

“THE CUTTING EDGE” CONTINUES WITH “INVINCIBLE” Written by Perri Smith
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Albertville Rink – 1992 Olympics - Pairs Skate - - Long Program. “Invincible” picks up at the end of “The Cutting Edge” movie with Doug kissing Kate for the very first time after successfully completing the “Pamchenko Twist ” and skating their personal best program.

Kate Moseley expected to feel triumphant, miserable, exhilarated, destroyed. Her final skate, the Olympic skate, the gold medal theirs to win or lose according to the judges’ marks.

What she hadn’t expected was not giving a damn about those marks. She was too busy concentrating on the feel of Doug Dorsey’s arms around her, and the sweet, rough heat of his mouth against hers. She threaded her fingers through his short hair to try and pull him closer as the roaring in her ears got louder and louder...

And she suddenly remembered she was in the middle of an ice rink, and 10,000 people – including nine judges, her coach and her father –were watching her make out with her partner. She shoved Doug away so fast he almost dropped her, but he recovered in time, somehow keeping his balance. His eyes were as glazed as hers. Kate was pleased to note through the flood of embarrassment threatening to make her face explode, and she could see the exact second he, too, remembered where they were.

“Hell of a first kiss”, he muttered with a crooked grin as he lifted them both to their feet: if impossible, the crowd’s applause increased. “What’re we gonna do for an encore”?

“Shut up and wave”, she shot back through gritted teeth, but couldn’t prevent her own smile from spreading across her face as she executed a fairly respectable curtsy. Not aided by the fact that her knees were weak, which she refused to give Doug credit for. He refused to relax his grip on her hand, and they lifted their other arms into the air to wave at the crowd.

Which was on their feet. Kate noticed with a little shock. They were stomping and cheering and oh my god, there were a lot of flowers on the ice, and still more falling down, from all over the arena: the flower girls were working overtime trying to get them all.

“Damn, we’re good!” Doug shouted above the noise as they turned to face the other side, and Kate started laughing, soaking up the applause and Doug’s jubilant smile, and wondering why she’d ever cared about those stupid judges.

They finally left the ice, half-racing back past the boards, too closely in synch with each other to finish in anything but a tie. Anton met them before they could even put their

guards on, picking Kate up and whirling her halfway around, before getting his other arm around Doug in an enormous three-way Russian bear hug.

“I knew you could do it!” he shouted, the words almost incomprehensible through his accent, planting smacking kisses on her cheeks, then Doug’s. “Never have I seen such skating, my children!”

Doug shouted back, “Well, you know, we’ve got this great coach and all”, and she wished she’d said that first, but settled for plastering first Anton’s face with kisses, then Doug’s. She tasted the salt of tears on both of them, and realized her cheeks were wet, too.

They somehow made it the kiss and cry without letting go of each other, and put their guards on with trembling hands. Doug couldn’t sit, but bounced on his toes, his grin so big it threatened to split his face. Kate laughed up at him, but had to sit: her knees were too weak to hold her. It was hard to look away from the crowd, the cheering, screaming crowd, but she forced herself to check the scoreboard, held her breath in anticipation.

The scoreboard was still blank, and she frowned, the wave of adrenaline receding slightly. It seemed like it had been forever since they’d finished, but still no numbers. There were, however, a lot of hastily conferring judges, and a few coaches, Rick included, gesturing vehemently and making a lot of noise. She suddenly remembered that whole thing about the Pamchenko Twist and “gray areas”.

Her stomach clenched into a hard knot, and she wondered if Doug’s sick bucket was still around.

“What’s the hold-up?” Doug asked, sliding onto the bench beside her, one arm around her shoulders like he was going to hold onto her forever. Kate resisted the urge to retreat into him, sitting straight and stiff instead.

“They’re deciding whether they can disqualify us,” she answered quietly. Anton sat heavily beside them, his big, rough hand taking hers. “They’re deciding whether the Pamchenko was legal”.

Doug’s arm tightened around her, “No way,” he said, with the hyper-confidence he always used when he was completely full of crap. “No way they can disqualify us. Not when we just kicked that much ass”.

She tried to smile and found out she already was, a frozen, painful smile. “It doesn’t matter,” she said quickly, slipping her arm around Doug’s waist and holding on, trying to convince herself. “We know what we did. So do they. The marks don’t matter.”

Doug looked down at her, his eyes warm enough to melt the ice, and she wondered how long it would take her to get used to that. “Babe, if I didn’t love you before, believe me, I

would now.” He leaned down and kissed her, a quick, hard kiss that promised a lot more to come, then added as he pulled away, “But, Kate? The marks still matter.”

He looked over at the judges with a confident smile that challenged them to kick Moseley and Dorsey out of the running. Kate blinked at him in astonishment, then slowly nodded, the adrenaline rising again. Damn straight the scores mattered. They weren’t in this for the fun of it. She sat up straight and tall, her chin as high as Kate the Bitch had ever managed to get it, and matched Doug’s expression. They still had some ass-kicking in them.

The little girls had delivered the armloads of flowers, and the crowd had started to quiet, confused muttering replacing the fevered applause, before the debate behind the judges wound down, and they settled into place. Kate held her breath, trying to read their impassive faces, waiting for the first set of scores. Or for the disqualification. The display board leapt into red-numbered life as the announcer began to read the numbers off in French.

Technical Merit: 5.9/5.8/5.8/6.0/5.9/5.8/5.6/5.7/5.9

The low scores got a hearty boo from the audience, but Kate was too busy trying to simultaneously ride a wave of relief and do the math in her head. Smilkov and Brushlin’s scores had looked a lot like those, without the low points, so much higher than they’d dared to dream they could go...

“It’s gonna be close,” Doug half-said, half-prayed. “Damn tight-assed judges.” His hand slipped down her arm to clench around her fingers, so tightly she could feel the blood cutting off in the tips. She squeezed back, slipped her arm through Anton’s, and held her breath as the second set of marks flashed up.

Artistic Merit: 5.9/6.0/5.9/6.0/6.0/5.8/5.7/5.6/6.0

It was so close, so close, but there were 6.0s up there, perfect marks. Oh my god, perfect marks. She couldn’t breath, couldn’t speak, couldn’t do anything but clutch Doug’s hand and Anton’s arm and try to force the numbers to make sense. The ordinals flashed up and she couldn’t focus on them, the ranking scoreboard flickered and changed—

--and the world stopped moving when Moseley/Dorsey blinked in at number one.

Then the wild cheers of the audience battered at her like a physical blow and congratulations rained on them from all sides. But all she was aware of was Anton’s shout of triumph, and the force of Doug’s arms as they lifted her off her feet and spun her around, far above the floor, “There’s your gold medal, Kate! He shouted, “God damn, there’s your gold medal!”

“Ours!” Kate shouted back, and she was smiling, laughing, crying all at once, throwing one arm around Doug’s neck and holding the other out to Anton, “Our gold medal!”

“Damn straight, ours!!” Another bear hug, trapped between the two men, then she was flying again as Doug danced her around the kiss-and-cry. Flashbulbs popped, blinding her again, only this time she wasn’t on the ice, alone in the silence as her ‘partner’ stood above her in disgust. This time, there were cheers, and she was high in her partner’s arms, and soon, there would be a gold medal around their necks.

She tilted her head back and laughed up at the ceiling. Up at the sky.

If he could die right here, right now, Doug figured, he’d die a happy man. Not that he wanted to die, not with that gold medal waiting for him on the ice and Kate – oh God, Kate loved him and how had that happened? – standing under his arm, her arms tightly around his waist and her smile the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen.

“How did you feel going into today’s event?” an American reporter Doug vaguely recognized was asking them, for the ‘folks back home’. God. Walter was watching this, seeing this!

“Confident,” Kate lied cheerfully at the same time that Doug answered, “Scared out of our minds.” She short-punched him in the ribs and he couldn’t get out of the way in time. Guess that move needed some work, too.

The reporter laughed at them. “You two had a bit of a rough time in the short program – how did you overcome that to perform so beautifully tonight?”

He looked down at Kate at the same time that she looked up at him, and he wondered how to fit fights, buttons, too much honesty, soul searching, and heartfelt confessions into one sound bite. He came up empty, but Kate beat him to it anyway.

“Real partners can work through anything,” she answered easily. Her smile turned rueful, “It sometimes takes some yelling and screaming, but we worked it out.”

“You certainly did,” the reporter smiled with lots of very white teeth. “How did you feel watching your competitors skate tonight?”

“Impressed,” Doug popped in, not waiting to find out if Kate’s current ‘high on life’ was going to translate into being a gracious winner. He doubted it. “There were some really strong teams out there, and it was great to be a part of this. It makes winning the gold even more amazing.” Okay, so he wasn’t all that great a winner himself.

“Four years ago, both of you saw some dreams crash at the Olympics. Now, you’re standing here as the champions – Kate with a different partner, Doug in an entirely different sport. What got you here?”

“Determination,” Kate answered immediately.

“She means pig-headedness,” Doug translated, tightening his arms before she could get the punch off this time. “Hey, I meant both of us!” Kate made a face at him that would have been a hell of a lot more impressive without the face-splitting smile, and he risked his ribs to drag her even closer.

“The way I figure it,” he said, partly to the camera, and mostly to Kate, “everybody gets this one day, this one piece of time in your life when everything else fades away, and you just can’t get beaten. Nothing can go wrong, nothing can take you down, as long as you stay on your feet long enough to get there. Kate and me, we’ve been knocked around some, but we always got back up. And tonight...”

He shrugged easily, grinning down at his partner. His girlfriend? Nah, not Kate. That was a Hale word, trying to make Kate into something she wasn’t, something sweet and calm and peaceful. Partner covered it a lot better as far as Doug was concerned.

“Tonight was our night to be invincible,” he finished, kissing her again. She blushed and shoved him away, but her eyes shone.

“Well, congratulations, both of you.” The reporter started to try to say something else, but someone shouted Kate’s name from behind her, and Kate jerked, then abandoned Doug to race full-tilt across the floor to her father, almost tipping over in her skates. Doug was too entertained by the sight of Kate Moseley losing every bit of dignity she had to do more than grin sideways at the reporter and amble over to Kate and Jack.

Jack’s hug had picked her up off the floor again, but she didn’t seem to mind, laughing when he dropped her back to her feet. Jack’s face was split with the broadest smile Doug had ever seen on the man as he held his hand out, “Doug.”

“Jack,” Doug shook the offered hand, meeting Jack’s eyes levelly: the night before hadn’t been forgotten, but in brightness of the night after, it didn’t matter so much anymore. Then the rest of the room seemed to converge around them; he accepted gritted-teeth congratulations from Neuman, avoided a kiss from Lorie, who he guessed hadn’t been paying attention, and exchanged gestures of congratulations and condolences with Smilkov and Brushkin, who were going home with silvers and really didn’t have a lot of room to complain. Except that, you know, they weren’t gold. Then, all of a sudden, they were being called back to the ice, and there were three podiums waiting.

It wasn’t like opening ceremonies, the big group and the long march, all those hopes and dreams packed into one huge-small space. This was quieter, more deliberate. Brain and Lorie led the way out onto the ice, pretending third place was okay with them. The Russian pair followed, and got a good, solid cheer from the stands. Then it was Kate and Doug, skating out with their hands locked together and their arms held high, and the applause almost knocked them over. An American pair had never taken home the gold, not ever, not until Kate Moseley and Doug Dorsey, and there were a lot of Americans in

that crowd. For a moment, he almost wished Neuman and Lorie had finished in the silver, for an American one-two. Then he just concentrated on making it over to the podium without tripping on his toe picks.

Lorie and Neuman were on the lowest tier. Lorie's face shinning like maybe the bronze really was good enough for her. Smilkov and Brushkin stood straight and dignified on the second tier, faces set in Russian stoicism. They exchanged handshakes, and the Russian woman's lips brushed Doug's cheek. Then Doug lifted Kate onto the highest tier, and stepped past Neuman to take his place behind her.

The officials came out with their trays and the bronze medals were hung: Lorie and Neuman waved to the crowd. The Russians accepted their silver, then the officials were in front of the highest tier. Kate didn't have to bend far, and her face shone with joy and tears as she straightened. Then it was his turn, and the official strained to get high enough, and the golden weight of dreams come true settled around his neck. The flowers were an afterthought, a flag to wave at the audience who'd skated with them, and he wrapped his arm around Kate's shoulders from behind.

He used to think, when he dreamed about this, that it wouldn't be a podium, but a long stretch of ice, with a gang of sweaty, grinning teammates lined up on either side of him. But there was only Kate, leaning back against him, and the way she caught her breath as the flags rose in front of them and the first notes of the national anthem – their national anthem, played for *them* -- broke through the air.

Oh say, can you see
By the dawn's early light

Doug straightened to stand as tall as he could, and his arm slipped down so he could take Kate's hand. Not the way he'd imagined it, but he wasn't up here alone. And goddamned it if wasn't just the way he wanted it.

What so proudly we hailed
At the twilight's last gleaming

Kate clutched her flowers to her chest, wanting to put her hand over her heart, but needing more to hold onto Doug. He leaned over, singing quietly into her ear, and she started to tease him, but found that she was signing along already.

Whose broad stripes and bright stars
Were so gallantly streaming

Jack Moseley couldn't take his eyes away from his daughter's face, so like her mother's. He clenched his hands together, and hoped that somehow, somewhere, she was here to see this. That she could forgive him for all the ways he'd nearly screwed it all up, and know her daughter had made it here anyway.

And the rocket's red glare
The bombs bursting in air
Gave proof through the night
That our flag was still there

In a small, rundown sports bar in Minnesota, Walter Dorsey stood as straight as Doug, half a world away, and watched his little brother being hailed as a champion. He would never admit to the tears of pride that ran down his face, but they were there, and someone took a picture that would make Doug cry the next Christmas.

Oh say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free

Doug tore his eyes away from the flag long enough to look down at his partner. She was looking back at him, and her hand tightened on his as they sang the last line to each other.

And the home of the brave

Then there was the applause again, as they turned and lifted their flowers in salute. The other four skaters climbed onto the podium beside them and they stood together, as the flashbulb popped, the cameras rolled, and their moment of glory stretched on into infinity.

It wasn't the kind of thing you could slip quietly away from. Kate's legs were leaden with exhaustion, her hands were shaking, and the weight of the medal around her neck seemed like it should bow her shoulders down. But she couldn't stop smiling, and her head was high enough to float off her shoulders and this was better than being drunk had been. Or maybe she was drunk, just on winning and the cheers and Doug's body next to hers.

There were more hugs and interviews backstage, more congratulations from what seemed like everyone in the world. Her father found a payphone and handed Doug his credit card, and they got to hear more cheers from a bar halfway around the globe. Kate talked to Walter Dorsey for a minute, and couldn't remember a word either of them had said, except being teased about kissing his brother on international TV.

They finally made it away from the ice, dressed in their Olympic sweat suits, their medals gleaming proudly against the white fabric. The half-coherent plan was to find something to eat, someplace to regroup, but that was forgotten when what seemed to be the entire U.S. hockey team descended on them out of nowhere, bringing with them most of the skating team, past and present. They made a loud, cheerful mob running through the streets to the athlete's village. Most of the hockey players found an excuse to kiss Kate: all of them took their turn at hassling Doug about his 'pansy medal', trying to shine it for him as they put him into headlock after headlock.

Everyone they passed on the street saw the medals, and smiled, and cheered.

There was food set up at the American dormitory, along with more Americans waiting to congratulate them, shake their hands, hug them and pummel them. Her father made them fill plates with finger food, and Anton made them eat. Kate didn't taste anything, too busy laughing at Doug's imitation of Rick's face when he'd come over to 'congratulate' them. His fingers played with hers on the table, then lunged forward to steal a mini egg roll before she could stop him. She bitched at him for the fun of it, and he stopped chewing long enough to flash her one of those toothy grins. "Children..." Anton warned, his smile almost hidden by his beard: Doug threw a potato chip at him.

Athlete's Village was a dry zone – when they staggered back out towards home, it was from exhaustion, not alcohol. Kate dozed against Doug's shoulder in the car, her hand in her father's, feeling safe and protected and senselessly happy, as she hadn't felt since she was a little girl in her mother's arms.

Anton excused himself in the foyer, hugging them each one last time before he went up the stairs. Kate's father looked from her to Doug, then hugged her and mumbled something before he left. And then they were alone for the first time.

Silence fell.

Kate inspected the toes of her sneakers, digging them into the tile. Doug ran his hand along the staircase railing. The single light in the foyer cast shadows over them both.

"Okay, so, this is dumb," Doug said finally.

She laughed in spite of herself, "Why should we start being any different now?"

He chuckled, a low sound that made her catch her breath, and held out his hand to her. "Come on, let's get some sleep."

She stared at his hand, biting her lip, "We should...talk. Or something."

He rolled his eyes, extending his hand further, "Kate, I'm going to hit the mattress and fall asleep in about ten seconds, and I bet you're going to do the same thing. We'll talk in the morning, I swear, just...Stay with me tonight, okay?"

She looked up at him, at the sincerity in his deep brown eyes, and took his hand.

He lied – they didn't fall asleep in ten seconds. It couldn't have been more than five.

She woke in darkness and an unfamiliar bed, with an unfamiliar body breathing deeply and steadily under her cheek, just on the edge of a snore, 'Hale,' she thought for a moment, but Hale smelled like cologne and aftershave, not sweat and wool and work. 'Doug,' she realized, and levered herself up on one elbow to check.

Yes, Doug, looking about 12 – except for the stubble – as he sprawled on his back, completely dead to the world. He'd stripped down to his boxer shorts before he'd crawled under the sheets, grinning as he left his medal on, then reaching one arm out to pull her to him like a teddy bear. She traced the muscles of his chest carefully, delicately, afraid of waking him up. She knew every inch of his body, like he knew every inch of hers, but not like this. She knew how to skate with him, not how to sleep next to him. Not how to be in love with him.

So many things she didn't know, had never taken time to learn. Life was skating, had always been skating – even Hale had only happened because he'd never been around. He'd been convenient, simple, accepting whatever crumbs she doled out, and she'd almost married him.

Doug didn't accept anything. He yelled, demanded, pushed and shoved at her until she yelled back, demanded back, gave him everything she had to give. Which wasn't really all that much, but hey, if he hadn't figured that out after two years, it wasn't her fault.

Her short laugh caught in her throat, became a choked sob, and she buried her head against his chest. He stirred underneath her. "Kate?" he mumbled sleepily.

"Go back to sleep," she told him, not lifting her head. "It's still early. Go back to sleep."

Like he'd ever believed it when she bullshitted him. Even half-asleep, he lifted his head to stare down at her, lifted one hand to stroke her hair back from her face. She turned it a little deeper into his chest. "What's wrong?"

She shook her head. "Nothing. You should sleep."

"No." He sat partway up, looking at her blearily. "You're crying? Kate, what's wrong?"

She pressed her lips together and shook her head again, his skin under her cheek like a caress. His arms tightened around her, holding her close. "Talk to me, Kate. Please."

"I..." Her voice broke, humiliatingly. But he just pulled her closer. "What do we do next?" she asked in a child-sized voice that no one would have recognized as coming from Kate the Bitch.

He thought, then shrugged, "World championships. We're gonna need more work on the Pamchenko, but at least no one else will be able to do it that soon. If they're crazy enough to try. And new costumes –

"No." She pressed her fingers against his lips, holding herself up with her forearm against his chest. "Not skating. Or, not just skating," she corrected herself.

“Oh.” He blinked, looking like every stereotype of the dumb jock she’d ever teased him about. “I thought we were going to talk about this in the morning.”

“We were,” she sniffed. “But you wanted to talk about it now.”

“No, I...” He stopped, took a deep breath. “What are you scared of, Kate?”

“I’m not scared,” she answered automatically, Kate Moseley didn’t get scared, she didn’t cry, she didn’t pour out her heart to hockey players.

She didn’t win gold medals.

“I am scared,” she admitted, lowering her eyes to his throat. The words were harder to say than anything she’d ever said. Almost anything. ‘Why did you stay?’ she’d asked him, and he hadn’t answered.

“What are you scared of?” he asked again, quietly.

“I don’t...I don’t know how to do this.”

“Do what? This?” He gestured at the bed, at them and grinned crookedly. “Cause I know Hale’s kind of uptight, but—“

“Don’t. This isn’t a joke.”

He sobered, “Yeah. Sorry. I just – Kate, we won the gold medal tonight. I love you, you love me, we already said it. What’s left to be scared of doing?”

“Everything!” She sat up, her hands flying wide. “Doug there has never been anything in my life as important as getting the gold medal. And we got it, and it’s beautiful and perfect and what if that’s it? What if we never do anything that perfect ever again? What are we going to do with our lives? Are we going to skate with ice shows, or stay in competition, or retire, or try for another Olympics? And us, what are we going to do about us? I was engaged until six weeks ago. Doug! I can’t just jump into this, I can’t”.

“Kate!” He was sitting up, too, and if he laughed at her, so help her God, she was going to break his nose this time.

He didn’t laugh, but it took a lot of effort. The knowledge that she really was terrified helped, and he managed to answer seriously, “Kate, you don’t have to plan your whole life out tonight. Most of this stuff...It’ll wait. Trust me.”

“No, it won’t,” she insisted. Her eyes were huge in the dim light from the window as she looked back at him. She was wearing the hockey jersey he’d given her, and it slipped off

one shoulder. Her medal swung between her breasts, and he tried not to look in that direction.

“Yes, it will.” He took her hands carefully, “Look, Kate...I know you’re big on planning. I know...I know your life has revolved around that empty medal case, and it’s the only thing I know about you that...that makes me feel sorry for you.”

Her eyes got even wider, like he’d slapped her. Then her face hardened and she tried to pull away, but he’d been expecting it, and held on.

“No, listen, please.” He took a second to think, trying to get the words right. He wasn’t good at this talking crap, damn it! That was for guys like Hale, not Doug Dorsey. But he took a deep breath and gave it his best shot. “Kate, you are a beautiful woman, an amazing athlete, and one hell of a skating partner. You’re one of the strongest people I’ve ever met, and I am in awe of you sometimes.”

Kate still refused to look at him, “You said you feel sorry for me.”

“Yeah, but what I meant was...your are such an amazing person, and your life could be about so much more than just skating. Especially when most of the time, you don’t even *like* skating.”

“That’s not true. I do like skating.” Doug gave her a ‘yeah, right’ look and she flushed. “Please. Why would I spend 14 years doing something I don’t like?”

“I don’t know. I wouldn’t have, but I am not you.” He cupped her cheek in his palm, forcing her to meet his eyes, so they could say the things he didn’t have the words for. “I want to skate with you. I want to go to Worlds and prove this wasn’t a fluke, that we really are the best there is, the best there ever will be. But I don’t want you to keep doing something that makes you unhappy. I saw you cry last night, Kate, and it almost broke my heart. I don’t ever want to see you cry again.”

Tears welled up instantly, of course, and he hung his head in resignation. “I’m sorry,” she apologized immediately, and he took a second to savor two apologies from Kate Moseley in two days. It wasn’t likely to happen again any time soon, “It’s just...Nobody’s ever said anything that nice to me. Ever. And I...I don’t know what to do.”

He had the idea and made the decision at almost the same time. “Come on.” He almost knocker her off the bed getting up, and rummaged through his duffel bag for a pair of jeans. She stared at him from the bed, wide-eyed, her legs bare from mid-thigh down. “Come on,” he repeated, “Get dressed and get your practice skates. We’re going out.”

She lifted her eyebrows in the first trace of the ‘old Kate’ he’d seen in a while. “And where do you think we’re going to skate at this time of night? We’re not at home, Doug.”

He flashed her a conspiratorial grin, "Trust me. If there's a place in this town with ice, I'll get us into it."

"I don't want to skate," she tried next.

"I know, that's the problem, I'm working on the solution. Go on, get dressed. And keep your medal on."

She gave one her gusty 'humoring the Neanderthal lunatic' sighs, but slipped off his bed and back to her own room. He appreciated the view until she was out of sight, then finished dressing. As an afterthought, he grabbed their little practice boom box before he left the room.

"No! You can't do it! It's illegal!"

"That's what you said about the Pamchenko", Doug pointed out, hauling Kate behind him with one hand as he tried the door to the arena. The Olympic arena. Which was very closed and very off-limits, and would be for another three hours. "Relax. I've done this before."

"In Albertville? When?" She pulled her hand free so she could cross her arms over her chest.

"Well, no, not here," he admitted, starting towards another door, "But in Calgary. The whole team sneaked into the arena the night before my last game. Brought some girls and --" He broke off, shooting her a guilty look, "--and skated."

She snorted eloquently, "Doug, we are not breaking into this arena. Olympic gold medalists do not break into arenas!"

"Sure, they do." The door gave under the pressure of his hand, swinging smoothly open. He flashed her a smug smile. "But we don't have to. All these doors, they always leave at least one open."

"What about the guards?"

"What guards? It's a skating rink, who breaks into a skating rink?"

"Apparently, we do," she grumbled, but followed him through the door. "If we get caught, I'm blaming everything on you."

"Like I'd expect anything else."

The arena was different when it was empty – huge and silent, every footstep echoing forever. There were no coaches behind the boards, no skaters on the ice; the spectators who had cheered for them a few hours before were only memories. Dim lights ran around the backs of the rows of seats, and the ice seemed to glow with the faint reflection.

Doug put the tape player he was carrying down next to the ice, and stripped off his parka. “Come on, get your skates on,” he told her, plopping down on the edge of the ice to start lacing his. His figure skates, not his hockey skates. For some reason, that made her smile and she sat down next to him taking hers out of their case.

He pulled her onto the ice as soon as she was done, pushing the ‘play’ button in passing. “What are we going to practice?” she asked. “I don’t want to work on the Pamchenko. Ever again.”

He grinned. “We’re not working on the Pamchenko, Kate. We’re not working on anything. We’re just going to skate. For fun.” She must have looked as baffled as she felt, because he rolled his eyes to the ceiling. “Fun, Kate. I know you’re unfamiliar with the concept, but that’s why we’re here.”

The music started, making her jump, but it was kind of pretty, voices chanting. “It’s a kind of magic.” over and over.

“This is Queen,” Doug informed her, tracing a circle around her that ended in a toe loop. “We’re not allowed to skate to it in competition, because Olympic judges are incredibly conservative and boring. When we go pro, that’s going to change.”

The beat of the song picked up as the real lyrics started, and Doug held out his hand. “Come on, Kate,” he said gently, persuasively, “Skate with me. For the fun of it.”

She took his hand and started skating.

It was weird, skating like this. Every other time he’d been with Kate on the ice, it was about competition – beating the other guys, or beating each other. This was... different. He threw a double axel for the hell of it, landed on his ass, and came up grinning. Kate flew by him and tried the same jump. She landed it, of course, and circled back for him, smiling.

“I know. I Know,” he groaned. “Toe pick.”

Her smile spread. “Yeah.” She held out her hand to pull him up and they started back across the ice. They did the double axels together this time, and landed perfectly. Their eyes met and they started laughing, so hard that they both blew the triple toe loops they tried next.

He took her hands and towed her after him into a footwork patter that owed more to Michael Jackson than to Mikhail Barishnikov. She matched him step for step, and tossed in a double salchow. They landed them together and her smile was brighter than spotlights. He popped the next triple on purpose, turning it into a single – she matched him like she’d read his mind, then threw the triple for real, skating backwards from her landing with the smuggest expression he’d ever seen. He caught up with her in three strides, lifting her until she overbalanced, and carrying her that way across the ice as she laughed and demanded to be let down, unable to squirm for fear of falling.

Freddy Mercury’s kind of magic gave way to Queensryche’s refusal to believe in love, then to Foreigner wanting to know what love is. She landed a throw triple sal that was the highest he’d ever gotten her. He tried a triple axel because he’d never tried it before, and almost fell over in shock when he held the landing. Kate cheered and tried it herself, and wound up with a cold, wet butt. When he tried to help her up, she pulled him down onto the ice next to her, both of them laughing too hard to get back up right away.

He’d flipped the tape twice by the time they gave in to exhaustion, sitting wrapped up together in the middle of the ice. Cheap Trick’s ‘The Flame’ started, and Kate leaned her head back against his shoulder, the fabric of Bobby Hull’s jersey rough against his hands. He wrapped his arms around her and rested his cheek against her hair, staring out at the empty seats.

“What if we never do it again?” Kate asked finally.

“We will.” There was no doubt in his mind.

“But what if we don’t? What if that was the only time we’ll ever win?”

He shrugged without releasing her. “Then we’ll find something else to be the best at. Trust me, I’ve done it. Not that hard.”

She almost smiled, almost laughed. “And what if we can’t do this?” She gestured from his face to hers.

It was Doug’s turn to almost laugh. “Kate, in two years we turned a has-been hockey player and a never-will-be ice queen into Olympic gold medal champions. There is *nothing* we can’t do, as long as we want it bad enough.”

“Do you? Want this badly enough?”

Vulnerable Kate – it was still hard to get used to. He pulled her closer, tighter, turned her head so he could see her eyes. Got lost in them. When he answered her, it was nothing less than the truth.

“Sometimes when I look at you, I can’t remember ever wanting anything else.”

She studied him, looking for something, and seemed to find it. She smiled softly, then lifted her eyebrows in challenge, “Only sometimes?”

He grinned sheepishly, “Well, there was this gold medal...”

She laughed and swatted at him, and he kissed her, long and slow and deep. She turned enough to wrap her arms around his neck, and gave as good as she got. Like always. “So.” He asked on a gasp, when they finally came up for air. “Are we going to Worlds?”

She gave him that ‘time to kick a little ass’ look. “Was there ever any doubt? I want to make Rick come over and congratulate us at least one more time. Maybe two. I could live with three. Or—“

He stopped her by kissing her again and they laughed into each other’s mouths. “You and me, Kate – we’re partners. That’s forever.”

“Partners.” She echoed, like she was tasting the word. “Forever.”

“Sound good to you?” he asked, startled by the vulnerability in his own voice.

Kate’s eyes glowed warmer than their medals. “I think I can get used to it.”

“Glad to hear it.” He kissed her again before she could make a comeback, and pulled her back to her skates, pushing them both off across the ice.

Two security guards and a janitor stood behind the highest row of seats, looking down at the ice and smoking idly. It wasn’t every day you got a private performance by Olympic gold medalists, even if they weren’t supposed to be in the building, much less on the ice. But the couple wasn’t hurting anything, and if there was one thing three Frenchmen could appreciate, it was a good love story. They exchanged looks, then wandered off to finish preparing the arena for the athletes who would be arriving soon for practice, looking for their dreams.

Below them, in the dim lights of the arena, two lovers whose dreams had already come true slow-danced together on the ice -- for one night, for one moment of time, invincible.

Wherever you go, I’ll be with you
Whatever you want, I’ll give it to you
Whenever you need someone to lay your heart and head upon
Remember after the fire
After all the rain
I will be the flame
I will be the flame

FIN

