smirked. "Yeah but a hot one." She slipped out of bed, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes. "You're going to do great today." She wrapped her arms around the woman's waist, resting her head between her shoulder blades. "Nervous?"*

*Applying the red lipstick, Delphine sighed softly. "Less about skating and more about the press interviews." She turned in the woman's arms, grinning mischievously before leaning down and pressing a kiss against the American's cheek, leaving almost a perfect print of lips on the woman's skin.*

*"Hey!" Cosima wrinkled her nose at the mark, but didn't wipe it away. "You are a brat." She pushed the blonde backwards until she was seated on the edge of the bed.*

*Delphine laughed as she found her lap full of a naked and wriggling American. "Cosima, what are you doing?"*

*"I think a 'before your awesome performance' selfie is in order." Cosima said as-a-matter-of-factly, lifting up her cell phone.*

*"You realize you are naked." With an embarrassed smile, Delphine allowed the spunky American to take a series of photos of the two of them, from the shoulders up of course, eventually ending with a heated kiss that made the skater have to push the woman off her lap or risk being late.*

"Earth to Cos." Sarah jarred the woman's daze by punching her on the shoulder. "I hate to hear what you were thinking about."

Cosima at least had the decency to blush as she shrugged. "Sorry. I'm just still a little overwhelmed by everything that's happened."

"Yeah I bet." Sarah gave her sister a tight-lipped smile. "So...you moving France then? It's not all that bad. I went a few times when I was living in London."

Pulling up the pictures from earlier, Cosima smiled at the tolerant yet delighted look on the blonde's face. "You know I could never leave you losers." She sighed softly putting the phone away. "I don't know what's going to happen, but we're gonna make it work."

Sarah thought about that for a minute. "So I'm guessing this isn't your standard Olympic hook up?" When Cosima closed her eyes and smiled, Sarah grinned, punching her again. "You are so far gone, you're in deep shit." Sarah laughed before pulling her into a one armed hug.

"Pardon."

Cosima was laughing when she looked up at the man that had interrupted them. "Hello." She tilted her head in question as the man stopped talking. He was looking back and forth between the two, a confused look on her face and there was a slight tingling of recognition in her mind.

"You alright?" Sarah asked in confusion.

The older man nodded, removing his brimmed hat. "Pardon, but one of you is Mademoiselle Niehaus..um...Cosima?"

The French accent was all it took and the puzzle pieces snapped into place. "Holy crap." Cosima stood quickly. "You're Delphine's dad."

## Chapter 23

Cosima quickly offered her hand to the older man. "I'm Cosima. Sorry, I wasn't expecting to meet you today." She grinned as the hand was accepted and not dismissed. "This is my sister, Sarah."

"Enchanté." He smiled softly, a smile that Cosima had become very familiar with. "Forgive me for intruding." He spoke slowly as though searching for each word. He nodded to Sarah. "You look very similar."

With a laugh, Cosima bit the tip of her tongue. "We are identical...identical quadruplets." She saw recognition and was glad she didn't have to explain further, once again wishing she'd taken French instead of Latin in high school. "You know who I am?"

"My wife saw you, but does not speak English well." He gave a half smile that was all Delphine. "She has sent me as a...a ice cracker?"

Cosima smiled brightly at that. "Ice breaker." She corrected. "It is a pleasure to meet you. I know Delphine will be glad to hear that you are here."

He shook his head. "Monsieur Allard spoke to us of his plan, so we have not been able to talk to her."

Cosima nodded. "I know that it's been hard for her." She rocked on her heels slightly. "She was just telling me yesterday that she misses talking to you."

The older man nodded. "I do not wish to leave my wife alone for too long, but will you give Delphine a message for me?" At Cosima's nod, he smiled. "Will you tell her that we love her and we are not upset."

"Yeah...Totally." Cosima grinned. She looked down at Sarah when the man turned to leave, her sister gesturing at the space they had taken up. "Oh! Um...Monsieur...Cormier?" She grimaced at the way the words sounded on her tongue, but thankfully the man stopped and turned. "Um, I know we're not in the French area or anything, but my sister and I are kinda spread out over here." By the confused look on the man's face, she bit her lip before continuing. "We have space here, if you two would like to join us?"

Understanding dawned on his face and he nodded. "That is very gracious of you. I will speak of your offer to my wife."

When the man left, Cosima gave Sarah a freaked out look. "Holy crap." She sat down roughly, turning to stare at her sister again. "Holy crap."

"And I thought this would be boring." Sarah smirked.

Delphine was stretching. She didn't want to think too much because she was afraid her nervousness would return. She had woken up that morning to a warm body and delicious memories and she was feeling pleasantly excited about the day. This would be the first time that Cosima would get to see her skating in person and although she should feel nervous, she didn't. She looked at the phone that was sitting on the bench beside her, suspiciously quiet. Monsieur Allard had made sure that she had a lot of space to herself but without any messages from Cosima, she was getting bored. The skating had started half an hour ago and she was part of the group that would warm up next. The current skaters were being shown on the televisions around the room, but Delphine never was one to care about others skating. She could hear the comments of the

other skaters at certain moments when there was a trip or a flopped landing.

Delphine sighed softly, reaching for her phone and sending off a quick text message to Cosima. She hoped the woman had shown up in time. This was definitely not the same audience that Cosima was used to with snowboarding. When her phone beeped, she quickly read the message.

*Hey Doll. Sorry I was busy chatting with some new friends.*

Her brows furrowing, Delphine quickly responded. "New friends?" She chewed on her bottom lip, trying to imagine who the woman could be talking to. New friends. What did that even mean? There was a delay in the response and she wondered if that was the American's fault, or the network.

*Sarah apparently got a ticket and we ran into a couple French folks that know you so I've been learning a whole bunch of new things I never knew about you..*

"What?" Delphine yelled at her phone in surprise. She looked around to make sure no one noticed her as she quickly responded. "What?" Tapping her fingers on her knee, Delphine looked at her phone impatiently. It seemed like the American was taking forever to respond and there were a million things that were going through her head. She chewed on a nail nervously. When her phone beeped she nearly dropped it.

*I think I should just show you.*

"What does that even mean?" Delphine looked at her phone. She glared at her phone as it didn't respond to her voiced question.

"Is everything alright, Delphine?"

The voice made Delphine jump in shock. Looking up, she found Monsieur Allard standing not far from her, a questioning look on his face. "Oui. Everything is fine." She waved him off, looking at her phone. There was another beep and she saw the symbol for a downloading photo. Watching the percentage count up, she sighed heavily. It was frustratingly slow and she guessed it was due to congested towers. This was worse than waiting for her turn to skate. It was far worse.

*Did you get it?*

Delphine blew out a frustrated breath, shaking the phone slightly as if physical coercion would make the device download faster. "No I haven't yet." She spoke to the phone, not wanting to risk interrupting the download by sending messages.

When the picture downloaded, Delphine dropped her phone. "What..." She reached down and picked up the device, closing her eyes to gather her wits before looking at it again. Cosima was smiling, sitting in the crowd. That would not be quite surprising if it weren't for the fact that she was sitting beside Delphine's father and mother. More surprisingly, her father had his arm around the American's shoulder. "You little shit." She whispered as she thought about the implications of the picture.

Her parents came. They had showed up to watch her skate. It wasn't often that they came to a competition, usually unable to take the time away from work.

Even better was that her parents were accepting of Cosima. She had no doubt in her mind that Cosima would eventually charm her parents into loving her, but she had thought she would at least get to see it in person. She quickly dialed the woman's number, waiting the long moment before it started ringing.

"Hey we were just talking about you." She could hear the smile in Cosima's voice.

Delphine closed her eyes. "Are they really there?" She could hear Sarah talking in the background and she swore she could hear her father speaking in English, a rare sound for her ears.

"Yeah." Cosima's voice was soft yet reassuring. "They said to tell you they love you and they're not upset."

Taking a deep breath, Delphine smiled, wishing she could be there with them. "I love you."

There was a pause before the American responded. "Ditto...obvs." The comment was nervous and Delphine imagined the woman sitting with her parents, trying to think of a way to covertly respond.

"Delphine...it is time to go." Monsieur Allard showed up out of nowhere seemingly, pointing to his watch.

Delphine sighed heavily. "Cosima..."

"I heard." The American cut her off. "Good luck even though you don't need it."

Hanging up the phone, Delphine grinned.

"Are you ready?" Her coach asked as he gestured for the blonde to proceed her out of the room.

"Obvs." She responded, nearly laughing at how ridiculous it sounded coming out of her mouth.

## Chapter 24

Delphine took a deep breath as she circled the ice, feeling the cold air coming off the slick surface. It was finally her turn to skate and when the music started, Delphine could feel the difference in her movement. As *La Petite Mort* echoed through the large room, she wondered if skating to this song was a wise decision for her anymore. For the short program, most skaters performed the same piece that they did in the team event, much like Delphine was doing now, but some changed to another performance all together. Delphine wasn't sure if she shouldn't have done that. She loved *Coeur De Pirate*, but with her current mindset, maybe it wasn't the best for her emotions.

A year ago when she had chosen the song to skate to, Monsieur Allard had agreed because he thought it would help her connect with the emotion of the song. Back then she had just enjoyed the soothing feel of the melody and a year later, she was afraid she would connect too much with the song. Now, with her impending separation from the American, she wondered if she ever connected with the song at all before. During her warm up, she had spotted the woman in the crowd. Of course she would manage to snag a front row seat. Of course she would be enthusiastically speaking with Delphine's parents, her hands flying around dramatically as they always did when she was talking. When their eyes locked, the hands turned into a gleeful wave that Delphine couldn't help but return.

Now her mind replayed the missing lyrics from the instrumental music and her heart lurched. As she pushed off into her first set of jumps, she remembered translating the words for *Cosima* as they lay in bed, the music playing softly from her tablet.

*A breathless moment*

On a late summer evening  
The angels have left  
And their faces stained white  
I think that it's too late  
To admit to you that I'm hurting  
With my dying heart  
And my memories stained white

Her skate touched down on the ice and she felt herself getting absorbed into the music as she transitioned into a spin. During her first performance, her brain had moved her through the motions, the routine almost second nature to her. This time, she was aware of every move. She could feel the fluidity of her muscles and the precision of her skates as each move flowed out of her.

*If they lose me, know that I'll be yours,*  
And nestled in his arms, death will cradle us  
Because if they lose me,  
It's only so I stay yours  
And nestled in his arms, death will cradle us

As she landed the jumps, she felt tears stinging her eyes but she pushed through the emotion. She wished she could go back to her first skate, where memories of soft flesh and silly banter had filled her mind, taking her away from the music and into a place of love. Now as the words echoed through her mind, she could only think of their impending separation. She could feel a chill on her cheek from a tear that broke free as she pushed off again.

*The rain runs down my temples*

The lightning is singing your descent

Huddled up against my life  
Your laughter echoes and then flees  
I think that it's too late  
To admit to you that I'm hurting  
My heart is not like it was before  
Because it softly falls asleep

Her skate hit the ice and she knew it was perfect, but she couldn't find it in her heart to be happy. The chorus repeated again as she began her complex spin combination and she felt the tears drying as they escaped, her body chilled from the ice cold air whipping around her body. She wanted nothing more than to feel Cosima's arms around her, to feel the warm skin she loved so much pressed against her own. She could hear the hammering of her heart in her ears as her rotations slowed, stopping in her ending pose. As the music died down, it was replaced by the sound of cheering and applause that matched the beating in her heart. With a half-hearted smile, she waved at the crowd, her eyes focusing on where Cosima was watching her, an odd look on her face as she clapped.

As she weaved around flowers that had been thrown onto the ice, she knelt down to pick up a stuffed animal, smiling softly as she hugged it to herself. As she hit dry land again, she was pulled into an even harder hug than before by Monsieur Allard and she reached up to wipe away the tears she didn't know she'd been crying. Her jacket settled over her shoulders and she attempted to put on a happy smile as she was suddenly faced with a dozen cameras focusing on her.

"You did good." Monsieur Allard whispered, his arm still draped around her shoulder in a one-armed hug.

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Cosima chewed on her thumbnail as she watched the replay on the big screen. The performance had been flawless to her untrained eye. She had been both enthralled and haunted by the music and moves combined. Maybe no one else noticed it, or maybe they did, but she was torn by the look of complete sadness that had shown on the skater's face almost the entire program. The camera focused on the woman's half-smile and red rimmed eyes and it was everything she could do to not hop over the wall and run to the blonde's side.

"Hey Cos...what's that song about?" Sarah's brow furrowed as she tried to understand why the woman looked so distraught.

Cosima didn't hear her. She was watching the blonde who was doing everything she could to keep up the cheerful facade. She pulled out her cell phone, sending off a quick text message.

"It is about love...and losing love." Delphine's father smiled as he hugged his wife with one arm, the woman dabbing at a tear-filled eye.

"Oh." Sarah looked at Cosima who was worrying away at a nail. She shook her head and slapped the hand away from the woman's mouth.

"Hey!"

"That's disgusting." Sarah grinned as she wrapped an arm around her sister, hugging her as they both watched the scoreboard.

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Delphine felt her phone vibrating in her jacket pocket and quickly checked it.

*I love you.*

She felt a genuine smile spread across her face as the chill began to fade, replaced by a subtly warmth that began to spread through her entire body. She took a deep breath before her eyes went up to the screen, time going by agonizingly slow.

74.97

There was a loud cheer and Delphine smiled as she was pulled into a fierce hug by her coach. She was currently in first place, but as always, there were still skaters left to perform. She waved at the crowd as she was ushered to the waiting room again.

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"First place is good, right?" Sarah was wondering why Cosima wasn't more excited by the news.

Cosima nodded. "Yes, she's in first place but there are still a bunch of skaters left. It's a good score though." She felt her phone buzz and looked down at it.

*I wish you were here with me right now. I love you. I will see you soon.*

Cosima sighed softly, wanting the same thing.

## Chapter 25

Delphine had lived most of her life so afraid of falling. Before the Olympics, she had been plagued with nightmares of fighting with gravity, fearing the impact of the sudden stop and the pain it brought. It wasn't until now, as a shorter and determined form scaled her body, pressing into her and spinning her out of control, that she welcomed it. Her world was turning upside down. She was shaking and fighting for breath, but it was delicious and she welcomed every second of it, just like she welcomed the lips that pressed against her own, tasting herself as well as a taste that was all Cosima. She had fallen so bad, and the impending pain was something that stained her future.

"I love you."

The words slipped passed her ear, mingled with the tears that escaped and she unclenched her fingers from the sheets, hugging the woman to her. It was everything she needed to feel whole again.

She had barely even made it to the back room and away from the prying eyes of the cameras when she was overcome with emotions. When all the skaters had finished their skate of the night, and Delphine still remained in first place, Monsieur Allard had retrieved her, doing his best to cheer her up for the obligatory interviews that had been set up, the questions having already been sorted through and pre-approved by her coach.

She had only gotten to see her parents for a moment since they hadn't gone through the required background checks required to visit the village. There had been hugs and meaningful words of encouragement and promises of dinner the following night no matter the outcome.

She and Cosima hadn't talked about it the entire ride back to the mountain village. No words were actually necessary as the American's hand was firmly locked with her own, a thumb rubbing across her knuckles. Cosima hadn't congratulated her. There were no celebrations and no packed nightclub scenes of dancing and sexual tension. The shorter woman had taken one look at her when they were finally alone and had pulled her into a kiss. She had wiped away the tears that had slowly begun to fall and placed soft kisses on her cheeks, whispering words of love and devotion that began the slow process of mending Delphine's broken shell.

"You should sleep." Cosima whispered, running fingertips up her abdomen that was glistening with sweat. She pulled the covers up over them, their bodies intertwined like a complicated puzzle of flesh and bones.

Instead, Delphine rolled over to pin the American to the mattress, her fingertips caressing the soft skin of her jaw. "I don't want to waste a single moment with you." Delphine brushed her lips down the woman's neck, her hips settling between the woman's thighs. "I want to memorize every freckle, every dip, every curve."

Cosima hummed softly in delight but shook her head at the same time, pulling the woman up to meet her gaze. "As much as I love being at your insatiable mercy, and believe me, I can't believe I'm totally saying this, but you need sleep." She hugged the woman's body to her. "I'll be right here all night." She tucked the blonde hair behind Delphine's ear, turning on her side as she settled beside her. "I'm not going anywhere."

Delphine just nodded, her emotional drain already having an effect on her as she felt her eyelids getting heavy. The last thing she remembered from that night was soft kisses being placed along her shoulder and arm as finger stroked soothingly through her hair, and the feeling of falling.

---

It had seemed like forever since Delphine ran. As the gravel crunched under her shoes, she was careful to time each breath. She had woken up over an hour ago, using the moment to study the American woman's face relaxed in sleep. She would have stayed there all morning, but she had to clear her head and so close to the end of the games, the track had been deserted.

She was in first place and she had one more performance left. Everything would come down to four minutes on the ice and she was feeling very overwhelmed. Earplugs were firmly planted in her ears as she listened to the song she would be performing her free skate to. God she had been so naive choosing the song that was playing. La Petite Mort had been hard enough, how was she supposed to skate to this song? In comparison, La Petite Mort was child's play.

Coeur de Pirate's Place de la République filled every step she took, threatening to destroy her resolve that was still fragile from the night before. She used to love the way the song started with a simple piano, the melody starting slow and speeding up as it progressed, the orchestra entering in halfway through. It was a perfect song for a long program, but now it was the lyrics that destroyed her.

Maybe it had been fate. What were the chances that she would be here in Russia, completely in love with someone that lived a world away, skating to a song that sang their story. And it was their story, through and through. A woman traveling overseas falls in love while on vacation despite the fact that they lived an ocean apart. It wasn't just their story, but it had the ending she feared the most: a tearful goodbye as she is forced to face the reality of returning home. And wasn't that just what was happening? Their days together were numbered and god only knew what would happen. They both had their own lives thousands of miles away. Sure they'd mentioned tentative possibilities, but there was still so much possibility for heartbreak.

She had been so focused on her thoughts that she didn't notice the form running beside her until a hand snaked out and pulled her earbud out.

"Merde!" Delphine looked to find a lopsided smirk and sleepy hazel eyes watching her as she slowed down. "Are you trying to give me a heart attack?"

Cosima shook her head. "Of course not, but I called your name like three times and you know how much I hate running." She rested her hands on her knees, trying to catch her breath after the half sprint she had done to try to catch up to the blonde. "How are you feeling today?"

Delphine shrugged, feeling her own breath coming back under control. "Better and worse." She sighed softly. "I'm sorry I left you in bed. I just needed to clear my mind."

Nodding, Cosima waved her off. "No it's cool...Did you..." She bit her bottom lip as she stretched her back. "Did you want me to leave you alone for a bit?"

Looking at the American, Delphine smiled. What was so bad about just giving in and deciding they were meant to be together? Nothing. "I want a kiss."

"Well..." Cosima grinned, hooking her fingers in the edge of the skater's workout pants. "I can definitely do that."

With their lips pressed together, Delphine gave in. She gave in to accepting the possibility that they would make it. Even though they would be saying goodbye soon, it wouldn't be forever. Breaking off the kiss, she smiled, leaning her forehead against the American's.

"How about some breakfast? I'll buy." Cosima joked, bumping her nose against the blonde's.

"Cheeky American." Delphine responded, her fingers intertwining with the brunette's as she allowed herself to be pulled towards the cafe.

## Chapter 26

"Cosima?"

Cosima was leaning against the brick wall of the building, her eyes squinting against the afternoon sun. "Delphine?" She grinned the way that Delphine loved, one corner of her mouth higher than the other, her head tilted just slightly to the side.

Delphine had been rocking on her heels as she contemplated closing the distance between their bodies. They had just had a light snack after her short ice time and it was getting close to the time she had to get ready. She sipped the bottle of water she had as they stood outside the back door of the building, the athletes entrance pretty desolate at this time of the afternoon. She was still a little nervous about being out in the open, unknown eyes on them, prying on their moments that were things she considered private. "Will you do me a favor?" It was different when they were in areas restricted to just athletes. This was a public building.

Cosima tilted her head in question. "Anything."

Delphine gave in and moved closer, just inches from actually touching the snowboarder's body. "Kiss me?"

That grin widened impossibly as fingertips hooked into the edge of Delphine's workout pants, pulling her closer. Their bodies molded together, Cosima's arms slipping around her waist, close enough to feel the woman's heated breath against her own lips. "As you wish." She chuckled just before capturing the blonde's lips in a kiss that seared into both of their memories, ignoring the fact that they were out in public in a hostile country that hated their relationship.

After a long moment, Delphine pulled away, leaning her forehead against the woman's. "Thank you."

Cosima smiled.

"Oi! Stop acting creepy!" Sarah punched Cosima in the shoulder, getting her attention. "It's bad enough you got me here watching what's basically the bloody ballet on ice, but you can't be zoning out on me when I don't know a lick of French to share with your new in-laws." A devious grin spread across her face as she nudged her sister. "Must have been a crazy night if you're sittin' here off your rocker, grinning like an idiot."

Cosima's eyes doubled as she cast a look back at Mr. and Mrs. Cormier who were thankfully not paying attention. "Oh my god. Ix-nay on the ex-talk-say." She growled between her teeth in her best pig Latin. "And they're not my in-laws, Punk." She snatched the half eaten hot dog from Sarah's hands, taking a big bite.

"Shite. Forgot what you were like when you aren't on your crazy diet." Sarah rolled her eyes, sipping from her cup of soda. "No more worrying about ingredients...just eating whatever the hell you see." She chuckled as they watched the ice being resurfaced after the last group of skaters had performed. Each performance was taking twice as long as the night before and it was turning out to be a long night. "You know when you get home, there's going to be the biggest party every, right?" She nudged the snowboarder. "We've got a gold medal to celebrate."

Cosima didn't want to think about things after the Olympics. She had college apps to fill out, a job to find...a girl to miss...fuck. There was really only one thing she could think of that would help. "Hey when we get home, I need you to call Felix and the boys. I don't know if I'm gonna be able

to deal sober."

Sarah didn't have to ask what she meant. Instead she just draped an arm over her sister's shoulder, pulling her close for a lopsided hug. "You know we're all going to be there for you."

Cosima gave her a tight lipped smile as a kiss was placed to her temple. Everyone was going to be there for her, except the one person she needed.

---

Four minutes. Delphine took a deep breath as she took to the ice, easily skating around the perimeter of the ice as the previous skater's scores were read off and she did her best to ignore it. She had spotted Cosima quickly and smiled. Her name was read by the announcer and she smiled at the crowd, waving quickly before taking her spot in the center of the ice. Before each performance there was always 2 or three seconds of complete silence as she waited for the music to start and she closed her eyes for a moment, taking a deep breath and thought of her favorite lopsided grin framed by black dreads just as the piano started and she pushed off.

Choreography. Each performance always involved so much choreography, but even more so for the free skate. Being almost twice as long as the short program, it offered more time for jumps, spins, and filling the in-betweens with choreography. Skating was part skill, part hard work, and part just waving your arms around with fancy footwork to make the time go by quicker and somehow trying to look graceful while doing it.

*"Skate as if this is the last time she will see you skate."*

Delphine blinked as she soared across the ice, kicking off into her first set of jumps. Monsieur Allard had not wasted any time in finding the inspiration that would drive Delphine to do her best. As she landed the three quick jumps, she was flying across the ice, her skates scraping across the ice as she worked through the choreographed footwork, the music playing loudly over the intercom.

*Don't forget me.*

I will wait for you at least long enough to say  
that I had wanted to take the biggest risk.

The lyrics that were missing from the song were not missing from her mind as she kicked off the ice into a double axel that transitioned into a combination spin. As she tested the limits of her flexibility, she felt the limits of her composure being tested.

---

"Shite, this is some aerobic type stuff." Sarah mumbled, watching the blonde practically skipping across the ice in tune to the music that was picking up, making little hops and spins with ease. She looked at her sister who's eyes were rimmed with tears and she sighed softly, wrapping her arm around her shoulder again.

Cosima was gnawing on her thumb as she watched the form moving across the ice, the picture of grace and skill. When the blonde kicked off and was in the air spinning, Cosima held her breath until her skates touched the ice again, landing perfectly in tempo with the instrumental piece. The words weren't in the song the blonde skated to, but Cosima knew exactly what the song was about.

*"You haven't told me what you're skating to tonight."*

*Delphine paused for a brief second before quickly binding her pony tail. "I know."*

*Cosima gave her a confused look, not sure why the blonde was being so aloof. "Are you going to*

*tell me?"*

*With a quick nod, Delphine moved over to the bed, reaching for her tablet. "I..." She sighed softly, searching for the video she'd bookmarked earlier, knowing the American was going to ask. She didn't say anything else but handed the tablet and disappeared into the bathroom.*

*Her confusion growing, Cosima hit play, smiling when she was it was subtitled in English. Her smile only lasted until the chorus started.*

*And I don't know if you're worth it anymore  
It's rather hard to be sure  
And when you are in Vincennes  
That evening, don't forget me  
I will wait for you long enough to say  
that I wanted to take the greatest risk  
An evening that made me so sad  
An evening at Republique Square*

*She felt her heart beating quickly as she risked a glance to the bathroom where the blonde had disappeared. When the next verse started, so did the tears that threatened to destroy her.*

*And as you can see it's the end  
I must cross the ocean tomorrow morning  
From your arms I will slide out ever so gently  
And it's reality that awaits me  
I know your heart is already inhabited  
by one or more girls that have marked you  
I'm less strong than the other  
But I hope strongly that you miss me  
That I stand out so much*

*A tear slipped down her cheek as she watched the couple on the screen seemingly happy in their temporary love until eventually they separated, the woman left alone in the end of the video. Setting the tablet down, Cosima wiped at her eyes angrily, trying to cope with what she had just saw. It was their story wasn't it? How weird was that? Pushing herself up, she made her way to the bathroom where the door was cracked open. She could see the blonde leaning against the sink, her eyes closed as she seemed to be locked in a mental battle. "Hey."*

*Reddened eyes opened and Delphine gave her a weak smile. "I've been skating to that song for over a year, mon amour. I never thought I'd end up living it."*

*Cosima didn't waste any time stepping forward, wrapping an arm around the woman's waist, capturing her lips in a kiss that was both loving and forceful as she tried to convey everything she was feeling. When their lips separated, she bumped her nose against the skater's. "You are worth all the pain in the world, Delphine. I'm not going to forget you, and I'm certainly not going to let you forget me. Plus..." Cosima grinned as she wiped away a tear that slipped from the blonde's hazel eyes. "I'm super awesome at phone sex."*

*She was rewarded with a laugh and a slap to the bicep before being pulled forward for another kiss.*

*Landing her last set of jumps, Delphine laughed at the memory of Cosima's comment, her body moving into a sit-spin naturally, the world whipping by what felt like a million kilometers a second as she slowly rose to a stand, her body tilting backwards as she grabbed her skate, stretching one leg straight up. A few more choreographed waves of her arms and she ended in her ending pose,*

the building erupting into cheers and applause. She felt the weakened dam that was holding back her tears shatter as she fought to keep her smile, her hands shaking as she took her bows, ending up resting her hands on her knees as she tried to gather herself.

It was over. Years of preparation and her first Olympic competition was over. She just barely made it to dry ground before she was pulled into a big hug, not even hearing the words Monsieur Allard was speaking over the loud cheering and the commentators speaking as there were replays shown on the big screen.

Dropping onto the padded bench, Delphine took a deep breath. Now she just had to wait.

## Chapter 27

Cosima held up the half-empty bottle of wine, giving the blonde a questioning glance as she took a sip from her own half-empty glass.

Delphine shook her head, instead grabbing for the soft body that was moving past the bed, completely absent of all clothing. "Come back here." There was a soft thud as the wine was set on the bedside table, and a creak of the bed as the shorter frame straddled long legs. After dinner with her parents and Sarah, she and the snowboarder had stumbled back to Cosima's room, barely waiting for the door to unlock before they started shedding clothing. Now, she could feel sleep already tugging at her senses, their bodies both marred and bruised by lips and teeth, exhaustion threatening to take over. "I just want you." She whispered against lips that were already bruised from the unending supply of kisses.

"You already have me." Cosima replied, caressing a soft cheek and wiping at a near-dried trail left by an errant tear. She brushed her lips across a cheek, pecking a kiss on the tip of a nose and peppering kisses across a forehead. "You have me so completely that it's leaving a hole, right here." Cosima picked up the woman's hand, holding it to her chest. There was a sadness in her eyes that Delphine could see just before the snowboarder closed them, breathing in a ragged breath, obviously fighting her emotions.

Delphine pressed her ear against the woman's chest, her arms wrapping around the strong waist, listening to the steady beating of her heart. She closed her eyes at the feeling of strong fingers running through her hair, scratching her scalp lightly. It felt like her tears were as limitless as their kisses as she felt her eyes beginning to sting again. "I don't want this to end." She took a long shuddering breath. She didn't want to think about the fact that they only had two more nights together, not even a full 48 hours. "I am going to miss you so much."

Cosima leaned her cheek against the curly blonde hair, sighing softly. "Ditto...obvs..." When the woman pulled back with mock outrage, she cut her off with a kiss, her already aching strained tongue slipping past soft lips in defiant exploration.

Delphine knew their bodies were already at their limits but she leaned backwards, pulling the woman with her as nails left trails of fire over already heated flesh. She had trained all her life for the Olympics, but no gold medal could ever match this.

*Delphine was waiting in the back room, pacing back and forth as the small crowd stood in front of the large television on the wall. 149.71. That was the score she had gotten. She had felt the world close in on her as she waited the agonizingly long wait. Her total score for the two nights was 224.68 which meant that she was currently in first place and there was only one skater left who was currently in the middle of her skate.*

*She was going to medal. This was her first Olympics, and she was going to medal. She looked down at her phone which was blinking with a new message.*

*"She's good, but you were way better."*

*Of course Cosima would say so. The American didn't know the fundamentals of figure skating judging. Her statement was pure bias based on their closeness. Of course Cosima would have complete confidence in her, but how could Delphine not be nervous? The current skater was the returning champion. Delphine had seen her skate and the other woman was flawless. She had scored just a few tenths of a point less than Delphine the previous night and there was definitely a chance the champion could maintain her status. She skated with the ease and grace of experience.*

*She had done the Olympic thing before and she didn't have the same nervousness that plagued Delphine. She didn't have the...*

*"Oh my god." A voice sounded.*

*Delphine jumped as there was a commotion near the tv. She looked up to see every one looking back and forth between the screen and her, waiting for a reaction. On the TV she had been doing her best to ignore, she saw the champion pushing herself up from where she'd missed a landing, slipping on the ice and hitting a barrier. She watched as it took almost a full minute for the skater to regain her composure and finish the number. There was an odd mixture of confusion and concern as her brain refused to put the information together. Feeling her phone vibrate in her hand, she looked down to see Cosima's name blinking across the screen and with a shocked look, she absentmindedly answered it. "Hello?"*

*"Hey."*

*Delphine could hear the smile in the woman's voice and it was all she needed. "Je t'aime, Cosima."*

*There was a pause before she got a response. "I love you too." There was a soft laugh and she could hear a lot of noise going on in the background. "You are such a rock star, Delphine. I just wanted to call and tell you that. "*

*Delphine laughed, taking a deep breath. There was no doubt that she was going to win the gold.*

And there hadn't been any reason to doubt. The sun poured in the window, reflecting off the gold medal that sat on the bedside table, accompanying Cosima's own two medals, shining onto the forms huddled under the soft quilt.

Delphine groaned softly as she felt consciousness tugging at her. She could feel the arm around her waist tighten and she smiled, recognizing the presence without having to open her eyes. She was still tired but she forced herself awake, turning just slightly to see the brunette's body curled against her own. Looking down at the tangle of their bodies, she wrinkled her nose. Both of their bodies were covered in little red bruises and bite marks, bringing a smile with its memory. God her body ached.

"Bonjour." Cosima nuzzled the woman's shoulder, brushing her lips across the pale skin before her eyes blinked open. "Is it morning already? I feel like we just fell asleep."

Delphine laughed at that, caressing the soft cheek. "Because we did just fall asleep not that long ago." She guided the woman's mouth to her own, feeling a dull ache in her bruised lips. She felt a stirring in her gut and smiled against the lips, sighing softly as she broke the kiss off. "I have to get ready in a few hour to skate today and I don't even know if I can walk."

Cosima chuckled, pushing herself up with a grunt. "At least it's just like an exhibition or whatever." She stretched slightly, snagging her glasses off the nightstand and slipping them on. "It's so weird that they make you guys do that."

Delphine just shrugged, admiring the way the sun cast shadows across the woman's body. Why was she so aroused by this? "You are beautiful." She ran fingertips up the soft skin. "If you do not send me at least one nude picture of you every day that we are apart, I will be quite distraught." She commented, grinning when the brunette rose an eyebrow at her.

"Tell you what..." Cosima ran a fingertip over the woman's skin. "I'll send you one for every one you send. In fact..." She reached for Delphine's phone, glad the blonde's coach had given her back

her own phone.

Watching the woman take several scandalous photos with her phone, Delphine shook her head. "You are incorrigible." With a slow and intentional move, she removed the phone from the American's hands, setting it on her nightstand before turning to the brunette. She met soft lips in a kiss as she pressed into the woman's body. They had just over 24 hours left together, and she wasn't going to waste a single one.

## Chapter 28

"Well that was ridiculous." Delphine wanted to rub at her eyes but knew she would smear her makeup. She could feel her eyelids getting heavy as she leaned against the brunette's shoulder while they walked.

"You were totally cute." Cosima laughed. "Skating is much more entertaining when the songs have words and they're less tense." They had just returned to the village after Delphine's exhibition skate and she was currently pulling the blonde towards the cafeteria. Thinking back on the first interview she'd been able to sit in on, she cringed. "So, sorry about the whole sponsor thing. That bitch reporter shouldn't have sprung that on you. I wanted to tell you when it happened, but your coach made me swear not to."

Delphine sighed. "It's ok." She knew she should be devastated by the loss of one of her major sponsors, but it was not something she was surprised by. There were consequences to everything, but she was going to let her management deal with that. There were definitely other things she was losing that meant more to her than photo shoots and advertisements. She fit her hand into the American's, feeling the clasp returned. "I did not like that company anyway."

Cosima grinned. "They can take their homophobic bullshit and shove it up their asses." She was absolutely jumping with energy. "You should totally go to the press. You could start a revolution...fucking boycott their asses." She pulled open the door for the blonde.

"Why are you so hyper?" Delphine's brow furrowed as she took in the bounding woman.

"Because of this!" Cosima led the blonde to the coffee area, an ear-splitting grin taking over her face.

Delphine's eyes doubled as she took in the coffee area that was still opened with it's lonely barista flipping through a magazine. "Coffee?"

Cosima pulled the blonde eerily close, her eyes just inches from the blonde's as she stood on the tips of her toes. "Well...we have a long night ahead of us and I know you must be super tired." A quick kiss and she waved down the barista behind the counter. "Hey hey! We'll take two of whatever the lady is ordering and put it on my tab."

The woman behind the counter shook her head. "Oh yes...payment humor. Like that is the first time I've heard that." She looked at Delphine expectantly. "Well?"

"Cafe au lait?" Delphine asked hopefully, licking her lips. It had been so long since her last coffee and she wondered if the woman would be able to make it correctly. She looked over at Cosima who was fidgeting with the straw holder. "You weren't by any chance drinking coffee during the exhibition were you?"

Cosima ginned. "Nope! I might have had an energy drink...or four...whatever I don't plan on getting a single minute of sleep tonight." She laughed and jumped when the barista rang the bell to get their drinks. When she received her drink, Cosima's brow furrowed at the bowl. "Um..." She lifted the bowl up and tilted it slightly, looking for a handle. "Why is this in a bowl? They run out of to-go cups?"

Delphine laughed as she led the way to a table, cradling her own drink gingerly. "I sometimes forget you Americans get everything to go." She took a slow sip from the porcelain bowl, enjoying the wash of warmth that accompanied the bitter drink. "This is how it is supposed to be

served."

Cosima took her own sip and scrunched her nose. "Holy crap, that needs sugar."

Rolling her eyes, Delphine reached for one of the packets that was in the carrier on the table. "Perhaps a soda would be easier to handle? Or another energy drink loaded with sugar and toxic waste."

"I can handle this. Don't be a bitch." Cosima smiled to remove the sting as she said it, leaning towards the blonde to meet her lips in a kiss. "Besides...we're going to need all the energy we can get."

Delphine looked down at the coffee in her hands and then back up at the American. "Maybe there is something to be said about getting coffee to go."

Cosima laughed.

She had wanted to change her flight. Cosima's trip back to the United States had her transferring planes in London. Delphine had looked into changing her flight to share that leg of travel with the American. It would only be a 3 hour trip by train from London to Paris. It would be worth the extra hours she would be able to spend with the brunette. Unfortunately, Cosima's flight was full. The Olympics were apparently a very popular time for the airlines. At least they could wait together.

Cosima would be leaving first so they were sitting near her gate, sitting on the ground hidden from a majority of the crowd since the chairs had armrests that were putting an unnecessary barrier between them. While Delphine would be traveling with Monsieur Allard, who had conveniently found something better to do in the time before their flight, Sarah had already returned to the states and Cosima would be flying alone. Her fingers were locked with Delphine's, her thumb absentmindedly running over pale knuckles.

Neither woman said anything, both afraid of losing their composure. Instead Delphine leaned her head on Cosima's shoulder, breathing in the familiar scent of her perfume. It matched the same scent that clung to the t-shirt she had stolen, tucked away secretly in her carry-on bag so it would remain close to her. Weeks had turned into days which turned into hours and now they were minutes. The plane was already sitting in the gate, being prepared for the flight which meant it was less than an hour before the American would board a plane and travel thousands of kilometers away from her. She wished she could turn back the clock, even just a little, so she could make their time together last just that much longer.

They refused to go to sleep. Even when the caffeine had worn out and they were both exhausted, their bodies glistening with sweat, curled together under the covers, neither would give in. They didn't want to lose a minute of their time together, even if it was spent just laying with arms around each other, foreheads pressed together. Cosima had one hand buried in blonde hair, toying with a curl, too exhausted to cry, not wanting to waste a single minute she could be spending with the blonde. "I love you."

Delphine closed her eyes, savoring the sound of the words. "Je t'aime, Cosima." She responded, feeling the tears threatening to return. "How long do you think it will be?"

Cosima swallowed, hating that she didn't have an answer. She caressed a soft cheek. "I don't know. We both have some stuff to sort through." She brushed her lips across Delphine's ever so softly. "You have to deal with your sponsor problem." She sighed softly. "If anything...I've heard that Spring is a great time to visit France."

Delphine laughed, nodding even as tears managed to spill down her cheeks. "Oui. It is beautiful in the Spring." She slipped a hand behind the American's neck, getting no resistance as she pulled her forward. There were so many things she wanted to memorize. She wanted to memorize the scent of the woman's body without her perfume. She wanted to remember the taste of her skin at 2 am in the morning. Running her hand up the woman's bare body, she smiled sadly against bruised lips. She wanted to memorize the weight of her breasts in her hands

Cosima leaned into the touch, her usually cheerful personality dampened by a sad smile.

"Who's picking you up from the airport?" Cosima asked, breaking the silence.

"No one." Delphine sighed softly, bringing the back of the American's hand up to her lips. "It is not too far from my apartment to catch a taxi."

Cosima frowned at that but decided to not press the matter. "Did Isabelle get home ok?"

Delphine nodded, wiggling a little closer to the American. She wasn't happy until the woman circled her shoulders with an arm, pulling her closer. "Who is picking you up?"

Burying her nose in blonde hair, Cosima inhaled the sweet scent of shampoo. "Probably Alison."

They both jumped when there was an announcement. The Russian accent was thick and Delphine barely identified the words London, and Cosima's flight number. She sighed softly, burrowing closer into the American's side. She could feel the tears threatening to overcome her, but she fought them back, not wanting to ruin their last moments together by crying. "Cosima?" Looking up, she found red-rimmed eyes watching her, a bottom lip being worried between teeth. She wanted to give the American another chance to call it off. That's what people did right? They had long affairs that ended by parting ways? Wasn't that what the sub-culture of the Olympics was all about? What happens in the Olympic Village, stays in the Olympic Village? She wanted to give the woman a chance to back out of promises that were whispered in the darkness while they were wrapped around each others' bodies, but she couldn't find the words.

"You know this isn't forever, right?" Cosima interrupted her inner diatribe, pressing her forehead against Delphine's. "Before you know it, we're going to be together again."

Delphine closed her eyes. She wanted to believe it. She wanted to believe that they could last, that they could survive this. "Tell me you love me." She opened her eyes, feeling the sting of her tears.

"I love you, Delphine Cormier." Cosima tilted her head to capture her lips in a kiss.

Delphine didn't care who saw them. She pressed closer, her hand coming up to caress a soft cheek. She felt a bit of wetness touch her hand and pulled back to see tears falling. "Je t'aime, mon amour." She buried her face in the woman's dreads. "Je t'aime."

Je t'aime. Je t'aime. Je t'aime. Je t'aime. The words repeated in Delphine's mind as she now sat alone, watching the plane pull away from the gate. She hugged her knees to her chest. Je t'aime.

"Delphine?" Monsieur Allard sat down beside the blonde. He could hear the soft sobs coming from the blonde who had hid her face in her knees, her shoulders trembling. "I know this is a difficult time for you." He paused, trying to find the right words. "When you are ready to talk, I think I have found a solution to your sponsor problem."

Delphine shook her head, looking up at the man. She couldn't even fathom thinking about sponsors right now. "Monsieur..."

"I know you do not think you want to hear it right now, but believe me..." He reached out and

wiped away a tear. "You will want to hear this."

## Epilogue

"Hey, Sexy!" Cosima grinned as she picked up her phone, leaning against the counter.

"Bonjour, mon amour."

With a wave of her hand, Cosima signaled her co-worker that she was slipping into the backroom, looking at her watch. It was just after 4 which meant it was 1 in the morning for the France resident. "It's a little late for you, isn't it?"

"I couldn't sleep." There was a soft sigh. "And it's your birthday in France right now so I wanted to officially be the first one to call you."

Cosima toyed with a skateboard wheel as she settled into one of the chairs. She was back to working at the small skateboard shop she'd worked at months ago before the snowboarding season had started. She had needed anything to take her mind off of the separation. Like the blonde, she'd been having trouble sleeping herself and usually resorted to spending hours on the phone with her. "Thanks. You know I'd totally help tire you out to get you to sleep, but I'm at work and after last time I'm not allowed to be back here for longer than a few minutes at a time unsupervised." There was a soft laughter that she wished she could hear in person and she felt that emptiness in the pit of her stomach again. "I miss you."

There was a pause before the woman responded. "I miss you too, Cosima. Every moment of every day." here was a soft snuffle. "So, any big plans?"

"Well...I wanted to sit at home all day with a bottle of vodka, sending you pictures of everything I would be letting you do to me if you were here." Cosima hummed softly at the silence that got her, imagining the surprised look on the blonde's face. "But, I think my parents are set on keeping me from being a recluse. Sarah's actually supposed to pick me up in a few hours and drag me home for some early birthday shenanigans at the parents' place. It usually gets pretty hectic for us around our birthday."

"I can only imagine having to celebrate four birthdays at once."

Cosima sighed softly. "Yeah." She took a deep breath, pushing back the tears she could feel. "Another year goes by and now I only have one birthday wish." When there was silence, she picked at her leggings. "I miss you so much sometimes, it drives me crazy." She released a shuddering breath. "I can't stop thinking about you. I can't stop...missing you."

"Cosima..." There was a break in the skater's voice that pulled at Cosima's heart. "I wish I could fast forward time so that I could see you." Another snuffle. "I've almost got this sponsor nonsense handled and then we can talk about travel dates."

Laughing, Cosima wiped at her eyes, careful of her makeup. "Ah the notoriously mysterious sponsor that you refuse to tell me about." She grinned. "I never knew you were so superstitious."

"Yes well, I don't want to...how do you say... *jinx* anything. It is a very big company and it will mean a lot of good things in the future."

The blonde was being very vague, but Cosima just sighed. When a head popped into the back room, she waved a hand dismissively at her co-worker. "Hey, D, I have to get back to work before Scotty boy has an aneurism." She stood up and straightened her skirt, checking her make up in the bathroom mirror. "You'll probably be asleep but I have a longer break coming up. If

you're still having trouble sleeping in an hour, call me?"

"Oui. Go back to work, ma cherie. Je t'aime."

"I love you, too."

"Oi...Debbie Downer!" Sarah shoved Cosima into the chair and slapped a bottle into the woman's hand. "You are not going to make this the most depressing party ever, are you?"

Cosima sighed as she propped her head up on her fist. "No, sorry, I was just hoping Delphine would call me back."

Sarah rolled her eyes. "Why don't you call her?"

"She's probably sleeping. It's the middle of the night there." Cosima sipped her beer. "I'll talk to her later." She sighed softly.

"You miss her huh?"

Her brow furrowed as she looked up, a wry expression on her face. "Understatement of the year, dude."

"Who's ready for presents?" Mrs. Niehaus entered the room from the hallway behind Cosima, carrying a pile of presents.

"Don't we normally wait till after dinner?" Cosima smirked as her sister's gathered around.

Alison plopped down on the couch. "Yes well, we figured someone needed some cheering up."

"And what better way than gifted non-necessities?" Mr. Niehaus chuckled as he dropped his own stack, looking at the labels before passing them out.

Helena accepted the wrapped package, toying with the ribbon as she looked over Sarah's shoulder at the present she was currently unwrapping.

Cosima smiled as she sipped her beer. Kira and Alison's kids were all staying with Donnie for the night as usual and she wondered what sort of nonsense she would be dragged off to in the middle of the night. That was usually how things went. They would have dinner at their parents' and then they would sneak off to a night club some years, or just to the nearby lake for drinks and smoking as they bonded.

"Well, this is just lovely." Alison smiled as she held up the cardigan sweater, running her fingers over the embroidered vines around the button holes.

"Kick ass." Sarah lifted up a flask, her initials etched into it. "Though I don't know what it says about me when my parents get me something to hold booze."

"We raised you, my dear." Mrs. Niehaus looked at Helena who had a surprised look on her face as she held up the set of keys. "Try not to crash it again."

"You fixed my bike?" Helena smiled childishly.

If she couldn't be with Delphine, Cosima decided, this was an acceptable distraction. She ran her fingertips over the flat box, easily removing the paper and revealing a scarf. "Oh this is totally cool." She lifted up the thin black material, running a finger over the rhinestone skulls. "You know, most parents suck at getting kids gifts."

"We're totally hip with the new fads." Mr. Niehaus exclaimed laughing.

There was a chorus of groans that responded.

"Cosima." Mrs. Niehaus cleared her throat. "There's one more present that showed up this morning." She pulled out a small box, handing it to her daughter. "Delphine wanted us to give it to you."

Cosima's brow furrowed as she looked at the small box. "That's totally weird. Why didn't she just mail it to my place?" She looked at the small box, held closed by a simple white satin ribbon.

"Maybe it's some weird French thing." Sarah sat back in her seat, unscrewing her flask and peering into the opening and scoffing at the emptiness. "Open it!"

Pulling the ribbon, Cosima set it aside, not wanting to lose a single piece that was touched by Delphine. Pulling back the silk cloth that was wrapped around something solid, she found a square, silver, compact mirror, cursive writing scribbled across the front.

*"When I am with you, we stay up all night.  
When you're not here, I can't go to sleep."*

Flipping it over, she found the other half of the poem.

*"Praise God for those two insomnias!  
And the difference between them."*

Cosima traced the words with a fingertip, smiling softly. She ran her fingertips over the clasp, springing it open absentmindedly. "God, she is so ..." Her voice trailed off as she looked at the reflection and saw hazel eyes and blonde curls just over her shoulder.

"Joyeux Anniversaire, Cosima."

The words brushed past her ear and Cosima quickly turned and froze. "Holy watershed." With the grace and ease of a newborn calf, threw herself over the back of the chair and into the woman's arms. "You're totally here." She reached up to touch a pale cheek. With a soft sigh, she pressed forward, raising to her toes as she captured soft lips in a kiss. She laughed as arms slipped around her waist, lifting her slightly. There was a familiar warmth she hadn't felt in weeks that began to spread through her entire body. She buried a hand in blonde hair, completely lost in the feel and taste that was all Delphine.

"Well..." Sarah cleared her throat. "How long do we let them..." She gestured to the pair.

Mrs. Niehaus cleared her throat a little louder than Sarah.

Cosima regretfully broke off the kiss, keeping her forehead pressed against Delphine's. She felt the blush rising to her cheeks. "Sorry." She spoke, never letting her eyes leave Delphine's who still had her arms around her waist.

"Ok, well, if we're all done getting thoroughly creeped out, shall we set the table." Mrs. Niehaus ushered her children and husband towards the dining room. "Let's give your sister a minute to gather herself." She looked at Cosima. "We expect the two of you fully clothed and in the dining room in 3 minutes, Cosima."

Her blush deepening a few shades, Cosima buried her face in blonde hair, breathing in the familiar scent of perfume. When they were alone, she leaned back. "Not that I am not totally excited to see you, cause I think that's like totally obvious, but what are you doing here?"

Delphine smiled, leaning forward for a quicker kiss before taking a step and grabbing a box that she had brought out with her. "It is your birthday, Cosima. I would think that every girl deserves to have their birthday wishes come true."

"You are totally amazing...and completely over the top...and just the best thing I've laid my eyes on all day." Cosima grinned as she opened the box, her look turning confused as she pulled out a track jacket.

"The reason I was able to come out here is because I was touring the headquarters of my new sponsor. I signed the papers this afternoon."

Looking from the blonde to the jacket, her eyes fell on the Nike symbol with the name Cormier embroidered beneath it and her eyes doubled in size. "Are you kidding me?" She pulled the blonde into a hug. "Oh my god that is so rad. Congrats!" With a devious grin, she slipped the jacket on, feeling just a little bit traitorous to her own sponsors accompanied by absolutely no regret whatsoever.

"Sorry it's why I'm a little...travel-worn." The blonde ran a hand through her hair. "I just got off a flight from Portland like an hour ago."

"You're beautiful." Cosima pulled her down for a kiss again, still barely believing the blonde was there. "So I guess we can start making travel plans now?" She did a little dance of excitement.

Delphine smiled, running a fingertip across the woman's cheek. "Well...there was one small stipulation to my agreement to signing with Nike."

Cosima pulled back slightly, a worried look on her face. "What?" She asked hesitantly, imagining a thousand things that could go wrong. What if the blonde wouldn't have time for her to visit? Sponsors were weird like that.

Delphine rested her forehead against the snowboarder's, savoring the closeness like the drug it was. "I told them I had interest in training in California."

"What?" Cosima leaned back, her face turning serious. Her heart was beating a thousand beats per second. "What are you saying?" The blonde couldn't mean what she thought she was hearing, could she?

Intertwining her fingers with the American's, Delphine brushed her lips across the woman's knuckles. "It will take a little bit to get my Visa, but when I do get it, Nike will assist me in finding proper training facilities and residence as close to San Francisco as possible...if that is ok with you."

Cosima blinked, her mind still stuck on words like Visa and San Francisco. "Are you serious?" She felt the tears pooling in her eyes, threatening to break her composure. "Like, are you for real serious?"

Delphine nodded, suddenly self-conscious at the woman's reaction. "If it is what you..." She didn't get to finish the sentence before she was pulled down for a kiss, the force strong enough that she knew her lips would bruise.

Even as they parted, Cosima felt the tears and reached up to wipe them away. "You are like the best birthday present ever." She sniffled before burying her face in the woman's chest, breathing in the scent she missed so much. "I cannot wait...to unwrap you." She grinned.

Raising an eyebrow, Delphine felt all exhaustion disappear. "Do you have plans after dinner?"

Thinking about their normal birthday activities she and her sister normally partook in, Cosima bit her bottom lip. "Well..."

"No she bloody well doesn't have any plans." Sarah interrupted them, winking at her sister.

"But..."

Sarah shook her head. "Hell if mom and dad wouldn't kill us all, I'd recommend you taking off now, but dinner is ready." She tucked her keys into Cosima's hand. "I'm trusting you not to drive this one into a tree...please."

"And ruin my plans for a night of complete debauchery? Never." Cosima grinned, tucking the keys into the pocket of the jacket. "I don't know what you heard, but can we not tell everyone about..."

"GUESS WHO'S MOVING TO CALIFORNIA!" Sarah called out to the dining room as they entered.

Delphine covered her eyes with a hand.

Cosima rolled her eyes and brushed a kiss against the blonde's cheek. "Welcome to San Fran."

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